

GREETING THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN LOST: REFLECTIVE PERSONAL PREACHING OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTORS IN THE POHUWATO EX-NAPITER CIRCLE

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the reflective personal preaching approach in the process of deradicalization and social reintegration of ex-terrorism convicts (ex-napiter) in Pohuwato Regency, Gorontalo Province. This approach emphasizes empathetic communication, spiritual guidance, and a humanizing reflection space. The method used is autoethnography, with the author as an Islamic religious instructor as well as a direct actor in the preaching process to seven ex-napiters. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and field notes. The results of the study indicate that reflective personal preaching is able to build trust, encourage ideological transformation, and strengthen the national spirit of ex-napiters. Through a preaching process that is not patronizing, but listens and touches on emotional aspects, ex-napiters begin to accept the values of religious moderation, play an active role in society, and demonstrate a commitment to living peacefully within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia. In conclusion, reflective personal preaching is effective as a humanitarian-based approach strategy in post-sentence deradicalization, and is relevant to be developed in the context of local-based extremism prevention.

Keywords: *Reflective Personal Preaching, Deradicalization, Social Reintegration.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji efektivitas pendekatan dakwah personal reflektif dalam proses deradikalisasi dan reintegrasi sosial eks-narapidana kasus terorisme (eks-napiter) di Kabupaten Pohuwato, Provinsi Gorontalo. Pendekatan ini menitikberatkan pada komunikasi empatik, pendampingan spiritual, dan ruang refleksi yang memanusiakan. Metode yang digunakan adalah autoetnografi, dengan penulis sebagai penyuluh agama Islam sekaligus pelaku langsung dalam proses dakwah kepada tujuh eks-napiter. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan catatan lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dakwah personal reflektif mampu membangun kepercayaan, mendorong transformasi ideologis, dan memperkuat semangat kebangsaan para eks-napiter. Melalui proses dakwah yang tidak menggurui, tetapi mendengarkan dan menyentuh aspek emosional, para eks-napiter

mulai menerima nilai-nilai moderasi beragama, berperan aktif dalam masyarakat, dan menunjukkan komitmen untuk hidup damai dalam bingkai NKRI. Kesimpulannya, dakwah personal reflektif efektif sebagai strategi pendekatan berbasis kemanusiaan dalam deradikalisasi pasca-hukuman, serta relevan dikembangkan dalam konteks penanggulangan ekstremisme berbasis lokal.

Kata Kunci: *Dakwah Personal Reflektif, Deradikalisasi, Reintegrasi Sosial.*

INTRODUCTION

The return of former terrorist convicts (napiter) to society often leaves an invisible void, but is felt in the social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. On paper, they have served their sentences, declared their loyalty to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, and even shown a more peaceful and moderate Islamic face. But behind this formality, there is a question that continues to echo in the inner space of society. Have they truly recovered from the ideology of violence? Or are they just moving rooms while storing old embers?

Pohuwato, a quiet area in Gorontalo Province despite its complex social dynamics, witnessed a group of ex-convicts trying to rebuild their lives. In the midst of a climate of conditional acceptance in society, with collective trauma that has not fully healed and suspicion that is sometimes unspoken, the existence of ex-convicts is like walking between two worlds: the old world that they want to leave behind, and the new world that has not fully accepted them.

In that context, the role of religious instructors becomes very vital. Researchers and religious instructors come as fellow servants who greet the inner wounds with empathy. The approach taken by researchers is through a personal approach rooted in human relations. Researchers are present to listen before advising, to understand before directing. The researcher's preaching is not about one-way lectures, but rather heart-to-heart dialogue. Because researchers realize that the biggest concern for ex-convicts is the void of values and spirituality that can be filled by anyone, including by the ideology they previously lived.

This reflective personal preaching approach aims to slowly rebuild the foundations of religious moderation. Researchers try to maintain their belief in Islam as rahmatan lil

alamin, and ensure that their recognition of the Republic of Indonesia is not merely a formality to free themselves from legal status, but is a form of new ideological awareness that is whole and rooted.

This study aims to describe in depth the process of personal preaching to ex-convicts in Pohuwato Regency as a strategy to strengthen religious moderation at the grassroots level after punishment. This research is based on concerns about the weakness of formal and uniform deradicalization approaches, which often fail to reach the inner spaces of individuals and their psychospiritual needs. Therefore, this research aims to raise alternative narratives that are more contextual, humanistic, and transformative.

