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Ex-Muslims in Singapore:

A Clash of Social Realities

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ABSTRACT

Apostates often face persecution from religious communities and also their loved ones. It is paramount that we understand how and why individuals become apostates so that they can receive the proper social support from their families and relevant authorities, minimizing their suffering. Hence, this paper investigates how clashes between the Islamic social reality and other social realities pushes Muslims in Singapore towards apostasy by analyzing the narratives of 35 ex-Muslims in Singapore through Berger and Luckmann's framework; *the social construction of reality*. The findings show that the presence of alternative realities, unsuccessful socialization and therapy of the ex-Muslims result in the delegitimization of the Islamic social reality. In addition, the study also found that mindlessness perpetuates the synonymy between race and religion. These findings illustrate the journey that ex-Muslims have undergone and how hatred towards them is misplaced while shedding light onto how other hidden populations might have come about.

Key Words: Ex-Muslims, The Social Construction of Reality, Conceptual Machineries, Religious Conversion, Social Change, Apostasy,

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Literature Review	6
2.1. Macro.....	6
2.2. Meso.....	6
2.3. Micro.....	7
2.4. Studies on ex-Muslims	7
3. Theoretical Framework	9
3.1. The Social Construction of Reality	9
3.1.1. Conceptual Machineries of Universe Maintenance.....	10
3.1.2. Therapy	11
4. Methodology	13
5. Findings and Discussion: The Clash of Social Realities	15
5.1. Findings: Delegitimization of the Islamic Social Reality.....	15
5.1.1. Discussion: Presence of Alternative Social Realities, Unsuccessful Socialization and Therapy	19
5.2. Findings: The Synonymy of Race and Religion	22
5.2.1. Discussion: Mindlessness and the Perpetuation of Synonymy Between Race and Religion.....	23
6. Conclusion	26
7. Bibliography	29

1. INTRODUCTION

Singapore's history in the past century has been a rather volatile one, especially with regards to maintaining social cohesion. The different cultures that are squeezed within Singapore's society create a breeding ground for misunderstandings between communities that could incite social upheavals such as the Mariah Hertogh riot and race riots in the 1960s. Although Singapore has never faced another race or religion-related riot since the 1960s and overt racial-religious discrimination is uncommon, that does not indicate that social cohesion is just over the horizon. Behind the fast-rising concrete walls lies a deep-rooted problem that all modern societies will face – the inevitable divide between newly constructed social norms and those of the past. This divide experiences exponential growth because Singaporeans are increasingly bombarded by cultural norms and ideas from different corners of the globe, influencing the construction of new social norms in Singapore. We have to look no further than the growing acceptance of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) movement in Singapore as an example (Kok 2017). Populations that used to be hidden are starting to surface while forming their own networks in order to push for their community's agenda. One of these hidden populations is the community of ex-Muslims in Singapore

Members of hidden communities such as the ex-Muslims face unnecessarily difficult lives. They have to make a difficult choice between living a double life and facing persecution from the Muslim community. Living a double life entails a constant performance or façade, preventing them from being themselves while making their apostate status publicly known can result in social isolation when the Muslim community severs ties with them. Although the experiences of the ex-Muslims may be vastly different from members of other hidden communities such as the LGBTQ, their experiences will be similar in its form, thus giving us insight into what other hidden communities could potentially face and how such communities came to be.

With the above in mind, the findings of this study will shed light on the larger social forces at play that will proliferate the growth of not only the ex-Muslim community but also other hidden communities such as apostate communities from other religions and the LGBTQ community. Hence, this study seeks to investigate how clashes between the Islamic social reality and other social realities can push Muslims in Singapore towards apostasy. This will be achieved through analyzing the narratives of the ex-Muslims via Berger and Luckmann's (1966) *social construction of reality*. This paper will be a guide through which one may experience the journey

of apostatizing Muslims in Singapore. The choice to focus the investigation on ex-Muslims rather than apostates of other religions or even the LGBTQ community is to show that even in one of the “strictest” religions, there is always trouble in paradise.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, a review of the literature shows a significant number of studies focused on conversion into Christianity (Abel 2006, Hall 2006, Ng 2002, Purwanto and Basri 2016, Yang and Tamney 2006). The remainder of the literature is split between the topics of apostasy, atheism and agnosticism – of which, studies on agnosticism is the least prevalent while the literature on apostasy, which is the most abundant, centered on establishing demographic profiles of apostasy in different communities (Froese 2004, Hout and Fischer 2002). In order to facilitate a comprehensive presentation of the literature, it is categorized into the macro, meso or micro sections.

2.1. Macro

The literature that is macro focused details mass conversion patterns among different communities in different time periods (Barro, Hwang and McCleary 2010, Froese 2004, Hayes 2000, Sherkat and Wilson 1995, Yang and Tamney 2006). These quantitative studies are useful in outlining demographic trends. For instance, in the United States of America, Sherkat (2008) found that an increase in age correlates with a strengthening one's belief system – individuals who believe in God had a stronger belief in God as they age while individuals who do not believe in God became more certain in their lack of belief. Sherkat (2008) also found that having higher educational qualifications correlates with atheism and agnosticism. The universality of these findings is further supported by the same conclusions that arise out of studies conducted in Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy and Spain (Hayes 2000)

On another note, mass conversions out of a religion can also be fueled by structural factors. In the first half of the 20th Century, the communist party in the Soviet Union initiated forced secularization of its states, resulting in the disintegration of monopolies that dominant religions hold over the religious markets (Froese 2004). More interestingly, in the USA, studies have found that Christianity is tied to the Republican party and that a conflict between political and religious identity have pushed individuals to convert out of Christianity (Hout and Fischer 2002, Putnam and Campbell 2012).

