

Edited by
Najib Kailani & Munirul Ikhwan

THE NARRATIVES OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN INDONESIA

Educational Background and Individual Agency



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PERFORMING ‘THE FIELD ACTION’ COMPLETELY ‘ :

Former Convicted Terrorists and the Narratives of Mediated Religious Education in Central Java

Najib Kailani , Munirul Ikhwan, and Aflahal Misbah



Introduction

Central Java is recognized as one of the most significant hub of terrorist networks from the alumni of Afghanistan jihadists, Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), and the Hisbah Team. Some of the popular figures include Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Umar Patek, Dulmatin, Abu Rusydan, Abu Tholut, and Sigit Qardhawi. The important location of Central Java in the issue of religious extremism and radicalism has in turn attracted many scholars to examine it in detail.

Some scholars have interested in analysing the ideology and network of Islamic State of Indonesia/Indonesian Islamic Army (NII / TII) and the formation of Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) in Indonesia and they have linked their analysis to the significant

location of Islamic Boarding School or Pesantren Ngruki and its two main figures, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Abdullah Sungkar. Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki is associated as the centre of religious violent extremism not only in Indonesia but also in Southeast Asia. The alumni of Ngruki terrorists then called "Ngruki network". This network began to consolidate itself in the late 1970s as an opposition movement against the government (New Order) and secular symbols of the state . This network grew in significant number in the early 1980s , before two of its central figures, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir moved to Malaysia in 1985 (ICG 2002 , Ismail 2007, Feillard and Madinier 2011, Solahudin 2011, Bruinessen 2013, Wildan 2013).

In addition, other studies have highlighted the political economy and identity problem. In his study on religious violence in Indonesia, John T. Sidel (2006: 13-17) underscores the relationship between the phenomenon of mass riots that occurred in the end of Suharto's New Order, racial and religious based conflicts including in Central Java, Ambon and other Post New Order religious violent extremism with the uncertainty and vulnerability experienced by Muslim to Western-secular domination from colonialism to the market economy and under siege mentality on Jewish and Christian penetration. This situation stimulates resistance identity through the narrative of Islamism (Hasan 2008).

Meanwhile, Vedi Hadiz (2020) argues that although it is not a dominant voice, since the New Order the discourse of the establishment of an Islamic state continuously

reverberates in Indonesian public sphere. Hadiz suggests that the aspiration is significantly related to two reasons: the absence of channelling the voice of marginalized groups when left discourse was annihilated by the New Order and the result of official religion policy as an effort to eradicate communism in Indonesia.

Substantiating his main argument on 'Islamic populism' (2016) in Indonesia and the Middle East, Hadiz argues that the rise of Islamism in Central Java is related to the conversion of *abangan* groups to devout Muslims (Hadiz 2020). He maintains that the socio economic background of the lower middle class from experiencing marginalization, feeling uncertainty and structural vulnerability have stimulated these 'new Muslims' to seek for channels to resonate their aspiration and resistance through the discourse of jihad and the commanding good and forbidding wrong (*amar makruf nahi munkar*) movement.

Robert Hefner in his article entitles "Where have All the *Abangan* gone? Religionization and the Decline of non-stand ar d Islam in Contemporary Indonesia" (2011) suggests that the disappearance of *abangan* groups in Indonesia cannot be separated from the practice of state religionization or more precisely the Islamization promoted by the state at the end of the New Order. Hefner (2000: 84) states that in the first two years of the New Order, it had banned more than a hundred mystical organizations that were closely associated with *abangan* groups as the main supporters of communism in the Old Order era. According to him, this ban has been enhanced

the conservative Islamic discourse which is in line with the idea of eradicating local Islamic expressions.

In modern Indonesian history, Central Java is recognised as the basis of *abangan* group. Stephen C. Headley's ethnographic study (2004) on Islam in Central Java presents a thick description about the encounter of Islam and local tradition in which realised through the practices of *abangan*. Prior to the political revolution in 1965, Central Java was a the main basis of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) which the *abangan* was its main sympathizers (Wildan 2013). After the fall of the New Order in 1998, Central Java becomes the main basis of the secular nationalist party, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), which has always dominated the local parliament won local election in Central Java .

The gender aspect is also an important unit of analysis used by researchers to portray religious radicalism and extremism. The narratives of violence through sweeping, training camp and bomb-making are associated with discourses of masculinity. However, recent studies have also shown the role of women as an important agency in the discourse of radicalism and religious violent extremism (Nur aniyah 2018, Duriesmith and Ismail 2019).

In addition, the educational background of the terrorist has long been in the spotlight of the observers. The fact that the majority of people who have radical and extremist views coming from diverse religious education such as *madrasa*

and *pesantren* have stimulated scholars to examine the madrasa networks and their curriculums. Some scholars have investigated the network of Al-Mukmin Ngruki which has extended beyond Surakarta like Al-Muttaqien in Jepara, Darus Syahadah in Boyolali, Al-Islam in Lamongan and Lukman Hakiem in Johor (ICG 2003) and the their curriculum as well as Salafi network in Indonesia (Hasan 2008. Wahid 2018). Meanwhile, Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog (2016) have paid their particular attention to the link between education and violent extremism. They locate education as an important variable in understanding violent extremism .

After 9/11, most of counter-terrorism policies focus on *madrasa* and Islamic boarding schools. They tend to represent madrasa and pesantren as simplistic as an incubator of terrorists. As a result, the counter terrorism policies emphasis on the supervision and control of Islamic schools. This in turn enhances to the unpleasant image of Islamic education (Noor, Sikand and Bruinessen 2008: 11). However, some scholars indicate insignificant relationship between religious educational background with the views and behaviours of violent and religious extremism.

Martin van Bruinessen (2006) in his study of the contrasting views shared by two alumni of modern Islamic boarding school Gontor, Nurcholis Madjid, who is known as a liberal Muslim scholar, and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the prominent leader of the Indonesian combatants disputes the inherent relationship between religious education in Indonesia and the emergence of radicalism and extremism. The similar

position was also shown by Mark Woodward (2010). He refuses the causal relationship between formal religious education with the emergence of radicalism and extremism. He argues that many students who have attracted to Islamist ideas have experienced “re-Islamization” (Ismail 2004) on campus through various channels including informal Islamic study channels. Thus, they become detached from the tradition of religious learning in general.