By directly observing and recording the natural process of da'wah interaction, this study attempts to capture the dynamics of the relationship between researchers as religious instructors and ex-convicts as a meeting between humans who are both in the process of moving towards inner peace. The main objective of this study is to understand how to use an empathetic, communicative and non-preachy da'wah approach to rekindle the spirit of moderate Islam and love for the homeland in ex-convicts. This study also seeks to examine to what extent this approach is able to erode the residue of violent ideology that may still reside secretly, while strengthening the national identity that was previously torn apart by extreme narratives.

Furthermore, this research is expected to provide real contributions in building a more contextual, humane and effective coaching model. Theoretically, this research aims to broaden the horizon of da'wah and deradicalization studies by offering a perspective from below. From voices that may have so far escaped attention, namely the voices of counselors who work silently, and ex-convicts who are struggling to find new meaning in their lives. Practically, the results of this research can be a reference for stakeholders, both at the ministry level, local government, and non-governmental organizations in designing social reintegration programs that are not only oriented towards security, but also towards spiritual and social sustainability. Meanwhile, socially, this research aims to be a bridge of understanding between society and ex-convicts, so that they no longer see them merely as threats, but as humans who have been lost and are now trying to return.

Reflective Dialogue

Da'wah is not enough to be interpreted as just conveying Islamic teachings verbally, but as a process of heart communication that touches the psychological and spiritual dimensions of humans. In the context of ex-convicts, top-down da'wah can actually trigger resistance, because they often experience fatigue with normative discourse that does not touch the roots of their life experiences. The reflective personal da'wah approach assumes a human encounter built on empathy and equality. Nurcholish Madjid himself emphasized that da'wah should be "a revival of deep and enlightening religious awareness".¹

This empathetic communication model in preaching is also in line with Carl Rogers' non-directive counseling theory, which emphasizes the importance of unconditional acceptance, empathy, and full presence as the foundation of psychological transformation.² This means that religious instructors act not as single preachers, but as active listeners who provide reflective space. In the context of ex-convicts, this presence is important to rebuild trust that has long been damaged both towards each other, religion, and the state.

Deradicalization as a Process of Identity and Spirituality Restoration

Deradicalization cannot be interpreted as a one-way re-ideologization process, but rather as a restoration of identity and spirituality. The RAND Corporation study emphasized that effective deradicalization always involves personal and spiritual dimensions, not just security rhetoric.³ Ex-convicts generally experience a loss of identity after leaving an extreme group, they feel empty, uprooted from their belief system, and experience a lack of meaning in life.

The social identity theory of Henri Tajfel and John Turner explains that a person tends to seek protection in groups that can give him a sense of belonging and

¹ Nurcholish Madjid. *Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban: Sebuah Telaah Kritis tentang Masalah Keimanan, Kemanusiaan, dan Kemodernan*. Jakarta: Paramadina, 2000, h. 45–47.

² Carl R. Rogers. *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961, h. 17–23.

³ Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez, Christopher Boucek. *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010, h. 5–9.

meaning.⁴So when someone leaves the old ideological group, he does not immediately become “neutral”, but is in a dangerous vacuum. Viktor Frankl called this condition a “vacuum existence” that is vulnerable to being infiltrated by new ideologies if not immediately filled with positive meaning.⁵This is where the importance of reflective and spiritual preaching lies, namely preaching that does not preach but accompanies the search for meaning authentically.

Religious Moderation, Humanizing the Subject of Da'wah from Within

Religious moderation as developed by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion is not merely a policy discourse, but a religious approach that balances textuality and contextuality, between religious commitment and respect for diversity.⁶In the context of ex-convicts, religious moderation needs to be instilled not only through formal lectures, but through interactions that raise new awareness.

Autoethnography is an appropriate method for recording this process because it is able to combine the researcher's personal experiences with scientific analysis.⁷Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner explain that autoethnography is not just a method of self-writing, but a medium for understanding social complexity through reflective and in-depth experiences.⁸With this approach, the experience of religious instructors who are directly involved in mentoring ex-convicts is not only a story, but also data. Preaching narratives are no longer separated from social reality, but instead become a reflection of inner transformation for both the instructor and the object of preaching.

Literature Review

Research on the deradicalization of ex-convicts continues to receive widespread attention in the academic realm, especially since the increasing threat of religious-based violence in various regions of Indonesia. However, most studies emphasize aspects of

⁴ Henri Tajfel dan John C. Turner. “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior.” Dalam Stephen Worchel dan William G. Austin (Ed.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986, h. 7–24.

