

Ideology deconstruction of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) returnees in Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper discusses the problem of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) foreign terrorist fighters who returned to Indonesia—also called returnees. The establishment of ISIS in Syria and its propaganda related to the Khilafah attracted many Muslims in the world to emigrate, engage in *jihād*, and settle in Syria. After the defeat suffered by ISIS in various regions in Syria, many of these foreign terrorist fighters finally returned to their respective countries of origin. However, this research found that the returnees returned and decided not to want to be part of a terrorist group network in Indonesia anymore. This change

in understanding is an appeal topic to analyze further so that things change in their understanding, leading to their unwillingness to be affiliated with ISIS. This research is qualitative with a basic research type that aims to explore new issues. Changes in the understanding of Muslim groups that initially supported ISIS can change. Data collection techniques used in this research are literature review and in-depth interviews with 12 returnees who do not want to re-join the terror network. This study uses Just World Theory and Deconstruction as an analytical framework. The findings of this study indicate that the factors that influence changes in thinking are not due to the deradicalization program carried out by the government, but are due to the experiences and interactions that occur and are felt by returnees. When classified, five factors drive changes in their ideology, namely: the experience of being a victim of violence and sexual harassment, the experience of witnessing the atrocities committed by ISIS, the reality in Syria which is different from the expectations they had before leaving, the differences in understanding of the verses of the Koran and Hadith, and powerful family influence.

Tulisan ini membahas masalah *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) foreign terrorist fighters* yang pulang ke Indonesia atau disebut dengan *returnees*. Berdirinya ISIS di Suriah dan propagandanya terkait khilafah telah menarik minat banyak umat muslim di dunia untuk berhijrah, berjihad, hingga menetap di Suriah. Setelah kekalahan yang dialami oleh ISIS di berbagai daerah di Suriah, akhirnya banyak dari para *foreign terrorist fighters* ini kembali ke negara asalnya masing-masing. Penelitian ini menemukan adanya returnees yang memutuskan untuk tidak mau lagi bergabung dengan jaringan kelompok teroris di Indonesia. Perubahan pemahaman ini menjadi menarik untuk dianalisis lebih lanjut sehingga mendapatkan hal-hal yang merubah pemahaman mereka sehingga tidak mau lagi terafiliasi dengan ISIS. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan tipe *basic research* yang bertujuan untuk melakukan eksplorasi terhadap suatu isu baru. Perubahan pemahaman kelompok muslim yang awalnya mendukung ISIS ternyata dapat berubah. Teknik pengumpulan data yang dilakukan dalam penelitian ini adalah studi literatur dan wawancara mendalam terhadap 12 returnees yang tidak ingin kembali bergabung dengan jaringan teror. Penelitian ini menggunakan *Just World Theory* dan Dekonstruksi sebagai *framework* analisis. Temuan penelitian ini memperlihatkan bahwa faktor yang mempengaruhi

perubahan pemikiran tersebut bukan karena adanya program deradikalisasi yang dilakukan oleh pemerintah, namun karena adanya pengalaman dan interaksi yang terjadi dan dirasakan oleh returnees. Sehingga ketika diklasifikasikan, terdapat lima hal yang mendorong perubahan ideologi mereka yaitu; pengalaman menjadi korban kekerasan dan pelecehan seksual, pengalaman menyaksikan kekejaman yang dilakukan ISIS, kenyataan di Suriah yang berbeda dengan ekspektasi yang mereka miliki sebelum berangkat, perbedaan pemahaman terhadap ayat alquran dan hadis, dan pengaruh keluarga yang sangat kuat.

Keywords: *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS); Returnees; Foreign terrorist fighters; Deradicalization*

Introduction

Currently, terrorism has become a global problem for countries in the world, causing various losses, both material and human as a result of acts of terrorism that occur.¹ ISIS or the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham is one of the terrorist groups that has received extensive attention in the development of the latest dynamics of terror development. ISIS aims to establish Islamic Caliphate in the world.

There are five tactics used by terrorists to achieve the realization of an Islamic state; *da'wah*, *tarbiyah*, *amar-ma'ruf nahi-munkar*, *hijrah*, and *jihād*.² Declaration of Caliphate Establishment or Daulah Islam made ISIS such a strong magnet of Muslims around the world to immediately pledge allegiance and join Abu Bakr Al- Baghdadi. Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi is a leader of ISIS, as well as a figure appointed as as the caliph for the Muslims by ISIS. The critical thing to be done by ISIS in the declaration is the call for Muslims around the world to join and jihād with ISIS.³

¹Institute for Economic and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2016*, Maryland: Institute for Economic and Peace, 2016.

²M. Tito Karnavian, *Explaining Islamist Insurgencies: The Case of al-Jamaah al-Islamiyah and the Radicalisation of the Poso Conflict, 2000-2007*, London: Imperial College Press, 2015.

³A. Mbai, *Dinamika Jejaring Teror di Indonesia*, Jakarta: AS. Production Indonesia, 2014.