2.2. Meso

On a meso level, the literature points towards the instrumental role of the behaviors of members of a religion in either pulling members into a religion or pushing them away. There are numerous studies that highlighted how individuals who convert into another religion are attracted by the

personalities, values and character of the members of that religion (Abel 2006, Ng 2002). On the flipside, hypocritical or “bad” behavior is a major factor that pushes members to leave a religion (Altemeyer 2004)

2.3. Micro

The Lofland Stark Model of religious conversion dominated the sociological discipline in the discourse of religious conversions (Hall 2006, Snow and Phillips 1980, Snow and Machalek 1984). The model posits that conversion into another religion requires two factors to be fulfilled; predisposing conditions and situational contingencies. Lofland and Stark (1965) explain that predisposing conditions can be understood as background factors that make an individual more susceptible to being recruited into another religion. However, the Lofland Stark Model, in its domination of the religious conversion discourse, has provided researchers with both time and opportunity to challenge the validity of the model. Numerous studies stood in resistance, showing that individuals can convert into other religions even without having any prior predisposing conditions (Heirich 1977, Seggar and Kunz 1972). The situational contingencies on the other hand are broken down into six different factors which focus on the amount and quality of social interaction between the potential convert and a member of the recruiting religion.

During the period when the model was frequently used, studies mainly focused on outlining the type of individuals who are more likely to be converted as well as the recruitment process upon entering another religion (Yang 1998).

2.4. Studies on Ex-Muslims

Among the few studies that specifically targets ex-Muslims, most focused on describing the narratives that were presented by the ex-Muslims (Cottee 2015, Khalil and Bilici 2007, Orenstein and Weismann 2016, Pulcini 2017). Some other studies detailed the challenges with being an ex-Muslim (Abdul 2013, Ali 2009, Kasmarang 2017, Samuri and Quraishi 2014). For instance, Samuri and Quaraishi (2014) highlight the difficulty in officially renouncing one’s Islamic faith in Malaysia due to court rulings that deny such requests. Abdul (2013) adds that within a Singaporean context, ex-Muslims are denied recognition by the state. Kasmarang (2017) found that apostasy the Islamic faith can be cited as a legitimate reason to incite a divorce. Ali (2009) illustrated the challenges that an ex-Muslim Malay Bible study group in Singapore faced in developing a unique group identity.

Other studies that were more technical focused on analyzing the validity of the death penalty for ex-Muslim as stated by Islamic law and found that such laws are only valid when the ex-Muslim wages a war against Islam (Abdullah 2012, Assagaf 2014, Kahveci 2017, Musif 2015) as well as how bringing ex-Muslims back into Islam should be conducted humanely (Smith 2012). Another study called for governmental support to both Muslim converts and ex-Muslims alike while detailing institutions within society that will be affected by religious conversions (Ibrahim, Urus and Mohamed 2016).

Purwanto and Basri (2016) conducted one of the very few studies that specifically focused on the reasons for apostasy among Muslims. They found that Wonoagung and Tamansatriyan villagers in the Tortoyudo Malang district in Indonesia converted from Islam to Christianity mainly because they were attracted to the personal qualities of the Christian pastor that converted them – this aligns with the meso level literature that describes the personal qualities of members within a religion as a pull factor.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Although the literature review clearly shows the different possible avenues of analyzing the case of ex-Muslims in Singapore, I argue that utilizing a meso-micro approach will yield more benefits than using a macro approach. Firstly, there is little to no quantitative data on Singaporean's religious affiliations besides data from Singapore's Census. Given the time and resources available to me, I will be unable to conduct a large scale quantitative study that can add value to the data from the Census. Furthermore, even with access to the relevant data, its analysis will likely produce similar results as the quantitative studies mentioned previously in the macro section. In addition, conducting such a study would only show correlations and not causation. Given that I have gained access to a hidden population, I will capitalize on the present opportunity and conduct an in-depth study instead.

However, this presents me with a great challenge, because not only there are minimal studies conducted on ex-Muslims but also, the theoretical frameworks used in these studies and the other studies cited in the previous sections may not necessarily fit my study. For instance, the literature shows that most studies that were conducted focused on individuals specifically converting into another religion rather than having none. The participants that I have sourced for this study are a mixture of ex-Muslims with and without religions. There is also a misfit between the theoretical frameworks commonly used and the scope of my study; according to the Lofland Stark Model, participants will only convert into another religion if the predisposing conditions and situational contingencies are fulfilled. However, the majority of participants in my study have not fulfilled the conditions and contingencies proposed by the Lofland Stark Model, yet they have converted out of Islam. This aligns with how other studies have surfaced the same flaw of the model (Heirich 1977, Seggar and Kunz 1972).

Since I aim to highlight and analyze how the ex-Muslims in Singapore manage their different social realities, I require an analytical framework that can help deconstruct the complex issue of religious conversion without illustrating it as a universal process. Therefore, I will employ Berger and Luckmann's (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality* which explains how symbolic realities are created and maintained.

3.1. The Social Construction of Reality

Berger and Luckmann (1966) start off by positing that societies are first formed through the habitualization of actions. Once actions are performed out of habit, this results in what Langer

(1989) would refer to as mindlessness whereby individuals automatically rely on past definitions and categories of situations and objects in order to make decisions quickly, without thinking. When we act mindlessly, we are acting based on meanings that have been applied to objects and situations in the past. This further strengthens the arbitrary associations of the specific meanings that have been tied to specific objects and situations. Over time, when typifications of habitualized actions are formed, institutionalization occurs.

