

# Extremist Marriage: The Role of ISIS Women in Indonesia

A Seminar on Frontiers of Gender Studies in Asia with Solahudin, Director of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, Indonesia

On October 3, 2023, CSEAS held the following Special Seminar with Solahudin, currently a visiting research fellow at CSEAS. Solahudin has conducted research on jihadi movements in Indonesia for decades and is the author of *The Roots of Terrorism in Indonesia* (Cornell University Press, 2013). Comments were provided by Masako Ishii, a professor at Rikkyo University who has conducted research on Muslim society in the Philippines focusing on gender, peace process, and migration. An animated question and answer period was moderated by [Chika Obiya](#), the Chair of the CSEAS Gender Equality Promotion Committee.

## INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In opening the seminar, Professor Obiya noted that generally, when we think about ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), or extremists, or terrorists, we can hardly imagine the women supporters, who are married and have a family life. Solahudin's unique data provides us a window into the reality of ISIS women in Indonesia—something that is perhaps beyond our imagination. Solahudin noted that this was his first time speaking at a gender seminar and although gender issues are not his expertise, his research on terrorism intersects with gender studies.

The presentation is based on analysis of data taken from three sources. The first source is interviews with terrorist prisoners and former ISIS activists, including men whose wives divorced them. A total of 9 women and more than 20 men were interviewed. The socioeconomic status of ISIS members is comparable to the Indonesian population in general. Therefore, some interviewees had a low education level, but some had a very high level of education. This is also true for their economic background. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and in person. Before conducting interviews with inmates, Solahudin received a green light from law enforcement authorities guaranteeing the safety of the interviewees. The second data source is an analysis of

conversations in ISIS social media groups. The third source is profiles of suspected female terrorists collected from court data. Academic sources on this topic are extremely rare and Solahudin noted that he has not been able to find any journal or book that discusses the role of ISIS women in Indonesia.

## **PRESENTATION**

### ***ISIS women versus Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) women in Indonesia: A stark contrast***

Women in extremist groups are often portrayed as inferior to men. This portrayal is not completely wrong, if we consider the status of women within Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the terrorist organization in Indonesia that was responsible for the 2002 Bali bombing. For example, the majority of JI women cannot decide who they will marry because JI imposes restrictions on women that prohibit them from interacting with men. This makes it impossible to directly meet a potential husband, therefore most women have an arranged marriage. The main role of JI women is to take care of their family and obey their husband (obeying one's husband is considered the way for women to enter paradise). JI women cannot ask for a divorce because women who do so are considered hypocrites. JI also prohibits women from waging jihad. When asked why this is so, a JI leader explained: "because women are less physically strong, they are mentally unstable, and they tend to rely on feelings rather than logic."

The role of women in ISIS, however, is much broader, and it is evolving. Women in ISIS are now allowed to do things that were previously monopolized by men. For example, ISIS allows women to carry out jihad, to choose their own husbands, to get married without parental guardians, and to divorce their husbands. ISIS women are relatively free to express their opinions and even to challenge men's opinions. Today there are also many ISIS women who work to generate income. From these observations, we may say that ISIS women have a status that is superior to women in JI or other extremist groups. What, then, are the factors that elevate ISIS women?

### ***The power of divorce and use of the Takfiri doctrine for ISIS women***

I have documented approximately 30 cases of ISIS women who have divorced their husbands since 2018, with some women remarrying even before their first husband agreed to divorce. I will illustrate this phenomenon with the story of one woman. In 2022, Wahyu Mega filed to divorce her husband. Her husband, Abu Umar, was a former ISIS leader in east Java. He was arrested in 2018 for his involvement in the Surabaya bombing and is now in prison. Why did his wife file to divorce him? When Abu Umar joined a deradicalization program inside the prison, she considered that he had committed idolatry, and he was therefore no longer Muslim. This automatically annulled their marriage, because, according to Wahyu Mega, Muslim women are only for Muslim men. She judged that her husband was no longer worthy of being her partner and without feeling guilty, she remarried his former subordinate before he agreed to divorce. A few months after the divorce, Wahyu Mega was arrested for stealing items from a convenience store in Solo, central Java. During interrogation, she described her action as *fa'i*, or waging jihad to take over the property of infidels.