In addition to the declaration, ISIS is also actively engaging interesting propaganda and internalizing ideology to support their recruitment process. ISIS relies on propaganda in the form of videos and images distributed through the Internet to gain support and recruit new members.⁴ The ease of propaganda and internalization of ISIS ideology is supported by the spread of personal and global communication through the Internet, which facilitates the broadcasting of images of cruelty as a choice. Recruiters even use propaganda films released theatrically. ISIS's films use Hollywood-style production tricks and special effects to portray ISIS terrorists as heroes and portray ISIS's struggle in real life.⁵

In one of ISIS' propaganda films titled *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*, they present the beheadings of 22 Syrian soldiers, and executioners perform the execution unmasked.⁶ Although ISIS propaganda videos are often banned from social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter because of their violent content, which includes beheading, ISIS often uploads videos to sites such as Liveleaks, Pastebin, and Internet Archives, where users can upload information anonymously. The videos are then shared through social media networks by ISIS supporters so that even if they are removed from major social media sites, they are still accessible to stakeholders.⁷

Through the internet, ISIS also presents lucrative benefits of joining, such as the offer of financial support for individuals or families who join them. Lieberman (2017) states that propaganda with a more materialistic

⁴W. H. Allendorfer, and Herring, S. C., "ISIS vs the US government: A war of online video propaganda", *First Monday: Peer Reviewed Journal of the Internet*, Vol. 20, No. 12 (2015).

⁵A. V. Lieberman, "Terrorism, the Internet, and Propaganda: A Deadly Combination", *Journal of National Security Law and Policy*, Vol. 9 (2017), 95-124.

⁶J. C. Yeung, "A Critical Analysis on ISIS Propaganda and Social Media Strategies", *Terrorism and Security Studies*, 2015.

⁷W. H. Allendorfer, and Herring, S. C., "ISIS vs the US government: A war of online video propaganda", *First Monday: Peer Reviewed Journal of the Internet*, Vol. 20, No. 12 (2015).

focus like this is an effective recruitment tool. In fact, propaganda that focuses on finance is a powerful way to attract warriors who may not really believe in ideological or theological messages.⁸ Of course, this gives a better life expectancy, especially for candidates coming from countries full of uncertainty or financial prosperity. ISIS's maximum support for the daily needs of the Mujahideen family is also widely exposed on the internet, such as free health care, electricity, etc. for the people in the ISIS country. Not only that, the lucrative offer made by women for fighters is also a commodity that is very attractive for those who seek sexual satisfaction, similar to Mut'ah Marriage (contract marriage) of the Shia religion.⁹ The Internet also exposes "success" in executing prisoners and reporting the amount of financial wealth, so it is not surprising that ISIS can recruit tens of thousands of people every year from all over the world. The impact of the Khilafah state declaration and so many benefits and convenience promised by the ISIS group finally convinced many people to come to Syria to join ISIS. These people were later called foreign terrorist fighters or foreign fighters. Indeed, this is the major goal of ISIS propaganda through social media.¹⁰

The Foreign Terrorist Fighters Task Force National Counter Terrorism Agency releases data related to the number of Indonesians, including adults and children, who became foreign terrorists in Syria and Iraq from 2014 to 2018. Referring to the data, the number of ISIS deportees originating from Indonesia in 2014 totaled 38 people; in 2015, 175 people; in 2016, 303 people; in 2017, 535 people; and in 2018, 554 people. Then, ISIS

⁸A. V. Lieberman, "Terrorism, the Internet, and Propaganda: A Deadly Combination", *Journal of National Security Law and Policy*, Vol. 9 (2017), 95-124.

⁹Indonesian Ulema Council, *Mengenal dan Mewaspadai Penyimpangan Syiah di Indonesia*, Depok: Gema Insani, 2006.

¹⁰S. Ozeren, et al., "An Analysis of ISIS Propaganda and Recruitment Activities Targeting the Turkish-Speaking Population", *International Annals of Criminology*, Vol. 56 (2018), 105-121.

returnees from Indonesia in 2014, 2015, 2016 were 49 people, 62 people, 61 people, respectively. In 2017 and 2018, ISIS returnees from Indonesia had a similar number, which is 86 people.¹¹

After searching the previous literature, several clusters of topics were found: foreign terrorist fighters background,¹² combatting foreign terrorist fighters,¹³ risk prediction of foreign terrorist fighters,¹⁴ foreign terrorist fighters social structures,¹⁵ motivation of joining foreign terrorist fighters groups,¹⁶ and history of foreign terrorist fighters.¹⁷ The last research study was conducted by Sylvene See, which revealed that returning foreign terrorist fighters could be a risk for Indonesia because they could play a role as recruiters or trainers. Sylvene proposes a counter-terrorist approach

¹¹The Foreign Terrorist Fighters Task Force Database, Jakarta: National Counter Terrorism Agency, 2019.

¹²Jean-Paul Azam, *Why Suicide Terrorist Get Educated, and What to Do About It*, Toulouse: University of Toulouse, 2012; The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: an Update Assesment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, New York: The Soufan Group, 2015.

¹³Jean Paul Azam and Veronique Thelen, "Foreign Aid Versus Military Intervention in the War on Terror", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (2010): 237-261; Katherine Guilford, "Countering Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Warrantless Surveillance Powers of the New Zealand Security Intelligence", *Victoria University of Wellington Legal Research Papers Student and Alumni Paper Series*, (2016): 95-122; Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State*, The Brooking Project on U.S. Relation with the Islamic World, Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, 2015.