⁵ Viktor E. Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006, h. 111–136.

⁶ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia. *Moderasi Beragama*. Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat, 2019, h. 13–22.

⁷ Heewon Chang. *Autoethnography as Method*. New York: Routledge, 2008, h. 43–72.

⁸ Carolyn Ellis dan Arthur P. Bochner. “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject.” Dalam Norman K. Denzin dan Yvonna S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000, h. 733–768.

policy, national security, or formal institutional approaches. Meanwhile, micro spaces, such as interpersonal relationships based on trust and spirituality, are still rarely touched upon in depth.

One important study was conducted by Solahudin and Marcus Mietzner who explored the dynamics of deradicalization in Indonesia. They highlighted that the government's approach tends to be technocratic and ineffective because it fails to reach the psychosocial roots of radicalism. Their study underlines the importance of community-based approaches and interpersonal relationships as essential elements in the social reintegration of ex-convicts.⁹

In line with that, M. Imdadun Rahmat in his dissertation showed that deradicalization programs that only emphasize formal aspects, such as lectures or training, are often unable to penetrate the deepest inner space of ex-convicts, especially those who experience ideological and existential trauma. He suggested the need for a more communicative, participatory, and personal approach.¹⁰

Furthermore, research by Noor Huda Ismail ethnographically illustrates how genuine and empathy-based friendships can be a powerful gateway to changing extreme beliefs. Through a narrative approach to ex-convicts, Ismail shows that deradicalization cannot be imposed from the outside, but must be born from within a person, often mediated by strong emotional experiences and supportive relationships.¹¹

As a complement to this approach, Nur Rofiah's study, which is more oriented towards a humanist Islamic perspective, emphasizes that the narrative of Islam that is full of compassion and humanity is very important in the process of ideological rehabilitation. She reminds us that religion is often misused not because of its texts, but because of the human experience that does not find a way home spiritually.¹²

⁹ Solahudin & Marcus Mietzner, "Explaining Islamist Insurgencies in Indonesia: Lessons from the Radicalisation of Poso," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2012, h. 207–226.

¹⁰ M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Ideologi Radikal dan Deradikalisasi*, Disertasi, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2011, h. 233–250.

¹¹ Noor Huda Ismail, *Temanku Teroris: Mengubah Jalan Hidup Mantan Napiter*, Jakarta: Tempo Publishing, 2013, h. 89–102.

¹² Nur Rofiah, "Menafsir Ulang Islam: Narasi Kemanusiaan sebagai Kritik terhadap Kekerasan Berbasis Agama," *Jurnal Studi Gender Al-Fikrah*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2015, h. 45–60.

Meanwhile, Asna Husin researched the rehabilitation program for ex-convicts in Aceh and found that the participation of local religious figures and a cultural value-based approach were very helpful in rebuilding the peaceful identity of ex-convicts. This study shows that local context and spiritual relationships are more effective than a uniform and standardized national approach.¹³

Finally, research by Lies Marcoes and the Rumah KitaB team strengthens the argument that a personal approach, especially by female religious figures, can touch the deepest psychological side of former perpetrators of violence. They underline the importance of the role of a “spiritual listener” who is present without judgment, but still provides guidance.¹⁴

From the six previous studies, it appears that the gap for a reflective autoethnographic approach is still wide open. No one has explicitly narrated the inner experiences of religious instructors in personally touching and accompanying ex-convicts. Therefore, this study tries to provide a unique contribution, presenting a humanitarian, spiritual, and emotional narrative that is often missed from ordinary academic reports.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a reflective autoethnography approach as the main method, an approach that combines the power of personal narrative with the sharpness of social analysis. In it, the researcher does not only act as a researcher, but also as a subject who lives, witnesses, and reflects on every moment of preaching to ex-convicts of terrorism cases (ex-napiter) in Pohuwato Regency. The researcher does not stand behind a desk, but sits with them on the porch of the house. Not just taking notes, but also getting involved in conversations that break the distance between the dark past and new hopes.

¹³ Asna Husin, “The Role of Local Religious Leaders in the Rehabilitation of Former Terrorists in Aceh,” *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2017, h. 471–499.

¹⁴ Lies Marcoes dkk., *Perempuan dan Deradikalisasi: Studi Kasus Program Pemulihan oleh Tokoh Perempuan*, Jakarta: Rumah KitaB, 2019, h. 56–78.

