ISLAM AND LIBERALISM IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA:
THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF JARINGAN ISLAM LIBERAL
(THE LIBERAL ISLAM NETWORK)

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ISLAM AND LIBERALISM IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA:

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(THE LIBERAL ISLAM NETWORK)

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Islam in Indonesia is acknowledged as moderate, although there are radical Islamic groups that are involved in violent religious conflicts and insist on the implementation of Islamic law in the post-authoritarian Soeharto era. The moderation of Islam in Indonesia is not merely because of historical factors, but is also the result of ongoing debates on how to reconcile Islam with modernity. Jaringan Islam Liberal/JIL (the Liberal Islam Network), a network of young Muslim intellectuals, emerges as a forum to disseminate liberal interpretations of Islam. This study is to determine whether JIL’s liberal Islam is meant to develop an Islamic conception of liberalism or an Islamic liberal theology. This study shows that JIL’s liberal Islam is the continuation of Islamic renewal projects by Islamic neomodernists. The ideas proposed by JIL activists mostly deal with the compatibility of Islam and democracy, especially on the issues of toleration, pluralism, secularization, and individual and women’s rights. This network is very significant to the development of liberal Islamic ideas and the future of moderation of Islam in predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia.
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Appendix 1. Comparison of the History of the Liberal Idea and the Islamic Faith .......119
Indonesia is home to more Muslims than any other country in the world, but Islam in Indonesia is acknowledged as having more moderate nuances than in other Muslim countries. Islam is practiced by more than 85 percent of Indonesia’s 220 million people and coexists with other religions and faiths in a relatively peaceful situation, although tensions between Muslims and Christians have risen since the downfall of Soeharto’s authoritarian regime in 1998. These tensions have taken different forms. In parts of Maluku and Sulawesi, violent conflicts between Muslim and Christian communities have resulted in several thousand deaths and the displacement of more than a half million people from their homes. In addition, fundamentalist Muslim groups have begun to advocate the implementation of Islamic law (shari’a). Although they have not gained broad political support from the majority of moderate Indonesian Muslims, they have compelled other groups to reconsider the decision of the country’s founding fathers to reject the adoption of an Islamic state.

It is commonly argued that the moderate Islam in Indonesia is the result of the process of Islamization known as peaceful penetration mostly by traders-cum-missionaries, not by military conquest to supplant the existing religions.¹ However, the historical background does not adequately explain the moderate Islam in modern

Indonesia. Today in Indonesia there is an ongoing debate about how Islam should be reconciled with other values as well as how to adapt and bring normative Islam into dialogue with modernity. A critical issue in this debate is Islam and pluralism. Pluralism is a reality for Indonesia, as the country consists of more than 200 ethnic and language groupings. In order to maintain the moderation of Islam in Indonesia, many Islamic scholars have tried to re-interpret normative Islamic values by reconciling them with modern, Western liberal philosophical discourses.

Therefore, there is an ongoing debate about the compatibility of Islamic values with liberalism (and democracy in general) in Indonesia. Arguments proposed by Indonesian Islamic scholars can be categorized into two main contradicting points of view. The first position based on the textual interpretations of the Qur’an is that Islamic values are not compatible with liberalism. The main argument supporting this view is that Islamic values were God-created values and theological doctrines of divinity, while liberalism was invented and developed by human beings, and, therefore, it was based on the primacy of reason. The second position based on the contextual interpretations of the Qur’an is that both values can be reconciled. Islamic values and liberalism are not totally in contradiction. In many aspects, Islam and liberalism reinforce and reconstitute the values needed by the individual to pursue justice, equality, liberty, and happiness.

The argument for the incompatibility of Islamic values and liberalism is mostly proposed by dogmatic, textual-minded Islamic scholars. Islam in their view is superior to other values, and it should be the sole source of individual values. Islam is a perfect, complete set of values that is adequate to guide people’s conduct in life. Theologically, Islam rules people’s lives in the world and in the afterlife. Therefore, there is no
compatibility between Islamic values and any kind of human-created values and ideologies.

The alternative approach is based on the argument that Islam as a set of values can be interpreted contextually (ijtihad). Islam in this view is a source of ethics and morals that should be elaborated in the broader context of social life by utilizing rationality. In this sense, Islam as personal values differs with Islam as public values. As public values, the universality of Islam should be reconciled with other universal values in order to harmonize with the basic structure of society. This kind of interpretation results in the emergence of liberal or moderate Islam in many countries.

This thesis will deal with the phenomena of liberal Islam in Indonesia, especially as proposed by Jaringan Islam Liberal/JIL (the Liberal Islam Network), a network of Muslim intellectuals and Islamic scholars. This network emerged in 2001 during the early period of transition to democracy in Indonesia as a response to growing concern over the demand from Islamic groups and political parties for the implementation of Islamic law and the increasing level of violent religious conflict, particularly between Muslims and Christians, which led some radical Islamic groups to mobilize Islamic fighters into the conflict areas. Most of JIL’s active members are prominent Muslim intellectuals and

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Islamic scholars who come from different Islamic traditions and organizations. Some of them have wide influence in Muslim communities. Their ideas, though not yet widespread in Indonesian society, are gaining more attention from young scholars and students as well as radical Islamic groups that oppose liberal Islamic ideas.

The main problem in this thesis is whether *Jaringan Islam Liberal*’s liberal Islam is meant to develop an Islamic conception of liberalism or an Islamic liberal theology in Indonesia. This thesis will also address the issue of whether JIL’s liberal Islam deals with the compatibility of Islam and liberalism or Islam and democracy. Although liberalism and democracy mostly perceived as an identical set of values, there are some differences between those values, especially in the political spheres. Democracy can be operated under non-liberal values like communitarianism, socialism, or in the constitutional monarchy system like in the United Kingdom.

It seems that liberal interpretations of Islam proposed by JIL activists most likely leads to the development of liberal theology rather than a liberal political philosophy. This might be a consequence of the choice to use some notions of liberalism and put them in an Islamic context in order to provide theological justification (instead of rational justification) of the ideas of liberal Islam. It might be also that Western liberalism can be transplanted into Muslim societies, but it has to be modified using liberal theology. Meanwhile, JIL’s liberal Islam seems to address more issues and problems of democracy than liberalism. In this sense, JIL seems to focus on the development of a notion of “democratic Islam” instead of liberal Islam.

This first part of the study will briefly discuss the meaning of and academic works on liberal Islam, its notions of democracy, liberalism and liberal theology. A basic
discussion on liberalism and liberal theories will also be presented in order to contrast these secular, humanist values with concepts developed by participants in Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL).

**Liberal Islam: A Brief Introduction**

Liberal Islam is a debatable concept. The Arabic word “Islam”\(^3\) refers to submission to the will of God or peace, while the term “liberal” refers to individual freedom.\(^4\) Islam requires its followers to surrender to the will of God and become members of a world-wide community of faith (ummah). By contrast, the notion of liberalism requires individuals to master themselves based on the principle that individual liberty is an ultimate value for human beings. As Martha Nussbaum suggests, liberal (liberalis) means something that is “fitted for freedom” and “makes for freedom.”\(^5\)

Liberal Islam is a relatively new interpretation of Islam in the context of modernity. This term is used loosely by many Western and Islamic scholars to label those who reject static, literal views of Islam and propose open, contextual interpretations. In contrast to Islamic traditionalists, who see the language of the Qur’an as the basis for absolute knowledge of the world, proponents of liberal Islam believe that “the language of the Qur’an is coordinate with the essence of revelation, but the content and meaning of


\(^{4}\) The word “liberal” derived from Middle English, from Middle French, from Latin *liberalis* “suitable for a freeman, generous”; and from *liber* “free”; perhaps akin to Old English *lEodan* “to grow,” Greek *eleutheros* “free.” See, Merriam Webster Dictionary online at <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?liberal> accessed on December 9, 2002.

revelation is not essentially verbal.” Contemporary Islamic liberals reject a blind adherence to earlier Muslim doctrines and respond to the challenges of modernity with *itijihad* (creative interpretation) of Islam’s main material sources: the Qur’an and Prophetic traditions (*sunnah*).

The term “liberal Islam” was coined in *A Modern Approach to Islam* by Asaf Ali Asghar Fyzee (1899-1981). In this book, he strongly advocates a critical reinterpretation and reexamination of *shari’a* (Islamic law) and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) to make them relevant to contemporary modern life. He also used the term “protestant” Islam in contrast with orthodox, scripturalist Islam. He says:

> “If the complete fabric of the *Shari’a* is examined in...critical manner, it is obvious that in addition to the orthodox and stable pattern of religion, a newer ‘protestant’ Islam will be born in conformity with conditions of life in the twentieth century, cutting away the dead wood of the past and looking hopefully at the future. We need not bother about nomenclature, but if some name has to be given to it, let us call [it] ‘Liberal Islam.’”

The term has become familiar to Western audiences after Leonard Binder, an internationally known specialist on Islamic political thought and Middle Eastern politics, published his book *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* in 1988. In this book, Binder analyzed various Western developments and Islamic thought in order to better understand the prospect of political liberalism in the Middle East. The central focus of his book is the relationship of Islamic liberalism—a term used to describe a political synthesis of liberalism and Islam—and political liberalism. Binder stated three main purposes of his book. The first is “to question the intellectual ground of the currently

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7 An Indian-born jurist, Fyzee was professor of law, and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Jammu and Kashmir as well as a former visiting professor at Cambridge University and the University of California at Los Angeles.

dominant interpretive paradigm employed in both the public and the academic explanations of Middle East politics.” The second is “to construct a framework, or paradigm, for the proper study of the Islamic resurgence,” and finally is to examine and prove that “without a vigorous Islamic liberalism, political liberalism will not succeed in the Middle East, despite the emergence of bourgeois states.”

Binder uses the term “Islamic liberalism” or “liberal Islam” interchangeably in the political context. For him, all traditions in the interpretation of Islam, which is based on human reasoning or rational discourse, can be labeled Islamic liberalism. From his analysis of Middle East politics, he concluded that there are at least two kinds of Islamic liberalism in relation to the issue of the Islamic state. On the one hand is Islamic liberalism, which argues that “the idea of a liberal Islamic state [is] possible and desirable not only because such a liberal, democratic state accords with the spirit of Islam, but especially because, in matters political, Islam has few specific requirements” or guidance on this issue. For the proponents of this version of Islamic liberalism, Islam does not prescribe a political system, because “Islam has few or no political institutional prescriptions, and little canonical experience that can be said to be incumbent upon present-day political authorities or constituent powers.” This kind of argument can be called “the silent shari’a.” On the other hand, there is a form of Islamic liberalism that

9 Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, 19. Binder disagreed with classical Marxian and Modernization theorists who mainly argued that the emergence of bourgeois state and the gradual growth of capitalism will contribute significantly to the democratization of the Middle East region. Instead, he preferred to focus his study on the ideological or intellectual ground of Islamic liberalism which will become the basis for a liberal, democratic government in Muslim societies. In Binder’s account, the main political problem faced by Muslims in the Middle East is not the lack of democratic institutions, but is more the lack of critical interpretation of Islam.


11 *Ibid.*, 243. Binder notes that the silence of shari’a implies that “Islam is compatible only with a liberal system in which Muslims are free to choose and change their political arrangements” within a liberal Islamic state.
takes the opposite view by justifying “the establishment of liberal institutions (parliament, elections, civil rights) and even some social welfare policies, not on the basis of the absence of any contradictory Islamic legislation, but rather on the basis of quite specific Islamic legislation.” Binder called the latter version “scripturalist liberalism” and argues that it is inherently “anomalous” because it justifies liberal institutions based on “explicit Islamic legislation of divine origin,” not on liberal political, epistemological and moral principles.\(^\text{12}\)

The most recent source published in 1998 and ambitiously intended as a “main reference” for Islamic liberalism is *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, edited by Charles Kurzman. This book is intended primarily to clarify the terminology of liberal Islam, a term that is inherently *contradictio in terminis* (contradictory in its terminology). Kurzman traced the history of the debate over liberal Islam and found three different traditions of socio-religious interpretation in the Islamic world in the past two centuries: customary Islam, revivalist Islam, and liberal Islam. Customary Islam is “characterized by the combination of regional practices and those that are shared throughout the Islamic world” and this tradition tends to be justified in local terms along with distinctive characteristics of identity, prudence and linkages to the past.\(^\text{13}\) On the other hand, revivalist Islam—closely reflected in Islamism, fundamentalism, or Wahhabism—rejects locality and customary interpretation of Islam, and urges bringing Islam back to its purity. Meanwhile, liberal Islam is a tradition of interpretation critical of both customary

\(^\text{12}\) *Ibid.*, 244.

\(^\text{13}\) Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5. He gives examples of customary traditions in Islam such as reverence for saintly figures in Morocco and rituals to display the spirituality and power that express regional cultural traditions.
and revivalist Islam, as those traditions have hindered Muslims from living in and
benefiting from modernity.

In explaining the variations within the Islamic liberalism tradition, Kurzman
proposes three different modes of liberal Islam. First, is the liberal shari’
a which “holds
that the shari’a is itself liberal, if interpreted properly.” Kurzman believes that this
mode is the most influential form of liberal Islam, as it is derived solidly from orthodox
Islamic sources, is based on argument that liberal position is also divine command, and is
powerful rhetorical strategy to ease inferiority of Muslims vis a vis Westener societies.
Second, is the silent shari’a which argues that shari’a lacks explanation or guidance in
some topics. In this mode, the argument against the idea of Islamic states is based on the
fact that “of some 6000 Qur’anic verses, only 200 have a legal aspect” and “the Qur’an
does not dictate the adoption of any particular form of government.” The third mode is
the interpreted shari’a. This is the one closest to Western liberal thinking as it “holds that
the shari’a is mediated by human interpretation.” Based on the belief that the shari’a is
divine but human interpretation is fallible, proponents of this mode argue that
interpretation and re-interpretation of shari’a is a must for the good of Muslims, as “the
Qur’an [itself] is malleable, capable of many types of interpretation.” They also argue
that variation of interpretation of shari’a is the hallmark of the Islamic tradition and
useful for the development of Muslim communities, and that proper understanding of
religious truths can be achieved better through dialogue.

14 Ibid., 14.
15 Ibid., 15.
16 Ibid., 16.
Kurzman’s book is a compilation of various Islamic scholars’ writings on six different liberal themes: against theocracy, for democracy, rights of women, the rights of non-Muslims, freedom of thought, and progress. The theme against theocracy deals with the objection to the implementation of Islamic law (shari’a) in public life. In regards to democracy, liberal Muslims support the notion of shura (consultation) as democracy, political pluralism, the democratic state, and democratic procedures. Liberal Muslims see the problem of women in Islam in more critical ways. Their arguments range from the claim that “the seclusion of women and restriction of their rights is a result of customary misreadings of the shari’a”, to the belief that certain oppressive verses against women in shari’a are intended to be temporary, and to the idea that shari’a does not “prohibit women from organizing to protect their rights.” Regarding the rights of non-Muslims, Islamic liberal scholars argue in favor of the rights of non-Muslims to practice their religion, toleration, religious pluralism, peaceful co-existence, and inter-communal and inter-faith dialogue. Freedom of thought is the most crucial issue addressed by liberal Muslims because it relates to the problem of who has the authority to practice ijtihad and

17 Kurzman selected 32 articles written by 32 authors from 19 countries, five of them are Shi’ite and the rest Sunni. He chose arbitrarily the authors in his book based on the following criteria: “liberal,” particularly those who express opposition to Islamic revivalism; “Islamic” in the sense that they believe Islam has an important role in the contemporary world, as opposed to secularists; their works are widely read nationally or internationally; geographically representing the entire Islamic world; ideologically representing the variety of liberal Islam; and temporally emphasizing the contemporary period. See, Ibid., 18. However, his choice is controversial, if not outright mistaken, as he chose two illiberal Islamic scholars, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi (Egypt) and Muhammad Natsir (Indonesia). It is true that their works selected by Kurzman have some notion of liberal views, but overall they are ideologically close to Islamism and against the ‘liberalization’ of Islam.

18 Kurzman identifies four basic arguments of liberal Muslims against an Islamic state. First, a traditional argument, which states that “divine revelation has left the form of government for human construction” as the Prophet Muhammad did not lay the foundations for future Islamic governments and the emphasis in the Qur’an is to create a just society, not an ideological state. Second, theocracy will likely be easy to be manipulated to serve the interests of those who rule in the name of God. Third, there is no guarantee that the implementation of shari’a will effectively solve Muslims’ problems. Instead, it will likely distract Muslims from addressing issues. Finally, shari’a is not a “ready-made system of law” which can be implemented without further interpretation. See, Ibid., 19.

19 Ibid., 20.
what may be interpreted. The issue of progress relates to liberal Muslims’ acceptance of modernity and objection to status-quo traditionalism which is past-oriented thinking.

The development of a contemporary liberal tradition of Islamic interpretation can be traced in the works of neo-modernist Islamic thinkers. One principal figure who was influential in the dissemination of a critical interpretation of Islam in Western academia as well as in Indonesia is Fazlur Rahman. A leading figure in Pakistan and a noted scholar in the University of Chicago, he advocated the reformation of Islamic intellectualism and education. He suggests that Muslims should first “distinguish clearly between ‘normative Islam’ and ‘historical Islam.’”\(^{20}\) For Fazlur Rahman, a modern and progressive Islam can be achieved only if Islam can be liberated from the Arabic historical context which has formed a very particular tradition and meaning of Islam.

He strongly rejects fundamentalists (like the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia) or their neofundamentalist successors (such as Ikhwanul Muslimin/Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt) or classical modernists who argue that “Muslims must go back to the original and definitive sources of Islam and perform *ijtihad* on that basis.” Instead, Rahman suggests Muslims should study the Qur’an “in its total and specific background…not just studying it verse by verse or passage by passage with an isolated ‘occasion of revelation’ (*sha’n al-nuzul*).”\(^{21}\) By this method, Rahman re-constructs a more critical and contextual interpretation and understanding of Islam based on systematic study of Islam in a historical context. This effort is needed in order to avoid historical dogmatism which

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hinders Muslims from progress. The school of thought developed by Rahman is known in Islam as neomodernism.

Both neomodernism and the newer movement of liberal Islam maintain that Islam is not only compatible with Western modernity and its political institutions, but is also complementary in some ways. Although they still hold that Islam provides a complete set of guidelines covering both private and public issues as well as religion and state (din wa dawla), they argue that Islam needs “secular ideas,” such as the free market, liberalism, and democracy in order to be meaningful for the welfare of Muslim societies. This outward orientation is in contrast to traditionalists or fundamentalists who prefer to bring Islamic civilization back to its initial years. Neomodernists and Islamic liberals try to develop a mixed, if not a totally modern system, of Islamic economy, politics, and social welfare. This tendency can be seen in the adoption of Islamic socialism in Iraq under the Baath regime of Saddam Hussein, democratic Islamic states in Pakistan and Algeria, or Islamic democracy in developing countries that are neither an Islamic nor a secular state.

As the issue of compatibility between Islam and democracy is very important, it is necessary to look briefly at the arguments of liberal Islam on democracy. One of the principal differences between liberal Islam and illiberal, literal Islam is on the acceptance and response to the idea of democracy. The debate is not only about whether a democratic Islamic state is possible or not, but goes deeper into the issue of women’s

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22 Esposito and Voll note that many Muslims “believe that the global processes of religious resurgence and democratization can be, and, in the case of the Muslim world, are, complementary. The two processes are contradictory and competitive only if ‘democracy’ is defined in a highly restricted way and is viewed as possible only if specific Western European or American institutions are adopted, or if important Islamic principles are defined in a rigid and traditional manner.” See, John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, Islam and Democracy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 21.
rights, minority rights, freedom of speech, pluralism and toleration. Those issues are among the main concerns for liberal Islam. The next part of this thesis will discuss briefly the Islamic liberal notions of democracy.

**Liberal Islam on Democracy: A Brief Survey**

The relationship between Islam and democracy has generated much debate among Islamic scholars. Traditionalists or Islamic formalists typically reject the adoption of democracy in an Islamic society. Their arguments range from an objection to the root of democracy, the different values in democracy and Islam, to the possibility and reliability of Islamic solutions for modern political problems. Some illiberal Muslim scholars argue that democracy has a classical Greek origin, while Islam was developed from Arabic culture. Therefore, Islam will never be compatible with democracy. Another argument proposed by a prominent proponent of political Islam Abu al-A’la al-Maududi, for example, maintains that Islam and democracy cannot be reconciled because of value differences. He writes, “There can be no reconciliation between Islam and democracy, not even in minor issues, because they contradict one…another in all terms. Where this system [of democracy] exists we consider Islam to be absent.”

Some scholars point to Sudan, Algeria, Iran, Pakistan and Egypt as examples of an Islamic solution for the Muslim world in dealing with modernity and democracy. One

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23 This kind of “genealogical argument” has been cleared by Bassam Tibi by pointing to the fact that Muslim philosophers in the classical age of Islam named Aristotle as “the Mu’allim al-Awwal or the first master, whereas the most significant Muslim philosopher, al-Farabi, was ranked as al-Muallim al-Thani, only second to Aristotle.” See, Bassam Tibi, “Democracy and Democratization in Islam: The Quest for an Islamic Enlightenment,” in *Democracy in Asia*, edited by Michele Schmiegelow (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 127.

of the leading Islamic scholars who articulates this view is Yusuf al-Qaradawi from Egypt. He proposed the formula of *al-Hall al-Islami* (the Islamic Solution) in contrast to *al-Hulul al-Mustawrada* (the Imported Solution). Democratic liberalism, in his account, is one of the most dangerous imported solutions. He argued that “democratic liberalism came into the life of Muslims through the impact of colonialism. It is one of the most dangerous legacies of the colonial era.” The Islamic model of government as an alternative to democracy that most Islamic fundamentalists propose is an Islamic state based on the legitimacy of *Hakimiyyat Allah* (God’s rule).

In contrast, Islamic liberals believe that democracy and Islam are compatible, and that the Qur’an says nothing about this matter. The arguments used to defend the compatibility of Islam and democracy vary from the legalistic and ethical to political points of view. A moderate liberal Islamic scholar, Bassam Tibi, argues that the fundamentalist notion of *Hakimiyyat Allah* or the concept of an Islamic state is “definitely not an authentic Islamic concept” because “neither does it occur in the Qur’an nor can it be found in the hadith, i.e. the tradition of the Prophet.” Therefore, an Islamic solution is not a genuine Islamic formula. Another moderate scholar, Hamid Enayat, argues that a synthesis between Islam and democracy is possible and desirable for the good of Muslim communities. However, he carefully notes that there are many areas of conflict between Islam and democracy due to their different characteristics. He says, “If

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25 *Ibid.*, 133. Yusuf al-Qaradawi is one of the most influential contemporary Islamic writers along with Abu al-A’la al-Maududi and the Egyptian spiritual father of political Islam, Sayyid Qutb.


Islam comes into conflict [with] certain postulates of democracy, it is because of its general character as a religion.”

