

The Flowering of Islamic Thought: Liberal-Progressive Discourse and Activism in Contemporary Indonesia¹

By Suratno²

Abstract

Since the fall of President Suharto in May 1998, liberal-progressive Islamic groups have been mushrooming in Indonesia. This article explores the contribution of those groups in spreading liberal-progressive Islamic discourse, while at the same time countering the discourses and activism of radical-conservative Islamic groups. In the interests of accessibility and ease of comprehension, I have divided the article into four parts. The first section will start with a brief explanation on the emergence of Liberal Islam in a global context. The second section will elaborate on the first wave of liberal Islam, in an Indonesian context, that emerged during the 1970s and until the fall of President Suharto in 1998. The third section will provide an explanation about the second wave of liberal Islamic groups and their various discourses, activists and activism. For several reasons, this part will focus only on particular groups that represent liberal-progressive Islam in Indonesia. Finally, to conclude this article my closing remarks will be an overall explanation of liberal-progressive Islam and its future in Indonesia.

¹ The author would like to thank Dr. Rémy Madinier (IRASEC-CNRS, Jakarta) for involving him in a research project on Contemporary Indonesian Islam, our sponsor for this research, BNP Paribas and Kristian Sutherland (SOAS, London) for reviewing the article.

² Suratno (b. 1977) is a lecturer at the Department of Philosophy and Religion, Paramadina University, Jakarta, Indonesia. He is currently a PhD Candidate in Political Anthropology and Religion at Goethe-University Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Backgrounds

Since the fall of President Suharto in May 1998, liberal-progressive Islamic groups have been mushrooming in Indonesia. Some of these groups are new, while others have existed for some time. Unsurprisingly, due to its wide media coverage, people tend to identify those groups with JIL (Liberal Islam Network). However, JIL is not the only group that promotes liberal-progressive Islamic discourses. There are many other groups that have shared similar concerns. They include JIMM (Muhammadiyah Young Intellectual Network), CMM (Center for Moderate Muslim), WI (the Wahid Institute), ICIP (International Centre for Islam and Pluralism), ICRP (Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace), Paramadina, Lakpedsam-NU, P3M (the Indonesian Society for *Pesantren* and Community Development), Ma'arif Institute, al-Maun Institute and Rahima, to name but some. These groups are located in Jakarta. Outside of Jakarta, there is LKiS, Syarikat and Rifka Annisa in Yogyakarta, Fahmina in Cirebon, ILHAM in Semarang, LKAS in Surabaya, Resist in Malang, LAPPAR in Makassar and LK3 in Banjarmasin.

The aforementioned liberal-progressive groups are generally Islamic NGOs (Non Government Organisations) committed to the idea of strengthening civil society by promoting and advocating the compatibility of Islam with modern discourses such as democracy, human rights, pluralism, freedom of thought, gender equality, the idea of progress, etc. While promoting and advocating these discourses, they are also countering the discourses and activities of radical-conservative Islamic groups. In doing so, some of those liberal-progressive groups have a national scope, but others are limited to regional and local audiences. Furthermore, national and regional groups are concerned with different issues, use different methods and address their discourse and activities to suit different audiences. Nevertheless, apart from these differences, they appear to share the opinion that radical-conservative Islamic groups in Indonesia have currently adopted an increasingly threatening attitude towards democratic values. Such radical-conservative Islamic groups sometimes use violent or aggressive means to overcome their grievances against the government or ideologically opposed sections of society, which is generally perceived as un-Islamic by Indonesians and highlights their true impotence. Liberal-progressive Islamic groups on the other hand, share the notion of religious tolerance and promote one or many themes that, according to Charles Kruzman,³ marked those groups as liberal-progressive Islam. Those themes include opposing theocracy and advocating democracy, women's rights, the rights of non-Muslims, freedom of thought and progress.⁴

In a global context, the rise of liberal-progressive Islamic groups cannot merely be explained in terms of their resistance against Islamic radicalism and conservatism. Such groups came into being as part of the various Islamic reform movements that have taken place over the last two centuries in the Muslim world. In Southeast Asia, a tradition of Islamic reform has existed since the seventeenth Century. Subsequent reformist groups in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, led by young Muslim scholars who were seeking to interpret Islamic teachings according to the spirit of their time and place, originally

³ Kruzman, Charles (Ed.) *Liberal Islam: A Source Book* (New York: Oxford University Press 1998)

⁴ The term 'Liberal Islam' was firstly popularised by Asaf Ali Asghar Fyzee, a Muslim Scholar from India who coined the term during the 1950s. The term became more prominent in Indonesia after Paramadina published the Indonesian translation of the influential book, '*Liberal Islam: a Source Book*'. Another publication translated into Indonesian that enriched the intellectual debate of the term was written by Leonard Binder, 1998, *Islamic liberalism: a Critique of Development Ideologies*, University of Chicago Press.

adopted and adapted their discourses from Middle Eastern reformists such as Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), Jamaluddin al-Afhgani (1838-1897), Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), Rashid Rida (1865-1935) and Ali Abdur Raziq (1888-1966), to name but a few. In the late twentieth century, more reformists emerged in the Middle-East and elsewhere, including the West. They include Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (an Egyptian, now residing in Leiden, Netherlands), Hassan Hanafi (Egyptian), Abdulkarim Soroush (Iranian), Fatima Mernissi (a Moroccan feminist), Muhammad Shahrour (Syrian), Fazlur Rahman (Pakistani), Mohammed Arkoun (Algerian), Asghar Ali (Indian, Engineer), Fareed Esack (South African).

Despite their different intellectual inclinations, these reformists have contributed to the intellectual underpinnings of young liberal-progressive Muslims in Indonesia. Liberal-progressive Islamic groups in the Muslim and non-Muslim world such as al-Qalam (South Africa), an-Nahdah (Tunisia), the IIIT/International Institute for Islamic Thought (USA and Malaysia), the Liberation Movement (Iran), Liberty for Muslim World (England), Progressive Dawoodi Bohras (India), Progressive Muslims (USA), Sister in Islam (Malaysia), all coincided with the rise of liberal-progressive Islamic groups in Indonesia. Although all these groups emerged independently throughout the world, in terms of discourse, such existing groups in Indonesia are all tied to liberal Islamic groups that developed elsewhere.⁵

Liberal Islam in Indonesia: First Wave

In an Indonesian context, while liberal and progressive discourses have been a characteristic of Islam for all of the twentieth century, such discourses increased in prominence from the early 1970s, and continued to until the middle of the 1990s. Therefore, present day Indonesian liberal-progressive Islamic groups rose out of the previous neo-modernist movement; namely from two pioneers, the late Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur) and Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). Although, Gus Dur once claimed that such groups are more legacies of Cak Nur rather than of himself.⁶ According to Greg Barton⁷, such liberal-progressive Islamic groups are not only associated with just these two figures, but also with Djohan Effendy and Ahmad Wahib. The discourse and activism from such figures, as well as some other important factors, marked the first wave of liberal Islam in Indonesia.

On 2 January 1972, Cak Nur delivered his lecture about the urgency of interpreting Islam in accordance with Indonesian and modern values. He also called for Islamic reformation and secularisation. On that day the seeds of liberal Islam were planted, although the term 'liberal Islam' was not yet explicitly used.⁸ His call for Islamic reformation and secularisation aroused heated debate and was challenged by other Muslim intellectuals at that time. According to Ahmad Munjid, in an era when many

⁵Ali, Muhammad 'The Rise of Liberal Islam Network (JIL) in Contemporary Indonesia' *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 22:1 (Winter 2005) pp. 1-27 www.assyaaukanie.com/file_download/22

⁶Gus Dur regarded this as a consequence of his style of critique. Present day liberal-progressive Islam discourse tends to be very technical and intellectual meanwhile his "texts" have been more accessible. As a '*pesantren*' man, Gus Dur sought the power of liberal progressive Islam discourse in tradition, while Cak Nur, like most contemporary young liberal-progressive Muslims, preferred to use a more scientific and academic analysis of Islamic teaching sources.

⁷Barton, Greg *Liberal Islamic Thought: A study of the writing of Nurcholish Madjid, Djohan Effendi, Ahmad Wahid and Abdurrahman Wahid* (Jakarta: Paramadina 1999) p. 609

⁸Boy, Pradana ZTF *In Defence of Pure Islam: Progressive-Conservative Debate within Muhammadiyah* (Australia: Unpublished Master's Thesis in the Faculty of Asian Studies, the Australian National University 2007) p. 36

people were discouraged by the dangers of secularisation, as consequence of modernisation, Cak Nur boldly said that secularisation is a necessity. However, he emphasised that secularisation should be approached cautiously, and to treat anything secular as secular, and anything profane as profane. It was also clear that Cak Nur did not wholly adopt the ideology of secularism as he recognised *Pancasila*⁹, which he believed Indonesian Muslims should not find problematic, and even regard as common platform for a pluralistic Indonesian society. Cak Nur tirelessly promoted the idea that Islam is entirely compatible with science, the notion of progress and modernity. He also argued that Islam and modernity are not alternatives, or that they contradict each other, and that when modernisation is understood as acting in accordance with natural law, it is a historical necessity: a divine order. Furthermore, Cak Nur believed that Islam is inherently a modern religion. In order to provide Indonesian Muslims with a theological basis for their social interaction in a plural society, Cak Nur then formulated the idea of Islamic inclusive-theology.¹⁰

In October 1986, in order to spread and implement his liberal-progressive discourses more effectively, Cak Nur set up the Paramadina Foundation. The foundation was established as a centre for activism to promote innovative and constructive religiosity, namely Islamic inclusive-theology. Paramadina fostered Cak Nur's theology through education, discussions and various publications; it created an Islamic studies seminar especially for Muslim middle class urbanites, KKA (*Klub Kajian Agama*), and published many influential and inspiring books. One of the many books that caused a heated debate and controversy among Indonesian Muslims is '*Fiqh Lintas Agama*' (Interfaith Islamic Jurisprudence), in which Paramadina applied inclusive-theology in the field of Fiqh (*Islamic jurisprudence*). On 10 January 1998, Paramadina even established a university to spread such theology, among other Cak Nur ideas, to younger generations.

Gus Dur, the grandchild of Hasyim Asy'ari, (co-founder of Nahdlatul Ulama/NU) was widely known during the 1980s as a prolific writer in national newspapers and magazines. His career became brighter when he was selected as the chairman of NU in 1984. During his tenure (1984-1999), he launched much criticism of Suharto's regime, backed minority rights and encouraged young NU members to familiarise themselves with modern discourses. He also introduced the concept of '*Pribumisasi Islam*' (the indigenisation of Islam). This concept argues that the formal adoption of a local culture is necessary if Islam is to be an integral part of a Muslim's life, instead of isolating it from reality. Gus Dur's career reached its zenith in 1999 when he was appointed as President of Indonesia. According to Munjid, Gus Dur, who has a very strong *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia) background, spoke mainly on behalf of, and worked with, traditional Muslims. Before conceiving the national development project he later articulated, Gus Dur recognised the challenges and problems of modernisation and noted that these would need to be overcome by Muslim organisations, and the government, working together. While a small group of Indonesian Muslims promoted the purification of Islam, which often equated with an anti-cultural, if not an Arab-isation of

⁹ '*Pancasila*' is the official philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state, consisting of five principles: the belief in one God, a just and civilised humanity, Indonesian unity, democracy under the wise guidance of representative consultations and social justice for all the peoples of Indonesia.