Here, the Takfiri doctrine, which is used to declare another Muslim an infidel, is a key ideological factor elevating the status of ISIS women. The Takfiri doctrine originated from the Tawhid Hakimiyyah ideology of ISIS. The principle of this ideology is that God (Allah) is the law maker and has created sharia law. A government that does not implement sharia law is an apostate and therefore whoever obeys this government is an infidel.

On the one hand, this doctrine increases the moral superiority of ISIS supporters, including women like Wahyu Mega. On the other hand, this doctrine dehumanizes those who are labelled as infidels, because, according to ISIS teaching, the blood and the property of infidels are not to be protected. This allows Wahyu Mega to take the property of infidels and justifies ISIS's brutal attacks as legitimate. This excessive superiority is one of the factors that drives ISIS to commit brutal violence against others without feeling guilty; it is also used by ISIS women to elevate their status. The question becomes, is the superiority of ISIS women only because of ideological factors, or are there other non-ideological factors involved?

### ***Information technology: Its impact on women's mobility and income generation***

Like other extremist organizations, ISIS imposes restrictions on women's mobility and interactions. However, thanks to cheap Chinese mobile phones, cheap Indonesian internet quotas, and various free social media apps, communication has become easy and affordable. The development of information technology, and social media in particular, has allowed ISIS women to overcome mobility restrictions because they are *physical* restrictions. ISIS women can communicate with men as long as they do not meet face to face. Males and females can join the same social media discussion groups, where women can express their own opinion and are able to challenge male opinions. Women can criticize men when their argument is rejected, and even direct accusations of heresy or idolatry at men.

Another consequence of social media is that it enables ISIS women to generate money, because they can work without having to leave the home. ISIS women are starting to actively do business online from home through social media and various marketplaces. The impact: Women have more freedom to express their own opinions and are economically more independent because they can generate their own income. This increases their bargaining position vis-à-vis their husbands.

### ***Indonesia's security context: The impact of the pre-emptive strike policy on ISIS women***

Following the 2018 Surabaya bombing, Indonesia was due to host several important events: the 2018 Asian games, the 2018 IMF meeting in Bali, and the 2019 national election. To prevent terror during these events, the Indonesian police implemented a new pre-emptive strike strategy using a new, more repressive anti-terrorism law that criminalized activities not considered crimes under the previous law. As a result of this policy, from 2018-2022, more than 1,500 suspected terrorists were arrested, approximately 1,200 of whom were affiliated with ISIS. This immediately devastated ISIS families, who lost their husbands. As the new head of the

ISIS family, women had to earn money and they had to ensure that their family remains committed to ISIS ideology. Thus, women gained new roles both as primary supporters and guardians of ISIS ideology. To support their families, more ISIS women began actively working to generate income. Today they are not only working online, but also offline, as street vendors for example.

***The significance of ISIS charity organizations: Economic support reinforces ideological commitment***

Meanwhile, some ISIS women formed active charity organizations to raise funds to help ISIS families with husbands in prison. These were set up like any other Islamic charity organization, making it difficult for people to know whether they belong to ISIS or another Muslim organization. This smart initiative relies on the great potential of public funds in Indonesia. According to the World Giving Index, Indonesia is one of the most generous countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> ISIS is very creative and more sophisticated than JI in using its charity organizations to conduct fundraising and has been relatively successful in raising funds.

Many of the ISIS charity organizations are controlled by women. Apart from providing allowances to ISIS families, they also build small ISIS boarding schools, or *pesantren*, provide scholarships to ISIS children (particularly those whose fathers are in prison), provide health services, and provide small business funds to ISIS families and former terrorist inmates.

With such expansive economic support, many ISIS families become dependent on these organizations as the only support system they have. As ISIS members often cut ties with their relatives and extended family, considering them infidels, they have no alternative means of support. ISIS uses this dependency to control the ideological commitment of ISIS prisoners and their families. Two instruments are used. First, economic and educational assistance is withdrawn from an ISIS family if the husband participates in any deradicalization program.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-research/world-giving-index-2023.pdf?sfvrsn=44dd5447\\_2](https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-research/world-giving-index-2023.pdf?sfvrsn=44dd5447_2)

Second, ISIS will ask the wife of a terrorist convict to file for divorce if her husband joins a deradicalization program. In addition, the charity organization will also help the wife who files for divorce to find a new husband. These tactics have been extremely successful: ISIS prisoners have refused to take part in deradicalization programs because they are afraid of being divorced by their wives and of losing economic support.

