Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia

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6 The Internet, cyber-religion, and authority

The case of the Indonesian Liberal Islam Network

Muhamad Ali

Gary R. Bunt's recent notion of "iMuslims: rewiring the House of Islam" suggests a new type of Muslim who regularly uses the Internet for a wide variety of purposes that complement or alternate with offline networks (Bunt 2009: 34–5). But his cases focus on the Wahhabi and Salafi networks and marginalize the liberal networks. The case of the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Liberal Islam, JIL), whose base is in Indonesia, shows that Muslim discourses are imagined both within and beyond the traditional space of "the House of Islam." This chapter seeks to analyze the extent to which the Internet has shaped Islamic discourse and Muslim networking, particularly among those viewing themselves as liberal Muslims. It investigates how liberals play an increasing role in constructing and disseminating their views in competition and in coexistence with the "fundamentalist" Muslims in cyberspace as well as through the printed media and face-to-face communities.[1] It offers a case of a network community rather than a strict organization, of contestation of religious authorities, of diverse views within the liberal Islam category, and of the limits of cyberspace in terms of determining tolerant and ideological attitudes.

The websites, online discussion forums, online editorials, blogs, and friendship networks such as Friendster and Facebook, serve as cross-cultural, cross-boundary modes of communication and interactions, but at the same time function as a difference marker of particular religious orientations, often a simple extension of the offline ideological orientations. The permeable boundaries of cyberspace have helped to create new forms of religious alliances, but online activities have also reinforced older forms of religious community. A new sense of public has now emerged not only in "the Muslim world," but in the worlds of other religious and non-religious communities.[2] The new media, and its associated networks of new people and new forms of community, has created a sense of a new Muslim public, but the extent of newness and effectiveness varies according to different networks and contextual situations.[3] This may imply more openness and tolerance among online activists. However, traditional pre-existing ideological attitudes remain and in many cases become reinforced in cyberspace.

iMuslims and cyber-Islams

Cyberspace, originally the imaginary spaces where computer stimulations occurred, is now used more generally for the "place" where the electronic network links a global community of users. The Internet, an international computer network that links other computer networks and even personal computers, has many features: e-mail, newsgroups which post messages about topics and get discussions going, and the World Wide Web, a system that provides rapid access to news and information. If the Internet enables the interconnection of contacts, the Web enables the interconnection of content (Kerckhove 1998: 80). With such functions, the Internet widens Muslim contacts and discourses of Islam. More interpretations of Islamic texts have emerged within changing virtual and non-virtual contexts. Before the Internet, Muslim thinkers and activists could only meet face-to-face to express and discuss their views. Muslim scholars (*ulama*) and lay people (*awwam*) are now able to express and share their views and experiences with others more freely from their computer desks or laptops anywhere in the world.

The Web can transform the minds and feelings of an increasing number of people who are otherwise ignorant, misinformed, passive, or reactive about particular religious issues. Websites can give firsthand information about the principles and messages of particular Muslim groups. Islam has become increasingly pluralistic and complex, so it is in cyberspace that "religious literacy" is hoped to increase.[4] Websites and newsgroups may reduce the intellectual gap between the so-called traditionalists and the modernists, between the elites and the popular, between *santri* (devout Muslims) and *abangan* (nominal Muslims), between the specialists and the generalists, between the liberals and the conservatives, and so forth. The spectrums are not necessarily binary, but for the purpose of simplification of a complex reality, categories become even more fluid via the Internet. While Islam has become diverse offline, it has become even more diverse online. The Internet has shaped Islam into something more complex.

No single movement—traditionalist, modernist, radical, fundamentalist, moderate, or liberal—rejects the use of the Internet. Groups affiliated with these movements use media to serve their purposes. Using these media, many of the fundamentalists can be anti-Western in their discourse, content, and objectives, but they are computer literate and use the Internet to further their anti-Western views. Internet use among these various movements is not necessarily different and the content of what users browse can be very similar. A wide range of information about Islam has enabled the traditionalist, the modernist, the Islamist, and the liberal to become more personalized and more highly contextualized via the Internet.

The Internet is one of many modes for producing and disseminating discourses about Islam. Muslim groups use various media: bulletins, journals, magazines, newspapers, books, sermons, workshops, banners, radio programs, TV programs, as well as the Internet. With the help of all types of media, everyone struggles to win the minds and hearts of people across Indonesia and beyond. Offline competition confined to particular localities among Muslim groups has turned now into a cyberspace struggle. One issue in one small area can become national and global in a matter of minutes. For example, programs put forward by the local regency in Bulu Kumba, South Sulawesi, advocating for female students to wear headscarves and for civil servants to read the Qur'an correctly in 2003, quickly became a national issue, inciting responses from multiple Muslim orientations, including liberal activists located in Jakarta. Although there is still a regional and social gap concerning the use of the Internet in big cities compared to villages and mountainous areas, the increased number and quality of internet cafés side by side with mosques and schools, mostly in big cities, have resulted in new developments: Islamic information has become less centralized, widespread, and popular, and people have felt freer to contest and accept or reject particular religious interpretations and ideologies.

Those iMuslims who have regular access to the Internet are able to view other Muslim worlds and the wider world in a different way from previous generations, and they have more options to diverse patterns of life and more choices to live accordingly. Many iMuslims maintain and reinforce online affiliations and networks at the expense of traditional networks. The impact of the Internet is complex and cannot be generalized for all persons and all cases. As Gary Bunt has pointed out, whether iMuslims believe that their religiosity and "iMuslimness" is intensified by online activities demands further research (Bunt 2009: 280–1). The impact of the Internet, however, can be clearly seen in the ways it has shaped the Muslim community in terms of its organization and networks, as I will describe in this chapter.

The rise of network communities and JIL

Scholars define the Islamic community, or the *ummah*, as an idealized identity across classes, ethnicities, nationalities, and gender. With cyber networks, a sense of Islamic community is not necessarily present across such boundaries when particular communities adhere strongly to particular religious or ideological orientations. The Islamic community in cyberspace can become even more divided into smaller and finite communities of membership. There is the potential for greater fragmentation of the idealized Islamic community.

The rise of JIL cannot be separated from the impact of the Internet. Founded in March 2001, JIL served partly as a counter-movement to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism within the more open political circumstances made possible by President Suharto's fall in 1998. Six young people, namely, Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, Luthfi Assyaukani, Hamid Basyaib, Ihsan Ali Fauzi, Nong Darol Mahmada, and Ahmad Sahal, met with senior journalist and founding editor of news magazine *Tempo*, Goenawan Mohamad, in January 2001. In this meeting, they discussed the possibility of establishing a network that would link different intellectuals and activists concerned with liberal interpretations of Islamic teachings to counter the fundamentalist movement. Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, who became JIL's chief coordinator, contended that while radical Islam grows militant, systematic, and

organized, "liberal Islam" has been unorganized, weak, not militant, not resistant, and unassertive in giving voice to its perspective (Ali 2005: 1–6).