Liberal Muslim thinkers point to the Islamic concepts of consultation (shurah), consensus (ijma), and independent interpretive judgment (ijtihad) as the three most important elements in the relationship between Islam and democracy. These three concepts work in accordance with shari’a. Mutual consultation (shurah) is a mechanism whereby “mutual advice through mutual discussion on an equal footing” is conducted to solve particular problems in Muslim society. Ijma (consensus) is widely acknowledged by many different schools of thought in Islam as a formal validating concept in Islamic law based on the collective judgment of society. Meanwhile, ijtihad is an Islamic concept that gives the individual greater possibility to exercise informed, independent judgment. Islamic liberals also expand their arguments in favor of democracy and egalitarianism beyond Qur’anic verses and classical interpretations. These arguments treat such fundamental democratic values as toleration, women’s rights, and civil liberties.

In the Islamic liberal tradition, contemporary Muslim liberal thinkers point out that toleration is a virtue of Islam. They point to the Qur’anic verses on freedom of religion (al-Hurriyyah al-Diniyyah) as well on the practices (sunna), instructions/speeches of the Prophet Mohammad (hadits) and classical interpretation of Islamic laws (fiqh). The main reference and most explicit of the Qur’an verses for religious toleration is the following verse in Surah al-Baqarah (2:256):

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28 Hamid Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 126.
29 Esposito and Voll, Islam and Democracy, 27.
“There is to be no compulsion in religion. Surely the right direction has been made clear and distinct from error. He who rejects false deities and believes in God has grasped a firm handhold which will never break.”

Toleration is actually a foreign word in Arabic. Muslims usually use the word *tasamuh*, which has become a common term for toleration. The root form of *tasamuh* has two connotations: generosity (*jud wa karam*) and ease (*tasahul*), and is always used in reciprocal form. The absence of the word “toleration” in the Qur’an and other Islamic references makes it easier for Islamic liberals to introduce this concept to Muslim society. Moreover, there are many verses in the Qur’an which support arguments in favor of toleration in Islam: the Qur’an is a continuation of previous scriptures (12:111), the Prophet Muhammad is one among previous messengers (3:144), and the respect and acceptance of Jews and Christians as the people of the book (*ahl al-kitab*) in the Qur’an, among others.

On civil liberties, Islamic liberals tend to develop a broad conception of human rights. If fundamentalists or conservatives emphasize faith and the supremacy of literal Qur’an values (this approach can be defined as formalist), Islamic liberals prefer to use reason in integrating individual rights and freedoms with Islamic values. The difference between literal and liberal Islam on civil liberties can be seen in how each camp proposes its own conception of human rights. Islamic conservatives from countries like Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia who participated in the preparation of a draft of the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UIDHR) to be submitted to the UNESCO (United

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Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) meeting in Paris in 1981, proposed an illiberal conception of human rights. In this draft, they determined the following rights based on Islamic law (shari‘a): the right to inflict injury or death, the right to liberty, the right to justice, the right to assume public office, the right of expression, the right to “protest and strive”, the right to disseminate information, the right to earn a living, the right to pursue given economic activities, the rights of spouses in marriage, and a wife’s right to divorce.

However, as Mayer points out, those rights do not automatically entitle individuals. The draft of the UIDHR accepts that all rights may be qualified by the Islamic law and leaves it to the authorities to determine the Islamic qualifications of rights. This means that rights depend on religious authorities or the government for their application, because those authorities can define which “Islamic” principle to apply. For example, many conservatives would argue that women should not leave their homes without being accompanied by their husbands or female relatives, and it is ‘un-Islamic’ for women to drive cars. In this case, shari‘a can be applied by the authorities to justify restrictions on women’s freedom of movement. In short, rights are restricted within shari‘a, and, in certain ways, discriminate against women and non-Muslims, as the latter are not subjects of Islamic law.

These conservative conceptions of civil liberties are rejected by Islamic liberals who argue that Islam is ultimately guidance for living for Muslims who are gifted with reason and logic to answer the challenges of modern life. Following the Hanafi legal

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school, which is known for its endorsement of reason and logic as legitimate sources in the application of rules to practical questions of life; Islamic liberals develop more universal conceptions of civil liberties. Islamic scholars like Rachid Gannoushi, for example, acknowledge democracy as among the positive contributions or accomplishments of Western liberal traditions. Therefore, he agrees with aspects of democracy, including the universality of human rights and protection of civil liberties for all individuals, as those are “necessary prerequisites of the new Islamic order.” He also harshly criticizes discrimination against women in many Islamic societies, as he says that many Islamists have remained ignorant and insensitive to the

“oppression, degradation, abasement, [and] restrictions of their horizons and roles…during the long centuries of decline…[in which a] woman’s personality was obliterated and she was transformed into an object of pleasure—in the name of religion!”

Another moderate Islamic scholar, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, offers an alternative perspective to explain freedom of expression in Islam. According to Kamali, there are some areas where shari’a may have aspects in common with Western legal theories such as the category of rights, founded on fundamental principles of morality. In the Western liberal tradition, a right may be called fundamental when it legally embodies what is basically a moral right or value. However, under shari’a, a right is fundamental if it is founded in the clear injunctions and foundational principles of the Qur’an and Sunnah.

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37 Ibid., 108.
38 Ibid., 111.
Accordingly, there are many different individual freedoms guaranteed by the Qur’an, such as *hurriyyah al-ray* (freedom of opinion), *hurriyyah al-qawl* (freedom of speech), *hurriyyah al-tafkir* (freedom of thought), and *hurriyyah al-tabir* (freedom of expression or interpretation).\(^{40}\) Those different terminologies for freedom of expression are intended by many Islamic scholars to distinguish freedom of expression from freedom of religion, which they consistently treat as a separate category, variously referred to as *al-hurriyyah al-tadayyun* (freedom of religion) and *al-hurriyyah al-aqidah* (freedom of belief). At this point, the liberal Islamic conception of rights differs from the Western tradition which incorporates freedom of religion into freedom of expression.

In his account, Kamali also notes that most Islamic scholars tend to accept the primacy of *hukm* (laws or values of shari’a) and *wajib* (obligation) over *haqq* (rights) in Islamic law, but neither of these has ever intended to relegate *haqq* into insignificance.\(^{41}\) This implies that the place of the individual in Islamic values is not central. However, there are many possibilities in Islamic tradition to interpret, construct and define individual rights based on the principles of *hisbah* (commanding good and forbidding evil), *nasihah* (sincere advice), *shura* (consultation), *ijtihad* (juristic reasoning) and *haqq al-mu’aradah* (the right to constructive criticism).

From this brief overview of liberal Islamic ideas, it seems that most arguments proposed by Islamic liberals focus on how to justify some liberal notions based on Islamic texts and traditions. Therefore, the discussion of Islamic liberalism is not

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\(^{40}\) Many Arab writers are not consistent in using terminology for freedom of expression as they often mix those terms. Mahmassani uses both *hurriyyah al-ray* and *hurriyyah al-ray wal al-tabir*, while Abd al-Wahid Wafi prefers *hurriyyah al-fikriyyah* (freedom of thought). Faruq al-Nabhan has used *hurriyyah al-ray wa al-tafkir* to imply the basic freedom of opinion and thought, but the freedom to express and propagate them is referred to *hurriyyah al-tabir*. See, *Ibid.*, 7.

grounded on moral and philosophical principles. This distinguishes liberal Islam from liberal theory which has been developed based on individual reasoning for the good of all people. Ideally, liberal theories reject particular arguments based on religion or traditional morality, as these kinds of sources of ethics cannot encompass different categories in society. Liberal theorists try to avoid any reasoning that will base liberalism in a traditional moralistic institution such as religion or kinship. As a secular value, supposedly liberalism is not based on “non-rational” or traditional ethics and values. The next part of this chapter will briefly discuss some basic principles of liberalism and liberal theology.

Liberalism and Liberal Theology: A Brief Introduction

Liberalism encompasses political, social, and economic doctrines that emphasize individual freedom, limited government intervention, gradual social process, and a free market economy. In its contemporary construction, liberalism accepts the role of the state in delivering social welfare and economic policy while upholding personal liberty and opportunity.42

As a political philosophy, it is a basic principle that individual liberty is an ultimate value for human beings. The primacy of this basic freedom determines the individual position on every social and political arrangement. Liberty is also an essential

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42 Chris Rohmann, *A World of Ideas*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 231. As a set of political practice, liberal political tradition has been applied differently in many countries in many eras. English liberal tradition has centered on government by consent, individual and economic freedom, and religious tolerance. In France, the liberal tradition has closely related to secularism and participatory democracy. Meanwhile, in the United States during the 1930s, for instance, President Franklin Roosevelt resurrected and redefined “liberalism” to describe his New Deal programs. He sees the government as the guarantor of individual rights and freedoms through the regulation of economic and social policy to check the excesses of capitalism and provide a safety net against poverty.
attribute for human beings in the state of nature. Liberals believe that, first, humans are naturally in a state of nature/freedom (nothingness). According to John Locke, individuals in state of nature are in “…a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or dependency upon the will of any other man.”

Second, as freedom and equality are normatively basic, any limitation of them should be based on rational justifications. As rationality in modern liberal tradition is an individual attribute that is essential to the concept of justice, political authorities and laws that limit the liberty of citizens must be justified rationally, such as by social contract. However, the strategy of justification for this purpose is still debatable. Many classical liberals, who developed contractarian theories, from Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, have distinctive features in their theories.

In contemporary political philosophy, the roots of liberal theory can be traced from two liberal traditions, Utilitarian and Kantian approaches. Modern utilitarianism was developed by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) in his *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* appeared in 1789, and was made popular by his “student,” John Stuart Mill, in his *Utilitarianism* published in 1861. Following Mill, the utilitarian

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44 Classical contractarian theories have an original aim to legitimate political obligations and to show that acceptance of obligations could be justified by rational individuals. In Hobbesian tradition, it is argued that persons are primarily self-interested, and by their rational assessment, they will find the best strategy to maximize their self-interests that, then, it will lead them to give consent to governmental authority. Meanwhile, Kantian tradition argues that rationality requires respect to persons, which in turn requires that moral principles be such that they can be justified to each person. Thus, individuals are not taken to be motivated by self-interest but rather by a commitment to publicly justify the standards of morality to which each will be held. See, “Contractarianism,” in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractarianism/> accessed on December 6, 2002. According to Julie White, Thomas Hobbes is a proponent of liberal conception of self, but not a liberal politics. Meanwhile, Rousseau is mostly perceived as not clearly a liberal.
view—with its famous credo, “the greatest good for the greatest number”—defends liberal principles of individual freedom, equality, and justice in the name of maximizing the general welfare. For Mill, utility is “the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.” Mill develops utilitarianism as a form of consequentialism in the view that, “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.”

As an ethical position, utilitarianism maintains that the morally superior position would result in the greatest pleasure or happiness and minimum pain if applied to everybody. It rejects state intervention into individual (private) life. The state cannot force a uniform way of life preferable to the authorities onto its citizens, even for the sake of the citizens’ own good. The reason is that by imposing a preferred social norm it can reduce the happiness of every human being in the long run. Utilitarians argue that it is better for people to choose for themselves, although sometimes they do not make the appropriate or the best choice. Mill writes, “The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.”

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46 The core idea of consequentialism is that what makes an action (or a policy) right is that it brings about better consequences than any of its alternatives. See, Marcia Baron, “Kantian Ethics,” in Marcia W. Baron, Philip Pettit, and Michael Slote, eds., *Three Methods of Ethics* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 5. Two principles in consequentialism are: first, it is morally obligatory to do whatever will produce the best consequences, and second, it is always morally permissible to do whatever will produce the best consequences.


The basic idea of Bentham’s utilitarianism was rejected by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). He argued that empirical principles, such as utility, were unfit to serve as a basis for moral law. Utilitarianism’s instrumental defense of freedom and rights makes rights vulnerable because “the utilitarian calculus” treats people as means to the happiness of others, not as ends in themselves. In a famous passage, Kant proclaims that “Man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will: he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed at the same time as an end.”

Utilitarianism not only fails to respect the inherent dignity of persons, but it also fails to take seriously the distinction between persons. In order to maximize the general welfare, the utilitarian treats society as a whole as if it were a single person and that leads to the failure to respect plurality and distinctness. Modern Kantian liberals do not depend on utilitarian considerations in justifying rights. They view certain rights as so fundamental that even the general welfare cannot override them. According to John Rawls, “…each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override…the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests.”

The different roots of the liberal tradition affect the development of liberal theories, particularly with regard to new controversial issues such as the welfare state, property and free market, care issues, abortion, and so on. They also influence the development of a new brand of political liberalism, known as neo-liberalism.

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50 Quoted from Baron, Pettit, and Slote, *Three Methods*, 11.
As individual liberty is of primary importance to liberals, it is important to elaborate briefly the meaning of liberty or freedom to better understand liberalism. Freedom is a central theme for liberals because only through freedom can all human beings be guaranteed their rights and progress in society be achieved. In the liberal tradition, freedom refers both to political independence and to self-determination and to personal autonomy and self-direction. Modern political theorists such as Locke and Mill distinguished between liberty and license. Most contemporary liberals see freedom in at least two different ways: freedom from, and, freedom to.

Isaiah Berlin, a philosopher and historian of ideas, differentiated between negative freedom and positive freedom. The negative conception of freedom centers on “freedom from” interference by others. In Berlin’s words, “Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others.” For Berlin, liberty means that there is an absence of coercion by others, and the extent of negative liberty is determined by the availability of possible choice for every individual. This type of freedom, as he noted, is in response to the classic question, “What is the area within which the subject—a person or group of persons—is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by others persons?” or, to put it more simply, “Over what area am I master?”

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53 Ibid., 121-2. In Berlin’s view, “Liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture, or human happiness or a quiet conscience.” He also argues that “If individual liberty is an ultimate end for human beings, none should be deprived of it by others; least of all that some should enjoy it at the expense of others.” Isaiah Berlin is an advocate of negative freedom and in his understanding of history he found that theories of positive freedom were more likely to have led to human tragedy. It is the positive theories of freedom that have been most frequently used as instruments of oppression and have been most open to abuse than have the negative ones.
Meanwhile, the concept of positive freedom deals with the ability and resources to pursue one’s dreams and ambitions and the capacity for self-mastery and self-government. For Berlin, positive freedom “derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master” and answers the question “What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine [that] someone [does], or [is], this rather than that?” In short, it is the answer to, “who is master?” Berlin’s notion of positive freedom does not apply only to self-mastery at the individual level, but also gives emphasis to collective control over common life. For instance, a free society in which members play an active role in controlling it through their participation in democratic institutions, can be understood in terms of positive freedom. In this case, the society as a whole is free, because collectively they have mastery over the life of their society.54

Most people in late capitalist societies tend to hold a negative sense of freedom, which is expected to guarantee the maximization of individual rights without any meaningful interference from others. Under this conception of freedom, negative freedom could become an issue as conflicts between individuals and between individuals and the state could occur. Under a negative conception of freedom, toleration would almost become a necessity in this situation. It is a likely that individuals who exercise their particular freedom overlap or conflict with others, as their exercises are misguided, or even at extreme unconscious. In this situation, flexibility is needed to accept others’

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54 See Nigel Warburton, Freedom: An Introduction with Readings, (London: Routledge, 2001), 9-10. Warburton counts Berlin’s article as important for three reasons: First, it provides a useful distinction between negative and positive freedom. Second, it makes a case for the view that theories of positive freedom have often been used as instruments of oppression. Third, by describing the incompatibility of various fundamental human aims in life, it suggests a reason why we put such a high value on freedom.
choices of lifestyles without harassment or intervention. The importance of toleration makes it necessary to elaborate briefly on toleration in the liberal political tradition.

**Toleration**

The idea of toleration flourished after John Locke published his seminal work *A Letter Concerning Toleration* in 1689. In his work, Locke advocates state tolerance of religious diversity and argues that the state should not oppress the freedom of individuals who do not subscribe to the authorized religion of the state. Historically, toleration—meaning acceptance of something on a temporary basis, something not in itself desirable—is a practice rather than a theory.\(^{55}\)

Locke’s arguments are basically intended to define the appropriate relation between religion and the civil order, not only in the theoretical level, but also in the reality as at that time Europe was in the era of religious warfare. According to Galston, “Locke may be said to make five arguments in favor of religious toleration” based on three categories: the nature of religious truth, the nature of coercion, and the nature of politics.\(^{56}\) The first argument may be called *epistemological neutrality*. Considering the wide range of religious disputes, Locke insists that “no rational adjudication is possible among competing claims” and, without ignoring the “religious truth,” there is no competent judge on earth to determine “the truth.”

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\(^{56}\) This discussion is drawn from William A. Galston, “Public Morality and Religion in the Liberal State,” *PS (Political Science)* 19 no. 4 (Autumn, 1986), 807-824. According to Galston, Locke’s thesis on toleration may be summarized in three propositions like these: “Because religious truth cannot be known with certainty, efforts to impose truth through coercion lack rational warrant. Even if religious truth could be established, inward faith cannot be imposed through external coercion. And even if coercion could succeed, it would be wrong to employ it.”

The second argument based on the nature of coercion is **ontological neutrality**. Locke argues that “even if religious truth could be intersubjectively established,…the coercive weapons at the disposal of civil society could not be possibly achieve their purported end—the inculcation of true belief of truth.” In his words, Locke says, “True and saving religion, consists in the inward persuasion of the Mind, without which nothing is acceptable to God. And such is the nature of understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of any thing by outward force.”

Another argument based on the nature of coercion but from moral rather than ontological standpoint is **character-based neutrality**. In Locke’s account, “those who use the power of the state to suppress religious dissent,” regardless of their motives, or those who are appointed as the guardians of orthodoxy tend to act based on cruelty and lust of power. Here Locke clearly defends toleration because it can guarantee the absent of state coercion for the sake of a particular religious interest.

Based on the nature of politics, there is an argument of **rights-based neutrality**. This is developed from Locke’s concept of limited government. Locke argues “that human beings enter into civil society to attain and protect non-moral goods such as goods of the body and external possessions. To secure these goods, the civil magistrate is created and invested with coercive power.” This implies, as Locke says, that “the whole jurisdiction of the Magistrate reaches only to these Civil Concernments [and] neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of the soul.”

**Finally**, is the argument of **prudential neutrality**. Considering the fact of religious differences, Locke argues that “the consequences of trying to impose uniformity are

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worse than the consequences of accepting the existence of controversial opinions.”

History, as Locke mentions, “shows that religious coercion yields, not agreement and civil concord, but rather discord, destruction, and war.” Locke believes that coercion of the state in religious affairs is not only harmful for peace and civil order, but it also endangers the state itself, as the power of the state to enforce the truth can be used against the truth.

In the general sense, toleration matters and possibly arises when there are individual behaviors or acts that provoke unpleasant feelings or harm others. Toleration will be relevant where there is moral disapproval of an individual habit, behavior, or acts, although they do not cause damage or harm to others. It is also necessary to provide a moral basis for judgment of actions that influence an individual, who does not wish to be oppressed. However, toleration can lead to restraints on actions of individuals as members of a liberal society will have a broader sense of a positive notion of liberty. The issue of toleration is likely to be unavoidable, as every human being in the state of nature will be thoroughly “indifferent” to one another yet he will not be able to completely avoid the influence of others’ actions and opinions.

In short, there are at least three components of the core conception of toleration that can be identified. First, there must be disapproval (or at least some dislike) of some conduct. Second, this disapproval must not be acted upon in ways that coercively prevent others from acting in the disapproved manner. Third, this refusal to interfere must be more than mere acquiescence or resignation.58 Furthermore, according to Horton, the conceptual structure of toleration is tripartite; it includes, first, a principle justifying

disapproval of some act; second, a principle inhibiting coercive restraint of that action; and finally, an explanation of when coercive restraint (intolerance) is justified.\(^{59}\)

In politics, toleration matters as it provides certain principles that dictate the relations between organized religion and the state as well as between individuals in the plural societies. However, the issue of the state and organized religion relations is still debatable and controversial in many senses. There have been many efforts to solve tension in maintaining toleration in particular and liberalism in general in politics, such as through the idea of liberal theology or recent political liberalism. Both have different emphasis in outlining principles of a liberal society in a secular state. Below is a brief discussion on this issue.

**Liberal Theology and Political Liberalism**

Liberal theology\(^{60}\) is a form of religious belief which permits and encourages freedom of thought and interpretation.\(^{61}\) According to Hodgson, there are five marks of

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 14.

\(^{60}\) The term of “liberal theology” was made popular by Johann Salomo Semler in 1774 when he gave the name “liberalis theologia” to a purely historical investigation of the New Testament unconstrained by dogmatic presupposition. This term has competed with other terms such as positive theology, critical theology, modern theology, confessional theology, neo-orthodox theology, mediating theology, or free theology in the theological debate since the 1770s. This term refers to critical biblical research that is “sought to make Christianity first and foremost into a religion of practical reason in contrast to the ‘ecclesiastical Christianity’ with its old confessions and public doctrine. In the conflict over the legitimacy of the Enlightenment in the 1770s and 80s, ‘theologia liberalis’ became the party label for the Neologists and the Rationalists, that is, the theological disciples of Immanuel Kant.” See, Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, “What Has London (or Oxford or Cambridge) to do with Augsburg?: The Enduring Significance of the German Liberal Tradition in Christian Theology,” in Mark D. Chapman, ed., *The Future of Liberal Theology* (Burlington, VT.: Ashgate, 2002), 25.

\(^{61}\) Keith Ward, “The Importance of Liberal Theology,” in *Ibid.*, 39. In his account, liberal tradition in theology, particularly in Christianity, is developed because of three main elements. First, is the rise of the natural sciences. Galileo’s theory that contradicted church’s dogma of earth as a center of the universe, the development of astronomy and other hard sciences (physics, biology and chemistry), and the publication of Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection have seriously eroded the superiority and authority of the priests and the church in controlling all forms of knowledge and all claims of absolute truth based on holy text of Bible. Those scientific developments put the Bible in question on some of its “truth.” Second, is the
The first mark is that liberal theology is a free and open theology. Liberal theology acknowledges that “there is a divine liberality as well as a human liberality, and the two are profoundly interconnected.” This position implies that a liberal theology concerns not only primarily with the negative conception of freedom—“freedom from the constraints of tradition, confession, institution, external authorities”—but also on the positive conception of freedom—“freedom for, or, openness to.” The principle of “openness to” refers to “whatever presents itself or reveals itself” in the religious holy books, in religious tradition, the whole experience of human-beings, be in personal, cultural and religious experiences, as well as traditions.

Liberal theology is a critically constructive theology. In this theology, liberal Kantian element is present in the notion of critical consciousness. Liberal theology is supposedly critical to all “established orthodoxies, partial truths, seductive idolatries, and parochial judgments.” This does not mean that liberal theology is “indifferent to truth and is merely neutral, tolerant, permissive, or relativistic.” Liberal theology has its goal not only to “destroy or lose the heritage of the past, but [also] to preserve and appreciate it.” This goal can be achieved only through a (re)construction process of theological doctrines and symbols to replace overused or obsolete ones. With this position, a democratic society is a necessity because “truth will come out through the testing of these constructions in a community of free and open discourse.”

