

**Ahmad Bunyan Wahib**

**Liberal Islam in Indonesia**

**Jaringan Islam Liberal on Religious Freedom and  
Pluralism**



STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY  
**SUNAN KALIJAGA**  
YOGYAKARTA

**LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing**

**Impressum/Imprint (nur für Deutschland/only for Germany)**

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek: Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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Coverbild: [www.ingimage.com](http://www.ingimage.com)

Verlag: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing GmbH & Co. KG  
Heinrich-Böcking-Str. 6-8, 66121 Saarbrücken, Deutschland  
Telefon +49 681 3720-310, Telefax +49 681 3720-3109  
Email: [info@lap-publishing.com](mailto:info@lap-publishing.com)

Herstellung in Deutschland:  
Schaltungsdienst Lange o.H.G., Berlin  
Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt  
Reha GmbH, Saarbrücken  
Amazon Distribution GmbH, Leipzig  
**ISBN: 978-3-8484-0636-4**

**Imprint (only for USA, GB)**

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek: The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

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Publisher: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing GmbH & Co. KG  
Heinrich-Böcking-Str. 6-8, 66121 Saarbrücken, Germany  
Phone +49 681 3720-310, Fax +49 681 3720-3109  
Email: [info@lap-publishing.com](mailto:info@lap-publishing.com)

Printed in the U.S.A.  
Printed in the U.K. by (see last page)  
**ISBN: 978-3-8484-0636-4**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work originates from my master's thesis at Leiden University in 2004. I was interested to study liberal Islam for the first time at the end of 2002. At that time, I was browsing information through Internet and found a website [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com). This site is organized by a group of young Muslims which named itself as *Jaringan Islam Liberal* (JIL). It promotes such ideas as democratization, human rights, ideas of progress, freedom of expression, and religious pluralism. From that time, I had awareness that there is a tendency among Indonesian Muslims to disseminate liberal Islam and it is interesting to be studied. I was more interested to study JIL since I involved myself in an evening discussion about liberal Islam with Prof. Nasr Abu Zayd as a speaker at the early 2003 in which he described liberal Islam as a rebellion against orthodoxy. Therefore, my interest to study JIL started no long after I arrived in Leiden.

I am indebted to many individuals and institutions for finishing my study at Leiden University. First of all, I am indebted to Indonesia Netherlands cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), Department of Religious Affairs of the Republic Indonesia for the awards of a fellowship to pursue my M.A. studies at Leiden University. It is my real pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor W.A.L. Stokhof, Professor Jacob Vredenburg, Dr Nico G. Kaptein, Dr Dick van Der Meij, Drs Rinske Boersma, Ibu Pauline Roring, Mbak Rahmawati. My study would also not have been possible without the support from the State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Faculty of Shari'a particularly. I would like to thank to Prof. Dr Amin Abdullah, Dr Syamsul Anwar and Drs Malik Madaniy, MA.

My deep gratitude also goes to M.N. Ichwan, Noorhaidi, Andi Faisal Bakti, and Prof. Dr Martin van Bruinessen for the discussions and the input for this thesis. I would like also to thank to classmates: Deden Ridwan, Najib Burhani, Munajat, Abdun Nasir, Saptoni, Eva Fakhrunnisa, Muna, Deni and Sabir. My thanks also go to the members of JIL, especially Ulil Abshar Abdalla who spent his time answering questions and discussions, Luthfi Assyaukanie and Nong Darol Mahmada who gave me opportunities to involve myself in cybernetic discussions through [islamliberal@yahoogroups.com](mailto:islamliberal@yahoogroups.com). I would like also to thank to Rosemary Robson who has, by her patience, edited the first draft of my thesis, and Judy Laffan who has edited final draft of this thesis.

The last, my great appreciation is due to my parents, Sunhaji and Muthomimah,  
my wife: Fosa Sarassina and my son: Novin Raushan.

Ahmad Bunyan Wahib



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#### Note

In this work, I use the version of *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, for the system of transliteration of Arabic characters with some exceptions: 1) no line under th, kh, dh, sh, and gh; 2) j instead of dj and q instead of k. For the bibliography, Indonesian names which are containing no family names are classified according to the personal name of the author. For example, Nurcholish Madjid is written as “Nurcholish Madjid”, not “Madjid, Nurcholish”.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The recent developments of Islamic thought have been coloured by two contrasting forms, which occupy diametrically opposed positions in ways of understanding Islamic doctrines: revivalist and liberal Islam respectively.<sup>1</sup> Both these revivalist and liberal views of Islam have widely coloured Islamic discourse in the Muslim world, and delineate a conflict and a tension between both groups which starts from their different opinions and methods of interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

The present study deals with liberal Islam in Indonesia by concentrating on the group *Jaringan Islam Liberal* (Liberal Islam Network; henceforward JIL).<sup>3</sup> The members of this group claim that they are proponents of liberal Islam. Referring to various prominent Muslim scholars with similar ideas,<sup>4</sup> this group spreads basic ideas such as the opening of the gates of *ijtihad*, stressing the spirit of religious ethics, pluralism and relativism, the support of minorities, freedom of religious expression or religious freedom, and secularisation (the separation of religion and politics).

It is interesting to study JIL because this group has aroused many responses to the ideas which it promotes, even the death penalty has been passed by *Forum Ulama Umat Islam* (*Forum for Muslim Scholars of Muslim Society*) on Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, the coordinator of JIL, because of the ideas expressed in one of his articles.

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<sup>1</sup> There are two other names for revivalist Islam: fundamentalist Islam and radical Islam. June Chandra Santosa uses the term radical Islam to refer to Muslims who have similar characteristics to revivalist Muslims. Kurzman calls them fundamentalist Muslims. All these names will be used in this work. See June Chandra Santosa, *Modernization, Utopia and The Rise of Islamic Radicalism in Indonesia*, Ph. D. dissertation submitted to Boston University Graduate School, 1996, Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation services, 1996; Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam, A Sourcebook*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.islamlib.com/arsip/diskusi.php](http://www.islamlib.com/arsip/diskusi.php), accessed on 16 November 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Many Muslim scholars across the Muslim world such as Azumardi Azra, Nurcholish Madjid, Masdar F. Mas'udi, Mohammad Shahrour, Ahmed an-Na'im, Farid Essack, Hassan Hanafi and Mohammed Arkoun have significantly influenced the formation of JIL. In its website, JIL call them *kontributor* (contributors) of *Jaringan Islam Liberal*. See [www.islamlib.com/contributor.php](http://www.islamlib.com/contributor.php), accessed on 16 November 2002.



The term “liberal Islam” used by JIL refers to the definition introduced by Leonard Binder in his *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies*,<sup>5</sup> and Charles Kurzman in his *Liberal Islam: A sourcebook*.<sup>6</sup> It refers to a trend among a particular group of Muslims who argue that understanding the text of Islamic teachings should be complemented by the context in which it is being reinterpreted because the text does not exhaust all the meanings of the revelation.<sup>7</sup> The term also stands for an attitude that is essentially tolerant, allowing diversity in those areas which are often traditionally held to be fundamental.<sup>8</sup> It also refers to an interpretation of Islamic teachings which is concerned with such issues as democracy, separating religion from political involvement, women's rights, freedom of thought, and promotion of human progress.<sup>9</sup> In short, it can be said that the term liberal Islam as conceptualised by JIL refers to the understanding of Islamic teachings through searching the essential meaning of the texts and by utilizing the fruits of modernity.

This work will focus on the ideas of religious freedom and on pluralism developed by this group and the responses to their ideas. The study of the views of JIL on both ideas is interesting because for many Muslims, Islam is the only religion accepted by God (*inna al-dīn ‘inda Allāh al-Islām*). For them, absolute freedom of religion cannot be accepted. Apostasy is a crime against God and political authority.<sup>10</sup> However, the members of JIL argue that religious expression is a private affair. Everyone's choice to have, or not to have a religion, has to be respected. Furthermore, they also believe in religious pluralism, which leads to the conviction of the similarity of all religions. According to them, all religions are in the same position. They offer a straight path to the salvation of all people.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Before Binder's *Islamic Liberalism*, there were two works devoted to the discussion of liberal Islam. The first, Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Ages*, refers to the nineteenth century as a liberal age in the Muslim world. The second, *Modern Approach to Islam* by A.A. Asaf Fyzee not only mentions liberal Islam, but also “protestant Islam.” The term refers to a group in the Muslim community attempting to interpret Islamic doctrines, which differ from established ones. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Ages 1798-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Asaf A. Fyzee, *Modern Approach to Islam*, London: Asia Publisher, 1963.

<sup>6</sup> Kurzman, *Liberal Islam*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, pp. 2- 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-18.

<sup>10</sup> Katerina Dalacoura, *Islam, Liberalism and Human Rights*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998, pp. 47-8.

<sup>11</sup> See “Tentang Kami,” <http://www.islamlib.com/tentangkami/id/php>, accessed on 16 August 2003.

In order to verify the liberality of JIL, its view of religious freedom and pluralism, in many cases, will be contrasted to the view of fundamentalist Islam on those same matters. This study also will trace the roots of liberal Islam in the development of Islam in Indonesia. This can be achieved because similar ideas have been promoted by some Indonesian Muslim scholars such as Nurcholish Madjid in his *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam (the Renewal of Islamic thought)* in the early 1970s,<sup>12</sup> Harun Nasution who introduced the idea of rationality through *Islam Rasional* (rational Islam),<sup>13</sup> and Abdurrahman Wahid who promoted the term *Islam Pribumi* (indigenous Islam).<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the responses to the ideas of liberal Islam promoted by JIL will also be elucidated upon. The responses are discussed on two levels. Firstly, I shall deal with the question of freedom of religion and pluralism. In this framework, I shall pay particular attention to the different attitudes of fundamentalist and liberal Muslims toward the questions of the public sphere. Secondly, I shall elucidate upon responses of Indonesian Muslims in general to JIL. These responses will be classified along the lines of the degree of criticism to the ideas of liberal Islam.

In this study, the term liberal Islam is defined as a critical understanding of Islamic teachings by connecting the text with the context of the society. In this case, the fruits of modernity, the values within society have significant role.<sup>15</sup>

Since its formation in 2001, several works discussing JIL have been published.<sup>16</sup> *Wajah Liberal Islam di Indonesia (The Face of Liberal Islam in Indonesia)* edited by Luthfi Asyaukani is a compilation which covers the issues which have been main themes of the movement of liberal Islam, particularly those disseminated by JIL.<sup>17</sup> These include issues such as inter-religious relations, women's rights, freedom of expression and pluralism. It seems that this work is published to disseminate the ideas

<sup>12</sup> See Greg Barton, *The Emergence of Neo-Modernism: A Progressive, Liberal Movement of Islamic Thought. [A Textual Study Examining the Writings of Nurcholish Madjid, Djohan Effendi, Ahmad Wahib and Abdurrahman Wahid 1968-1980]*, Monash University Press, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> See Harun Nasution, *Islam Rasional*, Bandung: Mizan, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, "Pribumisasi Islam", in Muntaha Azhari and Abdul Mun'im Saleh (eds.) *Islam Indonesia Menatap Masa Depan*, Jakarta: Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat/P3M, 1989, pp. 81-98.

<sup>15</sup> Compare with Barton, *The emergence of Neo Modernism*, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> The history of JIL will be discussed below.

<sup>17</sup> Luthfi Assyaukanie (ed.) *Wajah Liberal Islam di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Jaringan Islam Liberal, 2002.

of liberal Islam in Indonesia. This is strengthened by the fact that the publisher is JIL itself and the editor is a prominent supporter of liberal Islam.

While *Wajah Liberal Islam* promotes the ideas upheld by JIL some other works criticize it. *Islam Liberal: Sejarah, Konsepsi, Penyimpangan dan Jawabannya* (Liberal Islam: History, its conception, deviation and the answer to it), by Andian Husaini and Nuim Hidayat, is a book which tries to trace the history of liberal Islam and criticize the ideas promoted by JIL.<sup>18</sup> *Jaringan Islam Liberal*, according to the authors, has historical roots since the 1970s in the discourse of Islam in Indonesia. These ideas can be traced back to the ideas of Nurcholish Madjid in *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam* and Harun Nasution in *Islam Rasional*. Furthermore, *Bahaya Islam Liberal* (The Danger of Liberal Islam) by Hartono Jaiz is another book severely criticizes JIL. Completed by apologetic doctrines of Islamic teachings, the author argues that JIL is a dangerous Muslim group fostering un-Islamic ideas.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover two later articles entitled "Islam Liberal, Pemurtadan Berlabel Islam" (Liberal Islam, Apostasy with the face of Islam),<sup>20</sup> and "Melawan Islam Liberal" (Against Liberal Islam)<sup>21</sup> are devoted to rejecting the ideas of liberal Islam upheld by JIL. These articles use apologetic arguments rather than scholarly one to explain liberal Islam.

An article entitled "Perseteruan Dua Kutub Pemikiran Islam Indonesia Kontemporer: Jaringan Islam Liberal dan Media Dakwah" (Conflict of Two Sides of Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Thought: Jaringan Islam Liberal and Media Dakwah) by Muzakki analyzes conflict and tension between JIL and Media Dakwah.<sup>22</sup> Muzakki focuses on the condemnation by Media Dakwah of JIL. Such negative terms like "agent of orientalism and secularism", "diabolical reason" (*logika iblis*), and "deviated sect of Islam" are negative attributes given to JIL by Media Dakwah.

<sup>18</sup> Andian Husaini and Nuim Hidayat, *Islam Liberal: Sejarah, Konsepsi, Penyimpangan dan Jawabannya*, Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Hartono A. Jaiz, *Bahaya Islam Liberal*, Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Islam Liberal, Pemurtadan Berlabel Islam* in <http://www.alislam.or.id/artikel/arsip/00000038.html>, accessed on 04 May 2002.

<sup>21</sup> <http://tabligh.tripod.com/jil16.html>, accessed on 07 May 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Akh. Muzakki, "Perseteruan Dua Kutub Pemikiran Islam Indonesia Kontemporer: Jaringan Islam Liberal dan Media Dakwah," *Jurnal Universitas Paramadina*, Vol. 3 No. 1, September 2003, pp. 40-62

Whilst the works mentioned above focus on the development of liberal Islam in Indonesia; promote the ideas of this ideology such as *Wajah Islam Liberal*; comment on the conflict between JIL and Media Dakwah, such as Muzakki's article; or criticize liberal Islam as a negative trend within Islamic thought, such as *Bahaya Islam Liberal*; this study will attempt to present an analysis of JIL and the responses of Indonesian Muslims to it.

Since the topic being discussed is a contemporary phenomenon, this study is based on both real and virtual library research. A considerable number of the references will be taken from the Internet, <http://www.islamlib.com>, a website in which the proponents of JIL promote their concept of liberal Islam. Articles and books publishing by JIL relating to religious freedom and pluralism are other primary sources upon which this thesis is based. Previous studies and literature on liberal Islam are used as secondary sources to support the argument.

The present study will be divided into six major chapters. Chapter One is, naturally, an introduction. Chapter Two focuses on the profile of JIL as an agent of liberal Islam and will concentrate on the explanation of liberal Islam used by JIL, its formation as well as offering a short biographical sketch of its members, and its main agenda. Chapter Three deals with the roots of liberal Islam in Indonesia. This chapter concentrates on Renewal of Islamic Thought upheld by previous movements promoting ideas which are close to those of JIL. This will shed light on whether or not liberal Islam, as promoted by JIL, has historical roots in the of Islamic thought of Indonesia.

Chapter Four focuses on the view of JIL in regards to religious freedom and pluralism. This chapter will explore the way proponents of JIL formulate their ideas and will attempt to verify the liberality of JIL. The way the members of JIL consider the text and the context regarding religious freedom and pluralism and the way they define the self and the other, is another focus of this study. To achieve this, chapter four ends with a discussion of JIL's concept of *ahl al-kitāb* (the people of the Book) and some criticisms directed against them on religious freedom and pluralism.

Chapter Five contains some responses to the ideas of liberal Islam promoted by JIL. This chapter will elucidate the response of fundamentalist Muslims and Indonesian Muslims in general. The responses are mainly categorized based on the degree of criticism to the scholarly methodology of JIL, the contents of its ideas, and the way it

propagates its ideas, respectively. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion on the similarity of responses addressed to JIL, Renewal of Islamic Thought and other earlier movements.

Chapter Six will present the concluding remarks of the previously mentioned discussions.



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## CHAPTER TWO

### *JARINGAN ISLAM LIBERAL:*

### TOWARDS A LIBERAL ISLAMIC THOUGHT

"JIL [*Jaringan Islam Liberal*] is more liberal than Cak Nur [Nurcholish Madjid]. Cak Nur still uses Islamic terms. For example, in response to the matters pertaining to the state, JIL uses the term *masyarakat sipil*, while Cak Nur still uses the term *masyarakat madani*." (Salahuddin Wahid)\*

#### A. Introduction

As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, *Jaringan Islam Liberal* is an institution claiming itself to be a proponent of liberal Islam. This chapter focuses on the profile of JIL as an agent of liberal Islam in Indonesia. In order to get a clear understanding of liberal Islam, a brief discussion of liberal Islam in general will be provided followed by the formation of JIL, its ideas, its methodological approach to understanding the doctrines of Islam, and its main agenda.

#### B. What is Liberal Islam?

The word liberal in the strict political sense is the opposite of totalitarian or authoritarian and, as an adjective, it refers to an ideology, namely liberalism which insists on the free will of human beings. Human beings have a right to be free to actualize their expression, and have to be liberated from all kinds of oppression.<sup>23</sup> So, in an Islamic sense we can say that liberal means that there is an assimilation of religion with the common framework of liberalism.<sup>24</sup> So what is liberal Islam? And how appropriate is the term for a school of thought in Islam?

Before answering these questions, a few alternative names of liberal Islam should be mentioned. These have been noted by Abdou Filali-Ansary, and include "reformed Islam", "modern Islam", "Protestant Islam", "positive Islam", "the Islam of modernity", "enlightened Islam" and so on. All terms refer to a critical interpretation of

\* Salahuddin Wahid, "JIL Lebih Liberal dari Cak Nur", *Sabili* No. 15 Th. IX 25 January 2002, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> See Jaringan Islam Liberal, "Tentang Kami," [www.islamlib.com/tentangkami/id/php](http://www.islamlib.com/tentangkami/id/php).

<sup>24</sup> Abdou Filali-Ansary, "The Sources of Enlightened Muslim Thought", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 2 April 2003, p. 19.



Islamic doctrine. Among these designations, liberal Islam is the name that seems to be the most widely accepted nowadays.<sup>25</sup>

The term liberal Islam was introduced by Asaf A. Fyze, an Indian Muslim scholar, in his *A Modern Approach to Islam* which was published in 1963.<sup>26</sup> He defines liberal Muslims as Muslims who are of the opinion that the essential meaning of the text cannot be reached through the literal meaning of the text only, but by taking into consideration the context of the interpretation.<sup>27</sup> According to him, like Protestants within Christianity, liberal Muslims argue that Islamic teachings should be critically understood by Muslims themselves in order to reach a better understanding of the teachings.<sup>28</sup>

Hourani and Binder similarly argue that liberal Islam presents a critical understanding of Islam based on both the text and the context within which the text is formed and applied. Unlike a fundamentalist Muslim who understand the doctrines of Islam mainly by accepting the literal meaning of the words of the texts (the Qur'an and the Hadith), a liberal Muslim attempts to understand more than the literal meaning of the texts by considering the context and the essential meaning beyond the text within the interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

Kurzman has made a more detailed further definition of liberal Islam. Besides being characterized by a deep appreciation of the contextual interpretation, liberal Islam is defined with a critical understanding of Islamic doctrines by using the fruits of modernity in matters such as the opposition to theocracy, the struggle for democracy, the rights of women, the rights of Non-Muslims, freedom of thought, and the idea of progress.<sup>30</sup> Liberal Islam believes that Islam should respond positively to the challenges

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>26</sup> Fyze, *A Modern Approach*, p. 84.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-102.

<sup>28</sup> Fyze proposes the term Protestant Muslims, besides liberal Muslims, to mention Muslims who do not follow orthodox understandings of Islamic teachings. Ibid., p. 84. He also notes that the general approach by which liberal Islam interprets Islamic teachings is an historical approach, which insists on the relationship between Islamic teachings and the history of Muslims. Liberal Islam proposes some specific rules of interpretation which cover: the study of the history of religions, comparative religion of the Semitic races, the study of Semitic languages and philology, separation of law and religion, re-examination of *shari'a* [Islamic law] and *kalam* [Islamic theology], and reinterpretation of cosmology and scientific facts. See Fyze, Ibid., pp. 84-102. See also Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 91-101.

<sup>29</sup> See Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. v-vii; 34-66; 103-190; Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, pp. 4-8; 96.

<sup>30</sup> Kurzman classifies people like 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq and Khalāf Allāh as Muslims who promote

of modernity, particularly to the upsets engendered by rapid social change, in such a way that the doctrines of Islam can be brought to bear upon modern society.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Kurzman argues that liberal Islam also defines itself as both a proponent and an opponent of customary tradition. Like the traditional understanding of Islam, liberal Islam calls upon the precedents of the early period of Islam in order to legitimate present-day practices. However, it also refutes this customary tradition. Liberal Islam believes that achieving a critical understanding of the past is urgently required, but it should be reformulated. Past precedents should be critiqued in light of modernity by searching the spirit of those precedents. In this way, Islam can be interpreted as being in conformity with modernity, even with western liberalism.<sup>32</sup>

Liberal Islam is also based on the spirit of self-criticism and dialogue as a method leading to mutual understanding and improved self-understanding. It tries to identify and eliminate internal problems like the backwardness and social inequality faced by Muslims, by looking at their condition, and develop a spirit of dialogue among those who are presumed to have an alternative consciousness and understanding.<sup>33</sup> This dialogue can be reached by creating a space in which all people have a chance to express their ideas freely.

In short, liberal Islam is a vision insisting on the critical understanding of Islamic teachings by focusing on the essential meaning of the text (especially the Qur'an and the Hadith) by going beyond the text. In this case, the context where the text is formed and applied as well, play a significant role, and as a result of the dialectical interaction between Islam and modernity, the fruits of modernity become an integral part of liberal Islam. It is also tolerant in that it pays great attention to differences of interpretation.

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ideas against theocracy. Bazargan (Iran) and Sadek J. Sulaiman (Oman) promote ideas supporting democracy. Amina Wadud Muhsin and Benazir Butho are women who promote the rights of Women. Humayun Kabir, Chandra Muzaffar, Abdurrahman Wahid are some Muslims whose ideas can be classified as ideas supporting the rights of Non-Muslims. Shahrour, 'Ali Shari'ati and al-Qaradawi are people who insist on freedom of thought in Islam. While Muhammad Iqbal, Fazlur Rahman, and Nurcholish Madjid are considered as Muslims who promote the idea of progress in Islam. See *Liberal Islam*, pp. 19-26.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-11.

### C. The Formation of *Jaringan Islam Liberal*

Jaringan Islam Liberal was made public on 8 March 2001 at Utan Kayu, a district of East Jakarta. The formation of JIL resulted from regular discussions held by a group of young Muslims coordinated by Ulil Abshar-Abdalla. This group discussed the actual issues colouring Islamic discourse in the world, paying particular interest to Indonesia. Its members have become involved in discussions on such issues as human rights, freedom of expression, pluralism, democratization, secularization and so forth. They try to synthesize Islamic teachings with these issues, as they believe Islamic teachings are of great relevance to the spirit of these issues.

The formation of JIL occurred for a number of reasons. One of these was the failure of previous movements to disseminate its ideas. The members of JIL argued that the Renewal of Islamic Thought which started in the 1970s bore little fruit. Although Renewal of Islamic Thought did attempt to disseminate its ideas, it was rather impractical and gave little insight to society. The proponents of Renewal of Islamic Thought at that time succeeded in upholding the issues of modernity in the discourse of Islamic thought, but they failed to build any degree of cultural insight among Indonesian Muslims. Renewal of Islamic Thought was only a representation of the general attitude of middle class Indonesian Muslims who had a sympathetic response to modernity.<sup>34</sup>

The formation of JIL was also a response to the more intensive efforts of fundamentalist Muslims to disseminate their ideas in Indonesia.<sup>35</sup> After the Indonesian New Order government collapsed, the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism came to the fore. The formation of Muslim organizations such as *Laskar Jihad*, *Forum Komunika Ahlul-sunnah waljama'ah*, *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia*, and *Front Pembela Islam* are evidence of this.<sup>36</sup> These organizations claim to be proponents and supporters of *shari'a*. They insist on the implementation of *shari'a* in Indonesia because they are convinced of an integral relationship between religion and the state.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Budhy Munawar-Rachman, "Agama sebagai Kritik Ideologi", *Prisma*, No. 3, Tahun XX Maret, 1991, pp. 61-62.

<sup>35</sup> See Krisnadi Yuliawan et al, "Kampanye Baru Mengangkat Tabu", *Gatra*, 8 September 2001, p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> On the development of Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia, see Khamami Zada, *Islam Radikal*, Jakarta: Teraju, 2002; see also Noorhaidi Hasan, "Faith and Politics: The Rise of The Laskar Jihad in the Era of Transition in Indonesia", *Indonesia*, No. 73 April 2002, pp. 145-169.

Islamic fundamentalism has exerted a negative influence on the appreciation of Islamic teachings by Indonesian society. It has bolstered the idea that Islam is a stagnant religion which does not appreciate the influences of modernity, and that a literal interpretation is the best way to understand Islamic teachings ---a result of which is that they are also known as literalists. The text gives a final solution to the problems faced by Muslims because the text covers the whole meaning of the doctrines. This method allows little creative interpretation in the understanding of Islamic doctrines.<sup>38</sup> All ideas about the creative interpretation of Islamic teachings are put into the framework of *bid'ā* (religious innovation) and of deviation from Islam.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, JIL presents itself as a counter discourse to fundamentalist Muslims which tries to present Islam in a way which is in conformity with modernity, and which is inspired by a spirit of creativity.

The formation of JIL cannot be separated from the development of liberal Islam in the world.<sup>40</sup> This impact is indicated by the many works and outstanding figures to which, and to whom, the members of JIL refer.<sup>41</sup> The spirit of Islamic liberation adopted by JIL is similar to Essack's idea of Islamic teachings which support the oppressed. According to Essack, the nature of the revelation of the Qur'an supports the ideal of social equality by rejecting any oppression such as slavery and inequality.<sup>42</sup>

The principle of the historicity of the text, a view which places the text within human history, is similar to the views of Abu Zaid, an Egyptian Muslim scholar, on the historicity of the language of the Qur'an. Abu Zaid believes that the language of the Qur'an has a close relationship with the history of Muslims.<sup>43</sup> In order to reach a proper

<sup>38</sup> See Kurzman, *Liberal Islam*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> The condemnation of the creative interpretation of liberal Islam can be seen, for example, in the work of Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Bahaya Islam Liberal*; an interview with Daud Rasyid, "Mereka Merampas Wewenang Allah", *Majalah Islam Sabili*, 25 January 2002, pp. 36-41.

<sup>40</sup> This bears some similarity with the emergence of some organizations which are under banner of Islamic fundamentalism in the sense that they have a close relation to the *salafi* movement in the Muslim world. See Noorhaidi Hasan, "Transnational Islam within the Boundary of National Politics: Middle Eastern *fatwas* on *Jihad* in the Moluccas," a paper presented at the conference *Fatwa and Dissemination of Religious Authority in Indonesia* held by the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden, 31 October 2002.

<sup>41</sup> The emergence of Renewal of Islamic Thought was also inspired by the development of Islam in the world. The idea of rationality, as upheld by Abduh, has inspired Harun Nasution to uphold the idea of *Islam rasional* (rational Islam) in the period of 1980s. Ibn Taimiyya has exerted a considerable influence to Nurcholish Madjid's idea of Renewal of Islamic Thought in Indonesia. See Harun Nasution, *Islam Rasional*; Nurcholish Madjid, "Beberapa Renungan", pp. 5-7.

<sup>42</sup> See Farid Essack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism, An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*, Oxford: One World, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> See, Nasr H. Abu Zaid, *Mafhūm al-Nas: Dirāsāt fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'mma li al-Kitāb, 1993; Moch. Nur Ichwan, *Meretas Kesarjanaan Kritis Al-Qur'an, Teori Hermeneutika*



understanding of the Qur'an, the history of Muslims must take a central role. Muslim scholars like Mohammed Arkoun with his critique of Islamic reason, and Hasan Hanafi with his idea of the Islamic left are other Muslim scholars who are very popular, and who have inspired the ideas upheld by JIL.<sup>44</sup>

The development of a new approach to Islamic studies by western scholars is another factor that influenced the establishment of JIL. Unlike the classical western scholars who studied Islam mainly on a textual basis, and (on this basis) argued that the variety of living Islam is a deviation from the understanding of Islamic teaching, recent western scholars have made attempts to understand the variety of Islamic faces as a result of the dialectical relationship between Muslims and the context in which the doctrines of Islam are practised. These faces are not seen as a deviation from Islamic doctrines, but as a result of the response of Muslims to various contexts.<sup>45</sup>

Binder and Kurzman are western scholars who have given inspiration to the establishment of JIL. The term liberal Islam adopted by the JIL has become widely known due to the works of both Binder and Kurzman.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Kurzman has influenced the proponents of JIL in formulating its agenda to the extent that it shares similarities with the main agenda of liberal Islam classified by Kurzman in his *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*.<sup>47</sup>

In a wider context, the formation of JIL cannot be separated from the will of Muslims to study the humanities, particularly social theories.<sup>48</sup> The proponents of JIL have a great appreciation for such ideas as archeology of knowledge and the

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Nasr Abu Zaid, Jakarta: Teraju, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> See [www.islamlib.com/REDAKSI/kontributor.php](http://www.islamlib.com/REDAKSI/kontributor.php). Accessed on 11 November 2003.

