

## **YOUTH MOVEMENT AND ISLAMIC LIBERALISM IN INDONESIA**

### **The Birth of Jaringan Islam Liberal and the Fundamentalist Muslim's Responses**

**Herdi Sahrasad**

*Paramadina University, Indonesia*

*sahrasad@yahoo.com*

#### **Abstract**

*This article examines dynamics of Islamic discourses in Post-New Order Indonesia, focusing on the birth of Jaringan Islam Liberal/JIL (Islamic Liberalism Network). The network which emerged in 2001 was a result of informal meeting and group discussions of young intellectuals at Jl. Utan Kayu 68 H, East Jakarta who later agreed to establish the JIL. Since its earliest foundation, the networks has been at the forefront to attack Islamic extremist and fundamentalist groups while calling for Islamic liberalism. This article tries portray the emergence of the JIL and its liberalism agenda and offers the contestation on Islamic liberalism in Indonesia. As for the latter, it not only encapsulates responses of fundamentalism groups, but also important Muslim organisation, like the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama/NU and the Modernist Muhammadiyah, and important Indonesian Muslim thinkers. This article further argues that Islamic liberalism that takes its root to Muslim activism during the New Order Indonesia has shaken the basic foundation of religion as introducing liberalism in Islamic discourses. It has invited contestation and responses for a significant Muslim groups, including the two-most important Indonesian Muslim organisations, the NU and the Muhammadiyah. As this article further demonstrates, the contestation is mainly because of different opinions among Muslims on the limit of reason to understand religion.*

*[Artikel ini mengkaji tentang pergolakan diskursus Islam pasca Orde Baru. Munculnya Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL) pada awal tahun 2001 adalah momentum penting yang menandai lahirnya liberalisasi wacana Islam di Indonesia. Sekumpulan intelektual muda berkumpul di kawasan Jalan Utan Kayu 68 H, Jakarta Timur untuk membentuk kelompok bernama JIL. Komunitas yang diprakarsai oleh Ulil Absar Abdalla, Ahmad Sahal dan Gunawan Mohamad ini menjadi “lawan” nyata atas berbagai kejumudan dan kekakuan berpikir umat Islam terutama kelompok ekstremis dan fundamentalis Islam. Artikel ini tidak hanya fokus pada vis a vis antara Islam Liberal dan Fundamentalisme Islam, tetapi juga berbagai respon yang muncul atas gebrakan wacana yang disebarluaskan oleh JIL, termasuk dari kalangan Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) dan beberapa intelektual Muslim berpengaruh di Indonesia. Namun demikian, kontroversi JIL sendiri tidak mudah dihapuskan oleh karena kompleksitas masalah dan perbedaan pemahaman atas ajaran dan praktik Islam di Indonesia itu sendiri.]*

**Keyword:** *Islamic liberalism, Islamic fundamentalism, Discourse war*

## Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, the war of ideas and mutual criticism between liberal Islam and Islamic fundamentalism has happened in around of *ummah*. The contestation between of them should be viewed in the broader context of struggle for public sphere, mainly political and social context, in an effort to struggle for the real in a socio-political field in Indonesia. The discursive battle between liberal and Islamic fundamentalism was impressively indicated there is struggling for political opportunity structure that took place openly or hiddenly.

In social movement studies, it is important for the availability of political opportunity structures that allows or un allows social actors to move. According to Sidney Tarrow, political opportunity structure is defined as “consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to

use their internal resources to form social movements.”<sup>1</sup>

Political opportunity structures are classified into two types: first static, means related to state institutions (external to movement actors), such as the opening of the political system, transparency of the courts. Second, a dynamic political opportunity structure, which is closely related to internal conditions within civil society, such as strong solidarity, alliances, etc. Successful social movements usually have two forms of opportunity structure.

This article examines the dynamics of post-New Order Islamic discourse that was represented by JIL in responding to the existence of Islamic fundamentalism. There are several researches that are relevant to this theme, including Nicalaus Teguh Budi Haryanto, *Islam and Liberalism in Contemporary Indonesia: The Political Ideas of Liberal Islam Network (JIL)*,” which is his thesis at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, USA, 2003. Also Budi Hardianto, *50 Liberal Muslim Figures in Indonesia* and Adian Husaini, “Dari Yahudi Liberal ke Islam Liberal”, a preface for the Budi Hardianto’s book.

## **The Emergence of JIL**

The emergence of organization of JIL (Liberal Islamic Network) begins from discussion between Ulil Abshar Abdalla (staff at Lakpesdam NU), Ahmad Sahal (editor of *Kalam Journal*), and Gunawan Mohamad (Chief Editor in *Tempo* magazine and Institute Studi Arus Informasi-ISAI) in Jl. Utan Kayu No. 68 H, East Jakarta, February 2001. Later, it became headquarter of JIL. Then, other young thinkers, such as Lutfi Asyyaukani, Ihsan Ali Fauzi, Hamid Basyaib, and Saiful Mujani, also joined the JIL. During its development, Ulil was chosen as coordinator.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tarrow in Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Transnational Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Haryanto, Nicalaus Teguh Budi, “Islam and Liberalism in Contemporary Indonesia: The Political Ideas of Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL),” *thesis*, Ohio University,

JIL initiated by some young intellectual. They are generally students, columnist, researcher, or journalist. Its ultimate goal is: to spread idea of liberal Islam as broad as possible. “For that we choose the form of network, instead of community-based organizations, and political parties,” wrote the site *islamlib.com*, as suggests JIL ideas in the Manifesto of the Liberal Islam Network.

JIL registered 28 domestic and overseas contributors as the “actors” of liberal Islam. The national contributors were Nurcholish Madjid, Djohan Effendi, Jalaluddin Rakhmat, Said Agiel Siradj, Azyumardi Azra, Masdar F. Mas’udi, and Komaruddin Hidayat, while the international contributors are Asghar Ali Engineer (India), Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im (Sudan), Mohammed Arkoun (France), and Abdallah Laroui (Morocco). The network provides various stages—ranging from newspapers, radios, books, booklets, and websites—for its contributors to express their views in public. Among its first activities was virtual discussion on “mailing lists”. From June 25, 2001, every Sunday JIL issued rubrics in *Kajian Utan Kayu* in *Jawa Pos*. The rubrics contained articles and interviews that shared the social and religious perspectives of liberal Islam.<sup>3</sup>

JIL is an organization that carries out liberal thoughts in Indonesia, which includes pluralism, anti-theocracy, democracy and guaranteeing women’s rights. JIL emphasizes individual freedom, by opening the door to *ijtihad* as widely as possible by prioritizing understanding of context rather than text, and liberating from oppressive social and political structures.<sup>4</sup> The JIL discourse is considered to have undermined

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Athens, Ohio, USA, 2003; Asrori S. Karni, *Komunitas Utan Kayu*, *GATRA* 17 November 2003; Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Islam Liberal dan Konteks Islaminya*, in *Wacana Islam Liberal, Paramadina* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001); Budi Hardianto, *50 Liberal Muslim Figures in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Hujjab Press, 2008); Adian Husaini, “Dari Yahudi Liberal ke Islam Liberal”, a preface for the Budi Hardianto’s book.

