

***LIBERAL ISLAM AND ITS INFLUENCES ON THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF QURANIC EXEGESIS IN INDONESIA AND  
MALAYSIA***

***ISLAM LIBERAL DAN PENGARUHNYA DALAM PERKEMBANGAN  
TAFSIR AL-QUR'AN DI INDONESIA DAN MALAYSIA***

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***Abstract***

Liberal Islamic movements in Indonesia and Malaysia are still active in voicing their thoughts although they have been strongly rejected by some local religious authorities. Even though it is no longer as massive as it used to be, its influence in the development of interpretations of the Qur'an is still very pronounced today. This study examines the influence of Liberal Islamic thought on the development of Quranic exegesis in Indonesia and Malaysia and focuses on Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL) and Sisters in Islam (SIS), which are the most influential Liberal Islamic movements in Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia. The data were collected from literature references with textual analysis as the main method. The results of this study indicate that the influence of JIL in the development of Quranic exegesis in Indonesia: first, the influence on the authority of interpretation by urging the Al-Quran. Second, the influence on the methodology of interpretation. Although JIL was not the initiator, JIL has a significant influence in bringing the flow of contextual methodology, *maqāṣid* approaches, hermeneutics, and other contemporary methods to Indonesia. Third, the influence on the popularization of new interpretive issues, such as human rights and gender. Meanwhile, SIS does not have a significant influence on the interpretation of the Quran in Malaysia like JIL, because: first, the hermeneutic approach used by SIS in the interpretation of the Quran is Amina Wadud's hermeneutics, so she is more



famous than SIS itself. Second, the liberal Islamic movement in Malaysia is strongly opposed by the Malaysian kingdom.

**Keywords:** JIL, SIS, Quranic exegesis, Contextual, Hermeneutic

### **Abstrak**

Gerakan Islam Liberal di Indonesia dan Malaysia masih aktif menyuarakan pemikirannya meski telah ditolak dengan tegas oleh sebagian otoritas agama setempat. Walau saat ini tidak lagi semasif dulu, namun pengaruhnya dalam pengembangan tafsir al-Qur'an masih sangat terasa hingga saat ini. Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh pemikiran Islam Liberal terhadap pengembangan tafsir al-Qur'an di Indonesia dan Malaysia dengan berfokus pada Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL) dan Sister in Islam (SIS) yang merupakan gerakan Islam Liberal paling berpengaruh di Asia Tenggara khususnya di Indonesia dan Malaysia. Data-data dikumpulkan dari referensi pustaka dengan analisis tekstual sebagai metode utamanya. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh JIL dalam pengembangan penafsiran al-Qur'an di Indonesia: pertama, pada otoritas penafsiran dengan mendesakralisasi Al-Quran. Kedua, pada metodologi penafsiran. Meskipun bukan penggagas, JIL memiliki pengaruh signifikan dalam membawa arus metodologi kontekstual, pendekatan *maqāṣid*, hermenutika dan metode kontemporer lain ke Indonesia. Ketiga, mempopulerkan isu-isu penafsiran baru, seperti HAM, dan gender. Sedangkan SIS tidak memberi pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap penafsiran Al-Quran di Malaysia layaknya JIL, disebabkan: pertama, pendekatan hermenutika yang digunakan SIS dalam penafsiran al-Quran adalah hermenutika Amina Wadud, sehingga ia lebih terkenal dari pada SIS itu sendiri. Kedua, gerakan Islam liberal di Malaysia ditentang keras oleh kerajaan Malaysia.

**Kata Kunci:** JIL, SIS, Penafsiran al-Qur'an, Kontekstual, Hermeneutika

### **Introduction**

Liberal Islam is recorded as one among others that have colored Islamic discourses in the world, especially in Indonesia. Liberal Islam is defined as a movement emphasizing and promoting liberality in Islam by opening Ijtihad's gate, propagating freedom of belief and faith, and separating of *ukhrāwiy vis-ā-vis duniawiy* authority.<sup>1</sup> In Indonesia and Malaysia, Liberalism was appointed by national religious authority as misguided and prohibited

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Ali Nurdin, "Islam and State: A Study of the Liberal Islamic Network in Indonesia, 1999-2004," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 7, no. 2 (2005): 27.

understanding or movements.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Liberal Islam was fronted by Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal/JIL) in Indonesia, and Sister In Islam/SIS in Malaysia survive to promote liberalism. The Quran as the main source of Islam has certainly become the main target in providing liberal thought by updating methodology and contemporary issues. This research will be discussing the influence of the thought of JIL and SIS in Quranic exegesis in Indonesia and Malaysia in the current situation. This study focuses only on these two liberal Islamic movements, because JIL was the largest liberal Islamic movement in Indonesia, while SIS is the most influential liberal Islamic movement and still active in Malaysia now. The issues of this article are 1) How is the fundamental view of JIL regarding al-Qur'an 2) How Quranic exegesis in Indonesia and Malaysia after JIL and SIS exists. 3) What extent the influence of JIL and SIS's thoughts on the Quranic exegesis in Indonesia and Malaysia at this time. This study is important to do because considering that Indonesia and Malaysia are countries with a majority Muslim population in Southeast Asia, where the issue of liberal Islam is endless, especially the ideology brought by JIL and SIS in interpreting the Quran, so the latest developments in liberal Islam towards interpretation need to be examined back to what extent it has influenced the interpretation of the Quran today

There has been much research regarding liberal Islam, especially regarding JIL and SIS. One of the research conducted by Zuraidah Kamaruddin examined the methodology of interpreting the SIS Quran using hermeneutics, she concluded that SIS hermeneutics contradicts the rules of interpreting the Quran.<sup>3</sup> Much previous research regarding Quranic exegesis by SIS previously only explained the methodology of its interpretation, but this research will update the influence of SIS ideology on the Quranic exegesis, whether

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<sup>2</sup> In Indonesia, MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/Indonesian Ulama Council) released formal fatwa that prohibits Indonesian Muslims to follow liberalism on July, 2005 (Fatwa's Number: 7/MUNAS VII/MUI/11/2005). So did Malaysian Kingdom. It decided to assign Liberal Thought as a heretical understanding by releasing Fatwa by the National Fatwa Commission in 2006. Suhanim Abdullah & Marzalina Mansor Munif Zarriruddin Fikri Nordin, "Religious Liberalism in Sisters in Islam Discourse: An Analysis on Identification," *Proceeding of the International Conference on Social Science Research*, no. June (2013): 1047-63.

<sup>3</sup> Zuraidah Kamaruddin et al., "An Analysis Of The Method Of Problem Solving By Sis Through A Model Of Qur'anic Hermeneutics From An Islamic Thought Perspective, *Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human; Academy of Islamic Studies . University of Malaya . Email : Zuraidah\_*" 14 (2013): 33-50.

methodologically there is a new approach used by SIS in interpreting the Quran, and the extent of its influence SIS until now in the interpretation of the Quran. Another research was carried out by Hamdiah A. Latif who criticized JIL's thinking, he concluded that JIL had errors in the use of the *maslahah* concept in the methodology of interpreting its contextuality.<sup>4</sup>

Previous studies related to JIL and SIS did not study their influence in updating Qur'anic exegesis yet so it is necessary to re-study it regarding the recent developments in JIL and SIS, and to what extent the significance of their impact on the Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia and Malaysia today. This is library research using content analysis, and only limits the influence of JIL and SIS on the Qur'anic exegesis aspect in Indonesia and Malaysia. The main data sources and objects in this study are the JIL and SIS websites, books and articles written by JIL and SIS members, as well as articles and books related to JIL and SIS, and articles on liberal Islam in general.