¹⁴Peter Bergen and Alec Reynolds, "Blowback Revisited: Today's Insurgents in Iraq Are Tomorrow's Terrorists", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.84 (2005), 2-6; R. Kim Cragin, "The Challenge of Foreign Fighter Returnees", *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, Vol. 33, Issue 3 (2016), 292-312; Alex Braithwaite dan Tiffany S. Chu, "Civil Conflicts Abroad, Foreign Fighters, and Terrorism at Home", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 62, Issue 8 (2017), 1636-1660; The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: an Update Assesment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, New York: The Soufan Group, 2015.

¹⁵Alessandro Boncio, *Italian Foreign Terrorist Fighters: A Quantitative Analysis of Radicalization Risk Factor*, New York: Jane's Terrorism Monitor, 2015.

¹⁶Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice Between Domestic and Foreign Fighting", *American Political Science Review* (2013), 1-15.

¹⁷David Malet, "Why Foreign Fighters? Historical Perspective and Solutions", *Orbis*, Vol. 54, Issue 1 (2010), 97-114; Thomas Hegghammer, *The Rise of Muslims Foreign Fighter: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad*, New York: Belfercenter Harvard University, 2010.

that covers de-radicalization, disengagement, re-engagement, and re-radicalization to prevent the disengaged foreign terrorist fighters from re-connecting with their former network.¹⁸

Much literature describes the potential threat of FTF returning to their home countries; however, not all foreign terrorist fighters who return to Indonesia still have radical ideologies and want to remain in the FTF or other terrorist networks. Some people who return from Syria feel deterred and do not want to rejoin the FTF or with ISIS. One example is a family of 18 people who became FTF and came to Syria. After two years of being there, it turned out that what ISIS had promised did not project the reality that happened there. Finally, the family decided to flee from ISIS and asked the Indonesian government to take them back into Indonesia.¹⁹

The phenomenon was not getting enough attention from researchers to find the reasons why the returnees change their mind and do not want to join their former terrorist network. This fact is the main reason that encouraged this research. This research is qualitative. Data collection techniques were carried out with literature studies and in-depth interviews with 20 returnees who did not want to be part of terrorist networks in Indonesia.

Motivation of Indonesian foreign terrorist fighters

The just-world theory is adopted to analyze the reason that could explain the interviewees' decision to go to Syria to join ISIS. This theory helps researchers to understand the subjective world of justice according to each of the interviewees encouraged them to make a move to Syria.

The main idea of the just-world theory is trust in a just world. The

¹⁸Sylvene See, "Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters: A Catalyst for Recidivism Among Disengaged Terrorists", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 10, No. 6 (2018), 7-15.

¹⁹M. Iqbal, (2017, Agustus 13). Diduga Bergabung dengan ISIS, 18 WNI dari Suriah Dipulangkan ke Tanah Air. Retrieved Februari 4, 2018, from okezone.com: <https://news.okezone.com/read/2017/08/13/337/1755037/diduga-bergabung-dengan-isis-18-wni-dari-suriah-dipulangkan-ke-tanah-air>

theory developed by Lerner has several important points, including the belief in a just world, referring to the assumptions underlying how one orientates themselves to the environment. This assumption is stated to have functional components related to a world that can be regulated and predictable. With this assumption, someone can plan, work, achieve what they want, and avoid painful experiences.

Then, the environment is very influential on one's perspective. Lerner found that a destroyed environment would have a harmful impact on one's fate. In addition, the just-world theory assesses that an individual tends to believe that the world works consistently and fairly, where goodwill gets appreciation and ill will, punishment.²⁰

In general, the just world is an assumption that someone gets what they deserve.²¹ In short, this theory sees that a person deserves a result if certain preconditions have occurred. However, the rules must be fulfilled as a result determined by the social context.

Individuals who hold confidence in the just world view believe that someone will get what is right for them. These individuals will plan their lives as if they live in a just world. Therefore, just world is a personal belief system that reflects the investment in the idea that good things happen to good people, and bad things, bad people.²²

Referring to Lerner (1980), there are several elements in the just-world theory. First, individuals will develop a "belief in a Just World." This element is related to how individuals develop what they deserve. A Fair World is a world where people "get what they deserve." Judgments about what one "deserves" are based on results that are rightfully accepted by

²⁰Kelsi Toews, et. al., "Mother Blame and the Just World Theory in Child Sexual Abuse Cases", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2016. DOI: 10.1177/0886260516675922

²¹M. J. Lerner, *The Belief in a Just World*, Waterloo: Springer Science and Business, 1980.

²²Kelsi Toews, et. al., "Mother Blame and the Just World Theory"..., DOI: 10.1177/0886260516675922

someone. When applying this element, it was found that interviewees decided to go to Syria because they felt they were worthy of living in a world of Khilafah. This life is similar to the time of the prophet and also heaven. Propaganda carried out by ISIS-related Khilafah and certainty of heaven in the hereafter finally made the interviewees tempted to get it.

