

Formation of self-identity among former terrorism convicts through symbolic interactionism and self-reflection

Fikri Fairuzzahron^{*)}, Hendy Nabil Rais

*Department of Communication Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada
Sosio-Yustisia Street, Bulaksumur, Sleman, Yogyakarta Special Region, Indonesia
Email: fikrifairuzzahron@mail.ugm.ac.id, Phone: +62 274 563362*

How to Cite This Article: Fairuzzahron, F. & Rais, H.N. (2025). Formation of self-identity among former terrorism convicts through symbolic interactionism and self-reflection. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 9(2). doi: 10.25139/jsk.v9i2.9687
Received: 24-01-2025, Revision: 09-05-2025, Acceptance: 22-05-2025, Published: 31-07-2025

Abstract Social stigma remains the main obstacle in the process of social reintegration despite successful deradicalisation programs. Former terrorism convicts face a dual challenge: the need to build a new positive identity while confronting strong societal resistance. This study aimed to understand the process of self-identity formation among former terrorism convicts through symbolic interactionism and self-reflection, using the self-concept theories of George Herbert Mead and Anthony Giddens as this study's theoretical framework. This research employed an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to explore the subjective experiences of three former terrorism convicts who have participated in a deradicalisation program by the National Counterterrorism Agency for at least two years. Data were obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analysed step by step to identify individual experiences related to social stigma, symbolic interactionism strategies, and self-reflection in building a new identity. The findings reveal that the success of social reintegration for former terrorism convicts does not solely depend on ideological change but also on their ability to negotiate a new identity through effective communication with society. This process involves identity narratives constructed through supportive social interactions and deep self-reflection. This study provides practical contributions to the development of more adaptive deradicalisation policies and enriches theoretical studies on communication in identity transformation.

Keywords: communication; deradicalisation; phenomenology; self-identity; social reintegration

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is an extraordinary crime that significantly affects various aspects of life, including social, economic, and psychological dimensions (Lestari et al., 2024). It manifests in many forms, such as intimidation, threats, persecution, hostage-taking, and more violent acts like explosions, bombings, hijackings, and arson (Fahreza, 2020). These acts cause immediate impacts such as fear, physical harm, and infrastructural destruction. More importantly, terrorism leaves behind deep-rooted social trauma and often leads to long-term exclusion and marginalisation of individuals who were formerly involved, even after they have disengaged from extremist networks (Goldwen & Octavia S, 2024).

^{*)} Corresponding Author

As a country with a long history of confronting radical groups, the Indonesian government continually strengthens its counterterrorism strategy through a comprehensive approach (Erikha & Rufaedah, 2019). In addition to addressing physical threats, it is essential to recognise the long-term social consequences of terrorism, particularly the complex challenges faced by individuals involved in past acts of extremism when they attempt to return to society. The National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), as an institution authorised to handle terrorism issues in Indonesia, has implemented a deradicalisation program as outlined in several laws. This program aims to disrupt the spread of extremism ideology while helping former terrorist convicts reintegrate into society and prevent their re-engagement in radical activities.

According to data from BNPT (2024), more than 1,685 former terrorism convicts have participated in the deradicalisation program, which has a success rate of 92% based on changes in ideology and behaviour. However, this success rate masks deeper complexities related to social stigma and community acceptance. Former convicts are often perceived as individuals who have violated social norms and, consequently, have been subjected to punishment. This identity as former convicts can become a source of stigma and shame during their reintegration into society (Adzani & Manalu, 2022). Such stigma tends to be enduring and is commonly rooted in public fear and suspicion. As Goffman (2022) explains, stigma arises when individuals are perceived as deviating from dominant social norms and are thus constructed as 'others' within the social order.

The stigma attached to these individuals is typically expressed through labels such as 'terrorists', despite their participation in the deradicalisation process. This labelling not only diminishes their social status but also fosters a sense of alienation from their surroundings. Society tends to reject their reintegration in various aspects of life, including acceptance in neighbourhoods, workplaces, and religious communities. Furthermore, the fear that they may revert to radical activities perpetuates community suspicion and reinforces their marginalized status.

The stigma surrounding former terrorism convicts creates significant challenges in their process of self-identity formation. The psychological distress they experience often exacerbates their sense of alienation, which in turn slows down their ability to build a new identity. Fitriani et al. (2024) have highlighted that this stigma not only hinders social reintegration but also increases the risk of re-engagement with extremist networks. Additionally, the diversity of Indonesian society, with its various values, norms, and social expectations, complicates efforts to rebuild healthy social relationships.

In this case, the formation of a new identity becomes a crucial step for former terrorism convicts to leave their extremist past behind. Ulyana & Riyansyah (2021) argue that the success of a deradicalisation program relies not only on ideological change but also on the individuals' ability to create a new and positive self-identity. Identity formation involves not just changes in internal self-perception but also interactions with a society that may hold different views of them. This process requires a deeper understanding of how individuals work to rebuild their self-image to achieve sustainable social acceptance.