#### *Al-Qur'an and Liberal Islamic Thought*

Like the holy books in other religions, the Quran is believed by Muslims to be a revelation of guidance from Allah. To explore guidance from the Qur'an, of course, attempts at interpretation have been made since the early period of Islam. Tafsir also plays a significant role in making al-Qur'an a relevant book in various places and times (*ṣāliḥ li kulli makān wa zamān*).<sup>5</sup> It means by interpretation, the claim that the Quran is a universal book can answer the problems of the people. Although Muslims are aware that the Quran must be understood and applied by all Muslims, in the course of history, there has been a limitation on the authority of the interpretation of the Quran itself. Not everyone is judged to have the right to interpret the Quran. So that a series of criteria emerged so that a person can achieve that authority.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hamdiah A. Latif, "Mengkritis Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL): Antara Spirit Revivalisme, Liberalisme Dan Bahaya Sekularisme," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 10, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Al-Qur'an and Its Interpreters* (Albani: State University of New York Press, 1984), 24.

<sup>6</sup> Manna 'al-Qaṭṭān lists several mufassir requirements put forward by scholars in interpreting al-Qur'an into the following nine conditions: 1) Uphold the *ṣāḥih* aqidah 2) Freeing oneself from personal interests 3) Starting interpretations with fellow al-Qur'an (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*) 4) If does not find a verse of the Quran that is the explanation, it will turn to the hadith (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-ḥadīth*) 5) Referring to sahabah/ the words of the

Apart from the dimension of authority, the methodology of interpreting the Quran has also undergone an evolution which has led to an interpretive epistemology that tends to be scriptural. Even an Egyptian thinker, Prof. Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid labels the Islamic civilization that has passed as the civilization of texts.<sup>7</sup> Nash/the text civilization was born from a long history of the formulation of an epistemology of interpretation and Islamic law which always puts forward the text as something superior. The epistemology of the exegesis is then held firmly and is seen as a perfect epistemology in achieving the truth and guidance that God wants in the Quran. The marriage between claims of authority and the conceptualization of classical epistemology then causes the product of its interpretation to be seen as something taken for granted, cannot be doubted and questioned, so that the methodology and product are firmly held as standards in the validation of interpretation and development of Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>8</sup> Over time, the classical exegesis products and methodology are no longer considered relevant in reading the al-Qur'an. Instead of reaching a holistic interpretation, according to Hasan Hanafi, the classical interpretation which is burdensome is the product of confusing interpretive information with various other information and can't answer the needs of contemporary society.<sup>9</sup> The Liberal Islam

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Prophet's companions (tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi aqwāl al-ṣaḥābah) 6) Referring to *tābi'īn* dan *salaf* 7) Mastering arabic language 8) Understanding of several disciplines related to the Qur'an. Muhammad Abd al-Mun'im al-Qī'i mentioned the knowledge tools such as *lughah*, *naḥwu*, *taṣrīf*, *balāghah*, *ilm al-qir'āt*, *uṣūl fiqh* dan *uṣūl tafsīr* including *sabab nuzūl*, *nāsikh-mansūkh* and so much more 9) Must have the ability to *tarjih* ma'na and *istinbāt* of the law. The requirements put forward by these classical scholars do not even describe the personal qualifications of the exegete, but they even describe the methods and steps of interpretation that one must go through. Al-Qaṭṭān was not the first to propose such a qualification, but predecessors such as al-Suyūṭī, al-Zarkasyī have also spoken at length about such qualifications. For more information see Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāhith Fī Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Maktabah al-Ma'arif, 2000), 340. Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: al-Hai'ah al-Mishriyyah, 1974). Al-Suyūṭī. Muhammad Abd al-Mun'im Al-Qī'i, *Al-Aṣlān Fī Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Abu Zaid menyatakan:

و ليس من قبيل التبسيط أنصف الحضارة الإسلامية بأنها حضرات النص

"It is not an exaggeration if we labeling Islamic civilization as a highly scriptural civilization". Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhūm Al-Naṣ: Dirasat Fi Ulum Al-Qur'an* (Kairo: al-Hai'ah al-Mishriyyah al-'Ammah, 1993), 11.

<sup>8</sup> John Burton, Law and Exegesis: The Penalty for A adultery in Islam dalam budi Juliandi Dan Saifuddin Herlambang Dosen Iain Zck Langsa and Iain Pontianak, "Menggugat Tafsir Tekstual," *Jurnal At-Tibyan*, vol. 1, 2016, <https://www.journal.iainlangsa.ac.id/index.php/tibyan/article/view/32>.

<sup>9</sup> Hasan Hanafi, *Qadlāyā Mu'āṣirāt Fī Al-Fikr Al-Gharb Al-Mu'āṣir* (Kairo: al-Muassasāt al-Jam'iyyāt li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nasyr wa al-Tawzī', 1990), 120.

movement came with a critical mission towards the classical Quranic interpretation by voicing *ijtihad* and rereading the Quran. According to C. Kurzman, one of the most basic criteria of Liberal Islam is their relationship with the Qur'an and also the *sunnah*. The attitude of Liberal Islam in positioning the Quran is inseparable from one of the modes, namely between the modes of sanctions against *sharia* in the Koran, the freedom to adopt things that are ignored by the Quran, and the freedom to reinterpret a set of rules that is in the Quran.<sup>10</sup>

The core of the Liberal Islam movement can be traced from Shah Wali-Allah al-Dihlawi in the early 18th century AD.<sup>11</sup> Al-Dihlawi, who initially tended to revivalist thinking, underwent an intellectual revolution to become a character voicing Islamic reform. One quote from his phenomenal statement at that time was "Time has come that the religious law of Islam should be Brought to the open fully dressed in reason and argument".<sup>12</sup> Starting from the idea of reforming al-Dihlawi, the eastern liberal figures of the 19th century appeared such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni, Sayyid Ahmad Khān, and Muhammad Abduh.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from influencing the Middle East, rejuvenation of the Qur'anic interpretation in the west was also developed by an Indo-Pakistani scholar, namely Fazlur Rahman, a

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Source Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Source Book*.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Kurzman.

<sup>13</sup> Abduh with his commentary, *al-Manar*, has significant influences on *Tafseer al-Qur'an* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Middle East by spreading his renewal thought and methodology on the Interpretation of *al-Qur'an* criticizes the tradition of *taqlid* among Muslims in interpreting *al-Qur'an* while influenced by positivism which was being the dominant paradigm and methodology in the West. Abduh often fills his vacation time by attending lectures and scientific discussions in Europe such as at the University of Oxford, Cambridge and Geneva. The exchange of ideas with philosophers and the inclusion of their thoughts in Abduh's writings are evidence of Abduh's contact with the West. One of the philosophical figures he mentioned in his work and who had exchanged ideas directly with 'Abduh was Herbert Spencer, who was considered a supporter of the positivism Comte. Abduh's renewal thinking in interpretation is significant because in addition to being a teacher at Al-Azhar, he also published his thoughts in the newspaper *al-'urwah al-wutsqo* and taught in Paris as well after he taught in Egypt. Fuad Syukri, "Bias Filsafat Barat Dalam Tafsir Modern Muhammad 'Abduh," *Journal of Al-Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 3, no. 2 (2014). Muhammad Abduh, *Al-Islām Wa Al-Naṣrānīyah Ma'a Al-'Ilm Wa Al-Madaniyah* (Kairo: *al-Manar*, 1323), 270. Devy Aisyah, Risman Bustamam, and Iain Batusangkar, *Model Penafsiran Kisah deḥ Muhammad Abduh dalam Al-Manar, Studi Kisah Adampada Surah Al-Baqarah,* " *Mashdar: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 2, no. 2 (August 2020): 199-218. Penafsiran Kisah oleh Muhammad Abduh dalam *Al-Manar*, Kisah Adam pada Surah Al-Baqarah Risman Bustamam, and Batusangkar.

