

Religious moderation and character education as a model for countering radicalization in Indonesia

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Abstract

The phenomenon of the spread of extremist religious ideologies and practices in Indonesia, particularly through social networks and digital platforms over the past two decades, has caused serious emotional, psychological, social, and political impacts. This situation underscores the urgency of strengthening religious moderation as a counter-radicalization strategy. This study aims to describe the pattern of strengthening religious moderation through character education as a counter-radicalization model among former terrorism convicts at the Lingkar Perdamaian Foundation (YLP) in Lamongan, Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques involving YLP administrators and former convicts, this research analyzes patterns of awareness and behavioral transformation. The results show that a character education-based model for strengthening religious moderation—through philosophical-ideological and psychological-religious approaches—has proven strategic in transforming the self-awareness of former terrorism convicts. This pattern enables a shift from radical ideology to a moderate attitude through the internalization of character values, education, and inclusive religious practices. The main findings highlight three key aspects: (1) the transformation of religious identity toward a more moderate form, (2) the strengthening of the social roles of former convicts within local communities, and (3) resistance to extremist narratives through reflective life experiences. Therefore, character education integrated with religious moderation becomes an effective instrument in building social resilience and preventing the reproduction of radicalism. This study recommends expanding this model within community-based deradicalization policies.

Fenomena penyebaran ideologi dan praktik keagamaan ekstremis di Indonesia, terutama melalui jaringan sosial dan platform digital dalam dua dekade terakhir, telah menimbulkan dampak emosional, psikologis, sosial, dan politik yang serius. Situasi ini menunjukkan urgensi untuk memperkuat moderasi beragama sebagai strategi kontra-radikalisme. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan pola penguatan moderasi beragama melalui pendidikan karakter sebagai model kontra-radikalisme di kalangan mantan narapidana terorisme di Yayasan Lingkar Perdamaian (YLP), Lamongan, Indonesia. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik wawancara mendalam terhadap pengurus YLP dan mantan napiter, penelitian ini menganalisis pola transformasi kesadaran dan perilaku. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa model penguatan moderasi beragama berbasis pendidikan karakter, dengan

pendekatan filosofis-ideologis dan psikologis-religius, terbukti strategis dalam mengubah kesadaran diri mantan napiter. Pola ini memungkinkan pergeseran dari ideologi radikal menuju sikap moderat melalui internalisasi nilai karakter, edukasi, serta praktik keagamaan yang inklusif. Temuan utama memperlihatkan tiga aspek kunci: (1) transformasi identitas keagamaan yang lebih moderat, (2) penguatan peran sosial eks-napiter dalam komunitas lokal, dan (3) resistensi terhadap narasi ekstremisme melalui pengalaman hidup yang direfleksikan. Dengan demikian, pendidikan karakter yang terintegrasi dengan moderasi beragama menjadi instrumen efektif dalam membangun ketahanan sosial dan mencegah reproduksi radikalisme. Studi ini merekomendasikan agar model ini diperluas dalam kebijakan deradikalisasi berbasis komunitas.

Keywords: *Religious moderation; Character education; Counter-radicalism; Lingkar Perdamaian Foundation*

Introduction

Terrorism and radicalism remain persistent strategic challenges for Indonesia, despite its improved standing in the 2024 *Global Terrorism Index* (GTI), moving from rank 24 (score 5.502) in 2023 to rank 31 (score 3.993) in 2024.¹ This improvement, however, does not signify a reduced threat. Religiously motivated violence and the dissemination of extremist ideologies particularly through digital platforms and transnational networks—continue to challenge Indonesia’s resilience. This situation confirms Haedar Nashir’s assertion that addressing terrorism and radicalism requires comprehensive efforts across political, cultural, economic, and religious domains, by reinforcing religious moderation grounded in *Pancasila* and Indonesia’s moderate Islamic identity.²

The persistence of extremist actions highlights that terrorism is not merely a security issue but one deeply tied to ideology, identity, and social integration. The 2024 GTI reported a 22 percent increase in

¹Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), *Global Terrorism Index 2024*, Sydney: IEP, 2024.

²Haedar Nashir, *Moderasi Beragama dalam Bingkai Pancasila*, Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2019, 44–45.

terrorism-related deaths globally in 2023—the highest since 2017. Although Indonesia's Radicalism Potential Index (RPI) declined from 12.2 percent in 2020 to 10 percent in 2022, youth, women, and digitally connected communities remain vulnerable to radicalization.³ These indicators underscore the persistent and potentially resurgent threat of radicalism and terrorism.

Radicalism, derived from the word *radical* meaning “root,” refers ideologically to the use of violence in pursuing extreme political, social, or religious goals.⁴ Religious radicalism is characterized by rigid thinking, intolerance, and the conviction that only one's interpretation of scripture is correct.⁵ Yusuf al-Qaradawi identifies its roots in literalist interpretations of Islam, excessive prohibitions, weak historical and sociological understanding, and reactions to social, political, and economic injustice. Religion, therefore, holds two opposing potentials: it can be a driver of peace or, conversely, a source of hostility.⁶

In the Indonesian context, radicalism has been shaped by changes in the political order, increasingly intolerant socio-religious dynamics, and the penetration of Wahhabi thought, which narrows the boundaries of the Muslim community and legitimizes violence against those with differing

³Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (BNPT), *Indeks Potensi Radikalisme 2022*, Jakarta: BNPT, 2022.

⁴John Horgan, “From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism”, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 618, No. 1 (Juli 2008), 80–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716208317539//>.

⁵Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways toward Terrorism”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2008), 415–433, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550802073367//>.