<sup>45</sup> See Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, pp. 1-100.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96. According to Binder, although orientalism had a progressive impact on the development of Islamic thought, it should be criticized because of its European bias. To some extent, it is a worldview based on Eurocentricism. A brilliant critique is, for example, Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said argues that orientalism is an ideological discourse which has a serious bias in looking at the orient (including Islam). He says that orientalism views the orient merely as an object of study with no equal dialogue between the East and the West. The bias comes from the religiously prejudiced western discourse on Islam which constitutes the foundation of literary, political and scientific discourse. Orientalism is still a result of the development of western civilization, which continues to look at the West as superior to the East. See, Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 263.

<sup>47</sup> But it should be kept in mind that the ideas which are close to the idea of liberal Islam, like Kurzman says, emerged at the beginning of eighteenth century. Both Binder and Kurzman influenced the rise of liberal Islam at a conceptual level. Both scholars have made, more or less, a theoretical conception of liberal Islam by proposing the definition, the classification and the agenda which liberal Islam upholds.

<sup>48</sup> During the 1970s, Nurcholish Madjid was much influenced by the idea of secularization coined by Harvey Cox and Robert N. Bellah. Nurcholish, moreover, adopted the definition of secular and secularization formulated by Cox. See Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Kemandirian*, p. 207 and Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, p. 16.

relationship of knowledge and power by Michel Foucault, the deliberate public sphere by Jürgen Habermas, social hermeneutics by Paul Ricoeur, deconstructionisms by Jacques Derrida and so forth.<sup>49</sup>

The formation of JIL also cannot be separated from the financial support of The Asia Foundation, a foreign (western) foundation concerned with the development of civil society in the developing world.<sup>50</sup> Millions of rupiahs have been subsidized by this foundation to stimulate the systematic dissemination of liberal Islam. The result is that more than 40 daily newspapers publish their ideas in weekly feature articles.<sup>51</sup> This network also propagates its ideas live by radio *Namlapanha*, which is an East Jakarta based central radio station. No less than fifteen radio stations relay the programme.<sup>52</sup> Through [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com), the JIL disseminates its ideas in cybernetic space. This site is also as an effective store-room in which all the ideas, programmes and activities of JIL are preserved.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, it can be concluded that there are two factors which influenced the formation of JIL, one internal and one external. The internal one comprises factors which influence the condition of the Indonesian Muslim community from within the community like the dissemination of liberal Islam in Indonesia, which has been mainly encouraged by the dissemination of Renewal of Islamic Thought since the early 1970s, as well as the socio-religious situation in the country such as the growth of Islamic fundamentalism. The external facets are conditions influencing the ideas of liberal Islam in Indonesia from outside the Indonesian Muslim society. These include such aspects as the development of liberal Islam in the Muslim world, the development of social science and the financial support of The Asia Foundation.

<sup>49</sup> See Ulil Abshar Abdalla, "Wahyu Itu Non-Historis sekaligus Historis," in Ulil Abshar-Abdalla et al, *Islam Liberal & Fundamental, Sebuah Pertarungan Wacana*, Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2003, pp. 254-255. See also Adnin Armas, *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis terhadap Islam Liberal, Dialog Interaktif dengan Aktivis Jaringan Islam Liberal*, Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2003, pp. 79-85.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 66. Because of this foundation, the opponents of JIL accuse JIL of being an agent of Jews and America. See, *Majalah Suara Hidayatullah*, February 2002.

<sup>51</sup> Some of them are: Jawa Pos/Surabaya, Riau pos/Pekanbaru, and Fajar/Makassar. Ibid., p. 67; *Pantau Tahun II* No. 021, Januari 2002 pp. 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> Some of them are: Namlapanha FM/Jakarta, Muara FM/Jakarta and Unisi/Jogjakarta, Sonya FM/Medan, Gema Hikmah Ternate FM/Maluku, Nusantara Antik FM/Banjar Masin, SPFM/Makassar. See Krisnadi, "Kampanye Baru", p. 67. See also, "Daftar Radio Yang Menyiarkan Talkshow," <http://www.islamlib.com/AGENDA/radio.html>, accessed on 16 May 2003.

<sup>53</sup> See [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com). All the ideas propagated through the radios, the daily newspapers and seminars are stored at this site.



#### **D. Jaringan Islam Liberal as an Agent of the Movement of Liberal Islam**

To strengthen the identity of JIL, its members chose to use the term “liberal” as part of its name. The members of JIL interpret the meaning of “liberal” in two senses. Firstly, it implies liberating from (orthodoxy). It is similar to liberation. It is an attempt to liberate Islam from the domination of orthodoxy which gives little chance for the development of creative understandings of Islamic teachings, and to liberate socio-political structures from the unhealthy and oppressive social order dominating the society. The second meaning is liberating for (progressiveness). It is similar to the idea of progress, or an effort to create a better atmosphere for the development of Islam.<sup>54</sup>

The consensus of the members of JIL on the meaning of liberal as referring to liberation indicates that it tries to put the doctrines of liberalism into practice. Liberation indicates that Islam should be presented in a form of action which is in conformity with the doctrines of liberalism. According to the proponents of JIL, Islam should be able to liberate Muslims from any oppression. Islamic teachings are imbued with the spirit of liberation by nature. Islam proposes some doctrines on the liberation of human beings from oppression and Islam stands behind the oppressed group.<sup>55</sup>

The term liberal is applied in opposition to fundamentalism as understood in Islam. From the time of its formation, the members of JIL bravely took the position of a group opposing Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia. They argued that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia has to be combated by a far more flexible and liberal interpretation.

Furthermore, the choice of the term liberal as an attribute of the name of the organization is mainly based on the argument that it is impossible to observe and practise Islam without any tendency or motive. The motive and tendency by which Islam is practised is closely related to the condition in which Islamic teachings are applied. The condition exerts a significant influence on the understanding of these teachings. From this situation, Islam has grown up and gives rise to many forms and tendencies such as fundamentalist Islam, literalist Islam, substantialist Islam, and liberal Islam. The tendencies lead to the formation of living Islam, as it is practised by

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<sup>54</sup> Jaringan Islam Liberal, “Tentang Kami,” <http://www.islamlib.com/id/tentangkami.php>. Or the English version: Jaringan Islam Liberal, “About Us,” <http://www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php>, accessed on 16 August 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Essack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*.

Muslims. Therefore, there is no doubt that living Islam is designated by a particular adjective, which describes the tendency and motive of the people who follow those particular Islamic doctrines and which has a close relationship with how Islam is practised.<sup>56</sup>

#### **E. Biographical Sketch of Some Proponents of Jaringan Islam Liberal**

The establishment and growth of JIL has been determined to a great extent by a group of young Muslims who believe Islam should be presented as a dynamic and progressive religion in order to compete with the static ideology of Islamic fundamentalism. Thus, the members of JIL are bound by the ideology of Islamic liberalism. As individuals, each member has varied interpretations. In order to reach a better understanding of the internal dynamics of the members, this section will sketch the biographies of four active members of JIL ---there are about ten people actively involved in the dissemination. Due to difficulties in gaining information, the biographies concentrate on their formal higher education.

Ulil Abshar-Abdalla is the most prominent member of JIL. The magazine *Gatra* has even given him the nickname *Konduktor Orkestra Islam Liberal* (The Conductor of the Liberal Islam Orchestra).<sup>57</sup> The organization is almost identical to him: JIL is Ulil and Ulil is JIL.

Ulil was born in a religious family in Pati, Central Java, January 11, 1967. His father is a *kyai* (religious leader) in this area. His early education was at *Madrasah Mathali'ul Falah* under the supervision of KH M.A. Sahal Mahfudz (the general leader of Syuriah Nahdlatul Ulama) in his native town.<sup>58</sup> After having finished his secondary school, he went to Jakarta to continue his studies at the Institute for Islamic and Arabic studies (LIPIA) sponsored by the Saudi Arabian government, which follows Wahabism. His direct experiences with the doctrines of Wahabism at this institute, which insists on the literal understanding of text, have not influenced him as a literalist, but on the contrary, have had the reverse effect and encouraged a spirit of rebellion to those doctrines, leading him to a critical understanding of the text. This created tension with

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.islamlib.com/id/tentangkami.php>. Or the English version: <http://www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php>.

<sup>57</sup> Asrori S. Karni, "Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, Konduktor Orkestra Islam Liberal", *Gatra*, Special Edition, 23 August 2003, p.29.

<sup>58</sup> Luthfi Assyaukanie, *Wajah Liberal Islam*, p. 317.

his lecturers, and he did not finish his studies at this institute.<sup>59</sup> He also studied at the College STF Driyarkara, a philosophy college affiliated with Catholicism.<sup>60</sup> At JIL, he is the director (coordinator) who is responsible for the existence of the institution, and particularly responsible for a talk show programme broadcasted live through *Namlapanha* radio station and its network.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, as director of JIL he is also a chief editor of the journal *Tashwirul Afkar* published by *Lakpesdam* (Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumberdaya Manusia/the Institute of Studies and Developments of Human Resources), an organization which is under the umbrella of the Nahdlatul Ulama.<sup>62</sup>

Luthfi Assyaukanie is another significant member of JIL. He is the moderator of <http://www.islamliberal.yahooogroups.com>, a cyber-room for discussing ideas and issues which are close to liberal Islam. He is a lecturer at the University of Paramadina Mulya, Jakarta. Having completed his bachelor's degree at the faculty of Shari'a at Jordan University, he took his Master of Arts at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia by submitting a thesis on contemporary Arabic thought. He is currently enrolled in a doctoral programme at the Melbourne Institute of Asian Language and Societies (MIALS), University of Melbourne.<sup>63</sup>

Taufik Adnan Amal is another person who involves himself in the dissemination of liberal Islam through JIL. He is a lecturer at the Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) Alauddin, Makassar, South Sulawesi. He graduated from the faculty of Shari'a IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta.<sup>64</sup> Afterwards, he went onto be a student at University of Johannes Gutenberg, Mainz, Germany.<sup>65</sup> He has been interested with the idea of Islamic liberalism since he was a student at Yogyakarta. His bachelor's degree thesis was an analysis of Fazlur Rahman on Islamic law.<sup>66</sup> Among the members of JIL, he is

<sup>59</sup> Asrori S. Karni, "Konduktor Orkestra", p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> Burhanuddin (ed.), *Syariat Islam*, p. 277.

<sup>61</sup> Asrori S. Karni, "Konduktor Orkestra", p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Luthfi Assyaukanie, *Wajah Liberal Islam*, p. 317.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.315.

<sup>64</sup> Burhanuddin, *Syariat Islam*, p. 277.

<sup>65</sup> See Taufik Adnan Amal, "Membumikan Al-Qur'an", *Prisma*, 3 March 1991, p. 48.

<sup>66</sup> His bachelor thesis was published by Mizan under the title, *Islam dan Tantangan Modernitas, Studi atas Pemikiran Hukum Fazlur Rahman*, See Taufik Adnan Amal, *Islam dan Tantangan Modernitas, Studi atas Pemikiran Hukum Fazlur Rahman*, Bandung: Mizan, 1989.

particularly well-versed in the methodology of Qur'anic studies.<sup>67</sup> He published *Tafsir Kontekstual al-Qur'an* (together with Syamsurizal Panggabean, 1989) and *Rekonstruksi Sejarah al-Qur'an* (2001).<sup>68</sup>

Another young Muslim who actively involves himself in the discussion of liberal Islam is Ahmad Sahal. His secondary education was gained from two *pesantrens*, *Pesantren Futuhiyyah*, Demak, Central Java and *Pesantren Al-Falah*, Kediri, East Java. He was a student at the faculty of Shari'a IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta and the faculty of Ushuluddin IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. He completed his bachelor's degree at the college STF *Driyarkara*, Jakarta. Among the proponents of JIL, he is a moderator of weekly discussions at Utan Kayu.<sup>69</sup>

Among these four people, Lutfi is the person with the most different educational background. His bachelor's and master's degrees were obtained from overseas Islamic universities and he now follows a Ph. D. programme at Melbourne University. Ulil and Sahal are people whose educational backgrounds were similar. Both graduated from *pesantrens*, and studied at the Philosophy College STF *Driyarkara*. Taufik who stands between both groups completed his bachelor's degree from IAIN, and was a student at a western University. The different educational backgrounds of the members of JIL, more or less, colour their discussions. However, these differences are of a technical nature and despite their educational backgrounds, these four individuals agree on both theological and ideological levels.<sup>70</sup>

In the case of the roots of liberalism in Islam for example, although they have different opinions, for example, Luthfi traced back the idea of liberal Islam to Rifa'a al-Tahtawi and Ahmad Sahal traced it back to the period of 'Umar ibn al-Kha'ashb, they share the opinion that liberal Islam has a foundation in, and is part of the development of, the history of Islam. They believe that Islamic teachings should be understood in a critical way and should be presented in line with humanity and modernity. Indeed, JIL was formed in order to promote this opinion.<sup>71</sup> Again we can observe that the internal dynamics of JIL do not exert negative influences on its unity or on its promotion of

<sup>67</sup> Haidar Bagir, "Islib Butuh Metodologi" *Republika*, Selasa 20 Maret 2002.

<sup>68</sup> Burhanuddin (ed.), *Syariat Islam*, p. 277.

<sup>69</sup> Luthfi Assyaukanie, *Wajah Liberal Islam*, p. 313.

<sup>70</sup> Other discussions are for example discussion on agenda of liberal Islam, on theology of modern state, and on secularization. For more about internal discussion of JIL, see third part of *Wajah Liberal Islam* on "Diskusi Off-Line and Diskusi On-Line, p. 153-309.

liberal Islam. We can summarize from this that any opinion on any issue publicized by JIL is the view of all its members.

#### **F. The Agenda of *Jaringan Islam Liberal***

The term liberal used by the members of the JIL describes the method by which they understand the doctrines of Islam, a method which liberates interpretation from the domination of the text,<sup>72</sup> and urges modernity as a decisive factor in the development of Islam. On the basis of a deep appreciation of modernity, JIL tries to develop a critical method by which to understand Islamic doctrines. To achieve this, JIL develops the idea of the historicity of the text, and of human beings as autonomous interpreters.

The historicity of the text can be claimed to be a critical interpretation of a text (the Qur'an and the Hadith), which is based on the conviction that both text and context are essential to interpretation. The text is a direct statement of the doctrines, and the context is a condition within which the text should be applied.<sup>73</sup>

Liberal Islam also argues that each human being is an autonomous agent of the interpretation who has an innate ability to understand the text. As an autonomous agent of interpretation, the people have an independent right to create a critical understanding of the text, and a valid interpretation of Islamic doctrines can be reached by creating a conducive mental situation, a situation which pays considerable attention to the freedom of human beings as thinking, sentient beings.

In order to clarify their position, JIL upholds an agenda which consists of a number of clearly defined principles, which shall be discussed in detail below. These principles are:

- (1) The opening of the gates of *ijtihad* in all aspects of Islamic thought;<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See Dipo Handoko et al., "Tafsir Liberal dari Utan Kayu", *Gatra* 8 December 2001, p. 67.

<sup>72</sup> Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, "Menghindari Bibliolatri: tentang Pentingnya Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam", an article presented before a regular discussion at Paramadina at 8, February, 2003. This article is also available at [www.islamlib.com/en/clipping.php](http://www.islamlib.com/en/clipping.php), accessed on 16 August 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Even the revelation of the Qur'an itself has an intimate relationship with human history. Additionally, Nasr Abu Zaid considers the language of the Qur'an to also have a relationship with human history. On Abu Zaid's view of the historicity of the text, see Nasr H. Abu Zaid, *Maḥmūd al-Nas*, pp. 33-152. See also Moch. Nur Ichwan, *Meretas Kesarjanaan Kritis Al-Qur'an, Teori Hermeneutika Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd*, Jakarta: Teraju, 2003.

<sup>74</sup> The term *ijtihad*, in the narrow sense, is typically a term of Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). It refers to a serious attempt to obtain a correct knowledge of Islamic law by understanding the text (the Qur'an and the Hadith). In a wider sense and how it has been used in this thesis, it comes closer to meaning independent reasoning in all aspects of Islamic doctrine. It refers to a creative understanding of the doctrines of Islam.



(2) Emphasis on an ethico-religious spirit, rather than the literal meaning, of the text;

- (3) The relativeness, openness and plurality of truth;
  - (4) Standing behind the minorities and the oppressed;
  - (5) Freedom of belief and faith; and
  - (6) The separation of *ukhrawi* (heavenly) and *duniawi* (worldly), authority, and the religious vis-à-vis political authority.<sup>75</sup>
- (1) The opening of the gates of *ijtihad* in all aspects of Islamic thought

Modern Muslim society faces new complex problems. Some issues are clearly the product of modernity such as democratization, gender issues, human rights, and the idea of progress. The question then arises concerning how should Muslims deal with these problems. Muslims present the solutions to these issues from their own perspective, which JIL believes can only be reached through a process of creative reasoning.

*Ijtihad* is a fundamental prerequisite to obtain a creative and critical interpretation of the doctrines of Islam. The supporters of JIL argue that *ijtihad* is a vehicle to interpret Islamic doctrines. Through using *ijtihad* Islam can be presented as a progressive and dynamic religion. Closing the gates of *ijtihad*, as proposed by some Muslim scholars, leads to an uncritical acceptance of Islamic teachings, and is a threat to the progressive characteristics of Islam itself, for it removes the elasticity of Islam and its dynamism. This lack of elasticity leads to a static condition which threatens to stagnate Islam, which in turn will lose the capacity and indeed the vision to provide a dynamic solution to the problems of modernity faced by Muslims.<sup>76</sup>

- (2) Emphasis on an ethico-religious spirit, rather than the literal meaning of the text

The spirit of religious ethics is fundamental if a valid interpretation is to be achieved. The opening of the gates of *ijtihad* in all aspects of Islamic thought upheld by JIL is an attempt to understand the doctrines of Islam on the basis of a spirit of religious ethics (*maqasid al-shari'a*) of the Qur'an and the Hadith. It is not an understanding of the literal meaning of the text which concentrates on the words of the text, but rather critical understanding of the text achieved by analyzing the context within which the

<sup>75</sup> All terms are adopted from those formulated by the organization in the English version of its website. See, <http://www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php>.

<sup>76</sup> See, "Tentang Jaringan Islam Liberal", [www.islamlib.com/id/tentangkami.php](http://www.islamlib.com/id/tentangkami.php).



text is applied. It is the only way to present Islam in a dynamic form, an Islam which can survive in response to the problems of modernity. Only by attempting an interpretation which is based on an ethico-religious spirit, will Islam live and grow in creative association with universal civilization.<sup>77</sup>

This principle was emphasized by Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, in his article entitled "*Menghindari 'Bibliolatri': Tentang Pentingnya Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam*" (Avoiding Bibliolatri: The Urgency of Refreshing the Understanding of Islam). In this article, he argues that the premises which look at the Qur'an as a text isolated from its historical context should be evaluated. He believes that the text is closely related to its context, and exerts a significant influence on its formation. Furthermore, the text is an expression of the condition of the context within which the text occurs. Thus, the interpretation of the text cannot be removed from its historical context.

### (3) The relateness, openness, and plurality of truth

Pluralism ---an admission of diversity, and tolerance--- a sympathetic attitude to the other, are other principles that JIL promotes. Both are essential constituents of modernity conveyed in the nature of Islamic teachings. For liberal Islam, the idea of plurality is one of the fundamental principles of Islam.

This idea of liberal Islam is based on the idea of relativity of the truth. It claims that any interpretation of religious doctrines is a human activity which is inexorably shackled to a certain context and cannot be separated from the context in which the interpretation has emerged. Interpretation is also open to criticism because human activity has the potential to be fallible because interpretation is an attempt to understand the text in order to respond to the problem. It is a reflection of any interpreter's outlook continually shaped and reshaped by incessant changes in time and place. For the members of JIL, interpretation is a response of the people to a specific problem which is closely related to specific conditions.<sup>78</sup>

### (4) Standing behind the minorities and the oppressed

It is commonly known that one of the crucial concerns in a modern and plural society is the relationship between the majority and the minority populations. It is not rare for the relationship to worsen because it rests on unequal foundations, whereby the

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. See also Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, "Menghindari Bibliolatri."

<sup>78</sup> [www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php](http://www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php).

majority assumes a superior position over the minority. The ideology of majority, reigns supreme, and wishes and needs of the minorities come a poor second.<sup>79</sup> The minority here is understood in a wide sense as minority of religion, ethnicity, race, culture, politics, economy, sexual orientation and so forth.

The ideas of liberal Islam support the minority, potentially oppressed groups. Liberal Islam argues that the minorities should be supported in order to allow them to survive. According to liberal Islam, the problem of the minority is closely related to the problem of social justice. It is not rare that a minority is victimized by the rule or regulation in the society, because the regulation does not pay enough consideration to the minority view point. Within this, liberal Islam argues that any social order that contradicts justice should be abolished. In order to achieve this, liberal Islam argues that religious interpretations should support minority or oppressed groups. To this end, JIL feels that any interpretation that is devoid of the spirit of equality is considered as an inappropriate interpretation of the principles of Islam.<sup>80</sup>

#### (5) Freedom of belief and faith

Liberal Islam is based on the conviction of freedom of expression. Everyone should be free from any oppression which impedes freedom of expression. In this case liberal Islam pays considerable attention to individual and public liberty. Everyone should be given adequate room to state their expressions, including in the fields of belief and faith, as they are integral parts of private liberties which should be respected. Unlike fundamentalist Muslims, who believe that Islam is the only straight path to salvation and that everyone should be invited to follow Islamic teachings, liberal Islam argues that everyone has to be given a chance to follow, or not to follow, any religion. Liberal Islam considers that the matter of being religious or not being religious depends on personal free will. It is a personal right that should be protected and respected. Any prosecution on the basis of any belief is unacceptable because it contradicts private liberties.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

- (6) The separation of ukhrawi (heavenly) and duniawi (worldly), authority, and religious and political authority

According to the members of JIL, religious and political power should be separated, while fundamentalist Islam is convinced that Islam is both a system of religion and of the state (*al-dīn wa al-dawla*) which insists on the implementation of the *sharī'a* and the formation of an Islamic state.<sup>82</sup> In its very nature, liberal Islam in general believes that the unification of both religious and political power will lead to authoritarianism in religious matters.<sup>83</sup> Thus liberal Islam does not tolerate any notion of a religious state in which the authority of a religious leader is the highest authority and is considered infallible. Rather it argues that best form of state in which religious and political growth may flourish is a state in which both aspects are separated.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, JIL argues that religion is an inspirational source which has considerable influence on public policies. However, they do not consider it to be the one and only source that has undeniable transcendental privileges in the determination of all public policies. Religion works mainly in the private space, while public affairs function through a process of collective independent reasoning (*ijtihad jamā'i*), where everyone can be involved in the debate to find the best vision.<sup>85</sup>

#### G. Conclusion

Jaringan Islam Liberal is a network whose members claim themselves to be proponents of liberal Islam in Indonesia. The group promotes a critical understanding of Islamic teachings by searching for the essential meaning of the text by going beyond the literal meaning of the text. It also argues that the fruits of modernity, such as the ideas of progress, human rights, secularization, supporting a minority, and freedom of expression and pluralism, play significant roles in interpretation.

The formation of JIL was inspired by the failure of previous Islamic movements like Renewal of Islamic Thought to disseminate similar ideas. Additionally, the formation of JIL was a response to the emergence of some organizations under the banner of Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia. Jaringan Islam Liberal, also, cannot be

<sup>82</sup> On the discussion of the implementation of the *sharī'a*, see Burhanuddin, *Syariat Islam, Pandangan Muslim Liberal*, Jakarta: JIL/The Asia Foundation, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Compare with the idea of *sekularisasi* promoted by Nurcholish Madjid. See Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Kemodernan*, pp. 207-208; 215-222; 257-260.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

separated from the movement of liberal Islam in the Muslim world. People like Nasr Abu Zaid, Mohammed Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi, Farid Esack, to mention four, are people who have exerted significant influence on the formation and agenda of JIL.

The development of Islamic studies in the West and the development of social sciences are other factors that have influenced its formation. Binder and Kurzman are western scholars who have inspired the conceptual formulation of the definition of liberal Islam and the agenda of JIL.

Additionally, the group's formation cannot be separated of the financial support from The Asia Foundation, which affects the dissemination of liberal Islam by JIL. In order to disseminate liberal Islam, JIL upholds an agenda which consists of a number of clearly defined principles. These principles are: the opening of the gates of *ijtihad* in all aspects of Islamic thought; emphasis on an ethico-religious spirit, rather than the literal meaning of the text; the relativeness, openness and plurality of truth; supporting minority groups and the oppressed; freedom of belief and faith; and the separation of *ukhrawi* (heavenly) and *duniawi* (worldly), authority, and the religious and political authority.



**CHAPTER THREE**  
**RENEWAL OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT**  
**THE ROOTS OF LIBERAL ISLAM IN INDONESIA**

“In point of fact, if a Muslim is truly consistent with the teachings [of Islam], then the value of the “idea of progress,” like all other values of truth need not be stated, because it is, in fact, already part of these teachings.”

(Nurcholish Madjid)\*

**A. Introduction**

This chapter deals with the historical roots of liberal Islam as promoted by JIL. The discussion will commence with a discussion of liberal Islamic thought in Indonesia from the 1970s. It will cover the development of liberal Islam and the responses devoted to it as well as analyze the relationship between JIL and other earlier movements.

**B. The Origins of Liberal Islam**

Liberal Islam as an effort to critically understand Islamic teachings as defined by JIL, was originally the result of some Muslim scholars to reinterpret Islamic doctrines by combining the text and the context of Muslim society. In this sense, scholars such as Fyzee, Hourani and Kurzman, argue that this kind of interpretation has historical roots in the development of Islamic thought and movements during the eighteenth century.

Fyzee and Kurzman trace liberal Islam back to the early eighteenth century, during which, Shah Wali-Allah (1703-65), an Indian Muslim scholar proposed a creative understanding of Islamic teachings in light of local traditions. He argued that through the principle of independent interpretation (*ijtihad*) and rejection of blind imitation (*taqlid*), Muslim society could purify and reconstruct itself.<sup>86</sup> Unlike other thinkers at that time, who strictly rejected all customary traditions, he argued that, if customary tradition was not compatible with Islamic orthodoxy, it would be unwise to replace it with practices unknown to local people. In this case, to some extent, Islam has

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\* Nurcholish Madjid, “The Necessity of Renewing Islamic thought and the Problem of the integration of the Ummat,” translated by Mohammed Kamal Hassan, in Kamal Hassan, *Contemporary Muslim*, p. 295.

<sup>86</sup> Fyzee, *A Modern Approach*, p. 70.



to be accompanied with existing tradition.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, it can be said that the rise of critical understandings of Islamic teachings comes from the awareness of Muslim scholars to consider the context of the society in which the text is applied.

Hourani has a different opinion on the emergence of liberal Islam to that of Kurzman and Fyze. Hourani argues that the first emergence of critical ideas in Islam occurred in the late eighteenth century. It was not a result of the relationship between Islam and local tradition, but rather a result of the relationship between Islam and the West. On the reform of the administration of the Ottoman Empire, which started when Sultan Selim III, followed by Sultan Mahmud II, sent their administrators to study in Europe, some Muslims gained access to western ideas.<sup>88</sup> These reforms significantly impacted on the development of Islamic thought whereby it developed more progressively than before. These developments became more cristalized after Rifa'a Badawi Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801-73), an Egyptian, was sent by Muhammad Ali of Egypt to France.<sup>89</sup>

After the reform of the Ottoman Empire, the history of liberal Islam proceeds under the wing of the most renowned reformists of the nineteenth century: Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-97), Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98), and Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905). They revealed themselves in their writing as people who appreciated and tolerated other cultures whilst they continued to nurture a deep awareness of Islamic culture. They demonstrated their respect for modernity in their willingness to introduce western subjects into the traditional education curricula. All three thinkers proposed a new horizon of understanding of Islam by approaching Islam from a different method to that commonly used by other Muslim scholars.<sup>90</sup> Through the works of these people, liberal Islam has widely spread across the entire Islamic world.<sup>91</sup>

The development of liberal Islam in the nineteenth century crystallized as the ideology of liberalism in general, spread across the entire world.<sup>92</sup> Possibly, due to

<sup>87</sup> Kurzman, *Liberal Islam*, p. 7.

