

## Islam Nusantara and The Essence of Islam

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**Abstract:** *The Wali played a dynamic role in spreading Islam so that the religion can easily be accepted by the Indonesian people. The spread of Islam in the archipelago used several approaches or ways, including trade, marriage, sufism, educational, art and political. While at that time Indonesia was in the cultural vacuum of civilization due to the influence of two great kingdoms, the Hindu kingdom and Buddhist kingdom. Islam brought social and cultural changes which are refining and developing Indonesian culture. Adjustments between adat and sharia in various regions in Indonesia always occur, although sometimes, they face conflicts in local societies. Nevertheless, the process of Islamization in various places in Indonesia is carried out in a way that is acceptable to the local people. Thus, the religious life of the people, in general, shows a mix of elements of Islam and previous beliefs. This was done by Islamic disseminators because there had long been religions (Hindu-Buddhist) and animistic beliefs in Indonesia*

**Abstrak:** *Wali memainkan peran yang dinamis dalam menyebarkan Islam sehingga agama ini dapat dengan mudah diterima oleh masyarakat Indonesia. Penyebaran Islam di kepulauan ini menggunakan beberapa pendekatan atau cara, termasuk perdagangan, pernikahan, tasawuf, pendidikan, seni dan politik. Sementara pada saat itu Indonesia tidak berada dalam kekosongan budaya dari peradaban yang dipengaruhi oleh dua kerajaan besar, kerajaan Hindu dan kerajaan Budha. Islam membawa perubahan sosial dan budaya yang memurnikan dan mengembangkan budaya Indonesia. Penyesuaian antara adat dan syariah di berbagai daerah di Indonesia selalu terjadi, meskipun kadang-kadang, mereka menghadapi konflik di masyarakat lokal. Namun demikian,*

*proses islamisasi di berbagai wilayah di Indonesia dilakukan dengan cara yang dapat diterima oleh masyarakat setempat. Dengan demikian, kehidupan beragama masyarakat, secara umum, menunjukkan perpaduan unsur-unsur Islam dan kepercayaan sebelumnya. Ini dilakukan oleh penyebar Islam karena sudah lama ada agama (Hindu-Budha) dan kepercayaan animistis di Indonesia*

**Keywords:** Politic, Jawara, Moslem Elit, Banten, Indonesia

## **A. Introduction**

The discourse about the Nusantara Islam today is widely discussed both by academics, government, and the general public. The term Islam Nusantara re-emerged especially after it was rolled out by the Chairperson of the PBNU, KH Said Aqil Siradj at the opening of the Istighotsah event Welcoming Ramadhan and the Opening of the NU Ulema Muslim Conference, Sunday, 14 June 2015 at Istiqlal Mosque, Jakarta.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Nusantara Islam was the main theme in the 33rd Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Congress in Jombang, East Java. Determining the main theme of the Nusantara Islam in the conference in response to the declining image of Islam on the international stage even tended to be considered negative, because cases of violence carried out in the name of Islam, both murder, hostage taking, bombing and so on.

The radical actions of a small number of Muslims have led to the false notion that Islam teaches violence, bloodshed, cruel acts, cruel and sadistic treatment, barbaric acts, and other dehumanization actions. Even though Islam teaches more peace, harmony, tolerance and openness. Unfortunately, these beautiful and cool teachings are not highlighted, so they are less well known by the international community. Likewise, the majority of Muslims actually prioritize

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<sup>1</sup> On this occasion, KH. Said Aqil Siradj said that NU would continue to fight for and oversee the Nusantara Islamic model. The term Islamic Nusantara which he refers to refers to the historical fact of the spread of Islam in the archipelago which he calls "by way of cultural approaches, not with rigid and rigid doctrines, Islam Nusantara is intended to embrace culture, preserve culture, respect culture, not suppress culture. See on Muhamad Guntur Romli and Tim Ciputat School, *Islam Kita Islam Nusantara: Lima Nilai Dasar Islam Nusantara* (Jakarta: Ciputat School, 2016), h. 17.

peace rather than violence. Uniquely, these acts of violence carried out by a handful of Muslims invited negative-pejorative attention from the international community, then justified it as a characteristic of Islam.

Therefore, the presence of Islam Nusantara then received positive responses from several Western scholars. One of them is James B. Hoesterey, an anthropologist from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. He saw that Indonesian Islam could be an example for Islam in other countries.<sup>2</sup> Similar comments were also delivered by Chiara Formichi, an Islamic history expert in Indonesia, from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. According to him the idea of Islamic Nusantara has relevance to Indonesian culture and history. He saw Nusantara Islam as an example for other countries in understanding Islam and how to interact with non-Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

