

# Hate Speech and the Indonesian Islamic Defenders Front

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front – FPI) is a domestic Indonesian terrorist organization. Its goal is the implementation of *Shari'ah* at national and local levels in Indonesia. It presents itself as an ally of government security forces in their attempts to control sin and vice. It uses hate speech to motivate and legitimize violent attacks on organizations and individuals it considers to be sinful or religiously deviant. It has targeted Christian minorities and members of the Ahmadiyah Muslim sect for physically violent attacks. It conducts hate speech campaigns against Muslim organizations and intellectuals supporting religious freedom, branding them as “enemies of the state” and “more satanic than Satan.”

Unlike many other Muslim terrorist organizations FPI is not based on *Salafi* or Wahhabi religious teachings. It does not have ties with trans-national religious or political movements. FPI leaders have religious roots in traditional Indonesian Islam and are associated with Sufi mystical brotherhoods. Rank and file members have little religious education. Many have criminal backgrounds and describe themselves as “reformed gangsters.”

FPI has established “discursive cover” for violence by linking its actions to *fatwa* (legal opinions) issued by the semi-official *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars – MUI). It has also established relationships with elements of the security forces and with *Salafi* oriented organizations. It can be understood as a violent element of a broadly based movement seeking to establish *Shari'ah* but not to alter the structure of the Indonesian political system.

The Indonesian government and its leaders condemn violence committed in the name of religion and support religious liberty in policy statements and speeches. Efforts by Indonesian security forces to contain internationally oriented, anti-state terrorist organization have been largely successful. They have done little to counter FPI violence. This indicates that the government lacks the political will to defend the lives and rights of religious minorities.

## INTRODUCTION

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*A frame established by the Indonesian Council of Muslim Scholars and support from powerful political factions enable FPI campaigns of demonization and violence with impunity.*

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This paper explores the ways in which the Indonesian *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front – FPI) uses hate speech to motivate and legitimize violent attacks on organizations and individuals it considers to be sinful and deviant.<sup>2</sup>

We argue that the use of a discursive frame established by *fatwa* (legal opinions) issued by the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Council of Muslim Scholars) and tacit support from powerful political factions enable FPI to conduct campaigns of demonization and violence with impunity. We also elaborate on a distinction between what the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies at Gadjah Mada University calls the two faces of FPI.<sup>3</sup> A CRCS report distinguishes between civil and uncivil modes of FPI discourse and praxis. The civil mode seeks to establish the organization’s credibility in the public sphere. It presents FPI as the ally of authorities in attempts to control deviance and assisting those in need, especially victims of natural disasters. The uncivil mode uses demonizing rhetoric to build and maintain a base for violently confronting and brutally punishing deviants.<sup>4</sup> We demonstrate that FPI has not two, but three faces: one civil; a second that dehumanizes and demonizes enemies; and a third explicitly calling on FPI supporters to attack them. FPI discourse becomes increasingly violent as the audience they are engaging changes from the general public to in-group religious gatherings.

We concur with others who have reached the conclusion that the Indonesian government has failed to curb FPI violence for fear of appearing “un-Islamic.” We carry this line of reasoning a step further pointing to the collusion between elements of the security forces and FPI as a significant factor contributing to the seeming disconnect between official discourse that condemns violence and practices that accommodate it.

Efforts by the Indonesian government to contain trans-national terrorist organizations including *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), the group responsible for the 2002 Bali Bombings, have been largely successful.<sup>5</sup> Much of the JI leadership has been killed or captured and the organization’s attempts to regroup and re-structure thwarted by security forces.<sup>6</sup> In the last several years there has, however, been an upsurge in violence committed in the name of religion by organizations with exclusively domestic agendas. The prospect of sectarian violence poses a more serious threat to Indonesia’s political stability than JI ever did because of its potential to provoke conflict between religious communities, especially Muslims and Christians. In July 2012 the Front for Peace and *Foreign Policy* magazine released a report that mentions Indonesia as being at risk for state failure in part because of escalating religious tensions and the government’s

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*The MUI has not encouraged or promoted violence but has established a frame that enables it.*

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reluctance to contain attacks on minority groups.<sup>7</sup> The Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta and the Jakarta based Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace also report increased levels of religious intolerance and violence.<sup>8</sup> On July 18<sup>th</sup> the *New York Times* reported on attacks on the tiny *Shi'ah* minority and the failure of the Indonesian government, at national and local levels, to address issues of sectarian violence for fear of being seen as un-Islamic. The *Shi'ah* are not the only Muslim minority group to fall victim to demonization and violence. The Ahmadiyah sect, which teaches that its founder was a prophet, mystical groups rooted in Javanese culture (*aliran kepercayaan*) and others departing from broadly defined Sunni orthodoxy are also targets.<sup>9</sup> So-called Muslim liberals and pluralists and Christian minorities, especially those wishing to build churches in Muslim majority neighborhoods, have also come under attack. Social and sexual “deviants,” particularly gays, lesbians and transgendered people, are also subject to derision and physical violence. FPI is one of the primary perpetrators of this violence.

*The Times* and others have pointed to the role of the MUI in promoting a climate of religious intolerance contributing to sectarian violence.<sup>10</sup> In this paper we argue that MUI has not encouraged or promoted violence but has established a discursive frame that enables it, allowing FPI and other perpetrators to define violence as defense of Indonesia and Islam. This public, uncivil discourse defines religious minorities as intolerable existential threats to the Muslim community. It is an example of a virulent form of hate speech that, as Richardson observes, uses intensely negative representation of others as “social weapons” to control and discredit them.<sup>11</sup>

## UNDERSTANDING HATE SPEECH

Hate speech is a frequently mentioned, but under-theorized, mode of contentious political discourse. The term is most commonly used to describe contentious discourse focused on racial and ethnic minorities and people with alternative sexual orientations in western democracies. Imprecise definition and the absence of criteria for distinguishing potentially dangerous hate speech from merely derogatory and bigoted modes of discourse make it difficult to control, especially in countries such as Indonesia and the United States where freedom of speech is protected and highly valued.

For analytic purposes we locate contentious religious discourse on a four-point scale. This scale is a continuum measuring the degree to which an individual or group endorses symbolic or physical violence against religious others. Points 1 through 4 designate levels on this continuum.