<sup>3</sup> Nicalaus Teguh Budi Haryanto, *Islam and Liberalism...*; Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Islam Liberal...*

<sup>4</sup> Kamaruddin, “Islam Liberal di Indonesia, Tinjauan Sosiologi,” *Jurnal Ilmu Agama*, Vol. 18, No. 1105, 2017, pp. 105-117.

the already established understanding of Islamic teachings (*qath'i*). In practical terms, this movement of thought does not see the problem comprehensively.<sup>5</sup>

Every Thursday afternoon between 2001-2002, JIL broadcast live interviews and focus group discussions with its contributors, via radio 68H and 15 radios of its network. The topics being discussed were within the scope of religion and democracy. It also provided critical reading on jihad, application of Islamic law, gender justice, women's scarf, and secular state. The discussions laid down an argument that Islam is compatible with democracy. As mentioned on *islamlib.com*, the birth of the JIL was a response to the rise of religious "extremism" and "fundamentalism" in Indonesia. It attempted to counter the discourses of militant Islamic groups, condemned churches destructions, and refuted the use of the term "*jihad*" as legitimation for violent actions.<sup>6</sup>

JIL not only blatantly refuted extremist thoughts, but also straight forwardly introduced liberal moves in interpreting religion. Its style of campaign is rather provocative. The accumulation of this style culminated in a controversial article written Ulil Abshar Abdallah in *Kompas* newspaper. FUUI accused him of insulting Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, Islam, Muslim clerics, and Muslim societies at once. In his article Ulil Abshar Abdallah said "my writing is deliberately provocative, because I am dealing with audiences who are also provocative." Abdallah's statement sparked various reactions. 2002 was JIL's most polemical year that affected diverse spectrums: from warning, criticism in the form of books, until death threat.

Although relatively young, the JIL movement has become popular because it brings new ideas that often cause controversy in society. JIL's progressive thinking is related to these four areas. First, political reform, JIL promotes secularism. Second, in the field of social and religious

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<sup>5</sup> Anis Malik Thoha, *Trend Pluralisme Agama: Tinjauan Kritis* (Jakarta: Perspektif, 2005). Kamaruddin, *Islam Liberal di Indonesia*...

<sup>6</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla, *Menjadi Islam Liberal* (Jakarta: Jaringan Islam Liberal, 2005).

community reform, JIL carries the idea or concept of pluralism. Third, reform in individual freedom, JIL puts forward the idea of liberalism in both thought and action. Fourth, reform in the field of women, JIL carries the idea of gender equality. This thinking gets several pros and cons in society. Some denounce and condemn, but others respect and support it. In such an atmosphere, JIL continues to develop as a progressive Islamic thought and movement in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup>

NU Branch of East Java (PWNU) gave warning against JIL's 'heterodoxy' through recommendation (*tausbiyah*) of its Regional Conference on 11-13 October 2002. It reads: "PWNU of East Java instructed to alert and prevent immediately Liberal Islamic thought within NU communities. If Liberal Islam ideas are introduced by the executive councils of NU (at all levels), they should be given sanctions, either in the forms of warning or organization sanction (even disallowed from the management)."<sup>8</sup>

Criticism came from chairman of the Data and Information Department of Indonesian Council of Mujahidin, Fauzan al-Ansari on August 4, 2002, responding JIL's advertisement plan to be aired on RCTI and SCTV, two national private television channels, entitled "Colorful Islam". Due to harsh responses, the advertisement was eventually canceled. Utan Kayu then reported Fauzan al-Anshari to police. JIL's religious thoughts was criticized methodologically by Haidar Bagir, director of Mizan publishing in Bandung. He wrote a column in *Republika* daily newspaper on March 20, 2002 "Liberal Islam Needs Methodology". Bagir said that JIL had no systematic methodology. The term "liberal", Haidar wrote, "tends to be a basket into which anything can go". Without a clear methodology, it will reinforce impressions that Liberal Islam is "manipulative conspiracy to undermine Islam precisely

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<sup>7</sup> Asep Ilyas Ismail, "Pemikiran Islam Progresif," *Theologia*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2012, pp. 277-308.

<sup>8</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla, *Menjadi Islam Liberal...*; Asrori S. Karni, *Komunitas Utan Kayu..*

by abusing the term of Islam itself’.”<sup>9</sup>

Reaction in the form of books came for example from Adian Husaini and Nuim Hidayat, *Liberal Islam: History, Conception, Deviation and Answer for It* (2002). The authors highlighted what they call as three JIL agendas: developing an inclusive, pluralist theology that may equate all religions and undermine faith; rejecting the implementation of Islamic law as a part of global plan to destroy Islam; and campaigning American and Zionist projects in the fight against Muslim fundamentalists. Another book is written by Adnin Armas, *The influence of Christian-Orientalist to Liberal Islam* (2003). It is collection of debates between Armas with JIL activists in liberal Islamic mailing list. These various responses exhausted the energy of JIL activists. However, these would indeed boost JIL's popularity.

Towards the end of 2003, controversies about JIL started to wane. The fate of FUUI's complaints and JIL's complaint against Fauzan to Police had been evaporated. In this atmosphere, JIL began to lead a new more constructive phase, no longer explosive. "The initial kick off phase, we think is enough. Now, we are concerned with developing inter-university networks," said Nong Darol Mahmada, coordinator deputy of JIL. Its mission is to stem scriptural Islam, like that introduced by Hizb ut-Tahrir, that had been permeated in public campuses. There were 10 campuses in Java, which entered the network. JIL organized a SWOT to evaluate performance and to formulate the future agenda. In Ramadan 2003, JIL held a program through which classical books of the philosophy of Islamic law (*usul fiqh*), like *al-Risala* of al-Shafi'i, *al-Muwafaqat* of al-Syatibi, works by Najm al-Din al-Tufi, and *Jam' al-Jawami'* of Taj al-Din al-Subki, were taught and discussed. The program was named "Gelar Tadarus Ramadhan: Return to Classical Islam" held at the Utan Kayu Theater. The discussions was followed by the *tarawih* prayer together.

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<sup>9</sup> Haidar Bagir, *Republika*, March 23, 2003.