Many studies have been carried out on the Nusantara Islam. Even so, until now there has been no agreement between the experts about the Islam Nusantara. Azyumardi Azra, for example, understands the Nusantara Islam in the context of a place, namely Islam in the archipelago or "Southeast Asian Islam" in the Muslim regions of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Pattani (Southern Thailand) and Mindanao (Southern Philippines).<sup>4</sup> While Kemal Fasya refers to the nature, namely Islam which is archipelago, which has its own characteristics different from Islam in other places.<sup>5</sup> Muhajir saw Nusantara Islam in its substantive aspects. In this case he saw Nusantara Islam as an understanding and practice of Islam in the archipelago as a result of the dialectic between shari'ah texts and local reality and culture.<sup>6</sup> In line with that, Bizawie saw Nusantara Islam as a distinctive Islamic style in Indonesia, a combination of theological values of Islam with the values of local traditions, culture, customs in the country.<sup>7</sup> In different languages, similar opinions were also expressed by NU intellectuals such as Isom Yusqi, Quraish Shihab,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 21-22.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Azyumardi Azra, "Islam Indonesia Berkelanjutan," in *Opini Kompas*, Agustus 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Teuku Kemal Fasya, "Dimensi Puitis Dan Kulutal Islam Nusantara," in *Opini Kompas*, Agustus 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Akhmad Sahal and Munawir Azis, eds., *Islam Nusantara Dari Ushul Fiqh Hingga Paham Kebangsaan* (Bandung: Mizan, 2015), p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, h. 239.

Mustofa Bisri, Faisal Romdoni, Umar AH, Abdul Muqsih Ghazali, KH. Afifuddin Muhajjir, Aqil Siradj, Oman Fathurrahman, Irham,<sup>8</sup> and others.

This article will reinforce what the archipelago's Islamic rights are. The two points highlighted in this article are the historical aspects of the entry of Islam into the archipelago, as well as the characteristics of the Nusantara Islam. By understanding the Islamic nature of the archipelago, it is hoped that the community will be wiser in responding to the presence of Nusantara Islam. In addition, the presence of the Islamic archipelago is expected to be the ideal model for the spread of peaceful teachings of Islam and rahmatan lil alamin.

## **B. Definition of Islam Nusantara**

Before discussing the concept of *Islam Nusantara*, we will explain about Islam Nusantara itself from the founder of this concept. According to KH. Aqil Siraj, General Chairman of the NU Executive Board:

*"Islam Nusantara is a combination of theological Islamic values with the values of local traditions, culture, and customs in the country. This is not new one in Indonesia, nor is it a new flow. Islam Nusantara is a thought based on the history of Islam entering Indonesia not through warfare, but compromising on culture."*<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the above definition, there are some experts' opinions about *Islam Nusantara*.

1. The definition of *Islam Nusantara* proposed by Professor of Islamic Cultural History Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic Jakarta *Azyumardi Azra*. He defines Islam Nusantara as "a distinctive Islam as a result of interaction, contextualization, indigenization and vernacularization of universal Islam with social, cultural and religious realities in Indonesia, Orthodoxy of Islam of archipelago

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<sup>8</sup> See on Khabibi Muhammad Luthfi, "Islam Nusantara: Relasi Islam Dan Budaya Lokal," *Shahih* Vol. I, no. 1 (June 2016): h. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Republika* Newspaper online, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015. See also K.H. Said Aqil Siroj as General Chairperson of the 2010-2015 PBNU in a talk show with TV One on Friday, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

(kalam Asy'ari, fiqih mazhab Syafi'i, and Ghazali Sufism) has grown moderate and tolerant wasathiyah character. *Islam Nusantara*, which is rich in Islamic heritage (Islamic Legacy), is the hope of the renaissance of global Islamic civilization. "<sup>10</sup>

2. Katib Syuriah PBNU, who also teaches at Islamic boarding school of Salafiyah Aly Ma'had Shafi'ites Asembagus, Situbondo *KH Afifuddin Muhajir*, defines "Islam Nusantara" as "the ideals and the practices of Islam in the archipelago as a result of the dialectic between the Shari'a text and local reality and culture "<sup>11</sup>
3. A productive young NU intellectual writer, Ahmad Baso, defines Islam Nusantara as "*ma'rifatul ulama-il-Indonesiyyin bil-ahkami-sy-syar'iyyah al-amaliyyah al-muktasab min adillatiha-t-tafshiliyyah*" or "*majmu'atu ma'arifil -l-ulama-il-Indonesiyyin bil-ahkami-sy-syar'iyyah al-amaliyyah al-muktasab min adillatiha-t-tafshiliyyah*" (Al-Quran, Hadith, Ijma 'and Qiyas).
4. *Gus Mus* (KH. Musthofa Bisryi) defines *Islam Nusantara* ad, Islam existing in Indonesia from the past until now taught by Wali Songo, "*Islam ngono iku seng digleki wong kono* (such Islam is sought by people there), Islam that is peaceful, *guyub* (*harmonious*), *ora petentengan* (not stretched - around), and *rahmatan lil 'alamin*." He explained.<sup>12</sup>
5. *Prof. Isom Yusqi* (Director of Postgraduate Program of STAINU Jakarta) explained that Islam Nusantara is "*a term used to assemble Islamic teachings and understandings with the culture and local wisdom of the archipelago which does not conflict with the basic values of Islamic teachings*".<sup>13</sup>
6. Like what was conveyed by Gus Dur : "*Arabization or the process of identifying yourself with Middle Eastern culture is depriving us of our own cultural roots. Moreover, Arabization does not necessarily match the needs. Indigenusness is not an effort to avoid the emergence of resistance from the strength of local cultures, but*

