



# Muslim Attitudes to Jews and Israel

The Ambivalences  
of Rejection,  
Antagonism,  
Tolerance and  
Cooperation

STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY  
SUNAN KALIJAGA  
YOGYAKARTA

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## Preface

Over the last few decades, manifestations of hatred of Jews and Israel have increased in the Arab and Muslim world. This hatred is demonstrated in various ways: in speeches and writings of religious, intellectual and political leaders; in school textbooks and mass media; and in horrific suicide bombing and other terrorist actions. For example, Iran’s president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, al-Qa’ida leader Osama Bin Laden, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hizballah organizations all have repeatedly called for Israel’s destruction.

For their part, Jewish religious and political leaders, as well as some scholars and journalists, particularly in Israel, have depicted these manifestations of hatred as “Muslim [or Arab] anti-Semitism.” According to them, this anti-Semitism is inherent in Islam from its origins – not merely in its contemporary militant wings – and has “taken root in the body politic of Islam to an unprecedented degree.”<sup>1</sup>

It is true that extreme or fanatic Muslim groups, such as al-Qa’ida and Hizballah are determined to fight the “Crusaders and Jews” and destroy Israel. These organizations and other Muslim terrorists have killed many innocent civilians – Christians, Jews and Muslims alike – in the US, Israel and elsewhere. They and some Muslim leaders and writers have indeed employed anti-Semitic expressions, particularly in connection with the Palestinian and Arab struggle against Zionism and Israel. These expressions, which derive partly from selected Qur’anic verses and partly from classic Christian anti-Semitism, have influenced many Muslims in the Middle East and beyond. But the allegation that Islam, or its mainstream, has been anti-Semitic, on a par with Nazism, represents gross generalization. Such a contention is misleading and contributes to needless suspicion, fear and hatred of Muslims by Jews.

According to most scholars of Islam, for many centuries anti-Semitism was foreign to Islam and to Muslims. Professor Bernard Lewis writes, for example:

One important point should be made right away. There is little sign of any deep-rooted emotional hostility directed against Jews . . . such as the anti-Semitism of the Christian world. There were, however, unambiguously negative attitudes. These were in part the “normal” feelings of a dominant group toward a subject group, with parallels in virtually any society . . .<sup>2</sup>

Many Muslims felt antagonism or contempt for Jews (and Christians) that had rejected Islam, the true religion, and its founder, Prophet Muhammad.

CHAPTER  
12Indonesian Muslims'  
Perceptions of Jews and Israel

IBNU BURDAH

As a preliminary consideration, here is my conversation with an Indonesian Muslim student in Central Java:

Q: "Do you know anything about Jews?"

A: "Yeah sure I do. Originally, [the term] Israel had good meaning. It was from Arabic *isra* meaning 'to journey' and *El* meaning 'God'. Therefore, *Israel* is a journey for God. The meaning [of the name] was just great, unfortunately [the people] behave like beasts."

Q: "Have you ever met them?"

A: "Of course, almost everyday. They *are* in my family, even in this city of *santri* (pious Muslim). They refuse to worship God, they take other people's wife as theirs, they deceive people . . ."

Q: "How do you know? Where did you learn it from?"

A: "Everybody knows it. The Holy Qur'an also said so [about Jews]. On TV [I] learn their attitude to Palestinians . . . My *Ustadz* (religious teacher) says they are actually great people, but [they] don't thank God for it."

Despite the fact that the history of the encounter between the Jewish community and Indonesian Muslims is very limited, the word *Jew* is widely known by Indonesian Muslims. Among 300 Indonesian Muslim schoolchildren I interviewed, no one was unfamiliar with the term, though the referents of which may vary. To my surprise, the word *Jew* in their perception does not refer to the actual Jewish community in Indonesia. Furthermore, none of them knows of the existence of Jewish communities in Indonesia, both in the past and at present time. Most Indonesians know Jews neither from the real encounter nor from the coverage about them but from non-Jewish sources. It is in this sense that the Indonesians' reference of the term, which points to some "varied" and sometimes "blurry" concepts, as well as the

stigma and prejudice around it, could then be explained.

This study makes its core argument that there are at least three major sources from which Jews became widely known and narrowly stigmatized among the Indonesian Muslims. Those sources include *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, media coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as well as the Islamization of the issue, and a narrow-mindedness of the (Islamic) religious instruction at school.

*The Protocols*

*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is the most important source from which Indonesian Muslims define Jews. There are many publications of *The Protocols* in the forms of both long quotations and reviews. One of the most influential volumes is Shalaby's *Perbandingan Agama: Agama Yahudi* [Comparative Religious Studies: Judaism]. The author was an Egyptian visiting professor at the Yogyakarta State Institute for Islamic Studies in 1950s. Chapter IV of the book mentions *The Protocols* as the third Jewish religious scripture. Shalaby quotes some points from the first to the nineteenth Protocols, which he thinks important. Here are some of them:

Protocol I: We should note that the group of people with evil characteristics outnumbers the people with noble characteristics. Then, the best way to control the world is by plundering their power and threatening, not by academic vision.<sup>1</sup>

From the third Protocol: Basically, the morality of the society and the existing customs will decline soon for we have and will always corrode them . . . In fact, it would be our benefit when the youth of the other nations become weak, and our strength will be unshakable, when a labor will be in their poverty and illness forever, because in that way, we will endorse them as serfs that will always serve under our command, so that they will not be able to stand to challenge us.

