

**THE NARRATIVES  
OF RELIGIOUS-BASED  
EXTREMIST GROUPS  
IN INDONESIA:  
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND  
AND RELIGIOUS ASPIRATION**

PUSPIDEP and School of Graduate Studies UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta  
PPIM UIN Jakarta - UNDP Indonesia

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**Disusun oleh**

Munirul Ikhwan, Najib Kailani, and Subi Nur Isnaini

PUSPIDEP and School of Graduate Studies UIN Sunan Kalijaga  
Yogyakarta  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The religious educational background of former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees and deportees will only play a significant role in exposing them to radical and extremist ideology if mediated by external factors such as structural factors, identity, social linkages, and ideology.
2. There are two categories of radical and extremist generation if we take into account the perpetrators' worldview and their method in acquiring religious knowledge: the old and the new generations. The old generation is dominated by those former convicted terrorists, who mainly come from lower-middle-class family backgrounds, and were mainly exposed through such social linkages as *halaqah* (exclusive religious circles) and public religious congregation. Meanwhile, the new generation is dominated by those ISIS returnees and deportees, who generally come from wealthy families with urban cultural backgrounds, and were generally exposed through family networks and the Internet.
3. Women's agency seems less significant among the old generation. On the contrary, among the new generation, women's agency appear to be more salient in disseminating radical and extremist ideas.

4. Informal religious education contributes significantly to shaping individuals to become radical and extremist because formal religious education fails to understand students' agency: exploring their religious personal narratives and aspirations.
5. Some individuals who have been exposed may experience a turning point when they find a new path of upward mobility or new spiritual authority.
6. *Engaging Education* –or education that gives attention to the unique personality, individual backgrounds, and problems of each student's, and connects religious concepts to the socio-religious realities within society– is the weak point of formal religious education in schools, Islamic boarding schools, and universities.
7. As a point of recommendation, actors and discourses promoting religious moderatism in informal religious education need to be encouraged to fill the spaces of public religious congregation and *halaqahs* in order to restrict the latitudes of actors and discourses that promote radicalism and extremism. In addition, contextual readings of Islam need to be encouraged more and more through publications, social media contents, and community engagements so that religion can get a new space for actualization that brings the common good for humanity.

## INTRODUCTION

This research is part of the Convey 4 Program carried out by PusPIDeP Yogyakarta and School of Graduate Studies UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta with the support of Convey Indonesia and PPIM UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. This study examines the relationship between religious education background and individual decision to join radical and extremist groups. Religious education here includes not only formal education, such as schools, madrasas, universities and Islamic boarding schools, but also informal education, such as public religious congregation, exclusive religious circles, social networks, and the internet. In addition, this study also investigates the factors that encourage former convicted terrorists, returnees, and deportees to finally decide to leave radical and terrorist groups. Furthermore, the relationship between terrorism and religious educational background is still being debated, despite the fact that radicalism and terrorism are often associated with figures with certain educational backgrounds. This matter has prompted a number of researchers to examine the extent to which religious education has contributed significantly to the emergence of radicalism and extremism in Indonesia.

It should be remembered that the post-1998 democratization of Indonesia has facilitated individual and group freedom which necessitates an intensification of contestation and fragmentation of political and religious authority (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Salvatore



and Eickelman 2004; Turner 2007). One of the implications of this new era is the emergence of religious-based radicalism and extremism - triggered by communal conflicts involving the killing of Muslims, jihadist fatwas from religious leaders in the Middle East, and the victory of the influence of global jihadism - which under certain conditions can transform into jihadism and terrorism (ICG 2004). Having said that not all acts of terrorism were inspired by new movements that emerged during the Reformation era. Among them were actually old movements that moved clandestine under the New Order government, and were driven by religious figures with clear affiliations of Islamic educational institutions, such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir with Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki in Sukoharjo, Central Java. This fact raises the question of the extent to which religious institutions and education contribute to fostering radicalism and terrorism at a time when the Islamic world is no longer in control of global politics and discourse.

A survey conducted in 2017 by Center for the Study of Islam and Society (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat, PPIM) of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University shows that 58.50% of school and university students have a religious view that tends to be radical. Another survey by PPIM in 2018 links the student radical views with their teachers' religious views (56.90% of the teachers have intolerant opinions, and 46.09% have radical opinions). The above numbers certainly show an alarming condition related to socio-religious life in Indonesia in the post-1998 Reformation. Moreover, the emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (2013-2019) has managed to attract the sympathy from many (educated) Muslims in Indonesia, and encourage some of them to join to Iraq and Syria.

Although religious educational background may explain the emergence of radicalism and extremism (ICG 2002), the relationship between perpetrators of radicalism and extremism and their religious educational backgrounds still leaves an important question. Martin van Bruinessen (2006), for example, explores how Pondok Modern

Gontor produced two figures who have contrasting religious views, Nurcholis Madjid, who is known as a liberal Muslim scholar, and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who is known as the leader of Muslim jihadists. Mark Woodward et al. (2010) even rejects the causal relationship between religious education in Indonesia and the emergence of radicalism and extremism in public campuses whose students experience some form of "re-Islamization" through informal religious education such as public religious congregation, exclusive religious circles, and *da'wa* units of college students. Through this gathering, they become detached from the tradition of religious learning in general. The studies above encourage PusPIDEp and Postgraduate researchers at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta to look closer at whether certain religious education features in schools, pesantren, and tertiary institutions had a causal relationship with the religious trends in their alumni or not.

In addition, other studies suggest that radicalism and extremism in Muslim societies may be involved in youth for claiming their youthfulness. Youth is often seen as a social construction with socio-psychological characteristics and a unique *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). They were often seen as "the future of the nation," but under certain conditions, they could be the most vulnerable to radicalism and manipulation (Harrera 2006; Bayat 2010; Bayat and Herrera 2010). It is important to pay attention to religious, spiritual development in youth to see how pluralism is shaped in adulthood. In the Indonesian context, the dysfunctional social, economic, and political conditions, as well as perceptions of the state, contributed to the resistance (16.44%) of religious figures - especially those who tend to have exclusive and radical religious views - towards the idea of a nation-state (Burdah, Kailani, and Ikhwan 2019). However, this rejection was not only motivated by radical and extreme religious ideology but also an effort by some religious leaders to negotiate their positions before the state or the government (Hasan 2019).

Terrorists with religious backgrounds who emerged during the Reformation Era and the interest of a number of Indonesian citizens to

join the ISIS have become a puzzle for policy makers and researchers in the social, religious, political and educational fields. What context that makes them moved and consolidates themselves to commit acts of terror and ‘treason’ still poses serious questions that require unsimple answers. Reading Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, for example, we need to look not only at his educational backgrounds, but also the context of his youth, the narratives of his individual religiosity, and the political position he took face to face with the state and the government. Another aspect that becomes our question is of course the former convicted terrorists who have experienced existentialist experiences and found a turning point. What factors make them quit their old ideology and activities? The above aspects need to be answered in order to unravel the tangled threads of religious-based radicalism and extremism in Indonesia as materials for the efforts to create best practices for religious learning, both within formal and informal educational institutions and the wider community.

Therefore, this research aims to see what factors underlie the emergence of radicalism and extremism in Indonesia? Why are some Indonesian Muslims attracted to extremist ideology and compelled to join radical organizations or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)? What is the educational background of the former convicted terrorists, the Indonesian jihadists who returned to their hometowns (returnees) and the ISIS deportees? To what extent did their educational backgrounds instill or facilitate the growth of extremist and jihadist ideologies in themselves? What religious education institutions have helped shape the personality and thoughts of former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees and deportees? Is it a formal or informal educational institution? What religious authorities do constitute important references for former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees and deportees? What religious literature do become the reference for former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees, and deportees, which inspires them to take religious-based extremism?

## **APPROACHES AND METHODS**

Radicalism and extremism are complex issues that do not stand alone. Religious educational background and its relation to radicalism become a central topic that needs to be traced and analyzed in a deeper way. Research methods and designs becomes very important to look more closely at the role of certain religious educational styles in shaping individuals to be exposed to radicalism. This study uses a qualitative method (in-depth interviews) to explore the life history of individuals exposed to radicalism with an emphasis on the aspects of religious education.