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<sup>10</sup>Jakarta, *NU Online*. Uploaded on August 1, 2018

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> K.H. Musthofa Bisri, who is familiarly called Gus Mus in the National Seminar on Institute for Nusantara Studies (INNUS) on Wednesday, November 18, 2015 which coincided in the building of the Da'wah Faculty hall of State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*

*precisely so that culture is not lost. The essence of Indigenous Islamization is the need not to avoid polarization between religions and cultures, because such polarization is inevitable.*"<sup>14</sup>

Islam Nusantara is not a new group. It only emphasizes the local characteristics of Indonesians and their social surroundings. These local characteristics are in the form of adat. In Arabic, there is a term *Al Adah Al Muhakkamah* or tradition that becomes a habit.

Actually, *Islam Nusantara* is an emphasis, that on the one hand sees the need for a universal understanding of Islam. On the other hand, there is a locality of problems that can be owned by a region and not owned by other regions. However, both are accommodated in the Islamic religious spirit.<sup>15</sup>

President Jokowi mentioned that, our Islam is Islam Nusantara, Islam which is full of manners, that is Islam Nusantara, Islam that is full of tolerance. In addition to President Jokowi, a number of other Indonesian officials also expressed a similar notion, including President Jusuf Kalla, who often uses the term "Islam Nusantara".

Islam Nusantara is an empirical form of Islam developed in the archipelago at least since the 16th century, as a result of interaction, contextualization, indigenization, interpretation, and vernacularization of universal Islamic teachings and values, which correspond to the social Indonesian culture. This term was firstly introduced and promoted by Nahdlatul Ulama in 2015, as an alternative form of interpretation of the global Islamic discourse which has always been dominated by Arab and Middle Eastern perspectives.

The term Islam of archipelago is the same of the term of progressive Islam used by Muhammadiyah, in addition, MUI has its own term, namely, Islam *Wasathiyah*. "*So it should not be exaggerated and questioned because it can damage brotherhood relations among Muslims*".<sup>16</sup> Islam Nusantara is only a term". It is included as religious

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<sup>14</sup> An introductory quote from Imaduddin Rahmat, *Indigenous Islam, Dialogue of Islam Indonesia on Religion Reading Reality* by Ahmad Baso, ed. (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2003), xxi

<sup>15</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Religion in Humanity: Building Traditions and a New Vision of Islam Indonesia*, cet. iv, p. 36

<sup>16</sup><https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/93580/saran-peneliti-universitas-victoria-untuk-pengritik-islam-nusantara>, uploaded on August 1, 2018

branches category (*furu'iyah*), which is not the main issue of religion, but it is only a term not a substance,"<sup>17</sup>

Referring to the explanations of the experts above, we can define *Islam Nusantara* based on several approaches. Sociologically, Islam Nusantara is distinctive Islam as a result of interaction, contextualization, destructive indigenization and vernacularization of universal Islam with social, cultural and religious realities in Indonesia. Islam Nusantara that has wealth and Islamic heritage is hoped to become renaissance of global Islamic civilization acculturated with the new world order.<sup>18</sup>

Historically, *Islam Nusantara* is the result of *ijma* and *ijtihad* of the archipelago scholars in carrying out *istinbath* against *al-muktasab min adillatiha-tafshiliyah*, namely *idrakul hukmi min dalililhi ala sabili-rujhan*. *Islam Nusantara* gives the Islamic character in the texts of the archipelago scholars to make a relationship between us and our ancestral traditions, to be respected, and for us to emulate.<sup>19</sup> Islam of archipelago is syncretic which is a combination of Islamic theological values with local (non-theological) values, culture and customs in the country.<sup>20</sup>

### C. History of The Arrival and Spread of Islam

In the dynamics of national and religious life, there are a number of Muslim-majority countries, especially in the Middle East such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Egypt and Libya - are struggling with endless civil war. Such reality appeared to a steriotype of Islam (Islamophobia).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup><https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1110976/mui-islam-nusantara-only-no-need-to-be-exaggerated>Zainut, through written statements, Thursday, July 26, 2018.

<sup>18</sup>[www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita\\_indonesia/2015/06/150614\\_indonesia\\_islam\\_nusantara](http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150614_indonesia_islam_nusantara), uploaded on August 1, 2018

<sup>19</sup>[www.republika.co.id/berita/kolom/resonansi/15/06/17/nq3f9n-islam-nusantara-1](http://www.republika.co.id/berita/kolom/resonansi/15/06/17/nq3f9n-islam-nusantara-1), uploaded on August 1, 2018

<sup>20</sup>[www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita\\_indonesia/2015/06/150614\\_indonesia\\_islam\\_nusantara](http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150614_indonesia_islam_nusantara), uploaded on August 1, 2018

<sup>21</sup> Runnymede Trust – a Muslim Commission of Britain and Islam about defining Islamophobia with the shorthand way of referring to dread or hartred of Islam, and therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims (rasa takut dan kebencian terhadap Islam dan oleh karena itu juga pada semua Muslim). Periksa Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: a Challenge for Us all: Report of The Runnymede*

The presence of Wali Songo has an important role in the development of Islam in Indonesia. In fact they are the main pioneers in the field of Islamic *da'wah* in Indonesia as well as a pioneer of spreading Islam in the archipelago. Besides that, Islam is also an intellectual who became a reformer of society in that time.