¹⁰ Munjid, Ahmad 'Militant and Liberal Islam, The Unwanted Twin Children of Modernization: Indonesia- A Case Study' *The 34 AMSS Annual Conference* (Department of Religious Studies, Temple University, Philadelphia, USA, 25 September 2005) See: www.amss.org/pdfs/34/finalpapers/AhmadMunjid.pdf

Indonesian culture, Gus Dur promoted *Pribumisasi* Islam. Furthermore, Munjid explains that in response to the general negative judgement that Muslim traditionalists are backward, ignorant, static and poor, Gus Dur critically reminded the government that modernisation should be implemented in accordance with the needs, values and culture of society. In other words, it should be bottom up, rather than top down social engineering.¹¹ In the early 1970s, together with many Muslim leaders and activists, Gus Dur established P3M (the Indonesian Society for *Pesantren* and Community Development), an NGO that offers alternative social projects of empowerment, especially for *pesantren* people. Like Paramadina, P3M has become an organisation that greatly contributes to the development of liberal-progressive Islam in present day Indonesia.

Besides Gus Dur and Cak Nur, the first wave of liberal Islam in Indonesia is also closely associated with both Djohan Effendy and the late Ahmad Wahib. During their university life, together with Dawam Rahardjo, Effendy and Wahib created a discussion group named the 'Limited Group'; a group later noted as a breeding ground for Islamic liberalism in Indonesia. Effendi worked in the Department of Religion and served in several positions, including Head of Research and Development (1998-2000). During Gus Dur's presidential term, he was appointed as the State Secretary (2000-2001). In 2001, together with other Muslim leaders Effendy established ICRP (International Conference on Religion and Peace).¹² The late Ahmad Wahid, who died in 1973 after a motorbike knocked him down, left his diaries to be published as a book posthumously. His diaries are not only about his daily life, but also a record of his intercourse-ideas. From mid-1967 until the end of 1971, Wahib joined the 'Limited Group' discussion, a group of young people who would later become historically renowned as Indonesian intellectuals. They included Mukti Ali, Dawam Rahardjo, WS Rendra, Kuntowijoyo and Deliar Noer. From those discussions, Wahib wrote retrospective notes in which he tried to open the path to a huge field of questions, wide, cavernous and dense-thicketed, where God, the Koran and faith are questioned. Eight years after the death of Wahib, in July 1981, his diary was published by LP3ES as a book. Djohan Effendy and Ismed Natsir edited the diary and gave the 351-page book the title, '*Pergolakan Pemikiran Islam: Catatan Harian Ahmad Wahib*'. At the time of its first publication, some people were impressed, surprised and some even angry. DDI (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah) denounced it. Even now, although it is difficult to find in bookshops, according to Robbert Heffner, the book remains popular among young people who are interested in furthering, in a more systematic way, what it pioneered: entering an area where God, the Koran and faith are questioned, without the aim of heresy.¹³

In his book on liberal Islam in Indonesia, Greg Barton classifies four names (Gus Dur, Cak Nur, Effendy and Wahib) as the pioneers of 'liberal Islam'. Their role in spreading liberal-progressive discourses among Indonesian Muslims was highly important. While Cak Nur, Wahib and Effendy have influenced a whole generation of young Muslims in the modernist camp, Gus Dur's influence has been enormous among traditional Muslims. Barton, in his extended discussion on the antecedents of liberal Islam, identifies clear linkages to modernist and traditionalist scholarship; traditionalist in the sense of

¹¹ Munjid, Ahmad *The 34 AMSS Annual Conference* (2005) Idem

¹² Assyaukanie, Luthfi *Islam and The Secular State in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS Publication 2009)

¹³ Goenawan, Muhammad *Conversation with Difference: Essays from TEMPO Magazine* (translated by Jennifer Lindsay) (Jakarta: PT Tempo Inti Media Tbk) pp. 63-64.

traditional Muslim educational practices, such as a *pesantren* education and scholarship in Arabic.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Bahtiar Effendy and Fachry Ali, in their book *Merambah Jalan Baru Islam* (1986), identify essential factors when considering the 'liberal Islam' approach in Indonesia. The core principle they share is the separation of two spheres of knowledge; the absolute (that which is eternally true) and the relative (that which can be modified as circumstances change). Both authors suggest that there are three principles which stem from this separation: (1) a stress on individual autonomy in matters of faith, (2) a stress on personal development and personal responsibility, in short a theology of Individualism, Rationalism and natural law, and (3) a rejection of *taqlid* (imitation) and a celebration of *ijtihad* (individual interpretation).¹⁵

According to Luthfi Assyaukanie however, the first wave of liberal Islam in Indonesia cannot be limited only to the above names. The role of State Institutes of Islamic Studies (IAIN)¹⁶, and several NGOs, have also been crucial in spreading liberal-progressive Islamic discourses. Apart from Cak Nur, who is also often linked to IAIN, there are two names that have made a great impact on IAIN universities and their students; Mukti Ali (Rector of IAIN Yogyakarta) and Harun Nasution (Director of Post-Graduate Program of IAIN Jakarta). Ali played a great role in modernising the institute. He introduced an inclusive approach to the study of religions and promoted religious pluralism to students of IAIN universities. During his tenure as Minister of Religion, Ali sent a delegation of young IAIN lecturers to continue their studies in Western universities, particularly McGill University in Canada. Consequently, this project had a great impact on the development of Islamic intellectualism in IAIN universities. Meanwhile, the role of Nasution was crucial in introducing and consistently addressing this rational approach to the study of religion. Nasution has written several books which have become textbooks for students in IAIN universities. He has often been seen as a controversial figure, mainly because of his ideas regarding rational Islam. Admiring Mu'tazilah¹⁷, Nasution suggested to students of IAIN universities that they learn, and follow, the spirit of this Islamic school of thought. He encouraged them to study Islam in a critical manner. Furthermore, what is significant in the role of Cak Nur, Nasution and Ali, is that they have made IAIN an institution that stimulates its students to embrace 'enlightened Islam'; an Islam that supports liberal ideas and values. Quoting Azyumardi Azra (former rector of IAIN Jakarta), Assyaukanie explains even although they are Islamic universities, IAIN does not teach the fanaticisms of just certain *madzhab* (school of thought) or Muslim scholars, but teaches all *madzhab* and scholars work, using a modern framework, perspective and methodology. IAIN students are also taught about other religions in a fair, objective manner and free of prejudice. The study of comparative religions is an obligatory subject for all students. Those enlightening materials, and a liberal academic environment, enabled IAIN students to explore various ideas freely, and drove them to express their thoughts within scholarly forums and in the mass media.¹⁸

¹⁴ Barton, Greg 1999, *op.cit.*

¹⁵ Effendy, Bahtiar and Ali, Fahry (eds.) *Merambah Jalan Baru Islam: Rekonstruksi Pemikiran Islam Indonesia Masa Orde Baru* (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan 1986)

¹⁶ IAIN (*Institut agama Islam negeri*) is a form of state Islamic university in Indonesia that provides an academic education in Islamic disciplines.

¹⁷ An Islamic school of thought that flourished in Basra and Baghdad from the eighth, and until tenth century, following the belief that human reason can be applied alongside Qur'anic revelations.

¹⁸ Assyaukanie, Luthfi (2009) *op.cit.*

In addition, Assyaukanie explains that the writing tradition among IAIN students in the mass-media actually began during the generation of Cak Nur in the late 1960s. Yet, at that time its scope was rather small and it wasn't until the mid-1980s that the tradition significantly increased. Magazine and newspapers such as *Panji Masyarakat*, *Tempo*, *Kompas*, *Merdeka*, *Media Indonesia*, *Pelita*, were the main print media publications where IAIN students published their writings. Furthermore, if the writing tradition among IAIN students is to be considered, one name has to be mentioned, Dawam Rahardjo. Dawam contributed tirelessly to the training and encouragement of IAIN students to publish their writings in the media, as well as involving them in several research projects he conducted. Several IAIN students at that time, such as Azyumardi Azra, Komaruddin Hidayat and Fachry Ali, were all prolific writers who Dawam had trained. While these writers were schooled in Islamic universities, they're work was not only concerned with religious issues. According to a survey on the contribution of IAIN students in seven national newspapers from the years 1995-2000, social and political issues were more dominant than religious issues. These writings mostly resonated with a vision of tolerant Islam, and more importantly had a constructive attitude towards modern social and political concepts such as democracy, human rights, pluralism, and gender equity.¹⁹

Main topics written by IAIN students in 7 national median (1995-2000)

Topics	Number	%
Religion, ethics & spirituality	49	22,07
Religion & politics	45	20,27
Religious pluralism & culture	39	17,56
Religion & social justice	26	11,71
Islam & modernity	20	9,00
Gender equity	16	7,20
Civil society	10	4,50
Human rights & democracy	6	2,70
Others topic	11	4,95
Total	222	100

Source: Jamhari & Jabali, 2002²⁰

During the same period in Yogyakarta, several IAIN Graduates were working in NGOs and were active in strengthening civil society and implementing democratisation. Some of them established publishing houses. One of the most successful publishing houses is LKiS (Institute for Islam and Social Studies).²¹ Other IAIN Graduates in Yogyakarta, such as Masdar F Mas'udi, Said Agil Siradj and Amin Abdullah, were well-known as liberal Muslims whose contributions to Islamic intellectual and political discourses, and activism, have been enormous. Masdar Mas'udi (born in 1954) has a strong *pesantren* and NU background. He graduated from IAIN Yogyakarta in 1980 and

¹⁹ Assyaukanie, Luthfi (2009) *Idem*

²⁰ Jamhari and Jabali, Fuad (Ed.) *IAIN dan Modernisasi Islam* (Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu Ciputat 2002) p. 154

²¹ Assyaukanie, Luthi (2009) *op.cit.*

then established P3M.²² Said Agil (born in 1953), although he did not finish his studies at IAIN Yogyakarta, did however complete a BA from King Abdul Azis University, and then an MA and PhD from Ummul Qurro University in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. He was also involved with the NU, serving as one of the chairmen of the NU Central Board from 1994.²³ Meanwhile, Amin Abdullah (born in 1953) is currently an activist of Muhammadiyah. After obtaining a BA in comparative religions from IAIN Yogyakarta in 1981, Abdullah went to Turkey to pursue a PhD Degree in Islamic Philosophy at the Middle East Technical University (METU), which he completed in 1990.²⁴

Assyaukanie highlights that those IAIN students and IAIN networks in general, have shaped what Bahtiar Effendi calls 'a new Islamic intellectualism', which is different from that of the 1950s *Santri* mainstream. This Islamic intellectualism greatly contributed to the first wave of liberal Islam in Indonesia. It was also more constructive than previous mainstream developments in dealing with modern discourses about Islam.²⁵

The development of liberal Islamic discourses in Indonesia was also broadened through the translation of many influential foreign academic works on liberal Islam. Two of those books, translated and published by Paramadina, are Charlez Kruzman's '*Liberal Islam: A Source Book*' and Leonard Binder's '*Islamic Liberalism: Critique to the Development Ideologies*'. In his edited book, Kruzman notes that the term liberal Islam refers to basic themes in the history of liberalism such as democracy, freedom of thought, social equality and human progress. The term 'liberal' has a variety of meanings depending on the context of its usage, and its reputation in much of the Islamic world has been tainted by its hypocritical introduction under colonialism. Thus as an anthology, Kruzman's book includes some authors and activists who may not consider themselves 'liberal', though they deal seriously with liberal themes. Kruzman also classifies Islam into three traditions of customary Islam. First, is an Islam that is characterised by a combination of Islamic practices and local traditions, second, revivalist Islam or fundamentalist Islam and third, liberal Islam. According to Kruzman, those Muslims who share parallel concerns with Western liberalism (e.g. separation of church and state, democracy, women's and minorities' rights, freedom of thought, human progress, and so on) can also be considered as liberal.²⁶ Meanwhile, Binder's book tries to understand the term 'liberal Islam' by distinguishing the term with traditional Islam. Binder outlines a history of liberal knowledge in the Middle East, in which he views liberalism as critiques of development ideologies.²⁷ Although these books were produced more recently, they played an important role in introducing liberal Islamic discourse, especially to young Muslim generations who did not witness the debate on such discourses when it was first launched by Cak Nur in the 1970s.

