The Islamic Defenders Front: Demonization, Violence and the State in Indonesia

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In this paper we explore the ways in which the Indonesian *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front–FPI) uses hate speech and demonization to legitimize violent attacks on organizations and individuals it considers to be sinful or religiously deviant, and civil discourse to establish credibility and respectability.[1] We argue that the use of a discursive frame established by *fatwa* (legal opinions) issued by the semi-official *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI–Indonesian Council of Muslim Scholars) and tacit support from powerful political factions enable FPI to conduct campaigns of demonization and violence with near impunity and to avoid being labeled as a terrorist organization. We elaborate on a distinction between what the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) at Gadjah Mada University calls the two faces of FPI (Bagir et al. 2010a). The 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

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[1] For general discussions of FPI see: Jahroni (2008), Rossadi (2008) and (Woodward et al. 2012).

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uncivil mode uses demonizing rhetoric to build and maintain a base for violently confronting, brutalizing and sometimes killing those it deems deviant.[2] We show that FPI has not two, but three faces: one civil; a second that dehumanizes and demonizes enemies; and a third explicitly calling on members and supporters to attack and kill them. FPI discourse becomes increasingly violent as the audience they are engaging changes from the general public to in-group religious gatherings. While it demonizes nearly all of its opponents, FPI targets for physical violence only those who lack official status and protection. Factions within the government and police are reluctant to curb FPI violence for fear of appearing "un-Islamic," or because they sympathize with the group's goals despite their criminality. Collusion between elements of the security forces and FPI is a significant factor contributing to the seeming disconnect between official discourse that condemns violence and practices that accommodate or even facilitate it.

FPI and terrorism

As Gunning (2007) observes, the concept of terrorism is frequently invoked but notoriously difficult to define. The US and Indonesian governments and the international community have not listed FPI as a terrorist organization and it has not been on the agenda at Indonesian and regional Southeast Asia terrorism conferences we have attended over the past 4 years.

However, FPI clearly meets the criteria used to define terrorism by the US military in 2001 (US Army 2001:37). These are:

> The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.

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.[3] Much of the JI leadership has been killed or captured and the organization's attempts to regroup and re-structure thwarted by security forces. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, JI's purported spiritual leader, was jailed on terrorism charges in 2011, though he continues to issue *fatwa* from prison (Jones 2012; Woodward et al. 2010; Woodward 2012). 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 including FPI.

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 The CRCS at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta and the Jakarta-based Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace have reported increasing levels of religious intolerance and sectarian violence (Bagir et al. 2010b; Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace 2012). A Fund for Peace report (2012) mentions Indonesia as

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[2] We use the terms deviant and deviance in ways that reflect FPI and some other Indonesian usage, not in a normative sense.
[3] On JI see: Barton (2005)

being at risk of state failure partly because of escalating religious tensions and the government's reluctance to contain attacks on minority groups.

So-called Muslim liberals, Indonesia's Islamic universities, Muslim pluralists and Christian minorities, especially those wishing to build churches in Muslim majority areas, have come under verbal and physical attack. Muslim groups that depart from a broadly defined Sunni orthodoxy including the small *Shi'ah* minority, the Ahmadiyah sect that teaches that its founder was a prophet and mystical groups rooted in Javanese culture (*aliran kepercayaan*) have all been subject to demonization and violence. [4] Social and sexual "deviants," particularly gays, lesbians and trans-gendered people, are also subject to derision and physical violence. FPI is one of the primary perpetrators of this violence. [5]

Crouch ([2009](#)), Menchick ([2007](#)) and others have pointed to the role of MUI in promoting a climate of religious intolerance contributing to sectarian violence. [6] MUI does not encourage or promote violence but has established a discursive frame that enables it, allowing FPI and other perpetrators to define sectarian violence as defense of Indonesia and Islam. This public, uncivil discourse defines religious minorities as intolerable existential threats to the Muslim community. [7] It is an example of a virulent form of hate speech that, as Richardson ([2011](#):33) observes, uses intensely negative representation of others as "social weapons" to control and discredit them.

Hate speech

Hate speech is an 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 (Gates [1994](#)). 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.

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[4] On Ahmadiyah history and teachings see: Friedman ([1989](#)), Glasse and Ahmadiyya ([2008](#)) and Lavan ([1974](#)).

[5] On anti-homosexual violence, see, for example: Bernardi et al. ([2012](#)) and Boellstroff ([2007](#)). Boellstroff's analysis of homosexuality and Islam is instructive, including a case of the MUI issuing a level 2 condemnation of a meeting of a gay group in Surabaya, and how it spurred the FPI and other groups to level 3 and 4 reactions.