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rise of history as a science or rigorously evidential discipline, and of new techniques of textual analysis. When the Bible is seen as a collection of ancient documents and being analyzed like any other historical artifacts, it could lead to different views and insights. Third, is the rise of the role of philosophers not only in rejecting the authority of the church, but also in criticizing the Bible from a moral point of view. This development leads to a general consequence of the possible rejection of some Biblical texts in favor of more basic Biblical principles.

The third mark is that liberal theology is an experiential theology, based on the thesis that “all religion is rooted in the experience, both immediate and mediated, concrete and universal.” This thesis states that “the revelation of God’s gracious liberality occurs through certain root experiences that reverberate in history, are mediated by texts and traditions, and interact with the personal experience of interpreters and communities. As it is hard to reject this thesis, therefore, religion as well as theology can be studied and developed with a “science of experience” in psychology, sociology of religion or comparative history of religion.

The next mark of liberal theology is a vision with strong emphasis on spiritualism and holistic doctrines. In Hodgson’s account, a visionary liberal theology nowadays is in the form of:

“a postmetaphysical speculative political theology, one that can articulate a holistic ontological vision, an interpretation of reality that connects nature and spirit, psyche and culture, the aesthetic and the ethical, the personal and the political, and that does so in the form of an open, nontotalising metanarrative.”

Finally, liberal theology is a culturally transformative theology. Besides liberating theology, liberal theology should be able to cope with challenges of all time, and be

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63 This term initially came from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) as a way of characterizing his phenomenology of Spirit, where he described three categories of spirit: the subjective spirit, deals with (anthropology) and psychology; the objective spirit, deals among others with law, ethics, politics and history; and the absolute spirit that deals with fine arts, religion and philosophy. For a broader discussion on this topic, see among others, Terry P. Pinkard, Hegel: A Biography (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Terry P. Pinkard, Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

64 Hodgson continues this explanation by saying that “What is required is not simply a methodological or cultural-linguistic holism, as postliberals claim, but an ontological holism, perhaps even...’ontotheological’ holism, or better a ‘cosmotheandric’ holism.” He credits Hegel with his seminal works on Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion and Phenomenology of Mind as one of the modern saints of visionary, spiritual theology. See, Hodgson, “Liberal Theology,” 107. Cosmotheandric principle is developed by Raimon Panikkar, a well-known advocate for intrareligious dialogue. In short, it is a principle “in which what is divine, what is human and what is earthly...are the three irreducible dimensions which constitute what is real. These three parts are not juxtaposed simply by chance, but they are essentially related and together constitute the Whole.” See, in his interview with “Share International” at <http://www.shareintl.org/archives/religion/rl Cfnew-innocence.htm> accessed on February 14, 2003.
contextual. In order to achieve this goal, liberal theology—like theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) suggests—should be able to develop “a new cultural synthesis, a Neugestaltung, a transformative ethic of cultural values.” In this theology, there should be answers and identification of “the emancipatory, the ecological, and the dialogical quests of our time.”

Liberal theology is widely acknowledged as a necessary foundation for a liberal society. With its open and inclusive characters, liberal theology could serve liberal principles of individual freedom and toleration, especially in a diverse, plural society. It also serves as a liberal moral foundation of a secular state. Liberal theology supports the “erection of the wall of separation” between organized religion and the state.

However, the issue of secularization is still controversial up until now. This can be seen from the contemporary debate on the relation between religion and the state based on the idea of political liberalism proposed by John Rawls. Political liberalism, as a variant of liberal theories, simply tries to answer a basic problem faced by many liberal societies: how to respond to diverse cultural groups, which some of them do not share the values or beliefs related to liberalism. In short, it tries to answer the problem of how liberal societies should respond to pluralism.

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls proposes an optimistic view to support the argument of the possibility of a liberal society to respond to pluralism in a more positive and constructive way, and the ability of a liberal society to accommodate the diversity of moral, religious, or philosophical doctrines. By revising some of his basic arguments in *Theory of Justice*, Rawls argues that a society is no longer united in its basic moral

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beliefs, but in its political conception of justice. This conception primarily becomes the focus of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. An overlapping consensus becomes one of his main arguments. In his view, the necessity of an overlapping consensus arises because those with comprehensive moral views must seek some common ground for reaching consensus about principles of justice. The actual circumstances of living in a democratic society then provide individuals with the motivation for accepting a political conception that is not in conflict with each other's comprehensive views.66

Besides proposing “overlapping consensus” argument, Rawls also asserts that in the pluralistic societies, an ideal of public reason should be accorded to which “citizens are to conduct their fundamental discussions within the framework of what each regards as a political conception of justice based on values that others can reasonably be expected to endorse.”67 It means that religious considerations in public debate over fundamental issues should be avoided because citizens in the pluralist societies cannot “reasonably be expected to share the same religious values.”68 However, after facing criticism for being too restrictive, Rawls has modified his ideal to explicitly allow some exceptions to this restriction.69 In short, Rawls’ political liberalism is meant to solve the problem of “how is

67 Ibid., 226.
69 John Rawls made this modification in the preface for paperback 1996 edition of his *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), li-1ii. In some cases, Rawls justifies an appeal to religious considerations in support of a political conception of justice in pluralistic societies. He uses the cases of American abolition movement that begin in the 1830s and the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King in the 1960s as examples of such justifiable uses. He says, “the abolitionists or the leaders of the civil rights movement did not go against the ideal of public reason; or rather, they did not provided they thought, or on reflection would have thought (as they certainly could have thought), that the comprehensive reasons they appealed to were required to give strength to the political conception to be subsequently realized.” See, in Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (1993), 251.
it possible to have a just society over time composed of free and equal citizens who are divided, sometimes profoundly so, by incompatible comprehensive religious (or philosophical) doctrines that are nonetheless reasonable?"  

Echoing Rawls’ ideal of public reason in religiously diverse societies, another liberal theorist, Robert Audi, outlines the following principles which should govern public discourse. Public discourse should comply the principle of theo-ethical equilibrium that states that, “Those who are religious should embody a commitment to a rational integration between religious deliverances and insights and secular ethical considerations.” In order to maintain this position, it is necessary that public discourse follows the principle of secular rationale. This principle mandates that, “Everyone has a prima facie obligation not to advocate or support any law or public policy that restricts human conduct, unless he or she has, and is willing to offer, adequate secular reasons for this advocacy.” To support this principle, “Everyone also has a prima facie obligation to abstain from advocacy or support of law or public policy that restricts human conduct unless he or she is sufficiently motivated by some normatively adequate secular reasons.” This is called as the principle of secular motivation. In the broader sense, a liberal public discourse should be conducted in line with the institutional principle of theo-ethical equilibrium. It states that, “Religious institutions, at least insofar as they are committed to citizenship in a liberal democratic society, have a prima facie obligation to seek an

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71 See, in James P. Sterba, “Rawls and Religion,” 35-6. Robert Audi, an advocate of ‘wall of separation’ in a world of inescapable religious pluralism, also suggests that institutional separation of the state in order to achieve ideal “well-ordered pluralism” should be guided by three basic principles: a libertarian principle (state must permit the practice of any religion), an equalitarian principle (states may not give preference to one religion over another), and a neutrality principle (states should neither in favor nor disfavor religion as such). See, in Veit Bader, “Religious Pluralism: Secularism or Priority for Democracy?” in Political Theory 27 no. 5 (October 1999), 599.
equilibrium between religious deliverances and secular ethical considerations when advocating or supporting laws or public policies that restrict human conduct.”

Two other principles which should be considered for a healthy liberal public discourse are the principle of ecclesiastical political neutrality and the principle of clerical neutrality. The former principle states that, “In a free and liberal democratic society, [organized religions] committed to being institutional citizens in such a society have a prima facie obligation to abstain from supporting candidates for public office or pressing for laws or public policies that restrict human conduct.” Meanwhile, the latter principle outlines the obligation of clergy in a liberal democratic society. It consists of:

“(1) to observe a distinction between their personal political views and those of their office or otherwise held by them as clergy, especially in making public statements, (2) to prevent any political aims they may have from dominating their professional conduct as clergy, and (3) to abstain from officially (as religious leaders) supporting candidates for public office or pressing laws or policies that would restrict human conduct.”

The importance of these principles is that they provide framework of the relations between organized religion and the state. However, this liberal framework is not necessarily applicable to all societies as it is based on Western liberalism. Because of the particularity of this framework, it might be difficult for non-Western liberals to apply certain liberal principles or to find justification. Therefore, modification is needed to reconcile some contrasting values. Liberal Islam seems to be one of the intellectual efforts to modify liberalism in order to be fit with Islamic teachings.

**The Plan of the Thesis**

This thesis is methodologically qualitative and interpretive and mainly intended to map the political ideas of *Jaringan Islam Liberal* (the Liberal Islam Network) in
Indonesia. By mapping it means, *first*, to identify the main issues by surveying and analyzing their writings; *second*, to find what is new and different in their ideas when compared with writings by other contemporary Islamic intellectuals in Indonesia; and *third*, compare and contrast their conception of liberal Islam with classical liberal theory developed in the West. However, this thesis will not analyze the “liberalness” of the ideas proposed by JIL activists, because there is no such rigid “benchmark” for liberalism and JIL has limited ideas on liberalism. As a category of moral theories, liberalism is almost always in a state of progress, and, therefore, there are many variations within liberalism.

Data for this study come from conversations with proponents of *Jaringan Islam Liberal*, opinion, columns, books, and articles they published in magazines, newspapers, and on their official website, www.islamlib.com.

This thesis will be divided into five chapters, with introduction to liberal Islam, liberalism and liberal theology in this first chapter. The second chapter is about intellectual roots and historical background of JIL. Chapter three is about the ideas of the proponents of JIL on liberal Islam. It will also cover some criticism of the idea of liberal Islam from different perspectives. Chapter four is about *Jaringan Islam Liberal* on democracy, and it will cover their particular ideas of democracy. This chapter will also discuss some controversies they made and problems of freedom of expression they faced. The last chapter contains the conclusions of the study.

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Chapter 2

Jaringan Islam Liberal: Its Intellectual Roots and Historical Background

Introduction

Liberal Islam is a continuation of previous tradition in Islamic thinking. In the history of Islamic interpretation, various traditions have been developed which yield in different approaches and acceptance to concepts like toleration, individual freedom, the relation between (organized) religion and the state, and politics in general. Beside the differences between Sunni and Shi‘ite, there are other movements in the history of Islam which can be described as traditionalism, modernism, or liberalism in Islam. In modern history, Fazlur Rahman notes that there have been four Islamic renewal movements in the last two centuries. First, revivalist movements at the end of the 18th century and the early 19th century as represented in the Wahhabiyyah movement in Arabia, Sanusiyah in North Africa, and Fulaniyyah in West Africa. Second, modernist movements pioneered by Sayyid Ahmad Khan (died in 1898) in India, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (died in 1897) in

72 Fazlur Rahman was born in 1919 in the British colonies that became Pakistan. He went for graduate studies at Punjab University and the University of Oxford and started his academic career as a lecturer in Islamic philosophy in the United Kingdom and Canada. In 1961 he returned to Pakistan and became the chairman of the Central Institute of Islamic Research in Karachi. With this institute, Rahman introduced Islamic renewal thinking in Pakistan and countered Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. His views were controversial and he was labeled as “‘the destroyer of hadiths (tradition of the Prophet)’ because of his insistence on judging the weight of hadith reports in light of the overall spirit of the Qur’an.” See, Tamara Sonn, “Rahman, Fazlur,” in John L. Esposito, ed., The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, Volume 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 408. As controversies mounted, he left Pakistan in 1968 and became a professor at the University of Chicago, where he continued to disseminate neo-modernism. His seminal works, among others are Islam (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979) and Major Themes of the Qur’an (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980). In the early 1970s, he went to Indonesia for the first time. There, he met with Nurcoholic Madjid and sponsored him to go to Chicago for research where he then undertook doctoral program. Rahman died in 1988.

the Middle East, and Muhammad Abduh (died in 1905) in Egypt. Third, neo-revivalist movements that used modern but still reactionary approaches, of which Abul A’la al-Maududi with his Jama’ati Islami in Pakistan was the best example. Fourth, neo-modernism, which combines modernist rationality with *ijtihad* (individual reasoning) and classical traditions in Islam. Fazlur Rahman declares himself a neo-modernist.

Ahmad Syafii Maarif, a noted Indonesian Islamic scholar and currently chairman of the modernist Islamic organization *Muhammadiyah*, offers another typology of Islamic movements. In his account, there are four types of Islamic movements. First, is the modernist movement and its successor, neo-modernist. Figures like Al-Afghani, Abduh, Ahmad Khan, Syibli Nu’mani, Namik Kemal, Ziya Gokalp, Iqbal, Haji Agus Salim, Mohamad Natsir, Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka), Amir Syakib Arselan, Muhammad Asad, Fazlur Rahman, Ali Syariati, Ismail al-Faruqi and Mohammed Arkoun are in this traditions. These Islamic intellectuals are well-known as defenders of *ijtihad* (interpretation) as a method to overcome the impasse in Islamic thinking. They criticize traditional *ulemas* who are past-oriented and stuck in the classical Islamic literatures. Second, is neo-traditionalist Islam with a strong tendency toward Sufism and philosophy. Figures like Fritjof Schuon (Isa Nuruddin), Hossein Nasr, Hamid Algar, Roger Garaudy, Martin Lings (Abubakar Sirajuddin), and Mohammad Naquib Al-Attas are

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74 A. Syafii Maarif, *Peta Bumi Intelektualisme Islam di Indonesia* [The Map of Islamic Intellectualism in Indonesia], (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1993), 12-3. Maarif was born in May 31, 1935 in West Sumatra, Indonesia. He received an MA degree in history from Ohio University and a PhD from Chicago University in 1983 with a dissertation entitled, “Islam as the Basis of State: A Study of the Islamic Political Ideas as Reflected in the Constituent Assembly Debates in Indonesia” under the supervision of Fazlur Rahman.

75 Isa Nuruddin is the name of Fritjof Schuon (1907-1988) adopted after he converted to Islam. A German-Swiss writer, he is acknowledged as one of the greatest spokesmen of the century for the perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*). His classic works include: *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976); *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Publishing House, 1984) and *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom Books, 1981).
among the intellectual leaders of this tradition. They argue that ideas rooted in Western civilization cannot be “Islamized,” and Islam must be kept away from the impulses and influences of the secular-materialist world. They also hold the view that Sufism and philosophical traditions in Islam are valid sources for Islamic understanding. Third, are the exclusive Muslims or Islamists who make Islam a political ideology. They are “allergic” to Western culture and civilization. They firmly reject Islamic interpretations and teachings which are “contaminated” with Western influence. Figures like Abul A’la al-Maududi, Sayid Qutb, and Ayatullah Ruhullah Khomeini are the best examples. This group is similar to revivalists/neo-revivalists of the Rahmanian category. Fourth, are the modernist-secularist Muslims. In this tradition, figures like Ali Abd Raziq, Kemal Attaturk, Sukarno, Bassam Tibi, Abdullah Laroui, Detlev H. Khalid and Abul Kalam Azad are the most well-known. For them, Islam should be separated from politics and should be viewed as an ethical system.

Islam in Indonesia is also not a single entity. There are many varied traditions, organizations and orientations of Indonesian Islam. Theologically, the majority of Indonesian Muslims are mainstream Sunni, though a small number of Muslims subscribe to Shi’ite or other Sunni Islamic sects such as Wahhabism, Ahmadiyah, and Darul al-Arqam. Traditionally, Islam in Indonesia is divided into three broad categories: traditionalist, modernist, and neo-revivalist.76 Traditional Islam is represented in the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (The Awakening of Islamic Scholars). Founded in 1926, *Nahdlatul Ulama*...
Ulama (NU) is the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia with around 35 million followers. Relying on traditional Islamic education system in a pesantren, NU “was created in reaction to the emergence of the [reform] movement”\textsuperscript{77} that wanted to abolish the madhhab schools of Malikite, Shafi’ite, Hanafite, or Hanbalite in Indonesia. On the other hand, modernist Islam is largely centered in Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organization with around 30 million followers that was founded in 1912. It “has always been most concerned with promoting the necessity of tajdid, or renewal, in Indonesian Islam.”\textsuperscript{78} Meanwhile, neo-revivalist Islam in Indonesia, which aims to “purify” Islamic teachings and bring Islam back to its earlier history, is represented by many smaller Islamic organizations with different traditions, such as Dewan Dawah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII/Indonesian Council of Islamic Propagations), Darul Islam (DI/Islamic State), Ikhwanul Muslimin Indonesia (IMI/Indonesian Muslim Brotherhood) and Majelis Mujahiddin Indonesia (MMI/Council of Indonesian Holy Fighters).

The orientation of these Islamic organizations is also different. NU is primarily focused on Islamic education in rural areas with a traditional boarding school system called pesantren. NU is Java-centric as most of its followers live in rural areas of Java and Madura. Muhammadiyah, on the other hand, adopts a modern education system and operates thousands of schools, colleges and universities throughout Indonesia. Other smaller Islamic organizations adopt either the NU or Muhammadiyah system or mix them. They do not formally affiliate with political parties in Indonesia. However, they

\textsuperscript{77} Sydney Jones, “The Contraction and Expansion of the ‘Umat’ and the Role of the Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia,” in Indonesia 38 (October 1984), 9, as quoted from Fauzan Saleh, Modern Trends in Islamic Theological Discourse in 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Indonesia: A Critical Survey (Boston: Brill, 2001), 72. For NU members, according to Saleh, “attachment to the doctrines of Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jama’ah—with their peculiar way of interpretation—characterizes their religious identification.” See, Saleh, Modern Trends, 74. 

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 75.
sponsor or support many Islamic or Muslim-based political parties. NU clearly (but unofficially) facilitated the establishment of Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB/the National Awakening Party) in 1998, while some Muhammadiyah figures were involved in the creation of Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN/the National Mandate Party) in 1998, and DDII functionaries sponsored the establishment of an Islamic political party, Partai Bulan Bintang (the Crescent Moon and Star Party) in the same year.

In the development of liberal interpretations of Islam in Indonesia, NU and Muhammadiyah are the most important players. Surprisingly, NU, which is labeled traditionalist, has influenced the renewal of Islamic thinking in Indonesia. The most prominent figure from this tradition is Abdurrahman Wahid. The contribution of Muhammadiyah figures on the Islamic renewal is also critical. The most influential figure from this tradition is Nurcholish Madjid. Below is the discussion on the leading figures on liberal/neomodernist Islam in contemporary Indonesia and their contributions to liberal Islamic renewal.

**Leading Figures of Liberal Islamic Renewal in Contemporary Indonesia**

In contemporary Indonesian Islamic renewal, there are two very important figures from modernist and traditionalist traditions. One is Nurcholish Madjid, a founder of Paramadina Mulya University and former chairman of Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam/HMI (Islamic Student Association), the largest student organization in Indonesia, and the other is Abdurrahman Wahid, a former chairman of NU (1984-2000) and former president of

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79 However, it should be noted that there are other influential intellectuals who work extensively on the issue of Islamic thinking renewal in contemporary Indonesia, such as Djoohan Effendi, Ahmad Wahib, Kunto Wijoyo, Jalaluddin Rahmat, Dawam Rahadjo, Adi Sasono, Masdar Farid Mas’udi, Harun Nasution, Bakhtiar Effendi, and Moeslim Abdurrahman.
Indonesia (1999-2001). Both can be classified as neo-modernists in Rahmanian terminology. Although they espouse different traditions, they share many similarities in their thoughts on the relationships between religion and state, Islam and democracy, human rights, and Islam in Indonesia in general. In order to better understand who they are and their contributions to the current debate on liberal Islam in Indonesia, below are brief biographies and notes on them.

**Nurcholish Madjid**

Nurcholish Madjid, known as Cak Nur, is the most influential neomodernist Islam thinker in Indonesian history. Born in Mojoanyar, Jombang, East Java on March 17, 1939, he is the Rector of Paramadina University in Jakarta, a professor in the Post-graduate Faculty at the State Islamic University *(Universitas Islam Negeri/UIN)* Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, and a senior researcher at the Indonesian Institutes of Sciences *(Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia/LIPI)*. He is a prolific and productive writer. He has published dozens of books and hundreds of articles in various academic journals and books. He obtained his Ph.D degree in philosophy from the University of Chicago with his dissertation entitled, “Ibn Taimiya on *Kalam* and *Falsafah*: Problems on Reason and Revelation in Islam” under the supervision of Fazlur Rahman. His elementary to high school education was in traditional Islamic boarding schools. He went to his father’s religious school *al Wathoniyah madrasah* for elementary education and continued his studies at the *Darul Ulum pesantren* in Rejoso, Jombang. His high school education was in the *Pondok Modern Darus Salam* (modern Islamic boarding school) in Gontor, where he completed his Islamic education in 1960. Then, he moved to Jakarta and enrolled in
the Faculty of Islamic Literature and Culture at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Syarif Hidayatullah where he obtained his bachelor’s degree in Arabic Literature in 1968.

The young Nurcholish Madjid was an activist. While he was studying at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, he was elected the general chairman of HMI for two consecutive periods, 1966-1969 and 1969-1971. He was the only chairman for more than one period in this organization’s history, although he often said that it was a historical accident that made him hold the chairmanship for two periods. During his leadership in HMI, Indonesia experienced political turmoil following the failed coup by the Indonesian Communist Party and some elements in the military. That period was also a time when Soeharto’s New Order regime took power from President Soekarno and began to launch a massive campaign of political murder and arrest of communists and Soekarno sympathizers. Therefore, Madjid’s leadership in HMI came at a crucial moment for the development and the future of the organization. He was also the president of the United Islamic Students of Southeast Asia and assistant to the Secretary General of the International Islamic Federation of Students Organization (IIFSO) in the early 1970s.

His intellectual reputation soared in the public eye following his controversial speech on January 3, 1970, entitled “The Necessity of Renewing Islamic Thought and the Problem of the Integration of the Umma.”\(^\text{80}\) This speech was controversial because

\(^{80}\) The Indonesian title for this speech is “Keharusan Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Umat.” The English version can be found in Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 284-9. Before this speech, Madjid’s writing in 1968 entitled “Modernization Is Rationalization not Westernization” had been praised by many Islamic scholars and intellectuals as a brilliant work. The modernist political circle also acknowledged him as a potential intellectual figure who would be a future leader. In this long article, he laid the foundation for progressive, creative thinking on Islam, although he made a strong apologetic defense of Islamic conservatism. In short, he argued that Muslims should work for rationalization and have positive attitudes toward modernization without losing their religiosity. For a good analysis on the importance of this article, see, Greg Barton, *Gagasan Islam Liberal di Indonesia: Pemikiran Neo-Modernisme Nurcholish Madjid*, Djohan Effendi,
Madjid argued for the need for a liberalization process in the teachings and views of Islam. For Madjid, the “liberalization of outlook towards the present teachings of Islam in Indonesia” should involve secularization, intellectual freedom and the idea of progress and open attitudes. In his account, that process is needed to allow renewal of Islam so it can free “[itself] from traditional values” and seek “values which are oriented toward the future.” As a part of Islamic renewal, he stated that intellectual freedom must be guaranteed because “among the freedoms of the individual, the freedom to think and to express opinions are the most valuable” and Muslims “must have a firm conviction that all ideas and forms of thought…should be accorded means of expression.” In his account, the backwardness of the Muslim community is, among other things, caused by the lack of fresh ideas which has made Muslims lose their “psychological striking force,” making them inferior and less innovative than the Westerners. Madjid also voiced the need for open attitudes and acceptance of the idea of progress, because “the idea of progress springs from the concept

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82 Ibid., 286. Madjid made clear his point on secularization by saying that by “secularization is not meant the application of secularism, because ‘secularism’ is the name for an ideology, a new closed worldview which functions very much like a new religion…by ‘secularization’ one does not mean the application of secularism and the transformation of Muslims into secularists. What is intended is the ‘temporalizing’ of values which are in fact worldly, and the freeing of the umma from the tendency to spiritualize them.”