To explain this process, Self-Concept Theory serves as a relevant theoretical framework. Pioneered by George Herbert Mead (1934) and expanded upon by Anthony Giddens (1991), this theory highlights that a person's identity is constructed through symbolic interactionism and self-reflection. Central to Mead's concept is the internal dialogue between the 'I' (the spontaneous self) and the 'me' (the internalised social norms), which together shape an individual's self-awareness. Building on this, Giddens introduces the notion of reflexivity, the active and conscious shaping of one's self-narrative in response to changing social structures. Both perspectives position communication not merely as a medium, but as a dynamic arena where meaning is negotiated and the self is reconstructed (Charmaz, 2006).

This theoretical lens becomes particularly relevant in analysing how former terrorism convicts attempt to rebuild their identities in a society that continues to associate them with their past. As Kavish (2020) notes, symbolic interactionist frameworks shed light on how ongoing social reactions reinforce stigma and stereotypes, significantly influencing the trajectory of identity reconstruction. For former terrorism convicts, this dynamic becomes even more intense as they continuously oscillate between their former and emerging selves. In such contexts, Mead's conceptualisation of the 'I' and 'me' gains critical importance, reflecting the struggle to assert a new identity in a social environment that often insists on defining them by their past.

Moreover, Giddens (2023) concept of reflexivity, further illuminates this process. He posits that self-identity is a continuous narrative shaped by self-reflection, enabling individuals to redefine who they are in response to evolving social experiences. Through this lens, identity is not static but is actively negotiated, particularly vital for those seeking reintegration after involvement in radical movements. It allows individuals not only to process and reinterpret their past but to deliberately construct identities that align with both personal growth and social acceptance.

Former terrorism convicts, who have undergone deradicalisation programs, often face a significant dilemma. On one hand, they are trying to construct a new narrative as changed individuals; on the other hand, they encounter resistance and distrust from the community, which can hinder their adaptation process. According to Giddens in Lusianawati (2019), self-identity is narrative, meaning that individuals create the meaning of their lives through the stories they construct about themselves. This narrative becomes a crucial tool in social reintegration efforts, especially when stigma and community resistance pose major challenges.

In this complex situation, a deep understanding of how former terrorism convicts construct their self-identity through communication becomes crucial. In this context, Mead (1934) posits that the self is a social structure that emerges through interactive experiences, meaning that individuals shape their identities based on the social responses they receive in relation to others. Communication thus functions not merely as a medium for message delivery, but as an instrument for self-reflection and the construction of new meanings, especially in negotiating new identities, obtaining social recognition, and discovering new purposes in life, both within familial settings and broader societal contexts. This perspective aligns with Mareta (2018), who emphasises that the success of Indonesia's deradicalisation programs is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of communication between former terrorism convicts and the wider community. Failure in constructing a new self-identity may lead to social alienation and increase the risk of recidivism into radical networks. Therefore, understanding the self-identity formation process among former terrorism convicts is vital to support their successful social reintegration.

This study presents a novel contribution to the discourse on former terrorism convicts in Indonesia. It integrates George Herbert Mead's Self-Concept Theory with Anthony Giddens' concept of self-reflexivity. Previous studies, such as those by Mareta (2018) and Ulyana & Riyansyah (2021), have predominantly focused on deradicalisation from ideological and security perspectives. In contrast, this research positions the reconstruction of identity as a communicative process that bridges internal transformation with social acceptance. Employing phenomenological analysis, the study explores each participant's subjective experience and identity negotiation amid varying degrees of social stigma. Furthermore, this study enriches our understanding of identity formation, specifically among former terrorism convicts within Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural context, offering a foundation for developing deradicalisation programs that are more adaptive to local dynamics.

Based on the urgency of this issue, this study poses the central research question: 'How does the self-identity formation process occur among former terrorism convicts through symbolic interactionism and self-reflection?', this research aimed to explore how former terrorism convicts reconstruct their identities through symbolic interactionism and self-reflection within society. To achieve this goal, the study adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach developed by Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer (Gyollai, 2019), which enables an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences of former terrorism convicts in constructing a new self-identity. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the essence of their lived experiences, particularly in overcoming social stigma and building a positive identity narrative. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with three former terrorism convicts who had participated in the BNPT's deradicalisation program.

By understanding how these individuals navigate social stigma and construct a new identity, this research contributes to a deeper theoretical and practical comprehension of the internal processes experienced by former terrorism convicts. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on communication theories in identity transformation. Practically, the findings are expected to offer valuable recommendations for the improvement of deradicalisation policies and the development of more effective and adaptive social reintegration programs in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach using phenomenological methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of former terrorism convicts in the process of forming their self-identity through symbolic interactionism and self-reflection. Philosophically, the research is grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology as developed by Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer (Gyollai, 2019). Heidegger emphasises that understanding human experience cannot be separated from the individual's existential context, or *being-in-the-world*, where meaning arises through active engagement with one's social and historical environment. Gadamer extends this line of thought with the concept of the *fusion of horizons*, which describes the dialogical process between the researcher's pre-understanding and the participant's perspective, leading to a deeper interpretation of the studied experience (Gadamer, 2004). This approach is chosen because it enables a comprehensive exploration of the complexities within the communication process of identity formation, the dynamics of social interaction with the community, and the mechanisms of self-reflection in confronting social stigma within Indonesia's multicultural society.