<sup>88</sup> See Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 40-43; 67-75.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Although they proposed new ways of understanding Islam, according to Hourani, they still considered that *ijtihad* should be restricted to competent religious scholars. Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-10. Unfortunately, Kurzman fails to clearly attribute them to the works of Muslim scholars whose works are edited in his *Liberal Islam*. There is no clear criteria about liberal Muslims made by Kurzman. The ideas of Al-Mawdudi, a Muslim scholar who according to some scholars upheld the idea of theocracy, are considered by Kurzman to be in the line with liberal Islam.

<sup>92</sup> Kurzman, (ed.), *Liberal Islam*, p. 13.



intensive scholarly interaction between Islam and the West, liberal Muslims hold similar principles to those of western liberalism. They are against theocracy and support democracy, insist on the rights of women and the rights of non-Muslims and lay stress on freedom of thought.<sup>93</sup>

Although liberal Islam and western liberalism have similar ideas, liberal Islam is not merely a secular ideology, or an ideology which supports western liberalism. The values with which liberalism in Europe and North America are associated are not expressed in the same terms as the religious and cultural values traditionally held by Muslims.<sup>94</sup> Liberalism in Europe and North America is a direct result of the industrial revolution and is an integral part of modernity.<sup>95</sup> Liberal Islam, although it has links with the liberal attitudes of western society, is greatly coloured by religious values.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, although the ideology of liberalism and liberal Islam are related, there is a fundamental difference between both.

### C. Liberal Islam in Indonesian: A Brief History

Jaringan Islam Liberal claims to be a supporter of liberal Islamic movements in Indonesia. It promotes a creative understanding of Islamic teachings and such ideas as democratization, secularization, human rights, idea of progress, religious freedom and pluralism, and the interpretation of Islamic teachings based on the text and the context.

In the development of Islamic thought in Indonesia, such a creative and progressive understanding was promoted by some scholars in the 1960s. People like Hazairin and Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy tried to propose a new horizon of interpretation of Islamic doctrines. Hazairin proposed the term *Fiqh Mazhab Nasional*, a term referring to understanding the doctrines of Islamic law based on the condition of Indonesian Muslims, and Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy introduced *Fiqh Indonesia*, a term referring to the interpretation of Islamic law based on the particular characteristics of Indonesian Muslim society. Both also argued that Islamic law had to be interpreted in terms which made sense to Indonesian Muslims.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Binder, *Islamic liberalism*, pp. 19-25

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> See Hazairin, *Hukum Waris Bilateral*, Jakarta: Pustaka Tinta Mas, 1973; Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, *Fleksibilitas Hukum Islam*, Jakarta, Bulan Bintang, 1975. For more see Barton, *The Emergence of Neo-Modernism*, pp. 1-40.

The progressive development of Islam has become more distinct since the beginning of the 1970s. The 1970s was a decade in which liberal Islam significantly coloured Islamic discourse in Indonesia in a wider sense than previously. This was marked by the movement of *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam* (The Renewal of Islamic Thought) then also well known as the movement of Islamic Neo-Modernism.<sup>98</sup> Renewal of Islamic Thought promoted such ideas as democratization, religious freedom and pluralism, and idea of progress. Renewal of Islamic Thought came to the fore as a representation of a positive response of Indonesian Muslims to the idea of modernization promoted by the state.<sup>99</sup>

With the collapse of the Indonesian Old Order at the end of the 1960s, the Indonesian New Order took its position in the country promoting an ideology of modernization. The New Order administration attempted to foster a forward looking atmosphere through *Pembangunan* (development). In this programme, Indonesian Muslims as the largest part of Indonesian society played a decisive role. Most of them, however, were suspicious of the programme assuming that it was a part of an agenda of westernization and Christianization.<sup>100</sup> The emergence of the idea of *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam* (Renewal of Islamic Thought) was an attempt to involve Indonesian Muslim society in the ideology of developmentalism held by New Order Indonesia.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Islamic Neo-Modernism refers to efforts to understand Islamic doctrines on the basis of the heritage of classical Islamic thoughts and the fruits of modernity. The term was initially introduced by Fazlur Rahman with his *double movement theory* (between Islamic tradition and modernity), that is a method trying to understand the doctrines of Islam by looking at their ethics then applying the ethics to solve the contemporary problem. See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966; Idem, *Islamic Methodology in History*, Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965.

<sup>99</sup> See Mohammed Kamal Hassan, *Contemporary Muslim Religio-Political Thought*, 1975.

<sup>100</sup> This suspicion can be seen from the explanation of some Indonesian Muslim scholars on the relationship between Islam and modernization. Kamal Hasan notes some works which were devoted to explaining Islam and modernization like "Umat Islam dan Masalah Modernisasi" (The Muslim Community and the Problem of Modernization) by Deliar Noer, "Sekali Lagi Modernisasi" (More on Modernization) by Omar Hashem, "Agama, Modernisasi, dan Mahasiswa (Religion, Modernization and University Students)", "Ilmu Pengetahuan, Modernisasi dan Sekularisme" (Knowledge, Modernization and Secularism) by Saodoeiddin Djambek, "Modernisasi Adalah Rasionalisasi Bukan Westernisasi" (Modernization is Rationalization, Not Westernization) by Nurcholish Madjid and *Modernisasi dalam Persoalan: Bagaimana Sikap Islam?* (*Modernization in Question: What Attitude Should Islam Take?*) are titles which coloured the polemic on Islam and modernization at the end of 1960s and into the 1970s. All these publications argued that modernization was a fact that Muslims should face and should respond to positively. Only Omar Hashem warns against the negative side of modernism such as hedonistic values which potentially attach to modernity. See Kamal Hasan, *Contemporary Muslim Religio-Political Response*, pp. 16-29.

<sup>101</sup> See Ibid., pp. 1-63; Fachry Ali and Bahtiar Effendy, *Merambah Jalan Baru*, p. 54; Barton, *The Emergence of Neo-Modernism*, p. 76. This is different from the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism in the period of Indonesian New Order. The emergence of Islamic fundamentalism at this

In other words, the existence of Renewal of Islamic Thought was a response to policies made by the state.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, JIL emerged in a situation in which the state was weak. It was also not a response to policy of the state, but a response to the movement of fundamentalist Islam in the country. Its formation, also, cannot be separated from the financial assistance of The Asia Foundation. Although JIL and Renewal of Islamic Thought have different backgrounds, they share similarities in their agendas.

The ideas of opening the gates of *ijtihad* and emphasizing an ethico-religious spirit promoted by JIL are similar to the spirit of Renewal of Islamic Thought of the early 1970s. Such critical ideas as *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam* (the renewal of Islamic thought) by Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Pribumi* (indigenous Islam) by Abdurrahman Wahid, *Reaktualisasi Ajaran Islam* (Re-actualization of Islamic teachings) by Munawir Sjadzali, and *Agama Keadilan* (Religion of Justice) by Masdar F. Mas'udi were efforts much influenced by the spirit of *ijtihad* and understanding of Islamic teachings on the basis of the spirit of religious ethics.

These ideas were inspired by the opinion of some Muslim scholars that the understanding of Islamic teachings had to be renewed by going beyond the literal meaning of the texts towards the underlying objectives (*maqāsid al-sharī'a*).<sup>102</sup> The central concern is a conviction that Islamic thought should respond positively to the rapid social changes of modernity and the local context of Indonesian society. In this context, the modern world and particular characteristics of Indonesian Muslims have a decisive role. Renewal of Islamic Thought paid deep attention to both modernity and locality.

The suggestion to separate the heavenly and worldly spheres promoted by JIL is exactly the same as the idea of *sekularisasi* promoted by Nurcholish Madjid. In his

period was, to a great extent, caused by dissatisfaction of some groups of Indonesian Muslims regarding the policy of the regime towards Indonesian Muslims. The regime had a dualistic approach to Islam. On the one hand, it supported Islam as a religion, on the other hand it imposed severe restrictions on Islamic political activities. This approach led to a negative assumption among some Muslim groups of the New Order regime. The regime was accused of being anti-Islamic. This accusation was strengthened by the cooperative approach of the regime to non-Muslim groups, particularly Christian ones. This caused various protests from some Muslim groups at that period in various forms. June Chandra Santosa notes that Islamic fundamentalists in the period of New Order Indonesia expressed themselves as separatists, agitators, radical core groups, ideologues, and radical heretics. See June Chandra Santosa, *Modernization*, pp. 342-377.

<sup>102</sup> Greg Barton, *The Origins of Islamic Liberalism*, pp. 31-33.

*Pembaharuan*, Nurcholish Madjid proposed the term *sekularisasi* to refer to properly positioning the sacred and the profane. He felt many Muslims tended to look at Islam as wholly sacred, even in stances where it was profane. In order to overcome this problem, he proposed the concept of secularization.<sup>103</sup> In practical terms, he tried to apply *sekularisasi* in the political sphere by promoting the phrase: "Islam Yes, Partai Islam No" (Islam Yes, Islamic Party No).<sup>104</sup> This slogan describes the aim of Renewal of Islamic Thought to separate Islam from politics in praxis, whilst maintaining the sacredness of Islam.<sup>105</sup>

Other ideas promoted by JIL such as democratization, religious freedom and pluralism, supporting minorities, and secularization cannot be separated from previous movements. It is commonly known that the proponents of Renewal of Islamic Thought, like Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid and Djohan Effendi, are Muslim scholars who insist on the realization of democratization and religious freedom and pluralism. These men have argued that democratization should be applied in Indonesian society.<sup>106</sup> They have also tried to promote inter-religious dialogue to discuss inter-religious problems.<sup>107</sup> The idea of pluralism in their opinion is a part of God's destination and an integral part of Islamic teachings. Persons like Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid and Djohan Effendi were also well known as prominent figures of the struggle for the rights of minorities.

<sup>103</sup> On secularization he was much influenced by the definition made by Harvey Cox in his *Secular City*. See Harvey Cox, *The Secular City, A Christian Acclamation of Both the Emergence of Secular Urban Civilization and the Breakdown of Traditional Religion*, Great Britain: Pelican Book, 1975, pp. 16-17; pp. 32-35. Nurcholish Madjid himself declares explicitly that he quotes Cox's definition. Nurcholish Madjid defines secularization as firstly freedom from the tutelage (*asuhan*) of religion; and secondly the application of knowledge. Secularisation for Nurcholish Madjid does not mean an application of secularism and a change in the orientation of Muslims in the direction of being secularists and developing worldly life. Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, Kemodernan*, pp. 206-211. Nurcholish wrote an article discussing *sekularisasi* entitled "Sekali lagi tentang Sekularisasi". This article has been translated into English by Muhammad Kamal Hasan, "More on Secularization," in Kamal Hasan, *Muslim Intellectual*, pp. 216-233.

<sup>104</sup> This slogan also indicated the domination of the state over society. It arose due to the policy of the New Order government to eliminate religious political parties in general elections.

<sup>105</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, Kemodernan*, p. 204.

<sup>106</sup> See Nurcholish Madjid, *Demokrasi dan Proses Demokratisasi di Indonesia, Beberapa Pandangan Dasar dan Prospek Pelaksanaannya sebagai Kelanjutan Logis Pembangunan Nasional*, Jakarta: Paramadina, 1989; Abdurrahman Wahid, *Membangun Demokrasi*, Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 1999.

<sup>107</sup> Djohan Effendi, "Dialog Antar Agama, Bisakah Melahirkan Teologi Kerukunan?" *Prisma*, No. 5, Juni 1974, pp. 12-17; Nurcholish Madjid, *Iman dan Kemajemukan Masyarakat: Intra-Umat, Seri KKA*, Jakarta: Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, 1989.



Both groups have argued that as a majority group, Indonesian Muslims should appreciate the rights of minorities in order to reach an egalitarian society. In this case, they have given deep attention to minority of religion. The difference between JIL and those scholars lies in the way JIL defines a minority. While the proponents of previous movements concentrated on religious minorities through inter-religious dialogue, economy through empowerment of civilians,<sup>108</sup> politics and culture through the movement of education of politics and did not pay attention to sexual orientation,<sup>109</sup> the JIL includes people with the an alternative sexual orientation in the definition of minority.<sup>110</sup> However, no data from JIL can be found to substantiate their claim to support this group.

Attention to particular characteristics of Indonesian Muslim society is the point of difference between JIL and the previous movements mentioned. Besides insisting on modernity, the ideas promoted by Renewal of Islamic Thought, such as *keindonesiaan*, *Islam pribumi*, *Reaktualisasi ajaran Islam*, place local values as an important part of the interpretation of Islamic teachings. Particular aspects of Indonesian society should be taken into consideration in the interpretation in order to reach a critical understanding of Islamic teachings which is in conformity with Indonesian society and will be able to provide the solutions to problems faced by Indonesian Muslims. The followers of Renewal of Islamic Thought have attempted to understand Islamic teachings on the basis of a classical Islamic heritage whilst looking at and plucking the fruits of modernity and the local values of Indonesia. They believed that Indonesian Muslim society enshrines particular values and attitudes which differ from those in other Muslim societies in the world.<sup>111</sup>

This view differs a little from JIL. The group concentrates on the achievement of modernity in interpretation and tends to ignore the particular characteristics of Indonesian society. According to JIL, attention to the local in Islamic interpretation is not enough to answer the rapid social change in the modern world. The fruits of

<sup>108</sup> See for example, Abdurrahman Wahid, "Wawasan Islam tentang Etos Kerja"; Nurcholish Madjid, *Wawasan Islam tentang Etos Kerja*, Seri KKA No. 30/III, Jakarta: Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, 1989; Nurcholish Madjid, "Islam dan Cita-Cita Keadilan Sosial, in Idem, *Islam Kemodernan*, pp. 99-168

<sup>109</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, "Demokrasi harus Diperjuangkan," *Tempo*, Agustus 1978, p. 22

<sup>110</sup> Jaringan Islam Liberal, "Tentang Kami," <http://www.islamlib.com/tentangkami/id.php>. Or English version, Idem, "About Us," <http://www.islamlib.com/aboutus/eng.php>.

<sup>111</sup> See Budhy Munawar Rahman, "Dari Tahapan Moral ke Periode Sejarah, Pemikiran Neo-Modernisme Islam di Indonesia", *Ulumul Qur'an*, VI (1995), 3, p. 5.

modernity are the most important things to develop a critical understanding of Islamic teachings in the modern world in order for Islam to compete with modernity itself.<sup>112</sup>

In his *pembaharuan*, Nurcholish Madjid, for example, proposed the concept of *kemodernan* (modernity), which refers to the meaningfulness of modernity, and *Islam Keindonesiaan* (Indonesian Islam), which incorporates the usefulness of local values of Indonesian society in its understanding of Islamic teachings.<sup>113</sup> In an article entitled “Modernisasi Adalah Rasionalisasi Bukan Westernisasi” (Modernization is Rationalization Not Westernization), Nurcholish Madjid emphasized the need for Indonesian Muslims to be involved in the process of modernization promoted by the state.<sup>114</sup>

In this work, he argued that modernity is rationalization and it is in line with the spirit of Islamic teachings.<sup>115</sup> It is a process of correction of modes of thought and action which are not rational and replacing them with ones which are. This is based on the application of the fruits of modernity and discoveries of the sciences.<sup>116</sup> He declares that to Muslims, modernization in terms of rationalization is an imperative and absolute obligation. It constitutes a command and a teaching of God.<sup>117</sup> At the same time, he promoted the term *keindonesiaan* referring to the special characteristics of Indonesian Muslims.

According to Nurcholish Madjid, although Islamic doctrines are coloured by universal values, their application has to be in conformity with local values. The

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<sup>112</sup> See Ulii Abshar-Abdalla, “Menimbang Islam Pribumi,” *Tashwirul Afkar*, No. 14, 2003, pp. 129-135. In this article, Ulii doubts the capability of *Islam Pribumi* which pays attention to the particular characteristic of Indonesian society in competing with the ideology of modernity. The ignorance of JIL to local values has a significant impact on the impression that the ideas promoted by JIL are not down-to-earth. This will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

<sup>113</sup> The term *sekularisasi* has been misunderstood by some groups of Muslims and has become a controversial one. See Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan*, Bandung: Mizan, 1988. On 21 October 1992, Nurcholish Madjid presented an article entitled *Beberapa Renungan tentang Kehidupan Keagamaan di Indonesia untuk Generasi Mendatang* (Some Reflections for Next Generation on Religious life in Indonesia). Again, he emphasized the urgency of Islamic renewal for Indonesian Muslims. For more details about the issue, see Nurcholish Madjid, *Beberapa Renungan tentang Kehidupan Keagamaan untuk generasi Mendatang*, *Ulumul Qur'an* No. 1. Vol. IV tahun 1993, pp. 4-25.

<sup>114</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Modernisasi Adalah Rasionalisasi Bukan Westernisasi*, Bandung: Mimbar Demokrasi, 1968; See also Idem, “The Issue of Modernization among Muslim in Indonesia: From a Participant's Point of View,” in Gloria Davis, *What Is Indonesian Culture?*, Ohio University Center For International Studies, Southeast Asian Series No. 52, Ohio, 1979, pp. 143-155.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> To strengthen this argument, Nurcholish Madjid quotes Qur'anic verses such as Q.S. al-Na'el (16): 3; Q.S. an-Naml (27): 28; Q.S. al-Furqan (25): 2; Q.S. al-Sajdah (32): 7; Q.S. Yânus (10): 101; Q.S. al-Baqara(2): 170; Q.S. Fâir (35): 13. See *Ibid.*, pp. 6-9.



explanation and the application of the doctrines need an adequate understanding of the sociological and cultural patterns of Indonesian Muslims because they have specific characteristics which are different from those of other societies. Therefore, there is a need to interpret Islamic teachings on the basis of the matters essential to Indonesian Muslim society.<sup>118</sup> Nurcholish Madjid argues that Muslims in Indonesia should cultivate a historical consciousness, an awareness that societal orders have intimate relations with time and space, and this should be considered in the interpretation of Islamic teachings.<sup>119</sup>

*Islam Pribumi* by Abdurrahman Wahid and *Reaktualisasi Ajaran Islam* by Munawir Sjadzali are also ideas coloured by local values.<sup>120</sup> *Islam Pribumi* is upheld in reference to a specific interpretation of Islamic teachings which is in conformity with Indonesian Muslims society.<sup>121</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid believes that Islam should not only be seen as a living energy which inspires the development of Muslim civilization, but also as a vehicle to respond to modernity and local changes. The concept of *pribumisasi* is an attempt to consider local values in order to place them as Islamic norms. It is not a syncretism, the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties, of religion, but an effort to consider local values in creating religious law,<sup>122</sup> and an understanding of the text by considering local values as the contexts in which the text will be applied.<sup>123</sup>

*Reaktualisasi Ajaran Islam* is a term which refers to an interpretation of the Islamic law of inheritance on the basis of both the text (the Qur'an and the Hadith) and

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. See also Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban*, Jakarta: Paramadina, 1992. p. lxi.

<sup>119</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban*, p. lxii.

<sup>120</sup> The term *Islam Pribumi* refers to an understanding of the doctrines of Islam which pays significant attention to the characteristic of Indonesian Muslims. It is an attempt to highlight local values of Indonesian society. There have been serious attempts to promote the idea of *pribumisasi Islam* by some of the younger generation. The Journal *Tashwirul Afkar* published by Lakpesdam (Jakarta), an institution under the umbrella of Nahdlatul Ulama, to which Abdurrahman Wahid belongs, edition no 14, "Islam Pribumi: Menolak Arabisme, Mencari Islam Indonesia", tries to promote the idea of *Islam pribumi*. See *Tashwirul Afkar* No. 14, 2003, Lakpesdam, Jakarta, 2003.

<sup>121</sup> Fachry Ali, *Golongan Agama dan Etika Kekuasaan, Keharusan Demokratisasi dalam Islam Indonesia*, Surabaya: Risalah gusti, 1996, pp.120-122. See also, M. Syafi'i Anwar, "Sosiologi Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam Nurcholish Madjid" *Ulumul Qur'an*, No. 1. vol. IV. Tahun 1993. pp. 46-53.

<sup>122</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, "Pribumisasi Islam" in Muntaha Azhari and A. Mun'im Saleh (eds.), *Islam Indonesia Menatap Masa Depan*, Jakarta: P3M, 1989, p. 83.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p.86.

the reality of Indonesian Muslim Society.<sup>124</sup> Munawir Sjadzali argues that Indonesian Muslims tend to practise *adat* (customary) law to divide their legacy rather than Islamic laws of inheritance. According to him, in this case, the local values of Indonesian Muslims should be considered in the application of Islamic law.<sup>125</sup>

Another difference between JIL and Renewal of Islamic Thought is that the ideas promoted by Renewal of Islamic Thought were perceived to side with the programmes of the state. Modernity as rationalization, progress, secularization, and inter-religious dialogue are ideas launched in line with New Order policies.

As mentioned before, the idea of *kemodernan* (modernity) was an effort to involve Indonesian Muslims in developmentalism upheld by the state. Muslims' accusations of modernity as Christianity triggered some Muslim scholars to explain modernity. Modernity is rationalization and progressiveness and it is not in contradiction to Islamic teachings. The slogan "Islam yes, Partai Islam no?" although it based on the fact that Islamic political parties impacted negatively on the development of Islam, cannot be separated from the state policy to eliminate religious parties, including an Islamic party, as contestants in the general election.<sup>126</sup> Within this circumstance, Nurcholish Madjid promoted the slogan which is fully coloured by the spirit of the elimination of the Islamic party.

Inter-religious dialogue was also in line with the inter-religious harmony of the Indonesian New Order. The New Order government had a programme called *Tri Kerukunan Hidup Beragama* (Three forms of Religious Harmony) which insisted on harmony within the followers of a religion, harmony among the followers of all religions, and harmony between religion and the government. Inter-religious dialogue as viewed by the proponents of Renewal of Islamic Thought is in conformity with this programme.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Munawir Sjadzali, "Reaktualisasi Ajaran Islam," in Iqbal Abdurrauf Saimema (ed.), *Polemik Reaktualisasi Ajaran Islam*, Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1988, pp. 1-11

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Nurcholish Madjid argues that Islamic political parties have a negative image because of Muslims who involved themselves in the parties were corrupt. See Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Kemodernan*, p. 205.

<sup>127</sup> See, Djohan Effendi, *Masalah Hubungan Antar Umat Beragama di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Proyek Pembinaan Kerukunan Hidup Beragama, Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, 1978; Nurcholish Madjid, *Agama dan Dialog antar Peradaban*, Jakarta: Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, 1996; Abdurrahman Wahid, *Dialog: Kritik dan Identitas Agama*, Yogyakarta: DIAN, 1993

Again this differs from the ideas upheld by JIL. It can be said that none of the ideas promoted by JIL support the policies of the government. Rather, they are, particularly in some cases, critical responses to government policy. In the case of religious pluralism and the implementation of *shari'a*, JIL disagrees with the state. The will of some provinces to implement the *shari'a* is harshly rejected by JIL. The group argues that its implementation is contrary to the reality of Indonesian plural society. It will eliminate the spirit of Islam itself which pays deep attention to freedom of expression and pluralism.<sup>128</sup>

Based on this explanation, it can be argued that Renewal of Islamic Thought had different aims in the dissemination of its ideas from that of JIL. But both the proponents of Renewal of Islamic Thought and JIL are well known as Muslims who disseminate Islamic ideas through a cultural approach, rather than paying serious attention to the formal or symbolic aspect of Islam. The most important view they have is that Islamic doctrines can be naturally actualized within daily life without the label of Islam.

#### **D. Response to Renewal of Islam in Indonesia**

The dissemination of liberal Islam in Indonesia has met with various responses. This passage will elucidate the responses to liberal Islam by Indonesia Muslims. The passage will focus on the responses to the idea of Islamic neo-modernism, particularly the idea of renewal of Islam (*pembaruan Pemikiran Islam*), promoted by Nurcholish Madjid. The choice is based on the reason that he is the most prominent figure of the movement of Islamic renewal in the country, and his ideas are the most controversial ones among the ideas of the proponents of liberal Islam in the country.<sup>129</sup> His ideas have been greeted by a multitude of responses. The responses will be measured on the basis of the quality of the acceptance of the responses. They are measured along continuum between two types of responses, the positive and the negative. The positive responses are those supporting the idea, while the negative responses are those rejecting even condemning the idea.

<sup>128</sup> See Burhanuddin (ed.), *Syari'at Islam, Pandangan Muslim Liberal*, Jakarta: Jaringan Islam Liberal/The Asia Foundation, 2003. The view of JIL on religious freedom and pluralism will be explained in the next chapter.

<sup>129</sup> How important and controversial his ideas are is shown by the fact Budhy Munawar Rahman, a young Muslim scholar, noted that more than one hundred works, books and articles, have been devoted to responding to the ideas of Islamic renewal of Nurcholish Madjid. Budhy Munawar Rahman, "Berbagai Respon atas Gagasan Pembaharuan," *Ulumul Qur'an* Vol. 1 No. IV, Tahun 1993, p. 55.

### 1. Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam as a Positive Response to Modernity

As has been mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, in 1970s, Nurcholish Madjid promoted the idea of *Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam* (the renewal of Islamic Thought).<sup>130</sup> The idea tries to introduce an alternative understanding of Islamic teachings in the context of Indonesian society by going beyond the established Islamic thought and tries to embrace the fruits of contemporary thought like intellectual freedom,<sup>131</sup> the idea of progress, *kemodernan* (modernity), *sekularisasi* (secularisation).<sup>132</sup> Taking a contra position to the majority opinion which considered the fruits of modernity as strangers and serious threat of Islam, Nurcholish Madjid considered the fruits of modernity as a fundamental capital for the development of Indonesian Muslim society. Indonesian Muslims should function the fruits of modernity to reach a better understanding of Islamic teachings.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup> The ideas of *pembaharuan* found their first formal expression in a paper read by Nurcholish Madjid in Jakarta entitled "Keharusan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Ummat," (The Necessity of Renewing Islamic Thought and the Problem of the Integration of the Ummat). The paper was read at social evening (*silaturahmi*) in a post *'id al-fitr* (Feast of Breaking the Ramadan Fast) which was jointly organized by four elements of the most important Muslim youth and student organizations: HMI (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam/Association of Muslim University Students), GPI (Gerakan Pemuda Islam/Muslim Youth Movement), PII (Pelajar Islam Indonesia/Muslim Students of Indonesia) and Persami (Persatuan Sarjana Muslimin Indonesia/Association of Indonesian Muslim Graduates) in Jakarta. There are two version of the date in which the paper read. Kamal Hassan in his *Contemporary Muslim* notes 2 January 1970. See Kamal Hassan, *Contemporary Muslim*, p. 137. Whilst Barton notes 3 January 1970 as a time in which the paper read. See Barton, *Gagasan Islam Liberal*, p. 53, footnote no. 13. Nurcholish Madjid himself quotes two versions. In his article entitled "The Issue of Modernization among Muslims in Indonesia: From a Participant's Point of View," notes 2 January 1970. See Nurcholish Madjid, "The Issue of Modernization," in Gloria Davis, *What is Indonesian Culture?*, Ohio University Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Series No. 52, Ohio, p. 144. But in his ontology *Islam, Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan* notes 3 January 1970 as a time in which he delivered the article. See Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, Kemodernan*, p. 325.

<sup>131</sup> According to Nurcholish Madjid, Islam upholds individual freedom but does not allow unbridled freedom because it is potentially disastrous social consequences. In this context, Islam proposes the concept *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong). In this concept, social responsibility and individual freedom go hand in hand. See Nurcholish Madjid, *Modernisasi*, p. 26.

<sup>132</sup> On secularization, as mentioned above, he was much influenced by the definition from the definition made by Harvey Cox in his *Secular City*. See Harvey Cox, *The Secular City, A Christian Acclamation of Both the Emergence of Secular Urban Civilization and the Breakdown of Traditional Religion*, Great Britain: Pelican Book, 1975, p. 16-17; p. 32-35. Nurcholish Madjid himself declares explicitly that he quotes the definition from Cox's definition. The way he defines secularization as first: freedom from the tutelage (*asuhan*) of religion and second: the application of knowledge, secularisation does not mean as an application of secularism and a change in the orientation of Muslims in the direction of being secularists and developing worldly life, and the way he differentiates between secularism and secularization, are similar to the ideas of Cox in both. Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, Kemodernan*, p. 206-211.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*



The idea of Islamic renewal has stimulated many responses from Muslims throughout the country. Basically, it can be claimed that the most proponents of the idea of Islamic renewal were young educated Muslims at that time. Most young educated Muslims took in the same position as Nurcholish Madjid. They have argued that refreshing Islamic thought is an absolute need in order to solve the problem of Muslims in the country. Islamic renewal is a positive contribution to Islam because it promotes a critical interpretation of Islamic teachings. It is an attempt to present a critical understanding of Islam. In this case, Islam has been interpreted as a flexible religion which is inconformity with modernity and propagates this idea to Muslims in the country. The proponents of Islamic renewal argue that the idea of Islamic renewal is an attempt to create a new perspective in order to reach a better understanding of Islam.<sup>134</sup> It has offered a new way of understanding Islam, and has thus given indirect support to the idea of pluralism.<sup>135</sup> The rise of Islamic renewal is an attempt to present the friendly face of Islam.<sup>136</sup>

The renewal of Islamic thought is also described as an attempt to rise the profile of Islam on the basis of an academic and philosophical approach. It was considered as an effort to put Islam as a religion in an ideal theological position and insists on the universality of the Islamic spirituality.<sup>137</sup> Given this approach, the main focus of Islamic renewal is to locate the essential meaning of the text (*maqāsid al-sharī'a*) which cannot be conned from literal meaning of the text, but can be found by looking for the essential meaning of the text by analysing the meanings beyond the text.<sup>138</sup> Not all Indonesian Muslims agreed with the idea. Many works has been devoted to reject the idea. According to Fachri Ali and Bahtiar Effendi, the terms attached to the renewal, such as secularisation, liberalisation, modernity are main triggers of the rejection. Indonesian Muslims are not familiar with these terms.<sup>139</sup> As soon as the idea launched, various negative responses have been devoted. Some response argued that the idea of Islamic renewal was in contra position to *ukhuwwa Islamiyya* (Muslim brotherhood). Many of

<sup>134</sup> Fauzan Shaleh, *Modern Trends*, p. 196.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Mohamad Sobary, "Jalan Arteri ke Rumah Tuhan" *Ulumul Qur'an, Jurnal Ilmu dan Kebudayaan*, No. 1. Vol. IV Tahun 1993, p. 26-27.