Autoethnography was chosen because this approach allows for in-depth exploration of psychosocial, spiritual, and ideological dynamics that cannot be fully captured by traditional quantitative or qualitative methods.¹⁵ This method allows researchers to organize data into a reflective narrative that touches on the human side of preaching, that touching human hearts must be done through shared experiences.

This study involved seven ex-convicts who had returned to society after their sentence and settled in various sub-districts in Pohuwato Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and narratively compiled field notes during the mentoring process between 2023 and 2025. Interviews were conducted in an informal setting that allowed for trust and openness, often taking place on the veranda of their house, a coffee shop, or a small mosque that became their space for reflection.

Observations are made on verbal behavior, expressions, gestures, pauses and even silence. Because in silence there are often unspoken experiences.¹⁶ The researcher documented all of these experiences in notes, which were then analyzed using thematic narrative analysis techniques, an approach that allows for the extraction of meaning from narrative experiences while maintaining the context and emotions that accompany them.¹⁷

In the analysis process, the researcher used a triangulation approach between narrative data, personal reflection, and the local socio-cultural context of Pohuwato. Data validity was maintained through a process of repeated reflection, discussions with fellow counselors and reinterpretation of experiences based on academic literature on preaching, psychology of religion and deradicalization. This approach is in line with the emic principle in ethnography, namely understanding the world from an insider's perspective, not from a judgmental perspective.¹⁸

¹⁵ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, dan Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2011, h. 45

¹⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, h. 5–6.

¹⁷ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2008, h. 68–90.

¹⁸ James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979, h. 31–34.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The researcher never imagined that the researcher's small steps as an Islamic religious instructor at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Pohuwato Regency would bring the researcher to such a valuable experience in the realm of humanity. In Pohuwato, where the researcher was assigned, I met a group of people who in the past had slipped into the trap of extreme ideology. They are known as ex-convicts of terrorism cases. But for the researcher, they are brothers who are struggling to become part of society and the nation again, with wounds that are not always visible on the surface.

In the approach of preaching that the researcher calls "reflective personal preaching", where more ears and hearts are opened to listen and dive into the inner experiences of the ex-terrorist prisoners that I met. From the encounters, the researcher learned that the process of reconciliation, acceptance and transformation is not a straight and simple journey. But more like an effort to reweave the fabric of life that was once torn with the threads of patience, gentleness and affection. Here I describe 7 ex-convicts from Pohuwato, Gorontalo Province using only the initials;

1. SA

SA is one of those whose story has intrigued researchers from the start. He was arrested in 2020, serving two years and two months of a three-year sentence. From Mako Brimob Cikeas, he was then transferred to Gunung Sindur Prison. He spoke with teary eyes as we sat on the veranda of his house;

"After being released in 2023, I thought I would be rejected by society. But what I found was a warm welcome. Open arms. Alhamdulillah,"¹⁹

Over the past few months, researchers have often come to SA's house. Researchers do not always talk about religion monotonously. Sometimes researchers share stories about the meaning of life. But in those conversations, the meaning of preaching comes in the most humane and touching form.

"From Ustadz Wisno I learned that Islam does not reject differences. Islam is moderate. I used to be strict, but now I am more peaceful. I want to be a good Muslim."

¹⁹Suleman Alinti, Ex-Napiter, Interview on May 15, 2025.

We have recognized the Republic of Indonesia. We are no longer people who want to fight. We want to be part of this nation."²⁰

2. ZK

ZK, now 31 years old, had served one year in prison in Cikeas and one year and three months in Gunung Sindur. He was a tough, firm and initially quite withdrawn person. But one afternoon, after we had talked about the importance of tasamuh (tolerance) in Islam, he said quietly:

*"I am more grateful now that I live in Pohuwato. This is where I met Ustadz Wisno Pakaya. In prison, my body was restrained. But after I got out, my soul was freed."*²¹

He admitted that he used to not trust anyone outside his group. He lived in suspicion, in a doctrine of exclusivity that shielded him from the outside world. But slowly, through gentle dialogue, he began to let go of that shield.