Other more-detailed Indonesian versions of *The Protocols* are also available:

1. Sulaiman et al., 1990, *Ayat-ayat Setan Yahudi: Dokumen Rahasia Yahudi Menaklukkan Dunia dan Menghancurkan Agama* [Jewish Satanic Verses: Jewish Secret Documents to Conquer the World and to Destroy Religions], with an introduction by a Kuwaiti author.
2. A'lam, Jalal, S. Ali Thanthowi and Muhammad Namer. 1987. *Dendam Barat dan Yabudi terhadap Islam* [Western and Jewish Revenge to Islam], an Indonesian translation by M. Thalib and Musthoa Mahdamy.
3. Kailany, Madjid, 1988, *Bahaya Zionisme terhadap Dunia Islam* [The Dangers of Zionism to the Islamic World]. This volume is an Indonesian

- translation of a Saudi publication (1984). It contains *The Protocols* and provides a lengthy commentary.
4. Darouza, 1982, *Mengungkap tentang Yahudi: Watak, Jejak, Pijak dari Kasus-kasus lama Bani Israel* [Unveiling Jews: Jews' nature and track records based on Israelite's old cases]. The book was originally published in Damascus, 1970. This volume contains a concise version of *The Protocols*.
  5. *Skenario Rahasia Menguasai Dunia* [A Plot to Control the World], 1989. The author is unknown, but the introduction was probably written in Pakistan.

Carr's *Yahudi Menggenggam Dunia* [Jews Hold the World] that discusses lengthy the so-called Jewish conspiracy based on *The Protocols* gained wide popularity in Indonesia and was reprinted six-times. This volume has been translated from Arabic and published by Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut This volume was printed by a publisher specializing in Islamist books.<sup>2</sup>

I also found some version of *The Protocols* published by the Islamic Propagation Organization, Tehran, Iran. Although appear in different publications, two versions of *The Protocols* bear the same title: *Jewish Conspiracy: The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. Those books are about the so-called Jewish conspiracy to control the whole world, especially the Islamic World, by any fraudulent means. In the preface, the publisher states: "The anti-human crimes, aggressions and murders committed by the Zionist and their inveterate rancour against Islam and Muslim are known and to one and all." Based on their editorial preface, these publications clearly aim at naming Israel as a source of threat for Islamic World, especially the Middle East. Furthermore, I found in a bibliography of an Indonesian book a version of *The Protocols* published by Assuniyah, Kuala Lumpur, under the title of *Makalah tentang Protokol Yahudi* [Papers on the Jewish Protocols].

The authors of those books do not critically examine the Protocols. Shalaby describes the factuality of *The Protocols* by showing the importance of the secrecy of *The Protocols* for Jews: "These protocols are kept in secret places. Nobody knows about it, except some particular people among the Jews who try to implement all things inscribed."<sup>3</sup>

Still, in the Indonesian literature proper, more comprehensive and lucid explanations on the origins of *The Protocols* have been available. Among the books and articles containing such explanations are Max I. Dimont's *Jews, God, and History*, which is translated into *Desain Yahudi atau Kebendak Tuhan: Narasi-narasi Besar bagi Sebuah Sejarah Dunia* [Jewish Design or the Will of God: Grand Narratives for a World History] and Martin van Bruinessen's *Yahudi sebagai Simbol dalam Wacana Islam Indonesia Masa Kini* [Jews as A Symbol in Contemporary Indonesian Muslim's Discourse]. There is even Roger Garaudy's book that denies the authenticity of *The Protocols*. Dimont writes:

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A celebrated sourcebook by Nilus, *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* published in 1903 . . . Czar Nicolas II assigned Nilus, a priest, to make up something to strike Jews. Nilus compile a series of documents based on a French novel which basically tells nothing about Jews. Nilus' forgery centers about how a group of Jews engaged in conspiracy, known as the Elders of Zion, to conquer the world.<sup>4</sup>

The books that mention the fake origins of *The Protocols* are less frequently-cited in mass-media or by Indonesian writers on Jewish or Israeli problems. But anti-Jewish sections of these books, such as Garaudy's books, *Mitos dan Politik Israel* [Israel's Myths and Politics] and *Zionis: Sebuah Gerakan Keagamaan dan Politik* [Zionism: A Religious and Political Movement] have become the most important references for the discourse on Jews and Israel among Indonesian writers.<sup>5</sup>

An Indonesian Ainur Rofiq Sophiaan wrote a book entitled *Tantangan Media Informasi Islam: Antara Profesionalisme dan Dominasi Zionis* [Challenging Islamic Informational Media: Between Professionalism and the Zionist Domination].<sup>6</sup> The earlier part of this book is quite elaborate and impartial. It also mention two works in the bibliography that deny the authenticity of *The Protocols*, namely the works of Dimont and Garaudy. This book even incorporates a full translation of Garaudy's work into an appendix entitled "Strategi Zionis dan Cara Menghadapinya" [Zionist Strategy and How to Counter It]. In fact, this book simply quotes verbatim the whole Protocol XIII about which the author argues is the final evidence toward the so-called Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world through media.

