

## ISLAM NUSANTARA An Indonesian Translation to Practice Islam

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### Abstract

*This article discusses an Indonesian interpretation of Islam, focusing on the popular concept of Islam Nusantara, the archipelagic Islam. It delves into the account what Islam Nusantara is the underlying characteristic of the concept. As this article argues, Islam Nusantara reserves as a particular Islamic thought and method. Islam Nusantara is indeed an Indonesian interpretation of Islam that emphasizes on Islam as a cultural phenomenon thus inviting the understanding of religion through a cultural approach. This cultural approach demands pluralities and wasathiyah (moderation) as a main reference for understanding religion. To do so, Islam Nusantara begs inclusive, tolerance and friendly Islamic interpretation and respects differences in terms of cultures and religions. It takes its roots at the Islamic principles of tasamuh, tawazun and i'tidal. Historically speaking, the Javanese nine saints, the Walisongo, is a paradigmatic example in the early Islamic proselytization as translating Islam through cultural.*

*[Artikel ini menjelaskan satu bentuk interpretasi terhadap Islam yang populer di Indonesia kontemporer, Islam Nusantara. Problem definisi Islam Nusantara dan karakteristiknya akan dijelaskan melalui artikel ini. Kemudian, melalui artikel ini, penulis berpendapat bahwa Islam Nusantara merupakan satu bentuk pemikiran dan metode dalam memahami Islam yang berkembang di Indonesia. Islam Nusantara merupakan bentuk interpretasi Islam yang menempatkan agama dalam konteks kultural, karenanya agama*

*haruslah dipahami dalam wadah budaya. Pendekatan budaya terhadap Islam ini pada gilirannya menuntut keberagaman dan moderasi sebagai konsep penting dalam memahami agama. Karena itulah, Islam Nusantara menghendaki inklusifitas, toleransi, dan interpretasi Islam yang menghargai keragaman pemahaman budaya ada agama. Islam Nusantara mengakar pada prinsip tasamuh, tawazun dan i'tidal. Pada kesejarahannya, Walisongo merupakan paradigma penting dalam memahami menterjemahkan Islam melalui kebudayaan.]*

**Keyword:** *Islam Nusantara, Walisongo, Culture, Tradition, Modernity*

## **Introduction**

The concept of Islam Nusantara (archipelagic Islam) firstly appeared through a book *Islam Nusantara Jaringan Global dan Lokal* written by a prominent scholar Azyumardi Azra in 2002. Later, in 2007, another Indonesian scholar Nor Huda wrote his *Islam Nusantara: Sejarah Sosial Intelektual Islam di Indonesia* and introduced also the concept of Islam Nusantara. These two books are the earliest publications on Islam Nusantara seen from two perspectives: Islamic network analysis by Azra and intellectual social history by Huda. Nevertheless, these two publications did not generate a massive public attention as particularly seen as academic books that only circulated among scholars and researchers. The concept of Islam Nusantara later received public attention as the largest Indonesian Muslim organization, the Nahdlatul Ulama/NU, officially launched “Islam Nusantara” as the main theme of its 33<sup>rd</sup> National Congress (*Muktamar*) in Jombang-East Java on 1-5 August 2015.

Importantly, the concept of Islam Nusantara ignited public controversies among Indonesian Muslim intellectuals and activists. For the opponents, Islam Nusantara is particularly seen from theological perspective and deemed the concept as a deviant interpretation of Islam. For the champion, Islam Nusantara is translated as an interpretation of

Islam in Indonesian context; an Islamic interpretation which is suitable for Indonesian Muslim.

This article tries to portray the fundamental definition of Islam Nusantara, the relationship between religion and culture and partly tries to reconcile differences between the pros and the cons. The article further argues that Islam Nusantara, beyond theological debates, is a model of practicing Islam by Muslim in Indonesian archipelago. Islam Nusantara provides an Islamic interpretation that reconciles Islam as a universal message and local culture and is the bridge that links nationalism and modernization with tradition.

