



The Evolution of Islam Nusantara: Tracing the Origins and Examining Contemporary Manifestations of Pluralism and Tolerance

Gustiana Isya Marjani

Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University of Bandung, Indonesia

Correspondence: gustiana.im@uinsgd.ac.id

Abstrak: The primary objective of this study is to undertake a comprehensive and in-depth examination and analysis of the discourse surrounding Islam Nusantara, considering the evolutionary trajectory of ideas introduced by Gus Dur concerning the indigenization of Islam, spanning from the 1980s to the present-day concept of Islam Nusantara promoted by PBNU. As a result, the study endeavors to achieve a profound understanding and knowledge of the Nusantara Islamic civilization, which places utmost value on pluralism, tolerance, and the principle of *rahmatan lil alamin*, embodying compassion for all of creation. The research methodology employed in this study entails a rigorous review of relevant literature, drawing on diverse scholarly works exploring Islam Nusantara and tracing the origins of these ideas. Particular emphasis is placed on analyzing Gus Dur's perspectives regarding the indigenization of Islam. The study's findings reveal a significant correlation between the ideas espoused by Gus Dur and several noteworthy phenomena observed in contemporary Indonesian Islam. Firstly, a prevalent misinterpretation of jihad exists within specific segments of the Muslim community, leading to the emergence of explicit terrorist movements, such as ISIS and its sympathizers in Indonesia. Secondly, ongoing violations of religious freedom and beliefs continue to persist within the country. Thirdly, there is an expanding range of religious narratives and discourses prevalent in society that tend to lean towards radicalism and exhibit an aversion to diversity. Consequently, this study substantiates the notion that Islam Nusantara holds the potential to serve as a solid foundation for constructing a framework of religious moderation, serving as a crucial response to the progressively pervasive discourse and practice of religious radicalism within society.

Keywords: *Nusantara Islam; Tolerance; Religious moderation; Nahdlatul Ulama*

Introduction

The concept of Nusantara Islam has received significant attention and has generated extensive discussions within the context of Islam in Indonesia. This is closely linked to a series of violent and terrorist incidents motivated by ideological and religious factors that persist in the country. These circumstances reveal the existence of specific ideological and religious doctrines or interpretations that threaten peaceful coexistence in this diverse nation. Particularly, these doctrines embody a religious understanding of Islam that is characterized by its radicalism, exclusivity, and intolerance (Kurnia, 2020; Weimann, 2006). Followers of this religious ideology rigidly adhere to the belief that Islam is the sole path to salvation, viewing pluralistic governance and society as adversaries to be eradicated. They are prepared to employ extreme measures in their efforts to rectify the situation. Consequently, addressing this issue cannot be reduced to merely capturing the perpetrators of terrorism. The crux of the problem lies in the comprehension of religious teachings,

which constitute an ideological conviction and underlie every action taken by its proponents (Caruso, 2018; Siswo, 2015).

Such exclusive, radical, intolerant, and violence-endorsing interpretations of religious teachings have become prevalent narratives within society. These narratives frequently intersect with specific political agendas and interests, leading to societal divisions, particularly when political motives justify any means and exploit religious narratives, even for unfounded purposes. Furthermore, advancements in technology and the ease of communication access have facilitated the dissemination of these exclusive and intolerant religious narratives throughout society. They intertwine with political narratives and propagate misinformation (hoaxes), both through everyday conversations and various information and communication technology platforms. Ironically, these radical teachings have become the prominent perception of Islam, increasingly studied and comprehended by the public (Nafi'a et al., 2022; Sukabdi, 2022; Mamdani, 2022).

