After jihad: A biographical approach to passionate politics in Indonesia

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CHAPTER 3

Following the Flow, Digging Deep:
Doing Fieldwork on (post-) Jihadists

Introduction

After laying out the landscape and focus of the research in Chapter 1 and the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, I present the narratives of how the fieldwork research was conducted in this chapter. As explained earlier, the focus of this research is former non-local jihad actors who participated in the religious violence that took place in eastern Indonesia, namely in Ambon, Maluku, and Poso, Central Sulawesi. When I did the fieldwork, most of the non-local jihad actors had left the conflict area, having either returned to their hometowns, moved to another place to live or been imprisoned for their involvement in terrorist actions in the post-jihad period, while a few of them had decided to stay, either in Poso-Central Sulawesi or in Ambon-Maluku. So my first crucial step in doing the fieldwork was to find out “where they then lived”. Thus, instead of staying and conducting fieldwork in one particular site or area, my first strategy was “to follow the flow of the actors” to various places and locations: from big and medium size cities like Jakarta, Surabaya, Solo and Yogyakarta in Java to remote areas such as Pandan Jaya village in Poso, Central Sulawesi, and Gemba village in Western Seram Island, Maluku Province.

In doing the research, I applied a life history approach by collecting the biography of the jihad actors through conducting a series of life history interviews with them. In conducting these oral history
interviews, I divided the life story of the actors into three main periods: before, during, and after their participation in the course of the conflict. Thus, my next strategy was “to dig the deep of the personal life stories and life experiences of the actors” in the three respective episodes: before, during, and after their participation in jihad. Here I refer to Denzin’s distinction between the two levels of life lived by a person, namely the surface and the deep (1989: 28-9, see also 1984: 80-85). Whereas at the surface level, the person is reflected in their individual everyday doings, routines, and daily tasks, at the deep level, the person is a feeling, moral, sacred, inner self. According to Denzin (1989: 29, see also 1984: 159), the deep, the inner self, may only rarely be displayed to others, but may be captured in autobiographical or biographical documents and narratives. Poletta (2006: 13; emphasis in the original) also argues that narratives provide a deeper understanding of emotions than logical explanations and non-narrative accounts.

Following an interpretive format of “making sense of an individual’s life” in studying biography as proposed by Denzin (1989: 59, 64-67), I will discuss the biography of the jihad actors to make sense of the individual’s life by focusing on the turning point moments in their lives. It assumes, following Sartre, the existence of a pivotal event in a person’s life. Furthermore, Denzin contends (1989: 66), it also assumes that “this event will be a pivotal meaning structure that organizes the other activities in a person’s life.” As presented in Chapters 1 and 2, in this research, participation in jihad action was seen as a pivotal event which has gained a pivotal meaning structure that shaped the other activities in the actor’s life. Thus, it is assumed that jihad participation has marked the lives of the jihad actors so that there is a distinction between the life ‘before’ and ‘after’ the jihad. I will furthermore examine how participation in jihad movement comes to occupy a crucial place in the lives of the jihadists and how its meanings changes over time.

During the fieldwork I carried out life history interviews with 21 core-informants (see Table 1 in the appendices). I have classified the interviews into three categories: six are considered successful, nine are quite successful, and six are unsuccessful. Of the fifteen
interviews classified as *successful* and *quite successful*, I chose ten key life stories to be presented and discussed in this dissertation. In the next section I will describe the two main steps in carrying out the fieldwork, namely, *first*, finding and selecting the core-informants; *second*, carrying out the life history interviews with informants. Finally, I describe how to select, interpret and present the life story narratives of the informants based on the collected interviews. In between the narratives I also discuss some methodological issues concerning oral history, interpretive biography, and the link between life history methodology and the sociology of social movements.

“Following the flow of actors”: finding and selecting informants

How to find and select informants in this research? Before I present the narratives of how I found and selected informants to be interviewed in this research, I will map out the post-jihad period situation and features of the non-local actors who had participated in the jihad movement. Although sharing Della Porta’s (1992: 182) contention that “in the life-history research, it is virtually impossible to work with strictly representative samples,” I contend that sufficient knowledge of the landscape of the research subject helped me to get informants who reflected the complexity of the phenomena. There are four features of post-jihadists situation and movements which guided me in finding and selecting the informants during the fieldwork as follows.

First, of the more than five thousand non-local Muslim fighters who joined the *jihad* movement during the conflict came from different Islamist networks. As described in Chapter one, I distinguish three main networks of non-local jihad actors who participated in *jihad* movement: the Laskar Jihad, Laskar Mujahidin, and Other Mujahidin. Thus, in order to cover and reflect the variety of the networks, informants should be selected from each of the different Islamist networks identified. Second, those who joined in the
jihad movement came from various social profiles in terms of family backgrounds, social economic class, education level, et cetera. Thus, the selected informants should reflect the variations of social profiles of the non-local jihadists.

Third, when the research started the conflict had ended and peace agreements had been achieved and signed by the conflicting parties, both Muslim and Christian groups: the Malino I Peace Accord for Poso in December 2001 and the Malino II Peace Accord for Maluku in February 2002. So, most of non-local jihadists had left the area and returned home, and only few of them stayed on in the (post) conflict area, either in Ambon or in Poso. Thus, in order to reflect different trajectory taken by them, informants must include both those who left and those who stayed on.

Finally, those who had joined the jihad movement took different social pathways in the post-jihad period: some of them joined jihadi activism and took part in terrorism, some joined political parties, others joined paramilitary group, while others returned to their jobs or went back to study. Thus, informants should reflect the variety of social pathways taken by the post-jihadists.

Based on this mapping out of the features and situations of the non-local post-jihadists, I carried out fieldwork research for sixteen months in two different periods: the first one for a year from July 2007 to 2008 and the second one from September to December 2009. There were three steps to be taken: first, finding out where the actors lived; second, selecting who would be interviewed through the life history method; and finally, gaining the willingness and approval of the prospective interviewees.

The three different steps were, of course, not clearly distinct processes but were instead three consecutive stages that took place over a certain period of time: it could be either a quite short or rather long process that led either to success or simply failure. The most crucial and also most difficult step was certainly the last: gaining the approval and willingness of the prospective informant. Since only after the informant was willing and agreed, could the interview start.
At the start of the interview, I promised the informant anonymity if desired. I also asked permission to record all the interviews by using a digital recorder for the sake of academic purposes.

• *The double-face: the academic and the activist*

Before presenting the detailed stories of finding and selecting informants, I will explain some of the strategies I applied during the fieldwork. The first main strategy concerned how I presented myself to informants or to prospective informants. I usually presented two sides of myself: I am a lecturer-and-researcher and I am a Muslim. The fact that I work as a lecturer at the Department of Sociology of Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), a respected state university, was an advantage for me during the fieldwork. The generally good image of a university lecturer helped me to make and develop contacts with various kinds of people, including radical Islamist activists. The lecturer’s link to education programs and the institute generally provides a better image than a ‘pure’ researcher since research is something not generally familiar and directly linked to public needs.

The fact that I am a Muslim is strongly reflected in my Arabic name. Furthermore, I also come from a *santri* (devout) family with a long track record as a Muslim activist from junior high school to my early university period. I began my career as a Muslim activist by joining *Pelajar Islam Indonesia* (PII, Indonesian Muslim Student Association) when I was a junior high school student in the early 1980s. Later I was elected Chairman of the PII in Pekalongan when I was a senior high school student in the mid 1980s. During the period, PII was quite well known as one of the so called ‘fundamentalist student movements’ especially for its tough opposition toward the New Order policy of ‘Asas Tunngal Pancasila’.¹ My career as a Muslim activist continued to my time at university, by joining the

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¹) Through the policy, the New Order regime forced all social and political organizations to place “Panca Sila” (The Five Principles of State Ideology) as its sole ideological base, replacing religious or other forms of ideology. For further discussion see, for example, Karim (1999), especially Chapter 5.
Musholla\footnote{The Musholla was a transformation of the HMI Fisipol UGM following a fragmentation in the aftermath of the Asas Tunggal policy. Instead of taking part in the fragmentation and taking side with the pro-or-anti Asas Tunggal factions, some activists of HMI Fisipol UGM chose to have their own way by centering their activities on the Musholla.} of the Faculty of Social and Political Science (Fisipol) of UGM while continuing my involvement with the PII. Thus, many of my friends from the period recognized me as a Muslim activist, including some of those who later became core-informants.

During the fieldwork, in order to become closer and accepted by the Islamist activists, I occasionally utilized some symbolic gestures and attributes, including using simple spoken Arabic words and wearing the so-called ‘Islamic dress’. Some simple Arabic words I used to speak with informants were assalamualaikum (greetings), \textit{ana} (I, me), \textit{antum} (you), \textit{afwan} (sorry), syukran (thanks). On the other hand, I also occasionally wore Islamic attributes such as the Islamic shirt (\textit{baju koko}) or white skull cap (\textit{peci haji}), especially when attending a preaching session or other religious gatherings.\footnote{For some researchers of Islamist movements, growing a beard was another common strategy. So that they joked about the ‘beard of the project’, meaning a beard allowed to grow only for the duration of the project. Since I cannot grow a full beard, I did not consider it to be an important strategy.}

Furthermore, I also utilized both sides of my network to find prospective informants: my professional and personal network. By professional network, I mean the network of researchers, journalists, and NGO activists, with whom I work in my capacity as a lecturer and a researcher. By personal network, I mean the network of school and university friends, families and relatives, as well as Islamic fellow activists which I have developed throughout my life as a person since childhood to adulthood. In some cases the two sides merged: for instance, one of my university friends was also my colleague when I worked as a journalist; one of my cousins is also a leading NGO activist in Yogyakarta, and so on. By utilizing the two kinds of network simultaneously, I conducted my fieldwork for this research. Here the story.
• The rocky start from Yogyakarta

In July 2007 I began the first steps of my fieldwork in Yogyakarta, the place where I and my family have lived for years, Yogyakarta is a strategic site of the fieldwork since it was the location of the headquarters of both the Laskar Jihad and Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) during the mobilization period for jihad. So I assumed that it would be quite easy to find (and then to select) informants there. But the story proved to be different. Although I started the fieldwork with ample confidence, it did not run as smoothly as I had previously imagined.