The research participants included three former terrorism convicts who had completed the BNPT deradicalisation program and had lived in the community for at least two years, a period considered critical for evaluating reintegration dynamics. The decision to involve three participants aligns with Smith & Osborn (2009), who recommend a small sample size (typically 3–6 individuals) in interpretative phenomenological analysis to allow for deep and nuanced exploration of individual experiences. While the participants shared core characteristics as former terrorism convicts, the researcher intentionally selected individuals with diverse contextual backgrounds, including regional origin, group affiliation, and reintegration outcomes to ensure both depth and complexity of the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The selection of participants was carried out using *purposive sampling* technique, which is a sampling method that prioritises the relationship between the subject and the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2019). Criteria included differences in deradicalisation experience, ethnicity, region, prior involvement, and degrees of identity transformation. These variations are vital to understand how socio-cultural differences influence the communication and reconstruction of identity, especially within the pluralistic norms of Indonesian society (Mubaraq et al., 2022).

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews lasting 45–60 minutes per participant, allowing sufficient depth while maintaining engagement. The interview protocol was structured around four dimensions based on Mead and Giddens' Self-Concept Theory framework including the experience of de-radicalisation and identity transformation, the communication process in building a new identity, challenges in the process of social interaction and strategies to deal with stigma, and self-reflection on identity change (Khaerul Kholidi et al., 2022; Lusianawati, 2019). Each of these dimensions is elaborated through questions that allow in-depth exploration of participants' experiences.

In addition, data collection also involved analysing supporting documents with a systematic document analysis approach including: (1) *preliminary review* to identify relevant documents, (2) *thorough examination* with thematic coding, and (3) *interpretation* that integrates document findings with interview data (Dalglish et al., 2020). Documents analysed included deradicalisation program reports, participant progress evaluations, and social assistance records.

Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) by Smith & Osborn (2009), which emphasises in-depth understanding of lived experiences through a *double hermeneutic*, where researchers interpret how participants make sense of their own realities (Mohapatra & Satpathy, 2022). IPA's idiographic nature allows detailed case-by-case exploration before drawing thematic connections across participants. This is particularly relevant for individuals with extreme experiences and identity shifts, such as former terrorism convicts. As Hasan (2023) highlights, phenomenological understanding must account for personal history, social relations, and intersubjectivity.

This methodological approach proved effective in uncovering the complexity of participants' identity transformation and reintegration narratives. The analytical process followed several structured stages: (1) repeated reading of interview transcripts, (2) initial note taking, (3) development of emerging themes, (4) search for relationships between themes, (5) subsequent

case analysis, and (6) search for patterns between cases. During the analysis process, the researcher applied the *bracketing* technique (*epoché*) by identifying and setting aside personal assumptions related to the phenomenon under study. This is important to ensure that the resulting interpretations truly reflect the participants' experiences.

To ensure data validity, this study employed multiple validation strategies as recommended by Santos et al. (2020). Data triangulation was conducted by cross-checking interview results with relevant stakeholders, including BNPT officers and community leaders, to verify interpretations and broaden insights. Member checking was also conducted by returning findings to participants to confirm accuracy. Additionally, peer debriefing involved experts in deradicalisation to review and provide feedback on the analysis, enhancing research credibility. These strategies were selected in response to the complexity of deradicalisation, the sensitivity of identity and stigma issues, and the diversity of reintegration experiences.

Ethical protocols were strictly followed to protect participant confidentiality and safety. Before the study began, participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw without consequence. Data confidentiality was emphasised, and sensitive information was handled in accordance with research ethics standards to prevent potential risks for individuals with a background in terrorism-related offenses. This approach was taken to ensure that the study did not pose additional risks to participants who had a background as former terrorism convict. The following is the list of subjects included in this study at table 1.

Table 1. Subjects list

Code	Age	Region of Origin	Former Affiliation	Current Occupation
RA	35	East Java	JI	Soy milk entrepreneur
F	26	Flores	JAD	Tailor
W	41	Southern Papua	JAD	Delivery service operator

Source: Data from author (2024)

This study has several limitations, including a small sample size, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the limited observation time may not cover long-term dynamics in the social reintegration process. Nonetheless, the phenomenological approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the essence of individual experiences, which is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of more adaptive de-radicalisation policies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research are based on the researcher's findings in analysing the experiences of three former terrorism convicts with different backgrounds and environments. The three participants are RA (35 years old), a former member of Jamaah Islamiah East Java who now sells soy milk; F (26 years old), a former member of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah in Flores who works as a tailor; and W (41 years old), a former member of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah in Southern Papua who manages a freight forwarding service. The interviews were conducted in November 2024 with different days for each participant. The findings of this research include the following aspects:

Motivation for self-change in former convicts

During their participation in the deradicalisation program, the prisoners revealed that there were changes in themselves while in prison. The process of changing themselves occurs through a long journey that starts from internal awareness supported by external factors. The journey finally made them realise the fallacy of their previous views, which was then reinforced by a supportive environment to leave their radical groups.