In the second element, individuals will interpret events to fit this belief. In this element, there is a mechanism commonly used by individuals in interpreting events that occur around them, namely by making generalizations from the past. Cultural Wisdom and stories of morality play a role in the functioning of this mechanism. Whatever one is a direct experience of the possibility between certain conditions and consequences, there is a significant force in our culture that conveys the belief that this is a “just world.” Lerner exemplifies Western religions that emphasize the relationship between sin, harming others, with suffering.²³

The perspectives built on this element are success, prosperity, and others, which are a sign of salvation, and as a direct result of obedience and self-sacrifice. Referring to verses and traditions in the Al-Qur’an, the interviewees then interpreted a just and prosperous life as a direct gift of their obedience and sacrifice as a Muslim. Justice and prosperous life is the expectation that the interviewees want to address. Then, to meet these expectations, moving to Syria and participating in the war were defined by the interviewees as a form of obedience and self-sacrifice based on the teachings of the religion they understood.²⁴

The third element is about what influences judgments about what is appropriate in a “just world.” Lerner (1980) mentions the role of status as one of the influential factors in this assessment. This element is related

²³M. J. Lerner, *The Belief in a Just World*, Waterloo: Springer Science and Business, 1980.

²⁴R. Ramlan, T. Erwinsyahbana, & N. Hakim, “The Concept of Jihad In Islam”, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 21, No. 09 (2016), 35-42. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2109073542>

to expectations, which include restrictions, duties, obligations, rights, which are appropriate for a particular status or position. This element relates to the question of “who can be expected to do what for whom?” Furthermore, “who can expect what from whom?” is related to this element, the interviewees in this study are aware of their status as “true Muslims,” thereby raising awareness about their role to strive to help the brothers of the Muslims who are wronged in Syria, and also follow the orders of Hijrah as enshrined in the teachings of the religion he understands.

Confidence in benefits that are properly obtained

The development of narratives about ‘belief in a just world’ has become one of the factors influencing the resource people to make their determination to go to Syria. Before departure, Syria was imagined as a picture of the just world—the representation of Daulah Islamiyah, according to the interviewees. Therefore, when the interviewees later fulfilled their obligation to emigrate to Syria, they felt entitled to receive the “gift” promised by God. Based on the results of the interviews conducted, the researchers found two main concepts that they believed they deserved, namely the certainty of heaven.

Narrative data related to the appropriateness of obtaining paradise after migrating is seen in the results of interviews with DN, DF, and HL. DN revealed how certainty of heaven would be obtained for people who emigrate even when it has not arrived in Syria. DN believes that migrating, favors and great rewards from Allah will be obtained in the world and certainty of heaven will be obtained when he dies in a state of emigration.

In addition, interview data with HL shows his belief that it is considered martyrdom if he dies while carrying out jihad, which certainly takes him to heaven because of it. Departing for Syria was the path of jihad chosen by HL and his belief in getting paradise became one of the factors that made

him determined to leave. Then, another reason to obtain by migrating is to be able to feel a similar life in the time of the prophet when the Caliphate was in the glory era. The views of the speakers regarding the Khilafah also influenced their decision to go to Syria.

Another factor influencing the decision of the sources to go to Syria is their expectations of Daulah Islamiyah. Lawler (2003) states that expectations are movements that provoke someone to do something. This motivation becomes fuel for someone to do, or not to do, something.²⁵ DF already considers Syria like the American dream for Muslims where they can become a true Muslim because of the various benefits offered there, such as a better life expectancy and free health facilities.

An interesting statement came from DN, which said that she got information that when Syria becomes unemployed, it will continue to prosper because it will continue to be taken care of by the government. That information made DN determined to emigrate to Syria and join ISIS because not only did she get the blessings of heaven but worldly delights were also obtained.

The last factor influencing the decision of interviewees to go to Syria is related to their role status. This role could indirectly influence their judgment about what is appropriate in a just world. Aware of its role to uphold their obedience and belief in the Quranic Verses and Hadith, they strive to help fellow Muslim brothers and sisters who are wronged in Syria and also follow the instructions of the Hijrah outlined in religious teachings.

The effect of reading and interpreting Quranic verses and hadiths on the understanding of interviewees about how a fair world should be according to Islamic values and how they should act as Muslims is illustrated through the narratives of the interviews of IS, KR, DN and DF. IS said that Allah

²⁵E. E. Lawler III & J. Lloyd Suttle, "Expectancy Theory and Job Behaviour", *Organizational Behaviour and Human Performance*, Vol. 9 (1973), 482-532.

Almighty says that between a Muslim and another Muslim is a brother, and then he heard the hadith of the Messenger of Allah also stating that a believer is like a body which, if hurt by his hands, will give birth to tears and the whole body feels hurt.²⁶

Reading and studying Quranic interpretations by IS as an example influences his understanding and perspective regarding a believer and war. Based on the Quranic verses, IS states that between a Muslim and other Muslims are brothers. So, when there are fellow Muslims who are wronged and hurt, other Muslims are obliged to help. Not only that, but IS also revealed that the Quran permits war to oppose tyranny as a way to eliminate slander. By referring to and sticking to verses and hadith in the Qur'an, IS was moved to go to Syria.

Meanwhile, DN discovered a Quranic verse that influenced her understanding and belief about heaven by emigrating to Syria. Referring to the An-Nisa verses 97-100, DN believes that the Hijrah is mandatory, and she was moved to obey these obligations. By migrating, DN assumed that her life would continue to obtain sustenance from God, and obtain heaven for the world and the hereafter.