So, the first three months of my fieldwork (from July to September 2007) brought rather terrible news: I failed to make any single life history interview with post-jihadists in the period. Of course, I met many of them during the period, such as during the annual national gathering of the Salafis (Daurah Ilmiyah Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah) held in Bantul, Yogyakarta, on 18-20 August 2007. The event was attended by more than two thousand Salafi activists from throughout Indonesia, including from Papua, Aceh, Poso and Maluku. I attended the event, met and had chatted with plenty of them during the breaks, succeeded in getting the contact details of many of them, including those from Ambon and Poso, during the occasion. But I failed to get even one single person who was willing to become one of my core informants.

What happened? Why did it happen?

Reflecting back to the period, I think that one of the important causes of my ‘failure’ was that I chose to be too low profile and less aggressive in developing relationships with the potential informants I met during the period. Based on my understanding of the sensitive nature of the research topic (some might think that I was doing research on ‘Islamic terrorism’ as perhaps part of the ‘counter-terrorism’ projects being carried out, or at least supported, by western institutes) as well as the nature of life history approach I had chosen (which relies on the trust and willingness of informants to share their life stories with the interviewer), I focused on building
trust and confidence in the potential informants and their community and attempted to be accepted as a ‘friend’ of the movements. That is why I usually restrained myself from asking for an interview in the first or early encounters and meetings with them. Only later, after I considered I had succeeded in developing a certain level of trust and confidence with the prospective informants, that I would ask them if they were willing to be interviewed.

Building trust is, of course, not an easy task. Sometimes such trust and confidence could only be developed after quite a long process of relationship and interaction. At least in my case, I failed to find one willing core informant to agree to a life history interview after meeting or approaching many potential core informants over a period of three months! I had actually identified at least two potential life story informants with whom I had made initial contact even before I started my doctoral project. But I failed to persuade them to be interviewed, and even failed to meet one of them within six months!

One of the two was Ja’far Umar Thalib, the notorious former Commander-in-Chief of Laskar Jihad. I met him at his home in the Degolan village, the northern part of Yogyakarta, in August 2007. It was also the location of the *Ihyaus Sunnah Tadribud Duat* Islamic boarding school led by him, a veteran of the Afghan war. Surprisingly, it was easy to meet him. I just sent him an SMS informing him of my status as a UGM lecturer who was doing research on Islamist movements (*harakah Islamiyah*). He soon replied inviting me to visit his place. Perhaps, my status as a researcher of the Centre for Security and Peace Studies (CSPS) of UGM, that had invited him to participate in a public discussion on the conflict of Ambon during the peak crisis, held a plus point for him. There was also the fact that he had been abandoned by the Salafi mainstream in the aftermath of the Laskar Jihad disbandment. Thus, when I visited his home there was no sign of activities except for about ten pupils gathered in one room.

After listening to a brief explanation of my research project on the life history of post-jihadists, he responded it was a lucky coincidence: “I am currently in the middle of writing my own biography.” He said that it would cover the period of his childhood to his recent
activities in the aftermath of the jihad war in Maluku. He told me that the forthcoming book was planned to be published simultaneously in three languages: Indonesian, English and Arabic! Listening to his tale and statements, I got the impression that the sense of pride and prominence from the flamboyant former public hero remained with him. Unfortunately, he refused my request for the interview since it would certainly take a long time; instead he promised to let me know when the book was completed—which was expected to be at the end of 2007.4) Although I felt somewhat disappointed, his reason sounded quite plausible. Although he was no longer Commander-in-Chief of the Laskar Jihad he remained a prominent Salafi preacher with a number of followers and fans. He told me about a series of preaching programs in several cities, including in Sumatra, planned for the next month. Unfortunately, he also declined my request for him to recommend one of his pupils to be interviewed, saying “they are still quite emotional and not ready yet to be interviewed.” Although it might be true, it sounded to me more for his personal objective and interests rather than his pupils’.

Another rocky and unique story was my approach and relationship with Reza, a former LJ activist who is a cousin of Rahmi (pseudonym) a colleague of mine at UGM. Although not personally close, I have known Reza for years and met him several times, either when he visited his aunt at her office or when I visited Rahmi at home. Since I started my fieldwork in July 2007 I had tried several times to contact him, either by SMS or phone call, but I was not able to meet him until six months later. In fact, it was Reza who gave me the information about the Salafi annual national gathering in Bantul, Yogyakarta, in August 2007. Although he suggested I attend the event he did not promise to meet me there. So I went to the event and met many Salafi activists, including those from Ambon and Poso, and attended the sessions for two days—from morning to

4) The draft of the book still had not been completed at my last meeting and conversation with him in November 2009. I have also not received any information regarding the publication of his autobiographical book up to the date of writing this dissertation (July 2010).
late afternoon—but failed to meet him. I sent some SMS and called him during the breaks but he did not reply to my messages or accept my calls. Perhaps, he was just very busy with the programs or meeting old friends from different part of the archipelago who attended the gathering. Yet I guessed he did not feel comfortable meeting me there for one or reason or other.\(^5\) After that I continued to make contact to him but remained unsuccessful.

A big surprise occurred early morning on Sunday 23 December 2007 when a message arrived in my mobile from Reza: he offered to meet in the UGM Mosque at 8 a.m. I certainly agreed—though I had actually planned for a family trip out of the town that morning. I used that precious opportunity to explain carefully about my research topic, what I had been doing with my research so far, and the nature of the life history interview which would most likely require several sessions. At the end of the meeting I gave him a three-page of interview guidelines to read (see the interview guidelines in the appendices). “Please read it first, I will call you again later. If you agree, we can arrange for the interview.” The first interview took place on 12 January 2008, followed by two other interviews and a quite short casual conversation.

Although I did not know the real story behind his decision to agree to the interviews, I guessed it related to his up-and-down relationship with Rahmi, my personal contact to him. Although Rahmi did not play the role of ‘gate-keeper’ with authority to, directly or indirectly, ‘force’ him to be my informant, she had helped me to stay updated with what had happened to Reza, including when changed his mobile number so that I lost contact with him for a while. Rahmi also told me about other sides of Reza’s life story, including his

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\(^5\) Although I tried to dress quite ‘properly’ among the Salafis by putting a white skull cap on my head, wearing a white shirt or baju koko, and rolling up my trouser a bit above ankle, I think I still looked different amongst them. I had also made the mistake of openly taking pictures of the events with my digital camera. When I took pictures inside the mosque during a preaching session, I was eventually told by a security guard of the organizing committee not to any further photograph.
adolescence when Reza stayed with her and their recently improved relationship leading to Reza’s agreement to be interviewed.6)

In addition to Reza, I also interviewed Fauzi. He was a medical doctor from Yogyakarta who had joined jihad in Ambon through the LJ, whom I interviewed over a series of interviews from February 2008 to late 2009. I had met and interviewed him some years before when I conducted research on multiculturalism in Yogyakarta.7) I first met him again for this series of interviews in Solo where he was on call duty at the local hospital, staying at his second wife’s house. From the very beginning process ran smoothly: he still remembered me slightly and our previous interviews. He also expressed interest in my topic and was surprised that I had met some respected Muslim leaders from different groups, including the two opposing leading figures: Ja’far Umar Thalib and Abu Bakar Ba’asyir. The next meetings and interviews took place in Yogyakarta where he lived with his first wife and children.

• Stuck in Yogyakarta, Smooth in Pekalongan

While my efforts over the first few months to find informants in Yogyakarta became stuck, the process ran quite smoothly in my hometown Pekalongan, the place where I was born and grew up as a Muslim activist. I went to Pekalongan to celebrate the end of the Ramadhan fasting month on Idul Fitri 12/13 October 2007 with my extended family.8) Besides the usual family gatherings and visits to

6) There was a clear contrast life trajectory between the two: during the period Reza quit university after his participation in jihad in Ambon, Rahmi went to the USA to study. While Reza became further and deeper involved in Salafi activism, Rahmi moved in the opposite direction eventually removing her veil during day to day activities.


8) While the Indonesian government declared that the Idul Fitri began 13 October, Muhammadiyah, one of the biggest Muslim organizations in Indonesia stated that it in fact it began one day earlier. For further explanation, see http://indrapr.blogspot.com/2007/10/selamat-hari-raya-idul-fitri.html (accessed 12 July 2010). There is some-
friends and relatives, I attended a reunion held by my high school friends. It was at that event I got a mobile number for Jodi, an old high school friend who had joined the jihad in Afghanistan. He had been my colleague as a PII activist at high school. Unfortunately, he had not attended the reunion nor come home during Idul Fitri. Yet we were in touch and agreed to meet few weeks later in Pekalongan for a series of interviews on 29-30 October. So it was Jodi, my high school friend and fellow PII activist, who became my first life history informant almost four months after my fieldwork began.