At this juncture, the emergence of the discourse on Nusantara Islam assumes significance as it endeavors to offer an alternative perspective on religious praxes that embrace the unique religious landscape in Indonesia. Nusantara Islam is founded upon the pivotal thesis that Islam can be practiced while upholding the values and favorable local culture. However, Indonesia serves as the domicile for the world's largest Muslim populace, thus engendering a profound exploration of Nusantara Islam, affording a deeper comprehension of Islam's adaptation and evolution within the Indonesian milieu (Burhani, 2018; Nahdlatul Ulama, 2015; Schmidt, 2021). This illumination accentuates the distinctive attributes of Indonesian Islam, underscoring its pluralistic essence and the harmonious coexistence of sundry religious traditions.

The discourse surrounding the conception and praxis of Nusantara Islam in Indonesia ultimately assumes a pivotal role in advancing a more tolerant and inclusive manifestation of Islam. This discourse underscores the primacy of cherishing diversity, assimilating local culture, and nurturing interreligious dialogue. Within this contextual framework, Nusantara Islam assumes salience in the cultivation of religious moderation in Indonesia. Comprehending the inherent dimensions of this discourse is anticipated to contribute to the Muslim community's cognizance of the requisite endeavors for engendering a more tranquil and harmonious society, consonant with the objectives of religious moderation policies themselves (Burhani, 2018; Nahdlatul Ulama, 2015; Schmidt, 2021).

However, it is imperative to recognize that the emergence of the discourse surrounding Nusantara Islam is not without controversy. Certain factions argue that Nusantara Islam poses a threat to the purity of Islam or deviates from its fundamental principles of monotheism. Consequently, it becomes paramount to gain a comprehensive understanding of the origins, theoretical narratives, and controversies surrounding Nusantara Islam in order to fully comprehend the challenges and debates associated with the acceptance and implementation of this concept (Hasyim, 2018; Hosen, 2016).

The primary objective of this study is to delve into the conceptual potential of Nusantara Islam as a suitable framework for fostering religious moderation. This research endeavors to examine the rationale behind proposing Nusantara Islam as a guiding principle for practicing religious moderation, taking into consideration its capacity to adapt to local customs, integrate with cultural norms, and embrace diversity. In addition to synthesizing existing knowledge and scholarship, this paper will meticulously scrutinize the

conceptual historicity of Nusantara Islam and scrutinize its development, depth, and breadth. Through this comprehensive and in-depth analysis, this study aims to provide profound insights into the concept and practices of Nusantara Islam within the context of Indonesian Islam, particularly with regard to its evolution and the potential for its application in fostering more moderate religious practices that align with the pluralistic nature of faith in Indonesian society.

Literature Review

Extensive scholarly investigations have been dedicated to the exploration of Nusantara Islam. Previous studies have thoroughly examined multiple facets of Nusantara Islam, encompassing theoretical, methodological, practical, and ethical dimensions. Noteworthy research conducted by Hadi (2015) on Abdurrahman Wahid and the Indigenization of Islamic Education, have significantly contributed to the comprehension of Nusantara Islam. The indubitable significance of Abdurrahman Wahid, popularly known as Gus Dur, in the realm of Indonesian Islamic Studies, as well as in global studies of religion, particularly regarding religious plurality, cannot be overlooked. As the former Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), he has left an indelible intellectual legacy, particularly in the field of religious studies. On the occasion of the second anniversary of the Wahid Institute, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) (2008) unveiled his seminal work titled *"Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita"* (My Islam, Your Islam, Our Islam). This magnum opus consists of a collection of articles authored by Gus Dur, which delve into the understanding and definition of Islam in Indonesia within the context of pluralism. This profound contribution offers invaluable insights and critical perspectives to address the prevalent religious challenges in Indonesia.

Furthermore, multiple studies shed light on the merits and drawbacks associated with the conceptualization of Nusantara Islam among Indonesian ulama (Islamic scholars). For instance, a study conducted by Ridwan et al. (2019) indicates that ulama in West Sumatra predominantly exhibit reservations towards the notion of Nusantara Islam. The fundamental reason underlying this skepticism is rooted in the belief that Islam, as a religion, already embodies perfection and does not necessitate the inclusion of the term "Nusantara." However, certain religious leaders in West Sumatra embrace the concept of Nusantara Islam based on the principle of *"Adaik Bersandi Syarak, Syarak Bersandi Kitabullah"* (Customary Law Aligns with Islamic Law, Islamic Law Aligns with the Divine Book), rooted in the local Minangkabau adat (custom). This study also reveals that ulama who express dissent towards Nusantara Islam through social media platforms exemplify a shift in their roles, transitioning from religious leaders to influential opinion-makers. Nonetheless, this transition further consolidates the authority of ulama as guardians of religious knowledge.