### Defining Islam Nusantara

Indonesian Muslim intellectuals gave multiple definitions on the definition of Islam Nusantara. A prolific author with the NU background, Ahmad Baso, sees Islam Nusantara as “local Islam” adopted by Muslim in Nusantara. It is a “historical Islam” that takes its roots to particular situation in Nusantara landscape. Islam Nusantara is indeed no other than Islam itself and not a new religion.<sup>1</sup> Similar to Baso, the current chairman of the NU, Said Aqil Siroj, explained that Islam Nusantara was not a stream, sect or *mazhab*, but was a *kebashaisb wa mazayyat*, the type and character of Islam embraced by Nusantara society, namely Islam that was friendly, polite and moderate. This form of Islam is built on culture.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, both intellectuals have differences in defining whether Islam Nusantara is a category of *mazhab* or not. Baso explains that Islam Nusantara was a *mazhab* (mode of thought) carried out by the *ulama* (Muslim scholars) in Nusantara in practicing and translating Islam within the context of Nusantara cultures.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Siroj views

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara Ijtihad Genius & Ijma Ulama Islam Nusantara* (Jakarta: Pustaka Afid, 2015), p. 116-117.

<sup>2</sup> Said Aqil Siradj, “Pengantar”, M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Islam Nusantara Islam Indonesia Ijtihad Kemaslabatan Bangsa* (Yogyakarta & Jakarta: LKiS cooperate with SAS, 2018), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 21.

that Islam Nusantara does not form a particular *mazhab*, in contrast to Baso who precisely categorizes it as a *mazhab*. Despite different opinions, the two-preceding arguments imply a cross-cutting and meeting point. Siroj, for instance, argues that Islam Nusantara as a type or character, not a *mazhab*. Nevertheless, when the type and character of Islam that Siroj exemplifies pointing to the examples of Walisongo, then his view clearly locates a *mazhab*. Likewise, Islamic Nusantara as a *mazhab* which appears through Baso's definition certainly implies local specificities connoting a particular type or character of Islam, which distinguishes from other types and characters of Islam. Thus, both intellectuals differ in defining what *mazhab* is, but they share the same point in many instances. While Siroj defines *mazhab* as a close mode system of thought as reflected through the concepts of Islamic theology (*akidah*), *fiqh* and *tasawuf*, Baso defines *mazhab* in a broader understanding, as a mode of thought in general.

Another NU's intellectual, M. Imdadun Rahmat who served as a member of the National Commission of Human Rights (2012-2017) and the Deputy of the General Secretary of National Board of the NU (PBNU) (2010-2015) argues that Islam Nusantara is a *manhaj* (method) to understand and practice Islam in the Nusantara. It is a result of dialectics-interaction between the revealed Shari'ah and local situatedness in terms of cultural and condition. *Manhaj* Islam Nusantara was built and implemented by Walisongo and was followed by the mainstream *ulama* in Nusantara for the following periods.<sup>4</sup> *Manhaj* Islam Nusantara is the dominant form of Islamic interpretation practiced by the majority of Muslim in Indonesia. For Asep Salahudin, a lecturer of IAILM Suryalaya Tasikmalaya, Islam Nusantara is an Islamic interpretation of Islam as a revelation and Nusantara as cultural and political category. He explained that Islam is a religious identity, while Nusantara is a politico-cultural expression. These two words are complementing one to another and

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<sup>4</sup> M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Islam Nusantara Islam Indonesia Ijtihad Kemaslabatan Bangsa* (Yogyakarta & Jakarta: LKiS Cooperate with SAS, 2018), p. 20.

should not confronted or contradicted. He writes that “humanity and nationalism are congruent; Islam and Indonesianness become one breath. Therefore, Islam and Indonesia should not be confronted.”<sup>5</sup>

Islam Nusantara resembles a meeting of two high-quality of seeds. Islam and Nusantara acculturate one to another and the acculturation of the two gives a birth to the best tree. This best tree reflects in the so-called Islam Nusantara, a form of Islam that could positively contribute to the betterment of Muslim society and generate a solution to the socio-religious problems facing contemporary Indonesia.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Islam Nusantara is indeed an approach to Islam. It is an approach to deliver, to think, to understand, and to practice Islam. Different from Islam in the Middle Eastern countries where the problem of *akidah* and politics are dominant issues thus tend to be intolerant against differences, Islam Nusantara demands cultural diversities so that more flexible in dealing with differences.