DF admitted that she was increasingly convinced to emigrate to Syria with her family because it was driven by their belief in the hadiths, which stated that Syria was a blessed country, where Khilafah would rise again as in the time of the apostles. Another role of a true Muslim who grew up among the interviewees was to become a Mujahid. That is to depart with the aim of jihad to help their fellow Muslims in Syria. In general, jihad is defined as a struggle or effort to achieve spiritual, political, or military objectives. In the context of terrorism, jihad defined as an effort to fight the parties called enemies of God and religion.²⁷

²⁶Islamic State's Propaganda Book. 2018.

²⁷European Parliament, *Understanding Jihad and Jihadism*, Wina: European Parliament, 2015.

They change their beliefs

Not all ISIS returnees who return to Indonesia still have the same thoughts as when they departed. Some of them no longer want to join the terrorist group network in Indonesia; this is because several things have succeeded in changing their thinking. This change is explained in this paper by borrowing the concept of Derrida's deconstruction.

Deconstruction according to Derrida can be explained and experienced; *"deconstruction is not 'possible' if 'possible' [...] Deconstruction is an explanation with, an experience of the impossible."*²⁸

Derrida, as mentioned by Derek Attridge, also stated that *"deconstruction is neither a theory nor a philosophy. It is neither a school nor a method. It is not even a discourse, nor an act, nor a practice. It is what happens, what is happening today in what they call society, politics, diplomacy, economics, and so on and so forth."*²⁹

Although Derrida initially explained deconstruction as understanding behind a text or narrative, in its development, deconstruction was used to understand text more broadly, as done by McQuillan, who implemented deconstruction in a political context.

One of the phenomena exemplified by McQuillan is the problem of the 9/11 incident, which was associated with acts of terrorism in the United States. However, the formation of these relations was accompanied by readings, movements, and repeated interactions of specific deconstruction.

Deconstruction in this study is the process by which returnees who were the resource people in this study finally decided to go home and not return to join the terrorist group network in Indonesia. It is not easy to reduce deconstruction into stages or essential points that affect a thing. Derrida himself said that deconstruction is not a method or something

²⁸J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 2nd Edition, London: Routledge, 2002.

²⁹Derek Attridge, "Deconstruction Today", *Études anglaises*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (2005), 42-52.

imposed on the text because deconstruction itself is already in the text.³⁰

Discussing returnees originating from Syria will not be released from belief and religious elements; people who join foreign terrorist fighters and go to Syria to join ISIS have a strong impetus for their religious elements. Moreover, ISIS has been established as a terrorist group based on religious ideology.

Derrida's article entitled Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone raises two ideas, namely faith (faith) and knowledge (knowledge) to offer answers to the question 'what is religion?'. According to Derrida, faith is the experience of belief or the value of trust, which is manifested by actions that show faith, loyalty to calls without evidence, and intuition.

However, the knowledge referred to by Derrida is not knowledge understood as knowledge, but rather purity. Therefore, according to Derrida, knowledge refers to experiences related to unintentional purity and holiness.

When there are experiences that are not following the two sources, there will likely be change or at least doubt in what they believe so far. Derrida also mentioned that there are different responses; for example, by continuing to believe what he believes even though he has found experiences that are not appropriate. This is what Derrida called pragmatic and functional effects.³¹

Experiences which change their mind

While in Syria, four findings were experienced by the interviewees until they finally felt something was not right or odd during his stay in Syria and under the administration of the ISIS government. First, there are irrational

³⁰Eddis Miller, "Deconstruction and Religion", *Religion Compass*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 (2013), 25-35 <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12028>

³¹Ajda Guney & Kaan Guney, "A Brief Description Of Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction and Hermeneutics", *EJournal of New World Sciences Academy*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2008), 219-225.

words or actions by ISIS members or logically unjustified thinking. One example was RA's experience when she had to experience armed contact with other groups while on guard in the ISIS border area. RA claimed not to understand the thoughts of the ISIS people who gave everything to God, even though the weapons they used did not have the appropriate qualifications to reach the target.

Although in the values of Islam it is recommended to surrender all affairs to God Almighty, but RA feels that such things are no longer in accordance with the logic of thinking. In addition, how these people use their weapons is not logical. They fired their firearms upwards with the thought that later God would determine the fate of the bullets.

These thoughts cannot be explained in RA's rational mind because what humans do also has a causal law. If you want to hit the target, aim the firearm in the direction of the target instead of firing let alone fire it at the top. Even though they believe that nothing is impossible for God, it also creates a mind for humans to think in doing all their actions.

Another experience, which was also very shocking, was experienced by DF's mother, who was ill at the time, so she went to the hospital, but it turned out that the hospital experienced harassment behavior by doctors at the hospital. DF and her mother immediately reported the case to the government there, but the handling of the case was very disappointing. Nothing had been done by the government to process the report, whereas if it refers to Islamic law that is applied there, then sexual harassment is a serious crime. Unfortunately, they did not get proper treatment while in Syria. This gave rise to the idea that not all people in Syria were good-willed people. The government in Syria was supposed to provide a sense of security and protect its citizens instead of failing in providing these things.

While they were in Syria, several interviewees saw the cruelty of ISIS members. These experiences made them feel doubtful to ISIS's claim about

life with the prophet's values. Interviewees also do not agree with ISIS act and think that their act is out of the line. Some informants shared the same experience in seeing the cruelty of ISIS in beheading people who were considered enemies, which were then exhibited in public spaces and usually used as a playground for children.

