De-recidivism, not de-radicalisation: Understanding the cognitive process among de-radicalised Indonesian terrorist returnees

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Abstract: Against the looming public scepticism towards de-radicalisation, this paper argues for the reform of de-radicalisation programme from an effort to change terrorist’s worldview toward one that focuses on preventing terrorist recidivism. It contends that the lacklustre result of mainstream de-radicalisation programme can be attributed to its flawed assumption in viewing terrorist motivation as purely psychological without paying attention to the social context. To remedy this flaw, it takes inspirations from French theories to propose a new approach dubbed de-recidivism to understand the cognitive process and the social dynamics that lead individuals to quit terrorism. It then demonstrates how de-recidivism can be applied by analysing the experience of 20 Indonesian terrorist returnees who have decided to quit terrorism voluntarily. It concludes that in order to prevent terrorist recidivism, a de-recidivism-inspired programme must be able to create a condition that (1) enables individuals to deconstruct their terrorist ideology, (2) decolonise themselves from the cognitive clutch of their ideologues, and by way of (3) decapitalising the latter’s modality in the social field.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Didik Novi Rahmanto receives his doctoral degree through his study on criminology and terrorism in the University of Indonesia, whereas Petrus Reinhard Golose receives his doctoral degree from the department of police studies of the University of Indonesia. Both of them are involved in various counterterrorism and de-radicalisation programmes in Indonesia. They are gravely concerned with the future of these programmes, which increasingly sap more and more resources with no significant reduction in the terrorist recidivism rate. This paper is mostly based on Rahmanto’s dissertation which seeks to understand the reasoning behind Indonesian returnees’ decision to quit ISIL and return home. Golose saw that Rahmanto’s dissertation might provide an insight into new and innovative approach that can improve current de-radicalisation programme. The two then collaborated to write this paper to propose new ideas that can be applied and replicated in reducing terrorist recidivism in Indonesia.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
When de-radicalisation was first introduced, a 2008 Time Magazine special celebrated it as one of the “10 Ideas That Are Changing the World.” The premise was quite novel—rather than letting terror convicts rot in jail, what if we can just set their minds straight and allow them to be useful for the society? However, more than a decade later, there is barely any evidence on the success of de-radicalisation. In fact, there have been many cases of repeat offence among convicts who have supposedly been de-radicalised. This paper proposes an alternative approach to de-radicalisation called de-recidivism. It is an approach that puts more emphasis on preventing terror convicts from repeating their offence than altering their mind. Contrary to de-radicalisation, a de-recidivism-inspired programme will not worry about what an individual believes, but it will strive to create a condition that enables them to always behave non-violently.
Ever since the US-backed fighters in Syria claimed military victory over the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) (Al-Jazeera, 2019), governments around the world must face new problems in returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) (BBC News, 2019). During its peak, the United Nations estimated that between 25,000 and 30,000 FTFs fought for ISIL in Iraq and Syria (UNODC, 2017), and thousands of them have been disengaged and repatriated (UNSC, 2018). However, there is hardly any consensus on whether the return of FTFs was a good idea. Ideally, governments should take their FTFs and prosecute them according to the law (Erdianto, 2018; Malet, 2019), but many have expressed concerns about the potential danger these FTFs might bring should the government allow them back home (BBC News, 2019; Ng, 2019).

In the case of Indonesia, the Indonesian National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) recorded a total of 2,199 Indonesian citizens departing to ISIL territory as of 6 October 2019 and only 674 have returned. These people returned to Indonesia in several waves before ISIL’s military defeat in March 2019. However, a significant change has occurred in public perception toward ISIL returnees since then. The Indonesian Government’s plan to repatriate 689 Indonesian FTFs stranded in ISIL’s former territory went into a backlash. Most media outlets portray FTFs as ungrateful citizens who have abandoned their citizenship to join a rogue nation (Remotivi, 2020). Meanwhile, public officials expressed security concerns by portraying FTFs as “viruses” that can endanger and corrupt the nation (CNN Indonesia, 2020). Ultimately, on 12 February 2020 President Joko Widodo announced that the government will not repatriate Indonesian FTFs because “the government has a responsibility towards (the security of) the 260 million people of this country” (Setneg RI, 2020). By excluding Indonesian FTFs from the 260 million Indonesian citizens in that statement, the Indonesian Government has informally disowned them.

The disownment of ISIL’s FTF is not exclusive to the Indonesian Government. Just 1 week before President Joko Widodo’s announcement, 15-year-old Shamima Begum made a headline due to losing an appeal against the UK government’s decision to strip her citizenship (BBC News, 2020). The European countries, in general, appear to be reluctant to repatriate their citizens who fought for ISIL (Mai, 2019). The only difference was that Shamima and most European citizens are allowed to have dual citizenship, while Indonesians are legally prohibited from having such privilege. As such, disowning Indonesian FTFs is the same as turning them stateless. The fact that the Government of Indonesia must resort to legally, and ethically, questionable measure to deal with FTFs speaks a lot about their and the public’s lack of confidence in the government’s counter-terrorism programme—particularly, the de-radicalisation programme.