### ***Polygyny: Expanding the ISIS family for today and for the future***

Another factor facilitating the expanded role of women is polygyny. The practice of polygyny is widespread among ISIS families, and it is normal for ISIS women to deliberately offer their husbands new wives. For example, upon release, a former terrorist convict may receive a new wife as a gift from his first wife for courageously refusing the deradicalization program in prison. Most ISIS women are willing to share their husbands for three reasons. First, they believe that Islam allows men to have more than one wife. Second, they believe that there are more women than men in the population. Third, the more ISIS women marry, the more children will be born, which guarantees future generations of ISIS members.

While the practice of polygyny degrades women, it also facilitates the expansion of women's roles. How? With more wives, ISIS families have more members to feed. This makes it difficult for many ISIS husbands to provide for their families and in the end, they allow their wives to work.

### ***Conclusion***

The expansion of ISIS women's role and elevation of their status is not because ISIS promotes gender equity, but because of the "unintended consequences" of its ideology and the social-security dynamic in Indonesia. As a terrorist organization, ISIS is not as rigid as it is portrayed in the media. To a certain extent, ISIS is quite flexible in adapting to changing social and security contexts. For example, after ISIS lost significant territory in Syria and Iraq in 2016, the organization gave women permission to wage jihad by changing the legal status of jihad from *Fardh kifayah*, an obligation of community, to *Fardh al-ayn*, an obligation of an individual.

ISIS women's roles as guardians of ideology and income generators give them a greater bargaining position vis-à-vis their husbands. The role of ISIS women as guardians of ideology in the ISIS family makes deradicalization efforts in Indonesia even more challenging. In the past, if male terrorist convicts were deradicalized, their families were automatically also deradicalized, because most wives would obey their husbands. This model does not apply to ISIS terrorist prisoners. Targeting both husbands and wives still does not guarantee success for deradicalization programs, as ISIS families are highly dependent on the various ISIS charities that support them. In other words, some ISIS families remain radical because they do not want to lose economic support from ISIS charitable organizations.

Ultimately, the expansion of the role of ISIS women creates a moral dilemma. On the one hand, we support women gaining rights, but on the other hand, this also increases the threat of terrorism in Indonesia, which no longer comes only from men, but also from women.

## **COMMENTARY**

In opening her comments, Professor Masako Ishii noted her shock with the so-called Marawi Siege of 2017, in which the ISIS-affiliated group IS Ranao (better known as the Maute Group), fought against the Armed Forces of the Philippines, devastating the local area. She praised Solahudin's research for providing a rare look at the inner views of ISIS women.

### ***The importance of local contexts***

ISIS denies the existing international order as well as local social orders and norms. Therefore, one question in understanding the emergence of the ISIS phenomenon in Southeast Asia, which is outside of the Middle East, has been how ISIS, which emerged *in situ*, or locally, "delocalizes" its members to make them pledge allegiance to the ISIS Caliph and ideology to the extent that they justify conducting violent acts against their fellow men and women. In other words, the question of how they develop a sense of global religious mission from their individual local

problems and break away from the local context is very important.

No matter how much ISIS may deny local contexts, the discontent of the members, especially in the Philippines, originates from those contexts and their activities *in situ* are also entangled in the local contexts. Therefore, local contexts are important when considering the struggle on the ground, as focusing only on so-called extremist ideologies, individuals, and groups does not accurately capture the phenomenon at hand.

Solahudin examines gender relations and household economies to analyze both the global and local contexts. ISIS members who joined the movement based on ISIS ideology must contend with the specific social-security context in Indonesia to maintain and advance the movement, which has had unintended consequences. These unintended consequences occurred not because ISIS ideology promotes gender equality but because 1) it allows women to carry out jihad, 2) the Takfiri doctrine increases the moral superiority of ISIS women supporters vis-à-vis infidel men to the extent it allows women to divorce their husbands, 3) social media expands women's range of expression of opinions and economic activities, and 4) the pre-emptive strike policy has made the position of men economically vulnerable to women.

