

**Virtuous Debate Against Liberalist Muslims in Indonesia:  
Case Study of INSISTS Jakarta**

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**Abstract:** Due to different worldviews on knowledge, various parties often debate each other. In Indonesia, anti-mainstream groups often appear to challenge a common thought in Islam, whether religious, scientific, political, or philosophical. Liberal Islam is one of the prototypes that engage in debate in all sectors of already established thought in society, especially in Islamic issues, even fundamental issues such as faith. Due to its anti-mainstream nature, the emergence of Liberal Islam has drawn controversy and debate, especially among Liberalists from the West who brought ideas of freedom of thought. Some confronted their ideas with lengthy debates but often ended in protracted animosity. It is because the method of debate used tends not to consider the adab of arguing as taught by Islamic intellectuals. Yet, attempts at confrontation with them by taking a wiser path have been carried out by some activists of Islamic thought. Among them is INSISTS Jakarta, a research and publishing institution that has confronted the Liberal Islam discourse since the 2000s, not by way of confrontation but by counterarguments through scientific publications and seminars. This article will reveal the virtuous debate that has been carried out by these scientific institutions.

**Keywords:** *INSISTS Jakarta, Islamic Worldview, Liberal Islam, Virtuous Debate*

**Abstrak:** Disebabkan perbedaan cara pandang tentang pengetahuan, berbagai pihak sering kali berdebat satu sama lain. Di Indonesia, kelompok-kelompok anti-arus utama sering muncul untuk menantang pemikiran pada umumnya dalam Islam, baik yang bersifat agama, ilmiah, politik, maupun filsafat. Islam liberal adalah salah satu prototipe yang terlibat dalam debat di semua sektor pemikiran yang sudah mapan dalam masyarakat, terutama dalam masalah-masalah Islam, bahkan masalah-masalah mendasar seperti keimanan. Karena sifatnya yang anti-arus utama, munculnya Islam liberal telah menimbulkan kontroversi dan perdebatan, terutama ketika para liberalis dari Barat datang membawa gagasan kebebasan berpikir. Beberapa

orang menghadapi gagasan mereka dengan debat yang panjang tetapi seringkali berakhir dalam permusuhan yang berlarut-larut. Hal ini disebabkan oleh metode berdebat yang cenderung tidak mempertimbangkan adab berargumentasi seperti yang diajarkan oleh para ulama Islam. Namun, upaya konfrontasi dengan mereka dengan mengambil jalan yang lebih bijaksana telah dilakukan oleh beberapa aktivis pemikiran Islam. Salah satunya adalah INSISTS Jakarta, sebuah lembaga riset dan penerbitan yang telah menghadapi wacana Islam liberal sejak tahun 2000-an, bukan dengan cara konfrontasi tetapi dengan kontra-argumen melalui publikasi ilmiah dan seminar. Artikel ini akan mengungkapkan debat yang beradab yang telah dilakukan oleh lembaga ilmiah ini.

**Kata Kunci:** *INSISTS Jakarta, Pandangan Dunia Islam, Islam Liberal, Debat Mulia*

## **Introduction**

In Indonesia, the liberalization of Islamic thought has been going on for a long time and continues today. The trend of Western orientalist thoughts among Muslim thinkers and academicians, the emergence of the Liberal Islam Network (JIL), Muhammadiyah Young Islamic Network (JIMM), and others in the 2000s are the results of this liberalization process.<sup>1</sup> Although those who respond to this trend do not look serious. Even if there are parties who respond, their responses are often excessive emotion and tend to be less scientific, such as by accusing them of being infidels, *bid'ah* without more scientific elaboration.<sup>2</sup> The Indonesian Council of Ulemas (MUI) also intervened by issuing a fatwa that the “Religious Pluralism, Secularism, and Liberalism” are notions that are contrary to the teachings of Islam.<sup>3</sup> Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilizations (INSISTS) has responded in a wiser way to this liberalization. Founded on March 4, 2003, INSISTS does not want to debate liberal activists reactively and hastily. They prefer to contest their liberal ideas by exploring the roots of the problem in depth. This

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<sup>1</sup> Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, “Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam: Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis Dan Kolonialis,” *Tsaqafah* 5, no. 1 (2009): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Bunyan Wahib, “Questioning Liberal Islam in Indonesia: Response and Critique to Jaringan Islam Liberal,” *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 23.