Nevertheless, an exploration of religious education background narratives of the ex-terrorists tend to be overlooked in the existing studies. Paying too much attention to figures and networks of the radical and extremist educational institutions will lead to generalization of representation and deny the particular location of individual agency. Meanwhile, ignoring their religious education background by highlighting identity and structural problems seems to become reductionist. In order to enrich the previous studies, this chapter aims to examine the religious education background of former convicted terrorist in Central Java through exploration of their narratives and religious aspirations.

The data in this chapter are drawn from our interviews with 7 former convicted terrorists. All of them are males. These informants are chosen based on their variations in generation and affiliation. Some of them are associated with the second Bali bombing, Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), Tim Hisbah and Aman Abdurrahman network. Some informants seem to become

our interlocutors where the conversation was conducted in more intimate and relaxed. In addition, we also confirm the interviews with information in the media and analysis of Investigation Report (BAP) of terrorism cases in Indonesia. In order to protect the privacy of our informants, their names are disguised as part of research ethics.

This chapter consists as follow: first it describes the socio-economic backgrounds of the seven informants and then explores their efforts in learning Islam and their exposures to Islamism through social networks and informal education . Then, it presents their narratives and life aspirations. The description is situated within social and structural problems in order to link their interest in violent and extremist ideology. Lastly , this chapter investigates the sources of religious knowledge from the seven informants.

This chapter demonstrates that religious education background does not necessarily stimulate a person to become radical or extremist. We argue that religious education background will be significant in making a person to have radical religious views and encouraging him to engage in terrorist attack only if it is mediated by structural factors, identity, social networks, and ideology. Religious education background is basically something dormant. Dissatisfaction towards state policy and public justice, identity crisis, and social networks have stimulated their religious education knowledge to expose to the violent and extremist ideology or pushed them to find a new ways of spirituality in religious marketplace according to his individual aspirations .

The Biographies and Socio-Economic Backgrounds

The seven former convicted terrorists that we interview in this study were largely coming from lower socio economic background. Two of them grew up far away from their parents. Irsyad has a Hadrami family background in Pemalang. He has been left by his father since he was in junior high school. His father had to work in Saudi Arabia for 13 years. He lived with his mother who opens satay stall to cover their everyday needs. Meanwhile, Ariel had far afield from his parents since he was in grade two in primary school. His parents migrated to Karawang in order to seek their fortune by selling chicken noodle soup. Ariel stayed with his grandfather and grandmother in Wonogiri until he finished junior high school. Afterwards, he continued his study at senior high school and stayed in the MTA (Majelis Tafsir Al- Qur'an) Islamic boarding school in Surakarta .

Another story is coming from Nanda and Aji. While both of them were not left by their parents to move out to cities or go abroad, their parents are not able to support their education up to higher education level. Although Nanda's family is relatively coming from middle class family, his grandfather was military official and his uncle was a businessman in Solo, he mentioned that his father was a musician and his mother, a converted Muslim, was a stall vendor in traditional market only able to pay for his education up to Junior High School. As a result, Nanda had to look for jobs in order to cover his school expenses from senior high school to university. Nanda told us that he has inherited her father's talent as evident from his interest

in music and dance. Meanwhile, Aji only completed his formal education until senior high school. His brother, who only received primary school education had dedicated himself to finance Aji's education because his father already passed away earlier.

Unlike the four former convicted terrorists as mentioned above, the three following former convicted terrorists are having government official family background. Johan's father was not a civil servant, but worked as a military official in the Dutch colonial era, while one of his brothers worked as a civil servant in the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration in Jakarta. Meanwhile, Anjasmara and Ayus were born from civil servant family. Anjasmara's father was a civil servant and active in Muhammadiyah. He was appointed as a school principal. Meanwhile, Ayus's father worked as a civil servant at the Karanganyar Regional Revenue and Tourism Office. After retired, Ayus's father was active in farm. In short, it can be said that they were not high-rank government official families.

In addition to the middle to lower family economic background, the former convicted terrorists are also have not any *santri* family or have not religious education background. It could be found in their names, which are not Arabic names. In other words, their initial encounter to Islam was not from their nuclear family environment but they took it from outside. Accordingly, it is not surprising when they have to teach their own parents to perform Islam such as praying. Indeed, Ayus told us that his father did not

express his sympathy for Islamic activism. In short, their nuclear family for these former convicted terrorists did not provide any significant context of their religious preferences. Their family simply aspires their children to become a good person and finding a proper job after completing school such as civil servant.

Knowing Islam and Islamism in Secondary and Higher Education

Most of our informants in this study took their primary education in public schools before continuing to secondary in private schools. Johan obtained his primary, secondary and tertiary education in public school in Kediri and Kertosono Nganjuk. Although he grew up in Kediri which is recognised as the basis of Nahdhatul Ulama, he claimed that he began to learn Islam when he was in senior high school. He attracted to learn Islam outside of school environment. He began to attend Islamic study groups held by various religious groups including NU, Muhammadiyah, Hidayatullah, and Jamaah Tabligh. In 1996, Johan continued his study in concentration of management at Darul Ulum University (UNDAR) Jombang. UNDAR was his main choice because besides being close to his house, UNDAR itself was enjoying its popularity at that time. During his study, Johan remained active at Islamic study groups organized by various Islamic organizations and groups.

A similar story could be found in Aji and Ariel's educational background. Both of them completed their

study in public schools. Aji finished his primary school at SDN Notokusuman Solo (already closed) and SMP Negeri 6 Surakarta. He missed his school for a year because he did not pass entrance exam at vocational school (STM) he wanted. Realizing that schooling is important for his future and based on his friend suggestion Aji then continued his study at SMA Islam 1 Surakarta which managed by the Al-Mukmin Ngruki Foundation. During his training Aji stayed in a dormitory managed by SMA Islam 1 Surakarta. He admitted that he had begun to get to know Islamist movements such as the Islamic State of Indonesia (NII), Jamaah Tarbiyah and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) through his teachers at the school. This encounters, in turn has formed his religious consciousness and finally swore to become the Islamic State of Indonesia (NII) member through a female teacher who taught him physics.