Data gathering is first carried out through a desk study by exploring information from the media, previous existing studies, and Investigation Reports (BAP). To deepen the information, this study involves 20 informants in in-depth interview: 13 (thirteen) former convicted terrorists, 6 (six) returnees, and 1 (one) deportee from the three research locations: West Java, East Java and Central Java provinces. West Java is chosen because of its association as an important base for the DI/TII (Darul Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army) movement. Central Java, especially Solo Raya in academic studies, is often associated with the bases of radical and extremist Islamic movements. Central Java is a home or a place of origin for renowned terrorists incorporated in the Pesantren Ngruki network and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). Meanwhile, as for East Java, although generally known as an enclave for the followers of a moderate Islamic organization, NU (Nahdlatul Ulama), a church bombing in 2018 and the existence of several terrorist cells like Amrozi and co show the importance of East Java's position as a base of terrorist networks. In order to protect the privacy of former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees and deportees, the names mentioned in this report are changed (not real names).



Map of research and informants

This study uses a ‘*life narrative*’ approach that delves into the life history of former convicted terrorists, returnees, and deportees by exploring their educational backgrounds, life aspirations, and their worldviews. This research puts individuals (former convicted, ISIS terrorists, and deportees) involved in extremist religious-based violent behaviors in the frame of narrative theory and argument about the ‘self’, which is not intact, fractured, and ambivalent. The theoretical debate regarding the notion of an incomplete ‘self’ has attracted the attention of many scholars. Anthropologist Katherine P. Ewing (1990) suggests that individuals actually never experience the wholeness, but always in a moment of ambivalence and inconsistency.

Basing on her argument from a study by James W. Fernandez (1986) about religious movements whose members selectively choose religious ideas or situations to present a stable experience of wholeness even though its components are inconsistent, Ewing argues that individuals often experience moments of inconsistency that occur because of life aspirations that are not in line with culture or because of specific momentum responded by individuals. This moment of inconsistency is always in the process of becoming, negotiating or adapting to the situation that surrounds the individual. Ewing’s view is different from the argument of symbolic anthropologists such as

Clifford Geertz who position symbols as representations of culture or characteristic concepts about self or individuals.

Ewing's argument was further developed by Samuli Schielke (2009) with an articulation that specifically observes the experience of being Muslim. Schielke shows that being pious is not always linear with constant efforts of *ethical self-improvement*, but is also formed or influenced by one's life aspiration, such as willingness to be a good Muslim —by following the instructions of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition— on the one hand, but on the other, he is an individual who experiences falling in love, has the interest in prosper life, and so on. This momentum is what makes individuals always in the state of inconsistency, ambivalence, and fragmentation. In the context of this study, inconsistent, ambivalent and incomplete 'self' is only portrayed through the life narratives of individuals who engage in violent extremist ideology.

Narrative theory is very representative to portray individuals involved in religious-based extremist movements. This theory seeks to understand and analyze how violent ideology operates at the level of individuals and how their agency has a considerable impact on temporal and contextual acceptance. Several scholars have used this theory to examine vulnerable groups such as women and the radicals and extremists, like research conducted by Samina Yasmeen (2007) on Laskar e-Taiba in Pakistan, and by Minako Sakai and Samina Yasmeen (2016) on women's agency and womenhood.



*Theory illustration*

Based on the field findings, this study proposes a theoretical argument that educational background and religious knowledge significantly contribute to making individuals exposed to radical and extremist ideology and motivate them to be involved in religion-based terror activities only if mediated by such factors as structure, identity, socialization or social network, and ideology. In other words, these four factors play a major role in shaping and directing certain religious understandings towards radical religious understanding and religious-based terrorist practices.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MEDIATED BY OTHER FACTORS**

Based on data and analysis on the narratives of individual informants, which include family and educational backgrounds, social networks, and structural awareness, this study sees that the religious educational background of former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees, and deportees does not necessarily expose them to radical and terrorist



ideology. without being mediated by triggering factors. In this regard, structural factors, identity, social networks, and ideology significantly shape or direct individuals towards radical religious understanding, extremist acts or religion-based violence.

Structural problems such as poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment also encourage individuals to look for ways of resistance that accommodate their aspirations. In the context of the death of leftist criticism, radicalism and extremism have become an alternative ideology of resistance for them (Hadiz 2020). Ideology, which generally plays a central role in the recruitment process for members of radical movements, is considered to only strengthen a *framing* built on disenchantment with social, political and economic conditions. Having experience as victims of injustice, discrimination or marginalization, which blocks individuals from having necessary access to economic resources, social, educational, health, and politics, also contributes to directing individuals to radical movements, particularly among the youth who are still in the process of a search for identity. The youth who are in the transitional phase of growth are more susceptible to experiencing an identity crisis, which makes them experience what is known as *cognitive opening*, a micro-sociological process that brings them closer to the acceptance of new, more radical ideas.

In addition, moral shack also becomes one of the paths that leads a person to radical and extremist understanding. The factors above are able to make individuals radical when they meet social networks that provide them with religious education in the form of knowledge indoctrination. The style of religious education they receive from formal, informal, and even non-formal institutions is mutually interrelated, and expose them to radical and extremist understanding when mediated and supported by structural factors, identity, social linkages, and ideology.

This study finds two categories of generation exposed to radicalism and terrorism. This generational difference is seen from

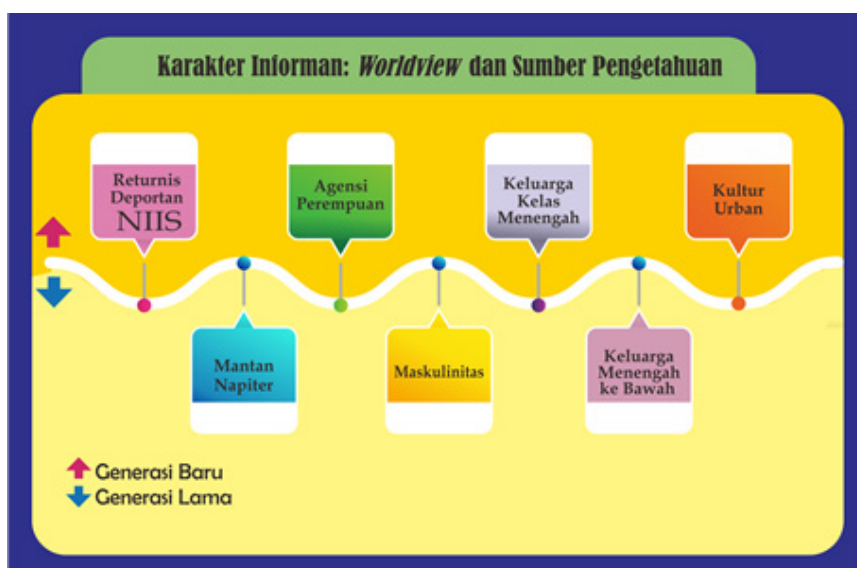


the way they see the world (worldview). The old generation's worldview is considerably shaped by their social networks, while the new generation's is much more influenced by open information related to their religious aspirations. The first generation is dominated by informants from those former convicted terrorists. In general, they come from lower middle class family backgrounds. They were exposed to terrorist ideology through social networks: public religious congregation, exclusive religious circles, and social linkages. Middle and lower social class status does not necessarily make someone radical. Many social networks shape their structural awareness to introduce them to radical and extremist ideologies. The spread of this old generation is relatively even, although Central Java appears to be a strong base for this generation. Although they have been released from prison, they seem to still hold strong extremist and radical ideologies. They still believe in their sacred mission of establishing an Islamic state (caliphate), war against the infidels, and resistance against any elements of *taghut*.

Meanwhile, the new generation is much more dominated by those ISIS returnees and deportees. They generally come from middle class families and urban cultures. Family networks and the Internet are an important context that exposed them to radicalism. The family became the first field for spreading radical propaganda. This can be seen from the fact of kinship relation between those who are exposed to radicalism as can be found in the West Java context. When a family member is exposed to radicalism, he becomes an agent of radical groups in recruiting and indoctrinating other family members.

This new radical generation access the information about radical understandings and movements through the Internet. They tend to be more 'independent' in delving extremist ideas from the internet. Their high curiosity led them to seek knowledge from the internet sources, such as digital books (ebooks) and videos containing radical contents on the Internet. Social media also become a means that connects them to the networks of radical groups. Currently,

social media are indeed the most effective means for the spread of radicalism. Extremist groups optimize the use of social media to incite and recruit young people to be exposed to radicalism and to engage in the acts of violent extremism, among others, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS is very active in using the Internet to spread radical propaganda and to recruit new members. Ironically, videos on *bai' a* (pledge of allegiance) to the radical group of ISIS in Indonesia are performed by young people, school dan university students.