Some informants shared the same experience in seeing the cruelty of ISIS in beheading people who were considered enemies, which were then exhibited in public spaces and usually used as a playground for children. HR also saw the children playing with corpses and made fun of them. Besides, IR stated that ISIS members did not question their need to kill people who denied the caliphate.

The last factor is the uncomfortable feeling experienced by the speakers. The resource person named AJ at the beginning of his departure for Syria was to join and carry out a humanitarian mission and hoped to help enemy victims; unfortunately, AJ eventually became a soldier and joined the war. In addition, a resource person named IS also explained that what happened at ISIS was not real jihad, meaning that jihad defended oppressed people but that the war they were waging was only for the struggle for power and money. DF also felt confused because of the inconsistent behavior of the mujahid who is referred to as an Islamic fighter, who turned out to misbehave. If it follows the Khilafah and the life of the Prophet Muhammad, then the behavior of the Mujahids should have good character and be reflected in their actions.

The resource person named DF also felt the strange behavior of the mujahid who did not carry out the obligation of worship, which was called for Muslims. Every Muslim male is required to pray every Friday, but the mujahid does not do this.

Family role in their changes

The role of the family, in this case, is values socialization, which is a derivative of the element of faith. Differences also influenced the return of the returnees to Indonesia in the thoughts obtained by speakers from family members. This was stated by DI when he got a response from his wife, who was a little angry and told him to go home.

Not only did DI get socialization from his family members, but the informant named MU also got a message from his mother to return home immediately. MU's mother advised all family members that if MU contacted her, the hope was that the mother's message was conveyed.

MU still considers that the mother is an essential figure as told in the stories of the prophet Muhammad. MU finally struggled with various ways to get back to Indonesia. After arriving to Indonesia and meeting his mother, MU realized that what he had fought for had been different. So MU finally did not want to join the terrorist network in Indonesia anymore.

An interviewee named KR felt remorseful for lying to his mother when he left for Syria. Consequently, KR only wanted to redeem his mistakes when leaving the house. Regarding his regret, KR wanted to repay all the hardships and time wasted for six months by prioritizing the interests of the mother over the interests of others.

Two sides of family role for returnees

Bornstein in Elga Sikkens shows that families have both direct and indirect effects on the process of radicalization.³² Parents influence their children directly using their genetic makeup, beliefs, and behaviors as well as indirectly through their influence on one another and the multiple

³²Elga Sikkens, Mario Van San, Stijn Sieckelinck; Micha de Winter, "Parental Influence on Radicalization and De-radicalization according to the Lived Experiences of Former Extremists and their Families", *Journal for Deradicalization*, Fall, No. 12 (2017), 191-226.

contexts in which they live. Research also shows that there are even families, who are respondents, have instilled the values of radicalism since their children were under five.³³

The role of families in the process of radicalization, until finally, there are family members who join terrorist groups or even become foreign fighters, have been widely discussed by researchers and academics. The role of the family is undeniable in instilling the values and actions that lead to acts of radicalism. However, it turns out that some other research studies also mention that the family can also play a role in the deconstruction of thought and deradicalization of terrorists or extremists.³⁴

The following is mentioned by Sikkens about the family having a role in deconstructing and de-radicalizing family members who became terrorists or extremists until finally leaving the group. One interesting finding related to the role of the family which emphasizes that terrorists who continue to establish communication with family members and friends are more likely to leave the group.³⁵

Supporting the previous opinion, there is a study conducted on former Jihadists in the Netherlands to see how the role of the family in returning them to the right path. Sikkens mentioned that research conducted by Weggemans and De Graaf found that all of their respondents were aware of their family's role in supporting them to leave the terrorist group.

The role of the family can be seen in the formation of values that lead to acts of radicalism and terrorism. However, it can also be a factor that influences the decision of terrorists to leave their network groups.

³³Elga Sikkens, Mario Van San, Stijn Sieckelinck, Micha de Winter, "Parental Influence on Radicalization"...

³⁴Y. E. Riany, D. Haslam, N. Musyafak, J. Farida, S. Ma'arif, & M. Sanders, "Understanding the role of parenting in developing radical beliefs: Lessons learned from Indonesia", *Security Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2019), 236-263. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41284-018-00162-6>

³⁵Elga Sikkens, Mario Van San, Stijn Sieckelinck, Micha de Winter, "Parental Influence on Radicalization"...

Derrida stated that one of the crucial things in deconstruction is structure. This structure is anything that neutralizes its essential.³⁶ Based on this, something that contributes to deconstruction is essential. In this research, it turns out that the factors considered important for returnees who do not want to return to the terrorist network are family. Thus, the family can be said to be an essential center for the deconstruction of the ideology of the returnees.

