

## ISLAM NUSANTARA: An Alternative Model of Islamic Thought, Comprehension, and Implementation

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### *Abstract*

*Islam Nusantara is a model of thought, comprehension, and implementation of Islamic teachings covered by culture and tradition developed in Southeast Asia (the scope of which is limited to Indonesia), that reflects Islamic identity with methodological nuance. The identity has various and controversial responses when it is socialized among Muslims because Islam is one, namely, Islam taught by the prophet Muhammad. Otherwise, the majority of Islamic scholars accepted Islam Nusantara. That Islam is one is substantively true, but it is expressed widely including Islam Nusantara. Islam is presented (thought, comprehended, and implemented) through a cultural approach. The result leads to the thinking model, comprehending, and implementing Islamic teachings which are harmonious, moderate, inclusive, tolerant, peaceful, and multicultural based. The diverse Islamic thought is caused by local culture, especially Javanese culture, called cultural acculturation. Indonesian Islam can be a role model. It brings peaceful and harmonious messages, so it could be socialized internationally and replaced the misleading opinion that Islam is full of violence.*

*Islam Nusantara merupakan model pemikiran, pemahaman dan pengamalan ajaran-ajaran Islam yang dikemas melalui pertimbangan budaya atau tradisi yang berkembang di wilayah Asia Tenggara (tetapi kajian ini dibatasi pada Indonesia), sehingga mencerminkan identitas Islam yang bernuansa metodologis. Identitas ini ketika disosialisasikan di kalangan umat Islam, khususnya para pemikirnya direspons dengan tanggapan yang kontroversial: ada yang menolak identitas Islam Nusantara itu karena Islam itu hanya satu, yaitu Islam yang diajarkan oleh Nabi. Sebaliknya, banyak pemikir Islam yang menerima identitas Islam*

Nusantara itu. Bagi mereka, Islam hanya satu itu benar secara substantif, tetapi ekspresinya beragam sekali, termasuk Islam Nusantara. Islam ini ditampilkan (dipikirkan, dipahami dan diamalkan) melalui pendekatan kultural. Hasilnya melahirkan model pemikiran, pemahaman dan pengamalan ajaran-ajaran Islam yang ramah, moderat, inklusif, toleran, cinta damai, harmonis, dan menghargai keberagaman. Keberagaman Islam demikian ini terjadi lantaran perjumpaan Islam dengan budaya (tradisi) lokal, khususnya Jawa, yang biasa disebut akulturasi budaya. Islam Indonesia patut menjadi contoh cara berislam yang demikian. Model Islam yang serba menyejukkan ini perlu dipublikasikan secara internasional dan diharapkan mampu menggugurkan persepsi dunia bahwa Islam itu penuh kekerasan.

**Keywords:** Islam, Nusantara, Indonesia

## Introduction

On a practical level, the Islam Nusantara typology has long been manifested in the Nusantara. A model of thinking, comprehending, and implementing Islamic teachings by considering local traditions or culture, thereby in matters outside the substance, able to express the Islamic model that is distinctive to the Nusantara and distinguish it from other Islamic models both in the Middle East, India, Turkey and so on. Conceptually, the identity of Islam Nusantara has been written by several authors, including Azyumardi Azra (2015) with the title *Islam Nusantara Jaringan Global dan Lokal* and Nor Huda (2013) with the title *Islam Nusantara Sejarah Sosial Intelektual Islam di Indonesia*. Hence the term Islam Nusantara is not new but has been known for quite a long time, including those introduced by the two authors. However, these two authors explain Islam Nusantara in terms of historical review, which has not touched much on methodological review.

In recent years, Islam Nusantara has become more popular because it was the main theme of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Nahdatul Ulama (henceforth NU) Conference in Jombang, East Java, which took place on August 1-5, 2015. While NU represents mainstream Indonesian Muslims, Islam Nusantara is increasingly publicized in the wider Indonesian Muslim community, penetrating urban to rural communities. The determination of the main theme Islam Nusantara in the conference was a response to the image of Islam on the international stage, which was declining. It even tended to be judged negatively because of violent cases committed on behalf of Islam, both murders, hostage-taking, bombings, and so on.