Wali songo consists of: Sunan Gresik (Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim), Sunan Ampel (Raden Rahmat), Sunan Giri (Raden Paku), Sunan Bonang (Raden Makdum Ibrahim), Sunan Drajat (Sheikh Syarifudin), Sunan Kudus (Shaykh Ja ' far Shadiq), Sunan Muria (Raden Umar Said), Sunan Gunung Jati (Sayid Syarif Hidayatullah), and Sunan Kalijaga (Raden Mahmud Syahid). The Wali songo have variety of ways to approach *da'wah*, including:

1. Theological Approach. Instilling basics of Islamic beliefs and way of life committed by Sunan Gresik and Sunan Ampel where the target of this approach is the people who are the majority of the region.
2. Scientific Approach. As Sunan Giri did by establishing Islamic boarding school and doing *da'wah* training systematically, such as children's play, songs (lir -ilir, padang-padang bulan) that contained Islamic values and meanings and also it aimed to give the assignment for *Da'i* to be sent to certain areas such as Madura, Bawean to Maluku.
3. Institutional approach. By establishing a government or kingdom, religious institutions such as mosques or other buildings that give interest to the public to know more about Islam, such as those carried out by Sunan Demak, Sunan Kudus and Sunan Gunung Jati.
4. Social Approach. Done by Sunan Muria and Sunan Drajat who prefer to live in the midst of people who are far from the crowd, fostering and improving the quality of religion and social life.
5. Cultural Approach. With the intellectual ability, Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Bonang carried out the Islamization of culture. In other words, the existing culture of society is Islamized.<sup>22</sup>

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Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Afif Nadjih Anies, *Prospects for Islam in Facing Challenges*, Periodic (Jakarta: Lantabora Press. 2005)

*Da'wah* must have a clear purpose, even though the direction is different, in the way it is conveyed, namely changing the state of the community from the less good to being *shariah* and social. Besides that, the success of proselytizing is also influenced by the quality of the preachers who can exemplify daily life which is always a "guide" and not just a spectacle as the personalities of the Wali Songo are still recognized as role models in Islam.

The first figure is Maulana Malik Ibrahim who is an Arab from the Prophet's descendants. He came from Kasyan, Persia and arrived in Java in 1404 as a propagator of Islam and settled in Leran, a village located in Gresik. He has been carrying out Islamic *da'wah* wisely and can adapt his teachings to the surrounding community so that people are attracted to this new religion, then embraced him. He introduced the field of commerce and through this, he won a place in the hearts of the people in the midst of an economic crisis and civil war. With this he succeeded in attracting Javanese from the subordinate caste to embrace Islam. He is also the creator of the first boarding school or *pesantren*, generally Java. This *pesantren* was built because of the increasing number of followers. Here too, he gave birth to Islamic preachers who worked in the land of Java.

Thus, Wali Songo played an important role in spreading Islam in the archipelago, namely by way of preaching. Islamic traders also acted as preachers who came with traders with their religious mission. The propagation of Islam through this *Da'wah* goes by the way the ulama approach the people of the object of *da'wah*, using a socio-cultural approach. In the period of the arrival and spread of Islam in Indonesia, there were Indonesian-Hindu kingdoms. In Sumatra there are Srivijaya and Malay kingdoms; in Java, Majapahit; in Sunda, Pajajaran; and in Kalimantan, Daha and Kutai. Islam that came to Indonesia received special attention from most people who had embraced Hinduism.<sup>23</sup>

Islam is seen as better by people who originally embraced Hinduism, because Islam does not recognize caste and, differences in

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<sup>23</sup> Suparjo, "Islam dan Budaya: Strategi Kultural Walisongo dalam Membangun Masyarakat Muslim Indonesia", *Komunika Journal*, *Da'wah Faculty of STAIN Purwokerto*, Vol.2 No.2 Jul-Des 2008, p. 181

groups in the local society.<sup>24</sup> The power of attracting Islam to merchant traders who lived under the control of the Indonesian-Hindu kings was apparently found in the minds of people. Islam gives something to his/her personality as a member of the Muslim community. According to Hinduism, it is only a creature that is inferior to other castes. In Islam, he feels himself equal or even higher than people who are not Muslim, even though in the structure of society occupies the position of subordinates.