The recruitment of young people to consolidate themselves in radical movements also raises issues on humanity. The agents of this radical group make humanitarian issues a commodity they offer to attract the sympathy of the young generation. Returnees in East Java (Syamsul Mubarak, Wahyu Faza Syafa'at, and Danang Barokah) were connected to the network of Abu Jandal who recruited them on the basis of humanitarian motives. According to them, they left for Syria on the basis of a humanitarian mission, helping fellow oppressed Muslims and children to get access to education. This context is different from some former convicted terrorists in Central Java such as Johan, Aji, and Anjasmara who decided to join radical groups because they were motivated by sympathy for oppressed Muslim groups. Johan joined JI

because of the Russian military aggression against Chechnya (1999), and the United States' and allies' aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq, while Aji and Anjasmara were moved to join Sigit Qardhawi's Tim Hisbah because of their sympathy for the conflict against Muslims in Ambon. In this case, human sympathy meets ideological factors together with structural, economic, social and political problems that led them to the acts of extremism and religious-based violence.

The educational background referred to in this study of course includes not only formal education, such as schools, madrasas, universities and Islamic boarding schools, but also informal education, such as public religious congregation, exclusive religious circles, social networks, and the Internet. It should be remembered that the background of formal religious education does not directly encourage someone to be exposed to radicalism and extremism if we look at the structure of the formal religious education curriculum in general. However, informal religious learning channels in certain schools, universities, or Islamic boarding schools contribute to introducing students to radical Islamic movements through teachers or lecturers, Rohis (student community for Islamic learning), or university student religious da'wah communities.



The role of schools or universities as represented by teachers and lecturers is very significant in blocking or even fostering radicalism within the school environment. Indoctrination is sometimes also carried out by individual teachers during teaching-learning processes or through extracurricular activities. The existence of Rohis as part of extracurricular activities in schools has become an entry point for the infiltration process of radical, intolerant, exclusive, and anti-human rights views. In certain contexts, even anti-Pancasila views are boosted by radical groups through these informal channels. At the university level, student religious da'wa communities have become an important entry for the regeneration process of radical groups at universities. Through their regular meetings, radical group activists carry out coaching that leads to indoctrination and regeneration.

However, we need to see these former terrorists, returnees, and deportees not merely as objects of radical and terrorist indoctrination, but rather as agents. As agents, they have the individual capacity to act independently in determining their own life choices. It seems that Islamic religious education in formal institutions has not been fully capable of exploring the students' religious aspirations, individual narratives, and agency. This condition encourages them to look for channels of informal religious education outside their schools, universities, or Islamic boarding schools, which they deem fit their aspirations and narratives. In the midst of identity crisis and structural problems they encounter and the inability of formal religious education to capture their aspirations, a number of students are looking for informal education outside. It is in this context that radicalism and terrorism develop more significantly.

Within former convicted terrorists in this study, formal Islamic religious education has not been able to accommodate their individual religious aspirations regarding, for example, heroism in Islam. They then look for external sources of education until they find a narrative that "fits" their aspirations. Heroism in Islam is then translated as involvement in actions of "*amar makruf nahi munkar*" (commanding

right and prohibiting evil). Their involvement in this action answered the question about the Islamic idea of “*kaffah*” (lit. intact), which is not sufficiently to be “known” only, but also to be “put into practice”. This encourages them to become involved in raids on ‘immoral’ practices and places. At the next level, this heroism can also be realized in *jihad* (war). The justification for *jihad* is deduced from their understanding that the livelihood of the Prophet Muhammad after the age of 40 was not trading, but *jihad* or war.

Reading books also has a big influence on directing one’s religious thoughts. Each book represents the ideology and interests of the author. There is an ideological message to be conveyed to the reader with the hope of influencing the reader to believe in the same ideology. Individuals exposed to radical ideology in the three provinces in this study share the same reading sources as their religious references. The variety of reading they consume generally carries the ideology of *tarbawi-jihadi* such as *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* by Abdullah Azzam, *Murtad Karena Hukum* (Apostate because of Law) by Abdul Qadir bin Abdul Aziz, *Mimpi Suci di Balik Jeruji* (Holy Dreams Behind Bars) by Ali Ghufron Nurhasyim Mukhlas At-Tenjuluny, *Sekuntum Rosela Pelipur Lara* (A Roselle the Healer of Sorrow) by Imam Samudra, *Senyum Terakhir Sang Mujahid* (The Final Smile of the Mujahid) by Amrozi bin Nurhasyim, *Al-Wala ‘wa al-Bara’* (Loyalty and Disloyalty) by Muhammad Sa’id al-Qahthani, and books by Aman Abdurrahman such as *Seri Materi Tauhid* (Series on Tauhid Lecture) and *Akidah Para Rasul* (the Faith of the Apostles).

Among returnees and deportees, family-based religious information and the Internet accommodate their individual aspirations in responding to structural and identity problems. ISIS is considered not only as an offer for a better period, but also an answer to structural problems in Indonesia. The transformation of a new identity through the consumption of religious information from their families and the Internet encouraged them to do something meaningful in their lives, namely migrating under the banner of ISIS. For them, religion is a

direct return to the Qur'an, and the story of the Prophet Muhammad is an example for the triumph of Islamic politics. This position makes the knowledge construction they acquire become romanticist and reformist.

It should be remembered that a turning point for individuals who were exposed to radicalism and terrorism occurred. A number of individuals decided to leave the circle of radicalism when they find a way for upward-mobility. Of course structural factors are not the only motive for this turning point. Among them are also those who experience a turning point when they feel that they have found a “new teacher” who is able to explore their religious aspirations—and of course after they have reflected on their previous experiences. Gus Baha' (a popular name for Ahmad Bahauddin Nursalim, a religious figure from an NU pesantren) is one of the names that is often mentioned in this turning point story.

## **CENTRAL JAVA: OLD GENERATION AND SOCIAL LINKAGE**

The seven Central Javanese informants in this study are former convicted terrorists from both the networks of Jama'ah Islamiyah (JI) and Tim Hisbah. Most of them come from middle to lower families. Two of them (Irsyad and Ariel) spent their childhood and adolescence far from their parents who had to work outside of their towns. The other two (Nanda and Aji) still live with their parents, but their parents are not able to afford the cost of their education properly until the higher education level. Nanda had to find additional fees to continue his studies from high school to university, while Aji could continue his studies until high school at the expense of his brother. The other three ex-convicted terrorists are slightly different because they come from military and civil servant (PNS) families. Johan's father worked in the military during the Dutch colonial era, while one of his brothers worked as a civil servant in the Ministry of Labor in Jakarta. Meanwhile, Anjasmara and Ayus were born to fathers of civil servant. However, they do not come from high-ranking civil servant families.



Apart from middle and lower class families, the former convicted terrorists do not come from a family with a *santri* background. This can also be seen from their names, which are generally not Arabic. They commonly knew religion for the first time not from their family. They came to know religious knowledge from outside: schools and open society. In other words, family for former convicted terrorists in Central Java is not the main context that directs their religiosity. The expectation of their family on them are generally simple: to be good persons and to get job after school/college, including becoming civil servants.

The informants in this study mostly took primary education in public schools before continuing to secondary school in public or private. Johan, Aji and Ariel took their elementary and junior secondary education in public schools, before continuing their senior secondary education in private Islamic schools. For them, high school education is their first context to know Islam and Islamism. Meanwhile, Nanda and Irsyad are examples of Central Java's former convicted terrorists who continued their junior and senior secondary education in private Islamic schools. Thus, they began to recognize Islamic religious education since junior high school with varying intensity of interests. Nanda admits that he learned Islam more intensively in junior high school, while Irsyad became more intensive in learning Islam in high school.

Another former terrorist, Anjasmara, took his elementary education in a private Islamic school, then continued to a state junior high school, and finally went back to continue to a private Islamic senior high school. Until high school, Anjasmara's religious sentiments were deemed mediocre, and he was only exposed after graduating from school education. Ayus is the only informant who attended public schools from elementary to secondary levels (SDN Tawangmangu, SMPN 3 Popongan, and SMAN 1 Karanganyar). Ayus, who was introverted, began to get to know NII in high school from an underground exclusive religious circle, but he did not agree with

its doctrines. He began to be intensively exposed during his studies at UMS (Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta) through JI's exclusive religious circles.

### **Fluctuating Phase in Religious Learning and Practices**

As time goes, these former convicted terrorists' enthusiasm and interest in learning religion came under a fluctuating phase, but at certain phases it has increased for various reasons. Johan, for example, felt that his enthusiasm for learning religion came up after asking himself questions about religious practices that did not get satisfactory answers. Born in an NU environment, he felt that he did not get definite answers concerning the textual basis of *tahlilan*, *yasinan*, and other traditional rituals. Johan's open personal character to communities and organizations at large makes him feel comfortable in following religious learnings held by various Islamic groups or organizations, such as Muhammadiyah, Hidayatullah, and Jamaah Tablig. He even invited his younger brother to participate in the religious learnings that he attended.