The founders considered their alliance to be a network, so that individuals could have multiple memberships as well as temporary and limited involvement. These young intellectual-activists decided not to create a rigid organization; instead, they established a network, or *jaringan*, because they viewed it as loose, fluid, and virtual.[5] The creation of a collective identity occured in the midst of tensions created by the inadequacy of those means available to achieve personal and collective goals. From these tensions, as well as from close face-to-face inter-action, a heavy emotional investment developed that encouraged individuals to share in the collective identity. From the outset, there was a debate about the nature of such a network.

The concept of "submerged networks" in social movement studies describes the ways in which networks function as "cultural laboratories" submerged within civil society (Melucci 1996: 144). From the "submerged network" perspective, the reason for choosing a network may be explained in the following way: more members are expected to be recruited because their new JIL membership does not require them to leave their original organizational affiliation. Further, people tend to have multiple memberships. Muslims and non-Muslims who are concerned about Islamic liberalism are welcome to join the ranks of JIL's activists, members, contributors, or supporters. A strict organization limits the range of movement of its activists, who have emerged from among those young intellectuals, students, professionals, and others, whose access to the Internet enables them to be in constant communication without leaving their own offices. To put it another way, a network makes it possible for activists to be involved in the discourses and activities regardless of time and place constraints (Ali 2005: 7–8).

Thus, with both offline meetings and the Internet, a sense of difference has often become reinforced, although network membership is voluntary and fluid. The Internet is an important tool, but it becomes effective only with young intel-lectuals and activists who have courage, self-confidence, creative imagination, and religious knowledge. The emergence of these young elites is also attributed to higher education, greater access to new media, more frequent travel, contact and reading. Here the Internet provides more efficient and immediate virtual interac-tion between dispersed makers of Islamic discourse and Muslim audiences, and provides new types of networking opportunities.

The concept of community among "liberal" Muslims is not global if "global" encompasses every Muslim. Their *ummah* was and still is the *ummah* of "liberal" Muslims. At the same time, the *ummah* of JIL continues to be intellectually linked to other like-minded individuals who have bases all over the world. JIL is linked to the Community of *Utan Kayu*, *Journal Kalam*, and Radio 68H, located in the same complex in Jakarta, but it continues to develop itself into an epistemic community of contributors, followers, sympathizers, and critics, non-Muslims, and non-native Indonesians.[6] The moderator of the JIL mailing list states that the website is for anyone interested in disseminating critical, progressive, and pluralist interpretations of Islam. At the same time, one may have multiple organizational affiliations; for example, a member of JIL can be a member of NU, Muhammadiyah, the Freedom Institute, the International Conference for Religion and Peace, the Interfaith forums (Interfidei and MADIA), an Islamic State University, and so forth. Anyone can also be non-affiliated to any network or institution.

The sense of "we-ness" (Dawson 2004: 77) becomes reinforced not by material fraternity or educational common grounds, but by a common concern and vision: liberal Islam is to a significant extent, shaped by a common "enemy" constructed in the struggle to interpret Islam, that is, fundamentalist Islam. The fundamentalist groups have continued to use the Internet to pursue their missions and objectives. For example, Laskar Jihad (now dissolved), the Sabili magazine, the Justice and Prosperity Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS), are active users of the Internet. Discourses of anti-Americanism and religious extremism take online forms as well (Lim 2005: 2–10).

The Internet shapes the way in which such discourses spread across religious and national boundaries. The sense of "we-ness," as members of a group or of an imagined Islamic community, become stronger when the Internet helps connect virtually and immediately peoples from anywhere who share the same ideological orientation. The sense of self versus others can remain strong and even become reinforced when people see the Internet as the battlefield.

Online "we-ness" can be more fluid and loose, and the degree of a sense of belonging to a particular community varies from person to person and operates according to changing contexts. The liberal Islam network defined their objectives in terms of the competition between the "progressives" and the "conservatives," thus the "dialectic of movement and countermovement" emerges endlessly in the struggle for winning the hearts and minds of the moderate Muslim majority and the public at large (Cowan 2004: 255). This sense of competition serves at the same time as one of the driving factors for a greater need to improve the use of the Internet in disseminating Islamic progressivism and liberalism on the one hand, and its use among conservatives, on the other.

Online discussion and JIL websites

The greater sense of competition for the hearts and minds of Muslims continues to be expressed and reinforced in JIL's discussion/yahoo newsgroup. The news/discussion group continues to develop liberal Islamic interpretations according to their set principles, and to disseminate them to their members, to create dialogical spaces which are open and free from traditional religious authority's pressures, to create a healthy debate and a just, democratic, and human social and political superstructure. The founders see democracy as the best system in pursuing and supporting these aims. Its membership is open, increasing from about ten in March 2001, to 1204 in October 2008, mostly residing in Indonesia, but now scattered throughout the United States, Great Britain, Australia, France, Germany, and Egypt, among other countries. The number of messages, from 2001 to 2008, ranged from 30 to 577 per month, indicating the high degree of activity.[7]

Individuals become interested in joining the Discussion Group for different reasons. For example, Mohamad Guntur Romli, a graduate from Al-Azhar University in Islamic philosophy, stated that he was driven to join the Network because of his support for Islamic reform, which had been previously advocated by senior Indonesian Muslim scholars including Harun Nasution, Nurcholish Madjid, and Abdurrahman Wahid (Romli 2007: ix). Others, such as Catholic priests and scholars, Protestant scholars, and Ahmadiyya leaders and members, became participants of the Discussion Group because they share with JIL the fight for freedom of religion. Some occasional voices of "outsiders," including members of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia or the PKS have participated in JIL's newsgroup, but such voices did not last. Few ideas of fundamentalist Muslims are posted in the discussion, but these have often become an "imagined rivalry" on the JIL's members' discussion of various issues.

JIL's website, http://islamlib.com/, is open to everyone. The website states its motto on the homepage: "In the name of Allah, God of Mercy, God of Compassion, God of all religions" (*Dengan nama Allah, Tuhan. Pengasih, Tuhan Penyayang, Tuhan Segala Agama*), suggesting the way in which the Network promotes their interpretation of the Qur'an and religious pluralism, despite a variety of meanings expressed by members. Some argue that Islam has its own concept of God, different from that of other religions, but others say that God is essentially one although it has many names and manifestations. As a virtual network, JIL has chosen its own particular interpretation, but allows other possible interpretations of the Qur'an as well.