[6] On MUI prior to the 1998 democratic transition see: van Bruinessen ([1996](#)).

[7] This extends to areas such as Ambon in eastern Indonesia, where the proportion of Christians is higher than in Java. Although there was a brief separatist insurgency—supported by both Christians and Muslims allied with the Dutch—there in 1950, there has been no serious threat to Indonesian sovereignty there in decades. Yet whenever interfaith tensions rise, Islamists portray Christians as separatists and crusaders, and as an existential threat to the state.

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.

Dehumanization and demonization are 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 et al. (2002) distinguish between self- and object-directed dehumanization. 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 most basic human qualities. Object-directed dehumanization promotes and legitimizes violence because it allows individuals and social groups to bypass inhibitions against it. 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 (2010) 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.

Hate speech often inverts hierarchies of power, 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 Mark Juergensmeyer (2003) defines as "cosmic war." 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 absolution and heavenly rewards.

Civic contentious discourse and hate speech in Indonesia

In the remainder of this paper we foucs 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 considers itself to the guardian of Shari'ah and broadly defined Sunni theological orthodoxy and has stated that religious tolerance is acceptable only within this "area of difference" (Majelis Ulama Indonesia 2013). It takes the position that views outside these limits, including those of Shia and Ahmadiyah Muslims, as well as Sunni liberalism and pluralism are unacceptable. Semantically, this discourse 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 fatwa 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. 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 (Hosen 2004). 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 or 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.

Since the democratic transition of 1998, MUI has become much more independent (Gillespie 2007). 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 (NU) 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 Islamist political party, interviewed in February 2011 stated that, because MUI had ruled that Ahmadiyah is deviant and should be banned, the party has no choice but 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 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 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 (MUI 2005).

This is what Diana Eck (2007) 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 accepting only those religious doctrines that accord with it (MUI 2005).

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 eighth–tenth 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

FPI is an Indonesian violent extremist organization responsible for numerous attacks on Ahmadiyah Muslims and others it deems religiously, socially or sexually deviant since its founding in 1998. FPI was founded and maintains its headquarters in Jakarta. It has branches in major urban areas throughout Indonesia. 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. So-called 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 violent Muslim movements. It is not, as some scholars have suggested, 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.[8]

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 at 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 Habaib as sources of blessing and out of respect and admiration for the Prophet and his family (Woodward et al. 2012). Most FPI supporters engage in modes of religious practice that Salafis and

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[8] See, for example: Fealy (2004); Daniels (2007).

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 Habaib to be paradoxical because they are generally thought of as peaceful Holy Men, and violence tends to be associated with Salafis.

FPI discource in public space

We focus next on three examples of FPI discourse on sin and deviance. Two are banners we observed near FPI's Jakarta headquarters on 21 July 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 Fig. 1) is approximately 30 ft high and 20 ft long. The text consists of a series of 22 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 (Shihab 2011). Tegakkan Syariat Islam

Fig. 1 This list is a categorical description of what the *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front–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

(Destroy Liberalism. Uphold Islamic Shari'ah). The second (Fig. 2) is much smaller. It explicitly and literally demonizes "liberal" organizations and their leaders.

Members of the paramilitary Laskar FPI we interviewed that same day at FPI headquarters in Jakarta 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 two banners are the second face of FPI–level 3 hate speech that literally demonizes opponents. The translation of the banner shown in Fig. 1 is given in Table 1.

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).

This is a very clear statement that the *munafiqun* will go to hell. The banner suggests strongly that FPI's opponents are among them.

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

Fig. 2 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 Riziieq Shihab, beneath which is a silhouette of an FPI fighter standing on a map

Table 1 Translation of the banner shown in Fig. 1

Liberals	
1. Agents of the Devil	More Satanic than Satan
2. Agents of Satan	Satanism is the Name of Religion
3. Zionist Agents	New Communist Movement
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

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 in the 1945 version of the preamble to Indonesia's Constitution—but later stricken— that outlines the national ideology *Pancasila* (five principles) that includes 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 (Elson 2009). Given the fact that approximately 90 % 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 Riziieq 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 (Satan) 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.

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. This is the third face of FPI–level 4 hate speech that encourages extreme violence and cosmic war. 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![9]

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 (1989) calls the public sphere. 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 five discursive and political strategies to distance itself from terrorism and 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 discussion comprised of students from Yogyakarta's Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic

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[9] This video can be viewed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynunOMEtUmg (accessed 20 March 2013).

University we conducted during the same month 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 many mainstream Muslims do not accept and behaviors 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 them 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 conducts enforcement actions:

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.