The initial interview did not run that smoothly actually. We started with a little debate. As a brilliant student, Jodi had obtained a scholarship to study aeronautics in the Netherlands soon after graduating from high school. Due to some personal troubles he failed to finish his studies and later joined the jihad movement in Afghanistan. When we met he began by questioning my reasons for studying in the Netherlands and even expressed some regret over my choice: “Why did you agree to enter into their [foreign, non-Muslim] trap?” I replied by trying to convince him that what I had been doing was also a struggle for the sake of Muslim interests, namely to fight against stereotypes in the western world about jihad doctrine and jihad activists. He eventually accepted my arguments and agreed to be interviewed. Unfortunately, I later discovered that he had not participates in jihad movements either in Ambon or in Poso. Since my research focus was limited on those who participated in jihad movements in Indonesia, Jodi’s life story is not included in this dissertation.

Besides Jodi, I also met and conducted a series of life story interviews with Nizam, an old friend at the junior high school of Ma’had Islam in Pekalongan. I met Nizam firstly in Yogyakarta when he and other Pekalongan Salafi activists attended the Dau-

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9) Jodi told me in an interview that he was keen to join jihad in Ambon after taking part in a jihad mobilization session held in Pekalongan. He had even been enlisted to the organizer. He eventually canceled his participation after his mother did not give him approval.
rah Nasional in August 2007. It was during the afternoon break on the second day when I heard an announcement from the organizing committee that “all participants from Pekalongan are asked to gather in the front of the organizing committee tent.” I was very surprised to hear the announcement and quickly moved to the meeting place. It was there I first met Nizam again—after more than twenty years perhaps: wearing the typical white Salafi robe and a very long beard, almost four inches long, I estimated. My attempts to persuade Nizam to participate were soon effective: it was in the first meeting in his house in Pekalongan that Nizam agreed to be interviewed—after thinking it over for only about ten seconds. While both Jodi and Nizam quickly agreed to be my informants through their personal friendship with me as well as my reputation as a (former) Muslim activist, Abu Ayyash, the FPI leader in Pekalongan, most likely made his decision based on the second factor.

I had first met Ayyash when I had been invited to speak at a discussion forum held by an Islamic Study group led by Aris Kurniawan, a junior member when I was Chairman of the PII in Pekalongan. Aris, who later also became Chairman of the PII in Pekalongan, was one of the founders and a leading activist of Forum Silaturahmi Umat Islam (FSUI, the Hospitality Forum of Islamic Community) in Pekalongan. Both Ayyash and Aris were actively involved with the FSUI. Following a casual conversation after the discussion, I approached him asking for his approval to be interviewed to which he quickly agreed. It seemed to me that he was quite being proud to be interviewed for my doctoral research and was very helpful in providing me with some documents of his own as well as the FPI. Ayyash went to jihad in Ambon through KOMPAK—though, he claimed, the banner was not used openly in public.

Yet it was not all success stories in Pekalongan. I failed to meet and interview Said Sungkar, the leader of Dewan Syuro of FPI Pekalongan, who was prominent for his key role in mobilizing people to jihad in Ambon as well as his vast connections with Islamist movements at the national level, particularly associated with JI. Two FPI Pekalongan activists had been sentenced to jail for their role
in hiding Noordin M. Top, allegedly after being connected in some ways by Sungkar (ICG 2006, 2007a). Later he played a leading role in the funeral ceremony of some jihadi activists involved in terrorism, including Urwah and Dul Matin. Some reports linked him to Abdullah Sungkar, the founder of JI. Yet ICG (2006) argues that there is no strong evidence of his membership of the JI. Sungkar was always out of the town on the few times I paid a call on him.

• *A series of confessions in Jagat Mulya*

Another success story came from Jagat Mulya (pseudonym of a town in East Java). There I met Baghdad, a young NU activist from a strong Sufi tradition, and conducted a series of interviews over three days in his house and surroundings. He is another informant whom I had known years before when I was a university student in Yogyakarta. I had even made a casual interview with him before commencing my doctoral project when he went to Yogyakarta to do research for his master thesis. Another personal link is that my cousin, Jazir, a leading young NU activist in Yogyakarta, was a very close friend of Baghdad and family. This fact helped me to get approval for the interviews, including from his mother. The approval was crucial because Baghdad had experienced a sort of post-traumatic mental disorder for about three years after his participation in jihad.

Baghdad was also an exceptional case. He had joined jihad mainly for mystical reasons: he had dreams and other mystical experiences of mystical encounters with holy people, including his grandfather, who had passed away a long time ago, advising him to join jihad. “Please bring *Ahad* to the land of Ambon,” said Baghdad in the whisper he had heard in his dreams. *Ahad* means The One or God or the blessing of God. As a young NU activist from a liberal tradition associated with Abdurrahman Wahid, his participation in the *jihad* movement in Ambon was not to fight against Christians but as a way to search for peace. Baghdad was among those who believed that the conflict was instigated, and even orchestrated, by the political elite associated with the old regime in order to sabotage
the reformasi. Instead of joining the battle, he went to Ambon to investigate what had really happened and who were allegedly the real players behind the scene. So, rather than joining established Islamist networks such as Laskar Jihad or Laskar Mujahidin, Baghdad went to Ambon following his personal network, including the help of his fellow Ambonese Muslim friends who were studying in Surabaya, East Java. This brought some unique features to his stories: engagement with ordinary lives, including drug users and drug traders, and another side of social life during the jihad period, including casual sexual relationships and prostitution.

The series of interviews with Baghdad was conducted in various unique places, from his home to the mosque and then two different cemetery sites. The interviews ran deep into the history of his family, childhood, adolescence, jihad experience as well as his three-year period of mental disorder. At the end of the interview series he said that it felt like a series of confessions: he became a sinner who made a confession to a priest… In addition, I also gained another view of Baghdad’s life from Jazir and Fairuz, two good friends of his. Together we attended Baghdad’s rather posh wedding held in a big convention hall in the city of Jagat Mulya. After the wedding, Baghdad moved to Surabaya, where his wife, a master’s graduate from an Australian university, worked as a lecturer at the Airlangga University, a prestigious state university. I visited him once in their new house in Surabaya for an interview.

• Hanging out with post-jihadists in Solo

Another important base of (post) jihadists is the city of Solo or Surakarta, the heart of Javanese culture as well as the hotbed of both Nationalist and Islamist movements (Shiraishi 1990). Large numbers of jihadists were sent from this area, both from Laskar Jihad and Laskar Mujahidin. There was a compound located in the Cemani ward belonged to Laskar Jihad, where thousands of prospective of jihadists were prepared and trained before deployed to jihad. For those associated with Laskar Mujahidin, Gedung Ummat Islam (The House of
Islamic Community), located in the Kartopuran ward, was the center of activities, in addition to the notorious Ngruki Pesantren, founded and led by the late Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba’asyir.

I came into the network of (post) jihadists in Solo through three main channels: Ali Usman, the Chairman of Ikatan Keluarga Besar Alumni Pondok Pesantren Ngruki (IKAPIM, the Ngruki Alumni Association) in the period of 2003-2007; Heri Varia, a former journalist turned businessman; and Ghozali, a local Muslim activist who works as a freelance researcher. Ali and Heri were UGM alumni and former HMI activists, while Gozali was a local associate of the Research Institute for Democracy and Peace (RIDEP), a Jakarta-based NGO. I got to know Ali and Heri when I was a UGM student and later went to work as a journalist at the DeTIK news weekly together with Heri. I met Ghozali when I was invited to talk at a RIDEP workshop in Puncak where Ghozali was one of the participants. Ghozali helped me by playing the role of a casual research assistant in Solo.

Through Heri I was introduced to Awod Umar, the leader of the Brigade Hizbullah, a paramilitary group affiliated to Partai Bulan Bintang (PBB), who had participated in jihad in Ambon. Awod and other Hizbullah fellows had occasionally assisted Heri running a middle-level business supplying fuel to local manufacturers and industry. Besides being an activist of the PBB and Brigade Hizbullah, Awod also joined a local NGO called Supremasi, providing legal aid for the unprivileged and took the role as coordinator of volunteers. Interestingly, Supremasi was led by Bares Lamhot, a Christian lawyer. The NGO shared a rental house with Awod’s family in Nusukan, a slum area of Solo which was quite prominent as the preman area; the front part was used by Supremasi while Awod’s family lived out the back. Over many visits to the place I met people from various backgrounds: PBB functionaries, Brigade Hizbullah activists, Supremasi volunteers, as well as (post) jihadists. I also met some other Ambon ‘alumni’ there, including Udin and Muslih, who were also Brigade Hizbullah activists. With a strong personal guarantee given by Heri as well as my own track record as a (former) Muslim activ-
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ist, I quickly gained the confidence of Awod and his friends. I made a series of interviews with Awod in Nusukan before later moving to another rental house in Baluwarti, next to the Surakarta Palace. Other meetings and interviews took place in the headquarters of the PBB and Hizbullah, in Kartopuran, Solo.

