BEYOND IDEOLOGY: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF WOMEN'S DISENGAGEMENT PATHWAYS FROM TRANSNATIONAL TERRORIST NETWORKS IN INDONESIA

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Abstrak

Studi ini menganalisis faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi pelepasan perempuan Indonesia dari jaringan teroris transnasional yang berafiliasi ISIS. Dengan menggunakan Model ABC (Atitudes-Behaviors Corrective) dan teori teori push-pull berbasis gender, studi ini menyajikan studi kasus kualitatif dari tiga mantan simpatisan ISIS melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi tiga jalur disengagement: (1) disengagement relasional-ideologi melalui pasangan dengan pengalaman yang sama; (2) disengagement perilaku melalui pelatihan kejuruan di penjara dan perlakuan manusiawi dari petugas; dan (3) disengagement interpretasi agama melalui akomodasi pragmatis yang diarahkan sendiri. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pelepasan perempuan lebih berorientasi pada relasional dan praktis daripada berakar pada motivasi organisasi atau ideologis, menyoroti bahwa kepergian mereka dari jaringan ini bukan semata-mata didorong oleh ideologi.

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Abstract

This study analyses factors influencing the disengagement of Indonesian women from transnational ISIS-affiliated networks. Utilizing the Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model and gendered push-pull theory, this study presents a qualitative case study of three former ISIS sympathizers through semi-structured interviews. The research identifies three disengagement pathways: (1) relation-ideology disengagement through a partner with shared experiences; (2) behavioral disengagement via vocational training in prison and humane treatment from officers; and (3) religious interpretation disengagement through self-directed pragmatic accommodation. Findings show that women's disengagement is more relationally and practically oriented rather than rooted in organizational or ideological motivations, highlighting that their departure from these networks is not solely ideology-driven.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its territorial expansion between 2014 and 2017 fundamentally transformed global terrorism, mobilizing an unprecedented 40,000-50,000 foreign fighters from over 100 countries (Cook & Vale, 2018; Hegghammer, 2013). This movement included significant numbers of women, who represented approximately 13 percent of foreign fighters, with Southeast Asian women comprising a notable contingent (Saltman & Smith, 2015). In Indonesia, this phenomenon manifested through women's involvement with Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and other ISIS-inspired groups, reflecting broader transnational recruitment patterns observed across Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Unlike historical patterns where women primarily served support roles, contemporary female extremists have engaged in operational planning, recruitment, cross-border facilitation, digital recruitment, and direct violence, challenging traditional assumptions about gender and terrorism (Bloom, 2011; Winterbotham & Pearson, 2021). The transnational dimensions of these networks—characterized by international recruitment, cross-border movement, digital communications transcending national boundaries, and coordinated operations across multiple countries—necessitate international cooperation frameworks that account for gender-specific dimensions.

In Indonesia, this phenomenon manifested through women's involvement in ISIS's inspired organizations such as Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and other radical networks. The 2018 church bombing in Surabaya exemplifies the transformation of women's involvement in terrorism. The incident killed one family member and 13 others, and injured 41 people in the church area (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC)., 2016; Jones, 2021). Meanwhile, in 2014-2019, the Indonesian government recorded that at least 68 women migrated to Syria to join ISIS and hundreds of others supported ISIS's struggle through fundraising, recruitment and the spread of ISIS ideology (Dewi, 2023; Dewi et al., 2026; UN Women, 2022).

However, after ISIS lost control in 2019, researchers shifted their attention from studying the reasons why people join international terrorist networks to studying how people leave these networks. Leaving behind extremist life - known as

disengagement - means stopping violent acts, though beliefs may linger. But most studies about leaving terrorist groups have centered on men, building ideas around shifting beliefs, spiritual relearning, and quitting violent acts (Demant et al., 2008; Horgan, 2009; Hwang, 2017). Horgan (2009) pointed at two kinds of forces: one pushing people away - like frustration with how things are run or falling out of favor - and another drawing them back - such as care for family or wanting better finances. Most researchers relied heavily on this model when studying how men leave extremist groups. But women-focused studies have raised doubts about whether it fits women's paths well (Schmidt, 2022; Winterbotham & Pearson, 2021).