<sup>3</sup> “Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia Nomor: 7/MUNAS VII/MUI/11/2005 Tentang Pluralisme, Liberalisme, Dan Sekularisme Agama” (2005). <https://mui.or.id/wp-content/uploads/files/fatwa/12.-Pluralisme-Liberalisme-dan-Sekularisme-Agama.pdf>.

paper will explore INSISTS' method of intellectual confrontation we call a "virtuous debate" facing Liberalist Muslims in Indonesia.

## **Literature Review**

Much research has been done on INSISTS and its role in confronting liberalism.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, adequate attention still hasn't been given to the topic being investigated. Since the theme of this research consists of three variables, namely debate, Liberal Islam and INSISTS, this literature review will try to select articles that are directly related to these three variables, especially containing the confrontation of thoughts regarding Liberal Islam. First, research on the liberalization of Islamic thought which is contrasted with other thoughts, such as: (1) The study of Islamic liberalism against HizbutTahrir Indonesia was carried out by Ali Maksum with two articles at once. The first in 2017 entitled: "Discourses On Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: A Study on the Intellectual Debate between Liberal Islam Network (JIL) and HizbutTahrir Indonesia (HTI)" published in the Journal of Indonesia Islam and the second in 2022 with the title: "Islamic Movements in Indonesia: A Critical Study of HizbutTahrir Indonesia and the Liberal Islam Network" published in the Journal of Al-Tamaddun. These two articles present a contrast between liberalism and Hizb al-Tahrir from a very sharp point of view, namely that the spirit is based on liberal ideology while HTI adheres to the basis of the khilafah which can lead to disbelief for those who are not based on the khilafah, especially those who use democracy as a system of life in political.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, (2) Liberal Islam against the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council written by Akh.Muzakki with the title "Current Debates in The Postsoeharto Indonesian Islam: Examining the Intellectual Base of Liberal and Anti-liberal Islamic Movement" published in the Journal Al-Jami'ah, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2007 M/1428 H. This article concludes that the Liberal Islam Network understands Islam by implementing its liberalism, while DDII represents a conservative, purified and anti-

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<sup>4</sup>Bachtiar, T A. *Pertarungan Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia: Kritik-Kritik Terhadap Islam Liberan Dari H.M Rasjidi Sampai INSIST*. Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2017.

<sup>5</sup>Ali Maksum, "Discourses on Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: A Study on the Intellectual Debate between Liberal Islam Network (JIL) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, no. 2 (2017): 405-422.

liberal Muslim group in Indonesia.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this article does not provide an overview of how the debate should be carried out in the contrasting phenomenon of JIL and DDII. Second, research directly related to INSISTS' confrontation with liberal Islam. There is a book written by AkhmadKhoirul Fata entitled *Benarkah Semua Agama Sama (Are All Religions the Same?)*. This book is about the polemic of religious pluralism between INSISTS and liberals. Even though the discussion is about the controversy over the issue of religious pluralism and displays a liberal perspective and INSISTS, the concept of debate is not contained in this book<sup>7</sup>. Likewise with the book written by Tiar Anwar Bachtiar with the title *Pertarungan Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia: Kritik-kritik Terhadap Islam liberal dari HM Rasjidisampai INSISTS* (Battle of Islamic Thought in Indonesia: Criticisms of Liberal Islam from HM Rasjidi to INSISTS), but this book also does not discuss the concept of debate in Islam and how the debate is carried out in INSISTS.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, from the literature survey conducted, although in several articles the term "debate" was raised, the debate concept itself was not discussed. This article will discuss the concept of virtuous debate that is carried out by INSISTS in facing the liberalization of thought in Indonesia.