### Characterising Islam Nusantara

As the above discussion, Islam Nusantara reflects local peculiarities that could be distinguished from other forms of Islam elsewhere. The religious deliberation board (*Bahtsul Masail*) of NU in East Java characterises Islam Nusantara through five crucial elements, namely reform (*işlahiyyah*), balanced in all fields (*tawazuniyyah*), voluntary (*tathawwuniyyah*), ethics (*akblaqiyyah*), and tolerance (*tasamuh*).<sup>7</sup> The Indonesian Minister of Religious Affair Lukman Hakim Saifuddin further characterises Islam Nusantara with moderatism (*wasathiyyah*), inclusive, tolerance and respecting differences. Islam Nusantara avoids a

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<sup>5</sup> Asep Salahudin, *Sufisme Sunda Hubungan Islam dan Budaya dalam Masyarakat Sunda* (Bandung: Nuansa, 2017), p. 250.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ma'ruf Amin, “Khittah Islam Nusantara”, Team PW LBM NU East Java, *Islam Nusantara Manhaj Dakwah Islam Aswaja di Nusantara*, Ahmad Muntaha AM (ed.) (t.t.p.: PW LTN NU East Java & PW LBM NU East Java & State University of Malang, 2018), p. vi.

truth-claim to a single religion or religious understanding and respect the state principle of *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity).<sup>8</sup> The activist of Islam Nusantara Center (INC), Zainul Milal Bizawie states that Islam Nusantara is an Islamic interpretation which is friendly, open, inclusive and capable of providing solutions to problems of the nation and the state. Islam Nusantara is dynamic and respecting cultural and religious differences.<sup>9</sup> Another NU scholar Abdullah Ubaid argues that Islam Nusantara is characterised by the principle of *tasamuh*, *tawasuth*, *tawazun*, *i'tidal* and *wasathiyah*. The later principle, according to Ubaid, is the most fundamental character of Islam Nusantara because this principle could lead to the birth of three other principles: *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal*.<sup>10</sup> He further argues that, in the Indonesian context, *wasathiyah* appears in five elements of religion: faith (*kalam*), Islamic law (*fiqh*), Islamic mysticism (*sufism*), politics and culture. As for *wasathiyah* in cultural element, Imdadun Rahmat suggests that Islam Nusantara is supposed to accommodate local culture and elements of progress originating from other cultures.<sup>11</sup> Rahmat explains the crucial characteristics of the Islam Nusantara include; *first*, the manifestation of Islamic interpretation which is suitable for Indonesian Muslim; *second*, local culture as an important element of Islamic interpretation and expression rather than a threat to the purity of religion; *third*, adaptation to progress and changes regardless in terms of technology, modernity, and ideas; *fourth*, culture as the foundation of political force in a pluralistic state.<sup>12</sup> Islam Nusantara, Rahmat further argues, does not only a slogan, but is indeed the essential meaning of

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<sup>8</sup> Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, "Pengantar: Islam Nusantara dan Pembentukan Karakter Bangsa", Zainul Milal Bizawie, *Masterpiece Islam Nusantara Sanad dan Jejaring Ulama-Santri (1830-1945)* (Tangerang: Pustaka Kompas, 2016), p. iii.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144-145.

Islam.<sup>13</sup> It is a product of a long-process of interaction between Islam and local specificity that has resulted in a particular form and interpretation of Islam in Indonesia.<sup>14</sup>

As for Islamic local specificity in Indonesia, we could clearly pinpoint multiple Islamic rituals that does not belong elsewhere in the Muslim world, such as Islamic rituals following the celebration of *Ied*, like *balal-bibahal*, *silaturrahim*, and *kupatan*. Indonesian-Islamic rituals celebrating rites of passage, such as death and marriage, also demonstrate a high degree of local spesifity which includes the *selamatan* following 7 days, 40 days, 100 days and 1000 days of Muslim burial, yearly commemoration of the death (*haul*) and *nyadran*, *tingkepan*, *sepasaran* for the bride and groom, *undang mantu*, *ngunduh mantu* and Indonesian ritual of *walimat al-‘urs*. In the affairs of education, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) also deliver local specificity of Islam in Indonesia which includes the Arabic-script of Javanese (*pegon*) and the Javanese style of translation of Arabic texts. In clothing and dressing, Muslim wear *sarung* and *kopyah*. Importantly, the principle of tolerance also characterises Islamic practices in Indonesia. The principle applies not only to diversities of Islamic expressions and interpretations, but also to other traditions, such as the prohibition of slaughtering cows at the celebration of *Ied Adha* in Kudus for respecting the Hindus’ tradition.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the very foundation of Islam Nusantara is the acceptance towards diversities and local culture or tradition. This principle rooted at the Islamic legal maxim (*ushul al-fiqh*), the *‘urf* or *adat*. The *‘urf* literally means “customs and tradition” and Islam embraces the popular custom, local culture or tradition as long as non-contradictory to the foundation