<sup>137</sup> Masdar F. Mas'udi, "Ide Pembaharuan Cak Nur di Mata Orang Pesantren" *Ulumul Qur'an* Vol. 1. Vol. IV, p. 28-33.

<sup>138</sup> Fachri Ali and Bahtiar Effendi, *Merambah Jalan Baru Islam Rekonstruksi Pemikiran Islam Indonesia Masa Orde Baru*, Bandung: Mizan, 1986. p. 34-35.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

them hardly rejected it and accused it as a part of mission of Zionism, an attempt to destroy Islam from within and so forth.

## 2. Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam and Integrasi Umat

A serious problem, namely that of integration,<sup>140</sup> was faced by the idea of Islamic renewal. The problem of integration has stimulated various reactions from Muslims. This censure was based on the statement made by Nurcholish Madjid at the beginning of his article entitled "Keharusan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Integrasi Ummat". In the article, Nurcholish Madjid argues:

The *ummat* is immediately confronted with a dilemma: should it choose to blaze the trail of regeneration within itself at the expense of long-coveted integration, or should it cling to the preservation of efforts toward integration even though it has to bear the consequences of inertia in thought and the loss of invulnerable moral forces?<sup>141</sup>

The quotation above is a neutral statement which expresses a serious problem for Muslims in doing renewal of thought. It shows that Nurcholish Madjid has reminded the readers that Muslims have two choices: recharging their thought or retaining integration. The recharging of thought leads to critical and dynamic thought about Islam, but it exerts a negative impact on the integration of Muslims. On the other hand, it is true that retention of integration is needed, but it does not solve the problem of backwardness of Muslims. Nurcholish Madjid opts for the first in order to create a solution rather than keeping the integration of *ummat*. He believes that it is the only way to solve the problems faced by Indonesian Muslims.<sup>142</sup> The preference made by Nurcholish Madjid has been misunderstood by some Muslims. They have accused him as a Muslim who promoted the ideas of disintegration of *ummat*. They condemned Nurcholish Madjid as a person who is intent on breaking up integration of the Muslim community.

<sup>140</sup> The word integration here is synonym to an Arabic *ukhuwwa* that is brotherhood.

<sup>141</sup> See English version "The Necessity of Renewing Islamic Thought and the Problem of the Integration of the Ummat" translated by Kamal Hassan in "Appendix A", in *Contemporary Muslim*, p. 290. "Sebuah dilemma segera dihadapkan pada umat Islam: apakah akan memilih menempuh jalan pembaharuan dalam dirinya, dengan merugikan integrasi yang selama ini didambakan, ataupun akan mempertahankan dilakukannya usaha-usaha ke arah integrasi itu, sekalipun dengan akibat keharusan ditolerirnya kebakuan pemikiran dan hilangnya kekuatan-kekuatan moral yang ampuh? Nurcholish Madjid, "Keharusan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Integrasi Ummat," in *Islam Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan*, Mizan: Bandung, 1987, p. 204.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*



Endang Saefuddin Anshari,<sup>143</sup> Ismail Hasan Metareuem,<sup>144</sup> H.M. Rasjidi,<sup>145</sup> and Abdul Qadir Djailani<sup>146</sup> are people who have argued intensively that the renewal of Islamic thought promoted by Nurcholish Madjid does not pay enough attention to the integration of Muslim society, the most important matter for plural society like Indonesian.<sup>147</sup> Endang Saifuddin, for example, argues that the attempt of renewal of Islamic thought is important, but it should not sacrifice the integration of *ummat*. In such a pluralistic society like Indonesian Muslim society, in which Muslims affiliate to some religious organizations, the integration is more important than the renewal.<sup>148</sup> A similar response also has been devoted by Ismail Hasan Metareuem. He argues that although Nurcholish Madjid used *integrasi ummat* as a part of his title, he does not pay attention to the integration. He believes that the integration is the most important thing for Muslims in the country in which Muslims has been affiliated to different groups.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, in the end of his article, he insists on the establishment of the institution in which the integration of all Indonesian Muslims is covered.<sup>150</sup>

A more negative response has been devoted to the idea of *pembaharuan* by Abdul Qadir Djailani. According to him, Nurcholish Madjid did not pay attention to the problem of integration of Muslim society in Indonesia. More than that, he also has consciously tried to break up the integration of Indonesian Muslim society. He argues that Nurcholish Madjid has tried to make Indonesian Muslims are confused.<sup>151</sup> He believes that Nurcholish Madjid has consciously tried to undermine the integration of

<sup>143</sup> E. Saifuddin Anshari, *Kritik atas Fahaman dan Gerakan "Pembaharuan" Drs. Nurcholish Madjid*, Bandung: Bulan Sabit, 1973.

<sup>144</sup> Ismail Hasan Metareuem, "Pembahasan terhadap Prasaran Sdr. Drs. Nurcholish Madjid: tentang Keharusan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Ummat," in Nurcholish Madjid et al., *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam*, Jakarta: Islamic Research Centre, 1970, p. 26-38.

<sup>145</sup> H.M. Rasjidi, *Koreksi terhadap Drs. Nurcholish Madjid tentang Sekularisasi*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1972.

<sup>146</sup> Abdul Qadir Djailani, *Menelusuri Kekeliruan Pembaharuan Islam Nurcholish Madjid*, Bandung: Yadia, 1994. Fauzan Saleh in his *Modern Trends* classifies Abdul Qadir Djailani as a proponent of scripturalism. See, Fauzan Saleh, *Modern Trends*, p. 184.

<sup>147</sup> See, H.M. Rasjidi, *Koreksi Terhadap Drs Nurcholish Madjid Tentang Sekularisasi*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1972; Idem, *Suatu Koreksi Lagi bagi Drs Nurcholish Madjid*, Banjarmasin: Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia Perwakilan Kalimantan Selatan, 1973; Endang Saefuddin Anshari, *Kritik atas Fahaman dan Gerakan Pembaharuan Drs Nurcholish Madjid*, Bandung: Bulan Sabit, 1973; Abdul Qadir Djailani, *Menelusuri Kekeliruan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam Nurcholish Madjid*, Bandung: Yadia, 1994.

<sup>148</sup> See Endang Saifuddin Anshari, "Tjatan atas Referat Sdr Nurcholish Madjid: Keharusan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Ummat, in *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam*, p. 47-72.

<sup>149</sup> Ismail Hasan Metareuem, "Pembahasan terhadap Prasaran," p. 36-37.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37-38

<sup>151</sup> Abdul Qadir Djailani, *Menelusuri Kekeliruan*, p. 22.

Indonesian Muslims. Furthermore, He argues that the main intention of the idea of Islamic renewal is to destroy Islam from within by shattering the integration which binds Muslims together. "Nurcholish Madjid is doing his best to confuse Indonesian Muslims," he argues. He also accused that the idea of Islamic renewal is a part of a non-Muslim agenda in order to weaken Muslims as a group, "Non-Muslims need a Muslim figure who has an ability to destroy Islam from within."<sup>152</sup> In this case, the ideas of Islamic renewal are considered as ideas which are in contraposition to the concept of integration of *ummat*.

### 3. *Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam as an Idea with a Hidden Agenda*

As mentioned before, the emergence of liberal Islam in the country has met with negative responses. The movement of Islamic renewal has been categorized as a part of political movement and global strategy of Zionism, an international Jewish movement which tries to dominate the world. These negative responses have come not only from Islamic fundamentalism, which understands the doctrine literally, but also the group of orthodoxy in the country, a group of Muslims who try to understand Islamic doctrines mainly on the basis of the mainstream of understanding.<sup>153</sup>

The opponents of Islamic renewal argue that Islamic renewal is a kind of deviation in understanding Islam. On several occasions, Nurcholish Madjid was even denounced as a theosophist, an agent of Zionism, an agent of Western orientalism, an apostate, an enemy of Islam seeking to destroy it from within, a person who should be brought to justice by the community, a stranger in the land of Allah, and a cancer which must be removed from the body of Islam.<sup>154</sup> He also was accused of being a Muslim

<sup>152</sup> Abdul Qadir Djailani has also criticized the way of thinking of Nurcholish Madjid. In one case, he accuses Nurcholish of being an irrational man because he quoted the ideas of Muhy al-DĒn Ibn al-'ArabĒ, a pantheistic Muslim sufi thinker, which is not based on rational reasoning but on the intuition. He also condemns Nurcholish as a liar and a man without integrity. Nurcholish is not an honest person because, in some cases, he quotes the ideas of Muslim scholars without valid references. See Abdul Qadir Djailani, *Menelusuri Kekeliruan*, pp. 20-24. His critiques have been criticized by Muhamad Wahyuni Nafis. Wahyuni Nafis in his "Kekeliruan dalam 'Kekeliruan'" argues that Abdul Qadir Djailani does not have proper understanding of the idea of Islamic renewal promoted by Nurcholish Madjid. Abdul Qadir Djailani made many mistakes in understanding the idea. See Muhamad Wahyuni Nafis, "Kekeliruan dalam 'Kekeliruan'", *Ummul Qur'an, Journal Ilmu dan Kebudayaan*, No. 3 Vol. VI 1995, Jakarta: LSAF, 1995, p. 84-93.

<sup>153</sup> The scripturalist response to the idea of substantialism can be seen at R. William Liddle, "Media Dakwah Scripturalism: One Form of Islamic Political thought and Action in New Order Indonesia" in Mark R. Woodward (ed.), *Toward a New Paradigm: Recent Developments in Indonesian Islamic Thought*, Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, 1996, pp. 323-356.

<sup>154</sup> See Woodward, "Foreward," *Towards a New paradigm*, p. 12.

trying to destroy Islam from within and cost a heresy in a scientific guise.<sup>155</sup> Some Muslims have said that the phenomenon of Islamic renewal in the country is a proof of the successful efforts of the enemies of Islam. The threat of the enemies of Islam has appeared in a new shape. It comes from within Muslims and is claimed as a part of Muslims. It is insidious and therefore more dangerous than other threats.<sup>156</sup>

Such accusations for example, have been devoted by *Media Dakwah*, a magazine published by DDII (*Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia*/The Indonesian Council of Islamic Missions), an institution which energetically propagates Islamic teachings in Indonesia.<sup>157</sup>

#### *Destroying Islam from Within*

The opponents of Islamic renewal claim that one of its main purposes of Islamic renewal is to destroy Islam from within. They argue that all the ideas of Islamic associated with Islamic renewal such as freedom of thought, desacralization, and critical interpretation of Islamic doctrines have to be seen in the light of a plot to destroy Islam from within.<sup>158</sup> They assert that in order to destroy Islam, the enemies of Islam need a prominent Muslim. The accusation made by Ridwan Saidi,<sup>159</sup> is a clear example. He cast Nurcholish Madjid in the role same as Snouck Hurgronje, who tried to destroy Indonesian Muslims from within in the colonial period. He argues: "In order to destroy Islam, non-Muslims need a prominent figure who can destroy Islam from within, so we are confused and can do nothing."<sup>160</sup> Two accusations will be looked more deep in the next passage: heresy in a scientific form and Jewish conspiracy.

#### *Heresy in a scientific form*

The idea of Islamic renewal has also been branded heresy in a scientific form by some Indonesian Muslims. The accusation derives from the fact that the idea has raised

<sup>155</sup> The accusation was publicly published by *Media Dakwah*, a magazine which tries to promote the scriptural approach to Islamic doctrines. See, Ade Armando, 'Citra Kaum Pembaharu', p. 69. About the scriptural approach of *Media Dakwah*, see R. William Liddle, 'Media Dakwah Scripturalism', p. 325-354.

<sup>156</sup> Liddle, 'Media Dakwah', p. 327.

<sup>157</sup> See Ade Armando, 'Citra Kaum Pembaharu' p. 66-76.

<sup>158</sup> Ade Armando, *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>159</sup> Ridwan Saidi is a prominent Betawi figure. He was an official of HMI (*Himpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia*) at 1970s.

<sup>160</sup> "Dalam rangka mengacak-acak Islam, orang lain memerlukan seorang tokoh yang bisa 'ngubek' di dalam sehingga kita mabuk dan tidak bisa berbuat apa-apa". See direct quotation in Ade Armando, 'Citra Kaum Pembaharu', p. 69.

some theological problems currently faced by Muslims in the country such as secularisation, freedom of thought, religious pluralism, and contextual interpretation. All attempts to interpret the text have to be distrusted as interpretations with a hidden agenda. The definition of Nurcholish Madjid of *al-Ēanifiyya al-samĒa* as a spirit of tolerance, *Islām* as a total surrender to The Truth (God), and *kalima sawṣ* (similarity of word/religion) as a central point of religions have been described as a number of manipulations of the essential meaning of the verses. Such definitions are the result of interpretation based on carnal desire. Such an interpretation is a specific characteristic of the people of the book (*ahl al-kitāb*), namely the Jews and Christians.<sup>161</sup>

In order to strengthen the accusation, the opponents of Islamic renewal note some points raised in statements by Nurcholish Madjid. For example, they argue that Nurcholish Madjid has made some mistakes when he refers to the term of “people of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*) in the Qur’an regarding religious pluralism. According to Nurcholish Madjid, referring to the opinion of Rashid Rida in his work, *al-Manṣūr*, the term the peoples of book refers not only to Jews and Christians, but also other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism and so forth.

Daud Rasyid, a prominent opponent of Islamic renewal who graduated from Cairo University, argues that Nurcholish Madjid has made a mistake in his understanding of this matter. He says that, as far as he knows, Rashid Ridha only holds the opinion that the peoples of Book consist of Jews and Christians. So, the statement that says that Rashid Rida includes people other Jews and Christians is a veritable lie. Nurcholish has made a serious mistake in this mater.<sup>162</sup>

#### *Jewish conspiracy*

From the perspective of the opponents of Islamic renewal, the idea of Islamic renewal has been influenced by Western orientalism, which looks at Islam as an enemy and which is itself a part of the Zionist movement in the world. The idea has come to the fore since Indonesian Muslims has had direct relationship with Western scholars. It

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>162</sup> But the statement of Daud Rasyid has been criticized by Zainul Kamal, another Muslim scholar graduated from Cairo University. As quoted by Ade Armando, according to Zainul Kamal, Rashid Ridha argues that the people of Book consists not only of Jewish and Christian, but also other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto and so on. See Ade Armando, *Ibid.*, p. 71. See also Muhamad Wahyuni Nafis, “Kekeliruan dalam ”Kekeliruan, p. 88-89.

was Leonard Binder, a Jew who invited Nurcholish to study Islamic studies at Chicago University.

Nurcholish is acquainted with Prof. Leonard Binder, a fanatical Jew who once asked a prominent figure among Indonesian Muslims to write a dissertation on the subject which denies the role of Muslims in the past and the future of Indonesia.<sup>163</sup>

Western orientalists are poison to Muslim scholars who study with them because the orientalists indoctrinate them with mission of Zionists and Christians. This is indicated by the fact that the subjects studied which orientalists concentrate are focused on the deviant sects of Islam.<sup>164</sup>

To strengthen the argument, the opponents of Islamic renewal quote some opinions of Muslim scholars who have studied at Western universities. They have noted the statement of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi which argues that the study of Islam in Western University is inextricably bound up with the Zionist mission and Christianity. There is no objective study in the West. All studies about Islam insist on the materials which deny the glorification of Islam. The idea of the renewal of Islamic thought is in line with these tendencies.<sup>165</sup>

Both accusations above show that the ideas of Islamic renewal promoted by Nurcholish Madjid did not only have technical problem regarding the integration of *ummat*, but to some great extent, according to some Indonesian Muslims also had ideological and theological problem. The ideas were loaded by some outside interests, namely an attempt of non-Muslims to make Muslims confused.

#### 4. Critical Response to *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam* in Indonesia

In trying to solve problems besetting Indonesian Muslims, the movement for the renewal of Islamic thought mainly insists on examining the religiosity of Indonesian Muslims. They have made some mistakes in their responses to daily life. The mistakes arise from an inaccurate interpretation of the doctrines which leads to fatalistic attitudes.

<sup>163</sup> "Nurcholish berkenalan dengan Prof. Leonard Binder, seorang Yahudi fanatik yang pernah menawari seorang tokoh intelektual Muslim Indonesia untuk mengambil gelar Doktor asal yang bersangkutan mau menulis disertasi yang menafikan peran umat Islam dalam kehidupan di Indonesia di masa lalu dan masa depan." See, direct quotation of *Media Dakwah* Ade Armando, *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73-74..



As a result, they are not imbued with a work ethic. In order to solve the problem, the renewal of thought setting them on a new course is the solution.

The insistence on weaknesses in the religious attitude of Muslim as a root of backwardness of Indonesian Muslims which Islamic renewal argues has raised a flood of criticism. Besides critiques dealing with the material used by opponents of the renewal of Islamic thought, there are some critiques which concentrate on the method by which the idea is promoted. These criticisms have given rise to a better understanding of Islamic doctrines.

The method by which the idea of Islamic renewal has been promoted is a serious problem facing liberal Islam. The problem lies in the preference for and formulation of the method. Some Indonesian Muslim scholars argue that the idea of Islamic renewal, to some extent, is not based on an adequate methodology. Indeed, Nurcholish Madjid, for instance, has mainly focused on the general social problems assailing the country by using a sociological and historical approach to strengthen the idea of Islamic renewal, and he has not concentrated on the local values and the psychological nature Indonesian Muslims. The anthropological approach which insists on the local value and specific character of human being, and the psychological approach, which focuses on the emotional attitude of human beings do not play a significant role in this matter. That is why the idea of Islamic renewal is unacceptable to some groups of Muslims.<sup>166</sup> This is the criticism proposed by M. Amin Abdullah, an Indonesian Muslim scholar.

According to M. Amin Abdullah, the idea of Islamic renewal is based mainly on historical and sociological approaches which concentrate on treating all Indonesian Muslims as a whole. Indonesian Muslims as a community have been seen as a community with one major overriding problem, that is backwardness. Less attention has been paid to the diversity within Muslim society. Amin Abdullah says that it should be complemented by an anthropological approach which concentrates on the particular variation of the values within society and the psychological approach which focuses on the emotion and motives which effects to the members of the community.<sup>167</sup> According to him, the condemnation of the idea of Islamic renewal is because Islamic renewal

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<sup>166</sup> M. Amin Abdullah, "Islam Indonesia lebih Pluralistik dan Demokratis," *Ulumul Qur'an* No. 3. Vol. VI Tahun 1995, p. 72-73.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

lacks of attention to the diversities and the wide-ranging psychological aspects of Indonesian Muslim society.<sup>168</sup>

Furthermore, one criticism also has been devoted to the precedents to which the idea of Islamic renewal refers. The critique deals with an allegation that the idea of Islamic renewal is oriented solely towards the past, that is, to the early period of history of Islam, in which Muslims found their glory and superiority over others.<sup>169</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, for example, justifies the ideas of democratisation, pluralism and tolerance as ideas which had been put into practice during the period of the Prophet and his Rightly-Guided Caliphs.<sup>170</sup> In other words, Nurcholish Madjid is trying to revive the past in present.<sup>171</sup> In fact, the early Muslim community has not always been described as being an ideal model. Even the first Islamic community established by the Prophet at Medina did not reflect the real values of egalitarianism or the idea of tolerance upheld by Nurcholish Madjid. This was indicated by regarding non Muslims as the second class in the society.<sup>172</sup>

*Islam transformasi* (transformation Islam) is another response to the idea of Islamic renewal. The critique is mainly engaged in the subject matter of the idea and the method by which the Islamic renewal was upheld. *Islam transformasi* uses a structural approach to analyse the backwardness of Indonesian Muslim society. Unlike the renewal of Islamic thought promoted by Nurcholish Madjid, which concentrates on a theological approach by focusing on the religious attitudes of Indonesian Muslims, *Islam transformasi* focuses on the structural order of society. According to the idea of Islamic transformation, Nurcholish Madjid has paid too little attention to the structural

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<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Such a critique comes from the work of Ahmad Baso. See Ahmad Baso, *Civil Society versus Masyarakat Madani*, Yogyakarta, LKiS, p. 272-273

<sup>170</sup> To verify these ideas, Nurcholish Madjid refers to the works of Ibn Taimiyya, Marshal Hodgson, Ernest Gellner and Max Dimont. According to Fauzan Saleh, in these works, Islam is described as a religion adopting all of these ideas of democratisation, pluralism and tolerance. See Fauzan Shaleh, *Modern Trends* p. 286.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>172</sup> According to Ahmad Baso as noted by Fauzan Saleh, Nurcholish Madjid's uncritical acceptance of the Islamic historical past is also because of his unfamiliarity with the works of contemporary Muslim scholars, like Muhammad Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi, Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid. See, *Ibid.*, p. 287. But it should be kept in mind that the idea of Islamic renewal promoted by Nurcholish Madjid was started at the early 1970s, while the works of those people mentioned above were widely known since the period of 1980s and 1990s. *Maftum al-Nas* of Abu Zaid, for example, have been published in the early 1993. So it is an anachronistic critique if criticizing Nurcholish Madjid's mode of thought from the side of his unfamiliarity to the works of contemporary Muslim scholars.

order of society. The backwardness of Indonesian Muslims is not only because of the adoption of wrong theological and cultural attitudes, but it is also because of the unequal relationships within society, namely between the higher classes and the lower classes and, in a wider sense, between developed and developing countries. The relationship is fully coloured by imperialism and exploitation. The higher classes position themselves as superior and exploit the lower.<sup>173</sup> There is no equality and justice in society. If Muslims want to solve this problem, the structure of society should be changed.

Creating a new social order, then, is the solution, a social order which gives a chance of growing equality and justice among its members. In order to gain this goal, *Islam transformasi* has proposed a dialectical method combining between theology and social approach. The theological method is to observe the theological problem of the backwardness of Muslims and the social method is to solve societal problem which Muslims face. If this method is adopted, the solution to the backwardness should be based not only on the internal problems faced by Muslims such as the idea of Islamic renewal, but should also be founded on the reality of Indonesian society and external aspects of Indonesian society such as educational and cultural problems.<sup>174</sup>

In short, it can be said that the critiques by *Islam transformasi* are on the theoretical and technical framework of Islamic renewal. According to it, the idea of Islamic renewal concentrated on theological problems of Indonesian Muslim society, but paid little attention to the social order of Indonesian society, a matter which the proponents of *Islam transformasi* consider it as a fundamental problem of the backwardness of Indonesian Muslim society.

#### E. Conclusion

The movement of liberal Islam in the sense of an effort to make a creative understanding of Islamic teachings by connecting the text and the context in which the text is produced and applied was widely introduced by some Indonesian Muslim scholars since the 1970. Persons like Nurcholish Madjid, Harun Nasution, and Abdurrahman Wahid promoted the ideas known as *pembaharuan pemikiran Islam* which have similarity to the idea of liberal Islam. These ideas have reached various

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<sup>173</sup> Budhy Munawar-Rahman, "Berbagai Respon", p. 22.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

responses from Indonesian Muslims. Some peoples argue that the idea of *pembaharuan* was an effort to introduce Islam which has conformity with modernity and it should be positively responded. The others argue that the idea was a serious threat to Islam itself. Some attributes have been labelled to it. According to some Muslims, the idea of *pembaharuan* was a part of International Zionist movement which tried to weaken Islam from within. It was a cancer for Muslims. It was a movement with a hidden agenda, and the like. Critical response also have been devoted to it. *Islam transformasi* is an example. It criticized the way of thinking of the proponents of *pembaharuan*. According to *Islam transformasi*, the idea of *pembaharuan* tended to concentrate on theological perspective and paid less attention to societal one. The result is that *pembaharuan* did not reach the essential element of the problem faced by Indonesian Muslims.

Liberal Islam in the sense adopted by JIL, considers Islamic teachings and modernity as important parts of interpretation. This concept was widely introduced by some Indonesian Muslim scholars during the 1970s. People like Nurcholish Madjid, Harun Nasution, and Abdurrahman Wahid promoted ideas known as *pembaharuan pemikiran Islam* (Renewal of Islamic Thought) which share similarities to the ideas of JIL.

However, despite their similarities, the different social and political backgrounds against which both movements evolved have provided different attitudes to liberalism. The ideas upheld by Renewal of Islamic Thought were the result of a direct response to the development programme introduced by the New Order government. All ideas were designed in line with the programme. This liberal group considers modernity to play a great role in understanding Islam. Renewal of Islamic Thought also paid equal attention to both modernity and local values of Indonesian society in its interpretation of Islam. Contrary to this, the concepts adopted by JIL were formed to stem the development of Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia, and in some cases contradicted state policy.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**THE VIEW OF THE JARINGAN ISLAM LIBERAL**  
**ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND PLURALISM**

*Other religions are equally valid ways to the same truth*  
(John Hick); *Other religions speak of different but*  
*equally valid truths* (John B. Cobb Jr); *Each religion*  
*expresses an important part of the truth* (Raimundo

*Panikkar), or, every religion expresses the existence of*  
*The one in the many* (Seyyed Hossein Nasr)\*

**A. Introduction**

As a proponent of liberal Islam, JIL advocates a critical understanding of Islamic teachings by searching for meaning beyond the text. In the modern world, modernity plays a significant role, and is incorporated into the agenda of the movement of liberal Islam.

This chapter offers an in depth analysis of the agenda of JIL by concentrating on the view of JIL on the particular issues of religious freedom and pluralism. In order to obtain a better understanding of this view, the analysis starts with a brief explanation of these issues in Indonesia.

**B. Religious Freedom and Pluralism in Indonesia**

Jaringan Islam Liberal argues that religious freedom is an integral part of freedom of expression. This idea is based on the belief that the right of religious expression is a fundamental right of every human being. Everyone is free to follow a religion and become a religious person or not to follow a religion and become an atheist.<sup>175</sup>

The idea of religious freedom bears a close relation to the idea of religious pluralism, an idea which concentrates on the variety of forms of, and the relativity of truth. The variety of forms of religion and belief are looked at as a natural phenomenon

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\* Quoted from Budhy Munawar-Rachman, *Islam Pluralis*, Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001.

<sup>175</sup> See Djohan Effendi, "Harus Ada Kebebasan Tidak Beragama", in Luthfi Assyauckanie (ed.), *Seri Islam Liberal: Wajah Liberal Islam di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Jaringan Islam Liberal, 2002. pp. 35-38.



and all religions exist to guide human beings to reach the truth and be wise in their understandings of primordial time.<sup>176</sup>

It is generally acknowledged among Indonesian people that religious plurality is a fact faced by Indonesian society. The major religions, which are officially accepted by the state, are Islam, Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant streams, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. There are also some local religions (*aliran-aliran kepercayaan*) which are now recognized. The followers of these religions believe that their specific religious teachings should be actualized in their daily lives. In this, religion has the potential to stimulate conflict in a highly heterogeneous society. Indeed, social conflict has been caused by divergent religious interests between the groups of the society.<sup>177</sup> In such a society, common interests and purposes which bind all groups of the society, play a significant role in unifying the society. One such commonality is the idea of religious freedom and pluralism, which pays considerable attention to the existence of the various groups within society.

The ideas surrounding religious freedom and pluralism support the right to observe a religion or no religion. This right is a private matter although it impacts upon society as a whole. In this context, the awareness of the freedom of expression and religious plurality is of inestimable importance.

Historically, the practice of religious freedom and pluralism among Indonesians has been considered to be a success story both in traditional and in modern Indonesia. The state protects the individual right to be free to follow a religion of individual choice.<sup>178</sup> For the sake of state integrity and harmonic relations between religious communities, the state does not have the power to prosecute citizens who follow a certain religion. Adherence to religion is a fundamental right of Indonesians. The constitution of Indonesia argues that Indonesia is a state founded on the basis of belief in the One and Only God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*),<sup>179</sup> and the state also guarantees its citizens the right to follow one of the officially accepted religions.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> The issues surrounding *kristenisasi*, propagating Christianity, is one example of a social tension caused by religious issues. After the collapse of the Indonesian New Order, serious conflict threatened religious pluralism. In recent days, inter-religious tension has been coloured by physical conflict, the recent strife in Sambas and Maluku are examples of this socio-religious conflict.

