

The Transmission of Terrorist Movements in Sulawesi through the Narrative of the Islamic State of DI/TII (1953-1965)

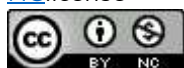
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This study analyses the transmission of the narrative of the Darul Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII) movement in Sulawesi led by Kahar Muzakkar (1953–1965) into the ideology of contemporary terrorist groups in the region. Using historical methods within a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) framework, the study reveals the mechanisms of transmission through kinship networks, informal education, and the circulation of literature that mythologises the history of this resistance. The findings show that the DI/TII narrative has been adapted and synthesised with transnational ideologies such as ISIS, resulting in historical-emotional legitimacy for groups such as Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT). This process of 'glocalisation of jihad' confirms that counter-terrorism approaches in Sulawesi must critically consider the historical roots and memory of local conflicts, in addition to countering global narratives.

Keywords: Narrative Transmission, DI/TII Sulawesi, Jihad Glocalization.

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1. Introduction

The background to research on the transmission of terrorist movements in Sulawesi with the narrative of the Islamic State of DI/TII (1953-1965) stems from a complex paradox. [1]. On the one hand, Sulawesi, particularly the central and southern regions, has been the epicentre of a significant wave of religiously motivated violence over the past two decades, often linked to transnational terrorist ideologies such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. [2]. On the other hand, the roots of conflict in this region actually refer to a very local and historical phenomenon: the Darul Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII) rebellion under the leadership of Kahar Muzakkar in the 1950s and 1960s [3]. The urgency of this research lies in the need to bridge these two realities to understand how the narratives, symbols, and collective memory of a local insurgency movement in the early days of the Republic were transmitted, adapted, and revived by contemporary actors who operate within the global discourse of jihadism. [4]. Without a deep understanding of this historical transmission, deradicalisation and counter-terrorism efforts in the region risk being superficial, addressing the symptoms of current violence without touching on the ideological roots that are deeply embedded in local history.

Sulawesi, especially after the sectarian riots in Poso (1998–2007)[5] which claimed thousands of lives, has become one of the 'laboratories' and important battlegrounds for the jihadist movement in Indonesia. [6]. Over time, this region gave rise to the most brutal and enduring local militant group: Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) under the leadership of Santoso (Abu Wardah)[7]. MIT not only carried out a series of violent acts and terror against officials and civilians, but most crucially, in 2014 they openly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) [8]. This is a clear meeting point between local unrest and the most recent transnational terrorist ideology. However, the narrative constructed by MIT and its sympathizers in Sulawesi does not only quote the doctrines of Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi or Osama bin Laden [9]. In leaflets, propaganda videos, and internal discussions, references to Kahar Muzakkar's struggle and the ideal of

establishing an Islamic State of Indonesia often appear. They refer to Sulawesi as a 'region of da'wah' with a strong tradition of Islamic resistance, with Kahar as one of its icons. This phenomenon proves that there has been a transmission not merely a repetition of history from the DI/TII movement of the past into the imagination and legitimacy of today's terrorist movement.

To understand the urgency of tracing this transmission, we must delve into both ends of the spectrum: the historical context of DI/TII Sulawesi and the contemporary landscape of terrorism there. The Kahar Muzakkar rebellion began in 1953, initially triggered by disappointment over the integration of guerrilla forces into the Indonesian Republican Army (TRI) following the recognition of sovereignty [10]. However, this conflict quickly turned into a separatist movement aimed at establishing an Islamic State of Indonesia, as part of the wider DI/TII network in West Java, Aceh and South Kalimantan [11]. In Sulawesi, this struggle raged fiercely for more than a decade, creating deep social trauma, dividing communities and leaving a legacy of violence embedded in the collective memory [12]. Kahar was not only a military commander; he established a parallel government system, a Sharia court system, and sought to consolidate power in the interior [13]. The narrative that was constructed was one of resistance against the Republic, which was considered secular and un-Islamic, a holy war (jihad) to establish Allah's sovereignty on the island of Sulawesi. The military defeat in 1965 and Kahar's execution did not immediately erase this narrative [14]. He was even mythologized as a martyr and hero by some circles, especially in his strongholds.