²² See 'Sekilas Tentang Masdar Mas'udi' in

<http://pmiikomfaksyahum.wordpress.com/2007/12/19/sekilas-tentang-masdar-farid-masudi/>

²³ See "KH Said Agil Siradj Manajer NU yang Alim", in *Suara Merdeka* (27 March 2010)

²⁴ See "Amin Abdullah: Dialog Antar-Agama", in

http://www.uin-suka.info/ind/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=509&Itemid=341

²⁵ Assyaukanie, Luthfi (2009) *op.cit.*

²⁶ Kurzman, Charles (Ed.) *Islam Liberal: A source book* (New York: Oxford university Press 1998)

²⁷ Binder, Leonard *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998)

Liberal Islam in Indonesia: Second Wave

The second wave of liberal Islam emerged in the post-Suharto era through the establishment of a number of young Muslim groups that offered a new interpretation of Islamic teachings and how Islam should be interpreted in the changing social and political conditions. Not only offering interpretations, these groups also intensively countered the discourses and activism of radical-conservative Islamic groups whose members were viewed as a threat to a peaceful and tolerant Indonesian society.

Since the fall of President Suharto in May 1998 - after more than three decades in power - there followed by an unprecedented amount political freedom, especially for radical-conservative Islamic groups that in the past had been severely restricted in the public domain. Thus, radical-conservative groups flourished with their new found freedom to express and articulate their ideas in the public domain without the fear of reprisals.²⁸ Their agendas' vary from group to group, but do share some similarities, ranging from the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, Islamic states and the implementation of *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) in constitutional life. More importantly, they are not only politically opposed to the existence of the Indonesian state philosophy *Pancasila*, but adhere to a very literal, strict and exclusive interpretation of Islamic teachings. In addition, there is strong evidence that most of their leaders adopt religio-political ideas from that of Middle East, especially the ideology of radical-salafism.²⁹ Such ideological adherents can, more or less, be indentified among groups such as FPI (*Front Pembela Islam*, Islamic Defenders Form), HTI (*Hizb Tahrir Indonesia*, Indonesian Liberation Party), MMI (*Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia*, Indonesian Mujahidin Council), LJ (*Laskar Jihad*, Jihad Troops), JI (*Jamaah Islamiyah*, Islamic Congregations), JAMI (*Jamaah Ikhwanul Muslimin Indonesia*, Indonesian Congregations of Muslim Brotherhood), PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, Prosperous and Justice Party), PBB (*Partai Bulan Bintang*, Crescent and Star Party), etc. FPI, for instance, has carried out radical and violent attacks, acting like religious policemen in places they accused of being un-Islamic, such as discotheques, nightclubs and other similar venues in order to eradicate all sorts of religiously prohibited practices; such as gambling, alcohol consumption, and prostitution. In so doing they see themselves as the torchbearers in the application of *Shari'ah* in Indonesia. In their efforts they are frequently confronted by other groups, including non-Muslim and liberal-progressive Muslim groups, who explicitly condemn their exclusive claims and radically violent ways.

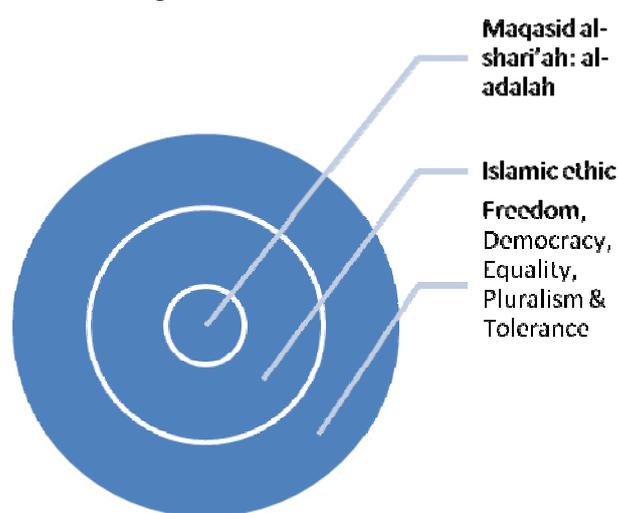
The emergence of such radical-conservative Islamic groups has led several young liberal-progressive Muslim groups to counter their discourses and activism. For these liberal-progressive groups, Islam is inherently compatible with democracy. Reaching further than simply talking about compatibility, these groups actively disseminate the view that Islam supports modern discourses on human rights, pluralism, gender equality, and the separation of state and church. And apart from seminars and discussions, these groups

²⁸ Liddle, William 'Indonesia's Unexpected Failure of Leadership' Schwarz, Adam and Paris, Jonathan (Eds.) *The Politics of Post Suharto Indonesia* (New York: Council on Foreign Relation Press 1991) p. 26.

²⁹ 'Salafism' refers to the theological and ideological underpinnings that impose pure and pristine Islam practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and the two generations that followed him (the Salafi). Radical-Salafism in this context refers to contemporary movements in Sunni Islam which demand the exclusive implementation of pure and pristine Islam practiced by the Prophet and his companions. In this regard, they call for a return to a strict, legal and exclusive interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna. See "Salafism" creedopedia, www.creedopedia.com/topics/Salafism. See also, Azra, Azyumardi 'Islam in Southeast Asia: Tolerance and Radicalism' (Miegunyah Public Lecture, the University of Melbourne, 6 April 2005) pp. 16-18.

also engaged in very practical activities, such as 'democracy education' for the under privileged, rural population and *pesantren*. They also protected minority and marginalised groups from being oppressed as well as working on their behalf in their struggle for freedom. Although having differences in their discourses and activities, they share one main approach towards curbing the influence of Islamist hardliners; education and dialogue as the key to mutual understanding in the multicultural states of Indonesia. Liberal-progressive Islamic groups are more mostly concerned with a substantive approach to Islam. This is the fundamental tenet of their political theology. They believe that Islam as a religion does not stipulate any theoretical concepts related to politics, maintaining that there is no single text in the Qur'an which calls upon Muslims to establish an Islamic state. Rather, they argue that the Qur'an contains ethical and moral guidance regarding good governance, including how to achieve justice, freedom, equality and democracy. A key argument for this opinion is that the mission of Prophet Muhammad was not to establish a kingdom or a state, but that Muhammad's mission, like other prophets, was preaching the virtue of religious values. Also, that Muhammad and his successors governed in the spirit and ethical framework of Islam.

According to Syafii Anwar³⁰, liberal-progressive Islamic groups generally assert that *Shari'ah* doesn't specifically address government or political systems. They argue that Islam provides the opportunity and the freedom for its adherents to set up or develop a political systems based on their own choice. In this regard, modern discourses such as pluralism, equality, freedom and democracy are most welcome, given there is an understanding that upholding justice is the public purpose of *Shari'ah*. Consequently, *Shari'ah*, for members of these groups is not merely embedded in Islamic law, but is a fundamental ethical value that adapts and reconfigures to living realities. They insist that the meaning of *Shari'ah* should be based on a contextual, inclusive and pluralistic paradigm.³¹ Furthermore, Syafii creates a chart that describes the liberal-progressive scheme based on Islamic teaching:



³⁰ Syafii Anwar was born 27 September 1953, in Kudus, East Java. Syafii received a law degree from the University of Indonesia in 1984 and a Master's in political science in 1994. He also has a PhD in history and political sociology from the University of Melbourne, Australia, in 2005. His doctoral dissertation was titled '*The State and Political Islam in Indonesia: A Study of State Politics and Modernist Muslim Leaders*'. A former journalist and editor of *Ummat* and *Panji Masyarakat* magazines, whose hardworking style is still vividly recalled by his former colleagues, recently helped prepare, strengthen and update international standards against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other related intolerance. See <http://www.planetmole.org/indonesian-news/indonesians-in-focus-m-syafii-anwar.html>

³¹ Anwar, Syafii 'The Interplay Between US Foreign Policy and Political Islam in the Post-Suharto Indonesia' *Working Paper Number* (Brooking: The Saban Centre for Middle East Policy 2008)

1. – Freedom

On 18 November 2002, the *Kompas* daily newspaper published an article titled '*Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam*' (Refreshing Our Understanding of Islam), written by Ulil Abshar Abdalla, who at that time was a coordinator of JIL (*Jaringan Islam Liberal*, Liberal Islam Network). In this article, Ulil strongly criticises the religious understanding of some Indonesian Muslims. He states that some groups have fossilised Islam by unconditionally accepting an understanding of Islam as it was practiced in seventh century Arabia. They allow no room for reinterpretation. In his view, the interpretation of Islam which those groups propagate has led to stagnation within Islam. Ulil argues that Islam should be perceived as a living organism, something which grows and develops. He maintains that Islam does not promote divine laws; rather it develops universal principles, the implementation of which may change with time and place.

Surprisingly, a small group of conservative Muslim leaders and activists, namely the FUUI (Muslim & Islamic Leaders Forum), heartily condemned the article. When they had a meeting in al-Fajar Mosque, in Bandung West Java on 30 November 2002, they concluded that Ulil, through his article, had been deliberately provocative and attacked the basic principles of religion; God, Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, Muslim scholars and the Muslim community in general. Based on this conclusion, the FUUI argued that Ulil deserved the death penalty. The FUUI pointed out that according to Islamic law the death penalty can be issued for any act of humiliation directed towards the teachings of Islam. The FUUI's chairman and one of those responsible for issuing the fatwa, Athian Ali Dai, said in response to Ulil's article that "being a Muslim, my blood boiled".³² Yet, such threats were not taken seriously.