83 Ibid., 287.
that man is intrinsically good, pure, and yearns for truth and good.”\footnote{Ibid., 287. He argued that “man was created by God with fitra (natural disposition to the good) and endowed with hanif quality (that is, inclined to truth).” Therefore, “one of the manifestations of the existence of the idea of progress is the belief in the future of man throughout his history.” In his account, “a reactionary attitude and a closed mentality in fact stem from a pessimistic view of history.” This argument is in contrast to Christian ideas about original sin.}

In order to make progress, an open attitude “in the form of a readiness to accept and to take (temporal) values from whatever source as long as they contain truth” is particularly needed. This speech was also historical as Madjid stated the famous slogan of “Islam yes, Islamic Party No.” This slogan then influenced the political attitudes of the majority of Muslims in Indonesia.

The controversy over his speech forced him to write “Some Notes on Renewing Islamic Thought” and “One More Time about Secularization,” in 1972. In both writings, he clarified his position on secularization, which had been attacked by many conservative Islamists who argued that secularization without secularism is impossible. In defending his position, Madjid first elaborated upon the etymology of the word “secular” and its neutral meaning. He firmly believed that secularization is possible and an obligation of all religious human beings, especially Muslims, as this is in accordance with the teaching of Islam in the Qur’an Surrah al-Qashash/28:77.\footnote{“And seek by means of what Allah has given you the future abode, and do not neglect your portion of this world, and do good (to others) as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land, surely Allah does not love the mischief-makers” (Q 28:77). Madjid used this verse to strengthen his argument that Muslims should always be careful with the future (after life) and worldly affairs.} Madjid also argued that secularization as “desacralization” is inevitably a realization of the primary Islamic oath (syahadat) which states that there is “no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet.” By professing that there is no God but Allah, Muslims must be critical of all Islamic interpretations in order to avoid absolutism, because the only absolute thing is God. Therefore, by “desacralizing” temporal, worldly things, Muslims would be able to keep
away from *shirk* (polytheism) and strengthen *tawhid* (belief in the unity of God). As critics and controversies continued to mount, Madjid began to avoid using the word “secularization” to express his ideas about Islamic renewal.

Madjid continues working on renewing Islamic thought in Indonesia up to the present time. His legacy and influence can be seen in his many young liberal and progressive Muslim intellectual cadres. As a public intellectual and Islamic scholar, he consistently dedicates his time to public education. He is not so interested in politics. Instead, he humbly chooses an intellectual life, making him one of the most respected figures in the country. This political position is different from that of Abdurrahman Wahid, another prominent figure of Islamic renewal in Indonesia, who has been involved deeply in mass organization and politics for decades.

*Abdurrahman Wahid*

Born in Jombang, East Java in 1940, Wahid comes from a family of prominent Islamic intellectuals and national heroes. Known as Gus Dur, he is the grandson of the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) founder, the late Hasyim Ashari, and the son of the late Wahid Hasyim, a national figure who was the chairman of NU and minister for religious affairs under Soekarno. His “royal family blood” of NU gave him wider opportunity to get a good education. He went to several well-known *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) in East Java, the region where NU is strongest, where he studied Islam from many

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87 The most recent and intended as an authoritative biography of Abdurrahman Wahid is by Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President, A View from the Inside* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002).
influential *kiais* (Islamic clerics who own boarding schools). He studied English in Yogyakarta from a sympathizer of the Indonesian Communist Party while he was learning Islamic law. Besides using Javanese as his native language and Bahasa Indonesia as a national language, he is fluent in Arabic, English and Dutch and he reads French and German. His intelligence has been sharpened by his hobbies of reading literature, watching foreign movies, and listening to classical music and rock.\(^{88}\)

In 1962 Wahid went on a scholarship from the Egyptian government to study Islamic law and philosophy in the Department of Higher Islamic and Arabic Studies at al-Azhar University in Cairo, one of the most prestigious Islamic schools in the world. After three years at al-Azhar University, he incurred an administrative sanction and lost his scholarship due to his frequent class absences. He apparently spent most of his time reading western philosophy, spy-fiction novels, and biographies of prominent figures at the library of the American University in Cairo, locked in discussions around campuses, or watching foreign movies. He moved to Baghdad University in Iraq in 1965, and enrolled in the Faculty of Letters where he continued to skip classes. He maintained his hobbies of reading, watching movies, listening to classical music, and getting involved in discussions. He lived modestly and spent most of his money on books. After four years in Baghdad, he went home and started to write opinion pieces in leading mass media and became a part-time researcher as well as a consultant.

\(^{88}\) He read *Das Capital* by Karl Marx, *La Porte Etroite* by Andre Gide, *Republic* by Plato, *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, and many others, and listened to Beethoven and other classical music while he was studying in junior high school and in *pesantren*. His understanding of *Kitab Kuning*, the second most important classical books on Islam after the Qur’an for NU’s sources of values, went beyond many senior ulemas who had studied them for life. According to Liddle, Wahid’s favorite contemporary novel was Chaim Potok’s *My Name is Asher Lev*, which Wahid said was a mirror of his life. See, R. William Liddle, “The Story behind Abdurrahman Wahid,” in Harry Bhaskara, ed., *Understanding Gus Dur* (Jakarta: The Jakarta Post, 2000), 76. According to Michael Malley, Wahid also likes rock music, especially from Janis Joplin.
Wahid’s outspokenness and progressive thinking drew the attention of many people. After Indonesia experienced the abortive coup of the Communist Party in 1965 that brought General Soeharto to power, Wahid, while in Baghdad, began sending letters full of advice, often critical, of the new leader. Then, after he taught in his father’s boarding school for a while, he started to demonstrate his progressive thinking. He began criticizing the existing Islamic interpretations, the relations between religion and the state, and Indonesian democracy. In his view, Islamic interpretation should not be a static dogma. Instead, he proposed liberal notions in his interpretation of Islam and disagreed with mainstream Islamic scholarly thinking. For him, Islam is a private, individual religion that must not be turned into a political process as this can erode the Islamic values and degrade the sanctity of Islam. He insisted that the state should be neutral and not impose any religious teaching and should respect minorities, including faiths not in accordance with Islamic teachings. His “liberal version” of Islam, as well as his diverse knowledge, has attracted young scholars, and his broad and in-depth understanding of Islam has made him respected by many noted influential ulemas.

Shortly after coming home in the early 1970s, Wahid began to develop his political career and influence. First, he established a reputation as a promising intellectual and man of culture. He could talk on various subjects, from religion, philosophy, music, movies, sports, history, literature to popular jokes. He is a prolific writer. He could write quickly about those subjects in every situation without losing a stylish quality in his writing. He spoke in different arenas, from village meetings to international fora. He

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89  Ahmad Bahruddin, “Telling Tales About the Young Gus Dur,” in Ibid., 147.
90  Susanto Pudjomartono, an editor of Indonesia’s biggest English daily The Jakarta Post, tells a personal story how quick and well Wahid writes an article. “When the deadline came for Wahid’s next
also began to involve himself in many non-governmental organizations as a supervisor, consultant, or functionary. He was elected in 1983 and served from 1983 to 1986 as the chairman of the Jakarta Institute of Culture. Since the late 1970s, he had held the position of Katib Syuriah (secretary of the central advisory board) in NU. When NU was in danger of schism as rivalry between two camps heightened in the early 1980s, Gus Dur with several young NU scholars, came to be a mediating force. In the historic NU congress at Situbondo in East Java in 1984, he was elected chairman of NU, after he advocated that NU as an organization should return to its initial commitment as a social-religious movement in order to prevent NU from becoming a supporting or opposition force of the authoritarian regime of Soeharto. His leadership in NU was deeply rooted and respected, as many influential figures at that time felt that Gus Dur was a reincarnation of his grandfather, the founder of NU.

During the Suharto dictatorship, he moved back and forth from close proximity with the regime to criticism of it, making him a controversial and unpredictable figure. Besides abandoning an overtly political role for NU in 1984 with a “back to initial function” policy (kembali ke Khittah), he endorsed the government when it moved to force all political parties and social organizations to adopt the state ideology Pancasila (five principles) in the mid-80s. Later, he stood against the former president's efforts to harness Islam for the regime's own advantage, and he declined membership in the government-backed Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI/Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia) that was established in 1990. Rather, he set up the

_Tempo_ (Indonesian magazine) submission, he would find an empty desk and begin furiously typing (using a manual typewriter). About an hour later he would present a finished, clean copy.” See, Susanto Pudjomartono, “Foreword,” in _Ibid._, iv.
alternative *Forum Demokrasi* (Democratic Forum) with many prominent nationalist figures in March 1992 to counter sectarian and primordial tendencies in Indonesian politics.\(^9^1\)

Despite his Islamic credentials, Wahid opposes the idea of making Indonesia an Islamic state, consistently arguing that if Islam is institutionalized in the state, it will go against the plurality of Indonesian society and will marginalize many minorities, which would lead inevitably to national disintegration. Gus Dur has also been one of the few prominent Muslim leaders to speak up for Indonesia's economically influential, but politically weak Chinese community. In a gesture of reconciliation, he even claimed Chinese ancestry.

The inclusive platform of his National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*), formed in July, 1998, made Wahid one of the most powerful voices for inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance in Indonesia and the most acceptable figure for Indonesian people in the 1990s. His charisma as the most acceptable figure brought him to the presidency in 1999. Although he was nearly blind, he was the first democratically elected president in the Indonesian history. However, his presidency was unsuccessful as he created many controversies, heightened tensions and made unnecessary enemies. As a result, he was impeached in July, 2001, by the People’s Consultative Assembly for a money scandal involving his close aide.

While Wahid’s charisma has diminished, his legacy remains powerful. His long struggle for democracy and inclusiveness has been followed by many young NU intellectuals. Working on different themes and styles, there are many young

“Gusdurians” who continue disseminating progressive and liberal Islamic ideas. The influence of Wahid, as well as Madjid, in shaping contemporary liberal Islamic thought is very significant. Below is a brief survey of the ideas proposed by young Muslim scholars who independently worked to strengthen the foundations of moderate, tolerant Islam advocated by Madjid and Wahid.

**Embryo of Jaringan Islam Liberal: A Brief Survey**

Progressive young intellectuals in Indonesia have conducted much research on issues related to modernizing Islam, women’s rights, tolerance, and democracy in the 1980s and 1990s. Group discussions, as well as non-governmental organizations supporting the modernization of Islamic thinking flourished all across the country. These developments were also influenced by political developments in the 1990s. At that time, opposition groups grew up to challenge the dictatorship of Soeharto, who began to deeply politicize Islam following the establishment of ICMI.

The 1980s were marked by a significant development of Islamic activism in universities and intellectual circles. Activities related to dawa (Islamic preaching) and discussions on Islamic thought flourished in most public universities and Muslim youth groups as well as in governmental and business offices. These activities, which mostly dealt with religious affairs, freed Muslim student activists from the impact of the draconian government policies on *Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus/Badan Kegiatan Kampus* (Normalization of Campus Life/Campus Activity Unit) and the forced

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92 Besides domestic political explanations, the emergence of Islamic activism in many universities is also influenced by many external factors. An important one of these is the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran led by Ayatollah Khomeini.
implementation of Pancasila as the sole ideology. Instead of being active in formal student organizations, they preferred to stay away from politics and began to seriously discuss the issue of Islamic renewal.

In the late 1980s, several young Muslim intellectuals began to gain public attention for their works. Inspired by Nurcholish Madjid and other neo-modernists, young intellectuals like Goenawan Muhamad, Hamid Basyaib, Taufik Adnan Amal, Ihsan Ali-Fauzi, Saiful Mujani, Budhy Munawar-Rahman, Samsurizal Panggabean and Ahmad Sahal wrote eloquently on Islamic issues and modernism, developing a critical interpretation of Islam, emphasizing inclusiveness, and discussing the relation between religion and politics. Other young intellectuals with less Islamic background like Rizal Mallarangeng and Denny J. A. also became known for their writings on politics and democracy.

Some of their progressive thoughts can be found in Mencari Islam: Kumpulan Otobiografi Intelektual Kaum Muda Muslim Indonesia Angkatan 80-an [Searching Islam: A Compilation of Autobiographies of Young Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals from the Generation of 80s] edited by Ihsan Ali-Fauzi and Haidar Bagir. In this book, some young Muslim intellectuals—who then actively participated in the establishment of JIL—reflected their understanding of the meaning of Islam. In general, they felt that the

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94 Ihsan Ali-Fauzi and Haidar Bagir, eds., Mencari Islam: Kumpulan Otobiografi Intelektual Kaum Muda Muslim Indonesia Angkatan 80-an (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1990). The publication of this book is one of the works of a students’ group discussion called Forum Mahasiswa Ciputat [Ciputat Student Forum], which is based in the area of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta.
orthodox, old-school understanding of Islam was no longer appropriate or adequate to face the current challenges of modernization in both urban and rural areas. They argued that Islam should be understood contextually. In their search, some found a tentative, inconclusive version of Islam after they seriously studied Islamic neo-modernism, Western philosophy, psychoanalysis, or critical theories. Hamid Basyaib, for example, confessed that he was deeply influenced by Fazlur Rahman’s ideas on Islam after reading one of his books, while Budhy Munawar-Rahman was attracted to the ideas of Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich in his effort to find the meaning of Islam.

In the 1990s, Islamic intellectualism among Muslim youth blossomed. For “exclusive Islamic” circles, the early 1990s were a time of resurgence as the Soeharto regime began to accommodate (if not co-opt) political Islamic figures with the establishment of ICMI. That move created euphoria not only in the elite circles of modernist Islam, but also in the modernist student movement. In many public university campuses across Indonesia there was strong activism by student movements or organizations affiliated to or under the supervision of modernist figures grouped in ICMI. These groups were active not only in dominating student bodies in the universities, but also in the public discourse promoting “the ideology” of ICMI.

On the other hand, pluralist Islamic circles and the mainstream of traditionalist Islam felt that the close proximity of the exclusive Islamic circles to the Soeharto regime was dangerous for the future of Indonesian harmony and plurality. They were also threatened by the fact that many ICMI members under the patronage of B. J. Habibie were placed in prestigious and strategic positions in the government, at both the central and local levels. One of the outspoken figures who rejected the establishment of ICMI was Abdurrahman Wahid who at that time headed the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, NU. With a traditionalist Islamic background, his rejection of ICMI signaled to traditionalist Muslim youth to combat the widespread influence of ICMI in public discourse.

Wahid’s firm stance in support of democratic principles was echoed by many senior and young traditionalist Muslim scholars, like Said Aqil Siradj, Muhammad A.S. Hikam, Masdar F. Mas’udi and Ulil Abshar Abdalla. Their ideas spread throughout traditionalist student groups, making them a counter force against the domination of ICMI activists. There were many critical opinions, not only directed to the political situation, but also to the understanding of Islam. As an alternative to “the ICMI-like interpretation of Islam,” progressive traditionalist Muslim scholars echoed Wahid’s ideas of inclusive Islam and toleration.

However, not all modernist Muslims agreed with an “exclusive understanding” of Islam. Some of the neo-modernists who were actively involved in the Islamic renewal in the 1970s and 1980s continued their work and joined by several young intellectuals from Forum Mahasiswa Ciputat (Formaci/Ciputat Student Forum), they proposed an alternative “school of thought” on Islam. Labeled tentatively Mazhab Ciputat (Ciputat
School), they seriously discussed many issues related to the renewal of Islamic interpretations and some “unrevealed dimensions” of Islamic traditions. They were also concerned with the “contamination” of Islam by other cultural ideas, arts or values that could make Islamic interpretations become more particularistic. Some of their progressive thinking was published in a book entitled *Dekonstruksi Islam: Mazhab Ciputat* (Deconstruction of Islam: Ciputat School) edited by Edy A. Effendy.  

In that book, Nurcholish Madjid—who is acclaimed as the “father” of the Ciputat School—analyzed trends in contemporary religious life that would affect future generations. One of the common trends in many post-industrial countries is that people are no longer interested in organized religion, but prefer to experience spirituality. This trend—best described by Naisbitt and Aburdene using the phrase “Spirituality Yes, Organized Religion No”—along with other trends like religious cults and fundamentalism, had to be considered seriously by Muslim scholars in order to make Islam an open religion relevant and attractive to future generations. That effort, as Madjid suggests, requires Muslims to better understand the history of Islam, present Islamic civilization and future trends. Again, this writing sparked controversy. Some

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98 Edy A. Effendy, ed., *Dekonstruksi Islam: Mazhab Ciputat* [Deconstruction of Islam: Ciputat School] (Bandung: Zaman Wacana Mulia, 1999). This book consists of three parts. Part one is on deconstruction of Islam. In this part, Nurcholish Madjid wrote some reflection on religious life for the future generations, Kautzar Azhari-Noer wrote inter-religious dialogue from the Sufi perspective, Komaruddin Hidayat wrote on Islam and postmodernism, and Budhy Munawar-Rahman wrote on Islamic neo-modernism thinking in Indonesia. In part two, on cultural deconstruction, Azyumardi Azra wrote about nationalism, ethnicity and religion in Indonesia and Malaysia; Ahmad Sahal wrote about emancipation with the focus on critical theories, and Hendro Prasetyo wrote an answer to the Huntington thesis of the clash of civilization. Part three is on social deconstruction. In this part, Ihsan Ali-Fauzi analyzed orientalism from the perspective of an orientalist, Maxim Rodinson. Then, Saiful Mujani wrote on Islam in the hegemony of modernization theory, and the last author, Fachry Ali wrote a critical note on Nurcholish Madjid thought on Islamic renewal.
fundamentalist Islamic groups accused Madjid of propagating spiritualism, as it is against the “overall Islamic truth.”

Other younger intellectuals proposed various alternative interpretations and understandings of Islam, some of them utilizing the perspective of post-modernism or critical theory. Komarudin Hidayat, for example, wrote the deconstruction of the language of Islam and Saiful Mujani engaged in a critical examination of Islam and the modernization paradigm. Mujani argues that the efforts by neo-modernist figures to find an alternative Islamic perspective for modernization is most likely to fail as they cannot move from the “shadow of the hegemony of the modernization paradigm.” Therefore, he argues contextual and contemporary Islamic interpretations should fit with the mainstream of a capitalist, modernization paradigm.

These intellectuals from Mazhab Ciputat and those affiliated to the University of Paramadina initiated a dialogue expanding the liberal interpretation of Islam to a wider audience with better organizational effort. They with other young Muslim intellectuals from different Islamic traditions and with the support of many “secular” or “nationalist” intellectuals, made arrangements to campaign openly for liberal Islam. They agreed to forge a distinctive identity to differentiate themselves from other established or militant Islamic groups by labeling their forum Jaringan Islam Liberal.

**Jaringan Islam Liberal: Background, Activities, and Meaning**

*Jaringan Islam Liberal* (JIL) is a loose forum for discussing and disseminating the concept of Islamic liberalism in Indonesia. One *raison d’etre* of its establishment is to counter the growing influence and activism of militant and radical Islam in Indonesia.
The “official” description of JIL is “a community which is studying and bringing forth a discourse on Islamic vision that is tolerant, open and supportive for the strengthening of Indonesian democratization.” It was started from several meetings and discussions among young Muslim intellectuals in ISAI (Institut Studi Arus Informasi Institute for the Study of the Flow of Information), Jakarta, and then extended through discussion using a mailing list, islamliberal@yahoogroups.com in early 2001. The founders held the first discussion on February 21, 2001, in Teater Utan Kayu, Jakarta, on Akar-Akar Liberalisme Islam: Pengalaman Timur Tengah [The Roots of Islamic Liberalism: The Middle East Experience], presented by a young progressive scholar, Luthfie Assyaukanie. That meeting was followed by other discussions, either in the form of face-to-face meetings or through the mailing list. Since mid 2001, the “official” name of Jaringan Islam Liberal has been used on their website, www.islamlib.com, which displays their activities, articles, discussions, and relevant sources for the dissemination of liberal Islam. Their place of meeting and secretariat is in Teater Utan Kayu, Jakarta, a complex owned by Goenawan Mohamad, a leading journalist and author, and used for arts performances and by non-governmental organizations.

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100 Interview, Ihsan Ali-Fauzi in Athens, Ohio on November 24, 2002.

101 Assyaukanie graduated from the Faculty of Islamic Law (Syariah), Jordan University in Amman, then continued his graduate study at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilizations in Malaysia. After for a short period of time teaching at the University of Paramadina, Jakarta, he went to Australia to do doctoral study at the Melbourne Institute of Asian Languages and Societies, University of Melbourne until the present.

102 The first online discussion in March 2001 was about the agenda and the future of liberal Islam. The topic was intended to clarify the concept of liberal Islam and the reasons behind the establishment of JIL. Participants in that discussion were: Ade Armando, A.E. Priyono, Denny J. A., Hamid Basyaib, Ichan Loulembah, Luthfi Assyaukanie, Nirwan Ahmad Arsuka, Putut Widjanarko, Rizal Mallarangeng, Robin Bush, Saiful Mujani, Sukidi, Taufik Adnan Amal, Zainal Abidin Baqir and Uni Zulfiani Lubis. The full transcript of the discussion can be found in Assyaukanie, ed., Wajah Liberal, 199-231.
Participants in the early process of the establishment of JIL are diverse in their background. Most of them are middle class, young intellectuals, but there are also politicians and prominent authors. Several key figures in the early phase included Ahmad Sahal, Budhy Munawar-Rachman, Goenawan Mohamad, Hamid Basyaib, Luthfie Assyaukanie, Rizal Mallarangeng, Denny J. A., Ihsan Ali-Fauzi, A.E. Priyono, Samsurizal Panggabean, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Saiful Mujani and Hadimulyo. Other important figures who became source persons in the establishment of JIL included more senior Islamic scholars such as Nurcholish Madjid, Azyumardi Azra and Komaruddin Hidayat.\textsuperscript{103} Assyaukanie is the first coordinator of JIL who arranged discussions and maintained offline and online discussions through a mailing list. Since its first meeting, the participants and those who are interested in joining JIL are increasing. As an open forum without rigid organization, JIL does not have a membership system. Therefore, there is no data on the number of members. The current coordinator of JIL is Ulil Abshar Abdalla, the head of NU’s human resources think-tank, Lakpesdam-NU.