### **Methodology**

This research is a descriptive qualitative research using a case study approach to the INSISTS debate method against the liberalization of Islamic thought in Indonesia. With this approach it is hoped that it can build a theory and develop the concept of virtuous debate that already exists in Islamic literatures. The theory development process occurs through a "dialogue" between the data obtained from the data collection and the developing theory, and then compared with the existing literatures. The data collected is in the form of documents in INSISTS and related matters. Then the data were analyzed descriptively, namely by describing the virtuous

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<sup>6</sup>Akh. Muzakki, "Current Debates in the Post-Soeharto Indonesian Islam: Examining the Intellectual Base of Liberal and Anti-Liberal Islamic Movement," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 45, no. 2 (2007): 321–366.

<sup>7</sup>Fata, A K. *Benarkah Semua Agama Sama? Debat Aktivis Islam Liberal vs INSISTS Tentang Pluralisme Agama*. 2020th ed. GUEPEDIA, n.d.

<sup>8</sup>Bachtiar, T A. *Pertarungan Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia: Kritik-Kritik Terhadap Islam Liberan Dari H.M Rasjidi Sampai INSIST*. Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2017.

debate in Islam which would be combined (pattern matching) with what occurred at the empirical level with a predicted pattern. The results of these two patterns can strengthen the internal validity of the case study in question. Pattern matching analysis in this study is to compare initial predictions or assumptions that will occur with actual facts on the ground; between the concept of virtuous debate and what INSISTS is doing in dealing with the liberalization of Islamic thought.

## **Discussion**

Conceptually, “Virtuous Debate” comes from two words: “virtuous” and “debate”. “Virtuous” is an excellent quality of men, including physical strength, valorous conduct, and moral rectitude<sup>9</sup>. In another explanation, virtue is a good moral quality in a person or the general quality of being morally good. Therefore, virtue is the best character of a human that emerges from the process of personality training through knowledge and practice. As Aristotle stated, one cannot naturally obtain intellectual moral, or intellectual virtue.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the “virtuous man” comes about through practice. Thus, this discussion of virtue is included in the framework of practical knowledge.

In Arabic, virtue is “fadhilah”, the virtue that a person gets after purifying his soul. People who succeed in maximizing their soul’s potential and gain virtue that is called civilized person, from the Arabic “adab”. “Adab” notably means an invitation to one’s repast or banquet, so “ma’dabah” is a dish in a banquet invitation<sup>11</sup>. Of course, one must follow some rules at a banquet. In other words, there is an etiquette for eating and drinking there. Here on, the term “ta’dib” emerges, which means disciplinary process. Ibn Mandzur further explained that the discipline here is not just disciplining the human body but comprehensively disciplining the soul. From the context of knowledge, it means the discipline of the human intellect,

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<sup>9</sup> *Cambridge Dictionary*, last modified 2023, accessed April 30, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/virtue>.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Lesley Brown, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Mandzur, *Lisan Al-Arab* (Beyrut: Dar Sadr, 1994).

as Edward Lane explained.<sup>12</sup> In short, the “virtuous man” must include knowledge and practice, as explained by Al-Ghazali in *Mizān al-‘Amal*.<sup>13</sup>

How about the debate? A debate is a serious discussion of a subject in which many people participate<sup>14</sup>. The subject matter of debate can be philosophical or didactic form mainly associated in philosophy with the Socratic dialogue as developed by Plato, where Plato in almost most of his works is in dialogue form. His dialogues are the initial form of cross-examination debate. It means the outcome of the debate in the dialogue is not to turn off the opponent but to discover the truth together nor to decide a case in court,<sup>15</sup> like the court that sentenced Socrates to death. The debate can also mean judging and refuting other people’s opinions to find other truths beyond what already exists. A so-called dialectic disputation or debate is only to defeat the opponent, although it could be that the opposing party is in the just position, as sophists usually do.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, in terms of the model, there are two types of debate: conversational dialogue and dialectical disputation.

