

## Desacralizing The Past: The Liberal Approach to Islamic History

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### **Abstract**

This research examines the approach of liberal thinkers towards the history of Islam, focusing on the articles published on the online platform Islamlib.com. The research problem is formulated as follows: How do the historical articles on Islam, particularly in terms of content and thematic choices, manifest themselves on Islamlib.com. Additionally, what criticisms regarding the history of Islam are developed by Islamlib.com, encompassing sources, methodology, and approaches. The research employs the historiographical method, analyzing themes, methods, data sources, and approaches through content analysis techniques. The findings indicate that the historical articles on Islamlib.com are crafted within the framework of Islamic history as part of world history and total history. This research argues that the historiography of liberal thinkers has reached a sophisticated level. The articles explore a variety of themes related to Islam, embracing a comprehensive view that goes beyond conventional narratives. The historiographical critiques offered by Islamlib.com extend to source reliability, methodological choices, and the adopted approaches. The methodology used in this study, content analysis, facilitates a thorough examination of the themes, methods, sources, and approaches present in the historical articles. The liberal historiography demonstrated on Islamlib.com reveals a nuanced and advanced understanding of Islamic history. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on liberal perspectives in historiography, shedding light on the diverse themes and critical methodologies employed by liberal thinkers in shaping the narrative of Islamic history.

*Keywords: Historiography; Islamic history; Liberal Islam; Total history; World history.*

## Introduction

In recent times, the discourse on liberal Islamic thought has always been intriguing to discuss. Not only because its ideas are often controversial within the established discourse of Islam, but also due to the influence of Islamism, one of the main adversaries of liberal Islam, which is now spreading and penetrating almost every aspect of Muslim society. Both discourse models essentially encounter difficulties in the Indonesian context. However, compared to the first discourse that often receives criticism, the latter seems to have a more prominent place and following among Muslims in Indonesia today.

The difference in societal acceptance between the two seems to be inseparable from the *da'wa* (preaching) strategies used. So far, based on their intellectual products, liberal Islamic groups often play with fire by attempting to criticize fundamental Islamic sciences that have long been established, such as the sciences of the Qur'an, the *hadith*, *kalam* (Islamic theology), *tasawwuf* (Sufism), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and others (Mukhlis, 2019). Liberal Islamic groups often harshly attack the epistemological foundations of these Islamic sciences, sparking reactions from other Islamic groups who—sometimes excessively—feel that their religion is being insulted. The preaching of liberal Islam is primarily carried out in seminar pulpits and through its well-known online media platform: Islamlib.com. Issue after issue, this group often becomes the subject of excommunication by its opponents.

Meanwhile, it is not the same with Islamist groups. Although at certain points not less intense than the confrontational style of liberal groups, they employ different methods in preaching. Their mission revolves around purifying Islam, which involves cleansing Islamic teachings from any influences deemed to come from outside Islam, referred to as *bid'a* (innovation) and *khurafat* (superstition) (Meijer, 2009, p. 4). This group cannot accept any form of expression, worship, or action that lacks precedent in the Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunna*. The preaching of Islamist groups is primarily conducted through mosque pulpits, especially in mosques that have been acquired as a channel for spreading their ideology (Saparudin & Emawati, 2018). Unlike liberal Islamic groups, which are often excommunicated, Islamist groups are considered the ones most prone to excommunication (Redjosari, 2019).

Regardless of the controversial tendencies of the aforementioned Islamic groups, this study aims to explore the intellectual treasure of one of these groups, namely Jaringan Islam Liberal (the Liberal Islam Network or JIL), particularly its thoughts in the study of Islamic history. More specifically, this study will highlight the study of liberal Islamic history based on data from articles published on its online platform, Islamlib.com. The selection of this topic holds significance in two aspects; firstly, aside

from the controversy and frontal preaching methods, the pages of liberal Islamic thought are intriguing at certain points, especially when placed in the context of the current religiosity of the Indonesian Muslim community. Secondly, a study focusing on its historical thinking, particularly relying on Islamlib.com data, has not been undertaken before.