The perpetrators of radical acts' identity on behalf of Islam lead to the false assumption that Islam teaches violence, bloodshed, heinous acts, cruel and sadistic treatment, barbaric acts, and other acts of *dehumanization*. Islam teaches more peace, harmony, tolerance, and transparency. Unfortunately, these beautiful, peaceful, and harmonious teachings are not highlighted, so they are less known by the international community. Similarly, the majority of Muslims prioritize peace instead over violence. Uniquely, this violence committed by this handful of Muslims invited negative-pejorative attention from the international community, then justified it as a characteristic of Islam.

The author's purpose in studying Islam Nusantara in this paper is to attempt to present an alternative model of thought, comprehension, and implementation of humanist and friendly Islamic teachings, both in the geographical, social, and cultural scopes. As a new term, for most Muslims in Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and the world, the meaning of Islam Nusantara needs to get enough explanation so that it is easy to understand.

### **Meaning of Islam Nusantara**

Efforts to interpret significantly contribute to the attempt to understand the nature of Islam Nusantara. As nature, it is difficult to understand without knowing its characteristics. Furthermore, the meaning provides an initial understanding to one who attempts to understand its substance. In other words, the meaning of Islam Nusantara serves to pave the initial way for one's understanding in exploring and studying thought, comprehension, and implementation of Islamic teachings that reflect and are influenced by this region.

There are several definitions of Islam Nusantara stated by Islamic scholars, including: "Islam Nusantara is the Islamic comprehension and implementation in the mainland of Nusantara as a result of a dialectic between sharia text and local culture and reality." (Muhajir in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 67). Similar interpretations, "Islam Nusantara is a distinctive Islam in the Indonesian style, combining theological Islamic values with local tradition values, culture, and customs in Indonesia." (Bizawie in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 239). The first definition demonstrates that substantively Islam Nusantara is Islamic understanding and its implementation that takes place in the Nusantara region as a result of the synthesis between revelation and local culture, thus

contains nuances of local wisdom. Meanwhile, the second definition is Islam with Indonesian characteristics, but also due to the synthesis between theological Islamic and local traditional values. It is just that the movement area is limited to the territory of Indonesia, so it is narrower than the movement area in the first definition that mentions the mainland of Nusantara. Unfortunately, the mainland of Nusantara's coverage area is not explained in the sources.

Moreover, an interpretation of Islam Nusantara emphasized a different dawah methodology to the first or second interpretation.

“Islam Nusantara is dawah methodology to understand and implement universality (*syumuliyah*) Islamic teaching according to Ahlussunnah waljama'ah's principles, in a model that has undergone a process of contact with a good tradition (*'urf shahih*) in Nusantara, in this case, the territory of Indonesia, or is a bad tradition (*'urf fasid*) but is/or has undergone a process amputation, assimilation, or minimization of dawah, thereby it does not contradict the sharia's dictums” (Anam, t.t: 22).

The definition, in terms of enactment scale, has similarities to the second definition. However, this definition contains an emphasis, in addition to the dawah methodology, also on the Islamic teachings universality, the principles of *ahlussunnah waljama'ah*, and the process of dawah amputation, assimilation, or minimization to sterilize the dawah methodology from misleading local traditions. The line of thinking reflected in the third definition is also less clear, to not saying it is chaotic; thus, it is not easy to understand unless closely and carefully examined due to the meandering line of thinking.

As for other parts, efforts are to expand the implementation area of Islam Nusantara to reach the Southeast Asian region. Islam Nusantara refers to a group of islands or maritime continents (Nusantara) that includes Indonesia, the Muslim region of Malaysia, Southern Thailand (Patani), Singapore, the Southern Philippines (Moro), and Champa (Kampuchea) (Azra in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 169). Thus, Islam Nusantara is the same as 'Southeast Asian Islam'.