The process of Islamization in Indonesia happened and was made easier because of the support of two parties: immigrant Muslims who taught Islam and the Indonesian community who received it. In times of political, economic and socio-cultural turmoil, Islam as a religion can easily enter and fill the people who are looking for a way of life. Moreover, in spreading Islam, muslim adjusted the existing socio-cultural conditions. Thus, the initial stage of Islamization is done through a mutual understanding of needs and adapted to the conditions of the community. The bearers and disseminators of Islam in the early days were the merchant class, actually made the trade economic factor the main driver for visiting Indonesia. It coincided with the time of the development of international shipping and trade between countries in the west, southeast and east of Asia.<sup>25</sup>

Islam Nusantara is defined as the interpretation of Islam which takes into account local culture and customs in Indonesia in its *fiqh*. The spread of Islam in Indonesia is a slow and gradual through a peaceful process. One theory states that Islam came directly from the Arabian Peninsula before the 9th century AD while others mentioned the role of merchants and scholars Sufi who brought Islam to the archipelago in the 12th or 13th century, either through Gujarat in India or directly from the Middle East. In the 16th century, Islam replaced Hinduism and Buddhism as the majority religion in the archipelago. The first traditional Islam that developed in Indonesia was a branch of the *Sunni Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah*, which was taught by the ulema, the kyai in the pesantren. This model of spreading Islam is mainly

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<sup>24</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Pakistan, Islamic Research Institute, 1965), h. 10

<sup>25</sup> Madya Wan Hussein Azmi, dalam A. Hassjimy, *Sejarah Masuk dan Berkembangnya Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Alma'arif, 1989), p. 178

found in Java. Some aspects of traditional Islam have included various local cultures and customs.

The practice of early Islam in the archipelago was more or less influenced by the teachings of Sufism and Javanese spiritual schools that had existed before. Some traditions, such as respecting the authority of the kyai, respecting Islamic figures such as *Wali Songo*, also became part of the Islamic traditions such as the grave pilgrimage, *tahlilan*, and commemorating the Prophet's birthday, including celebrations *sekaten*, obediently carried out by traditional Indonesian Muslims. However, after the arrival of Islam modernist Salafi followed by the coming of teachings Wahhabi from Arabia, this scripturalist puritanical Islam rejects all forms of tradition and denounces them as acts of *shirk* or heresy, denigrated as a form of syncretism which damages the sanctity of Islam. This condition has caused religious tension, uneasy togetherness, and spiritual competition between the traditional Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah the modernist and puritan.

While Indonesians carefully pay attention to the Middle East which has been torn apart by conflict and prolonged wars, starting from the Israel-Palestine conflict, the rise of the Arab world, the wars in Iraq and Syria, it was realized that there was a religious aspect in this conflict, namely the emergence problems of radical Islamic. Indonesia also suffered from terrorist attacks launched by groups jihadi such as Jamaah Islamiyah which attacked Bali. The ultra-conservative Salafi and Wahhabi doctrines sponsored by the Saudi Arabian Government has dominated the global discourse on Islam. Concerns were further aggravated by the emergence of ISIS in 2013 who committed a vicious war crime in the name of Islam. Domestically, several-leaning organizations Islamist such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), as well as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) have been actively engaged in the Indonesian political world in recent years. This undermined the influence of traditional Islamic institutions, especially Nahdlatul Ulama. This element of Islamism in Indonesian politics is often suspected of being able to weaken Pancasila.

As a result, pressure from moderate Muslim intellectuals who wanted to distance themselves from what is called Arab Islam emerged, by defining Indonesian Islam. Compared to Middle Eastern

Muslims, Muslims in Indonesia have enjoyed peace and harmony for decades. It is believed that this is due to the moderate, inclusive and tolerant understanding of Islam in Indonesia. In addition, there has been support from the international community which has pushed Indonesia as the largest Muslim country, to contribute to the evolution and development of the Islamic world, by offering the Islamic Archipelago as an alternative to Saudi Wahhabism. Henceforth, *Islam Nusantara* was identified, formulated, and promoted.

#### **D. The Characteristics of Islam Nusantara**

According to the term, Islam Nusantara must understand the Islamic pattern and character of the archipelago Muslim community which indeed has a specific character that is very different from the Islamic pattern of the Middle East, where Islam originated. The thought of Islam of archipelago is not a new school as well as splinter and *firqah*, but is an effort that attempts to portray Islam in the regional domain, as suggested by Gusdur which challenges Islamic scientists to make theories of what is called Islamic study based on the region. Gusdur has proposed the hypothesis that there are six studies of Islamic regions: the Middle East, Africa, mainland India, Central Asia including Russia, the Archipelago and Europe. According to Gusdur, each of them has prominent characteristics.

In the context of the characteristics of Islam, the archipelago can be seen as having at least eight prominent characteristics, namely:

1. Islamic archipelago is the product of *da'wah* later known by its characters as Wali Songo, namely the process of peace by peaceful means through cultural acculturation and the core teachings of Islam. Therefore Islam can develop quickly without violence. This situation is considered by Islamic reviewers, such as Anwar Ibrahim, as the best Islamic process.
2. A loyal follower of Ahlunnah's teachings with moderate characters. This is a prominent feature of Islam Nusantara. This is contrary to the way of thinking of Islam in the Middle East.
3. The *ulama* or the Islamic community of the archipelago in choosing a school is not arbitrary and the origin of choice. So far, those who are chosen or used as role models are those who have adequate and tested intellectual capability in history and those who

have integrity, truly independent scholars, so that the results of their *ijtihad* are the result of complete knowledge and a clear heart without intervening in the interests of lust. Nusantara Islamic society in the field of jurisprudence follows one of the schools of jurisprudence, namely Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. However, the most popular and taught and become the choice of Faforit is the Shafi'i school, so that it is natural that the literary books of the Islamic community of the archipelago are dominated by the Shafi'i school of thought.