When de-radicalisation was first introduced, a 2008 Time Magazine special celebrated it as one of the “10 Ideas That Are Changing the World.” The special described it as a revolutionary programme to reintegrate “radicals” back to society. Yet there is barely any evidence on the success of de-radicalisation programme since its inception. Various studies have criticised de-radicalisation programme’s sheer focus on forcing counter-truths (nationalism, modernisation) through habituation (Crowell, 2017; Masbah, 2019; Porges, 2010; Suratman, 2017). Proofs of success in de-radicalisation programmes are mostly anecdotal; in fact, limited to few individuals who turned into whistle-blowers against jihadi organisations (Aaronson, 2019) or those who already oppose violence in the first place (Schulze, 2008). It has also been argued that de-radicalisation programme cannot predict the terrorist recidivism rate (Hasisi et al., 2019) and that de-radicalisation programme still produces a high recidivism rate (Aggarwal, 2013).
This paper argues for a major reform on existing de-radicalisation programme. Our argument will be elaborated in four sections. First, we will provide a review on recent literature about de-radicalisation to prove that there is no merit in continuing the existing model of de-radicalisation programme. Second, we will propose a new approach to understand the dialectical process between the cognitive and social dimensions in an individual's decision to become a terrorist and to quit terrorism. In line with our goal to make de-radicalisation more about preventing recidivism, we would like to call this new approach “de-recidivism”. Third, we will attempt to demonstrate the de-recidivism approach by analysing the experience of Indonesian FTFs, particularly how they manage to turn away from terrorist activities voluntarily. In other words, this paper will try to reveal the very dialectical process underlying the returnees’ decision to refrain from recidivating. Finally, the paper concludes and proposes an alternative approach in designing a programme to prevent terrorist recidivism based on de-recidivism framework.

1. De-radicalisation: From psychological intervention to liberal technology

There is no shortage of literature criticising state-led de-radicalisation programmes. A major criticism often raised against the programme is that it reduces radicalisation into merely psychological illness in need of a cure. By relying on this assumption, de-radicalisation programmes posit their subjects as non-actors—persons with neither political commitment nor agency who will swing in any direction according to what a person they deem authoritative told them (Conti, 2019). For example, state-led de-radicalisation programmes are often implemented in the form of dialogue between the “radicals” and “moderate authority” (clergymen, psychologist, consultant, advisor, ex-radical) under the assumption that this process will eventually shift the radicals into moderate point of view—especially if they are provided with incentives (housing, employment) to do so (Dechesne, 2011; Sumpter, 2017). This type of implementation rarely works as it relies on full cooperation and commitment from the subjects (Koehler, 2019) as well as the availability of dexterous personnel with the capacity to monitor, mentor, and persuade the terror convicts (Suratman, 2017). There is also a severe lack of metrics to assess the effectiveness of de-radicalisation efforts since it often depends on subjective parameters, such as interview results with the subject (Aggarwal, 2013). More importantly, this type of implementation falls into what we refer to as the “psychologisation trap,” i.e., recklessly assuming the disembodiment between mind, body, and environment to conclude that an individual's decision-making process always occurs inside the head (De Vos, 2013). As such, recent literature on de-radicalisation is devoted to re-conceptualising de-radicalisation to remedy the programme’s identified flaw.

According to Elshimi (2015), the first academic conceptualisation of de-radicalisation came from John Horgan, who pointed out the need to distinguish the cognitive and behavioural aspects of de-radicalisation programme. Horgan (2008) critiques current de-radicalisation programmes as heavily reliant on the assumption that initiating cognitive change in terrorist by altering their worldview will result in a behavioural change in which the said terrorists renounce violence and then reintegrate into the society. However, he argued that if the ultimate aim of de-radicalisation is to create behavioural change, then incarceration and supervision to modify terrorists’ behaviour—otherwise known as disengagement—will already be sufficient. Horgan then argues in favour of a disengagement-focused de-radicalisation programme that abandons attempts at cognitive change because he believes that radical views are not the sole predictor of radical behaviour. Contrary to popular belief, Horgan found that people often acquire extremist views after they join a group rather than before. Another contribution to the academic conceptualisation of de-radicalisation came from Ashour (2009) who argued that de-radicalisation can only occur at a behavioural level, not ideological. He made this argument based on the findings that some de-radicalised groups still adopt misogynist, homophobic, xenophobic and anti-democratic perspectives. The only change in these groups is their attitude toward violence. They may be able to renounce the use of violence to achieve their goals, but they may not necessarily renounce their ideology. Horgan’s and Ashour’s ideas were eventually used as reference for various de-radicalisation policies onward, resulting in a major shift of focus into enacting behavioural change through various intervention measures (Elshimi, 2015, p. 114).
Notwithstanding, the sole focus on behavioural change still leaves us with the problem of terrorist recidivism since the criminal justice system is still unable to completely deter common criminals from recidivating—let alone ideologically motivated criminals like terrorists (Hasisi et al., 2019). One potential answer to improve the capacity of de-radicalisation programme in preventing recidivism can be found in literature that situates de-radicalisation as a Foucauldian governmentality project. This entails re-conceptualising de-radicalisation into an art of instilling self-governance among terror convicts by correcting their everyday gestures, activities, and habits. This will in turn reconstruct their subjectivities, reproducing them into “docile bodies” who will restrain their behaviour according to what the society expects them to; hence, preventing their relapse into terrorist activities (Aggarwal, 2013). Further benefit that can be gained by incorporating Foucauldian governmentality is that de-radicalisation can be transformed into a broader programme to ensure all potential radicals within the national territory are disciplined and act in ways and behaviours that the state deemed satisfactory (Elshimi, 2015).