From this internal factor, participant RA stated that what changed him was when he reflected on the question from his son why RA hated his neighbour so much. The question made him flinch. The external factor itself, RA admitted that the de-radicalisation program while in prison helped him change his perspective plus the ustadz who were there were able to guide him well so that he could see the world more openly.

Participant F stated that the internal factor that made him realise this was when he saw the kindness of a priest who was there while F was in prison who often brought him food and taught him to sew. From these behaviours, F realised that all this time non-Muslims were not in accordance with what was in his previous teachings. The external factors that emerged in F were

when the local tailoring community helped her from the beginning of the sewing business, then she saw BNPT officers also strengthened this change. In addition, her mother always provided support during her ideological crisis in prison.

Participant W explained his internal factors that made him begin to escape radical influence when he began to question JAD's teachings. He saw that non-Muslims could also behave well. The key moment was when her child was very sick, and she saw that the Christian doctor was very helpful and sincere in treating her child. F began to realize that they could also behave well and finally began to doubt his old teachings. The external factor is from BNPT officers and the ustadz there who helped him psychologically change himself into someone who is more open.

All three participants showed strong motivation to change their lives for the better. This drive made them leave their old radical groups and try to start a new life. Participant RA interpreted his new self as a human being who returned to his nature who loved peace and left hatred. Participant F interpreted himself as a cloth that was re-sewn with the same pattern but produced something better. F feels that he is still a Muslim, but now has more respect for ancestral culture and diversity. Meanwhile, participant W understands himself as someone who has returned to human nature, a Muslim who embraces love, not hatred. In addition, W also has the determination to atone for his past sins by becoming a better individual, providing benefits to his surroundings, opening up jobs for other former convicts, and being active in terrorism prevention programs to prevent others from following the wrong path like him in the past.

The negative stigma of former terrorism convicts

These three former convicts cannot escape the negative stigma of society when they return to their environment. This is due to the prevailing societal perception that tends to stigmatise former convicts. When interviewed, the three participants shared their experiences:

"The initial phase of reintegration was extremely challenging. My wife experienced emotional distress due to the trauma of my past involvement. I was ostracised by neighbours, some even relocated out of fear. My child was subjected to bullying at school because of my status. The most painful experience was when extended family members refused to attend a family event I organised". (Interview with RA on 21 November 2024).

"What hurt the most was the judgment from fellow Muslims. Some labelled me as a former terrorist, expressing fear that I might re-engage in extremist activities. As a result, when I first launched my tailoring business, there were almost no orders". (Interview with F on 22 November 2024).

"The most difficult challenges came from within the Muslim community. I was accused of apostasy simply because I interacted with non-Muslims. My children were bullied at school. The most distressing moment was when a local religious leader urged his congregation not to use my delivery services because of my past status as a former terrorist". (Interview with W on 23 November 2024).

All three participants experienced discrimination from various parties, ranging from family, neighbours, to the surrounding community. One of the participants' wives almost wanted a divorce due to past trauma, while their children experienced unfair treatment from schoolmates. Even the extended family of one of the participants refused to attend family events. In the community, they faced suspicion from neighbours who labelled them with a negative stigma. This situation was exacerbated by a cleric who openly invited the community not to use the services of one of the participants just because of his status. From these findings, it appears that discriminatory treatment often comes from religious communities that are supposed to be a place of support. These experiences created deep discomfort and psychological distress for the participants. However, they realise that the stigma is unavoidable, and therefore they feel the need to make real efforts to change the stigma around them so that they can be accepted by society again.

Efforts of former convicts and forms of support received to return to society

Currently, all three participants are living their lives as entrepreneurs. They have made various efforts to prove that they deserve to be accepted back into society. However, this journey has not been easy. The efforts made by the participants were seen in their interviews, they said that:

"I demonstrate my transformation through concrete actions. I regularly attend congregational prayers at the mosque, actively participate in community activities, and develop my business in accordance with halal principles" (Interview with RA on 21 November 2024).

"I prove myself through my work. My stitching is neat, my prices are competitive, and I offer friendly service. Over time, people forget about my past status; what they remember is the quality of my tailoring" (Interview with F on 22 November 2024)

"I now focus on building a halal business, educating my children with values of tolerance, and actively engaging in interfaith social activities. I strive to atone for my past mistakes by doing as much good as possible" (Interview with W on 23 November 2024).

The participants made various efforts, starting with themselves. They do activities that are acceptable to the community, such as trading halal and showing totality in their work by prioritising the quality of their work. In addition, in terms of society, they also try to be active in social activities such as community service, interfaith communication, and various other activities that show their good intentions. Through this dedication, they seek to change the way society views them.