Pakistani scholar who was lecturing at taught at some Universities in America and Europe such as McGill, Durham, California, and Chicago University.<sup>14</sup> His exegetical methodology known as the double movement has become one of the most frequently quoted theories in contemporary exegesis and has influenced many other contemporary exegesis scholars such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Arash Naraqj, Abdullah Saeed, Nurcholish Madjid, and Amina Wadud.<sup>15</sup>

Liberal Islamic thought streams in the interpretation of the Quran then also entered Indonesia and Malaysia, as two countries with a Muslim majority in Southeast Asia. The arrival of renewal thought in Quranic studies to Indonesia comes from both the middle east and the west. Indonesian Scholars who graduated from the middle east begin to be influenced by renewal thought there<sup>16</sup> while the arrival of some Indonesian scholars who graduated from western countries brought various thoughts and understanding influenced by western scholars.<sup>17</sup> Before the arrival of these renewal thoughts, Quranic exegesis in Indonesia in 20<sup>th</sup> Century was not more than translating and quoting eastern commentaries and was widely accepted as an unquestionable principle while western dialectics are blamed in most of the Quranic exegesis arguing that Islamic studies of orientalist were contradicting Islamic doctrine.<sup>18</sup> Not much different from Indonesia, before the massive reform of the Quranic exegesis in Malaysia, it still originated from the Quranic commentary writing movement

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<sup>14</sup> Megan Brankley Abbas, "Between Western Academia and Pakistan: Fazlur Rahman and the Fight for Fusionism," *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 3 (2017), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X15000517>.

<sup>15</sup> Ali Akbar, "Fazlur Rahman's Influence on Contemporary Islamic Thought," *The Muslim World* 110, no. 2 (2020): 129, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12334>.

<sup>16</sup> Norbani B Ismael, "The Qur'anic Exegesis, Reformism, and Women in Twentieth Century Indonesia," *Studia Islamica* 24, no. 3 (2017): 134, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v24i3.5187>.

<sup>17</sup> Talking about the entry of Liberal Islamic thought into Indonesia, the Middle East route was represented by Abdurrahman Wahid / Gus Dur. Born into a traditionalist family, Gus Dur studied at al-Azhar, Cairo and studied Western philosophy books there, especially at the library of the American University in Cairo. Then he continued his education to Baghdad University, Iraq. After pursuing his education in Iraq, he returned to Indonesia and voiced progressive and liberal thoughts in Indonesia. As for the flows that come directly from the west, representative examples are Nurcholish Madjid and Harun Nasution. Both of them were direct students of Fazlur Rahman who were very influential in reforming the Qur'anic interpretation in the West.

<sup>18</sup> Howard M. Federspiel, *Popular Indonesia Literature of the Qur'an* (Newyork: Cornell Modern Indonesia Period, 1994), 145.

which began in the early 20th century AD marked by the proliferation of studies and comments on the Quran which is carried out in Islamic institutions.<sup>19</sup> The beginning of the development of renewal in the Quranic exegesis in Malaysia can be traced from two causes,<sup>20</sup> the first is caused by orientalist and liberalism thought from the west, this ideology of liberalism is the result of the Secularism movement that emerged in the west in the 15th and 16th centuries. In its early stages, the movement was more focused on efforts to liberate itself from the scientific, socio-political, economic, and subsequent spreads to the religious sphere. The second is caused by liberal Islam ideology in Indonesia, where the embryo of liberal Islam in Indonesia is very massive, this is because Islamic thought in Indonesia is much more open, so it affects and affects other Southeast Asian regions around it, including Malaysia itself.

### *JIL's Thought in Developing Quranic Exegesis in Indonesia*

The return of Muslim scholars from western universities not only strengthens the modernist movement<sup>21</sup> in Indonesia but also becomes a significant factor for developing liberal Islam in Indonesia. Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid who attended lectures of Fazlur Rahman at Chicago University<sup>22</sup> become central scholars importing western thought

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<sup>19</sup> Shah Mazlan Ibrahim, Haziyah Hussin, "The Trend of Malay Quranic Commentary Writing in Malaysia in the 20th Century, Vol. 08, No. 08 (2012), 4345.," *Journal of Applied Sciences Research* 08, no. 08 (2012): 43-45.

<sup>20</sup> Rahimin Affandi Abd. Rahim, & Ahmad Farid Abdul Jalal, And Muhammad Ikhlas Rosele., "Islam Liberal Dan Ancamannya Terhadap Kelangsungan Ahl Sunnah Wal Jamaah Di Malaysia" (Universiti Malaya: Kuala Lumpur, 2016), 1-13.

<sup>21</sup> Syafi'i Ma'arif classifies current Islamic movements into four types. First, is the modernist with their ijihad propaganda and their criticism of the fanatical traditionalist Muslims like Al-Afghani, Abduh, and Ahmad Khan. Second, is neo-traditionalist with their strong tendency toward philosophy and Sufism like Naquib Al-Attas and Hossein Nasr. They state that western ideas and ideologies can not be Islamized so Islam must be kept away from them. Third, are those who attempt to politicize Islam as a political ideology like Sayid Qutb, Al-Maudūdī, and Khomeini. This type is most similar to neo-revivalist in Fazlur Rahman's typology. Fourth, are those who think that Islam should be separated from politics like Kemal Attaturk, Abdul Kalam Azad, and Soekarno. Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif, *Peta Bumi Intelektualisme Di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1993). Anton Minardi, "The New Islamic Revivalism In Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 12, no. 2 (2018): 248, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2018>.

<sup>22</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Suatu Tatapan Islam Terhadap Masa Depan Politik Indonesia* (Bandung: Prisma, 1983).



to Indonesia.<sup>23</sup> Some scholars and their students accepting their thought started to create a serious discussion forum in the 1980s. The forum namely Forum Mahasiswa Ciputat then grew as an Islamic thought school labeled as “Madzhab Ciputat”. Madjid was claimed as a founder of it. This embryo continued with both offline and online discussions in email-list, [islamliberal@yahoo.com](mailto:islamliberal@yahoo.com) in early 2001. This forum evolved to be a formal community that has the official name “Jaringan Islam Liberal” (JIL) in their official site, [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com).<sup>24</sup>

Criticizing classical methodology on the Quranic exegesis, JIL tries to construct their methodology based on basic ideas and arguments as follows: First, al-Qur’an is an open text, it allows to receive multiple interpretations.<sup>25</sup> As everyone has their right to follow their belief and no one compels others to follow, there is no compulsion to follow a certain interpretation of a certain person. Every coercion to unify the quranic exegesis contradicts what was assigned by Allah in Qur’an that highly appreciates diversity, difference, and liberality. Second, Context first and history later. Assyaukanie states that the nature and history of the Quran composing itself were full of complexities and full of debates, conflicts intrigues, and fakes. JIL wants to position the context proportionally in reading text balancing between perspective on text (history) and real context where the readers actively engage with.<sup>26</sup> Bibliotaristic and isolating quranic text from the context form understanding that al-Qur’an contains everything permanent and universal. For JIL, there is no more fateful mistake in understanding all text except this kind of militaristic view.<sup>27</sup> Third, Qur’an must be

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<sup>23</sup> Kamaruzzaman Bustamam Ahmad, “Contemporary Islamic Thought In Indonesian Indonesian and Malay World Malay World Malay World (Islam Liberal, Islam Hadhari, and Islam Progresif),” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 5, no. 1 (2011): 101.