As can be observed, existing studies on liberal Islamic thought have predominantly focused on its intellectual products, such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) issues (Krisdianto, 2017), interfaith marriages (Ma'arif, 2016), Islam and liberalism (Muhajirin, 2018; Riyanto, 2008; Prayitno, 2017), religious pluralism (Wicaksono, 2008), as well as the contests between liberal Islamic groups and others (Rohimah, 2017), along with their contributions to Islamic sciences (Mukhlis, 2019; Tasmuji, 2011). Among these studies, none have highlighted the exploration of Islamic history undertaken by liberal groups, especially through the medium of Islamlib.com. Thus, the discussion in this study brings a novel perspective. The absence of studies on the historical analysis of liberal Islam does not imply a lack of value in such investigations. Examining several published articles, as will be demonstrated in various sections of this article, the study of Islamic history emerges as an important and serious theme that the JIL attempt to spotlight.

It is worth emphasizing that Islamlib.com has ceased publishing articles since 2016, and there is no precise information regarding this cessation. Numerous assumptions surround the 'discontinuation' of the JIL, including claims that the JIL succumbed to the discourse of Islamist groups or faced financial constraints. I personally assume that JIL's struggle has transformed into various facets, evident in the independent paths chosen by its prominent figures. Even the chairman of JIL, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, has 'transformed' to spread Sufism rather than liberalism (Akmaliyah & Saat, 2022). However, regardless of the transformation of this group, it must be acknowledged that it has left a legacy of thought in various fields that should not be forgotten and remains relevant in contemporary contexts, including the field of Islamic historiography, as discussed in this article. Some sparks of these thoughts can be traced within Islamlib.com.

This study aims to address the question: how do articles on Islamic history on the online platform Islamlib.com, particularly in terms of content and theme selection, unfold? What is the level of scrutiny applied to the Islamic historical discourse developed by Islamlib.com, encompassing data sources, methodologies, and approaches.

## **Research Methods**

To answer the above research problems, the research method utilized in this study is historiographic, which examines a historical work through its elements, with a particular focus on the elements of theme, methods,

data sources, and approaches used in a historical work/article. Those elements are then analyzed using *content analysis* techniques to gain a comprehensive overview of the historical articles published by Islamlib.com. The data sources used in this study are the historical-category articles on the Islamlib.com website (primary), as well as some books, journals, and other papers (secondary).

## Results and Discussion

In this section, I will present the detailed results of the research on the online platform Islamlib.com for discussion. First, I will outline the objective conditions of Islamlib.com in detail, including exploring the menus, pages, or existing features. Next, the articles on Islamlib.com that specifically address Islamic history will be discussed. Finally, this section will delve into the themes, methods, data sources, and approaches collectively used by these articles.

### 1. The Islamlib.com's Directory

As a platform managed by a group of liberal Islamic thinkers, Islamlib.com publishes articles that align with the ideology of liberal Islam in an online format. This is what distinguishes the site from other online platforms, each with its own specifications. The site is easily discoverable through the Google search engine, often appearing on the first page of search results. As understood, this indicates that the site is frequently searched for, visited, or receives a substantial number of clicks from its visitors. In the author's opinion, aside from its "challenging" content, the elegant, responsive, and practical appearance of Islamlib.com also contributes to boosting visitor traffic. Regardless of the quality of a website's content, without an elegant appearance, it remains challenging to capture the interest of visitors enough to make a stop.