In terms of the scope of Islam Nusantara, Muhajir did not provide clear limitations on its enactment; Bizawie and Anam only limited it to the territory of Indonesia, so Azra expanded the area of enactment to include Muslim areas throughout Southeast Asia. However, it is unfortunate that Azra did not

explain the nature of the term Islam Nusantara. The author agrees with efforts to expand the scope of Islam Nusantara to reach Southeast Asia, as expressed by Azra. Still, in the following discussion, the author limits only Islam that developed in the territory of Indonesia.

Considering these four definitions, it can be affirmed that Islam Nusantara, referred to here, is a model of thought, comprehension, and implementation of Islamic teachings covered by cultures and traditions that developed in the Southeast Asian region. In terms of its Islamic component, "Islam Nusantara's Orthodoxy is *kalam Asy'ariah* (theology), *fiqh* of Shafi'i, and al Ghazali's sufism" (Azra in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 172). In addition to these three components, three more components can be added to strengthen the concept of Islam Nusantara, namely political, educational, and cultural components. Hence the object of study of Islam Nusantara must at least include six components, namely *kalam* (theology), *fiqh*, Sufism, politics, education, and culture (tradition).

Thus, some of Islam Nusantara's interpretation is currently receiving considerable attention, especially for Muslims in Indonesia. Their attention was divided in responding to the presence and existence of Islam Nusantara, leading to controversy between pro and con groups.

### **Muslim's Response to Islam Nusantara**

The socialization of Islam Nusantara's identity got various responses among Muslims, particularly scholars. There was controversy over opinions and judgments among them until they split into several groups, four groups, at least. According to Sahal (Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 16), Islam Nusantara, which became the main theme of the NU Congress, has caused serious public debate. A similar witness was expressed by Fatoni (Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 229). There are pros and cons to Islam Nusantara among them; some struggle hard and argue by utilizing their reasoning so that Islam Nusantara can be accepted both among Muslims and non-Muslims, while there are those who block the struggle and try to break their arguments; some have high expectations for the presence of Islam Nusantara, but some actually have various suspicions that it was sophisticated fabrications from the West; some do not approve of Islam Nusantara, but they keep it quiet, not carrying out attacks that attempt to break

the arguments of groups that approve of Islam Nusantara, and some approve of using Islam Nusantara's term but are silent and passive so as not to attempt to promote it.

Those who reject Islam Nusantara hold the opinion that Islam is only one. The Islam that is one is Islam taught by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Islam cannot be given an identity based on an approach, pattern, role, or region to form a special Islamic identity such as Islam Nusantara. If there is another Islam outside the Islam taught by the Prophet Muhammad, it must immediately conform to the standard Islam so that the uniqueness of a particular Islamic identity is judged negatively because it has deviated from the ideal Islamic format (real Islam). The uniqueness of Indonesian Islam is facing a lawsuit and the presence of the radicalism phenomenon lately (Rahmat in Rahmat et al., 2003: xvi). The *mainstream* religious comprehension of Indonesian Muslims is considered a wrong comprehension because it is different from the ideal Islam, the Islam exemplified by *salaf al-Salih*. The uniqueness of the Islamic expression of Indonesian society is reviled as 'modern jahiliyah', which deviates from true, authentic, and original Islam. The authenticity of Islam disappears when it mixes with external elements, including elements of Nusantara.

Islam is always one anytime and anywhere. Islam will not change even in modern times, and Islam will also not change when the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad is disseminated and developed outside Makkah, for example, when it was spread and developed in Indonesia. There is an opinion that Indonesian Islam differs from Islam in other regions (Langgulang in Azhari & Saleh, 1989: 157). Islam is Islam wherever it is. Thus, the nature of Islam is absolute, eternal, and everlasting. The different possibilities are only at the level of implementation. These three characteristics of Islam guard the unity of Islamic identity so that wherever and whenever Islam is, it remains as Islam taught by the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

On the other hand, in a position that is contrary to the opinions that reject Islam Nusantara, some scholars actually agree with it. Azra (in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 171-172) stated that Islam exists only at the level of the Qur'an. But the Qur'an (as well as hadith) requires a detailed formulation, so its verses need to be interpreted and explained. The result is the emergence of different interpretations and explanations, which becomes *madhab* or sect. This is,

according to the author, the reality we face and we must be aware of. Islam which is one, is found only in the substance of its teachings, but its outward appearance is very diverse. As Muhammad's reference, Qatadah stated that *al-din Wahid wa al-shari'ah mukhtalifah*/religion is only one. At the same time, Sharia is different (in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 98). The religion mentioned here is the religion of Islam.