Above all, actions and reactions that accompanied the journey of JIL has unfold the fact that the JIL had its own constituents who felt spiritually awakened with JIL's articulation of Islamic doctrines. For example, during a radio talk with Prof. Hasanuddin A.F., about capital punishment in Islam, aired in December 2002, Henri Tan was determined to leave Islam, if Ulil Abshar Abdalla was threatened by a death *fatwa*. He said, "Ulil is a model of Islamness that attracted me to Islam. If this model is turned off, I better leave Islam." Similar response arose during a book discussion "Islamic law in Liberal Islam Perspective", held at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in June 2003. One of the participants, calling him Djohan, deplored the issuance of death *fatwa* on Ulil. He said, "I left Christianity and converted to Islam precisely because of the Islamic model introduced by *Mas* Ulil. He does not undermine faith; in fact he strengthens my faith. Considering this confession, allegations that JIL undermined faith needs to be reviewed."<sup>10</sup>

JIL held a press conference to respond FUUI's *fatwa* in December 2002. One of the audiences who claimed to be a "nominal" Muslim (*abangan*) felt that he had been alienated from the majority of Muslims. But the presence of JIL made him feel that he was recognized and respected as a Muslim. Because of JIL he was motivated to improve the quality of his Islamness.<sup>11</sup>

### **The "Liberal Islam" Terminology**

Liberal Islam or Islamic Liberalism is actually a term popularized by Charles Kurzman in his book. He collects articles from a number of Muslim intellectuals who in his view articulate liberal Islam. Among those intellectuals are Ali Abd al-Raziq, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, Abdullahi Ahmad Na'im, Fazlur Rahman, and Nurcholish Madjid. The book was

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<sup>10</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla, *Menjadi Islam Liberal*...; Ulil Abshar Abdalla (et.al), *Islam Liberal dan Fundamental: Sebuah Pertarungan Wacana* (Yogyakarta: Elsaq, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla, *Menjadi Islam Liberal*...; Asrori S. Karni, *Komunitas Utan Kayu*...



first published in 1998.<sup>12</sup>

Before Kurzman's book, there was another book that also talked about liberal Islam, i.e., *Islamic Liberalism* written by Leonard Binder. Binder does not specifically talk about the idea of Liberal Islam, but maps the streams of thought, which he categorizes as liberal. Another book, a classic book *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, is written by Albert Hourani. He refers to the period of Arab revival in the early 19th century or the end of the 18th century as a liberal period. If we see these developments, it can be seen that the term liberal Islam does not start from Kurzman. The term has been initiated by Hourani in the 1960s.<sup>13</sup>

Liberal Islam holds a common belief that the Qur'an was revealed to Muslims as a religious basis to correspond to the changing realities encountered by Muslim societies. Liberal Islam accepts such modern ideas as pluralism, democracy, and human rights. In its view, pluralism is a guarantee for cultural wealth and diversity. Liberal Muslims, like Abbasi Madani, a liberal Muslim intellectual from Algeria, contend that they are Muslims, but do not want monopolize religion. Democracy, that they understand, means pluralism, and freedom of choice.<sup>14</sup>

Under the umbrella of freedom, liberal Islam in Indonesia is associated to Muhammad Natsir, Nurcholish Madjid and AM *Fatwa*. In their view, public should be given protection in developing research activities and contemplation. Communities should be given their freedom to think and argue. Democracy requires that the communities seek freedom for creativity. Liberal Islam as articulated by Hassan Hanafi never embraces a static and eternal theology; rather it proposes a dynamic theology compatible with a particular time and place. Theology is always

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<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Ali, "The Rise of Liberal Islam Network (JIL) in Contemporary Indonesia," *The American Journal, Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 22, 2003, pp. 1; Charles Kurzman (ed.) *Islam Liberal*...

<sup>13</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla, *Menjadi Islam Liberal*...; Ulil Abshar Abdalla (et.al), *Islam Liberal dan Fundamental*...

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Brumberg, "Islam, Elections and Reform in Algeria," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 2, 1991; Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Wacana Islam Liberal*..., p.1-26.

an expression of spirit and time. In this regard, Hassan Hanafi argues that there is no single interpretation of religious texts, but rather many interpretations that show the gap of understanding among different interpreters. The conflict of interpretation is essentially political rather than theoretical. A particular theory is a cover of epistemology, and every interpretation expresses political and social commitment of the commentators.<sup>15</sup>

According to Al Sadiq al Mahdi's (Muslim scholar from Sudan, 1983), Muslims are not bound by traditional approaches, but should attempt to seek and build a good synthesis of Islamic and modernity. It is so because Islam does not specify a particular system, which is universally applied for government, economics, international relations and legislation.<sup>16</sup> In this case, such as affirmation of Muhammad Abduh (Egypt 1849-1905), liberal Islam refuses to classic and static understanding of Islam. Liberal Islam strongly proposes the implementation of independent religious reasoning (*ijtihad*), and stand against *taqlid*. *Ijtihad* means human endeavor to acquire religious knowledge and to articulate religious messages by directly reading the primary sources of Islam. In this way, liberal Muslim intellectuals views, the true messages of Islam can effectively deal with the real problems of Muslim societies. Religion should be a friend to science, and encourage people to explore the mysteries of existence.

Regardless of various controversies, however, there are certain segments of Muslim society that find Islam as proposed by JIL a model of Islam that suit their spirituality. Liberal Islam is not only aspired by new converts and nominal Muslims, but also certain Muslim academicians, researchers, activists, and students, who embrace critical thinking, pluralist ideas, and freedom. In this sense, JIL serve its constituents.

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<sup>15</sup> Ade Jamarudin, "Social Approach in Tafsir Al-Qur'an Perspective of Hasan Hanafi," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* Vol. 23 No. 1, June 2015, pp. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Gabriel Warburg, "Mahdism and Islamism in Sudan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1995, pp. 219.

What is liberal Islam? “Liber” comes from Latin, meaning “free,” “freedom.” From this term we can ask some simple questions: Islam (Muslims) wants to be free from what? Is it from political confines? Is it from its own doctrine, legacy and heritage? Is it from ignorance? In addition, should Muslims be free for what to do? Should they be free from the obligation of worship? Living in a democratic state like Indonesia, should Muslims be free to reinterpret existing doctrines in a way that religion and modernity are fully compatible? What is conceptual foundation that can be given to the issues of “free from” and “free for” for people who call themselves liberal Muslims?<sup>17</sup>

So, what is a liberal interpretation of Islam in politics (democracy)? Liberal Islam is an interpretation of Islam in favor of or parallel to civic culture (pro-pluralism, equal opportunity, moderation, trust, tolerance, and sense of national community). Luthfi Assyauckanie defines “liberal Islam” as a critical, progressive, and dynamic Islam. “Liberal Islam” is actually a term introduced by AA Fyzee, an Indian Muslim intellectual, and popularized by Charles Kurzman in his *Liberal Islam*.<sup>18</sup> The term is probably not very important, because we can replace it, for example, with such terms as “progressive Islam,” “pluralist Islam,” or “emancipatory Islam” and so on. But Farid Esack, a South African intellectual, for example, does not agree with the use of the term “liberal” because it connotes resistance and rebellion. But liberal Muslims in Indonesia are