4. The majority of the Islamic community of the archipelago are observers of Sufism, so the tarekat thrives. Sufism figures who became role models included Imam Ghazali, Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jailani, Imam Syazili and others who were very popular among the Islamic archipelago. From there the Islam of the archipelago later became a very harmonious, tolerant Islam, and respected plurality as the original character of Sufism.
5. Prioritizing peace, harmony and tolerance. The Indonesian Muslim community has implemented this tolerance or *tasamuh* as *part* of the foundation of Islamic teachings that gives religious freedom. Islam not only condemns the imposition of religion, but more than that it highly upholds the rights of non-Muslims in the Islamic kingdom government, because Islamic and non-Islamic relations are peaceful relations, except in the case of cases that can cause conflictS between the two sides
6. Natural cultural adaptation of the Islamic community of the archipelago has the view that local activity cannot be eliminated. It needs to be preserved as a nation's identity as long as it does not conflict with the Shari'a and this is justified in the Qur'an that Allah created man in various tribes (*qobail*) and nation (*syu'uba*) *lita 'taarafu for mutual ta'aruf* (mutual understanding) about ethnicity, of course also with culture.
7. Rahmatan lil'alamin's Islamic vision dominates the Islamic thought of the archipelago Islamic community trying to carry out the vision of Islam rahamat lil'alamin as the main mission in implementing the teachings of Islam in life. In this case always refers to the main noble task of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, namely the sacred duties, perfect tasks and the whole task of the teachings brought by the prophets. Because it is clear that the

message of Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad is to give mercy as the word of God means "We have not sent you Muhammad but as a mercy to all the worlds" -Al Anbiya 107. There is no doubt that Islam as a blessing and guidance, light will bring safety. This means that grace will bring salvation to both the world and the hereafter.

8. In understanding *nash* using a literal approach in matters that are Qath'i, such as the obligation to pray and the procedures for worship of mahdhah, the pillars of Islam, the pillars of faith, and so on. Therefore, the literal approach to using the *nash* is more focused on things that are religious and theological issues. Meanwhile, in community relations, a contextual approach is often used. This approach not only takes the meaning of the text but takes more substance or values contained in the *text*.<sup>26</sup>

The main characteristic of Islam Nusantara is *tawasut* (moderate), *rahmah* (loving), anti-radical, inclusive and tolerant. In relation to the local culture, Islam Nusantara uses a sympathetic cultural approach in carrying out the syiar Islam; It does not destroy, destroy, or eradicate indigenous culture, but instead, embrace, respect, maintain, and preserve local culture. One of the main characteristics of Islam Nusantara is to consider the elements of Indonesian culture in formulating jurisprudence.

Islam Nusantara is developed locally through traditional educational institutions *pesantren*. This education was built based on courtesy and eastern manners; emphasizing respect for clerics and scholars as religious teachers. The santri need guidance from their religious teacher so as not to get lost so as to develop a false or radical understanding. One distinctive aspect is the emphasis on the principle of *Rahmatan lil Alamin* (a blessing for the universe) as the universal value of Islam, which promotes peace, tolerance, mutual respect, and diverse views in relation to fellow Muslims, or interfaith relations with adherents other religions.

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<sup>26</sup>Mukhlas Sarkun, *Islamnusantara.web.id/umum/islam-nusantara-between-theoretic-and-characteristics*, uploaded on August 1, 2018

## E. Practices of Islam Nusantara in Community, Nation and State Life

The idea of Islam Nusantara is one of the thoughts that is unique to Indonesia from the past and present. Historically, based on philological data (handwritten note manuscripts), the Islamic people in the archipelago have been able to provide interpretations of their teachings in accordance with the context, without causing physical warfare and rejection from society. For example, the teachings are packaged through the customs and traditions in society. Therefore, there are traditional Minangkabau expressions, *basandi syarak*, *syarak basandi*, *Kitabullah*. Then, at that time there were teachings of seven dignity from Sufism to be an integral part of the Buton sultanate law. It is similar in Java, either through Wali Songo teachings or the title of a king by combining local traditions and Arab traditions, such as Senopati ing Alogo Sayyidin Panatagama Khalifatullah Tanah Java. Thus, the practice of Islam Nusantara is able to provide peace of mankind. At that time, both the islands of Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi and the surrounding scholars in writing their teachings also had an acculturative and adaptive tradition. The *da'wah* strategy is written in various characters and languages based on the region, for example there are *carakan characters* in Java, and *pegon* with Javanese, Sundanese, or Madurese, which are adapted from Arabic script and language. Meanwhile, In Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan, there are Jawi characters in Malay, and local characters / languages according to their tribes, Bugis, Batak, and so on.