The website seeks to be accessible to an English-speaking or international audience, with a variety of rubrics.[8] JIL attempts to maintain its position as the most vocal countermovement against religious conservatism. The Internet enables this dialectic and it provides a space for more dialogical, and sometimes emotional conversations through readers' comments. The online readers of the website are from diverse localities and orientations, demonstrating a relatively more democratic and inclusive nature of cyber-religion to the extent that everyone's voices may be posted and heard. However, the webmaster may sometimes censor some language and comments deemed ethically inappropriate. For example, a post on Islam and pornography by a JIL contributor received a wide variety of responses from readers. One of the readers commented, "You do not understand true Islam. You study Islam from countries that are enemies of Islam; You are disgusting (*najis*) and friends of Satan" (translated from Indonesian). The JIL webmaster responded: "Dear readers, you all are smart enough to see the danger of monopolizing truth in front of our eyes" (translated from Indonesian).[9]

Changing features of cyberspace have further changed the mode of interaction among Internet users. Thus, since 2005, all articles posted on the JIL website have spaces for comments by visitors. The comments are either supportive or dismissive of the issues raised or approaches used. Although there is no feedback from the writer in response to the comments by the visitor, the space at least serves as a tool for relating one another with the topics and with the writer, and both the writer and the audience become part of a virtual network of relationships.

As the Internet has changed, blogging has become an important communication tool for iMuslims. Unlike the websites that are often organizational and communal, blogging shows how Islam can be personal as well as communal despite particular social affiliations and networks.

Blogging: personalization of religiosity and secularity

Blogging has created an even more fragmented sense of religious authority and discourse. The personal character of blogging shapes the self-assertiveness of particular religious beliefs and interpretations. Blogs serve as another tool for creating a personal network of discourse, often complementary to the communal networks such as JIL and others. Among JIL members, Ulil Abdalla (hereafter Ulil), who is currently pursuing a doctorate in religion at Harvard University in the United States, is the most active blogger. His personal blog http://ulil.net has the motto (translated from Indonesian): "A strong faith will not fear doubts. A weak and dogmatic faith is always worried about questioning and doubts." Ulil expresses his attitude toward the relationship between faith and reason. The self-portrait, a feature in the blog, contains his short autobiography, as follows (translated from Indonesian):

I was born in a very traditional *santri* family. My grandfather was a village religious teacher who had a flexible understanding of religion, in some respects, but his beliefs could also be rigid and "hard." He, for example, did not allow a woman to go to school, perhaps in accordance with a fatwa [religious edict] issued by Ibn Hajjar al-Haitami (d.1566) in his work "*Al-Fatawa al-Hadithiyya*" (Contemporary Edicts). Therefore none of his daughters went to school. However, my father disagreed with that fatwa and chose to bring his daughters to school. My mother said, "Times have changed so girls should go to school." Although my mother was formally uneducated, she was able to consider the issue contextually. This experience has had an impact on my thinking and shaped my way of understanding the next phase of Islam.

In response to this self-portrait, readers expressed comments according to their own religious perspectives, as indicated below (translated from Indonesian):

Assalamu'alaikum Mas[10] Ulil, maybe I am one of the fans of your writings. I own almost all the books that you published (although mostly only photocopies). Your writings have really opened my horizons about Islam, giving me enlightenment. *Mas*, please don't stop producing. Thank you.

Mas Ulil, I doubt that you are Muslim, I want to see your picture praying at a Friday congregation.

Assalamu'alaikum. I hope that by studying in a country full of violence [a reference to the United States], you return to a straight path.

I can accept some of your opinions, but do not accept others. I am confused.

I am a non-Muslim. I am sad to see Islam today, especially in Indonesia. [Motivational author] Steven Covey has explained that everything begins with perception, and perception is formed by context. The idea of freedom that you are promoting has a positive impact on my understanding of Islam which has deteriorated into a negative stigma in the world today. In your hands, Islam will be a blessing, not a disaster for humanity.

Here is Ulil, one of the Muslim thinkers who have become victims of character assassination by the media of the extremist puritans. I do not side with any Islamic group, I accept what is good and reject what is harmful. Good luck, *Mas* Ulil.

Ulil's postings in his blogs have sparked supportive, critical, and ambivalent comments. In his blogposts, he represents himself rather than the JIL network. Personalization of views has now become more common through blogging, unlike the websites and online group discussions. For example, in her personal blog, Nong Darol Mahmada, another JIL activist, writes:

I was born and raised in a *santri* (religiously devout) family. I have studied Islam since childhood. After elementary school, I attended Pesantren Cipasung in Tasikmalaya for junior and senior high school. Then I attended the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) Jakarta, but I gained more knowledge at the study club called *Formaci* (a Forum for Ciputat students), conferences, discussions and street activities. I have worked as a journalist for Interactive *Tempo* and the Institute for Information Studies (ISAI) in Jakarta. In March 2001, together with *Mas* Ulil, *Mas* Luthfi, *Mas* Goen [Goenawan Mohamad], and others, we founded an Islamic Liberal Netwok and up to now have we maintained it regardless of the risks of being beaten to the point of shedding blood and tears. This is a true struggle in creating a healthy public debate about Islam. Nowadays I have spent much more time helping *Mas Rizal* at the Freedom Institute (http://www.freedom-institute.org) and have been enjoying life being a mother of Andrea.[11]

Nong Mahmada's blog expresses the importance of being an activist and being a mother. Her blogs also contain her poems, writings by others, and pictures of her wearing both Muslim dress and Western attire. Nong also writes about being terrorized by unknown authors through the Internet. As Gary Bunt points out, many elements of the mundane and trivial are also located in blogs and these offer insights into popular culture and ethics, including people's personal interpretations of Islam (Bunt 2009: 133). The religious and the secular, the private and the public, can be blurred in blogs when iMuslims use them without fear and without limits. They can respond to concerns, questions, and criticisms posed by readers throughout the world.

