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Deradicalisation and Disengagement from Terrorism and Threat to Identity: An Analysis of Former Jihadist Prisoners' Accounts

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Abstract

This qualitative study aims to explore the personal experience of former prisoners jailed for terrorism-related offenses in Indonesia who have reported or have been reported as having deradicalised or disengaged from violent extremism. The participants were interviewed about their experiences of deradicalisation and disengagement and the perceived implication of the experiences on their identities. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and analysed using a thematic analysis. The results show that most participants reported that they experience identity threats because of their status as former terrorist prisoners from former comrades as well as from the wider society. The threats were said to have impacted negatively upon their positive sense of self; thus, they invoked the strategies to cope with the threats. While participants' strategies to cope with former jihadist comrades' threats operated in the intrapersonal level, their strategies to alleviate the threats from wider society occur in the interpersonal level. This study found that most participants re-evaluate their past experiences positively and even utilised them as a part of their present identities primarily

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when they dealt with former comrades' criticisms. To resist the wider society's stigma and suspicion, they concealed their identity as a former terrorist prisoner while, at the same time, bolstered their personal characteristics in terms of interpersonal relationships.

Keywords

Deradicalisation, disengagement, identity threats, coping strategies, terrorism

Introduction

Deradicalisation and disengagement efforts to counter terrorism have been implemented in the past decade, not only in Islamic countries where most detainees of Islamist terrorism cases have been recently jailed, but also in European countries, North America and Australia (Bell, 2015; Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009; Koehler, 2017). Recently, most governments in the world adopted national strategies to counter terrorism using a blend of both hard and soft approaches to deradicalise terrorist inmates and detainees mostly through rehabilitation programmes both before and after release from the prison (Hettiarachchi, 2018). However, no conclusions can be confidently drawn about how successful these deradicalisation programmes have been on account of a lack of empirical data and good evidence about what has been working (Abuza, 2009; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Koehler, 2017; Silke & Veldhuis, 2017).

While studies on radicalisation have been conducted extensively by many scholars, deradicalisation and disengagement as scientific topics still need further study (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009; Chernov Hwang, 2018; Koehler, 2017). Specifically, the issue of disengagement from religiously motivated terrorism has been given less consideration both in the academic sphere and in public knowledge (Chernov Hwang, 2018). The lack of attention paid by researchers to these topics might be rooted from the assumption that when the violent radicals or terrorists stop their movements, then it is not necessary to pay attention to them any further because they are no longer a threat (Horgan, 2009). But, one important consideration in an attempt to counter terrorism and other violence in the name of ideology is to learn how and why the radicals or terrorists leave their violent participation. Studies on these issues are expected to contribute to the strategies, designs and programmes, which should be employed to counter terrorism and other ideology-based violent actions.

Recently, a number of studies have been conducted to uncover how and why violent extremists or terrorists exit from terrorism since Horgan (2009), and Bjorgo and Horgan (2009) published their works. Most of the studies used Horgan's (2009) push and pull factor hypothesis to explain individuals' opportunities to disengage from violent extremist groups. The push factors include 'disillusionment with the groups' goals, their methods, leaders, social relations, their own status within the groups and the pressures of being underground', while pull factors comprise the availability of amnesties or reduced sentences, education, training, financial inducements as well as the possibility of establishing a new social network and family (Horgan, 2009, pp. 21–22). Recent studies generally found that disillusionment, burnout and available alternative social networks are among the most important factors in determining whether individuals will stay or leave their terrorist groups (Koehler, 2017; Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010). Koehler (2016) and Barrelle (2015) argued that the process of disengagement of former violent extremists will be likely become a sustained process if they are able to form new social relationships away from former associations with members of terrorist groups.

In addition to alternative social networks, the issues related with an identity cannot be undermined in explaining the disengagement from terrorism. For instance, Bjorgo (2009, p. 30) found that the right-wing extremist groups provided their members with a community, a substitute family and identity. della Porta (2009) also concluded that underground organisations in Italy gave their members such emotional bonds that the members felt extreme solidarity towards their comrades. Thus, Noricks (2009) stated that terrorists or radicals, who no longer believe in their group's ideology, sometimes still stay in their groups because they do not want to leave their social groups and identities. Harris (2015) also found that the process of individual disengagement from ideological social groups often start from the erosion of the senses of belongingness toward their groups, which eventually leads to dis-identification with the groups. In this case, the availability of new relationship networks and the abilities to reform personal identities are crucial to determine the success of the individual disengagement from violent extremism (Harris, Gringart, & Drake, 2017). Barrelle (2015, p. 113) also found that the core aspect of disengagement from violent extremism is 'a realignment of personal and social identity as they reconnect with society'. Thus, former violent extremists who have left their terrorist groups need to create a new identity and reintegrate into the mainstream society (Rabasa et al., 2010, p. 12). The successful struggle to do these processes, along with the degree of

renouncement of their former violent ideology, will determine the permanent disengagement and deradicalisation. It is therefore important to study the identity issues in the context of disengagement from terrorism. Unfortunately, studies on this topic are still rare (Barrelle, 2015; Harris, 2015; Harris et al., 2017; Raets, 2017).