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<sup>13</sup> Abd A’la, *Ijtihad Islam Nusantara Refleksi Pemikiran dan Kontekstualisasi Ajaran Islam di Era Globalisasi & Liberalisasi Informasi* (Surabaya: PW LTN NU East Java & Muara Progresif, 2018), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Team of PW LBM NU East Java, *Islam Nusantara Manhaj Dakwah Aswaja di Nusantara* (t.t.p.: PW LTN NU East Java & PW LBM NU East Java & State University of Malang, 2018), p. 1-2.

of Islam, the Quran and the Prophetic tradition (*sunna*).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, *ushul al-fiqh* also rules that Islamically-confirmed '*urf*' is indeed one of Islamic law sources (*al-'adah mubkamat*).<sup>17</sup> The *sunna* also proclaims that "*ma ra'ahu al-Muslimuna hasanan fabuwa 'inda Allah hasanun* (What is considered as positive by Muslims, then according to Allah is also preferable). These two Islamic legal sources provide the principle that Muslim should embrace customs and tradition rooted from non-Islamic environment and call for dialogue between Islam and non-Islamic-inspired tradition.

The acceptance towards local customs and tradition further reflects also the relatively independence of Indonesian Muslim scholars (*ulama*) to define Islamic laws ala Indonesia.<sup>18</sup> Their Islamic interpretation particularly demonstrates a high-degree of independence of deliberation. In contrast to Middle-Eastern *ulama* with their puritan attitude, the Indonesian *ulama* begs for acculturation between Islam and local culture. Choirul Fuad Yusuf and Tawalinuddin Haris argue that the Islamic acculturation in Indonesia is related the history of Islam in the country. In the early Islamisation period of the archipelago in 14-15<sup>th</sup> century, the earliest Islamic proselytiser (*da'i*) introduced Islam peacefull, through cultural elements, such as *wayang*, music (*gamelan*), and traditional Javanese song (*tembang*).<sup>19</sup> Local culture, Asep Salahuddin argues, is indeed the oxygen of the Islam Nusantara.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it is important that the limit of adaptation and acculturation should be placed within the Islamic framework.

As the above-mentioned, Islam allows adaptation and acculturation upon confirmed-local culture and tradition. As an Indonesian renowned professor Machasin stated that the attitude of Islam in dealing with

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<sup>16</sup> Ma'ruf Amin, "Khittah Islam...", p. v.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Imam Jalal al-Din Abd al-Rahman Ibn Abi Bakr al-Suyuthi, *al-Aisyabahu wa al-Nadhair fi al-Furu'* (t.t.p: Syirkah al-Nur Asia, t.t.), p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> Choirul Fuad Yusuf & Tawalinuddin Haris (eds.), *Inskripsi Islam Nusantara Jawa dan Sumatera* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang & Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2014), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Asep Salahuddin, *Sufisme Sunda*..., p. 251.



local culture and traditions can be divided into three: *first*, receiving and developing a culture that is in accordance with Islamic principles and useful for nurturing of human lives, *second*, refusing traditions and cultural elements that are contrary to Islamic principles, and *third* is the mid-between the two; confirming local tradition which does not relate to the foundation of religion, such as the ways Muslim dressing.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of Indonesian as a pluralistic country, the principle of accommodation is crucial serving the core principle to build a tolerant and peaceful country. Islam Nusantara further translates the principle of accommodation into three forms of brotherhood: brotherhood among fellow Muslims (*ukhuwwah Islamiyyah*), among fellow Indonesians (*ukhuwwah wathaniyyah*), and among human-beings (*ukhuwwah insaniyyah*).<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the fact that local specificity and diversities of Islamic expression in Indonesia, this is not to say that contestation is absent from the Islamic Indonesian landscape as the more orthodox Muslim like the *salafi* strongly contest Islamic expression that demonstrates a high degree of local adaptation. Nevertheless, we could argue that Islam Nusantara is the mainstream Islam in Indonesia and a genuine Islam in Indonesia-scape which embrace differences and shows a string of blending between Islam and local culture.

### **Islam Nusantara: Practicing Islam through Culture**

Islam Nusantara is the Indonesian model to practice Islam which is transferred and translated through cultural elements. Thus, culture is instrumental in the ways Muslim in Indonesia practice and interpret Islam. The following discussion is an ample example of how Indonesian Muslim translate and practice Islam through cultural frameworks. It discusses the translation and the practice of Islam as appear in five Islamic realms, thoughts, and practices: in affairs related to Islamic proselytization

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<sup>21</sup> Machasin, *Islam Dinamis Islam Harmonis Lokalitas Pluralisme* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2011), p. 187.

<sup>22</sup> Said Aqil Siradj, "Pengantar...", p. iii.