3.1.1. Conceptual Machineries of Universe Maintenance

However, the institutionalized meanings require constant legitimation (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Legitimation of institutions are achieved through operationalizing the *conceptual machineries of universe maintenance*. Conceptual machineries are the institutionalized meanings within society – it is from these conceptual machineries that we know how the world works and ought to work. We live in a symbolic universe that constructs a social reality for us based on the conceptual machineries within our society. The validity of institutionalized meanings carried within the conceptual machineries becomes irrelevant because members believe the meanings to be true, they act on them and thus create real consequences in objective reality.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued that the purpose of conceptual machineries is to help maintain the legitimacy of a social reality. Retaining members within a social reality entails enforcement of conceptual machineries that have been legitimized within that community's social reality. Adherence to specific shared meanings can be enforced by both the individual and the other members in order to maintain communal bonds within that community. It is important to note that enforcement does not necessitate physical oppression – once members subscribe to a social reality, they will engage in self-policing or be policed by other members in order to reaffirm their identity as a member of that community to themselves and to other members. A caveat to this claim is that members do not always fully subscribe to the conceptual machineries of the social reality that they live in. A catalyst for a weakening subscription to a specific set of conceptual machineries is the exposure to another social reality which operates on a different set of conceptual machineries.

The appearance of an alternative symbolic universe poses a threat because its very existence demonstrates empirically that one's own universe is less than inevitable. (Berger and Luckmann 1966:126)

Another issue with universe maintenance is that the process of transmitting a symbolic universe or social reality from generation to generation is inherently problematic because the

process of socialization is not always successful. Even if an individual was successfully socialized to the conceptual machineries of his reality, his understanding of the institutionalized meanings is subjective and thus may not be a completely accurate understanding of the “original” meanings.

Socialization is never completely successful. Some individuals ‘inhabit’ the transmitted universe more definitely than others. Even among the more or less accredited ‘inhabitants’, there will always be idiosyncratic variations in the way they conceive the universe.(Berger and Luckmann 1966:124)

The way in which a symbolic universe and its conceptual machineries get passed down to the next generation is through *primary socialization* and *secondary socialization*. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) put it,

Primary socialization is the first socialization an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society. Secondary socialization is any subsequent process that inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society. (Berger and Luckmann 1966:150)

Primary socialization mainly occurs in the family unit. Parents teach their children how to function within society on a fundamental level – they teach their children language. Aside from language, they also teach basic roles within their society. Secondary socialization usually takes place in educational institutions such as public and religious school. It is here where individuals will learn the institutionalized meanings ascribed to complex roles in society.

The possibility of unsuccessful socialization process, the subjective understanding of the conceptual machineries and the presence of other social realities would result in any society producing deviants. In order to maintain the symbolic totality of a social reality, members within a social reality will deal with deviancy. This is done by utilizing the conceptual machineries of a society through *therapy*

3.1.2.Application of Conceptual Machineries: Therapy

Therapy is a way of re-socializing a deviant or potentially deviant individual to the conceptual machineries of the deviant’s social reality by making them re-subscribe to the legitimacy of that reality. Berger and Luckmann (1966:130) adds that this is to “prevent the ‘inhabitants’ of a given universe from ‘emigrating’”.

Successful therapy establishes a symmetry between the conceptual machinery and its subjective appropriation in the individual's consciousness; it re-socializes the deviant into the objective reality of the symbolic universe of the society. (Berger and Luckmann 1966:132)

The links between how ex-Muslims manage their Islamic reality, ex-Muslim reality and modern day Singapore reality should have begun to form. In section 5, "Findings and Discussion", Berger and Luckmann's ideas on the social construction of reality will illuminate the narratives of the ex-Muslims while also explaining how such narratives came to be.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study collected its data via semi-structured in-depth interviews with a sample size of 35 participants out of approximately 170 ex-Muslims that I had access to. The purpose of having a larger sample size was to capture a potentially diverse range of responses. I was expecting participants to fall within larger homogenous religious or spiritual affiliation categories; however, this was far from the truth in reality. Table 1 will showcase the diversity in demographics among the participants.

Table 1: Breakdown of participants by race, sex and belief system.

Race	Religion		No Religion		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Malay	4	2	10	7	23
Indian	-	-	4	3	7
Biracial	-	1	4	-	5
Total	4	3	18	10	35

When sourcing for participants, the categories that I kept in mind were ex-Muslims in organized religions and ex-Muslims with no religion. Other subcategories such as sex, race and socio-economic background were kept in mind but did not serve as a prerequisite to being enrolled in the study. There was a plan to specifically fill up these sub-categories if they were under-represented. This was the case towards the end of the study whereby I stopped accepting male participants because of their over-representation. I also had difficulty recruiting participants from organized religions and thus placed more effort into their recruitment towards the end of the data collection phase. Throughout the whole study, I could not locate any Chinese ex-Muslims.

Conducting a study with a large pool of participants does not come without its fair share of challenges – particularly in locating different Ex-Muslim communities and scheduling interviews. As mentioned previously, a majority of the participants were sourced from the Council of ex-Muslims of Singapore (CEMSG) and Church on the Move (COM). COM was the only group that I had contact with prior to the study. CEMSG approached me through social media to express their interest in the study. As for scheduling difficulties, the timeframe for conducting interviews fell between mid-November 2017 and early January 2018 – a period that coincided with the exam period (for schools), school holidays, vacation period for workers and two national holidays in Singapore. This created scheduling issues, limiting my pool of

participants. There were four participants who opted to be dropped from the study but were successfully replaced. It was challenging to convince participants to join the study as they were afraid that the study was a ruse to get them to expose their real identities. This was understandable since the CEMSG group had been infiltrated by Muslims pretending to be ex-Muslims, who later revealed the identities of some CEMSG members. CEMSG even sent an associate to verify my identity while going through my social media activities. In order to ease tensions, I made it a point to join their social gatherings as much as I could.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: A CLASH OF SOCIAL REALITIES

One major finding and one sub-finding will be presented in this section, of which both findings will be framed and discussed through the social construction of reality. The main finding shows how the Islamic social reality becomes delegitimized while the sub-finding highlights how mindlessness perpetuates synonymy between race and religion.