Furthermore, support for the Islam Nusantara's identity received stronger support from several other Islamic scholars and was more numerous. Ali (2006: 10) explained that Islam is one. However, when Islam has become settled, the comprehension and expression of its people were very diverse. Fanani (2004: 116) states that the phenomenon of people's religion today is experiencing a very diverse pendulum. Thus, Islam is no longer seen as singular but plural (Rahmat Rahmat et al., 2003: xx-xxi), Sobarna (2008: v) states that Islam is one, but in studying it, two faces are usually expressed with various expressions. Shihab (1998: 249) suggests that contemporary scholars introduced regional Islam and universal Islam. Ma'arif (2009: 181) expressed in a sub-chapter of his book in beautiful language, "An Islam, a thousand and one expressions."

For Islamic scholars who support the Islam Nusantara's identity, it seems that they perceive the substance of Islam as indeed one, but the expression is very diverse. When they acknowledge the existence of Islam Nusantara's identity, they only perceive the Islamic identity from a review of its expression. This expression of Islam Nusantara, when demonstrating the same phenomena continuously from generation to generation, in turn, will form certain characteristics that can be identified, known, and understood to facilitate others in comprehending Islam Nusantara.

### **Characteristics of Islam Nusantara**

Islam Nusantara has distinctive characteristics that distinguish it from the characteristics of Islam in other regions, especially Middle Eastern Islam which has influenced Islam in various parts of the world. The Nusantara region has several uniqueness that is different from those in other countries, ranging from geographical, socio-political, and civilizational traditions (Ghozali in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 115). This uniqueness is taken into consideration by scholars when implementing

Islam in Nusantara. Finally, this uniqueness forms the characteristic of Islam Nusantara, which is different from the characteristic of Islam in the Middle East. Islam Nusantara is an Islam that is friendly, transparent, inclusive, and able to solve the problems of the nation and state (Bizawie in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 240). Islam is dynamic and friendly, with diverse cultural environments, subcultures, and religions. Islam is not only acceptable to the people of the Nusantara but also worthy of giving a distinctive characteristic to the culture of Nusantara to manifest its accommodating nature, namely *rahmatan li al'alamin*. This message of *rahmatan li al'alamin* animates the characteristics of Islam Nusantara, an image that is moderate, tolerant, peace-loving, and respects diversity (Bizawie in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 242). Islam that hugs, not hits; Islam that guides, not degrades; Islam that loving, not scolding; Islam that invites repentance, not denounce; and Islam that gives understanding, not imposing.

Since the beginning, Indonesian Islam has had its own style and typology, namely Islam, which is friendly and moderate, and a *middle-line* Islam that adheres to moderate ideological and philosophical foundations (Sucipto, 2007: 18). The large current represented by NU and Muhammadiyah has become a patent brand for moderate, modern, transparent, inclusive, and constructive Islamic movements (Ma'arif, 2009: 304). Moderation and tolerance are mainstream characteristics of members of both organizations (Bruinessen in Samuel & Norddholt, 2004: 61). NU and Muhammadiyah act as gatekeepers of moderation (Qomar, 2013: 153). The moderation of NU and Muhammadiyah has influenced Islam Nusantara's style. Because these two largest Islamic organizations are symbols of Islam Nusantara, although there are also radical and liberal Islamic organizations, both are so small that they should not be mainstream groups representing Islam Nusantara.

Moderate Islam has a mission to balance two kinds of extremism, especially between fundamental Islamic thought, comprehension, and movement with liberal, as two poles of extremity that are difficult to integrate. Hence moderate Islam maintains and develops holistic peace, namely peace among Muslims and with other people so that moderate Islam frees society from fear. Moderate Islam offers an enlightening liberation discourse because it is not based on an approach of violence and haste (Basya in Sucipto, 2007: 392). Moderate Islam is also an effort to save the world's current condition (Imarah in Sucipto, 2007: 443). Moderate

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Islam civilization is built on a combination of reason, intuition, revelation, sharia, and faith in two books, namely the written book (the Quran) and the open book (the universe).