Islamlib.com can be accessed through [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com), leading every visitor to its Depan (homepage). On this page, the distinctive template theme of Islamlib.com is evident, characterized by the dominant use of the color purple, with a comprehensive page structure including menu tabs, headers, navigation (navbar) menu, sidebar, content/articles, search column, and footer. The menu tabs include: Tentang Kami (About Us), Kontak (Contact), Timeline, and the search column. The header features a specially designed "IslamLib" inscription. The navbar menu consists of Depan (Home), Mazhab (School of Thought), Politik (Politics), Gagasan (Ideas), Kajian (Studies), Aksara (Script), Agama (Religion), Lembaga (Institutions), Sains (Science), Keluarga (Family), Timeline, some of which have submenus. For example, hovering the cursor or mouse indicator over the navbar Mazhab will reveal submenus such as Ahmadiyah and Wahabisme without clicking. The sidebar includes Topik

Terkini (Latest Topics), Gagasan (Ideas), and several article categories such as Fikih (Islamic Jurisprudence), Filsafat (Philosophy), Islam Nusantara, Keluarga (Family), and Tokoh (Figures). The content section displays newly published articles with larger font size titles and display pictures compared to others. The footer contains sections for Redaksi (Editorial), Naskah (Manuscripts), and Iklan (Advertisements). These page structures make it easy for visitors to access any article on the site according to their interests or desired categories. The elegant template theme, including color, layout, font, and images, also contributes to creating a pleasant browsing experience for visitors on the site.

Islamlib.com asserts its position as a proponent of liberal Islam through its Tentang Kami page (see <http://islamlib.com/tentang/>). The page clarifies that Islamlib.com serves as a platform to seek knowledge about anything related to Islam. The concept of Islam here is not confined to a specific sect, school of thought, or particular group. The site refrains from passing judgment on different groups or Islamic ideologies. Islamlib.com welcomes all groups and Islamic perspectives for dialogue rather than confrontation, aiming to enrich the Islamic knowledge base of the Muslim community. Diversity or differences in religious matters among Muslims are considered an asset that should be viewed positively, fostering strength and preventing easy division or manipulation. Islamlib.com positions all of this in the context of continuing the reform of Islam that began in the 19th century. The evolving times toward progress do not always align with the phenomenon of religious diversity; they seem to struggle to catch up and comprehend advancements or merely interpret progress. Therefore, Islamlib.com strives to bridge the gap between religion and the progress of the times.

Islamlib.com is managed by – borrowing the language of Islamlib.com itself – “experts in the field of Islam,” particularly those well-known for their liberal Islamic thoughts. They include Ulil Abshar Abdalla (Editor-in-Chief), Nong Darol Mahmada, Novriantoni Kahar, and Saidiman Ahmad (<http://islamlib.com/author/>). Ulil, in particular, has gained significant popularity as a prominent figure in liberal Islam in the country. This popularity increased notably after he stirred public attention in 2002 with his article “Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam” (Refreshing the Understanding of Islam) in Kompas (Abdalla, 2002). The article sparked reactions from various parties, including from his father-in-law, KH. A. Mustofa Bisri, who responded in the newspaper on the same page (Bisri, 2002).

The articles published on Islamlib.com are not exclusively written by individuals affiliated with organizations supporting liberal Islamic ideologies, such as JIL. Instead, they are contributed by anyone with themes or a “feel” that aligns with Islamlib.com’s focus on social, political, and

religious issues. Nevertheless, specific themes related to religion, such as art, literature, and science, are also considered for publication. The length of Islamlib.com articles ranges from 800 to 1,200 words, with paragraphs (in Microsoft Word) structured to not exceed five lines. Accompanied by a brief author biography, articles can be submitted to the email address: [redaksi@islamlib.com](mailto:redaksi@islamlib.com) (<http://islamlib.com/tentang/naskah/>). For communication purposes, visitors or readers of Islamlib.com can also send messages through the Kontak page (<http://islamlib.com/kontak/>). Although Islamlib.com is an online advertising platform (<http://islamlib.com/tentang/iklan/>), there is no clear information regarding whether they impose fees for published articles, unlike some other online platforms.