These types of debates can be virtuous, or disorganized or chaotic. Hence, it needs to be regulated personally by the debaters’ personalities and institutionally by those who organize the debate. Thus, the word “adab” here is significant, and we will find many books on the methods of arguing in Islam entitled *Ādāb Al-Baḥṭswa al-Munāẓarah* (The Art of Discussion and Disputation).

In the books with the *Ādāb Al-Baḥṭswa al-Munāẓarah* genre, the ultimate goal is to achieve the best debate, as ordered in the Quran An-Naḥl [16]: 125 and Al-‘Ankabūt [29]: 47. In order to achieve the ideals of the Quran, there are critical principles formulated by Muslim Scholars, including: First, both parties are not fanatical and willing to accept the truth; Second, both parties must use fine and

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<sup>12</sup> Lane, E W, and S Lane-Poole. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. Arabic-English Lexicon - 8-Volume Series. Cosimo, Incorporated, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Imam Al-Ghazali, *Mizan Al-‘Amal*, ed. Ahmad Syamsuddin (Beyrut: Dar Al Kutub Al Ilmiyah, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> *Cambridge Dictionary*. Last modified 2023. Accessed April 30, 2023. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/virtue>.”

<sup>15</sup> A J Freeley and D L Steinberg, *Argumentation and Debate* (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> R C Bartlett, *Sophistry and Political Philosophy: Protagoras’ Challenge to Socrates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

orderly speech, far from slurring, insulting, belittling the opponent; Third, use the right way of reasoning during the debate; Fourth, do not use an opinion that actually contradicts what is claimed so that it drops its own contention; Fifth, there should be no contradiction in the argument; Sixth, the arguments put forward must not cause doubt in their claims; Seventh, do not attack your opponent other than from a logical point of view; Eighth, being able to accept the main premises that have been agreed upon; Ninth, consent any conclusion or truth reached in the arguments that have been examined together.<sup>17</sup>

So, the term “virtuous debate” that we mean here, based on the debate concept described above and which has become a tradition in Islam, is a debate committed to the truth carried out with the *adab* that exists in Islam.

### **INSISTS vs. Liberalism**

As far as the background of the emergence of INSISTS is concerned, where it was present amid the massive liberalization of Islamic thought in Indonesia through the prudent thinking of its founders, it was not too hasty to go into the arena of debate to directly confront liberal thinkers, even though this debate sometimes still happens unavoidably. However, the first step taken is an in-depth analysis of the fundamental problems faced by the Muslims as a whole. The thoughts of Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a founder of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, are helpful here. In Al-Attas’ view, the ummah is currently facing a dilemma between external problems from the West and internal matters that he calls *the loss of adab*.<sup>18</sup> The first problem is a massive attack on them by products of Western thought like freedom, democracy, gender equality, religious pluralism, secularism, atheism, etcetera, propagated in various ways, either openly or latently, through diverse media with unlimited funds. Their oriental studies by orientalist are an undeniable historical fact that contributes to the confusion of

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<sup>17</sup> Abdurrahman Habannakah Al-Maydani, *Dhawabith Al-Ma’rifah WaUshul Al-Istidlal Wa Al-Munadzarah* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

thought among Islamic thinkers.<sup>19</sup> Al-Attas said it caused “a perpetual clash of worldviews between Islam and the West”. The second problem is more internal to Muslims, where the *loss of adab* affects them.