<sup>178</sup> During the period of the Indonesian New Order, only five religions were allowed to exist in Indonesia. So religious freedom in Indonesia was freedom in a restricted sense.

<sup>179</sup> "*Negara berdasarkan atas Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*" (The state is based on the belief in

Although the ideas of religious freedom and pluralism are guaranteed by the constitution, the issues are still highly controversial and face challenges. The biggest challenge comes from proselytizing religions as they invite others, who may not be so enthusiastic, to join their religion.<sup>181</sup>

Conversionist religion is a serious challenge. In contrast to the position of religious pluralism, it is founded on the basis of a binary opposition which considers others to be rivals, who should be invited to be a part of themselves.<sup>182</sup> In this context, the efforts of *Islamisasi*, invitation and propagation to convert to Islam and *Kristenisasi*, propagation to be a Christian, are examples.<sup>183</sup> As missionary religions, Islam and Christianity oblige their followers to propagate their teachings. The followers invite others to follow their beliefs in order to reach salvation. This is a serious problem contrary to the idea of pluralism which has to be equated with tolerance and the idea live and let live.<sup>184</sup>

Another challenge to pluralism is fanaticism among certain followers of some religions. All religions teach their followers to consistently perform their teachings in all aspects of life. This concept insists on followers showing their different religious identities to each other. The emergence of different identities within society creates boundaries and differentiation between the self and the other. In this situation, fanaticism among the followers of religions has the potential to come to the fore. Fanaticism grows from the exclusiveness of the group which looks at its religion as the only right one. Exclusive people believe that the only truth is that which is in accordance with their belief because only one truth can be followed. This idea too, is contrary to the idea of pluralism, which supports diversity.<sup>185</sup>

The truth claim is one of the problems among Indonesians. This comes from the religious teachings itself. Religion, on the one hand, can teach an inclusive doctrine which acknowledges other religions as partners; on the other hand, religion can also

the One and Only God). Article 29 (1) the Constitution of 1945 of the Indonesian Republic.

<sup>180</sup> Article 29 (2) of the Constitution of 1945 of the Indonesian Republic: "*Negera menjamin kemerdekaan tiap-tiap penduduk untuk memeluk agamanya masing-masing dan untuk beribadat menurut agamanya dan kepercayaannya itu.* (The state guarantees the people to adhere to their own religion and to worship in accordance with their religion and beliefs).

<sup>181</sup> See Nurcholish Madjid, "Pluralisme Agama di Indonesia," *Ulumul Qur'an*, No. 3 Vol. VI 1995, Jakarta: LSAF, 1995, pp. 66-67.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>184</sup> Yusril Ihza Mahendra, "HAM, Pluralisme Agama", p. 145.

<sup>185</sup> See Djohan Effendi, "Harus Ada Kebebasan Tidak Beragama", p. 136.

insist on its followers believing in its doctrines as the best one among all religions. In this context, there are groups of Muslims, and groups of adherents of other religions, who believe that their religion is the only religion which teaches the truth and the path to salvation. The Qur'an, for example, states that the only religion accepted by God is Islam (*inna al-dīn 'inda Allāh al-Islām*). Some Muslims understand this doctrine as implying a rejection of the truth of other religions. This is a serious threat to the idea of religious pluralism. Thus, the idea of religious pluralism among Indonesian Muslims faces two types of challenges. The first are merely external challenges to the Muslim community like the missionary activities of other religions. The second includes both internal and external challenges like fanaticism and exclusive claims to truth.

Under such conditions, the proponents of JIL who uphold the idea of religious pluralism are challenged to reformulate the principles of human rights in Islam. Indonesians, including Muslims, insist on formulating the best way to overcome the problem of religious freedom and pluralism.<sup>186</sup> This is crucial because in order to respond to internal and external challenges, a continuous interpretation of the doctrines of Islam in order to achieve a better understanding of reality need to be undertaken.

### **C. Jaringan Islam Liberal on Religious Freedom and Pluralism**

Two of JIL's principles bear a close relationship to the idea of religious freedom and pluralism: the principle of the openness and plurality of truth ---a general discussion of these principles has been offered in Chapter Two. Unfortunately, the proponents of JIL do not develop their principles in more detail. Therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of its opinions, the stance of JIL on religious freedom and pluralism will be discussed in depth by looking at the opinions of Muslim scholars who are published by JIL through either print material or the JIL's website.

Gramsci proposed a concept of the organic intellectual which looks at the intellectual as the thinker of a particular social class and group which has a duty to direct the ideas and aspirations of the class and group to which they belong. In this context, there is a correlation between the class or group and the intellectual (scholar).

<sup>186</sup> In the words of Abdul Moqith Ghazali, Muslims should reinterpret religious doctrines which have a close relation to inter-religion relationships such as the term of *dhimmi* (infidels who cooperate with Muslims), *ahl al-kitāb* (people of the Book) and *kāfir* (infidel). See Abdul Moqith Ghazali, "Cetak Biru Toleransi di Indonesia," <http://www.islamlib.com/id/page.php?page=article&id=162>, accessed on 11 November 2003.

On the one hand, an organic intellectual will always uphold the ideas which support the existence of their class or group, on the other hand, an institution will not spread ideas that are in contradiction to its principles. Based on this conviction, while Gramsci focuses on the intellectual and the class, in this thesis, the analysis focuses on the relationship between the intellectual and JIL as a social community. Therefore works of scholars on any particular matter published by JIL will be claimed as opinions which are supported by JIL.<sup>187</sup>

To support the dissemination of the ideas of religious freedom and pluralism, the proponents of JIL involve many liberal Muslim figures. People who are well known as proponents of liberal Islam like Nurcholish Madjid, Djohan Effendi, Masdar F. Mas'udi and Azyumardi Azra have been interviewed through talk show programmes broadcasted by the *Namlapanha* radio station and its network. These people speak about religious freedom and pluralism.<sup>188</sup> Some discussion which are related to the agenda of JIL include: "Penerapan Syari'at Islam Bisa Kontra Produktif" (The Implementation of *Shari'a* could be Contra-productive) by Azyumardi Azra, "Penganut Budha dan Hindu adalah Ahlul Kitab" (The Adherences of Buddhism and Hinduism are People of Book) by Zainul Kamal, "Harus ada Kebebasan untuk Tidak Beragama (There should be Freedom for Not Embracing Religion) by Djohan Effendi and "Orang Beragama Tidak Boleh Dipaksa" (Embracing Religion Could not be Prosecuted) by Nurcholish Madjid.<sup>189</sup>

Printed materials are also an effective medium through which to disseminate the ideas of liberal Islam. This type of medium seems more effective in inviting contributors to it than electronic media. Whilst talk shows through radio involve public figures of liberal Islam, printed media involves anyone who is interested in the idea of liberal Islam and has an ability to express ideas in written works. On the idea of religious freedom and pluralism, many works have been written such as: "Basis Teologi Persaudaraan antar Agama" (The Foundation of Inter-Religious Brotherhood) by Budhi Munawar Rahman, "Dialog, Bukan Konfrontasi" (Dialogue, Not Confrontation) by Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, "Konsep Dhimmi dalam Islam" (The Concept of *Dhimmī* in Islam) by

<sup>187</sup> On organic intellectuals, see Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Newell Smith (eds), *Selections From The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978, pp. 4, 14.

<sup>188</sup> Asrori S. Karni, "Kampanye Baru," p. 65. To reach wider audiences, these interviews have also been publicized through [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. See also Luthfi Assyaukanie, *Wajah Liberal Islam*.

Hamka Haq, "Cetak Biru Toleransi di Indonesia" (Blueprint of Religious Tolerance in Indonesia) by Abdul Moqsith Ghazali, and "Menyegarkan Wacana Ahli Kitab" (Freshening the Discourse of *Ahl al-Kitāb*) by Cecep Ramli Bihar Anwar.<sup>190</sup> All these people have similar opinions expressed in these interviews and works on religious freedom and pluralism. They believe in the spirit of religious pluralism in Islam and they encourage pragmatism in Indonesia, ideas which are in line with the agenda of JIL discussed above. This relationship also demonstrates a mutual relationship between JIL as a network of liberal Islam and those people who have liberal understandings of Islamic teachings. Such intellectuals require space to freely express, and to disseminate their ideas and JIL provides this access.

### 1. Religious Expression as a Private Right

The Muslim community is the largest religious community in Indonesia. Thus its standpoint on religious freedom and religious pluralism is of particular importance for Indonesian society at large.<sup>191</sup> Although there are Muslims, particularly fundamentalist Muslims, who reject the idea of religious pluralism,<sup>192</sup> many Muslims believe that the idea of religious freedom and pluralism itself is fundamental to Islamic doctrines. Islam teaches its followers to behave respectfully to non-Muslims because plurality of societies and religions is natural for human beings. The concept of the people of Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) is the example of the acceptance by Islam of others.<sup>193</sup> Thus it should have great importance for Muslims.

In order to understand more fully the position of non-Muslims for JIL, its principle on the freedom of belief and faith needs to be examined. It states:

LI [liberal Islam] considers that the matter of "being religious" or "being not religious" is a personal right that should be protected. LI does not abide any prosecution on the base [basis?] of an opinion or belief.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>190</sup> <http://www.islamlib.com/article/id.php>. Accessed on 11 November 2003.

<sup>191</sup> See Nurcholish Madjid, "Hak Asasi Manusia, Pluralisme Agama dan Integrasi Nasional (Konsep dan Aktualisasi)", in Anshari Thayib et al. (eds.), *HAM dan Pluralisme Agama*. Surabaya: PKSK, 1997, pp. 57-59. See also, Yusril Ihza Mahendra, "HAM, Pluralisme Agama dan Integrasi Nasional (Antara Harapan dan Kenyataan)", in Anshari Thayib et al. (eds.), *Ibid.*, pp. 141-149.

<sup>192</sup> Muslims who reject the idea of religious pluralism as propagated by JIL are, for example: Hartono Ahmad Jaiz in his *Bahaya Islam Liberal*; Adian Husaini and Nuim Hidayat in their *Islam Liberal*; Athian Ali in an interview with Gatra, "Islam Liberal: Tafsir Agama Pemicu Fatwa".

<sup>193</sup> See Muhammad Galib M., *Ahl al-kitāb, Makna dan Cakupannya*, Jakarta: Paramadina, 1998, p. 157.

<sup>194</sup> See "About Liberal Islam Network", [www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php](http://www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php). This differs from the stand of fundamentalist Islam which believes that religion is not only a part of the private sphere, but



This statement demonstrates that JIL tries to classify of human rights into two categories: personal or private and collective or public. The first refers to the right which is based on the accountability of human beings as independent and individual agents. The latter refers to collective accountability. In this case, JIL believes that professing a religion is a private right. The matter of being religious or unreligious depends solely on the responsibility of everyone as individual agents. This is based on the conviction that the principle of freedom of belief and faith is a fundamental right for everyone.

According to JIL, religious matters are personal or private and everyone is free to follow his or her belief whether it is Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism or Confucianism, or even atheism. Autonomy of belief grants the individual full responsibility for one's self and should be respected. Prosecution and oppression in the name of religion and faith even by the state, is not allowed because it contradicts the spirit of this basic right.<sup>195</sup>

The principle on freedom of religion and faith is defended by Djohan Effendi.<sup>196</sup> He argues that the state does not have a right to force people to profess a religion. The role of the state in religious affairs should only be to support an environment conducive to the free expression of religious belief be it prayer, the teaching of religion, the celebration of holidays and so forth. In this respect, the state acts as a servant to the people.<sup>197</sup>

In addition to freedom of religion and faith, the members of JIL argue that plurality is a concept natural to human beings. This group believes that Islam teaches tolerance and acceptance of a variety of forms of religions as a part of this nature. The Qur'an itself argues that pluralism is a part of destination.<sup>198</sup>

The idea of tolerance by JIL is closely related to the idea of relativity and plurality. The members of JIL believe that truth in religious interpretation is relative, in the sense that it is limited by the subjectivity of the interpreter and by the space where,

a part of the public sphere. This is indicated by the obligation for Muslims to perform *da'wa* (Islamic propagation) on non-Muslims as the Prophet did. See Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Bahaya Islam Liberal*, p. 85.

<sup>195</sup> See "About Liberal Islam Network", [www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php](http://www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php).

<sup>196</sup> Djohan Effendi, "Harus ada Kebebasan Tidak Beragama", pp. 135-136. This contradicts stand of fundamentalist Muslims who insist on state regulation of religion. See Umar Basalim, *Kontra Piagam Jakarta di Era Reformasi*, Jakarta: Pustaka Indonesia Satu, 2002, pp. 140-153.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> For example Q.S. al-Ma'idah (5): 48.

and the time when, interpretation occurs. According to JIL, truth in religious interpretation is a human activity which is “shackled,” therefore, it is possible that an interpretation may not be completely true.<sup>199</sup>

## 2. Redefining the self and the other

The idea of religious pluralism upheld by the members of JIL has a significant impact on ideas about religion as a path to salvation. Pluralism is based on the conviction that all religions propose the concept of salvation in different ways. In this context, religious identity, particular characteristics of religion which differentiate one religion from another, have significant importance.<sup>200</sup> The matter of religious identity colours how the followers of a particular religion view themselves and others. To this end, terms of exclusion and inclusion seem to be an intrinsic part of all religions. The Qur'an, for example, proposes two terms, *īmān* and *kufṛ*, to refer to faith and disbelief.<sup>201</sup> These terms describe the definition of the self and other among Muslims and influence the acceptance of Muslims to the other.<sup>202</sup> Based on both terms, some questions can be raised, such as how do Muslims look at the other? And how do Muslims position themselves among the others?

By analyzing these questions, the view of JIL on religious freedom and pluralism will be elucidated upon. In particular the view of JIL will be explained from the view of the members of this group on the concept of the peoples of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). This choice is based on the conviction that the way people look at self-identity and the way they define themselves and the other has a significant impact on the way they behave towards the other. Unlike the concept of *kufṛ*, which positions Islam in

<sup>199</sup> “About Liberal Islam Network”, [www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php](http://www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php).

<sup>200</sup> See Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion*, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, pp. 70-80.

<sup>201</sup> The discussion on both *iman* and *kufṛ*, can be seen in the work of Farid Essack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism, An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2002, p. 114. In this work, Essack tries to trace the concept of *īmān* and *kufṛ* through the works of classical and medieval Muslim scholars. He concludes that the terms *īmān*, *islām*, and *kufṛ* are ethical terms proposed by the Qur'an to affirm the basic ethos of justice and injustice, and they are not labels that are counted by God, but actions that are weighed. See also Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology, A Semantic Analysis of Iman and Islam*, Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1965; Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in The Qur'an*, Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966, pp.105-177. In both works, Izutsu tries to explain the term *īmān* and *kufṛ* on the basis of a semantic analysis by using a binary approach which places the ethical concepts of the Qur'an into two radically opposed categories. With this in mind, he argues that *īmān* is a term dealing with positive moral and *kufṛ* is a term referring to negative morals.

<sup>202</sup> Essack argues that the understanding of the concept of faith (*īmān*) and disbelief (*kufṛ*) provides insights in the way Muslims define themselves and the other. See *Ibid.*, pp. 114-144.

opposition to other religions and tends to reject other religions, the concept of the people of the Book is a theological concept that implies acceptance of other religions. The concept of *ahl al-kitāb* in Islam positions the other as a partner who should be respected.<sup>203</sup> This concept is closely tied to religious pluralism. Thus this discussion will deal with the way the members of JIL understand the concept of the people of the Book.

The term *ahl al-kitāb*, lexically is a term which refers to the possessors of Holy Scripture revealed to the prophet.<sup>204</sup> In this sense, Holy Scripture takes a central position as the main condition of the people of the book. The term can also be understood as a group of people who believe in a prophet and a holy book.<sup>205</sup> However, when the term becomes a religious concept, as in Islam, to represent other religions, does it refer to the followers of all religions which believe in the Holy Scripture? Can these groups all be classified as *ahl al-kitāb*?

As yet there is no consensus among Muslims on the concept of *ahl al-kitāb*. Some Muslims argue that the term refers only to the Jews (*Yahūdī*) and Christians (*Nasrānī*). Al-Shāfi'ī, however, argues that the term needs to be understood in a narrower ethnic sense. Thus the term for him only refers to Jews and Christians who are descendants of Isaac (*banī Isrā'īl*).<sup>206</sup> Alternatively, there is the view of the majority of scholars of Islamic law, who consider the term refers to both *Yahūdī* and *Nasrānī*, and any person who believes in a prophet or a holy book revealed to a prophet. There are also those who believe the term refers to any religion whose doctrines are based on a holy text. According to this view, the Qur'an itself mentions Sabeans (*sābi'īn*), a group who believe in God, as a group of believers. In this sense, the term also covers Hindus and Buddhists.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>203</sup> Although on some particular occasions the Qur'an condemns *ahl al-kitāb* as people who compete against Muslims like the statement of the Qur'an on their will to call Muslims to join their belief, the Qur'an generally looks at them in a positive way. There is no prohibition from avoiding contact with them and the Qur'an positions them as partners of Muslims. The proof of the partnership between Muslims and the *ahl al-kitāb* can be shown in allowing Muslim men to marry women of the *ahl al-kitāb*, Muslims are also allowed to eat the food (meat) of the *ahl al-kitāb*. But Muslims are not allowed to take wives and food from people of the *ahl al-kitāb*. See Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an*, Bandung: Mizan, 1996, p. 371; Muhammad Galib M., *Ahl al-Kitāb, Makna dan Cakupannya*, Jakarta: Paramadina, 1998, pp. 157-180.

<sup>204</sup> H.A.R. Gibb et al. (eds.), "Ahl al-kitāb," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. I, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> See Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an*, p. 366; Muhammad Galib M., *Ahl al-Kitāb*, pp. 28-38.

<sup>207</sup> Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an*, p. 267.

The view of the proponents of JIL on the concept of *ahl al-kitāb* seems closest to this last view, which is an inclusive classification of Jews, Christians, and those who follow other holy texts. This is clearly expressed in an article included in *Wajah Liberal Islam di Indonesia* published by JIL and on their website [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com). An interview with Zainun Kamal also demonstrates that the term refers to all religions and beliefs following Holy Scriptures and prophets.<sup>208</sup> According to him, the main point of the appellation *ahl al-kitāb* is belief in a holy text. So the followers of Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism can be classified as part of the peoples of the Book.<sup>209</sup>

In addition, Zainun Kamal argues that in early Islam, the term *ahl al-kitāb* did tend to refer to both Jews and Christians. Both Judaism and Christianity were well known at that time and the Prophet interacted with members of both groups. Thus in that period, the term mainly referred to the Jews and Christians. Over time, this definition spread widely among Muslims and became accepted as the mainstream understanding of the term. Furthermore, some works of classical Muslims show that when the term is mentioned, it refers to Jews and Christians and that followers of other religions, such as Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Buddhism, are excluded from the definition.<sup>210</sup> Today, most Muslims continue to argue on the extent of the *ahl al-kitāb*.

Despite this exclusive understanding of the term, some Muslim scholars have tried interpret the term to be more inclusive.<sup>211</sup> This began in the period of medieval Islam. Al-Baghdadi (980-1037), in his *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, argued that the term not only referred to the followers of Judaism and Christianity, but also to the followers of other religions such as Zoroastrianism and Sabeanism. According to al-Baghdadi, the main element of *ahl al-kitāb* is the belief in a holy book and a prophet. Thus, the followers of religions having a prophet and a holy book can be classified as peoples of the Book. Zoroastrians can be classified as a group of people of the Book because they believe in the teachings and the prophethood of Zarathustra, additionally, the Sabeans

<sup>208</sup> See Zainun Kamal, "Penganut Budha dan Hindu, pp. 143-147.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>210</sup> For example, the work of al-Tabarī, see Ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān an Ta'wīl Ay al-Qur'ān*, Vol. VI, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984, p.102; al-Shartastani, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, p. 209; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Tafsīr al-Qāsimī*, Vol. VI, Cairo: Isā al-Bābī al-Halbi, 1958, pp. 1863.

<sup>211</sup> See Zainun Kamal, "Penganut Budha", in Luthfi Assyaukanie, *Wajah Liberal Islam*, p. 143-147.

believe in the prophethood of Hermes, Plato and other philosophers and can, thus, also be included.<sup>212</sup>

The definition of *ahl al-kitāb* in this wider sense is also held by Muhammad ‘Abduh and his pupil, Rashīd Rida. According to them, the term of *ahl al-kitāb* covers all peoples who believe in a holy book. In this sense, the followers of Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism are a part of the *ahl al-kitāb*.<sup>213</sup>

After having discussed the view points on the concept of “people of the Book” of various groups of Muslims, including JIL we can turn to a related question, their attitudes towards the *ahl al-kitāb*. This is difficult task because on the one hand, the Qur’an says that some groups of *ahl al-kitāb* have similar attitudes to infidels (*kāfir*),<sup>214</sup> in the sense that they are groups of peoples who agitate Muslims to join their belief. On the other hand, the Qur’an also considers them to differ from the infidel and appreciates them as a group of people whose belief focuses on a path to salvation.<sup>215</sup>

Among Muslims scholars, again, there are a number of opinions voiced on this issue. Quraish Shihab, an Indonesian Muslim scholar on Qur’anic exegeses, argues that the Qur’an basically pays respectful attention to the *ahl al-kitāb*. There are no obstacles to Muslims keeping in contact with them on social or cultural matters (*mu‘āmalah*) in the achievement of social justice. According to him, their condemnation in the Qur’an is mainly based on their political and economical attitudes, especially the attitude of Jews to Muslims.<sup>216</sup> Unfortunately, he does not explain the political attitude of Jews which causes the Qur’an to condemn them. It seems that the political attitude of Jews refers to their response to the prophethood of Muhammad as mentioned by the Qur’an. They

<sup>212</sup> See ‘Abd al-Qāhir b. Tāhir Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-Fīraq*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, p. 76, Ibn Hazm is another Muslim scholar who believe that Zoroastrianism (*Majāzī*) is a follower of People of the Book. See Ibn Hazm, *al-Muhalla*, Vol. VI, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d., p.445.

<sup>213</sup> See Muhammad ‘Abduh & Rasid Rida, *Tafsīr al-Manār* Vol. VI, pp. 185-189. It is interesting to note the development of Rida’s view on the concept of the *ahl al-kitāb*. In his *Manār*, Rida argues firstly that he believes that the term refers to both Jews and Christians, but then, he includes other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism.

<sup>214</sup> For example, see Q.S. al-Baqāra (2): 109; Q.S. Ali ‘Imrān (3): 69, 100; in these verses, *ahl al-kitāb* is described as a group of people who want Muslims to become infidels and fall into the darkness.

<sup>215</sup> For example Q.S. al-Baqāra (2): 146; Alī ‘Imrān (3): 199.

<sup>216</sup> The Qur’an also warns Muslims to be careful in their faith. See M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur’an*, Bandung: Mizan, 1996, p. 371.



were not happy with the emergence of Islam because Muhammad, as the prophet of Islam, was not a Jew.<sup>217</sup>

According to Muhammad Galib, Hassan Hanafi, an Egyptian Muslim scholar, also attempts to explain the condemnation by the Qur'an of the *ahl al-kitāb*. Hanafi believes that it is related to their attitudes and deeds regarding their religion. They break the rules of their religions to worship one God and they reject giving thanks to God. Jews also practise the giving of financial interest (*ribā*) in their daily lives and they are an exclusive group who do not respect others.<sup>218</sup> According to Hanafi, the condemnation of the Qur'an is in response to their infidelity to God.<sup>219</sup>

Whilst some Muslim scholars have different opinions on the condemnation by the Qur'an of the people of the Book, the view of JIL on Muslim's attitudes to *ahl al-kitāb* reflects an attempt to soften the barrier of identity by focusing on the similarities between Islam and them. Some proponents of JIL try to create partnerships between Muslims and the *ahl al-kitāb* not only in the social sphere, but also in the theological sphere. In this case, JIL argues that *ahl al-kitāb* is a group of peoples who believe in revealed religions and are thus not infidels. An article "Menyegarkan Wacana Ahli Kitab" (Freshening *Ahl al-kitāb* Discourse) by Cecep Ramli Bihar Anwar (Cecep), which is published through [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com), shows that the Qur'an argues that the *ahl al-kitāb* are not groups of infidels (*kāfir*).<sup>220</sup> He argues that negative perceptions and attitudes of Muslims to *ahl al-kitāb* are an effect of two distortions made by Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*), especially al-Ghazzālī.<sup>221</sup> The first is the opinion of certain Muslim theologians that *ahl al-kitāb* reject the prophethood of Muhammad. This opinion has exerted a significant influence on Muslim outlooks on *ahl al-kitāb*. Although *ahl al-kitāb* are classified and accepted as followers of revealed religions,

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 359. Cf. Muhammad Galib M., *Ahl al-Kitāb*, p. 147.

<sup>218</sup> On the exclusivity of *ahl al-Kitāb*, Muhammad Galib argues that they not only have an exclusive attitude to Muslims, but also among themselves. They only keep in contact with the people who have the same belief as them. The Jews only have a good relation among themselves, not with Christians and Muslims. See Muhammad Galib M. *Ahl al-Kitāb*, p. 157.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., pp.150-157.  
<sup>220</sup> See Cecep Ramli Bihar Anwar, "Menyegarkan Wacana Ahli Kitab", <http://www.islamlib.com/id/page.php?page=article&id=130>. Accessed on 5 October 2003.

<sup>221</sup> According to Cecep, al-Ghazzālī is a Muslim who is responsible for the condemnation of the *ahl al-kitāb* as infidels. The author notes that al-Ghazzālī, in his *fiṣāl al-Tafriqa baina al-Islām wa al-Zindīqa*, argues that infidelity is the rejection of the prophethood of Muhammad and his teachings. Jews and Christians are infidels because they do not believe in the prophethood of Muhammad; and followers of Hinduism are infidels because they do not believe in the prophethood of Muhammad or other prophets. Ibid.

many groups of Muslims condemn them as infidels because they reject the prophethood of Muhammad. The second is the accusation on the deviation of the Bible.<sup>222</sup> This accusation is based on the *sura* of the Qur'an, al-Ma'idah (5): 13 saying that *ahl al-kitāb* are people who have corrupted and made deviations in their teachings. On this claim, Cecep argues that this *sura* is not a condemnation, by the Qur'an, of them as infidels. It should be more appropriately understood as a historical critique in the Qur'an of the Bible, not a theological critique. Adopting Muhammad Arkoun's theory on the historicity of the holy book, which argues that the contents of the holy book can be misunderstood by its followers, Cecep says that this verse is a warning against the reification of religious doctrines by their followers, including that of Islam. If the doctrines are reified, they will lose their prophetic mission.<sup>223</sup>

In the last part of his article, Cecep proposes an inter-religious partnership by insisting on the mutual understanding of all followers of religions which provide opportunities for inter-religious dialogue, because the Qur'an itself supports this spirit of dialogue. This idea is in line with the ideas of Budhy Munawar-Rahman<sup>224</sup> and Ulil Abshar-Abdalla.<sup>225</sup>

Budhy Munawar-Rahman insists on the brotherhood of human beings and believers, citing Q.S. al-Hujura (49): 10-12 which describes the brotherhood among believers as an ideal type of brotherhood. According to him, the believer in this verse should be understood in an inclusive manner by giving it its generic meaning, that is a person who submits to the Will of God. In this sense, the form of religion is not essential.<sup>226</sup> Such an interpretation is crucial for the formation of the idea of the brotherhood of human beings, which will lead to the idea of religious tolerance and pluralism.<sup>227</sup> Ulil Abshar-Abdalla is another person who insists on inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, between Islam and the West in particular. He believes that this

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Budhy Munawar-Rahman, "Basis Teologi Persaudaraan antar Agama", in Luthfi Assyauckanie (ed.), *Wajah Liberal Islam*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>225</sup> Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, "Dialog, Bukan Kofrontasi", in Luthfi Assyauckanie (ed.), *Wajah Liberal Islam*, pp. 54-59.

<sup>226</sup> Budhy Munawar-Rahman, "Basis Teologi", p. 51.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

intercultural relationship is the best way to cool down the tensions between both groups.<sup>228</sup>

All the explanations above show that JIL tries to soften the strict barrier between religions by proposing the similarity of religions through the concept of pluralistic theology. The concept pays less attention to the different self-identities. Self-identity is not really important in the concept of religious plurality because pluralistic theology considers all religions similar to each other. Religion is the one among the many. Many religions speak of different but equally valid truths.<sup>229</sup>

### 3. Between Text and Context

One of the main characteristics of liberal Islam is searching the essential meaning of the text by taking into consideration the context within which the text is formed in the interpretation. As was discussed before, liberal Islam concentrates on the idea of substantialism, which insists on the essential understanding of Islamic teachings and rejects the literal interpretation of the text. An authoritative and valid interpretation is an interpretation beyond the text. All attempts by JIL to understand Islamic teachings should be understood as an effort of understanding the text by considering the context in which JIL exists. The view of JIL on religious freedom and pluralism should be considered within this framework. It cannot be separated from the way members of JIL understand Islamic teachings on the acceptance of other religions, the context of modernity by which JIL is inspired, or the Indonesian context in which JIL exists.