The Present Study

This study aims at exploring the experiences of former violent jihadis in Indonesia who have left their terrorist groups and abandoned the use of violence for achieving their goals. The study focuses on the implication of their disengagements to their identities. The focus was on how the experiences of deradicalisation and disengagement have caused threats to their personal identities and how they cope with the threats. Studying this topic is important since disengagement and deradicalisation are the transitional processes, which often require former violent extremists to face their past identity before being able to move forward to establish new roles or positions for their new lives (Raets, 2017). In this case, the experience of such changes among former violent jihadists may cause threats to their identity as an individual. As stated by Breakwell (1986), individuals who seek to change their positions or roles such as changing group memberships or interpersonal networks are likely to experience the threats to their identity. However, as the threats are aversive, individual will strive to seek strategies to cope with them in accordance with the operation of identity principle, namely continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Breakwell, 1986). Coping strategy is 'any activity, in thought and deed, which has as its goal the removal or modification of a threat to identity' (Breakwell, 1986, p. 78). The coping strategies operate at three levels (intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup) depending on the type of the threat and social context of the threat, individuals' prior identity structure, and cognitive-emotional capacity available to individuals.

This study also considers Horgan's (2008) suggestion that distinguishes deradicalisation from disengagement. While deradicalisation refers to the change in thinking or belief from embracing violent radical ideology to renouncing it, disengagement relates to the significant behavioural change to avoid and reject violent participation. Horgan (2008) asserted that the difference between these two terms is important to understand the fact that not all individuals who have left terrorism also renounce the terrorist groups' beliefs.

In this study, the term 'jihadist' will be used rather than 'terrorist' as the term is more suitable mindful of how participants may position themselves within their accounts. While there are many interpretations of this word *jihad* in Islamic discourses, Morgan (2010, p. 87) proposes two legitimate meanings which are accepted by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars: 'inner spiritual effort and outer physical struggle against the enemies of Islam.'

Deradicalisation in Indonesia

The issue of terrorism in Indonesia gained global attention when the suicide bomb attack that took place in Bali in October 2002 claimed the lives of 202 civilians. The attack inspired the other attacks including the Marriot Hotel bombing in Jakarta in 2003, a car bomb in the Australian Embassy in 2004, the second Bali bombing in 2005 and suicide bomb attacks at the Marriott and the Ritz Carlton Hotels in Jakarta in 2009. All the attacks were said as being perpetrated by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members (Abuza, 2009; Febrica, 2010). JI is a clandestine Islamist group that loosely affiliates with Al-Qaeda and shares the same ideology called *Salafi-Jihadism* (Abuza, 2009). The followers of this ideology differ from mainstream *Salafi* Muslims, in that they believe violent jihad is a legitimate way to fight their perceived enemies (Fealy, 2006, p. 362).

In 2003, the special counter-terrorism detachment 'Densus 88' was established in Indonesia. The squad has been considered as gaining significant success in weakening the JI network. The number of the terror suspects captured rose dramatically within the next 7 years with more than 900 terror suspects have been captured, according to the data from Indonesian National Police, including charismatic leaders, ideologues and action recruiters (Sukabdi, 2015). To eradicate terrorism mainly by combating terrorist ideology through a soft approach, the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT) was established in 2010. BNPT has launched several deradicalisation programmes involving former terrorists, some of whom are the top leaders of JI, as well as well-known religious figures among Islamic scholars and clerics, along with financial aids, to approach the terrorist detainees and prisoners with aims to persuade them to leave terrorist group and ideology (Chalk, Rabasa, Rosenau, & Piggott, 2009; Chernov Hwang, 2017, 2018; Febrica, 2010; Rohmah, 2017). BNPT has claimed that the Indonesian deradicalisation program has achieved a high rate of success with only 5 per cent of the

total number of 538 former terrorists in 2015 returning to the terrorist activities (Dajani, 2016). However, according to Sumpter (2017, p. 114), BNPT's deradicalisation programmes are less effective as they employed top-down approach without considering cooperation with civil societies that have 'strong grass-roots networks, hands-on experience, and the legitimacy's prerequisite to deal with former terrorists.'

Method

Participants

Seven participants involved in the study were former prisoners jailed for terrorism-related offenses and have undergone what may be loosely termed as deradicalisation programmes before and after release from prisons. Four of them were recruited with the help of 'gatekeepers' who are directors of Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (Institute for International Peace Building) and Yayasan Lingkar Perdamaian (Peace Circle Foundation), local non-government organisations that have been involved in arranging the rehabilitation programmes for former terrorist prisoners in Indonesia. The other three participants were recruited using a snowball strategy, by which the researcher asked help from one of the participants to be introduced to the other participants. All participants were male, and their ages ranged from 38 to 52 years (see Table 1 for the detail of participants).