⁶Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Awakening Between Rejection and Extremism*, trans. Sidney HFrankel and William Shepard, London: The Islamic Fondation, 1991, esp. chapter “Defects of Religious Extremism”; see also Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Extremism: The Accusation and the Truth*, Cairo: Islmaic Inc. Publishing and Distribution, 2001; dan Dhita Ayomi Purwanigtyas & Zahra Uswah Hasanah, “Yusuf al-Qaradawi's View on Religious Extremism”, *Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2024): 47-66.

views.⁷ Radicalization itself follows a process: from ideological sympathy, to indoctrination, to militant action.

Table 1. Stages of Radicalization–Terrorism⁸

Stage	Main Characteristics	Key Triggers
Pre-Radicalization	Normal state, beginning exposure to radical ideas	Political disappointment, social injustice, identity crisis
Self-Identification	Seeking identity through ideology, adopting exclusivism	Online propaganda, extremist circles
Indoctrination	Radical beliefs intensify, violence legitimized	Mentors, jihad literature, global conflicts
Commitment	Joining networks, readiness for action	Recruitment, oath of allegiance, funding
Terrorist Action	Carrying out violent attacks	Theological justification, propaganda, retaliation

Radical ideology does not always translate into terrorism, but the two are interconnected through literalist religious understandings. Terrorism itself is defined in Indonesian Law No. 5/2018 as acts of violence causing widespread fear, casualties, and threats to national security.⁹ Factors driving terrorism include poverty, ignorance, unemployment, partial understanding of religion, and social injustice.¹⁰

⁷Rini Setiawati, “Radicalism and Salafism in Indonesia: Development and Movement of Transnational Ideology”, *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, Vol.24, No. 2 (2024), 227-256. <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v24i2.24412//>.

⁸McCauley and Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization”..., 425.

⁹Republic of Indonesia. Law Number 5 of 2018 concerning the Amendment to Law Number 15 of 2003 on the Stipulation of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2002 on the Eradication of Terrorism Crimes into Law. State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia Year 2018 Number 92, Supplement to the State Gazette Number 6216. <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/82919/uu-no-5-tahun-2018>.

¹⁰Cameron Sumpter, “Countering violent extremism in Indonesia: priorities, practice and

The complexity of radicalism necessitates multidimensional responses. Bertelsen identifies marginalization as a key link between poverty and radicalism, aligning with global findings that link structural injustice to extremism. Internationally, models such as EXIT-Deutschland in Germany, the Aarhus Model in Denmark, and community-driven programs in Nigeria have demonstrated the effectiveness of combining psychological, social, and multi-sectoral strategies. These experiences underscore the need to move beyond securitized approaches.¹¹

In Indonesia, counter-radicalization efforts have long been state-centric and focused on securitization. While effective in neutralizing immediate threats, they often overlook the structural and cultural roots of radicalism. As Cherney emphasizes, deradicalization requires not only security responses but also reintegration strategies that empower communities and provide alternatives to extremist narratives.¹² Hence, scholars and practitioners increasingly call for participatory, community-based strategies integrating economic empowerment, cultural dialogue, and religious moderation.¹³

Religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) promotes a balanced socio-religious

the role of civil society”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, Vol. Summer, No.11 (2017), 112 – 147.

¹¹Poul Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures and Deradicalization Strategies: The Aarhus Model”, *Panorama: Insights into Asian and European Affairs*, No. 1 (2015): 241–53. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_42032-1522-2-30.pdf?150714075727. Adetayo Olamide Sowale and Ayodeji Anthony Aduloju, “Deradicalization of Repentant Boko Haram Militants: Institutional Dilemma Between the Victims and Villains in Northeast Nigeria”, *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2023), 169–83; Agbiboa, Daniel E., “Peace at Daggers Drawn? Boko Haram and the State of Emergency in Nigeria”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 37, No.1 (2013), 41–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.853602//>.

¹²Adrian Cherney, et al, “The push and pull of radicalization and extremist disengagement: The application of criminological theory to Indonesian and Australian cases of radicalization”, *Journal of Criminology*, No. 4 (2021), 407-424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26338076211034893//>

¹³Wesam Charkawi, Kevin Dunn, and Ana-Maria Bliuc, “Evaluations of Countering Violent Extremism Programs: Linking Success to Content, Approach, Setting, and Participants”, *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, Vol. 77, No. 100674 (2024), 100674, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcrj.2024.100674//>.

understanding, avoiding both extremes of liberalism and radicalism.¹⁴ In the Indonesian context, this approach resonates with *Pancasila* and the nation's plural identity. Irfan Idris, director of BNPT's deradicalization program, outlines four strategies: re-education, rehabilitation, resocialization, and reintegration. These aim to combat terrorism, prevent radicalization, counter religious hatred, protect society, and foster public resilience against extremist ideologies.¹⁵

Recent studies emphasize the importance of integrating character education as a crucial means of reinforcing religious moderation. In Indonesia, it was found that moral education shaped cadets' tolerance. Meanwhile, Nafi'a demonstrated that religious interpretation often outweighed social tolerance in higher education, signaling the urgency of embedding religious nationalism into curricula¹⁶. Likewise, school-community partnerships are key to effective Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) strategies.¹⁷

The Lingkar Perdamaian Foundation (YLP) in Lamongan, founded in 2016 by former militant Ali Fauzi, exemplifies a grassroots model integrating religious moderation and character education. YLP provides training, counseling, and religious re-interpretation for former terrorists

¹⁴Hasse Jubba, Jaffary Awang, Zuly Qodir, Hannani, and Mustaqim Pabbajah, "The Contestation between Conservative and Moderate Muslims in Promoting Islamic Moderatism in Indonesia", *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vo. 8, No. 1 (2022): 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2116162//>.