After the New Order, in a climate of democratisation and freedom of expression, memories of DI/TII and Kahar Muzakkar began to be openly revived. Some former members or their descendants became involved in local politics, while others were active in missionary and educational organisations. It is here that the channels of transmission can begin to be identified [10]. First, family and kinship channels. The extended family network of former DI/TII members became a reservoir of memory and ideology. Second, informal education channels, such as certain religious lectures at Islamic boarding schools or majelis taklim (Islamic study groups) in South and Central Sulawesi, where Kahar's struggle was recounted as part of the heroic local Islamic history, often with a filter that removed the complex political context. [15]. Third, literature and written works. Books, bulletins, and now digital content containing Kahar's history or thoughts are in circulation, sometimes printed by foundations associated with former sympathizers.

This transmission becomes particularly significant and dangerous when interacting with the wave of global radicalism after 2000 [16], but also an existing narrative of local Islamic resistance. They reframed the DI/TII struggle, equating it with the Afghan mujahideen's struggle against the Soviets or Al-Qaeda's global war against the United States [17]. Kahar Muzakkar was appointed as a local 'fighter for monotheism' whose vision was in line with the struggle to establish a global caliphate. This process is referred to as 'jihad glocalisation' where abstract transnational ideology is injected into local narratives and symbols that already have emotional appeal and legitimacy. Data from various terrorism court reports, research by the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), and the International Crisis Group (ICG) show a clear pattern: many suspected terrorists from Sulawesi who were arrested claimed to have been inspired by the story of Kahar Muzakkar, in addition to figures such as Abdullah Sungkar and Osama bin Laden [18].

Data on terrorist acts in Sulawesi that have espoused transnational ideologies over the past two decades reinforce the thesis of a convergence between local heritage and ideology global [19]. After the 2002 Bali bombings, the Poso-based JI network became one of the most active cells [20]. They were not only involved in military training and bomb-making, but also carried out a series of killings of officials and civilians who were considered 'infidels' or obstacles to jihad. The group later evolved into MIT (East Indonesian Mujahideen) under Santoso, which became a real threat in the forests of Poso [21]. MIT is a perfect example of ideological fusion: they adopt the highly transnational structure, tactics, and discourse of ISIS (such as

the use of social media for professional propaganda, the production of execution videos, and loyalty to the 'caliph' in Syria), but their operations are very local, exploiting their knowledge of the terrain, kinship networks, and existing anti-government sentiment [22]. Research from IPAC [23] and Tempo (2019) shows how MIT members, including Santoso himself, were exposed to radical ideas through religious lectures that also glorified the history of the DI/TII struggle. They saw themselves as the successors of Kahar Muzakkar's struggle in a new phase [24].

Apart from MIT, a series of other terrorist acts in Sulawesi also show a similar pattern. The perpetrators of the church bombing in Makassar in March 2021, a married couple from the Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) group an ISIS-affiliated network in Indonesia carried out their act in a city with a long history with DI/TII [25]. Although the motive was directly related to retaliation for the conflict in Palestine (transnational narrative), the choice of location and recruitment network of the perpetrators cannot be separated from the radical ecosystem that has long been established in Sulawesi [19]. Academic literature, such as the works of Kirsten E. Schulze and Sidney Jones, consistently notes that the effectiveness of groups such as JI and MIT in recruiting members depends not only on global doctrine, but also on their ability to connect that doctrine with experiences of local injustice and the history of Islamic resistance in the region.