1. Dialog concerning/discussion of religious differences.
2. Unilateral condemnation of the beliefs and practices others.
3. Dehumanization and demonization of individuals and groups, implicit justification of violence.
4. Explicit provocation of violence.

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*Dehumanization and demonization make symbolic associations that are inherently threatening.*

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Dehumanization and demonization are critical psychological and symbolic concepts that distinguish between civil contentious discourse and hate speech. Levels 1 and 2 are critiques located within the limits of civil discourse because they do not implicitly or explicitly threaten others. Levels 3 and 4 are hate speech. They make symbolic associations that are inherently threatening. Dehumanization is a psychological and symbolic process defining individuals or groups as less than fully human. Bernard, Ottenberg and Redl distinguish between self and object directed dehumanization.<sup>12</sup> This distinction is important for understanding the dynamics of hate speech because both speakers and their enemy others are dehumanized, through in opposite ways. Self directed dehumanization is characterized by a sense of powerlessness and corresponding absence of agency in situations in which individuals and communities confront overwhelming destructive force. Hate speech can define the speaker and his community as powerless victims, even when they are not. Object directed dehumanization involves the characterization of enemy others as lacking “the attributes considered to be most human.” Object directed dehumanization promotes and legitimizes violence because it allows individuals and social groups to bypass “those psychic inhibitions against taking life that have become part of civilized man.” They understand the two modes of dehumanization as interdependent because perpetrators engage in self-dehumanization by portraying themselves as victims, while simultaneously employing object directed dehumanization in their interpretation of the other.

Demonization carries the process of object directed dehumanization a step further. It defines the perceived enemy as not only less than human, but as evil in the religious sense of the term and as an existential threat. Lukens-Bull and Woodward have argued that the symbolic processes of object directed dehumanization involve the projection of deeply seated fears or archetypes of evil onto opponents . It raises the stakes of ensuing conflict because it locates it in the context of ultimate religious concerns, thereby moving the symbolic and social location of the discourse from profane to sacred space. This combination of self-victimization and demonization of opponents is apparent in discourse about communal violence in Indonesia and elsewhere. Demonization can also function as theodicy because it explains suffering as the consequence of the evil actions of enemy others and cloaks violent acts perpetrated by self designated victims, including imagined ones, in an aura of sanctity.

Another characteristic of hate speech is that it often inverts hierarchies of power. This strategy involves depicting perpetrators as victims of supposed powerful others who are actually the intended victims of communal or sectarian violence. Level four hate speech typically includes some or all of the following propositions:

1. The other is inherently evil.
2. This evil poses an existential threat.
3. The other cannot or will not change.
4. Therefore, the other must be destroyed.
5. Destruction of the other is virtuous.

Conflict stemming from hate speech is what Juergensmeyer defines as “cosmic war.”<sup>13</sup> It is a zero sum game, in which compromise and negotiation are impossible and where even the most extreme forms of violence are morally justified. In many cases participation in cosmic war carries with it the promises of absolutism and heavenly rewards. These are not ordinary conflicts.

## **CIVIC CONTENTIOUS DISCOURSE AND HATE SPEECH IN INDONESIA**

In the remainder of this paper we focus on the strategies employed by MUI and FPI in discourse concerning sectarianism, liberalism and pluralism. These are contentious and polarizing issues in which symbols and perceptions are often more important than facts. MUI discourse is highly critical and declares sectarianism beyond the limits of broadly defined Sunni orthodoxy, liberalism and pluralism to be religiously unacceptable. Semantically it is located at Level 2 and presumably emerged from internal debates conducted at Level 1. FPI discourse is hate speech, located at Levels 3 and 4. There are also stylistic differences. MUI fatwas are written in polite, if strongly worded, formal Indonesian. FPI uses extremely coarse, sexually oriented language common among the *preman* (gangsters) who make up its paramilitary units.<sup>14</sup> Indonesians we asked about FPI language found it rude, shocking and vulgar.

### ***MAJELIS ULAMA INDONESIA***

MUI was founded in 1975 when Indonesia was governed by the oligarchic military-backed regime of the country’s second president Suharto (1966-1998). At that time its mandate was to advise the government on Muslim affairs and function as its liaison with the Muslim community. Its actual purpose was to buttress the regime’s Islamic legitimacy by rubber-stamping its religious and social policies. MUI is not an official body. It is something of a hybrid in that it is government

funded, but not controlled. It also operates the semi-official lucrative halal food certification process. Unlike similar organizations in neighboring Malaysia and Singapore, MUI does not speak for the government. Its fatwa are purely advisory and it does not have the authority of power to enforce them. Nor can they be understood as policy statements. The Indonesian government ignores MUI pronouncements it disagrees with, but rarely criticizes it directly.

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*MUI presents itself as an official body and the voice of the Indonesian Islamic community.*

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Since the democratic transition of 1998 MUI has become much more independent. It presents itself as an official body and the voice of the Indonesian Muslim community as a whole. It has drifted steadily in a conservative direction but has consistently condemned anti-state terrorism. MUI is self-regulating. There are no formal procedures for appointing members. The process often involves self-nomination or a suggestion to the council that representatives of a particular group be included. Because it strives for inclusiveness, conservative and Islamist groups are over represented. There are representatives of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama on the MUI fatwa council. It also includes distinguished legal scholars from the country's leading Muslim universities. These voices are, however, often drowned out by a loose coalition of radical organizations that has effectively captured the council and uses it to advance intolerant and *Shari'ah* centered agendas. This has led critics to conclude that MUI is an authoritarian and unrepresentative body without legitimate authority. NU and Muhammadiyah have their own fatwa councils and do not take MUI rulings seriously. In part because they tend to agree with them, Islamist organizations consider themselves "obligated" to conform with its decisions. A leader from the Islamist political party Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (Prosperous Justice Party), Indonesia's largest and most influential Muslim political party, interviewed in February 2011 stated that because MUI had ruled that Ahmadiyah is deviant and should be banned that the party has no choice to adopt this position. FPI also mentions MUI fatwa to justify its actions. The current Indonesian administration is more inclined to consider MUI advice than earlier post-Suharto governments because it depends on Islamist groups, including PKS, for parliamentary support.