Research on women's reintegration from violent extremism reveals a different set of parameters. Pearson et al. (2020) demonstrated that women reintegrate more often through the family and relationship sphere rather than ideological engagement. Schmidt (2022) found that women are excluded from the programs currently available because they are constructed with a masculine model of agency, rational choice and theological discourse. Bunn et al. (2024) showed that programs for female returnees from ISIS territories that included trauma-

informed approaches, childcare facilities and vocational training in place of ideological re-education were more effective.

In Indonesia, however, women's disengagement has not yet received sufficient research attention. Although Hwang (2017) and Hwang & Schulze (2018) studied Indonesian jihadists entering and leaving terrorist networks, their study sample was mostly male, leaving limited room for gender-specific differences. Suryakusuma (2024), however, challenged the relevant authorities' current course of action, pointing out that the leading anti-terrorism agency in Indonesia, the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT), has developed programs for recovering ex-jihadists that it has developed almost exclusively for male ex-combatants. Yet despite UN Women's 2022 call for Gender-sensitive approaches to addressing terrorism, there is no available data that sheds light on how many Indonesian women have successfully disengaged from extremist groups. There is a lack of thorough research that details exactly what happens when Indonesian women disengage from these groups. What is especially concerning about these women is how the process of disengaging in Indonesia works in stark contrast to what happens to those who came back from Syria, where it seems people lose

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their citizenship and have no place to re-integrate into society within their homeland. This group of women must disengage from their extremist networks without estranging themselves from their neighbors, friends, and community. They might hold the key in a world where global ideological ideologies reign—but only in a place far from their home. What has not been researched in studies on this topic is how this group of Indonesian women who belong to far-flung jihadi networks differ when it comes to disengagement.

This study will fill this gap by examining the experiences of three women who are former ISIS sympathizers who left the international terrorist network. Even though only a few individuals are studied here, detailed examination might reveal patterns in how women leave such environments that current theories overlook. What stands out is how these women's ties to global terrorist beliefs influenced their decisions to act locally. Their journeys offer clues about what future strategies could include when aiming to prevent radicalization across Southeast Asia and beyond.

This study is guided by the following research question: What factors primarily shape the disengagement pathways of Indonesian women from transnational ISIS-affiliated networks? The research provides detailed knowledge about disengagement, which stems from the actual experiences of women who participate in a transnational terrorist network.

ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

To address the research question, this study draws on the concept of disengagement. Disengagement is the renunciation of violent extremist conduct, but it does not require a change in belief. It is different from deradicalization, which is a belief change that rejects the ideological underpinnings of the extremist group. The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model (Khalil et al., 2022) provides the most rigorous conceptualization of disengagement. The Model treats the concepts of attitude (ideological beliefs), behavior (participation in violent extremism), and the relationship between them as conceptually and empirically distinguishable from one another. Crucially, behavior can change without requiring change in attitude: an individual can cease to be engaged in the operations of a terrorist group (stop attending meetings, stop engaging in recruitment or

fundraising) while retaining ideological sympathies with its goals; conversely, an individual can undergo an ideological change of beliefs without disengaging from participation in a terrorist group due to dependency on the group, fear, or the lack of viable alternatives for social integration. This is an empirically established pattern rather than a theoretical expectation, and it has critical implications for how disengagement is expected to be facilitated. Programs that expect ideological change to precede behavioral change will incorrectly handle the disengagement needs of people who disengage via non-ideological routes.

Bjørgo and Horgan's (2009) typology of disengagement mechanisms provides additional conceptual clarity. A typology distinguishes conceptually related yet distinct constructs. The typology distinguishes between push factors and pull factors. Push factors pertain to the processes and conditions within the extremist organization that increase the costs of remaining a member or render membership untenable; pull factors pertain to conditions outside the organization that enhance the appeal of disengagement and reintegration into non-extremist social networks. Examples of push factors include disappointment with the group's leaders or internal conflicts; military defeats; and loss

of trust in the group's tactics or ideology. Examples of pull factors include family reintegration; access to economic opportunities, romance, religious reinterpretation of one's beliefs, and social recognition of one's reformed status.