Blogging provides a space for JIL activists to express their voices in more open ways, to be read by not only like-minded audiences, but critics as well. Blogs can also be used to promote more openness for debate and criticism. In one of his posts, Ulil wrote on whether pluralism discourages discussion and criticism. In this blog, he made reference to an imaginary critic:

If you are democrat, liberal, or pluralist, who respects difference, why do you criticize others whose views are different from yours? Why don't you just let those views exist? If you criticize them, you are not a true pluralist. This is a comment I often receive when I criticize other ideologies, doctrines, and the views of fundamentalist and radical groups. If I were a true liberal Muslim who promotes respect of religious views among Muslims, why did I criticize them? Aren't these attitudes contradictory, reflecting a double-standard? At the surface, these opinions seem right, but if I closely look at these, I understand that this is just a misunderstanding of pluralism, democracy, liberalism, and other similar concepts. Pluralism cannot be separated from the basic principle of democracy whose spirit is that every individual and group is given full and equal rights to expression according to their beliefs. No one should be excluded from expressing their views, whether they disagree or not with political or religious authorities. But respecting other views does not mean stopping criticism and investigation of their views. In democracy, there is the right to criticize. From there, a public debate is conducted to test the views.[12]

Here Ulil as a representative of JIL is promoting a respectful but critical attitude toward the views of others. He not only promotes tolerance of other views, but he does this through means that allow him to express this position without fear. However, this does not mean that everyone will agree with him. One reader responded to the abovementioned post as follows:

Don't use a double-standard, *Mas*. I often read your criticisms against the Front of Islamic Defenders (*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI) and the like, but I have never read your criticisms against Ahmadiyya. Or criticisms against the legality of homosexuality promoted by Musdah Mulia. Or against Christian hard-liners.[13]

This example shows how blogs can provide dialogic communication among bloggers without face-to-face meetings where criticisms are less possible and people tend to be reluctant about expressing their views. Criticisms in the physical absence of the criticized are made possible by online communication. The advantage of this is that people can understand the views of others without waiting for meetings and this can prevent prejudices or reduce tensions that may arise in face-to-face contacts.

In another post, Ulil thanked his readers for their comments and explained why he was not able to respond to some of them. He also reminded his readers of the ethics of dialogue, especially in terms of the use of address and language (translated from Indonesian):

Ma lam yashkur al-nas, lam yashkur al-Lah, "those who do not thank other human beings are not thankful to God." This is a *hadith* that we often hear from religious preachers and teachers. In this letter, I would like to thank all readers. There is no greater satisfaction than when what we write is read by the public. Thanks to anyone who has spent their time writing their comments, either criticism or praise and support, which are very useful for me. The comments show me that the readers care about the issues I discuss. However, I do not post some comments that I consider too harsh and unethical in the use of language. I respect disagreement, but I want it to operate in an ethical manner. I do not include the comments that are supportive to what I write; I include those which disagree with me. I apologize if I do not respond to your comments, for different reasons; I do not think I should respond to every comment because the comment is not serious, or because it simply supports what I write, or because it balances what I write so that readers can make their judgment, or because I am not able to respond to certain issues that I do not know about. I am not a super human who can answer all questions. Even Imam Malik ibn Anas, the founder of the Maliki school of thought, when asked about many things, often replied, "*la adri*"; "I do not know." Oftentimes I simply do not have time to respond to comments.[14]

The responses in Ulil's blog show how interactions between bloggers and their audiences go beyond simple questions and answers. Some of his readers have accepted his views while others believe that he has made mistakes in relation to God and Islam, as shown in the following posts:

Mas, as a human being, I am obliged to forgive someone who asks forgiveness. So I forgive you, *Mas* Ulil. But *Mas* Ulil should ask forgiveness to Allah first because my forgiveness will be useless if He remains mad at you.

Thanks also to *Mas* Ulil, who has spent his time and knowledge with his writings. Regarding swearing or harsh words by the commentators in your blog, I see them as normal in our society with such a low degree of intellectuality. In other forums and blogs concerning sports or entertainment, swearing is common, let alone concerning belief! If we like what we read, we read; if we don't like what we read, we don't read.[15]

Again, these posts show that Ulil's interpretations of religion in his blog are more personal than his views in the Discussion Group and websites. In his blog, he shows his own self-categorization of his views and reflections. His readers, including Muslims as well as non-Muslims, read his stories and articles directly from their personal perspectives.

In blogs, personal experiences and religiosity can intersect, and this intersection will become public immediately. Ulil, for example, has written some light stories, such as about his first day of fasting during Ramadhan in Boston. He told the readers how his wife and he invited their non-Muslim neighbors to break the fast

together at their apartment; and how his Christian friend often discussed with him Islamic and Christian topics, such as the concept of justice according to both religions, and respect between faiths. In this story, Ulil was surprised to know that his Christian friend also performed the fast one day because "I want to know what it feels like to be a Muslim." Ulil concluded his story: "The lesson I have taken from this: building a path of dialogue with other religions is possible if we are willing to be open and do not develop a mentality of distrust of other religions."[16]

In other postings, Ulil Abdallah reflects on a variety of issues, from "Looking at the Islamic World after the Olympics in Beijing," "Understanding Holy Scriptures non-apologetically," "About Utopia and Slow Democracy," "A 'Muslim' Note on John Shelby Spong," and "Karate, Family and Cultural Relativism." As can be seen from the titles of the postings, personal interpretations of Islam and the mundane aspects of life are mixed. In a post entitled "A Muslim Note on John Shelby Spong" (in English), he wrote:

John Shelby Spong is one of my favorite theologians. All of his works stuff my private library, including my favorite, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die.* Irrespective of the fact that the message contained in the book is addressed toward Christians, it speaks very well to the very problem faced by Muslims nowadays. Islam and Christianity are faced with the same problem, i.e. the problem of literalistic readings of the Scripture. Spong wrote that there are myriad doctrines both in Islam and Christianity that we who live in the twenty-first century can no longer believe in without being subject to reinterpretation. Let me end by quoting some lines from Spong as follows: *Institutional Christianity seems fearful of inquiry, fearful of freedom, fearful of knowledge – indeed, fearful of anything except its own repetitious propaganda, which has its own origins in a world that none of us any longer inhabits* . . . You can replace "Christianity" here with "Islam," and yet the whole sentence still makes sense.[17]

This particular posting tells us about language usage among Indonesian liberal bloggers. The Islamic blogosphere that Gary Bunt has explored is in Arabic and English. But among many Indonesian Muslims, local bloggers use local languages due to lack of proficiency in Arabic and English and due to the fact that the targeted audience is predominantly Indonesian. Ulil's blog readers are mostly Indonesian; only a few times does he write in English. One of his English postings is left without comment, perhaps suggesting his unpopularity among English readers. The crucial thing, however, as Ulil himself realizes, is that blogging gives him more freedom to express his personal faith and views without fear.[18] This is in line with Zizi Papacharissi's observation: "blogs present a personalized, self-referential, and self-serving use of the Internet, a medium first introduced as informational and then established on the social communication avenues it provided" (Papacharissi 2007: 37). The use of blogs and their impact seems to have competed with other more widespread and comprehensive tools of social networking, especially Facebook. Among Indonesians, including Indonesian Muslims, Facebook

has, at the time of writing this chapter (June 2010), become the most popular online medium of social networking. All cell phone companies, including the Blackberry, include Facebook as a feature to attract customers. Among my Facebook friends, for example, there are leaders of Islamic organizations, members of the Council of Islamic Clerics (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI), politicians, businessmen, academics, artists, and so forth. The following is an attempt to see the extent to which Facebook has so far shaped Islamic liberal views among Indonesians in Indonesia and elsewhere.