The practices of Islam Nusantara are able to provide peace of mankind. The works of the archipelago scholars in the local language for the spread of Islam are one of the strengths and peculiarities of Islam of archipelago. The knowledge of Islam of archipelago, such as fikih (law), tauhid (theology), and Sufism (*sufism*) have been partially adapted to local scripts and languages.

Actually, the activities of Islam Nusantara, such as *tahlilan*, *tujuh bulanan*, *muludan*, *bedug/kentongan* can contribute to harmony, the balance of life in society. Tradition that adheres to the Islamic Shari'ah can prove the practice of tolerant, moderate life and respect for indigenous customs.

The network of Islam nusantara in the world is very important to anticipate global politics that impresses part of global terrorism. The

character Islam Nusantara can be a guide to think and act in understanding the teachings of Islam today, so that they avoid radical thoughts and actions that lead to physical violence and damage to nature.<sup>27</sup>

## F. The Pros and Cons of Islam Nusantara

The term of Islam Nusantara has recently attracted a lot of debate among a number of Islamic scholars. Some accepted and some refused. The reason for the rejection might be because the term is the same with the belief that Islam is one and refers to one (the same), namely the Qur'an and al-Sunna.

Legitimately, it is important to add to the 'Islamic' word deixis, such as *Islam Nusantara*, *American Islam*, *Islamic Egypt*, and so on. The meaning of Islamic of archipelago is none other than understanding, practicing, and applying Islam in the segment of fiqh mu'amalah as the dialectic result between texts, shari'ah, and 'urf, culture, and reality in the archipelago. In the term "Islam Nusantara", there is no hateful towards the nation and culture of any country, particularly the Arab countries, especially Saudi as the birthplace of Islam and the language becomes the language of the Qur'an.

"Why Islam Nusantara", both from the historical and the current point of view can be explained as follows:

1. The Teaching of Islam Nusantara, both in the field of fikih (law), tauhid (theology), and Sufism have been partially adapted to script and language local. Even though some books still use Arabic language, although the substance is based on locality, such as the work of Kyai Jampers Kediri.
2. Actually, the Islam Nusantara practices, such as *tahlilan*, *tujuh bulanan*, *muludan*, *bedug/ kentongan* are able to contribute to harmony, the balance of life in society. This balance is one of the characteristics of Islam Nusantara, from the past to the present or the future.
3. Tradition who still adhere to the Islamic Shari'a can prove the practice of a tolerant, moderate life, and respect for indigenous

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<sup>27</sup><http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/58821/teks-dan-karakter-islam-nusantara>, uploaded on August 1 s 2018

customs, so that the teachings of Ahlus sunnah wal pilgrims can be applied. This good tradition needs to be maintained, and may take a new tradition again, if that is better than the previous tradition.

4. Manuscripts (handwritten notes) about Islamic religion, such as babad, saga, primbon, and fiqh teachings, etc. since the 18th / 20th century is a philological evidence that Islam Nusantara has been developed and practiced in the past by the ulamas and the community, especially in the islamic boarding school community.
5. The traditions of Islam Nusantara, are also similarities with the practice of Islamic traditions in some Middle Eastern countries, such as Morocco and Yemen, so that Islam Nusantara is not the monopoly of NU or Indonesian Muslims only, because the Islam Nusantara network in the world is important to anticipate global politics who impressed part of global terrorism.
6. The character of Islam Nusantara, as mentioned earlier, is no exaggeration if it can be a guide to thinking and acting to understand the teachings of Islam at this time, so as to avoid radical thoughts and actions that lead to physical violence, and damage to nature.
7. NU as an organization that was born to guard the traditions of the archipelago scholars, especially when it reached a succes. So that, guardians have an important role to keep guarding and reaffirming the Islam Nusantara, which always tolerates tolerance.<sup>28</sup>

As soon as it was announced, Islam Nusantara faced opposition and criticism from other Islamic sects. The opposition came from the followers of the Wahhabi and Salafi sects, or similar streams that wanted to cleanse Islam from local elements that were considered un-Islamic, which were often blasphemed as the practice of shirk or heresy. *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* has openly opposed the concept of Islam Nusantara. Islam Nusantara is criticized as a form of syncretism that undermines the perfection and unity of Islam, and is considered to damage the unity of the people.

Muhammadiyah, one of the most influential Islamic organizations in Indonesia, although it did not directly oppose this concept, but it emphasized that the term Islam Nusantara must be used

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<sup>28</sup><http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/58821/teks-dan-karakter-islam-nusantara>, uploaded on August 1, 2018

carefully and proportionally, so as not to suppress other Islamic sects that have different understandings of Islam. If Islam Nusantara is supported and appointed as the main Islamic sect by the state, then other Islamic sects will be subjected to oppression and discrimination.<sup>29</sup>

They have a number of considerations to reject Islam Nusantara. First, the term "Islam Nusantara" invites useless debate and neglects Muslims from various important issues. According to MUI of west sumatra that The term "Islam Nusantara" can bring a strange and confusion among muslim in understanding Islam.