In the process of the establishment of JIL, support from Goenawan Mohamad, a distinguished author and publisher, was very significant. He not only provided a meeting place, secretarial support and temporary funding through ISAI, but his involvement also attracted the interest of many young intellectuals from his circle at Tempo weekly magazine and the Korantempo daily newspaper as well as ISAI. He is also a relatively neutral figure for either modernist or traditionalist Islam in Indonesia.

Since its inception, JIL has conducted many regular activities concerning public education. With the assistance from funding agencies such as The Asia Foundation, JIL is able to voice liberal, tolerant aspirations and interpretations of Islam in Indonesia. Activities and programs of JIL include, first, syndication of liberal Islam writers. This is the most important program done by JIL. This program is intended to collect writings from authors who defend pluralism and inclusivism and disseminate them to local mass media which have difficulties in finding good writings and writers on those issues. This syndication provides selected articles, interviews, and sources every week for local newspapers. Second, talk-shows in the news office of Radio 68H, Jakarta. The talk-show, which interviews those who promote pluralism and an inclusive understanding of religion, is broadcast through 40 radio stations in the Namlapanha radio network across Indonesia. This program is the most effective effort to disseminate liberal Islam. Third, publication of books on liberal Islam, pluralism, and inclusivism in religion. Fourth, publication of booklets or leaflets which contain a short article, interview, or abstract

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from books on controversial issues in religion.$^{105}$ Fifth, the website, www.islamlib.com, which displays information and relevant writings on liberal Islam. Sixth, public service advertisements on television which contain messages for religious toleration and peaceful co-existence among different religious followers and pluralism in Islam.$^{106}$ Seventh, discussion of Islam. With cooperation from other institutions, JIL arranges discussions on Islam with distinguished speakers from all over the world. Eighth, road-show discussions to disseminate the idea of liberal Islam which are held on campuses in Indonesia with the cooperation of student organizations.

These activities reflect the mission of JIL which is described as follows:$$^{107}$ First, to develop liberal interpretations of Islam which correspond to their principles and to disseminate them to the public. Second, to provide a medium for dialogue that is open and free from the pressure of conservatism. JIL believes that only through the availability of this kind of dialogue, can the development of Islamic thinking and action move in a good direction. Third, to create a just and humane socio-political structure. For JIL, democracy is the best system for that purpose.

For the proponents of JIL, using liberal Islam in the name of their forum is intended to make a clear point. Liberal Islam represents an Islam that emphasizes individual freedom in accordance with the *Mutā'zila* (or Mu’tazilite)$^{108}$ doctrine of

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$^{105}$ Its first booklet is *Quran untuk Perempuan* [Qur’an for Women], written by Nazaruddin Umar, a professor at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta.

$^{106}$ One public service advertisement on *Islam Warna Warni* [A Colorful Islam] has incited rage from the militant group of Majelis Mujahiddin Indonesia [Council of Indonesian Holy Fighters] led by a controversial cleric, Abu Bakar Baasyir. This group threatened to sue the television stations which broadcast the advertisement as they believed that Islam is unique and there is no other “color” of Islam.


$^{108}$ As a school of thought, Mu’tazilite has five common principles: *al-tawhid* (belief in one God), *al-adl* (divine justice), *al-wa’d wa’l-wa’id* (promise and threat), *al-manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn* (a position...
human freedom and liberation of socio-political structure from oppressive and undemocratic domination. The adjective “liberal” for the activists in JIL has two meanings: “being liberal” and “liberating.” They use this adjective because they do not believe in Islam as such, Islam without an adjective, since in reality Islam has many different interpretations. Therefore, liberal Islam is another variant of Islam and an alternative to literal Islam, Islamic fundamentalism, radical Islam, and many others.

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between two positions), and al-amr bi’l-ma’ruf wa’l-nahy ‘an al-munkar (commanding the good and prohibiting the evil). For a good discussion on Mu’tazilism and neo-modernism in contemporary Indonesia, see, Saleh, Modern Trends, especially chapter 4.
Introduction

One of the most challenging agendas of Islamic liberals is likely to establish a politically liberal society. Through this society, all Islamic liberal ideas and goals could be realized and achieved. However, this kind of society is absent in the Islamic history. The most common form of society in early Islam was communal or tribalistic. The problem in transforming Islamic societies into politically liberal ones is complex, as it deals with theological, philosophical, moral, and cultural values. This transformation requires the development of a liberal Islamic theology that can serve as the foundation of a politically liberal society. Liberal Islam is likely intended to be a liberal Islamic theology. This theology can only be defined after intense intellectual activities conducted with a willingness to engage in theological as well as theoretical debates with classical, traditional, and radical views.

Activists of Jaringan Islam Liberal have those characteristics. They enjoy intellectual exchange through dialogue, discussion, and reading. They seriously study Islam, empirical social sciences and normative ideas. They like to explore various perspectives and ideas, from Western and Islamic intellectual traditions. They are not

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109 In a well-functioning politically liberal society, as John Rawls writes in his Political Liberalism, those who affirm illiberal doctrines and those who tend not to gain adherents “under the political and social conditions of a just constitutional regime” would be socially irrelevant. See, John Rawls, Political Liberalism (1993), 196-7. According to Rawls, in a politically liberal society there will be no place for those who are racists, sexists, and “certain religious groups that could survive only by controlling the state machinery and practicing effective intolerance.” See, in John Tomasi, Liberalism Beyond Justice: Citizens, Society, and the Boundaries of Political Theory (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 24.
afraid to challenge orthodoxy in Islamic interpretation, although they face many serious threats and accusations from several fundamentalist groups. They are eager to publicly express their liberal thoughts through mass media. On several occasions, they arranged limited discussions with “opponent” figures to clarify some objections to and rejections of their ideas. Their intellectual exchange, analysis, and interpretation, according to Daniel Lev, is not only interesting, but also challenging and in many points, surprising.\textsuperscript{110}

However, the “plurality” of JIL activists brings consequences for its internal organization. As a forum for intellectual exchange and promotion of liberal Islam in Indonesia, the internal dynamic of JIL depends largely on the activism and participation of its members. The most active members will likely “color” JIL’s ideas and programs. This creates several layers in “membership:” those who actively participate in daily activities become the core of JIL, while some other initiators are in the second or third layers of the JIL’s circle.\textsuperscript{111} The most important consequence of its plurality is that there is no single idea, interpretation, or analysis that they propose. In short, although JIL is able to define its meanings and agendas, there is no “official voice” of JIL. Except for the basic platform that they accept, all ideas, interpretations and analysis are solely the members’ responsibility.

This plurality creates many spectrums of thinking in JIL. The range could be from moderate, “minimalist” liberal Islam to “fully” Western liberalism. The approach they apply to make interpretations and analysis is as diverse as their educational backgrounds. This chapter will deal with the elaboration of JIL’s basic platform of liberal Islam and

\textsuperscript{111} Interview with Ihsan Ali-Fauzi and Sukidi Mulyadi in Athens, Ohio, in December 2002.
illustrates some of perspectives on liberal Islam proposed by its active members. In order to better understand how their ideas are received by Muslims in Indonesia, this chapter will also discuss objections by the opponents of JIL.

**Jaringan Islam Liberal on Liberal Islam**

The first discussion in the JIL mailing list started on March 8, 2001, on the theme of the agenda and the future of liberal Islam. With around 70 members listed, the discussion got a positive response from many active members who were mainly academicians or young intellectuals living in Indonesia or abroad. The enthusiasm of the active participants can be seen from their responses to the problems and questions posed by the coordinator of discussion, Luthfie Assyaukanie. He opened the debate by highlighting two contrasting opinions about liberal Islam in Indonesia: on the one hand, Ulil Abshar Abdalla stated that liberal Islam in Indonesia has failed, while on the other hand, Syamsu Rizal Panggabean argued for the success of liberal Islam based on the diminishing number of votes for Islamic parties in the 1999 election. Abdalla’s pessimism about liberal Islam in Indonesia is based on his deep concern about the increasingly violent religious conflicts in Indonesia. This problem not only led the

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113 Some active members in the first discussion include (alphabetically): Ade Armando (*University of Indonesia, Jakarta*), A.E. Priyono (*Jakarta*), Denny J.A. (*Ohio State University, Columbus*), Hamid Basyaib (*Aksara Foundation, Jakarta*), Ichan Loulembah (*Puskakom, Jakarta*), Luthfi Assyaukanie (*University of Paramadina, Jakarta*), Nirwan Ahmad Arsuka (*Bentara Foundation, Jakarta*), Putut Widjanarko (*Bandung, Indonesia*), Rizal Mallarangeng (*Ohio State University, Columbus*), Robin Bush (*Ohio State University, Columbus*), Saiful Mujani (*Ohio State University, Columbus*), Sukidi (*Puan Amal Hayati Foundation, Jakarta*), Taufik Adnan Amal (*IAIN Alauddin, Makasar, Indonesia*), Zainal Abidin (*Indiana University, Bloomington*), and Uni Zulfani Lubis (*Panjimas Weekly, Jakarta*). See, Ibid., 199.
participants to discuss the success or failure of liberal Islam in Indonesia, but also led to discussions of the meaning and definition of liberal Islam and its theological bases.

In this discussion, the most debatable point is about the meaning of liberal Islam. There are pros and cons on the use of an “adjective” for Islam. Uni Zulfiani Lubis, a journalist, for instance, objects to using any kind of adjective for Islam, either liberal, fundamentalist, or democratic, as those adjectives would only create “compartmentalization” among Muslims on the one hand and create another exclusive identity on the other hand. Denny J. A., a political scientist educated in Ohio State University, Columbus, notes the importance of using the word “liberal” because this word characterizes a liberal interpretation of Islam which fits with the fundamental principle of a modern state: democracy. For Assyaukanie, the terminology of liberal Islam is not the main issue, because it can be substituted with other names such as “progressive Islam,” “pluralist Islam,” or “dynamic Islam.” However, he prefers using liberal Islam because it has an implicit connotation of revolt and rebellion. Liberal Islam is a revolt or rebellion against orthodoxies in Islam, either in the form of fundamentalism in politics or conservatism in theology. He also rejects the idea of a single Islam, because sociological realities show that there are many interpretations of Islam.

A challenging issue is raised by Rizal Mallarangeng. Deeply interested in the ideas of liberalism, he uses Isaiah Berlin’s conception of positive and negative freedoms to challenge the participants to discuss the conceptual framework and Islamic interpretations of “freedom for” and “freedom to.” He also asks how to formulate Islamic doctrines which will not be in contradiction with the “very simple principle” of John
Stuart Mill’s liberalism: all people are free as long as the exercise of individuals’ freedom does not harm others. In a simple dictum, this means “live and let live.”

However, this issue did not provoke many responses, as only Assyaukanie answers shortly stating that liberal Islam wants freedom from “the past authority” and freedom to interpret and be critical of that authority. Past authority in his account most likely refers to all established Islamic institutions (clerics, religious organizations, dogmatic interpretations, and fatwas/Islamic cleric decisions). The rest of the discussion mostly deals with the definition and the importance of liberal Islam as a new form of interpretation of Islamic values on public issues.

On the basis of those discussions, JIL’s activists agreed on a common, four-point agenda. *First* is to strengthen the foundation of democratization through the dissemination of pluralist, inclusivist, and humanist values. *Second* is to build a religious life that is based on the respect for plurality/differences. *Third* is to support and disseminate religious ideas (particularly Islam) which are pluralist, open, and humane. *Finally* is to prevent militant and pro-violent religious views dominating public discourse. This agenda clearly reflect their concern with current problems in Indonesia, where during the reformation era many inter-religious conflicts emerged, there was a resurgence of religious fundamentalism and a campaign of *jihad* (holy war) by several militant, radical Islamic groups.

**Definition and Meaning**

Based on such discussions, activists of JIL reached an “official” agreement on the meaning of liberal Islam. On its website, liberal Islam is described as “a new form of
interpretation (although not completely new) of Islam based on following principles:"

The first is openness of *ijtihad* (rational interpretation) in all aspects. Islamic liberals believe that *ijtihad* of Islamic texts is the primary principles that will make Islam survive. The “closing” of chances for *ijtihad*, either partially or completely, is a threat for Islam itself, because Islam could be in decay. The Islamic liberals believe that *ijtihad* could be done in almost all aspects of Islam: *ilahiyyat* (theology), *ubudiyyat* (ritual), and *muamalat* (social interaction). They, however, acknowledge that the “room” for *ijtihad* on the aspect of *ubudiyyat* (ritual) is less than in other areas.

The second principle is emphasis on the spirit of religious-ethics, not on the literal meaning of Islamic texts. Islamic liberals develop *ijtihad* to interpret Islam based on the spirit of religious-ethics in the Qur’an and *Sunnah* (Prophetic traditions), not merely based on the literal meaning of the texts. The literal interpretation of Islam, in their accounts, would “kill” Islam. Only with interpretation based on the spirit of religious-ethics, would Islam be able to live and be creatively developed to be part of a universal “humane civilization.”

Third is the principle of relative, open and pluralistic truth. Liberal Islam is based on the idea that “truth” (in religious interpretation) is “relative,” because interpretation is a “human activity” which is carried on a particular context; “open,” because all interpretation has probability of being erroneous or correct; and “plural,” because an interpretation of religion, in one or another way, is a reflection of the interpreters who live in different times and places.

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The fourth principle is affirmative/supportive to minorities and oppressed people. Liberal Islam is based on Islamic interpretation which favors/benefits the “commoners,” minorities, the oppressed and marginalized people. All socio-political structures which inflict injustice on minorities are in contradiction with the spirit of Islam. Minorities here are understood in a wide sense, covering religious, ethnic, racial, cultural, political, economic, sexual orientation minorities. “Gender justice,” therefore, is an important issue, because the current social structure is based on patriarchy, which is basically in contradiction with the idea of justice in Islam. All religious interpretation which ignores “gender justice,” presumably, is not in accordance with the Islamic principle of justice.

Fifth is the principle of freedom of religion and belief. Liberal Islam sees the issue of “being religious” or “being atheist” is an individual right that must be protected. Liberal Islam will not justify human persecution based on opinions or belief. Finally, is the principle of the separation of worldly and ukhrawi (heavenly) authority, or religious and political authority. Liberal Islam believes in the necessity of a separation between religious and political authorities, or secularization. Liberal Islam will not justify the idea of a religious-state (theocracy) where a cleric is assumed to be an errorless, ultimate authority. An ideal form of state for the good development of religion and politics is a state where political and religious authority is separated. Religion is an inspirational source that can influence public policy, but this does not mean that religion has a “transcendental privilege” which determines all public policies. Religion should work in private, individual spheres of life, while public affairs should be decided through “collective ijtihad” processes where all parties can argue and truth is determined in “inductive” ways through debate and intellectual exchange.
These principles represent a “mainstream” Islamic liberalism proposed by many earlier scholars. The importance of *ijtihad* in contextualizing Islam has been advocated by neo-modernist scholars like Fazlur Rahman and Nurcholish Madjid. *Ijtihad* is the *conditio sine qua non* (required condition) for liberal interpretation of Islam. The argument to defend *ijtihad* is not only based on the fact that the Qur’an is silent in many aspects, but also is based on historical precedent, such as interpretation by Umar bin Khatab, the second caliph after the Prophet Muhammad, who did not follow the Qur’anic verses in solving some problems.\(^{115}\) Umar’s *ijtihad* inspired the development of a school of thought in Islam called as *Madrasah Ra’yu* (Ra’yu school of thought), which prioritized the use of rational reasoning in interpreting the Qur’an. This school of thought, that was developed by Islamic scholars like Ibn Rusyd and Muhammad Abduh, assumes that *nash* (Islamic texts) are *ta’aqquli* (should be approached with reason).

Therefore, in the Islamic liberal view according to Ahmad Sahal,\(^{116}\) *nash* do not totally regulate Muslims’ lives, because the most important thing is not the rules stated in the *nash*, but universal principles of morality such as justice, equality and the good. This view definitely supports the second principle held by JIL: the emphasis on the spirit of religious-ethics (universal principle of morality). Sahal also defends the third principle of

\(^{115}\) As mentioned by Ahmad Sahal, under the caliphate of Umar bin Khatab, Islamic fighters seized areas span from Syria, Iraq, Persian region to Egypt. According to the Qur’an Shurah al-Anfal 41, those who involved in the war should get four-fifth of all areas they controlled (*ghanimah*) and one-fifth would be under the caliphate’s control for the good of all Muslims (*ummah*). This rule was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad when he conquered the land of Khaibar. However, Umar did not follow that verse. Considering the good of the future generation, he decided to control all seized lands and asked previous owners to work on their land but they must pay some kind of taxes (*kharaj*). His *ijtihad* that clearly against a specific verse in the Qur’an (*nash sharih*) received strong opposition from other Prophet’s friends like Bilal, Abdurrahman bin Auf, and Zubair bin Awwam, but Umar insisted on his decision. Previously, Umar also made a decision not to cut the hand of a thief as mandated by the Qur’an Shurah al-Maidah 38, because that thief stole the camel for survival under the famine times. See, Ahmad Sahal, “Umar bin Khatab dan Islam Liberal” [Umar bin Kathab and Liberal Islam], in Assyaukanie, ed., *Wajah Liberal*, 4.

JIL based on arguments in the *Ra’yu* school of thought: by prioritizing the rational reasoning, *Ra’yu* views basically acknowledge plurality and historical context, and consider “Islam as an interpretation of Islam,” which implies relativism of Islamic interpretation.

JIL’s commitment to be supportive to minorities and oppressed people is in accordance with the basic Islamic teaching to uphold justice. The problems of *dimmi* (minority) and women’s rights are among the most sensitive justice issues for Islamic society. There are many controversies because of the difficulty of implementing some verses in the Qur’an in daily life. Islamic feminist like Fatima Mernissi\(^\text{117}\) for instance, believes that verses in the Qur’an related to the rights of women should be approached contextually in order to build a just Islamic society. However, JIL activists do not deeply and comprehensively address the meaning and justification of “what is justice” and how it could be operationalized in an Islamic society. They are still focused on the problem of justification of the rights of minorities and gender equality from an Islamic theological basis.

The principles of religious freedom and secularization are basically intended to confront political Islamic forces which reject the traditional belief system and demand the full implementation of *shariah* in daily life. It is clear that JIL activists acknowledge

liberal principles of entrance and exit for every informed decision taken by individuals. Meanwhile, the emphasis on separation of worldly and heavenly affairs (secularization) reflects the commitment of JIL activists to continue the work of Nurcholish Madjid and other neo-modernists.

Strong liberal principles also reflect the commitment of JIL activists to deconstruct orthodox, dogmatic interpretations of Islam that they learned since their childhood. They are no longer taken for granted the meaning and interpretation of Islam. With better exposure to current world problems and the latest development in Western theoretical traditions, JIL activists utilize various approaches to develop more profound arguments on the Islamic basis of toleration, democracy, and emancipation. Historical, theological, and political hermeneutics are among the approaches used by JIL activists to develop their arguments. Below are some perspectives on liberal Islam produced by activists of JIL from different approaches and points of view.

**Perspectives on Liberal Islam**

Charles Kurzman’s categorization of themes in liberal Islam is widely accepted by JIL activists. However, the theme of progress and modernity does not seem crucial. JIL activists seem to focus on public and political issues such as democracy, toleration, and freedom of expression. Many of their writings deal with the problems of supplying Islamic justification for those concepts, and they do not specifically address liberal theories. There is no thoughtful analysis of liberalism or criticism of current liberal theories. This is likely a consequence of their choice of entry point in elaborating liberal
Islam: they use some notions of liberalism and put them in an Islamic context in order to provide theological justification (instead of rational justification) of their ideas.

However, the progressiveness of their thinking is unquestionable. Learning from what happened in other religious histories and philosophical debates, some of them try to defend the theological position of liberal Islam from the perspectives of “truth,” ethics, and interpretive theory. In defending the idea of religious pluralism, for instance, scholar like Kautzar Azhari Noer recalls to Muslims the philosophy of Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240) on the concept of God.\textsuperscript{118} One of the greatest Sufis, al-Arabi criticizes religious followers who claim that their “god” is the only true God. In Islamic literature, there are various nomenclatures for God, although they refer to the same “Being.”\textsuperscript{119}

Based on al-Arabi’s writings, Noer tells Muslims (and especially those who reject religious pluralism) that Islam, as confirmed in some verses in the Qur’an and hadiths, acknowledges various conceptions of God. Therefore, there is no justification for Muslims to claim that their God is the only true God, because true God belongs to every religious individual who believes in the one God although they have different understandings or conceptions of God. This concept, according to Noer, is similar to “apofatic theology” in Christianity traditions or some parts of the Hindus “bible” or

\textsuperscript{118} Kautzar Azhari Noer, “Tuhan Kepercayaan” [The God Belief], in Assyaukanie, ed., Wajah Liberal, 68-73. Noer is a professor at the State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah and an activist at Masyarakat Dialog Antar Agama/MADIA [Society for Inter-religious Dialogue]. He received his doctoral degree from his alma-mater with the dissertation on Wahdatul Wujud Ibnu Arabi.

\textsuperscript{119} In al-Arabi accounts, God believed by religious followers can be called as \textit{ilah al-mu’taqad} (“The God Belief”), \textit{al-ilah al-mu’taqad} (“The Believed God”), \textit{al-ilah fi al-i’tiqad} (“The God in Belief”), \textit{al-haqq alladzi fi al-i’tiqad} (“The God in the Belief”), and \textit{al-haqq al-makhluq fi al-i’tiqad} (“The God Created in the Belief”). Based on al-Arabi philosophy and some verses in the Qur’an and hadiths, Noer states that “God” in the Islamic belief system can be called as “the Sky God” or “the Heavenly God” or “the Celestial Supreme Being.” See, in \textit{Ibid.}, p. 71.
Upanisad which states that people will never absolutely understand God with their senses.

There is also an effort to justify liberal interpretations of Islam based on historical considerations. Young intellectuals like Ulil Abshar Abdalla, for instance, believe that Islamic development in the future would be fruitful as long as Muslims could acknowledge the existence of “progressive revelation.”\textsuperscript{120} Abdalla asserts that Islamic civilization could reach a new golden era if Muslims have a progressive view, instead of being backward or past-oriented. Muslims should not be burdened with the ideal of a utopia replicating the Prophet Muhammad’s society, but they should develop their rational faculties and historical wisdom in order to be prepared as “little Muhammads.” In his account, the only obligation for Muslims to imitate the Prophet’s act is \textit{shalat} (Islamic praying ritual). The rest of Islamic teachings and values is open for \textit{ijtihad}.

Another strategy to defend liberal Islamic interpretation is by criticizing the main source of Islamic values, the Qur’an. Scholars like Taufik Adnan Amal, for instance, question the standard version of the Qur’an and argue for the necessity of creating a critical edition of the Qur’an. Amal, after studying the history of the Qur’an, finds several problems relating to the writing, compilation, translation, and authorization of the Qur’an. In his view, there are various opinions about who compiled the Qur’an, how God’s revelation came to the Prophet Muhammad, what language was being used and problems left from the effort to standardize the Qur’an.\textsuperscript{121} In short, he wants to challenge

\textsuperscript{120} Ulil Abshar Abdalla, “Wahyu Progressif” [The Progressive Revelation], in \textit{Ibid.}, 74-77.