Meanwhile, Ariel completed his education at SDN 2 Jatiroto and SMP N 2 Jatiroto. Ariel was recognised as smart student. He actually can go to a public high school, however, he decided to continue his study at senior high school majoring natural sciences at SMA Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA), a private school owned by an Islamic study group concerning on quranic interpretation based on modernist perspective in Semanggi, Solo. Since living in the dormitory, Ariel has begun to get to know MTA's Islamic teachings more closely, which he thinks are simple : they don't present complicated arguments and debates .



Nanda and Irsyad are examples of former convicted terrorists who continued their junior and senior high school education in private schools. After completing his basic education at public school SDN 100 Selembaran Solo, Nanda continued his training in private school namely junior high school, SMP Al-Islam Solo and senior high school Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta majoring in Social Studies. Nanda getting to know Islamic teachings including Muhammad sayings (*hadist*) and the history of Muhammad Prophet during his study in the junior school Al-Islam. At that time he claimed that he learnt Islam through memorization and understanding. Nanda told us that when he studied at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 he felt far from religion. He started to mingle with street punk and his rebellious spirit began to take shape. He claimed that he was one of the senior high school students who took to

demonstration during the decline of the Suharto regime in 1998. Nanda began to study Islam in depth when he worked in a textile company named Batik Keris and studied Diploma in Accounting at the Surakarta School of Economics. Prior to his interest in learning Islam, he attended ESQ (*Emotional Spiritual Quotient*) trainings popularised by a self-help guru Ary Ginanjar which was part of the programs offered by the college. Nanda fascinated with Ary Ginanjar's trainings which combine Islam and management knowledge. Since then he was curious to study Islam from one to other mosques.

Meanwhile, Irsyad continued his training at junior high school SMP Muhammadiyah and SMA Muhammadiyah 4 Belik Pematang majoring in social studies after completing his education in elementary schools in Randudongkal Pematang. He began to learn to recite the Al-Qur'an with his father who had studied Islam from al-Irsyad school and was a quranic teacher in the village they lived. However, Irsyad claimed that he began studying Islam intensively when he was student of SMA Muhammadiyah especially when he stayed in dormitory. According to him he attracted with the Muhammad sayings (*hadist*) and the history of Muhammad prophet (*sirah*) lessons. However, his intensity of studying Islam decreased when he went to Yogyakarta to study at Yogyakarta Accounting Academy (AAY), recently renamed Yogyakarta Technological University (UTY).

Irsyad who had to work in order to cover his needs finally dropped out from college. He then moved to Solo and worked

in his uncle's printing business. One day he had a conflict with his uncle that made him to resign and look for another job. He had a casual job as a driver and until he became a *takmir*, someone who organise mosque activity in Semanggi. From the mosque, he began to intensively attend and organize Islamic lectures which presenting various religious teachers (*ustadz*) including the Islamist from Solo. He in turn started to participate intensively in various Islamic study groups in various mosques in Solo including the Marwah mosque, Al-Ikhlâs mosque, and Istiqomah mosque. Some of the *ustaz* that delivered Islamic sermons were Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Abdurrahim Ba'asyir, and Abdullah Manaf.

Other former convicted terrorists, Anjasmara, took his primary education in private schools such as SD Muhammadiyah, then he continued to junior high school SMP N 1 Surakarta, finished his senior high school at SMA Al Islam 1 Surakarta. During his school days, Anjasmara admitted that he enjoyed listening to KH Zainuddin MZ's Islamic sermons because he considered him as a humorous figure so that his Islamic teachings were easy to understand. He also curious to read history books which were displayed in his father book shelf especially on Indonesian history on fighting colonialism such as Imam Bonjol, the Prince of Diponegoro and Soedirman or national heroic war stories. Until senior high school Anjasmara's religious sentiment was conventional. After he completed school years, however, particularly when he was appointed as the branch chairman of Young Muhammadiyah (*Pemuda Muhammadiyah*) Semang

gi and chairman of sub-district youth mosque organisation his religious passion began to churn. Anjasmara started to attend Sigit Qaradawi who is eager to raid the place under the banner of forbidding the wrong (*nahi munkar*).

Among the seven informants that we interviewed Ayus is the only informant who attended public schools from elementary to middle school namely SDN Tawangmangu, SMPN 3 Popongan and SMAN 1 Karanganyar). Meanwhile, Ayus, who seemed introvert began to know the Islamic State of Indonesia (*Negara Islam Indonesia*, NII) when he studied senior high school from an underground Islamic study circle (*halaqah*). But he said that he was not interested in joining with NII at that time. Yet he tended to resist because of NII doctrine about "*takfiri*" namely judging all people including Muslims who were not joining NII and in line with this group as infidels. He cannot accept the label of infidels for himself and his parents. In order to find the religious answers which made him uncomfortable Ayus went to Solo every Sunday to attend Islamic sermon delivered by Ustaz Abdullah Manaf at the Istiqomah mosque in Penumping Solo. When he attended university, especially in Islamic Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah Faculty UMS (Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta) Ayus began to intersect with a wider range of Islamic groups, including Tarbiyah, Salafi, NII congregations, and certainly Muhammadiyah which became the campus standard curriculum. During his college days, he was also active in the executive halaqah of the JI network.

From Identity Issues to Social Networks

Youth is a crucial period for someone to question himself and his future. This is a phase for someone to find identity and determine the orientation of his life. The attention of the former convicted terrorists to take a particular path of understanding and religious ideology is part of their efforts to answer the questions of their youth in transition. The tendency of young people to choose the path of religion (Islam) can be explained in the context of the current of Islamization that began in Indonesia since the 1990s where the idiom of piety has become an important and popular narrative among young people. In this case, the senior and undergraduate education stages is an important phase that needs to be considered in order to determine the trajectories that make young people choose the path of cosmopolitanism or religious-based radicalism.