The term of Islam Nusantara is also considered to contain the potential of narrowing the universal meaning of Islam. The term Islam Nusantara is also often used to refer to a tolerant way of Islam. According to the MUI of West Sumatra, tolerance is only one aspect of Islam, even though there are many other aspects in Islam. Islam cannot be reduced to just one aspect, but it must be comprehensive.

The MUI of West Sumatra also assessed the term Islam archipelago as potentially dividing Muslims and gave rise to negative views on Muslims from other regions. The following is the argument of the MUI of West Sumatra as stated in the letter uploaded by Gusrizal:

1. The term of "*Islam Nusantara*" gave birth to a variety of problems that would invite useless debate and neglect Muslims from various important issues being faced. In fact, the term of "Nusantara Islam" can bring a strange and confusion among people in understanding Islam.
2. The Indonesian language structure which embraces the concept of DM (Explained Explains), shows the limitations of Islam in an area called "*Archipelago*". This results in stunting and narrowing of the scope of Islam which should be a blessing for universe (rahmatan lil alamin) and all humanity (kaaffatan linnaas).
3. If the term of "Islam Nusantara" means washatiah hospitality (proportional and middle in balance and justice), tolerance and others, it is not a special character of Islam in a particular area but it is between the very basic teachings of Islam because, it presents

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<sup>29</sup>[https://www.nu.or.id/post / read / 93580 / suggestion-researcher-university-victoria-for-critic-islam-nusantara](https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/93580/suggestion-researcher-university-victoria-for-critic-islam-nusantara), uploaded on 1 August 2018

the label "Archipelago" for Islam, it only has influenced to Muslims and create negative views of the people to Muslim brothers and sisters in other regions.

4. *Wasathiyah* (moderate), *samhah* (easy), *'fair,' aqliy* (rational), and others mentioned as the character of "Islam Nusantara", are only a part of the privileges of Islam that cannot be separated from other features such as *rabbaniyyah* (deity), *ilahiyyah*, *syumuliyah* (comprehensive), and others. Floating one by one from *mummaziyat* by separating from other *mummaziyat* will only cause confusion in understanding Islam and removing Islam from its perfection.
5. "Islam Nusantara" is understood through *da'wah* that refers to the teachings and approaches of Wali Songo on Java, it could have a serious impact on the integrity of the nation, because in various regions of the Republic of Indonesia, there are scholars with approaches and teachings that may differ from Wali Songo . Imposing the approach and teachings of Wali Songo throughout Indonesia, it means minimizing the role of scholars who spread Islam in other regions that have various characteristics of *da'wah*.
6. If the cultural approach that characterizes "Islam Nusantara" means that it is not a monopoly of "Islam Nusantara" but it has become a general character of *da'wah* in various regions of the world because of the attitude of Islam towards local traditions and culture, has been stated in the study of Ustadh Al Fiqh clearly. Even the ulamas in West Sumatra with a long history of Islamic prosecution in Ranah Minang colored with such great dynamics, have gone through cultural approach steps. It causes them to reach the joint commitment which gave birth to the "Sumpah Sati Bukit Marapalam" with the philosophy held by the Minang Kabau community to nowadays, namely: Adat Basandi Syara' Syara' Basandi Kitabullah, Syara 'Mangato, Adat Mamakai. Although it had arrived at the point of togetherness, but no one of Minang kabau scholars added the Islamic label in Minang to "Islam Minang".
7. "Islam Nusantara" refers to a tolerant Islam, not radical then confronts the current condition of the Middle East, it shows allegations against the teachings of Islam as a trigger for radical attitudes and acts of violence. This is a threat to Islam and a

superficial view of the Middle East conflict. This is also an enmity against the *ukhuwwah Islamiyyah* among Muslims in the world, because the struggle carried out by some Muslims like in Palestine is very inappropriate to be labeled with radicalism and violence. They should get our sympathy from the Muslims in this country as they treat us when we struggled for Indonesia independence in the past.<sup>30</sup>

## G. Conclusion

The trustees played a dynamic role in spreading Islam so that the religion can easily be accepted by the Indonesian people. The spread of Islam in the archipelago used several approaches or ways, including trade, marriage, sufism, educational, art and political. While at that time Indonesia was in the cultural vacuum of civilization due to the influence of two great kingdoms, the Hindu kingdom and Buddhist kingdom.

Islam brought social and cultural changes which are refining and developing Indonesian culture. Adjustments between *adat* and *sharia* in various regions in Indonesia always occur, although sometimes, they face conflicts in local societies. Nevertheless, the process of Islamization in various places in Indonesia is carried out in a way that is acceptable to the local people. Thus, the religious life of the people, in general, shows a mix of elements of Islam and previous beliefs. This was done by Islamic disseminators because there had long been religions (Hindu-Buddhist) and animistic beliefs in Indonesia. []

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<sup>30</sup>[https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita\\_indonesia/2015/06/150614\\_in\\_donesia\\_islam\\_nusantara](https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150614_in_donesia_islam_nusantara), uploaded on August 1, 2018

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