The typology is especially pertinent to this study because the three informants whose experiences are reported here each manifest a distinct configuration of push and pull factors that are gendered (i.e. structured by gender differences) in ways that are not accounted for by current theories when analyzed using currently available disengagement theory. A woman's disengagement from an extremist organization is structured by factors such as her relationship with her husband, her role as a mother, and her position within gender-segregated social networks; yet disengagement theory, when applied without regard for gender, cannot explain the specific configurations of push and pull factors that are observable in the cases of women like the three informants.

The theory of disengagement has been criticized for its male-centric empirical foundation, which this study addresses. The foundational study of Horgan (2009) as well as the validation studies of the ABC Model, and the majority of subsequent empirical

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studies, rely on male former extremists as their primary research population; this is also true for systematic citation analysis of terrorism studies conducted by Davis et al. (2021), who uncovered androcentricity that extends beyond the focus of this field of study. Schmidt (2022) demonstrates that the design of programs intended to facilitate this process is structured in a way that reflects the androcentricity of its empirical foundation: in particular, programs that use theological debate, credentialed religious authority figures, and rational-choice persuasion assume a model of female disengagement that is consistent with masculine (i.e. agent-centered) conceptions of agency yet ignores the fact that women are embedded in a network of interpersonal relationships. If the primary empirical sources for theories of disengagement involve male former extremists while programs designed to facilitate the process ignore gender differences between men and women, then any claims made for the universality of these theories in relation to women must be viewed as an untested assumption.

The current study addresses this gap by placing the theory on the shoulders of Indonesian women who have disengaged from an ISIS-affiliated transnational terrorist group, and it identifies gender-sensitive mechanisms that have not yet been captured by existing theories.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs qualitative methodology using in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore women's lived experiences of disengagement from transnational terrorist networks. Three female former extremists affiliated with JAD and ISIS-inspired networks participated in this research. Participants were recruited through civil society organizations working on counter-extremism and former extremist networks. Selection criteria included: (1) confirmed previous affiliation with transnational terrorist organizations; (2) behavioural disengagement from extremist activities; (3) voluntary participation; and (4) sufficient time elapsed since disengagement to allow reflection.

The participants represent diverse profiles in terms of education levels, family backgrounds, roles within extremist networks, and disengagement pathways. All three participants had connections to transnational networks with cross-border dimensions, including digital engagement with international extremist content, family

or personal relationships spanning multiple countries, and aspirations or plans for migration to ISIS territories.

Interviews were conducted between October 2023-August 2024 using semi-structured protocols that allowed flexibility to explore emergent themes while maintaining focus on key research questions. Interview topics included pathways into extremism, roles within networks, transnational network connections, turning points toward disengagement, formal and informal interventions experienced, current beliefs and behaviours, and reintegration challenges.

Given the sensitive nature of this research, extensive measures ensured participant safety and ethical research conduct. Informed consent emphasized voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. All identifying information has been removed from reported findings to protect participants while enabling regional policy learning from their experiences.

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, involving familiarization with data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, and defining final themes. Analysis was

iterative, moving between inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-informed) approaches. Gender-sensitive analytical lenses were applied throughout to identify gendered dimensions of disengagement processes.

Although this study is based on three key informants, the depth of their narratives provides micro-sociological insights that are often missed in macro policies that tend to be gender-blind.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Transnational Network and Radicalization Background

All three informants were part of ISIS-inspired transnational social networks, albeit in ways that differ in analytically meaningful ways with regard to the types of disengagement pathways that would later be taken. Informant 1 was part of a highly digitized transnational social network that involved spreading digitized ISIS propaganda in multiple languages, participating in Telegram groups that linked individuals from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, and maintaining digital connections with Indonesian women who had joined ISIS in Syria (Informant 1, 2024). Her radicalization began when she was a migrant worker in Hong Kong and occurred via

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transnational digital networks rather than via in-person interactions.