• **Penetrating the core of the ‘Ngruki Network’**

Through the help of Ali Usman I tried to penetrate the core of the notorious Ngruki network. Besides a former chairman of IKAPIM, Usman had been a “special assistant” of Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, the founder of Ngruki pesantren and the Chairman of the MMI Advisory Board. Ali had a unique prominent profile but had fallen on bad times. After graduating from the Ngruki pesantren, Ali continued his study to the Department of Sociology at UGM and then to the MBA program at the University of Santo Thomas, Quezon City, and the Philippines. On his return from the Philippines, he successfully ran several businesses which eventually led him to be elected Chairman of the HIPMI (*Himpunan Pengusaha Muda Indonesia*, The Young Businessmen Association) in the city of Solo in 1997-2000. Following a family dispute, his business collapsed, and he went bankrupt and fell ill. But he survived and gradually revived his business, successfully repaying his debt to the bank by, among others, utilizing his expertise in currency trading. Reflecting back on his bankruptcy, he joked: “If I had not fallen bankrupt, I could have been trapped into *jama’ah kafiriyah*. My bankruptcy has brought me closer to the *ustadz* and even led to me taking part in *jama’ah Islamiyah*…”

From Usman, I learned the bigger picture of the Islamist movements in Solo, and was given a sort of endorsement, as well as some personnel contacts. Unfortunately Ali had just lost his mobile phone so that he could not help me with many contact numbers. With the help of Gozali, I tried to enter the core of the Ngruki network, and have a meeting with Zainuddin, a teacher of the Pesantren Abidin who was known to have joined jihad in Ambon. Luckily, Ghozali himself was a graduate of Pesantren Abidin, a few years senior to Zainuddin.
We met in the mosque inside the pesantren complex, on Friday morning, 30 November 2007. After briefly telling him about my research project, including my initial contact with Ali Usman, he replied that although he had joined the jihad he had failed to reach Ambon due to the security situation. But he said that he knew other friends who had. However, he suggested I first get permission from the Amir, Ustadz Abu Bakar Ba’asyir. “We were just foot soldiers who knew very little about the big story, but if amir gives his approval we could tell a few things we had experienced in the field,” he said.

Ghozali then tried to contact Abdul Rahim, Ba’asyir’s son and ‘special assistant’ in order to make an appointment. Rahim asked Ghozali and me to go to Ngruki after ashar to meet him first. We went to Ngruki earlier to meet Afriadi, another friend of Gozali who works as a computer teacher at Ngruki. Afriadi promised to arrange a meeting with Windar, another teacher at Ngruki, who was known to have joined jihad in Ambon. Later, Windar told me that he failed to reach Ambon since the police had conducted an operation in Ujung Pandang to prevent mujahidin from entering Ambon.

When the Ashar prayer call was heard, we went to the mosque to join the collective prayer. I reached the mosque a bit late, separate from Ghozali, when the prayer had begun, and took my place in the rear line to the right side of the mosque. When I was in the middle of the prayer someone else entered and stood right next to me: an old man with a sarong, gamis (long Muslim robe), cap and sajadah (prayer mat) all in white. The pleasant scent of non-alcoholic Arabic perfume floated from his body and dress. At the end of the prayer I recognized who he was: Abu Bakar Ba’asyir! I was soon struck by bewilderment: should I greet him and introduce myself, asking for an interview with him? Or should I just follow the approach already taken by Ghozali through his son, Abdul Rahim?

I then quickly decided I would try my own way! Soon after he finished the prayers, as he headed out the side door, I followed his steps. As he picked up his sandals, I greeted him: assalamualaikum, Ustaz Abu! He replied wa ‘alaikum salam giving a little smile. I began to launch a series of mild ‘attacks’: introducing myself as
a UGM lecturer doing research on *harakah Islamiyah* as well as a researcher of CSPS UGM who had previously invited him to talk on campus through a friend, Ali Usman: “Do you still remember the occasion, Ustaz Abu?” Though his eyes reflected bafflement, he replied still smiling: *I am sorry I can’t.* But I felt that he had a good feeling about me. Perhaps, he vaguely remembered his talk on campus, attended by a crowd of journalists just few days before he was forcefully arrested by the police in hospital. Perhaps he felt good about me because I had mentioned a former trusted and devoted pupil of his: Ali Usman. I did not know what his true feelings were, but he responded nicely to my request for an interview. “Please come home, but make it quick, because I must give a sermon after four o’clock,” he said calmly.

Of course, I was very glad and grateful and moved quickly to a house a mere 100 meters from the mosque. The house had been quite recently re-built—with some parts, including the wall, not completely finished off. Ba’asyir welcomed me into the guest room: a space of about 6 x 4 meters with no chairs but a wide green carpet, a low-level table, and several cushions scattered around. A cup of hot tea, salted peanuts and some sweets from Kudus accompanied our talk some minutes later. I thus grabbed the precious opportunity to introduce myself and my research topic by mentioning the core issue: this is research about jihad and the jihad activists who had participated in jihad mobilization in Ambon and/or Poso. I also attempted to persuade him that it was an important topic for study by a Muslim, because many studies and discourses on jihad and jihad activists were carried out by non-Muslims which quite often had resulted in unfair and biased judgments. In addition to the research leading to a doctorate degree, I told him it was also part of my job as a lecturer in the Sociology of Religion at UGM. After my rather long briefing he replied: “For the sake of science, it would be okay to do research on the topic…”

Following a conversation and interview which eventually took forty minutes more than previously planned, Ba’asyir recommended I contact two people: Abu Tholut, a JI leader just released from
prison, and Afif Abdul Majid, his former special aide who had accompanied him to Malaysia. After the meeting, Ghozali and I quickly moved to Majid’s house which was located close to the Ngruki pesantren. He welcomed us kindly especially after being informed that Ustad Abu had suggested we meet him on the subject. Instead of Abu Tholut, he suggested I meet Ali Imron, Nasir Abbas or Aris Munandar to talk about the subject. Majid suggested that Imron knew much more on Ambon than Tholut. Ghozali asked if Munandar was no longer a fugitive. Majid replied he had been cleared by the police, especially after Ustaz Abu had been cleared—previously Munandar had been a police fugitive when they tried to link him to Ustaz Abu. Strangely, Majid claimed to have no number of Munandar, instead he suggested us to contact him through his wife.

In short: my attempts to penetrate the core of the Ngruki network eventually failed. Although I finally succeeded in getting Munandar’s mobile number, I failed to meet him even after several appointments. He canceled some appointments at the last minute due to some sudden, urgent activities outside the city of Solo. My endeavors to meet some informants through Zainuddin also ended up the same way. In the meeting after I got the endorsement from Ustaz Abu, he explained to me that some of his fellow Ambon veterans had moved out from Solo and he had failed to get hold of their current contact numbers.

- Hanging out in the Jakarta ‘terrorist complex’

From a journalist friend in Jakarta, I got some contact numbers, including for Mahendradatta, a member of Tim Pembela Muslim (TPM – Muslim Lawyer Team), and Nasir Abbas, a former JI leader who now worked with the police. With the help of a researcher friend, I was introduced to Fauzan, a JI activist who had completed a jail sentence for his role in the violent Poso conflict. After meeting and having an interview with Mahendradatta, a Muslim lawyer and activist who had graduated from UCLA, I was given some contact numbers, including that of Brigadier General Suryadarma, the com-
mander of the notorious special counter-terrorist police unit, Densus 88. Yet, Mahendra warned me: “Don’t mention you got his number from me, because our relationship has been tense recently.”

A few days later, I decided to risk sending a message to Suryadarma’s mobile. Introducing myself as a UGM lecturer doing research on *harakah Islamiyah* (Islamist movement) by focusing on “jihad transformation”, I asked for permission and help to interview Ali Imron and Abu Dujana.\(^ {10} \) Totally beyond my expectations he called me on Monday morning 28 January 2008: “Assalamualaikum! Good morning *Pak Dosen*…” With a peasant, friendly voice he expressed his willingness to help me meet Ali Imron. He even promised to send his staff to pick me up from my boarding house to take me to the jail where Imron was imprisoned. But due to his staff’s busy schedule, nobody was available to pick me up. “Just come to the special detention center for drugs of the Jakarta Police Headquarters and tell the guards that you have been approved by Pak Surya,” he said in his second call several minutes after the first one.

In addition to Suryadarma, I was also helped by Nasir Abbas. After having a meeting and interview with him in a pizza restaurant in Warung Buncit, South Jakarta, on 30 January 2008, I asked his help in arranging an interview with Ali Imron. He responded kindly by contacting Pepen, his fellow ‘Afghanistan alumnus’, to take me to see Ali Imron. The next morning I met Pepen at the canteen food stall of the Jakarta Police Headquarters and then went together to see Ali Imron in his cell in the ‘terrorist complex’ of the detention center. At least two things surprised me greatly that day. First, Pepen’s appearance was nothing like an Afghanistan alumnus: he was dressed in a black shirt and trousers like an official of the U.S. *Jeep* team, with

\(^ {10} \) Here is the message I sent to Brig. General Suryadarma, originally in capital letters. *Ass. Wr. Wb. Perkenalkan saya Najib Azca, dosen sosiologi UGM yang sedang riset tentang harakah Islamiyah dengan focus transformasi jihad. Bolehkah saya menemui Ali Imron dan Abu Dujana sebagai narasumber? Atas bantuan dari Pak Suryadarma dihaturkan terima kasih. Wass, Najib Azca.* (Muslim greetings. Let me introduce myself Najib Arca, a UGM sociology lecturer doing research on *harakah Islamiyah* with a focus on jihad transformation. May I meet Ali Imron and Abu Dujana as sources? I extend my appreciation of your help Mr Suryadarma. Muslim farewell, Najib Azca.*
its brand embroidered in several parts of his shirt. He had a muscular body and neat, short hair with trim moustache and short beard made me completely fail to recognize him as an ‘Afghan alumni’. The next surprise was that Pepen and I went into the maximum security jail as if we were entering our very own house: without any strict scrutiny, presentation of personal identity documents or writing any personal details in the visitor’s book. Only on the second floor, before the steel gate of the ‘terrorist complex’, which was locked by a huge padlock, was I asked to hand in our personal identity to the prison guard. That was all. So I could bring in everything in my backpack, including my digital camera and digital recorder.

It seemed likely that Pepen was quite well known and recognized by the guards and his presence was enough to entitle me to enter a place where the most dangerous terrorists in Southeast Asia were detained. On my next four visits, it was enough for me to say: “I am the visitor of Pak Ali Imron” to be granted entry to the complex, Then, after submitting my identity card to the guards, I would be allowed to enter the complex without any strict scrutiny nor any extra money to be which was commonly demanded of visitors to other prisoners.