As mentioned previously, although the constitution guarantees to the people the right to freely confess their beliefs as mentioned in the article 29 (1) and (2) of the constitution 1945 of the Republic Indonesia, it is generally understood as "strict" freedom and pluralism. Firstly, the state does not allow the people not to profess religion and atheists. Everyone should profess a religion or a belief. This means that the state gives only one choice to the people, that is to be a religious people. Secondly, there are only six religions which are accepted as official in Indonesia. Therefore, the freedom of religion in the country is a freedom of the people to abide by one of these

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<sup>228</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla, "Dialog," p. 56.

<sup>229</sup> On pluralistic theology, see for example, Budhy Munawar-Rahman, "Memudarnya Kerukunan Hidup Beragama, Agama-Agama Harus Berdialog", at [www.islamlib.com.-article/id.php](http://www.islamlib.com.-article/id.php), accessed on 7 February 2003.

religions and thus religious pluralism in Indonesia is restricted to these religions. How does JIL view this situation?

As a proponent of liberal Islam, JIL upholds the ideas of religious freedom and pluralism as it currently exists in Indonesia. However, the group is not enslaved by the ideology of religious freedom and pluralism of the state at the theoretical level. The members of JIL argue that religion is a private affair and everyone has a right to freely follow any religion, even to have no religion. Prosecution on the basis of faith is seen as an oppression of a human right. Two interviews with Nurcholish Madjid, "Orang Beragama Tak Boleh Dipaksa" (The Oppression to Profess Religion is Not Allowed),<sup>230</sup> and Djohan Effendi entitled "Harus Ada Kebebasan Tidak Beragama" (Freedom of not Professing Religion Should be There),<sup>231</sup> clarify a concept of religious freedom.

Nurcholish Madjid argues that plurality is a fact by nature. It is a part of God's determinations. Therefore, anyone who rejects plurality rejects God's will. Thus, religious freedom is a fundamental right of human beings.<sup>232</sup>

Besides the right to have a one's religion, everyone has a right not to have a religion. Both rights are private and fundamental rights for everyone which should be protected. There is no prosecution allowed, the state does not even have the right to regulate these rights. The state only has a right to provide space for the people to actualize their beliefs.<sup>233</sup> In this context, the stand of JIL on religious freedom and pluralism can be claimed as an opinion which is not in accordance with the state.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>230</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, "Orang Beragama Tak Boleh Dipaksa", in Luthfi Assyauckanie (ed.), *Wajah Liberal Islam*, pp. 139-142.

<sup>231</sup> Djohan Effendi, "Harus Ada Kebebasan Tidak Beragama", in Luthfi Assyauckanie (ed.), *Wajah Liberal Islam*, p. 135-138. This interview is also available in <http://www.islamlib.com/id/page.php?page=article&id=172>, accessed on 11 November 2003.

<sup>232</sup> See Nurcholsih Madjid, "Orang Beragama," p. 139.

<sup>233</sup> Djohan Effendi entitled "Harus Ada Kebebasan," p. 135-138.

<sup>234</sup> Although after the collapse of Indonesian New Order it is difficult to formulate clearly the stand of the state on religious pluralism, it can be generally said that there is no significantly different view on these matters to that of the period of the Indonesian New Order government. One difference is the acceptance by the state of Confucianism as an officially accepted religion in Indonesia. Some commentaries on Rancangan Undang-Undang Kerukunan Umat Beragama 2003 (the draft bill of Inter-religious Harmony) indicate that the appreciation of the state on the concept of religious freedom and pluralism after the Indonesian New Order has not changed. Even in some cases, the draft indicates that the state tries to have a control wider than in the period of Indonesian New Order. An example is inter-religious marriage. In the period of Indonesian New Order, inter-religious marriage was a private affair and the state did not regulate this, but the draft, article 1 (11); article 15, proposes a regulation on this matter. Some articles have been devoted to criticize the draft. Zuly Qodir, for example, in his article "Mengkritisi RUU KUB," (Criticizing RUU KUB), *Kompas*, 13 November 2003 argues that it will be better to leave religion as a private affair rather than trying to regulate it as the state does.

On the other hand, the discussion on other religions which JIL upholds, cannot be separated from the discussion on Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The discussion is dominated by issues of inter-religious dialogue among these religions. So, although the stand of JIL on religious freedom and pluralism at a conceptual level is liberal in the sense that everyone has a right to or not to become religious, the view of JIL on both issues shows that in discussions the members of JIL cannot extricate themselves from the dominant ideology and from the discussion of religious plurality in Indonesia. This indicates an intensive tension between modernity, particularly liberalism which JIL upholds, which insists on the liberality of religious freedom and pluralism in its original meaning, and the context of Indonesian society as a religious society where atheism is unacceptable, and the state only accepts following one of five religions.

The tension between the issue of modernity and the local context within the discussion on religious freedom and pluralism can be analyzed on the basis of two assumptions. The first one, which was encountered in discussions between JIL and other Indonesian Muslims, is that JIL has failed to escape from the domination of the state in which it exists, a state which restricts religious freedom and pluralism. In this context JIL is framed under, what Gramsci calls the historical bloc, that is a mutual influence, or even dependency, between the praxis (structure) and the ideology of the state (superstructure).<sup>235</sup> In the case of JIL, all the applications of the ideas relating to religious freedom and pluralism should be in conformity with the dominant stream or ideology of the state. The second assumption is that it is an attempt of JIL to provide a solution for a particular real problem faced by the society in which JIL exists. Religious tolerance and pluralism among those religions mentioned is a fact that Indonesian Muslim society is entwined with.

From both assumptions, this work tends to argue that the second assumption is stronger than the first one. Several arguments can be mentioned in support of this conclusion. Firstly, the main agenda of JIL relating to religious freedom and pluralism is different from state policy. Whilst the state defines religious freedom and pluralism in a limited sense, JIL tries to propose an alternative idea on religious freedom by defining the term by its original meaning. Secondly, the main object which JIL faces is the

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<sup>235</sup> See Esteve Morera, *Gramsci's Historicism, A Realist Interpretation*, London/New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 139-140.



society not the state. This is different from the movement of Renewal of Islamic Thought in the 1970s when the domination of the state was much stronger. The problem faced by JIL is the direct relationship between Muslims and the five other religions in the country. It is a duty for JIL as an organization which is concerned with the social problems of Muslims to propose a real solution. Thirdly, the domination of the state over the citizens occurs when the state is quite strong.<sup>236</sup> After the fall of the Indonesian New Order government, it could be claimed that the Indonesian state became weaker, and was unable to overcome its social problems well. Therefore, organizations like JIL or fundamentalist movements began to address these problems. Fourthly, in relation to financial capital, JIL is a non-governmental organization funded by foreign funding, namely The Asia Foundation.<sup>237</sup> Therefore, the inability of the members of JIL to escape from the dominant discussion on Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism that are generally recognized in Indonesia is seen as an attempt by JIL to provide a real solution to Indonesian Muslim society relating to inter-religious problems rather than the cooptation of the state.

Nevertheless, some critiques can be addressed to JIL. Although JIL has tried to liberate the doctrines from the domination of the text by considering context in the interpretation, it seems that JIL, from a certain perspective, has failed to do so. The lack of attention paid to local values does not allow JIL to have a solid understanding of the crisis in response to the problems faced by Indonesian Muslims. In the case of religious freedom and pluralism, particularly in the case of *ahl al-kitāb*, as far as articles can be found, JIL only interprets the term in a wider sense than that of orthodox interpretation. Furthermore, JIL failed to critically reinterpret the term in accordance with Indonesian society. Its members concentrated its discussion on religions which have been discussed by Muslim scholars such as Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism and paid less attention to cover alternative local faiths (*aliran-aliran kepercayaan*) alive in Indonesian society. The organization has failed to discuss, to date, the status of those local faiths in relation

<sup>236</sup> On the relationship and domination of the state over the citizens, see Adam B. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society*, New York/Macmillan: The Free Press/Maxwell, 1992, pp. 1-58; 101-144.

<sup>237</sup> The Asia Foundation subsidizes millions of rupiahs to this organization. Fauzan al-Anshari, a head of The Department of Information and Data of *Majelis Mujahidin*, an Islamic fundamentalist organization, calls this an unlimited subsidy in order for JIL to promote its ideas throughout a variety of forms of media. See, Fauzan Al-Anzhari, "Agama Islam Beku, Akal Terus Berkembang", *Kompas*, 4 December 2002; Krisnadi Yuliawan et al, "Kampanye Baru", *Gatra*, p. 66; Umaruddin Masdar, *Agama Kolonial, Colonial Mindset dalam Pemikiran Islam Liberal*, Yogyakarta: Klik.R, 2003, pp. 128-132.

to Islam and the *ahl al-kitāb*. In doing so, JIL failed to solve the real problem faced by Indonesian Muslims and to liberate itself from the domination of the text made by Muslim scholars.

#### D. Conclusion

Jaringan Islam Liberal is of the opinion that religious freedom and pluralism are fundamental rights of human beings and part of the spirit of Islamic teachings. These rights should be respected and all people are free to be religious or not. This is based on the acceptance of a plural Indonesian society in light of Islamic doctrines. In the case of *ahl al-kitāb*, referring to the opinion of some Muslim scholars, JIL argues that every religion based on a Holy Scripture, including Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism, can be classified as *ahl al-kitāb*. This indicates that JIL tries to soften the barrier between Islam and other religions.

Although JIL has tried to analyze religious freedom and pluralism, some criticism can be addressed to their process. The hesitation of JIL to consider local values as fundamental to the interpretation of Islamic teachings has made JIL less aware of the need of Indonesian Muslims. In the case of religious freedom and pluralism local faiths and beliefs (*aliran-aliran kepercayaan*) within the society were not discussed. This creates an impression that the ideas promoted by JIL are not pragmatic, and that JIL is an elite institution established to fulfill the needs of middle class Indonesian Muslim society.

As a propagator of liberal Islam, the JIL also tends to be framed under extreme attitude. If Islamic fundamentalism claims that literal meaning is the only authoritative interpretation, the JIL falls into the opposite extreme claim: the most important is the meaning beyond the text. While fundamentalist Islam is potential to fall into an anachronistic interpretation because of the application of the text without considering the context, liberal Islam is potential to fall into pragmatic one because many interpretations can be arisen. In this case, the way of thinking plays a significant role. If no adequate method can be formulated to do the interpretation, it is worried that Islam will be only as a justification to the wrong practice. In Haidar Bagir's term, Islam will be a "*keranjang sampah*" (rubbish tank) into which all things can be put.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Haidar Bagir, "Islib Butuh Metodologi," *Republika* 23 March 2003.

“Package from the sponsor” is probably a phrase to describe the dependency of the JIL to the funding. The JIL is an institution which is subsidized by a foreign (Western) funding, The Asia Foundation. The dependency to this foreign funding makes JIL has not easy to escape from Western bias. It is still in doubt that such terms as democratization, pluralism, religious freedom and human rights are on the basis of self-consciousness as Indonesian Muslims. Among Indonesian Muslims, these terms are peculiar ones. They are Western ideas which are tried to be implemented in the country. It is possible to implement these ideas, but it should be reformulate in order to be in conformity with Indonesian society. In this context, particular values and experiences of Indonesian Muslim society play significant role.

Another critique is that the JIL is an elitist institution. It is a representation of middle class institution conducted by some young scholars. For the majority of Indonesian Muslims, the ideas which the JIL promotes are very complicated ones and can only be understood by well-educated people. It is only an agent of thinking movement which only promotes the ideas on a conceptual level. It does not have an adequate tool to correlate the ideas to the real problems faced by Indonesian society, or in Umaruddin’s term: *keberagamaan berbasis ilusi* (religiousness based on illusion).<sup>239</sup> As a result, the ideas upheld by JIL do not go down-to-earth and do not meet with the need of Indonesian Muslims. So it is quite easy for some Muslims who do not agree with the JIL object negative label even condemnation to the JIL: the JIL is a representation of the inferiority of Muslims before the West.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Umaruddin Masdar, *Agama Kolonial: Colonial Mindset dalam Pemikiran Islam Liberal*, Yogyakarta: Klik-R, 2003.

<sup>240</sup> *Media Dakwah*, as has been quoted by Akh. Muzakki condemns the JIL as part of terror to Muslim, as diabolical reason (*logika iblis*), as a deviated sect, as an agent of orientlists and secularists. See Akh. Muzakki, “Perseteruan Dua Kutub, p. 43.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESPONSE TO JARINGAN ISLAM LIBERAL

*"If there is no effort to prevent militant view in religion, in the long run, it is possible that the view will be a dominant view... in Indonesia."*  
(Jaringan Islam Liberal)\*

*"It is impossible to mix liberalism and Islam because both are [different] ideologies... when they [the JIL] said that they are liberal, they claim indirectly that they reject Islam."*  
(Daud Rasyid)\*\*

#### A. Introduction

The emergence of any idea within a particular society is articulated as an opinion in the public domain relating to public interest. The idea comes from a certain individual within society and is launched through the public sphere, a realm in which individuals gather to participate in open discussion.<sup>241</sup> The public sphere comes to the fore because of the people need room to discuss ideas.<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, the public sphere has to expand when the people require it to. Jürgen Habermas argues that at an ideal level, everyone should have access to and stand on the same level. No one should enter into public discourse with an advantage over another.<sup>243</sup>

The rise of various ideas within the public sphere should be seen as part of the participation of the members in public debate. The various forms of ideas depend on the historical context of the group which proposes each idea, with different backgrounds creating different opinions. All ideas compete among each other to survive in the public sphere. In this case, all ideas need supporters to support their existence. The supporters of an idea have the will to maintain followers through a continuous struggle in this

\* <http://www.islamlib.com/aboutus/en/php>, accessed on 13 October 2003.

\*\* Daud Rasyid, "Mereka Merampas Wewenang Allah," *Sabili* No. 15 Th. IX, 25 January 2002, p. 37

<sup>241</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, translated by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, pp. 1-5; Robert C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas, Critic in the Public Sphere*, London & New York: 1991, p. 3.

<sup>242</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, pp. 14-25.

<sup>243</sup> This equal society is broken when any interest, be it political, economical or social, of a particular group of people is introduced. Habermas notes that the state, with its hegemonic power, is an institution which has the potential to break the neutrality of the public sphere. *Ibid.*, p.20.

public sphere. Their successfulness in attracting followers depends on the validity of the idea and the way in which the idea is promoted.

Habermas argues that three types of validity assumptions are raised and recognized by interlocutors (speaker and audience) in relation to the social context in which the speakers are speaking. First, the speaker's statements are true. Second, the speaker is sincere or truthful, that is, the speaker is offering reliable knowledge and it is in response to appropriate values. Third, what the speaker is saying can be justified and fits the relationship between the speaker and the listener.<sup>244</sup> If one of the assumptions is questioned, the claim cannot be regarded as a valid one. To measure these three assumptions, he argues that the process of understanding within the three types depends on the relations between interlocutors and "three world concepts" which he calls the objective world---factual world, the social world---interpersonal relations, and the subjective world---personal experience. It is the discussants themselves who seek understanding and consensus, but their understanding has a close relationship to these three concepts.<sup>245</sup>

Inspired by explanation of the validity claim above, this chapter deals with responses to ideas promoted by JIL by concentrating on the validity of the organization's ideas for Indonesian Muslims, the authority of JIL as a speaker of an idea, and the way JIL communicates its ideas to Indonesian Muslims. The responses, particularly responses given by fundamentalist Muslims will also be related to the three world concepts by arguing that modern Indonesian society is seen as an objective world, the relations within Indonesian Muslim society correspond to intersubjectivity or an interpersonal relation, and is therefore claimed as the social world. The different experiences leading to different opinions among Indonesian Muslims is related to the relationship between Islam and modernity and are thus seen as Habermas' subjective world.

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<sup>244</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, translated by T. McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, p. 99. See also Nigel Dood, *Social Theory and Modernity*, Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p. 118.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., p. 120.



## **B. The Collapse of The Indonesian New Order: The Newly Emergent Public Sphere**

The Indonesia New Order was a phase in which the state tried to control all public aspects of its citizens' daily life. All ideas proposed in the public sphere fell under the control of the state. The banning of newspapers and magazines like *Tempo* and *Detik*, and of books---particularly books containing Marxist ideas--- and the appellation of the term *Organisasi Tanpa Bentuk* (OTB/underground organization) to discredit groups of people seen as a threat to the state are all examples that demonstrate the domination of the state over its citizens. In short, it was the state which decided the life or the death of an idea.

For approximately 32 years the Indonesian New Order regime organized the state, its collapsed in 1998 marked by Suharto's retirement and ushered in a transition period in Indonesia called the Era Reformasi (Reformation Era). This period has been marked by the will of the Indonesian people to reform the government and rid it of all its deviations, namely *kolusi* (collusion), *korupsi* (corruption) and *nepotisme* (nepotism), which are popularly known as KKN. KKN was rife in the New Order period. This attempted eradication is seen as a starting point to the changing of the state from an authoritarian one to a democratic one which allows wider room for the citizens to express and act out their interests.

In this transition period, the domination of the state has become weaker than what it was in the New Order period. In this situation, the society has become stronger and gained a significant bargaining position with the state. Some aspects of the public sphere which were closed by the state in the previous period became open. In these circumstances, the people have more opportunity to express their ideas and interests regarding politics, the economy and culture freely whether as individual or as a community.<sup>246</sup>

The intensity of the role of the society in contemporary Indonesia in praxis is marked by the intensity of the socio-political demands of society on the state. The

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<sup>246</sup> On the debate on implementation of *shari'a*, for example, Indonesian Muslims bravely and openly express their ideas. Some books have been published discussing this issue. For example: A. Syafi'i Ma'arif et al., *Syari'at Islam Yes Syari'at Islam No*, Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001; Umar Basalim, *Pro-Kontra Piagam Jakarta di Era Reformasi*, Jakarta: Pustaka Indonesia Satu, 2002; Muhammad Rizieq bin Husein Syihab, *Dialog Piagam Jakarta*, Jakarta: PIS; Burhanuddin (ed.), *Syari'at Islam, Pandangan Muslim Liberal*, Jakarta: Jaringan Islam Liberal/The Asia Fondation, 2003.

emergence, and to some extent the crystalization, of some groups in the society is obvious evidence of this. The emergence of liberal and fundamentalist groups in the context of Indonesian Muslim society is clear evidence of the emergence of a new public sphere.<sup>247</sup>

It is true that both liberal and fundamentalist Islam have historical roots in Indonesia. Fundamentalist Islam can be traced back to the movement of the DI/TII (Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia/Islamic Community/Indonesian Islamic Soldier) in the 1950s. In the New Order period the DDII (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia/the Indonesian Council of Islamic Missions) and the KISDI (Komite Indonesia untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam/Indonesian Committee for Muslim World Solidarity) were also added proof of the existence of Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>248</sup> In contrast, as was discussed in chapter three, the emergence of ideas close to that of liberal Islam in Indonesia spread widely from the 1970s.

Both Islamic fundamentalist and liberal Islam movements were highly dependent on the state during New Order Indonesia. Most of their ideas were associated with the idea of development as proposed by the state. Renewal of Islamic Thought promoted by Nurcholish Madjid in the 1970s, for example, attempted to attract Indonesian Muslims to become involved in state development programmes.

It is highly likely that the development of both fundamentalist and liberalist groups in the transition period will be more independent, and, in some cases, their ideas and practices will be distinctly separated from the state. The formation of such fundamentalist Islamic organizations as Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, Front Pembela Islam, and Lasykar Jihad, to mention some, has been because of an inability of the state to govern the country well. A number of *fatwas* on jihad in the Moluccas issued by Forum Komunikasi Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah (FKAWJ/ Communication Forum for Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah) are proof that questioning the legitimacy of the state by fundamentalist groups is occurring.<sup>249</sup> The formation of JIL is also independent of the

<sup>247</sup> Compare with Khamami Zada, *Islam Radikal*.

<sup>248</sup> See Khamami Zada, *Ibid.*, Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia has been involved in a serious polemic on the idea of Renewal of Islamic Thought promoted by Nurcholish Madjid, as discussed in Chapter Two. Through *Media Dakwah*, a magazine published by the institution, it has harshly condemned Nurcholish Madjid as an agent of Zionism, a cancer of Muslims, "an enemy of Islam from within" and so forth. For a deeper analysis, see Ade Armando, "Citra Kaum Pembaharu."

<sup>249</sup> See Noorhaidi Hasan, "Transnational Islam within the Boundary of national Politics: Middle Eastern *fatwas* on *Jihad* in the Moluccas, unpublished paper presented at the conference *Fatwas and*

state and is more a response to the development of the fundamentalist Islam in the country than a response to any government programme. In this context, the support of the state does not play a decisive role. The existence of both groups depends on the ability of their advocates to promote their ideas to their audiences, and also on how appropriate the ideas are to solve the problems faced by Indonesian Muslims.

### C. Religion, Between the Private and Public Affairs: A Debate on Religious Freedom and Pluralism

What we can see from the propagation of liberal Islam by JIL, as well as fundamentalist Islam, is a public attempt to provide alternative solutions to the problems of modernity faced by Indonesian Muslims. Liberal Islam is generally perceived as a moderate and tolerant face of Islam which pays considerable attention to different aspects of modernity. Modernity, besides tradition, is a fundamental element of the basis of its understanding of Islamic teachings. Liberal Islam is also well known as substantialist Islam which does not insist on the formalization or symbolization of Islam. The more important issue is that Islamic doctrines can be enacted within daily life without the label of Islam. Alternatively, most fundamentalist Muslims believe that modernity along with liberalisms, pluralism, and secularization are a serious threat to the existence of Islamic doctrines (*shari'a*).<sup>250</sup> They argue that modernity should be combated by *shari'a*. In this competition, identity plays a decisive role. In order to differentiate between Islam on one side and modernity on the other, Islamic symbols and the formalization of Islamic teachings are very important. The close attention of fundamentalist Islam to religious symbolism makes it also well known as symbolist Islam.

Where ideas of religious freedom and pluralism are concerned, JIL and fundamentalist groups adopt different opinions. On one hand, the proponents of JIL believe that being or not being religious is a private affair; it is a human right. Everyone is free to adhere to, or not to adhere to, a religion. On the other hand, fundamentalist

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*Dissemination of Religious Authority in Indonesia* held by International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden, 31 October 2002.

<sup>250</sup> The works of some Indonesian Muslims considered to be fundamentalists like Hartono Ahmad Jaiz in his *Bahaya Islam Liberal*, Adian Husaini in his *Islam Liberal*, Adnin Armas in his *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis*, Fauzan al-Anshari in his *Melawan Konspirasi JIL* and Daud Rasyid in his "Mereka Merampas Wewenang Allah, indicate that they reject such ideas as religious pluralism, religious freedom and secularization.

Muslims argue that the matter of being or not being religious is a collective responsibility for the entire society. Fundamentalist Muslims believe that Islam recognizes religious matters as public matters. They support their argument by emphasizing the doctrine of Islamic propagation (*da'wa*). *Da'wa* is a doctrine obliging Muslims to disseminate Islamic teachings to all people. This was done from the early period of Islam, and is considered a part of Muslims activities.<sup>251</sup> In this context, absolute religious freedom cannot be considered as an Islamic teaching.

The difference of opinion between both ideologies on religious freedom and pluralism will be explained further with the help of the concept of Habermas' three worlds. The text (Qur'anic verses) and the context of Indonesian society represent the objective world as both ideologies claim the texts as well as their society are factual or truthful entities. Ideology and the way of thinking of JIL and fundamentalists can be considered the subjective world. Furthermore, as the conclusions of these groups are directly related to their unique perceptions of the truth, the network to which the groups affiliate corresponds to Habermas' social world.

In the Qur'an, there are some verses related to ideas of religious freedom and pluralism. These verses can be classified into two categories. The first indicates that plurality of religion is recognized by Islam: for example Q.S. 3: 64 on inter-religious dialogue; Q.S. 5: 48 and Q.S. 2: 21 on religious plurality and the like. The second includes some verses indicating the exclusivity of Islam—for example Q.S. 3: 19; 85 on the right religion before God; Q.S. 7: 158 on Muhammad as a messenger for all human beings and so forth. These verses are applied, in the context of Indonesia's plural society, with its five recognized religions, by both JIL and proponents of fundamentalist Islamic movements.

The different interpretations of the verses on the ideas of religious freedom and pluralism between JIL and fundamentalist Islam can be explained by the ideology and the method by which they understand Islamic teachings. For JIL, Islam is a network propagating an inclusive ideology which makes provision for plurality and diversity. On

<sup>251</sup> See Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Bahaya Islam Liberal*, p. 85. In this book, Hartono Ahmad Jaiz notes that there is much evidence of the propagation upheld by the Prophet which were collected within the books of *Eadith*. The Prophet invited many leaders to follow his teachings. Some of them are King Najazi (Ethiopia), King Muqauqis (Egypt), King Heraclius (Rome [Byzantine?]). See also Idem, *Tasawuf Pluralisme dan Pemurtadan*, Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2001, pp. 84-86.

the other hand, fundamentalist Islam promotes an exclusivist ideology which claims only one truth.

The verses accepting religious pluralism, are argued by JIL to be the principal verses upon which all interpretations of this topic are based. The proponents of JIL believe that Islam is a religion which appreciates plurality by nature. Anyone who rejects plurality, rejects the essential doctrines of Islam. The verses indicating the exclusivity of Islam should be put in their own context, namely, in the context of strengthening Islamic faith rather than being used as a proof for inter-religious relationships.

Their conclusions are a result of the interpretation of meaning beyond the literal verses, a process which JIL considers to be essential in interpretation. It believes that the most important thing is the meaning beyond the text. This can be reached by considering the context in which the text is formed and applied.<sup>252</sup> In this case, the existence, or truth, of an Indonesian plural society should be taken into consideration in interpretation. The point of contact between the verses and the context of Indonesian society on one side as the objective world and the method of understanding of JIL, on other side, as the subjective world lead to an opinion that the ideas of religious freedom and pluralism have their foundation in Islamic teachings. This objective world meets together with the subjective world: the creativities and experiences of its proponents in understanding the text.

Alternatively, fundamentalist Muslims argue that the ideas of religious freedom and pluralism do not have an adequate foundation within Islamic teachings. They see a truth in that Islam recognizes other religions as religions, but their interpretation of the Qur'an is literal and clearly states that Islam is the only straight path to salvation, and that it is the only religion recognized by God.<sup>253</sup> They consider that religious freedom and pluralism are only suggested by the verses. They tend to give a preference to the verses indicating the superiority of Islam over other religions and pay less attention to the verses indicating religious pluralism, or, at least, they argue that the verses regarding religious pluralism should be put within their particular context.<sup>254</sup>

<sup>252</sup> See <http://www.islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php>, accessed on 10 October 2003.

<sup>253</sup> See "Tafsir Agama Pemucu Fatwa," *Gatra*, 21 December 2002, p. 28. See also Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Bahaya Islam Liberal*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.



Furthermore, fundamentalist Muslims consider these ideas reject the early period of Islamic history in which the Prophet Muhammad disseminated Islamic teachings to the followers of Christianity and Zoroastrianism.<sup>255</sup> Therefore, the idea of all religions are recognized as valid as is proposed by JIL contradict to the Qur'an and the history of Islam.

The rejection by fundamentalist Muslim of religious pluralism bears close relation to their exclusivist ideology which tends to maintain a strict barrier between them and other groups.<sup>256</sup> In this context, they feel Islam should be differentiated from other religions. Islam has its own values which are superior to those of other groups, and the followers of other belief systems, should be invited to join Islam. In this context, their subjective world is an exclusive vision which tends to draw a line between the self and the other. This ideology is strengthened by the literal method in which they understand the text.

The different opinions between fundamentalist Islam and liberal Islam are influenced by the social world, namely, the institutions and networks to which both groups bear particular relations. For example, JIL is financially supported by The Asia Foundation, a western organization which has considerable interest in the development of democratization and human rights in the third world.<sup>257</sup> Millions of rupiahs have been subsidized by The Asia Foundation in order to disseminate JIL's ideas through both print and electronic media. In this context, religious freedom and pluralism play a significant role in this relationship.

The existence of fundamentalist Islam in Indonesia also cannot be separated from transnational networks. The Salafi-Wahabi movement which is closely connected to the Islamic Middle East is also a movement with an exclusivist ideology. In a recent Moluccan conflict, Lasykar Jihad requested justification for jihad from a number of *salafi* 'ulama in the Middle East.<sup>258</sup> It is also conceivable that fundamentalist groups in Indonesia also receive financial support from the Middle East.<sup>259</sup> In other words, while

<sup>255</sup> Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Bahaya Islam Liberal*, p. 85.

<sup>256</sup> See for example Adian Husaini and Nuim Hidayat, *Islam Liberal*, pp. 96-106.

<sup>257</sup> Fauzan al-Anshari, "Agama Islam Beku, Akal terus Berkembang," <http://media.isnet.org/islam/etc/TanggapanSegar.html>, accessed on 17 November 2003. This article is also available in *Islam Liberal & Fundamental*, pp. 187-191 and Fauzan al-Anshari, *Melawan Konspirasi JIL*, Jakarta: Pustaka al-Furqan, 2003, pp. 209-215.