*"Ustadz Wisno never forced me. But from the way he spoke, from the way he listened, I came to know that Islam does not teach hostility. In fact, I used to want to die as a fighter. But now I want to live as a peacemaker."*²²

3. ZL

ZL is serving a 3-year sentence. When I met him, he was wearing a black jacket and looked calm, although his words carried wounds that had not fully healed. He said;

*"When I first got out of prison, people accepted me. But I know, sometimes they still talk behind my back. I'm not angry. I understand. Forgiving is not easy."*²³

What is interesting about ZL is his honesty in reflecting on his changes. He does not cover up his past, but also does not let it become a shadow that continues to bind him. According to him again;

*"I have realized. In the past, I was narrow in understanding Islam. Now I understand that religion should not be excessive. Especially after often receiving enlightenment on religious moderation from Ustadz Wisno Pakaya, I feel that my heart's eyes have been opened."*²⁴

4. JY

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Zainudin Kiai, Ex-Napiter, Interview on May 15, 2025.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Zunaidin Z. Liputo, Ex-Napiter, Interview on May 16, 2025.

²⁴*Ibid.*

JY is one of the most vivid examples of successful social reintegration. He was very well received by the community, and is now a role model for his other peers.

*"I have never heard a bad word from society since I came out. They treat me like normal. That made me want to really change. I always listen to Ustadz Wisno's advice, that Islam never teaches violence. What I know now is that Islam is full of love."*²⁵

5. FK

FK has an extraordinary spirit of learning. He often notes down the points of my preaching in his little book. One of the things he remembers most is the principle of wasathiyah.

*"Islam is in the middle. Not hard, not loose. Not excessive. That's what I learned from Ustadz."*²⁶

He is now involved in mosque activities and is a bridge between ex-convict youth and local community leaders.

*"In the past, I was distant from society. Now I want to be close. I want Islam to be seen as a friendly religion, not an angry one."*²⁷

Unlike the 5 ex-convicts above, MZL and AHM find it difficult to speak up. But their presence in every forum, their activeness in social activities, and their open attitude in accepting invitations to socialize show that change does not always have to be conveyed in words. MZL, who wears his distinctive cream shirt, is a loyal listener. AHM who lives in Duhiadaa District, is an important liaison between the ex-convict group and religious figures there.

These small steps in mentoring have resonated widely in various circles. In the eyes of the Regent of Pohuwato, Saiful Mbuinga, efforts to mentor ex-terrorist convicts are very urgent to ground religious moderation in Bumi Panua. Here is Saiful Mbuinga's statement;

*"For me, what Ustadz Wisno did was a very urgent mission. His preaching method was the best, Ustadz Wisno was present in their midst, conveying that Islam is peaceful and harmonious."*²⁸

²⁵Jelfis Yusuf, Ex-Napiter, Interview on May 16, 2025.

²⁶Fizal Kadue, Ex-Napiter, Interview on May 17, 2025.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸Saiful Mbuinga, Regent of Pohuwato, Interview on May 24, 2025.

The same appreciation came from Rais Abaidata, Head of the Pohuwato Regency Ministry of Religious Affairs Office. In a warm interview in his office, he expressed his admiration and deep appreciation for the personal preaching approach carried out by Islamic religious instructors in his area. Rais Abaidata saw that the work of mentoring ex-convicts was a real manifestation of the vision of religious moderation that has been echoed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The following is an excerpt from the interview with Rais Abaidata;

*"This mentoring is authentic preaching, down-to-earth preaching. Ustadz Wisno has proven that big changes can start from small, sincere touches. And that is special."*²⁹

In line with that, Usman Pulomoduyo, Chairman of the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Pohuwato Regency, also voiced his appreciation for the consistency and sincerity of the preaching that I have done so far. According to him;

*"Ustadz Wisno is indeed a cleric who is quite consistent in voicing moderate and peaceful Islam. He does not only speak, but goes down directly, and that is what makes his preaching touching."*³⁰

Discussion

In the context of overcoming post-punishment extremism, a preaching approach that prioritizes the humanitarian side is an urgent need. The researcher's experience as an Islamic religious instructor in Pohuwato Regency, Gorontalo Province, opened up a new horizon in understanding that ideological rehabilitation is not enough to be carried out only through formal programs, it must touch the deepest side of a person's spiritual and social experience. From here was born the approach that the researcher formulated as reflective personal preaching, namely a preaching method based on emotional intimacy, active empathy and non-patronizing religious reflection.

In the field, researchers interacted with seven ex-convicts of terrorism. Each of them carried wounds, doubts and hopes. Instead of intervening with them with doctrine, researchers chose to be listeners, opening an equal chat room, positioning them as

²⁹Rais Abaidata, Head of the Pohuwato Ministry of Religious Affairs Office, Interview on May 24, 2025.