During my interview with Ali Imron I was informed that Hendro, a prisoner sentenced for terrorism in Poso, was jailed in a different place due to misbehavior. I was curious to discover his details. I had the feeling I could uncover a very different case by interviewing him. So soon after finishing my interview with Imron, I sent another message to General Suryadarma expressing my gratitude while asking for more help and permission, if possible to interview Hendro. The General, again surprisingly, said yes and asked me to contact his adjutant to arrange the visit with him. As I will explain in Chapter Five, my instincts were true: the life story and life trajectory of Hendro was quite in contrast to Ali Imron, both in terms of his ideological views and his relationship with the police.

In the meantime, I also met Abu Dujana, the alleged military JI commander, during the break of his trial in the South Jakarta Court on 28 January 2008. After having a brief opportunity to talk
with him, having mentioned that Pak Surya had given his approval, he told me that he had had no critical involvement either in Ambon or in Poso. So I then stopped my efforts to interview him.

In addition to the two contrasting life stories of (ex) JI activists in jail, I met Fauzan, a JI activist who had been released from jail. I was introduced to Fauzan by Badrus Sholeh, a lecturer of the State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta who was a fellow student with me at ANU, Canberra. I had actually heard his name from a journalist friend, Darlis Muhammad, when I was in Palu before starting my doctoral program. But Fauzan was not around in Palu at the time. My relationship with Fauzan quickly became closer and friendlier after he mentioned that he had been living in Menteng Raya 58, Central Jakarta, the PII and GPI headquarters, which I had visited several times as a PII activist and later. I had a series of interviews with him in Menteng Raya 58 as well as in Palu when we met there. It was with his help that I met with some of ‘the Afghan alumni’ who run herbal clinic in Cililitan, Jakarta. I was even given a nabawi herbal treatment by Chaidir, an Afghan veteran, in the clinic. It was also through his channels that I met with some militia leaders in Poso, including Pian Jempai.

Fauzan had been jailed for a shorter sentence than either Imron or Hendro and for cases not directly linked to terrorist actions. He had been jailed twice; firstly, for his role in leading an attack to Christian villages in Poso in September 2000, and secondly, for his role in smuggling weapons and bullets to Poso in September 2002. Compared to the two other JI activists, his historical root to jihadi activism ran deeper: his father and uncle were the diehard DI activists. The jihadi tradition was continued by the children: he and two other younger brothers were jailed for activities related to terrorism. However, in the post-prison period, his affiliation with JI was seriously damaged after he was accused by other JI fellows of disclosing the jihadi network to the police. Although he himself felt he remained affiliated with JI, his relationship with police was also quite close which caused him trouble among JI activists.
• **Poso stories: from ‘Islamic shop’ to fire brigade office**

Before making the trip to Poso, I stayed for two nights in Palu, the capital of Central Sulawesi, to meet local resource persons and to discuss with local journalists and activists of AJI (Aliansi Jurnalis Independen, Alliance of Independent Journalists). I went to Poso accompanied by two journalists from Palu, namely Darlis Muhammad, the local correspondent of the *Tempo* news weekly, and Iwan Lapasere, a freelance TV journalist. During my stay in Poso, there were two important places to spend time and collect information: a local NGO, *Lembaga Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Sipil* (LPMS, Institute for Civil Society Empowerment), and a youth radio station named ‘Matahari’. While my relationship with LPMS had developed several years before my fieldwork, my link to the Radio Matahari began after my fieldwork commenced when I was introduced by Muhammad and Lapasere to its young and energetic manager, Rafik. With his vast networks in Poso, Rafik kindly helped me to develop contacts with various Islamist groups in Poso, including ex Laskar Jihad activists as well as the JI-related group Tanah Runtuh.

Yet, my approach to the Tanah Runtuh group had begun in Jakarta through Hendro, the son-in-law of a leading figure in the Tanah Runtuh, Haji Abdullah (a pseudonym). Bearing Hendro’s greetings, I was able to meet and interview Haji Abdullah in his house, also the site of a *pesantren* in the Tanah Runtuh ward, Poso. During the interview he rejected any association with JI and claimed to know nothing about Hendro’s link to JI until the case was recently exposed by the media. One of my JI informants, however, suggested the opposite, claiming Haji Abdullah had been committed to JI. Through the full endorsement of Haji Abdullah, I met two *ustaz* who had come to Poso during the conflict, namely Arman and Imran (both pseudonyms). Arman, of Javanese descent, born and raised in Aceh, was also the secretary of the *pesantren* and ran an Islamic shop in Poso, selling various goods from clothing to food, from books to perfumes. A series of interviews took place in his shop, accompanied by some glasses of mineral water. Imran was from Yogyakarta and had graduated from Ngruki *pesantren* before later studying at the State Uni-
versity of Yogyakarta. Imran went with his wife to Poso, where they both worked as teachers, specializing in childhood education, in the pesantren under the auspice of Haji Abdullah.

By the second visit in 2009, Arman had moved out from the pesantren after receiving pressure from other ustaz following some internal dispute. Arman told me there had been a difference of opinion between Haji Abdullah and other ‘migrant’ ustaz over some issues, including relations with the government. Haji Abdullah is a retired civil servant and had only became radicalized during the conflict, but his ideological views are basically moderate and include maintaining good relations with the government. He also had also taken part in the post-conflict ‘reconstruction project’ and recovery programs implemented by the national government. On the other hand, some of the migrant ustaz were associated with more radical Islamic schools of thought and the Salafi Jihadism of JI. According to Arman, due to the worsening relationship between Haji Abdullah and other migrant ustaz, the former was spending more time in Palu than Poso recently. When I asked Arman if Hendro was the intellectual patron of the migrant ustaz he declined to answer.

With the help of Rafik, I was able to meet the ex Laskar Jihad activists in Poso through Pak Jufri, a local Salafi activist. Pak Jufri helped me to meet some Salafi activists who lived in Sayo, including Abim, the leader of the Poso Salafis, and Adang, one of its young leaders. Initially I planned to interview Abim and he had agreed to be interviewed. However, after the first interview, I failed to gain a further interview with him due to his packed schedule as the husband of four wives as well as the leader of the Poso Salafis. After a series of last minute cancelation of interviews by him, I asked Adang to be my life history informant. Perhaps feeling pity toward me, he agreed. Since he worked as a part-time staff of the Poso city fire brigade unit, I conducted two interviews in the office (to be exact: in the mosque of the office) while he was on duty.

Instead of only spending time in the town of Poso, I also went to the Pandajaya village, located in the sub-district of South Pamaona in the Poso District. Pandajaya is a Muslim village, with many
migrant inhabitants, surrounded by a number of Christian villages, situated close to Tentena, the center of the Christian community in the Poso District. It took almost four hours by car to reach Pandajaya. Nothing ran smoothly during my trip to Pandajaya. It began with the help of Chalis, an LPMS (Lembaga Penguatan Masyarakat Sipil, Civil Society Empowering Institute) activist, who was about to run for local parliament during the upcoming 2009 election. He helped me to meet a young leader of Pandajaya, Salim (pseudonym) who was organizing a soccer tournament in South Pamona. Salim had gone to Poso, among other reasons, for a fund raising mission. We met where I was staying in Poso. After introducing myself as a UGM lecturer, doing research on Islamist movements in the post-conflict setting of Poso, we talked a little about Sulaiman, a jihadist from Java who had been in Pandajaya and was jailed for his role in a failed bombing attempt in Yogyakarta. Salim said that Sulaiman was a good friend of him and the two of them had almost been arrested together at the time. Salim did not happen to be arrested because he refused to leave before he conducted the *dhurur* (midday) prayer. Sulaiman had never returned since.

In the middle of the talk, I asked him if there were any non-local activists still staying in his area. He told me they had all left. He also said that he was often asked such a question, especially by intelligence operatives. It seemed he lacked trust in me, and was even suspicious, so that he refused to tell me the real situation. Close to the end of the meeting, Chalish asked me about my plan to visit Pandajaya. With nobody available to be interviewed I had no reason to go there, I said. But Salim did not change his mind. I took my leave from him to prepare to leave for an interview. Before leaving I decided to donate some money for the tournament, followed by Chalis. At that very moment, Salim changed his tune by saying there was a non-local *mujahidin* who had just returned from Java, named Harun (a pseudonym) from the *Darus Syahadah* pesantren of Boyolali. I responded telling him I had felt he had lacked trust in me but was happy he had changed his mind. He admitted he had suspected I was an intelligence officer. So we agreed to make an appointment
to meet in Pandajaya the following Sunday, 23 March 2008, on the day of the tournament. I then interviewed Harun in Salim’s house but he did not seem relaxed and open during the interview. It was understandable. It is very difficult to build trust in such a short period of time.

During my visit to Poso I also interviewed the Poso District Chief of Police, Daeng Adeni Muhan, and some local militia leaders including Sofian Jempay from the KOMPAK (Komite Penanggulangan Krisis - Committee for Overcoming Crises) Kayamanya, Abah Mohan and Abang Tokorondo (who was taking care of the new building of the Pesantren Gontor project).

- **Ambon stories: from a wedding to preaching in jail**

It was my bad luck that I had lost the contact numbers of some Ambon-based Salafi activists which I had collected during the *Daulah Nasional* in Yogyakarta several weeks before I left for Ambon. Luckily, Djuanda Umasugi, a lecturer at Pattimura University, Ambon who had helped me during fieldwork had a good friend among them. So it was through Umasugi that I was able to meet Pak Erwin, a leading Salafi activist in Ambon who works as a local building developer. Erwin is a Buginese, about 45 years old, who migrated to Ambon and married a daughter of a senior lecturer of Pattimura University, a colleague of Umasugi’s. Although working as a mid-level building developer, Erwin was dressed like a typical Salafi in a long gown and above ankle trousers with a long beard. Initially our encounter at his office-cum-house at the Kebun Cengkikh housing complex was a bit stiff since he was suspicious of my research focus on non-local ex LJ activists: “What’s wrong with ex Laskar staying on here?”