Therefore, moderate Islam can move flexibly in encountering any challenge. Moderate Islam is also able to respond to traditions that have been entrenched in society, so moderate Islam acts wisely. Local historiography needs to be taken into account in the process of Islamization and intensification of the formation of Islam Nusantara's identity and tradition (Azra, 2002: 15) because local Muslim communities also have a network of collective memory about the Islamization process that took place among them, then recorded in various local historiography. Islamization in Indonesia occurred with a very complicated and long process. Acceptance of Islam by the indigenous population gradually caused Islam to be integrated with the traditions, norms, and daily way of life of the local population (Huda, 2013: 61). The encounter between the two led to a process of taking and giving between the newly arrived teachings of Islam and local traditions that have long been entrenched in the community.

Finally, Islam and local traditions meet with communities individually and collectively, without being clearly classified as Islamic and which are local products, so that these traditions develop, are inherited, and transmitted from the past to the present (2008: viii). The implication is that the reconstructed local Islamic tradition has a distinctive uniqueness: it is not Islamic genuine, not *Kejawen* (beliefs held by the Javanese people) genuine, and neither other genuine (Khalil, 2008: ix), because both (Islam and local traditions) have merged into one unit, as a new tradition that absorbs elements of both. This phenomenon is usually called cultural acculturation.

In the context of Islam Nusantara, the most dominant acculturation occurs between Islam and Javanese culture (tradition) because both are equally strong. Javanese culture and traditions in the past, since the establishment and glory of the Demak kingdom, Pajang to Mataram still maintain Hindu-Buddhist traditions and Animism-Dynamism as a cultural product before Hindu-Buddhist times (Khalil, 2008: 149). This tradition is enriched and adapted to Islamic values. The royal palaces of Pajang and Mataram have Islamic nuances, but customs are still maintained (Hariwijaya, 2006: 206). This overview of local Islam dates back to the past, and its reality is still clearly exposed today. Many cultures, traditions, and local customs influenced by Islam continue to develop and vice versa, many

comprehension and implementation of Islamic teachings are influenced by local cultures and traditions that have developed and been entrenched in the community.

The encounter of Islam with local traditions is the main cause of the mutual adjustment process. The peaceful presence of Islam affects cultural acculturation between local cultures and Islam (Yusuf & Haris, 2014: 1). The existence of complementarity between the two embodies a new culture, both physical and non-physical. That culture then became a characteristic of the Indonesian Islamic community's culture. No religion is free from the long tradition produced by its adherents (Machasin, 2011: 185-186). So, the Islam comprehended and implemented by the Javanese is practically different from the Islam comprehended and lived by the Sundanese. On a broader scale, Islam lived by Middle Easterners is, to some extent, different from Islam lived by Indonesians. Tradition, on the other hand, is never static or stops (Ramadan, 2010: 146). Tradition is constantly evolving, mainly through the transition of future generations who are part of it. Traditions transmit values, norms, culture, and way of life.

The attitude of Islam in dealing with local culture or tradition can be divided into three: (1) accept and develop a culture that is in accordance with Islamic principles and useful for the glorification of human life; (2) reject traditions and cultural elements that contradict Islamic principles; and (3) leave it as it is how to dress (Machasin, 2011: 187). The first attitude is based on the consideration that local culture is beneficial and supports the improvement and welfare of the community; the second attitude is because local culture is seen as endangering the community, while the third attitude is because the culture faced by Islam does not harm them, even though it also does not provide meaningful benefits to them.