There is no adequate discussion or debate between the proponents and opponents of *The Protocols* in Indonesia. Instead, each party speaks to itself, leaving no room for studying and criticizing *The Protocols*, as if both the support and the rejection are irreconcilable paradigms. The proponents of the issue of *The Protocols* authenticity, being the majority, keep reproducing *The Protocols* by quoting, multiplying, expounding, and emphasizing it without taking into account the opinions that says that *The Protocols* are a forgery. Finally, this becomes one of the root causes of the Indonesian Muslim's stigmatic perception towards Jews.

Such a development is at least confirmed by the appearance of two most recent books on Jews. The first one is *Jaringan Gelap Freemasonry: Sejarah dan Perkembangannya hingga ke Indonesia* [The Hidden Networks of Freemasonry: Its History, Development, and Spread to Indonesia].<sup>7</sup> Although the book was not written by a well-known writer and was firstly published only in 2005, it has been reprinted three times so far, the last printing being in January 2007. The book includes a chapter entitled "Kisah Ditemukannya Protokol Zion" [On the Discovery of The Protocols of Zion] describing the same data of earlier writings without a new discussion. Garaudy's works provide the main data.

The second most-recent book is *Fakta dan Data Yahudi di Indonesia: Dulu dan Kini* [The Facts and Data about Jews in Indonesia: Past and Present].<sup>8</sup> It was published in February 2006 and so far has been reprinted three times. The first author is an influential figure in the discourse of Judaism and Jews, and has been conventionally considered the Indonesian expert on Zionism,<sup>9</sup> while the co-author is not well-known. The volume is in fact a revised edition of Saidi's previous work *Fakta dan Data Yahudi di Indonesia* [The Facts and Data about Jews in Indonesia] published in 1992, with new data by the co-author.

Apart from their wide circle of readership, there has been no new discussion on *The Protocols*, which I consider as the most important hindrance in the Jewish–Muslim relations. Instead, the volume ignores the previous considerable studies that proved *The Protocols*' fabrication.

Thus the absence of adequate discussion on the authenticity of *The Protocols* simply enforces the perception of the existence of a Jewish conspiracy that threatens Muslims. It often stimulates Muslims' actions and, at certain moments, shapes Muslim reactions to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The efforts of M. Thalib to compile and rephrase a volume on *76 Karakter Yahudi*<sup>10</sup> [76 Jewish (Evil) Characteristics] corresponds to such a stand. In the preface, the editors declare:

We choose this problem as a object of study because all of us, without exception, got the impact of the wave of the world destroying, conducted in a systematic, fully-directed, and planned, and with unlimited funds. We are never aware of the source of all these.<sup>11</sup>

What the compiler refers to as the “root cause” is the so-called Jewish conspiracy. M. Thalib and Mustafa Mahdomy also compile various writings on Jews, some of which, in turn, appear as a volume *Dendam Barat dan Yahudi terhadap Islam*<sup>12</sup> [Western and Jewish Revenge to Islam]. This volume is a collection of three translations of separate articles: “*Qodatu al-gharb yaqulun dammiru al-islam wa abidu ablahu*” [Western Leaders Declaring the Demolition of Islam and its Adherents] by Jalal A'lam, “*Qisas min al-tarikh*” [Stories from History] by Shyakh Ali Tantawi, and “*Haqiqat al-yahud wa al-mubtaammal al-yahudiyah*” [The Truth of Jews and Jewish Aspirations] by M. Namir al-Khatib.

### Media Coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

Before starting a class on Judaism in a course *Religious Studies*, I usually hand a preliminary questionnaire to the students. One of the questions is: Name one Jewish person that you know. From at least 300 students of various backgrounds, I received 100 answers. Sometimes with such titles as “The Bloodthirsty General,” “The Butcher” etc.<sup>13</sup> Why has “Ariel Sharon”

become the most frequently one named, and not Einstein, Max Weber, Martin Buber, Karl Marx, Spielberg or other Israeli prime ministers such as Ben-Gurion, Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, or Yitzhak Rabin? Only less than 10 students mentioned those names.