Upon investigation through the Timeline tab, Islamlib.com has been publishing articles since 2001 until 2016. The first article published was Luthfi Assyaukanie's "Wacana Islam Liberal di Timur Tengah" (Discourse of Liberal Islam in the Middle East) on 21 February 2002, and the latest publication was Agus Khudlori's article, "Revolusi Spiritual ala Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani: Telaah atas Kitab Futuhul Ghaib " (Spiritual Revolution à la Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani: Study of the Book Futuhul Ghaib) on 28 October 2016 (<http://islamlib.com/timeline/>). As an online platform, the publishing timeline is not bound by specific days, months, or dates. Islamlib.com can release up to 4 articles in a day or even none at all, depending on the quantity and eligibility of submitted articles. There have been instances of publishing only two articles in a year, as was the case in 2004. However, from 2016 to the present, Islamlib.com has not published any articles. I did not find clear information explaining this cessation.

## **2. Articles with the Theme of Islamic History on Islamlib.com**

Islamlib.com possesses a relatively extensive archive of articles with themes related to history. To access these articles, the author navigates to the Study menu bar until a dropdown submenu appears. The submenu consists of seven categories, starting from the top: *Hikam* (Wisdom), *Qur'an*, *Fikih*, *Filsafat*, *Teologi* (Theology), *Sufisme* (Sufism), and the bottom submenu being History. Through this last submenu, the author is directed to the archive page of historical articles, totaling 25 in all.

After a brief examination, it becomes apparent that these 25 articles not only discuss the history of Islam but also encompass world history in general, particularly the history of religions. However, it cannot be denied that Islamic history receives a more significant share. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, the author will not include all 25 articles outright. The author is currently in the process of filtering them to obtain articles related to Islamic history, spanning from classical to modern times, aligning

with the paper's discussed topics, ultimately resulting in 12 highlighted articles. The details of these 12 articles are provided in the following table:

**Table 1. Articles on Islamic History Published on Islamlib.com**

No.	Title	Author	Date
01.	Refleksi Maulid Nabi SAW	Novriantoni Kahar	26/05/2002
02.	"Convivencia" di Andalusia	Ihsan Ali-Fauzi	14/07/2002
03.	Syura di Mata Muawiyah	Abd A'la	13/09/2004
04.	Islam Baghdad	Lutfi Assyaukanie	15/11/2005
05.	Waktu Isra-Mikraj Nabi Muhammad	Abdul Moqsith Ghazali	22/07/2010
06.	Perang di Zaman Nabi	Abdul Moqsith Ghazali	02/05/2011
07.	Islam Madinah	Luthfi Assyaukanie	11/07/2015
08.	Dulu, Muslim Perdana Berperang demi Kebebasan Beragama	Novriantoni Kahar	15/10/2015
09.	Merenungkan Pangkal Perseteruan Sunni-Syiah	Novriantoni Kahar	31/10/2015
10.	Pengaruh Syiah dalam Perayaan Maulid Nabi	Fina Mazida Husna	23/12/2015
11.	Sejarah Kelam Turki	Hanafi Wibowo	30/12/2015
12.	Toleransi Nabi Muhammad terhadap Homoseksualitas	Khoirul Anwar	18/02/2016

Table 1. Exploring the rich tapestry of Islamic history through the lens of insightful articles. Dive into the narratives at Islamlib.com and embark on a journey through time. The articles above cover a variety of themes on the history of Islam, spanning from the early period to contemporary times. These themes naturally align with the ideas within the realm of liberal Islam. Although some of the articles are written by individuals who may be considered 'not familiar' as followers of liberal Islam. However, as published on Islamlib.com, these articles—regardless of the authors' backgrounds—are deemed to represent the aspirations of liberal Islam. In the next section, the content of these articles will be briefly explained and categorized according to themes for further discussion. For ease of reference, the articles will be mentioned in subsequent discussions based on their numerical order, such as Article 01, Article 02, up to Article 12. Meanwhile, the full titles and names of the authors will be cited in footnotes.

### 3. The Themes in Islamlib.com

#### a) *Islamic Universalism*

As a proponent of liberal Islamic ideas, Islamlib.com highly upholds the universal values of Islam. With these values, Islam is not confined by space and time; it transcends various traditions, ethnicities, and cultures, truly becoming a mercy for all worlds (*rahma li al-'alamin*). In this context, the practice of Islam is emphasized more on substantive aspects rather than formal-legalistic ones. This theme is represented in several articles on Islamlib.com, especially Article 01, Article 04, and Article 05.