While we value the importance of discussing Foucauldian governmentality in de-radicalisation, we argue that the concept alone is not enough to ensure the complete prevention of terrorist recidivism. Foucault’s early conceptualisation of governmentality may have hinted at the over-dominating nature of neo-liberal governance, but his later works have elaborated more on the role of individual’s agency in fighting back against the structure (Van Camp, 2012). Elshimi (2015) is also aware of this situation, which is why he referred to Foucault’s later works that revised the conception of power to also allow subject the possibility to “act upon themselves” within the constraints of the limited resources they possess. As such, there is still a possibility of terror convicts relapsing into terrorist activities once they gain access to the resources that allow them to do so (e.g., reuniting with their religious mentor or comrades). Integrating de-radicalisation practice into Foucauldian governmentality may provide the state with more elaborate tools in controlling radicals and potential radicals by modifying their sense of self, but whether this amounts to complete prevention of terrorist recidivism remains debatable.

In contrast to the above literature that view de-radicalisation as an intervention programme to correct the behaviour of radicals, there is a growing literature about voluntary de-radicalisation. These studies found that de-radicalisation can occur voluntarily without any coordinated action to enable it. The main argument is that instead of an outright rejection of the radicals’ ideology, de-radicalisation can produce better results by gradually modifying some of their attitudes and behaviours without forcing them to renounce their entire ideology (Mhanna-Matar, 2017). One of the most extensive understandings on voluntary de-radicalisation can be found in the research funded by the US Department of Homeland Security, authored by Mary Beth Altier and others (Altier et al., 2012). By building upon this and later works (Altier et al., 2017, 2014), they argued that an individual’s decision to quit terrorism can be attributed to two factors: the negative experience during involvement with terrorist organisation (push factor) and external influences that offer conventional, often better social life (pull factor). By analysing 87 autobiographies of former terrorists, they conclude that push factors, especially one’s disillusionment with their organisation, are the most prevalent reason for individuals to leave terrorism. This implies that effort to de-radicalise individuals may be more effective by identifying the factors that matter the most for specific individuals and focusing on modifying the said factors (Altier et al., 2017).

This paper argues that the idea put forward in voluntary de-radicalisation literature is much closer to achieving complete prevention of terrorist recidivism as it relies on individual’s agency to change how they see their ideology and, in turn, how they act upon said ideology. However, although these literature have proven the possibility of voluntary de-radicalisation and why under what circumstances this condition might occur, the exact mechanism that leads to this result is still under-discussed. To mend that gap, this paper will incorporate the ideas of three French theorists, namely Derrida, Fanon and Bourdieu to gain insights into how subjects position themselves within ideology as a dominating structure and how they freed themselves from said structure. These insights, as will be made clear, will help us understand the role that state-led de-radicalisation programmes must take in preventing terrorist recidivism.
2. De-recidivism proposal

Based on existing literature on de-radicalisation and terrorist ideology, this paper argues that an effective de-radicalisation programme will require an understanding of the complete cognitive process underlying an individual’s decision to become a terrorist or to quit terrorism. Although this paper urges de-radicalisation programmes to focus on preventing terrorist recidivism, we acknowledge the fact that terrorists operate on an entirely different cognitive process that explicitly permits them to use violence against their perceived enemies (Ackerman & Burnham, 2019). As such, disengagement practices through incarceration and supervision alone will not be enough to ensure the prevention of terrorist recidivism. To solve this conundrum, this paper proposes an alternative approach to understand the decision to terror and, in turn, to inspire practitioners to devise a de-radicalisation programme with an approach we call “de-recidivism.”

De-recidivism, as the name suggests, is an approach that aims to reduce or even eliminate recidivism, which is defined as “a tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behaviour (recidivism, n. d.).” Specifically, in the case of terrorist convicts, de-recidivism is an approach to understand the decision to no longer relapse into committing terrorist activities. The concept promises a fresh look at why an ex-terrorist stops committing acts of terror. Even though it focuses on the concrete outcome that the ex-terrorist ceases doing and believing in terrorism, de-recidivism aims to shed light on the dialectical processes that lead the subject to that outcome. The dialectics that de-recidivism envisions involve the actual cognitive process inside the subject’s mind, the social structure that orient the process, and the subjective yearning that motivates their participation in the social interaction. In short, de-recidivism investigates the conditions that enable an ex-terrorist to willingly or unwittingly undo the very cognitive process that allowed them to justify violence.