Ulil and his article are in fact only one among many challenges that members of JIL have had to face due to their discourses and activities. Established in Jakarta in March 2001 by several young Muslims such as Luthfi Assyaukanie,³³ Ulil Abshar Abdalla,³⁴ and Hamid Basyaib,³⁵ JIL wants not only also to promote liberal Islam but also to counter radical-conservative Islam discourses and activism. The name Liberal Islam Network represents the principles they believe in. It is an Islam that stresses individual freedom and

³² Muzakki, Akh 'Accusation of Blasphemy' (2006) see:

http://en.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-478/_nr-444/i.html (accessed on 10 January 2010)

³³ Luthfi Assyaukanie was born in Jakarta on August 27, 1967. He received his early education in religious institutions. He later continued his studies at the University of Jordan specialising in Islamic Law and Philosophy. He obtained his Master's degree from the International Islamic University in Malaysia, and in 2005 received his Ph.D degree in Islamic Studies from the University of Melbourne, Australia. See his homepage at www.assyaukanie.com/

³⁴ Ulil Abshar-Abdalla was born on 11 January 1967 in Pati, Central Java. He completed his secondary education in Madrasah Mathali'ul Falah, Kajen, Pati, Central Java. This school is led by Ahmad Sahal Mahfudz who sat on the Nahdlatul Ulama leadership board during the period 1994-99. He also studied in Pesantren Mansajul 'Ulum, Cebolek, Kajen, Pati, and Pondok Pesantren Al-Anwar, Sarang, Rembang, all in Central Java. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in the Shari'ah faculty of LIPIA (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab - Islamic and Arabic Knowledge Institute) in Jakarta. He was also educated in Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Driyarkara (Driyarkara School of Philosophy). He once held the position of chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama's Lakpesdam (Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia - Human Resources Research and Development Centre), and as a researcher in ISAI (Institut Studi Arus Informasi), Jakarta, and as Program Director in the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP). After completing his Master's degree in religion at Boston University in 2007, he continued his studies with a PhD in the department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. See his homepage at www.ulil.net/

³⁵ Hamid Basyaib was born in Teluk Betung Lampung on 3 July 1962 into a religious family of Arab descents. He studied law at UII (Indonesian Islamic University) in Yogyakarta. During his studies he was active in the Islamic Student Movement. After completing his studies he moved to Jakarta to work as a column writer for several Indonesian journals and newspapers. He later worked for an Islamic magazine, but then moved to start work as a researcher.

the liberation from all forms of oppressive structures within politics and society. Liberal, therefore, means two things: freedom and liberation. They believe Islam is always tied to an adjective, because Islam is always differently interpreted depending on the needs of its readers. To promote their liberal reading, they set up JIL to take place in the form of a network as they wanted JIL to become a medium for Muslim activists from different liberal Islamic groups to interact, discuss and share their opinions in an open and free manner. In short, JIL wants to become a liaison-organiser among several liberal Islamic groups in Indonesia, especially in Jakarta.

Since its establishment, JIL has created many guidelines related to public religious education, such as the promotion liberal Islam, tolerant aspiration, and the critical interpretation of Islamic teachings. These guidelines are based on their manifesto of liberal Islam and contains six main concepts: they include (1) the openness of *ijtihad's* gate in its entire aspects, (2) the emphasis on an ethical-religious spirit, not the literal meaning of the text, (3) the relative, open and plural truth, (4) supporting minorities and the oppressed, (5) freedom of belief and faith, and (6) the separation of a heavenly (*ukhrawi*) vis-à-vis worldly (*duniawi*) authority, and the religious vis-à-vis political authority.³⁶

JIL has attempted to promote these ideas through various mediums. They are as such: (1) syndication of liberal Islam's writers by providing weekly articles and interviews for local newspapers, (2) broadcasting a talk show and inviting widely known advocates of religious pluralism and freedom to discuss various socio-religious issues affecting the country (a weekly show broadcasting across Radio 68H network in Indonesia), (3) publishing books on religious pluralism and freedom from translated texts and by republishing relevant out of print books. For instance, JIL has published compilations of articles, interviews and discussions they held, titled '*Wajah Liberal Islam Indonesia*' (Face of Indonesian Liberal Islam) and *Ijtihad Islam Liberal* (Reason's Exercise of Liberal Islam), (4) publishing a booklet of 50-100 pages in a crunchy and digestive language. These booklets discuss and respond to many controversial issues in Indonesian society, from a liberal-Islam perspective. For instance, JIL published booklets on 'The Koran for Women', critics of *Jilbab* and Islamic *Shari'ah*, (5) set up a Mailing list at and the website www.islamlib.com, (6) JIL also produce several Public Service Advertisements about pluralism, celebrating diversity and social conflict prevention. For instance, JIL produced an advertisement under title *The Colorful Islam, Do Not Use Religion as Political Commodity* and (7) through cooperation with the external organisations (universities, student associations, *pesantren*, etc.), JIL organises discussions about liberal-Islam discourses and other various religious themes. They are held monthly in Teater Utan Kayu, Jakarta. The discussions are also held in other places, mostly in cooperation with student associations of several universities, and other forms of youth groups in Indonesia.³⁷

In response to their activities and discourses, JIL has received not only praise and support, but also a great amount of criticism, and even threats. These criticisms and threats, from conservative-radical Muslims, came in the form of a death threat, legal prosecutions and critiques in the form of books and articles. The death threat came from FUUI to Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (JIL's former coordinator) because of his article in the

³⁶ www.islamlib.com (accessed on 25 February 2010)

³⁷ *Idem*

newspaper *Kompas*, titled '*Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam*'. The article was accused of humiliating Islam and therefore its author, Ulil, in the opinion of FUUI, should receive the death penalty.

Novriantoni, currently a JIL activist, explains that the threats relating to JIL's work came from several Ulama conservatives, under the authority of PWNNU (*Nahdlatul Ulama* Regional Board), in East Java. On 13 October 2002 through their *tausyiah* (religious suggestion), they warned NU members and officers to be cautious of following the ideology of liberal Islam promoted by JIL. Furthermore, if there are NU members and officers that are recognised as proponents of these theories, they should be prohibited from becoming an NU officer at any level.³⁸

Legal prosecution against JIL came from MMI (Indonesian Mujahedin Council). They prosecuted the RCTI and SCTV TV stations due to their publication of a JIL advertisement entitled '*Islam Warna Warni*' (*The Colorful Islam*). On August 2002, JIL promoted '*Islam Warna-Warni*' on several Indonesian TV channels. According to Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, the advertisement emerged from the idea that a non-Arabic local tradition of Islam appeared more sympathetic and accommodating, but JIL went further by arguing for the inevitability of Islam transforming to accommodate real life. Ulil argued that Islam is continuing to develop in a variety of cultural traditions. Furthermore, he argued that Islam changes its expression in light of the existing cultural traditions. As a result, he argued that Islam is obviously varied (*warna-warni*, colorful); there being no single Islam.³⁹ The advertising campaign was cancelled because of the legal prosecution from MMI.⁴⁰

Furthermore, critiques of JIL discourses and activism, in the form of books and articles came from several conservative Muslim writers. Hartono Ahmad Jaiz,⁴¹ in his book titled '*Bahaya Islam Liberal/The Danger of Liberal Islam*' (2002), called for the religious prosecution of JIL, accusing it of humiliating Islam. For Hartono, JIL humiliated Islam as they rejected the formalisation of Islamic *Shari'ah*. Adnin Armas also wrote a book titled '*Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis Terhadap Islam Liberal/The influence of Christians-Orientalists to Liberal Islam*' (2003). This book not only contained criticism but also named several JIL activists from within the JIL mailing list. Similarly, Adian Husaini⁴² criticised three of JIL's main agendas through his books titled '*Islam Liberal: Sejarah, Konsep, Penyimpangan dan Jawabannya/Liberal Islam: its history, concept, deviation and answer*' (2003). Those criticisms are: (1) JIL's development of inclusive-pluralistic theology has led to a decline in Muslim's faith, (2) JIL's rejection of Islamic *Shari'ah* is a part of global plan to destroy the Islamic world, designed by the West, and that (3) JIL's attempts to counter conservative and radical Islam are part of a US project engineered by Israeli Zionists.

³⁸ Correspondence with Novriantoni by E-mail.

³⁹ Abshar-Abdalla, Ulil *Islam Warna-Warni (The Colorful Islam)*
www.islamlib.com/id/page.php?page=article&id=236 (12 August 2002)

⁴⁰ See *Kompas* "Di Sesalkan, Penghentian Sepihak Tayangan 'Islam Warna-Warni'", (14 August 2002)

⁴¹ Hartono is a well-known prolific and conservative Muslim writer. He publishes innumerable books, brochures and pamphlets attacking various organisations and individuals considered "heretical".

⁴² Both Adnin Armas and Adian Husaini are prolific and conservative Muslim writers, who graduated from ISTAC-IIUM Malaysia. They are both active in a Jakarta based organisation, namely INSIST (Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilization). One of INSIST's main campaigns was fighting liberalism and the "de-Westernising of knowledge". See: http://www.bt.com.bn/analysis/2008/02/19/from_veranda_of_masjid

Another challenge to JIL activities and discourses, Novriantoni explains, came from MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council). On 29 July 2005, MUI issued 11 *fatwas* (edicts), one of those being the prohibition of secularism, liberalism and pluralism. It is widely-known that such proposed prohibitions were intended to hamper JIL and other liberal-Islamic groups. Those *fatwas* also gave direct legitimacy to conservative-radical Islamic groups to counter JIL's discourse and activism. Furthermore, several days after the edicts, one of those groups tried to attack JIL's Utan Kayu office in Jakarta, in the name of the Muslim people and on the basis of the *fatwas*.

From 23 till 28 March 2010, during a five-day Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) national leadership conference in Makassar South Sulawesi, also appeared another small challenge to JIL activism. Ulil-Abshar Abdalla, a former JIL coordinator, was first denied to enter the race for the NU Chairmanship because of his connection with JIL. Uli faced strong resistance from the former NU leader, Hasyim Muzadi. However, he later managed to secure a place in the first round of the race, receiving 22 votes. Although, it was not enough to pass the round as only the first two candidates with the most votes go through the final round, namely Said Agil Siradj and Slamet Effendy Yusuf. Said Agil went on to win the NU leadership contest (2010-2015). From this event we can see that because of his activism within JIL, Ulil faced serious a challenge from the NU's new standing orders that banned clerics with a liberal interpretation of Islam from entering the race. In short, it reflected that there was a small group of conservative NU leaders and *Ulama* who reject the discourses and activism of JIL.

2. – Pluralism

Nowadays, there are at least five Islamic groups that are working, both covertly and overtly, towards an Islamic state in Indonesia. Those organisations are *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI), Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI), Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Darul Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII), and the Indonesian Islamic Dakwah Council (DDII). By promoting *Shari'ah* law as a solution to any problems that Indonesia face today, they have tried to push the government, at all levels, to include *Shari'ah* values in government policies. Among those groups, FPI is a well-known radical organisation that has stated its goal is the full implementation of Islamic *Shari'ah* law. FPI has been involved in many raids on bars, massage parlours and gaming halls. The FPI justified these raids on the grounds that the police were unable to uphold laws on gambling and prostitution.⁴³ Tempo magazine once reported that, between March 1996 and August 2005, about 180 churches were destroyed, burned or closed by force.⁴⁴ For instance, in Jakarta 2003, and in many parts of Java, many similar incidents were perpetrated by the FPI, which attacked and forced the closure of more than two dozen churches in West Java, the lockout of believers from the 'Sang Timur' Catholic School, the conflict between Muslim residents and members of a Christian Batak Church, and the violent attack against followers of the Muslim Ahmadiyah sect.

⁴³ Agus Nahrowi, 2006, *Religious Pluralism in Indonesia: Helpful and Hindering Aspects*, at: <http://www.pluralism.org/reports/view/37> (Accessed on February 2010).