Written as a reflection on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday, Article 01 revisits the prophetic messages contained within it (the Mawlid), particularly focusing on three aspects: equality (*al-musawat*), liberty (*al-hurriyya*), and justice (*al-'adala*). These three principles, considered as ideal values for modern individuals, were strongly embedded by the Prophet in his era. According to this article, these universal values have emerged and sometimes submerged in the historical journey of Islam, not to mention being distorted, twisted, and overshadowed. However, the essence of religions lies in these universal values (Kahar, 2002).

Article 04 describes Baghdad, a "modern" city in its time. Indeed, Baghdad was the capital of the Islamic caliphate during the era known as the golden age of Islam. Baghdad symbolizes the universal values of Islam. Besides its erotic nuances as a human city (which certainly did not escape flaws), Baghdad is also rich in its religious atmosphere. Many Muslim thinkers, Sufis, and even the most heretical, flourished in this city and contributed to humanity. This is attributed to the universal and flexible values of Islam (Assyaukanie, 2005).

Meanwhile, Article 05 discusses the differences of opinion regarding the timing of the event of the Prophet's *Isra' Mi'raj* (Night Journey and Ascension). Among these opinions are those stating that the event occurred in the third year of prophethood, the fifth year, the sixth year, 10 years and three months into the prophethood, 12 years into the prophethood, one year and five months before the Hijra, one year and three months before the Hijra, and six months before the Hijra. These differences are understandable, considering there is no precise documentation related to the event. Similarly, scholars and historians have not reached a consensus on this matter. One thing is certain: the event did indeed occur. Muslims should believe in the reality of this event, extracting wisdom and goodness from it, rather than focusing solely on the debate about the timing, which is not so crucial for the faith of a Muslim (Ghazali, 2010).

**b) *Islamic State***

Although there are not many historical articles discussing this theme, given the substantive ideas developed by the liberal Islamic group, this theme is quite important. Islamlib.com views the concept of an Islamic state with a pessimistic tone as an ideal Islamic state has never truly emerged in the world that effectively addresses the disparities in people's lives. Furthermore, there is no established format for the Islamic state as regulated by Islam. In fact, there have been several Islamic states in the world, but acknowledged or not, they have not been able to create a just and prosperous state as envisioned in the Qur'an. The rejection of the democratic system (even though the *shûrâ* system exists as a precedent in the Qur'an) is not accompanied by the establishment of a better system. This theme is elaborated specifically in Article 03 and Article 07.

In Article 03, it is mentioned that Mu'awiya led using religious legitimacy for power, one of which could be proven by the dissemination of the Jabariyya doctrine in his time to legitimize his power as a divine destiny. Mu'awiya rejected the concept of *shura* (democracy) as found in its precedent in the Qur'an. Instead, he implemented an oligarchic governance system, so the prosperity of the state could only be enjoyed by a few individuals. The weak, especially minorities like the Shi'a, were persecuted. There was no welfare for the people at that time, except for violence against minorities or groups whose beliefs contradicted the incessant rulers (A'la, 2004).

Meanwhile, Article 07, titled "Islam in Medina," attempts to depict Islam in the dynamics of life in Medina, especially in terms of its politics. This article concludes that the city of Medina built by the Prophet cannot be an ideal inspiration for the governance of a state. The city lacked a clear format to become an ideal or modern state. Until the end of the Prophet's life, Medina remained a city continually seeking a governance format, and a standardized political model was never formulated by the Prophet. This is understandable considering the Prophet was a messenger, not a political leader, let alone a political thinker (Assyaukanie, 2015).