Facebook: new social networking for iMuslims

Facebook puts religion in the social context of a wide network of people, who may or may not share the same religion and ideology, but still are regarded as "friends." Within this larger network of "friends," religion is just one of many activities that people participate in. Some of them practice religion on a daily basis, while others do not at all. Religious identity goes hand in hand with other forms of identity: parenting, political activism, music-making, cooking, etc. This kind of presentation of identity is different from face-to-face interaction, at the *mesjid* (mosque) for example, or at the *pesantren* (religious school). As such, Facebook gives people many ways to articulate religion with these other identities. The quality and texture of these interactions are different, as I will discuss in the following section.

Ulil and many JIL members now use Facebook. Ulil continues to invite others in the Discussion Board to consider joining Facebook for what he sees as its numerous benefits. Many Facebook members have also requested to be his "friend." Like his blog, Facebook is personal to him, but Facebook has more features and is more controlled and managed than his blog. Publishing one's identity on cyberspace is voluntary, but one can choose to publicize parts of his or her identity: name, date of birth, relationship status, religious views, political views, networks, and so forth.

With Facebook, Ulil is now more assertive about his self-identity: his locality (Boston, MA), sex (male), birthday, relationship status (married), political views ("liberal"), and religious views (*Islam-Sunni-Ash'ari-Sufi-Shafi'I* or liberal-progressive). What is new about his self-identification is that he juxtaposes multiple identities. His family and educational tradition of *pesantren* has been Islam and Sunni, rather than Shi'a or Ahmady. The jurisprudence school of thought is the well-established Shafi'i school in Southeast Asia. For Ulil Abdalla, being a follower of Sunni and Shafi'i represents his early upbringing and religious background. He is comfortable with and is proud of carrying these identities: being a member of a community of Indonesian Muslims, rather than, for example, a community of Iranian Shi'ite Muslims, or American Muslims. In one of his posts, Ulil considers himself as someone who is in the process of "becoming a Muslim liberal" (*menjadi Muslim liberal*), because he believes there is no final stage of being Muslim.

On the Internet, as stated above, one of the benefits of living in cyberspace is the provision of freedom of expression and freedom from fear. When Ulil wrote

an article in the newspaper *Kompas* in 2003, he received a death *fatwa* from the Forum of Religious Scholars (*Forum Umat Islam Indonesia*) led by cleric Mr. Athian Ali. But Ulil's views on the Internet through the Discussion Group and now Facebook have been even more confrontational toward fundamentalists. The Discussion Group, Facebook, and blogs gave Ulil and others more freedom and less direct physical relationship with outsiders. The Internet's borderless quality makes it difficult for traditional religious authorities to control and for hardliners to take action in face-to-face confrontations.

Freedom to express one's personal information is one of Facebook's features that Ulil feels comfortable with. Facebook also gives freedom to make information available for people. Ulil shows that he has a wide variety of interests, as indicated on his Profile page (translated from Indonesian):

> Interests: Academic interests: Islamic philosophy and theology, Islamic law, Arabic literature, contemporary Islamic thought.

> General interest: writing, reading novels (I like those by Borges, Orhan Pamuk, Gabriel G. Marquez, and V.S. Naipaul), watching movie (I like movies by Abbas Kiarostami and Akira Kurosawa), eating out (my favorite is Korean, Japanese, and, of course, Indonesian food), listening to music (my favorite is Louis Armstrong, Omar Faruk Tekbilek, Umm Kulthum, Sarah Brightman).

> Favorite Music: Jazz and classic

> Favorite Movies: Seven Samurai, Rashomon, Throne of Blood (all by Akira Kurosawa), Taste of Cherry, Godfather, Gandhi (starring Ben Kingsley), all series of Willis' Die Hard and Sly's Rocky. But I also like "sexy" Angelina Jolie in "Original Sin."

Ulil's list of memberships includes: Muhammadiyah; Reject the Anti-Pornography Bill; Paramadina; Tareqa Bani Alawi; Abdolkarim Soroush; *Rumah Film*; Indonesian Progressive Radio Network; Indonesian Muslim; *Pecinta Buku*; Komunitas NU AS-Canada; Islamic-World-Studies; Muslims, Christians, & Jews Unity; and Love For All Hatred for None. People who read this personal information may now be more aware of his diverse and seemingly conflicting affiliations and networks along with diverse hobbies and interests. The picture of Ulil, along with his being an icon of the JIL network, is more complete than ever before. All this information may not be relevant to many of his friends, but Ulil's publicity can shape the way in which others see him as having multiple identities and activities.

What is striking about this list is that he can be simultaneously a member of Muhammadiyah and NU, two competing and collaborating religious organizations in Indonesia. This is striking for Indonesians, and this is noteworthy particularly because traditional offline organizations require membership cards. The Internet provides looseness instead of strict membership and affiliation. There is no legal implication of personal claims to membership in NU, Muhammadiyah, or other

organizations. Ulil has listed his affiliation with some NGOs working on interfaith dialogue and cooperation, such as an open group called Christians, Jews, and Muslims. In short, Facebook allows an individual to freely express his or her own identity, which may have been traditionally contradictory and disconnected. Juxtaposition of categories and identities has now become more possible in cyberspace due to the freedom that the Internet has provided and the accessibility and popularity of the Internet among an increased number of Indonesians. Multiplicity of Islamic and other religious identities on Facebook is also more acceptable because of the absence of censorship by traditional religious authorities (such as the MUI and other groups claiming religious authority). This reveals the unique and important potentiality of the Internet in shaping Muslims' personal freedom.