Their perception of Jews has been influenced by various media coverage on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Broadly speaking, Jews have been identified with the Israeli army committing violence against innocent Palestinian civilians, plundering Palestinian land, and spoiling the holiness of al-Quds. Those images have been personified by Ariel Sharon, an important symbol, typical of the Indonesian media coverage on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The accumulative impact of such a phenomenon is that Jews are presented in a greatly distorted fashion. In the preface to Saidi's *Fakta dan Data Yahudi di Indonesia*, the publisher thus writes:

Yet the history of Jewish incivility did not end to be a classical history of humanity. The records of meanness and cunning keep going up to now, in the modern era of human history. And the readers know what is their dream? To hold the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that they use all means for that end. At present, there is no entity immune to the amusement of the state of the “monkeys and pigs.”<sup>14</sup>

The statement is clearly unverifiable since the history of Indonesian Jews shows that they have never been a significant community. The total population of Indonesian Jews reached its climax only in 1945 – 3,000 people – but only for a short period as the number kept decreasing significantly after the end of World War II. Most of them came from The Netherlands and Iraq, and a small number were from Eastern Europe, Armenia, and China. They lived in Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, the Jewish community in Surabaya bear no Jewish characteristics, but are psychologically anxious about the Indonesians' perception of Jews as bands of armies committing violence of all sorts towards innocent civilians as the media coverage on Israel always presents.<sup>16</sup>

### The Islamization of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

The Islamization of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict appeared only in 1990s when the Saudis supported Islamist groups such as KISDI (*Komite Indonesia untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam* – Indonesian Committee for Islamic World Solidarity) and DDII (*Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia* – Indonesian Council of Islamic Propagation) that aroused the issues of Islamic World as a central theme. Apart from the Bosnian issue, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has become a fertile public discourse. It was marked by an intense circulation of the Palestinian *intifada* songs and demonstrations against some movies suspected as Jewish propaganda,<sup>17</sup> Islamic preachers voicing

anti-Jewish slogans in various religious rituals, and a call for *jihād* in Palestine. Even a new formula *allahumma unshur ikhwanana fi falistin* [God, give the triumph upon our brethren in Palestine] was added after the five-times prayers.

In the schools run by Modernist Muslims and Activist Muslims, the pupils are accustomed to memorize a verse of the Holy Qur'an (2:120), at least in its Indonesian translation. This verse narrates a perpetual threat from Christians and Jews and is taken at face value by the Islamist circle. These Islamists ignore the fact that Muslim–Jewish relations were much better than either Muslim–Christian or Jewish–Christian relations: the common ancestor Abraham, the Qur'anic appreciation of Jews as *ahlu al-kitab*, and the Jewish faith (including the above-mentioned verse, which fundamentally emphasizes the unity of Abrahamic religions).<sup>18</sup> In Padang, West Sumatra, people use for example two popular terms: *Ngarai Sianok* (Sianok Valley: Zion Valley) and *orang bertuah* 'wise man' (from *orang ber-Torah*, literally means a-man-with-Torah). Some people interpret these terms as reflecting the intimate relationship among Jews and Muslims in Indonesia. Yet many others would say: "Yes, it's true, they are people of The Book; yet they have corrupted it."

Closely related to this is the publication of 76 *Karakter Yahudi dalam Qur'an* which is a rephrasing of some parts of a Qur'anic exegesis of Shaykh Mustafa al-Maraghi popularly known as *Tafsir al-Maraghi* [al-Maraghi Exegesis]. Among the so-called 76 evil characteristics of Jews that they are deceitful, ill-provoking, hostile, and the like; these characteristic are claimed to be based on Qur'anic verses.<sup>19</sup>

### Religious Instruction and Religious Studies at Schools

Seven years ago when I asked for permission to study Judaism, my religious teacher suggested two things. First, I should be cautious of Jews. Second, I should have to learn Qur'anic verses concerning Jews. In practice, I took the suggestion by writing verbatim those Qur'anic verses on the inside cover of my first five books on Judaism. I also memorized and understood them at face value since I had been familiar with Arabic since I was a child. Each time when I was about to read the books, I read those verse several times. Meanwhile, my teacher's first suggestion was sometimes even more urging. I should be aware of and cautious as I would learn about the people who had reportedly committed lots of evil. I also should remember that the Holy Qur'an itself strictly narrates Jews' perpetual hostility to Muslims. These circumstances colored the early phase of my study on Judaism, Jewish people, and Israel.

Actually, I had got the idea of the perpetual hostility between Muslim and Jews long before I started my study on Judaism. The lectures by religious teachers at schools I attended, often emphasized this hostility by quoting the well-known Qur'anic verse (2:120) "And We have certainly sent down to you the book with the notion of a conspiracy to weaken Islam, though those teachers never mentioned *The*

*Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. I encountered this idea when I was in the grades 7–12 during 1989–1995 and on my first year of undergraduate studies, though in a reduced intensity. Such experience embraces the majority of the young Indonesian students, more specifically those in Islamic religious institutions, in their encounter with the idea of Jews and Judaism.

In state school curricula, the discussion on Judaism has almost no place. From primary school (Grade 1) to the undergraduate level, there is no subject that specifically discusses Judaism, except in the department of comparative religious studies at certain state Islamic universities. The important textbooks used are Ahmad Shalaby's *Perbandingan Agama: Agama Yahudi* [Comparative Religious Studies: Judaism] and Burhanuddin Daja's *Agama Yahudi* [Judaism]. Shalaby was a visiting professor at the State Institute for Islamic Studies in the 1950s. He finished writing his book in Cairo in 1965. The volume was then translated into Indonesian by Syamsuddin Manaf and was published in 1990 by Bina Ilmu, Surabaya. The book is comprised of six chapters, all of which are negative accounts of the Jews, including their history, characteristics, beliefs, rituals, scriptures, and various sects and movements. Here is an example of how the book describes the evil characteristics of Jews: "Secret societies and terrors of murder are the characteristics of Jews that had never disappeared throughout the ages."<sup>20</sup>

Although Shalaby used some references written by Jews, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* remained his most important reference and was most influential in his writing.