Likewise, Ayus's enthusiasm to learn Islam emerged due to the accusation of being infidel addressed to him and his family by NII activists for not taking allegiance according to NII. Since that incident, Ayus actively looked for a more suitable Islamic learning in Solo. The first learning circle he participated in was that in the Istiqomah Mosque, which was instructed by ustaz Abdullah Manaf, in Penumping, Surakarta. If Ayus did not accept NII and immediately looked for another learning circle, Aji is quite the opposite. After being told that his Islamness was not accepted because he lived in an infidel country, Aji immediately decided to take allegiance to NII. He was demanded to move from an infidel country to an Islamic state, even though the location is the same, namely in the territory of Indonesia. Aji's decision to take allegiance could not be separated from his knowledge of Islam, which at that time was still minimal, even though at high school he might have been taught Islamic such subjects as theology, ethics,



jurisprudence, the Quran and the prophetic tradition. In addition, to improve his religious knowledge, Aji participated in many religious learning circles outside of school such as that instructed by ustaz Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in the Marwah Semanggi Mosque in Surakarta.

The senior high school where Aji went to is a branch of the Al-Mukmin Foundation in Ngruki whose many of its teachers were affiliated with various Islamist groups, such as HTI, NII and Jamaah Tarbiyah. The influence of the teachers' religious tendencies on their students depends on how close or intensive the communication was established between teachers and students. Aji himself at that time had a very intensive communication with its physics teacher, Mrs. Rini, who then invited him to a religious congregation, which was attended only by three persons. From that congregation, he then took allegiance to NII (not KW-9) and considered all groups or organizations outside of NII to be deviants and infidel.



Just like the others, Nanda's enthusiasm to learn and practice religion came up after he worked at Batik Keris and became a student at STIE (College of Economic Studies). The starting point was his participation in Ary Ginanjar Agustian's ESQ (Emotional Spirit Quotient)

program. As a result of his participation in the program, Nanda began to diligently go and pray in mosque and felt more grateful, even though the religious knowledge taught in ESQ was actually general that he actually had all learned during junior and senior high schools, such as praying, being obedient to the senior, and spirit of hard work.

Another informant, Ariel graduated from high school in 2005 and decided to live in the dormitory of Majlis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) in Solo as one of MTA's cooperative managers. The monotonous and boring social conditions around MTA led Ariel to open new interaction with wider communities around MTA, until he finally came to know Islamic learning circles held by various Islamic organizations such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and LDII around the Semanggi area. Ariel thought that religious learning circles outside of MTA were more lively, participatory, down to earth, and comprehensive—a contrast picture from that held in MTA, which tend to be too simple and less practical, which was only suitable for the elderly.

Another experience comes from Irsyad who was interested in learning Islam after moving from Yogyakarta to Surakarta. Amid his activities as a goat breeder and slaughterer, Irsyad actively participates in Islamic public religious congregation held in the mosques of Marwah, Al-Ikhlas, and Istiqomah, which are managed by hardline religious leaders as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Abdurrahim Ba'asyir, and Abdullah Manaf.

The last is Anjasmara, whose interest in Islam began to increase since his school graduation, and appointment as chairman of the Muhammadiyah Youth and head of Mosque Youth Association. In 2005, he met and developed an intense relationship with Sigit Qardhawi, and worked together to form the PIS (Semanggi Islamic Association), which consisted of mosque youths and former thugs. This community often made collaborative relation with PIJ (Joyosuran Islamic Union), a community formed by a religious teacher from Ma'had Ali An-Nur, in carrying out a movement of “nahi munkar” in society, such as drinking, gambling and so on.

In this phase, there were processes and efforts where these former convicted terrorists felt the need to come back to learn and practice Islam. In this case, we cannot deny that the social and religious environment around them significantly colors and affects their religious understanding in the next phase.

### Joining a Jihadi Group

Frankly speaking, Central Java's seven former convicted terrorists are members of two jihadist groups, Jamaah Islamiyah (Johan, Ayus and Irsyad) and Tim Hisbah (Nanda, Aji, Anjasmara and Ariel). From these two groups, they received a doctrine on *jihad*. In this study, there are at least 5 important factors that cause former convicted terrorists of Central Java to join the two groups above.

**First: New Exclusive Religious Learning Circles.** The interest in religious learning is one of the important factors that made former convicted terrorists join the jihadist group. The religious learning meant in this study is that newly attended by former convicted terrorists, which directly pointed them to the jihad movement. Among those having this experience are Johan, Irsyad, Ariel, Aji, and Nanda. Johan and Irsyad have almost the same process of following new exclusive religious circles. Both of them, apart from attending Islamic public learning in general, were then interested in forming new more specific religious learning/ exclusive religious circles (*halaqah*). Both of them did not act as religious teachers who usually gave lectures in public religious congregation. However, both of them were the persons who proposed, founded, and even provided a place for those new *halaqahs*. Irsyad himself often invited teachers from Ngruki, one of whom was Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's son, Rasyid Ridha, on the recommendation of Abdurrahim Ba'asyir.

Unlike Johan and Irsyad who held their own exclusive religious circles, Ariel and Aji tend to look for new exclusive religious circles that suit themselves. Ariel then joined a group or *halaqah* called Tim Hisbah with its *amar makruf nahi munkar* movement. His interest in this group

arose when he heard of Team Hisbah's success in killing the number one thug in Joyosuran, Surakarta, Kipli. He felt greatly compatible with the actions of Hisbah Team because it practiced the true Islam through exercising *amar makruf nahi munkar*, such as sweeping against immoral places and behaviors.

If Ariel joined after Team Hisbah became popular, Aji had joined it long before that. After taking allegiance with NII during high school education, he finally quitted because he could not accept the concept of an Islamic state initiated by NII. A number of questions concerning NII's leadership and financial management taken from 2.5 percent of mandatory contribution were never answered. Aji finally decided to leave NII. In 2007, Aji join a new halaqah, which consisted of mosque youth associations led by Sigid Qaradhawi. Soon, the *halaqah* he participated in was named Tim Hisbah in 2008 after Sigit managed to kill Kipli. About two years after Tim Hisbah became popular, Aji then joined "Jamaah Jihad" (community of jihad), which was formed by Sigit after his meeting with the founder of Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD), Aman Abdurrahman. Aji took the pledge together with 50 other members.

Meanwhile, Nanda was interested in new exclusive religious circles precisely because he was invited by one of his friends who later joined the public religious congregation in the Baiturrahman Mosque, which was instructed by ustaz Ziyad, a terrorist of the Marriot bomb case. At that time, the material presented in public religious congregation had nothing to do with extremist ideology, but tended to be a general religious learning, instead. After that, he added his hours of religious learning to the Purwosari district, which was instructed, among others, by Abu Tholut, a war training expert in Afghanistan whose *halaqah* at the beginning still taught general topics, such as prayers and recommendable rituals.

Apart from learning Islam from Ziyad and Abu Tholut, Nanda also actively participated in bigger public religious congregations in Solo, such as in Semanggi. Every Sunday, he also attended many discussions

on radical books such as *Millah Ibrahim*, *Murtad karena Hukum*, and *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah*. As he became more often in attending religious learning circles, public religious congregations (*tabligh akbar*), and “special” book discussions, Nanda began to change his appearance a lot. He began to often wear a robe, grow a beard, and wear cingkrang (above heels) pants.

**Second: Advanced Halaqah.** Advanced halaqah is the intensive one followed by former convicted terrorists after having previously participated in a more general learning circle for a certain period. Ayus, for example, joined a more intensive *hallaqah*, which was attended only by six persons after following a bigger halaqah for about one to two years in the Istiqomah Mosque of Penumping in Surakarta, which was instructed by Abdullah Manaf. This intensive *halaqah* later influenced Ayus a lot on his religious knowledge. Giving the fact that he has expertise in computer, Ayus won the trust to enter the IT Division, and was assigned for the task of writing religious materials, syllabus, summaries, and sending e-mails to a network in Poso, which led to his arrest for a terrorism case. While in this more specialized division, he was no longer allowed to attend other religious gatherings outside of his group. Even though he was placed in the computer field, he once took part in a training for unloading and reloading weapons.