Another extensive study conducted by Mubarok and Rustam (2019) provides a positive explanation of Nusantara Islam as a deliberate endeavor to integrate Islam with local culture in Indonesia. This study demonstrates that Nusantara Islam can effectively serve as an approach to da'wah in diverse communities characterized by cultural and traditional differences. Nusantara Islam emerges as an Islamic understanding rooted in the Nusantara (Indonesian archipelago) culture, thereby acquiring a distinctive feature within the Islamic framework in Indonesia. Furthermore, Nusantara Islam is also defined as a method of Islamic propagation, specifically categorized as Syu'ubiyah Qabailiyah da'wah.

The communication of da'wah within this framework is exemplified through three essential communication functions: monitoring, bridging, and socialization of values.

A corresponding study conducted by Darajat (2020) confirms that Nusantara Islam, with its diverse characteristics, successfully upholds a moderate approach. This approach reflects the inclination to find a balanced middle ground across all aspects of religious life, in line with the flexible, tolerant, and open nature of Indonesian Muslims in embracing diverse traditions, perspectives, and religious beliefs. Consequently, this has led to the development of local wisdom and the distinctive traits of Nusantara Islam, characterized by its friendly, tolerant, and pluralistic nature. It is important to note that these characteristics of tolerance, hospitality, cheerfulness, and the expansion of Islam did not emerge spontaneously; rather, they are the outcomes of a meticulous and extensive process undertaken by Indonesian Muslims. This process encompasses various aspects, such as the profiles of Islamic preachers, methods of disseminating Islam in the Nusantara region, the means and media employed for its propagation, and its relationship with political power. These factors collectively contribute to the robustness of moderate Islam in the Nusantara context. Presently, Nusantara Islam stands as an invaluable cultural heritage and serves as an authentic testament to the significant role Islam has played in influencing and advancing Muslim civilization in Indonesia and beyond.

The studies centered on Nusantara Islam hold the potential to provide a profound understanding of the intricate interplay between Islam and local culture in Indonesia. In this particular context, Nusantara Islam represents a concerted effort to harmonize and integrate Islamic values with the existing cultural values prevalent in the Nusantara region. This conceptual framework acknowledges the vast array of cultural diversity, customs, and traditions in Indonesia, while promoting an attitude of tolerance, dialogue, and respect for differences. The approach of Nusantara Islam serves as an effective and adaptive tool in the field of da'wah, as it possesses the capability to accommodate the diverse nature of society and effectively communicate comprehensive and inclusive messages of Islam.

Methods

The research methodology employed in this study adopts a qualitative approach, encompassing a thorough literature review and meticulous document analysis. The initial phase of this methodology involves an extensive review of literature on Nusantara Islam, encompassing the identification of pertinent primary and secondary sources such as books, scholarly journal articles, and related publications. This comprehensive literature review will facilitate a comprehensive comprehension of the historical progression of the Nusantara Islam concept and provide profound insights into the notions of pluralism and tolerance within the religious landscape of Indonesia.

The subsequent stage entails a meticulous analysis of documents comprising diverse texts, declarations, speeches, and significant writings associated with Nusantara Islam, pluralism, and tolerance within Indonesian Islam. Through this analysis, the research aims to discern the fundamental ideas, arguments, and underlying concepts inherent in Nusantara Islam, while also tracing the evolution and transformations within this religious perspective across temporal boundaries. Concurrently, the document analysis will enable the identification and examination of the debates and controversies surrounding Nusantara Islam, pluralism, and tolerance within the Indonesian Muslim community. This comprehensive investigation of various viewpoints will yield a nuanced understanding of

the diverse perspectives within the Indonesian Muslim community pertaining to these issues.