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<sup>17</sup> This view is quoted from discussion at the circle of Liberal Islam, involving Rizal Mallarangeng, Goenawan Mohamad, Denny JA, Nirwan Arsuka, Sukidi Mulyadi, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Luthfi Assyauckanie, Ahmad Sahal, etc., 2001. The discussion of *Wacana Islam Liberal di Timur Tengah*, which was held in Jakarta, Wednesday, 21 February 2001, was attended by Muslim young activists from various circles. In response, a group of fundamentalist Islam published *Islamia Journal* as response to Liberal Islam. *Islamia* is a quarterly magazine, which was first launched on March 6, 2004 in Hotel Sofyan Cikini, Jakarta. Its format and appearance reminds us of the *Ulumul Qur'an* magazine. Yet, *Islamia* totally took a different path, countering secularism and liberal Islam that were frequently promoted by the “authors” of articles published in *Ulumul Qur'an*. Although the *Ulumul Qur'an* magazine has been unpublished for long time, fundamentalist Muslims are still concerned that its intellectual legacy still exists.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Islam Liberal*...

happy to use the term, because there is something to be resisted, and there is no reason to rebel. They assume that the existing ‘orthodoxies’ of Islam in the country tend to be fundamentalist (in their political attitudes) and conservative (in their religious understanding). Therefore,<sup>19</sup> Assyaukanie says, liberal Islam comes as a form of protest and resistance to such domination, to solve the most fundamental problems, to be free from the past authority and to have courage to interpret and criticize the existing authority that monopolizes the interpretation of Islam. “When we say “free” and “for free,” we are positioning ourselves to be “protestants”, who try to find things that are good from religious heritage, and discard bad things (I imagine the spirit of Protestantism, it is spirit which is entirely positive, as best described by Max Weber,” said Luthfie, one of the most important proponents of liberal Islam in Indonesia.

In this case, Sukidi Mulyadi looks critically at that. *First*, the term “liberal Islam” that is considered as exclusive and leads to divisions, in fact reminds us on daily reflection of an Indonesian liberal Muslim leader, Ahmad Wahib. In this context we put liberal thought within Islam, which Kurzman terms “liberal Islam.” *Second*, liberal Islam is liberating the reading of religious text and discourse, but not necessarily liberating the oppressed. On the contrary, it tends to oppress the oppressed, and is even totally disconnected with the discourse of the oppressed people. Gus Dur, According to Greg Barton, is a first-class liberal Muslim leader, but, in the political aspect, tends to be authoritarian and not democratic at all. He has liberal democratic approach, but the actualization of his political movements tends to be undemocratic. In this regard, Sukidi says, liberal Islam is nonsense. *Third*, how to put liberal Islam in the context of liberating efforts is another task. Farid Esack worked against the oppressive apartheid regime in South Africa through the reconstruction of a pluralist theology in the Qur’an to raise “inter-faith solidarity” against the oppressive regime. We may situate liberal Islamic

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

discourses in Indonesia for inter-faith solidarity in order to fight against the oppressive regime.

Liberal Islam is appalling. In just two months, the book written by Ulil Abshar Abdalla has been reprinted for the second time. The anthology book about the controversial writing of Ulil Abshar Abdalla which was published by *Kompas* in 2002 is a compelling study by *santri*, those young Muslim intellectuals.<sup>20</sup> Controversy around liberal Islam arose as it proposes that the Qur'an should be constantly interpreted according to social, cultural and political progression in Muslim societies in different places and times. This necessity is not because the teachings of Islam should be matched opportunistically with situation, but because there are demands of times and uniqueness of localities that require that the primary sources of Islam be interpreted in a different way.

Liberal Islam offers contextual readings of Islamic doctrines. *First*, it suggests that Islam be interpreted in a non-literal, but substantial way, corresponding to the pulses of human civilization, which is subject to changing. *Second*, it proposes the distinction between the substantial and complimentary elements in Islam, the fixed and changing elements in Islam. *Third*, Muslims can no longer consider themselves as “*ummah*”, which must be unique and separated from the rest of humanity. Human race is bound by universal family of humanity itself. Humanity is in line with Islamic values, not the opposite. In turn, human beings are equal. Marriage prohibition between couple of different religious backgrounds despite the Qur'anic literal interdiction becomes no longer relevant, and therefore should be amended. Such prohibition is not compatible with the spirit of equality in Islam. *Fourth*, there is a need for separation between ‘worldly’ and religious affairs. In conclusion, Muslims should strictly distinguish Islam from understandings of Islam.

Responding the approaches of liberal Islam, public responses

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<sup>20</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla (et.al), *Islam Liberal dan Fundamental...*; Akhmad Fauzi, “Shahih Islam Liberal,” *Islamlib.com* August, 15, 2003.

diversely. There are at least three groups. First are those who support the ideas of liberal Islam, and confirm the thoughts of Muslim liberal thinkers. For them, what has been initiated by Ulil Abshar Abdalla for example, is a necessary effort to bridge religion with social realities. So, Muslims need contextual and grounded interpretation that is beyond merely the romance of the past. The first group is the majority of Muslim intellectuals who find liberal Muslim thinkers like Ulil Abshar Abdallah and his colleagues good examples for young people who get bored with the present situation in which Islam can no longer be vital in contemporary Muslim life. In this way, Islamic doctrines will become acceptable in the broader realm of human life that becomes increasingly different from the context where Islam first appeared.

The second group is those Muslim intellectuals who give constructive criticism. This group is represented by Mustafa Bisri, A. Haidar Bagir, and Gaus AF. Mustafa Bisri tries to criticize the delivery method that raised fury among Muslim society. It becomes less effective if new ideas are delivered by creating anger that makes public think that these new ideas are completely incompatible with Indonesian Islam. Liberal Muslim thinkers often criticize those people who are too “excited” with religiosity but without sufficient understanding of religious teachings. Ulil Abshar, for example, shows a spirit of fighting the “enemies of Islam” who have blurred the clarity of mind he wants to convey. Meanwhile, Gaus criticizes religious articulation, which he considers “old”. For him, this is the right time for religious institutions or authorities to promote public freedom, which in his view constitutes an essential element of religious messages rather than merely repeating old articulation of Islam.<sup>21</sup>

Haidar Bagir questions liberal Muslims’ methodology of thinking. Ulil Abshar’s writings on liberal Islam, for Haidar Bagir, are products of thought, but how these products came into being is never comprehensively

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

discussed. So, he views that liberal Islam leaves methodological questions. Haidar exemplifies the problems of *hijab*, beard, stoning, and robes where Ulil Abshar mixes issues between those whose validity is definite (*qat'iy al-wurud*) and those indicating definite meaning (*qat'iy al-dilalah*).<sup>22</sup>

The ruling of women's clothing that covers their entire body except for the face and both hands are explicitly revealed in the Qur'an. If it has to be interpreted in a different way, it needs a convincing argument and methodological steps. To consider that the practices of Islam should not be narrowed to its practices in Medina during the Prophet's era still requires further explanation, because Muslims believe that the Prophets was directly guided by God. Except probably the matters where the Prophet clearly distinguished between his position as God's apostle and as a human being.