¹⁵Irfan Idris, *Deradikalisasi: Kebijakan, Strategi, dan Program Penanggulangan Terorisme*, Bantul: Cahaya Insani, 2018.

¹⁶Ilman Nafi'a, Septi Gumindari, Mohammad Andi Hakim, Safii Safii, and Rokhmadi Rokhmadi, "Mitigating Radicalism Amongst Islamic College Students in Indonesia Through Religious Nationalism", *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, Vol. 78, No. 4 (2022): a7547, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7547//>.

¹⁷D. Aprilianto, S. S. Aslamayah, S. Zahidi, N. A. Crisnasari, and T. Febbrianti, "Religious Moderation as a Counter-Narrative of Intolerance in Schools and Universities", *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2025), 188-212, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v6i1.1361//>.

while engaging them in community development. This dual approach—ideological disengagement and social empowerment—transforms former combatants into peace ambassadors. As a “social laboratory,” YLP demonstrates how localized, participatory strategies can strengthen resilience and prevent recidivism.

The YLP experience reflects the “peacebuilding from below” paradigm, where community agency and cultural legitimacy are valued more highly than technocratic, top-down programs. It also confirms that counter-radicalization requires dialogue, not coercion, and the cultivation of inclusive narratives that resonate with local contexts.¹⁸

Religious moderation and character education complement each other as preventive strategies. Moderation prevents polarization and exclusivism, while character education nurtures ethical, tolerant, and civic-minded citizens. When combined, they help individuals resist radical propaganda and reinforce national cohesion. This integrated strategy situates counter-radicalization not only in the realm of security but also in education, culture, and community empowerment.

Thus, the most effective counter-radicalization model for Indonesia is not securitization alone, but the cultivation of *wasathiyah* values through character education. This model strengthens inclusive religiosity, prevents extremism, and reinforces social harmony. Ultimately, it contributes to global peace by positioning Indonesia as a model in the Global South for community-driven counter-radicalization.

Indonesia’s improved standing in the GTI should not obscure the persisting risks of terrorism and radicalism. The ideological, social, and economic roots of extremism demand responses beyond security

¹⁸Rui Saraiva, Alastair Erfe, “Preventing violent extremism with resilience, adaptive peacebuilding, and community-embedded approaches”, *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, Volume 61, (2023), 101271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2023.101271.1/>.

frameworks. Religious moderation and character education, integrated into community-based models such as YLP, represent sustainable and culturally resonant strategies. They transform counter-radicalization from coercion into empowerment, from securitization into social resilience. As such, they provide a blueprint for addressing radicalism not only in Indonesia but across diverse contexts in the Muslim world.

YLP: civil movement against terrorism

Social-historical context of Tenggulun

Yayasan Lingkar Perdamaian (YLP) is a civil society initiative in Indonesia that focuses on combating terrorism by promoting religious inclusivism and character education. Founded in Tenggulun Village, Lamongan—a region once stigmatized as the “Village of Terrorists” because it was home to the families of Amrozi, Mukhlas, and Ali Imron, perpetrators of the 2002 Bali Bombing—YLP grew as a response to collective trauma and the need for social reconciliation.¹⁹

In Tenggulun, the Al-Islam boarding school—founded by Khozin, brother of the Bali Bomb Trio—promotes a Salafi-Wahhabi exclusivist style and maintains ties with the Al-Mukmin Ngruki school, reinforcing radical networks locally and nationally.²⁰ In contrast, NU and Muhammadiyah communities represent moderate Islam, creating a tension between exclusivism and moderation that makes the village both vulnerable to radicalism and ripe for community-based counter-radicalization efforts.²¹

¹⁹Nidia Masithoh, Sapto Priyanto, dan Muhammad Syauquillah, “Ex-Terrorists Reintegration Programs On Conditional Release Period By Formers Foundation Yayasan Lingkar Perdamaian (YLP),” *Journal of Terrorism Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2022), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.7454/jts.v4i2.1052>.

²⁰Richard C. Paddock, “School Raided in Bali Probe,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 November, 2002, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-nov-10-fg-bali10>.

²¹M. A. Sila dan Greg Fealy, “Counterterrorism, Civil Society Organisations and Peacebuilding: The Role of Non-State Actors in Deradicalisation in Bima, Indonesia,” *Asia*

The birth of YLP and its movement orientation

Founded in 2016 by Ali Fauzi, the youngest brother of the Bali Bomb Trio, YLP serves as an alternative platform for former terrorism convicts (ex-napiter) to reintegrate into society.²² Recognizing that many return to old networks for ideological, emotional, or material reasons, YLP aims to offer a “new community” grounded in peace, nationalism, and a tolerant interpretation of Islam.

Fauzi likens terrorism to a “complicated disease” that cannot be adequately treated with a single therapy. According to him, former militants are actually more credible as “specialist doctors” in counter-radicalization campaigns because they possess experiential legitimacy—legitimacy derived from firsthand experience.²³ This perspective positions ex-napiter not as objects, but as subjects of change, peace ambassadors.

Peacebuilding from below

The establishment of Yayasan Lingkar Perdamaian (YLP) reflects a bottom-up peacebuilding approach rooted in community initiatives. It emphasizes local actors, lived experiences, and the community’s capacity to foster peace beyond state structures.²⁴ Unlike state-centric strategies focused on imprisonment and surveillance, YLP prioritizes social rehabilitation, relational justice, and identity reconstruction.

Peace narratives shared by former terrorist convicts are more persuasive than state-delivered messages, aligning with Mac Ginty’s concept of everyday peace—where personal experience and daily interaction build

Pacific Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2022), 97–117, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2022.2041076>.

²²Ali Fauzi, interview by author, Lamongan, July 2024.