Subsequently, the collected data will be subjected to thematic analysis, unveiling discernible patterns, emerging trends, and key findings derived from both the literature review and document analysis. These findings will be interpreted and contextualized within relevant theoretical frameworks, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the evolutionary trajectory, pluralistic dimensions, and tolerant attributes within Nusantara Islam in the Indonesian context. Such an approach will enable the research to explore the complexities and nuances associated with Nusantara Islam, contributing to a deeper scholarly understanding of this religious paradigm in Indonesia.

Results and Discussion

Indonesia showcases a remarkable tapestry of religious diversity, serving as a testament to the country's societal wealth. Particularly within the realm of Islam, the assortment of religious expressions prevalent among its populace attests to the multiplicity of interpretations and comprehensions regarding Islamic teachings. Nonetheless, the overall understanding of Islamic tenets within Indonesian society can be categorized into several primary factions, each representing distinct variations in religious practices, beliefs, and traditions (Ardi et al., 2021). First and foremost, there exists a group commonly referred to as traditionalists, who align themselves with the Sunni branch of Islam, constituting the majority in Indonesia. These individuals recognize the Quran and Hadith as the foremost sources of Islamic teachings, diligently adhering to the principles espoused by the four universally recognized Sunni schools of jurisprudence: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali. The traditionalist faction derives its religious understanding from the interpretations put forth by esteemed scholars, while simultaneously embracing local customs and traditions as invaluable sources of wisdom and legal guidance (Yani et al., 2022). Conversely, another segment of Indonesian society adheres to an interpretation of Islam influenced by the Salafi-Wahhabi ideology. Central to their belief system is a resolute commitment to returning to the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Generally characterized by a literal approach to the interpretation of religious texts, this faction tends to exhibit tendencies towards exclusivity, rigidity, and an inclination to exalt Arab culture (referred to as Arabism) (Wahid, 2008).

Furthermore, there are various minority Islamic groups in Indonesia, including Shiite and Ahmadiyya communities, which have garnered followers. The Shiite group derives their religious understanding from the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt, emphasizing the significance of these imams as legitimate inheritors of religious authority. Conversely, the Ahmadiyya Islamic group holds distinct beliefs and interpretations that diverge from the majority of Muslims in Indonesia. Ahmadis view Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as an additional prophet subsequent to Prophet Muhammad. This perspective has ignited controversy and polemics within Indonesia, resulting in acts of persecution by those who perceive Ahmadiyya teachings as deviant and incompatible with mainstream Islamic doctrine.

Nonetheless, such categorizations merely offer a simplified representation of the intricate realities within the Indonesian Islamic community. It is noteworthy that various Muslim factions exist, placing emphasis on Sufi-inspired practices, such as specific tariqas (spiritual orders) like Tijaniyah, Qadiriyyah, Naqshbandiyah, Idrisiyyah, among others. Additionally, there are Muslims who prioritize cultural participation in certain religious

occasions without placing significant emphasis on religious understanding. For these groups, religion does not serve as a central aspect of their identity. Nevertheless, the role of religion as a vital element in the lives of Indonesians is widely acknowledged, and as a result, a multitude of religiously-oriented activities can be readily observed within the community (Yani et al., 2022; Barton et al., 2021).

To comprehensively grasp the religious landscape in Indonesia, it is essential to acknowledge the dynamic nature of religious expressions, which are shaped by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors. The diversity within the Islamic community reflects a rich tapestry of beliefs, practices, and interpretations, thus contributing to the distinctive religious milieu that characterizes Indonesian society. It is essential to recognize that the categorization of Indonesian Muslims into these distinct groups provides a simplified framework for understanding the diverse religious landscape within the country. In reality, the multifaceted nature of Islamic practices and beliefs in Indonesia transcends rigid categorizations, with individuals often embracing a combination of influences, adapting to local customs, and nurturing their personal spiritual journeys. Consequently, an inclusive and nuanced comprehension of the religious landscape in Indonesia requires a deeper exploration of the interplay between historical, cultural, and socio-political factors that have shaped the evolution of Islamic expressions in the archipelago (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2020; Safitri, 2016).