⁴⁴ 'Perusakan dan Penutupan Gereja di Indonesia (beberapa kasus 1996-2005)', Pusat Data, *Tempo*, see http://www.pdat.co.id/hg/political_pdat/2005/08/31/pol,20050831-01,id.html

According to Syafii Anwar, there are three ways to explain the religious radicalism in Indonesian society. First, there is an inclination to interpret texts from the holy book literally and ignore the context. Second, there is a tendency to agree with *Shari'ah* law enforcement, or be *Shari'ah* minded. Third, anti-pluralist sentiments are being widely propagated.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Syafii explains that it might be difficult to establish religious pluralism within the Islamic radical community, because they tend to be anti-dialogue and intolerant, believing that everybody must follow their rule of law. Therefore, it is unsurprising that intolerance has become one of the most crucial and challenging issues of religious life in Indonesia over the last five years.⁴⁶

The International Centre for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) is an Islamic NGO that is committed to promoting pluralism and countering the religio-political agenda of radical-conservative Islamic groups. The group was established by intellectual Muslims Syafii Anwar, Syafiq Hasyim⁴⁷ and others, July 2003 in Jakarta (after one year of preparation and dialogue) to promote pluralism and multiculturalism here, and in Malaysia, Bangladesh, Thailand and the Philippines. ICIP developed texts on tolerant Islam for use in religious schools in Southeast Asia. ICIP has a vision of a harmonious relationship among various cultural and religious groups, of integrating all civilisations based on the principles of pluralism and multiculturalism. The main mission of ICIP is to disseminate the ideas of Indonesia's moderate and progressive Muslims to audiences in both Indonesia and around the world, and to disseminate the ideas of international moderate and progressive Muslim thinkers to the people of Indonesia.

To realise the aforementioned vision and mission, ICIP has carried out various activities. They include: (a) the translation and publication of cutting-edge re-interpretive works found only in Indonesian into English, and distributing them through cooperation with regional publishers; (b) by conducting public lectures and workshops with international progressive scholars/activists and their counterparts at ICIP, not only in Jakarta but in other Indonesian cities; (c) releasing downloadable articles and speeches of scholars and activists, updates on pro-democracy work among Muslim NGOs in the region and a discussion list in a forum for the exchange of ideas on issues faced by Muslim activists and scholars, all on their website;⁴⁸ (d) a training and sharing session on multiculturalism with *pesantren* members; (e) a program on 'Open, Distance and e-Learning' (ODEL) for Islamic transformation through *pesantren*. This program seeks to provide eight *pesantren* in Java, who have access to the internet, with equivalent education packages in life skills and humanism. This program was supported by the Jakarta Ford Foundation for a three year period (2007-2010).⁴⁹

Through such activities, according to Syafii Anwar, ICIP does not simply reach the elite, middle classes and highly educated people living in urban areas, but also ordinary

⁴⁵ See <http://islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&id=1020>

⁴⁶ Syafii Anwar, 'Political Islam & Democracy in Indonesia' paper presented in 'International Conference Towards A Civic Democratic Islamic Discourse', organised by Al Quds Centre for Political Studies-Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Amman, Jordania, 27-29 May 2006.

⁴⁷ Syafiq Hasyim was born in Jepara Central Java on 18 April 1971. He obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Theology and Philosophy from IAIN Jakarta and a Master's degree in Islamic Studies from Leiden University, the Netherlands. Before working at ICIP, Syafiq had been actively involved in P3M and Rahima. Since 2009, Syafiq has been pursuing a PhD Degree in Islamic Studies at Freie-University in Berlin, Germany.

⁴⁸ See official website of ICIP at: www.icipglobal.org

⁴⁹ *Idem*

people who live in villages and rural areas. Indeed, during 2003/04, the ICIP carried out activities addressing mainly the elite and intellectual communities, such as academicians, professionals, journalists, etc. But since 2005, the ICIP changed their strategy by conducting programs addressing ordinary people, religious communities and *santri* as well as maintaining activities with elite groups. For instance, there is an innovative and populist program addressed to *pesantren* communities. Many *pesantren* in Indonesia use traditional methods of education and lack ICT (Information and Communication Technology) knowledge and capacity. Based on this, the ODEL program is not simply addressed to enhance the quality of *pesantren* in absorbing modern ICT, but also to provide real and practical benefits for those who have, for one reason or another, discontinued their schooling.

Furthermore, Syafii explains that having carried out the ODEL program in several selected *pesantren* throughout Java, the program has gained positive responses and support from *pesantren*, and their surrounding communities. Based on *pesantren* annual reports, there is high participation in the program. Interestingly, a conservative *pesantren* in Cianjur, al-Mushri, which participated in the program, was most welcoming of it despite initially rejecting the ODEL program due to their suspicions of ICIP motives. ICIP was pleased to see that many *santri* women who wear the *jilbab* were very excited to have the opportunity to use a computer and access the internet. The ICIP showed them education materials related to religious curricula on pluralism, international affairs, Islam in the west, etc. It seemed to be clear that by having modern ICT there would be a gradual change in their mindset and attitude towards a modern development of life.

Other approach from the ICIP to overcome radicalism and conservatism is a program to strengthen the understanding of pluralism, good governance and regional autonomy through *pesantren*. According to Syafii Anwar, this program is particularly addressed to *pesantren* in West Java cities where several conservative *pesantren* are located, such as in Cirebon, Sukabumi, Ciamis, Tasikmalaya, Bandung and Majalengka. In these six cities, radical-conservative Islamic groups have had a strong influence in developing an anti-pluralistic spirit and supporting 'a creeping *Shari'ah*-isation' agenda through several efforts and actions. Also, that most *pesantren* in these cities are vulnerable to the spread of radical-conservative ideology and propaganda. These cities are well-known of having radical-conservative groups that are committed to imposing intolerant and undemocratic attitudes toward others groups; radical-conservative groups such as FUUI (Islamic Ulama and Community Forum), GAP (Anti-Apostasy Movement), etc. Furthermore, Syafii explains that all radical-conservative groups in these cities seek to impose *Perda Shari'ah* by manufacturing regional autonomous regulations. Therefore, ICIP works to challenge propaganda from such groups in these cities by setting up a program on pluralism, good governance and regional autonomy. The program is carried out through public discussions, radio talk shows and the exchange of information. All information on pluralism, good governance and regional autonomy is based on an inclusive and substantive interpretation towards the Qur'an, Hadith and classical texts. It is also contextualised with daily living realities and modern socio-political development.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Anwar, Syafii 'Political Islam & Democracy in Indonesia' paper presented in *International Conference Towards A Civic Democratic Islamic Discourse* organized by Al Quds Center for Political Studies-Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Amman, Jordania (27-29 May 2006)

Due to the ICIP's ideological stance and their activism, they often receive critiques and challenges come from radical-conservative Islamic groups. In his article titled '*Pluralisme Agama Model ICIP*', Adian Husaini, a prolific conservative Muslim writer and DDII activist, encourages Muslims to pay much more attention to the ICIP and their activities regarding religious pluralism, because like other liberal groups, the ICIP promotes discourses that deconstruct Islamic teachings including that of *qath'iy* (some teachings perceived as final). For Husaini, this is exemplified by the ICIP's publication of a controversial English-translation book, '*Interfaith Theology: Responses of Progressive Indonesian Muslims*' (published with the support of The Asia Foundation in 2006). For Husaini, if we consider all the books published by ICIP, including *Interfaith Theology*, we will see ICIP's fallacy regarding their concept of faith, Islam and God. Therefore, Husaini denies ICIP's claim that they promote '*Pluralisme Mua'amalah*' (pluralism that recognises the plurality of religions and its consequence in social life). Furthermore, Husaini emphasises that people must be aware of the fact that there are many groups like the ICIP that openly promote pluralism; something which was clearly prohibited by MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) through their *fatwa* in 2005.⁵¹ Another challenge occurred when ICIP's Director, Syafii Anwar, was branded a 'CIA agent (Central Intelligence Agency) of the US and a 'Western puppet' by radical Islamic groups when he publicly denounced MUI's *fatwa* (Indonesian Ulema Council), which deemed pluralism as 'religiously unlawful' and was driving the nation toward disintegration. He received angry responses and threats via email, SMS (Short Message Service) and over the telephone. One of the major mosques in Jakarta even forbade him from giving speeches and sermons there, despite the fact Syafii is a renowned Muslim intellectual and activist whose contributions to the development of the mosque's youth movement have been well noted.⁵²

Similar to the ICIP, is the Wahid Institute (WI), an Islamic NGO committed to a tolerant and pluralistic form of Islam in Indonesia. Adopting the name from the late KH Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), WI was established on 7 September 2004. However, discussions to form the group had begun after the launching of Gus Dur's website (www.gusdur.net) on 17 August 2001. Yenni Wahid,⁵³ the second-daughter of Gus Dur was then elected as Director, and Ahmad Suaedy⁵⁴ as the Executive Director. The reason for establishing WI was because at that time in Indonesian, and the world over, there was a rising fear due to the threat of terrorism, radicalism and associated violence in the name

⁵¹ Husaini, Adian *Pluralisme Agama Model ICIP* see: www.swaramuslim.net/more.php?id=A5955_0_1_0_M

⁵² Amirrachman, Alpha *Indonesian in Focus: M. Syafii Anwar* in <http://www.planetmole.org/indonesian-news/indonesians-in-focus-m-syafii-anwar.html>

⁵³ Yenni Wahid (Zanuba Arifah Chafshoh) was born in Jombang, East Java on 29 October 1974. An Indonesian Islamic activist and politician, Yenni obtained her bachelor's degree in design and visual communication from Trisakti University in Jakarta, but upon graduation went to work as journalist for two Australian newspapers, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age. As a journalist, she covered news stories from East Timor and Aceh, and her stories in post-referendum East Timor earned her and her team the Walkley Award for journalism. When her father was elected as the fourth Indonesian president, she had decided to leave journalism in order to assist her father. Regarded as Gus Dur's right hand person, she also worked as his special staff in communication. Upon Wahid's impeachment, she went to pursue a Master's degree at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. In 2004, upon her return from Boston, she was appointed as the director of the newly-founded Wahid Institute (WI) and as Political Communication Advisor to the President of the Republic of Indonesia 2005-07. She has also been actively involved in the National Awakening Party (PKB) as Secretary General. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yenni_Wahid

⁵⁴ Ahmad Suaedy was born on 6 May 1963 in Kebumen, Central Java. In 1990 he graduated from the Faculty of Syari'ah (Islamic Law) from IAIN (State Islamic Studies Institute) Yogyakarta. During the 1980s he was one of the founders of LKiS (Institute for Islam and Social Studies). He then moved to Jakarta in the 1990s and was involved in P3M, as well as Lakpesdam NU. In 2005 he was awarded a grant to take a Sandwich Program at Deakin University, Australia. See: http://www.wahidinstitute.org/Agenda/Detail/?id=32/hl=id/Ahmad_Suaedy_Menentang_Tapi_Juga_Menghargai_SKB

of religion (Islam). Therefore, it forced young Muslims like Yenny, Suaedy and others, to create cooperative-action to promote religious pluralism in the form of intra and inter-religious dialogue, as well as nation and ethnic dialogues.⁵⁵