Another former convicted terrorist who was also affiliated with Tim Hisbah is Anjasmara. His involvement in religious-based violent extremism cannot be separated from his very intense relationship with Sigit Qardhawi, even before Tim Hisbah was founded. Both of them collaborated in eradicating community diseases such as drinking, gambling, and so on. From this collaboration, Anjasmara and Sigit later formed a new group under one command called Tim Hisbah, and Anjasmara became one of the commanders. Not long after its foundation and popularity, Tim Hisbah began to face disunity since Sigit’s meeting with Aman Abdurrahman. At least this split resulted in two groups: the one turning into a radical and extreme jihadi movement with its *takfir* doctrine, while the other remaining as a *nahi munkar* movement as Tim Hisbah was originally founded.

**Third: Ustaz or Figure.** Some former convicted terrorists have their authoritative teacher, who attracted them to join jihadist groups. Among those teachers who became the reference for former terrorists in Central Java were ustaz Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Subur, Abdullah Manaf, and Sigit Qardhawi. The former convicted terrorist Johan was deeply inspired by Subur, and made him his main teacher. He views that his teacher had a very calm character and charismatic appeal. Subur was the one who connects him with Noordin M. Top.

Another former terrorist, Ayus, made Abdullah Manaf his favorite teacher. He considered Abdullah Manaf's lectures full of enthusiasm and comprehensive explanations. He also deemed that his teacher was able to elaborate and link religious topics with Muslims' current conditions. The reasons above made Abdullah Manaf an authoritative teacher for Ayus. Meanwhile, other two former convicted terrorists, Ariel and Aji, are much more impressed by the figure of Sigit Qardhawi because he is considered a simple figure, who did not pursue the worldly purposes, but had a brave spirit and was a defender of Muslims. They feel that Sigit had influenced them a lot on the doctrines and movements of jihad.

The most important figure for former convicted terrorists is Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. This figure really impressed Irsyad because of his personality as being gentle, honest, and courageous to be straightforward and simple. His lectures are easy to understand. Considering himself to have well acquaintance with Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's personal history, Irsyad also feels close to the members of the Ba'asyir family. He views that the government's treatment of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir is a mistake. His proximity to the Ba'asyir family, especially Nu'aim Ba'asyir, led him to be involved in a terrorist network.

**Fourth: Topics of Religious Learning.** The topic of religious learning is an important factor that encourages former convicted terrorists to continue their involvement in jihadi groups. Seeing what happened to Ayus, although he might receive a lot of knowledge about faith, jurisprudence, movement, and interpretation, one



material that could make him even more enthusiastic was a topic on *jihād*. *Jihād* represented the most touching topic that gave him a picture about the condition of Muslims who were being oppressed in many countries. This information, according to him, was often concealed, and everything became more accessible when he attended an intensive religious learning circle. He also concluded that *jihād* was the answer to help Muslim brothers who were oppressed in various regions or parts of the world.

**Fifth: Literature.** Some of the reading references are able to make former convicted terrorists feel enthusiastic about *jihād*, although they may become more enthusiastic to do *jihād* because they listen to lectures at public religious congregation or exclusive religious circles. Among those important books that have become the main reference, and are able to evoke the spirit of *jihād* among former convicted terrorists are is *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* by the al-Qaeda ideologue, Abdullah Azzam. This book is the first book read by Aji when he was very passionate about learning Islam in high school. According to him, *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah*, which is a collection of Abdullah Azzam's lectures and direct experiences, is capable of boosting the youth's spirit for *jihād*.

Several other books that are often read and referenced to by former convicted terrorists are *Koreksi terhadap Dr. Harun Nasution tentang Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya* (Correction for Dr. Harun Nasution about Islam Seen from Various Aspects) written by H.M. Rasjidi which is a counter argument against Harun Nasution's book, *Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya*. Other books accessed by former convicted terrorists are *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq* of Sayyid Qutb, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* of Salih bin Fauzan al-Fauzan, *al-Uṣūl ath-Thalātha* of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, *al-Walā' wa al-Barā'* of Muhammad Said al-Qahtani, *Millah Ibrahim* of Abu Muhammad Ashim al-Maqdisi (translated by Aman Abdurrahman), *Murtad karena Hukum* of Abdul Qadir bin Abdul Aziz, *Mimpi Suci di balik Jeruji* of Ghufron/Mukhlas, *Sekuntum Rosela Pelipur Lara* of Imam Samudra, and *Senyum Terakhir Sang Mujahid* of Amrozi.

## The Ideology of JI and Tim Hisbah

There are very basic differences regarding the ideology held by JI and Tim Hisbah in arousing the spirit of *jihad*. JI founds its jihadi ideology on the doctrine of Muslim brotherhood (*al-ukhuwwah al-Islāmiyyah*), which also includes Muslim brotherhood across countries. There was a strong desire from former convicted terrorists such as Joko and Ayus as well as other groups to rise up and fight against countries, which oppressed Muslims in Muslim-majority countries. This model of *jihad* is considered a form of retaliation or defense against fellow Muslims who were oppressed. This retaliation actually had nothing to do with treason against the state or against the Indonesian government. The fact is that JI's jihadi actions are mostly carried out in Indonesia because they felt that they were unable to reach out those foreign countries. For that reason, they then targeted the symbols of foreign states and "western" citizens such as Australia and America, who visited Indonesia. They called this kind of attack a form of "urban guerrilla".

An emphasis on the doctrine of solid brotherhood was at the same time tied with some limitations or special rules in *jihad*. These rules seem to define the criteria of the opponents or enemies: they only attack foreign or infidels, and must not attack unless they have been attacked. They also prohibit attacking places of worship, whether run by Muslims affiliated with other organizations or non-Muslim places of worship, because *jihad* that they commit is only a form of defense and retaliation for those oppressed Muslim brothers.

As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia is an fertile area for the spread of radical and extremist understandings. One of the backgrounds for the emergence of radicalism and extremism is the *takfīr* doctrine. Nanda says that around 2005-2006 he began to recognize a jihadi movement, which shifted toward a new direction. This movement based its action on the doctrine of *takfīr*. This movement is, therefore, different from the JI jihadi group, which bases its movement on the doctrine of *ukhuwwah Islāmiyyah*. This



*takfīr* doctrine does not only target non-Muslims but also Muslims who are considered not to practice Islamic law as their version. Based on this point of view, all those being considered infidels are worth to be killed, and their property and dignity are allowed to be confiscated.

Although the scope of *takfīr* is very broad, the targets of attack is commonly directed more toward the state and those who work under state agencies, especially the police. This can be seen in the attacks carried out by Tim Hisbah. In addition to attacking churches, they also attacked mosques within the police station or mosques that were launched or funded by the government, such as the mosque at the Cirebon Police Headquarter and the Pancasila Mosque in Surakarta. Apart from carrying out attacks on the state or people under state agencies, they are also no longer willing to participate in activities organized by the state such as elections.

### **Many Still Ideological**

Former convicted terrorists' awareness of the structural problems faced themselves and Muslims indeed pushed them to seek for an ideological umbrella. In the context of the disappearance of critical left groups, radicalism and extremism emerge as a promising ideology of resistance (Hadiz 2020). However, understanding radicalism and extremism in Indonesia from a structural perspective alone cannot fully delve into and explain the phenomena of a number of former convicted terrorists who still have a commitment to “dare to die” in the path of *jihad*.

The case of Aji, for example, along with his 50 colleagues who are determined to deliver “death pledge” to Sigit Qardhawi, is difficult to understand if only explained from the structural perspective. Even after getting out of prison, Aji explicitly still aspires to ‘martyrdom’ like Sigit and other jihadis if this opportunity comes to him. An imagination about angels waiting for them in paradise becomes a firmly believed narrative. In this context, structural resistance has transformed into ideology. In this case, Central Java may still have former convicted

terrorists who are still very ideological. Social linkages and routinization of jihadi doctrine among them also explain how the jihadi ideology is still embedded in them, even though they are jammed in the midst of mainstream religious narratives, whose bearers become increasingly aware of the importance of controlling space of discourse, and are suppressed by the state that becomes increasingly active in initiating policies and actions against radicalism and extremism.

### **WEST JAVA: AN EMPTY SPACE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND RETURNEES' FAMILY NETWORKS**

West Java has been known as a region in Java most exposed to radicalism and extremism due to several factors. First, the number of the arrest of extremist and religion-based violence perpetrators is very high in West Java. And secondly, West Java has districts or cities from which extremists are originated, such as Bekasi, Sumedang, Bogor, Depok, Cianjur, and Ciamis. This study involves 7 informants from West Java consisting of 3 former convicted terrorists (Soleh, Hasan, Mukhlis), 3 ISIS returnees (Fadli, Denok, Soleha), and 1 deportee (Pak Huda).