The initial process of recruiting the participants involved several stages. First, the gatekeeper drew up a list of potential participants whom he considered to be suitable for the study and contacted them to determine whether they would be willing to learn about the study and take part of it. Then, the gatekeeper invited the authors to meet with the potential participants.

Data Collection

Semistructured interviews were conducted to collect data as it allowed the researcher to probe interesting areas that emerged while at the same time could follow the participants' interests (Smith & Eatough, 2007). The interviews mostly lasted for an hour. All participants were asked to sign the consent form and informed about their rights to withdraw from

Table 1. The Profiles of Participants

No	Name	Age (years)	Cases & Backgrounds	Sentenced (years)	In Prison	Current Employment
1	SH	45	The shopping centre bombing, Jakarta	7	3.5	A motorcycle taxi driver
2	SM	42	Concealing firearms and explosive materials related to the 2002 Bali Bombings	3.6	2.5	A teacher at an Islamic boarding school
3	HSR	41	Assisted Indonesia's top terrorist; waging jihad against Christians in Ambon (Moluccas)	5	3.5	Managing prawn farm; trading foreign exchange
4	FH	52	Alumnae of *Afghan Mujahidin* camp, waging jihad against Christians in Ambon and Poso (Central Sulawesi)	5	3.5	Selling herbal medicines, books, and clothes
5	SA	38	Waging jihad against Christians in Poso	3.5	2.5	A farmer and trader
6	MH	42	Alumnae of Moro Jihad camp (the Philippines); a shopping centre bombing, Jakarta	10	5.5	Working at a restaurant and renting a car business
7	US	38	The Australian Embassy bombing, waging jihad against Christians in Ambon	7	4	Working at an Islamic financial institution

Source: The author.

the study at any time and were ensured the confidentiality of their data. Both the researcher and participants of this study were Muslim, which may bring some benefits considering the opportunities to gain the same understanding of certain important issues related to the study topic. The interviews were guided by the interview schedule, which began with demographic questions, followed by some questions on how participants sensed themselves after leaving their groups, what challenges they faced from both former comrades and surrounding society after living a normal and peaceful life and how they coped with the challenges. The interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language and recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analytic Strategy

A thematic analysis was employed as the main method of data analysis. This method allowed the researcher for 'identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The procedures of analysing data were conducted as follows, all transcripts were read repeatedly and were given equal attention during the coding process. After that, the codes of all transcripts were examined whether they could be clustered into the subthemes. Finally, the subthemes of each transcript were organised into a final set of superordinate themes.

As suggested by Elliot, Fischer, and Rennie (1999, p. 222), to allow readers to assess the persuasiveness of the analysis, extracts from the data set were quoted in the analysis with the purpose of grounding the analysis with examples. The three dots within the square bracket in the quotation indicated that the material has been deleted, and the material within the bracket was the researcher's clarification to explain the original material.

Findings

The findings of this study were categorised into two themes, namely identity threats from former comrades and identity threats from surrounding society. All participants reported that they have been experiencing threats to their identity as former terrorist prisoners from both former comrades and wider Muslim society. For their jihadist former comrades, participants' disengagement from jihadist activism was

negatively evaluated and was deemed to have adversely affected their identity, including identities as a 'good Muslim'. Among the surrounding society, participants perceived their activity in jihadist involvement as having tainted their identity and rendered them currently 'suspicious', with a perceived fear of reversion to jihadist 'terrorism'. The threats from both former comrades and surrounding people were perceived as aversive by participants, and, thus, they invoked some strategies to alleviate the threats. Participants reported different forms of the threats they experienced due to the different sources of the threats (former comrades and wider society). Consequently, they seem to employ different strategies to cope with threats.

Identity Threats from Former Comrades and Coping Strategies

Most participants reported that they received negative judgments from their former comrades and the reasons behind the criticism.

> They regard me as a coward because they think that *jihad fardhi* [obligatory jihad] should be performed by all Muslims at the present. They argued that presently Muslim condition can be likened to the situation where I am mugged with gun by someone who wants to rob my property. So, they think I should perform armed jihad. In my opinion, the *jihad fardhi* has not been mandatory yet because there is no physical conflict between us and our enemies. *Jihad fardhi* deals with physical war, while our enemies do not attack us physically at this moment. (SH, 45 years)

'A coward' is a derogatory term for people. However, for the participants who reported having been trained by the military and who had been involved in physical conflict or a war, the word could be understood to have a much more offensive meaning. In the military context, cowardice would be a personality trait, which is shunned and disdained and even may be treated as a crime. However, this participant seemed to contextualise the offensive criticism from his former comrades, which targeted him personally within the religious debate about when the obligatory, armed jihad should be performed by Muslims. His account revealed his desire to be evaluated in term of holding different concept of jihad rather than of his personal characteristics. By doing this, the participant appeared to satisfy his perceived self-control on his choice and action and to gain a sense of self-determination. It could be said that he used a strategy, which complies with the 'self-efficacy identity' principle.