Furthermore, Suaedy explains that Indonesian Islam is pluralistic in character, both in its expression of Islam and in its relation with other religions. Also, that there are differences between Islam in Central Java and East Java. For instance, Sultan Hamengku Buwono X (currently a Governor of Yogyakarta) considers himself a good Muslim in his beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, his Islam is different from that of NU with their *pesantren* culture. Suaedy also notes that there are also differences between Islam in Java and outside Java. Indonesia is pluralistic, not only in its Islamic religion but also in its ethnicity. Therefore, Indonesia offers a pluralistic version of Islam to the world, as opposed to a "monolithic" form of Islam that comes mainly from the Middle East. With its pluralistic character, Indonesian Islam has not received adequate recognition in the world. This pluralistic understanding of Islam must go through a globalisation process, to replace an Islam that is anti-pluralistic. This goal, one among many, is a very important agenda for WI.⁵⁶

Since its establishment, WI has sought to expand the vision and intellectual principles of Gus Dur regarding the development of progressive Islamic thought to promote democratic reform, religious pluralism, multiculturalism and tolerance amongst Muslims in Indonesia, and around the world. In particular, WI is committed to developing a dialogue between the highest spiritual and political leaders in the West and the Muslim world. WI has embarked on an impressive agenda of programs, including an effort to facilitate communication between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars on Islam and Muslim society, and on the subjects of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism. This goal is pursued through conferences, discussions, publications and its website. WI is committed to serving scholars, researchers and activists, and has built a library of Gus Dur's life work to facilitate that commitment. More importantly, WI also focuses on the education of young people, by supporting opportunities for promising young people in Indonesia with a focus on liberal-progressive Muslim thinking. In this program, promising young people from across the country with basic-textual skills in Islamic studies will be selected to undergo an intensive period of training. For five to six months selected students will live and interact under one roof, learning from a curriculum based on liberal-progressive Muslim thinking devised by WI.⁵⁷

According to Suaedy, since 2005 WI has documented various issues and incidents, particularly those concerning religious pluralism in Indonesia. Yet, only since 2008 has WI been able to produce a comprehensive annual report on religious pluralism in Indonesia. The reports are compiled by a team working on a national scale, though not every region in Indonesia is covered. The team consists of non-profit institutes, in 11 provinces that throughout the course of the year monitor religious issues in each region. The eleven provinces are Maluku, South Sulawesi, South Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, NTB (West Nusa Tenggara), West Java, Central Java, East Java, Yogyakarta, Jakarta and Banten, but the reports are not strictly limited to these regions. WI also monitors and records other occurrences/issues outside of these provinces through the media and personal networks.

⁵⁵ See www.wahidinstitute.org

⁵⁶ Suaedy, Ahmad *Indonesian Islam Is Pluralistic in Character* UNANEWS (May 5 2009)

⁵⁷ See WI official website at: www.wahidinstitute.org

Collection of data involves a number of different methods, including the analysis of legislation, interviews with perpetrators and victims of related crimes, data collection via media clippings, meetings with policy makers, field investigations and direct onsite observations. Not all have been used simultaneously, but rather, methods were chosen in accordance with the needs of each case. The next step in the process is for field researchers to input all components of their cases into forms for analysis. WI uses these forms to create a matrix of cases, to help estimate the number of cases in each category and compare figures with previous years. After reviewing the regulation of religious life in Indonesia, the report then groups the institute's findings into the following three groups; (1) cases related to violation of religious freedom, both *forum internum* (the right of conscience) and *forum externum* (the right to manifest religious belief), by omission and by commission. In doing so, the report refers to relevant international covenants and national law, (2) cases concerning relations between religious groups and community groups, which include instances of religious intolerance and discrimination, (3) cases that indicate progression in guaranteeing religious freedom in Indonesia. The report, according to Suaedy, refers to two concepts often present in the discourse on religious freedom, namely intolerance and discrimination. Both are frequently used to determine whether or not religious freedom is guaranteed in a particular country.⁵⁸

The 2008 Annual Report on Religious Pluralism, for instance, was titled 'Tracing the Footsteps of an Increasingly Divided Nation'.⁵⁹ The report explains that religious freedom-related violence had increased throughout the country, with 232 cases reported in 2008, compared to 197 the previous year. The documented increase in acts of violence against religious freedom was carried out either by civilians (60 per cent) or state actors (33 per cent). It explains the state perpetrators included local administrations, police, legislators, courts and the Religious Affairs Ministry. Civilian perpetrators were identified as members of the Islam Defenders Front (FPI), the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and the Communications Forum for Religious Harmony. Compared to that of 2007, the frequency and severity of the violence in 2008 also increased. It noted that the government had been weak in administering punishment and set a worrisome trend for the future. The report stated that violations against religious freedom had come in the form of physical attacks, raids, the destruction of places of worship and accusations of apostasy and heresy. The report recorded some 50 cases of violence in 2008, which were sparked by issuances of *fatwas* by the MUI against certain groups it branded as "heretical or deviant". MUI *fatwas* against specific groups are often used to legalise violence and legitimise stigmatisation. The report criticises the government for bowing to pressure from hard-liners to disband the Jamaah Ahmadiyah sect. The government in June 2008 issued a joint ministerial decree banning Ahmadiyah from disseminating its doctrine. The report says it is an example of the fact that the mobilisation of a mob can be used to force the government to take action against conceived constitutional violations. If it allows such practices to continue, the government is investing in the future disintegration of the nation. In its report, the institute lists the 'Monas tragedy' as the worst act of violence against pluralism in 2008, referring to an event in which activists from AKBB (the National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and

⁵⁸ See 'Executive Summary' in *2009 Annual Report on Religious Freedom & Religious Life in Indonesia*, see:

http://www.wahidinstitute.org/files/_docs/EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY-%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%20RELIGIOUS%20FREEDOM%202009%20WI.pdf

⁵⁹ See *The 2008 Wahid Institute Annual Report on Religious Pluralism in Indonesia*

http://www.wahidinstitute.org/Programs/Detail/?id=413/hl=en/The_WAHID_Institute_2008_Annual_Report_Religious_Pluralism_In_Indonesia (Accessed on October 2009).

Belief) were attacked by members of the FPI, injuring 70 people, including Suaedy, currently an Executive Director of WI.⁶⁰

In 2009, WI and the Maarif Institute, among others, jointly published an important and controversial book titled *'The Illusion of an Islamic State: Expansion of Transnational Islamist Movements to Indonesia'*, placing the PKS, HTI, MMI, and FPI in a single box called 'hard-line Islam'. The book was first launched in Jakarta in the middle of May 2009 and edited by Gus Dur. When the book was ready to be published, it was reported that some radical Islamic groups threatened co-publishing bookstores. Several bookstores received phone calls threatening to burn their stores down. As a result, some distributors who had first agreed to distribute the book later apologised to WI as they would not take the book anymore. Suaedy, acting as spokesperson for WI, stated that they should not be afraid of any threats.⁶¹

3. – Gender Equality

Regarding gender equality, starting in the late 1970s and early 1980, along with Islamic revivalism, the history of Muslim women's groups in Indonesia has somehow been connected to the nature of their surrounding political systems and the developmental ideology of the powers that be. The perception of women changed with increasing tendencies towards liberalisation and democratisation. The 2002 election of Megawati Soekarnoputri was symbolic of Indonesian women's contribution to the country. While this should be regarded positively, the ongoing struggle of Muslim women's rights groups in Indonesia has also revealed a lingering gender inequality, despite the growing liberal political atmosphere. A snapshot of Muslim women's activism during the period of democratic consolidation does draw a picture of success, but also highlights setbacks regarding Muslim women's efforts to make their voice heard. Although Muslim women's groups operate within highly heterogeneous political and social frameworks, one strong message reaches out: the rejection of a patriarchal inspired religious conservatism that gradually encroaches upon women's rights.⁶²

Rahima is a good example of a Muslim women's rights group that clearly rejects this conservatism and advocates gender equality in Indonesia. According to Rachel Rinaldo, Rahima considers itself as part of the women's rights movement, collaborating with both secular women's groups and progressive groups representing different religions.⁶³ Rahima is a NGO that aims to advocate women's equality based on Islamic, modern and democratic principles. The organisation was established in August 2000 because of the need to promote and advocate the rights of women in Islam.⁶⁴ Currently, the Director of Rahima is

⁶⁰ See 'Cases of Religious Violence Up: Report' *The Jakarta Post* (11 December 2008) <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/12/11/cases-religious-violence-report.html>

⁶¹ See 'Wahid Book on Islamic State Under Threat' *The Jakarta Post* (25 May 2009)

⁶² Derichs, Claudia 'Snapshots: Women Struggle for Change in Post-Suharto Indonesia' see: www.kas.de/doc.kas_10256-544-2-30.pdf#page=10 (Accessed on 22 February 2010)

⁶³ Rinaldo, Rachel *Pious Islam and Women Activism in Indonesia* (2008) <http://gencen.isp.msu.edu/documents/WP291.pdf> (Accessed on January 2010)

⁶⁴ According to Farid Muttaqin, Rahima was established by ex-P3M activists who had previously worked for the fiqh al-nisa Division but were disappointed with P3M's Director, Masdar F Mas'udi. Masdar was once perceived as a prominent defender of women's right, until he took a second wife. Masdar pointed out that there is no verse in the Qur'an that forbids polygamy. Meanwhile, his fiqh al-Nisa staff believe that polygamy appeared to be an important factor in

Aditiona Dewi Eridani⁶⁵ who in 2007 replaced the former Director Farha Ciciek.⁶⁶ The name Rahima comes from the Arabic '*al-rahim*' which means divine mercy. It also refers to one of the God's 99 names (*al-asma al-husna*). Based on these, Rahima celebrates the human spirit of love and compassion and commenced campaigning in February 2001. Since that time, Rahima has stood tirelessly against parochial interpretations of Islamic law and fought to protect women's rights in Indonesia. In general, all activities of Rahima can be categorised into four main programs: (1) education on women's rights through an Islamic perspective, training, discussion and workshops, (2) public campaigning by publishing bulletins, journals and books, (3) commissioning research and policy papers, and (4) providing information services through a library, website, etc.⁶⁷

Different from other groups who focus on travelling from conference to conference, Rahima prefers to work at the grass-root level, taking their message directly to people in countryside, such as *pesantren* schools. Rahima also works closely with non-Muslim organisations. In the beginning Rahima's focus was on the training and dissemination of information concerning women's rights in Islam to local community Muslim groups and *pesantren*. Yet, with an increasing interest in gender issues in Indonesian, Rahima has extended its network to reach a broader audience, ranging from other Islamic women's movements, university groups (mostly with the PSG/Centre for Gender Studies), and other secular-women's NGOs.⁶⁸

Another Rahima program is the training of female religious scholars (*nyai*), who play an important role in promoting women's rights within society. In various Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic universities, *madrrasah* and *pesantren*, they have increased the number of educated Muslim female teachers who have access to primary sources of Islamic teaching, but these women still lack the opportunity to speak with authority about Islam. The discourse of Muslim scholars in Indonesia is still dominated by men. In this program Rahima aids female religious scholars to use their Islamic scholarship to advocate women's rights. Rahima also encourages female religious scholars and women in general, to participate in the discussion and criticism of the contents of *Perda Shari'ah*. Since 1998, when Suharto's authoritarian regime fell, political reforms gave regional government new powers. In some districts, Islamic law has been implemented as *Peraturan Daerah (perda)* or local regulations, well-known as *perda Shari'ah*. These *perda* reinforced religious conservatism and marginalised women. For instance, Chapter XIII of the *perda* No. 11/2002 of Nanggroe, Aceh Darussalam province, implementation of Islamic

violence against women. See: Muttaqin, Farid *Progressive Muslim Feminists in Indonesia from Pioneering to the Next Agendas* Master's of Arts paper (Ohio University, Southeast Asian Studies, International Studies 2008)

See: http://etd.ohiolink.edu/view.cgi?acc_num=ohiou1213212021

⁶⁵ Aditiona Dewi Eridani was born in 1967 in Jakarta, studied law at Diponegoro University in Semarang, from which she graduated in 1991. Up until 2001, Aditiona worked for P3M (the Indonesian Society for Pesantren and Community Development) but later moved to Rahima.