Informant 2 was part of a kinship-based transnational terrorist network linking Malaysia and the Philippines. Informant 2's extended family has historical ties to militants operating along the cross-border region encompassing Indonesia and the Philippines, reflecting the pattern of transnational family ties that Jones (2021) identifies as characteristic of Southeast Asian jihadist recruitment (Informant 2, 2024). Informant 2's entry into extremist ideology was therefore not primarily via digitized ideological content.

Informant 3 accessed international jihadist ideological discourse via multilingual propaganda materials in Arabic and English when she participated in online discussion groups that included individuals from diverse locations within Southeast Asia. Informant 3 was also in advanced planning stages for travel to Syria when she was arrested (Informant 3, 2023). Her case resembles that of other women who have utilized ISIS's (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2025) geographically diffuse female recruitment strategy that relied on access to ideological materials and community structures that spanned national and linguistic boundaries.

The different forms and intensities of transnational engagement among these three informants are analytically relevant. It demonstrates that there is no single type of connection that can be severed that would facilitate disengagement for all three informants. Instead, each informant required interventions with regard to uniquely meaningful types of transnational connections that had contributed to her radicalization. This is consistent with Davis et al. (2021) assertion that most mainstream models overlook the diversity of structural pathways by which women become engaged in violent extremism.

All three cases demonstrate how radicalization operates across international borders. The first informant joined Telegram groups that linked Southeast Asia to Europe and the Middle East to experience digital radicalization patterns that Peresin and Cervone (2015) studied in Europe but within Southeast Asian parameters. The second informant's family connections between Malaysia and the Philippines demonstrate Jemaah Islamiyah's regional network structure, which Jones (2021) studied, but she also shows how family networks drive Southeast Asian extremist recruitment differently than other regional groups. The

third informant showed how she accessed jihadi content in multiple languages while joining online study groups that spanned different regions to experience ISIS's worldwide female recruitment effort, which Bigio and Vogelstein (2025) studied.

These transnational aspects played a role in their radicalization process through exposure to global extremist narratives, recognition from international extremist communities, and a desire to engage in international jihad. These aspects also influenced the process of disengagement, which requires interventions that consider international network connections.

Disengagement Pathways

Based on the analysis of the three informants, distinct configurations of disengagement can be identified using the ABC Model of Khalil et al. (2022) and the push-pull typology of Bjørgo and Horgan (2009). The ABC Model conceptualizes and operationalizes attitudes (ideological beliefs), behaviors (participation in violent extremism), and the relationship between the two. Applying this model to the three cases identifies three distinct pathways. The following sub-sections examine each pathway in turn.

Pathway 1: Relational-Ideological Disengagement (Informant 1)

Informant 1 underwent the most complete disengagement of all the informants, according to the ABC Model, which conceptualizes and operationalizes changes to both the attitude and behavior dimensions of her engagement. The primary mechanism that guided her disengagement was relational rather than institutional. Her trusted peers in her former transnational network provided her with alternative religious interpretations that countered ISIS's ideological stance, thereby allowing her to successfully re-integrate into her community.

In terms of the push-pull typology, her disengagement is characterized by a high degree of reliance on pull factors, which in this case was her emotional bond with her husband. He was a former member with international network experience, thus providing an effective relational anchor for her re-integration back into a non-violent extremist community. Informant 1 described her experience:

> "So when I was released, I was escorted home by Densus, also by the Semarang Regional Police. It turned out there was a team of journalists there, one of whom, Mr. Eka, left his phone number for me in case I wanted to be interviewed or something. I contacted Mr. Eka for about two months because I thought he knew about this terrorist

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convict affair. Eventually, I got to know them. I got the phone number of Ivan, who was already a member of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), who was with me at the headquarters. That's where I argued with them because they were members of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). They said, "Well, why not NKRI?" They gave me explanations and books that discussed, if you look at ISIS, there are also many fatal mistakes, such as being quick to label others as infidels and the like. The last time I met my current husband, that's when we had a discussion, and finally I became a member of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), although the discussion was intense via WhatsApp. It was more because of those books. They were told, and if you can't read Arabic, they were told the meaning. That's where we discussed whether our movement was indeed *khawarij* in the past. It's mostly the one who is now my husband who gives enlightenment." (Informant 1, 2024).