(*dakwah*), theology (*akidah*), Islamic law (*fiqh*), nation-state (*wathan*), and the relationship between tradition and modernity.

### *Cultural Approach in Dakwah*

In the realm of *dakwah*, Islam Nusantara pays a particular emphasis on peaceful and non-coercive method in *dakwah* activism.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, cultural capital and practices is crucial as a means for Muslim activism in *dakwah* activities. Islam is presented as a body of cultural practices that embraces local tradition. Believed to be the earliest Muslim who introduced Islam in Indonesia, the Nine saints (Walisongo) is a paradigmatic example. The Walisongo introduced Islam through cultural means, such as the Javanese traditional song, *Ilir-Ilir*. The *Ilir-Ilir* is indeed a Javanese song with Islamic messages. The song calls for the new Muslim converts (*mu'alaf*) to carry out five pillars of Islam (*rukun Islam*); the Islamic-faith confession (*shabada*), the five-time prayers, fasting during the Ramadhan, alms-giving (*zakat*) and pilgrimage (*hajj*).<sup>24</sup> The Walisongo also acculturated Islam with Javanese rituals, such as the Javanese concept of *jamus kalimosodho* referring to the Islamic *shabada* and the Javanese *sekaten gong* which means two-forms of faith confession (*syahadatain*); monotheism and the prophet Muhammad as the messenger. The Walisongo also imbued the Hindu's popular traditions, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, with Islamic messages that tell Islamic monotheism through the Javanese puppet performance (*wayang kulit*).

As for the story of *wayang kulit*, the Walisongo also introduced new-figures, such as Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong. These figures are indeed the translation of Islamic characters: Semar for “*samir*”, Gareng for “*khairin*” and Petruk for “*fatruk*” and Bagong for “*bagha*.” These new characters served as the embodiment of the Quranic principle of the promotion of goodness and prevention of evil (*sal-amru bi al-ma'ruf*

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<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. xvii.

<sup>24</sup> Mujamil Qomar, *Fajar Baru Islam Indonesia? Kajian Komprehensif atas Arab Sejarah dan Dinamika Intelektual Islam Nusantara* (Bandung: Mizan, 2012), p. 35.

*wa al-nahyu 'an al-munkar*).<sup>25</sup> In the Javanese musical realms, the Javanese Sunan Kalijogo, one of the nine saints, also adopted the Hindu musical instrument, the *gamelan*, and the Javanese *kidung* tradition, into his *dakwah* activities. The adaptation between Hindu and Islamic tradition later gave a birth to a new Javanese Islamic tradition of *sekaten*, *grebeg maulid*, *mauludan* celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>26</sup> Sunan Kalijaga also translated Islamic principles through the architecture of Javanese house with three-tiered roof symbolising “*Islam, Iman and Ihsan*”.<sup>27</sup> Through cultural adaptation, Islam had been introduced peacefully and the Islamisation reached to the political centres of Javanese kingdoms in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The early Islamic history in Indonesia demonstrated, rulers (*adipati*) of Javanese courts converted to Islam which includes names, such as *adipati* of Pandanaran, Kartasura, Kebumen, Banyumas, Pajang, Kotagede-Yogyakarta, and the last king of Hindu Majapahit, the King Brawijaya V.<sup>28</sup> As an Indonesian historian, Ahmad Syafi Maarif correctly writes “indeed Islamic victory is very phenomenal, two major religions [Hindu and Buddhism] who that traced centuries in the Nusantara region were eliminated in such a way, except Hinduism in Bali which still survives.”<sup>29</sup> At the peak of the Dutch colonial era, Islam has survived as a religion of the majority amid the massive Christianisation (*zendings*) sponsored by the colonial government.

Despite the importance of cultural approach in *dakwah* activism, the board of the traditionalist Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama, warns that contemporary *dakwah* activism should be flexible and concerned with contemporary challenges. Thus, the board writes that *dakwah* ought to answer the current problems of Muslim societies. The

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 115.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xx.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv; M. Hariwijaya, *Islam Kejawaen* (Yogyakarta: Gelombang Pasang, 2006), p. 206.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmad Syafi Maarif, *Islam dalam Bingkai Keindonesiaan dan Kemanusiaan Sebuah Refleksi Sejarah* (Bandung: Mizan & Maarif Institute, 2009), p. 62.