Indescribable experiences

The experience named indescribable refers to experiences or spiritual stories experienced by the source and is believed to provide answers and specific paths to the balance. This can be seen from the opinion of IS and IN. IS admitted that he suddenly received a kind of guidance and explanation from the leaflet he got. In the leaflet, the story of a friend of the Prophet Muhammad was told kill an enemy in battle, but the enemy shouted the words *laa ilaa ha illallah* before being killed. IS re-tells the story that causes his inner upheaval as follows:

“There is a story about the Messenger of Allah about Osama bin Zayd. Osama bin Zaid was the favorite of the Prophet. Usamah bin Zaid was then sent by the Messenger of Allah to fight. When fighting, there was a Quraysh who said *laa ilaa ha illallah*. However, at that time, Osama bin Zaid killed the person who said *laa ilaa ha illallah*. Return Usamah bin Zaid to the Messenger of Allah telling this story. O Messenger of God, when I fought, I saw people who said *laa ilaa ha illallahu*, then I killed. Rasulullah saw his face was red. Then said to Osama bin Zaid, ‘did you kill the person who said *laa ilaa ha illallahu*’, ‘yes the apostle is this person afraid of the sword, so he said *laa ilaa ha illallahu*.’ ‘Shouldn’t you just open your heart?’ The Prophet Muhammad responds, ‘just split

³⁶Babita, “Jacques Derrida As A Deconstructive Theorist With Special Reference To “Structure , Sign And Play In The Discourse of Human Sciences”, *Research Scholar: An International Refereed eJournal of Literary Explorations*, Vol. 1, Issue 3 (2013), 1-4.

his chest. So you see what he means.’ Then the Prophet was angry with Osama bin Zaid and said, “So what will you say to *laa ilaa ha illallahu*, if *laa ilaa ha illallahu* was brought to you on the Day of Resurrection blaspheming you? “So I saw in Syria. Furthermore, when that verse goes down, ‘O believers, if you fight in the way of Allah, then *tabayyun*, study,’ right? ‘Examine in the way of Allah, and do not say or kill the one who says hello to you’, (continue the verse), ‘you are not a believer. For the sake of something false. So when I saw it, this was not just saying *Laa ilaa ha ill Allah*, but fighting for the sake of defending *laa ilaa ha ill Allah*. People who say *laa ilaa ha ill Allah* only in war, if he is afraid of being killed, he is *zahid* he is a Muslim and should not be killed. Especially people who fight because of *laa ilaa ill Allah*, defending the Muslims who are being wronged.”³⁷

The story that was read made IS aware that lest what he believed so far was a mistake. Because IS has realized that the enemies and those killed are fellow Muslims, IS has, since then, been determined to return to Indonesia and did not want to join terrorist groups anymore because he believes that killing fellow Muslims would incur the Prophet Muhammad’s anger towards him.

Besides IS, an interviewee named IN gained experience through dreams. Previously, IN was upset because people at ISIS always put forward the hadiths and often even put aside what is stated in the Alquran. IN dreamed of meeting the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, such as Usman bin Affan and Abdurahman bin Auf and giving the Koran to him. This dream was translated by faith as a warning to return to the Quran, so he believes that his dream is the answer to his anxiety. He also believes that what he did was wrong, and the dream is what shows the truth.

The Quran and hadith as the significant factor

The interpretation of the Qur’anic verses greatly influences the understanding of the informants in shaping the concept of a just state and

³⁷Islamic State’s Propaganda Book, 2018.

an ideal system of government.³⁸ It is specific interpretations of certain Quranic verses that ultimately form understanding of Just World Theory, where they have their images related to the Islamic State in Syria. This includes acts of jihad and helping fellow Muslims.

In the context of Just World Theory, they understand that when in Hijrah they will get worldly pleasures and prosperous life, but also they will get the reward of heaven later on in the hereafter for carrying out the obligation to migrate. Before deciding to leave for Syria, they were exposed to information, appeals, and propaganda, which were then strengthened through the verses of the Koran so that they could get their respective ideals about ISIS and Syria. However, after finally leaving for Syria, many informants claimed to continue studying and finding the verses of the Koran that contradicted the interpretation of the verse they believed.

An interviewee named DJ also claimed to have found a Quranic verse that contradicts what ISIS did. He found this verse in the Syrian newspaper. In that verse, it was mentioned not to be proud of having divided the religion. This then made him think that what happened was just contrary to the Quranic teachings. What ISIS is doing is dividing between religions and even among Muslims themselves. Even fellow Muslims can be hurt and even killed when it is not in accordance with ISIS's understanding.

The difference between the verses of the Alquran and the behavior carried out by ISIS people also raises the irregularities and distrust of the speakers of ISIS members and then extends to no longer trust the government system that they apply in Syria. For example, such as the obligation of Muslims, especially men, to pray every Friday. What the interviewees found in Syria was precisely the opposite because the ISIS

³⁸Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman, "Countering ISIS Call for Hijra (Emigration): A Review through the Lens of Maqāṣid Ash-Sharīḥah", *Journal for Deradicalization*, Fall, No. 12 (2017), 60-83.

members did not carry out the service because they were traveling long distances, even though there were mosques around them. This is, as mentioned by a resource person named DF, who was surprised because the mujahids there did not observe Friday prayers, which were an obligation for Muslim men.

Experiences such as those mentioned by DJ and DF turned out to raise doubts and finally made them realize that what they had believed by then was not right. This then gave the verse a role in encouraging deconstruction. Based on the explanation above, it can be seen how the verses of the Alquran have a role in supporting the formation of understanding in Just World Theory and also supporting the deconstruction.