²³R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

²⁴Oliver P. Richmond, *Peace in International Relations*, London: Routledge, 2008.

deeper, more credible connections than formal policies.²⁵ YLP's legitimacy, therefore, stems not from state authority but from the authentic voices of those once inside extremist circles.

YLP's programs are multi-layered and interconnected. First, religious moderation is promoted to redefine jihad and reframe religious identity. Second, family counseling reinforces individual change through the support of the household. Third, economic empowerment addresses structural vulnerabilities that drive radicalization. Fourth, public forums like "Jalan Terang" provide inclusive spaces for dialogue and counter-narratives among ex-napiter, academics, officials, and the wider community.²⁶

Using Vergani et al.'s "three P" theory—push, pull, and personal²⁷—YLP works across all dimensions. It tackles poverty, stigma, and marginalization (push); reduces the attraction of radical networks by offering a supportive alternative community (pull); and fosters ideological and spiritual change through character education, religious guidance, and peaceful life experiences (personal).

Furthermore, the YLP model demonstrates the integration of material, psychosocial, and religious dimensions in building peace. This expands the scope of peacebuilding from below, which typically focuses on social capital, into a broader peace ecosystem that encompasses livelihoods, family relations, and cultural transformation. Thus, YLP is not merely an organization for rehabilitating ex-napiter, but a hybrid peacebuilding arena that unites community agency with state capacity within a collaborative

²⁵Roger Mac Ginty, *Everyday Peace: How So-Called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

²⁶Ali Fauzi, *Merawat Persaudaraan, Menjalin Perdamaian*, Lamongan: YLP Publication, 2020. 22-25

²⁷M. Vergani, M. Iqbal, E. Ilbahar, dan G. Barton, "The Three Ps of Radicalization: Push, Pull and Personal: A Systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence about Radicalization into Violent Extremism", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 43, No. 10 (2018), 854–885, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1505686>.

framework.²⁸

YLP's success demonstrates that local peacebuilding is essential, not just supplementary, to preventing the recurrence of radicalization. It complements state strategies by addressing gaps left by security-focused approaches. Sustainable peace requires recognizing and involving community initiatives in national deradicalization efforts.

Transformation of ex-napiter identity

The stories of Ahmad, Bakar, Candra, and Dawud illustrate the dynamics of identity transformation experienced by members of Yayasan Lingkar Perdamaian (YLP). This transformation is not an instant process but a long journey involving interrelated psychological, religious, and socio-economic dimensions.

Ahmad, for example, who initially rejected the presence of state authorities, gradually changed after participating in psychosocial support and religious moderation studies organized by YLP. He began to develop an inclusive attitude toward differences and rebuilt harmonious relationships with his community. Bakar experienced a similar journey; his feelings of disappointment and resentment toward the state gradually faded through intensive guidance, until he eventually reestablished positive relationships with the police and gained social recognition from his community.²⁹

The stories of Candra and Dawud demonstrate that ideological change also requires rebuilding social identity. At YLP, they found a new community that replaced their former radical networks,³⁰ Offering moral support, economic opportunities, education, and social recognition. This reflects the "social reintegration" theory, which stresses the role of

²⁸Oliver P. Richmond and Audra Mitchell, *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

²⁹Bakar, Ahmad, interview by author, Lamongan, July 2024.

³⁰Dawud, Candra, Ali Fauzi, interview by author, Lamongan, July 2024.

recognition and relationships in post-conflict recovery.³¹

These personal narratives reinforce findings from international studies that the transformation of ex-militants is more effective in undermining the ideological authority of radical groups than formal state interventions. Scrivens, for instance, shows that legitimacy derived from firsthand experience (experiential legitimacy) carries stronger persuasive power because it is based on authentic narratives from individuals who have “been on the inside”³². This contrasts with state approaches, which are often perceived as instruments of external control and therefore lack credibility in the eyes of radical communities.

The transformation of ex-napiter in YLP reflects both disengagement the end of violent involvement and deradicalization, involving cognitive, emotional, and identity shifts.³³ The experiences of Ahmad, Bakar, Candra, and Dawud show how leaving violence is accompanied by a redefinition of jihad, from a militant concept to one rooted in social, educational, and family values.

This transformation underscores the need for sustained support or a continuum of care. Identities shaped by radical narratives cannot be undone through short-term interventions but require ongoing spiritual guidance, economic empowerment, and social recognition.³⁴ Without adequate after-care, ex-napiters risk returning to old networks, as seen in

³¹Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

³²Ryan Scrivens, Steven Windisch, dan Pete Simi, “Former Extremists in North American Research”, in *Former Extremists*, Gordon Clubb, Ryan Scrivens, and Md. Didarul Islam (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024; University of Maryland National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197765067.003.0006>.

³³John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*, London: Routledge, 2009.

³⁴Gonda Yumitro, Rizki Febriani, Ali Roziqin, dan Sukma Oktaviani, “Rebuilding a New Identity: The Psychological and Social Process of Deradicalization Among Ex-Terrorists in Indonesia”, *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2024), 20987–20995.

studies from the Middle East and Africa. YLP, therefore, serves not just as a rehabilitation center but as a space for forming new identities grounded in moderation, peace, and nationalism.

More broadly, the identity transformation of ex-napiters reflects not just individual success but the effectiveness of community-based approaches. YLP's experience shows that a dialogical, participatory, and multi-layered deradicalization process fosters more sustainable social inclusion than securitization alone. The stories of Ahmad, Bakar, Candra, and Dawud thus highlight the crucial role of local agency in post-conflict peacebuilding.