Please allow me to share an observation made by my colleague when we conducted joint field research in the Philippines. When the Marawi Siege happened, some ulama specifically mentioned that "ISIS is not Islam." Because the ulama are learned men and can differentiate various Islamic doctrines, they have enough knowledge to judge that ISIS ideology is not Islam. On the other hand, some women, without considering or understanding the radical or dangerous aspects of ISIS, sympathized with IS Ranao (the Maute Group) because the group fought against local injustices. In other words, some Muslims supported ISIS not because of its (global) ideology, but rather because of an identification/empathy with a local struggle. We can observe unintended consequences based on the local context here. Based on this, I have the following question.



### ***Gender differentiation of unintended consequences and changing norms***

Can we see gender differences in the unintended consequences of the Indonesian context? For example, did some women follow men into ISIS without adhering to its radical ideology, but by being empowered individually and economically, they have unintentionally become the guardian of the ISIS ideology? Conversely, do the men, who were more indoctrinated than women when they entered the ISIS, refuse to take part in the deradicalization program not because of their indoctrination, but because they are afraid of being divorced by their wives due to their economical vulnerability?

The IPAC Report No. 83 of February 2, 2023 “The Consequences of Renouncing Extremism for Indonesian Women Prisoners” introduces five cases of women who eventually renounced extremism. One woman found it easier because she was less ideologically committed. On the other hand, one woman does not renounce ISIS, not because of her belief in the ideology, but because of her resentment of the treatment by the authorities and because her dignity matters. Can we identify specific characteristics of the women who unintentionally become guardians of the ISIS ideology?

Finally, it is interesting that the ISIS ideology promotes a kind of individualism among women in many ways (e.g., by allowing them to marry without parental guardians). Women marry and divorce frequently; the practice of polygyny is widespread. It will be interesting to conduct further research on the norms of femininity and sexuality among ISIS women with regards to marriage and divorce of the ISIS women, and how these have changed.

### **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

*Can you comment on the characteristics and motives of women who become guardians of ideology and men who do or do not renounce the ideology?*

It is very difficult to characterize which women are more likely to become guardians of ideology and to differentiate them versus women who are less inclined. What are the individual factors at play? For example, what makes Wahyu Mega different from other women? To better understand this, more intensive research is needed with skills in psychology. By the same token, I cannot differentiate whether, or to what extent, ISIS men remain radical inside the prison because of a commitment to the ideology or because they worry about their wives divorcing them. Some are also quite worried about losing their children. One inmate told me, "If I lose my wife, I can still look for another wife, but if I lose my kids, I cannot afford that." Another important factor is the employability of the inmates after they are released. No company will employ him after he is affiliated with the terrorist organization. As it is difficult for them to get a formal job, this also contributes to the practice of polygyny and allowing their wife(s) to earn money. While it is clear that the men are worried about economic factors *and* they are committed to ISIS ideology, I need to conduct further research to analyze their motives.

*Islamic Studies has been criticized for being too Arab-centric and Middle Eastern-biased. Your presentation speaks to this by examining what is happening in Indonesia, which may be different from how ISIS women are faring elsewhere. Your study may be affirming previous research on women's right to divorce in Indonesia and the country's more liberal environment compared to other parts of the Islamic world. As I am interested in comparison studies, can you describe your points of comparison?*

I try to compare women in ISIS with women in Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). Why is the role of JI women not expanding even though they face the same social and security context as ISIS women? I believe there are three reasons. First, JI ideology is "less Takfiri" than ISIS ideology. For example, according to JI teaching, a JI terrorist prisoner is allowed to take part in deradicalization programs. If a JI member is arrested, this falls under the category of an "emergency situation." When a Muslim is in an emergency situation, things that are prohibited become permissible. For example, although it is prohibited for Muslims to eat pork, in an emergency when there is no other food, pork may be eaten. Therefore, in the JI view, a JI

member who is imprisoned and takes part in the deradicalization program is not committing idolatry. Taking part in the deradicalization program does not make him an infidel because it is an “emergency situation.” Therefore, there are no cases of JI women divorcing their husbands because the husband participated in a deradicalization program.

Second, JI women have less external exposure than ISIS women because JI restricts their members from using social media, especially to discuss internal JI problems. Even today, many JI members continue to use SMS only. Indeed, JI’s standard operating security protocol prohibits its members from using social media for anything but casual conversation.

Third, the pressure on JI women to earn money to feed their family is not as great as the pressure on ISIS women. Why? Because JI women receive more support than ISIS women. They received support not only from JI, but also from their family because most of them maintain good relations with their family and do not consider their family members infidels.