FPI and other radical groups rely on two MUI rulings are to justify hate speech and sectarian violence. A 1980 MUI fatwa declared Ahmadiyah to be a deviant sect. The government took no action in response to this ruling. Islamist groups, who then had little freedom of action and often faced government persecution themselves, remained silent. The Ahmadiyah question did not figure significantly in public discourse until after the democratic transition of 1998. The Saudi government pressured Indonesia to take stronger action against Ahmadiyah and in 2002 sponsored conferences and religious gatherings that contributed directly to

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outbreaks of anti-Ahmadiyah violence. In 2005 MUI issued a new ruling confirming and strengthening its earlier decision. The 2005 fatwa quoted a 1985 Saudi affirmation of the 1974 ruling and called for the Indonesian government to disband Ahmadiyah organizations.

Another 2005 MUI fatwa declared pluralism and liberalism to be dangers to the Islamic faith. The MUI ruling defined pluralism as follows:

Religious pluralism is the view according to which all religions are the same and because of that, the truth of all religions is relative. For that reason, adherents of a religion cannot claim that only their own religion is true and others are false.

This is what Diana Eck of the Harvard Pluralism Project calls “theological pluralism.” Few Indonesians, and very few religious people anywhere, advocate this position. MUI prohibited a position that almost does not exist in Indonesian Muslim discourse. This fatwa has, however, allowed radical groups to demonize substantial portions of the Muslim community. This encompasses the leadership of many progressive organizations including NU and Muhammadiyah who publicly support what Eck calls “civic pluralism” which is what progressives refer to simply as “pluralism.” This is the view that all religions should enjoy equal protection under the law and that religious practice should not be limited by government regulations. FPI and others have suggested that those who support civic pluralism actually endorse theological pluralism.

The MUI ruling defined liberalism as follows:

Liberalism is an approach to understanding the texts of the Qur’an tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah) through the use of unrestricted reason and only accepting religious doctrines that accord with it.

Debates concerning the relative importance of reason and revelation are among the fundamental concerns of Islamic theology. The position that MUI condemns closely resembles that of the 8th-10th century Mu’tazila school of kalam (systematic theology). Few Indonesian Muslims endorse this position.

Radical groups’ attempts to link their opponents to these definitions rarely mention alternative interpretations or uses of these concepts, especially the ones their enemies actually use. Liberalism has been effectively demonized in much the same way that it has been in the United States. Pluralism is a more difficult target because former Indonesian President and NU leader Abdurrahman Wahid, who tens of millions of Indonesian Muslims believe to be a saint, was a strong supporter of civic pluralism.



Banners posted near his grave in Jombang, East Java praise him as the “Father of Pluralism.”

## ***FRONT PEMBELA ISLAM***

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*Moral and religious deviance, not the state or the world order, are the targets of the FPI's jihad.*

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FPI is an Indonesian domestic terrorist organization responsible for numerous attacks on Ahmadiyah Muslims and others it deems religiously, socially or sexually deviant since its founding in 1998. Its motto is “Live Honorably or Die as a Martyr.” It is known for violent, though generally non-lethal, attacks on those it deems “deviant others” and for “sweepings” (ransacking) of night clubs, bars, massage parlors and other establishments promoting what it considers to be immoral activities, especially during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. FPI actions have yielded few fatalities but many victims have been severely injured by blows from machetes and subjected to savage beatings with metal pipes or bamboo poles. These attacks often involve hundreds of young men, most of who are dressed in distinctive white robes and turbans. Smaller groups confront, verbally and occasionally physically abuse young couples they suspect of engaging in immoral behaviors including being seen in public after dark. Moral and religious deviance, not the state or the world order, are the targets of the FPI's jihad.

Unlike many other radical Muslim organizations FPI does not locate itself within or frame its actions in terms of discourse concerning either the “purification” of Islamic religious practice or the struggle to establish an explicitly Islamic state, social and political order. FPI is “out of the boxes” commonly used in the analysis of contemporary Muslim movements. It is not Salafi or Wahhabi, it is not linked to trans-national Islamist movements and it is not, in principle at least, anti-state, though it has built alliances with more radical organizations on issues of common concern. FPI's leaders, including founder Rizieq Syihab, and most of their followers come from traditional Indonesian Muslim backgrounds. Syihab is an Indonesian of Hadrami (Yemini) descent. He is known as Habib Rizieq. Habib (beloved) is an honorific applied to Hadrami sayyid or descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. This lends an aura of sanctity to FPI, because many Indonesian Muslims revere Habib as sources of blessing and out of respect and admiration for the Prophet and his family. Most FPI supporters engage in modes of religious practice that Salafis and Wahhabis consider improper, such as visiting holy graves. Many are members of Sufi mystical brotherhoods. FPI pengajian (religious gatherings) typically include shalawat (songs praising the Prophet Muhammad and his family) accompanied by drums and tambourines that are an anathema to Wahhabis. FPI is also extremely violent. Many Indonesians think that FPI is the most dangerous extremist movement in the country. Many also find the idea of religious violence sponsored by

Habib to be paradoxical because Habib are generally thought of as peaceful Holy Men and violence tends to be associated by Salafis.

We focus next on three examples of FPI discourse on sin and deviance. Two are banners we observed near FPI's Jakarta headquarters on July 21, 2012. They are located in public space, visible to many who do not seek information from or about FPI. One is located on a major thoroughfare near FPI headquarters in the Tanah Abang district of Jakarta. The other is displayed in front of one of the headquarters' buildings. The third is a 2008 speech by FPI general secretary Sobri Lubis at a public gathering in Banjar, West Java. The fact that all of these texts are located in public space is an indicator of FPI's lack of concern for public civility or fear of police and other security forces. Unlike highly secretive internationally focused terrorist organizations, FPI is an established participant in public discourse.

The first of the banners (see Figure 1) is approximately thirty feet high and twenty feet long. The text consists of a series of twenty-two couplets in rhymed or free verse poetry, describing characteristics FPI associates with Liberalism. Most are taken directly from FPI founder Rizieq Shihab's book, *Hancurkan Liberalisme. Tegakkan Syariat Islam* (Destroy Liberalism. Uphold Islamic Shari'ah). The second is much smaller. It explicitly and literally demonizes "liberal" organizations and their leaders.