International comparison: EXIT-Deutschland and the Aarhus model

When compared globally, YLP shares both similarities and differences with other models such as EXIT-Deutschland in Germany and the Aarhus Model in Denmark. EXIT-Deutschland focuses on individual exit mechanisms through counseling, relocation, and security protection.³⁵ The Aarhus Model emphasizes hybrid governance that integrates police, schools, social services, communities, and families, with key instruments including risk assessment and case management.³⁶

Unlike the two models, YLP positions ex-napiter as the main actor in managing the movement. Its legitimacy is rooted in firsthand experience, while the state serves as a strategic partner rather than the initiator. This cross-case comparison highlights that deradicalization cannot stop at the level of disengagement (ceasing violent actions), but must continue to the level of cognitive-affective deradicalization and sustained social reintegration.

³⁵Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism*, New York: Routledge, 2016.

³⁶Preben Bertelsen, "Danish Preventive Measures and De-radicalization Strategies: The Aarhus Model", *Panorama: Insights into Asian and European Affairs*, Vol. 1 (2015), 241–253.

Relevance for the global south

In the Global South context, Lingkar Perdamaian Foundation (YLP) exemplifies civil society engagement that complements state efforts in tackling radicalization and terrorism. YLP's community-based model affirms that securitization alone cannot break the cycle of extremism. Civil society initiatives can address relational, psychological, and cultural dimensions often missed by state approaches, echoing findings from Nigeria, where such organizations more effectively reintegrate ex-militants than repressive government strategies.³⁷

YLP also reflects what Mac Ginty refers to as *everyday peace*, a peace practice that emerges from daily interactions and restores social relations at the grassroots level³⁸. In this context, ex-militants are no longer positioned as threats, but as peace agents who build legitimacy through lived experience and personal narratives. Such a transformation demonstrates *experiential legitimacy*, which is far more credible than the discursive authority of state officials or external actors.

Furthermore, YLP's experience reinforces the *local turn* thesis in peace studies, which emphasizes a shift in focus from liberal, top-down strategies toward local agency. The *local turn* does not merely position communities as passive recipients of policy, but as knowledge producers and key agents of change. In the context of the Global South—often characterized by structural injustice, poverty, and marginalization—community-based peacebuilding models, such as YLP, present a more sustainable alternative.

³⁷Hassan, Mohamed Feisal Mohamed, and Ahmad Saiful Rijal Hassan, "Reintegrating Extremists in Southeast Asia: Lessons in Deradicalisation and Rehabilitation", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2025), 112–17. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48807513>. Cameron Sumpter, "Reintegration in Indonesia: Extremists, Start-Ups and Occasional Engagements", *ICCT Perspective*, 2019, <https://icct.nl/publication/reintegration-in-indonesia-extremists-start-ups-and-occasional-engagements>.

³⁸Roger Mac Ginty, *Everyday Peace: How So-Called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Additionally, YLP can be understood within the framework of hybrid peacebuilding as formulated by Richmond and Mitchell, which is the convergence of state capacity with community initiatives.³⁹ In the case of Indonesia, BNPT or security forces still play a crucial role in law enforcement, but YLP complements this function by providing space for social rehabilitation, economic empowerment, and the production of peace narratives. This model proposes a hybrid governance approach that is applicable to other countries in the Global South, such as Nigeria, Pakistan, or Afghanistan, where state strategies have proven fragile without community agency support.

YLP's vision, "Nurturing Brotherhood, Weaving Peace," carries a meaning that goes beyond the local context. It symbolizes that every individual, even those with a troubled past, has the opportunity to contribute to building a peaceful future.⁴⁰ This message is relevant to the needs of the Global South, where conflict, poverty, and injustice often give rise to new cycles of radicalization. Thus, the lessons from YLP are not only valuable for Indonesia but also serve as an inspiration for community-based counter-radicalization practices in other countries in the Global South.

Strengthening religious moderation and character education

Counter-radicalization through character education is gaining increasing academic recognition as an effective strategy to prevent extremism and terrorism. This approach is especially relevant for former terrorism convicts (ex-napiter), who often struggle with social reintegration, public stigma, and rebuilding their post-conflict identities. The experience of Lingkar Perdamaian Foundation (YLP) in Tenggulun, Lamongan, demonstrates that structured character education can effectively shift ex-napiters' ideological

³⁹Oliver P. Richmond and Audra Mitchell, *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

⁴⁰Fauzi, *Merawat Persaudaraan...*, 22-25.

orientation from radicalism to moderation. This transformation is not immediate, but the result of a gradual process involving the internalization of ethical values, participation in social activities, and consistent long-term community support.

Thomas Lickona emphasizes that “Character education is the deliberate effort to help people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values.” This statement positions character education not merely as a cognitive endeavor, but as a comprehensive transformation involving moral awareness, affection, and concrete action. Within the framework of counter-radicalization, character education serves as a mechanism for ideological and social healing, freeing individuals from the grip of violent ideology while equipping them with an ethical ethos and a sense of social responsibility.

Empirical studies support the role of character education in promoting religious moderation. Mukhibat shows that integrating character education into Islamic higher education curricula in Indonesia effectively fosters inclusivity and prevents early-stage intolerance.⁴¹ This aligns with Vergani et al.’s view that counter-radicalization requires a multidimensional approach combining economic, psychological, and moral aspects. In this context, character education offers a cognitive-affective framework for internalizing values of moderation, tolerance, and respect for plurality.⁴²

Lickona identifies seven key goals of character education: developing noble character, enhancing academic achievement, strengthening personal character, fostering respect in a pluralistic society, addressing moral and social issues, promoting ethical workplace behavior, and internalizing

⁴¹Mukhibat, M., Mukhlison Effendi, Wawan Herry Setyawan, and M. Sutoyo, “Development and Evaluation of Religious Moderation Education Curriculum at Higher Education in Indonesia”, *Cogent Education*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2302308>.