Another principal author of Jewish textbook is Burhanuddin Daja. He is a professor of religious studies at the State Islamic University of Yogyakarta. He is the only Indonesian professor of religious studies specializing in Judaism. His 246-page textbook was published in 1982 by Bagus Arafah Publisher, Yogyakarta. Generally speaking, Daja's perspective on inter-religious relations could be classified inclusive, or even pluralistic due to his balanced views.<sup>21</sup> A certain drawback of Daja is his lack of criticism of the authenticity of *The Protocols*. Daja simply follows Shalaby and leaves no room both for criticism and for a re-examination of *The Protocols*.<sup>22</sup>

Beside "Judaism" as a separate course, the course of "History of Religions" or "Religious Studies," the topic on Judaism is only discussed in one session: "Religious Studies" is for second-year students.

The little interest in studying Judaism, despite the fact that Judaism is close to the religion of the majority of Indonesians, might be due to the unawareness of the existence of Jewish communities in Indonesia, both in the past and at present. For example, the father of Comparative Religious Studies at the State Islamic Universities in Indonesia and the former Minister for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Mukti Ali, noticed in his preface to Daja's *Agama Yahudi*: "We do admit that Indonesians have less interest to study Judaism. This is perhaps because there is no Jewish community in Indonesia."<sup>23</sup> But, in his introduction, Daja states: "Even though it is almost

sure that there is no person of Jewish faith in Indonesia, the need for a book on Judaism in the Indonesian language is quite compelling."<sup>24</sup>

In the religious textbooks of primary and high schools, there is almost no adequate and accurate data on Judaism. Generally, Judaism and Jews are mentioned in the context of the prophets, specifically the Prophet Moses. For example, in a textbook of Religious Education for Muslim students in East Java is written: "It is the first revelation given to Moses (peace be upon him). It was a proof of his being a Prophet of God and His Messenger . . . Torah is revealed in Hebrew, of which authenticity was then corrupted by Jews."<sup>25</sup>

In this particular book, Jews are also described as idolaters, violated God's Commandments by fishing on Saturdays, demanded water of Moses in the barren and heated desert, and for food from heaven. It concludes "Yet various miracles displayed by Prophet Moses did not make them believe, they even rejected Moses and kept committing evil things."<sup>26</sup>

### Traditional and Liberal Muslims: Positive Approaches to Jews and Israel

Among Indonesian traditionalist Muslims, who are the majority, the Qur'anic verse (2:120) or the Palestinian issue are not a priority. Furthermore, from among this large group there has emerged a generation of youth liberal Muslim thinkers who have encouraged the opening of diplomatic ties with Israel. Their position has been influenced by notions of democracy, pluralism, and various other modern ideas.

Among the important figures of these groups is the former President of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid, best known as Gus Dur. As an eminent religious figure and intellectual, he enjoys not only respect from the traditionalist Muslims that constitute the majority of the Indonesian Muslims, but also has been the hero of young Indonesian thinkers.

Wahid perceives Muslim–Jewish relations as the relations among brothers and sisters in the sense that both religious adherents are the heirs of the same Abrahamic, monotheist tradition. Therefore, relations should be closer than those between Muslims and Russians or Chinese. This is his belief and response to his critics concerning the importance of the opening of the diplomatic relations with Israel, namely, that Israel is constitutionally a state that recognizes God and religion.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, Wahid often articulates that a *de facto* relationship between Indonesia and Israel has actually taken place. In many cases, the Indonesian press reported on secret relations between the two states, either in trade or in military cooperation. Moreover, former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin paid a visit to Indonesia on October 15, 1993 and was welcomed by President Suharto, in addition to non-formal, ministerial level meetings between the two governments. In 2003, it was proposed, on pragmatic grounds, that Indonesia should open a diplomatic relation with Israel. For

example, the head of the secular-nationalist PDI-P party's R&D, Subagio Anam, suggested opening diplomatic ties with Israel, and so did the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs in Abdurrahman Wahid's administration. Yet this plan was not implemented.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Wahid strongly voiced and worked hard to promote the peace process between the two religious siblings.<sup>29</sup> He joined a long march for peace in Jerusalem and participated in a Muslim–Jewish dialogue at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was also involved in the foundation of the *Strategic Dialogue Center* in Israel and the *Shimon Peres Foundation*, etc. According to Wahid, the best way for conflict resolution is the spiritual way, i.e., to cooperate in combating poverty, illiteracy, and in the development of a shared civilization. To Arafat, who paid a visit to Indonesia before Camp David II (July 2000), Wahid suggested to accept the land for peace formula, including Jerusalem as the shared city.