Members of the paramilitary Laskar FPI we interviewed described "liberals" as being the most dangerous enemies of Islam in Indonesia. They also denied being radicals or terrorists, explained that they were misunderstood and that they only want to help the authorities combat sin and vice. They did admit to being reformed gangsters. One described the reform process as being a gradual one that he had not yet completed. None of them were well versed in Islamic theology or law or were able to answer even basic questions about FPI's theological orientation. They did not even know the names of the religious leaders whose portraits hung on the walls of the reception room of the headquarters building. They also did not wear the white robes associated with FPI. These, it would seem, are uniforms that provide an aura of sanctity to FPI public events.

The translation of the banner shown in Figure 1 is given in Table 1.

Figure 1. Banner outside FPI's Jakarta Headquarters

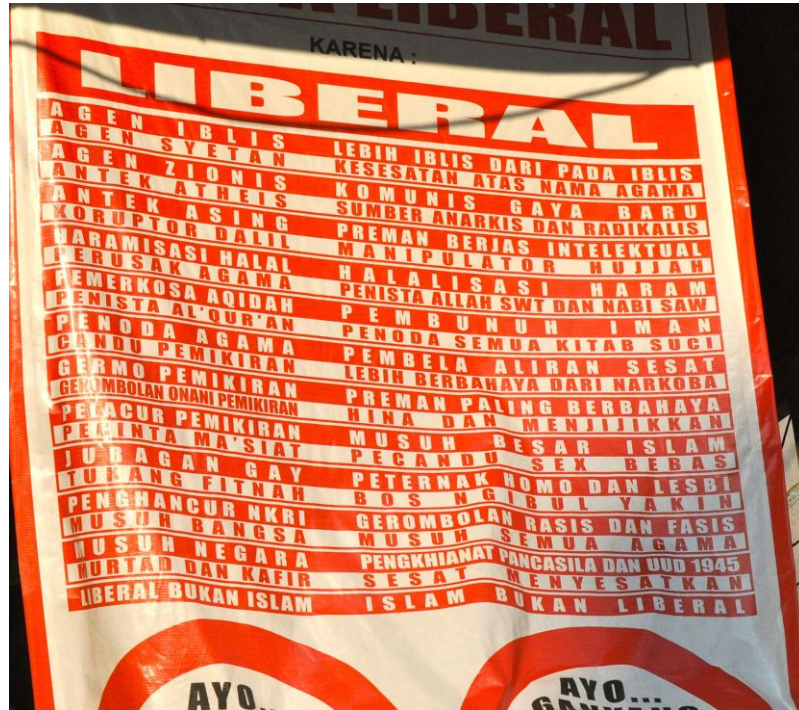


Table 1. Translation of Figure 1

<b>LIBERALS</b>	
1. Agents of the Devil	More Satanic than Satan
2. Agents of Satan	Satanism is the Name of Religion
3. Zionist Agents	New Style Communists
4. Atheist Lackeys	Source of Anarchy and Radicalism
5. Foreigners Lackeys	Intellectual Gangsters
6. Corrupters of Quranic Verses	Manipulators of Quranic Quotations
7. Forbidding the Permitted	Permitting the Prohibited
8. Destroyers of Religion	Insulting Allah and His Prophet
9. Rapist of Faith	Murderers of Faith
10. Defilers of the Qur'an	Defilers of all Holy Books
11. Tarnishers of Religion	Defenders of Deviant Movements
12. Narcotic Thinkers	More Dangerous than Narcotics
13. Pimp Thinkers	The Most Dangerous Gangsters
14. Gang of Masturbators	Insulting and Disgusting
15. Prostitution of Thought	The Greatest Enemies of Islam
16. Lovers of Sin	Addicted to Free Sex
17. Leaders of Gays	Raising Animalistic Gays and Lesbians
18. Specialists in Sowing Discord	Bosses of Liars
19. Destroyers of Indonesia	Gang of Racists and Fascists
20. Enemies of the Nation	Enemies of All Religions
21. Enemies of the State	Betrayers of the Constitution
22. Apostates and Unbelievers	Deviators who Spread Deviation
23. Liberalism is Not Islam	Islam is Not Liberalism

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*Nationalism is another theme of FPI discourse.*

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The meanings of first and the last of these couplets are transparent. If 1-22 are true, it follows that 23 is also true if Islam is defined in the technical sense of “Submission to Allah.” Some of the others, and the list as a whole, require explication. Couplets 1 and 2 are general statements about liberals that describe them as being the exact opposite of Muslims in the technical sense of “people who submit to Allah.” Couplets 8-11 and 22 are more specific, referring to typical actions and characteristic features of 1 and 2. Couplets 6, 7 and 18 are more explicit references to some of the deplorable acts of munafiqun -- hypocrites who profess to be Muslims but are actually kafir (unbelievers). The Qur’an has this to say about munafiqun: :

It is all the same for them whether you ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; never will Allah forgive them. Indeed, Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people. (63:60)

Couplet 6 suggests that liberals engage in tahrif or deliberate distortion of the text or meaning of the Qur’an. Couplet 10 is a related accusation, extending it to Holy Books in general. Couplet 7 charges liberals with prohibiting things that Allah allows (halal) and allowing things that he prohibits (haram); in other words, encouraging Muslims to do exactly the opposite of what Islam requires. The 18th accuses them of sowing discord (fitnah) which the Qur’an mentions as being more evil than killing (2: 191).

Nationalism is another theme of FPI discourse. Unlike Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), JI and other radical Islamist organizations dedicated to the establishment of a caliphate, FPI strongly supports Indonesian nationalism. Its goal is to reform the Indonesian state and to implement the Jakarta Charter. This is a statement originally included in the 1945 version of the national ideology Pancasila (five principles) appending seven words, which in English state “with the obligation for Muslims to adhere to Shari’ah,” to the first principle that defines Indonesia as a nation based on devotion to God. Given the fact that approximately ninety percent of Indonesians are Muslims, it would have established the country as a de facto Islamic state. This clause was omitted when it became clear that it was unacceptable to Christian and Hindu minorities. Couplets 2-4 and 19-21 describe liberals as enemies of the Indonesian state. This claim is entirely fictitious. There is nothing in “liberal” discourse that points even remotely in this direction. Exactly the opposite is true. Those FPI condemns as liberals and secularists are the strongest supporters of the Pancasila-based state.