⁴²M. Vergani et. al., *The Three Ps of Radicalization...*, 854.

cultural values.⁴³ These goals closely align with YLP's program, which combines a philosophical-ideological approach—reinterpreting religious teachings toward peace—with a psychological-religious approach focused on the spiritual recovery and emotional well-being of former terrorists.

In Indonesia's pluralistic society, character education is the integration of moral knowledge, feelings, and actions. This model fosters critical thinking, motivation, ethical obedience, and the practice of values in daily life. YLP applies this through social habituation engaging former terrorism convicts in community activities, peace education, and family economic empowerment. Thus, character education in counter-radicalization builds both normative awareness and a new social habitus, thereby enhancing the public legitimacy of former convicts.⁴⁴

International literature provides strong support for the importance of character education in post-conflict contexts. David and Waghid emphasize that character-based education can facilitate social transformation through the internalization of values such as justice, empathy, and collective responsibility.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Cherney highlights the urgency of community-based rehabilitation in addressing stigma and promoting social acceptance of former extremists.⁴⁶ This aligns with the experience of YLP, where community acceptance is built not only through discourse on moderation but also through the concrete actions of former terrorism convicts in fostering social harmony.

⁴³Lickona, *Educating for Character...*, 8

⁴⁴Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe*, Vienna: OSCE, 2018.

⁴⁵Yusef Waghid dan Nuraan Davids, "Combating Terrorism through an Education for Democratic Iteration", *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2013), 1–21, <https://mail.ajis.org/index.php/ajiss/article/view/304>.

⁴⁶Adrian Cherney, "Evaluating the Impact of Programmes to Counter Violent Extremism: What Are the Options?", *CREST Research* (2025), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/comment/evaluating-the-impact-of-programmes-to-counter-violent-extremism-what-are-the-options/>.

The character education model practiced by YLP is also in line with the *peacebuilding from below* framework, in which local initiatives are positioned at the center of transformation.⁴⁷ This approach provides an alternative to state policies that often employ a top-down approach and prioritize securitization. Through character education, counter-radicalization gains social legitimacy because it engages with the everyday realities of communities, including religious values, local customs, and social ethics. Thus, this strategy not only neutralizes radical ideologies but also fosters a new identity that is moderate, productive, and accepted by the community.

Thus, counter-radicalization through character education can be seen as a hybrid model that bridges the individual, community, and state dimensions. On one hand, it builds the moral and spiritual capacity of former terrorism convicts; on the other, it strengthens social cohesion through the everyday practice of religious moderation. This approach demonstrates that moderation cannot be instilled solely through formal regulations, but must be brought to life through character education that fosters ethical awareness, grounded spirituality, and the courage to live with diversity.

Philosophical-ideological approach

The philosophical-ideological approach in counter-radicalization is a strategy that focuses on reconstructing the mindset of former terrorism convicts through rational, epistemological, and ethical reflection. Philosophy, etymologically derived from *philosophia* (the love of wisdom), is used by the Lingkar Perdamaian Foundation (YLP) as a tool for critical awareness. Philosophy is not positioned as an abstract discourse, but as a practical instrument to encourage former convicts to break free from the dogmatism of violent ideologies and enter a space of rational, open, and inclusive dialogue.

⁴⁷Oliver P. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*, London: Routledge, 2011.

Ideology is seen here not just as a political doctrine, but as a cognitive frame that shapes how individuals view social reality, as Mitja Sardoc describes radical ideology. Deconstructing it requires more than security measures; it demands critical consciousness through a philosophical-ideological framework.⁴⁸ This approach functions both as an epistemological critique of rigid religious views and as an ethical basis for promoting a peaceful, inclusive, and rahmatan lil-'alamin (mercy to all) narrative of Islam.

"Jalan Terang" study

One concrete implementation of this approach is the *Jalan Terang* Study program, a monthly forum that brings together former terrorism convicts, YLP administrators, security officers, religious scholars, academics, and victims of terrorism. This forum serves as a space for collective reflection where the interpretation of jihad, previously understood within a militaristic framework, is deconstructed into a moral, social, and humanitarian struggle.

This forum "brings together religious experiences with the suffering of victims," thereby fostering empathy and opening space for ideological reconstruction. Encountering victims has a significant psychological effect. Moral shock theory explains that emotional experiences—such as witnessing the suffering of others—can trigger a transformation of consciousness and encourage changes in radical attitudes. In the *Jalan Terang* forum, former terrorism convicts not only listen to religious lectures but also directly face the narratives of bomb victims' suffering, forcing them to critically reflect on their old beliefs.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Mitja Sardoc, C. A. J. Coady, Vittorio Bufacchi, Marek Tesar, et al., "Philosophy of Education in a New Key: On Radicalization and Violent Extremism," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 54, No. 6 (January 2021), 585–604, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1861937>.

⁴⁹Fuazi, Interview, Lamongan, July 2024.

Student Friendship Gathering Forum (FSPM)

In addition to forums for former terrorism convicts, YLP also initiated the Student Friendship Gathering Forum (FSPM). This forum serves as a space for intergenerational dialogue, bringing together the children of former convicts with local youth. FSPM has a dual mission: to prevent the transmission of radical ideology between generations, and to foster an inclusive understanding of jihad as a peaceful struggle.