However, when he was asked about his response to the derogatory judgment, this participant seemed to give more emphasis to his personal characteristics rather than religious arguments.

> I just said, *lana a'maaluna walakum a'maalukum* [quoted from the Holy Quran, 2: 139, means] 'we shall have our deeds and you shall have your deeds'. The important thing is I am still actively involved to defend the religion of Allah [by preaching Islam]. [...] The second one, I have ever felt the bitterness of life in prison, how my faith was tested when I was tortured. Not everyone is strong and can go through with it. I was just tortured for a week, a week full of hard torture. I am sure if I was tortured any longer, a month for example, mentally I would drop. I am sure if my friends were in such situation, they would unable to bear the torture. If I think now about how bitter my torture was, I don't believe I was able to bear it. Yet I had a trick during the torture [in order not to deliver the secret information about his groups]. Thus, when I was released, I challenged my friends whether I had ever implicated my friends in my legal case. (SH, 45 years)

It can be noted from this account that this participant tried to emphasise that his disengagement from the armed jihadist movement was only a change of role. He wanted to be seen as still having the commitment to defend his religion. The difference is that instead of using weapons, he chose preaching of Islam as his current duty. However, it seems that he did not see his new role as having the same value and importance as his past, armed, jihadist role. Thus, the participant tried to restore his personal credibility when occupying his new role by invoking his past experiences as jihadist and used it as one of elements of his present identity as a former jihadist: the ability to endure the torture and, thus, the ability to cover his comrades.

When the threat challenges self-esteem directly, the usual tactic to be employed by individuals is to 'refocus attention upon some other element of identity and inflate its value' (Breakwell, 1986, p. 101). By emphasising that his active-jihadist friends might not be able to face the same situation that he had endured and stating that, 'Not everyone is strong and can go through with it', he indicated that he want to 'inflate' the value of his 'self-endurance' and 'loyalty to comrades'.

Indeed, most participants tended to perceive their past experiences of involvement in armed jihadist movement as valuable parts of their present identity. They perceived their past selves in positive ways and even used them to preserve their present identities as former prisoners jailed for terrorism offences. Most participants reported that they were criticised by their friends as 'a weak person' because they did not want to be

involved in bombing actions any longer. Their friends also censured them for having 'given up' because they worked within the judicial system for parole, for his release from prison. They responded to the criticism by invoking their past experience.

> So, there were times when I had to think wise. I have gone into jihad [armed jihad] already, while they have not conducted it yet. That's the point. They have never been to the Philippines. [...] Actually, when I was at Moro [the Philippines] I was living with a military and I fought the other military. I thought that we and our enemy were balance, so I felt I was dashing. I fought those who used weapons, while I used weapons too. [...] They fired me with rockets I fired them back with rockets. They shot me from a distance I shot them from behind the mountain. I and my enemy were almost equal. It means we were commensurate. They were proud, I was also proud. Currently, reflecting on my life in Moro, I think it was beautiful because there was equilibrium between me and my enemy. We were balance. (MH, 42 years)

This account revealed that the participant answered his friends' criticism by questioning the essence of being a jihadist. It can be seen from his words that he placed the experience of involvement in a war as a fundamental element of the jihadist identity. Thus, he tended to negate the credibility of these critical friends as they were not 'true' jihadists because they had never been involved in a war against armed enemies. This assertion also can be interpreted as the way he regarded the recent armed jihad conducted by his former comrades as illegitimate because their targets were civilians not military personnel. Arguably, this tendency indicated that some participants' coping strategies were guided by their need to maintain their self-continuity as a jihadist, thus, as a good Muslim.

Another participant explicitly reported his perceived self-continuity by reversing the criticisms of his former comrades.

> They became more extreme than before [...]. They have changed, not me. I'm now like I used to be. They have changed their mind. They easily judge people as infidels. Their neighbours were also judged as infidel by them. Everyone is judged infidel. [...] If people ask me why I am different from what I used to be, I will tell them that I'm still and always like I used to be. Since senior high school, I had already been active in *Bina Desa* [Empowerment Programme for villagers]. Nothing changes. [...] Actually I joined social mission. But, by chance there was a horizontal conflict [between Muslims and Christians] in Ambon [...]. The conflict pushed me to fight using weapons. (US, 38 years)

The participant accused his former jihadist comrades of a tendency towards more extreme ideology (the ideology of infidelity-*takfiri*) as the cause of his former comrades' ongoing involvement in the armed jihadist movement. This account reveals that the participant perceived his past involvement in armed jihad as temporary or conditional and comprehended his disengagement from armed jihad as going back to his 'true' self. Thus, for this participant, it was normal to stop using weapons and go back to his perceived 'true' self as a 'social activist'. Furthermore, to preserve his positive sense of his present self, he internalised a dominant representation of the Muslim condition as poverty.