In mainstream psychological literature, cognitive process is usually explained by information processing theory. The theory assumes that the human mind works like a computer—it does not only respond to outside stimuli, but also processes them to produce an output that can be observed as behaviour (Simon & Newell, 1964). However, we find this theory problematic since it takes for granted how and why certain information is processed by the human mind, while others are overlooked. This is problematic insofar as our goal to understand the cognitive process of an individual radicalised with terrorist ideology because the theory cannot help us to understand the political and social process that allows the terrorist ideology itself to be embraced over its alternatives. Therefore, it is imperative to venture deeper into endeavours that can explain the power dynamics between the individual and the social structure that play a decisive influence in shaping their motivation, behaviour, and judgment. By understanding these dynamics, we might be able to reverse engineer the process so as to devise better intervention. We believe that this goal is best served by introducing three French theories that arguably provide the best explanation about ideology and how it affects subject formation, namely: Derridean deconstruction, Fanonian decolonisation, and Bourdieusian decapitalisation.

First, Jacques Derrida’s concept of deconstruction provides an underlying assumption for the capacity of an individual to undo any ideologies that subjugate them by way of self-deconstruction. Derrida (1989) posits that idea (including ideologies) is akin to architecture, a building made of “truth-claim” as its core, and supplemented by various ideas about “the object others” that the truth-claim rejects. The supplementarity of an idea can be identified from the adjectives used to glorify the “truth-claim” and marginalise “the object others” at the same time. However, when this supplement dies or becomes untenable, that idea will be deconstructed. It is this supplementarity—the fact that an idea holds so long as its supplements exist—that is responsible for the characteristic of deconstruction that is, according to Derrida, “always already at work” (Derrida, 1989). Therefore, an idea is not deconstructed from without; an idea self-deconstructs itself by having the deconstructive potentiality from within its edifice activated. In this sense, the edifice of terrorist ideology, such as in the case of ISIL, is built upon the same logic of supplementarity: its idea of permitting violence for the sake of creating a glorious and just world can only be sustained by another idea for which there is a truly existing separation between the current world (unjust world) and the envisioned world (just world). Thus, when an FTF realised that there is not much
difference between their country of origin and the country that ISIL wishes to build, the ideology self-deconstructs, and the individual can no longer justify the use of violence.

In Derridean parlance, we can refer to this phenomenon as “supplementary weakness” in which any idea, including terrorist ideology, always contains within itself what Derrida calls a “force of dislocation” capable of self-deconstructing it from within should an individual manage to simulate that idea without its supplements (Derrida, 1989). As such, any adherents of terrorist ideology always have the potential to self-de-radicalise. This insight is in line with the findings in voluntary de-radicalisation literature. However, it should be noted that the potential to self-de-radicalise is not located in the subject but in the ideology itself. The subject may appear as the executor of their own de-radicalisation, but this behaviour is made possible by the ontological potentiality of any ideology.

However, once an individual’s ideology self-deconstructs, they will lose the foundation to justify not only their actions but also their sense of subjectivity. This is so since only in ideology can a subject find themselves (Žižek, 1989). In this case, the Fanonian concept of decolonisation will help us understand how, in the aftermath of self-deconstruction, a subject might acquire a whole new sense of subjectivity precisely by self-transforming the pre-existing ideological edifice. So, not only the subject is able to shrug off the colonisation of the ideology, they will even go so far as to modulate the ideology away from how it was told by their coloniser—toward one according to their own crafting. A post-deconstruction subject is no longer subjected to their ideology; they are now the subject of their ideology. To comprehend the cognitive process that gives new life to a decolonised, post-deconstruction subject, one must lend ears to Frantz Fanon’s theoretical recounting of his story of decolonial struggle.

By using his own experience as a black man in France, psychiatrist and postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon (1986) suggests that colonised subjects always have within themselves what he calls a dual narcissism. On one hand, they always believe that they (black people) are not that different from their colonisers (white people). But, on the other hand, they also realise that no matter what they do, they can never neatly identify their identity and desire with that of their colonisers—that they will always be absolutely nothing compared to white people (Fanon, 1986). However, even after having realised the supplementary weakness that the “whiteness” ideology is built upon, Fanon can never forego his pursuit of desire implanted in him by the whiteness ideology: to live as a white man, to sleep with the white man’s wife, to obtain the power that has subjugated him (Fanon, 1963, p. 39). He refers to this phenomenon as “anomalies of affect” by which one realises the impossibility of becoming the ideal but paradoxically feels that they have no other choice but to pursue it. The only way to move forward from this situation, according to Fanon, is by subduing the ideal and making their own attainable version out of it.

Fanonian decolonisation consists not in removing the ideology—because one cannot—but in de-essentialising its colonial relicification and substituting it with something other within its image, “almost the same, but not white” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 89). One must not fail to notice that in decolonisation, not only the subject is transformed, but also the ideology itself experiences a postcolonial mutation. The mutation of the whiteness ideology in Fanon’s decolonial schemata might also reinforce our understanding of the role of ideology in being a mediator for subjects’ desire. In this way, we can see how, in essence, ideology is never essentialist. It serves only as a vehicle for subjects to satisfy their desire. Nevertheless, one must never underestimate its role: even though it is non-essentialist, ideology is absolutely essential for the subjects’ effort to attain their desire. Fanon is aware of this ambiguity: he preserves it but alter its metonymy.