The third group is fundamentalist Muslims who from the very beginning have made theological demarcation with liberal Islam. They strongly reject everything related to liberal Islam and consider liberal thoughts as heterodox. Indeed, both liberal and fundamentalist Muslims have their own starting point when understanding religion. So it becomes difficult to reconcile both. They stand in a binary opposition.<sup>23</sup>

### **Various Responses to Islamic Liberalism Network (JIL)**

Liberal Islam Network (JIL) is an intellectual group or community of Muslims, who are often seen by fundamentalist counterparts to promote liberal and secular thinking. They are deemed to hinder the Islamization project espoused by Muslims in general as their ideal. JIL activists often questions some religious doctrines, e.g., the origin of the Qur'an, and Muslim theology, that are considered by many Muslims to have been final, and therefore should not be questioned anymore.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla (et.al), *Islam Liberal dan Fundamental...*; Adian Husaini, "Paradoks Kebangkitan Islam," *ICMI.org*, December 20, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla (et.al), *Islam Liberal dan Fundamental...*

<sup>24</sup> Sufandi Maruih, "Dialog with JIL Activists," *Terbit daily*, January 30, 2004.

Adnin Armas considers JIL to have worked out of control. He accuses JIL of having been influenced by Christian thoughts and the orientalist who have long been promoting secularization. In Armas's opinion, the ideas promoted by JIL have long been developed by Western orientalist and Christian missionaries who currently are working to promote secularization and liberalization in the Muslim world. The demolition of the roots of Islam like the question on the origin of the Qur'an and the deconstruction of its interpretation, which are among the most sensitive area to be debated in Muslim faith, is campaigned by JIL. Based on his debates against JIL activists like Hamid Basyaib, Taufiq Adnan Amal, Lutfi As-Syaukanie, without exception Ulil Abshar Abdalla in a mailing list, Armas argues that the agendas of JIL covering a theology for modern state, the necessity of secularization, and reorientation in understanding of Islam will always become a serious threat to Islamic theology and morality.<sup>25</sup>

### **On Islamic *Shari'a***

A liberal Muslim activist, Lutfi Assyaukanie, believes that there is no Islamic law, and there is no concept of Islamic Law as well. He argues that it is just written by people who come later with an idealization of Islam (like Islamic state, Islamic economics, and Islamic banking). According to him, all laws applied in public are essentially positive law, including the law applied by the Prophet. Even if the source of the constitution comes from the Qur'an, adding Lutfi, because Muhammad is a messenger of God, the law is still a positive law. He views that there was a better constitution available at the time other than the Qur'an. In many cases, punishments applied by Muhammad and his companions took the spirit of customary law (*'urf*), including stoning in the case of fornication, limbs cross-cutting, man-burning man (in the case of sodomy) and *diyat* (fines;

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<sup>25</sup> Adnin Armas, *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis terhadap Islam Liberal* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2003); "Discourses of Liberal Islam in the Middle East", [www.Islamlib.com](http://www.Islamlib.com), February 21, 2001.



taken from Roman and Nabatean laws). Only a few which the Prophet took from the Qur'an.<sup>26</sup>

Why did this happen? Lutfi argues, it is because the Prophet Muhammad was interacting with the Medina tribes and the Jews. As long as law is a reflection of the dynamics of a society, what was practiced by the Prophet (*sunnah fi'liyyah*) is merely a human decision. 'There is nothing special that should be considered as something 'unique' or Islamic. *Hajj* (pilgrimage), for instance, according to Lutfi, is a pre-Islamic practice; *zaka* (almsgiving) was a revised Roman tradition; *salat* (prayer) is a modified legacy of the Prophet David; and in 'Islamic' economy, the Prophet endorsed all economic practices of the Romans that later dominated almost all affairs of state administration and procedures, except for *riba*' (usury).<sup>27</sup>

Armas agree with the Luthfi Assyaukanie opinion above, but Armas said that Lutfi was too bold to conclude that there is no Islamic *shari'a*. "I still do not see your strong argument. Please mention reference stated that Sharia does not exist so that we can discuss it in depth reference. I saw the Prophet Muhammad is not just ordinary people like us. I would also argue that the pilgrimage can not be said *jabiliyyah* heritage, the revised Roman heritage charity, prayers of David the modified heritage, and economic systems of the Prophet Muhammad agreed to all Roman economic system, except *riba*,'" said Armas in his essay.

Armas agrees with Luthfi Assyaukanie's opinion above, but he says that Assyaukanie is too bold to conclude that there is no Islamic *shari'a*. "I still do not see your strong argument. Please mention the reference stating that *shari'a* does not exist so that we can discuss it in depth. I see that the Prophet Muhammad is not just ordinary person like us. I would also argue that the pilgrimage cannot be said as a *jabiliyyah* tradition, *zakat* as the revised Roman practice of charity, *salat* as modified prayer

<sup>26</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla (et.al), *Islam Liberal dan Fundamental...*

<sup>27</sup> "Discourses of Liberal Islam in the Middle East", [www.Islamlib.com](http://www.Islamlib.com), February 21, 2001.

introduced by the Prophet David, and the Prophet's economic systems as the legacy of Roman economic systems, except for *riba*," said Armas in his essay. Armas responded Assyaukanie's opinion and said, "if there is little in common, it does not mean the absence of fundamental and basic values. Indeed, the Prophet Muhammad brought the messages of the previous prophets. So here comes the resemblance. Therefore, *shabada* (confession) and the Islamic *shari'a* mark that Islam is a new religion, not simply a modified and adjusted one. Here Armas recalls the efforts of orientalist who want to socialize the idea that the Jewish and Christian influences are so great that Islam cannot be considered superior over its older religions.

Ulil Abshar Abdalla himself was optimistic the future of Islam that he promoted. "I am increasingly optimistic that the school of liberal Islam will move forward and soon will replace the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali, Ja'fari and other schools." Armas responded Ulil by saying that it was a too bold statement, "how was Ulil sure to say things before they take place? Although JIL was not yet mature enough as a movement, it has become an object of sharp criticisms and attracted the attention of various parties.<sup>28</sup> Liberal, pluralist, democratic, and humanist religious views broadcast through various media (seminars, talk shows, writing, etc.) often lead to resistance from religious leaders, not only fundamentalist and radical groups, but also from those known as moderate clerics. For them, JIL is considered to have allegedly created unrest in Muslim society, and engaged in activities that lead to silting faith, and insulting Islam and its doctrines.<sup>29</sup> Those criticizing JIL were not only clerics, activist-intellectuals had also launched sharp criticism. Muslim clerics criticized JIL more on "theological" basis, while intellectual activists criticized JIL more on its

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<sup>28</sup> Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Quo Vadis Jaringan Islam Liberal?" *Islamlib.com*. March 10, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Many more books wrote to discredit JIL, for instance *Bahaya Islam Liberal* by Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis terhadap Islam Liberal* by Adnin Armas, and *Islam Liberal: Sejarah, Konsepsi, Penyimpangan dan Jawabannya* by Adian Husaini. Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Al-Qur'an Dibina Gus Dur* (Jakarta: Hujjah Press, 2006).

platform, vision, mission, and agenda.