The story of Afif, a child of a former terrorist convict, illustrates the effectiveness of this forum. He admits that FSPM helped him overcome feelings of resentment toward state authorities and understand that the struggle for Islam can be carried out through peaceful means.⁵⁰ Thus, FSPM serves as a space for the transformation of young generations who were previously vulnerable to inheriting trauma and social alienation. This aligns with findings from international studies showing that second-generation former militants often face the risk of reproducing radical identities if not guided toward alternative paths.⁵¹

Dimensions of moderation and inclusive character

YLP's philosophical-ideological approach is closely connected to character education. The philosophical discourse not only deconstructs radical mindsets but also builds an ethical foundation that promotes tolerant and inclusive attitudes. Character education involves three dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.⁵² In YLP's forum, these three dimensions are present simultaneously: former terrorism convicts acquire new knowledge about peaceful Islam, experience empathy through

⁵⁰Afif, Interview, Lamongan, July 2024.

⁵¹John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*, London: Routledge, 2009

⁵²Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, New York: Bantam Books, 1991.

encounters with victims, and are encouraged to apply these values in their social lives.

Thus, the philosophical-ideological approach is not merely discursive but practical. The new narrative of jihad as a peaceful struggle does not stop at the level of discourse but is realized in social actions, such as mutual cooperation, peaceful preaching, and community empowerment. This demonstrates a close connection between cognitive opening (awareness-raising) and behavioral change.⁵³

Findings from YLP are consistent with practices in Europe. EXIT-Deutschland, for example, emphasizes the importance of ideological disengagement through mentorship and critical dialogue. Daniel Koehler asserts that “ideology is not defeated by repression, but by alternative narratives and personal support.”⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the Aarhus Model in Denmark positions multi-stakeholder dialogue as the main strategy. This model involves the police, schools, social services, communities, and families within a single prevention network.⁵⁵

Both models emphasize the significance of dialogue forums as strategies for ideological reconstruction and social reintegration. However, YLP’s uniqueness lies in its local basis and the spirituality of Nusantara Islam. While EXIT-Deutschland focuses on individual exit programs and Aarhus highlights state-community coordination, YLP is rooted in the wisdom of rural Muslim communities. YLP’s forums combine the *pesantren* tradition, the authority of local religious leaders, and the practice of *silaturahmi* (community bonding), making them more easily accepted by

⁵³Peter Enz-Harlass, “‘Peaceful Civil Jihad’ – Saudi Arabia’s Islamic Civil Rights Movement and Its Concept of Jihad”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (2022), 184-200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2021.1926995>.

⁵⁴Daniel Koehler, “Introduction,” in *Understanding Deradicalization*, 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2016, 9.

⁵⁵Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures and De-radicalization Strategies”...

the community.

From the description above, it can be concluded that YLP's philosophical-ideological approach has two main dimensions. The first is cognitive opening, which is the opening of critical awareness towards religious interpretations and national identity. This is achieved through reflective forums that bring together former terrorism convicts with religious scholars, academics, and victims. The second is social reconciliation, which is social reconciliation through multi-stakeholder dialogue and intergenerational meeting spaces.

The strength of this approach lies in its ability to bridge the individual, community, and state dimensions. For the individual, it fosters critical awareness and promotes new moral values. For the community, it creates social legitimacy for former terrorist convicts. For the state, it addresses the weaknesses of securitization approaches that tend to be top-down. Thus, YLP's philosophical-ideological approach demonstrates how peacebuilding from below works concretely: building peace through philosophical reflection, ideological reconstruction, and grounded religious moderation.

Psychological-religious approach

The psychological-religious approach emphasizes the importance of mental and emotional dimensions in the transformation process of former terrorism convicts. The perspective of the psychology of religion asserts that religious behavior never occurs in a vacuum but is the result of a dynamic interaction between internal (psychological) factors and external (social environment) factors.⁵⁶ Therefore, the counter-radicalization process is not sufficient merely by changing thought patterns, but must also address the affective and emotional realms. Humanistic and behavioristic psychology

⁵⁶Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*, New York: Guilford Press, 1997.

models are relevant here because both emphasize that behavioral change can occur through new, repeated, and meaningful social learning experiences.⁵⁷

The Lingkar Perdamaian Foundation (YLP) implements this approach through empathetic and relational programs, such as visits to correctional facilities, visits to former convicts or members who are ill, and regular meetings among members. These activities aim to strengthen emotional bonds, reduce stress, and foster social solidarity. These activities are not only expressions of care but also counter-radicalization instruments that gradually internalize values of compassion, empathy, and religious moderation in the daily lives of former convicts.⁵⁸

A concrete example can be seen in visits to Porong Correctional Facility. The convicts who are still serving their sentences feel moral and emotional support from the YLP community, which contrasts with the social stigma they typically face. This collective presence fosters a sense of acceptance, reduces anxiety, and nurtures motivation to change.⁵⁹ Similarly, visits to sick members strengthen the sense of humanity and prevent the possibility of them from returning to old networks due to feelings of neglect.

In addition, regular activities such as *moderation camping* offer an integration of spiritual reflection and social engagement. These activities combine sports, communal prayers, group discussions, and simple recreational activities that foster a sense of togetherness. This combination strengthens emotional bonds while guiding behavior toward moderation.

⁵⁷Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, New York: Harper & Row, 1954; E. Scott Geller, "Seven Life Lessons From Humanistic Behaviorism: How to Bring the Best Out of Yourself and Others", *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, Vol.35, No. 1-2 (2015), 151-170.

⁵⁸Ali Fauzi, *Edukasi Moderasi Beragama bagi para Mantan Narapidana Teroris (Napiter): Studi Fenomenologi pada Yayasan Lingkar Perdamaian (YLP) di Desa Tenggulun Kecamatan Solokuro Kabupaten Lamongan*, doctoral Dissertation, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, 2023).

⁵⁹Grant Duwe & Byron R. Johnson, "The Effects of Prison Visits From Community Volunteers on Offender Recidivism", *The Prison Journal*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (2016), 279-303.