Unlike informants from Central Java, the 7 informants from West Java can be said to be more diverse from several aspects, among others from their generational background and information channels from which they can access radical and extremist contents. Likewise, from an economic point of view, most of the informants come from the middle economic class. Therefore, their exposure to radicalism and extremism is unlikely to be motivated by economic factors. And last but not least, they also come from families or communities with an urban cultural background.

The educational backgrounds of those seven West Java informants can be said to be quite diverse. Most of them come from public schools, although some have attended *pesantren* such as Soleh who studied at the Al-Falah Pesantren in Ploso, Kediri, East Java. Since most of these informants came from public schools, it can be said

that they did not receive relatively good religious education. Of these 7 informants, some of them received higher education and obtained bachelor's degree (Hasan,) while some others only finished education up to a diploma (Mukhlas). Even, one of the informants is a graduate of a Police School, and once worked as a police officer (Soleh).

Although the older generation of radical and extremist movements also operates in West Java, what has attracted our attention from this province is that the activism of the new generation is quite striking. This new generation displays a different color: urban culture, family networks, and last but not least women's agency. Although her religious narrative was significantly constructed by her husband, Soleha, for example, played an important role not only as a medium for transmitting knowledge within her family, but also as a point of decision-making and involvement of more subjects. In other words, women play a role in the decisions of their family members to migrate and join ISIS. This pattern can range from the influence of wives on husbands, mothers on children, or daughters on parents.

### **A Story of a Former Convicted Terrorist with a Santri Background**

This is the story of Soleh who received primary to high school education from public schools in Jakarta, then continued his studies at a well-known Islamic boarding school in the city of Kediri, East Java, and graduated as a police officer from the National Police School in Lido, Bogor, West Java, in 1998. Known as an unruly student since high school, Soleh changed drastically when he found a book in his school mosque that discussed *jihad* in Palestine and Bosnia in the 1990s. From there, he was moved to do something, to show solidarity by helping fellow Muslim brothers. Apart from that, he also began to enjoy participating in religious learnings and joined the Jamaah Tarbiyah until Jamaah Islamiyah.

His decision to continue his education at a police school was to follow the footsteps of his brother and father. Graduating from a police school, he was assigned to the Depok Police Office in the

Sabhara and Community Guidance section. While in Depok, he actively participated in the Jamaah Tarbiyah's religious learning, which invited Ustaz Suparyono, a member of PKS (Prosperity and Justice Party) in Depok. During his time as a police officer, Soleh still had sympathy and empathy for the injustice and oppression encountered by Muslims in various countries such as in Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq. He also admired the Muslim extremist movement in Poso and Ambon, and even considered the WTC (World Trade Center) bombing in America in 2001 as an appropriate retaliation for the United States which had treated Muslims unfairly.

Soleh's story of being exposed to radicalism and extremism began when he was assigned to Aceh in 2004 and met Aman Abdurrahman. Through Aman, he was invited to meet ustadz Urwah and ustaz Joni Hendrawan, the 2005 Bali bombers. Having interacted with them, he began to be amazed by the thoughts of those who really loved *jihad*. In addition, he was also advised by Urwah to quit his job as a police officer. Between 2006-2007, he intensively read books by Aman Abdurrahman which led him to the idea that a government that is not based on God's law is *thagut*, which is worth fighting. He also began to often apostatize those who did not agree with him.

In 2008, Soleh began to feel uncomfortable with his job as a police officer. He was called by the Provos because he was considered deserting from the police. In that year, he officially joined the Al-Qaeda terrorist network of Southeast Asia (AAT), and adopted a name Abu Ayas. His decision to join the AAT was motivated by a deep empathy for the oppression in Palestine by Israel. He also felt disappointed that the Indonesian government did not have the courage to defend Palestine and enforce Islamic law, even though Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country in the world. Another reason that encouraged Soleh to join AAT was because he wanted to protect his fellow Muslims who were oppressed. Moreover, he was also tempted by the reward he might get in the name of *jihad*, i.e., going into paradise. The reward of paradise made his motivation for *jihad* even higher, and he wanted to be

martyred immediately. In addition, he also experienced an unpleasant moment because he felt humiliated in public by his superior, a moment which led him to a personality crisis.

In 2009, Soleh was officially and disrespectfully sacked from the police for the charge of desertion, polygamy, and involvement in radical and extremist groups. At that time, he was seen to have joined the terrorist groups of the Bali, Ritz-Carlton, and Marriott bombings. After being sacked from the police, Soleh trained 10 members of FPI Aceh for shooting practice in Mako Brimob Center and in the Jantho Forest for war training assisted by Dulmatin. Soleh was also responsible for procuring a number of weapons for the purpose of war training for his group. Ironically, he bought the weapon from someone in the police. In 2010, Soleh was arrested and sentenced up to 10 years in prison by the State Court of the Depok District. Soleh was released early on October 21, 2015 after receiving several remissions. While in prison, Soleh thought and began to realize that what he had been doing was wrong. Since then, he has been looking for a new spiritual teacher, and finds Gus Baha '(Ahmad Bahauddin Nursalim) as the right teacher.

### **A Story of an Adventuring Former Convicted Terrorist**

Another informant, Hasan, is a former convicted terrorist who previously traveled a lot and was exposed to extremist networks in the Philippines. His educational background is STM (Secondary Technical School) in Lampung, and the Military Academy of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao, the Philippines. In Indonesia, he attended the as-Sunnah religious gathering, which was instructed by Aman Abdurrahman.

Hasan's adventure of jihad began when the Ambon conflict erupted (1999-2002). At that time, he had to survive in Ambon, and the best defense was to attack. Because attacking requires expertise, Hasan finally participated in a military training in the West Seram Island, and started getting acquainted with the mujahidin alumni of Afghanistan and the Philippines. From the Ambon conflict, Hasan's

mindset began to change to a radical direction. He then joined Abu Sayyaf's group in the Philippines and received military training there. After about two years there, he became one of the best cadres until he achieved the rank of lieutenant. In addition, he was also able to master well the world's weaponry and deonation systems. He became known as an expert in explosive systems and devices.

After undergoing military training in the Mindanao Military Academy in the Philippines, Hasan then returned to Indonesia in late 2004 and armed extremist groups in Indonesia with homemade weapons. As time went on, he had thought that what he had been doing was wrong. However, he himself realized that to quit from a terrorist network was not easy. The social network that has been established gives strong control on its members. Moreover, Hasan's position was quite high in the network. This situation caused Hasan to come back again in a case of terrorism in 2013 because he was involved in supplying homemade weapons to terrorist groups.

### **Disenchantment with ISIS's Religious Doctrines**

The third former terrorist informant, Mukhlas, has actually been quite acquainted with Islamic religious topics, because he attended Islamic religious secondary school (*madrassa*) before continuing his studies for D3 (diplome 3) in Islamic education at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. His involvement in the ISIS group started from a closed religious gathering he participated in, and at the same time he also became an activist of a "religious" party in 2005. The main agenda presented during the religious gathering was getting acquainted with politics. For several years he studied books on war and watched jihadist video documentaries from Afghanistan, Bosnia and so on. This attracted him to take up a role in religious war (*jihād*). Even then, he considered it necessary to create conflict fields in Indonesia.

In 2007, he joined the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI), which then pushed him into the network of Dulmatin, an Indonesian extremist figure whose head was valued at USD 10 million. Mukhlas



was arrested by the Densus 88 during a shootout between his group and the Densus 88. He was caught and sentenced to 8 years in prison. In prison he became even more extreme because he was in the same cell as an extremist leader, Aman Abdurrahman. His encounter with Aman Abdurrahman further strengthened his understanding of the concept of *takfir* (calling someone an apostate). Even, he once claimed that his parents were disbelieving and refused to pray for both. In prison he also learned how to read maps, recognize types of weapons, learn to assemble bombs and grenades, and to learn infantry tactics.

Mukhlas greatly admired Aman Abdurrahman's personality and knowledge. In prison, he interacted a lot with ISIS sympathizers and kept up with the development of information about ISIS. However, from here he actually began to realize and felt that the ideas promoted by ISIS were largely absurd, such as forbidding sports that were games and even considering people who exercise as apostates. ISIS adherents also refuse congregational prayers at the prison mosque because the mosque is a place for inmates to be given a training on Pancasila. They are very introverted and feel the most righteous. They tend to look down on people who have a different understanding from theirs. They also consider the marriage of those who do not agree with them as adultery. They rejected the flag ceremony because they considered it to be *kufr* (heathen). They also consider people who are involved in democracy to be idolaters. Seeing these irregularities, Mukhlas ventured to access other references about Islam, from sources that are not used by Aman and his followers until he finally decided to leave ISIS.