Therefore, the majority development of Islamic culture in Indonesia results from a dialogue between universal Islamic values and the cultural characteristics of Nusantara (Madjid, 1996: 92). Islam dialogues peacefully with the local culture of Nusantara, which is very different from Arab culture and Islamic teachings. The nuances of peaceful dialogue are also carried out by Islam with local religions of animism-dynamism and imported Hindu-Buddhist religions. The peaceful dialogue occurred because of the Sufistic approach factor in spreading Islam (Wijaya, 2011: 179). The Sufistic approach in conducting religious dialogue seems to be effective because this approach can restore relations and interactions between religious believers so that Animists, Dynamism,

Hinduism and Buddhism quickly became attached to Islam as a new religion. Finally, most of them converted to Islam. It was this interactive religious dialogue that, in turn, elicited the distinctive Islam of the Nusantara.

In addition, the substance of Islam Nusantara can also be comprehended with the support of other forming factors analysis, such as geographical factors. It is very important for one attempting to comprehend and explain Islamization in the Nusantara region to consider it (Azra in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 18). The distance of Nusantara caused this Islamization to be very different from Islamization in other regions in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Due to its geographical position far from the center spread of Islam, Indonesia was late in following the process of Islamization (Saleh in Wasim et al., 2005: 57). Indonesia has long been seen as a peripheral region of world Islam, although Indonesian Muslims have never called themselves converts (Sychev, 2008: 11). They see the focal points of Islam as Makkah and Medina, but the ties and links between the two regions with Arab countries and other Islamic centers have always been strong. The wave of Islamic revival that swept Indonesia starting in the 1970s made it more difficult to portray Islam simply as a marginal force located on the fringes of Indonesian civilization (Woodward, 1996: 34). Modern Indonesian history is heading toward Islam *santri* (people steeped in Islam) (Maarif, 1993: 105). *Islam Abangan* (Javanese term for adherents of Islam who do not practice their religion in accordance with Islamic sharia) is gradually and consciously moving towards the process of Islam *santri*. This process proceeded reasonably and peacefully. This confirms that Indonesian Islam is not a static religion but one full of dynamic spirit (Nakamura, 1976: vi).

Indonesia's uniqueness and potential have recently had high bargaining power. If Indonesian Islam was previously considered as fringe Islam, many Islamic scholars of international reputation expect Indonesia to emerge as the leader of the Islamic world, such as Fazlur Rahman and Malik Bennabi. At least there are several reasons for that expectation's emergence. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, has the most advanced democratic development among Muslim countries, has tremendous cultural wealth, has fertile land, and its geographical position is far from the conflict center, namely Palestine.

This geographical position contains double values. On the one hand, Indonesian Islam is often considered "less Islamic" because its interaction cannot be an intern with Middle East Muslims. Still, on the other hand, its

position is far from the Middle East, especially Palestine, which benefits from a political security perspective. In addition, this geographical position must also be a special consideration in implementing Islamic law.

"It is a mistake when Makkah customs are forced to be applied in Indonesia. The nature of Makkah is different from the nature of Indonesia, which causes the condition of the Makkah people to be different from the conditions of the Indonesian people. The ability level of Makkah people is not necessarily the same as the ability of Indonesians. A benefit for the Makkah people does not necessarily benefit the Indonesians. And vice versa" (Ash-Shiddieqy in Shiddiqi, 1997: 231).

Therefore, Indonesian Islam has a special character that differs from Islam in other regions, within certain limits, due to geographical conditions.

Another uniqueness of Islam Nusantara, viewed from a religious perspective, is that Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation in the world. Still, religion-politically and ideologically, Indonesia is not an Islamic state (Madjid, 1996: 89). This fact is considered an oddity and weakness of Indonesian Muslims according to the line of thinking of Arabs or Middle Easterners. As for Indonesian Islamic scholars, it is precisely their wisdom in getting around Indonesian politics. Although Indonesia has a majority Muslim population, many non-Muslims participated in the struggle for Indonesian independence. Their existence must also be considered when Indonesia succeeded in becoming independent and establishing a state. So Islamic figures consider that the most important thing is that Islamic teachings can be carried out well in Indonesia without having to make an Islamic State formally because they emphasize *maqashid al-shari'ah*. This method is agreed upon by the majority of Indonesian Islam.