also out six fundamental principles of *dakwah* in responding to current challenges; *first*, *hikmah* and *mauidzah hasanah* (being a role model and respecting differences), *second*, embracing local cultures and being tolerant to differences, *third*, *al-akhlak al-karimah* (ethically-correct), *fourth*, *maṣlahah ‘ammah* (common good) than *maṣlahah khashshah* (particular good), *fifth*, *irtikaf akhaff al-dararain* (the lowest risk), *sixth*, *dar al-mafasid muqaddam ‘ala jalbi al-maṣalih* (rejecting damage prior to producing benefits).<sup>30</sup> Despite the fact that these six principles outlined by the NU, the modernist Muhammadiyah later followed the move introducing the call for embracing cultural approach in the organisation’s *dakwah* activities.<sup>31</sup> An Indonesian scholar as well as a leading Muhammadiyah activist Mohamad Ali entitled the Muhammadiyah’s shift towards cultural approach as “the post-puritan” Muhammadiyah.<sup>32</sup>

### *Cultural Approach in Akidah*

*Akidah* is the most fundamental principle in Islamic theology as it serves of the foundation of Muslim’s belief. Despite the *akidah* related to rational and deliberative aspects of religion, Islam Nusantara translates the cognitive dimension of religion into communal activities, such as *tahlilan*, *istighasah*, *haul akbar* and *selamatan*. *Tablilan*, an Indonesian abbreviation of chanting the *shabada lailaha illallah* (*there is no God that must be worshiped except Allah*), reserves as the communal activities where the principle of Islamic monotheism is translated into communal ceremonies. It is a popular activity in Indonesia which is particularly performed on weekly basis through neighbourhood association or Muslim association. The *istighasah* is another Islamic gathering. Different from the *tahlilan*, Muslim mainly performed the *istighasah* during the crisis and aims at seeking God’s help. The *haul* and *selamatan* are two communal activities related to the death. The *selamatan* aims at commemorating the death at 7 days, 40 days, 100

<sup>30</sup> PW LBM NU Jawa Timur, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 24-25.

<sup>31</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Islam dalam Bingkai*..., p. 62.

<sup>32</sup> Mohamad Ali, *Islam Muda Liberal, Post-Puritan, Post-Tradisional* (Yogyakarta: Apeiron Philotes, 2006), p. 111.

days following the dead, whereas the *haul* is the death commemoration at annual basis. A leading NU intellectual, Ahmad Baso argues that the *haul* and *selamatan* are two important issues addressed by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Indonesian-Muslim scholar Nawawi al-Bantani through his *Nihayat al-Zain*.<sup>33</sup> Importantly, the theological aspect of Islam Nusantara is also transferred through Muslim practice of pilgrimage to local sacred sites (*ziarah*). Unlike the *hajj* and *umra* performed only in two Muslim's holy sites, Mecca and Medina, *ziarah* is Indonesian Muslim's practice of visiting tombs of their parents and the Muslim saints. Through the *ziarah*, Muslim seek not only prayers for the deaths, but also builds the connectivity with the past figures and tradition. Contemporary *ziarah* has been involving thousands of pilgrims and hundreds of local pilgrimage sites.

### *Cultural Approach in Fiqh*

Islam Nusantara reserves as the *manhaj* meaning that Islam Nusantara is a method of practicing Islam by Indonesian Muslim. The Walisongo and their pious predecessor is a paradigmatic example of how Islam is translated into practice.<sup>34</sup> In the realm of Islamic law (*fiqh*), Islam Nusantara demands an adaption and deliberation (*ijtihad*) resulting in Islamic law which is suitable for Indonesian Muslims. This particularly appears in the affair of marriage where the bride and the groom testify the marriage contract and commitment (*ta'liq thalaq*). The practice of *ta'liq thalaq* is developed by one of the Walisongo, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Sunan Giri, who felt the necessity to protect women in their marriage.<sup>35</sup> Sunan Giri applied the principle of *maqasid shariah* (the objectives of law) through his *ijtihad* which in later centuries has reserved as the core principle of Islamic law.<sup>36</sup> at the post-Independence Indonesia, in marriage issues, the Indonesian government and Muslim scholars later translated the principle of *ijtihad* and *maqasid shariah* through the codification of Islamic laws

<sup>33</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 58 & 104.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

(Kompilasi Hukum Islam/KHI). The laws particularly rule the restriction of Muslim polygamy, the valid divorce pronouncement (*talak*) before the judge of Religious Court (Pengadilan Agama), rights for Muslim women in inheritance and joint-properties following their divorce, and the prohibition of under-age and child marriage.<sup>37</sup>

In other communal affairs, there have been communal activities which demonstrate the products of *ijtihad* in affairs of Islamic laws, such as *imsak*, *halal bibahal*, *ta'liq thalaq*, and *zakat*. *Imsak* or the rule to stop Muslim consuming drinks and food before the dawk (*fajr*) during the Ramadhan is a genuine practice of Islam Nusantara which is absent from the classical *fiqh* literatures, mainly produced in the Middle Eastern countries. *Halal bibahal* is another communal practice involving millions of Indonesian Muslim to travel back to their hometown and village origins. It is the Indonesian translation of the principle of Islamic brotherhood (*silaturahmi*). Also, unlike their Muslim counterparts in the Middle Eastern countries, Indonesian Muslim donated rice, rather than oatmeal, to perform the alms-giving (*zakat*).