According to Wahid, Indonesia should be neutral, objective, fair and rational in perceiving the Palestinian–Israeli problem and should intensify its role in the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. But it is not possible for Indonesia to do so without a good relationship with Israel. In other words, Wahid wants to highlight that Indonesian–Israeli relations are not only important in the framework of the brother and sister relations among believers, but also a strategic step toward the realization of a Palestinian state. Thus he rejects the irrational notion among Indonesian Islamists regarding the Palestinian issue.

### The Palestinian Problem

The Islamization of the Palestinian issue has created a dissonance between the Indonesian Muslim conception and the actual development of the issue. On the one hand, during the mid-1990s, the Israeli–Palestinian relationship improved and both parties agreed to settle the conflict through a peace process. On the other hand, Indonesian Islamists' perspective on Jews and Israel remained negative. Although the government of Indonesia highly appreciated the results of the Oslo Accords, this development did not moderate or change the Islamists' perspective. In fact, the year 1994 witnessed the republication of books such as an Indonesian translation of an Arabic volume, *Why do we refuse to make peace with Jews*. This book by Muhsin Anbatani speaks about the reasons why Muslims have to reject peace with Jews. The Indonesian epilogue of the volume states the reasons why Muslims cannot make peace with Jews ever:

Influential figures of the world voice their calls to Muslims: "Let's make peace with Jews." Meanwhile, Jews from day to day keep waging war against Muslims and paralyzing them with their poisonous gas. They not



only invade but also erode the whole aspects of Muslims' life. Due to this sorrowful fact, how should a Muslim respond to the calls?<sup>30</sup>

In 2001, an Islamist publisher issued a translation of Muhsin Muhammad Shaleh's *The Palestinian Issue: Its Background and Development up to 2000*. In the first paragraph of the Preface, the editorial board strongly suggests that Palestine is a problem to which every Muslim has to pay attention. A second paragraph voices the editorial board's concern:

God's Messenger has reprimanded that upon approaching the end of the world, among the signs will be the defeat of the Jews by Muslims in Palestine, and the Muslims will regain the caliphate over the world. Thus, it can be concluded that the center of the conflict in the world is Palestine, which is now occupied by Israeli Zionist. There is an existential struggle between The Truth (Islam) and The Evil (Jews and their allies/Christians and Pagans). This essence should be comprehended by every Muslim, that the problem of Palestine is his/her problem: the problem doesn't only belong to Palestinians . . .<sup>31</sup>

In April 2004, Sayyid Qutb's *ma'rikatuna ma'a al-yahud* [Our war against Jews] appeared in Indonesian under the title *Melawan Kebiasaan Yahudi* [Confronting Jews' Incivility]. Here, again, the Indonesian editors' preface emphasizes Muslims' position in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict based on Qur'anic verses. It says *inter alia*: “Jews never cease creating terror in the name of peace. Their targets are massacre and conversion”.<sup>32</sup> “For all . . . there is no other way for us except go on declaring war against them, in all fields of life.”<sup>33</sup>

In recent years, there have appeared many anti-Jewish pamphlets urging to boycott any products related to Jews in Palestine. Usually, those pamphlets are either displayed on notice boards at big mosques to which many people usually go, or handed out directly to the people in public places.

Yet the publishers of these pamphlets have no real and significant basis in the Muslim communities, except for the PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* – The Justice and Welfare Party) and KAMMI (*Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia* – Indonesian Muslim Students Allied Action). Such groups as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, Ikhwan al-Muslimun, Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, Komite Solidaritas Indonesia untuk Dunia Islam have little influence among the Indonesian Muslim communities. Nevertheless, the issue of Israeli–Palestinian conflict is very important for these groups for several reasons.

First, supporting this issue will distinguish them from the big Indonesian Muslim groups as the defenders of oppressed Muslim groups, unlike Nahdhatul Ulama, that never asserts any demands over the issue. Second, it is important for them to show that they remain in public after acting underground for a long period of time. Third, it is not always easy for them to

express their radical ideas in the midst of moderate Muslim communities and the Israeli–Palestinian issue helps them to increase and even strengthens their bargaining position vis-a-vis other groups, as well as the government.

Indeed, the Indonesian Government during the early Reformation Era was not always able to control these small groups concerning this issue. For example, when Alwi Shihab, Minister of Foreign Affairs during Abdurrahman Wahid's presidency, suggested opening a bilateral trade relation with Israel, a large-scale protest by Islamists erupted. An Indonesian Islamist author criticized Wahid's administration for conceptualizing diplomatic ties with Israel, asserting that “International Zionism Plunders Indonesia.”<sup>34</sup>

## Conflict over Jerusalem

The struggle over Jerusalem has further deepened the religious sentiment regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This issue became most sensitive even comparable to other problems of Indonesian national interest. Thus, the issue of the Indonesian borders with Singapore and Malaysia, which are directly connected to Indonesian national defense, did not gain the same reaction as the Jerusalem issue. For example, Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount in 2000 that triggered the *intifada*, provoked many demonstrations in Indonesia. Pamphlets were printed urging to boycott all products related to Israel, as Yusuf Qardawi affirmed in his *fatwa*. This *fatwa* was abundantly quoted in the pamphlets issued by activist Muslim groups, while similar voices from Middle Eastern states have frequently earned a special place among some Indonesians.