What is meant by *loss of adab* is the loss of orientation of the soul so that the human soul is not disciplined in dealing with itself, society, and the community; not disciplined in recognizing and acknowledging one’s place in the capacity and potential of his body, mind, and spirit; not disciplined either in recognizing and conceding the fact that knowledge and things that exist have a hierarchy. In this self-undisciplined situation, this ummah, although great in quantity, is easily swayed by all kinds of problems, including problems of thinking that come from the Western worldview. Al-Atas continued that the fundamental problem that causes the dilemma of the people between the two propositions above is not political, economic, cultural, and so on, but the fundamental one is the confusion and error in knowledge. The problem of liberalization of thought principally is nothing but a matter of confusion and error in this knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

With this *adab* concept, INSISTS analyzes the problem of the liberalization of Islamic thought in Indonesia to make it easier to determine the most addressed points. Therefore, through some of its founders, such as Prof. Dr. Hamid FahmyZarkasyi, AdninArmas, MA., Dr. Ugi Suharto, Dr. SyamsuddinArif, Dr. Anis Malik Thoha, Dr. NirwanSyafirin, Muhammad Arifin Ismail M.A, Dr. AdianHusaini, M.A., the first step taken after the founding of INSISTS was to publish the bulletin in 1424 H and ISLAMIA journal which directly discussed the problems of contemporary thought. The first edition of ISLAMIA discussed the hottest issue, that is hermeneutics in Islamic Thought. Its first edition rejects the use of hermeneutic methods for interpreting the Quran, where the use of hermeneutics for the Quran became common in Islamic campuses, as they sometimes consider the Quran as a text that is equivalent to another manuscript in general. This first edition of ISLAMIA Journal became an inaugural edition as a new trend in Islamic thought in Indonesia. Following the first edition, subsequent editions

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<sup>19</sup>Zarkasyi, “Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam: Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis Dan Kolonialis.”

<sup>20</sup>Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*.



consistently raise themes that criticize Western thoughts that are currently being hotly discussed, as follows: “Hermeticsv.s. Tafsir”, “Critical Study of Arthur Jeffery’s, Arkoun’s, Nasr Hamid’s and AbidJabiri’s thoughts”; “Behind the Understanding of Religious Pluralism”; “Religious Pluralism, from Globalization to Global Theology”; “Islamic Epistemology and the Problems of Contemporary Muslim Thought”; “Building Islamic Civilization: from Westernization to Islamization of Sciences”; etcetera.<sup>21</sup>

Together with the publication of the *Islamia* Journal, INSISTS organizes workshops on Islamic thought in various cities, institutions, universities, and *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), to scientifically explain contemporary scientific problems. There have been hundreds of seminars, workshops, and training in Islamic thought for lecturers, students, *Pesantren* leaders, professionals, and many others. Thousands of people have attended INSISTS workshops in various parts of the world, not only in Indonesia but also in Malaysia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. INSISTS researchers also developed the Islamic Worldview courses and then taught at several universities, such as at the Post Graduate University of Ibn Khaldun Bogor, Muhammadiyah University Surakarta, Islamic University az-Zahra, Post Graduate UNIDA Gontor, STAI Al Mujtama, and many more today. INSISTS researchers continue to participate in the world of thinking through writing books and articles, lecturing activities, teaching, discussions, and seminars. In publication, some books also won significant achievements, such as a book entitled *WajahPeradaban Barat* (The Face of Western Civilization) by AdianHusaini and a book entitled *TrenPluralisme Agama* (The Trend of Religious Pluralism) by Anis Malik Thoha awarded as the best book in the Islamic Book Fair in 2006 and 2007 in Jakarta. Besides that, AdninArmas has written a critical publication in Quranic studies, that is *Metode Bible dalamStudi Al-Quran: KajianKritis*(The Biblical Method in Quranic Studies: Critical Studies); Henri Shalahuddin also specifically criticized the thoughts of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, through his book *Al-Quran Dihujat* (Al-Quran Is Blasphemed); and SyamsuddinArif wrote a notable book entitled *OrientalismedanDiabolismeIntelektual* (Orientalism and Intellectual Diabolism).