> The main problem of Muslims is now about poverty. There are so many people who need our help. Before deciding to perform jihad using weapons, it'll be better if they look at around them. Social activities, that's what we need now. (US, 38 years)

It can be noted from this account that the participant underlined the value of social activities in helping people in need in the Muslim society as his current, main priority. His words also revealed that the participant differentiated between armed jihadists according to whether they want to stop or aim to continue the armed struggle. He evaluated them more on their understanding of the current social situation within the Muslim society rather than on abstract religious matters. Some participants indeed reported different understanding and interpretations of the current situation of Muslim society, which affected the standpoints or roles the jihadists took and, therefore, whether they stopped or continued in armed jihadist activity.

The extract below exemplifies the main differences in interpretation between him and his former comrades.

> Jihad is the encounter of two opposite forces, more like *qital* [war], for example, when two opposite forces met face to face. As for the bombing, there are no two opposite forces. The last encounter of two opposite forces [Muslims and Christians] happened in Ambon, which were two forces met face to face [...]. So, the difference between us and them is in the application of jihad. They still think that Indonesia is the jihad battlefield. (HSR, 41 years)

This extract reveals the importance of different perceptions about recent bombings in determining the different interpretations of jihad. He seems to situate his understanding of the current situation as not between equally matched armies as the main reason that he left the armed jihadist

movement behind. This emphasis also can be seen as an indication that he has positioned his former jihadist comrades as the ones who fail to accurately understand the characteristics of the current situation.

However, most participants tended to maintain the belief that leaving the armed jihadist movement does not mean leaving behind their duties as a 'good Muslim'. In fact, they tend to base their notions regarding the duty of a 'good Muslim' on the understanding of the principal priorities of the current situation. *Da'wah* (an Arabic word means the preaching of Islam), rather than armed struggle, as the priority for every Muslim in every situation.

> Some of them claimed that I am *futuur* [Arabic word]. *Futuur* means you stop struggling, or losing the spirit of struggle. There are many who said like that. However, such comments do not stop us to perform *da'wah* […]. We must understand that physical struggle or *amaliyah* power [bombing action] can harm ourselves. At least, we can see the negative effect is our *da'wah* can be prevented by the government apparatus [...]. (SM, 42 years)

This account revealed that the participant used the perceived negative effects of performing armed jihad in the current situation as the reason why he left armed jihad and chose *da'wah*. He accused his former comrades of using an inappropriate strategy in exploiting armed jihad to defend his religion since its negative effects are far greater than any positive outcomes. The participant answered his former comrades' criticism, which targeted him personally ('losing the spirit of struggle') by placing more emphasis on his ability to 'stand back' and identify the positive and negative effects of the armed jihad strategy. By doing this, it seems that the participant wanted to be seen as having self-control over his decision to leave the armed jihadist movement and choose the path of *da'wah*.

Threats from Surrounding Society and Coping Strategies

Most participants reported that wider society's preconception of a terrorist had imposed threats upon their identities as former prisoners jailed for terrorism offences. All participants realised the risks of experiencing the 'terrorist' label if their background as former 'terrorist' prisoners was ever discovered. Participants reported that antipathy, suspicion and exclusion were some of the risks. For instance, a participant (SH, 45 years) reported that he had experienced the threat when he was in the prison as a terrorist convict.

SH	:	[...] They mocked me. Even the head of jailers said, "He is a terrorist, but he prays." It humiliated me. I was angry.
Researcher	:	What was his mockery?
SH	:	Terror. The terror eventually only stained Muslim people.
Researcher	:	Why were you angry?
SH	:	First, I was still hiding my status. The second, he mocked the principle of jihad. That is wrong. Our target is non-Muslim. It is impossible for us to kill our Muslim brothers. For example, if the immoral place was filled mostly by Muslims then we would not bomb the places [...]. However, as good Muslims, they should avoid immoral places. So if there was bombing in such places, do not only blame the bombers. We should also consider why they were in the immoral places.

This extract reveals that the participant perceived people in prison, primarily the jailers, as questioning his Muslim identity because of his status as a 'terrorist' convict. He also recognised that the representation of a 'terrorist' circulated in society, at least in prison communities, is of individual who acknowledges himself as a Muslim and boasts about his fighting to defend Islam but does not hesitate to kill any target, including his Muslim brothers. This representation violated his continuity as a jihadist, and thus, as a good Muslim. To maintain his self-continuity, he resisted this mainstream representation by emphasising his or his group's own alternative representation of the 'true' principles of jihad. He also blamed the Muslims who were the victims of terrorism offences as 'not good Muslims' because they were in 'immoral places'.