Masdar Farid Mas'udi, for example, criticized JIL because it emphasized more on discursive aspects of trivial issues (scarf, beard, veil, etc) rather than touched fundamental issues faced by Muslims such as unemployment, poverty, ignorance, and retardation. Masdar seems to form his criticism from the perspective of his project of emancipatory Islam whose sole purpose was to bridge Islam and the real problems faced by Muslim society.<sup>30</sup> Other intellectual activists who criticized JIL were Bisri Effendy, Ahmad Baso and “postra (post-traditional) Islamic network”. They criticized JIL for it ignored rich local traditions in Indonesia. According to them, tradition, and local culture are part of local wisdom that should be placed proportionally in Islamic discourse. Local traditions, including local Islam and other local religions, have to be defended because many Islamic groups working “in the name of the purification of Islam” often take action to force their theological view on others. This is not in line with the inclusive insight and democratic character developed by Islam.

In addition to there two groups, there are more intellectual activists (especially from the Yogyakarta camp like LKiS as a major proponent of Islam as developed by the Wahid Institute), who are critical to JIL. They deemed JIL too “western” minded, promoting western modernism, secularism, and global capitalism.<sup>31</sup> According to them, the face of Islam that should be displayed is “Islam Left” as a critique against Western cultural hegemony that gripped in almost all areas of Islam rather than worked behind the cloak of Western modernism. There are many other criticisms addressed to JIL.

JIL is often associated with young Muslim intellectual belonging to NU. Abu Su'ud (*Suara Merdeka*, 04/03/2005), for example, views that JIL was a container of young NU liberal intellectuals. It should be noted,

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

however, that perhaps only 20% of JIL activists were associated to NU, while the rest were those intellectual activists who had nothing to do with NU. They joined the “JIL network” because they have the similar insight and passion, to build glorious Islamic civilization in the future as well as to erode the misleading of religious fundamentalism. In addition, some NU intellectual activists may share some liberal thinking, but they were not necessarily members of the JIL syndicate, because they have their own affiliations such as emancipatory Islam Network (JIE), Post-Traditionalism, Islam Left and others. On several occasions, the young intellectuals criticized fiercely NU’s agendas and movements, as well as the agendas of their liberal Muslim counterparts.<sup>32</sup>

### **Response of Fundamentalism Islam toward Islamic Liberalism**

Fundamentalist Muslims consider that liberal Muslims are a group of destroyer (*firqah halikah*). Liberal Muslims are the West’s subordinates, and therefore share their assumptions, theories and views of life.<sup>33</sup> In his thesis, entitled “Western Political Thought,” Suhelmi Ahmad mentions a number of principles of Western thinking: individual freedom. social contract, free market society. belief in the plurality of socio-cultural and political realities of world societies.<sup>34</sup> According to the fundamentalist activists, Islam and liberalism are two antagonistic terms, which can never meet each other. However, there are a bunch of people in Indonesia who are willing to call themselves as Liberal Islam Network (JIL). The name may “fit” its people or ideas and agenda. Yet, Islam is a recognition that what they are calling for is *haqq* but essentially their voices are wrong, because liberal is incompatible with Islam, what was revealed and delivered by the Prophet Muhammad. What they called for was actually an innovation offered by those who disbelieve in the Prophet Muhammad.

Fundamentalist Muslims Islam address liberal Muslims through

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<sup>32</sup> Asrori S. Karni, *Komunitas Utan Kayu...*

<sup>33</sup> Agus Hasan Bashori, *Bahaya Islam Liberal* (Jakarta: Risalah, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> “Gado-Gado Islam Liberal”, *Sabili Magazine*, No. 15, 2001.

their view on their vision, mission and the dangers of JIL's agenda, as follows:

*Origins of the Firqah Liberal*

Liberal Islam, according to Charles Kurzman, first appeared around the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Ottoman, Mughal, and Shafawi Dynasties were at the gate of collapse. On those days, religious clergies initiated purist movements, a return to the Qur'an and *sunnah*. At this time liberal Islam came up as an early embryo with the emergence of Shah Wali Allah in India (1703-1762). According to him, Islam had to follow local customs of any place in accordance with requirements of its people. This also happened among Shi'ites. There was Muhammad Bihibhani (1790) who dared to break the door of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). This idea continued with the Egyptian Rifa'ah Rafi 'al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) who introduced European elements in Islamic educational system. In addition, Shihabuddin Marjani (1818-1889) and Ahmad Makhdun (1827-1897) also included secular subjects into the curriculum of Islamic education).

In India Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) persuaded Muslims to cooperate with the British colonial government. In 1877 he opened a college which later became Aligarh University (1920). Meanwhile, Syed Amir Ali (1879-1928) through his book *The Spirit of Islam* tried to realize liberal values, which was celebrated in the UK during the period of Queen Victoria. Syed Amir Ali argued that the Prophet Muhammad was the great pioneer of rationalism (William Montgomery Waft, 1979, 1982).

In Egypt emerged Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905), who adopted many of the Mu'tazilite ways of thinking, tried to interpret Islam free from the shadows of classical Muslim scholars. 'Abduh's steps were followed by Qasim Amin (1865-1908), a European accomplice and a pioneer of women's emancipation, and the author of *Tabrir al-Mar'ah* (women liberation). Then came Ali Abd. Raziq (1888-1966), who was a strong critic of the caliphate system. He argued that Islam did not dictate any political system because the Prophet Muhammad was mainly a religious

leader. Muhammad Khalafullah (1926-1997) even argued that the Koran indeed promoted a system with democratic spirit.<sup>35</sup> Muhammad Arkoun (1928-2010), an Algerian scholar based in France initiated a new model of Qur'anic interpretation based on various disciplines from semiotics (the science of symbols), anthropology, philosophy and linguistics. He intended to examine the essences of Islam based on modern Western sciences, and to bridge the diversity of Islamic thought with the diversity of thought outside of Islam.<sup>36</sup>

In Pakistan, there emerged Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) who spent a lot of time in America and became professor at the University of Chicago. Rahman promotes a contextual interpretation. He views that the Qur'an contains two aspects: legal and moral. The latter is the dominant message in the Qur'an. Everyone concerned with interpreting the Qur'an should therefore, pay much attention to its moral ideals.<sup>37</sup> In Indonesia, we have Nurcholis Madjid, who was Fazlur Rahman's student in Chicago. Madjid was known for his pioneering move toward promoting liberal Islam together with such other intellectuals as Djohan Efendi, Ahmad Wahid and Abdurrahman Wachid.<sup>38</sup> Madjid had consistently promoted the idea of reform since the 1970s. At that time, Madjid voiced religious pluralism by stating: "Religious tolerance will only grow on the basis of relativism in understanding religion forms and shared recognition of the absoluteness of universal values, which lead every human being to the core of every religion." JIL to a great extent adopts the ideas of Nurcholish Madjid and other Muslim thinkers who share the same vision with him.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Arkoun Mu'adz, "Anggitan tentang Cara-Cara Tafsir al-Qur'an", *Salam*, Vol. 3 No. 1, 2000, pp. 100-111.