The above-instances clearly demonstrate the flexibility of Islamic laws on the one hand and the practice of Indonesian Muslim scholars to interpret the laws. Islam Nusantara has been essential in the process of finding the appropriate laws for giving a wider room for Islamic interpretation which is suitable with local situation and environment. The Islam Nusantara interpretation later produced Islamic laws which strongly show local characteristics which are absent from classical *fiqh* literatures which are mainly written by Middle Eastern scholars.<sup>38</sup> The Indonesian traditional Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) has been at the forefront to translate Islam within the framework of Indonesian culture and tradition. Through the Islamic legal maxim (*ushul fiqh*) of *maslahah*, *maqashid*, social

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<sup>37</sup> Said Aqil Siradj, "Kata Pengantar Ketua Umum Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama", Marzuki Wahid, *Fiqh Indonesia Kompilasi Hukum dalam Bingkai Politik Hukum Indonesia* (Cirebon: Institut Studi Islam Fahmina, 2014), p. xvi.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58 & 115.

ethics or *al-ushul al-khams* (five principles of Islamic law), the *pesantren* communities are capable of providing a contextual interpretation to Islam laws (*dhurufi-maṣlahi*).<sup>39</sup> The *pesantren* communities are indeed the most important agents for the reconstruction of Islam Nusantara, mainly in affairs of Islamic law.<sup>40</sup> Thus, it is reasonably true that Islam Nusantara opens for a contextual Islamic interpretation which locates dialogue and negotiation between cultures and traditions at its core principle.<sup>41</sup> As an Indonesian scholar Imdadun Rahmat argues Islam Nusantara is indeed a process of “indigenisation”. It is a process of translating Islam into local contexts and respects cultural differences.<sup>42</sup> Another Indonesian scholar Syaiful Arif mentions that “indigenization of Islam” refers to a process translating Islamic norms and values into local cultures and traditions.<sup>43</sup> The indigenisation of Islam is the prime method of Islam Nusantara.<sup>44</sup>

### *Islam and Nationalism: An Islam Nusantara's Cultural Approach*

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, following the foundation of modern nation-state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nationalism had been a heated debate among Muslim scholars. Some Muslim scholars contradicts between Islam and nationalism, but the other finds the middle-path. In Indonesia, Islam and nationalism has never experienced an ideological confrontation. Moreover, nationalism has been understood within the Islamic framework. The famous *ulama* and the founder of the NU *Kiai* Hasyim Asy'ari argues that nationalism and defending the statehood are an Islamic obligation and, in the context of colonialism, whomever died to protect nation-state is a martyr (*sahid*).<sup>45</sup> The Indonesian form nationalism

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<sup>39</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 113.

<sup>40</sup> Zainul Milal Bizawie, *Masterpiece Islam*..., p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Abdullah Ubaid, ‘Pengantar Editor...’, p. Xi.

<sup>42</sup> M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 141.

<sup>43</sup> Syaiful Arif, “NU dan Islam Nusantara”, Abdullah Ubaid & Mohammad Bakir (eds.), *Nasionalisme dan Islam Nusantara* (Jakarta: PT. Kompas Media Nusantara, 2015), p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Asep Salahudin, *Sufisme Sunda*..., p. 238.

is surely different from other forms of nationalism which tend to negate eliminate religion, such as American-nationalism and the French Laicism which tends to be hostile to religion.<sup>46</sup> Also, unlike many Middle Eastern countries, Indonesian nationalism is “Godly nationalism” where religion plays a central role in the making of nation-state. As Jeremy Menchik argues godly nationalism refers to an imagined community bound by a common and orthodox theism.<sup>47</sup> This form of nationalism has rooted in Sunni-theology that construct the middle-path between the two extremes. Islam Nusantara translates Islam in a nation-state model; thus, Islam and nationalism in Indonesia are two-side of the same coin.