Johan called himself a bad boy during senior high school. At the same time, the religious environment around him seemed to make him wonder about his quest for the religious and meaning of life. He irritated with questions about how to perform Islam in a proper way which is based on foundational texts Al-Qur'an and hadist. Because he grew up in the traditional Islamic environment or Nahdlatul Ulama, the Islamic rituals referring to NU tradition was his first answer about this question.

However, he was not satisfied with the religious authority of NU. He found that NU's religious justifications cannot answer his questions regarding the postulates of his usual practices, such as the practice of *yasinan* and other

rituals. This situation prompted him to look for another sources of Islamic study groups which might be able to answer his religious quest. During his secondary education Johan began to become active in several religious communities and Islamic study groups as his effort to find the proper way to perform Islam correctly. He told us that he did not limit himself to certain communities or religious organizations. He attended a wide range of Islamic study groups conducted by various groups and organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Hidayatullah, Jamaat Tabligh, and NU.

Johan's curiosity to learn Islam across religious communities continued when he studied in UNDAR. He claimed that he had just found his religious answer after completing his study at UNDAR. At first, he attended a public sermon in Kertosono, Nganjuk, East Java. He then became interested in the Islamic study session delivered by ustaz Subur because it taught about Muslim brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*). The Islamic study group emphasizes on the importance of Muslim brotherhood which is not limited to the surrounding environment or one country. He became attracted to this Islamic study group and finally suggested it to open a special halaqah in his village. Once the request received, Johan then attended the *halaqah* intensively.

Furthermore, Johan had to move to Semarang in 2002. He then brought the Islamic study group to Semarang. In that city Johan opened a Padang restaurant in a second shop plus house building. He used the second floor as a place for Islamic study group. Apart from Islamic study group at his

place of business, Johan also participated in two different *halaqah* simultaneously: one was general in nature and the other was specific. The difference between the two lies in the system and nature of the study. Public sermon was open to everyone including his wife, while special *halaqah* was only attended by certain member. Johan told us that his wife did not know about the other *halaqah*. The special *halaqah* was designed in stages like a school and the participants have passed the test and this is what made him involved in the Noordin M Top terrorist network.

As mentioned above, Ayus's passion in learning Islam began when he was still in senior high school. He shocked when he met NII activists who considered him and his parents as infidels if they did not join it Ayus eventually seek a more appropriate Islamic study group. Feeling that he could not find a suitable Islamic study group in his area Karanganyar Ayus decided to look for it in Solo. About the second or third grade of senior high school Ayus and his younger brother rode a BMX bicycle from Karanganyar to Solo to attend ustaz Abdullah Manaf's regular Islamic study group at the Istiqomah Penumping Solo mosque. The great distance that they had to reach in order to learn Islam explains their serious efforts to study at Islamic boarding school. He mentioned that his father wanted him to go to public school in order to get a job as a civil servant. By taking the Faculty of Islamic Studies at UMS he had negotiated his aspirations with his father.

However, Ayus felt that the Faculty of Islamic Studies in UMS did not meet his aspirations to learn Islam. In campus,

he engaged with various Islamic groups such as Tarbiyah, HTI, and Salafi, but he still feels unsuitable. He was not interested in these groups, especially Muhammadiyah style Islam, which he considered was unable to fulfil his religious aspirations. As a result, he was more interested in joining the special *halaqah* which linked religion to his individual aspirations.

Ayus mentioned that he finally found that Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) network was fit with him. Interestingly, he just realized its name after being arrested and jailed. The *halaqah* consists of a limited number of people (6 people) and the Islamic study group held at night especially after Isya prayer. The Islamic study group was led by several *ustaz* especially JI ideologues including Abu Dujana. The *ukhuwwah* doctrine of JI helped him find the path of 'field action' (*amaliyah*) that he wished for. Conflict in Poso and Ambon which provided a narrative of the Muslim oppression by Christians as well as the inability of the government to handling the conflict, further stimulated Ayus's determination to involve in activities initiated by JI. Another thing that made him anchored with JI *halaqah* is the ability of JI ideologues to present 'actual interpretation' (*tafsir waqi'i*) namely the interpretation of the verses of Al-Qur'an that is connected with the reality faced by Muslims today. In addition, he thought that JI's method of conveying Islam could accommodate the aspirations of each individual in the *halaqah*.

On the other hand, Aji has another story. When his teacher let him know that his Islam was not recognised because he lived in non-Islamic state, he finally decided to join and vow (*baiat*)

with the NII. By declaring himself to join NII he had moved from pagan state (NKRI) to Islamic State (NII) in the same area. His intention to vow with NII cannot be separated from his first experience in contact with the Islamic movements in the past times during his efforts to seek for identity. As a member of the NII, he attended an exclusive *halaqah* which was followed by only a few people. However, this made him to passionately attending Islamic study groups outside Islamic classes at SMU Islam. Although he actually received various Islamic teachings at religious classes such as tauhid, akhlak (ethics), Islamic jurisprudence, Al-qur'an, hadith, and the history of Muhammad Prophet, Aji began to actively join extracurricular form of regular Islamic sermons held every Sunday outside school activities such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in Marwah mosque Semanggi.

By attending these different Islamic study groups, Aji's knowledge developed significantly. He began to rethink the NII doctrine which considers all Muslims outside NII to be infidels, including his parents, and Abu Bakr Ba'asyir because they were considered to have not completely migrated to NII as something vague. For NII, the only way to move was to take allegiance and be loyal to NII. He also began to wonder why NII claimed as a country but it did not have the area to be definitive, and was not known clearly who is its leader. Meanwhile he saw the compulsory donation of 2.5% continued to be required for all members of the NII was not clear in management. The above irregularities prompted Aji to leave NII.