According to informant 1 the beloved partner, her husband, who shared her religious principles but rejected extremist violence, offered emotional support and demonstrated practical alternative Islamic practices (Informant 1, 2024). The emotional attachment and mutual trust in this relationship led to a gradual questioning of the extremist narrative without eliciting a defensive reaction .

This path contradicts the conventional wisdom that official religious authorities are the most relevant actors in ideological change. Instead, trusted partners with experience in international networks and maintaining the authenticity of religious teachings have proven more persuasive. Key elements include sincerity in interactions rather than authoritative lectures, maintaining religious identity while rejecting violence, empathy, and gradual introduction to alternative views. The decision to sever ties with international networks requires more than simply cutting off access to radical content. New relationships with trusted religious authorities must be able to counter popular extremist narratives on a global scale.

The effectiveness of this pathway was conditional on the absence of institutional coercion. Informant 1 explicitly stated that she would never have responded to official religious counseling, which was condescending and forced upon her (Informant 1, 2024). This finding supports Schmidt's (2022) recent claim that programs based on hierarchically structured religious authority reproduce masculine models of agency that are not effective for women who have become ideologically entrenched in violent extremist groups through relational networks rather than institutional networks.

The legitimacy needed to contest transnational jihadist claims was not drawn from state-approved religious figures, but rather from credentialed insiders—former members of the same international network who remained religiously valid despite their rejection of violence.

Pathway 2: Behavioral Disengagement through Practical Integration (Informant 2)

Informant 2, disengaged through a combination of skills-based training, and social integration during incarceration. The prison programs offering practical vocational training in traditionally feminine domains (sewing, cooking, beauty class), provided both emotional grounding and economic alternatives. For informant 2, the process of swearing allegiance back to the Republic of Indonesia took a long time because she was still upset with the security forces (Informant 2, 2024)

Informant 2 represents a case study example of an informant who only underwent behavioral disengagement prior to attitudinal re-integration, thus aligning with the ABC Model's conceptualization of behavioral disengagement occurring prior to an informant's re-integration into non-violent extremist networks.

In contrast to the case of Informant 1, however, the mechanisms that guided Informant 2's disengagement were not attitudinal in nature, according to the push-pull typology for violent extremist disengagement. Her case study is characterized predominantly by pull factors pertaining to social integration (re-establishment of family ties) and pragmatic integration (gaining vocational skills).

Informant 2 explained how she re-integrated back into NKRI:

> "Actually, when I pledged to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), I felt a bit funny. Going back to the NKRI, who am I? So why wouldn't I pledge it? My NKRI process took a while because I was still angry about what happened to my uncle. My uncle was shot dead. Why did two lives have to be taken? If they had said from the start, we had a target for our assignment, then so be it. But I really disliked the word defense, oh, he resisted, so we shot him. I repeatedly said, if someone resists, I shoot his leg. That's what I argued with them about. Why did it have to be my uncle who was taken, my father's replacement. Why did it have to be my cousin's pregnant husband? If someone said terrorists were evil, I wanted to ask them back. When I think back to my past events, was it me or you who was inhumane? But I thought, well, maybe they have their own work standards. So I brought it back to myself. I couldn't be angry with their rules and understanding. So, I let it go, I let it go, and just live life with a take-it-easy

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attitude. From the beginning of the trial until all my friends had already joined the Republic of Indonesia, they finally held a dialogue. Well, after the dialogue, I signed it, and it was over (Informant 2, 2024).

But social environments during incarceration exposed her to non-extremist perspectives. Informant 2 told that while in prison, she received skills training, including cooking, sewing, embroidery, and even beauty salon training. She attended the embroidery training and realized she met good people. She also felt fortunate to have a very kind foster mother in prison. The closeness with her foster mother opened her heart. Moreover, informant 3 was able to share stories about her longing for her children. The conducive atmosphere in prison encouraged her to abandon radical thinking (Informant 2, 2024).