**c) *Religious Pluralism***

Pluralism is one of the principles advocated by the liberal group in the context of Islam and Indonesian identity. Particularly in the Indonesian context, closely associated with the reality of pluralism in many aspects, the idea of pluralism finds its significance. Based on the narratives constructed, Islamlib.com's pluralism not only refers to religious and belief-related matters but also extends to ethnic, linguistic, and cultural pluralities. This theme is reflected in Article 02, Article 06, Article 08, Article 09, Article 10, and Article 11.

Article 02 discusses the experiences of Muslims, Jews, and Christians during the heyday of Islam in Spain (Andalusia) from the tenth to the fifteenth century. The article emphasizes the coexistence (*convivencia*) among these three religious groups, where they collaborated to advance civilization, maintaining awareness of their religious identities and cultural origins without diminishing or exaggerating them at certain points. The article aims to draw lessons from the Muslim rule in Andalusia, where those in power were open to the existence of minority groups. Minorities were engaged in contributing to the advancement of civilization under a relatively secular governance climate. They were chosen based on their qualities, not their minority religious status (Fauzi, 2002).

In Article 06, wars during the early Islamic missionary experiences are mentioned, especially during the time of the Prophet. Prophet Muhammad participated in 17 recorded battles. Discussing the wars during the Prophet's time, this article draws conclusions: that the wars were conducted in self-defense; the wars were directed against the Quraysh unbelievers, not fellow Muslims; the war against the Jews was reluctantly carried out because they not only violated the agreements outlined in the Charter of Medina but also fueled hostility against the Muslim community (Ghazali, 2011). Thus, the Muslims' engagement in wars against non-believers in the past does not imply intolerance but was a response to oppression, necessitating a defense.

Still regarding the experiences of early Islamic warfare, with a different emphasis, Article 08 also draws different conclusions; that early Muslims were allowed to engage in warfare because they were attacked, to fight for religious and belief freedoms, and to defend the oppressed. In its concluding sentence, the article emphasizes that the early Muslims fought for religious and belief freedoms even through warfare, a rarity in contemporary times (Kahar, 2015a).

In Article 09, Kahar (the author) expresses his frustration with some individuals, particularly – borrowing Kahar's language – ignorant extremist groups, including academics, still immersed in the Sunni-Shi'a conflict discourse in Indonesia. According to Kahar, this should not always be fueled in the current context. Based on the historical fragments presented, Kahar eventually states in the article's conclusion: "Islam has flown with two wings, Sunni and Shi'a, from very early on. Both are equally valid. Questioning their validity, or attempting to eliminate one of them, is purely a sign of historical myopia" (Kahar, 2015b)

Similar to Article 09, Article 10 also touches on Shi'a. The article narrates how the tradition of celebrating the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*) among Sunnis originated from Shi'a traditions. Not only in the mawlid tradition but also in other practices, there are many opportunities to appreciate the *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet). The article then

laments the negative attitudes and prejudices shown by Sunni groups towards Shi'a. Shi'a has contributed to developing traditions, and this group should not be discriminated against. In essence, both groups can be brought together rather than being separated (Husna, 2015).

Meanwhile, Article 11 is significant in the context of Indonesian Muslims who still consider Turkey as a role model in upholding religious principles. The article indicates that Turkey is not the right example for advancing Islam; in Islamic history, Turkey has shown cruel actions against humanity, power struggles, and the suppression of rationality. The dark history of Turkey is presented through the account of a netizen who complained about the actions of Ridwal Kamil, the Mayor of Bandung at that time, who visited every church on Christmas night. The netizen then compared it to Erdogan, the President of Turkey, whom he considered a firm Islamic figure in upholding Islamic religious principles (Wibowo, 2015).

#### *d) Sexuality*

The last theme that the author successfully identified from the historical articles is sexuality, specifically homosexuality (sexual attraction to the same gender, not the opposite gender). So far, in the discourse of Islam in the country, this theme is considered taboo to discuss, while those perceived to have sexual deviations continue to be persecuted. Liberal Islamic groups consider this issue significant, as it involves clear human rights under positive state law and normative religious norms. The existence of such groups is also acknowledged in Islam, as demonstrated by Article 12.