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."[10] 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."

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[10] *Suara Islam Online*, 14 July 2010 http://www.suara-islam.com/news/tabloid/suara-utama/1014-sisi-sosial-sang-pembela-islam (accessed 13 July 2012)

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 19 July 2012, FPI issued a statement saying that if sinful activities did not stop during Ramadan, there would be "burnings." [11]

(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. 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 23 May 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.

FUI is linked closely 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 (Liddle 1996).

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

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[11] *Jakarta Globe* 2 August 2012 http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/who-will-be-regulated-during-ramadan-and-who-will-do-the-regulating/531418 (accessed 2 August 2012). *Era Muslim* July 19, 2012. http://www.eramuslim.com/berita-fpi-ancam-bakar-tempat-maksiat-jika-masih-buka-di-bulan-ramadhan.html (accessed August 3, 2012)

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 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.[12]

Yudhoyono's government has not translated these words into action. It has rarely been willing or able 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 6 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 (Millie 2012). In others they have simply not responded to requests for assistance, or stated that they are powerless to prevent attacks. Survivors we interviewed in Yogyakarta in 2013 reported that police officers laughed as they begged for assistance. The police have sometimes provided logistical support to FPI and following the "action" been seen sharing meals with FPI fighters. 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:

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[12] *Jakarta Globe* 5 December 2011. http://article.wn.com/view/2011/12/05/SBY_Urges_Religious_Tolerance_Scolds_Intimidators_in_Speech_/ (accessed 2 August 2012)

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.

A local clergyman stated that even through there were several hundred police of the scene:

The police did not do anything when the mob started throwing stones and hitting and kicking us.[13]

Sugianto suggests that the Indonesian police are incapable of controlling the rage of local populations armed with sticks and stones. This is clearly disingenuous. It suggests that violence is the natural consequence of moral outrage about the immorality of the victims (and that police armed with firearms are somehow unable to stop stick-wielding attackers). 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 (1997) 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 (1997:8) that: "The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail."

The Cikeusik case in which six members of the Ahmadiyah sect were killed and others severely injured is a more striking example. One of the survivors was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment for inciting violence against himself. FPI perpetrators who were convicted received the same, or lesser (3-month) sentences. This speaks volumes about the ability of FPI and other perpetrators of violence in the name of religion to define reality in Indonesia.

Former Jakarta Governor Fauzi Bowo and high-ranking police commanders cultivated relationships with Rizieq Shihab and other FPI leaders for several years. On 8 August 2010, the *Jakarta Post* reported that Bowo had been "hobnobbing" with FPI when Bowo and Jakarta Police Chief Timur Pradopo attended a celebration of FPI's 12th 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.[14]

On other occasions FPI has criticized authorities for not acting stringently enough to combat sin, and threatened to act independently if police do not follow their lead. On 16 March 2013, the *Jakarta Post* reported that FPI Depok chairman Habib Idrus Algadri had described the south Jakarta suburb's efforts to combat prostitution as "half hearted," and threatened direct action by FPI forces if stronger anti vice measures are not put in place.[15]

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[13] *Jakarta Post* 8 September 2011, http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/08/09/hkbp-congregation-urges-national-police-step.html (accessed 1 August 2012)

[14] *Jakarta Post*, 7 October 2010, http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/10/07/sole-candidate-wants-%E2%80%98embrace%E2%80%99-fpi.html (accessed 15 July 2012)

[15] *Jakarta Post*, 16 March 2013, http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/03/16/fpi-depok-red-light-raids-half-hearted.html (Accessed 20 March 2013)

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.[16]

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 (1998: 332–334) has argued that neutral and determined security forces play essential roles in containing and preventing cycles of ethnic and religious violence. 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). Quentin Temby (2010:24–36) 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 willing to engage with security and intelligence forces and the use of military and police power against those who chose continued resistance. 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) (Harvey 2009). The FPI case is somewhat different because it is located in the public sphere and because FPI has no history of anti-state activities and is linked to quasi-legal enforcement gangs used by security forces during the Suharto period. It can be understood as a violent segment of a broadly based social movement seeking the establishment of Shari'ah. It

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[16] *Jakarta Globe*, 6 February 2012, http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/commentary/a-year-after-the-murders-in-cikeusik-why-is-the-govt-going-soft-on-hard-liners/495971 (accessed 2 August 2012).

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 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 of retaliatory violence and alienating groups that accept FPI's goals, but not its tactics. If it does not, it faces equally serious short-term and more perilous long-term risks. In the short term it risks alienating political constituencies supportive of human rights agendas. The 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.

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