This social integration broke the echo chamber effect of isolation with other extremists. Humane treatment by prison authorities who respected her humanity while disapproving of her actions created cognitive dissonance with extremist narratives about state oppression. The effectiveness of this pathway depended on practical skills training for women and marketable in local economy, social integration with non-extremist individuals, humane institutional treatment, and economic alternatives enabling independence from extremist networks.

The pathway provides the strongest evidence for a central insight of the ABC Model: that change can occur in either or both of the behavioral and attitudinal dimensions without regard to the timing or sequence of the events. Informant 2's case study corresponds to Horgan's (2009) empirical observation of the separation between disengagement and deradicalization, and informs the theoretical insight that programs conditioned on the re-integration of individuals who demand changes in the ideology of their groups as a precondition on their reintegration will systematically fail those individuals for whom the reasons for their disengagement are pragmatic as opposed than theological.

The humane treatment of her (despite her ongoing grievances against the security forces), which resulted in a sufficient amount of cognitive dissonance for her to treat the extremist narrative about the state as no longer tenable is consistent with the finding of Altier et al. (2014), regarding the human re-integration process in that such re-integration only occurs after the individual has become disillusionized with group

dynamics (and not always in a linear fashion to the group's terrorist activities), and the fact that the vocational training that was provided to her corresponds to one of the elements that, according to Fink and Zeiger (2016), are necessary yet insufficiently provided by gender-sensitive reintegration programming according to systematic observations.

Pathway 3: Self-Determined Pragmatic Accommodation (Informant 3)

Informant 3, a highly educated woman with a deep engagement with the intellectual content of transnational jihad, chose to withdraw through practical accommodation driven by self-determination rather than complete ideological transformation. She abandoned radical thinking through lengthy discussions with a religious teacher, a former supporter of Daulah. She met him after being released from Malang Prison. The teacher had abandoned radical pro-ISIS thinking in 2019 and stated that he had changed. Through intensive discussions, Informant 3 finally opened up to abandoning radical thinking:

> "When I was in prison, I once asked for help to come to a religious teacher who could open my mind, until when I came home, they (BNPT) were still like that, as time went by I became like this because I met a wise person who could change my thinking, after that, thank

God, I became open. He explained why the caliphate collapsed to such a small area, until his children had to be in refugee camps. It turned out that the caliph Abu Bakr had misused policies, was also betrayed by his trusted people so that he died from that, I was opened. Oh, it turns out there are many excessive takfir (thoughts) from the caliphate".(Informant 3, 2023)

Informant 3 explained that after her thinking was opened she no longer wanted to communicate with people in the terrorist network:

> "My enthusiasm had faded, and I didn't want to be around people like that anymore. I only knew them, but I was arrested. I didn't want to have any contact with those people anymore. Sorry, I don't want to have anything to do with them anymore. It also faded because I wanted to communicate in detail with the person who explained the irregularities in Daulah. Finally, because I could accept it equally, not those who said murder, I saw it as wise." (Informant 3, 2023)

This pathway challenges the conventional assumption that disengagement requires a complete deradicalization process. Instead, it demonstrates that a highly educated woman with strong self-determination is able to separate beliefs and actions, deciding to withdraw from extremism through a cost-benefit calculation. Crucial elements include considering the costs of her involvement, pursuing

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educational and professional goals that are incompatible with the extremist lifestyle, and the ability to separate ideology and behaviour.

The case of Informant 3 represents the most conceptually challenging case of the three, as she has pragmatically (but not ideologically) disengaged from any involvement in extremist activities. In terms of the components of the ABC Model, her disengagement thus occurred without any change in her sympathetic attitude towards extremist ideologies; thus her disengagement is only partially successful (and thus not a failure) on the behavioral dimension while it is fully complete with respect to the attitudinal dimension. Such results would pose a problem to the theoretical expectations of previous researchers into extremist ideologies and their disengagement processes, her case study represents a critical validation of the model's basic conceptual assumption that the concepts of attitude and behavior are empirically separable.