See: http://en.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/c-307/nr-32/p-1/i.html

⁶⁶ Farha Ciciek was born on 26 June 1963 in Ambon, Moluccas. Farha obtained a bachelor's degree from an IAIN institute and Master's Degree in Sociology from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. During the time of her studies, she joined the struggle against violence against women, and in 1982 created a discussion forum for women's issues and religion. Together with other female activists in Yogyakarta, she established LSPAA (Institute for Study of The Development of Women and Children). She later moved to Jakarta, joined Kalyanamitra and then P3M.

See: www.ern.pendis.depag.go.id/DokPdf/ern-v-05-eng.pdf

⁶⁷ See profile of Rahima in its official website at: www.rahima.or.id

⁶⁸ Candraningrum, Dewi 'Perda Shari'ahh and The Indonesian Women' a paper presented at the conference on 'New Arbitrary against Women in Indonesia: Perda Shari'ah and Women's Rights' held by SOAI and MATA Asien in Blick, Bremen, Germany (11 November 2006) See also: <http://www.asienhaus.de/public/archiv/PaperPERDASHARI'AH.pdf>

law says every Muslim must wear Islamic dress. This was used to force Muslim women to wear the *jilbab* (head scarf). Rahima organised a protest to protect women from the negative socio-political influence of such *perda* and facilitated a discussion forum to criticise the patriarchal and gender-bias based content of these regulations. Rahima argued that such *perda* subordinated women by using a patriarchal interpretation of Islam. In this way, Rahima provided a model of participatory dialogue that acknowledged the intellectual ability of Muslim women and challenged the subordination of women's capacities. In Addition, Rahima members also actively protested against polygamy which is still being practiced in certain parts of Indonesian.⁶⁹

Furthermore, apart from their grass-roots work, Rahima has also built a library, published books, magazines, bulletins, and aired an online-information service. Swara Rahima (SR), for instances, is a magazine in which Rahima delivers information about feminism and feminist leaders in popular terms. This magazine has been important tool in building an audience of readers who were previously unaware of women issues, activists and potential activism. In a certain edition, for instance, SR published an interview with Siti Musdah Mulia, a prominent feminist. In this interview, Musdah pointed out that historically, every country that implements *Shari'ah* law begun its political program by repressing women's rights. Musdah views this as a political shortcut to gain legitimacy by using Islamic symbols, given that it would take a lot longer to establish legitimacy through social and economic development by improving the welfare of the people. For Musdah, women have been an easy target because they were unorganised and still subjugated to patriarchal values. Furthermore, Musdah explains that Islam in general and *Shari'ah* law in particular, has been deliberately misused to discriminate women.⁷⁰

Similar to Rahima, there is Fahmina in Cirebon, West Java. Fahmina was established in Cirebon, in November 2000 by K.H Hussein Muhammad,⁷¹ Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir,⁷² Marzuki Wahid,⁷³ among others. Its vision is the realisation of a civil society that is critical in its thinking, open in its attitudes, powerful in its dignity, and just in the way it regulates and orders people's lives. Fahmina has several main missions, they include: (1) to develop

⁶⁹ Farid Muttaqin, 'Progressive Muslim Feminists in Indonesia from Pioneering to the Next Agendas' Master's of Arts paper, (Ohio University, Southeast Asian Studies, International Studies 2008)

See: http://etd.ohiolink.edu/view.cgi?acc_num=ohiou1213212021

⁷⁰ See 'Kontroversi Perempuan Dalam Shari'ah Islam' *Swara Rahima* No. 2, (1 August 2001) p. 17

See also: <http://www.rahima.or.id/SR/02-01/Index.htm>

⁷¹ KH Hussein Muhammad was born in Arjawinangun, Cirebon West Java on 9 May 1953. Hussein first studied Islam in Pesantren Lirboyo Kediri, East Java and then onto the PTIQ (Institute for Qur'anic Studies) in Jakarta, where he received a bachelor's degree in 1979. After graduating he moved to Egypt to study at Al-Azhar University, but before completing his studies in Egypt he returned to Indonesia where, together with uncle, managed their family Pesantren Dar al-Tauhid in Cirebon. See: <http://daraltauhid.com/profil-pesantren/sejarah.html>

⁷² Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir was born in Cirebon, Indonesia in 1971. He has two Bachelor's degrees, one in Arabic and Islamic Studies, completed in 1994, from an Islamic College -the Libya branch of Damascus-Syria, and the second in Islamic Law, in 1995 from Omm Dourman University branch of Damascus-Syria. Faqih earned his Master's degree in 1999, in Fiqh and Ushul Fiqh, from the International Islamic University, in Malaysia. He is a lecturer in Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Cirebon. Since 2009 he has been pursuing his doctoral degree at ICRS-UGM Yogyakarta.

See: http://www.icrs.ugm.ac.id/main/student_lister.php?cof=3

⁷³ Marzuki Wahid was born on 20 August 1971 in Cirebon, West Java. He is a currently a PhD student at the State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta. For the past year Wahid has been based at the Australian National University (ANU), undertaking research for his PhD. He completed his Bachelor's of Arts in 1995 in the Faculty of Islamic Law, at the State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta and his Master's of Islamic Law at the State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta in 1998. Since 1998 he has been a lecturer in the Faculty Islamic Law, at the State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung.

See: <http://www.cils.unimelb.edu.au/index.cfm?objectid=DA586C59-E22A-FF58-946A7984D08EDAAA>

and propagate a critical discourse regarding religion, directed towards social change that is fair and just, (2) to facilitate empowerment of oppressed communities through education and strengthening participation in the utilisation of resources, and (3) to encourage the creation of a society that is democratic and tolerant of ethnic, class, gender and religious differences. To implement these missions, Fahmina strongly holds to its main values such as integrity and transparency, consistency and self reliance, harmony and a sense of community, and equality and gender equity.⁷⁴

Since its establishment, Fahmina has carried out a number of programs and activities that have contributed to change, both at a community level and policy-making level, particularly changes which affect community rights. Since 2001, female victims, their families and community advocacy groups have requested that Fahmina take action on their behalf, and become involved in direct advocacy for victims of violence. Although Fahmina has been involved in cases of direct advocacy, initially, it was not as intensive or as numerous as those handled by advocacy groups. At the time of its establishment, Fahmina preferred to work strategically with regard to the development of culture and understanding of religion, in order that it may become a basis for the realisation of justice and advocacy for the disenfranchised. It was not until later that Fahmina became directly involved in some advocacy cases.

In 2001, for instance, Fahmina facilitated the establishment of a women's crisis centre, 'Mawar Balqis', based in the *pesantren* community of Dar al-Tauhid Arjawinangun of Cirebon (owned by KH Hussein Muhammad). This centre, with the support of other several parties, has become a significant community force in supporting and handling cases of violence against women. The Mawar Balqis 2007 Report states that since 2001 it has handled 643 cases of violence against women, 58 per cent of which were domestic violence cases. In the last three months of 2007, for instance, Fahmina was involved with the following different types of direct advocacy cases: (1) that of three women, with a family connection in Cirebon, who had been sold as commercial sex workers in Lubuk Linggau, South Sumatera, (2) the case of a woman who died as a result of burns inflicted by her husband, (3) a case of domestic violence as result of a dismissal from a private company, (4) assisting and bringing back home some Acehnese women who were victims of violence perpetrated by organised criminals in Cirebon, (5) demanding alimony, medical expenses and recognition of paternity in the *Lembaga Pemasyarakatan* Gintung Lor cases, (6) assisting the cases of female migrant workers and victims of domestic violence in Majalengka, Indramayu and Cirebon, West Java. In 2005, Fahmina also urged the Indramayu District Government to devise a regulation to protect migrant workers, in particular, the protection of women from acts of violence or crime. It resulted in the creation of District regulation No. 12/2005 regarding the prohibition of 'Trafficking for the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children & Women' in Indramayu.

Although Fahmina prefers to focus on gender advocacy through cultural transformation, directly assisting advocacy cases strengthens their strategic work in developing a critical Islamic discourse that is friendly to women and based on gender equity. Fahmina's activities in cultural transformation take several forms and are both a primary and cross-cutting issue in their programs. These include courses, training, discussion and religious text study groups, writing prayers and publishing books, al-

⁷⁴ See: www.fahmina.or.id

Basyar and Blakasuta bulletins as well as publishing articles in local and national media. These programs are addressed at two target groups: women's rights activists and religious preachers, particularly those from *pesantren*. Indeed, in 2004 woman's rights activists within Fahmina carried out a course on Islam and gender. This course was attended by 28 women's rights activists from various regions of Indonesia. This course also resulted in a book titled '*Dawrah Fiqh Perempuan: A Training Course on Islam & Gender*'. This book would later be used in other programs, namely the training sessions for members of an Acehnese women's rights group and advocacy groups in Bangkalan Madura, East Java as well as Muslim women's rights activists from Davao City, in the Philippines 2007. About two thousand copies of that book were distributed to some activists and women's groups. The book was also translated into English and later distributed to national, regional and international NGO's. The second group, religious preachers from *pesantren* and Fahmina, ran the same programs.⁷⁵

From 2007 to 2009 Fahmina created a program of strengthening community-level task forces in West Java regarding women's rights and personal security. This program was aimed at combating and raising awareness on the dangers of human trafficking through a public campaign involving the production and distribution of leaflets and regular radio talk shows. Fahmina also created an anti-trafficking program for religious and community leaders in Situbondo, East Java, since they were already working to raise awareness in their communities about the danger of human trafficking and various efforts of protection through the publication of a handbook for *madrasah* (Islamic school) teachers and students.⁷⁶

4. – Democracy

In an essay titled '*Islam and Nation in the Post-Suharto Era*', as quoted by Mona Abuza, Robert Hefner writes that the largest audience for democratic and pluralistic ideas in Indonesia, since the late 1980s, has been reform-minded Muslim democrats, not secular-nationalist democrats. Nowhere in the Muslim world have Muslim intellectuals engaged in ideas of democracy, civil society, pluralism and the rule of law with such vigour and confidence equal to that of Indonesian Muslims.⁷⁷ His comments were based on the role that Islamic forces played in the pro-democracy movement in Indonesia. When the Suharto authoritarian regime still rested on their laurels, the two largest Muslim organizations, NU and Muhammadiyah, with their young and progressive leaders, such as the late Abdurrahman Wahid and A. Syafii Maarif, were already at the forefront of Muslim intellectual efforts to forge an understanding of democracy in an Islamic context. They argued that Islam should be the basis for the country's democratic development and the building of civil society. Going further than simply discussing the compatibility between Islam and democracy, they pointed out the ways in which Islam supported human rights, pluralism, gender equality and civil liberties. In their thesis, which has cast much influence on more than 70 million followers, democratic values are inherently

⁷⁵ See '*Fahmina Institute: 7 Years' Upholding Tradition for Justice & Democracy*' in: http://www.fahmina.or.id/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=581&Itemid=59

⁷⁶ See "Projects" in '*The Asia Foundation*'

also: <http://asiafoundation.org/project/projectsearch.php?country=indonesia&programLimit=2&year=#>

⁷⁷ Abuza, Zachary *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* (Boulder 2003) p. 68

rooted within Islam. Apart from research, they also engaged practical 'democracy education' for rural, poorly educated, and marginalised populations who had very little knowledge or experience democratic practices, and even less understanding of how to participate in democratic governance.⁷⁸ The NU and Muhammadiyah have also been clearly outspoken in their defence of the *Pancasila*-based-state and their objections to the Jakarta Charter.