<sup>258</sup> See Noorhaidi, "Transnational Islam", p. 3.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 8. Financial subsidies from the Middle East on a large scale have been a reality since

liberal Islam has a close relationship with western ideology from which modernity with its associated ideas such as liberalism, democratization and progress originates, fundamentalist Islam, at the same time, has an intimate relationship with Middle Eastern *salafi* ideology which is characterized by a spirit of Islamic revivalism, looking back to the period of the Prophet.

In short, it can be concluded that the different ideologies, different methods of understanding Islamic teachings, and different social relationships of JIL and fundamentalist groups heavily influence their different opinions on both religious freedom and religious pluralism.

#### **D. Response and Critique to Jaringan Islam Liberal**

Besides the responses of fundamentalist Muslims, many other responses have been directed towards JIL. These responses reached a peak when Ulil Abshar-Abdalla wrote an article entitled “Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam” (Freshening up the Understanding of Islam) published in the daily newspaper *Kompas*,<sup>260</sup> in which he threw some controversial statements into the ring such as non-literal interpretation, differentiation between particular and universal values in Islam, inclusiveness of Muslim society and critically understanding the Prophet as a historical person.<sup>261</sup> An edited volume, *Islam Liberal & Fundamental* was compiled of responses which were classified as either pro or anti Ulil’s article.

*Islam Liberal & Fundamental* consists of the compilation of the responses to the ideas. *Islam Liberal & Fundamental* unequivocally reveals that some Muslims argue that JIL exerts a positive influence on Islam which supports the ideas of Islam as a tolerant religion supporting peace and that it is in line with modernity. Other Muslims indicate that although the ideas of liberal Islam have positive effects on the development of Islam in Indonesia, caution needs to be exercised if the ideas are not balanced in their

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Saudi government was bolstered by its oil wealth. From this time, Saudi Arabia has played a decisive role in various local national Islamic organizations all over the world. See also Martin van Bruinessen, “Yahudi sebagai Simbol dan Wacana Pemikiran Islam Indonesia Masa Kini,” in Ahmad Suaedi et al., (eds.), *Spiritualitas Baru: Agama dan Aspirasi Rakyat*, Yogyakarta: DIAN/Interfedie, 1994.

<sup>260</sup> Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, “Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam,” *Kompas*, 18 November 2002.

<sup>261</sup> This is based on the responses devoted to JIL from its formation to the end of 2003 (around 30 months). A book entitled *Islam Liberal & Fundamental, Sebuah Pertarungan Wacana* consists of more than 40 articles devoted to Ulil Abshar-Abdalla’s controversial article. “Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam” by Ulil Abshar-Abdalla *Kompas*, 18 November 2002. See also Ulil Abshar-Abdalla et al., *Islam Liberal & Fundamental, Sebuah Pertarungan Wacana*, Yogyakarta: eLSAQ, 2003.

approach to understanding Islam. The rest argue that liberal Islam does not have any authoritative normative references in Islamic doctrine. They argue that JIL is no more than a representation of the inferiority of Muslims before the West. *Media Dakwah*, as has been quoted by Akh. Muzakki, even stigmatizes JIL as a terror to Muslims, a “diabolical logic” (*logika iblis*), a threat to Islam, a deviant sect, an agent of Orientalists and Secularists, and finally a group of Muslims who oppose to dialogue.<sup>262</sup>

In this study, these responses will be analyzed from the book as well as some articles devoted to criticizing liberal Islam. Because so many responses have been evoked in response to JIL, this study will concentrate on the responses particularly directed towards the article “Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam by Ulil Abshar Abdalla.” As more than thirty articles have been written in response to his ideas. This is based on the argument that the responses are representative enough to describe the variety of opinions about liberal Islam. Additionally, in order to strengthen the analysis, some books devoted to liberal Islam in Indonesia also will be discussed.

#### **Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam**

In this article, Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (Ulil) proposes some controversial ideas. First of all he argues that Islam should be looked at as a living organism (*organisme yang hidup*) which has evolved in line with the development of civilization. Ulil is convinced that in order to reach a proper understanding on the development of civilization, a critical understanding of Islamic teachings should be reached through looking for the essential meaning of the text. By doing this, particular or local values, such as the penalty of cutting off a hand or wearing a veil, and universal ones, such as justice and equality within Islamic teachings can be attested.<sup>263</sup>

In addition, Ulil emphasizes that Muslims should have an inclusive outlook regarding inter-religious and cultural relationships. Muslim society is, he argues, a part of the entire world community unified by humanism. In this context, all ideas opposed

<sup>262</sup> See Akh. Muzakki, “Perseteruan Dua Kutub,” p. 43.

<sup>263</sup> In one discussion, through the mailing list <http://www.islamliberal.yahoogroups.com> on Islamic liberalism, Ulil emphasizes the historicity of the text. Although he is aware that this view has some weaknesses, such as the limit of the knowledge of the context of the text itself, he believes that texts, including the Qur’an and the Hadith, cannot be separated from the context within which they occur. Interview with Ulil Abshar-Abdalla on liberalism and fundamentalism, Thursday, 28 August 2003.

to humanism such as doctrines forbidding inter-religious marriage have to be repudiated.

He also proposes the idea of secularization. Muslims need a social order which draws a distinct line between religion and politics. He believes that religion is a private affair which should be managed at a private level, and politics is public affair which is managed by social consensus.<sup>264</sup>

On the law of God, Ulil believes that there is no law of God in the sense in which most Muslims understand this concept, such as family law and cutting off the hand of a thief. What should be believed in are universal principles such as the five fundamental elements of classical Islamic legal reasoning (*usūl al-khamsa*) which are well known as *maqāṣid al-sharī'a*. They included the protection of freedom of religion, reason, property, family and honour of human beings.

On the position of the Prophet Muhammad in the context of history of Muslim society, he argues that Muhammad was a man who needs to be critically analyzed. Muhammad, like all people, was fallible. In this context, Muslims society in Medina at the period of the Prophet should be understood as a successful effort of the Prophet to build an ideal society in a particular time and place. Islam in the period of the Prophet is a result of an attempt to actualize universal values in a particular context. Therefore, Muslims do not need to follow the Prophet literally because this sort of unthinking behaviour will reject the universal values of Islam. Muslims should embrace *ijtihād* in order to actualize, to the best of their abilities, Islamic teachings in accordance with the context. In this, the ideology of plurality plays a significant role because it is an ideology that accepts diversity among Muslims themselves and among other groups.

At the end of his article, Ulil argues that religion exists to ensure human goodness, and that a human is a living organism who develops in quality and quantity. Because of this, religion should have the ability to develop itself in order to solve the many different, ever changing problems faced by people. If Islam, as a religion, is

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<sup>264</sup> On one occasion he even argued that the secular state is better than the religious state, including the Islamic state, because a secular state can manage positive and negative energy at the same time. This competence lies beyond the scope of the religious state because the religious state rejects negative energy. See Anonymous, "Islam Liberal Versus Islam Literal," *Tempo*, No. 38/XXX(19-25 November 2001), p. 96. This is also available at <http://www.islamlib.com/BERITA/tempo.html>, accessed on 17 December 2002.

interpreted in a way which is contradictory to general interest (*maslaha 'amma*), or even oppresses humanity, then, it is useless to human beings.

As soon as this article was published, numerous responses were written, which will be elucidated upon in this section. I will not concentrate on the degree to which they support or deny the idea of liberal Islam, but rather view them from the degree of criticism to Ulil's methodology, to his materials, and to the way of propagating liberal Islam. Based on this framework, there are, at least, three forms of response. The first is a response to the mode of thought or methodology of JIL. The second is a response to the matters which JIL promotes or an apologetic response. The third is a response to the modes of communication by which the members of JIL disseminate their ideas to their audience. This response is classified as a technical response.

#### 1. Methodological Critical Responses

Several people criticized Ulil's methodology and epistemology. These include: Haidar Bagir in two articles entitled "Islib Butuh Methodology" (Liberal Islam Needs a Methodology)<sup>265</sup> and "Beberapa Pertanyaan Untuk Ulil Abshar-Abdalla" (Some Questions to Ulil Abshar-Abdalla),<sup>266</sup> Husni Mu'adz in "Komentar Serius Untuk Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (A Serious Commentary to Ulil Abshar-Abdalla),<sup>267</sup> Ahmad Gaus AF in "How Liberal Can You Go?",<sup>268</sup> and Umaruddin Masdar in his *Agama Kolonial, Colonial Mindset dalam Pemikiran Islam Liberal* (Colonial Religion: Colonial Mindset in Liberal Islamic Thought).<sup>269</sup>

In "Beberapa Pertanyaan", Haidar Bagir as indicate above, critiques the method by which Ulil Abshar-Abdalla supports his argument. Haidar Bagir claims an inadequate method is a crucial problem faced by the proponents of liberal Islam. In "Islib Butuh Methodology" he also reminds the proponents of JIL to find an adequate method in order to reach an authoritative understanding. He argues that the proponents

<sup>265</sup> Haidar Bagir, "Islib Butuh Metodologi" *Republika*, Selasa 20 Maret 2002, see also <http://islamlib.com/TANGGAPAN/Haidar%Bagir%20Republika.htm>, accessed on 17 May 2003. Actually, this article was written to criticize JIL not Ulil's article.

<sup>266</sup> Haidar Bagir, "Beberapa Pertanyaan untuk Ulil Abshar-Abdalla", *Kompas*, 5 December 2002.

<sup>267</sup> Husni Mu'adz, "Komentar Serius Untuk Ulil Abshar-Abdalla", [www.media.isnet.org/islam](http://www.media.isnet.org/islam), accessed on 7 October 2003. This article is also compiled together with other responses within *Islam Liberal & Fundamental*, pp. 120-134.

<sup>268</sup> Ahmad Gaus AF, "How Liberal Can You Go?," *Kompas*, 13 December 2002. This article is also available in *Islam Liberal & Fundamental*, pp. 79-84.

<sup>269</sup> Umaruddin Masdar, *Agama Kolonial, Colonial Mindset dalam Pemikiran Islam Liberal*, Yogyakarta: Klik.R, 2003.



of JIL have so far shown themselves rather poverty-stricken in their methods of interpretation. Unlike other ideas and movements within Islam which are complemented by adequate methods, like Mu'tazila with its rationality, Islamic philosophy against the orthodoxy upheld by Ibn Rushd, Islamic law upheld by four founders of Islamic legal school, Fazlur Rahman with his double movement, and the recent movements launched by Muhammad Arkoun, Hasan Hanafī, Abu Zaid, Abid al-Jābirī and so on, the proponents of JIL have so far been deprived of this tool.<sup>270</sup> The lack of adequate methodology leads the readers to doubt the understanding the text.

One example cited by Haidar Bagir concerns the wearing of the veil or *jilbāb* for Muslim women. The Qur'an explicitly states the obligation of wearing a *jilbāb* for Muslim women. However, Ulil argues that Muslims do not need to follow Islamic teachings which are a part of Arabic culture like the *jilbāb*. Rather, what Muslims do should is to follow universal values which lie beyond the text of *jilbāb*. Thus, Muslims should wear dress which is in conformity with public decency and which has evolved in their history. In this argument, according to Haidar Bagir, there is an impression that Ulil has understood the Qur'anic verse arbitrarily. There is no qualified reasoning proposed by Ulil in this case other than that Muslims should understand beyond the text.

A similar response was aimed at JIL by Husni Mu'adz in his "Komentar Serius" referred to earlier. In this article, he argues that the members of JIL have two failings in their propagation of liberal Islam. Firstly, they fail to formulate a universal theoretical framework by which to understand Islamic teachings, particularly those relating to the social system which they idealize. Rather their ideas are framed by *ad hoc* methods within which they interpret the text. The consequence of this is that interpretation is valid only for a specific case. This causes the failure of JIL to develop a framework in praxis because there is no unequivocal ideal system as a vision.

Secondly, Husni Mu'adz claims JIL fails to inventorize all the data in the text (the Qur'an and the Sunna) as "the empirical testing ground"<sup>271</sup> of the idealized target

<sup>270</sup> This critique was responded to by Hamid Basyaib, a JIL activist, in his article entitled "Islīb Butuh Methodology? (Tanggapan untuk Haidar Bagir)," *Republika*, 23 March 2002. In this article, Hamid Basyaib argues that as far as promoting its ideas are concerned, JIL brainstormings in formulating its methodology. The problem is in the systematization of the methodology by which JIL understands Islamic teachings.

<sup>271</sup> The term is from Husni Mu'adz. See Husni Mu'adz, "Komentar Serius," p. 126.

by which the idea of liberal Islam is formulated.<sup>272</sup> The members of JIL do not stipulate their idealized aims ---the main one of which is liberalism, which pay considerable attention to individual freedom, to Islamic teachings such as the concept of Islamic taxation (*zakat*), Islamic justice and so forth. As a result, there are no clear criteria of acceptability and the propagation of liberal Islam fails to reach critical and objective responses and evokes an emotional reaction from the public.<sup>273</sup>

Another critical response was offered by Ahmad Gaus AF in his article entitled "How Liberal Can You Go?" While both Haidar Bagir and Husni Mu'adz tend to doubt the methods by which JIL propagates its ideas, Ahmad Gaus looks more optimistically at their method. He argues that Islam, as well as other religions, faces a serious threat, that is, the stagnation of religious thought. This inertia in religious thought will lead to the marginality of religion in daily life because religion simply does not provide adequate solutions. He argues that this is why historically there are some groups in religious society which have tried to overcome this serious problem by promoting the idea of renewal of religious thought. Islamic Neo-Modernism promoted by Nurcholish Madjid in the 1970s and liberal Islam promoted by JIL can be put firmly into this framework. However, he, citing the statement of Salahuddin Wahid, argues that JIL is more liberal than Islamic Neo-Modernism.<sup>274</sup>

Furthermore, Ahmad Gaus argues that it is not an easy task to freshen up the understanding of Islamic teachings among Indonesian Muslims. A serious obstacle has to be overcome within society, as feels their belief has been disturbed by the movement. In this, the issues which the movement upholds and the people to whom the movement addresses its work play significant roles. According to Ahmad Gaus, the agenda which is upheld by JIL should be related to structural issues (*isu-isu struktural*) which are part of the major themes of modernity such as democratization and human rights. He feels that JIL should be able to put the peripheral and particular issues such as the issues of

<sup>272</sup> The members of JIL are more or less aware of this shortcoming. From the beginning, they have argued that the liberal Islam which they uphold does not have a fixed foundation in the text. They stress the fruits of modernity as their basis of the understanding the text.

<sup>273</sup> Husni Mu'adz, "Komentar Serius", p. 130.

<sup>274</sup> In an interview with the Magazine *Sabili*, Salahuddin Wahid argues that JIL is more liberal than Nurcholish Madjid. This is indicated by the term by which JIL introduces the ideas. An example is the term regarding responses to the matters pertaining to the state. Nurcholish Madjid still uses the term which has religious nuance, namely *masyarakat madani* referring to the role of the society. In this case, JIL uses the term "civil society", a term which has originated from modernity. See Salahuddin Wahid, "JIL Lebih Liberal dari Cak Nur", *Sabili* No. 15 Th. IX 25 January 2002, p. 90.

the veil (*jilbāb*) and the penalty of cutting off the hand of a thief into the framework of structural issues. Furthermore, Ahmad Gaus argues that the issues which JIL upholds should be addressed to the entire community, not to individual members of society. In this context, social institutions such as universities, non-government organizations, including religious organizations, have strategic roles in the dissemination of the ideas. Therefore, JIL should make it a priority to promote their ideas to the institutions within society, not to individuals.

Umaruddin Masdar in his *Agama Kolonial* is another individual who has been spurred onto comment.<sup>275</sup> He argues that liberal Islam is heavily coloured by the imperialist paradigm which classifies religious followers into elite and ordinary followers.<sup>276</sup> This is an idea which does not have a bearing on the reality of Indonesian society and is flawed at its epistemological foundation.<sup>277</sup> According to him, the main characteristics of liberal Islam are a compromise between the text and the context. On the one hand, liberal Islam believes that the text identifies true moral values which can only be found through a creative interpretation of the holy text by searching the essential meaning of the text. In this case, the text has a central position. On the other hand, liberal Islam accepts the relativity of the truth in which modernity plays an integral role in the interpretation of the doctrines. In this context, Islam with its authentic truth can accept relative truth within modernity. This will lead to a pragmatic solution, whereby there is an adjustment of interpretation of the text to modernity through reinterpretation of the text.<sup>278</sup>

The pragmatic solution has an impact on the ways of thinking and action within liberal Islam. Liberal Islam is filled with bias of thought, of middle class values, of

<sup>275</sup> Umaruddin Masdar, *Agama Kolonial, Colonial Mindset dalam Pemikiran Islam Liberal*, Yogyakarta: Kliik.R, 2003.

<sup>276</sup> The elite followers have the authority to interpret religious doctrines and the ordinary followers should follow the interpretation of the elite. In this case, it seems that Umaruddin is inspired by Marxist theory of society without social class. He images religious society as a society without class in which all members have authority to understand the doctrines according to their understandings.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20. This critique can be questioned. The existence of many Muslim leaders like *kyai* in Java, *ajengan* in Sunda, and *tuan guru* in Lombok, to mention some, are distinct proof of religious class in Indonesia.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

funding, of liberalism and colonialism.<sup>279</sup> It, furthermore, becomes an imperialistic,<sup>280</sup> and anachronistic idea because is not founded at on the basis of reality.<sup>281</sup>

Umaruddin predicts that like Islamic fundamentalism, liberal Islam will not be granted a long life. It is like a fashion which is enthusiastically responded to by Muslims in Indonesia and will disappear without any significant trace. It will be removed from Islamic discourse in Indonesia by other modes of thought.<sup>282</sup> In the early stages of the government of the Indonesian New Order, there was a trend among Indonesian Muslim scholars to discuss Islam and modernity (development). This trend was changed by the ideas of Islam and post-modernism, and Islam and civil society at the end of Indonesian New Order. At a glance, all these ideas coloured Islamic discourse. Now there is liberal Islam. According to Umaruddin, liberal Islam also will disappear without any significant results because the ideas which it upholds are external and are not grounded in the Indonesian reality. In other words, the proponents of liberal Islam are only agents as well as consumers of modernity distributed by the West. They are labourers of western ideology who will promote orders from the boss (the West).<sup>283</sup>

## *2. Apologetic Ideological Response*

If a critical response focuses on the methodology of liberal Islam, an apologetic response concentrates on the matter and ideology of liberal Islam. It is a response, whether it is a defensive or offensive, to the movement and ideas of liberal Islam which looks at the validity of liberal Islam from the perspective of an ideological and normative point of view. This response can be sub-divided into three categories: normative apologetic; critical apologetic; and practical apologetic. The first, normative apologetic is an apologetic response which criticizes the ideas of liberal Islam based mainly on normative reasoning. The main target of this critique is the validity of the idea of liberal Islam in the framework of Islamic doctrines. The second, critical apologetic is an apologetic response which concentrates on the justification or the condemnation of the ideas of liberal Islam by concentrating on the degree of conformity of the ideas in the context of Indonesian society. The third, practical apologetic, is a

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-149.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-27.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-95.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-46.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

response which not only leads to the polemical debate, but also triggers the prosecution of physical action. While the first and the second are on the ontological and also epistemological level, the third exists on the axiological level.

*a. Normative apologetic response*

Hartono Ahmad Jaiz in his *Bahaya Islam Liberal* (The Danger of Liberal Islam), Adian Husaini and Nuim Hidayat in their *Islam Liberal, Sejarah, Konsepsi, Penyimpangan, dan Jawabannya* (Liberal Islam: History, Conception, Deviation and the Answer to It) can all be included as normative apologetic responses.

Hartono Ahmad Jaiz (henceforward Hartono) in his *Bahaya Islam Liberal* attempts to criticize the doctrines of liberal Islam from a normative point of view. He tries to aim at the roots of liberal Islam which were mainly laid down in the 1970s in which people like of Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid promoted the idea of Renewal of Islamic Thought.<sup>284</sup> He condemns, more than is critical of liberal Islam. He mentions only the negative side to liberal Islam without applying any critical method as a basis for this reasoning. He argues that there is no valid normative argument to strengthen liberal Islam, because their ideas do not have an adequate normative foundation. He, unfortunately, does not offer any deep explanation about these statements. No critical analysis has been argued to support his idea.

In the case of the development of liberal Islam in Indonesia, it is indelibly linked to the contributions of both Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid. They are the people who are responsible for the development of liberal Islam in Indonesia. Harun Nasution promoted the idea of the rationality of Islam by adopting the ideas of Mu'tazila which leads to the critical questioning of the fundamental doctrines of Islamic theology, including the doctrines those which have to be accepted without any question.<sup>285</sup>

From the normative perspective, Hartono argues that liberal Islam is a deviation in the understandings of Islamic doctrines. He claims there is no normative foundation for liberal Islam. Liberal Islam is a sign of Muslim weakness before the West because it

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<sup>284</sup> Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Bahaya Islam Liberal*, p. 9

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-12.



accepts western ideas without any critique.<sup>286</sup> Liberal Islam is based mainly on a method that is inadequate both from a normative and a scholarly point of view. Additionally, it does not have authoritative references.<sup>287</sup> Furthermore, in the case of religious pluralism, Ahmad Jaiz says that liberal Islam is very dangerous because it simplifies the doctrines of Islam by claiming that all religions are equal, and that all religions teach the truth.<sup>288</sup>

Another normative apologetic response was that elicited from Adian Husaini (Adian) and Nuim Hidayat (Nuim) in their *Liberal Islam*.<sup>289</sup> They concentrate on the history, including the major figures of liberal Islam,<sup>290</sup> the mission and the threat liberal Islam poses to Islam itself,<sup>291</sup> and the relationship between liberal Islam, the West and Zionism.<sup>292</sup> They argue that liberal Islam is an agent of an international orientalist movement which is trying to conquer the Islamic world, putting it under domination of western thought. Liberal Islam will attract Muslims to turn away from their religion. The proponents of liberal Islam interpret Islamic teachings in order to fulfill their own desires.<sup>293</sup> Such an interpretation will destroy Islamic doctrines (*penghancuran akidah*)<sup>294</sup> and Islamic law (*penghancuran syari'ah*).<sup>295</sup> Additionally, they offer in some cases, significant and critical remarks to the ideas promoted by liberal Islam. In the case of religious freedom and pluralism, they argue that religious pluralism does not have foundation in Islamic teachings, and it obscures particular characteristics of religions.<sup>296</sup> However, most of their critiques are on the basis of a normative perspective.

Alternatively, Nur Khalik Ridwan in his “‘Mati’ bagi Yang Berbeda: Menakar Fatwa Hukuman mati Islam Radikal” (“Death” to Those Who are Different: Measuring Fatwa on the Death Penalty Issued by Radical Islam)<sup>297</sup> supports, to some extent, the

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>289</sup> Andian Husaini & Nuim Hidayat, *Islam Liberal*.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., pp. 1- 40.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-166.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., pp. 169-221.

<sup>293</sup> See Ibid., pp. 106-110.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>297</sup> Nur Khalik Ridwan, “‘Mati’ Bagi Yang Berbeda: Menakar Fatwa Hukuman Mati Islam Radikal”, *Journal Renai*, Th. II. No. 3-4, 7 October 2002. This article is available in *Islam Liberal & Fundamental*, pp. 39-68.

ideas of Ulil from a normative apologetic perspective.<sup>298</sup> He argues that Ulil has tried to provide a critical understanding of Islamic teachings, which need to be done in order to present Islam as a religion which can solve the problems faced by Muslims. He argues that Ulil is trying to create a new awareness amongst Indonesian Muslims and awaken from their long sleep. Nur Khalik also says that Ulil attempts to bring Islam down-to-earth by introducing the historicity of Islam, including the historicity of the Prophet. This idea is similar to that of Anang Rizka Masyhadi (Anang) in his “Masih Tentang Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (Still on Ulil Abshar-Abdalla).”<sup>299</sup>

Anang argues that the main sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Hadith, are sacred, but this does not mean that the results of the interpretation of both sources becomes sacred. Interpretation is a result of understanding of both sources on the basis of a Muslim's creativity which is limited by context in time and place and, in some cases, the understanding may be in contradiction with the literal meaning of the text. To strengthen this argument, he refers to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab's *ijtihād* on *ghanīma* (the spoils of war) looted from the battle field in *sawad* (Iraq). In this case, 'Umar did not distribute the *ghanīma* (land) among the soldiers who were involved in the battle, as the Qur'an suggests he should have done, but maintained it as the property of the state and gave it back to the owners to cultivate. The owners were obliged to pay tax on the production from their land. 'Umar argued that if the land were distributed to the soldiers, later generations would not own it due to the land being divided among the soldiers.<sup>300</sup>

The case of 'Umar from Anang's point of view is seen as an attempt to interpret the text based on the social context in which the text is applied. Connecting the text to the context provides a more fitting arrival at an understanding of the text than understanding based solely on the text. Using this method does not cast doubts on the

<sup>298</sup> Nur Khalik argues that the ideas introduced by Ulil concentrate on a conceptual level such as the historicity of the prophet, the law of God and do not pay much attention to the actual situations faced by Indonesian society such as the protection of labour, slavery of children and so forth.

<sup>299</sup> Anang Rizka Masyhadi, “Masih tentang Ulil Abshar-Abdalla,” *Duta Masyarakat*, 17 Januari 2003. This article is also available in *Islam Liberal & Fundamental*, pp. 96-99.

<sup>300</sup> The case of 'Umar is often used to justify a critical understanding of the text in Islamic discourse made by substantialist Muslims. In the 1980s, Munawir Sadzali made the case as his foundation in offering the idea of *Reaktualisasi Ajaran Islam* regarding Islamic laws of inheritance. He argued that the idea was inspired by the case. See Munawir, *Reaktualisasi Ajaran Islam*, pp. 1-11. Ahmad Sahal, in one of his articles, also tries to track liberal Islam back to 'Umar period in which the creative understanding of Islam has deep roots. See Ahmad Sahal, “Umar bin al-Khattab dan Islam Liberal”, in Luthfi, *Wajah Liberal Islam*, pp. 4-8.

validity of the Qur'an or Hadith. Given this analysis, it is acceptable to put the ideas of liberal Islam, including those articulated in Ulil's article, into this category.

*b. Critical Apologetic Response*

Unlike the normative apologetic response, which concentrates on the justification or rejection of the idea from a normative perspective, critical apologetic tries to do this by connecting the idea to the circumstances in which the idea exists. Such a critique can be seen in the work of Adnin Armas.

In his *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis terhadap Islam Liberal, Dialog Interaktif dengan Aktivis Jaringan Islam Liberal* (Christian-Orientalist Impact to Liberal Islam, An Interactive Dialogue with the Activist of Jaringan Islam Liberal), Adnin Armas (Adnin) argues that the ideas of liberal Islam have been heavily influenced by orientalist ideology which has a euro-centric bias. His critique concentrates on the idea of secularization and the historicity and the graduality of the text as promoted by JIL.<sup>301</sup>

Adnin is convinced the idea of secularization promoted by JIL is influenced by secularization in Christianity as upheld by Harvey Cox in his *Secular City*, which in turn has influenced Robert Bellah in his *Beyond Belief*. Through secularization, Cox has tried to build a bridge between conservative theologians, who believe on the truthfulness of the text (Bible) and who look upon the Bible (religion) as the best way of life, and radical theologians who insist on the radical reformation of the doctrines of Christianity because these doctrines are not suitable to finding solutions to real situations. In order to lessen the tension, Cox proposes the idea of secularization which tries to separate religion and mundane affairs.<sup>302</sup> Furthermore, Adnin argues that in Indonesian Muslim society, the idea of secularization was adopted and promoted by Nurcholish Madjid in the 1970s and is currently continued by JIL.<sup>303</sup>

Commenting on the historicity and graduality of the text promoted by JIL, Adnin believes that their idea is influenced by the theory of evolution coined by Charles Darwin in his magnum opus: *The Origin of Species*, which says that all individuals will adjust to their environment. This theory has been adopted by sociologists to explain the development of religion within society. Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Auguste

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<sup>301</sup> Adnin Armas, *Pengaruh Kristen Orientalis*, pp. 1-30; 103-116.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Comte, Max Weber, and Robert Bellah are some sociologists who have adopted the theory of evolution as a fundamental basis in their works.<sup>304</sup>

Whilst Adnin tends to negatively comment on liberal Islam, Hamid Basyaib (Hamid) in his “Menyegarkan Pemahaman Islam: Sebuah Afirmasi” (Freshening Understanding Islam: An Affirmation)<sup>305</sup> can be said to offer a critical apologetic response which contains some positive remarks about JIL (Hamid himself is a proponent of JIL). According to Hamid, the core of Ulil’s ideas is that Islamic teaching, as mentioned in the Qur’an and the Hadith, should be continually reinterpreted in line with the social context. This does not mean that the teaching is opportunistically synchronized with the context, but that particular contexts within which the text are applied, should be taken into consideration. These values must be considered in interpretation in order for interpretation to solve the problems faced by Muslims.