5.1. Main Finding: Delegitimization of the Islamic Social Reality

The findings show that unsuccessful socialization and therapy of the ex-Muslims as well as the presence of alternative realities result in the delegitimization of the Islamic social reality within the ex-Muslim's subjective reality. The narratives presented will provide insight into the journey that ex-Muslims undergo on their road towards apostasy.

Almost all participants, had weak social bonds to the Muslim community during the period when they started to question their religious faith - they had few Muslim friends.

My circle of friends are all non-Malays. – Aliwal 26

I never really had many Muslim friends growing up, I think by the time even in secondary school I fell with the bad kids, the *mats* and *minahs*¹, and so they were my Malay friends, not the nice ones. And then by the time I went to poly, all Chinese friends and then I went to work at the zoo then all Indian friends. Now it's everything, now I actually have more Malay friends than I ever had in my life but they're all... not religious ahh. – Shima, 36.

Since most of the ex-Muslims such as Aliwal and Shima have few Muslim friends, the frequency and intensity of policing by other Muslims will also be low. This entails the participants experiencing less social pressure to conform to the conceptual machineries of the Islamic social reality, which could possibly weaken their subjective subscription to that reality in the long run. Dilah's experience exemplifies the power of social pressures.

Because I was still wearing a *tudung*, I had to live up to the expectations of a Muslim women with *tudung* la. By the way, I couldn't even say any expletives even with my friends. "*Eh kau pakai tudung tau. Mane boleh cakap macam gitu!*" [Eh you are wearing a *tudung*. How can you say that!...] And there was one time at work ah, I didn't want to pray, but because everybody was praying, I had no choice. I pretended to pray. I was just moving my hands around but I wasn't

¹ Male and Female punkish Malay teenagers.

doing anything. I think I pretended more with my colleagues at that time because there were like three of them who were quite religious and all of them wearing *tudung* and they are always like macam [like] preaching the good faith of Islam and all that. So I was like...I was trying to fit in ah, so that they don't ask so many questions. – Dilah, 32

Even though the ex-Muslims received minimal policing of their behavior, a majority of them engaged in self-policing by actively attempting to strengthen their religious beliefs at some point in their life, especially once they started to question it.

In addition to this, all the participants such as Awid and Nur, started to question the legitimacy of Islam once they started utilizing rationality to analyze religious texts and thinking.

It doesn't make sense. Because God is the all-knowing right? He knows everything, obviously he must know Malay also what, why have to talk to him in Arab? *Susah kan!*[Difficult right!] And then you have to say the right intonation, if wrong then different meaning. – Awid, 42.

I think it is just a natural thing when something is not right, you question. You don't just keep quiet... I cannot just do things that way. I question that, the rationale behind it and I think it doesn't make sense [referring to Islamic practices]. So if it doesn't make sense then you reject. – Nur, 55.

Participants cited that they started questioning Islam either because there was insufficient evidence to prove the existence of a God, Islamic teachings were contradictory in nature, they do not agree with some Islamic rituals and teachings on a personal level or religious leaders were exhibiting unreasonable behavior – all of which were analyzed based on rationality rather than Islamic views and values. Dilah's was one of the many ex-Muslims that had to face this dilemma.

My second breaking point when my family is trying to do the *kenduri cukur rambut* [religious feast with hair cutting ritual] and all that. Then when I was reading up, I couldn't find any substantial evidence on how this will benefit him, like *cukur rambut* [hair cutting ritual] la... I had to do *aqiqah*² and it was so expensive, then I didn't want to do it. I didn't see the sense in it. They were saying like it was a thanks to God for giving you this child, so you have to sacrifice these two goats. Ya I didn't wanna do it la. So all these things I feel doesn't make sense. Why am I doing all this? If I want to thank God, I thank God what. I don't have to sacrifice two goats. I don't have to shave his hair, my son's hair. Ya so I gave in la, to pressure from family members. I regretted it so badly I couldn't deal with what I did. I was so angry at myself for not standing up to this. – Dilah, 32

² A ritual of slaughtering goats to show gratitude to God after a safe birth of a baby. The meat from the goats will then be distributed to the poor.

Here, we can then see how the conceptual machineries of the two realities are in conflict – the Islamic reality that operates on conceptual machineries based on religious texts and the modern social reality that operates on conceptual machineries that encourage rational thinking.

To rectify this conflict, almost all the ex-Muslims would seek clarification from *Ustaz*³ and *Ustazahs* in order to resolve their doubts to relegitimize the Islamic social reality. However, their questions are perceived as an indicator of a lack of faith and they are often harshly reprimanded or punished for such behavior. Aliwal and Dilah are no strangers to having their questions silenced.

I knew there was no discussion, they would not have it any other way. There was not to be any discussion, argument or debate about that. There was only one truth and that was not to be debated. – Aliwal 26

In the *Madrasah*⁴, I was taught not to ask anything. Like if you asked anything, you are considered as committing blasphemy and you are challenging the existence of God which is the biggest sin of the world... They will say like oh, “You don’t ask so much. The *sunnahs*⁵ are all there for a reason and questioning too much will lead you to not believing in it and that is a sin. You will anger God”. – Dilah, 32

Reactions were similar, albeit not as harsh when the participants approached their parents and Muslim peers with the same questions.