<sup>24</sup> Nicolaus Teguh Budi Harjanto, *Islam and Liberalism in Contemporary Indonesia: The Political Ideas of Jaringan Islam Liberal* (Ohio: the College of Art and Sciences of Ohio University, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla, “Pandangan Muslim Liberal Tentang Quran,” [islamlib.com](http://islamlib.com), 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Yusa’ Farchan, “Reasoning of Liberal Islam: A Study on Islamic Perspectives in Liberal Islam Network Jakarta,” *Analisa* 1, no. 2 (2016): 189, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v1i2.352>.

<sup>27</sup> Abdalla, “Pandangan Muslim Liberal Tentang Quran.”

interpreted on the frame of *maqāṣid al-syarīh*<sup>28</sup>. The ethical vision of Islam has been formulated by classical jurists named as *al-kulliyāt al-khamsah* or *al-maqāṣid al-syarīh*. As the background of revelation, *maqāṣid al-syarīh* already exist before the text, so this is the highest level of Islamic postulate. JIL propose that the hierarchy of source of Islamic law must be *maqāṣid al-syarīh* than *al-Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.<sup>29</sup> Fourth, *al-Qur'an* must be interpreted for humans as it was revealed for breeding humans. Ultra theocentric paradigm bequeathing fatal textualism in Quranic exegesis is not in tune with God's will in revealing the *Qur'an*. Humanism and anthropocentric approach must be emphasized for making *Quran ṣālihun likulli zaman wa makān*.

Departing from these principles, JIL offers some rules in interpreting *Quran* as follows, First, *al-'ibrah bi al-maqāṣid lā bi al-alfāz* (determine the law of the *Quran* and *Hadith* by prioritizing *maqāṣid*, not the text). Second, *jawāz al-Naskh al-nuṣūṣ al-juz'iyah bi al-maṣlahah* (*maṣlahah* has the power to abrogate texts from the *Quran* and *hadith*), Third, *tanqīh al-nuṣūṣ bi aql al-mujtama'* (allowing to amend the law of texts with the public mind).<sup>30</sup> These alternative rules are proffered by JIL to overcome the scientific suspense of classical methodology in understanding the *Quran*.<sup>31</sup> The application of these ideas can be seen clearly at the official site of JIL, [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com).<sup>32</sup> There are 37 articles posted in Menu "Kajian *Quran*" in [islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com) which can be classified into four main themes include history, methodology, certain exegesis issues, and figure studies. Consistently, the authors carry actual issues in *Tafseer* such as tolerance, inclusiveness, freedom, and openness. Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, Abdol Muqsih Ghazalie, and Luthfi assyaukanie,- the authors of "Metodologi Studi *al-Qur'an*" are the

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<sup>28</sup> *Maqāṣid al-Syarīh* defined as God's intention in assigning sets of rules for main human rights include *hiḏh al-nafs*, *hiḏh al-dīn*, *hiḏh al-aql*, *hiḏh al-nasl* and *hiḏh al-māl*. Nūr al-Dīn Al-Khādimī, 'Ilm al-Maqāṣid al-Syarīh (Beirut: Maktabah al-'Abīkan, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Ulil Abshar Abdalla, *Metodologi Studi AL-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Abdalla, 152-168.

<sup>31</sup> Abdalla.

<sup>32</sup> "which they branded as a proper source for finding exact information and knowledge about Islam in wide meaning by leaving the judging, blaming, and discriminating certain mazhab, thought, or religion so that could bridge between religion and modernity. In [islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com), *Qur'an* is only a menu among others like theology, philosophy, *fikih*, Sufism, and history. Tentang Kami | IslamLib," accessed December 14, 2020, <http://islamlib.com/tentang/>.

main contributors of Menu “Qur’an” in islamlib.com besides other authors like Novrianti Kahar, Taufik Adnan Amal and others. The most quoted scholars in the articles of the menu are Syahrur, Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and other contemporary ones. Classical commentators are rarely quoted like Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Rāzī and other classical commentators which are cited for criticism. Besides islamlib.com, JIL’s goals are reflected in some programs such as the syndicating of liberal Islam authors<sup>33</sup>, holding some seminars, and other scientific forums about actual religious issues, publishing scientific books and pocketbooks containing popular issues, and holding not only virtual discussions but also offline discussions spearheaded by university students.<sup>34</sup> These programs were the application of principle ideas of JIL that Muslims have to encourage themselves for doing Ijtihad in interpreting al-Qur’an to face recent problems of Muslims.

A clear example to illustrate JIL’s exegesis is their interpretation of LGBT verses in the Quran such as al-Syu’arā’ [26]: 165-166, al-A’raf [7]: 80-81, and Hud [11]: 82. While most commentators stated that LGBT is a great sin and have to be banned, JIL scholars try to reinterpret these verses. Ulil Abshar Abdalla holds to two principles, namely the principle of science and the principle of generosity (tolerance). He clearly states that scientific consensus followed too by WHO is almost final that LGBT is not a disease but an ordinary preference. so the *aql al-mujtama’* can be used to reframe LGBT verses in the Quran. Furthermore, as the principle of generosity, for Ulil, the manifestation of tolerance and fairness to LGBT is giving them equal rights to life, not discriminating against them. Not forcing LGBT to do therapy and treatment only because of considering them as irregular

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<sup>33</sup> JIL collects the number of articles from authors expressing the liberality of Islam then publish them on reputed journals, newspaper, and other media.

<sup>34</sup> A. Ilyas Islami, “Islam Progresif: Telaah Pemikiran Dan Gerakan Jaringan Islam Liberal,” *Al-Qalam* 29, no. 1 (2012): 104.

human.<sup>35</sup> Another JIL scholar, Royyan Firdaus reframe that Allah's punishment to prophets of Luth is caused by their scorn and threat to Luth and his honor guests.<sup>36</sup>

### *Brief Review of JIL's Influence on Quranic Exegesis in Indonesia*

To clarify the influence of JIL on Quranic exegesis in Indonesia, this part will discuss their seen influence in developing quranic studies. JIL as a renewal movement in Indonesia faces various responses from Indonesian Muslims.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, the negative responses are more massive than supportive ones. It decreases JIL's popularity among Indonesian Muslims while the fund cessation from The Asian Foundation (TAF) worsen this situation.<sup>38</sup> This ushers JIL into the end of their structural existence. The member and activists start to leave JIL then choose other ways to promote their ideas. The official site of JIL does not update even a single article since 2016. Even though the spirits of JIL left their body, they start to drip onto other bodies, continues to influence, and promote their ideas in Islamic especially quranic studies.