In Indonesia, a multitude of societal organizations exists that are affiliated with specific religions or particular religious interpretations. Notably, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) serves as a representative of traditional Islam in Indonesia, functioning as a socio-religious organization with a substantial following. In contrast, Muhammadiyah embodies a modernist and reformist approach to Islam, aiming to revitalize and contemporize the faith. Additionally, Persis espouses a Salafi interpretation, adhering closely to the literal understanding of religious texts. Furthermore, there are Shiite and Ahmadiyya groups that possess distinct characteristics and beliefs within the broader Islamic framework. However, it is important to acknowledge that alongside this diversity, certain hardline religious factions have emerged, albeit some have faced governmental prohibition. Examples of such banned groups include Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Laskar Jihad, the Indonesian Mujahideen Council (MMI), and the Defenders of Ahlus Sunnah (PAS), among others. Each of these components contributes to the intricate tapestry of Islamic development in Indonesia.

The discourse surrounding Islam in Indonesia has witnessed intriguing developments as diverse groups and their respective doctrinal affiliations have emerged. This discourse encompasses the active engagement of intellectuals, academics, and religious scholars who strive to enrich and expand the understanding of Islam within the Indonesian context. It is crucial to recognize that this dynamic landscape is not devoid of challenges faced by the community. These challenges encompass socioeconomic disparities, structural inequities, resource distribution, income discrepancies, the profound impact of globalization and modernity, rapid advancements in science and technology, the intricate fabric of cultural diversity within society, and the interplay of political interests. Of significant concern is the proliferation of exclusive and extremist interpretations of Islam, which have led to incidents of intolerance, radicalism, and acts of religiously motivated terrorism. Understanding and addressing these multifaceted issues is essential for fostering a more inclusive, tolerant, and harmonious religious environment in Indonesia.

The existence of various pressing issues, particularly the last one mentioned, has spurred the endeavors of scholars and intellectuals to explore specific alternatives that can provide a more suitable framework for Islam within Indonesia's diverse society. Within this context, a notable concept that has surfaced is "Islam Nusantara," originating from the notion of "Pribumisasi Islam" (Indigenizing Islam) introduced by Abdurrahman Wahid in the late 1980s. Pribumisasi Islam entails the concerted effort to harmonize Islamic teachings with local cultural practices and Indonesian values, countering the trend of Arabization that was beginning to take root in society at that time. Gus Dur firmly believed that the interpretation and practice of Islam should be attuned to the local cultural and social milieu. He posited that foundational Islamic values, such as justice, peace, and tolerance, can harmoniously coexist with Indonesian principles such as "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) and "gotong royong" (mutual cooperation) (Wahid, 1989; 1998; Hadi, 2015).

Embedded within the framework of Pribumisasi Islam, Gus Dur actively advocated for religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and the utmost respect for religious freedom. He underscored the significance of inclusive understanding of Islam, valuing diversity, and embracing variations in the interpretation of religious tenets. Moreover, Gus Dur emphasized the imperative of fostering harmonious relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, while concurrently advancing a moderate and peaceful comprehension of Islam. He vehemently criticized narrow-minded and exclusionary interpretations that serve to perpetuate conflict and violence. Through the prism of Pribumisasi Islam, Gus Dur tirelessly endeavored to cultivate a distinctive manifestation of Islam in Indonesian society—one that acknowledges the local tapestry of diversity and places paramount importance on inclusivity, tolerance, and peace as central guiding principles in the practice of the faith (Hosen, 2016).