### *Finding the Path: Between Tradition and Modernity*

Islam Nusantara lies the foundation between tradition and modernity. It is a middle-path between the past, the present, and the future. In so doing, Islam translates modern idioms, such equality, people sovereignty, pluralism and human rights, into Islamic notions making Islam compatible with modernity.<sup>48</sup> Islam Nusantara locates modernity and locality as two-pillars of Islamic interpretation later generated a form of contextualised Islam.<sup>49</sup> This dialogical principle between modernity and tradition finds its root to Islamic legal maxim of *al-muhafadhab ‘ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadid al-aslah* (nurturing the good past, and taking the better new ones).<sup>50</sup> Islam Nusantara thus contests the dichotomy between tradition and modernity and offers a new model that bridges the two; thus, Islam Nusantara contrasts the secularism thesis. Moreover, the secularism thesis that forecasts the abolition of religion in the modern world has failed explain the currently global phenomenon where religion becomes more influential to the modern subjects.

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<sup>46</sup> Said Agil Siradj, “Pengantar”..., p. vi.

<sup>47</sup> Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), hlm. 67.

<sup>48</sup> M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. Xiii.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>50</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 103.



Indonesia is an ample example where modernity and religion goes hand-in-hand making “both spiritual and modern Indonesian Muslims.”

### **Concluding Remarks: Islam Nusantara as Diplomacy**

Islam Nusantara is an approach in practicing Islam that emphasises on local culture and tradition. It is an Islamic interpretation that embrace locality, modernity, and diversities. This approach is a deeply rooted form of Islam in Indonesia and a popular Islamic interpretation that emphasises on local culture and tradition. Islam Nusantara translates and adapts Islam into local idioms and worldviews. It produces an Islamic interpretation which is moderate, modern and religious at the same time, tolerance and respecting differences. Islam Nusantara is an ample proof of Islam as the blessing for the entire universe (*rahmatan lil' alamin*). In contemporary world where Islam has been a subject of accusation for terrorism, radicalism and violence, Islam Nusantara offers a contrasting trajectory showing a peaceful Islam and promoting differences. Thus, it is reasonably true that Islam Nusantara is a model of Islam for other Muslim elsewhere in the Muslim world.<sup>51</sup> As M. Fajar Marta argues, Islam Nusantara as a model was increasingly needed along with the rising of radical Islamic understanding and acts of terrorism in the name of Islam.<sup>52</sup> Mujamil Qomar and Masduki also argue that Islam Nusantara as a model of Islamic interpretation was increasingly essential along with various acts of violence carried out by Muslims on behalf of Islam.<sup>53</sup> Islam Nusantara also serves as a counter-narrative to Islamophobia which is a growing sentiment among non-Muslim societies.<sup>54</sup> A leading Indonesian scholar, Afifuddin Muhajir, suggests that Islam Nusantara reserves as a tool for

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<sup>51</sup> M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. xii.

<sup>52</sup> M. Fajar Marta, “Islam Nusantara Untuk Dunia”, Abdullah Ubaid & Mohammad Bakir (eds.), *Nasionalisme dan Islam Nusantara* (Jakarta: PT. Kompas Media Nusantara, 2015), p. 64.

<sup>53</sup> Mujamil Qomar & Masduki, *Islam Nusantara sebuah Model Pemikiran, Pemahaman dan Pengamalan Islam di Indonesia* (Tulungagung: Akademia Pustaka, 2018), p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Indonesian diplomacy. The Indonesian government should promote internationally Islam Nusantara as an offer of moderate interpretation of Islam and an answer to Islamophobic biases.<sup>55</sup> Strengthening joint-cooperation among regional and international networks is in need to create a better world and Islam Nusantara is crucial for creating peaceful dialogues among civilisations.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the methods and strategies of Islam Nusantara deserves to be a global reference and a model of Islamic societies.<sup>57</sup> The legal maxim *al-muhafadhab 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhsar bi al-jadid al-aslah*, a genuine interpretation of Indonesian *ulama*, is essential to bridge the tradition and the enormously contemporary social changes.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Afifuddin Muhajir, “Meneguhkan Islam Nusantara Untuk Peradaban Indonesia dan Dunia”, Akhmad Sahal dan Munawir Aziz (eds.), *Islam Nusantara dari Ushul Fiqh hingga Paham Kebangsaan* (Bandung: Mizan, 2015), p. 68.

<sup>56</sup> M. Fajar Marta, “Islam Nusantara...”, p. 65.

<sup>57</sup> Abd A'la, *Ijtihad Islam*..., p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara*..., p. 104.

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