Consistent with its title, the article discusses the Prophet's recognition of the existence of homosexuality. This is evidenced by the narration from 'Aisha about the Prophet not rebuking a transgender person (considered not desiring women) entering the homes of the Prophet's wives. Eventually, the transgender person was expelled by the Prophet after being exposed as a fake transgender; he was caught discussing the curves of a woman's body. Transgender individuals in the early Islamic era were usually entertainers, singers, and poets. One famous transgender person during the Prophet's time was named Tuways. He is recorded as the first person to sing in Madinah after the advent of Islam (Anwar, 2016).

#### **4. Methods, Sources, and Approachs**

Although not in a strict sense, the historical articles published on Islamlib.com appear to employ historical methods, including heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (). The articles are systematically organized, meaning they are coherent and do not contradict each other from one object to another. Similarly, the constructed historical

narrative is empirical in nature. Although more in the realm of popular science than academic science, other characteristics of these articles are rational, objective, and verifiable.

The historical method employed in the writing of these articles is in accordance with the principles of historical writing established by Dudung Abdurrahman (Abdurrahman, 1999, p. 28). First, the theme, which is the formulation of the main research object, whether related to politics, ideology, customs, or cultural traditions. Second, the data sources, which are historical sources used as references by a historian in producing their work, whether in the form of primary or secondary sources. Third, methods and approaches, which are a set of rules guiding a historian or researcher in conducting more focused research. Fourth, concepts or models, which are abstractions of a phenomenon or reality. The process of determining the concept is called conceptualization, a process of dividing and classifying according to the similarities and differences of the objects to be studied, resulting in a specific model such as empirical research, phenomenology, or metaphysics (Tamburaka, 1999, p. 17). Fifth, perspective, which is the way a researcher investigates and frames issues in their research object.

Upon closer inspection of the historical data sources used, it becomes clearer that the historical articles on Islamlib.com are more in the realm of popular science than academic science. They are considered popular science because the articles are written very briefly, ranging from 800-1,200 words, with a language style that is quite familiar and lively. The articles only include necessary primary sources, without including possible secondary sources. Once again, for a popular science article for an online platform, this is to save space. In such cases, the critical review of sources by the authors, both external and internal, does not appear as prominently as it usually does in academically-oriented historical articles. The latter type of article is typically created for academic purposes at universities, not for publication on online platforms.

Nevertheless, some of the data sources used in several historical articles on Islamlib.com, in the author's opinion, can be considered acceptable. In addition to the Qur'an and Hadith, some articles use primary sources from classical scholars, such as al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir, although their portions are not extensive. Furthermore, sources from modern thinkers like Philip K. Hitti, Americo Castro, 'Abduh, al-Dawoody, Ahmad Amin, and Thaha Husein are cited as supporting sources (Kahar, 2002; Fauzi, 2002; Kahar, 2015a; Anwar, 2016; Kahar, 2015b). However, not all articles specify their sources; some only mention secondary sources without primaries, and vice versa; there are even some articles that do not mention their sources at all. If positioned as an academic article, such a situation would certainly be unacceptable. However, if these articles are considered as popular science articles, such a situation could be acceptable.

Meanwhile, there are several approaches apparent in the historical articles on Islamlib.com. First, the history of the Muslim community. This approach places the history of the Muslim community as part of World History. It was primarily developed by Hodgson, who saw Islam as having the power to critique Western discourse. The Islamic civilization rooted in the Irano-Semitic religion and culture intermingled with the West Asian dynasties. Thus, for Hodgson, Islam is a cousin to Western civilization. The Islamic civilization is '*the other*' for Western civilization, through which the West can better explain itself (Soetomo, 2017, p. 2).

As a comparison, this is different from the model of the approach to the history of Islam in Indonesia. This second model approach has two patterns: 1) the history of Islam in Indonesia as part of the history of the Muslim community. This approach emphasizes the periodization and the role of influential figures in the development of Islamic kingdoms in the Nusantara archipelago; 2) the history of Islam in Indonesia as part of the national history of Indonesia (Umar, 1998, p. 188).