Since the reactions of the religious leaders, parents and Muslim peers did little to relegitimize the Islamic social reality for the ex-Muslims, some ex-Muslims would then continue to self-police by trying to find the answers they seek on their own. Participants who sought to relegitimize the Islamic social reality took a wide range of actions ranging from enrolling themselves into religious classes at *Madrasahs* and *Darul Arqam*⁶, self-study the Quran in greater depth as well as adhering to the 5 Pillars of Islam⁷ even more strictly. Dilah was among those who wished to reintegrate themselves back into the Islamic social reality but came away with negative experiences.

³ Male and female Islamic teachers.

⁴ Islamic religious school or college.

⁵ The words and actions of Prophet Muhammad which are considered the ideal behavior for Muslims.

⁶ *Darul Arqam* - the Muslim Converts Association of Singapore where Muslims and non-Muslims can enroll in Islamic classes.

⁷ The five bases of Islamic faith.

That time, I went to *Darul Arqam* ah, I asked this *Ustaz* why men can marry four women and women cannot [marry four men] and he said, “Oh, men are biologically stronger that’s why. And men are able to have intercourse longer than women. And can you imagine if females have four men? Do you know what is going to happen to her vagina? It’s going to be very loose. But for men we don’t have that issue”. I didn’t agree. I was so angry when he said that and I was challenging him la... I was pissed la and the class was very awkward. – Dilah, 32

However, in taking these steps to relegitimize the Islamic social reality, they were still analyzing the religious texts, thinking, and practices based on rationality which further de legitimizes the Islamic social reality in their subjective reality.

What exacerbates the delegitimizing of the Islamic social reality is how members of the Muslim community react to learning about the ex-Muslim’s apostasy – they would attempt to bring the ex-Muslims back to “the right path” after which they would cut off all ties once the former fails. Attempts at therapy includes summoning the extended family and religious leaders for an intervention, pressurizing the participants to enroll in more religious classes and playing recordings of Islamic prayers at home as much as possible. Three participants were also sent for exorcisms. Abigail and Ezekiel can clearly recount their experiences with therapy.

There was a big convention in the house. They invited three *Ustaz*. All my uncles were there, all my aunties, my brothers were there... one of the *Ustaz* said, “You know if this was another country we can chop your head off.” – Abigail, 40.

My grandmother would cry, she will force me to go to *madrasah* or *pesantren*⁸ in Indonesia. Probably try her best to influence my mum to do it but my mum won’t budge obviously. My relatives would disown me and not acknowledge me anymore. – Ezekiel, 24.

Once therapy has failed, religious leaders and family members subject the ex-Muslims to physical and verbal abuse, such as bombarding them with threats, financially boycotting them, or kicking them out of the house. Emotional blackmail was also a common tool utilized by parents, especially mothers. Fazli, among others, can strongly attest to this.

My mother said that I might be the reason why she may not go to heaven. – Fazli, 29.

Interestingly, the extended family would also direct their anger and frustrations towards the parents of the ex-Muslims, often citing the apostasy of the participants as a direct result of the

⁸ Islamic boarding school.

parents failing in their duty to adequately educate the participants in Islam. This is a painful blow to ex-Muslims such as Ezekiel, who are close to their parents.

I'll feel very sad because my mum is getting flamed and she did a good job at raising me so I don't understand why would she be flamed and it's not her fault I'm Christian. – Ezekiel, 24.

Failure of these attempts at therapy can be attributed to the actions taken by members of the Muslim community that were ineffective in relegitimizing the Islamic social reality within the subjective reality of the ex-Muslims. The Muslim community, and in most cases, the parents as well, would then sever all contact with the participants which reduce the chance of the participants ever returning to the Muslim community. Halimah reached her breaking point when she sought religious help from the Muslim community but was brushed off multiple times.

I gave a minimum of 3 mosques. I did call them to ask for counseling to help me... Can you help me personally to strengthen my faith that is shaky and to knock my head. But these three mosques said that "oh here the Mosque is only having counseling for divorce and drug addicts". So I was thinking, come on you don't have any lines like SOS lines? Muslim community only have problems [of] divorce and drug addicts? I [was] really disappointed, until I bang the phone. When [I called] the last mosque, I managed to talk to the *Ustaz*. He told me to call him after Ramadan because during that period he is very busy. – Halimah, 40.

A synthesis of the findings, therefore, shows that 1) the ex-Muslims have few Muslim friends thus reducing the frequency of policing, 2) most of the participants attempted self-therapy to reintegrate themselves back into the Islamic social reality, 3) however, participants continued to analyze Islamic conceptual machineries using the modern conceptual machinery of rationality and, 4) attempts at therapy by Muslim community were largely unsuccessful after which they actively pushed the ex-Muslims out of the Islamic social reality.

5.1.1. Discussion of Main Finding: Presence of an Alternative Reality, Unsuccessful Socialization and Therapy.

This section will dive into the main observations raised in the findings and discuss them based on the social construction of reality. By exploring how the presence of alternative social realities, unsuccessful socialization and therapy can lead to ex-Muslims leaving the Islamic social reality and the Muslim community pushing them out of the Islamic social reality.

In a modern society like Singapore, individuals are constantly exposed to multiple realities operating simultaneously as they are constantly interacting with other members of different races, religions, communities, and cultures. The presence of other alternative realities makes it easier to shift from one reality to another or to subscribe to multiple realities of his choosing. This, however, assumes that individuals will migrate to another reality given the opportunity and does not address why they would want to migrate into a different reality in the first place. This could be due to the fact that the existence of many different realities in Singapore threatens the legitimacy of one another. The frequency of which these different realities clash is increased by state policies that encourage interaction among people of different cultural backgrounds. For instance, the education and housing system employ racial quotas in order to have racial diversity in the classroom and housing blocks. It is through constant exposure of other realities that the ex-Muslims start to question the legitimacy of the Islamic social reality.