Of course I replied that nothing was wrong with them and I explained that I did not view them negatively at all. The mood became more relaxed when I said that I had met with ustaz Wahhab Lumaela in Yogyakarta several months before. Lumaela was a senior and highly respected Salafi activist with a noble Ambonese
background. Erwin then called Lumaela, who lived nearby, informing him of my presence at his house. The mood shifted drastically in a few minutes when Lumaela came to Erwin’s place and greeted me warmly, hugging me and kissing my cheek as close friends or fellow Salafi commonly do. He still remembered my name and had been reminded, he said, a month ago of my plan to visit Ambon. Lumaela was a sort of gatekeeper for the Salafis in Ambon. With such a pleasant welcome, fieldwork related to the Salafis in Ambon ran very well after that. I was even invited out twice for a restaurant meal by Pak Erwin and the Salafi group.

We then made agreed to meet the next day in the Kisar ward, which was renamed Nurlette ward and eventually Kampung Mujairin. This was the site of the new housing compound being built by Salafis in Ambon on land previously under dispute.11 They planned to carry out collective labor (kerja bakti) to build a new mosque in the complex, named Abu Bakar Ash-Shidiq—a similar name to the foundation that had been founded by the Salafis in Ambon in 2003. Things became even smoother when I was introduced to the Chairman of the foundation Yayasan Abu Bakar Ash-Shidiq the next day. Taufan (pseudonym) a young man born in Blora, Central Java, in 1976, who graduated from the UGM Faculty of Social and Political Sciences in 1999. Thus he was my junior, from the same faculty although from a different department. We soon became friendly and he helped me a lot in my fieldwork, including by allowing me to attend an internal Salafi meeting on the transmigration program and by introducing me to Salafi activists to be my informants, as well as becoming one of my core-informants himself.

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11 The land had been occupied by Christians from Kisar, a village in Southeast Maluku, before the conflict. When the conflict occurred, they left the area, mostly returning to their original homeland. The land ownership was then disputed before the court, with the case eventually ending up at the Supreme Court with the land rights being granted to the Nurlette Family, a local noble family in Ambon. Following due process of law, Haji Nurdin, a strong local businessman and a Salafi activist, had given significant financial support to the Nurlette Family. At the end of the case, he asked for a portion of land for himself as well as for the Salafi housing complex (conversation with Haji Nurdin, Ambon, 23/4/2008).
There was another series of interviews with Anshor (pseudonym), a Salafi who worked as a street vendor in Ambon. He had returned to his hometown, Kendal, Central Java, after the disbanding of the LJ but later decided to return to Ambon for ‘romantic’ reasons: he wanted to marry a girl he had met a few days before leaving Ambon in 2002…

One of my most memorable experiences in conducting fieldwork among the Salafis in Ambon was my attendance at the wedding of a Salafi ustaz in Gemba, a place where many Javanese transmigrants lived in the West Ceram District. Lumaela invited me to attend the wedding. Although he and Taufan were unable to attend, Lumaela helped to arrange a Salafi activist to take me there by motorcycle. The trip took about three hours, including crossing by ferry from Liang Port in Ambon to Waitatiri Port in Ceram Island. My attendance at the wedding proved things to me: first, marriage is a crucial way for Salafis to expand and to develop their network organically in the area; second, it reflected their strong self-confidence and friendly attitude toward outsiders like me.

While my efforts to enter the network of former LJ activists went well, I almost became stuck in my efforts to gain access to those linked with the Laskar Mujahidin. Friends of mine in Ambon, academics or journalists or NGO activists, had lost their contact to them, especially in the aftermath of the Loki incident in May 2004. The Loki incident occurred when a group of jihadi activists attacked a police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) post located in Loki village, Ceram Island, resulting in six people being killed, mainly police personnel. The police launched an intensive security operation to pursue the attackers which led to the arrest of several people associated with the incident while others remained at large (ICG 2005c). In this difficult situation, I sent a message to Syuhaib, a JI activist who had been in Ambon and was in custody at the Jakarta Police Headquarters, asking for advice. Strangely, I had never talked with Syuhaib before, I had just got his mobile number from Idris, a prisoner from the Bali bombing case in the same jail. So I introduced myself first, and then explained my position in Ambon and my problems in try-
ing to meet and interview non-local jihadists in the area. This was just simply an attempt for a sort of snowballing with very little hope.

Amazingly, Syuhaid replied to my message with a very kind offer of help. He suggested I met with Azzam, a KOMPAK activist, the alleged mastermind of the Loki attack and other terror actions, who was imprisoned in Ambon. He promised he would contact Azzam on my behalf, and then, after receiving his approval, sent me the contact number of a local activist who would help take me to see Azzam in custody. What perfect help from a maximum-security detention center in the capital of Jakarta for a researcher located in the tiny Island of Ambon!

Through the help of Ode (pseudonym), a local Muslim activist, I was able to meet Azzam in the Waiheru detention center and conduct two interviews, the first took about two hours while the second one took only about one hour. We made an appointment for a third interview but he eventually canceled it due to family matters. As the material from my interviews with him was insufficient, his life story has not been included. Yet it was a fascinating opportunity to observe a segment of life in custody, include participating in a preaching session given by Azzam in the prison mosque.

My last informant in Ambon was Surahman, a PKS activist, I had discovered as part of snowballing in the fieldwork. It began with a coincidental encounter with Muzakir Assegaf, the Chairman of PKS Maluku, in front of the PKS office, near my place of stay in Ambon. I was walking around with my local partner, Umasugi, who knew him well. After a short greeting and introduction, I asked for a meeting and interview some time in the next few days which he responded to with a kind willingness. Umasugi and I continued on to another appointment after obtaining his mobile number. Later I contacted Assegaf for an appointment. He agreed to meet at the house of Azis Arbi, a member of national parliament who also the former chairman of the Dewan Syura (Advisory Board) of PKS Maluku. During the interview, Assegaf told me about a da’i (preacher) from Jakarta who came to Ambon during the conflict and stayed on: it was Surahman.
After finishing the interview I contacted Surahman who soon came to see me at Arbi’s house. Surahman quickly agreed to become my core-informant. We made an interview then, followed by two other interviews during my second trip to Ambon in 2009. It seemed that being in the house of a senior and respected member of PKS granted me a privilege. In the middle of the interview with Surahman, the head of the Central Maluku District, Abdullah Tuasikal, came by. It was the run-up period before the Maluku Governor Election in which Tuasikal was going to run as a candidate with PKS political endorsement. He came to see Arbi who, unfortunately, had left to give a sermon nearby. So, the interview was interrupted for twenty or thirty minutes for a chat on recent local political developments with the number one person in the district of Central Maluku!

Having related the long narratives of “following the flow of actors” I now return to discussion of some methodological issues concerning oral history, interpretive biography, and the link between life history method and sociology of social movements.

**Oral history: events, meanings, subjectivity**

An oral history interview is basically a collaborative project between the narrator and researcher, between interviewee and interviewer. Shopes (2004: 2) defines oral history as “a self-conscious, disciplined conversation between two people about some aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical significance and intentionally recorded for the record.” At the heart of conversation is a dialogue, a process of interplay between the narrator and the interviewer each influencing the other in the interview process. Shopes (2004: 3) refers to Portelli (1997) in the quote: “Oral history . . . refers [to] what the source [i.e., the narrator] and the historian [i.e. the interviewer] do together at the moment of their encounter in the interview.”

While the term ‘oral history’ is a new one, Paul Thompson (1978: 19) argues in *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, that oral history is, in fact, as old as history itself: “It was the first kind of his-
But the main question commonly faced by oral history is: how reliable is the evidence of oral history? How does it compare with other types of historical source? After deeply discussing the matter comparing it with other kinds of sources, Thompson (1978: 134) concludes that “there are no absolute rules to indicate the reliability of oral evidence, any more than that of other historical sources.” He argues that the standard checks of reliability of oral history are just the same as for other sources, namely, “searching for internal consistency, cross-checking details from other sources, weighing evidence against a wider context.”

Another approach to the reliability of oral history is presented by Allesandro Portelli, an Italian historian. According to Portelli (1991: 51; emphasis in original), “Oral sources are credible but with different credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge.” Portelli underscores the importance of meaning and subjectivity in oral history and, thus, indicating there are no ‘false’ oral sources.

For him, the uniqueness of oral history is that “it tells us less about events than about their meaning... the unique and precious element which oral sources force upon the historian and which no other sources possess in equal measure is the speaker’s subjectivity... Subjectivity is as much the business of history as are the more visible “facts”. What informants believe is indeed a historical fact (that is, the fact that they believe it), as much as what really happened.” (1991: 50; emphasis in original)

I attempted to use two different approaches to oral history in my research. While trying to apply triangulation to test the reliability of oral evidence, as suggested by Thompson, it was also important to go beyond events and ‘facts’ in order to grasp the meanings and subjectivity of the narrators. By taking into account that all the informants who were interviewed in this research were activists, it is useful to apply Della Porta’s (1992: 182) warning on typical distortions of activist’s narrative. Based on her extensive research on social movements in Italy, she found a particular tendency among
activists who become life history informants, such as the usage of unusual oratorical skills, a strong bias towards justifying their behavior based on political and ideological beliefs, and to connect their own personal choices to a historical, generational or class fate. Thus, instead of describing their private lives, activists as informants tend to steer their story towards general features of the environment and on their ‘political’ biography. Thus, Della Porta (1992: 182) suggests that “life histories are better suited for recounting an activist’s perception [than] that the ‘reality’ itself.”