Over time, these efforts began to show results. Support came from various parties, from family to the surrounding community. The forms of support received also varied, as they revealed:

"My wife eventually supported my soymilk business. The capital assistance from the empowerment program for former terrorism convicts was very helpful. The neighbourhood head also gave me the opportunity to be involved in local community activities" (Interview with RA on 21 November 2024).

"In Flores, people are generally more accepting, perhaps due to the communal and family-oriented culture. In addition, my mother, who never stopped praying for me, and the local tailoring community also provided significant help through work orders. Now, people recognise me for the quality of my tailoring" (Interview with F on 22 November 2024).

"Thanks to support from BNPT and the local government, I had the opportunity to restart my delivery service business. Gradually, public trust began to grow. The greatest support came from the community of former convicts who had previously succeeded in transforming their lives" (Interview with W on 23 November 2024).

The biggest support comes from the community and BNPT, which includes psychological assistance as well as capital to start a business. This community does not only help in the economic aspect but also supports them in doing a better job. This community was established with the aim of assisting former convicts in rebuilding their lives after release from prison, enabling them to lead better lives and not return to criminal acts. In addition, support from family and the community had a significant impact. Their families began to see the good intentions of the participants and began to support their activities. In fact, RA gained the trust of the Head of the RT to be active in village activities. Cultural factors also made an important contribution. Participant F, who lives in a family culture in Flores, felt more easily accepted because the culture encourages solidarity. With their efforts, the community slowly began to accept them, paving the way for better integration.

Identity formation through Symbolic interactionism and Self-Reflection

One of the key findings in this study is that the self-identity formation process of former terrorism convicts does not only depend on ideological change, but also on their ability to negotiate a

new identity through the process of social interaction. Based on Mead (1934) self-concept theory, a person's self-concept consists of two elements, namely *I* and *Me* (Shobrianto & Warsono, 2022). The '*I*' represents the individual's spontaneous response to the social world, while the '*Me*' reflects the internalised attitudes and expectations of others formed through interaction.

In the context of former terrorism convicts, the process of forming their new identity is greatly influenced by the social stigma attached to them. Society often labels them as 'terrorists' even though they have completed the deradicalisation program. This label not only demeans their social status but also reinforces the feeling of alienation from the environment. Community rejection is seen in various aspects of social life, such as the difficulty of being accepted in the neighbourhood, extended family, or religious community. In facing this situation, former terrorism convicts attempt to rebuild their self-concept, both the *I* and *Me* elements, through symbolic interaction with society. They try to process the negative views received and create a new understanding of self-identity that is more positive and accepted.

Beyond social interaction, the participants also engaged in deep self-reflection as a strategy to reinterpret and reconstruct their identities. Giddens (2023) describes this process as self-reflexivity, where individuals consciously monitor and revise their personal narratives in response to evolving social contexts. This was evident in how participants articulated their transformation: RA saw himself as someone returning to his peaceful nature; F viewed himself as a cloth re-stitched into a better form; W perceived himself as a Muslim reoriented toward love rather than hatred.

Expanding on this, Giddens characterizes modern identity as a continuous project, one that requires ongoing self-evaluation and active engagement with one's environment. McAdams (1993) conceptualises this as 'narrative identity', where individuals construct meaning by rewriting their life stories with renewed social significance. Supporting this, Lusianawati (2019) study of female former convicts demonstrated that strong self-reflection could facilitate reintegration through a communicative redemption narrative.

The process of forming a new identity through symbolic interactionism and self-reflection is an important element in the successful social reintegration of former terrorism convicts. When they are able to design a new identity that can be accepted by the community, the social stigma that was previously attached slowly begins to diminish. In the end, this opens up opportunities for wider and more *sustainable* social acceptance.

Social stigma and the efforts of former terrorism convicts in building a new identity

One of the biggest challenges faced by former terrorism convicts in the social reintegration process is the negative stigma attached to them. Society tends to view them as individuals who have violated social and religious norms, thus deserving of punishment for their actions. As a result, their identity as former terrorism convicts becomes a social burden that is difficult to erase when they return to the community.

Reintegration, therefore, is not merely about completing a rehabilitation program, but also about navigating the complex social perceptions that persist afterward. Altier (2021) emphasises that successful reintegration requires acceptance from the communities to which these individuals return. Stigmatization and marginalization can severely limit their access to employment and pro-social relationships. Community-based approaches are thus essential, as they not only reduce stigma but also foster social capital and resilience, factors that are critical in preventing re-radicalisation and future recruitment.

These insights align with our findings in the Indonesian context, where former terrorism convicts must continuously negotiate their identity in a society marked by cultural and normative diversity. The stigma they face often results in psychological distress and social alienation, both of which hinder the formation of a new, positive self-identity.

In response to these challenges, many former convicts actively demonstrate their personal transformation through socially accepted behaviour. They engage in community activities, uphold professional integrity, and strive to contribute meaningfully to society. These acts are not only forms of self-reflection but also strategic symbolic interactions that allow them to reshape their public image.