Even though constant exposure to other realities contribute to the delegitimization of the Islamic social reality, what fuels this delegitimization is how the ex-Muslims were unsuccessfully socialized. It is difficult to assess and quantify the quality of primary socialization, based on the Islamic social reality, that the ex-Muslims have received. However, what is clear is that the Singapore education system has disrupted the process of socialization of Islamic conceptual machineries. Instead of allowing the ex-Muslims to transition to the secondary socialization of Islamic conceptual machineries, they were channeled into the national education system that provides them with secondary socialization of secular conceptual machineries that are institutionalized by the state. Even though the narratives of the ex-Muslims show that some of them did have some form of secondary socialization of the Islamic conceptual machineries by enrolling for religious classes, having the ex-Muslims undergo primary and secondary socialization based on different conceptual machineries, their socialization process is unfocused. In this sense, the ex-Muslims are neither completely socialized to the Islamic social reality nor the modern Singaporean social reality. They are neither completely “religious” nor “rational”, subjectively operating on some conceptual machineries from both social realities. Dilah’s dilemma about how she should raise her son exemplifies this point well;

I was thinking of how to bring up my son and because already, anyway I wasn’t practicing. My husband and I were not practicing already, so we were thinking about how to teach him about religion when we are not practicing at all. So that’s when I try to read up more and try to *macam* [like] increase our knowledge so that we can be the one to guide him through Islam. But along the way I felt that the things I don’t agree [with] are much stronger than my need to teach my son

Islam. And my husband and I try to go back to that path, pray again and just try to strengthen our faith... We just feel that something is off. Like, are we pretending? Because we don't believe in certain things yet we are still trying to believe. So it came to a point where I was discussing with my husband, how do we explain to our son about the violent verses, how this Prophet Muhammad you know, the things he did? How do we justify to our son when he asks these questions when we really don't agree ourselves. So like, we try to go for *syarahan*⁹, we try to everytime pray pray pray but it wasn't going anywhere. And I, there was a point in my life where I said, "You know what? This is too much for me to want to teach my son and I don't want him to be indoctrinated with this religion from young". So my husband and I decided to let him have the freedom of choice later on. – Dilah, 32

Dilah and the other ex-Muslims will be stuck "in the middle" of both the Islamic and modern social reality until they completely cease utilizing the conceptual machineries of either social reality. This is why most of the ex-Muslims still engage in self-policing.

In context with the presented findings and discussions above, the reason why attempts at therapy or bringing the ex-Muslims to "the right path" frequently fail, become clear. In the event where participants try to learn more about the Islamic conceptual machinery, they would analyze them based on the modern conceptual machinery of rationality. This attempt at self-therapy threatens the validity and legitimacy of the Islamic conceptual machinery even further. Therapy initialized by members of the Muslim community is also ineffective because they are utilizing the Islamic conceptual machinery that is already constantly being challenged by the subscription of the modern conceptual machineries by the ex-Muslims, as well as the heavy presence of other social realities within Singaporean society. What ineffectualizes the process of therapy even further is Singapore's openness to globalization which exposes the ex-Muslims to even more social realities that are not necessarily located in Singapore via mass media. Furthermore, in relation to the findings, the absence of Muslim peers in the social circle of the ex-Muslims would mean that there will be less social pressure to conform to the conceptual machineries of Islam which will make attempts at therapy even less effective.

The findings also show that once therapy has failed and the ex-Muslims are unsuccessfully re-socialized, members of the Muslim community begin to push the ex-Muslims out of the Islamic social reality. The presence of deviants within the Islamic social reality further threatens the legitimacy of the Islamic social reality because it challenges the infallibility of the system of conceptual machineries. This makes the act of cutting off the ex-Muslims or

⁹ Religious lecture.

minimizing contact with them by members of the Muslim community, more understandable. The Muslim community is merely trying to protect the legitimacy of the Islamic social reality from eroding even further. The presence of ex-Muslims within the Islamic social reality can influence other Muslims who are also unsuccessfully socialized to leave the Islamic social reality. The tradeoff for protecting the legitimacy of the Islamic social reality is that when the Muslim community cuts off contact with the ex-Muslims, they are making it even easier for the participants to abandon the Islamic conceptual machinery as there would be even less policing by the members. This allows the ex-Muslims to continue straying away from the Islamic social reality to the point where they decide that they will completely exit the Islamic social reality and choose to leave the Islamic religion.

5.2. Sub-Finding: The Synonymy of Race and Religion

The narratives of the ex-Muslims make it clear that race is tied to religion. Specifically, Malays are perceived to always be Muslim while Indians are perceived to always be Hindu. All the Malay and Bi-racial Malay participants, with an exception of two, have been told that they could not or should not eat pork because they are Malay. Fuddy and Ackhmad stood out among the ex-Muslims, who all expressed their annoyance with such experiences.

The assumption that just because I'm Malay, I have to be a Muslim, and just because I'm Muslim, I'm not like an open-minded person when it comes to food and of course I blame those idiots who get worked up over small matters when it comes to food. – Fuddy, 28.

The aunty selling food said, “Cannot cannot, you Malay! ... Later, afterlife I *kena* [get blamed]!” When I want to purchase non-Muslim food and then they [food vendors] realize that I am Malay and not allowed to eat, then I try to make friends with them so that they will just like give me my food goddammit... I don't know whether to feel guilty because another [person from another] race or religion is telling me to practice my religion. But I was pretty sad. – Ackhmad, 25

In the instances where participants were on the receiving end of such comments, the commenters explicitly mentioned race as the reason for having to abstain from pork consumption rather than religion; specifically, Islam. The ex-Muslims would then reason with such commenters by announcing their religious orientation or lack thereof just as how Stone often does.