Only in recognising this non-essentialist nature of ideology and the open possibility it offers to reorient its essence can an analysis comprehend the transformation taking place within the decolonised subject’s cognitive process. Fanonian concept of decolonisation helps us understand most cases of voluntary de-radicalisation in which an individual might no longer participate in violence but still believes in the ideal that they pursued previously—albeit by slightly modifying it or using a different, non-violent approach to
achieve it. Based on this insight, we can limit the outcome of de-radicalisation programme to modestly pertain one’s alteration of the method to achieve their ideal, but not necessarily rejecting said ideal.

By using Derrida and Fanon’s concepts, we can now set out to visualise the beginning and endpoint of de-recidivism. However, all of the processes described previously occur voluntarily without any intervention from external agents. One question will then come to mind as to whether the processes of self-deconstruction can be jumpstarted or precipitated without discounting the agentive nature of the processes. It matters especially in our goal to prevent terrorist recidivism: what can we do other than waiting for the radicals to realise their Derridean and Fanonian moments?

This is where the Bourdieusian concept of decapitalisation comes in. The concept of decapitalisation is useful to explain the power dynamics within the society that provide conditions for an individual to self-deconstruct and decolonise themselves from ideology. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) argued that social life is structured around the logic of the field, understood as a social arena within which subjects interact with each other according to their respective possession of capital and their subsequent hierarchical position in it as endowed by their type and amount of capital in possession. Capital, within this social field, is determinative of subjects’ position and embodies in their thoughts, behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, desires, parlements, and even bodily gestures and expressions (which altogether constitute what Bourdieu called habitus) in the field. Each social field has its own currency in different forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) that dictates the position of each individual and their degree of submission to the field.

For example, in the academic field, people who possess cultural capital in the form of knowledge and philosophy will be highly regarded more than people who possess only economic capital. In this situation, the one with less capital will be decapitalised: their capitals in possession will lose its value and thus lessen their power to shape the rule in the field and make them more vulnerable to be conditioned by the superior habitus of the one with more capital. Unequal distribution of capital plays a crucial role in subjects’ position within the social field hierarchy. The task of analysis in this paper is then to account for the many ways that this hierarchy moulds the cognitive process that yields the expected outcome, i.e. self-deconstruction and decolonisation from terrorist ideology.

This theory also translates directly into variables that can be used for external agents to modulate the conditions that will enable de-recidivism: that is, by identifying the field that the terrorist returnees reside and addressing the unequal condition of capital distribution in that exact field. As such, we can now see that a subject becomes subjected to an ideology as a result of the unequal distribution of capital in their field. Those few who possess more capital can decapitalise those who have less and subsequently entice the latter to self-identify with their ideology. In other words, the unequal relations of capital in the field have a direct impact on the actual cognitive process inside those with less capital that will, in turn, determine the practical decision and concrete manifestation of ideology in everyday life.

Bourdieusian decapitalisation helps us finding a window of intervention to the seemingly individual nature of the cognitive process that leads a terrorist ideology to self-deconstruct and the terrorists to decolonise from the ideology taking hold of them. The concept of decapitalisation in the social field helps explain the kind of occurrence in the social field that activates the self-deconstruction potential in terrorist’s ideology and their choices of manoeuvre to decolonise. We can now safely suggest that decapitalisation is a critical factor that allows individuals to realise the supplementary weakness of their ideology. A state-led de-radicalisation programme can then engineer the decapitalisation of the subject’s ideology. This will then provide the subject with open possibilities to decolonise from it. This outcome is what we refer to as de-recidivism as illustrated in Figure 1.

3. De-recidivism among Indonesian returnees
To demonstrate the de-recidivism approach, we would like to present a case study based on in-depth interview with 20 Indonesian returnees who have fought for ISIL in Syria. As can be seen in the attached informant data, most of them came from affluent backgrounds and respectable
occupations. Five of our informants are business owners, and one is a high ranking official. These six people also brought their families to Syria. There is also a student enrolled in a university in the Middle-East and also a preacher. Their income and education level puts them in the upper-middle class. This indicates that economic capital was not the logic that structured the social field in which they become subject to ISIL’s ideology.

When asked about what motivated them to go to Syria, almost all of them claimed that they were motivated by a humanitariain cause—to defend fellow Muslims who have been oppressed under Bashar Al-Assad’s regime. They believe this to be important because it is what they learned from the Quran that a Muslim has an obligation to fight (jihad) for their brethren when they have an opportunity to do so:

I have heard a hadith from the Prophet that Muslims are akin to a single body. If his hand is hurt, then his eyes will cry, and all his bodies will hurt too. That is what I felt when I saw the Arab Revolution in 2011, especially the Arab Revolution in Syria. Do you know how it started? A kid, Hamzah Al-Khatib, wrote in his school chair, “Freedom hurriyya, we want to be free.” Then he was caught by Bassar Al-Assad’s government, and his family was intimidated. He was just a child [...] he simply wrote “I want to be free” [...] but he was killed, tortured, and his family was intimidated just because [...] That was how I realised that Bashar Al-Assad’s regime is unjust and infidel [...] that was how I decided that I want to go to Syria (Interview with Idris).