For instance, RA reported that he consistently attended mosque prayers, engaged in social events, and ran a halal business to regain community trust. F focused on producing high-quality

tailoring services and maintaining good customer relations, which eventually shifted public perception. Meanwhile, W emphasised religious tolerance in raising his children and participated in interfaith community work as a way to atone for his past.

These examples illustrate how former terrorism convicts negotiate a new identity that is not defined by their past but built through persistent, pro-social engagement. While the journey is fraught with challenges, these efforts gradually cultivate public acceptance and contribute to more sustainable reintegration outcomes.

Social support and the role of institutions in supporting the reintegration of former terrorism convicts

In addition to the hard work done by the former convicts themselves, support from various parties also plays an important role in supporting their social reintegration process. This support comes from various sources, ranging from family, community, to related government institutions.

Support from family, especially wives and parents, is the main foundation for former terrorism convicts in their efforts to adapt back to society. One of the participants, RA, shared that although his wife had wanted to divorce him because she was traumatized by the past, she finally gave her full support to his soymilk business. This support from their family provides an important sense of security and acceptance, which strengthens their confidence and motivation to build a new and better life.

In addition to family, the former convict's community also provides valuable support. This community acts as a source of psychological support and a platform to help its members start a business network. Participant W said that the biggest support he received came from the community of former convicts who had succeeded in building a new life. This community provides assistance in various forms, such as sharing experiences, helping each other, and creating trust among its members.

In addition, government institutions, especially BNPT, also play an important role in supporting the social reintegration process of former terrorism convicts. BNPT does not only implement deradicalisation programs but also provides business capital assistance and social assistance. Participant F mentioned that the assistance from the former convicts of terrorism empowerment program really helped him in starting a sewing business. Meanwhile, W revealed that he was able to start his delivery service business thanks to assistance from BNPT and the local government.

The support provided by various parties has a significant impact in helping former terrorism convicts to rebuild self-confidence, earn a decent income, and gain acceptance from society. When they feel supported and accepted, the process of forming a new positive identity becomes smoother. This ultimately strengthens social reintegration efforts and effectively prevents reengagement in radical activities.

In addition, this support also shows that the social reintegration process of former terrorism convicts is not the responsibility of individuals alone, but involves the active role of families, communities, and government agencies. Synergy and collaboration among these various elements of society are the main keys to a more comprehensive deradicalisation and social reintegration success.

Theoretical and practical implications: strengthening deradicalisation and social reintegration programs

The findings in this study provide valuable contributions, both in theoretical and practical terms, in the development of communication studies, especially related to self-identity transformation and social reintegration of former terrorism convicts. Theoretically, this research enriches the understanding of *self-concept theory* pioneered by George Herbert Mead and expanded by Anthony Giddens. This research shows that the formation of a new identity does not only depend on symbolic interactions with society but also requires deep self-reflection. This process allows individuals to process the views of others and reinterpret their self-identity in accordance with social changes and evolving life experiences.

In addition, this research also provides a new perspective in understanding the dynamics of communication and identity in the context of Indonesian multiculturalism. The phenomenon of social stigma faced by former terrorism convicts and their efforts in building a new identity highlight the complexity of social reintegration in a diverse society. To illustrate the core findings

of this study and the identity transformation process experienced by former terrorism convicts, the following flowchart at Figure 1 describes the dynamic interaction between individual agency, communication, social support, and self-reflection in shaping a new identity and achieving social reintegration.