\textsuperscript{121} Taufik Adnan Amal and Syamsu Rizal Panggabean published their work on contextual interpretation of the Qur’an in 1989 entitled \textit{Tafsir Kontekstual al-Qur’an} [Contextual Interpretation of the Qur’an], (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1989). Based on this study, he wrote some other articles on the history of the Qur’an, such as “Edisi Kritis al-Qur’an” [Critical Edition of the Qur’an], in \textit{Jawa Pos} daily
the orthodoxy of Islamic teachings by pointing to the fact that its basic source of values and teaching still has some historical problems that should be addressed. In his opinion, to solve this basic problem, a critical edition of the Qur’an, which contains explanations and references for parts of the Qur’an which had been modified by caliphs and authorities in the past, is necessary.

Meanwhile, Assyaukanie, defending a contextual approach to the Qur’an, adds to Amal’s elaboration on the complex historical problems of editing the Qur’an with the problems related to the locality and universality of Qur’anic verses. Referring to the opinions of a classical Islamic scholar, Mahmud Mohammad Taha, from Sudan, he supports the view that there are two different categories of Qur’anic verses: universal and eternal *makkiyah* verses and local and temporal *madaniyah* verses. The latter category of verses are the most debatable and controversial issues for Islamic scholars. While many traditionalist or fundamentalist Islamic scholars argue for the literal meaning of those verses, Islamic liberals defend the position that in those verses, Muslims should “extract” the religious-ethical values in order to make those verses more sensible and applicable to the current human civilization.

Another perspective developed by JIL activists is about religious pluralism or inclusive theology. Continuing Madjid’s views on inclusive Islam, Muslim intellectuals
like Budhy Munawar-Rahman\textsuperscript{123} or young promising scholars like Sukidi Mulyadi,\textsuperscript{124} for instance, reassert the necessity for Muslims to accept the view that all religions have the same claim of truth and salvation. In this theology, all religion is equally accepted as the valid way to the same truth although there are many differences in the rituals, sources, and teachings. This theology, as well as Islamic inclusiveness, is intended to be the basis for religious toleration. For JIL activists, this theology could save Muslims from being radicalized with dogmatic teachings and facilitate peaceful coexistence among religious followers.

There is also strong commitment by JIL activists to campaign for gender equality. One way to support this is through the publication of a pocket-book about the Qur’an written for women by an Islamic law professor at the State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah, Nasaruddin Umar.\textsuperscript{125} The basic argument underlying the necessity to deconstruct gender bias in Islamic interpretation is a core value of Islam, justice. As there are many verses in the Qur’an denying women’s equal rights and preserving a patriarchal, male dominated social order, Islamic liberals, like proponents of Islamic feminism such as Fatima Mernissi, believe that in order to create a just society, those verses should be understood as having ethical values and religious messages, not constituting rigid, divinely given rules.

\textsuperscript{123} He wrote extensively on religious pluralism theology and published a book entitled \textit{Islam Pluralis} [The Pluralist Islam], (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001).
\textsuperscript{124} His defense to the idea of inclusive theology can be found in his compilation book entitled \textit{Teologi Inklusif Cak Nur} [An Inclusive Theology of Cak Nur (Nurcholish Madjid)], (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2001). Only several parts, some redundant, explain this idea.
These perspectives, which represent only part of Islamic renewal, clearly strengthen the basis for liberal interpretations of Islam and simultaneously challenge orthodox, established Islamic teachings. For liberal Muslims, there is nothing in the history of Islam that is fixed and unquestionable. Besides being critical of Islamic history and sources, JIL activists also try to develop more profound arguments to counter “suffocating” Islamic teachings from traditionalist and legalistic Islamic by proposing a more open-minded view of religion. However, their efforts are not free from criticism. There are some people who criticize Jaringan Islam Liberal as an intellectual forum and a new Islamic interpretation. Below are some examples of responses to the establishment of JIL.

Responses and Criticism to JIL

The emergence of Jaringan Islam Liberal triggered criticism from other progressive, moderate Islamic scholars and groups, although in their basic “theological” ideas are similar. Some young traditionalist Muslim intellectuals grouped in the Jakarta branch of NU’s human resources think-tank, Lakpesdam, and the Yogyakarta-based young NU’s intellectual research institute, LKiS, (Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial/Institute for Islamic and Social Studies), for example, criticizes JIL for its liberal orientation. In their view, liberal Islam has modernist biases toward Western liberalism, because this approach could eliminate some important issues such as people’s welfare, labor, traditional religions, local Islam, and spirituality which are problematic for
liberalism. Therefore, they prefer to develop an alternative approach to liberal Islam that they call “post-traditionalist Islam/postra.” ¹²⁶

Those who advocate “postra” insist that their approach is more comprehensive and critical of the dominant modernization paradigm. They claim to be the successors of NU’s traditionalist Islam, while JIL is perceived to be the continuation of the modernist Islamic project. For this criticism, there is no response so far from JIL activists.

Another serious criticism comes from Haidar Bagir, a moderate Muslim intellectual and publisher of Islamic books. A doctoral candidate on Islamic philosophy, Bagir primarily questions the methodology of liberal Islam. In his account, the kind of liberal Islam being campaigned for by JIL lacks a theoretical basis for its method to develop a paradigm for Islamic thinking.¹²⁷ Liberal Islam mostly refers to Fazlur Rahman’s arguments about world-view and the ethical-moral values of the Qur’an and “the living sunnah” as the substitution to hadits (Prophet Muhammad’s words) in defending their methodological reasoning. However, that method of thinking is less clear than the “textualism” method that fundamentalist Islam inherited from early salafi figures such as Ibn Taymiyya. Bagir also warns that liberal Islamic interpretation without firm methodological basis could “abuse” Islam and have the same destructive aspects as traditionalism, conservatism, or fundamentalism.

In response to Bagir’s criticism, an activist of JIL, Hamid Basyaib, acknowledges that JIL does not have an established methodology of interpretation. However, he affirms that JIL activists are concerned with this issue, and they are working to formulate their methodology. In his apologetic argument, Basyaib states that JIL is not a school of thought, a sect, or a rigid organization. JIL is more focused on “brainstorming” among activists and with the public. He also objects to Bagir’s suggestion that there is a danger of JIL abusing Islam, as at the level of praxis liberal Islam would create fewer problems for Muslim individuals. He cites examples from Saudi Arabia’s Islamic monarchy that does not give freedom to its citizens, the Iranian *mullah* regime that controls all authority, and the former Taliban regime that suppresses Afghan people based on its “illiberal” Islamic interpretation. In short, he asserts that the apprehension of liberal Islam with its commitments to pluralism, toleration, freedom, and democracy is groundless.

Criticism from the same “camps” basically has constructive effects in developing liberal Islamic interpretation. The problems related to the domination of modernization paradigm or Western development thinking and the lack of methodological basis are issues that JIL activists should address in elaborating its distinctive interpretation of Islam. From the methodological point of view, it is important for JIL activists to make clearer whether they want to “liberalize” Islam or to “Islamize” liberalism. Both approaches could lead to a specific methodology as developed in the philosophy of ethics, political theory, and critical theories. Besides those criticisms from its counterparts, the emergence of JIL also sparked controversies as many who claim to be “true” Muslims reject and condemn the concept of liberal Islam.

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Writings by JIL activists triggered controversies especially among Muslim hardliner groups in Indonesia. There were attacks from several puritan or fundamentalist Islamic groups with serious consequences, either at the level of ideas or in daily activities. The problems related to freedom of expression of JIL activists will be discussed in the next chapter, while this part of study will focus on the criticism and rejection of the ideas of liberal Islam in Indonesia from the JIL’s opponents.

Opponents of JIL have published two books and several articles to counter the dissemination of liberal Islam in Indonesia. One book, *Bahaya Islam Liberal* [The Danger of Liberal Islam], was written by a former Islamist journalist, Hartono Ahmad Jaiz. Another was written by Adian Husaini and Nuim Hidayat, both activists of Indonesian Committee for Islamic World Solidarity (KISDI), entitled *Islam Liberal: Sejarah, Konsepsi, Penyimpangan, dan Jawabannya* [Liberal Islam: History, Conception, Deviation, and the Answer]. While the first book is less argumentative and is probably intended as a “pocket book” for countering the liberal Islam campaign, the later book

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129 Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Bahaya Islam Liberal* [The Danger of Liberal Islam] (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautzar, 2002). While he was a journalist in the Pelita dailiy newspaper, he got the chance to reporting the Bosnian conflict situation where he believed thousands Muslims were killed by Christian Serbs. He is also active in the Media Dakwah, a scripturalist media under the revivalist Islamic group of *Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia* (Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation), and in the Indonesian Committee for Islamic World Solidarity (KISDI).

130 KISDI is a hardliner Islamic organization established in the late 1990s by figures like Ahmad Sumargono (currently a member of parliamentary) and Adian Husaini. Its main mission is to build solidarity among Muslims to help Muslims struggle in Palestine, Mindanao of the Southern Philippines, and other areas. However, KISDI also voices demand for the implementation of Islamic law (shari’a) in Indonesia.

131 Adian Husaini and Nuim Hidayat, *Islam Liberal: Sejarah, Konsepsi, Penyimpangan, dan Jawabannya* [Liberal Islam: History, Conception, Deviation, and the Answer], (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2002). Husaini currently is the Secretary General of Indonesian Committee for Islamic World Solidarity (KISDI) and a member of a commission in the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Islamic Clerics Council), a government-sponsored and the most “authoritative” council on Islam in Indonesia. Graduated from a master program in the study of International Relations from a less-known private university in Jakarta with the thesis on pragmatism in Israel foreign policy, he is a productive writer on defending Islamic revivalism. Meanwhile, Hidayat is a graduate student in the Middle East and Islamic Studies at the University of Indonesia.
argues that JIL interpretations are heresy. However, these books share similar nuance and contents in condemning the ideas of liberal Islam.

Jaiz’s book, for example, criticizes the identification of Islamic reformers as modernists or Islamic liberals. He argues that not all reformers in Islamic history can be fit in the same category, as some contradict to others in their tradition or orientation of reform. According to Jaiz, most Islamic reformers, like salafis (revivalists), basically intend to “purify” Islamic teachings and practices by bringing Islam back to its earlier history, while some Islamic scholars labeled neo-modernists deviate from the foundation of Islamic teachings because of their emphasis on rational reasoning principle (ijtihad). He rejects the view that neo-modernists or Islamic liberals are reformers, because their works “contaminate” Islam with Western, secular values.132

Like others who make revivalist arguments, Jaiz bases his rejection of the liberal interpretation of Islam on the Qur’an and other Islamic texts. He cites many parts of the Qur’an and the works of salafis, either to show that his arguments are more Islamic or that liberal interpretations of Islam are heretical. He contrasts Nurcholish Madjid’s ideas on Islamic renewal with his references to the Qur’an or other Islamic revivalist texts, and arbitrarily makes judgments about the “correct” understanding of Islam. Jaiz also cites arguments proposed by JIL activists in defending religious pluralism, inclusiveness, toleration, and democratic ideas and contrasts them to verses in the Qur’an. He summarizes his rejection of the ideas of liberal Islam proposed by JIL based on five fundamental weaknesses: there is no firm basis or clear Islamic principle, lack of

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132 He, for example, objects the categorization of Islamic scholar like Rifa’at Ath-Thahthawi from Egypt as an Islamic reformer for his contribution to the opening and developing ijtihad in modern Islam history because he is too “Westernized” by acknowledging that the French-style dance mixed male and female as halal (religiously acceptable in Islam). See, Jaiz, Bahaya Islam Liberal, 28.
verifiable scientific method, ignoring reality, rejecting the true history of Islam, and lack of authoritative Islamic references. He also harshly condemns JIL activists for raising doubt in Muslims on Islamic truth.

The book by Husaini and Hidayat is in many aspects “comparable” to the works of some JIL activists. By examining the basic ideas of JIL and studying historical as well as contemporary aspects of liberal Islam and comparative religion, the writers are able to criticize the ideas of liberal Islam. Although revivalist nuances are still present, their book reflects a serious effort to counter liberal Islam. They analyze basic ideas of JIL in order to “reveal” the mistakes of liberal Islam and, at certain points, trying to “demoralize” liberal Muslims with baseless accusations of “unholy alliance” between liberal Islam, Western imperialism, and Zionism. The later accusation wrapped in popular but naïve conspiracy theory becomes a common modus for those who reject Indonesian Islamic renewal proposed by figures like Nurcholish Madjid or Abdurrahman Wahid.

The book is divided into five themes, starting from the history of liberal Islam, the role of Nurcholish Madjid in modernizing Islamic thinking in Indonesia, the idea of religious pluralism and the destruction of Islamic belief (aqidah), the problem of Islamic state in Indonesia, to the issue of “unholy alliance.” The first part covers the historical background of JIL in particular and Islamic liberalism in general. It criticizes Kurzman’s categorization of Islamic liberal figures, arguing that Islamic scholars like Yusuf al-Qaradhawi from Qatar, who declares Christians and Jews to be infidels, and Muhammad Natsir from Indonesia, who advocates an Islamic state in Indonesia, are absolutely not

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133 In this book, the authors use dozens of references, either in Indonesian, English, or Arabic language, from various perspectives, from classical Islamic studies, contemporary writings by Islamic liberals, to strategic and international relations studies. Consists of 222 pages, it has 179 footnotes.
This part also briefly examines the role of Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid in renewing Islamic thinking in Indonesia and gives an example of Islamic liberalism in Turkey under Kemal Attaturk, which they claim clearly reflects the aim of secularizing Muslim world and “subordinating” Islam to the West. The second chapter is devoted entirely to judgement of the heretical principles of Madjid’s views and *ijtihad* on issues relating to Islam.

The rest of the book mostly deals with the “danger” of liberal Islam to Muslims. It contrasts liberal Islamic views with literal interpretations of Islam and discusses religious pluralism and democracy from the point of view of devout but marginalized Muslims who are described as victims of injustice world due to a conspiracy by orientalists, crusaders, and “Islamofobists.” The arguments rejecting liberal interpretations of Islam are typical revivalist views but critical of Western ideas and influences. In the argumentation, there are no substantial, challenging ideas which could be sensibly examined. However, for those who are not well-informed by current debates on Islamic thought, Indonesian politics and world affairs, the critics, citations, judgments, and conclusions may seem convincing.

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134 Husaini and Hidayat, *Islam Liberal*, 11-8. Both Qaradhawi and Natsir are proponents of the implementation of Islamic law as the public law and the establishment of Islamic state. In Qaradhawi argument, similar to other revivalists and Islamists, Islam is *din-wa-dawlah*, a complete set of political and religious values or *din-wa-dunya*, a religion and world, and an Islamic state is the best form of government and society to guarantee Islamic order and life.
Chapter 4

*Jaringan Islam Liberal on Democracy and Its Controversies*

**Introduction**

Mohammed Arkoun, a leading Arab Muslim intellectual, in his most recent work, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, indirectly suggests Muslim intellectuals should rethink the concept of authority and power in Islam in order to build a better understanding of what government system is the best and most beneficial for Muslims. Using a progressive-regressive method to trace the “ideological options” and “mythological constructions” of governance in the Islamic history, he offers some

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135 Born in Algeria on January 2, 1928, Arkoun is a prolific, thoughtful influential scholar. Educated in his native country and in Paris, he is an emeritus professor of the history of Islamic thought at the University of Sorbonne, Paris, and a visiting scholar in many reputable academic institutions in Europe and in the North America. He is among the most authoritative experts on the medieval Islamic thought and a leading scholar on the application of a sophisticated hermeneutical system inspired by contemporary Western critical methodologies to reinterpret and recast the Islamic classical legal and philosophical traditions. His important works are: *Lectures du Coran* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982); *Ouvertures sur l'Islam* (Paris: J. Grancher, 1989); *Rethinking Islam Today* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1987); and *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2002). For his brief biography, see Fedwa Malti-Douglas, “Arkoun, Mohammed,” in John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 139.

136 See, Arkoun, *Unthought in Contemporary*, especially in the chapter five that analyzes various perspectives, either medieval or contemporary Islamic thought on the tensions and connections between authority and power in Islam.

137 He explains that this method is a complement of “deconstructive approach” in analyzing Islamic historical facts and texts to find a more reliable basis of the articulation of authority and power in particular, and other theoretical and ethical issues in Islam in general. The logic of this method is as follow: “We look back to the past (regressive process) not to project on the sacralized, sacralizing texts used as sacred and foundational, reliable in all times and all places, the demands and needs of the present-day Muslim societies…We can look back, however, with the modern archaeological cognitive project which gives priority to the discovery –removing the cover or unveiling- of the axiological hidden discourse commanding the explicit discourses not only of the various disciplines practiced in the past, but also the Holy Texts used as the transcendent Sources-Foundations (*Usul*) of the normative Law, ethics, politics and semantics…[this] is simultaneously a progressive process used to liberate contemporary Islamic thought from obvious, heavily ideological, mythological manipulations of the dismantled collective memories in the present context of modernization and globalization.” See, *Ibid.*, 218.
provocative propositions as “new points of departure” to reconstruct Islamic understanding of authority and power that will make Islamic notions of governance more compatible with modernity. *First,* secularism and secularization are not alien concepts or practices in Islam. He says, “Secularism is implicitly and explicitly included in the Qur’anic discourse and the Medina historical experience.”

In his account, Islamic history includes eras such as the Islamic polity under the Umayyad-Abbasid caliphates, that clearly reflect secularist characteristics “in its sociological and anthropological basis, its military genesis and expansion, its administrative practice, [and] its ideological discourse of legitimacy.” He also mentions that there were many attempts to “rationalize *de facto* secularism and to develop a shared secularized, intellectual attitude and political culture” by philosophers in the tenth century under the Buyid regime.

*Second,* there are many non-theological and doctrinaire aspects of Islam which influence the dissemination and proliferation of orthodox expressions of Islam. He states that, “Orthodox expressions of Islam…are the result of different ethno-cultural backgrounds, arbitrary selection of traditions referred to the Prophet, the Companions and the Imams and ideological use and abuse of dogmatic exegesis and theological constructions.”

Therefore, the claim of orthodox groups that they have privilege because they have preserved the original orthodox teachings of Islam, and consequently that all other teachings are heretical sects is weak, if not “political” in nature.

*Third,* post-colonial political regimes in many Muslim societies are mostly “*de facto* secular.” Arkoun notes that these regimes, even to some extent the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, adopt “legal codes, governmental procedures, administrative hierarchies

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and practices borrowed from liberal Western, or Socialist-Communist patterns of thought and institutional models.”

Although secular in their characteristics, these regimes mostly do not fully introduce “a modern system of education, promote a culture of democracy and human rights or [accept] the emancipating principle of autonomy for the political and religious spheres.” The most common trend in these regimes is, unfortunately, the strengthening of “the politics of traditionalization with the strong support for the return to religious tradition.”

In his concluding remarks, Arkoun stresses that “secularism expresses the continuous effort of the human being to achieve the greatest adequacy between imagined, represented reality and objective, positive reality.” Based on this perspective, he urges Muslims intellectuals to study “the forms, trends, and content of secularism in its European/Western achievements.” This is important because these can serve as historical precedents that can be used in searching for adequacy of explanations and practices in other cultural and historical contexts, particularly in the Islamic context.

Activists of Jaringan Islam Liberal will likely agree with Arkoun’s propositions and suggestions. Discussed since its early formation, the issue of Islamic state is one of the most contested topics. Many aspects of Islamic history and recent trends are used, either to justify the necessity of establishing a liberal Islamic group or to develop democratic ideas in an Islamic context in a plural state like Indonesia. This chapter will discuss perspectives on democracy proposed by JIL activists and controversies and problems related to their campaign for liberal interpretations of Islam.

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140 Ibid., 249.
As stated earlier, escalating religious violence and the demand for the adoption of an Islamic state in Indonesia are two reasons for the establishment of JIL. Religious violence is answered by a liberal interpretation of Islam on toleration, while the demand for *shari’a* is addressed by deepening democratic consolidation in Indonesia through the dissemination of democratic ideas. Democracy, therefore, is one of the top priority issues addressed by JIL activists. Besides being discussed partially in the discussion on the definition and agenda of JIL, there were also special off-line discussions of a theology of a secular state and secularization in Islam.¹⁴¹

The discussion about the theology of a secular state appears as a search for the Islamic theological basis for a democratic, modern government system. In the opening of the discussion, likely inspired by the Liberation Theology in Latin America, Denny asserts the urgency for the liberal Islamic community to develop a “liberal Islam theology”—a religious philosophy based on Islamic texts and traditions that justifies a liberal culture, and a “secular state theology” in politics. The latter is a “religious philosophy” based on Islamic texts and traditions that justifies the importance of a secular and democratic state.

For Denny, there are four tentative foundational principles which can serve this theology: *first*, a nation-state is the highest evolution of a political community and, therefore, the idea to establish a global caliphate or the federation of Islamic states with a

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¹⁴¹ The discussion on the theology of a secular state was initiated by Denny J. A., a PhD candidate in political science at Ohio State University, Columbus at that time, and received many responses the mailing list members between March and April, 2001. This was followed with another discussion on Islam and the necessity for secularization on May 2001. The full transcripts of these discussions can be found in Assyaukanie, ed., *Wajah Liberal*, 232-300.
single leader *(imaam)* is irrelevant and useless. *Second,* the nation-state guarantees equal opportunity among its citizens with different religious, social, political or cultural background. *Third,* in the day-to-day politics, the role of religion should be minimal, and scientific knowledge and modern management should be dominant in the process of public policy making. *Finally,* Islam serves only as a source of morality for actors in the government and public morality, not a governmental system. With these principles, civic culture is expected to flourish in Muslim-dominated countries like Indonesia.

The responses to Denny’s arguments are range from complementary supporting to incongruously criticizing his ideas. Those who are aware of and equipped with the idea of a secular state and democracy mostly respond to Denny with more focus and relevant arguments. While several discussants blur important points with unnecessary comments and redundant arguments, mixing democratic ideas, practices, assumptions, and cases, the discussion is meaningful, not only for JIL activists in finding a common ground or consensus on this issue, but also to assess acceptance of the idea of secularization in Muslim societies in general and intellectuals in particular.

The supporting arguments generally emphasize the importance of secularization both in the state and societal levels, the existence of Islamic intellectualism in favor of a modern and democratic state, the advantages of democracy in supporting Islamic values, and the compatibility of Islam and democratic ideas. Although the idea of a secular state theology is not comprehensively discussed, arguments proposed by Denny J. A., Luthfi Assyaukanie, Saiful Mujani or Ulil Abshar Abdalla reinforce liberal Islamic notions of politics. They agree with the idea of state-religion separation and a democratic state in the Islamic context. Denny, for instance, repeatedly and thoughtfully explains the importance
and advantages of a secular, democratic state from the political point of view. In answering criticism and skepticism about a secular democracy, he mentions the effectiveness of democracy in guaranteeing equal opportunity for all citizens, civil liberties and political participation and in delivering better services and outcomes to the society. He also asserts that many Western democracies are better in fulfilling “Islamic values” such as justice, equality, welfare for the poor, and toleration than most Islamic states or illiberal democracies. For Denny, the main problem faced by Muslim countries like Indonesia is to secularize the government, not the society.