*Can you explain the types of groupings that ISIS women have?*

When I describe ISIS women, I refer to all those who have already pledged loyalty (taken *bay’ah*) to ISIS. I am not referring to a particular group or grouping. Although women may have initially come from different groups, such as Jamaah Anshorul Daulah or Jamaah Anshor Khilafah, I do not differentiate because since 2018, this has become less relevant. I will re-think whether these origin groups impact the behavior or role of ISIS women. Let me think about that, thank you for the suggestion.

*Although you emphasize that ISIS women are allowed to conduct jihad, women have not conducted many attacks, can you explain?*

Women have been involved in some attacks. The 2018 Surabaya bombing was carried out by two families. In 2019, two Indonesian couples conducted a suicide bombing of a Catholic church

in Jolo. Two years later, one couple from a similar group, Jamaah Anshorul Daulah (JAD) Makassar, conducted a suicide bombing in Catholic church in Makassar. The couple, who had only been married for eight months, copied what their mentor had done in the Philippines. In another case, in 2020, a woman was the mastermind behind an attack on the police.

*You have explained that both ideological and economic factors have created unintended consequences to expand the role of ISIS women and elevate their status. Which set of factors are more significant in your view? For example, if ISIS organized its members in poor neighborhoods where the government does not offer any jobs, could ISIS continue to be active? Or, will members stay committed to ISIS even if they are offered a job, because of their strong ideology?*

Economic factors are very important, particularly for ISIS men who are already married, because they need to feed their family. The backbone of ISIS now in Indonesia is its charity organizations. With the charity organizations, ISIS members have been able to create a self-contained society. If you need some money, you can borrow it from the charity organization; if your family needs money for school fees, the charity organization can provide it. The economic support is critical. In turn, ISIS uses this support as the instrument to maintain their members' commitment to ISIS ideology. Which one is more important? I think both are significant.

*It sounds like the women are repressed both economically and societally, thus structurally obliging them to join ISIS. How do you identify their agency within ISIS?*

I have not yet concluded that the driving factor for women to join ISIS is because they are socially and economically oppressed. The problem is, if this is true, why is the number of women joining ISIS relatively small compared to women in Indonesia who may also experience socio-economic repression? Further research needs to be done regarding the factors driving women to join ISIS.

Regarding the agency of ISIS women, I can say that the increasing role of ISIS women also, to some extent, increases ISIS women's agency. For example, there have been several cases of ISIS women divorcing their imprisoned husbands not solely because their husbands were deemed to have committed idolatry by participating in a deradicalization program, but also due to relationship problems before the husband was imprisoned. When her husband joined the deradicalization program, his wife had a reason to divorce her husband.

Recently there have also been cases of ISIS women in the Penatoi area of Bima (where approximately 100 ISIS families and dozens of former terrorist convicts live) who reject polygyny. There are many cases of former terrorist convicts asking permission to marry another woman, but their wives refuse to allow it. On average, former terrorist convicts work in the informal sector because it is difficult to find work in the formal sector (as no companies want to employ them). Meanwhile, almost all ISIS women in Penatoi have jobs. ISIS women refuse to allow their husbands to practice polygyny because they believe their husband does not have the economic capacity to support the family, which is considered unfair. In fact, according to Islamic teachings, justice is a condition for allowing polygyny. In Bima, the solidarity among ISIS women is also quite strong. When their husbands want to commit polygyny, the women work together to pressure the men not to do it. However, this has not occurred in other areas even though the conditions there are the same. Further research is needed to find out why only ISIS women in Bima reject polygyny.

*If ISIS becomes stronger again, will it weaken women's status, or will their status continue to get stronger?*

What will happen if ISIS becomes stronger, if the context changes? I do not foresee any significant change in Indonesia's security or technology information contexts for the next few years. The government will continue to implement the pre-emptive strike strategy because the national election will be held next year. Unlike JI, which does not have enough members in Indonesia now and therefore will avoid waging jihad, ISIS in Indonesia is connected to ISIS

central, which appeals to their members everywhere to conduct attacks during elections. Indeed, in July 2023 an ISIS member targeted an Islamic Party discussion about the election in Pakistan. Therefore, the Indonesian government will continue to implement the pre-emptive strike approach and as such, I think that in the near future, the situation will remain the same. In the long term, I do think that the extension of the role of women will become the new normal for ISIS, because once power is given, it cannot be taken back. There is a “no point of return.”