Therefore, research that only looks at terrorist acts in Sulawesi through a transnational lens will fail to capture the complexity of the issue. The narrative of the Islamic State of Indonesia (1953-1965) served as an 'emotional and ideological bridge' that made a foreign transnational ideology feel close, relevant, and personal to potential supporters in Sulawesi. It provides historical legitimacy that the armed struggle to establish an Islamic state was not an imported dream from the Middle East, but was once attempted by 'local sons' themselves against the same state. This transmission was organic and hidden, occurring in the private spaces of families, religious study groups, and the circulation of literature, long before these individuals were exposed to ISIS content on the internet.

The urgency of this research also lies in its implications for counter-terrorism and peace policies. Deradicalisation programmes, which have often focused on counter-narratives to ISIS or Al-Qaeda, may be less effective if they do not address deeply rooted local narratives such as the heroic narrative of DI/TII. Efforts to reintegrate former MIT combatants will be difficult if it is not understood that for some of them, joining the MIT was not merely a matter of following ISIS, but also of continuing the 'unfinished struggle' of their grandparents or great-grandparents [21]. On the other hand, this research is also important to prevent simplification and stigmatization. Not all descendants or groups that study the history of DI/TII are potential members. The history of DI/TII itself is part of the complex tapestry of Indonesian history, full of political nuances, disappointment with the centre, and local dynamics that cannot be reduced to mere 'terrorism'. The challenge of this research is to distinguish between the natural transmission of cultural memory and the deliberate transmission of violent ideology for mobilisation purposes.

Thus, examining the transmission of terrorist movements in Sulawesi through the narrative of the Islamic State of DI/TII (1953-1965) is not merely a historical excursion. It is an important effort to dismantle the machinery of legitimacy that fuels contemporary violent movements in the region. This research will contribute a more detailed picture of how violent ideologies migrate across time, adapt to new contexts, and exploit old wounds to inflict new ones. In the context of Sulawesi, which remains vulnerable and is striving to build post-conflict peace, understanding the symbiotic relationship between the historical spectre of DI/TII and the monster of contemporary transnational terrorism is no longer an option, but an academic and practical necessity. Without this understanding, we will only go round in circles in a cycle of violence whose roots are deeper than we think.

2. Method

This study uses a historical method reinforced by a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) framework to ensure a structured, comprehensive, and replicable process. SLR is applied not as a statistical method, but as a systematic procedure for collecting, selecting, analyzing, and synthesizing historical sources and relevant academic studies [26]. This approach was chosen to overcome the fragmentation of literature discussing DI/TII Sulawesi and contemporary terrorism separately, thereby enabling a rigorous integration of analysis between the two bodies of literature.

Research Map begins with Heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. This stage determines the academic database (such as JSTOR, Brill, and local repositories), keywords (e.g., “Kahar Muzakkar,” “DI/TII Sulawesi,” “ideological transmission,” “terrorism in Sulawesi,” “collective memory”), and criteria for including and excluding sources. Sources covered include primary historical documents (national archives and reports from the period 1950-1965), historical monographs, journal articles, dissertations, think-tank research reports (such as ICG and IPAC), and publicly available terrorism court documents. [27]. Implementation Phase This is followed by a systematic search of various databases, followed by gradual screening based on relevance, source credibility, and depth of analysis. Each selected source then goes through the Data Extraction and Analysis Phase, where key information such as narratives, actors, events, ideological claims, and transmission mechanisms identified by the author are codified and recorded [28].

The analysis was conducted qualitatively using a historical-critical approach and thematic content analysis. Primary historical sources were analysed using external and internal criticism methods to test their authenticity and credibility, while secondary literature was examined to identify patterns, gaps, and historiographical debates. The analysis focused on tracing the narrative and structural threads between two seemingly separate bodies of literature. The Synthesis phase was central to this methodology, in which findings from various sources were integrated to construct an argument regarding the mechanisms of transmission. Synthesis does not merely summarise, but performs critical interpretation to answer research questions, explicitly showing how narratives and symbols from the DI/TII period have been adapted in contemporary group discourse. Through these transparent SLR steps, this research aims to produce a deep and structured understanding of the transmission of terrorist movements in Sulawesi, while also contributing methodologically to the application of SLR for thematic-integrative historical studies [29].