### **A Story on the Family of ISIS Returnees and Deportees**

The family network is a unique fact in the case of returnees and deportees in West Java. West Java returnees and deportees (Saleha and Pak Huda respectively) had a background of secular education, while the other two (Denok and Fadli) went to primary and junior secondary education run by private Islamic institutions. Starting from

a deeper curiosity about Islam and an ideal country, Denok began independently searching for Islamic information through the Internet. Her curiosity about ISIS started from conversations with his uncle, Pak Huda, through social media Telegram and WhatsApp. Born as a digital native, Denok finally explored information about ISIS further through Facebook and Tumblr. The information about Islam that she found from both the Internet and her uncle was related to ISIS propaganda that offered justice, prosperity, and life in orderliness under the ISIS banner. For her, ISIS seemed to answer questions about an ideal and just state that she did not find from the portrait of the Indonesian state.

In her confession, Denok says that her interest in learning Islam began when she became active surfing on the Internet, precisely since she entered junior high school in 2010. At that time, she was touched when she saw photos of his friends on Facebook who looked elegant when wearing a *hijab* (headcover). Apart from seeing photos of her friends, her interest also arose because she saw some photos of her own sister who studied in Malaysia.



Since then she had become interested in changing her physical appearance and started actively reading books about the history of the Prophet Muhammad bought by her parents, and some articles on



Islam. From her reading activities, she felt that she became acquainted with the life of the Prophet, the early caliphs of Islam, and the Prophet's other companions. She became interested in their leadership, which according to her, was very just in realizing Muslims' welfare. She then compared her knowledge from reading with the social phenomena in Indonesia as broadcast on media such as television, which according to her displayed a lot of injustice. In a condition that she became aware of religious knowledge from various media such as the Internet and books, she began to feel dissatisfied within herself. The youth confusion in the process of finding identity began to emerge in her. Her confusion arose because all of her family members were busy with their own affairs and did not have time to discuss (having a family time) or what she called a "dinner table conference". Her father was so busy with his work at the office; her mother was also busy taking care of her younger sibling; and her sister was busy with her studies. In this condition, she ended up with exploring the virtual world more and more often.

In August 2014, Denok became aware of the ISIS declaration from her uncle, Pak Huda. Pak Huda shared information about ISIS to her via Telegram and WhatsApp. The message that her uncle sent was not only about the caliphate declaration, but also about the virtues of moving to Syria and the lucrative facilities promised by ISIS, such as free housing, free education, job with high salary, debt payment, economy security, and others. From here, she began to find out for herself the truth of the news further, and found an account named *daily of muhajirah* and *paladin of jihad* on Tumblr. These two accounts are from ISIS supporters who were already in Syria, and quite active in posting life situations there.

The three returnees above have never followed religious learning intensively. Perhaps only Pak Huda had learned Islam in Kebun Jeruk, Jakarta. He learned from ustaz Franky and ustaz Sobary who were affiliated with NII. However, he began to feel disappointed with them after seeing that both ustazs were involved in a conflict one against

another. Finally he decided to stop learning Islam from them. Later, Pak Huda formed and led his own religious learning, which was attended by his family members. The topics raised in his religious circle focused on issues around the caliphate, *jihad* and *hijrah* (migration).

Through this family religious forum, Pak Huda succeeded in introducing ISIS propaganda to his family members and invited them to go to Syria. Denok, who received a lot of information about ISIS from the Internet and discussions with her uncle, began to persuade and influence her parents about the ISIS propaganda. She persuaded her family by providing an understanding about the Qur'anic arguments on *hijrah* which she quoted from Chapter an-Nisa (4): 97-100. In addition, she also informed her family about the worldly pleasures and luxuries promised by ISIS if they were willing to emigrate to Syria, such as free housing, high salaries, economic security, free education, and so on.

Another returnees, Saleha, who is a wife of Pak Huda, admitted that she got the information about ISIS from open forums and the Internet. Together with other family members, Saleha also actively participated in family religious learning formed by her husband.

Three families consisting of 26 people, who are actually from the same kinship, finally agreed to leave for Syria to join ISIS. Of the 26 family members who left, only 19 successfully reached Syria, while 7 others failed and were deported to Indonesia, including Pak Huda. Denok's parents are among the donors who helped finance their departure to Syria.

Unlike Denok and Saleha who got the information about ISIS from the Internet, Fadli got the information from his mother and sister who were influenced by his brother-in-law, and were tempted by the ISIS propaganda. He actually grew up in a family from a fairly moderate and pluralistic background. From his father's path, his grandfather was an NU activist who became an adviser to Idham Chalid, an NU figure who had served as a minister during the first periods of the New Order government. His mother's extended family background is quite diverse: some are Muhammadiyah activists, but some are Christians.

With this kind of family background coupled with little knowledge of Islam he learned from kindergarten to junior high school, he was in conflict or disagreed with his family's position concerning ISIS.

In 2015, without being notified nor invited, Fadli was left alone in Indonesia by his mother, sister, and extended family. Living alone and rarely socializing, Fadli was not only confused and stressed, but also got often sick. He began to miss his mother badly. Since then he began to reflect back on various words or arguments he ever heard indirectly in his family religious gathering. In this situation, he became more and more curious to prove the truth of ISIS. He also began to prove the truth by looking for the information from websites that support ISIS. Unfortunately, he did not consult other sites that contradicted ISIS as a comparison. From this process, he finally began to believe that ISIS was right, while other sites that went against it were only perceived to have the intention to bring down ISIS. He finally decided to go after his family.

During their nearly two years of living under the ISIS leadership, the returnees and their extended families had encountered many paradoxical phenomena. They saw many violent incidents and realities that were very contrary to what they had previously imagined. Finally they decided to get out of the ISIS' trap and successfully flight back to Indonesia in 2017.

## **EAST JAVA: A PORTRAIT OF TWO EXTREMIST GENERATIONS**

East Java is known as a strong base for NU and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). However, the emergence of a terrorist cell associated with the Amrozi network is a fact that several *pesantrens* in East Java have served as a place of religion learning for former convicted terrorists, and the 2018 church bombing shows the importance of East Java in the studies of radical and terrorist networks. This study involves 6 informants. Three of them are former convicted terrorists, while the other three are ISIS returnees. The first three are older generations who come from lower middle class backgrounds.

Friendship networks, human sympathy, and structural problems are conditions that encourage them to choose to be part of a radical and terrorist network. Some of them even decided to become part of the ISIS or even went to Syria and joined the jihadists. They were initially called to join as sympathy and to conduct humanitarian missions.

The other three informants are generally the younger generation. They are young people who are worried about their identity and their future. This restlessness then prompted them to look for spiritual paths which eventually led them to the network of Islamic radical groups. Their decision was motivated by a belief that this was a golden opportunity to demonstrate their identity as young Muslims who were committed to the high ideals of Islam. In the projection of radical Islam, *jihad* is a heroic act that has become the aspiration and dream of today's youth.

This heroism arises from the desire to carry out *jihad* and become a martyr, which represents a symbol of young Muslims' heroism conditioned by global political moments. Among the most prominent global moments are the WTC (World Trade Center) bombing on September 11, 2001, the emergence of ISIS, and a number of suicide bombing incidents in Indonesia, such as the Bali bombing and the church bombing in Surabaya in 2018. These moments have inspired the younger generation to build more ideological radical awareness.

## **On Islamism and Radicalism in the Pesantren Environment**

The educational backgrounds of the East Java informants are quite diverse. However, the pesantren background of the former convicted terrorists is a unique fact when we talk about radicalism and extremism in this province. Abu Dzar is a former senior terrorist who had joined NII, then JI, and became a supporter of ISIS. He studied at Pondok Modern Gontor Ponorogo and was assigned to serve and teach at the Al-Mukmin Islamic Boarding School in Ngruki. Aris, who was an operator for jihadi candidates, studied at the Al Islam Islamic Boarding School in Tenggulun, Lamongan, which is managed

by Amrozi's family, the mastermind behind the 2002 Bali Bombings. Meanwhile, Wahyu Faza Syafa'at and Gafar Saleh studied at the Umar bin al-Khattab Islamic Boarding School in Surabaya.