*I'm curious about the children of the ISIS families. If the parents are taken to the prison and there are no relatives to take care of the kids, does the government intervene to put them up for adoption or is there any kind of center for the kids?*

If the husband is arrested, most ISIS families send their children to a small Islamic boarding school run by ISIS. As I mentioned before, the ISIS charity organizations have set up many of these schools. The children live there, where they are provided food and scholarships. The government cannot intervene in this. The government is now realizing that the real challenge comes from the ISIS charity organizations, so it is now trying to conduct deradicalization programs with the family. If there is permission from the parents, it is possible to help those children. But without permission from the parents, if the parents avoid government programs, the government cannot do anything. The key is how to get permission from the parents; as long as the parents refuse it, nothing can be done.

*So, parental permission is stronger than the government's role? Even if it is a terrorist school, the government cannot do anything? How are these communities allowed to exist in Indonesia?*

If they do not violate the law, nothing can be done. For example, living as members of ISIS is not a crime. Setting up a school is not a crime. Establishing an Islamic charity organization according to Indonesian law is not a crime. They cannot be arrested if they do not violate the law. Until now, it has been very difficult to deal with the ISIS charity organization because they simply help

their members, the families of the terrorist inmate. According to the law, this is not prohibited, it is not a criminal act, and it cannot be prosecuted.

*Is it possible that other extremist Islamist organizations will start to emulate ISIS and expand the role(s) of women in their organizations? Perhaps not the more hardline organizations that clearly separate men and women, but what about some less hardline groups, do you think such groups would start to emulate ISIS practices because they have been effective?*

This is interesting for further research. We know that JI will not want to emulate or copy ISIS, but I do not know about other organizations. Jemaah Anshorul Syariah (JAS) is like JI, because it has a similar ideology and is also affiliated with al Qaeda. And as we know, in the Middle East, ISIS and al Qaeda fight and kill each other. The women of JAS are more exposed to social media, because Jemaah Anshorul Syariah has already declared itself an open organization, while Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) has defined itself as *Tanzim siri*, a secret organization. JAS is very interesting because since 2016, when they joined the 212 movement with the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam or FPI), they have been active in politics. Women are involved in the JAS charity organization, which is called MEIDAN. It will be interesting to conduct further research on the role of women in this group.

*Is the changing role of ISIS women in Indonesia a phenomenon unique to Indonesia, or is something similar happening in ISIS areas elsewhere?*

I find that something very similar is happening to the women in al-Hawl refugee camp in Syria. More than 60,000 ISIS members were arrested in Syria and put into this camp; Indonesian women and children are also living there. Although there is no academic report about women in this camp, a very interesting journalistic report describes the role of women in the camp as very similar to that in Indonesia.<sup>2</sup> Like in Indonesia, these families have lost husbands, the women become the head of the family, and they have no other support system. The women actively

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/women-isis-and-al-hol-camp>

make sure that their children stay committed to ISIS ideology and they are very active to generate money. They have set up a center to receive money and they actually receive some money from the ISIS charity organizations in Indonesia. This is different from the Philippines, where ISIS-affiliated women still receive support from their families; for example, the Maute Group was supported by the entire clan of the Maute. As I mentioned in the conclusion, ISIS is not really a rigid organization; to a certain degree it is very flexible, they adapt to the changing context.

*How has the Indonesian government changed its methods of deradicalizing ISIS members?*

There are two main actors involved in the deradicalization program run by the Indonesian government. The first is BNPT (*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme*, or the National Counter Terrorism Agency) and the second is the police. Since 2018, both actors have been targeting the families, not only the individual terrorist inmate inside the prison. They try to disengage the family from the ISIS network, but ISIS inmates remain radical because they worry that their wife will divorce them, or they will lose ISIS economic assistance. The government has begun to realize the importance of deradicalizing the family and tries to provide economic assistance. Those who are less radical may accept the assistance.