The influence of the verses of the Qur'an in the lives of Muslims is indeed inseparable. According to Habil Ali al-Jifri (2012), in one of the verses of the Koran, namely, Al-Hujarat, it is stated that believing in Islam is to surrender to the will and decision of God. "*The Bedouins say: 'We have attained to faith.' Say you have not attained to faith, but say, 'We have surrendered'; for faith has not yet entered your hearts*" (Al-Hujurat, 49:14).³⁹

It is this attitude of submission or submission that sometimes pushes Muslims to lose their critical power when they are met with evidence in the form of interpretations of the Qur'anic verses. Without the support of sufficient knowledge about the interpretation of the Koran, in general, they will accept specific interpretations directly without any effort to look for alternative meanings of comparative interpretations.

The traditions of the Prophet Muhammad are also used as guidelines in the lives of Muslims. The use of verses of the Koran and Hadith has one goal to get obedience from its targets because by providing understanding based on individual interpretations of the verses of the Koran and the Hadith, the critical nature of the perpetrators of terrorism can be

³⁹Habil Ali Al-Jiffri, *The Concept of Faith in Islam*, Jordan: MABDA, 2012.

minimized. An example was when ISIS made manuals and guides for Muslims around the world who wanted to emigrate to Syria. The book begins with two traditions narrated by Abdullah bin Amr, which shows the command to emigrate from the Prophet Muhammad. *“There will be hijrah (emigration) after hijrah (emigration). The best people on earth will be those who keep to the land of Ibrahim’s hijrah.”*⁴⁰

Besides that, in the second hadith, it is stated that the destination of Muslims to emigrate is the land of Sham, which is interpreted as Syria as narrated by Ibn Taymiyyah Rahim Ullah. *“Islam in the end of times will be more manifest in Sham (Greater Syria). [...] So the best of the people on the earth in the end of times will be those who keep to the land of Ibrahim’s hijrah, which is Sham.”*⁴¹

Both of these traditions are examples of traditions that are repeated and instilled in the prospective foreign fighters who want to emigrate to Syria. The repetition of interpretations of certain traditions, especially those that support acts of terrorism and migration to Syria, will convince the perpetrators to follow and obey the commands in those traditions.

Another speaker, MU, mentioned that his interpretation of the end-time traditions by looking at how the situation in Syria at that time made up his mind to leave for Syria. Within the framework of Just World Theory, DF stated that there was a compatibility between the hadith and the material in the video used by ISIS to propagate and attract Muslims around the world to emigrate to Syria.

The returnees who were the resource persons in this study claimed that they increasingly found other traditions that conflicted with the traditions at the beginning of their departure to Syria.

Although these traditions have indeed become one of the tools used to embed specific images so that they have finally succeeded in influencing

⁴⁰ISIS, *Hijrah to the Islamic State*, Raqqa: ISIS, 2015.

⁴¹ISIS, *Hijrah to the Islamic State...*

the decision of resource persons to immigrate to Syria. Other traditions have also succeeded in making the convictions of the informants shaky. They have finally decided to return to Indonesia and not to rejoin their former terrorist group network. This then makes the Hadith a sliced factor found in Just World Theory and Deconstruction.

The demands in Islam to believe in God, the Prophet Muhammad, the Quran, and also believe in the end times are also required to declare that one believes and embraces Islam. Habib al-Jifri (2012) quoting the writings and narratives of Imam Muslim stated that Umar ibn al-Khattab was a witness where the angel Gabriel asked about faith in the Prophet Muhammad and got answers to believe these things. *“He said: “Tell me about faith (iman).” He said: “To believe in God and His angels and His books and His messengers and the Last Day, and to believe in Providence, the good of it and the evil of it.”*⁴²

In addition to faith, Muslims are required to believe and surrender themselves, without hesitation, to worship God and also believe in the Qur'an and Hadith. It is this belief that makes the speakers no longer doubt and question information about the interpretation of the Hadith they get. So that when confronted with the command of Hijrah and has been stated in the Hadith, then they tend not to question it and surrender themselves to fully believe in the Hadith. This is what caused a large number of foreign fighters who left for Syria to fulfill the call for migrations.

Conclusion

The foreign terrorist fighter departs for Syria for its picture of a better life, intending to strive to help those who are victims in Syria. This picture is meant by just world theory where foreign terrorist fighter believes that the picture is a real condition that occurs in Syria.

The picture formed by foreign terrorist fighters is experienced before

⁴²Habib Ali Al-Jifri, *The Concept of Faith in Islam*, Jordan: MABDA, 2012.

they leave. The picture formation occurs through a process of habitus through social media, the narrative on the Internet, as well as direct meetings through studies.

After knowing the real condition of ISIS, the foreign terrorist fighter experienced essential moments in his life that finally changed their earlier views. There are four problems that become triggers in deconstructing their previous understanding, namely welfare problems that they are not following what they promised, the problem of children's education there, the problems of the actions of people who are not under the values of Islam, and other interests who rode the war and the struggle for territory between Islamic groups there. Those moments made them realize that the ideology of the Caliphate was only a cover in the politics of power struggle. The promise of a beautiful life in the afterlife turns out to sacrifice humanity. This is what makes them return to Indonesia.

Theoretically, this study found a relationship and interaction between Just World Theory and Deconstruction in explaining ISIS returnees, who decided not to return to their networks. However, further discussion is still needed to be related to the stages of change in more detail.

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