The articles on Islamic history on Islamlib.com clearly demonstrate the approach of placing Islamic history as part of world history. This is evident in several articles that discuss the history of "*convivencia*" during the golden era of Islam in Andalusia (Article 02), the Islamic cosmopolitanism in Baghdad during the peak of the Abbasid Dynasty (Article 04), the role of Islam in the city of Madinah as one of the world's political communities alongside Rome and Persia (Article 07), and an article exploring the dark history of Turkey, attempting to delve into the adventures and colonization of the infamous Turks in the past (Article 11). These themes are sufficient to prove how liberals position the history of the Muslim community as part of World History.

Secondly, there is the concept of total history. Islamlib.com adopts a narrative of Islamic history with a total history approach. This approach allows history to capture things that are considered "unusual," deemed "unimportant," the history of the "marginalized" people, or—in Taufik Abdullah's terms—the history of the "silent" individuals (Abdullah, 1999, p. 55). Total history encompasses all aspects of societal life, not just focusing on the typically deemed most important areas, especially politics (Azra, 2002, p. 69). Thus, total history is the "opposite" of conventional history, which focuses on the "great people" and significant events considered influential in a particular historical context. Total history involves the "desacralization" of conventional history by giving full attention to structures and thus relying on social analysis theoretical tools (Hannan, 2014, p. 4).

Most of the Islamic history articles on Islamlib.com represent this approach. Some articles that serve as excellent examples of this approach include Article 12, which discusses the acknowledgment of the era of the

Prophet regarding homosexuality. At first glance, homosexuality may not be considered an important history or have a significant impact on the history of Islam, so it might not need to be written as the history of the Muslim community. However, from a total history perspective, it is crucial as it contributes to shaping the social structure of Islamic society at that time. Other articles that have no connection with “great people” or significant events in history, such as the *convivencia* or coexistence among various faiths in Andalusia (Article 02), representing the history of the weak or “marginalized” people, or articles on the social life of Islam in Baghdad that pay attention to even the heretics (Article 04), typically ignored or even erased in conventional Islamic historical narratives. In general, histories related to religious pluralism or the defense of minority groups can be incorporated into this approach model.

### **Conclusion**

The historical articles published on Islamlib.com embrace several themes in line with the spirit of liberal Islam advocated thus far. These themes include Islamic universalism, the illusion of the Islamic state, religious pluralism, and sexuality. Grounded in credible historical sources, these historical writings also appear within the framework of Islamic history as part of world history and total history. In total history, the narratives of great individuals and significant events are not the only aspects to be written about. Beyond that, total history accommodates the voices of ordinary people who have almost no representation in traditional historical frameworks. In the hands of liberal groups, history is aimed at addressing various humanitarian issues, such as persecution in religious societies, interfaith conflicts, and matters of sexuality, rather than serving as a tool for glorifying power or past-worldly magnificence.

Although the Islamic Liberal Network (JIL) has undergone transformation, and Islamlib.com no longer publishes articles, it must be acknowledged that the spectrum of thought it espoused, particularly in the realm of Islamic history, is worthy of appreciation and further development. The historical concepts it introduced should not only be adopted by similar online platforms but also explored more deeply within the academic environment of higher education. Whether acknowledged or not, the history teaching prevalent in Islamic universities in the country still preserves conventional history and is heavily imbued with theological nuances. This is evident, for example, in the history department curricula dominated by repetitive narratives of Islamic dynasties.

Finally, historiographical studies on objects of study in the form of online media are rarely conducted. This presents an opportunity for scholars interested in Islamic studies, particularly those focusing on Islamic history, to fill this gap, given the plethora of historical narratives

disseminated through online media nowadays. Perhaps there is a need to understand how the narratives of Islamic history, developed by groups such as Islamists, moderates, and others, unfold in the digital realm.

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