The existence of JIL's influence in Indonesia's Quranic exegesis can be seen in some aspects. The first is the Exegesis Authority. For traditionalist scholars, the authority of

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<sup>35</sup> Polemik Lgbt et al., "Lesbian Gay Biseksual and Transeksual (LGBT) Polemic in Indonesia: A Study of the Opinion of the Indonesian Ulama Council and the Liberal Islam Network (JIL)," *Islāmiyyāt* 40, no. 2 (2018): 127-28.

<sup>36</sup> "M. Royyan Firdaus | IslamLib," n.d.

<sup>37</sup> The responses for JIL movements can be generally classified into three categories. The first is methodological critical responses that try to criticize the methodological approach used by JIL in promoting ideas. The second is apologetic responses that focus on the validity of ideas promoted by JIL. This category of responses can be derived into three kinds, firstly, a normative apologetic response focusing on the normative doctrines in which the idea of liberal Islam is based; secondly, a critical apologetic response which tries to connect the idea of liberal Islam to the circumstance in which the idea is formed and applied; thirdly, a practical apologetic response. This response leads to the prosecution of physical action. The third is the technical response which relates to the way JIL communicates its ideas to its audience (Indonesian Muslims). The responses come not only from scholars but also from Islamic organizations like FUUI (Forum Ulama Umat Islam), Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia and FPI (Front Pembela Islam). Ahmad Bunyan Wahib, "Questioning Liberal Islam in Indonesia: Response and Critique to Jaringan Islam Liberal," *Al-Jam'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 48, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2006.441.23-51>.

<sup>38</sup> Another factor is the death of a senior figure of JIL like Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid decreasing support from the Islamic Organization. The participation of Muslim young scholars in practical politics also causes a pragmatic attitude and reluctance to respond to the actual issues of Islam. Media Zainul Bahri et al., "Ruh Hidup Dalam Jasad Kaku : Mengenang Peran Intelektual Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL) Dalam Diskursus Islam Indonesia Boleh Jadi Bagi Sebagian Muslim Muda Indonesia Saat Ini , Nama Jaringan Islam Terdengar Dibanding Atau Nama Tahrir Indonesia Pada Awal ," 2001, 296-97.

interpreting the Quran is due to certain religious groups namely Ulama<sup>39</sup> while modernists emphasize liberality and freedom in interpreting Qur'an. Arguing that Muslims' view about tafseer's profane, Liberal Islam including JIL makes sure that the desacralization of Qur'anic interpretation is a must.<sup>40</sup> Everyone should understand and interpret Qur'an based on his ability and knowledge so that Qur'an can be placed as a guidebook for Muslims. Even JIL is not the only one propagating authority's extending in Tafseer, it takes a significant part in supporting Indonesian Muslims to feel free expressing their views about Qur'an and Tafseer. The impact can be seen by recent scholars and commentators produced evidence to publish their Quranic thought for renewing traditional commentaries.<sup>41</sup>

The Second aspect is methodology. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Quranic exegesis is not more than translating Qur'an into local languages, resuming some points of the surah, and quoting classical commentaries from some books<sup>42</sup> based on ancient thought that classical methodology of understanding Qur'an is a perfect way to reach God's meaning.<sup>43</sup> JIL's presence in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century opens new horizons for Quranic exegesis in Indonesia. The methodological offer of JIL is emphasizing contextuality and plurality in understanding Quran because textuality produces fatal mistakes.<sup>44</sup> *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah* becomes a central spirit in JIL's methodology as they make some rules in interpreting Qur'an such as The recent trend of *Tafseer maqāṣidī*<sup>45</sup> in Indonesia is regarded as a brief influence of JIL's movement in Quranic studies.<sup>46</sup> Because of JIL, contextual exegesis, hermeneutical approach, and Tafseer

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<sup>39</sup> Johanna Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today* (Bristol: Equinox Publishing, 2019), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Halid Alkaf, *QuoVadis Liberalisme Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2011), 60.

<sup>41</sup> Masimo Campanini, *The Qur'an; The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 122.

<sup>42</sup> Ahmad Atabik, "Perkembangan Tafsir Modern Di Indonesia," *Hermeneutik* 8, no. 2 (2014): 321.

<sup>43</sup> Abdalla, *Metodologi Studi AL-Qur'an*, 29-30.

<sup>44</sup> Abdalla, "Pandangan Muslim Liberal Tentang Quran." Diakses pada 21.00 WIB, 19 Oktober 2020.

<sup>45</sup> *Tafseer maqāṣidī* is a recent approach in Quranic exegesis emphasizing the disclosure of Quranic meaning and Intention both particularly and generally then explaining the way to state and formulate those intention for human life development. Ali Muhammad As'ad, "Al-Tafsīr Al-Maqāṣidī Li Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm," *Islamiyah Al-Ma'rifah* 89, no. 3 (2017): 57.

<sup>46</sup> M Nurdin Zuhdi, "Maqasyid Asy- Syari ' Ah Sebagai Metodologi Penafsiran Al-Qur ' An Alternatif ' Ala ' Jaringan Islam Liberal," *An-Nur: Jurnal Studi Islam* 4, no. 2 (2012): 126, <http://ejournal.iq-annur.ac.id/index.php/An-Nur/article/view/15>.

maqāṣidi be common issues for Indonesian scholars even though JIL is not the first one arranging these. Other methodological impacts of JIL in Quranic studies are founded in Islamic universities in Indonesia. New curriculums and subjects are designed to introduce students to recent western methods in Quranic studies.

The third aspect that has been influenced by JIL are contemporary issues in Tafseer like human rights, pluralism, gender, and other jurisprudential issues. Even JIL is regarded as a fail in influencing Indonesian Muslims on the ontological level of Quranic views, its influence on the axiological level is very significant. Gender becomes a rampant issue in Indonesian Islamic journals<sup>47</sup> whereas Anthony H. Johns reported that Indonesian Islamic thought in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is not more than extensional thought from middle-east.<sup>48</sup> Recent gender issues in quranic studies can not be separated from JIL's role both at the individual and organizational levels, for instance, a recent product of Quran studies on the gender issue, *Qirā'ah Mubādalah*<sup>49</sup> initiated by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir. Kodir states clearly that his idea of Mubādalah is predominantly affected by Husein Muhammad (an activist of JIL) and Abdul Moqsith Ghozali<sup>50</sup>, an executive director of JIL 2008-2013. On the axiological level, JIL's influence can be seen in the success of some women in the political election like Khofifah Idarparawansa in East Java and Tri Rismaharini in Surabaya. More Indonesian Muslims can override gender issues on their election while in early 2004, There are many ulama refused Megawati Soekarnoputri candidating herself in the presidential election of Indonesia.

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<sup>47</sup> Muhammad Alfatih Suryadilaga, "Ragam Kajian Gender Dalam Jurnal Keagamaan Islam Di Indonesia," *Musawa: Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam* 17, no. 2 (2019): 95, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2018.172.95-106>.

<sup>48</sup> Anthony H. Johns, *Islam in the Malay World: An Explanatory Survey with Some References to Quranic Exegesis* dalam Raphael Israeli, "Southeast and East Asia," *Islam in Asia* 2 (1984).