However, there was inconsistency in this account. The participant made the assertion that he or his group would never have targeted even 'immoral' places if it had been known that there were mostly Muslims inside. This inconsistency indicated that actually the participant perceived even 'not good Muslims' were not truly a legitimate target for him or his group to attack. However, when they had become victims of his group's attacks, he had to denigrate the victims' Islamic identity. There are two possible reasons for this: first, this strategy serves to reduce or eliminate the participant's sense of guilt; second, it preserves the legitimacy of his identity as a jihadist who defended Islam and 'true' Muslims. The account also revealed that the participant might assume that his or his group's alternative representation of 'true' jihad would not be able to resist the dominant representation of terrorism adopted by wider society so he tried to conceal his identity as a 'terrorist convict' from the very beginning. According to Breakwell (1986, p. 116), this strategy can be categorised as a 'passing' strategy, which operates at the interpersonal level.

Indeed, many of the participants reported that they concealed their background as former prisoners jailed for terrorism offence as part of their strategy to cope with wider society's stigma. The extract from US (38 years) below indicates the possible benefits of such a concealment strategy to gain self-control over the participant's present and future life.

Researcher : How your society responded to you after your release from prison?
US : They did not know that I had been from jail.
Researcher : How?
US : It depends on the way you behaved. You have to know that I can be a government official, but I don't want to. [...] Nothing documented well in Indonesia.

This account revealed that the participant intentionally concealed his background as a former 'terrorist' prisoner. He was aware of the impact of revealing his 'criminal' background on his future career opportunities. However, most participants also reported that they realised that their secret would eventually be discovered. In order to be prepared for the disclosure of their backgrounds, either because of their own intentions to disclose their backgrounds or because of their fears of being 'out-casted' by others, most participants tended to emphasise their personal characteristics in the context of interpersonal relationships. One participant said:

> I am currently working at a brokerage firm. My partners and even my boss initially did not know that I was a prisoner jailed for terrorism offences. They finally found out about me when there was news in a newspaper which reported an interview between a journalist and me. Yet, after they discovered my background, they were fine. (HSR, 41 years)

It can be seen from the account that the participant desired to be acknowledged as a professional worker rather than as a former jihadist, or even as a former 'terrorist' prisoner. This account also reveals that the participant preferred to be known personally and asserted that knowing him personally would eliminate society's preconceptions of him as a 'terrorist'. The account also indicates that the participant intentionally disclosed his background by being willing to be interviewed by a journalist and being published in a newspaper. Arguably, the participant had already prepared for and anticipated the responses of his surrounding communities after his background was discovered. The perceived acceptance by his community after he disclosed his background shows that he

viewed himself as being able to engage in effective social relationships within the wider society. The following extract indicated the finding:

> I was professional in dealing with my co-workers and my boss when my background has not been discovered. I was and I am professional at work. It does not matter even though my boss is a non-Muslim woman. I do not behave that makes any suspicion. In my workplace, I was and I am good with people. (HSR, 41 years)

The participant emphasised that 'even though my boss is a non-Muslim woman', which indicated his perceived success of his social relations. He was aware of the society's dominant representation that jihadists or radical Muslims generally expose hostile attitudes and behaviours towards non-Muslims and often hold patriarchal beliefs with regards to the relationships between men and women. This participant valued himself positively for being able to maintain successful social relationships in his workplace, and thus he was able to preserve his self-efficacy. The other extract clearly showed the efforts taken by participants to be socially accepted.

> I learn farming and socialising with my neighbours and society. I have applied the knowledge of how to socialise with others. I often visit people from door to door, and make conversation with them. It is a part of learning how to get close with my society. (SA, 38 years)

In line with other participants, the following participant reported the ways he responded to wider society's negative representations of his present identity as a former terrorist prisoner by showing what he had done to resist the representation.

> They wondered whether I would or would not go back to terrorism. I was assumed to be definitely a terrorist. They were also concerned about my acquaintance with criminals in prison. They thought, "Well, he is ex-terrorist prisoner, he can bomb again!" But I did explain to them by working in this restaurant. I will explain with my product. I will explain that I am able to join with a management to run a real business: selling; catering; including selling to the police which had arrested me. (MH, 42 years)

This participant's account revealed that he responded to wider society's stigma by emphasising his occupational achievement. By stating that he was 'able to join with management' he appeared to regard himself not as a 'common' worker but as a part of management who shared the

responsibility of running a business. He wanted to be valued for having changed significantly from a 'terrorist' convict into 'a manager'. By doing this, referring to Breakwell (1986), the participant seemed to claim some degree of success in engaging with the exercise of self-efficacy and was aware that the perception of successful self-efficacy is controlled by social context. He was aware that being a 'manager' is considered as having a high social value in his society.

These words also indicated that the participant perceived that his society tends to categorise 'terrorist' convicts together with criminals. Most participants reported that they were encouraged to engage with this negative label. They perceived that the label imposed an aversive threat to their core identities, either as a Muslim or as an individual. The following extract clearly shows one participant's efforts to alleviate the effects of society's negative labelling.