Couplets 9 and 12- 17 refer to a combination of drug abuse and sexual sin. Sexual deviance and gender issues are increasingly important themes in

Indonesian Islamist discourse. These couplets attempt to establish links between these issues and theological elements of FPI's critique of liberalism. The logic of this association is that those who oppose truth and virtue in one way necessarily share the attributes of individuals who oppose them for other reasons. Hence if people who are "addicted to free sex" and those who "corrupt Quranic verses" are both enemies of Islam, it follows that those who corrupt the Qur'an are also addicted to free sex and those addicted to free sex corrupt the Qur'an. More formally, the existence of an intersection of two semantic fields implies a hidden identity relationship. This is an example of the symbolic logic of hate speech. It maps all of a group's designated enemies onto a unified demonic semantic field and associated (imagined) social group. This is also the logic underlying the collection of couplets as a totality. It defines the Muslim community (FPI) as being besieged by evil forces and paints all of its enemies with a single discursive brush.

This list is a categorical description of what FPI maintains are the sinful features of liberalism. It demonizes what it seeks to establish as a coherent and entirely evil totalistic ideology. Repeated references to Satan make it demonization in the literal sense of the term. The second image carries this logic a step further by linking this amalgam of evil with individuals and organizations. On the left side of the poster there is an image of Rizieq Shihab, beneath which is a silhouette of an FPI fighter standing on a map of Indonesia and the phrase "Allah Akbar!" (God is Great). In the center there are slogans including:

Oppose Liberals. Outlaw Ahmadiyah. Liberals and Ahmadiyah are: deviant, apostates, unbelievers, and not Islam.

Paramadina University and its founder Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005), arguably the most important Indonesian Muslim theologian of the second half of the twentieth century and who is known as "the nation's teacher," the entire national Muslim higher education system, the Asia Foundation, and the Setara Institute are described as uncivilized, utterly stupid, mentally retarded liberal intellectuals. Jaringan Liberal Islam (Liberal Islam Network), a think tank associated with NU, becomes Jaringan Iblis Laknatuallah -- The Satanic Network Cursed by God. It is difficult to imagine a more virulent form of demonization.

On the right side there are portraits of many of Indonesia's most prominent Muslim intellectuals and journalists adorned with blood and horns. Iblis is added as a middle name in captions identifying them. Mirza Ghulam, the founder of the Ahmadiyah movement, is also included. With the exception of Mirza Ghulam, all of those demonized in this poster are well known proponents of human rights, civic pluralism and democracy. They are all also known as critics of FPI.

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*FPI is a terrorist organization and has a long record of orchestrating violent attacks on those it demonizes.*

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This poster is an image of the idea of a cosmic war between Islam and Indonesia, represented by Rizieq Shihab and FPI, and the forces of Satan. The forces of Satan are intellectuals and theologians advocating various combinations of hermeneutic textual exegesis, thematic interpretation of the Qur'an along lines suggested by the Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman and who have formulated Islamic theological foundations for democracy and human rights. It stops short of calling for the death of the satanic forces, but the images are such that this exhortation need not be stated explicitly.

A video recorded in 2008 that circulates widely on the Internet explicitly calls on FPI followers to kill Ahmadiyah Muslims. In an address typical of internal FPI rhetoric General Secretary Sorbi Lubis stated:

We call on the Muslim community. Let us go to war with Ahmadiyah! Kill Ahmadiyah wherever they are! God is great! God is great! Kill! Kill! Kill!

If we do not kill Ahmadiyah they will destroy our faith. We won't be halal (permissible) anymore! .... The blood of Ahmadiyah is halal.

If they want to know who is responsible for killing Ahmadiyah, it is me; it is FPI and others from the Muslim community who are responsible for killing Ahmadiyah!

Say that Sobri Lubis ordered it, that Habib Rizieq and FPI ordered it! We are ready to be held responsible. God willing we will be held responsible in the afterlife for killing Ahmadiyah wherever they are!

This is Level 4 hate speech and a call to cosmic war.

## **FPI, TERRORISM AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

FPI is a terrorist organization. It uses a combination of intimidation, fear and violence in pursuit of political goals. It engages in escalating hate speech that demonizes ideologies, organizations and individuals, calls on followers to kill those it deems deviants and defines violence as cosmic war. It has a long record of orchestrating violent attacks on those it demonizes. It is not, however, recognized as a terrorist group by either the Indonesian government or the international community. FPI operates within the discursive and social spaces of Indonesian politics. It imagines and presents itself as a mass organization, the representative of the Indonesian Muslim community and as the partner of the security forces.

These are discursive strategies designed to establish its legitimacy in what Habermas calls the public sphere.<sup>15</sup> It has avoided being labeled a “terrorist” organization by positioning itself within the frame of acceptable discourse. It presents itself as operating at Level 2 on the hierarchy of contentious discourse described earlier in this paper, and selectively operates at Level 4, often crossing the threshold separating discursive and physical violence.

FPI has successfully employed a combination of discursive and political strategies to distance itself from terrorism and mainstream extremist positions.

1.) Many Indonesian Muslims support FPI’s goals, if not its violent tactics. One Jakarta Habib we interviewed in July 2012 stated that Rizieq Shihab has a good heart and is correct on many points but that: “His way is not my way, or my father’s way or my teacher’s way.” Participants in a focus group comprised of students from Yogyakarta’s Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University we conducted agreed nearly unanimously that Ahmadiyah should be banned because it is a “humiliation” for the Muslim community. FPI attacks and hate speech are directed towards ideologies that even many mainstream Muslims do not accept and behaviors and against acts widely believed to be sinful. FPI’s hate speech is located within a quasi-official discursive frame because MUI has declared the positions it opposes to be religiously unacceptable. FPI distorts its opponents’ positions to place individuals inside this frame when they cannot be located there on the basis of MUI definitions. These subtleties are easily lost on the theologically unsophisticated.

2.) FPI directs physical violence at groups and individuals who do not have strong constituencies or well-placed allies. The religious organizations it attacks, including Ahmadiyah Muslims and Pentecostal Christians, are outside the mainstreams of Islam and Christianity. FPI has demonized establishment groups including Indonesia’s Islamic University system, but has not directed violence against them. It has not attacked the state or symbolic targets, such as hotels, associated with western interests. FPI appears to have reasoned (correctly) that the Indonesian state would be unwilling to assume the political risk involved in countering a movement defining itself in terms of traditional Islamic teachings as long as violence is directed against the powerless.