In contrast to the other two case studies of this study, which resulted in disengagement that was a result of relational factors, Informant 3's disengagement was based upon a cost-benefit analysis that was relevant to her individual circumstances of

this highly-educated individual who was pragmatically focused on her future professional and educational goals. Hence, in contrast to the relational factors that operated as pull-factors in the disengagement of Informants 1 and 2 (respectively), the internal factors that informed her disengagement are thus pragmatically rather than relationally-focused (i.e. self-determination).

This case study counter to Neumann's (Neumann, 2015) expectations for successful re-integration into society via programs (such as the Saudi Arabia rehabilitation program) that place an emphasis upon the re-integration's reliance on the (theoretical) rejection of an extremist ideology on the part of those who undergo them, yet it corresponds with other case study observations concerning foreign fighters who have returned to their home countries and countries of origin, such as those presented in Speckhard and Yayla's (2020; 2015) research regarding returnee fighters from Syria and Iraq.

Gendered Push-Pull Mechanisms

The cross-case analysis of the three pathways to disengagement reveals that the gendered patterns of the push and pull factors that structure these women's disengagement

have not been adequately theorized in current disengagement literature. Following Schmidt (2022) and Winterbotham and Pearson (2021), this study finds that the push-pull typology of Bjørgo and Horgan (2009) requires gender-sensitive elaboration to account for the specific configurations seen in the three cases.

With respect to pull factors, all three informants showed a preference for social and pragmatic re-integration over the re-integration offered by ideological or institutional re-engagement. Informant 1 was re-engaged in a relationship with an intimate partner who did not object to her religious identity and who did object to its extremist manifestation. Informant 2 re-engaged with her community through a skill that gave her practical independence from extremist networks and allowed her to re-integrate into a social setting that provided her with alternative community ties. Informant 3 showed rational agency towards re-engagement when she expressed the wish to be re-integrated into a life that was consistent with her educational aspirations. In each of these cases, however, the operative pull factor was thus gendered; each informant required to re-establish herself in a way that respected her identity as a woman.

On the side of push factors, what is notable in the three cases is the absence of a factor: no informant cited disillusionization with the group's organizational functioning, or with its ideological stance or military engagements as a factor in her decision to disengage. The gendered difference between these findings and those found in the male-centric literature on disengagement (Demant et al., 2008; Horgan, 2009) is therefore relevant: women's extremist engagements were relational and identity-based, and their disengagement was accordingly structured along these lines rather than according to organizational functioning. This finding follows Gentry's (2020) and Ortbals and Poloni-Staudinger's (2013) feminist literature on violence and deradicalization, which emphasizes that women's violence and women's deradicalization follow relational rather than individual pathways.

A second finding that can be described as gendered relates to the role of the prison environment. The experiences of all three informants confirmed a pattern: that institutional isolation from other extremist women reinforced extremist bonds while interaction with diverse social groups exposed informants to ideologies other than their own. This finding follows Peresin and Cervone (2015) when they studied online

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radicalization; enclosure with like-minded individuals reinforces radicalization, while exposure to other views counters it. Yet it also points to a programmatic failure that literature on women's deradicalization has yet to address: the architecture of incarceration may itself be a gendered obstacle to deradicalization if it prevents women from reconnecting with the networks that support their disengagement.

The Failure of Formal Deradicalization Program

All three informants reported that no value was derived from participation in formal deradicalization programs (such as BNPT evaluations and standardized religious counseling), and in some cases it had a negative impact. This finding is in line with the existing comparative literature: De Leede et al. (2017), Schmidt (2022), and Bunn et al. (2024) all document how programs structured around male-normative concepts of agency, rational-choice behavior, and theological re-education systematically underserve women. The failure manifests in several ways.