Another uniqueness found in Islam Nusantara is that even though it is one of the largest Muslim nations in the world, Indonesia is the nation that has experienced the least *Arabization* compared to other Muslim countries (Madjid, 1996: 94). This region of Nusantara represents one of the least *Arabized* parts of the Islamic world. However, the development of Islam in Southeast Asia cannot be separated from the development of Islam in the Middle East (Azra, 2002: 90). So familiar is Islam to the local culture (tradition), Islam Nusantara is not too interested in *Arabization*. For example, in wearing prayer clothes, they prefer to wear *sarongs* and *songkok* rather than robes and turbans; in

the mention of religious figures, they prefer to refer to *kiai*, *ajengan*, *tuan guru*, or *buya* rather than sheiks or scholars; in mentioning places of prayer, most Indonesian Muslims are more likely to mention *langgar* than *mushalla*; In referring to the institution's anniversary, they prefer to mention *dies natalis* rather than *dies Maulidiyah*; and so on.

Therefore, Islam Nusantara is a way of implementing Islam through a cultural approach, resulting from maintaining and developing local culture (tradition) in accordance with Islamic teachings and attempting to influence the local culture (tradition) with Islamic values when the culture (tradition) is still not in line with Islam. Islam highly values the cultural creations of society insofar as it does not undermine the principles of humanity; it is maintained. However, if that culture (tradition) defiles the dignity of humanity, it must be rejected. So, Islam Nusantara is not enslaved by tradition because it is not immune to criticism. Only traditions that respect human values must be maintained (Ghazali in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 113). The working mechanism of Islam Nusantara is through an adaptive-selective approach by using strict filters on local cultures (traditions) that have been entrenched in the community. With this approach, Islam is expected to play an active role in influencing local culture and traditions.

The presence of Islam Nusantara is based on certain motives that are very human and adaptive, not confrontational. In using the term Islam Nusantara, there is no sentiment towards the Arabic language and culture because Islam was born in Arabia, and the Quran is in Arabic (Muhajir, in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 62-63). The idea of Islam Nusantara is not to change Islamic doctrine but only to find strategies to socialize Islam in the context of a plural society (Ghazai in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 106). This statement can dismiss the suspicions of Muslims themselves, who have been opposed to the use of the term Islam Nusantara. The term Islam Nusantara is completely sterile from the fabrications of non-Muslims, especially the West. The emergence of Islam Nusantara is a creation of Muslim culture that is used to provide alternative ways of thinking, ways of comprehending, and ways of implementing Islam with dignity. This method can be seen in Islam Nusantara as a real example.

### **Indonesian Islam as a Pilot**

This thought, comprehension, and implementation of Islam in Indonesia demonstrates harmony and peace, at least it can be seen from

the expression among the majority of Muslims in this country as mainstream Muslims. This harmony and peace has lasted for centuries to the present, and is not interested in following the phenomena of radical action emanating from the Middle East that are troubling the world. The majority of Muslims in the Emerald of the Equator are attempting to counter these radical acts with significant and functional efforts, media, and channels to sensitize their followers.

In addition, Indonesian Muslims have additional capital because they already have democratic experience. Indonesia has succeeded in implementing democracy far ahead of other Muslim countries, both in terms of time and quality. Therefore, they are trained to be transparent, tolerant, interact with religious and cultural pluralism, and use a cultural approach in developing Islamic teachings, compared to Muslims from other Muslim countries in any region (Qomar, 2012: 187). This experience strengthens the existence of Islam Nusantara, which always expresses friendliness, tolerance, and transparency in facing pluralist realities.

The model of Islamic thought, comprehension, and implementation that can demonstrate peace has now produced results to be proud of. From the perspective of the outside world, Indonesian Islam demonstrates an attractive image and alluring character as *rahmatan li al'alamin*, far from the radicalism and extremity that plagues the world today. Not only do Muslims in the East admire our religious approach, but the West also points to Indonesia as an alternative model for inter-religious harmony in the world (Shihab, 1998: 335). Compared to other Muslim countries, Indonesian Muslims prefer a pluralist comprehension of religion over an establishmentarian idea. Through a long history of experience building inter-religious, inter-tribal, and intercultural harmony, Indonesia can be a good example for the Islamic world and general (Shihab, 1998: 348). Indonesia is expected to be an example of a peaceful, transparent, and moderate Islam. If this expectation is realized, Indonesian Islam will become the antithesis of the image of Islam, which was damaged by the behavior of a few people who chose the path of violence (Maarif, 2009: 244).