After graduating from senior high school Aji worked in an electronic shop in Semarang. However, after a while he returned to Solo because he felt that Semarang did not offer any dynamic Islamic study atmospheres as in Solo Raya. In 2007, Aji finally joined the new *halaqah* led by Sigit Qardhawi from the mosque youth association. In the *halaqah* he had not only learnt Islamic teachings but also the practice of performing 'field action' (*amaliyah*) namely the practice of commanding right and forbidding wrong (*amar makruf nahi munkar*) in the community which implemented through an act of sweeping against the drunk and gambling. Aji claimed that Sigit was the person who most influenced him in shaping his personality. He was impressed by Sigit's courage in fighting evil among the community, including his courage in confrontation with a group of thugs in Solo. Since then, Aji has always followed Sigit, including joining "Jamaah Jihad" which formed by Sigit after his meeting with Aman Abdurrahman, the founder of Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD).

As similar as Aji, Anjasmara decided to join the Hisbah Team because he admired to Sigit Qardhawi. Although he was the Chair of Pemuda Muhammadiyah Semanggi, Muhammadiyah's Islamic path did not satisfy his religious aspirations. Together with Sigit he involved in the formation of the PIS (Semanggi Islamic Association) which consist of mosque youths and former thugs. These communities often collaborate with PIJ (Islamic Association Joyosuran) a group that formed by the religious leaders of Ma'had Ali An-Nur in order to carry out commanding right and forbidding

wrong in the community such as drinking, gambling, and so on. Anjasmara then often invited Sigit to deliver Islamic sermons in religious events, until finally he joined the Hisbah Team of Sigit Qardhawi which was headquartered at the al- Ansar Semanggi mosque where Anjasmara is recently the mosque imam. However, Anjasmara decided to leave when Hisbah Team's orientation changed from conducting commanding right and forbidding wrong to a jihad movement with has a takfir doctrine.

For Ariel , MTA was indeed the initial context for his intensive introduction to Islam. Stayed in Islamic boarding school of MTA Ariel appointed to take care of the cooperative of SMA MTA, and helped in organizing Islamic study groups in MTA headquarter. Ariel felt bored running his routine at MTA, so in 2007 he decided to look for a community of friends outside MTA. Starting from chatting in a coffee shop, he began to realize how complex the religious landscape in Semanggi is. He was trying to follow any Islamic teachings held in Semanggi, in addition to Islamic teachings of the MTA. He became more and more interested in Islamic studies outside MTA because they were considered capable of providing a more comprehensive understanding than in MTA which tended to be instantaneous and only suitable for adults. In addition, he also considered that Islamic studies outside were more participatory in society than MTA, which only focused on doctrine and theory.

He finally found a community that focuses on the importance of religious 'field action' (*amaliyah*) namely Hisbah Team. Ariel's interest in this group arose when he

heard of Team Hisbah's success in killing the number one thug in Joyosuran Solo, named Kipli. Ariel who heard this news finally started leaving MTA in 2009/2010 and decided to join the Hisbah Team. With his young age, he feels comfortable with the Hisbah Team because it feels like he was actually practicing Islam. According to him, in contrast to MTA the Hisbah Team's commanding right and forbidding wrong movement was able to have a direct impact on society. The thugs began to decrease drastically and many repented, some of them even joined the Team Hisbah. He felt that the religious field action (*amaliyah*) commanding right and forbidding wrong was in accordance with his youthful soul who wanted to do something for his religion. Together with his friends, he actively participated in sweeping convoys of places of considered 'immorality', expressing their youthfulness.

As mentioned above, Nanda found his way to perform *hijrah* when studying at Akademi Akuntansi Surakarta, especially in fourth semester between 2003 and 2004 when he took part in the ESQ (*Emotional Spiritual Quotient*) of Ari Ginanjar at Shahid Hotel in Solo for three days. Nanda was interested in the program due to the idea that successful life is based not only on the aspect of intellectual intelligence but also more important is emotional and spiritual intelligence. The program brought Nanda to return to the religious lessons he had learned in junior as well as senior high school. Since then, he became more religious and more diligent in practicing Islam such as reciting the Al-Qur'an in his business stall selling electronic devices such as handphone after Maghrib

prayer. This new condition then facilitated him to explore more experiences in learning Islam. The story started when his friend the sales of cigarettes, which invited him to attend a regular Islamic study groups in the mosque of Baiturrahman delivered by Ziyad, a former convicted terrorist of Marriott bomb. The content of his Islamic sermons were actually a general Islamic teachings such as calling to become a pious Muslim by following the sunnah, Muslim obligations, to practicing Islam and the history of Muhammad prophet related to *jihad*, the era of ruler tyranny. He claimed that there was no particular teachings led to the terrorist ideology.

Nanda had an adventurous spirit. In addition to Ziyad's Islamic study group, Nanda also went to Purwosari area in order to join Abu Tholut's Islamic lessons. Abu Tholut was trained in Afghanistan and an expert in bomb assembly. At that time, Nanda did not know about Abu Tholut. He mentioned that his sermon was also relatively general Islamic teachings. As a result, Nanda regularly attended Abu Tholut's Islamic study group, even up to two times a week starting after Isya prayer to nine o'clock in the evening. Moreover, he was also active in attending public sermon in Solo, such as in Semanggi. Almost every Sunday, he stated that he often attended various religious event such as book launching and discussion some of them were *Millah Ibrahim*, *Mutad Karena Hukum*, and *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah*, which in turn shaped his heroic spirit.

After participating in many Islamic lessons, Nanda's appearance began to change. He began to wear

a robe, maintained a long beard and wore ankle pants (*celana cingkrang*). With his new appearance, he even dared to initiate new movement at his workplace, Batik Keris. He made his own *halaqah* and taught his co-workers what he knew about Islam. Having a little educational background from Islamic institutions such as Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah much equipped himself about Islam. Yet he was a good public speaking that he learnt when active in the theatre. Unfortunately, Nanda mentioned that the *halaqah* only existed for a short period because his *halaqah* affected to work. As a result, his boss did not happy with him because he invited all of his colleagues to perform ashar prayer in congregation during the working hours. Insisting on his stance, Nanda was eventually moved to a less strategic position as an officer of warehouse.