Facebook also offers other features, such as sharing messages, pictures, and invitations, which can make religious interaction not only more active and colorful, but can blur the distinction between the private and the public, the personal and the academic. The private aspects of one's life become public, and public lives have become located in private and personal rooms. Thus Ulil has a few academic and more non-academic pictures with family and friends. One of the interesting pictures is that of him serving as a leader of a Ramadhan evening prayer (*tarawi*). The other posts exchange words of praise and wishes (e.g. *Wish you A Happy Ied*). One of his posts was on the birthday celebration of his son (translated from Indonesian):

> Greetings. My first son, Ektada Bennabi Mohamad (meaning: following Prophet Muhammad), whom we call Ben, was invited to birthday parties by his classmates. This morning, he was invited to a birthday party. What is special about a birthday party? Isn't it a trivial or normal thing? Isn't it a forbidden act of religious innovation (*bid'a*) that was never existent during the Prophet Muhammad's time? Isn't it a Western tradition? But the invitation is psychologically very important for our family. This means that the community where we live has accepted us. It means a process of inclusion or an acceptance of a foreigner, not exclusion, has operated in the community. Of course, accepting here is symbolic, but in social interaction, aren't symbolic things meaningful?[19]

This post attracted the following comments:

> A birthday can become a medium of *silaturahim* (also the tradition of the Prophet), a medium of introspection and learning about life and death, but it can also become a tool of excessiveness (thus forbidden) and arrogance (also forbidden). Everything depends on intention. We, humans, are given freedom to choose.[20]

> I am a member of a *zikir* (spiritual) community, which has received attacks of *bid'a* from other groups. We often receive provocative words in mosques, but we keep smiling.[21]

Ulil replied to the above comments as follows:

> Thank you for your comments. One of the religious understandings that liberal Islam advocates is that Muslims should respect the ways of worship of other groups, either of different religions or of different sects within one religion. To accuse others of being religious innovators or heretic (*bid'a*), according to an Islamic liberal point of view, is inappropriate, because such an act triggers social tension and conflict. I respect any type of worship of other religions and other Islamic groups. Having said this, I do not say that we have to modify our own ways of worship as we please. In the context of Islam, worship (*ibadah*) in general has its exact and rigid regulation, such as prayer five times a day, fasting, and pilgrimmage. Although in some details, there is a difference in interpretation, the general and basic rules are fixed.[22]

To Ulil and other JIL activists, Facebook has thus become a space to exchange ideas, views, and experiences. People can request and be requested to become "friends," suggesting a more equal, or less hierarchical, mode of relationship and interaction. A network of friendship, across different forms of boundaries, has been made possible in cyberspace. This element of egalitarianism in the social network is in line with the dispersion of religious authority traditionally at the hand of the clerics labeled as the *ulama*.

Religious authorities and discourses

With the Internet, religious authority is not entirely lost. It has been transformed. Muslims still need religious authority, but its form and characteristics have changed. In a less hierarchical relationship, such as among JIL members, the traditional religious authority, represented by the MUI, from 1975 to date, has often been challenged, but the Internet allows a more active struggle between the supporters and the challengers of the MUI.

Religious authority and its acceptance and contestation have become part of cyber-Islam in different forms. Although the MUI has its official website spreading information about its executive boards, mission and *fatwas*, individual Muslims have their own ways of consulting on these issues. A Muslim may simply consult his or her peers deemed "more learned" in particular Islamic problems. The religious views online may not be called *fatwa* by the traditional standard, but they may influence people's views on particular issues. Ulil and his colleagues hardly regard their ideas as *fatwa* in the sense of the term used by the institutional *ulama* such as those who are members of the MUI.

In some cases, liberal Muslims view their peer's interpretations of Islam as *fatwas*. A personal opinion of a Muslim thinker can be regarded as a *fatwa*, depending on the view of the person or group that requests it, or the receiving audience. Some members in the JIL Discussion Group use the term *fatwa* for some of Ulil's ideas on certain issues, but the term has not become popular among members. This indicates that a traditional religious authority as attached to MUI

or other independent *ulama* has consulted Ulil and his friends despite the sophistication of their religious discourse. In terms of forms of address, liberal Muslims may still use labels such as *kiai, ustad, syaikh, kanjeng sunan,* and the like for particular individuals recognized as being better versed in the discourse of Islam. A sense of religious authority is seen as necessary and is recognized by JIL members. In opposition to the MUI *fatwas* that often resist criticism or dissent, liberal Muslims are ready to accept resistance and further discussion. For liberal Muslims, there is no such thing as a final religious interpretation. Ulil realizes that his online writings are largely exploratory, and his messages are fluid and receptive to immediate feedback.

The fluid religious interpretations of Ulil's messages sometimes create contradictory responses. Ulil's article on "becoming a liberal Muslim" (posted first on the discussion group, then on the website), which elaborates how he differentiates between the non-rational aspect of Islam related to worship (*ibadah*) and the rational aspect of Islam (*muamalah*), attracted varying responses from readers (translated from Indonesian, with dates posted):

I agree with Ulil; it is my view of Islam. (11/25/2008)

That's right, *Mas* Ulil, although we are obliged to obey God, we cannot just obey without reservation and without rationalization. (11/10/2008)

JIL? Do not proclaim you are Muslim; it is clear that you are promoting the same anti-Muslim message as Abu Jahal during the time of Muhammad . . . remember that![23] (06/28/2008)

I am sorry, brothers, JIL and friends, to interpret the Qur'an, one has to have particular knowledge; I often read articles written by JIL activists which I find are strange (*nyeleneh*), rather foolish (*agak konyol*) and deviant (*sesat*). (09/5/2008)

The wide range of responses by the audience suggests that the religious authority of Ulil in interpreting Islam is both recognized and contested. Agreement, support, criticism, harsh charges, and sometimes hatred demonstrated by viewers toward him and JIL in general indicate a discursive clash, but it also demonstrates the fluid, dynamic, and democratic character of cyber-religion.

In terms of struggles over the meaning of Islam, in cyberspace, Islamic discourse is discussed in more accessible, vernacular terms with some basic reconfigurations of doctrine and practice (Eickelman and Anderson 2003: 12). Perspectives are increasingly diverse among the participants, ranging from popular to academic. The definition of what is liberal, what is Islamic, what is legal, what is ethical, what is heretical, and so forth, has varied. Among JIL members themselves, debate takes place on some key issues such as what Islam means and what Islam should mean.