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<sup>21</sup>*Islamia* 1, no. Maret 2004

The question is, why didn't INSISTS confront the liberals by debating it head-on? The answer is that the liberalists brought up the issues developed by the West through the Orientalists for a long time. Challenging and disproving the Orientalists' claims would result in the swift disintegration of the views held by their successors, who are known as the liberals. Therefore, the form of debate presented here is *radd* or disputation. Disputation here is to rid the alien concept that has infected Islamic thought. The hermeneutic approach has extended to the point where it disrupts Islamic thinking, and certain Muslim scholars have even applied blasphemous thinking to the Quran, no longer solely Orientalists doing so. These disputation models continue to be rolled out, not in the form of direct debate, but in scientific works expected to balance liberal discourse.

However, INSISTS does not always appear by publishing disputative works *ansich*. Works with accounts building civilization are moreover distributed along side others. Since its inception, the Islamia Journal is a medium for Islamic thought and civilization development based on and appreciative of the Islamic tradition. Islamia appears to present the idea that Islamic civilization is a product of the Islamic worldview and can only be built on Islamic principles. The discourse does not contain anything that is anti-Western. The effort is merely meant to clarify the distinction and prevent any misunderstandings on Islamic thought. As a result, books concerning the civilization building originated from this context. such as books entitled: *Islamic Science: Paradigma, Faktadan Agenda* (Islamic Science: Paradigm, Facts, and Agenda); *Epistemologi Islam: Prinsip-Prinsip Dasar* (Islamic Epistemology: Basic Principles); *Tradisi Intelektual Islam, Model Kebangkitan Umat Islam* (Islamic Intellectual Tradition, Model of the Islamic Ummah's Awakening); *Konsep Adab SMN al-Attas dan Aplikasinya di Perguruan Tinggi* (The Concept of Adab SMN al-Attas and Its Application in Higher Education); *Budaya Ilmu, Maknadan Manifestasi dalam Sejarah* (Knowledge Culture; Meaning and Manifestation in History); *Otoritas Imam Al-Ghazali dalam Ilmu Hadits* (Authority of Imam Al-Ghazali in Hadith Science); *Islamisasi Ilmu-ilmu Kontemporer dan Peran Universitas Islam* (Islamization of Contemporary Sciences and the Role of Islamic Universities); *Framework Studi Islam; Kajian Multidisiplin Wacana Keislaman* (Islamic Studies Framework:

Multidisciplinary Study of Islamic Discourse). These are attempts at the confrontation between INSISTS and liberal thoughts in Islam. This style of encounter is a form of indirect debate conducted by INSISTS.

In the context of virtuous debate conveyed here, what INSISTS has done seems to be more consequential because by building knowledge tradition, one can achieve perfect *adab*. And the goal of knowledge is the commitment to truth that is one of the meaning of discipline in Islam. Liberalist, on the contrary, consider that truth is relative, not final, or even something unjust is considered fair in their perspective. For all issues brought up by liberalist are based on the principle of doubt, as Western people doubt the truth that would create weak and distorted knowledge. INSISTS, therefore, builds a knowledge tradition as the wisest step to face liberal challenges, as suggested by.<sup>22</sup>

Has INSISTS not engaged in any direct debate with liberals? Institutionally, INSISTS does not offer a specific platform for debate. However, in workshops on Islamic thought held hundreds of times, discussions often occur with liberal activists on various issues so that they can accept the arguments presented by the INSISTS team. Some of INSISTS founders engaged in one-on-one debates with liberal activists. Among them is: [i] Ugi Suharto who debated Taufik Adnan Amal, one of the liberal activists of JIL, on Taufik's efforts to make a critical edition of the Holy Quran. This debate is documented through a book entitled *Pemikiran Islam Liberal: Pembahasan Isu-Isu Sentra* (Liberal Islamic Thought: Discussion of Central Issues); [ii] Adnin Armas who debated some liberal activists like Ulil Abshar Abdallah, Taufik Adnan Amal, Lutfi Syaukani, and others, on some issues in liberalism. The debate results are documented in a book entitled *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis terhadap Islam* (Christian-Orientalist Influence upon Islam).