As the ideas put forth by Gus Dur regarding the indigenization of Islam gained momentum, they encountered both support and opposition, particularly when he proposed equating the Islamic greeting "assalamu'alaikum" with "ahlan wa sahlan" or "shabah al-Khayr." Wahid suggested that these greetings could be substituted with "good morning" or "hello." The concept of indigenizing Islam stirred significant debate, primarily within the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community. This led to a gathering of approximately 200 Islamic scholars (kiai) at the Darut Tauhid Arjawinangun Cirebon boarding school on March 8-9, 1989, with the intention of "prosecuting" Wahid for his views. However, Wahid himself acknowledged that he was not the first to embark on this path. He considered himself part of the succeeding generation, following in the strategic footsteps of the Walisongo, who successfully spread Islam in Java without encountering substantial cultural tensions (Nahdlatul Ulama, 2015; Hosen, 2016).

Gus Dur recognized the imperative to rectify the misrepresentation of two terms, namely "Islamization" and "Arabization." He explicitly asserted that Islam is distinct from Arab culture. This ongoing debate has reached its zenith in the discourse on "Islam Nusantara" (Islam in the archipelago). The discourse initiated by Gus Dur remains highly pertinent to several contemporary manifestations of Islam in Indonesia. Firstly, there is a prevalent misinterpretation of jihad among certain segments of the Muslim community, which has given rise to explicit terrorist movements, such as ISIS and its sympathizers in Indonesia. Secondly, violations of religious freedom and beliefs persist within the country.

Thirdly, religious narratives and discourses are increasingly prevalent in society, often leaning towards radicalism and displaying resistance towards diversity.

The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) group, driven by the progressive spirit of Pribumisasi Islam, continues to cultivate a post-Islamic traditionalism. Abdurrahman Wahid, an influential figure in the indigenization of Islam in the archipelago, encountered obstacles even within his own milieu. Nonetheless, the endeavors of Gus Dur have yielded positive outcomes among the younger generation, thereby fostering NU's progressivism. Johan Effendi posits that the indigenization project gained momentum within NU under Gus Dur's leadership. He asserts that this project, encompassing the indigenization of Islam within NU, was successfully implemented without causing upheaval among senior students and venerable kiai (Islamic scholars). Gus Dur, alongside the younger members of NU, laid a sturdy groundwork for the profound indigenization of Islam within the organization.

Formerly, traditionalism within NU was characterized by technological obsolescence and a narrow focus on classical texts (yellow book). However, contemporary traditionalists can be regarded as more progressive than the initial reformers. While certain NU kiai initially opposed the initiatives of the youth groups, specific kiai within NU provided support and an enabling environment for the younger generation to introduce innovations to the tradition. This signifies the triumph of activities that initially encountered resistance during Gus Dur's early reforms in traditional Islamic boarding schools, where diverse ideas of indigenizing Islam were introduced.

The model of an inclusive, pluralist, and substantialist Islam often clashes with the formalization of Islamic law in Indonesia. The categorization of neo-modernism, encompassing inclusive and pluralist Islam, is frequently associated with the Pakistani thinker Fazlur Rahman, who exerted influence on Indonesian scholars such as Nurcholish Madjid and Ahmad Syafii during their studies at the University of Chicago. In addition to Nurcholish Madjid and Syafii, other Muslim scholars classified as neo-modernists include Gus Dur and Djohan Effendi. M. Syafii Anwar, alongside scholars like Jalaluddin Rachmat and Taufik Abdullah, also falls into the neo-modernist and substantialist categories. Azyumardi Azra and M. Amin Abdullah, as representatives of the new generation of Indonesian Muslim scholars, exemplify substantialist ethics.