They expect every Malay to be a Muslim not realizing that you don't have to be a Muslim to be a Malay. They question me and say, "Do you know that that stall is not halal?", and I say, "Yeah I

know and what's wrong?" I started questioning them until they brought up religion and that's when I told them, "Eh look, what makes you think I'm still a Muslim? I don't go around telling people but... it's a personal thing ah you know. Why would I go around telling people, "Hey I'm not a Muslim"? – Stone, 34.

After the ex-Muslims explain to the commenters that they are no longer Muslim and therefore it is not deviant for them to eat pork, the commenters would again reiterate that Malays should not and are not allowed to consume pork.

"I get called out all the time whenever I enter a *Bak Kut Teh*¹⁰ restaurant or something like that. People from other tables asking me, "Hey, aren't you supposed to be Muslim? You are not supposed to be eating pork"... They assumed I was Muslim and straight away said that... and then when I say, "No I'm not Muslim", they will say, "Oh but you are Malay". So that's how I got to the conclusion that they expect Malays to be Muslim all the time... If the situation is hostile then I will say that I'm Indian" – Ezekiel, 24.

Interestingly, all Indian participants experienced similar situations but instead of being told that they are not allowed to eat pork, they were told that they could not or should not eat beef because they are Indian. They will then undergo the same process as the Malay ex-Muslims – they will inform commenters that they are Indian but not Hindu. In most cases, such comments were made by friends of the Indian ex-Muslims, even though they are aware that the Indian participants are ex-Muslims and not Hindus. Again, the commenters explicitly mentioned race as the reason for having to abstain from beef consumption rather than religion. The Indian participants would then also explain to the commenters that they are not Hindu before being greeted with, "You can't eat beef because you are Indian". This is a clear example of how the Singaporean social reality has developed conceptual machineries that automatically defines Malays as Muslims and Indians as Hindus.

5.2.1. Discussion of Sub-Finding: Mindlessness and the Singaporean Social Reality

When individuals make the aforementioned comments, they are categorizing specific races with specific religions. Even when a clear explanation about how race need not necessarily be tied to a specific religion is offered, these individuals may not be able to discern a distinction not because they are incapable of doing so, but because, the Singaporean conceptual machineries that define Malays as Muslims and Indians as Hindus are deeply ingrained. The habitualized use of such conceptual machineries has become so intuitive to the point where it seems almost

¹⁰ A pork rib dish.

impossible for some individuals to imagine a Singaporean society whereby Indians are not Hindus and especially Malays not being Muslim. As for pinpointing the main causes of naturalizing Malays and Indians as always being Muslim and Hindu respectively, I can only speculate as to what they may be due to the lack of sufficient data. However, I can explain the processes involved in this naturalization process through the processes of how the Singaporean conceptual machineries that synonymize race and religion are formed and maintained. In order to develop such conceptual machineries, the religious labels of Muslim and Hindu will need to be regularly applied on the Malays and Indians while also reinforcing them over time. It would be easy to blame Singapore's government for the inaccurate definitions of race and religion, especially since most participants recalled how Racial Harmony Day¹¹ exhibits in school often depicted Malays as Muslims and Indians as Hindus. However, I would argue that there is a simpler explanation – we categorize Malays and Indians as Muslims and Hindus because it is a pragmatic way of understanding the world.

When Singaporeans continuously meet Malays who are Muslims and Indians who are Hindus, they start to synonymize these races with these religions. Since 98.7% of Malays are Muslims and 58.9% of Indians in Singapore are Hindus, it will be difficult for Singaporeans to meet Malays and Indians who are not Muslim and Hindu, further reinforcing the synonymy. Over time, the habitualized use of these definitions will develop into a conceptual machinery that becomes part of the Singaporean social reality. That is to say that in Singapore, Malays are Muslim and Indians are Hindus. When a Singaporean is able to automatically define a Malay and Indian as Muslim and Hindu without thinking, they are engaging in mindlessness. This is not necessarily undesirable as mindlessness allows us to go about our daily lives more efficiently (Langer 1989). The narratives of the ex-Muslims are a product of the mindlessness by other members of the public. It may seem odd that the commenters mentioned in the narratives seem to not listen to reason. However, when the ex-Muslim Malays and Indians eat pork and beef, they are challenging the Singaporean conceptual machinery; they are challenging the way people in Singapore understand how the Singaporean social reality ought to be. Despite reasoning from the ex-Muslims, it is still difficult for the commenters to abandon the conceptual machinery that ties race to religion because it is already deeply ingrained and especially since there may not be an alternative conceptual machinery to switch to in that situation. Given enough time, if these commenters regularly meet Malays and Indians who are not Muslim or Hindu in the future, they

¹¹ Held on 21st July, it is a day that commemorates the racial riots in 1964. Singaporean public schools will hold special activities such as promoting traditional games and ethnic food for the students. Plays, talks and history exhibitions are common.

will develop a conceptual machinery that can replace the current Singaporean conceptual machinery that synonymizes race and religion.

It now seems as though categorizing Malay and Indians as Muslims and Hindus are not a cause for concern, however, such strict categorical boundaries become problematic when we consider how it makes it more challenging for the ex-Muslims to hide their deviance. Before the members of the public can utilize the conceptual machinery, they will need to identify the race of the ex-Muslim first. This is achieved by subjectively assessing the skin color, facial features and dress – these definitions of what a person of a specific race looks like is also a Singaporean conceptual machinery. This process ties in with how the two Malay and four Bi-racial ex-Muslims who did not face such comments from members of the public, acknowledge that they do not look like a “typical” Malay or Indian. These ex-Muslims did not have such experiences because their physical appearance cannot be accurately categorized under the Singaporean conceptual machinery of what Malays and Indians should look like. This prevents members of the public from accurately identifying their race.