Consequently, Nanda did not care about his study at university and his work career, in contrast he was more active in attending Islamic study groups. He was only interested in jihad. This interest was motivated by his understanding from the *sirah* (history of Muhammad Prophet and his companions) readings which he concluded that the main job of the Prophet Muhammad after receiving the message (*wahyu*) was jihad or war. He claimed that his reading materials indicated that the Prophet Muhammad cover his need through *ghanimah*, wealth taken by force from an enemy in times of war not from trading profits as before the prophetic era. This individual aspiration was finally captured by the terrorist network. Nanda who was quite intelligent and

creative was finally recruited in the bomb training with Rocki Sahputra. He then trained other people, among them the eight people involved in the bombing at the Cirebon Police Headquarters in 2011.

The narrative of Aji, Ariel, Anjasmara and Nanda regarding the charisma of Sigit Qardawi and the Hisbah Team who was active in carrying out the commanding right and forbidding wrong presents a strong portrait of the discourse of masculinity in the minds of these former convicted terrorists. The heroic acts of jihad appear to be in line with the search for the identity of young people who emphasize masculinity as an important expression in their social interactions. This view of masculinity has recently become one of the most important concerns that scholars have explored (see Duriesmith and Ismail 2019).

From Structural Problems to Extremist Ideology

Identity problems which finds its firth in social networks as mentioned above eventually led these former convicted terrorists in their young age to the awareness of structural problems. They began to have an awareness of the existence of foreign powers which want to control the Islamic world and exploit Muslim societies. Conflicts and wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, and the Southern Philippines Moro involving Western countries, superpowers and their allies formed their understanding about the significant of global Muslim solidarity. Domestic conflicts such as Ambon and Poso shape their awareness of the inability of the Muslim state and government to take action as well as increase their motivation

to carry out resistance in the name of jihad. This awareness is increasingly fostered by the conspiracy information circulating on their social networks. In this context, religious-based extremism becomes an ideology that not only covers the expression of their resistance, but also determines the steps to achieve it.

Broadly speaking, the seven former convicted terrorists of Central Java in this study are having joined to two groups of jihad : Jemaah Islamiyah (Johan, Ayus, Irsyad) and Hisbah Team (Nanda, Ariel, Anjasmara, and Aji). From these two groups, they accepted the ideologization of jihad. This jihad is an ideological umbrella of resistance to structural problems. If JI provided more response to structural problems initiated by foreign powers, Hisbah Team associated the structural problems with the inability of the Indonesian government to establish morality, to manage conflict, and 'defend' the Muslim rights. This affects to the target jihadi operation of each network. JI is more targeting symbols of foreign powers in Indonesia, while Hisbah Team is targeting symbols of the state such as police.

The global Muslim Brotherhood (*ukhuwwah Islamiyyah*) is an entry point for JI's ideologies that have succeeded in arousing the spirit of Johan and Ayus' spirit of jihad. This ideology is simultaneously juxtaposed with the narratives of the condition of Muslims or Islamic countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq which are oppressed by Western countries such as America and its allies. These narratives were built in, among others, through books such as the *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* and

video pieces that were distributed during the Islamic lesson by the ideologue. These narratives are able to stimulate the spirit of jihad of Johan, Ayus, and other congregants to rise up against countries that oppress Islamic countries. This kind of jihad is considered as a form of retaliation or defense for Muslim brothers who are oppressed, and have nothing to do with the Indonesian government.

The inability of JI members to reach the territory of foreign countries has encouraged them to commit acts of jihad in the country by bombing of foreign symbols in Indonesia. They admitted that they were not targeting the Indonesian state and government, but Western countries such as Australia and America which are considered to have oppressed Islamic countries.

The Bali bombing case in 2002 is an example of the JI's field action. They targeted nightclubs in the area of Legian Bali. JI actually wanted to target the Australian warship that was leaning in the port of Benoa Denpasar. The guard was so tight that they were unable to reach it. After conducting their reconnaissance, they concluded that many Australian soldiers came to the nightclubs every day. The bombing was finally directed at the nightclub so that many Australians became victims.

For JI activists, the bomb victims were not ordinary civilians, but soldiers. In its development, the targets of bomb attack were not only soldiers, but also foreign civilians from America and Australia, such as in the second

Bali Bombing case in 2005 in Kuta and Jimbaran. According to Johan, this development was motivated by the development of narratives of the oppression of Westerners against Muslim civilians. JI built the opinion that foreign civilians must also feel because foreign soldiers oppressed civilians in Muslim countries. JI views their strategy as a war against infidels or countries that have oppressed Muslims. However, the location is not in the conflict area, so it is called "urban guerrilla".

The emphasis on the concept of the strong Muslim brotherhood has simultaneously impacted to the limitations or specific rules in jihad. These rules determine who were the target of the bombing such as Western, may not attack if they have not been attacked, and may not attack places of worship whether from Muslims affiliated to other organizations or non-Muslims. In other words, the jihad that took place was only a form of defense for oppressed Muslim brothers or retaliation against oppressive foreign and infidels .

On the other hand, the doctrine of *takfir* is the entrance to the ideology of Indonesianjihadist Indonesia who attacked the symbols of the state and the government. Prior to the emergence of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the modern era the doctrine of *takfir* was well known through the NII and the Salafi. Former convicted terrorists joined in Hisbah Team were getting to know the doctrine in 2005/2006. In those years, a number of Indonesian jihadists began to adopt the doctrine as a justification for their action.

The *takfir* doctrine is of course different from the *ukhuwah* doctrine which is popular among JI activists. *Takfir* does

not only target non-Muslims, but also all Muslims who are deemed not to uphold Islamic law. Based on this view, everyone who are justified as infidels judged lawful blood, his property is permitted to be taken. Although the target of *takfir* is very wide, the average target of attack is more directed at the institutions of state and people who work under or associated with state institutions, especially the police. This can be seen in the late retaliatory attack conducted by Hisbah Team targeting mosques in the police station such as mosque in Police station of Cirebon, or mosque officially opened or funded by the government such as Pancasila mosque in Surakarta.