Idris’ response carries a subtext that he has identified the supplementary weakness of the state’s ideology. His anger toward the state killing of a child due to expressing opinion relies on the presumption that a state should never do such thing—that state should protect the rights of all its citizens. The fact that Assad’s Syria can outright kill its citizens, especially fellow Muslims, due to expressing controversial opinions, has caused even the very concept of nation-state to lose its symbolic capital as the sole provider of protection and security.

This potential for deconstructing the state’s ideology is hidden behind our informant’s stated ideal to affirm their identity as a Muslim. Although claiming that they went to Syria to save the Syrians from their government, what they actually desire is to preserve their sense of being a good Muslim and live up to its ideal imperative. In this manner, they regard ISIL as an authoritative figure that might become a mediator to pursue their ideal, so they identify with its ideology. They did not, however, see ISIL as a terrorist organisation, nor did they see themselves as a terrorist:

Our original goal was indeed to help fellow Muslims in Syria. There is nothing that we can do in Indonesia [...] because Muslims are the majority in Indonesia. So, if we want to do, for instance, terrorist attacks, bombings, etc., Muslims will become the victim. That is what we want to avoid. So
we chose Syria. Why Syria? Because Syria situation is clear, the Muslims were indeed massacred [...] there is a hadith for Syria, there is none for Indonesia (Interview with Widan).

At this point, we can see that there has been a line drawn by our informants to differentiate between the indiscriminate killings conducted by what they deem as terrorists and the justified killings of enemies of Islam that they were ready to commit. What ISIL does, through their propaganda video and recruiters, is presenting themselves as the authoritative representation of the ideals that our informants are trying to pursue:

We, the people of Nusantara—Indonesia, The Philippines, Malaysia—have successfully migrated (hijrah) to this caliphate, we have successfully migrated from [our] foolish, disdainful and false countries, to this country venerated by Allah, to a caliphate that Allah has promised. Before us stand the children of the caliphate [video shows children exercising with their rifle], who answered the call to migrate. We also teach them virtues—the true virtues: whoever does not denounce an infidel (kafir), then he is also an infidel. (Excerpt from ISIL propaganda video in Indonesia).

What resonated the most with our informants from the above line is the idea that as a Muslim, they must fight against the infidels. Furthermore, ISIL has also separated themselves from other states by claiming that they are an Islamic country blessed by Allah Himself. From here, we can already see that what the ISIL had in abundance and our informants lacked was the cultural capital. Our informants are well-versed in Islamic philosophy and theology, but ISIL has already shown capable of materialising those things that our informants can only learn from their study group. This unequal distribution of cultural capital between ISIL and our informants made it possible for ISIL to convert their cultural capital into a symbolic capital, which extends its authority to any aspects of life beyond the domain of Islamic theology (i.e., the currency of its cultural capital). This, in turn, allows ISIL to represent themselves as the true provider of protection and security whose words can be relied on.

Thus, our informants began to see ISIL as a figure of authority that knows better about Islamic theology and possesses a network of institutions that they want to be a part of. Through the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital that ISIL possessed, ISIL successfully built an architecture of ideal supplemented by the ideas of justice, solidarity, and security. Similar to Fanon’s experience, our informants felt that they were nothing compared to ISIL or the people who have fought for ISIL and they want to do anything they could to be like these people. It is at this point that our informants were decapitalised and voluntarily submit to ISIL’s violent adversarial ideology against Bashar Al-Assad’s regime.

However, our informants did not necessarily believe in the whole ISIL utopia of a caliphate government. They simply believe in what ISIL represented—an opportunity to affirm their identity as a good Muslim. This can be seen from how they feel forced to pledge their loyalty to Caliph Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi:

[My loyalty] was pledged by another person. It was automatic, if I didn’t pledge my loyalty, I would get into trouble. So, when I returned, after I went home, I automatically lose my attachment with them ... the problem is at that time I participated in one, single set of training, so everyone who participates in that training has to pledge their loyalty (Interview with Affi).

From our informants’ point of view, they are justifying ISIL’s idea of building a caliphate only because the idea is a prerequisite to access the ideal they are trying to pursue; hence, a mediator. Therefore, they have already realised that their submission to ISIL relies solely on the idea that ISIL is killing the enemies of Islam and saving fellow Muslims. They would not decide to join if ISIL conducts indiscriminate killings for their own gain, just like the terrorists in Indonesia or the Syrian government that they despise. This means that even when they first join ISIL, they already have a grasp on the supplementary weakness of ISIL’s architecture. The self-deconstructive potential of ISIL’s ideology has already been germinated since its inception in our informants’ cognitive process and was waiting to be activated.
The reversal of power relations between ISIL and our informants began to occur once they realise that ISIL cannot help them fulfilling their ideal. This happened when they realise that the enemies they killed on the battlefield were actually the fellow Muslims that they were supposed to save. That they were not acting upon Islamic teaching but instead giving more political power for ISIL to control their territory:

I had this inner conflict within myself, that this war is no longer a war to uphold The One and Only God, to save fellow Muslims, but for the sake of material and political gain. So I had to end my jihad. I hope Allah will take note of my good intention (Interview with Idris).