Unfortunately, the comprehension of most Indonesian Muslims concerning Jerusalem has been rather poor, even among undergraduate students of State Islamic Universities. It is very difficult for them to differentiate between West Jerusalem, East Jerusalem, and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Only a few of them can differentiate the Wailing Wall from al Haram as-Sharif, the Dome of the Rock and masjid al-Aqsa; for them, the whole Holy City of Jerusalem belongs to Muslims.

The possible “division of Jerusalem,” as suggested in peace proposals, may be indiscernible by Indonesian Muslims, but not to the Government of Indonesia that would support it. The Indonesian public may accept the peace process, but it is very hard for them to accept the division of Jerusalem. As an undergraduate student puts it “Jerusalem clearly belongs to Palestine, why should it be divided? If it were divided, Jews would easily control it. We should not give them chance . . .”

Some Indonesian books have actually delineated various formulas to solve the Jerusalem problem. But, pamphlets that claim to speak for Muslim communities do not accept any formulas to divide Jerusalem.

The Indonesian Government may also possibly take into account this reaction of Indonesian Islamists as a potential to interrupt the political stability.

Moreover, being one of the components of the present Government, the PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* – The Justice and Welfare Party) is unlikely to compromise its stand on Israeli–Palestinian conflict and solidarity with the problems of the Islamic world.

By contrast, Indonesian Muslims' perspective on Jerusalem as a city of peace and a symbol for the believers of three faiths is also commonly voiced. An Islamic pop song well-known during the 1980s and 1990s with the tittle *Palestina* [Palestine] says:

Palestine, the holy place for Jews, Christian, and Muslims  
A symbol of the peace for the three religions of Heaven  
But now, your destiny encourages pity  
Your land got poured with ember  
Murder and killing in every corner  
Women and innocent children  
Became the victims of the ragged war  
Oh, the World! Do not tear Palestine off  
Help Palestine to regain peace.

In conclusion, the negative perception among Indonesian Muslims towards Jews is essentially due to their ignorance and unawareness of the tiny Jewish communities in Indonesia, both in the past and at present. This void has been filled with issues imported by various parties, notably the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that has been presented as the problem of the Islamic World, including the majority of Indonesians. These parties have also contributed to transmitting anti-Semitism that emerged in Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries, mainly through *The Protocols* which became popular in Indonesia. Finally, the religious instruction for Muslims, especially by teachers who studied in Arab Middle Eastern universities, has also contributed to sowing such negative seeds of anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli feelings.

#### Notes

- 1 Ahmad Shalaby, *Perbandingan Agama: Agama Yahudi* [Comparative Religious Studies: Judaism], translated by Syamsuddin Manaf. (Surabaya: Bina Ilmu, 1990), p. 289.
- 2 William G. Carr, *Yahudi Menggenggam Dunia* [Jews Hold the World], translated from Arabic (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2004). The publication of such books in luxurious form but at a cheap price has aroused a question: Who are the people behind them?
- 3 Shalaby, *op. cit.*, p. 281.
- 4 Max I. Dimont, *Desain Yahudi atau Kehendak Tuhan: Narasi-narasi Besar bagi Sebuah Sejarah Dunia* [Jewish Design or the Will of God: Grand Narratives for a World History], translated into Indonesian from *Jews, God, and History* by Al Toro and Sigit Haryoto (Bandung: Eraseni Media, 1993), p. 267. Martin van den Berg, "Jews as a Symbol in Contemporary Indonesian Muslim's Discourse" in *Journal*

*Teologi Gema*, Fakultas Teologi UKDW Yogyakarta, No. 53/1998, pp. 113–114. Roger Garaudy, *Mitos dan Politik Israel* [Israel's Myths and Politics] translated into Indonesian by Maulida Khiatuddin (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2000), pp. 171–172.