3.) FPI positions itself as the ally of the security forces in what are described as shared commitments to combat heresy and sin. When speaking in the public sphere Sobri Lubis, who called on his followers to kill Ahmadiyah Muslims, projects a very different image. This is a summary of his explanation of how FPI operates:

First there must be a written request for assistance in resolving the problem from the local community. FPI then conducts an investigation. If the area is found to be infested with sin, the first step taken against it is preaching. Next petitions against sin and vice are circulated and delivered to local authorities along with a deadline for resolving the problem. If local authorities are incapable of resolving the issues, they are brought to the attention of those at increasingly higher levels. If this fails to produce results FPI initiates a dialog with authorities and request advice concern what sort of *dakwah* it should undertake. Only if this fails does FPI issue an ultimatum.

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*FPI attempts to establish legitimacy through ties to more mainstream organizations.*

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In the same interview Lubis stated that most of FPI's actions have been peaceful and described it as a "victim of the mass media."<sup>16</sup> Rank and file members make very similar statements. They locate FPI at Level 1 of the contentious discourse scale. FPI also employs self-dehumanizing discourse to present itself as the victim of the "demonic" journalists and intellectuals depicted in Image 2.

4.) FPI attempts to intimidate the police by issuing warnings that if security forces do not comply with their demands, FPI will resort to violence. FPI's demands that sinful entertainment venues be closed during Ramadan can be flash points. In 2012 FPI issued statements that it did not intend to conduct Ramadan "sweepings." However, it also issued thinly and not so thinly veiled threats. FPI leader Salim Umar Al Attas stated that if the police did their job properly there would not be any need for FPI to conduct sweepings. On July 19, 2012, FPI issued a statement saying that if sinful activities did not stop during Ramadan, there would be "burnings."<sup>17</sup>

5.) FPI attempts to establish legitimacy through ties to more mainstream organizations. It is among the constituents of *Forum Umat Islam* (Islamic Community Forum), an umbrella organization established in 2005 to organize demonstrations against the desecration of the Qur'an by US military personnel at the Guantanamo Bay detention center.<sup>18</sup> Muslim organizations with very diverse religious and political orientations including Muhammadiyah and NU joined together in this effort. FUI vanished after staging a large demonstration May 23, 2005, but reappeared in August of the same year with a domestic agenda focused on the implementation of Shari'ah and opposition to Ahmadiyah and Liberalism. FUI continues to list NU and Muhammadiyah as affiliates but neither organization endorses it. In addition to FPI its principle supporters are Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia (Indonesian Board of Islamic Da'wah, DDII), PKS and HTI.<sup>19</sup>



FUI is closely linked to MUI and DDII. FUI chairman Muhammad Al Khaththath has been a member of MUI since 2005 and was a strong supporter of the fatwa banning liberalism and pluralism. He is also associated with *Hizbul Dakwah Indonesia*, a breakaway faction of HTI. FUI is housed in the DDII office building in Jakarta. DDII is Indonesia's oldest and most influential Islamist organization. It was founded in 1967 and combines a Salafi religious orientation with a political philosophy rooted in Muslim Brotherhood activism.<sup>20</sup>

Rizieq Shihab is a frequent contributor to – and one of the editors of – *Suara Islam (The Voice of Islam)*, FUI's biweekly tabloid. *Suara Islam* can be located at Level 2 of the hierarchy of contentious discourse. On the surface at least, it is more “moderate” than many Islamist publications. It does not support political violence in Indonesia or abroad. It exercises rhetorical restraint, refraining from *takfiri* (denouncing other Muslims as non-believers) and other forms demonization. It also avoids divisive controversies about theological, ritual and cultural issues. Instead it conducts a sustained moral critique of Indonesian society and government, attributing problems confronting the nation to its leaders' failure to govern in accordance with Shari'ah norms. It is also critical of “liberalism” and “deviant” Muslim groups but stops short of the hyperbolic demonizing rhetoric FPI uses. Unlike many other Islamist publications, *Suara Islam* supports its positions by reference to general religious principles rather than verbatim scriptural quotations, making it more accessible to a general audience with limited religious literacy.

For the most part the articles and interviews are in-depth, well researched and written. The writing is clear, succinct and subdued. Its reportage is not replete with references to *jihad*, and does not engage in the systematic demonization of alleged enemy others. In articles that are not concerned with explicitly religious topics there are only occasional references to the Qur'an and Hadith that often dominate other Islamist publications. In general, *Suara Islam* has the look and feel of a news and opinion publication. It frames current events in terms of Islamist social discourse in ways that set an agenda for social mobilization by constantly reminding readers of the precarious position of Islam and Muslims in the nation and the world. Presenting this message in journalistic style and language would appear to be an attempt to reach a readership not entirely familiar with the language of Islamist ideologies.

## FPI VIOLENCE AND THE INDONESIAN AUTHORITIES

FPI's discursive duplicity, intimidation and alliance-building strategies have proven to be effective. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono routinely applauds the virtues of religious tolerance in his speeches but does little to ensure enforcement of laws prohibiting inciting communal violence. In an address at a Jakarta church delivered in December of 2011 he stated:

Every religion teaches fundamental ideals of good and togetherness. Our nation's diversity is strength, a gift from God, which we must preserve... Therefore, we must not force our will onto or intimidate our brothers in performing their religious duties. Tolerance is non-negotiable.<sup>21</sup>

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*FPI's duplicity, intimidation and alliance-building strategies have proven to be effective.*

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Yudhoyono's government has not translated these words into action. It has been unwilling or unable to prosecute perpetrators of even the most extreme forms of violence committed in the name of religion, other than those directed at the state or Western targets, let alone purveyors of hate speech. When they have been prosecuted, perpetrators of violence against religious minorities have received light sentences. The contrast between the treatment of JI and FPI terrorists is striking. Three of the Bali Bombers were executed. The most severe sentence given to any of those involved in the killings of Ahmadiyah Muslims was six months in prison.