<sup>49</sup> *Qirā'ah Mubādalah* is reciprocal method in interpreting misogynist text in Qur'an and hadīts. In this understanding method, there is no superiority or inferiority both for man and woman. They are equal in front of the Qur'an and Sunnah. What must be applied for men must be applied for women too. Lukman Hakim, "Corak Feminisme Post-Modernis Dalam Penafsiran Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 21, No. 1 (January 30, 2020): 239, <https://doi.org/10.14421/Qh.2020.2101-12>.

<sup>50</sup> Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qirā'ah Mubadalah* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2019), 19.

### *SIS's Thought in Developing Quranic Exegesis in Malaysia*

In Indonesia the Liberal Movement is carried out by JIL, then In Malaysia, the liberalism agenda is brought in various forms, including through certain organizations such as the establishment of the Interfaith Commission (IFC).<sup>51</sup> The earliest history before the establishment of the IFC in Malaysia or its origin, the Inter-Religious Council (IRC) through the slogan "dialogue between religions". This agenda has been spearheaded by the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism (MCCBCHST) which was established in 1983, and the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) was established in 1985.<sup>52</sup>

Liberal Islamic thought in Malaysia became very visible in the 1988s when the group Sisters in Islam (SIS) emerged under the leadership of Zainah Anwar. This organization consists of academics, activists, lawyers, and journalists.<sup>53</sup> At the beginning of its establishment, SIS was also consisting of influential women such as Amina Wadud who is a lecturer at Islamic International University of Malaysia, Noraini Uthman a sociologist at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Rose Ismail a journalist, and Askiah Adam who is an analyst at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Rashidah Abdullah, Salbiah Ahmad, and Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri.<sup>54</sup> SIS has become one of the feminist movements that fight for human rights and gender equality, and the most popular and active feminism movement in Malaysia. It was officially registered as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in 1993 under the name SIS Forum (Malaysia Berhad).<sup>55</sup> This phenomenon has made SIS a women's movement that has always been overshadowed by the controversy behind its

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<sup>51</sup> "Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, *Ancaman Islam Liberal Di Malaysia*, (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, Putrajaya, 2017), 25.

<sup>52</sup> "See more on <https://akarimomar.wordpress.com/2014/03/25/mengingat-kembali-ancaman-ifc/>."

<sup>53</sup> Zuraidah Kamaruddin et al., "Women'S Rights According to Sisters in Islam (SIS)'S Understanding: An Analysis from an Islamic Perspective," *Proceeding of International Conference of Empowering Islamic Civilization (ICIC 2017)*: 10.

<sup>54</sup> Zuraidah Binti Kamaruddin and Saidatolakma Binti Yunus, "Proposals by Sisters in Islam ( SIS ) Pertaining To TAIÉq Issues : An Analysis from an Islamic Perspective Vol. 14, No. 2 (2017): 329.

<sup>55</sup> Zuraidah Kamaruddin et al., "The History of Sisters in Islam," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, Vo. 8, no. 11 (2018): 558.

success.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the struggle of the SIS, which upholds human rights and universal principles, as well as its religious approach based on interpretation from a human rights perspective, has invited allegations that link it to the Liberal Islamic ideology.

SIS has two main ideas, first: Islam and religious reform, second: the struggle to defend human rights and equality.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, if it is narrowed down again in the aspect of Quranic exegesis, SIS has ideas that are not much different from JIL in Indonesia. SIS also has an Islamic reform thought:<sup>58</sup> 1) eliminating religious authority and an emphasis on the freedom of each individual to perform *ijtihad*, they free themselves from the understanding of past *ulama*'s thoughts and issue their *ijtihad* in understanding Quran, 2) Reinterpreting the Quran by ignoring the epistemology of the *ulum al-Quran* that has been developed by classical Islamic scholars, in this case, SIS uses the Hermeneutic approach of Amina Wadud who is one of the founders as well as an important figure in SIS. 3) From the methodological aspect, SIS outlined the concept of relativism as the principle of exploration of the *syara'* texts by emphasizing that there is no absolute truth. By starting with the concept of freedom of thought and doing *ijtihad*, they scrambled so that the Quran was given its original interpretation, with the meaning of the Quran that suits the demands of the modern era phenomena. Even more extreme than that, some of them have the view that the Quran influences the human hand (human touch).<sup>59</sup> SIS also claims that the irrelevant interpretation of the Quran is caused by Islamic traditionalist scholars who have monopolized the interpretation of Islamic texts, especially the Quran, then amend Sharia law incorrectly, gender bias and self-interest, politics, and under the influence of cultural heritage of

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<sup>56</sup> "Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, *Ancaman Islam Liberal Di Malaysia*, 27"

<sup>57</sup> Suhanim Abdullah & Marzalina Mansor Munif Zarriruddin Fikri Nordin, "Religious Liberalism in Sisters in Islam Discourse : An Analysis on Identification," *Proceeding of the International Conference on Social Science Research*, no. June (2013): 1051.

<sup>58</sup> Ahmad Sanusi Azmi, "Ancaman Pemikiran Liberal Terhadap Pembangunan Peradaban Islam Di Malaysia: Analisis Isu-Isu Berkaitan Penafsiran Al-Quran," *Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 1, no. 1 SE- (2020): 59.

<sup>59</sup> "Mohammad Ariffin Bin Ismail, *Cabaran Akidah Pemikiran Islam Liberal*, Pejabat Mufti Wilayah Persekutuan Jabatan Perdana Menteri Malaysia, 2016, 21.



patriarchy.<sup>60</sup> In this aspect, SIS accepts the views expressed by Liberal Islam as presented by Amina Wadud. Particularly in guaranteeing and implementing the ideology that is embodied in Sharia regulations, she sees Islam as the same as other world religions, where Islam does not depend on the influence of orthodoxy, interpretation, and methods of implementation that have been in effect since its emergence over hundreds of years ago.<sup>61</sup>

In carrying out her interpretation, Amina Wadud analyzed the verses of the Qur'an using the following methods: 1) in their context; 2) in the context of discussing the same topic in the Qur'an; 3) concerning the same language and syntactic structures that are used in all parts of the Qur'an; 4) regarding the attitude of truly adhering to the principles of the Qur'an and 5) in the context of the Qur'an as *weltanschauung* or a way of life. One example of her interpretation is when she talking about the distribution of inheritance (4:11, 12, 176) Amina Wadud criticizes the old interpretation that 1: 2 (male and female) is the only mathematical formula. This theory is not true, because when we examine the verses on inheritance one by one, it turns out that the 1: 2 formula is only one variety of the model for the distribution of male and female inheritance. If there is only one daughter, that is half of the total inheritance.<sup>62</sup> In this case, Wadud understands this verse only based on the concept of equality, not by justice, because if it is understood based on justice it will produce balance.

Although SIS does not directly use the name Liberal Islam as is done by JIL but based on its ideas, it is very clear that SIS accepts Progressive Islamic<sup>63</sup> thought that is similar to Liberal Islam in terms of its concept, as well as its rejection of the Islamic heritage held by the majority of Muslims. The elements of liberalism in SIS were increasingly visible when they

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<sup>60</sup> Sister In Islam, *Islam, Gender and Human Rights: An Alternative Views*, (Kuala Lumpur: SIS Forum Berhad, 1993), 2.

<sup>61</sup> Sister In Islam, *Islam, Gender and Human Rights: An Alternative Views*.