6. CONCLUSION

At this point, it is clear that the underlying reason why ex-Muslims leave the Islamic social reality is that they are constantly exposed to a large plethora of alternate social realities within the modern Singaporean society, whose presence challenges the infallibility of the Islamic social reality. A highly globalized Singaporean society also provides ex-Muslims with alternate realities to migrate to. A crucial part in their journey towards apostasy is their use of the modern conceptual machinery of rationality to analyze the Islamic conceptual machineries when the ex-Muslims engaged in self-policing. Another factor that pushes them towards apostasy is the unfocussed socialization process that they underwent; their primary socialization was based on Islamic conceptual machineries while their secondary socialization was significantly based on the modern conceptual machineries as a result of enrolling in public schools. All these factors cumulate into a delegitimization of the Islamic social reality within the subjective reality of the ex-Muslims. What further delegitimizes the Islamic social reality is how the Muslim community reacts to questioning Islamic beliefs – the ex-Muslims were punished in various ways before being cut off from the community. Acting in such a manner actively prevents the ex-Muslims from reintegrating into the community, thus pushing them even closer towards apostasy. Ironically, when the questions of the ex-Muslims go unanswered, most would attempt to reintegrate themselves to the Islamic social reality but continue to analyze the teachings based on the modern conceptual machinery of rationality, which surfaces even more questions and inconsistencies that delegitimizes the Islamic social reality even further.

In addition to the above, following the journey of the ex-Muslims towards apostasy also uncovered narratives that highlight how the conceptual machineries within the Singaporean social reality synonymize Malays and Indians as Muslims and Hindus. Although the encounters between the ex-Muslims and members of the public may seem as ignorance on the part of the public, a stronger argument would be that members of the public were merely mindlessly utilizing their Singaporean conceptual machinery that developed in such a manner out of practicality. However, we also have to acknowledge the latent effect of this mindlessness – it becomes increasingly difficult for the ex-Muslims to hide their deviant behavior such as eating non-halal food. An additional layer to this issue would be how physical signifiers of race were instrumental in such encounters; the ex-Muslims who look neither Malay nor Indian did not experience such encounters because they could not be accurately tied to a race and hence, did not challenge the Singaporean social reality.

A higher rate of apostasy not only in Islam but in other religions as well can be expected in the near future. This is especially true since Singapore is an extremely globalized city (Huang 2016) where multiple realities exist in abundance within a small space. The fact that children are gaining access to the internet at an increasingly younger age (Williams 2014) means that they will be exposed to a multitude of realities; worst still if it is without supervision. We can also expect a shift in the definitions of social categories such as race and religion, just as we see how alternative sexual orientations and genders have gained more acceptance (Kok 2017). In other words, what it means to be "normal" is changing and will always change. Being homosexual or apostatizing are seen as deviant behaviors now, however, it is not a stretch to imagine a future that is otherwise.

In this light, it is paramount that the state, communities, and individuals consider these findings with goodwill as it shows how communities can better manage their members, why apostates are not to be blamed for their choices and thus should not be persecuted, as well as how conceptual machineries can act as a double-edged sword. Zooming out to a macro perspective, societies ought to focus on adapting to the constantly evolving social norms rather than furiously resisting change. Failure to do so translates into endless cycles of suffering by present and future deviants who are often not deviants because of their own doing. Achieving a fraction of this idealistic future requires the state, communities, and individuals to understand and accept that societies are always in transition – definitions of normalcy can be understood as phases that society passes through rather than a context that is natural and permanent. Achieving such a feat on any level will lubricate society's transition from one phase to another, reducing the intensity of persecution the deviants will face because the period in which their actions are defined as deviant becomes shortened. In order for societies to adapt to constantly changing social norms, all the agents involved will need to gain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying source of change, its process, and consequences before taking action to manage the change.

Therefore, an ideal scenario would be having social realities with a strong inward pull of its members while also allowing them to permeate to other realities if they wish to do so. This can be done by having institutional oversight over religious pedagogy whereby religious leaders are able to handle difficult situations in a way that does not push a potential deviant away but instead, place emphasis on peaceful reintegration. At the same time, the change in religious pedagogy should also steer religious leaders, as well as regular members, towards a culture of support instead of isolation when it comes to managing members who wish to apostatize. This allows the apostates to leave their religious community with less persecution while allowing them to

maintain ties with that same community based on ethnicity and personal relationships. In other words, new Islamic conceptual machineries need to be developed. Halimah, with a heavy heart, shares how she envisions a peaceful Singapore.

One thing I just wish, living in a secular country like Singapore where we practice democracy and belief of our religion, it's great if we are being treated as a human... that you can accept us like one because, at the end of the day when we sit with our friends at a round table, we don't talk about our religion. At the end of the day, it is the humanity that people talk about. – Halimah, 40.

Limitations of this study include having a restricted pool of interviewees that may limit the diversity in narratives – most of the ex-Muslims do not have a religion and out of the seven who do have a religion, six are Christians and one is Hindu. Furthermore, this paper is exploratory in nature; its focus is to gain a broad understanding of the topic and lay the foundation for future studies at the expense of depth. The problem is that this picture remains incomplete. This study surfaced multiple avenues for future investigation that will help form an increasingly robust understanding of how Singapore's society operates and transitions. More research is required in understanding 1) how individuals stay religious despite exposure to different social realities, 2) the extent to which secondary socialization based on modern conceptual machineries disrupts the socialization process of members from different social realities, 3) and what influences the gender imbalance among the ex-Muslims in Singapore. Having more pieces of the puzzle to work with will allow different agents to make more comprehensive decisions that will facilitate a smooth transition of Singapore's society from one phase to another. Even then, there will always be trouble in paradise.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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