### *c. Practical Apologetic Response*

A *fatwa* on the death penalty has been delivered by a group of Muslims who have unified themselves into the FUUI (Forum Ulama Umat Islam/Forum of Islamic Religious Scholars of the Muslim Community) in response to “Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam”. As was reported by *Tempo* 22 December 2002, not so long after the article was published, some eighty Muslims from East, Central and West Java, coordinated by Athian Ali, had a meeting in a mosque (*al-Fajr*), Bandung to discuss some important issues in Indonesia such as the capture of the chairperson of the *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia*, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, anti-terrorist regulation and Ulil’s article. Dissecting the article, the forum argued that the ideas promoted by Ulil can be classified as a humiliation to Islam.

The forum then publically issued a four-point collective statement on 2 December 2002. The third point of the four deals with the humiliation of Islam, whereby the forum insisted on the death penalty for those who humiliate Islam, and insists on the police breaking up any activity which systematically and massively humiliates Islam, Allah and the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>306</sup> At the end of the statement, the

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-108.

<sup>305</sup> Hamid Basyaib, “Menyegarkan Pemahaman Islam: Sebuah Afirmasi,” *Panjimas*, 27 December 2002. This article is also available in *Islam Liberal & Fundamental*, p. 29-35.

<sup>306</sup> “Fatwa Itu Lemah Tapi Menghawatirkan,” *Tempo*, No. 42, 22 December 2002. This report is available in *Islam Liberal & Fundamental*, pp. 207-216.

forum argued that in accordance with Islamic teachings, any people who distort Islamic teachings should be punished by the imposition of the death penalty.<sup>307</sup>

Although the coordinator, Athian Ali rejected the claim that the *fatwā* was specifically devoted to the case of Ulil,<sup>308</sup> there has been a very recent case in which the issuance of the death penalty *fatwā* was related to Ulil's article. This is strengthened by Athian's statement which has been quoted by Adnan Firdaus in his "Fatwa Mati buat yang 'Usil'" (Death Penalty for Annoying People). In this article, Adnan Firdaus quotes Athian's statement saying that Ulil's article is part of attempt to humiliate Islam by humiliating Allah and His Messenger. He finishes the argument, indicating that the *ulama* are a group of stupid people who have been frustrated in their attempt to solve contemporary problems by implementation of *shar'at*.<sup>309</sup>

### 3. Technical Response

The technical response is a response concentrating on the way the JIL communicates with its audience. In this case, the central point of the response is the technical method by which JIL promotes its ideas. Responses that concentrate on criticizing Ulil's technique include "Menyegarkan Kembali Sikap Islam" (Freshening up Islamic Attitudes)<sup>310</sup> by Mustofa Bisri and, to some extent the article "Memahami Kontroversi Tulisan Ulil Abshar-Abdalla" (Understanding The Controversy of Ulil Abshar-Abdalla) by Ratno Lukito.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> "Terlalu kecil jika kami mengurus dia" (It is too trivial for us to handle it [his article]).

<sup>309</sup> "...Kami menyerukan kepada pemerintah untuk membongkar jaringan yang selama ini menurut kami telah menghujat Islam. Di antaranya, tulisan Ulil Abshar-Abdalla itu. Di situ, dia telah menghina Allah, menghina rasulullah, dan menganggap para ulama yang memperjuangkan Syari'at Islam sebagai manusia-manusia picik yang kehabisan akal, frustrasi, dan mencoba mencari jalan keluar hanya dengan kembali ingin menjalankan hukum Allah." [We appeal to the government to break up a network which blasphemes against Islam according to us. The article written by Ulil Abshar-Abdalla is an example. In this article, he humiliates Allah, the Prophet, and accuses that 'Ulama who struggle for the implementation of *shar'at* of being narrow minded and frustrated persons who try to solve the problems by going back to the implementation of law of God]. See M. Adnan Firdaus, "Fatwa Mati Buat Yang 'Usil'"; *Sabili*, No. 12 Th. 10, December 2002. This article is available in *Islam Liberal & Fundamental*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>310</sup> Mustofa Bisri, "Menyegarkan Kembali Sikap Islam," *Kompas*, 5 December 2002.

<sup>311</sup> Ratno Lukito, "Memahami Kontroversi Tulisan Ulil Abshar-Abdalla," *Kompas*, 13 December 2002. In this article, he also pays much attention to the way of thinking by which Ulil introduces the ideas. Inspired by the concept of conflict and tension of Noel Colson which states that there are some conflicts and tensions in Islam like the particular and the universal, the sacred and the profane, continuity and change, unity and diversity and so forth, Ratno argues that Ulil tries to show that Islam consists of sacred and profane values (secularization) and shows that Islamic teachings, in some places have the potential to be reinterpreted.



Mustofa Bisri criticizes the way in which Ulil Abshar-Abdalla communicates the ideas of liberal Islam to his audience. He accuses Ulil of making mistakes by firstly putting forward his ideas in the form of highly charged expressions which are hostile towards Islamic fundamentalism and also comments that Ulil does not use less hostile methods of communication in general. Secondly, he attacks the media through which Ulil chooses to disseminate his ideas. He feels that the publication of ideas through a daily newspaper, *Kompas*, which all people can read easily is improper. As a result, the people which the article is not addressing are confused. According to Mustofa Bisri, such articles should be publicized to a limited group of people, read only by audience to whom the article addresses.

On the other hand, Ratno Lukito, although he does not agree with the way Ulil chooses to express his ideas, tolerates the method of communication by which Ulil promoted his article. Ratno acknowledges it is true that Ulil wrote the article to give full vent to his emotion. But, although it displays the typical expressions of a young person, it does not detract from the matters which Ulil raises. At the end of his article, Ratno Lukito argues that Ulil's article should be seen as a part of the development of Islamic thought in contemporary Indonesia. It should be kept in mind that Ulil successfully expresses contemporary Islamic thought. What Indonesian Muslims should do is to direct the conflict of Islamic thought into a channel of healthy discourse which will benefit the movement of Islam.

#### **E. Responses as Questions on Validity**

Various responses devoted to JIL indicate that it has some problems with its authority: methodology, ideas, and methods of communication.

Firstly, methodological responses are ones which try to question the validity of the method by which the ideas have been formulated and question the authority of JIL to promote the ideas. It only proposes the idea of critical understanding of Islamic teachings, but does not formulate the technical method which should be applied to understand Islamic teachings. The lack of this method gives a negative impression that JIL only arbitrarily understands Islamic teachings. An example, where the basis of the argument was never clearly formulated, was the case of *jilbāb* as has been criticized by Haidar Bagir, whereby JIL argues that wearing a *jilbāb* is not compulsory for Muslim women.

Secondly, as a result of using an inadequate method, the ideas that JIL promotes are weakly formulated. Although some Muslims believe that the themes which become main ideas of liberal Islam can be traced back to Islamic teachings through a critical understanding of Islam, some argue that the ideas of liberal Islam like secularization, religious freedom and pluralism do not have a normative foundation in Islam. These ideas are taken from outside and were arbitrarily claimed by liberal Muslims to be part of Islamic teachings.

Thirdly, technical responses can be seen which question the ability of the proponents of JIL to communicate its ideas to Indonesian Muslims as the audience. To some extent, the response devoted by Mustofa Bisri indicates that the members of JIL do not pay much attention to this aspect. The result is that there is an impression that its members are arrogant in the dissemination of their ideas.

Various responses devoted to JIL are a repetition of the various responses addressed to Renewal of Islamic Thought in the early 1970s. Basically, it can be claimed that most of the proponents of the idea of *pembaharuan* were young educated Muslims at that time. They have argued that Renewal of Islamic Thought was a positive contribution to Islam because it promoted a critical interpretation of Islamic teachings by searching the essential meaning of the text (*maqāsid al-sharī'a*) which can only be found by analysing the meanings beyond the text.<sup>312</sup> Islam has been interpreted as a flexible religion which is in conformity with modernity and propagates this idea to Muslims in Indonesia.<sup>313</sup> It has offered a new way of understanding Islam, and thus gave indirect support to the idea of pluralism,<sup>314</sup> and an attempt to present the friendly face of Islam.<sup>315</sup> It is also described as an attempt to place the profile of Islam on an academic and philosophical level which reveals the real nature of Islam and insists on the universality of Islamic spirituality.<sup>316</sup>

<sup>312</sup> Fachri Ali and Bahtiar Effendi, *Merambah Jalan Baru Islam Rekonstruksi Pemikiran Islam Indonesia Masa Orde Baru*, Bandung: Mizan, 1986, pp. 34-35.

<sup>313</sup> Fauzan Shaleh, *Modern Trends*, p. 196.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Mohamad Sobary, "Jalan Arteri ke Rumah Tuhan" *Ulumul Qur'an, Jurnal Ilmu dan Kebudayaan*, No. 1. Vol. IV Tahun 1993, pp. 26-27.

<sup>316</sup> Masdar F. Mas'udi, "Ide Pembaharuan Cak Nur di Mata Orang Pesantren" *Ulumul Qur'an*, Vol. 1. Vol. IV, pp. 28-33.

Various methodological responses have also been devoted to Renewal of Islamic Thought. Critiques by Amin Abdullah, Ahmad Baso and the emergence of *Islam Transformation* were similar to the methodological responses devoted to JIL.

Amin Abdullah criticized the method by which the idea of *pembaharuan* was promoted. Renewal of Islamic Thought has focused on general social problems by using a sociological and historical approach, but has paid less attention to the local values and the psychological nature of Indonesian Muslims. The anthropological approach, which insists on local values and specific character of human being, and the psychological approach, which focuses on the emotional attitude of human beings, did not play a significant role in this matter. This situation has led to Renewal of Islamic Thought's unacceptability by some groups of Muslims.<sup>317</sup>

Ahmad Baso criticized the precedents to which the ideas of Renewal of Islamic Thought refer. They were a group trying to revive the past in the present by justifying the ideas of democratisation, pluralism and tolerance as ideas which had been put into practice during the period of the Prophet and his Rightly-Guided Caliphs.<sup>318</sup> In fact, the early Muslim community did not reflect the real values of egalitarianism or the idea of tolerance upheld by Nurcholish Madjid. This was indicated by non-Muslims being considered second-class citizens in the society.<sup>319</sup>

Islam Transformasi (transformation Islam) is another response to the ideas of Renewal of Islamic Thought. This critique concentrates on the idea and the method by which Renewal of Islamic Thought was upheld. *Islam Transformasi* argued that Renewal of Islamic Thought was highly coloured by the theological method which focuses on the religious attitudes of Indonesian Muslims, and paid less attention to the

<sup>317</sup> M. Amin Abdullah, "Islam Indonesia lebih Pluralistik dan Demokratis," *Ulumul Qur'an*, No. 3. Vol. VI Tahun 1995, pp. 72-73.

<sup>318</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Civil Society versus Masyarakat Madani*, Yogyakarta, LKIS, pp. 272-273. To verify these ideas, Nurcholish Madjid refers to the works of Ibn Taimiyya, Marshal Hodgson, Ernest Gellner and Max Dimont. According to Fauzan Saleh, in these works, Islam is described as a religion adopting all of the idea of democratisation, pluralism and tolerance. See Fauzan Saleh, *Modern Trends*, p. 286.

<sup>319</sup> According to Ahmad Baso as noted by Fauzan Saleh, Nurcholish Madjid's uncritical acceptance of the Islamic historical past is also because of his unfamiliarity with the works of contemporary Muslim scholars, like Muhammad Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi, Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid. See, *Ibid.*, p. 287. But it should be kept in mind that the idea of Renewal of Islamic Thought promoted by Nurcholish Madjid was started at the early 1970s, while the works of those people mentioned above were widely known since the 1980s and 1990s. *Maqhum al-Nas* of Abu Zaid, for example, was published in early 1993. So it is an anachronistic critique if criticizing Nurcholish Madjid's mode of thought from the side of his unfamiliarity to the works of contemporary Muslim scholars.

societal problems caused by social relationship. *Islam Transformatif* proposed a dialectical method combining a theological and a social approach. The theological method is to observe the theological problem of the backwardness of Muslims and the social method is to solve social problems which Muslims face. The backwardness of Indonesian Muslims is not only because of their adoption of an incorrect theology and cultural attitudes, but it is also because of unequal relationships within society, namely between the higher classes and the lower classes and, in a wider sense, between developed and developing countries. The higher classes position themselves as superior and exploit the lower.<sup>320</sup> There is no equality and justice in society.

Creating a new social order, then, is the solution, a social order which will provide the opportunity for equality and justice among its members. The solution to backwardness should be based, not only on the internal problems faced by Muslims such as the idea of Renewal of Islamic Thought, but should also be founded on the reality of Indonesian society and general concerns of Indonesian society such as with education and culture.<sup>321</sup>

Other critiques by some Muslims like Endang Saefuddin Anshari,<sup>322</sup> Ismail Hasan Metareuem,<sup>323</sup> H.M. Rasjidi,<sup>324</sup> Abdul Qadir Djailani,<sup>325</sup> and critiques by *Media Dakwah* as well,<sup>326</sup> were also similar to the apologetic responses devoted to JIL. *Media Dakwah* and Abdul Qadir Djailani who reject the ideas of Renewal of Islamic Thought as odd ideas and who consider its proponents to be agents of the political movement and global strategy of Zionism, which tries to dominate the world, can be categorized as apologetic responses. They argued that the idea of Renewal of Islamic Thought was not relevant to the needs of Indonesian Muslims, and contradicted the spirit of *ukhuwwa*

<sup>320</sup> Budhy Munawar-Rahman, "Berbagai Respon", p. 22.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>322</sup> Endang Saifuddin Anshari, *Kritik atas Fahaman dan Gerakan "Pembaharuan" Drs. Nurcholish Madjid*, Bandung: Bulan Sabit, 1973.

<sup>323</sup> Ismail Hasan Metareuem, "Pembahasan terhadap Prasaran Sdr. Drs. Nurcholish Madjid: tentang Keharusan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Ummat," in Nurcholish Madjid et al., *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam*, Jakarta: Islamic Research Centre, 1970, pp. 26-38.

<sup>324</sup> H.M. Rasjidi, *Koreksi terhadap Drs. Nurcholish Madjid tentang Sekularisasi*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1972.

<sup>325</sup> Abdul Qadir Djailani, *Menelusuri Kekeliruan Pembaharuan Islam Nurcholish Madjid*, Bandung: Yadia, 1994. Fauzan Saleh in his *Modern Trends* classifies Abdul Qadir Djailani as a proponent of scripturalism. See, Fauzan Saleh, *Modern Trends*, p. 184.

<sup>326</sup> *Media Dakwah* is a weekly magazine published by DDII (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia/The Indonesian Council of Islamic Missions), an institution which energetically propagates Islamic teachings in Indonesia.

*Islāmiyya* (Muslim brotherhood) the most important concern for a plural society like Indonesia.<sup>327</sup> Abdul Qadir Djailani, even, argued that Nurcholish Madjid has consciously tried to break up the integration of Indonesian Muslim society and to make Indonesian Muslims confused.<sup>328</sup>

The technical response is another response which can be found in the responses devoted to Renewal of Islamic Thought. Renewal of Islamic Thought was criticized as a movement of the middle class which can only be understood by well-educated people.

Practical apologetic responses are responses which differentiate between those devoted to Renewal of Islamic Thought and JIL. It is correct that such responses can be seen with the harsh objection by *Media Dakwah* to Nurcholish Madjid, who was condemned as a person who should be brought to justice by the community, and a cancer which must be removed from the body of Islam.<sup>329</sup> But these attacks were only polemical in nature. None of the responses leads to the direct threat of the physical punishment like the *fatwa* of a death penalty issued by FUUI to Ulil Abshar-Abdalla.

Apart from the discussion above, some criticisms can be addressed to JIL. As a disseminator of liberal Islam, JIL tends to be framed as an extreme group. If Islamic fundamentalism claims that literal meaning is the only authoritative interpretation, JIL falls into the opposite side whereby the most important authority is the meaning beyond the text. While fundamentalist Islam has the potential to fall into an anachronistic interpretation because of the application of the text without considering the context, liberal Islam has the potential to fall into a pragmatic one because many interpretations can be found for the one situation. In this case, the way of thinking plays a significant role. If no adequate method can be formulated for the interpretation, it is a concern that an incorrect practice will be justified in the name of Islam. In Haidar Bagir's term, Islam will be a "*keranjang sampah*" (rubbish tank) into which all things can be put.<sup>330</sup>

<sup>327</sup> See, H.M. Rasjidi, *Koreksi Terhadap Drs Nurcholish Madjid Tentang Sekularisasi*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1972. Idem, *Suatu Koreksi Lagi bagi Drs Nurcholish Madjid*, Banjarmasin: Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia Perwakilan Kalimantan Selatan, 1973; Endang Saefuddin Anshari, *Kritik atas Fahaman dan Gerakan Pembaharuan Drs Nurcholish Madjid*, Bandung: Bulan Sabit, 1973; Abdul Qadir Djaelani, *Menelusuri Kekeliruan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam Nurcholish Madjid*, Bandung: Yadia, 1994.

<sup>328</sup> Abdul Qadir Djailani, *Menelusuri Kekeliruan*, p. 22.

<sup>329</sup> See William Liddle, "Media Dakwah Scripturalism: One Form of Islamic Political thought and Action in New Order Indonesia" in Mark R. Woodward (ed.), *Toward a New Paradigm: Recent Developments in Indonesian Islamic Thought*, Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, 1996, p. 327.

<sup>330</sup> Haidar Bagir, "Islah Butuh Metodologi," *Republika* 23 March 2003.



“Package from the sponsor” is probably a phrase to describe the dependency of JIL to funding. The dependency on western funding makes it difficult for JIL to escape from a western bias. It is still in doubt that such terms as democratization, pluralism, religious freedom and human rights are self-consciously Indonesian as these terms remain peculiar among Indonesian Muslims. Rather, they are western ideas which have been introduced to Indonesia. It is possible to implement these ideas, but they should be reformulated in order to be in conformity with Indonesian society. In this context, the particular values and experiences of Indonesian Muslim society plays significant role.

Another critique is that JIL is an elitist institution. Like Renewal of Islamic Thought, it is a representation of the middle class through the eyes of some young scholars. For the majority of Indonesian Muslims, the ideas which JIL promotes are very complicated ones and can only be understood by well-educated people. Thus JIL is perceived to be only an agent of thinking, which can only promote ideas on a conceptual level. It is not able to correlate its ideas with real problems faced by the Indonesian society, or in Umaruddin’s term it fosters: *keberagamaan berbasis ilusi* (religiousness based on illusion).<sup>331</sup> As a result, the ideas upheld by JIL are not pragmatic and do not meet the needs of Indonesian Muslims. So it is quite easy for some Muslims, who disagree with JIL, to object and even condemn JIL as a presentation of the inferiority of Muslims before the West.<sup>332</sup>

#### F. Conclusion

Jaringan Islam Liberal, as an agent of the liberal Islam movement in Indonesia, has been responded to in various forms. Fundamentalist Islam, as an opponent of liberal Islam, harshly rejects JIL’s ideas. It believes that liberal Islam propagated by JIL does not have a normative foundation in Islam. In the case of religious freedom and pluralism, it argues that both ideas are in conflict with Islamic doctrines and the early period of the history of Islam. This rejection is based on the different ideologies and methods of thinking used by both groups. While JIL promotes an inclusive ideology and

<sup>331</sup> Umaruddin Masdar, *Agama Kolonial: Colonial Mindset dalam Pemikiran Islam Liberal*, Yogyakarta: Kliik-R, 2003.

<sup>332</sup> *Media Dakwah*, as has been quoted by Akh. Muzakki condemns the JIL as a terror to Islam, as a diabolical logic (*logika iblis*), as a deviant sect, as an agent of orientlists and secularists. See Akh. Muzakki, “Perseteruan Dua Kutub, p. 43.

a non-literal interpretation of the text, fundamentalist Islam propagates an exclusive ideology and a literal interpretation of the text.

Other Indonesian Muslims have given various responses to liberal Islam. These responses are generally classified into three categories. The first is a methodological critical response which tries to criticize the methodological approach used by JIL to promote its ideas. The second is an apologetic response which focuses on the validity of ideas which JIL promotes. Three forms of responses can be derived from the apologetic response: firstly, a normative apologetic response focusing on the normative doctrines in which the idea of liberal Islam is based; secondly, a critical apologetic response which tries to connect the idea of liberal Islam to the circumstance in which the idea is formed and applied; thirdly, a practical apologetic response. This response leads to the prosecution of physical action. The third is the technical response which relates to the way JIL communicates its ideas to its audience (Indonesian Muslims).

Various responses devoted to JIL are a repetition of the various responses addressed to Renewal of Islamic Thought in the early 1970s. Practical apologetic responses are the point of difference between the responses devoted to Renewal of Islamic Thought and JIL. This type of response cannot be found in the responses which are objected to Renewal of Islamic Thought.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

Jaringan Islam Liberal is a network whose members claim themselves to be proponents of liberal Islam in Indonesia. The term liberal Islam adopted by JIL is much influenced by the definitions made by Leonard Binder and Charles Kurzman. It is a critical understanding of Islamic teachings based on the essential meaning of the text by going beyond the literal meaning of the text because the text does not exhaust all meanings of revelation. In order to achieve this, JIL considers the fruits of modernity such as democratization, the idea of progress, secularization, human rights, religious freedom and pluralism and so forth as important in interpretation.

Liberal Islam in the sense of a critical understanding of Islamic teachings has historical roots in the development of Islamic thought in Indonesia. From the beginning of the 1970s, there were some scholars who promoted *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam* (Renewal of Islamic Thought), later best known as Islamic Neo-Modernism, an idea which pays considerable attention to the fruits of modernity besides the classical heritage of Islam. Harun Nasution, Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, Djohan Effendi, and Ahmad Wahib are scholars who energetically promoted these ideas.

The intention of Renewal of Islamic Thought was to change the negative orientation and perception among Indonesian Muslims on *modernisasi* (modernization) as a foundation of the development programmes upheld by New Order Indonesia, and to involve Indonesian Muslims in these programmes. Indonesian Muslims held a negative perception of modernization at that time. Modernization was considered to be loaded with western culture and Christianity. In order to solve the problem, some Muslim scholars tried to propose ideas explaining modernity: modernization is not westernization, but rationalization with the spirit of progress and creativity, it is an integral part of Islamic teachings. In this case, the emergence of JIL after the period of New Order Indonesia is related to these previous movements. Jaringan Islam Liberal also claims itself to be a movement continuing the ideas of previous similar movements in the country.

The point of the difference between Renewal of Islamic Thought and JIL lies in their appreciation of local values. On the one hand, the ideas of *Keindonesiaan* by

Nurcholish Madjid and *Islam Pribumi* by Abdurrahman Wahid indicated that Renewal of Islamic Thought paid deep attention to modernity and particular characteristics of Indonesian society in the interpretation of Islamic teachings as well. On the other hand, there is no JIL's concept which indicates such emphasis on these values. Rather, JIL concentrates on modernity in the interpretation of Islamic teachings.

Apart from the adoption of the term liberal Islam and the formulation of the agenda of JIL, inspired by the works of Binder, Kurzman and the previous movements, the formation of JIL cannot be separated from other factors. The organization was formed as a reaction to Islamic fundamentalist movements promoted by organizations such as Forum Komunikasi Ahlul Sunnah Waljama'ah, Lasykar Jihad, Front Pembela Islam and Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, in Indonesia. Jaringan Islam Liberal encourages young Indonesian Muslims to challenge these movements by propagating liberal ideas of Islam. Furthermore, it cannot be separated from the development of liberal Islam in other Muslim nations and the development of scholarly methodology, particularly in the humanities.

The last factor is the financial subsidy by The Asia Foundation, which provides JIL with millions of rupiahs. This subsidy enables the dissemination of JIL's concepts of liberal Islam through various print and electronic media.

The liberality of JIL can be seen from its view on religious freedom and pluralism. Unlike orthodox Islam, JIL believes that religion is a private affair. Everyone is free to either embrace or not to embrace any religion. Additionally, JIL believes that all religions have the same spirit and are a straight path to salvation.

Fundamentalist Muslims strongly reject the ideas of liberal Islam. For fundamentalist Muslims, JIL is a threat to Islam itself. They perceive JIL's opinions on religious freedom and pluralism to potentially weaken a Muslim's faith and belief (*'aqida*), and show a weak Islam before the West. This is a picture, fundamentalist Muslims view with distaste, as they argue Islam proposes a complete set of values which guide believers in all aspects of their life and which are superior to those guiding the West.

Whilst fundamentalist Muslims reject the ideas of liberal Islam, other Indonesian Muslims give various responses to their ideas. The first is a methodological critique which concentrates on the mode of thinking by which JIL upholds its ideas. Haidar

Bagir and Husni Mu'adz who doubt the adequacy of the method of JIL, and Ahmad Gaus who appreciate the efforts of JIL can be categorized within this category. The second is apologetic response. It focuses on the validity of ideas which JIL promotes. Three forms of responses can be derived from this apologetic response: firstly, a normative apologetic response which focuses on the normative doctrines on which the idea of liberal Islam is based, like responses offered by Adian Husaini and Nuim Hidayat who do not agree with JIL and Nurchalik Ridwan and Anang Rizka Masyhadi who look at JIL as an institution promoting a critical understanding of Islam; secondly, a critical apologetic response which tries to connect the ideas of liberal Islam to the circumstances in which the ideas are formed and applied. Adnin Armas' critiques which concentrate on the influence of Christian-orientalists to JIL, and Hamid Basyaib's comment on Ulil's article which focuses on reinterpretation of Islamic teachings can be categorized under this form of response; thirdly, a practical apologetic response which result in physical action. The death penalty issued by FUUI (Forum Ulama Umat Islam/Forum of Islamic Religious Scholars of the Muslim Community) to Ulil is an example of this. The third response is a technical response and relates to the way JIL communicates its ideas to Indonesian Muslims. Responses by Mustofa Bisri and Ratno Lukito which criticize the way in, and medium by, which Ulil promoted his article can be grouped in this category.

Various responses devoted to JIL are a repetition of the responses made against Renewal of Islamic Thought. One of the critics of JIL, is even the same critic to Renewal of Islamic Thought, namely *Media Dakwah*. In the early 1970s, as soon as the ideas of Renewal of Islamic Thought were launched, various responses occurred. Practical apologetics addressed to JIL is response which cannot be found in the responses devoted to Renewal of Islamic Thought.

The responses addressed to JIL can be seen as questioning the validity of its concerns, its authority as a proponent of liberal Islam and the relationship between JIL and Indonesian society as its audience. The Apologetic response does, for example, question the authenticity of its ideas. The methodological critical response criticizes the authority of the members of JIL to promote its ideas. The last, technical response looks at the intention of the proponents of JIL. However, it should be kept in mind that all of these response types are a result of a study which concentrates on Indonesian Muslims'



responses, either positive or negative, to JIL's views on religious freedom and pluralism in general, and on the article "Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam" by Ulil Abshar-Abdalla in particular.

Apart from the responses mention above, some critical remarks can also be addressed to JIL. Firstly, JIL is an institution which is subsidized by a foreign organization. The dependency on this foreign funding gives the perception that JIL is influenced by a western bias. This is indicated by the impression that JIL does not pay much attention to particular experiences of the Indonesian Muslim society. Rather, the members of JIL tend to uphold major ideas of modernity such as democratization, human rights, secularization, ideas of progress, freedom of expression and so forth. The ignorance of JIL to local values of Indonesian Muslims causes JIL to lose its sense of perception of the needs of Indonesian Muslims. The ideas promoted by JIL are not pragmatic. For example, in the case of religious freedom and pluralism, JIL does not discuss local faiths (*aliran-aliran kepercayaan*) within Indonesian society.

The organization is also accused of being elitist. It is an agent of a theoretical movement conducted by young scholars which promotes odd ideas for a majority of Indonesian Muslims. The ideas can only be understood by people who are familiar with modernity, namely the educated middle class, which is a minority group, whilst the majority of Indonesians cannot understand their ideas. Thus, it is not impossible that JIL, as Umaruddin Masdar predicts, will only exist for a short time.

Finally, JIL is an Islamic organization which has gained popularity over the last two years, and is thus a hot phenomenon in Indonesia. This institution stimulates many Indonesian Muslims to voice their opinions. Following the development of JIL is no easy task. Muslim responses to JIL develop rapidly, and this study is not aimed at analyzing all of them. Indeed several days before the draft of this work was finished, Eljihan (Lembaga Kajian Islam Hanif/ the Institute for Study of Hanif Islam), an institution whose members claim it as a rival to JIL, was declared.<sup>333</sup>

<sup>333</sup> As of 7 November 2003, a news site, *Mediakreasi.com*, reports that *Eljihan* would be declared by some Muslim leaders on 16 November 2003. Sjechul Hadi Permono (the Director of Pascasarjana IAIN Sunan Ampel, Surabaya), Abdusshomad and Imam Mawardi (Council of Indonesian Ulama of East Java), Bisjri Affandi (Ex rector of IAIN Sunan Ampel) are people who have involved themselves in its formation. The establishment of the institution is in order to stem the ideas of liberal Islam promoted by the JIL. According to them, the idea of liberal Islam exerts a negative influence to Indonesian Muslims and it should be stemmed. <http://www/mediakreasi.com/article.php?story=20031107121817161>, accessed on 11 November 2003.

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