The online discourse may or may not reflect the offline discourse, depending on the actors and the selections they make. In general, there is no limit to which Islamic discourses can be expressed online. The discourse is located within the increasingly cross-cultural contexts of its users and audiences. Religious discourse, particularly on the JIL's Discussion Group, concerns a wide variety of topics, including the Qur'an and the *Hadiths*, Islamic jurisprudence and its fundamentals, the stories of saints, prophets and Jesus, conversion to and from Islam, *jihad*, caliphate, terrorism, sexuality and homosexuality, pornography, the arts, and sensual dances. This liberal Islamic discourse allows examination and analysis of a wide variety of "texts," from different genres, different geographical settings, different cultural backgrounds and different historical periods (Karaflogka 2007: 9). Ulil has written about different topics referring to the seventh century Qur'an and the *Hadiths*, medieval *fikh* works, twentieth-century Samuel Huntington (American philosopher and political theorist) and Nasr Abu Zaid (an Egyptian theologian based in Holland). The plurality of topics, issues, and problems and the relatively egalitarian attitudes towards other's views circulating in liberal Islamic cyberspace is an indication of how the Internet has shaped the ways in which religious authority has undergone some degree of decentralization.

Decentralization of religious authority, however, does not mean that cyberspace has the power to change every discourse simultaneously. Those who still see the MUI as their supreme religious authority, for example, would not want to consult their peers online in religious matters. They consult books and printed *fatwa* collections. For these people, the MUI remains authoritative through both offline and online media, and Islam online has very little impact in transforming their religious views. For many, there are limits to the cyberspace and online authorities.

Some limits to the cyberspace

The cyber conditions of gender, class, education, and religious orientations, albeit potentially more equal, still reflect the offline conditions of imbalance and inequality. Space and distance barriers are made closer, but cultural, gender, educational, class, and religious barriers are not always dissolved. In many cases, mutual recognition takes place only within particular communities, rather than across communities. Not unlike face-to-face encounters, online encounters are either democratizing or homogenizing. In modern societies, the creation of a common consensus about matters of shared concern, however, does not necessarily operate beyond communal barriers and boundaries. The activities and experiences on the Internet do not operate in a vacuum; social, political, cultural conditions work hand in hand with the vast technological potential of the Internet (Jacobs 2006: 240). The participants and audience of the JIL Discussion Group is widely open but it is still limited to interested or like-minded individuals. Like-mindedness remains a crucial dimension of online interaction when online affiliations and activities are simply an extension of offline organizations and activities. Reinforcement of identity and ideology has resulted from a greater sense of competition between ideologies in the market. The online religious market remains seen as an open market and everyone has the freedom to play in it.

This explains why the Internet cannot completely replace or challenge offline production and transmission of Islamic knowledge. Some of the e-mails on the Discussion Group and blogs have been reproduced and published as printed books (including Ghazali 2005 and Abdalla 2007) with the purpose of obtaining a wider public. Although limited to local or regional community of participants, traditional modes of transmission, from mosque sermons, religious study circles (*halaqah*), classroom education, printed media such as bulletins, magazines, and books serve functions that online modes of transmission do not. Offline spaces have long prevailed and continue to prevail despite the increased usage of the Internet and cyberspace.

Sometimes there are unexpected negative consequences of non-face-to-face communication, such as the spread of rumors, misperceptions, and prejudices toward particular personalities or views that are hard to deal with. Ulil realized these consequences, for example, when his messages were disseminated in print by his critics. These messages were full of distortions and spread *fitnah* (lies and unfounded charges) about himself and the JIL network.[24] In order to avoid misperceptions, Ulil had to write longer essays on the meaning and nature of liberal Muslims and how he understands Islam, published online and offline (Abdalla 2007: 163–232). He is aware that blogs and discussion groups are not sufficient spaces for his more elaborate writing about such serious issues regarding his faith and his views on Islam and liberalism.

Books are more elaborate and more scholarly than blogs or e-mails. For example, Ulil's epilog on how he understands Islam systematically explains the following points: the foundational basis of his beliefs (that "I believe Islam is true"); his ideas about Islamic perfection; the crisis of modern Islam vis-à-vis Western hegemony; the gradualism and historicity of revelation; the unlimited reality and limited text; moral ideas; historical constraint and negotiation; moral inspiration from the Prophet and his companions and Medinan experience; and lastly, on Islam as an open revelation. In a long essay in the book, he quotes and interprets Quranic verses and the *Hadiths*, as well as classical and medieval scholarship by Al-Suyuthi, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Taimiyya. He cites modern sources by Abduh, Rashid Rida, Sayyid Qutb, Khomeini, Ernest Renan, Yusuf Qardhawi, Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Abu Zaid, Mohammed Arkoun, Sayyid Hussein Nasr, Huston Smith, as well as Indonesian authors Nurcholish Madjid and A. Hassan. Unlike the writing in this book, Ulil Abdalla's writings in cyberspace are more dispersed pieces that are less elaborate and less comprehensive, without full quotations and footnotes. Discussion Group conversations and discussions are in different forms, but mostly incorporate casual responses, immediate responses to issues, and answers to questions rather than in-depth analyses and systematic or well-structured arguments such as those found in his academic books, chapters, and scholarly articles.

It may well be argued that the Web allows "a world-wide hearing of every voice" (Karaflogka 2007: 33), even those marginalized by the dominant religious traditions, but websites and discussion groups serve as media for conserving and disseminating certain perspectives which are not necessarily open, inclusive, and pluralist. Pluralization of voices paradoxically contains homogenizing and un-democratizing views as well as heterogenizing and democratizing ones. The image of the Inter-Communication Technology as an open, free, and wholly accessible forum of information exchange is far from reality (Karaflogka 2007: 85). It may be true that cyberspace could undermine hatred of others, fear of others, or xenophobia, minimizing "interreligious hate" among some people, but it could equally increase competition and conflict between groups (Karaflogka 2007: 36).

In cyberspace, one can encounter voices of hatred, ignorance, indifference, and dislike of religious difference and diversity. What is unique about JIL's website, Ulil's blog and Facebook is that such voices are allowed, as long as they are rendered in manners deemed respectful and ethical. On the Internet, one can disseminate attitudes against other views deemed heretical, *kafir* (infidel, disbeliever), *shirk* (associating God with anything else), irreligious, secular, and so forth. A site is monitored by a webmaster affiliated with the network, but the criteria for inclusion depends on the vision and mission of the website. The JIL website is managed by a number of liberal Islam-minded webmasters who play an important role in including and excluding particular content.

Modern attitudes about the acceptance of modern technology that exists across religious and ideological spectrums of Muslims do not necessarily lead one to accept modernist or reformist interpretations of Islam. One can be technologically modern, but remain religiously conservative or even radical. In this case, perhaps, technology is seen simply as part of the *dunia* (this world), having nothing to do with the principles of the *akhirat* (the hereafter). For many liberal Muslims, including members of JIL, Muslims are encouraged to have open and liberal attitudes toward Islam, toward the sacred as well as the profane. Rationality among JIL's members has to be used for critically understanding religion. Cyberspace may be regarded as a "sacred space" (O'Leary 1996: 781–808) alongside mosques or religious schools, but reason and revelation can intersect, and JIL members promote this desirable intersection.