The debates in the above documents occurred through a mailing list platform without any in-person interaction between the participants. However, there was a direct confrontation between a group of INSISTS and liberal activists on the issue of the Issuance of a Joint Decree by three ministers of Indonesia (SKB Tiga Menteri)

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<sup>22</sup>Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud. *Penjelasan Budaya Ilmu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1991.

regarding the Prohibition of Ahmadiyah Activities which was held in the DEBATE program at TVONE, a private television station in Indonesia, in June 18, 2008. In this debate, those participating as debaters from INSISTS were AdianHusaini, AdninArmas, and Muchlish M Hanafi, which confronted liberal debaters such as Abdul MoqsihGhazali, Rumadi, and Ahmadiyah adherent AhmadiyahZafrullah Ahmad Pontoh.<sup>23</sup>

Although there is not any special publication on behalf of INSISTS' method of debate, one of the founders of INSISTS, that is SyamsuddinArif, has researched an important manuscript regarding the art of debate in the Islamic tradition, namely the manuscript of a 16th century Ottoman scholar, namely the manuscript entitled *Ādāb al-baḥṭswa al-munāẓarah* of Abū al-Khayr 'Iṣām al-DīnAḥmad ibn Mūṣṭafā ibn Khalīl who is known as Taṣkōprūzade. The Research was then published in 2020 in Afkar Journal University of Malaya Malaysia entitled "The Art of Debate in Islam"<sup>24</sup> and the results have also been presented at the INSISTS Saturday Forum on Jan 17, 2021. In his discussion, SyamsuddinArif explained that debates in the Islamic tradition can be arranged as follows:

Two parties involved in the debate are: the first is questioner and the second is the claimant. The questioner is typically presumed to assume a role that seeks to undermine a given proposition, while the claimant endeavors to uphold the legitimacy of the questioner's argument by offering a rebuttal to the objections raised by the former via a counterargument. The function of the questioner encompasses a tripartite role: Firstly, to contradict or provide a counterargument to an assertion. Secondly, to refute or disprove a flawed claim using evidence or analysis. Thirdly, to oppose or argue against a certain perspective or viewpoint, providing valid reasons and supporting evidence to substantiate claimant position. The nature of the responsibilities assigned to the claimant is contingent upon the type of approach

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78vp9xnNGbk&t=15s>. Accessed April 30, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Syamsudin Arif, "The Art of Debate In Islam: Textual Analysis and Translation of Taṣkōprūzade's *Ādāb Al -Baḥṭh Wa Al-Munāẓarah*," *Afkar* 22, no. 1 (2020): 187–216.

employed by the questioner. He might offer a counterargument or point out the weaknesses in the questioner's logic to support the validity of the statement. Otherwise, the questioner's testimony may be rejected if the other party presents additional evidence. Instead, he may counter the questioner by challenging the credibility of their argument.

One instance of the direct debate between INSISTS and liberal activists is seen in the discussion between Ugi, a representative of INSISTS, and Taufik Adnan Amal, a representative of liberalist where is Taufik planned plan to make a critical edition of the Holy Qur'an. Ugi rejected the idea and claimed that his planning was just imitating orientalists to weaken the authenticity of the Qur'an. As a questioner, Ugi put forward several arguments by coming up with: [i] Gerd-R. Puin's message that "The plan of Bergstrasser, Jeffery and later Pretzl to Prepare a critical edition of the Qur'an was not realized, and the collection of variants derived from real old codices failed to survive the bombs of World War 11"; [ii] A.T. Welch's statement in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* about the loosening of orientalist beliefs in the project of presenting a critical edition of Al-Quran; [iii] John Burton who commented on the despair of orientalists in *Encyclopedia of Al-Quran* in continuing that project; [iv] Abu 'Ubayd, as mentioned in *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, who said that Usman bin Affan's efforts in collecting and compiling the Quran will always be remembered, because it is his greatest contribution to the Quran. Even if there were parties who criticized it, it is precisely their own defects that will be exposed, including those who came later such as orientalists who wanted to present this critical edition of the Quran.<sup>25</sup>