On the other hand, Abdalla argues that in order to support a secular state, society should also be secularized. Secularization of society, by educating its members to understand the proper role of state and religion, is one possible and less risky path toward a secular, democratic state in Muslim countries like Indonesia than through military force or state enforcement like in Turkey. He sees that secularizing the state in Indonesia is too late, because there has been many instances of religious interference in the state or political affairs. He mentions the existence of the Department of Religious Affairs, religion as a subject in the national curriculum, state Islamic schools, Islamic courts, and so forth. If there is a big push for state secularization, he predicts there will be a strong backlash from Muslim communities. Therefore, he asserts the importance of secular-civic education rather than adopting coercive-repressive secularization as in Turkey or waiting for the global market to transform the nature of society more adaptable to liberal and democratic world orders. Abdalla’s arguments represent the opinions of many Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia who are worried about the possibility of the emergence Islamic
hardliner political parties which might win control of the parliament and try to change constitution and legal frameworks replacing them with Islamic law.\textsuperscript{142} 

Meanwhile, Assyaukanie argues that the main problem with Islamic societies adopting democracy is cultural. There have been many discussions and debates among Islamic scholars on the advantages of a secular state or nation-state (\textit{wathaniyah}) over the caliphate system for Muslim countries. However, Muslim countries which adopt democratic ideas of governance, have often failed in adopting democracy. He suggests the failure of Muslims to accept democracy in practice is due to cultural and theological problems. This argument is important, although it is not discussed seriously, because there are many cultural indications in non-Western societies which support for the growing practices of illiberal democracy.

Another argument about democracy in Islamic societies deals with the necessity to secularize Islamic principles. Although in Indonesia secularization was advocated by prominent scholars like Nurcholish Madjid or Abdurrahmand Wahid in the early 1970s as a part of the Islamic renewal “project,” the controversies remain. Many younger well-educated Muslims are still hesitant to discuss this issue openly due to a strong backlash from hard-liner Muslims.

In the JIL discussion on secularization, the focus is on the roots of secularization in Islamic history rather than the philosophical or theological meaning of secularism and

\textsuperscript{142} This concern had been cleared by Denny J. A. who states that in the democracy is not only about majoritarian principle. There are at least two fundamental principles in the democracy: first, majoritarian decision cannot overrule the basic principle of democracy. Therefore, if Islamic forces win the election and insist to change the democratic system to Islamic governance, or in his example, if the majority of the parliament member decides not to held election, these kind of majoritarian decisions are not democratically legitimate and justified. Second, the majoritarian decision cannot eliminate minority rights. The implementation of Islamic law in a pluralistic state, although through a democratic mechanism, is definitely against the nature and idea of democracy itself.
In general, the discussion reaffirms previous examples of secularization in Islamic history, starting after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and explores the failure of the Islamic world in building a secular, democratic state. There is a consensus among JIL activists that secularization, as explained by their “mentor,” Nurcholish Madjid, is not an alien concept for Muslims. The caliphate system, they believe, had basically practiced secularization although in the form of “tribalistic” government.

There are several interesting arguments which reflect particular perspectives of JIL activists on this issue. Taufik Adnan Amal, for instance, states that secularization, a separation of spiritual and temporal authority, is a normal consequence of a political change. In the Islamic history, it started when Islamic civilization under the caliphate Ummayyah moved its political center to Damascus, while most clerics stayed in the Prophet’s city of Medina. This means that secularization in Islamic societies will always face fundamental problem from the dynamics of political change. Another argument in favor of secularization in Islam is based on its effectiveness in assuring religious principles. In Hamid Basyaib’s account, secularization would prevent politicization or manipulation of religious affairs and symbols, and up-holding religious principles could be easier under a secular government where the rules of the game are much clearer and less ambiguous than in religious jurisprudence. In his discussion, Basyaib describes several actual cases in the Islamic history to strengthen the argument in favor of secularization and a democratic state. The bitter experience with Islamic states as in post-

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143 Assyaukanie expresses his surprise after reading Karen Armstrong’s *The Battle for God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000) where she points out that the sixth *Shiite* cleric (*imam*), Ja’far al-Shadiq, was a true proponent of secularization. In his understanding, the idea of secularization in Islamic societies mostly comes from modernist figures, not clerics. The transcript of the discussion on “Islam dan Keharusan Sekularisasi” [Islam and the Necessity of Secularization] can be found in Assyaukanie, ed., *Wajah Liberal*, 289-300.
Islamic revolution Iran and Afghanistan under the Taliban regime are favorite examples of the dark-side of non-secular states. However, the case of “forced secularization” in Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Attaturk also influences JIL activists to have reservations about secularization.

Assyaukanie argues that secularization or a secular state is rooted in Islamic history, although it had been practiced for centuries in “primitive and authoritarian ways.” He says that the problem with secularization is not on the theological or historical. There are no relevant “Islamic” reasons to object to secularization. He rejects the idea that secularization will lead religious followers to be more agnostic or less religious. Instead, he argues that religion under a secular political system would survive and have meaning for the society, because religion has adaptive capability. He believes that Islam has egalitarian principles, and therefore, it can adapt to be a “public religion.” He also argues that secularization in plural Muslim countries like Indonesia is a must, because it can guarantee the “neutrality” of the state in religious affairs.

Although in general the idea that secularization is a necessary requirement for democracy is accepted, it seems that JIL activists still have reservations about using the terms secularism and secularization in a broader context. Unlike Arkoun, who argues that both secularism and secularization are not alien concepts in Islam, JIL activists tend to

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145 This is inspired, probably, by Jose Casanova’s Public Religions in the Modern World (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994). Assyaukanie does not mention this reference. Casanova’s book covers issues such as secularization, the role of religion in modern times, the actualization of religious principles in the modern society, and cases of transformation of religious institutions in Spain, Poland, Brazil and the United States.
avoid discussion of “secularism,”¹⁴⁶ as this is widely interpreted by many Muslims in Indonesia in a negative way. Therefore, the debate over secularization is not philosophical; instead, discussion mostly deals with historical examples in Islam. Actually, there are many important questions to be addressed such as whether secularization of Islam is possible or not, whether Islam and democracy are philosophically (not politically) compatible, what principles of secularization like neutrality, impartiality, non-involvement, or separation best fit with Islamic teachings.

A contributor of JIL, M. Zainuddin, writes about principles in Islam which reflect the compatibility of Islam and democracy.¹⁴⁷ These principles are al-shura, al-Adalah, al-Musawah, al-Amanah, al-Masuliyyah, and al-Hurriyyah. Al-shura is a principle of collective decision making in the Qur’an, where collective consultation is needed to enact laws or regulations concerning Islamic issues, and al-Adalah is a principle of justice that is manifested in law enforcement and clean government and good governance. The principle of equality in politics is al-Musawah that specifically mandates an equal relation of citizens to the state. State apparatuses are bounded by the principle of al-Amanah, an attitude that is responsive and accountable to the fulfilment of “public trust.” al-Masuliyyah, the principle of responsibility and accountability, is needed to guarantee that “public trust” is being exercised properly and democratically for the sake of public

¹⁴⁶ Secularism has its root from the Latin word of saeculum, meaning “age”, and to be secular means to be oriented toward this age. Secularism can be understood as a doctrine, spirit, or consciousness advocating the temporal (as opposed to the sacred) foundation of “... individual ideas, attitudes, beliefs, or interests.” This word was coined to George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) in his book Principles of Secularism (1857) to express “a certain positive and ethical element, which the terms ‘infidel,’ ‘skeptic,’ [and] ‘atheist’ do not express.” See, in Mehrzad Boroujerdi, “Can Islam Be Secularized?” in M.R. Ghanoonparvar and Faridoun Farrokh, eds., In Transition: Essays on Culture and Identity in the Middle Eastern Society (Laredo, TX: Texas A&M International University, 1994), 55-64.

interest. The last value in Islam that principally supports the idea of democracy is *al-Hurriyya*, a principle of freedom. Islam guarantees its followers full freedom of expression as long as they act with *al-akhlāq al-karimah* (good faith and good-intention) and aim to practice the Islamic teaching of *al-amr bi-‘l-ma’ruf wa an-nahy ‘an al-‘munkar* (promoting “good things” and avoiding “evil-doing”).

Besides discussions of secularization and the compatibility of democracy with Islam, the issue of minorities is also addressed. On the issue of minorities, there are two broad categories in Islam: *dimmi* and *al-mu’ahidun*. Historically, the first refers to those minorities who live under Islamic rule, who were guaranteed their personal safety by the ruler and were free from obligations to serve in the military and pay zakat (alms), but they should pay tax (*jizyah*). The latter refers to those who lived in the city of Madinah when the Prophet Muhammad moved there to establish an Islamic polity. These non-Muslims were bounded with a peace treaty with Muslims to live peacefully under the Prophet’s rule and were not obliged to pay tax to Islamic rulers. For Indonesian Islamic liberals, as explained briefly by Hamka Haq, non-Muslims in predominantly Muslim and plural countries like Indonesia are commonly categorized as *al-mu’ahidun*. This view is in contrast to most revivalists or Islamists who argue that non-Muslims are *dimmi* (literally is those who are conquered), and do not have equal rights in Muslim society.

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Controversies and Cases of Freedom of Speech

The emergence of JIL as a new voice of moderate, pluralistic, and tolerant Islam in Indonesia has sparked much controversy. Besides being received with criticism and suspicion by some modernist Muslims in Indonesia, JIL activists faced challenges to their right to free speech. There were many efforts by Islamic “literal” or revivalist groups to counter the dissemination of liberal Islamic interpretations either by arguing that JIL is a heretical sect or threatening JIL activists with the death fatwa or filing a suit accusing them of corrupting and abusing Islam. In the first year of its history, there are three cases involving freedom of speech faced by JIL activists.

In the first case, Sukidi Mulyadi was threatened by an Islamic militant group who said that he would be reported to the police for insulting Islam in his article in the Republika daily newspaper on January 14, 2002 entitled “Dialog Islam-Barat untuk Perdamaian Dunia” [Islam and the Western Dialogue for a World Peace]. In his article, Mulyadi argues that there should be more dialogue to build understanding between the West and the Islamic world after the September 11, 2001 tragedy in order to solve the problem of terrorism and eliminate stereotyping of Islam as a threat to the world and the West as a crusader against Islamic civilization. He states that both the West and Islamic world make the same mistake of being suspicious of one another because of orientalist perspectives in the West and extremism in Islam. In the last sentence of the article, he expresses his complete disagreement with the call for jihad (holy war) for Muslims or crusade for Christians, because these are only “commodification” of religious symbols for short term and “cheap” political interests.
His last remark on *jihad* triggered harsh criticism from an activist of an Islamic militant group *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* [Indonesian Council of Holy-fighters], Fauzan Al-Anshari, and the secretary general of KISDI (Indonesian Committee for the Islamic World Solidarity), Adian Husaini, who both are defenders of Islamic *jihad*, and if necessary, violence. Husaini rejects Mulyadi’s argument about *jihad*, saying that *jihad* is an important teaching in Islam. Referring to an opinion from an Islamic scholar, he says *jihad* is the “roof” while *shalat* (daily prayer) is the pillar of Islam.\textsuperscript{149} In his accounts, *jihad* against the West as conducted by Osama bin Laden, Taliban fighters, Hammas in Palestine, or other Islamic *jihad* is a form of resistance against Western imperialism and malevolence.

Similar points were made by Al-Anshari, whose organization’s chief cleric, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, is the *amir* (highest spiritual leader) of a terror network in Southeast Asia called *Jamaah Islamiyah*. He asserts that *jihad* is grateful and an obligation for devout Muslims, and those who resist the call of *jihad* have shallow Islamic faith. The strength of *jihad* is correlated with faith in *Allah* (God). Therefore, he accuses Mulyadi speaking against Islam, because his writing is a form of serious blasphemy and offense to Islam. In his view, Sukidi broke Indonesian criminal law on “hate speech” against “official religion” in Indonesia, by stating that *jihad* is merely a political commodity. This could lead to a prison term five years. Although a lawsuit was filed, Indonesian law enforcers seem reluctant to process it.

The second case faced by JIL concerns a public service advertisement on the plurality in Islam. Concerned with the resurgence of Islamic revivalist groups which

claim as the only “true” Islam, JIL broadcasts a series of advertisements on the two biggest private television stations in Indonesia, entitled *Islam Warna-Warni* [A Colorful Islam]. In these advertisements, there are images and narrative showing how Islam is understood and practiced differently. The message is intended to tell Muslims in particular and the Indonesian public in general that there are many variations in Islam, and groups should respect one another and live peacefully without tension and exclusive claims of being the only “true” Islam.

However, after being broadcasted for two weeks, on August 4, 2002, *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI) filed a complaint to the television stations about these advertisements. They asked television stations to stop the advertisement and threatened to take legal action against television stations which broadcast a “wrong teaching” of Islam. Referring to verses in the Qur’an saying Islam is only one, they argued that broadcasting an advertisement about a colorful Islam was a blasphemy against Islam. Both stations then dropped the advertisement without any consultation with *Komunitas Islam Utan Kayu* (Islamic Community of Utan Kayu), an organization related to JIL, that sponsored the campaign.

In response to this case, JIL issued a statement objecting to the policy of television stations that was not supportive of the dissemination of liberal and pluralistic views of Islam in Indonesia. Referring to sociological facts and some Islamic texts, JIL argued that although there is only one Islam, there are many variations of Islamic interpretations, traditions, and groups. Assyaukanie stated that the title of *Islam Warna-

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Warni was not chosen arbitrarily. Instead, it was based on deep reflection on the theological (kalamiyyah), fiqh (fiqhiyyah), and sociological (ijtimaiyyah) bases of Islam.

The latest serious problem of freedom of speech was experienced by JIL coordinator, Ulil Abshar Abdalla. Based on an article published in Kompas daily newspaper on November 18, 2002, entitled “Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam” [Rejuvenating the Understanding of Islam], a forum of local Islamic clerics and figures called Forum Ulama-Ummat Indonesia/FUUI [Forum of Indonesian Islamic Clerics and Muslims], stated that Abdalla has blasphemed Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, and therefore, was liable for capital punishment. Such a statement from an authority in Islam could be categorized as a death fatwa (religious ruling). Although the authority of this forum of clerics is questionable, their death fatwa could endanger a person’s life as it could be used by any (radical) Muslim to justify an act of violence. FUUI also reported Abdalla to the police.

In his article, Abdalla argued that Islamic principles as outlined in the Qur’an and Islamic law sources (hadith, ijma, or individual ijtihad) should always be interpreted contextually according to the development of a society. He argues for a clear separation between fundamental Islamic principles and local, particularistic values and traditions. In his view, Muslims should not be obliged to follow Islamic customs which reflect local, particular Islam in Arabia, such as the use of jilbab (headscarf), amputation of parts of

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152 Forum Ulama-Ummat Indonesia (FUUI) is led by a relatively unknown cleric from West Java, Athian Ali Dai. In the meeting in Bandung, a capital city of West Java province, on December 2, 2002, the forum issued several points concerning the problems faced by Indonesia in general and Muslims in particular, including the point directed to those who have blasphemed Islam like Abdalla. In the classical Islamic jurisprudence, according to a member of Fatwa Commission at Indonesian Islamic Clerics Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia), Dr. Hasanuddin A. F., some acts like killing, fornification/adultery, and quitting Islam (murtad) are liable for capital punishment.
body (*qishash*), and stoning to death, because these are Arabic social practices rather than Islamic teachings. Deeply concerned with the spirit of humanism, Abdalla suggests Muslims should not be indifferent to others and should reconsider some discriminatory teachings, such as the ban on inter-religious marriage and Islamic classical jurisprudence that differentiates the position of Muslims and non-Muslims. In addition, he maintains that Muslims should always examine in a critical manner the life of the Prophet Muhammad, who is also a historical figure, in order to avoid making him a mythical figure. Abdalla also defends inclusive and pluralistic views of Islam, stating that all good values, wherever they can be found, are basically Islamic values too. He expresses his opposition to the implementation of Islamic law.

Abdalla’s article did not trigger a response before the issuance of the death *fatwa* from FUUI. However, after mass media reported the recommendation of the FUUI meeting, there were many reactions. Some notable Islamic scholars, such as Mustofa Bisri and Azyumardi Azra, wrote opinions criticizing Abdalla’s style of writing and also rejecting a “non-authoritative” Islamic body’s right to issue a *fatwa*.

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153 A notable cleric and well-known *literati* from NU, Mustofa Bisri, is also Abdalla’s father-in-law. He wrote an opinion in the *Kompas* daily newspaper on December 4, 2002, entitled “Menyegarkan Kembali Sikap Islam: Beberapa Kesalahan Ulil Abshar Abdalla” [Rejuvenating Islamic Attitude: Some Ulil Abshar Abdalla’s Mistakes]. He criticizes Abdalla’s style of writing and does not offer some arguments on controversial issues.


155 There were also exchange opinions in the mass media among younger Islamic intellectuals, either defending or rejecting Abdalla’s position and arguments or expanding the debate into a wider perspective. See, Haidar Bagir, “Beberapa Pertanyaan untuk Ulil” [Some Questions to Ulil], *Kompas* daily, December 4, 2002; Ratno Lukito, “Memahami Kontroversi Ulil” [Understanding Ulil’s Controversies], *Kompas* daily, December 13, 2002; Ahmad Gaus A F, “How Liberal Can You Go?” *Kompas* daily, December 13, 2002; Hamid Basyaib, “Menyegarkan Pemahaman Islam: Sebuah Affirmasi” [Rejuvenating the Understanding of Islam: An Affirmation], *Panjimas* weekly, December 27, 2002; and Y. Herman Ibrahim, “Islam Substantif
Responding to this death fatwa, JIL activists wrote in defense of liberal Islam in particular and freedom of expression in general. Besides releasing a statement rejecting FUUI’s recommendation, JIL in collaboration with other Islamic groups facilitated a public dialogue on the issue. In a press release, JIL urged law enforcers to take action against all kinds of threats—including the death fatwa from FUUI—which could endanger a person or a group, and firmly asserted that freedom of expression is a basic civil liberty that is guaranteed by the law. They also stated that there was no blasphemous intention in Abdalla’s writing.\textsuperscript{156} In the press release, JIL urged peaceful expression of different views and warned about the violence from the exclusive claims of certain groups. JIL also organized some public dialogues to discuss this issue.

Despite these controversies and problems, JIL activists continue to disseminate moderate, contextual and “reasonable” Islamic understandings. However, there is not much discussion on how to respond to illiberal, if not anti-liberal practices. If many liberals will use the Dreyfus affair\textsuperscript{157} to defend the idea of republican democracy, there is little substantial effort made by JIL activists to use their cases to formulate stronger arguments for democratic ideas they proposed.

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\textsuperscript{157} This affair originated in conviction in 1894 and again in 1899 of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the only Jewish officer in the French army, for allegedly spying for Germany, France’s opponent in the last war, based on false accusations and fabricated documents. The only evidence was a scrap of paper with handwriting similar to Dreyfus. After long legal and political struggle, he finally gained legal rehabilitation in 1906. This affair shocked and split French on their existing political system. Dreyfusards struggled for a republican democracy, a secular and pluralistic nation in French, while the anti-Dreyfusards insisted on the continuation of authoritarian regime and an integrated nation which was “already embodied in the institutions of the church and the army.” See, Nathan Yanai, “The Political Affair: A Framework for Comparative Discussion,” \textit{Comparative Politics} 22 no. 2 (January 1990), 185-198.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

JIL’s liberal Islam and democracy in general are in line with neo-modernists’ arguments proposed by reform figures like Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Fazlur Rahman. The focus on creating an open, pluralistic and tolerant Islamic understanding and culture is the continuation of a liberalization project in Islamic thinking proposed by the pioneers of Islamic liberalism. On the issue of democracy and Islam, JIL perspectives reinforce the arguments for the compatibility of these values. Although there are not many newer or stronger arguments to defend this position, JIL ideas have clearly brought many controversial issues in Islam into Indonesian public discourse. With its better organizational capabilities, JIL also has been able to launch a more massive campaign in support of liberal Islam in Indonesia than its predecessors.

Liberal interpretations of Islam proposed by JIL, with an emphasis on liberal principles and democratic values, are a necessity for the development of a moderate, pluralistic and tolerant Islamic society in a predominantly Muslim country like Indonesia. Liberal Islam could also provide the moral and theological foundations of a “political Islamic liberal society.” These foundations, like liberalism in a liberal democracy, are sources for the legitimation of the ideas and practices of toleration, pluralism, and democracy in Muslim societies. Liberal interpretations of Islam, however, will not necessarily lead to the development of a liberal democratic society with its principles of freedom, equality, justice, “neutrality”, and impartiality. JIL’s liberal interpretation of
Islam leads to the development of a liberal theology rather than a liberal political philosophy.

JIL’s ideas on liberal Islam have some “marks of a liberal theology” as outlined by Hodgson. JIL’s liberal Islam has a strong emphasis on openness and freedom. Although JIL activists do not state whether they are concerned more with a negative conception or the positive conception of freedom, they maintain openness of *ijtihad* and the freedom of Muslims to interpret Islam and to be critical of Islamic authorities and orthodoxies. Liberal interpretation of Islam by JIL is intended to develop a critically constructive theology. With its principle of the openness of *ijtihad*, JIL activists maintain the view of partial or relativistic truth and religious pluralism as a foundation for democratic Muslim societies. JIL activists address controversial issues like a critical edition of the Qur’an or progressive revelation, an idea that indirectly reflects their awareness of the liberal Kantian elements of critical reasoning and consciousness. With these constructive marks of a liberal theology, JIL’s liberal Islam is also a culturally transformative theology. It is intended to transform Islamic dogmatism and orthodoxies into an open, critical, and contextual Islam. JIL’s liberal Islam is primarily aimed to counter the growing influence of religious radicalism and fundamentalism in Indonesia by offering inclusive and tolerant views on Islam.

Liberal Islam in Indonesia is an experiment by some young Muslim scholars and intellectuals with different educational backgrounds and interests. The plurality of JIL creates various arguments for liberal Islam based on history, sociology, hermeneutics, or democratic theories. This indicates that JIL’s liberal Islam is developed as an experiential theology. Although it shows limited application of relevant social sciences, JIL activists
discuss the issues of deconstruction of the language of Islam, critical analysis of Qur’anic texts, and the compatibility of Islam and secular ideas. With its experiential character, JIL’s liberal Islam is also a visionary theology. It has a strong commitment to the aspects of religio-ethical and spiritual values, which can lead liberal Islam to a universal humanism. It has principles which favor the development of democratic Muslim societies. JIL activists also have a vision of the separation of religious and political authority in Muslim society.

Although the basic ideas of JIL’s liberal Islam possess the marks of a liberal theology, there is also a tendency to develop religious pluralism. By accepting the view of relative, open, and pluralistic truth as one of their principle, JIL shares a commitment with liberal theology and religious pluralism: “expanding the boundaries of possible truth-claims.” JIL’s activists accept the view that there is salvation in other religions. They argue that “truth” can be found in any religion that teaches goodness, honesty, and other religious values. The consequence of this view is that they accept similarity among religions rather than emphasizing differences. In political contexts, this view is being transformed into toleration and secularization principles.