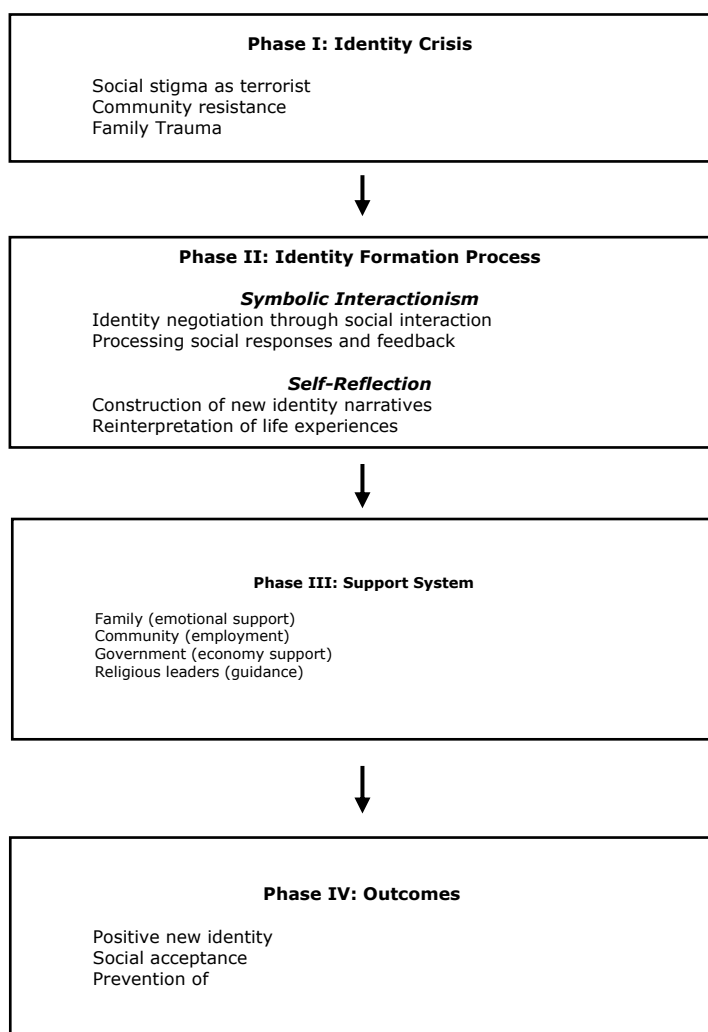


Figure 1. The process of self-identity formation among former terrorism convicts
Source: Data from author, 2024

From a practical perspective, this research provides valuable recommendations for the development of deradicalisation policies and more adaptive social reintegration programs in Indonesia. The findings of this study show that the success of social reintegration does not only depend on ideological change, but also on the ability of former terrorism convicts to build a new identity that is accepted by society. Therefore, deradicalisation programs need to be equipped with measures that support the formation of a new identity for former terrorism convicts. This can be done through psychosocial assistance, skills training, and more systematic facilitation of interaction with the community. In addition, efforts to reduce social stigma and increase community acceptance also need special attention, through public campaigns, cross-group dialogue, and the development of more inclusive communities.

Synergy between the government, non-governmental organisations, and local communities is an important element to strengthen deradicalisation and social reintegration programs. A good collaboration among these stakeholders can ensure that former terrorism convicts receive comprehensive support, covering aspects of ideology, economy, self-identity formation, and social acceptance in a sustainable manner.

Overall, this research provides useful insights for efforts to deal with terrorism in Indonesia. By understanding the complexity of the social reintegration process of former terrorism convicts, especially related to self-identity formation, it is hoped that deradicalisation and social reintegration programs can be designed and implemented more effectively and adaptively, addressing the needs of both individuals and society as a whole.

CONCLUSION

This study offers an in-depth insight into the process of self-identity formation among former terrorism convicts through symbolic interactionism and self-reflection. The findings indicate that successful social reintegration does not solely depend on ideological transformation but also on the individuals' ability to negotiate a new identity that is socially acceptable. From the perspective of Mead (1934) self-concept theory, the self-identity of former terrorism convicts is constructed through the synergy between the *I* and the *Me*, where symbolic interaction with society becomes a critical medium for processing negative stigma and constructing a more positive self-understanding. This process is reinforced through tangible actions, such as participation in social and religious activities as well as the development of legitimate businesses. On the other hand, self-reflection as conceptualized by Giddens as a continuous narrative process, enables former convicts to adjust their identities in response to evolving social dynamics.

However, one of the major challenges in this process is the deeply entrenched negative stigma. To overcome this, former convicts strive to demonstrate change through positive actions and active participation in community life. Support from family, communities, and institutions such as the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) plays a key role in creating comprehensive deradicalisation and reintegration programs aimed at fostering trust and societal acceptance.

The findings in this study make significant contributions, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enriches the understanding of self-concept and reflexivity theories within the context of Indonesia's multicultural society. Practically, it provides important recommendations for the development of more adaptive deradicalisation and reintegration policies.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations, particularly concerning the small number of participants and the absence of long-term analysis. It is therefore recommended that future research adopt a longitudinal approach to observe the continuous process of identity formation. Further inquiry into the experiences of female former terrorism convicts is also essential to capture gender-based identity dynamics. Additionally, future research should delve deeper into the roles of non-state actors, such as NGOs and religious communities, in supporting social reintegration, thereby strengthening inclusive and context-specific deradicalisation strategies. In this way, the findings of this study may serve as a valuable reference for academics, practitioners, and policymakers in designing a more holistic approach to counterterrorism efforts in Indonesia.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the Ministry of Communication and Digital (Kemkomdigi) for the financial support provided through the Domestic Master's Scholarship Program. This funding has significantly supported the completion of this research and publication. Appreciation is also extended to all parties who have contributed to the data collection and analysis processes involved in this study.