I have argued that the Internet has changed in the amount of participation in relation to Islam in the mode of interaction between Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, little has changed in terms of the content of Islamic knowledge and in the intellectual attitudes about Islam among participants. The Internet serves not as a determinant factor for tolerance and pluralism, as expected by its advocates, but it allows more access to diverse views and practices that may potentially shape one's thoughts and behavior. Cyberspace remains essentially a human space, and it is human agency that shapes its direction.

Conclusion

The JIL in cyberspace tells us about fluidity of religious space, religious discourse, religious authority and religious social networking. The Internet plays a pivotal role in creating a fluid network across spatial boundaries, but, depending on human agency and socio-cultural-technological contexts, it operates within a

confine of values, ideas, and ethics shared by its members, particularly in the cases of limited discussion groups. In cyberspace, participants, both active and passive, are able to express and share their ideas with each other without fear of state control and punishment or of conventional religious authorities. But many still view the traditional religious authorities as important. The online interactions among Internet users are bound to rules of interaction set by webmasters or moderators, and remain limited to this date. The Internet allows dissemination of information and ideas and diversification of religious voices and authorities, but has its limits as well. Technology transforms religion, but will resist any form of technological determinism.

The Internet has provided a sense of public religion with new social realities, new religious players and new alliances. But this public religion creates and reinforces a politics of difference where in-group and out-group identities occur among increasingly diverse networks.

There is now a greater possibility of online networks, such as JIL, to introduce and promote multiple and fluid identities, but the existing identities tend to be reinforced. iMuslims use the Internet regularly and their religious orientations are shaped by it. But for many others, the Internet is not necessarily a replacement of the traditional and the offline affiliations, such as mosques, schools, and organizations, whether fundamentalist, moderate, or liberal. The social location of JIL is not on the mainstream of Indonesia's public sphere, but its attempt in creating and nurturing a space where people can interact with each other less hierarchically is their significant contribution to the study of religion and the public sphere.

Gary R. Bunt has argued that cyber Islamic environments have the potential to transform aspects of religious understanding and expression, and have the power to enable elements within the population to discuss aspects of religious interpretation and authority with each other, and to consult with authorities both from traditional and non-traditional centers, in some cases subverting what were conventional channels for opinions on religious issues (Bunt 2003: 201–202). However, the extent of such transformative power cannot be generalized to everyone, every place, and everything. There are limits to the power of cyberspace.

The extent of participation in the discussion about particular issues is potentially wide and inclusive, but does not in reality include all possible and existing voices on that issue, because of its mission and vision of promoting liberal interpretations of Islam. The democratic and inclusive nature of a website, discussion group, blog, or Facebook is still within the limits of an individual's or a group's vision and mission given the increasing number of competing and often conflicting identities and ideas made possible by the very nature of cyberspace and because of the view that communication technology serves merely as a means for dissemination and furthering one's ideas.

In other words, the informative and transformative function of the Internet does not necessarily lead people to be more tolerant of other views. Factors shaping one's religious identities, views and attitudes may be found elsewhere: reading of religious and other texts, persistence of state and conventional religious authorities, formal and informal modes of education, the continued role of traditional

modes of transmission and interaction, and the dynamics of social, political, and cultural contexts.

Notes

1 Fundamentalist Muslims as defined by the Liberal Islam Network are those Muslim individuals and groups whose main focus is preserving the fundamental teachings of Islam in a literal, textual manner, often intolerant of other interpretations. The Liberal Islam Network would agree with Youssef M. Choueiri who defines fundamentalism as an ideology for a return to the "classical" form of Islam, to the golden age of Islam, to the past, and to the text (see Choueiri 1997: 1–5).
2 See Eickelman and Anderson 2003: 1; see also Meyer and Moords 2006.
3 See Eickelman and Anderson 2003: 1–16.
4 See Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, "Kenapa Saya Berpendapat Islam harus Dikritik," Islamliberal@yahoogroups.com, October 24, 2005.
5 JIL in Arabic also means "generation." Abdalla, editorial, www.islamlib.com, 25/8/2008. See also Ali 2005.
6 Utan Kayu, located on Utan Kayu Street in East Jakarta, is a community of artists and intellectuals whose projects promote freedom of expression, experimentation, creativity, and tolerance of opposing social, political, and religious beliefs. The experimental Utan Kayu theater company hosts performances of theater, music, and dance. Jurnal Kalam is a cultural journal of progressive writing in a variety of literary genres. Radio 68 H News Agency is the radio news network affiliated with Utan Kayu.
7 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Islamliberal/.
8 The website has a number of features: mission, programs, syndicates of liberal Islam writers, radio talk-show, book and booklet publication information, website posting, public advertisement, discussion, contacts, and other rubrics, consisting of press releases, ideas, books, liberal scholars, clippings, op-ed columns, discussions, interviews, and editorials, all with available spaces for comments by readers (http://islamlib.com).
9 http://islamlib.com/id/komentar/islam-dan-pornografi/; (accessed on November 22, 2009).
10 *Mas* is a Javanese term of respect for a male.
11 http://nongmahmada.blogspot.com/
12 Ulil Abdalla (2008) "Apakah Pluralisme Menghalangi Diskusi dan Kritik." Online posting. Ulil.net, posted (September 12, 2008).
13 Ulil.net, posted on September 15, 2008.
14 Ulil.net, posted on September 15, 2008.
15 Readers' comments to a post on September 15, 2008.
16 Ulil.net, posted on September 2, 2008.
17 Ulil.net., posted July 11, 2008.
18 The correlation here is not between writing in English and the expression of faith without fear, but rather between blogging (in Indonesian or in English) and expression without fear.
19 Ulil Abdalla, "Ben, Billy, dan Pesta Ulang Tahun di Amerika," Facebook, posted on June 20, 2008.
20 Reader, to the post "Ben, Billy, and Pesta Ulang Tahun di Amerika," Facebook, posted on August 30, 2008.
21 Reader, to the post "Ben, Billy, and Pesta Ulang Tahun di Amerika," Facebook, posted on August 30, 2008.
22 Ulil Abdalla, Facebook, posted on September 7, 2008.
23 Abu Jahal (d. 624) was a religious leader opposed to Muslims.
24 islamliberal@yahoogroups.com, October 21, 2005.

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