The authorities often ignore or excuse FPI violence. Police have stood by as FPI mobs attack Christians and Ahmadiyah Muslims, even in extreme cases such as a February 2011 incident in Cikeusik, Banten province, in which three Ahmadiyah Muslims were beaten to death.<sup>22</sup> In others they have simply not responded to request for assistance, or stated that they are powerless to prevent attacks. They have sometimes provided logistical support to FPI and following the "action" been seen sharing meals with FPI fighters.<sup>23</sup> Police commanders often blame victims of FPI violence for the attacks. They sometimes suggest that the presence of violent mobs indicates that the presence of "religious others" offends local residents, driving them to frenzied violence. In response to an attack on Christians, which his officers did nothing to prevent, Bekasi police chief Imam Sugianto stated: "We have warned the congregation not to hold their services in the area, because residents do not want them to do so, but they did not follow our instructions." Even though there were several hundred police on the scene, a clergyman stated that: "The police did not do anything when the mob started throwing stones and hitting and kicking us."<sup>24</sup>

Sugianto suggests that the Indonesian police are incapable of controlling the rage of local populations armed with sticks and stones. This is clearly

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*The government sent the message that Islamists can get away with murder, as long as their victims are members of minority groups.*

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disingenuous. It suggests that violence is the natural consequence of moral outrage about the immorality of the victims. According to this logic, victims are perpetrators and perpetrators victims. Put more bluntly, the Bekasi police told the Indonesian people that victims of FPI violence bear the blame for the psychological and physical suffering they endure. This is, as Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman observes, among the strategies commonly employed by perpetrators of violence against the weak in cases ranging from domestic violence to state terror. She also observes that: “The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail.”<sup>25</sup> One of the victims in the Cikeusik case was sentenced to six months imprisonment for inciting violence against himself. Perpetrators who were convicted received the same, or lesser (three months) sentences. This speaks volumes about the ability of FPI and other perpetrators of violence in the name of religion to define reality in Indonesia.<sup>26</sup>

Jakarta Governor Fauzi Bowo and high-ranking police commanders have cultivated relationships with Rizieq Shihab and other FPI leaders for several years. On August 8, 2010, the *Jakarta Post* reported that Bowo had been “hobnobbing” with FPI.<sup>27</sup> Bowo and Jakarta Police Chief Timur Pradopo attended a celebration of FPI’s twelfth anniversary where they met with Rizieq. In his speech Rizieq stated that: “The FPI is not the enemy of the police or state. Sin is the FPI’s enemy.” The previous day he had visited Police Headquarters to offer assistance enforcing Ramadan closing laws. When he was subsequently nominated to be National Police Commander Pradopo told a parliamentary committee that he intended to “embrace” FPI in the interest of national security.<sup>28</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Writing in the *Jakarta Globe*, Bramantyo Prijosusilo observed:

the message that the government sent to the people of Indonesia was that Islamists can get away with murder, as long as their victims are members of minority groups. Don’t try bombing Western symbols like Bali nightclubs or the JW Marriott Hotel. For that kind of terror, expect no mercy. To commit murder and get away with it, pick on a minority group and make sure you have a mob, preferably chanting God’s name.<sup>29</sup>

Prijosusilo and other Indonesian and international analysts have offered two possible explanations for this state of affairs. The first is that the Indonesian government is too weak to halt FPI violence. The second is that it lacks the political will because it secretly condones it. A more

nuanced interpretation combines the two perspectives. Rizieq Shihab and other FPI leaders are skilled rhetoricians and very adept at manipulating symbols. They have succeeded in establishing a measure of credibility and legitimacy in the public sphere. They present themselves as the allies of the authorities in attempts to control deviance and sin. At the same time they deploy demonizing rhetoric to build and maintain a base for violent confrontation. The two modes of discourse are interdependent because authorities and the public are aware of FPI's potential for violence when it speaks in a civil voice and foot soldiers may gain confidence and self-respect from knowledge that Rizieq Shihab and other FPI leaders have the ear of political elites.

Tambiah has argued that neutral and determined security forces play essential roles in containing and preventing cycles of ethnic and religious violence.<sup>30</sup> There are no signs that, as far as FPI is concerned, the Indonesian security forces are neutral or determined. Despite high-minded rhetoric about tolerance, they are complicit with FPI violence. By not taking action against extra-legal punishment of deviance the state accedes to FPI's definition of it.

By turning a blind eye towards FPI violence, the current Indonesian government continues a pattern of complicity with and co-optation of Muslim radicals that began during the "New Order" regime of former president Suharto (1966-1998). Temby shows that New Order strategies regarding the Darul Islam movement that seeks to establish Indonesia as an Islamic state combined secret co-optation of segments of the movement will to engage with security and intelligence forces and the use of military and police power against those who chose continued resistance.<sup>31</sup> The New Order government also allowed DDII to function in the public sphere, despite the fact that its founder Mohammed Natsir (1908–1993) had been affiliated with Islamic PRRI/Permesta rebellion (1957-1961).<sup>32</sup> The FPI case is somewhat different because it is located in the public sphere and because FPI has no history of anti-state activities. It can be understood as a violent segment of a broadly based social movement seeking the establishment of *Shari'ah*. It is situated on the borders of legality and maintains ties with even more established organizations including MUI. It poses far less of an immediate threat to the Indonesian state than either Darul Islam or JI.

The Indonesian government finds itself in a double bind. The democratic transition of 1998 has made it difficult for the government to use force to counter all but the most serious internal challenges. If the authorities take strong action against FPI they run the risk not only retaliatory violence, but also of alienating segments of the population and political groups that accept FPI's goals, but not its tactics. This poses immediate political risks because of the importance of small but powerful religious parties and

religious factions of nominally secular parties in coalition politics. If it does not take action against FPI, the government faces equally serious short-term and more perilous long-term risks. In the short term is risks alienating political constituencies opposed to communal violence and supportive of human rights agendas. The more serious long-term risk is the possibility of institutionalizing communal violence in much the same way that it has been in South Asia. The ability of FPI to form alliances with DDII, FUI and other Salafi-oriented groups that cross theological lines amplifies these risks.

There is nothing that the international community can do to counter FPI directly. It can, however, list it as a terrorist organization. This requires the political will to rethink policy oriented discourse about terrorism, which is structured in ways that preclude consideration of groups like FPI that do not have internationalist orientations and that do not attack Western governments, business interests and their allies.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> For general discussions of FPI see: Jahroni, J. (2008). *Defending the majesty of Islam. Indonesia's Front Pembela Islam, 1998-2003*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books; and Rossadi, A. (2008). *Hitam putih FPI [Front Pembela Islam]: Mengungkap rahasia-rahasia mencenangkan ormas keagamaan paling kontroversial*. Jakarta: Nun Publisher.