Another informant also reported that she was treated unjustly as a woman in ISIL’s territory. However, she could not escape because doing so will make her, her family, and those who help her be labeled as an apostate:

We started communicating with other people who might be able to help us escape, but they were frightened because if they help us, the Daulah [ISIL] will kill them. Anyone who escaped and caught will be labeled as an apostate, hypocrite, who must be killed even more than infidels (Interview with Difa).

Both these instances resulted in ISIL’s cultural capital (higher knowledge of Islamic theology) and symbolic capital (provider of protection and security) to lose value in the eyes of our informants. From here, the situation started to reverse—ISIL became the one who was decapitalised, whereas our informants maintain their cultural capital. This weakened the suppleness of ISIL’s ideological edifice and, in effect, our informants’ submission to ISIL. Under such circumstances, our informants were driven to save what is left from their ideal by decolonising the ideals previously represented by ISIL and reconstruct it into something that they can achieve:

I realised that there are many ways to do good things. It does not need to be here (in Syria). We can do it in Indonesia, to our neighbors, to anyone … I cannot do it [going into war]; I can’t be forced to do it … I went with good intention. I have no bad intention (Interview with Muhaimin).

Muhaimin’s response reflects his anomalies of affect. He realised that ISIL could no longer become an avenue to pursue his ideal, but he, nonetheless, still wants to pursue his original ideal. Therefore, he deconstructed what it means to be a Muslim by simply doing good to others. That way, he no longer needs to fight in foreign countries to affirm his identity; he simply needs to do good to the people around him. This becomes the output of the returnees’ attempt at deconstructing and decolonising from ISIL’s terrorist ideology. While they might continue to adhere to the more conservative Islamic theology, they can no longer consider the ISIL way of violence after realising that there are other means within their grasp that can help them affirm their identity as a Muslim. We are firm to say that they do not renounce their initial ideology; they simply stop actualising it in a terroristic manner. In other words, they did not de-radicalise; they de-recidivate.

A careful reader of our analysis above will notice that the process leading someone into becoming a terrorist and quitting terrorism is painstakingly the same. Our analysis reveals that our informants began to consider going to Syria and fight under ISIL only after they realised the supplementary weakness of the nation-state, i.e., that state must and will protect its citizens. Once they saw what the Syrian government has done to its citizens, especially to their fellow Muslims, the idea of the state of Syria as the provider of protection and security is self-deconstructed. This then allows ISIL to consolidate its ideology and establish its social field in which it presents itself as a state based on Islamic theology (cultural capital) that can provide better security than any other state (symbolic capital). In the presence of such figure, our informants become decapitalised and voluntarily submit to ISIL’s social field. Conversely, their decision to quit ISIL also starts off with the realisation of ISIL’s supplementary weakness which results in the decapitalisation of ISIS. Out of the desire to prove that there is nothing wrong with their ideal, they then began to subjugate the remains of their ideal and reconstruct it into something else attainable—quiet similar, but not ISIL.
4. Implications for state-led de-radicalisation programme

In conclusion, any programme that aims to prevent terrorist recidivism needs to first assess individuals’ degree of submission toward certain terrorist ideologies in the social field they are residing. Such programme must also be aware that submission is the function of an unequal distribution of capital in the field that places them into a position prone to ideological inculcation. Notwithstanding, we must never neglect the true nature of any ideology, that it is nothing more than a mediator, a vehicle, for the individuals to manifest its pre-existing belief. A robust, de-recidivism-inspired, programme will always aware that, on one hand, any ideological vehicle cannot forever mediate the individuals’ yearnings. On the other hand, the individuals themselves have the potential to decolonise from and replace whatever ideology they deem capable or incapable of realising its manifestation. Understanding the dialectics of these processes will help us to facilitate ex-terrorist individuals to find a new window of realisation for their belief. Another implication from our de-recidivism analysis is worth considering. As can be inferred from our informants, their decision to choose ISIL and to migrate to Syria did not simply appear out of thin air. It is a result of them deconstructing the state ideology as the one that purportedly protects and fosters its people. In other words, the “foolish, disdainful and false” image of the state, to use one of our informant’s expressions, also contributes to the radicalisation it seeks to combat. The state must never discount their share in the terrorism phenomena. A de-recidivism-informed programme must, therefore, find a way to address the unequal distribution of capital in the social field in which our informants regard the state as the enemy of their ideology. Therefore, the main implication from our analysis is that the state needs to maintain and live up to its symbolic capital as the most reliable provider of protection and security.

In the case of preventing terrorist recidivism, a proper programme to prevent terrorist recidivism must be able to decapitalise the capitals possessed by the terrorist organisation that the individuals submit to. The returnees in this study managed to escape ISIL’s ideological grasp independently due to experiencing situations that nudged them to the supplementary weakness in ISIL’s ideology, which then precipitated their decision to decolonise from it. The de-recidivism model that this paper proposes aims to emulate this experience within the subject by selectively modifying the most valuable capital that conditions the subject’s degree of submission to their organisation. The limited success of existing de-radicalisation programmes to prevent recidivism is due to its inability to help individuals dislocate the supplementary foundation of the ideology represented by their terrorist organisation. De-radicalisation programmes in Indonesia are more concerned with introducing new architecture of ideas as represented by “moderate” Islamic organisations or state symbols (e.g., Red and White Flag, Pancasila) whose cultural and symbolic capitals are located in a slightly different logic of social field with that of the terrorist organisation. These efforts are counter-productive because deconstruction does not occur from outside, but from within (Derrida, 1989). This means that all adherents of terrorist ideology always have the potential to deconstruct their ideology if they can do the Derridean memory work, i.e., simulating that ideology without its abject others.