Therefore, Islam Nusantara as a model of thinking, comprehending, and implementing this alternative Islam, needs to be introduced, socialized, and promoted nationally, regionally, and internationally. We

must attempt to promote the *manhaj* rules or provisions in Islamic scientific learning) Islam Nusantara to the whole world, especially to war-torn nations that do not stop, namely those who can only do damage (*fasad*) but do not make repairs (*shalah*) (Muhajir in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 68). The promotion of Islam Nusantara is based on Islamic values and norms built long since the pioneering era of the *Sufis*. The developing Islam was compromised with various local elements through assimilation and syncretization (Fatoni in Sahal & Aziz, 2015: 236). Islam Nusantara is a success story from Indonesia that needs to be spread internationally (Nakamura, 2015: 30).

Indonesian Islam should be promoted abroad because Muslims have certain privileges. Here are the privileges of Indonesian Muslims:

1. "Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world.
2. The number of Indonesian Muslims is still greater than the combined number of Muslims in Arabian countries.
3. Indonesia has the largest area when compared to other Muslim-majority countries.
4. Geographical Indonesia is at the position of transportation intersection.
5. Indonesian Muslims are supported by soft culture.
6. Indonesia's territory consists of thousands of islands, and its sea is wider than its land, which has an exposed tendency.
7. Indonesia is not involved in any Middle East regional conflicts.
8. The madhab developed in Indonesia was very homogeneous (*Sunni*).
9. The *Sunni* madhab adopted in Indonesia also greatly helped ease the burden on the government to unite this nation.
10. Indonesia adheres to a democratic system.
11. Indonesia was the first Islamic country to conduct direct presidential elections.
12. The presence of the Ministry of Religious Affairs takes care of and serves the interests of religious people in Indonesia.
13. The existence of Pancasila as a national philosophy proved to be very "magical" to unite the Indonesian nation, which is diverse in various aspects.
14. Indonesia's natural wealth is huge and varied.
15. Gender equality in Indonesia is more advanced than in other Islamic countries.

16. It has a variety of cultures that become the local varied of Islamic teachings in Indonesia.
17. The existence of the *pesantren* (Islamic school) system as one of the traditional Islamic educational institutions that has an important influence on society.
18. The presence of Islamic universities, such as UIN, IAIN, STAIN, and PTAIS, which are spread in almost every province and even district, plays a significant role in enlightening the devotees.
19. The presence of Islamic community organizations such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and other Islamic community organizations participated in creating good conditions for the nativity of a community that upholds plurality in society.
20. The presence of the *Majlis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Council of Religious Scholars) is also an important factor in maintaining community harmony, both internal harmony among Muslims, inter-religious harmony, and inter-religious harmony with the government.
21. The Indonesian Language factor as the language of instruction in conveying Islamic values and teachings is also very decisive" (Umar, 2014: 271- 276).

Such are the various potentials possessed by Indonesian Muslims as a great capital in displaying their Islam as an alternative thought, comprehension, and implementation of Islamic teachings that are full of peace and harmony for Muslims throughout the world and other people. Such Islam can challenge and change the ideas and perceptions of the world community that are already wrong towards Islam, as mentioned earlier, namely Islam as a religion that teaches violence, cruelty, abomination, and other radical acts.

## Conclusion

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that Islam Nusantara is an Islamic identity in terms of region, which can be aligned with Arab Islam, Indian Islam, Turkish Islam, and so on. Islam Nusantara is a model of thinking, understanding, and practicing Islamic teachings through a cultural approach, thus reflecting Islamic identity with methodological nuances. Islam Nusantara reflects the thought, understanding, and practice of Islam that is moderate, inclusive, tolerant, peace-loving, harmonious, nurturing, and respecting diversity



so that the existence of Islam Nusantara is the antithesis to radical actions on behalf of Islam.

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