³⁰Usman Pulomoduyo, Chair of FKUB Pohuwato, Interview on May 24 2025.

sovereign subjects over their life narratives. From these conversations, preaching became a safe space to reconstruct the meaning of faith that is friendly, inclusive and loving.

Table 1: Qualitative Analysis of Reflective Personal Preaching to Ex-Napiter

Name	Emotional Reflection & Spirituality	Ideological Transformation Narrative
SA	I thought it would be rejected. But it was welcomed.	From the ideology of resistance to the spirit of nationalism and peace
ZK	In prison my body was restrained, but my soul was only free after I got out.	From wanting to die as a warrior to wanting to be a peacemaker
ZL	I am not angry even though sometimes people talk behind my back. Forgiving is not easy	Awareness of the narrow understanding of Islam in the past, now open to moderation
JY	I want to really change. Islam is full of love.	Successful full social reintegration, becoming a community role model
FK	Islam is in the middle. Not hard, not loose	Reflections on the importance of wasathiyah; now active as a bridge between ex-convicts and the community
MZL	Not much talk, but always present, listening and opening up space for friendship	Change is demonstrated through consistent social participation
AHM	Becoming a liaison between ex-convict groups and religious figures in Duhiadaa	Transformation is seen through involvement in cross-social and inter-religious work.

These findings show that reflective personal preaching addresses previously locked emotional and existential layers. This is preaching that does not come with pamphlets, but with empathy, not with claims of truth, but with recognition of wounds and a desire to heal together. Theoretically, this approach affirms the importance of integration between the pastoral care approach (spiritual care) and deradicalization based on local values, where preaching is a spiritual therapy that restores human relationships with God, society, and themselves.

Through this approach, the exclusive and confrontational narrative of Islam is slowly transformed into a dialogical, calm and down-to-earth narrative of Islam. The ex-

convicts in Pohuwato become active actors in the work of religious moderation and peacekeeping.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study confirms that the reflective personal preaching approach has great potential in paving the way for social reintegration and ideological transformation of ex-terrorist convicts in Pohuwato Regency, Gorontalo Province. This approach does not rely on one-way lectures or formal institutional pressure, but is built on warm human relations, active empathy, and respect for individual spiritual autonomy. The seven ex-terrorist convicts we met showed that the process of change is not linear. Each individual is unique in the way they reinterpret religion, nation, and community life. From SA who experienced a warm welcome after being released to AHM who became an important liaison in the community, it is clear that change does not only start from understanding, but also from the experience of being accepted as whole human beings. Their narratives display inner struggles, spiritual reflections, and a strong will to foster peace, not to fight conflict. This reflective personal preaching penetrates the deepest layers of ex-terrorist spirituality, addressing existential wounds that are often untouched by formal approaches. This approach implicitly integrates the concept of pastoral care in Islam, making preaching a space for psychological and spiritual recovery. More than just correcting extreme religious understanding, this preaching is a means of healing and re-growing a sense of love for friendly Islam, for the Republic of Indonesia and for a peaceful life.

Suggestion

The experience of assisting ex-convicts of terrorism cases in Pohuwato Regency has opened our eyes that preaching is the key to the process of ideological transformation after sentencing. Based on these findings, it is important to present several strategic and applicable suggestions so that they can be developed more widely.

First, the capacity of religious instructors needs to be strengthened through theological, psychosocial and interdisciplinary training. Religious instructors on the front

lines need to be equipped with empathetic communication skills, trauma understanding and a locally-based deradicalization approach. Thus, they are able to be present as spiritual companions who understand the wounds and inner needs of ex-convicts.

Second, the success of preaching cannot be achieved if it is done alone. Therefore, close collaboration is needed between the Ministry of Religion, law enforcement officers, community leaders, religious organizations and correctional institutions. This synergy must be built in the spirit of humanity.

Third, it is important for local governments and religious institutions to create safe, open, and stigma-free spiritual dialogue spaces. These spaces become valuable places for ex-convicts to rebuild their self-confidence and repair their fractured social relations. This is where reconciliation finds its real form.

Fourth, a personal approach in preaching must be designed in a planned and sustainable manner. There needs to be a consistent mentoring system, involving figures who are trusted by ex-convicts, both from religious and community circles. Preaching is not enough to touch once, but must be a long-term dialogical process that grows in trust.

Finally, field experiences like these need to be documented and disseminated as best practices. Stories of successful social reintegration through reflective preaching are valuable legacies that can inspire many. By disseminating these stories, we build hope that change is possible.

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