First, the authority model that formal programs rely upon is at variance with the models of relational legitimacy that apply to the women in question. The informants expected peers with insider knowledge of transnational jihadist networks to offer credible alternative interpretations; they did not expect teachers with recognized religious expertise to provide correct theological instruction. The requirement for peer-level credibility was not met through the interventions of authorized religious counselors who presented themselves as hierarchical authorities on correct theological knowledge. This finding builds on Schmidt's (2022) critique of androcentric deradicalization design, transplanted to the transnational context: not only do programs misrecognize models of male agency (and fail to account for the role of women as agents of change), they also assume that legitimacy accrues in a vertical (institutional) rather than horizontal (network) manner.

Second, formal programs failed to account for the role of structural factors that impede the reintegration of the informants in their roles as women: the stigmatization and exclusion from social networks, exclusion from the labor market, lack of access to affordable housing, and the compounding effect of their status as terrorism suspects alongside their status as mothers/wives. The structural factors listed above represent the

most important hurdles to sustained disengagement. This finding is in line with the service delivery challenges identified by Khalil et al. (2022): returnees face obstacles in accessing services, restrictions on travel documents, and social stigma. The three informants' experiences confirm this but add a gender specificity; these obstacles were not merely bureaucratic hurdles but threats to the relational identities through which their disengagement was being enacted.

Third, the pragmatic accommodation approach adopted by Informant 3 raises the question of which indicators of deradicalization should be regarded as valid in assessing the effectiveness of formal deradicalization programs. The conceptual contribution of the ABC Model is that behavioral disengagement from violent extremism can be regarded as a legitimate outcome of deradicalization processes in their own right (irrespective of any changes to informants' attitudes towards violent extremism).

The current policy framework for deradicalization programs in Indonesia (based on the ABC Model) therefore has all the ingredients of a success story from a security perspective: Informant 3 has successfully disengaged from violent extremism. Yet unless evaluation criteria are reallocated from ideological expectations to behavioral outcomes, all existing programs will continue to treat every case of incomplete deradicalization as a program failure, thus creating a perverse incentive structure that perpetuates the detention/surveillance of individuals who have already functionally disengaged.

CONCLUSION

The empirical evidence gathered from three female former ISIS sympathizers reveals that disengagement is shaped not by ideological disillusionment or organizational dynamics—the factors that predominate in male-centered disengagement literature—but by relational bonds, practical economic integration, and self-determined identity negotiation. The three cases demonstrate empirically what the model posits theoretically: that attitudinal change and behavioral disengagement are separable processes that need not occur in sequence. Each pathway is valid as a disengagement outcome, and none conforms to the ideological-transformation-first model that dominates formal deradicalization programs in Indonesia and across the region.

The study's findings also carry direct implications for how formal deradicalization programs are evaluated. The BNPT visits and

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standardized religious counseling failed to contribute to disengagement of the three women and in some cases generated resistance. The consistent failure of these programs is not incidental but structural: they are premised on a hierarchical authority model, a rational-choice persuasion approach, and an ideological-transformation success metric that are each misaligned with the relational, practical, and identity-based dynamics through which these women actually disengaged.

The transnational character of all three informants' radicalization nonetheless underscores a broader policy implication: effective disengagement support for women embedded in transnational networks cannot be premised solely on ideological intervention. The same cross-border connections that sustained radicalization must be counterweighted by equally relational disengagement resources—peer credibility, kinship support, and economic opportunity—that are currently absent from Indonesia's national counter-terrorism architecture. Addressing this gap requires Indonesia to move beyond standardized programming toward context-sensitive approaches that recognize the transnational dimensions of women's extremist involvement as a structural feature demanding structural responses.

This study carries limitations that future research should address. The purposive sample of three informants, while enabling the depth of analysis required to map disengagement mechanisms through the ABC Model, does not permit statistical generalization. The pathways identified here—relational-ideological disengagement, behavioral disengagement through practical integration, and self-determined pragmatic accommodation—should be treated as analytically grounded propositions to be tested against larger and more diverse samples, including women who attempted to disengage but were drawn back into extremist networks. Future research should also examine whether the gendered push-pull configuration identified here holds across different national contexts within Southeast Asia, and whether the transnational dimensions of radicalization systematically predict the type of disengagement pathway women follow.

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