However, most ISIS members reject government programs on ideological grounds. According to ISIS, whoever obeys or accepts the government commits idolatry and is thus an infidel. Therefore, ISIS members cannot participate in any government program. They refuse all the government's social security programs, even if they need it. This makes them more dependent on the ISIS charity organizations and makes it quite difficult for the government to intervene through social-economic programs, such as free school, healthcare, and so on. ISIS says, "you are prohibited from bringing your child to the public school because in public school, they teach about Pancasila, which will make your children commit idolatry." For healthcare, they rely on Islamic herbal medicines. The consequences of becoming an infidel—this is how they maintain an extremely exclusive community. ISIS prevents their followers from interacting with other



agencies, making it difficult to intervene. The only government program that they accept is the identity card, because with that identity card they can make a passport. Passport for what? To make a hijra to Syria. Now they also consider going to Afghanistan. Most members also do not have birth certificates for their children or marriage certificates; they refuse it. The ISIS supporters in Indonesia have created a very tight-knit community; they set up their own neighborhoods and live together avoiding all government programs.

*Now that the Salafi movement is trending among the urban middle class in Jakarta, and some Salafis are promoting a very strict interpretation of gender roles, can we say that in certain aspects, ISIS's gender roles are more equal than this urban Salafi nonviolent group?*

No, the Salafi movement is very conservative and totally different from ISIS. Salafi women are more like JI women, they are inferior. For example, the husband forbids them to earn money and imposes restrictions on their mobility and interactions with other men.

I worry about the Salafi movement, particularly the situation in Saudi Arabia. Most ISIS supporters come from three clusters of religious Islamic organizations. The first is Islamist organizations who fight to implement Sharia law in Indonesia. They join ISIS because they think that ISIS will build an Islamic state in Syria. The second group is the Salafi. This is because ISIS is able to represent itself as committed to a purer Islam than the Salafi, because all ISIS teachings and doctrine come from the Wahhabi movement. While Salafi has made many revisions to Wahhabi teachings, ISIS has revived Wahhabi teachings. For example, the reference book for ISIS is *Ad Durar As Saniyah*, but this book is rarely used as a reference in Salafi anymore because it is considered too extreme. When ISIS revived Wahabi teachings, some Salafi supporters thought that ISIS's teachings were purer than Salafi.

Another factor that also causes many Salafi followers to join ISIS is their disappointment with the Salafi ulamas' response to recent political liberalization policies in Saudi Arabia. As we know, Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS), the new king of the Saudi Arabia, has permitted various policies

that are considered liberal and un-Islamic. For example, Saudi Arabia now allows music concerts, women to leave the veil, women to drive their own cars, and so on. In Indonesia, many Salafis were very disappointed with their *ulama* for not criticizing MBS. ISIS presented them with another alternative, a group with more commitment to purist Islam.

The third group that has joined ISIS are those who subscribe to eschatology Islam. In Indonesia, eschatology, or the end of the times narrative, is very popular. Many Muslims in Indonesia really believe that now is the end of times, the Messiah is coming, the Armageddon is coming. Some people obsessed with eschatology have also joined ISIS. ISIS is very successful in representing itself as a caliphate in the end of the times, because according to many prophecies, the caliphate will be established in Syria, willed by a descendant of Prophet Mohammed. ISIS declared the Islamic state in 2014 and was led by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who claimed to be a descendant of Prophet Mohammed. Many ISIS supporters in Indonesia really believe that ISIS represents the caliphate at the end of the times, at the end of the world.

*Are there any cases of ISIS men actively taking part in childcare in their family, or is there an official ideology among ISIS members that childcare is just for women? You mentioned that male prisoners are concerned about losing their children, so...*

This is very interesting. Frankly speaking, I have not found such cases, but there may be some men active in childcare, I do not know for now. It will be interesting to see if there are new roles for ISIS men within the family. Thank you for this good idea.

*I imagine that the existence of whistleblowers is really threatening for ISIS members because of the high risk of arrest. How does the community—which is small, as you mentioned—ensure trust among the members?*

There are approximately 2-3,000 ISIS members in Indonesia, which is a small number compared to the overall population. For comparison, JI has 6,000 members. However, ISIS supporters

across the country can communicate through social media, for example between central Java and Sulawesi. Most ISIS members live together in specific neighborhoods/areas, and they know each other. This is why news and gossip spreads very fast. For example, if an inmate husband participates in a deradicalization program, the information will spread quickly throughout the entire community and all the ISIS women will pressure the wife of the inmate who joined the program. Because it is a very small community, the level of trust is also quite high, with a strong sense sisterhood/brotherhood and mutual support. Whistleblowers exist from those who have already left, or “quit” the community. A person who has quit has withdrawn their pledge of loyalty, and they are considered a traitor. For my research I also obtained information from such former members who leak information from inside the group.