The extent to which the *pesantren* curriculum contributes to the seeding of radical and extremist understanding is a question that is not easily answered clearly. However, in the East Java context the “environment” of *pesantren* seems to have helped introduce *santri* to radical and extremist literature. Abu Dzar admits that he began to be interested in radicalism when he read a lot of literature written by Muslim Brotherhood figures such as Hasan Al Banna and Said Hawwa, and Abu A'la Maududi—a well-known Islamist ideologue from India. Aris admits that he came to know *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* when he was still studying in *pesantren* through his friendship network. Even though he continued his studies in a technical secondary school, Aris was still actively participating in religious public learning (*pengajian*), which was instructed by religious teachers from the Al Islam *pesantren*.

### **Exposed through Television Broadcast**

Generation of young extremists consists of those who are more familiar with the Internet and new media as sources of knowledge. Wahyu Faza Syafa'at, for example, admits that he began to be exposed to radicalism when he was in elementary school, precisely when the Bali Bombing incident was always broadcast by a national private television station. Every day after school he always watched the broadcast of the Bali Bombing on television which eventually instilled the seeds of jihadism in him. Wahyu Faza Syafa'at who comes from an affluent family had a computer since he was still in elementary school. Thus, he had the access to the internet to find videos about *jihad*. By the time he was in high school, he collected hundreds of videos about *jihad* and started to learn how to make bombs. In addition, because of his passion in reading, he was also diligent in collecting electronic books that he found from internet surfing. The Arabic version of *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* that he got at that time encouraged him to take an Arabic course at Pesantren Umar bin Khattab in Surabaya.

## **Socialization: Religious Lectures and Affiliations**

Gafar Saleh came to know Islamism and radical movements when he began to actively participate in religious learning in mosques or religious circles (*halaqahs*). He admits that he had participated in religious learning held by Jamaah Tarbiyah Porong in Sidoarjo, JI's religious learning in Magetan, and FPI's one in Paciran, Lamongan. From these learning circles, Gafar Saleh was finally connected with radical and terrorist activists. He was then moved to participate in the acts (*amaliyah*) of *jihād*. His background is from Muhammadiyah. However, while studying at ITS (Sepuluh November Institute of Technology) in Surabaya, he began to be connected with MMI (Indonesian Mujahidin Council) and was active in managing MMI's charities and journalistic works there. After the execution of the three Bali bombers, Gafar Saleh took the responsibility for MMI's front media. His journalistic works had brought him to several areas such as Ambon and Poso, and to several countries such as Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, and the Philippines. When MIT (East Indonesia Mujahidin) was formed, he joined and studied military at the invitation of Sabar Subagio alias Daeng Koro. He also studied religion directly from Santoso (founder of the East Indonesian Mujahidin).

The story of Syamsul Mubarak is quite interesting because he grew up in the traditional culture of NU. In fact, he himself had an official membership card for GP Ansor, an NU youth organization, which in the last two decades has been very active in campaigning for Islam, nationality, and pluralism. Spending his school times until high school in Jember, he then moved to Malang to study law at Merdeka University (UNMER) in Malang. During his university studies, Syamsul Mubarak was active in Lembaga Dakwah Kampus (LDK, Campus Proselytizing Body), Himpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia (HMI, Indonesian Muslim Student Association), and Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa (BEM, Student Executive Board). He began to interact with various radical networks such as MMI, NII, and JAT. He also joined the Tim Pengacara Muslim (TPM, Muslim Lawyers Team) to assist the terrorism case of



Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. The climax was when he decided to go to Syria with the aim of a humanitarian mission for six months in 2014. Three years after returning from Syria, he was arrested by Densus 88.

Danang Barokah also comes from a family of NU background. Until junior high school, his family invited a teacher to teach him the Koran at home. While in high school, he began to attend religious learning at Al Irsyad with his family. Danang Barokah never went to *pesantrèn* or joined any Islamic organizations. He only attended some religious learning circles at mosques around his house. What is interesting is that the instructors of the religious learnings that he participated in were those well-known figures from the JI network such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Abu Tholut (at that time he was leader of JI's Mantiqi III) in the Al Ihsan Sabilillah Mosque in Surabaya. Danang Barokah began to diligently and seriously follow Abu Tholut's religious learning circles since he witnessed the burial of the three Bali bombers in Lamongan. The circles he had participated in brought him closer to extremist networks. This can be seen from his decision to go to Syria at the invitation of Abu Jandal.

### **Returnees and Humanitarian Mission**

Like those from West Java, the returnees from East Java come from middle-class families. What distinguishes these two is perhaps the main motive for leaving for Syria. If West Java's returnees were much more motivated by structural disenchantment at home, East Java's returnees were motivated more by a call to be involved in a humanitarian mission. In this case Abu Jandal is an important node for those returnees (or deportees) from East Java.

As mentioned above, Danang Barokah began to be connected with Abu Jandal's network when he actively participated in religious learning held in the al-Ihsan Sabilillah Mosque in Surabaya attended by such speakers as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Abu Fida, and Abu Tholut. He also started inviting Abu Jandal to speak at a routine religious gathering in his house. Since then his views on Indonesia began to change.



He considered that Pancasila as the basis of the Indonesian state is incompatible with Islamic teachings because it is based on anything other than God's law. He also began to have a desire to move to Syria because of the knowledge he got about the virtues of the land of Syria and the rule of migration there from religious gatherings he participated in. Together with Syamsul Mubarak and others, he finally left for Syria in March 2014.

While in Syria, it turned out that Syamsul Mubarak and Danang Barokah had to be involved in training for unloading pairs of AK-47 rifles, in shooting training using an AK-47, and *ribāʿ* or training to guard security posts and gates. They also participated in religious learnings instructed by those considered competent, from Salim Mubarak and Shaikh Abu Romi. Apart from that, they underwent basic military training by the ISIS troops, physical training, training in throwing grenades and bombs, and training to attack the enemy led by Abu Zar from Palestine. Finishing this training series, they then took an allegiance to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, who was the leader of ISIS.

For approximately six months in Syria, Syamsul Mubarak and Danang Barokah wanted to return to Indonesia because what they did in Syria was very different from what they had imagined before leaving. Before leaving, both of them thought that they would carry out a humanitarian mission, such as helping victims and children to get proper education. However, when they arrived in Syria they were actually trained and used as ISIS soldiers. Moreover, the salary they earned was also not in accordance with what was promised when they were still in Indonesia. They were promised a salary of hundreds of millions rupiahs, but in fact they only got 600 thousand rupiahs, much lower than what was expected.

Syamsul Mubarak and Danang Barokah then began to doubt and felt disappointed with what they were doing at that time, especially when they saw violence everywhere, such as videos of murders, beheadings, and severed heads that were placed on the fences of the city of Raqqa. From the various events that occurred, they began to

question the true nature of Islam as *rahmatan lil ‘alamin* (blessing for the universe). Syamsul Mubarak began to question the declaration of caliphate, although he himself remained with the allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. This is because the condition of the country and its economy was not stable yet, and there were conflicts everywhere. The two of them finally decided to return to Indonesia.

## EPILOGUE AND RECOMMENDATION

The religious educational backgrounds of former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees, and deportees contribute to exposing them to radical and terrorist ideologies when mediated by structural factors, identity, social networks, and ideology. These factors shape or direct certain religious understandings in a significant way towards radical ones and religious-based extremist violences. Informal religious education contributes greatly to shaping individuals to become radical and extremist because of the inability of formal religious education to understand the agency of its students: to explore their religious narratives and aspirations. This situation encourages them to seek religious knowledge through various channels of informal religious learning in schools, universities, Islamic boarding schools, or certain social communities.

This research offers several points of recommendation that should be considered by the government, stakeholders, and society, as follow:

1. The importance of mainstreaming “engaging education” in religious teachings in schools, boarding schools, and universities, i.e., education that gives attention to student’s unique personality, individual background, and problems, and connect religious concepts to social-religious realities within society.
2. The importance of emphasizing communicative and persuasive methods in religious learning system in schools, *pesantrens*, and universities so that students can be more explorative.

3. Within informal religious education, actors and discourses with moderatist views need to be encouraged to take part in public religious congregation and *halaqahs* in order to restrict the spaces of hardline religious actors and discourses.
4. Encouraging contextual understanding of Islam through publications, social media contents, and community engagements so that religion can get a new space for actualization that brings the common good to humanity.
5. The idea of “engaging education”, which gives attention to each student’s unique personality, individual background, and problems, and involves them in socio-religious activities within a given society, can be channeled to the Ministry of Education and Culture’s program of *Cerdas Berkarakter* (smart with strong character), and the Ministry of Religion’s program of *Moderasi Beragama* (religious moderatism).

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