As such, this paper suggests that the target of de-radicalisation programme should not be the subjects directly, but the ideology that colonises the subject. A programme to prevent terrorist recidivism should create a condition that enables terror convicts to do this memory work, instead of imposing them to memorise another verse of ideology. Such programme must also have a comprehensive understanding of the subject’s social field and conditions of decapitalisation. Each case will be different (whether the lack of cultural, social or symbolic capital), and the programme must first identify it. This way, such a programme will no longer force individuals to submit into an entirely different field. They will instead mediate individuals to dislocate their condition of submission and decapitalise their organisation voluntarily. Only when an individual has fully deconstructed and decolonised from their ideology can the state introduce counter-narratives to direct individuals into exploring alternatives to pursue their ideals through constructive, non-violent means.
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Notes
1. Governmentality is a term coined by Michel Foucault commonly interpreted as a specific form of governance employed by liberal government to control individuals not through direct regulation or prohibition but by imparting freedom, stimulation and persuasion to create a liberal society capable of self-regulating (Lemke & Trump, 2010).

2. Although these French theories might seemingly come out of left field, there have been several literature on de-radicalisation that employ them. See, for example: (Cassam, 2021; Groeninck, 2011; Pranadipa, 2018; Rezan & Naupal, 2019; Taskarina, 2020).

3. As argued by Ashour (2009), terrorists might be able to renounce the use of violence to act upon their ideology but they cannot completely renounce their ideology. In some cases, there are also ex-terrorists who proclaimed that jihad does not always translate to waging war against infidels (jafari). They claimed that jhahd should be understood as a “hurah struggle” in which a Muslim strives to become a blessing for all living beings. By changing their interpretation on the word “jihad”, these ex-terrorists can no longer justify the use of violence to achieve their goal despite still believing in the importance of jihad (Ilyas et al., 2017).

4. All interviews were done in Indonesian Language. The excerpts provided in this article are the authors’ translation. The interviews were done voluntarily with express consent from all informants as well as—in the case of underage informants—their parents/guardians. We have also ensured their confidentiality by not using their real name in this paper. The topic of the interview is the informant’s experience before, during and after they went to Syria to fight for ISIL.

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### Appendix A: Informant data

| No | Name* | Sex | Year of Departure | Age on Departure | Occupation before departure | Position in Battlefield | Interview Date |
|----|-------|-----|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| 1  | Joko  | M   | 2015              | 52               | Non-combatant               | Translator             | 26-Jul-18      |
| 2  | Rifiy | F   | 2015              | Undisclosed      | Student (Joko's daughter)  | Non-combatant          | 27 July 2018   |
| 3  | Dhania| F   | 2015              | 17               | Student (Joko's wife)       | Non-combatant          | 09-Aug-18      |
| 4  | Naya  | F   | 2015              | 20               | Student in Andalus University | Combinant             | 09-Aug-18      |
| 5  | Ratna | F   | 2015              | 49               | Housewife (Joko's wife)     | Non-combatant          | 09-Aug-18      |
| 6  | Hero  | M   | 2015              | 19               | Student                     | Combinant              | 24-Aug-18      |
| 7  | Idris | M   | 2015              | 14               | Student                      | 12-Sep-18              |
| 8  | Mutian| F   | 2015              | 14               | Student                      | 01-Oct-18              |
| 9  | Dhia  | F   | 2015              | 20               | Unemployed                   | 01-Oct-18              |
| 10 | Febry | F   | 2015              | 45               | Housewife                    | 23-Oct-18              |
| 11 | Wulan | M   | 2013              | 20               | Unemployed                   | 23-Oct-18              |
| 12 | Ahmad | M   | 2014              | 45               | Business Owner               | 24-Oct-18              |
| 13 | Ridwan| M   | 2014              | 45               | Business Owner               | 24-Oct-18              |
| 14 | Afff  | M   | 2014              | 45               | Business Owner               | 24-Oct-18              |
| 15 | Irwan | M   | 2015              | 50               | Business Owner               | 13-Nov-18             |
| 16 | Hemi  | M   | 2014              | 50               | Business Owner               | 04-Dec-18             |
| 17 | Nurf  | M   | 2014              | 37               | Driver                       | 04-Dec-18             |
| 18 | Yahya | M   | 2013              | 37               | Driver                       | 5 December 2018      |
| 19 | Kik   | M   | 2014              | 37               | Driver                       | 5 December 2018      |
| 20 | Mutha | M   | 2014              | 37               | Driver                       | Undisclosed            |

*The names provided in this table are pseudonyms. Rahmanto & Golose, Cogent Social Sciences (2022), 8: 2051817
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