- 5 Roger Garaudy, *Zionis: Sebuah Gerakan Keagamaan dan Politik* [Zionism: A Religious and Political Movement], translated into Indonesian by Moelia Radja Siregar (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1995). Moreover, this volume is published by two different Indonesian publishers.
- 6 Ainur Rofiq Sophiaan, *Tantangan Media Informasi Islam: Antara Profesionalisme dan Dominasi Zionis* [Challenging Islamic Informational Media: Between Professionalism and the Zionist Domination] (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 1993).
- 7 A.D. El Marzdedeq, *Jaringan Gelap Freemasonry: Sejarah dan Perkembangannya hingga ke Indonesia* [The Hidden Networks of Freemasonry: Its History, Development, and Spread to Indonesia] (Bandung: Syamil Cipta Media, 2005). Cf. Mohammad Fahim Amin, *Rahasia Gerakan Freemasonry dan Rotary Club* [The Secret of Freemasonry Movements and the Rotary Club] (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 1991).
- 8 Ridwan Saidi and Rizki Ridyasmara, *Fakta dan Data Yahudi di Indonesia: Dulu dan Kini* [The Facts and Data about Jews in Indonesia: Past and Present] (Jakarta: Khalifa, 2006).
- 9 During the 1970s–1980s, Ridwan Saidi was in a heated polemic with the Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Nurcholsih Madjid, the implication of which was Saidi's accusation of Madjid as an agent of the "Jewish conspiracy". Saidi also wrote a novel *Diburu Mossad* [Chased by Mossad] (Jakarta: Lembaga Studi Informasi Pembangunan, 1996) that describes the presence of an enormous Israeli power in Indonesia.
- 10 Shyakh Mustafa al-Maraghi, *76 Karakter Yahudi dalam Qur'an (disadur M. Thalib)* [76 Jewish (Evil) Characteristics, compiled and edited by M. Thalib] (Solo: Pustaka Mantiq, 1991).
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 12 M. Thalib and Mustafa Mahdamy (eds.), *Dendam Barat dan Yahudi terhadap Islam* [Western and Jewish Revenge to Islam] (Solo: Pustaka Mantiq, 1987).
- 13 I have been teaching this course since 2003, when Sharon was prime minister.
- 14 Saidi and Ridyasmara, *op. cit.*, p. viii.
- 15 Anthony Lerman et al., *The Jewish Communities in the World: A Contemporary Guide* (London: Macmillan Press and the Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1989), pp. 81–82.
- 16 Nevertheless, they do associate with their Indonesian neighbors, both in trade and in other activities. See Indrianto's findings in *Journal Teologi Gema*, Fakultas Teologi UKDW Yogyakarta, No.53/1998. Different findings are presented by Hadler in his participatory research. According to Hadler, in West Sumatra there exists a strong sense of anti-Semitism among Indonesians. See Jeffrey Hadler, "Translations of Antisemitism: Jews, The Chinese, and Violence in Colonial and Post Colonial Indonesia", *Indonesian and Malay World*, Vol. 32, No. 94, November 2004.
- 17 In 1992, several big broadcasting companies in Indonesia were sued because those stations broadcast some movies regarded as Zionist propaganda.
- 18 If read completely, including the context of Muhammad at that time, the verse

- (2:120) in fact suggests the acknowledgement to three Abrahamic faiths sharing the one and same Source. This kind of reading or interpretation is actually familiar in Indonesia. See, for example, an Indonesian translation of Fazlur Rahman, *Tema Pokok Al-Qur'an*, translated from *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Bandung: Pustaka, 1985), pp. 237–238.
- 19 al-Maraghi, *op. cit.*
  - 20 Shalaby, *op. cit.*, p. 335. The publication of an Indonesian translation of *Mossad* (two volumes) that describes various operations of the Israeli Intelligence Unit underline these statements.
  - 21 This is also obvious in his explanation on the theological relations between Judaism and Islam. See Burhanuddin Daja, “Pengaruh Yudaisme terhadap Islam (Sepuluh Wasiat Allah dalam Perjanjian Lama dan Al-Qur’an)” *Journal Theologi Duta Wacana*, No. 53, 1998, pp. 85–108.
  - 22 Burhanuddin Daja, *Agama Yahudi* (Yogyakarta: Bagus Arafah, 1982), pp. 166–167.
  - 23 Mukti Ali in his Preface to Daja, *op. cit.*
  - 24 Daja, *ibid.*
  - 25 Buku Teks Pendidikan Agama Islam untuk SD kelas 6 [Textbook of Religious Education for Muslim Students of Grade 6] (Malang: Mega Ilmu, 2004), p. 19.
  - 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.
  - 27 Abdurrahman Wahid, “Benarkah Arafat Pemimpin Gerakan Islam?” (GusDur.net, 2005).
  - 28 H.A. Sumargono, “Masalah Hubungan Diplomatik dengan Israel.”
  - 29 Wahid maintains that the Palestinians (Philistines) were basically not Arabs but one of the tribes that inhabited in the West Bank of the Mediterranean Sea. They lived a peaceful coexistence with the other tribes, including the Hebrews. For some Indonesians, this notion is quite shocking.
  - 30 Muhsin Anbatani, Mengapa kita tidak berdamai saja dengan Yahudi? [Why don't we just make peace with Jews?], translated from the Arabic *limadha narfudu as-salam ma'a al-Yahud* [Why do we refuse to make peace with Jews] by H. Salim Basyrahil (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1994), on “Epilogue.”
  - 31 Mohammad Muhsin Shaleh, *Palestina: Sejarah, Perkembangan dan Konspirasi* [Palestine: History, Development, and Conspiracy], translated from *The Palestinian Issue: Its Background and Development up to 2000* by Tim Comes (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2001), pp. 5–6.
  - 32 Sayid Qutub, *Melawan Kebiadaban Yahudi* [Confronting Jews' Incivility], translated from the Arabic *ma'arikatuna ma'a al-yahud* [Our war against Jews] by Nashirul Haq and Muhammad Yusuf Hamdani (Bandung: Mujahid Press, 2004), p. 5.
  - 33 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
  - 34 Sidik Jatmika, *Gerakan Zionis Berwajah Melayu* [A Zionist Movement in A Malay Face] (Yogyakarta: Wihdah Press, 2001).