In responding to Ugi's arguments, Taufik denied that his efforts to present a critical edition of the Quran were not the same as those of the orientalists did. As a claimant, Taufik opted not to provide additional comments due to being occupied with other matters. As a questioner, Ugi continued his suggestion to Taufik not to use the term "critical edition" for the Quran. Ugi reasoned, this term is an attempt by orientalists to "deconstruct" the current version of the Quran. Taufik's persistent claims that his work on the critical edition

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<sup>25</sup>Ugi Suharto, *Pemikiran Islam Liberal: Pembahasan Isu-Isu Sentral* (Selangor: Dewan Pustaka Fajar, 2007).

of the Koran differed significantly from conventional orientalist approaches were fruitless, as Ugi believed that they were essentially the same. By knowing the position of Taufik's considering on the orientalist side, Ugi doesn't got to proceed the discourse, by saying:

“I think this is where our dialogue ends. you have the right to make comments on my comments. but I will not answer them. I think it's enough for me to know your position. take all the comments as advice.”

In an academic discussion, either the individual positing the thesis must compel the one challenging it to acknowledge it or the one challenging it must rebut the individual's thesis. The sole conceivable results of the discussion are viewed as these, seeing that the inability of the claimant to validate his argument would demonstrate the questioner's disagreement. If the person making a claim is unable to provide evidence to support their argument during a debate, they will be considered as having lost because the responsibility of proving their position is their own.<sup>26</sup>

During the debate, they accomplished several things, which included a dedication to honesty and accuracy as the foremost priority. To emphasize the importance of being open-minded during a debate, INSISTS advocates for being willing to accept correct points regardless of which side they come from. Furthermore, it is essential that INSISTS utilizes kind and organized language that refrains from insulting the opposite party. INSISTS should also properly reason its arguments and support its points with coherent and persuasive explanations. Lastly, INSISTS must refrain from attacking individuals and instead focuses on disagreeing with their ideas.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, the debate as analyzed in the above discussion, according to researcher, can be viewed as an virtuous debate. This is attributed to several reasons as follows. First, as the implementation of the meaning of adab, that is discipline, INSISTS is disciplined towards the truth by returning to the roots of the problems of Muslims, so that the most basic solution is to return to knowledge and how to make it a tradition, because true knowledge will always be in line with the truth. Second, in tracing the root of the problem,

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<sup>26</sup>Syamsuddin Arif, “The Art of Debate In Islam: Textual Analysis and Translation of Ṭaşkōprüzade's *Ādāb Al -Bahth Wa Al-Munāzarah*.”

INSISTS encountered a fundamental problem within Muslims, namely problems that come from outside and come from within. The solution is to solve both problems at once. Here the debate indirectly occurs, namely the exchange of ideas with intellectuals through reading literature, both affirming what is right, negating what is wrong, even criticizing and correcting how it should be. Third, as a concerned organization devoted to truthfulness, INSISTS emphasizes that it not only condemns dissenting views but also engages in discussions pertaining to build civilization. There is also a dialogue with the intended recipient of the discourse, and on occasion, a direct debate is unavoidable. Fourth, INSISTS specifically debates liberals not to win the debate just like the sophists do, but how truth can be caught on and acknowledged straightforwardly, both for INSISTS and for opponent. Debate with the meaning of direct debate will only be pursued if INSISTS feels it is necessary. If the truth can be directly conveyed and easily accepted without debate, then INSISTS will not take the path of direct debate. If direct debate cannot be avoided, then the etiquette of debate as contained in the Islamic tradition, as stated in the *Ādāb al-Baḥṣwa al-Munādzarah*, can be applied.

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