REFERENCES

- Adzani, A. L., & Manalu, S. R. (2022). Pengelolaan komunikasi mantan narapidana dalam berinteraksi dengan masyarakat. *Interaksi Online*, 10(3), 671-682. <https://ejournal3.undip.ac.id/index.php/interaksi-online/article/view/34990>
- Altier, M. B. (2021). *Violent extremist disengagement and reintegration: Lessons from over 30 years of DDR*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37805/vedr2021.1>
- BNPT. (2024). Laporan kinerja program deradikalisasi. In *Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme*.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage Publications.
- DalGLISH, S. L., Khalid, H., & McMahan, S. A. (2020). Document analysis in health policy research: The READ approach. *Health Policy and Planning*, 35(10), 1424-1431. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czaa064>
- Erikha, F., & Rufaedah, A. (2019). Dealing with terrorism in Indonesia. In *Terrorist Rehabilitation and Community Engagement in Malaysia and Southeast Asia* (1st Edition, pp. 131-138). Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367817466-9>

- Fahreza, A. (2020). Pencegahan terorisme berbasis masyarakat dengan pembentukan forum koordinasi pencegahan terorisme di tiga provinsi. *Jurnal Sosiologi Nusantara*, 6(1), 13-22. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33369/jsn.6.1.13-22>
- Fitriani, K., Alfirdaus, L. K., & Adnan, M. (2024). Reintegrasi sosial eks napiter: Asistensi pemerintah dan lembaga swadaya masyarakat di Kota Semarang. *Journal of Politic and Government Studies*, 13, 36-48. <https://ejournal3.undip.ac.id/index.php/jpgs/article/view/46553>
- Gadamer, H.-G. (2004). *Truth and method*. London: Continuum.
- Giddens, A. (2023). Modernity and self-identity. In *Social Theory Re-Wired* (3rd Edition). Routledge.
- Goffman, Erving. (2022). *Stigma : notes on the management of spoiled identity*. London: Penguin Books.
- Goldwen, F., & Octavia S, C. (2024). Terorisme dalam kacamata humaniora: Mengkaji akar permasalahan, dampak dan sikap penggangguannya. *Jurnal Sains Riset*, 14(1), 392-404. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.47647/jsr.v14i1.2327>
- Gyollai, D. (2019). Getting into it in the wrong way: Interpretative phenomenological analysis and the hermeneutic circle. *Nursing Philosophy*, 21(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12294>
- Hasan, P. (2023). Menyoal penelitian fenomenologis. *Edusifa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 9(1), 37-51. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56146/edusifa.v9i1.108>
- Kavish, D. (2020). Identity, stigma, and social reaction. *Societies*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/soc10010028>
- Khaerul Kholidi, A., Irwan, & Faizun, A. (2022). Interaksionisme simbolik George Herbert Mead di era new normal pasca covid 19 di Indonesia. *AT-TA'LIM*, 2(1), 1-12. <https://ejournal.unwmataram.ac.id/index.php/taklim/article/view/1256>
- Lestari, N. A. S. S., Hapifah, T., Purwati, S. A. R., & Hosnah, A. U. (2024). Analisis perilaku dan motivasi serta peranan psikologi dalam tindak pidana terorisme. *Jurnal Res Justitia: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, 4. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.46306/rj.v4i2.123>
- Lusianawati, H. (2019). *Perlintasan diri perempuan dalam proses moderenisasi melalui blog women traveler* [Disertasi]. Universitas Sahid Jakarta.
- Mareta, J. (2018). Rehabilitasi dalam upaya deradikalisasi narapidana terorisme. *Masalah-Masalah Hukum*, 47(4), 2527-4716. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.14710/jis.%v.%i.%Y.527-539>
- McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by personal myths and the making of the self*. New York: William Morrow & Company.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Mohapatra, M., & Satpathy, S. P. (2022). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: A constructive approach in qualitative research. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 27, 39-45. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2703083945>
- Mubaraq, Z., Arifin, S., Abdullah, I., Jubba, H., & Indiyanto, A. (2022). Return of the Lost Son: Disengagement and social reintegration of former terrorists in Indonesia. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2135235>
- Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal*, 20(1), 7-14. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14691/cppj.20.1.7>
- Santos, K. da S., Ribeiro, M. C., de Queiroga, D. E. U., da Silva, I. A. P., & Ferreira, S. M. S. (2020). The use of multiple triangulations as a validation strategy in a qualitative study. *Ciencia e Saude Coletiva*, 25(2), 655-664. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-81232020252.12302018>
- Shobrianto, A., & Warsono. (2022). Proses konsep diri mantan narapidana (Studi fenomenologi anggota komunitas Dedikasi Mantan Narapidana Untuk Negeri). *Kajian Moral Dan Kewarganegaraan*, 11(2), 429-443. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26740/kmkn.v11n2.p429-443>
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2009). Analisis fenomenologis interpretatif. In *Psikologi kualitatif: Panduan praktis metode riset*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif kualitatif dan R&D*. Bandung : Alfabeta.
- Ulyana, Y. A., & Riyansyah, A. (2021). De-radicalisation program: The case study of Indonesia. *International Journal of Business, Economics and Social Development*, 2(2), 78-88. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.46336/ijbesd.v2i2.130>
- Undang-Undang Nomor 5 Tahun 2018 tentang Perubahan atas Undang-Undang Nomor 15 Tahun 2003 tentang Penetapan Peraturan Pemerintah Pengganti Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 2002 tentang Pemberantasan Tindak Pidana Terorisme Menjadi Undang-Undang. (n.d.).