<sup>3</sup> Bagir, Z., Cholil S., Sapurto, E., Asyahari, B., and Rahayu, M. (2010). *Laporan tahunan kehidupan beragama di Indonesia 2010*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies. (p 14).

<sup>4</sup> We use the terms deviant and deviance in ways that reflect FPI and some other Indonesian usage, not in a normative sense.

<sup>5</sup> On JI see: See: Barton, G. (2005). *Jemaah Islamiyah: Radical Islamism in Indonesia*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.

<sup>6</sup> Jones, S. (2012). *Violent extremism in 2012*. International Crisis Group. Retrieved July 31, 2012 from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/op-eds/violent-extremism-in-2012.aspx>; Woodward, M., Amin, A. and Rohmaniyah, I. (2010). "Police power, soft power and extremist sub-culture in Indonesia." *COMOPS Journal*. Retrieved July 31, 2012 from <http://csc.asu.edu/2010/03/28/police-power-soft-power-and-extremist-sub-culture-in-indonesia/>; Woodward, M. (2012). "A different take on the ICG Indonesia report." *COMOPS Journal*. Retrieved July 31, 2012 from <http://csc.asu.edu/2010/03/28/police-power-soft-power-and-extremist-sub-culture-in-indonesia/>.

<sup>7</sup> The Fund for Peace Country Profiles. Retrieved July 27, 2012 from <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=states-indonesia>.

<sup>8</sup> Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies Gadjah Mada University. (2012). *Annual report on religious life in Indonesia*. Retrieved July 28, 2012 from <http://www.crccs.ugm.ac.id/>. Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace. (2012) “Indonesia: A bad year for religious rights.” Retrieved July 28, 2012 from <http://www.setara-institute.org/en/content/indonesia-bad-year-religious-rights>.

<sup>9</sup> On Ahmadiyah history and teachings see: Glasse, C. (2008). “Ahmadiyya.” In *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield (pp. 33-34); Friedman, Y. (1989). *Prophecy continuous; Aspects of Ahmadi religious thought and its medieval background*. Berkeley: University of California Press; and Lavan, S. (1974) *The Ahmadiyah movement*. Delhi: Manohar Book Service. On recent controversies surrounding Ahmadiyah in Indonesia, see: Crouch, M. (2009). “Indonesia, militant Islam and Ahmadiyah: Origins and implications.” Melbourne: *Melbourne University School of Law Islam, Syari’ah and Governance Background Paper Series*.

<sup>10</sup> On MUI see: van Bruinessen, M. (1996). “Islamic state or state Islam? Fifty years of state-Islam relations in Indonesia.” In Wessel, I. (ed.), *Indonesien am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Hamburg: Abera-Verlag. (pp. 19–34).

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, J. (2011). “Minority religions and the context of violence.” In Lewis, J. R. (ed.), *Violence and new religious movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (p. 33).

<sup>12</sup> Bernard, V., Ottenberg, P., and Redl, F. (2002, 1965) “Dehumanization: A composite psychological defense in relation to modern war.” In Schwebel, M. (ed.), *Behavior science and human survival*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2002. (pp. 64-82).

<sup>13</sup> Juergensmeyer, M. (2001). *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (pp. 143-66).

<sup>14</sup> Woodward, M. (2012). “A different take on the ICG Indonesia report.” *Comops Journal*. Retrieved August 2, 2012 from

<http://csc.asu.edu/2012/07/19/a-different-take-on-the-icg-indonesia-report/>.

<sup>15</sup> Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

<sup>16</sup> “Sisi social sang pembela Islam.” *Suara Islam Online*. Retrieved July 14, 2010 from <http://www.suara-islam.com/news/tabloid/suara-utama/1014-sisi-sosial-sang-pembela-islam>.

<sup>17</sup> “Who will be regulated during Ramadan and who will do the regulating?” (2012). *Jakarta Globe*. Retrieved August, 2, 2012 from <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/who-will-be-regulated-during-ramadan-and-who-will-do-the-regulating/531418>; “Berita FPI ancam bakar tempat maksiat buka di bulan Ramadan.” (2012). *Era Muslim*. Retrieved August 3, 2012 from <http://www.eramuslim.com/berita-fpi-ancam-bakar-tempat-maksiat-jika-masih-buka-di-bulan-ramadhan.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Van Klinken, G. (2008). “Indonesian politics in 2008: The ambiguities of democratic change.” *Bulletin of Indonesian economic studies*, 44 (3). (pp. 365-381).

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group. (2010). *Indonesia: The dark side of Jama'ah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT)*. Asia Briefing Number 107. Retrieved July 26, 2012 from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B107-indonesia-the-dark-side-of-jamaah-ansharut-tauhid-jat.aspx>.

<sup>20</sup> On DDII see: Liddle, W. (1996). “Media dakwah scripturalism. One form of political thought and action in New Order Indonesia.” in Woodward, M. (ed.). *Toward a new paradigm: Recent developments in Indonesian Islamic thought*. Tempe, AZ: Program for Southeast Asian Studies Monograph Series, Arizona State University; and Woodward, M., et. al. (2012), op. cit.; and Woodward, M., Amin, A., Rohmaniyah, I., and Lundry, C. “Getting culture: A new path for Indonesia’s Islamist Justice and Prosperity Party?” *Contemporary Islam*. February 2012.

<sup>21</sup> “SBY urges religious tolerance, scolds intimidators in speech.” (2011). *Jakarta Globe*. Retrieved August 2, 2012 from



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<sup>22</sup> Millie, J. (2012). "One Year After the Cikeusik Tragedy." *Inside Indonesia*.

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=399841777850](http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=399841777850)

<sup>24</sup> "HKBP Congregation urges National police step." (2011). *Jakarta Post*. Retrieved August 1, 2012 from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/-news/2010/08/09/hkbp-congregation-urges-national-police-step.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Herman, J. (1997). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror*. New York: Basic Books. (p. 8).

<sup>26</sup> Millie, *op. cit.*

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