3. Result

This research stems from a troubling puzzle: why does Sulawesi, particularly the central and southern regions, remain fertile ground for radicalism and religiously motivated terrorist acts, decades after the Darul Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII) rebellion was militarily crushed in 1965? Through a systematic review of primary historical literature, contemporary academic studies, research institute reports, and court documents, this study reveals that the answer lies not solely in the infiltration of transnational ideologies such as ISIS or Al-Qaeda, but rather in a deep and complex process of transmission. [30]. This process revives and adapts the narratives, symbols, and collective memories of Kahar Muzakkar's struggle to establish an Islamic State of Indonesia, transforming them into fuel for the legitimacy of today's violent movements. The main finding of this research is not merely a vague ideological continuity, but a clear map of the channels through which the past speaks to the present, and how its voice is misinterpreted, amplified, and mobilised for new purposes. [31].

From an in-depth study of historical documents from the period 1953-1965, both from government sources such as military operation reports and narratives recorded by the DI/TII camp, it appears that Kahar Muzakkar's project was far more ambitious than a mere rebellion [32]. He established a state within a state,

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with its own administrative system, religious courts, and logistics in the interior of Sulawesi. His narrative revolved around two main themes: first, resistance against the state, which he considered tyrannical and abandoning Islamic law; second, his vision to establish a homogeneous and separate Muslim community (Darul Islam) under Allah's law [33]. His military defeat did not immediately kill this vision. On the contrary, through a carefully designed SLR search, this study managed to trace how the narrative entered a dormant phase, stored in the private memories of former fighters' families, in obscure regional poems, and in socio-political disappointments that were never truly resolved. After the New Order, when freedom of speech was restored, these memories began to resurface in the public sphere, often in a mythologized form. Kahar was no longer present as a historical figure full of contradictions but was simplified into a symbol of resistance and steadfast faith [12]. Research has found that literature circulating in certain circles, such as biographies or accounts of the struggle published by local foundations, played a key role in polishing this narrative, removing the political complexities of the time and presenting it as an example of pure ideological struggle.

This transmission became particularly dangerous when it encountered the wave of global radicalism after 2000. Analysis of reports by the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, the International Crisis Group (ICG), and terrorism case files reveals a consistent pattern [34]. Networks such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) that entered Sulawesi after the Poso riots cleverly carried out frame alignment that is, aligning their global jihad ideology with existing local narratives [35]. They found in the history of DI/TII a perfect 'precursor'. In closed study sessions, jihadist preachers not only quoted Osama bin Laden, but also recounted the heroic story of Kahar Muzakkar holding out in the wilderness against a non-Islamic state. This narrative of local resistance provides a much stronger emotional and historical foundation for the youth of Sulawesi than simply the conflicts in Afghanistan or Syria. It makes the abstract transnational ideology feel close, real, and part of their regional identity. This process is not a replacement, but rather a synthesis: ISIS's global symbols the black flag, the term khilafah are woven together with the thread of local history of the DI/TII struggle [36].

The most concrete finding from this synthesis is evident in the case of Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) in Poso. Research into propaganda videos, statements, and documented testimonies of former members shows that Santoso and his followers did not view themselves as merely a foreign branch of ISIS. They see themselves as the ideological successors of Kahar Muzakkar's struggle. In their view, the war in Poso is a new chapter in the same war: establishing Islamic rule in Sulawesi, as previously envisioned by previous generations [37]. They utilise local knowledge of the terrain of Central Sulawesi knowledge similar to that possessed by the former DI/TII guerrillas and recruit from family and community networks that have emotional, though not always genealogical, ties to the history of past rebellions. Thus, MIT is a manifestation of a mutated transmission: from a territorially based separatist movement with the ideal of a domestic Islamic state, to a local armed protest movement that pledges allegiance to a global caliphate entity, while still drawing cultural legitimacy from local history [38].