> There is news in surrounding communities that my father was a terrorist and he taught me to do so. My family and I are accused as the terrorist recruiters. We assumed that they do not know. If they know us, they may change their point of view. We are not criminals, so the society does not have any problem [with us]. (FH, 52 years)

The participant tried to position the former terrorist as different from criminals. It can be said from the participant's perspective that while criminals might continue to pose problems to society, former terrorists would not cause any trouble. If criminals are assumed to conduct crimes because of their personal characteristics or egotistical motives, the former terrorists perceived themselves as acting for the sake of values, which were higher than merely egoistic/material needs. Thus, the participants asserted that knowing them personally would easily diminish wider society's negative label as their true characters became apparent.

However, not all participants reported successful coping strategies to deal with wider society's suspicion and stigma at the interpersonal level. The following participant reported that he experienced some level of perceived social exclusion. He was banned from preaching and leading prayers in his neighbourhood until recently.

> They were a bit worried. Now I have been banned from preaching. I should not preach in my neighbourhood [...]. I was the second *imam* before being imprisoned. Now I am deactivated to lead prayer. So, I no longer have a schedule [to lead prayers]. (SH, 45 years)

Society's suspicion and doubts as to whether former terrorist prisoners have been totally disengaged from their previous extremist groups and/or violent ideologies could be seen as the cause of such social exclusion.

Discussion

Most participants reported that they experienced some level of 'tension' in their sense of self due to the occupation of their present identity as former terrorists. This tension is indicated in the ways they perceived their identities in their responses to perceived threats and the sources of those threats. They reported that they have received negative evaluative responses to their occupation of the position as former prisoners jailed for terrorism offenses, not only from their surrounding people but also from their former comrades. Negative responses received by the participants from their former comrades such as 'regarded as a coward', 'weak', 'having given up', and 'having lost the spirit of struggle' have targeted the participants' personal identity and self-esteem as a true jihadist. Thus, the participants have made their efforts to restore their identity as a jihadist by emphasising the previous involvements in the real battle with the armed enemy and the personal trait such as the ability to endure tortures while they were arrested by police officers. On the other hand, they asserted their personal identity as a normal person when they engaged with the society's label and stigma such as 'criminal', 'killer', or 'recidivist'. The ways the participants cope with the threats caused by their present position as former jihadists are in line with Barrelle's (2015, p. 133) finding that most former violent extremists from various ideology backgrounds experienced the re-emergence of personal views and values that signify their separations from their previous extremist groups' norms.

The coping strategies the participants employed to alleviate the threats depend on the nature and form of the threats. Most participants employed the intrapersonal strategy, specifically 're-evaluation and re-attribution' (Breakwell, 1986) to cope with the threats from their former comrades. The threats from former comrades, which targeted the personal characteristics of the participants and their credibility as a good Muslim mostly operated at the level of representation regarding 'what is a jihadist supposed to be?' and 'exactly what kind of jihad should it be done in the current situation?' Most participants resisted the former comrades' criticisms, which targeted them personally by asserting the significance of their past experiences during their involvement in the armed jihadist

movement. This was the most interesting insight that can be drawn from the accounts of the participants throughout this study. Generally, changing one's life or identity involves the tendency to make a strict barrier between the present and the past by re-evaluating the past as negative. Aresti, Eatough, and Brooks-Gordon (2010) reported that almost all ex-prisoners (ex-offenders) who have reformed their life have negative evaluations of their past. Rejecting the past may enable them to safeguard a positive sense of self. Ex-offenders' positive evaluations towards their past only appeared when they worked to rehabilitate the other ex-offenders. However, these reformed offenders who have evaluated their past life positively in such situation were dealing with conflicting 'selves' because they also evaluated their past self in negative ways. In contrast, most of the participants in this study valued their past life positively in order to preserve their positive sense of the present self as former jihadists who have disengaged from the armed jihadist movement. The main reason why former jihadists differ from ex-offenders (i.e., ex-alcoholic, ex-drug user, ex-cult member, etc.) in evaluating their pasts is because during their times in jihadist group, they had internalised the values of the group that they were the vanguard of *ummah* (Roy, 2004) who are acting on the perceived grievances of Muslims by choosing to fight back against their perceived oppressors (Staunton, 2008). Preserving the positive evaluations on their past identity would help them to maintain self-continuity as a good Muslim even though they are now choosing a different path from their former comrades.

The other strategy employed by the participants is to re-evaluate their previous concept of jihad in term of its application to their current situation, the impacts of their previously chosen jihad strategy in Muslim society in general, and other priorities which stood against those that were taken by jihadists. The participants insisted that armed jihad should only be performed by Muslims in a physical conflict situation or a war. In a peaceful area, *da'wah* (preaching Islam peacefully) is the most appropriate strategy to perform jihad. Most participants of this study, indeed, have reinterpreted their concepts of jihad, which indicated that, to some extent, they have already deradicalised. Chalmers (2017, p. 340) has observed this perception when studied former jihadists in Indonesia and called it as 'provisionally deradicalised'. The main indicator for this category is they view that violent jihad is only legitimate to defend the Muslim community if attacked. Kruglanski et al. (2014) argue that deradicalisation may occur when violent extremists begin to regard violence as ineffective as a means of gaining personal significance because it is morally or religiously delegitimised.