<sup>62</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Women, Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 118.

<sup>63</sup> According to Kurzman, the characteristics of a Progressive Islamic sect refer to the Islamic modems that fight for Liberal Islamic ideas. He explained that among the main ideas are the practice of democracy, development and modernization of life, reform of Sharia law, religious pluralism, freedom of speech, freedom to practice *ijtihad*, defense of women's rights, rejection of religious authority and practice of a hermeneutic approach. Charles Kurzman, "Liberal Islam Prospects and Challenges," *Journal Meria* 03, no. 01 (1999).

were involved in the emergence of the Coalition of Malaysia NGOs in the UPR process to make demands for a comprehensive implementation of human rights made by the United Nations (UN). Among their demands were, first, that Malaysia is urged to recognize and justify Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), especially LGBT rights. Second, Malaysia is urged to sign the International Covenant On The Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and also sign the Covenant of Civil & Political Right (ICCPR) which contains religious freedom.<sup>64</sup> Liberalism in Malaysia was found to have started too with the initial lawsuit coming from non-Muslims. This current was later overtaken by Liberal Muslims as most of the demands put forward by non-Muslims were in line with the liberalism agenda.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, non-Muslims can benefit from the Liberal Muslims, as if their demands are also supported by the Muslims themselves, by highlighting the support of the Liberal Muslims.

#### *Response Malaysian Ulamas to the SIS' Quranic Exegesis in Malaysia*

SIS received many responses from the Malaysian public, but most of them gave a negative response. Moreover, Malaysia is a country with a predominantly Muslim population that greatly limits the existence of groups or organizations that deviate from the teachings of Islam which have been inaugurated by the Malaysian kingdom. Muzakarah Jawatankuasa Fatwa Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Hal Ehwal Ugama Islam Malaysia decided that the liberal thought is a heretical teaching and deviates from Islamic Sharia.<sup>66</sup> Besides, the Selangor Fatwa Bureau which convened on 17 July 2014 has prohibited the understanding of liberalism and religious pluralism, including the group of Sisters in Islam (SIS) as follows: 1) SIS Forum (Malaysia) and any individuals, bodies, or institutions adhering to the notions of liberalism and religious pluralism are deviant and deviate from Islamic teachings. 2) Any published material

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<sup>64</sup> Nurazimah Abdul Aziz & Nurul Syafini Abdul Rahman, "Pengaruh Pluralisme Dalam Sister in Islam," *Persidangan Antarabangsa Sains Sosial Dan Kemanusiaan*, April (2018): 13.

<sup>65</sup> Jaffary Awang et al., "Islamic Studies in Malaysia in Confronting Liberal Islam," *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 5, no. 5 (2011): 432.

<sup>66</sup> *Perlembagaan Persekutuan et al., "Perkara (3), Agama Persekutuan, (3) and (5). Perlembagaan Persekutuan Malaysia" Undang-Undang Malaysia Perlembagaan Persekutuan, 2006.*

containing ideas of liberalism and religious pluralism should be forbidden and may be confiscated. 3) Suruhanjaya Communication and Multimedia Malaysia (SKMM) should block social pages that are against the teachings of Islam and Syara' Law. 4) Every individual who adheres to the notion of liberalism and religious pluralism should repent and return to the path of Islam.<sup>67</sup>

Unlike JIL, which was initially so massive and then its popularity declined, the SIS movement and activities are still running well today, even though its popularity is not as massive as it used to be. This can be seen on the website <https://sistersinislam.org/>. On the website, it shows that SIS is still active in social activities, and publishing articles. However, the influence of SIS on the Quranic exegesis in Malaysia is not as massive as the influence of JIL in Indonesia. This is because, first, the methodology offered by SIS in interpreting the Quran in Malaysia is a hermeneutic method initiated by Amina Wadud in her book *Quran and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, who is one of the founders of SIS. So that Amina Wadud's hermeneutic approach is more popular than SIS itself. But on the other hand, SIS claims that they are involved in Amina Wadud's hermeneutic approach.<sup>68</sup>

Second, Malaysia has very strict regulations on the existence of religious teachings or sects that are indicated as deviant and liberal. The kingdom of Malaysia has an important role in dealing with the issue of liberal Islam, including the steps taken by Islamic royal management bodies such as the Majlis Fatwa Kebangsaan, Mufti Position, and JAKIM to curb the spread of liberal Islam in Malaysia.<sup>69</sup> One of the actions taken by the Malaysia government was when the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) eradicated the spread of liberal Islam in Malaysia through seminars or article publications, one of which was

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<sup>67</sup> Warta Kerajaan Negeri Selangor et al., "Enakmen Pentadbiran Agama Islam (Negeri Selangor) Tentang Fatwa Pemikiran Liberalisme Dan Pluralisme Agama," Pub. L. No. Sel. P.U. 28., 48 1 (2014).

<sup>68</sup> Kamaruddin et al., "An Analysis Of The Method Of Problem Solving By Sis Through A Model Of Qur'anic Hermeneutics From An Islamic Thought Perspective, 37.

<sup>69</sup> Mohd Fairuz Jamaluddin Ahmad Yumni Abu Bakar, *Menjawab Islam Liberal: Pendedahan Agenda Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL) & Sister in Islam (SIS)* (Kuala Lumpur: PTS Publications & Distributor Sdn.Bhd, 2014), 153-154.

holding a seminar entitled SIS: Wajah Gerakan Liberal di Malaysia, presented by a senior lecturer at Ushuluddin Faculty and philosophy, Faculty of Islamic studies UKM.<sup>70</sup>

While the influence of SIS's thoughts on the reinterpretation of the Quran and its support for LGBT legalization is still very pronounced. As happened in October 2019, the tragedy provided reinterpreting the Quran repeats with a more tragic, it more considerable is an environment that is not within the realm of academic debate, but absorbs into the high school-level debate arena. The debate competition held at Sekolah Datuk Abdul Razak (SDAR) on 11 and 13 October 2019, the committees of the Tun Razak Debate Cup have two controversial motions of the debate. What is raised involves issues similar to the ideas thrown by SIS:<sup>71</sup> (1) supporting the reinterpreting of the Quran. The committees say they provide a scope of discussion that leads to the description of the Quran as having deficiencies or defects and described the contents of the Qur'an as no longer relevant to the modern world. (2) the second controversial issue related to LGBT legal disputes. Because of that, the Department of Islamic Religious Affairs Negeri Sembilan and Mufti WP Kuala Lumpur has taken stern action by detaining the organizers for offenses under Section 50 of the Negeri Sembilan Syariah Criminal Enactment.<sup>72</sup> Although at first, no one expected the idea of disputing the Quran thrown by liberals such as SIS in 2019, such thoughts seem to begin to permeate into the network of school student activity agencies. Failure to filter out these liberal thoughts can pose a threat to the power of young people's thinking systems and potentially expose them to the confusion that can make them reject the contents of the Quran itself.

### *JIL and SIS through Liberal Islam in Southeast Asia*

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<sup>70</sup> "Www.Jais.Gov.My," n.d.

<sup>71</sup> Azmi, "Ancaman Pemikiran Liberal Terhadap Pembangunan Peradaban Islam Di Malaysia: Analisis Isu-Isu Berkaitan Penafsiran Al-Quran," 62.