The transmission channels successfully mapped in this study are diverse. First, family and kinship channels, where oral stories about the sacrifices and beliefs of former DI/TII members are passed down, often accompanied by feelings of resentment over perceived defeat or injustice. Second, certain informal education channels. Some Islamic boarding schools or majelis taklim in the former DI/TII strongholds, while not openly teaching violence, preserve the heroic memory of Kahar Muzakkar as part of the historical heritage of Islam in Sulawesi, creating a religious atmosphere that glorifies steadfastness and resistance. [39]. Third, the circulation of literature and, more recently, digital content. Books, newsletters, and now social media posts that promote DI/TII narratives without critical analysis provide a gateway for individuals to be exposed to more radical ideologies that claim to be their continuation. Fourth, and most crucially, is the exploitation of this narrative by identity and ideology entrepreneurs namely, preachers and recruiters

for radical groups who deliberately connect the dots between the suffering of local Muslim communities today (for example, post-conflict Poso) with narratives of state betrayal and armed resistance in the past. [40].

The implications of these findings are significant, while also offering important nuances. On the one hand, this study shows that counter-terrorism approaches that focus solely on deconstructing transnational narratives such as ISIS will be less effective in Sulawesi. Deradicalisation and counter-narrative programmes must dare to engage with and seriously critique these mythologised local narratives. [41]. They need to offer a more critical and comprehensive reading of DI/TII history one that acknowledges the disappointment and historical context, but also highlights the failures, internal violence, and tragic consequences for the people of Sulawesi themselves. On the other hand, this research also serves as a reminder not to fall into stigmatisation. Not everyone who remembers or studies the history of DI/TII is a potential terrorist. History is a complex legacy that lives on in society. The danger arises when historical narratives are hijacked, simplified, and radicalised by groups with violent agendas [42]. Therefore, peace and reintegration efforts in Sulawesi must take this historical burden into account, opening up space for dialogue about traumatic collective memories, so that old wounds are not continually exploited to create new ones.

This study confirms that the contemporary terrorist movement in Sulawesi cannot be understood as a phenomenon that suddenly descended from the global sky. It has deep roots in local history. The transmission of the DI/TII narrative from the 1953-1965 period into the discourse of groups such as MIT was a real process that occurred through specific socio-cultural channels. This process involves the selection of memories, the simplification of history, and its integration with global violent ideologies. By mapping this transmission, this study not only provides a richer explanation of the dynamics of terrorism in eastern Indonesia, but also offers opportunities for more intelligent and context-sensitive interventions. The past, it turns out, is not truly the past. It echoes in the choices of violence today, and only by understanding these echoes do we have any hope of silencing them..

4. Conclusions

This study concludes that contemporary terrorist acts in Sulawesi cannot be understood solely as a product of imported transnational ideologies such as ISIS, but rather as the result of a long and complex process of narrative transmission, in which the narratives, symbols, and collective memory of the Darul Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII) rebellion under Kahar Muzakkar (1953-1965) have been revived, adapted, and synthesized with the discourse of global jihad. Through channels such as family, informal education, the circulation of literature, and ideological activities, the narrative of resistance against a state considered secular and the ideal of establishing an Islamic State has been successfully transmitted across generations, providing a deep historical and emotional basis of legitimacy for groups such as the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT). This process of glocalization where transnational ideologies are injected into local narratives that already have appeal explains why violent radicalism continues to flourish in the region, while also revealing the weakness of counter-terrorism approaches that focus solely on deconstructing global narratives without addressing the traumatic local historical roots. Therefore, future peace and terrorism prevention efforts in Sulawesi must critically involve inclusive historical reinterpretation, open space for dialogue about problematic collective memory, and offer a complete alternative narrative about DI/TII and its consequences, so that old historical wounds are not continually exploited to perpetuate a new cycle of violence.

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