Apart from carrying out attacks on state symbols, they also refuse to participate in activities organized by the state such as the General Election, Presidential Election and local elections even though they previously participated. In fact, they also do not want to perform *salat* behind those who support the general election. Aji for example, mentioned that he should repeat his *salat* when he knew the *imam*, or someone who lead the *salat* prayers participated in the election that he saw from there his blue mark on his finger.

In other words, awareness of structural problems and dissatisfaction with the policies taken by the state prompted them to seek an ideological umbrella. In the context of the disappearance of critical left groups in Indonesia, Islam appears as an idiom used to show resistance to structural problems (Hadiz 2020). In this context, we can understand why radicalism and extremism emerged as an umbrella for the ideological resistance of the former convicted terrorists.

In addition, these former convicted terrorists are not always loyal to a radical group. Anjasmara is an example former convicted terrorists which decided to separate from the Hisbah Team when the team changed the orientation towards jihadi after a meeting of Sigit Qaradhawi with Aman Abdurrahman, the founder of JAD. Meanwhile, Ariel was still holding out, but he began to hesitate when he gets an assignment from Sigit to learn to make bombs. When Hisbah Team otherwise involved in many acts of field action (*amaliyah*) such as mosque bom in Police station of Cirebon in 2011 and the situation in Solo is not safe, Ariel said goodbye to Sigit. He flew to Medan, married a Medan girl, and joined the Riski Gunawan terrorist group, which is a specialist terrorist network of hackers. Ariel was interested in this group because previously he was offered to move to Syria at a time when the ISIS had not yet declared a caliphate. Prior to leave for Syria, Ariel already caught.

However, understanding radicalism and extremism in Indonesia from a structural perspective alone is unable to fully explore and explain the phenomenon of former convicted terrorists who have the courage to die in the path of jihad. The case of Aji and 50 of his colleagues who are determined to declare "ready to die" to Sigit Qardhawi is difficult to explain only from a structural perspective. Even after leaving prison, Aji still aspires to be martyred like Sigit if the opportunity comes. The imagination of an angel waiting in heaven became a narrative that he firmly believed in. Thus, structural resistance has transformed to become ideology.

Sources of Knowledge

The source of knowledge of former convicted terrorists in this study is beyond the nuclear family. Middle schools and colleges are the initial context for their introduction to Islam and Islamism. Agencies of young people who are becoming aware of environmental problems have encouraged them to seek sources of religious knowledge in the “free market” outside formal educational institutions, either in the form of general recitation in mosques or in exclusive *halaqah*.

Among the mosques they have visited are the Marwah Semanggi mosque, the Al-Ikhlâs mosque, the Istiqomah Penumping mosque, the Baiturrahman mosque, the Arafah mosque, and the A l-Ansar Semanggi mosque. In general, *ustaz* or religious figures that they attended their lectures most often or most impressive coming from the salafi group, JI, and Hisbah Team. They include Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, Subur, Abdullah Manaf, Zainuddin (Iskarima), Rasyid Ridha, Abdurrahim Ba’syir, Nu’aim Ba’asyir, Abu Dujana, Abu Tholul, Ziyad, and Sigit Qardhawi.

Some *ustaz* have succeeded in seriously orienting the religious views of these former convicted terrorists. In other words, a number of former convicted terrorists have a particular reference religious figure which causes them to join jihadist groups. *Ustaz* Subur acted as a liaison between Johan and Noordin M. Top. He was a figure that Johan really respected. Therefore, when he moved from Kediri to Semarang, he still chose Subur as his main teacher. Even though he was following the general and special teaching time in Semarang,

he was more interested in *Liqā* ‹ which suggests the jihad lessons which was delivered by Ustaz Subur. For Johan, Subur was the most impressive figure because of his charismatic character, calm, not being rushed, and “honesty and seriousness in providing material between theory and practice.” For Johan, Subur was not an orator or motivator, and when he gave a lecture he appeared as he was. However, everyone who listened to Subur’s Islamic sermons could immediately be attracted to him.

Abdullah Manaf is an *ustad* referral of Ayus. From Abdullah Manaf, Ayus involved in more intensive follow-up studies and led himself to take an important position in the JI movement in the IT field. For Ayus, Abdullah Manaf was a very impressive figure because his lecture was explosive, insightful, detailed explanations, and was able to elaborate on the description of the situation of the Muslim community at that time very well. For Ariel, Sigit Qardhawi is the leading figure of ustaz. Ariel impressed with Sigit who openly opposed and prevented forbidding wrong in Solo. As similar as Ariel, Aji also admired Sigit Qaradhawi. Aji said that Sigit was a simple figure and did not seek the world, “so that Allah hastened his martyrdom.” Sigit also regarded as one of the figures who have brave souls and defender of the Muslim. With this viewpoint, Aji claimed that he was heavily influenced by Sigit in the views and movements of jihad.

Meanwhile, for Irsyad, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir was a teacher who he admired most. For him, Abu Bakr Ba’asyir was a gentle and honest person. HIS Islamic sermons seemed straight

forward, simple and easy to understand. He claimed that he knew Abu personal story of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's and his biographical story. So he considered that the government's treatment of Ba'asyir was a big mistake. Irsyad is quite close to the Ba'asyir family. This can be seen from the context that caused him to enter into the terrorism network. He entered because of his close relationship with Nu'aim Ba'asyir, one of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's nephews.

Orality has indeed become an important means of transmitting religious knowledge among radical and extremist groups. Johan and Ariel are examples of former convicted terrorists who rely on oral sources for their religious knowledge. However, some of the former convicted terrorists were not enough to simply rely on oral sources. To enrich their insights they also read some literatures that are mentioned in their Islamic study groups. Nanda, Irsyad, Ayus and Aji are the examples of former convicted terrorists who love to read books. Their ability to read literatures can be explained by their role as lecturers in certain *halaqah* .