JIL arguments for liberal Islam support toleration and secularization. In defending the idea of toleration, JIL theorists mainly propose sociological and historical arguments, such as the plurality of Islamic understanding, the historical fact of toleration since the era of the Prophet Muhammad, and the silence of Islamic texts on particular issues concerning religious toleration. These arguments, unfortunately, provide only a small defense for toleration as outlined in the chapter one.

JIL’s liberal Islam does not address liberal theories or liberal arguments on some issues. It deals mainly with how to justify liberal (in contrast to literal or textual) interpretations of Islam, and not with how liberal principles are in accordance with Islamic values. JIL activists do not refer to liberal theories in developing their ideas about liberal Islam. Therefore, it is not clear whether JIL activists are Kantian or utilitarian liberals. JIL activists also do not address what conception of freedom is most compatible with Islamic teaching. If Western societies tend to prioritize a negative conception of freedom, should Islamic societies prioritize more a positive conception of freedom due to the Islamic teaching that Muslims should be members of a worldwide community of faith (ummah)?

The political ideas proposed by JIL mostly focus on democracy. There are many arguments defending the compatibility of Islam and democracy, but not Islam and liberalism. As JIL activists focus on support for democracy, there are some problematic arguments in their defense of liberal Islam.

On secularization, JIL arguments need more elaboration. It is correct that separation between sacred and worldly matters should be defined clearly in order to avoid many complexities. However, modern, secular states do not necessarily require a clear “wall of separation” between the state and (organized) religions. Arguments for a wall of separation are usually stated by liberal philosophers. For example, they claim that “values of freedom, equality, and toleration are best preserved if religion is removed from public affairs,” or that “both religious practice and pluralistic democracy are best preserved by
precluding religious argumentation within the public realm”¹⁵⁹ or that “secularism is [inescapable] in religiously diverse societies because it guarantees all equal and autonomous members of the modern democratic state a direct, non-exclusionary access to democratic deliberation and decision making.”¹⁶⁰ In contrast, many theorists opt for another option, such as pluralization of established religions or creation of “embryonic multi-faithism.”¹⁶¹ These theorists question “whether religious freedom and equal treatment of all religions requires disestablishment and whether political equality requires a complete separation between state and (organized) religions or even a complete privatization of religion.”¹⁶²

As JIL activists are primarily concerned with democratic theories, they do not address the principles of liberal theories on secularization as proposed by Locke, Rawls, or Audi. JIL could consider democratic principles of secularization proposed by Veit Bader. Bader prefers to supplant liberal arguments for complete separation of state from organized religion with principles of relational neutrality, fairness as evenhandedness,

¹⁵⁹ Veit Bader, “Religious Pluralism,” 598. Bader notes that many liberals’ arguments for the wall of separation are mainly motivated by two concerns: first, “by an old Lockean fear that public and political religions inherently threaten political unity and stability” and, second, “by a ‘hands-off’ notion of justice, which holds that to treat humans as free and equal reasonable persons requires abstracting from all their particularities, especially from religious belief and practices.”

¹⁶⁰ This argument is developed by Charles Taylor in his “Modes of Secularism” in Rajeev Bhargava, ed., *Secularism and Its Critics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Taylor is basically in opposition to John Rawls or Richard Rorty on the issue of secularization. He “insists that the separation of church and state, that centerpiece of secularism, should not be confused with one formula, the ‘complete disentanglement of government’ from any religious institutions.” In contrast, Rawls in his *Political Liberalism* is in favor for ruling out any role of religious consideration in public debate, except for in certain cases, while Richard Rorty in his “Religion as a Conversation-Stopper” argues that religious arguments should be restricted to private spheres, reference to religious sources and authorities should be precluded, and principles and practices of liberal democracy would require the privatization of religion.

¹⁶¹ See in, Tariq Modood, ed., *Church, State and Religious Minorities* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997). This book is a compilation of papers from a discussion on “Church, State and Religious Minorities” organized by the Policy Studies Institute in London, where most of non-Anglican contributors from Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu backgrounds objected the program of secular constitutional reform or complete disestablishment of (organized) religion in the United Kingdom proposed by the Liberal Party. See, also in Bader, “Religious Pluralism,” 597.

and priority for democracy. In relational neutrality, in contrast to strict neutrality or complete separation, difference-sensitivity—taking into account “actual differences and inequalities between religious groups and organizations”—replaces difference-blindness in order to ensure that institutions and policies will become more neutral in relation to religions and to nonreligious people in the long run.\textsuperscript{163} Meanwhile, fairness as evenhandedness—an alternative to the idea of symbolic accommodation—rests on the assumption that “nondiscrimination and equal treatment of different religions as well as of religious and nonreligious people are not well served by ‘hands-off’ abstractions…[Religious cultures and identities] require a sensitive balancing of the different claims, taking into account structural inequalities between majority religions and minority ones” in order to ensure “cultural equality.” The last principle of priority for a secular democracy, simply stated, is that “principles, institutions, virtues and practices of liberal democracy have priority over the competing and often incompatible foundations of liberal democracy, be they religious, philosophical (metaphysical, ontological, moral, ethical), or scientific.”

However, JIL arguments for religious pluralism and democracy have satisfied, if not led to, liberal notions. JIL accepts the idea and importance of secularization, although

\textsuperscript{163} The principle of neutrality, along with separation and secularism, are categorized as second-order moral principles in the liberal theories (the fundamental principles can be liberty, equality, justice, or tolerance). However, these principles are important because it can serve as guidelines when there are conflicts between constitutional rights and first-order (fundamental) moral principles and “in all cases of conflicting interpretations and applications of rights.” In the context of state, the principle of neutrality is usually elaborated into three different meaning and application: \textit{strict neutrality} that mandates governmental noninvolvement in religious matters; \textit{non-discriminatory neutrality} that mandates either \textit{no-aid to religion} (noninvolvement) policy whenever sectarian practices are at issue, or an \textit{equal aid to religion} (impartiality) policy when the practices are generally cultural or have a discernible secular purpose.
orthodoxies in Islamic understanding opposing this idea are still strong.\textsuperscript{164} Two important features of JIL arguments for secularization concern equality and public morality which are basically liberal arguments.\textsuperscript{165} Politically, secularization is intended to ensure equal opportunity for all members of a democratic, religiously diverse state, and to free the state from any religious interference. State morality, in JIL arguments, is not based on a particular religion, in this case Islam, but on “secular-humanism values” derived from the ethical and moral values of all religions. However, there is inadequate consideration of the kind of secularization and secular principles that best fit or are applicable to an illiberal Islamic culture as in Indonesian society. It is possible that Indonesia could be culturally and politically democratic without the erection of a strong “wall of separation” between the state and (organized) religions as there are many ways to achieve that ideal, such as giving priority to democracy principles, Rawls’ political liberalism, or Audi’s principles of public discourse.

\textsuperscript{164} Many orthodox views see that “secularization as a whole [is] the expression of an utterly unislamic worldview, it is also set against Islam, and Islam totally rejects the explicit as well as implicit manifestation and ultimate significance of secularization…it is…deadly poison to true faith (iman).” See, in Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, \textit{Islam and Secularism} (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993), 41.

\textsuperscript{165} However, aspects of secularization are far from the issues of equality and state morality. The integral “components” of secularization can be classified as disenchantment of nature, the desacralization of politics, and the deconsecration of values. Disenchantment of nature means “the freeing of nature from its religious overtones; and this involves the dispelling of animistic spirits and gods and magic from the natural world, separating it from God and distinguishing man from it, so that man may no longer regard nature as a divine entity, which thus allows him to act freely upon nature, to make use of it according to his needs and plans, and hence create historical change and ‘development.’” The desacralization of politics means “the abolition of sacral legitimation of political power and authority, which is the prerequisite of political change and hence also social change allowing for the emergence of the historical process.” Meanwhile, the deconsecration of values means “the rendering transient and relative all cultural creations and every value system which…includes religion and worldviews having ultimate and final significance, so that in this way history, the future, is open to change, and man is free to create the change and immerse himself in the ‘evolutionary’ process.” See, in \textit{Ibid.}, 19. According to Al-Attas, different to secularization in Christian traditions, Islamic secularization does not address the component of the deconsecration of values. This because Islam is widely perceived as a complete set of values which covers personal, societal, state, and even global affairs as well as afterlife.
In JIL there is a tendency to “liberalize” Islam and at the same time to “Islamize” liberalism. The first tendency can be found in arguments to make Islamic teachings and practices more open, tolerant, and pluralist. It is also visible in the use of basic Western, liberal ideas in the development of Islamic liberalism. The latter tendency is present in the admission that liberalism is inadequate in addressing problems with Islamic culture and traditions. The tendency to look back at Islamic historical facts and traditions or to find arguments in Islamic texts that support liberal Islam is similar to what is done by liberal theologians. In a broad liberal sense, this kind of argument might be classified as constructing “the moral character” of liberalism. This character can be religious, ethical, or cultural.\footnote{An important contribution to the debate of the moral character of liberalism is from John Stuart Mill. In his \textit{On Liberty} and \textit{Three Essays on Religion} (consists of three essays: “Nature,” “The Utility of Religion,” and “Theism”), Mill addresses some classical liberal issues like ethics, individuality, well-being, moral disintegration, and the “role” of religion in democratic society. In Robert Devigne’s accounts, these two works have many different emphases: “\textit{On Liberty} puts forward difference and nonconformity as liberty. The \textit{Three Essays on Religion} uphold a selfless devotion to the well-being of all others as the highest expression of the human good. \textit{On Liberty} projects the importance of impulse, desire, and willfulness; the \textit{Three Essays on Religion} puts forward the necessity for discipline, habit, and selfless, spiritual aims...\textit{On Liberty} focuses on the problems created by the oversocialized individual; the \textit{Three Essays on Religion} address the dangers of moral disintegration...The \textit{Three Essays on Religion} identify discipline, habits, and ethics as key instruments for structuring individual behavior. \textit{On Liberty} points out that modern individuality must be compressed by rigid rules of justice so that willfulness does not undermine the public good.” See in, Robert Davigne, “Mill on Liberty and Religion: An Unfinished Dialectic,” in Eldon J. Eisenach, ed., \textit{Mill and the Moral Character of Liberalism} (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 250-1. There are various perspectives on Mill’s contribution to this debate. Eisenach concludes that Mill’s moral character of liberalism from \textit{On Liberty} can be stated as “Mill’s liberal principles require Mill’s ‘illiberal’ horizons, if by illiberal one means the requirement of substantive goods and speculative truths in order to defend abstract rights...[and] liberalism itself is a set of substantive virtues as well as a set of abstract principles.” See in, Eldon J. Eisenach, “Mill and Liberal Christianity,” in \textit{Ibid.}, 228.}

One idea central to Islamic liberalism such as proposed by JIL is that there is compatibility between Islam and liberal ideas in general, and therefore, Islam could be a main source for the development of a liberal Islamic society with a democratic political framework. Liberal interpretations of Islam as well as the adoption of liberal principles is
intended to establish the theological, moral, and philosophical foundations of Islamic values that support democratic ideas and practices. However, this effort lacks theoretical foundations. It is hard to find specific arguments on many important issues like the conception of Islamic public morality, Islamic notions of civil liberties, and agreement or disagreement with contemporary arguments on the relationship of religion and liberalism or secularism in general. It is also difficult to decide whether JIL’s liberal Islam provides a “moral character” for liberalism in general or Islamic liberalism in particular.

In general, JIL arguments for liberal Islam and democracy have paved the way to the “theology of a secular state” or a “theology of liberal Islam.” Based on previous works of influential neo-modernists and liberal Islamic scholars, JIL activists continue the project of Islamic renewal in a broader context with diverse audiences. There are not many fundamental differences or intellectual breakthroughs compared to previous liberal Islamic reform movements, except for innovations in organization and networking. However, there are arguments that could help the realization of Islamic liberalism in Indonesia in the near future, such as support for gender equality, a critical approach to the Qur’an, secularization issue, and the campaign for pluralism within Islam. These themes, if enriched with more theoretical and philosophical arguments could lead to the establishment of a strong tradition and methodologically convincing liberal Islam.

To answer criticism, especially on methodological issues, it is necessary to consider Islamic intellectual traditions cited by Arkoun. Other arguments to support the development of Islamic liberalism can be adapted from the field of political theory, including the work of Kant, contractarianism, or utilitarianism. These theories, with careful application, might be appropriate to develop more “rational” (instead of
theological or ethical) arguments for Islamic liberalism. There should be more effort to bring the discussion on Islamic liberalism closer to the “established” ways of theory making. This means that JIL activists should incorporate more rational arguments in the development of liberal Islam, and use Islamic texts and historical facts as supportive arguments in order to maintain a connection with its main source of ideas, Islam.

JIL is politically significant for Indonesia, as it voices culturally liberal and democratic values. It has been able not only to counter the growing radicalization of Islam in Indonesia in the early years of the transition to democracy, but it also has laid a foundation for a liberal Islamic society. JIL activists are deeply concerned to strengthen Indonesia’s democratic system and they struggle to provide theological, and to some extent, rational justification for it. With their different backgrounds, JIL activists can penetrate traditionalist and modernist as well as “secular” Muslim communities, giving them wide access for the dissemination of liberal Islamic ideas.

From this study, it seems that the prospect for a moderate, tolerant and liberal Islamic society in predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia depends on the availability of liberal Islamic ideas and liberal Islamic elites. Therefore, Binder’s thesis or Kurzman’s arguments on Islamic liberalism, may be proven valid by movements like JIL. In the long run, if JIL is able to sustain its activism and spread its ideas, it is likely to play a crucial role in mediating conflicting ideas dominant in Western liberalism and Islamic revivalism. JIL is also an asset for public education in toleration, pluralism, and democracy, that may enlighten and open the minds of many Muslims, and also contribute to development of a liberal Islamic culture—a prerequisite for a liberal Islamic society.

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References:


Appendix 1. Comparison of the History of the Liberal Idea and the Islamic Faith

### The History of the Liberal Idea

In the reign of Henry II of England (1154-1189), the “rule of law” was established in books of “common law.” Arbitrary rule by King John I resulted in a baronial revolt and the signing of the **Magna Carta** in 1215. The King was obliged to maintain the rule of the law and consult the barons. In 1258, Simon de Montfort forced Henry III to accept the Provisions of Oxford. A fifteen-man council elected by barons assumed the key sovereign powers of the king, and an assembly of four knights elected from each English county represented the grievances of the entire realm. A parliament with powers over taxation would eventually become well established in England.

Across northern Europe, the Protestant Reformation challenged the divine claims of kings and the ideology of Catholicism. In England, relations between Charles I and Parliament broke down into the **Civil Wars** (1642-1651). The king was deposed by parliamentary forces led by John Pym, Thomas Fairfax, and Oliver Cromwell. Radical republicans known as the Levellers pressed for equality, democracy, and religious tolerance, but were suppressed after “agitation” in the New Model Army. The Levellers were too far ahead of their time. Cromwell drifted toward military dictatorship. The English monarchy was restored in 1660, but political rights were reaffirmed in the “Glorious Revolution” against James II in 1688-1689. In 1689, joint monarchs William III and Mary II ratified the “Bill of Rights”: it was the centerpiece of legislation that secured Parliament’s primacy over taxation and the army, denied the Crown the right to suspend the laws, and guaranteed certain rights and liberties, including religious toleration for all Protestants, elections every three years, and freedom of speech for parliamentarians. Britain led the world in the development of constitutional government.

The Enlightenment: Natural sciences led the way

### The History of the Islamic Faith

From 610 to 632 C.E., the Prophet Mohammad (570-632 C.E.) received revelation from God through the angel Gabriel. The Islamic era began in 622 C.E., when Mohammad migrated from Mecca to Medina (the **hejira**) to escape persecution and find a following. Mohammad’s recollections of God’s message were set down in the Qur’an, and its 114 chapters (suras) are the basis of Islamic faith and social life. God was one (tawhid), and so must be humanity’s submission. The aim of Muslims was to reach God’s paradise, and each had to account for his or her life’s deeds on a day of judgment. The perfect Muslim was the Prophet. Mohammad’s words and deeds were the **sunna**, later collected as the **hadith**.

The “five pillars” of Islamic observance are (1) the **shahadah** declaration (“there is no god but Allah, and Mohammad is his messenger”); (2) **salah** (five ritualized daily prayers oriented to Mecca); (3) **zakat** (alms giving); (4) **sawn** (dawn to sunset fasting during the month of Ramadhan); and (5) **hajj** (pilgrimage to Mecca). Muslims prayed to God directly, but mosques were built for community worship and learning. The midday prayer on Fridays—the **Jumah** prayer—is the most important act of weekly communal worship. All Muslims are equal under God.

The Islamic community (umma) was governed by the **caliph**, a ruler with both political and religious primacy. The era of the Four Rightly Guided Caliph ended in civil war. In 661 C.E., Caliph Ali (Mohammad’s cousin and son-in-law) was defeated and later murdered in a revolt by the Ummayad family based in Damascus. With astonishing speed, Islamic warriors and merchants forged an empire from Spain to India.

#### Sunni Islam

Under the Ummayad (661-750 C.E.) and Abbasid (750-1258 C.E.) Caliphates, the Qur’an and **sunna** were used to produce Islamic law (**shari’ah**). It included severe penalties for particular crimes, such as apostasy, adultery, theft, and drinking alcohol. Four schools of

#### Shia Islam

In the line of Ali: Ali’s son, Husain, was killed by Ummayad forces at Karbala in 680 C.E. Shia Islam fragmented into sects, such as the Ismailis and Zaydis, based on adherence to different religious personalities, known as **imams**. The most important sect, the

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to reason from the late seventeenth century, especially in the work of Isaac Newton and David Hume. In *Two Treatises on Civil Government* (1690), John Locke proposed a social contract that included freedom of conscience and the right to property. Adam Smith theorized market economics in the *Wealth of Nations* (1776). In France, Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau attacked the traditional and argued for the rights of the common people. In Germany, Immanuel Kant advocated religious tolerance, and in his essay *Perpetual Peace* (1795) claimed that the spread of democratic nations might produce a “democratic peace” across the world.

The American and French Revolutions: The kind of radical thought expressed by Englishman Thomas Paine in *Commonsense* (1776) and *The Rights of Man* (1791-1792) was taken up in a revolt over taxation in Britain’s American colonies. Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams made liberalism into a reality. The American Revolution (1775-1783) ended a colonial rule and led to the U.S. Constitution (1789); its Bill of Rights amendments (1791) became the classic statement of liberal rights, including the trial by jury and the freedoms of religion, speech, press, and assembly. In France, a bourgeois-led revolution overturned the ancien régime in 1789. Liberty, equality, and fraternity were promised, but the revolution was lost to the tyranny of Robespierre and Napoleon. European liberalism became inextricably associated with nationalism and the idea of national self-determination. In the Western world, democracy gradually became the norm; the franchise was extended for males, and in 1893, New Zealand became the first Western national to give women the vote in national elections. John Stuart Mill published *On Liberty* in 1859 and *Utilitarianism* in 1863 which became one of the foundations of modern liberalism.

During the nineteenth century, the British Empire was at the center of the first truly global economic system. Britain was the most important economic and normative force in the world, although its hegemony waned as other powers caught up. The twentieth century saw an epic struggle within European civilization between the liberal West and the authoritarianism East. U.S. intervention was decisive in swinging the balance. World War I did away with absolute monarchy. World War II turned the tide on orthodox jurisprudence developed: the Hanafi, Shafii, Hanbali, and Maliki. Sunni Islam prioritized order and became traditionalist. The subordinate status of women was fixed. Islam was periodically revived by mystical Sufi cults and by fundamentalist revivals.

The Islamic empire fragmented, but Islamic civilization developed advanced philosophy and science, reaching a peak in Andalusia. Muslims came under attack. The First Crusade in 1096 inaugurated 150 years of conflict with Christendom in the Holy Land. Muslims were pushed back in the Mediterranean. In Spain, Islamic Granada was extinguished in 1492. In the east, the Mongols destroyed the huge Muslim empire of Khwarezm in the 1220s and went on to smash the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad in 1258. Mamluk soldiers stopped the Mongols at Ayn Jalut in 1260 and led Islamic culture from Egypt until the rise of the Ottoman Empire. In 1453, the Ottomans stormed Christian Constantinople and made it their capital. In 1517, the Ottomans defeated the Mamluks. The caliphate was transferred to the Ottoman capital. The failure of the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 marked the end of Ottoman expansion. In India, Muslim soldiers of Mongol descent established the great Mughal empire in 1526.

The Muslim empires were bureaucratic, and the Islamic world stagnated. Between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, European moved in. The last Mughal emperor Twelvers, adhered to the twelfth and final imam, who disappeared in 873 C.E. but was expected to return as a madhi at the end of history. The Shia developed the Ja'fari school of jurisprudence, as well as a far more hierarchical clergy than Sunnis.

As a deviant minority, the were pressed to more remote regions, and developed the pacific doctrine of taqiyya (concealing their faith). The center of Shia Islam was Najaf and Karbala (now in southern Iraq), but in 1501 the Persian Safavid Empire (1501-1736) declared Shi’ism its official religion. In 1639, the border between the Safavid and Ottoman empires was fixed, approximating the present-day Iran-Iraq border. Persia eventually superseded Najaf and Karbala as the heartland of Shia Islam. Qom, Isfahan, and Mashad were the principal centers of Shia Islam in Iran.

In the early twentieth century, Iran experienced parliamentary politics, in which Shia clergymen were involved. In 1921, the Qajar monarchy was overthrown by Reza Khan, who established the modernizing Pahlavi dynasty. In the 1950s and 1960s, Grand Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini emerged as a key figure in the opposition to the Pahlavi state. Khomeini proposed the velayat-e faqih (the guardianship of the jurisconsult). Militant Shi’ism led the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79. The new Islamic state in Iran
extremist nationalism. In August 1941, Britain and the United States signed the Atlantic Charter, outlining a future world based on the rule of law, self-determination, and freer trade. The Atlantic Charter underpinned the foundation of the United Nations in 1945 and the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 1950, the European Convention on Human Rights was agreed by the Council of Europe. The United States superseded Britain’s global role and established a liberal system capable of resisting the Soviet alternative. In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan forged a liberal-capitalist revival that was to dominate the world economy. The Marxist-Leninist challenge was finally defeated in 1989. Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) spoke of the global triumph of the “liberal idea” and the way in which it represented the ultimate political and economic system. Anglo-American liberalism was the ideological foundation of a globalized Western hegemony. Liberalism faced only localized resistance.

... was deposed by the British following the Indian Mutiny in 1857. Periodic attempts were made to revive Islam, including an effort to absorb liberalism. World War I ended the Ottoman Empire. Britain and France divided the Middle East into territorial states. Mustafa Kemal abolished the Ottoman Caliphate, and secular nationalism carried Muslims toward independence. Nationalism failed. Jerusalem was lost to Israel in 1967. A new militant Islam was forged by Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi. The Islamic revival took hold across the Muslim world from the 1970s, but paralyzed political and economic development.