<sup>37</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); William M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987); WM Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca-History in the Quran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Greg Barton, *Sabili Magazine*, No. 15, 2001, pp. 88.

<sup>39</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University

That is genealogy of liberal Islam according to Hamilton Gibb, William Montgomery Watt, and Charles Kurzman. In this context, it should be noted that they did not intend to discredit Islam, or doubted the Qur'an as the word of God. Montgomery Watt, for example, argued that the Koran is the truth. So rather than follow the views of conservative Christians who think that the Koran is a replication of earlier scriptures, Watt builds his school by saying that the Qur'an is true from God, and it represents its own originality. To prove his view, Watt shows some evidence that the Meccan verses can be identified as follows: 1) God is Almighty and Merciful; 2) man will face God in hereafter to get justice for his actions; 3) man has to submit to God and worship Him; 4) man has to be willing to spend some of their wealth for charity (*zakat*) and to deliver truth, and 5) Muhammad was sent by God. According to Watt, those points are correct, as they are also mentioned in the Bible. The last point stating that Muhammad is the Messenger of God shows that the Qur'an is an original revelation despite its mentioning of some elements contained in the Jewish and Christian religious traditions.<sup>40</sup>

### *Mission of Islamic Liberalism*

According to militant Muslims, the mission of liberal Islam is to destroy the fundamentals of Islam. They catch this message from a statement on JIL's website, *www.islamlib.com*, "of course, if there is no effort to prevent the dominance of militant religious views, perhaps in a longtime, these views will possibly become dominant. If this happens, it will bring bad consequences for any effort to establish democracy in Indonesia because militant Muslims frequently escalate tensions and conflict among existing religious groups, between Islam and Christianity, for example. Meanwhile, inclusive, plural, and humanist religious views are the principles that underlie democratic life."

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of Chicago Press, 1982); William M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*...; WM Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca-History*...

<sup>40</sup> Pradan Boy ZTF, *Orientalisme dan Dialog Antarkitab* (Canberra: ANU Canberra, 2004); William M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*...



Muslim fundamentalists can be identified from the following characteristics: *first*, they spread hatred toward the West; *second*, they are determined to restore the romance of pre-modern Islamic civilization; *third*, they aim to implement Islamic law; *fourth*, they believe that Islam is both religion and state; *fifth*, they make the past as a guide (manual) for creating the future.

### *Agenda and Ideas of Islamic Liberalism*

Fundamentalist Muslims consider an article entitled “The Four Liberating Islamic Agenda” by Luthfie Asyaukanie to have introduced four agendas of liberal Islam. *First*, liberal Islam popularizes an idea that political and state affairs are purely world affairs, be they following monarchy system or parliamentary system (democracy). *Second*, there is a need to search for a theology of pluralism that provides Muslim society a theological argument and basis for accepting social and religious diversity in the Muslim world. *Third*, it strongly advocates women emancipation. And fourth, it advocates freedom of expression in an absolutely way.

Based on several sources we may describe JIL’s agendas as follow. *First*, liberal Islam strongly advocates the implementation of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*). *Second*, it puts reason in a central position in understanding religion. *Third*, it drives the public to accept social and religious pluralism. *Fourth*, it strongly advocates the separation of religion from political affairs and urges the state to take a non-sectarian position.

Fundamentalist Muslims view that liberal Islam makes Islam in the same position as other religions. They argue that liberal Islam is in fact against the very nature of Islam. This situation is desired by the Jews and Christians. They contend that the Jews and Christians echo this heresy particularly among Muslim academicians. Hence they articulate what they call the dangers of liberal Islam as follows.

*First*, they do not speak of Islam as intended by Allah, but voice thoughts that please devil, the West and other Evils. *Second*, they prefer evil attributes rather than a commitment to the pure faith because they



hate such words as *jihad* (war in the name of Islam), *sunnah* (prophetic tradition), and *salaf* (the earlier Muslim generations). Instead, they are willing to call their Islam with liberal Islam. The Qur'an says: "*Wretched is the name of disobedience after [one's] faith*" (al-Hujurat: 11). *Third*, they believe in some aspects of the Qur'anic messages and doubt some others. This is actually soft refusal in the garb of scientific reasoning. In such a way, they claim to have created a "new path" in interpretation of the al-Qur'an. They call it a contextual, hermeneutical, critical and liberalized interpretation. *Fourth*, they reject scientific paradigms and several conditions behind Islamic *ijtihad* because they feel inferior toward western culture. They see Islam with the heart and brains of the West. They do not follow the road taken by the Prophet, his Companions, and the believers. For them, understanding religion based merely on the normative aspects of religious texts and the normative reading of Islamic history is inadequate, such an understanding will make this religion ahistorical and exclusive.<sup>41</sup> *Fifth*, they do not represent authority in religion, and therefore, scholars do not believe in their religious discourse. They prefer to believe in their own desires, because they merely claim themselves to be "reformers" and even "super reformers". The Qur'an says: And when it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption on the earth," they say, "We are but reformers." Unquestionably, it is they who are the corrupters, but they perceive [it] not. And when it is said to them, "Believe as the people have believed," they say, "Should we believe as the foolish have believed?" Unquestionably, it is they who are the foolish, but they know [it] not (al-Baqarah: 11-13).

Hartono Ahmad Jaiz warns Muslims of the danger of liberal intellectuals because they are simply do not have a strong scientific foundation and do not possess an established faith. Facing the above complexity, fundamentalist Muslims firmly reject any liberal ideas in religious fields, without exception religious pluralism. In their view,

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<sup>41</sup> Syamsul Arifin, "Menakar Otentitas Islam Liberal," *Jawa Pos*, February 1, 2002.

religious pluralism contradict Islamic faith as mentioned in the al-Baqarah: 120 and other verses.<sup>42</sup> Pluralism, according to fundamentalist Muslims, is a heretic theology. Concerning this issue that theology at large can be divided into three kinds. The first is exclusive theology. It views that only their own religion is right, while others' are wrong, and therefore there is no other truth and salvation, except their own. The second is inclusive theology. The adherents of this theology view that their religion is right, while others' are right as well. They acknowledge that there are other truths, but still maintain that their religion is the utmost truth. This theology is more inclusive and open-minded. The third is the pluralist theology, which suggest that truth exists in every religion and faith. Truth therefore does not belong to or is monopolized by a certain religion.