It is also important to notice another difficulty in dealing with life history. As argued by Waterson (2007: 4) the very particularity of an individual live seems to resist generalizations because of “a (simultaneous) feeling of incompleteness, and of excess.” By a feeling of incompleteness, she means, the incapability of a person to tell everything about the self and also due to the fact that life itself is “unfinished business”. On the other hand, an excess of meaning is the consequence of the question: “how is one to derive conclusions from all of its idiosyncrasies?” In the same vein, Portelli (1991: vii) also recognizes “the sense of fluidity, of unfinishedness, or an inexhaustible work in progress, which is inherent to the fascination and frustration of oral history...” In this work I will try to delicately reconcile between the gap between biographical narratives as “unfinished business” and the well-established sociology of social movements by discussing the narratives of (post-)jihadists in Indonesia.

According to Anthony Giddens (1989: 680), the life history approach has been successfully employed in studies of major importance and is widely used in anthropology as well as sociology. It consists of biographical material assembled about particular individuals, without necessarily covering the whole span of an individual’s life, or all of its many aspects. One advantage of this approach, as Giddens argues, is its ability to provide as much detail about the development of people’s beliefs and attitudes over time. Furthermore, Della Porta (1999: 169) argues that while the use of biographical studies in sociological research remained noteworthy, by the end of the 1980s it was less significant in the subfield of political sociology,
in particular of social movement studies. Only a few endeavors have been carried out to work with life histories, especially in research focusing on clandestine political movements—in which Della Porta was among the proponents.

The use of life-history or biographical approach in the study of social movement, as Della Porta (1992: 173) suggests, has in fact oriented towards questions concerning several issues as follows: (1) “the influence of primary socialization on political behavior;” (2) “the role of social networks in the process of recruitment to political organizations;” (3) “the structures of incentives which motivate activists in their political involvements;” and, finally, (4) “the successive shifts in the perception of reality which involvement in a movement subculture brings about.“ Although sharing Della Porta’s suggestion to mainly focus on the recruitment process for participation into the movement, I have moved further by examining the biographical impact of activism to the individual activists.

Up to quite recently studies of the biographical impact of activism have received little attention in contrast to the bulk of works on the political institutional impacts of social movement, as McAdam (1999: 117-9) argues. A similar situation is also apparent when comparing the extensive literature on movement recruitment to the small body of follow-up studies of former activists that have attempted to discuss the biographical impact of movement participation (Giugni 2004: 490). Located under the conceptual map of silence and exit in the study of demography, the life course and contentions proposed by Goldstone and McAdam (quoted by Giugni 2004: 491), I will focus on the ‘biographical consequences of individual activism’ which can be located in the intersection of thematic focus on ‘decline/outcomes’ rather than ‘emergence/development’ and on the micro rather than macro level of analytic focus.

How to study the biographical impact of activism? Here I will follow Denzin (1989) to apply what he calls an interpretive biography. Following Sartre, Denzin (1989: 66) assumes, “the existence of a pivotal event in a person’s life. It also assumes that this event will constitute a pivotal meaning structure that organizes the other
activities in a person’s life.” Based on this assumption, he contends that life is shaped by key, turning-point moments, or what he calls *epiphanies*. Denzin (1989: 70) defines *epiphanies* as “interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives. In them, personal character is manifested. They are often moments of crisis. They alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person’s life.” By referring to Victor Turner’s (1986) notion of the “liminal phase of experience” where the person is in a “no-man land betwixt and between…the past and the…future,” Denzin (1989, p. 70-71) argues that epiphanies are existential acts. Some are ritualized, as in the rites of passage, while others become routinized. He also suggests that “The meanings of these experiences are always given retrospectively, as they are relived and re-experienced in the stories persons tell about what has happened to them.” (1989: 71)

I have argued in Chapter 1 that jihad participation has been a pivotal event that becomes a pivotal meaning structure which has biographical impacts to jihad actors. To study how jihad as a pivotal event has shaped the life-trajectory of jihad actors, I applied Sartre’s (1963) progressive-regressive method which, as formulated by Denzin (1989: 67), “begins with a key event in a subject’s live and then works forward and backward from that event.” In the case of this research, the key event is the process of ‘radical reasoning’ to participate in jihad movement as a collective action. Starting from that event, I then work forward by observing the life-trajectory of jihad actors in the post-jihad period, and then move backward to collect their social background and process of their engagement with the movement. Contending that biographical method “rests on subjective and intersubjectively gained knowledge and understandings of the life experiences of individuals,” Denzin (1989: 28) suggests that such understandings “rely on [an] interpretive process [that] leads one to enter into the emotional life of another.” He sees the link between the two steps of interpretation and understanding in biographical method as follows: “Interpretation, the act of interpreting and making sense out of something, creates the conditions for understanding, which involves being able to grasp the meaning of an
interpreted experience for another individual.” Here we come to the deep level of life lived by a person, or what Denzin (1989: 29) calls: “a feeling, moral, sacred, inner self.”

In oral history, the deep is the outcome of what may be called the ‘double dialogue’ in the process of interview. While the first level of dialogue between narrator and researcher, between interviewee and interviewer, brings to light facts of the ‘past’, the second level of dialogue between narrator and facts bring to light meanings of the ‘past’ which are strongly colored by the subjectivity of the narrators. Here we come to the next section of how to dig the deep of the life stories of the narrators during fieldwork.

“Digging deep”: doing the interviews

In order to get into deep of the life story, the inner self of the informants, which Denzin suggests may only rarely be shown to others, the first critical step to be done by the interviewer is to develop a certain level of trust and confidence in the interviewee. I argue this is one of the most important and simultaneously difficult steps to do in carrying the oral history interview, especially in the case of (post-) jihadists. The different character of relationship and the level of trust and confidence between interviewer and interviewee will affect the different type (formal or informal) and quality (personal or less personal) of information produced by the interview. I will examine the many different experiences I had with my informants during the fieldwork.

Life is so rich and complex; so doing life history interview may lead us to almost unlimited possibilities of stories from the life histories of people. Thus, in order to improve the comparability of different life histories Della Porta (1992: 183) suggests the use of an interview outline. Following Della Porta’s suggestion, I made an outline of interview (see the appendices) which basically divided the life history of informants into three parts: pre-jihad (consists of personal, social and family background, personal development from
childhood to adolescence/adulthood, as well as social, political and religious affiliation; \textit{jihad period} (consists of two main parts: the decision-making process to join jihad and ‘jihad experiences’); and finally \textit{post-jihad period} (consisting of two main parts: the decision to return or to stay and the life trajectory in ‘post-jihad’ period). In addition, I added two additional sections, namely, \textit{major historical events} and \textit{other issues}. In the first section, I listed some issues/questions concerning major historical events, global, national or local, and how the actors linked the events with their own experiences during jihad and the post jihad period. In the second section, I listed some issues/questions concerning some other general issues, such as the conflict, political changes, democratization, and other Islamist movements, and how they linked the issues with their own experiences during jihad and post jihad period.

Before starting the interview, after introducing the focus of the research and asking permission for the interview, I usually handed out the interview outline to the informants. I also asked for permission to record the interviews. If availability of, and access to, the informant was not difficult, I usually did not start the interview at the first meeting, but instead used the opportunity to develop a casual and relaxed relationship while building more trust and confidence in the informants. Where availability or access to an informant was quite difficult, such as those informants who were in the custody, I began the interview after a rather long introduction to develop a certain level of trust and confidence.

In some cases, the beginning of the interview was sometimes quite tough, such as my interview with Azzam in custody in Ambon and Hendro in West Jakarta Police custody. By Azzam, I was firstly confronted with a tough question: “are you working with the police, \textit{thaghut} (evil, un-Islamic forces), in doing this research?” Of course I refuted his accusation by telling him that I worked as a UGM lecturer and researcher while currently undertaking a doctoral project. In the case of Hendro, the interview was also commenced in such an inconvenient way: I went to his ‘isolation’ cell escorted by a member of Densus 88, the adjutant of its commander. As I described in Chap-
ter 5, I tried to smooth over the awkward situation by asking permission to conduct the Ashr prayer in his cell after I had explained my research topic about and handing him my interview outline.

It is obvious that not all the interviews done during the fieldwork were successful. Some interviews were simply unsuccessful due to the lack of opportunity to conduct the interview, such as the cases of Sulaiman, Harun, Azzam, Abim, Imran, and Amri (all pseudonyms). Except with Azzam and Sulaiman, I was only able to conduct one interview with the informants. However, although I conducted two interviews with Azzam and Sulaiman, the results were far from perfect for other reasons. In the case of Azzam, the first interview (although it lasted quite long, about two hours) was not quite successful due to my failure to guide the interview as well as his lack of trust, especially in the early parts. The second interview, while more fluent, was much shorter (about one hour). My interviews with Sulaiman took place when I had not yet started my doctoral project, so that the focus of the interviews did not really fit the dissertation objectives. The location of the interviews was also not a ‘neutral’ place, namely the office of a criminal investigator, which, I think, hindered Sulaiman from narrating his stories freely and comfortably.