In addition, as one participant said, social activities or charities in order to alleviate the poverty that has become the main problem of many Muslim societies today is the priority, which needs to be endorsed as the application of recent jihad. This re-evaluation of the concepts and application of jihad is aimed to counter former comrades' discourses of performing jihad with whatever means, including weapons, is mandatory for all Muslims today. Such discourses impose negative representations such as 'a coward', or 'weak' on former jihadists who have renounced the use of armed jihad to defend their religion. Thus, it is essential to develop new and alternative representations of how to 'fight the good fight' in order to challenge these denigrating images and to maintain the former jihadists' positive social identities (Howarth, 2002). Their ability to resist former comrades' negative representation indicated participants' high self-efficacy (Breakwell, 1986, 1993). High efficacy is related to an individual's ability to counter others' representation and create their own discourse (Breakwell, 1993). In addition, according to Chalmers (2017, p. 344), this finding indicates that the participants are 'fully deradicalised' because even though former jihadists still believe that Islam remains the best means to rule social and political life, they reject violent jihad as the strategy to achieve the goal and choose peaceful alternative strategies. The former jihadists who are able to participate in mainstream activities such as getting jobs and pro-social activities such as helping people in need, according to Barrelle (2015, p. 137), have shown positive social engagement, which is one of the requirements for permanent disengagement from violent extremism.

In contrast to their coping strategies to deal with threats from former comrades, participants employed a further interpersonal strategy, specifically, the 'passing' strategy, to cope with threats from the 'mainstream' Muslim society. By using the passing strategy, participants tried to conceal their identities as former 'terrorist' prisoners while, at the same time, they aimed to bolster their personal characteristics in terms of interpersonal relationships. This strategy seems to be appropriate considering the form of identity threats imposed by mainstream society, which may be easily hidden and difficult to measure objectively (Breakwell, 1986). The passing strategy has proved to be a useful strategy for stigmatised people to protect themselves from the threats when they can be hidden (Aresti et al., 2010; Breakwell, 1986; Major & Eccleston, 2005; McCoy & Major, 2003). There are, at least, two functions of this strategy. First, it helps the former 'terrorist' prisoners to avoid difficulties and negotiate any barriers to engaging in normal life in society, for example, for seeking jobs or achieving career success. Second, the strategy also

helps them to prepare in case their backgrounds as former 'terrorist' prisoners were discovered.

However, most participants realised that they would only be able to hide their background temporarily. It seems that by emphasising their personal characteristics and presenting themselves positively in the context of interpersonal interactions, they believed that society's negative representations of them as a 'terrorist' could eventually be eradicated. As noted by Ebaugh (1988, p. 156), individuals occupying an 'ex'-role or identity generally struggle with the presentation of self, the social reactions of others and the lingering effects of the label attached to their former identity. Thus, it can be said that former jihadist prisoners may give more attention to the reactions of wider society than to the opinions of their former comrades. Thus, the support of wider society would be tremendously important in facilitating the former jihadists in reaching a permanent disengagement. In the Southeast Asian context, Abuza (2009, p. 194) notes that the success of deradicalisation depends on the societal attitudes: 'will a former terrorist be welcomed back into society or will they be treated as outcasts?' Indeed, as Bjorgo (2009) asserted, the availability of alternative normal life and identity in the broader community for a former member of extremist groups will determine their permanent disengagement from violent extremism. Therefore, it is important that deradicalisation program be supported by building relations between former violent jihadists with civil society activists and trusted figures from the wider Muslim community as well as providing economic activities that become the alternative sources for the former terrorists and their families' livelihoods (Chalmers, 2017).

Conclusion

This study shows that all participants have experienced threats to their identity because of undergoing the process of deradicalisation and disengagement from terrorism. The threats were sourced both from their former comrades and their surrounding peoples. Most threats, which came from their former comrades, mostly violated the participants' personal identity as the true jihadists, while those that came from the surrounding people generally dealt with the negative labelling as former terrorists and the suspicion of their recidivism. The threats even invited some strategies used by participants of this study to deal with them. Most participants reported that they were accepted successfully by their communities, while a few participants reported that they have experienced some

extents of social exclusions. This study generally found that all participants were efficaciously engaged in dealing with threats to their identities imposed by their former comrades as well as by wider society. These strategies can be considered as opportunities that allow them to disengage permanently from violent action and armed jihadist groups and diminish their vulnerability to re-engagement into their previous armed jihadist groups and violent actions.

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