Fundamentalist Muslims accuse liberal Muslims of spreading liberalism together just as their allies, the Zionists who spread Zionism. They indeed do not call people to Zionisms, but make them submissive to the Zionist agendas.<sup>43</sup> Concerning the issue of terrorism that features the image of Islam pejoratively, JIL has a parallel view with the U.S./ West concerning fundamental Islam, which is often associated with terrorism. Fundamentalist Islam is often seen by the West as the ideology of those with the following characteristics: 1) Anti-Western civilization, 2) pro the official implementation of Islamic law, 3) willing to build Islamic civilization, 4) belief in the unity between Islam and state, and 5) making the predecessors (*salaf*) as the ultimate model for Muslims. These characteristics are used as parameters to assess whether certain Islamic movements deserves to be called as "fundamentalists" or not.

### **From Condemnation to Death Threat**

It has been narrated from Ali ibn Abi Talib, "In the last days of this world there will appear some young foolish people who will use (in their claim) the best speech of all people (i.e. the Qur'an) and they will abandon

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Agus Hasan Bashori, April 22, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Ustaz Agus Hasan Bashori, April 22, 2004.

Islam as an arrow going through the game. Their belief will not go beyond their throats (i.e. they will have practically no belief), so wherever you meet them, kill them, for he who kills them shall get a reward on the Day of Resurrection.” This tradition is used by fundamentalist Muslims to attack anything they regard as heretic interpretation of Islamic doctrines. Labeled as a sound tradition as it is included in the Sahih of al-Bukhari, this tradition is used to justify violent responses to liberal Muslims. It is used to bring the violence to the sphere of religious obligation.

Hartono Ahmad Jaiz’s book was published in January 2002, in the midst of the rise of young intellectuals who were affiliated to Liberal Islam Network (JIL). A report by Ali ibn Abi Talib is used to raise a question: do liberal Muslim youth affiliated to JIL are those mentioned and meant this report? If so, they deserved to be killed. Ahmad Jaiz does not give a clear answer, but says. “It has to be decided through legal mechanisms. He views that the message of this report is too general. Therefore, Hartono realizes that its application may lead to debates and disputes. So it needs the involvement of law to solve the dispute. In accordance with a principle of Islamic legal theory, it is the government that should decide, *hukm al-bakim yarfa’u al-khilaf* (the ruler’s decision solves the dispute).

Hartono calls the government to liberal Muslim intellectuals to the state court in order to assessed to what extent they deviate from the truth of religion. In the end of his book, he recommends killing as punishment for intellectuals, as Umar bin Khattab himself killed people who refused to adhere to Islamic *shari’a*. Hartono argues that among the sins of JIL activists is that they also reject *Islamic shari’a*.

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, in his commentary of Sahih al-Bukhari, *Fath al-Bari*, explains that Ali’s report is related to the context of crushing Kharijite rebellion. Kharijites were those opponents of Ali who approached the Qur’an literally. They are known for their inclination toward accusing their fellow Muslims of infidelity, and therefore they

deserve to be killed. This community, al-Asqalani views, is actually meant in the hadith. Nevertheless, Hartono Ahmad Jaiz uses the report to attack liberal Muslims, ignoring such elucidation by Ibnu Hajar al-Asqalani.

News about a *fatwa* of death against JIL intellectuals was circulating in late 2002. Hartono Ahmad Jaiz had voiced death punishment for JIL activists in his book, 11 months earlier. This *fatwa* confirmed Ahmad Jaiz's opinion, which later featured public debates. On November 30, 2002, Forum Ulama Umat Islam (FUUI, The Forum for Muslim Religious Scholars) came together in al-Fajr Mosque, Bandung, to issue a statement containing a *fatwa*. FUUI's statement reads, "Call for law enforcement officials to dismiss the network and its activities that systematically and massively insult God, Muslims, and Muslim scholars." They were ignited by Ulil Abshar Abdalla's provocative article "Refreshing Understanding of Islam", published in *Kompas*, on November 18, 2002, which they consider an example of insulting religion. FUUI stated, "According to Islamic law, persons who insult and distort the truth of religion can be put to death."

According to chairman of FUUI, KH Athian Ali, this *fatwa* is not just for Ulil Abshar. "Too small if we only target Ulil. We want to dismantle motives behind Liberal Islam Network, which he led," said Athian Ali. Throughout 2002, the calling for the death of JIL activists became a national issue. The *fatwa* sparked widespread controversy. FUUI's position also attracted many critics. The critics argued that Muslims may differ in their opinions, but it is not acceptable to intimidate people with death threat. It is enough to give a bitter lesson from the history such Muslim figures as al-Hallaj, Siti Jenar, Hamzah Fansuri, Farag Faudah and Mahmoud Taha, who lost their lives due to having different opinions on religion. FUUI finally clarified that they did not issue a death *fatwa*. "We are only demanding legal process," said Athian Ali. He proved his words by reporting Ulil Abshar to the Police Headquarter a week later. Indeed, FUUI did not mention the term "death *fatwa*", but Athian Ali stated that the legal basis of his position toward JIL is the

same position toward Suradi's case. In February 2001, FUUI openly used the term "death *fatwa*" against Suradi.

What kind of community is JIL exactly? Why were there other Muslim groups that called for the death of its activists? Is the danger of liberal Islam is equal to the danger of drugs or of communism so that its actors deserve death sentence? *GATRA* magazine discussed JIL in its Special Report "Liberal Islam Prevent Fundamentalism" on December 8, 2001, and in its Main Report "Dead *Fatwa* for Liberal Islam" on December 21, 2002. There may be many who disagree with the religious interpretations of JIL, but for them death threat seems to be too excessive. Only fundamentalists aspired to it.

## **Conclusion**

In the context of globalization, there is a strong tendency that Islam in Indonesia tends to be more liberal. This is marked by a permissive attitude towards new ideas about democracy, pluralism, and human rights. The phenomenon of the emergence of JIL as a new movement in the dynamics of post-reform Islamic discourse in Indonesia must be seen as not just "intellectual arrogance" or even religious blasphemy but a response to the Islamic fundamentalism movement which is beginning to become prevalent. The emergence of JIL in Indonesia on the other hand is also an attempt to reconstruct the face of Islam, which in a Western perspective is identical to terrorism. With an exclusive and permissive understanding of new ideas about democracy, pluralism, and human rights, JIL has given new nuances in the discursive contestation in post-reform Indonesia.

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