The interviews with some informants were only classified as quite successful due to the limited duration and frequency of the interviews, such as the cases of Surahman, Hendro, Reza, Adang, and Rahman. Notes need to be provided for Reza, an informant who live in Yogyakarta, the same city as the researcher. Although living in the same location, it was not easy to make an appointment with Reza since he seemed to be busy for taking care of a new family with two kids and earning money for them. Although I met him more than three times, it was for only a short time, sometimes for less than an hour. This seemed to be linked with the next factor, namely a ‘formal relationship’ during the interviews. Although I have known him for years, the difference in religious culture led us to a sort of cultural gap. It was reflected in his reluctance to meet and have the interview at his house or in another place nearby his house, though our houses
were located quite nearby in the northern part of Yogyakarta. Similar kinds of formal relationship also occurred with some other informants, namely Hendro, Ale, Adang, Anshor, and Rahman.

Finally, there were some life history interviews which, I consider, can be viewed as successful, namely with six informants as follows: Fauzan, Ayyash, Awod, Jodi, Nizam, Baghdad, and Fauzi. I consider my life history interview with them as successful because I could, to a certain extent, dig the deep of their life stories, their inner self. Striking evidence of the penetration of the deep of the informant’s inner self was articulated by Baghdad, after a series of life history interviews: “I feel as if I had just finished making a confession as a sinner to a priest…” The statement was made in a break after a series of life history interviews with him for more than two days in his house and other surrounding venues in November 2007. During the interviews, he narrated various aspects of his life stories: from childhood to adolescence, from his relationship with his parents to his girl friends, from jihad experience to post-jihad mental disorder, from mystical encounter to sexual desire…

Of course, not all informants in this category were ready and willing to share the deep of their life stories at the same level as Baghdad. However, they did share quite profoundly turning point moments in their lives: Fauzan in his period under a DI-affiliated high school in West Java; Ayyash in his early period of migration to Jakarta; Jodi in his turbulent period of study in the Netherlands; Fauzi and Awod in the early period of reformasi.

Some of them quite openly allowed me to follow and observe part of their daily lives or some particular events in their lives. With the exception of Jodi, who I interviewed in my parents’ house in Pekalongan, I interviewed the informants at their home—or within the same housing complex as in the case of Fauzan who lives in a compound. Thus I was able to meet, or be introduced, or have a little chat, with either their families or relatives or friends, who were around during the interviews. Some of them were willing to introduce me to their fellow activists or their social networks. Fauzan, for example, brought me to meet and hang out with a group of ‘Afghan alumni’
who run a herbal clinic in Cililitan, East Jakarta. He was also willing to introduce me to his ‘business partner’ in Ciledug, West Java, who runs a small plastic recycling business—though this has not yet happened due to my limited time during fieldwork. Ayyash, on the other hand, allowed me to accompany him to visit his former fellow prisoners, as well as his pupils, held in custody in Batang, Central Java. Fauzi let me attend the regular sermons held in his house. Whereas Awod, besides allowing me to befriend his Hizbullah and Supremasi fellows, helped me to get the contact numbers of some Islamist activists in Solo, including Aris Munandar, the former Chairman of KOMPAK Solo, and helped me to make contact with him.

From my fieldwork experience, I argue that personal networks play a very important role in building with the informants’ trust. Of the six informants with whom I made successful life history interviews, two of them were my old friends: Jodi is a senior high school friend and Nizam is a junior high school friend. Thus, I had long ties with both of them. My relationship with Baghdad was a shorter one as I had met him several years ago during my early period as a junior lecturer at UGM when I became engaged with youth NU activists in Yogyakarta. The personal relationship was also important here since my cousin, Jazir (pseudonym), a leading youth NU activist, is a close friend of Baghdad. I had met and conducted in-depth interviews with Fauzi before starting my doctoral project. My good relationship with one of his trusted political loyalists also seemed helpful in building trust and confidence in him.

The other three, namely Fauzan, Ayyash and Awod, I had just met and began to know them during fieldwork. Yet I had strong, though indirect, links with them through my good friends who had a strong reputation as Muslim activists and were also their close friends. I was introduced and became acquainted with Awod through Heri; with Ayyash through Aris, and with Fauzan through Darlis. With the exception of Nizam and Fauzan, they were political Islamic activists with multiple types of affiliation. For Nizam, it seemed likely that our personal relationship and my personal credentials as a Muslim activist were seen as sufficient factors for him to allow
me to do the interview. For Fauzan, my track record as a (former) PII activist, with its headquarters located in his housing compound and my older brother as its former leader, seemed likely to have influenced him to quickly trust me. The fact that his relationship with some JI fellows had been problematic since his release from prison had, eventually, led him to be relatively ‘open’ to both ‘deradicalized’ JI fellows and the police as well as to journalists and academics.

“Telling the tales”: presenting the narratives

Based on fieldwork notes and transcription of the interviews, I present the narratives of life stories of the informants in Chapters 4-6 of the dissertation. Following Thompson (1978), I present “a collection of stories” based on life history interviews with some informants. According to him, “a collection of stories” is a better way of presenting more typical life-history material rather than “the single life-history narrative” or “a cross-analysis” since “it also allows the stories to be used much more easily in constructing a broader historical interpretation, by grouping them—as a whole or fragmented—around common themes.” (1978: 204) The common theme for all informants in this research is their process of becoming jihad activists, their jihad participation and their ‘after jihad’ life.

Having abundant life story narratives from the core informants, I took the steps to determine whose narratives were to be included into the dissertation. The first step was to exclude the unsuccessful interviews from the list of core-informants. Through this step, I reduced the list of core-informants from twenty-one to fifteen. The second step was to distinguish between informants based on the different Islamic activism networks with which they have engaged, namely, pious, jihadi, and political activism. As discussed in Chapter 1, the categorization is not meant to be exhaustive, so that there is some overlap between them. Based on this categorization, I present the narratives of pious activists, jihadi activists, and political activists respectively in the next three chapters. The final step was to
select which informants to be included in the dissertation based on a variety of social profiles and backgrounds as well as the variety of life trajectory taken by informants in the post-jihad period. Through this step I came up with ten life story narratives (four pious activists; three jihadi activists; and three political activists) to be presented and discussed further in the following Chapters 4-6.

In some cases, instead of successful interviews I chose to include quite successful interviews for special considerations. In the case of Jodi, a jihadist who joined in Afghanistan, I do not include him because he did not participate in the religious communal conflict in Indonesia. In the case of Nizam, a Laskar Jihad activist, I did not include him because his ‘after jihad’ life was atypical so that I chose to present the life story narrative of Fauzi for his post-jihad trajectory of a Salafi activist. In the case of Baghdad, I did not include him due to his very unusual social background (liberal-NU), jihad experience (as a researcher/documenter), and post-jihad trajectory (a leader of Sufi order who occasionally played the role of a spiritual-political advisor). Instead I present the life story narratives of Surahman, a Tarbiyah activist, who stayed on in Ambon and transformed into a politician. Although I did not include all of the life story narratives of Nizam, Baghdad and Jodi, I use parts of their narratives in the discussion, either the pre or during or after jihad period.

Of the pious activists, I chose to present four people of different social backgrounds and life trajectory in the post-jihad period: two of them returning home after the jihad period, while another two stayed on in the conflict area: one in Ambon, another one in Poso. Of those who returned home, I present Reza, a UGM student who quit his studies after his jihad period, and Fauzi, a doctor-cum-politician who later resigned from the political party though still playing an indirect role through his personal and social network. Of those who stayed on, I present Taufan, a new UGM graduate who was a member of the LJ special forces during jihad who was later elected chairman of a Salafi foundation in Ambon, and Adang, the graduate of a vocational high school in West Java who works as a part-time staff member of the Poso fire brigade. Adang had returned home to
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West Java for some months before deciding to return to Poso after failing to find a proper job, no longer feeling ‘at home’ in his own hometown. I will use Nizam’s narrative to support my argument on ‘enclave culture’ on this chapter.

Of the jihadi activists, I chose to present three JI activists who had different social backgrounds as well as dissimilar life trajectories following a period of imprisonment. The first person is Fauzan, a Jakarta born male who took the path of jihad, by joining the Afghan war, in the footsteps of his father, the DI activist. After being released from a three and a half year prison sentence for his roles in the religious conflict in Poso, he was accused by his jihadi fellows of leaking information about the JI network to the police. So his association with JI movement has become ambivalent; while he still identifies himself as a JI activist, he received financial assistance from the police. The second person is Ali Imron, the field coordinator of the first Bali bombing, who joined the jihad in Afghanistan following his older brother Mukhlas. After being arrested by police and jailed, he made a public apology and converted to be a police partner in counter-terrorism programs. The last is Hendro, the son of an abangan family in Wonogiri who converted to be a jihadi activist and was sent to the jihadi academy in Mindanao after being a university dropout in the late 1990s. Although being sentenced to twenty years jail, he seemed likely remains strongly loyal to jihadism and refuses to be cooperative with police.

Finally, of the political activists, I chose to present three people: two who return home and one who stays on. Of those who returned home, I present Awod Umar, a man of Arabic-Gujarati descent who became a leader of the Brigade Hizbullah paramilitary group in Solo before the jihad and was later elected chairman of the PBB in Solo, and Abu Ayyash, the son of a non-devout Muslim family in Pekalongan who later became an FPI activist and eventually, after his jihad period, was elected chairman of the FPI Pekalongan. Both Umar and Ayyash were sentenced to jail for a short period of time for their involvement in leading ‘sweeping operation’ against illegal liquor businesses. Unlike Umar and Ayyash, Surahman, a
PKPU da’wa activist from Jakarta, decided to stay on in Ambon in the post jihad period. He was recruited as vice chairman of PKS in Maluku and plays an active role in local politics in Maluku, although not running for election to parliament. I will use part of the narratives from Jodi and Baghdad to support my argument on the process of becoming a jihadist in this chapter. Let us move to their life story narratives in the next chapters!***