Among the important literatures that became the main reference and was able to arise the spirit of jihad among the former convicted terrorists was *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* written by Abdullah Azzam. This book is the first book that Aji read when he was passionate about studying Islam in high school. Although he also read other literature written by Hasan al-Bana, and Sayid Qutub (*Ma'alim fi al- Thariq* especially) Aji felt that only *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* had influenced him a lot

in joining the jihad movement. According to him, this book is able to have a big impact on the readers when they want to empty their mind and heart like an empty glass. For him, this book is very encouraging because it is taken from the lectures and direct experience of Abdullah Azzam. This contains its own values and spirit, which can “really pound the young men’s chest” to carry out jihad.

Ayus also made the same assessment. He was very impressed with Abdullah Azzam’s book because it contains stories and direct experiences of jihadists who actually «have lived a good life but still want to find the hard ones» by way of jihad. Apart from *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah*, Ayus has also been active in reading Islamic books since attending a study at the Istiqomah Mosque. The book which was first read in college is work of HM. Rasyidi who counter Harun Nasution’s thoughts. Right-wing Islamic books that were widely excluded at that time did not escape his attention, such as publications containing the oppression of Muslims. He did not even limit if the books to be read should be according to the group. He read *Ma’alim fi Tariq* which is widely circulated on the Tarbiyah network, and *Kitab at-Tauhid* (Salih bin Fauzan al-Fauzan), *al - Usul at - Tsalatsah* (Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab) and *al-Wala wal-Bara* (Muhammad Said al-Qahtani) which is widely circulated among Salafi. He got these books from various places such as the book seller in Penumping, behind Sriwedari, and in the library. The books above were also read by Aji, especially the Salafi books as a source for delivering Islamic lessons.

The above readings are also known by Irsyad. When he was active as organizer of the mosque, Irsyad often read Islamic books in the library, especially *al-Wala' (wa a l - Bara)*. This book had given him a lot of understanding of Islam such as, *tauhid*, Islamic law, heretics, infidels, and unnecessary. Irsyad used to discuss his reading with his friends who came from various Islamic groups, such as those affiliated with PKS and those who thought like the ISIS. At that time, his friends from PKS did not want to be invited to a discussion because according to him the PKS people had accepted democracy while *al-Wala' (wa a l - Bara)* rejected democracy. Unlike his friends who are from PKS, when discussing with his friends who think like ISIS, Irsyad was actually affected. At that time, Irsyad's view changed significantly when looking at the state, state institutions, or state apparatus. An example is his view of civil servants who according to him are infidels.

Nanda is perhaps the portrait of a former convicted terrorits who was most familiar with jihadi books. Apart from *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah*, Nanda also admitted to reading *Millah Ibrahim* (Abu Muhammad Ashim al-Maqdisi translated by Aman Abdurrahman), *Murtad Karena Hukum* (Abdul Qadir bin Abdul Aziz); *Mimpi Suci di Balik Jeruji* (Ghufron / Mukhlas), *Sekuntum Rosela Pelipur Lara A* (Imam Samudra), and *Senyum Terakhir Sang Mujahid* (Amrozi). These books influenced Nanda a lot during his engagement in the jihad movement in addition to his understanding of war as the Prophet's main duty where he understood from reading the history of Muhammad prophet literatures. According to him, this understanding is what his colleagues in terrorist networks have learned.

Conclusion

The biographical narratives of our seven former convicted terrorists informants as described above show that there are similarities in socio-economic background and school of thought. All informants were coming from lower to middle socio-economic background and non-practicing Islam properly or *abangan*. In addition, most of them are getting to know the narratives of jihad from informal education channels through social networks. Some of them have started to get to know jihadist organizations such as NII in formal education circles through teachers who were already affiliated with the NII organization and school extra-curricular activities. However, they generally obtained a “maturation” of religious knowledge of jihad through the Islamic study groups they attended in mosques and limited as well as exclusive *halaqah*.

Apart from attending Islamic study groups, several informants actively sought knowledge through Islamic literature available in bookstores and mosque libraries. Central Java, especially Surakarta and its surroundings, is the basis for many Islamic book publishers. PusPIDeP research findings in 2017 (Hasan 2018) indicate the availability and accessibility of the ideological Islamic books such as Sayyid Qutb, Abdullah Azzam and Al Maqdisi in Surakarta.

Socio-economic, cultural affiliation and social networks of the former convicted terrorists have provided an important context how their religious knowledge finds a significant articulation. The understanding of field action (*amaliyah*)

which means commanding right and forbidding wrong through sweeping the places that they called as immoral places and acts of terror bombing is in line with the scholars analysis who relate it to political-economic discourse the search for identity and also the issue of masculinity.

The absence of channels to convey the aspirations of these marginalized groups after the loss of leftist discourse in Indonesia finds its momentum through the heroic narrative of Islamism and discourse of *takfir*, the history of Muhammad prophet and jihad. Here lies the significance of the religious education of radical and extremist groups. The background of religious education which is mediated by structural problems, social networks and the search for identity in the informants' biographical narratives finds momentum in what they call as field action (*amaliyah*).

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THE NARRATIVES OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN INDONESIA

Educational Background and Individual Agency

This book examines religious educational background of the former convicted terrorists, returnees and deportees through their biographical narratives and individual agency. In order to extend and enrich the exiting studies on religious extremism which pay much attention to figures and networks of violent extremist groups and emphasize structural and identity analysis, this book argues that religious education background also exposes a person to radical and extremist ideology when it is mediated by structural problems, identity crises, social networks, and ideologies. These factors shape or direct certain religious understandings significantly towards religion-based extremism.

This book demonstrates that there are two categories of generations within the discourse of religious violent extremism when viewed from the their perspectives and sources of religious knowledges. The former is characterized by social networks, while the latter is open to information related to religious aspirations. The first generation is dominated by former convicted terrorists informants. They generally come from lower middle class family backgrounds and are exposed to the ideology of radicalism and extremism through social networks: Islamic study groups and social linkages. Meanwhile, the second generation is dominated by ISIS returnees and deportees. They typically come from an affluent family and have an urban culture background. Family networks and the internet are important contexts that expose them to radicalism and extremism.



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