The Maarif Institute (MI) was established on 28 February 2003 by Prof. DR. Ahmad Syafii Maarif,⁷⁹ who was the former leader of Muhammadiyah, the second largest Muslim group in Indonesia. Currently, MI's Executive Director is Fajar Riza ul-Haq⁸⁰, who replaced the former Executive Director, Raja Juli Antoni, in 2008. MI's fundamental focus is to develop interfaith dialogue, but also develop dialogue between different cultures and civilisations in order to build up future cooperation. It also promotes the strengthening of civil society by expanding democratic vision and dialogue. The founding statute of this organisation asserts that MI is a non-profit NGO committed to remaining as a cultural institution that promotes the value of Islam, humanity and *KeIndonesiaan* (Indonesian-ness). These three tenets are based on the social and intellectual visions of Ahmad Syafii Maarif.

MI has coordinates several activities and programmes, they include research, publishing journals and books, creating a data-base for MI networks, developing the role of MI researchers, building college student inter-city networks, inter-campus networks, providing lectures and conferences. It is commonly perceived that the programs and activities of MI are also closely connected to the sociological needs of Muhammadiyah, although there is no organisational relationship between both groups. Muhammadiyah is widely understood to be the largest representation group of moderate Muslims in Indonesia, which devotes its activities to the promotion of Islamic thought, *da'wa* and social services. Through MI, young Muhammadiyah members, under the supervision of A. Syafii Maarif, seek to promote the reformation of Islamic thought within Muhammadiyah groups, enlightening and empowering moderate Muslim elements in Indonesia.

The strategic agenda that frames MI's programs are many. First, MI wants to strengthen the role of Islamic NGO's concerned with democratic issues, especially those NGOs that have a cultural relationship with Muhammadiyah. MI also wants to build partnership with all Muhammadiyah-based organisations and networks to secure long term progress. The very existence of those organisations, influence the perspective and policies of other Muslim based-organisation at their respective levels. Second, MI also wants to expand the outreach of interfaith dialogue and cooperation through the involvement of religious groups on democracy, social issues and public policies. The active role of 'Gerakan Moral Bangsa' facilitated by MI and KWI (Bishops' Conference of

⁷⁸ SAPC *Islam in Asia* (US-House representative: US Government Printing Office 2004) p. 17

⁷⁹ Ahmad Syafii Maarif was born 31 May 1935 in Sumpur Kudus, West Sumatra. Regarded as a prominent Indonesian intellectual, Ahmad was previously the leader of Muhammadiyah, the second largest Muslim organisation in Indonesia (1998 - 2005) and also the founder of Maarif Institute. At the time of writing this article, besides holding a senior lecturer position at IKIP Yogyakarta, Syafii is also an active spokesperson and writer who promotes moderate Islam.

See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Syafii_Maarif

⁸⁰ Fajar Riza ul-Haq was born 1 February 1979, in Sukabumi, West Java. He obtained a bachelor's degree from UMS (Solo Muhammadiyah University). During his studies, he was a head of IMM (Muhammadiyah Student Association), Solo Branch. Fajar studied at CRCS-UGM Yogyakarta (2004-07) from which he graduated and obtained a Master's degree (Source: Correspondence by email).

Indonesia), PGI (Communion of Churches in Indonesia) and other religious organisations in response to national issues, is a foundation for disseminating the spirit of inter-faith cooperation in a wider and deeper scale.⁸¹

Since 2007, MI has annually searched for leaders committed to democracy and human rights. Those who are chosen will receive an award from MI. Raja Juli Antoni, a former Executive Director of MI. The award is considered for various social and Islamic figures that have fought for human rights and made substantial democratic achievements in their respective fields. A. Syafii Maarif said that MI must defend the nation's democracy in a concrete way and not with vulnerable pretences. Also, that he was irked by the way present day leaders pay more attention to the popular vote and avoid policies with substance. Syafii is of the opinion that a leader is someone who is committed to working hard for what the people demand. Fajar Riza Ul-Haq, currently the Executive Director of MI, added that this award is unique in its commitment to empowering and rewarding local leadership, namely people who work at the grass-root level when promoting human rights, justice and democracy. Fajar said that the selection process considers the diversity of the nominees' social work to reflect the nation's pluralistic ideals.⁸²

The 2008 MI Awards, for instance, were specifically given to individuals who took significant part in the contribution of positive nationalistic ideals, hence providing leadership models during a time when Indonesia was suffering from a lack of vision in its governance. Three awardees were Cicilia Handayani, Hasanain and Ahmad Tafsir. Handayani from Blitar, East Java, who formed a cross-religious educational institution in his village, a village that has been isolated due to the stigmatisation of being associated with the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party). Hasanain is the caretaker of a woman's *pesantren*, Nurul Haramain in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. He has succeeded in encouraging 427 *madrasah* in the region to establish a Green Book, and to carry out conservation efforts that led to the rehabilitation of 30 hectare of barren hills. Meanwhile, Tafsir, a Head Secretary of Muhammadiyah Semarang Branch, was given the award for his consistent determination in delivering progressive discourse within Muhammadiyah, engaging himself in open cross-religious societal framework and by handling issues associated with a number of marginalised groups.

Another on-the-ground effort that was implemented from 2005 to 2008, organised by MI and in cooperation with the Ford Foundation, has been the Good Governance Project. This project was launched in three local *kabupaten* (district), in three provinces, namely Lampung, Yogyakarta and Central Java. The inter-religious leaders also acted as keen observers to monitor the progress and development of the project. According to Syafii Maarif, the purpose of the project was to find hard-facts on the extent to which local government carried out their duties efficiently and effectively while serving people in their respective territories. There were three categories used by the project to measure and evaluate either the success or the failure of local government in executing their functions as public servants. These three categories included transparency, accountability and efficiency, of which they regard as pre-requisites for creating good governance. Syafii explained that in August 2008, this project came to an end and was lauded as a great

⁸¹ See MI official website at: www.maarifinstitute.org

⁸² See Institute's Annual Award *The Jakarta Post* (3 February 2010)

Also see: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/02/03/institute's-annual-award-underway.html>

success. The project can be distinguished by the significant and crucial role played by inter-religious leaders in the monitoring phase of the project. This significance of this cannot be underestimated.⁸³

According to Fajar Riza, Syafii Maarif himself and MI's program have not been completely immune to critics from their Islamic fundamentalist counterparts, especially considering the MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) has condemned pluralism as a forbidden ideology under Islamic law or *haram*. Irena Handono, a female activist of GAP (Anti Apostasy Movement), for instance, through the fundamentalist Muslim site [swaramuslim.net](http://www.swaramuslim.net),⁸⁴ once condemned Syafii Maarif's intellectual approach regarding religious pluralism when responding to the issue of the Poso Massacre. Meanwhile, the democratic and pluralistic emphasis in MI's ideals is often perceived as a betrayal to Islamic teachings, and their activities have been considered as part of a Western Non-Muslim influenced agenda.⁸⁵

Closing Remarks

Present day liberal Islamic groups are in fact a continuation of the successful liberal-progressive movement that started in the early 1970s; namely that of the two pioneers, the late Cak Nur and Gus Dur. Such groups are also a reaction to the rise in radical-conservative Islamic groups, that in the past had been severely restricted, but since the fall of President Suharto in 1998 have been allowed unprecedented political freedom in the public domain. As a result, radical-conservative Islamic groups are now able to freely express and articulate their conservative discourse, and sometimes pursue radical activities with greater ease.

Considering their current status and condition, present day liberal Islamic groups have made several developments, furthering the progress of previous generations. First, not only has the amount of liberal Islamic increased, but also the standard of structural organisation within these groups has vastly improved. There is an increased awareness for the need to foster cooperation with other groups that have similar concerns, both in Indonesia and around the world. JIL, for instance, from the outset has claimed to exist for this function, namely to act as a liaison network-organiser among liberal Islamic groups in Indonesian. It also currently acts as a liaison network-organiser throughout Southeast Asia too. The Maarif Institute and Wahid Institute have jointly published an important and controversial book titled 'The Illusion of an Islamic State: Expansion of Transnational Islamist Movements to Indonesia', placing the PKS, HTI, MMI and FPI in a single-box called 'hard-line Islam'. Second, liberal Islamic groups are now concerned with a wider range of new and more specific issues. Surprisingly, not all of those issues are directly related to religious matters, aspects of civil life such as social, economic, cultural and political matters are broached too. Rahima and Fahmina, for instance, are concerned with new issues such as the spread of HIV-AIDS, female migrant-workers, the trafficking of women, homosexuality and mixed-marriage. Third, regarding methods of disseminating their messages and implementing plans of actions, liberal Islamic groups now not only

⁸³ Maarif, Ahmad Syafii *Waging Peace Through Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation: An Indonesian Experience* (Paper Presented at the 2008 Magsaysay Awardees' Lecture Series, Magsaysay Centre, Manila, 2 September 2008)

See: <http://www.rmaf.org.ph/Awardees/Lecture/LectureMaarifAhm.html>

⁸⁴ Handono, Irena 'Kabut Syafii Maarif'

in: http://www.swaramuslim.net/more.php?id=5407_0_1_0_M (Accessed on 3 April 2010).

⁸⁵ Correspondence with Fajar Riza by Email.

focus on creating seminars and discussions aimed at elite and educated audiences, but also now work with grass-root level sections of society by creating specific and pragmatic programs orientated at addressing their needs and solving their problems. Liberal Islamic groups are also taking benefit from contemporary-technological advances in media, such as the internet (through websites, mailing-lists and social networking sites), broadcasting (radio & TV), print media, and book publications to spread their discourses. Consequently, their activism reaches wider audiences, including those in rural and remote areas. Fourth, regarding any form of counter argument and challenge from radical-conservative Muslims, liberal-Islamic groups have successfully overcome them, and mostly done in peaceful fashion, through debates, conflict mediation, books, articles, and even legal prosecutions.

With the aforementioned efforts, liberal-Islamic groups have continued to survive, and are continuing their activism by promoting liberal-progressive Islamic discourses in Indonesia. Their existence, in the current perspective of political democracy, brings great expectations to the bright future of Indonesian Islam. Such expectations may be attainable with the tireless efforts of liberal Islamic groups. The reinterpretation and understanding of Islamic history and doctrines, parallel with the situation and conditions of the contemporary world, will hopefully help Indonesia realise those expectations in the near future.