<sup>72</sup> Statement Of Mufti Wp Kuala Lumpur On Bayan Linnas Article 217<sup>th</sup> Series Based On 505 Akta Pentadbiran Undang-Undang Islam (Wilayah-Wilayah Persekutuan) 1993 Seksyen 33 (Kuasa Mufti), See More:

Mufti Wilayah Persekutuan, "Debat Piala Tun Abdul Razak-Inilah Pendapat Kami," October 2019, <https://muftiwp.gov.my/Artikel/Bayan-Linnas/3749-Bayan-Linnas-Siri-Ke-216-Debat-Piala-Tun-Abdul-Razak-Ini-Lah-Pendapat-Kami>.

The strong relations between SIS and JIL can be seen clearly from the history of the emergence of liberal Islam in the Southeast Asia region which was started by the influence of liberal ideology, secularism, and feminism that has been brought by orientalist and Islamic scholar from the west to Indonesia in the 1970s.<sup>73</sup> At first identifiable several stages of the development of liberalism in Indonesia which is self-driving by Indonesian Islamic scholars themselves which consists of two periods: The first period introduced by Nur Cholish Majid in the 1970s,<sup>74</sup> with the idea of liberalization, secularization, and Islamic culture. All these ideas and ideas have received a warm response among Indonesian Islamic thinkers until Nur Cholish Majid has received the title of Guru Bangsa (teacher's nation) a title large enough to commemorate his services in bringing about the renewal of modern Islamic thought. The second period was in 2002, with the existence of a young group of liberal Islamic networks (JIL) consisting of Ulil Abshar Abdallah, Muqstith Ghazali, Novriantoni, Hamid Basyaib, and so on.

The liberal Islamic understanding in Southeast Asia has been made a major commodity that should be marketed to all world communities, assisted by various international funders in the name of the struggle for humanity and human rights. This humanitarian aid fund has been given and taken by the majority of the population of the Third World, including Muslims themselves in various countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. Among the funders in question are Asia, Ford, Fullbright, Toyota, and Konhraf Adenour Foundation.<sup>75</sup>

While the liberal Islamic movement in Malaysia is still hidden and its movements are very smooth, in contrast to Indonesia, liberal Islam moves very widely because its movement clearly states as a liberal Islamic movement such as JIL which gave the name of its movement

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<sup>73</sup> Hamdiah A. Latif, "Mengkritis Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL): Antara Spirit Revivalisme, Liberalisme Dan Bahaya Sekularisme," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* Vol.10, No. 2 (2011), 53.

<sup>74</sup> Lily Zubaidah Rahim, "Discursive Contest between Liberal and Literal Islam in Southeast Asia," *Policy and Society* 25, no. 4 (2006): 77-98.

<sup>75</sup> Rahim, &, and Rosele., "Islam Liberal Dan Ancamannya Terhadap Kelangsungan Ahl Sunnah Wal Jamaah Di Malaysia, (Universiti Malaya: Kuala Lumpur, 2016), 1-13."

as liberal Islam, so it was easy to find out its thoughts and figures. It is caused the discourse of Islamic thought in Indonesia has grown so rapidly, that its momentum is so great and affects other areas around it, including in Malaysia itself. What is unique is that the new Islamic thought map in Indonesia is constantly expanding beyond other areas such as the Middle East, Indo-Pakistan, and Europe.<sup>76</sup> It is colored, among others, with the high nature of traditionalism, rationalism, and appreciation of the reality of Indonesian society which is indeed multicultural. Besides, the Indonesian society does practice the nature of openness with various new forms of thinking that come from outside, whether from the west and middle east. In Malaysia, although no figure or NGO has openly claimed to adhere to liberal Islamic ideology like JIL in Indonesia, we can trace the followers of this ideology through written discourses and talks. This group joins several specialized NGOs that carry the promotion of western ideology in the name of Malaysian Human Rights. It consists of Sisters In Islam (SIS), Insitutut Kajian Dasar/Institute of Policy Studies (IKD), Middle Eastern Study Group, and Forum Iqra / Jemaah al-Quran Malaysia. All of these groups have some key similarities.<sup>77</sup>

Then specifically in the aspect of interpreting the Quran, the relation between JIL and SIS are influenced by Amina Wadud's Hermeneutic approach, which is an Islamic scholar from the west and also one of the founders and an important figure of SIS,<sup>78</sup> while Amina Wadud's thoughts are heavily influenced by Fazlur Rahman's concept of contextual interpretation.<sup>79</sup> Fazlur Rahman's method of contextual interpretation is evident in his Double Movements theory.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, JIL uses a hermeneutic and contextual approach in

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<sup>76</sup> Rahim, &, and Rosele., "Islam Liberal Dan Ancamannya Terhadap Kelangsungan Ahl Sunnah Wal Jamaah Di Malaysia, 7.

<sup>77</sup> Mohd Safri Ali et al., "Liberalism between Acceptance and Rejection in Muslim World: A Review," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 9, no. 11 (2019): 798-810.

<sup>78</sup> Kamaruddin et al., "The History of Sisters in Islam", 554

<sup>79</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Women, Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 20.

<sup>80</sup> The theory is as follows: the first movement consists of two steps (1) the interpreter must understand the meaning or meaning of a particular statement by examining the historical (social) situation or problem in which the statement is the answer. This step consists of understanding the meaning of the Qur'an as a whole as well as regarding specific teachings which are a response to specific situations; (2) generalizing the specific answers

interpreting the Quran as promoted by Ulil and Muqsith Ghazali.<sup>81</sup> Unlike the previous commentators who paid more attention to the aspect of language and theological debate, the emphasis of the JIL and SIS figures in studying the Qur'an was on the importance of seeing the text of the Qur'an in its context. This interpretive approach model is known as the contextual approach. In this case, can be seen that SIS and JIL believe that to maintain the relevance of the Quran with human life, the Quran must be continually reinterpreted.

### ***Conclusion***

JIL and Sister in Islam SIS for two decades have been actively propagating the need for refreshing and renewing Islamic understanding especially Qur'anic Exegesis by voicing liberality, plurality, and freedom of Islam. Although they face serious rejection from many groups till being not as massive as they were, their influence in the development of Islamic studies in Indonesia and Malaysia is still very pronounced today especially JIL which very loudly recognizes themselves as a movement that adheres to liberal Islamic ideology. Three aspects influenced by the Liberal Islam movement in updating quranic exegesis are authority, methodology, and contemporary issues as products of the interpretations.

The regulations and culture of a country regarding freedom of expression are crucial for the growth of a movement. Political hegemony and financial support are not less dominant in determining a movement's sustainability, in which Indonesia and Malaysia have different regulations to respond to the existence of the liberal Islam movement. This is visible in the history of JIL and SIS in constructing new development of Islamic studies including Quranic exegesis.

Different factors both internal and external change movement's stability, including Liberal Islam and other movements in Malaysia in Indonesia. Further research is needed to

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and expressing them as statements that have general moral-social objectives which can be drawn from specific texts in the light of their socio-historical background and legis rationes. And the second movement is a process that departs from a general viewpoint to a specific view that must be formulated and realized in the present reality. (Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 7-8.

<sup>81</sup> Muqsith Ghazali, *Metodologi Studi AL-Qur'an*, 143.

unveil the next challenges of SIS and other Islamic movements so that Islamic studies particularly quranic exegesis will be updated regularly and encouraged for not being static.

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