This aligns with the findings of Post, Sprinzak, and Denny, who emphasize that positive interpersonal relationships can serve as a crucial catalyst in the process of deradicalization and disengagement.⁶⁰

The effectiveness of YLP's psychological-religious approach is also supported by international comparative studies. Research in Nigeria shows that psychosocial and community-based interventions are more effective in rehabilitating former Boko Haram militants compared to repressive state securitization strategies.⁶¹ Similarly, Cherney and Belton emphasize that reintegration, focusing on psychological well-being and social support, is far more sustainable than relying solely on legal enforcement.⁶² These findings reinforce the thesis that community-based psychosocial support can build individual resilience against extremist narratives.

The religious dimension in this approach is also very important. Communal prayers, thematic religious studies, and spiritual reflection not only function as religious rituals but also serve as means of emotional healing and purification of the meaning of faith. The concept of religious coping affirms that religion can be a psychological healing mechanism in facing trauma and crisis.⁶³ In the context of YLP, the integration of spirituality and psychology is key to building resilience in former terrorism convicts, especially against social pressure and the potential relapse into extremist narratives.

⁶⁰Jerrold M. Post, Ehud Sprinzak, dan Laurita M. Denny, "The Terrorists in Their Own Words: Interviews with 35 Incarcerated Middle Eastern Terrorists", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2003), 171–184.

⁶¹Daniel E. Agbiboa, "Peace at Daggers Drawn? Boko Haram and the State of Emergency in Nigeria", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2013), 41–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.853602>.

⁶²Adrian Cherney and Emma Belton, "Evaluating Case-Managed Approaches to Counter Radicalization and Violent Extremism: An Example of the Proactive Integrated Support Model (PRISM) Intervention", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 44, No. 8 (2019), 625–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1577016>.

⁶³Edward B. Davis, Everett L. Worthington Jr., Sarah A. Schnitker, and Barbara L. Fredrickson, eds., *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, Cham: Springer, 2021.

Contemporary studies also support the integration of psychological and religious dimensions in counter-radicalization. Vergani et al., in a cross-country study, emphasize that personal and emotional factors are often the main drivers of the successful transformation of individuals from extremists to moderate citizens.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, research by Yeung shows that community-based programs combining psychological support with faith-based mentoring are more effective in preventing ideological relapse.⁶⁵

Thus, YLP's psychological-religious approach represents a form of peacebuilding from below that connects ideological transformation with psychological support to produce sustainable change. It asserts that moderation is not enough to be taught as an abstract idea but must be experienced as a process of emotional healing, social recovery, and spiritual renewal. At this point, it becomes clear that counter-radicalization involving the heart, mind, and collective experience simultaneously can be a more holistic and enduring strategy.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight that character education serves as the central pillar in counter-radicalization. This effort does not merely aim at changing the behavior of former terrorism convicts but also shifts their ideological orientation from exclusive radicalism toward inclusive moderation. For the Institute for Peace Circle (YLP), deradicalization cannot rely solely on state securitization; instead, it requires a continuous educational process that touches moral, affective, and social dimensions.

In line with Thomas Lickona's ideas, character education is understood as a deliberate effort to help individuals comprehend, care about, and

⁶⁴Vergani, *The Three Ps of Radicalization...*, 854

⁶⁵John W. K. Yeung, "Faith-Based Intervention, Change of Religiosity, and Abstinence of Substance Addicts", *Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2022), 46–56, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1516-4446-2020-1576>.

practice ethical values in daily life. Within this framework, YLP positions character education as a dual-function instrument: liberating individuals from ignorance and poverty, while reintegrating them productively into society. Programs are designed to integrate moral knowing, moral feelings, and moral actions, thereby fostering new behaviors that are ethical, tolerant, and socially beneficial.

YLP applies two main approaches. The first is a philosophical-ideological approach aiming to reconstruct the meaning of jihad. From an initially militaristic interpretation, jihad is reframed as an effort to build civilization and promote the common good. The Jalan Terang program provides a strategic platform where ex-convicts, religious leaders, academics, security personnel, and even victims of terrorism engage in dialogue. Such encounters cultivate critical awareness, empathy, and challenge the authority of violent ideologies. In addition, the Student Friendship Gathering Forum (FSPM) provides a space for young people to internalize moderation values and break the intergenerational cycle of vengeance.

The second is a psychological-religious approach, which emphasizes emotional and spiritual reinforcement through direct experiences and community support. Activities such as prison visits, accompaniment of sick ex-convicts, and regular gatherings like moderation camps help to build solidarity and function as psychosocial mechanisms to prevent recidivism. These experiences underscore that ideological transformation cannot be separated from emotional support, human solidarity, and social reconstruction.

Conceptually, YLP represents a model of peacebuilding from below, a form of peacebuilding driven by local agency. Rather than treating ex-convicts as passive objects, YLP positions them as active agents of change. This approach proves more credible than top-down, technocratic state strategies. Similar lessons are found in international experiences such as

EXIT-Deutschland in Germany and the Aarhus Model in Denmark.

Therefore, strengthening religious moderation through character education is an effective and contextually relevant model of deradicalization in Indonesia. The integration of philosophical-ideological and psychological-religious approaches has been demonstrated to foster new awareness, enhance behavior, and promote the social reintegration of former convicts. The policy implication is the need for a hybrid architecture in deradicalization efforts: the state maintains its strategic role in regulation, security, and facilitation, while civil society organizations, such as YLP, act as the frontline of cognitive, psychosocial, and cultural transformation.

Finally, YLP's success underscores the importance of a continuum of care—from pre-release to transition and aftercare—with layered success indicators, including non-recidivism, stronger moderation attitudes, economic stability, family reconciliation, and community participation. YLP's practices thus not only contribute to national security but also enrich the global discourse on community-based deradicalization in the Global South.

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