The Discourse of Islam Nusantara

Islam Nusantara represents a distinctive paradigm of Islamic thought that emerged within the Nahdlatul Ulama movement and has developed in the Nusantara region, encompassing Indonesia. Introduced in 2015, Islam Nusantara embodies a reaction against denominational forms of Islam that predominantly adhere to Arab and Middle Eastern perspectives, exemplified by Wahhabism from Saudi Arabia (Nahdlatul Ulama, 2015). According to Nahdlatul Ulama, the foundations of Islam Nusantara can be traced back to at least the 16th century, evolving through the processes of interaction, contextualization, indigenization, interpretation, and vernacularization of universal Islamic teachings and values that resonate with Indonesian cultural realities. This conceptual framework of Islam Nusantara acknowledges the importance of local culture and customs in Indonesia when constructing its jurisprudence (Nahdlatul Ulama, 2015; Fachrudin, 2015). Islam Nusantara should not be misconstrued as a normative Islam; rather, it embodies an empirical and distinct form of Islam that emerges from the dynamic interplay, contextualization, indigenization, translation, and vernacularization of universal Islamic principles within the

social, cultural, and literary fabric of Indonesia. Historical records attribute the initial articulation of Islam Nusantara to the Walisongo, the nine saints of Java, who employed a cultural approach in disseminating Islam within the Nusantara during their time (Nadhlatul Ulama, 2015; Hosen, 2016; Mubarak & Rustam, 2019).

Islam possesses an inherent adaptability that allows for its harmonious integration within diverse cultural contexts. Contrary to eradicating regional cultures and imposing an alien cultural paradigm, Islam embraces and accommodates local customs, while selectively eliminating elements that contradict its core teachings. The experiences of the Wali Sembilan in Java serve as a notable illustration of how the practice of da'wah can be tailored to Javanese cultural sensibilities, exemplifying a framework that respects and integrates local traditions. The universal nature of Islamic teachings contributes to its widespread acceptance across various regions and cultures. Islam does not advocate a wholesale rejection of indigenous elements within different cultural landscapes. Instead, Islam endeavors to incorporate and adapt these elements within its doctrinal framework, facilitating a more receptive and inclusive approach to Islamic teachings (Nasr, 2002; Schmidt, 2021; Burhani, 2018).

The emergence and development of Islam in the Nusantara region brought about a distinct practice that deviated from the Arab tradition. Rather than adhering strictly to Arab customs, Islam in the Nusantara region adapted to the local culture while remaining faithful to its core teachings. Islam Nusantara encompasses not only the Islamic practices of Indonesians but also serves as a technical term to describe how Islam manifests within a community. It is a metaphorical representation of Islam in Indonesia. From a technical standpoint, Islam Nusantara can be viewed as a method or approach to da'wah, encompassing the unique ways in which Islamic teachings have evolved and are conveyed within the Nusantara region. For instance, the dissemination of Islamic knowledge often takes place through the establishment of Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren) scattered across the Nusantara.

Islam Nusantara exhibits a profound diversity of models and configurations, making it challenging to define a uniform form of Islam within this context. During his visit to Indonesia in late 2010, John Esposito, an Islamologist from Georgetown University, acknowledged the distinctive and diverse nature of Islam Nusantara. The varied configurations of Islam Nusantara can be attributed to a range of factors. Prominent Islamic scholars like William Shephartz argue that these configurations are influenced by individual backgrounds, including educational experiences, sources of knowledge, social associations, historical contexts, and even personal psychology. Further exploration of the configurations of Islam Nusantara reveals significant changes that have occurred over time, with numerous factors, particularly those related to national politics, shaping this diversity. The specific sects or forms of Islam that emerge in Indonesia are determined by the social, political, economic, cultural, and psychological conditions that Muslims experience in the country (Burhani, 2018).

Considering both external and internal factors, Islam Nusantara will continue to evolve, providing a deeper understanding of its configurations in the future. It is important to note that Islam Nusantara should be distinguished from a mere cultural Islamic movement, although such movements can influence social and political dynamics at both national and international levels. In essence, the incorporation of local wisdom within the archipelago reflects a value system that has long been recognized within Islamic principles.

Similar to the pre-Islamic Arab society, certain rules and traditions were adopted by Islam. Principles such as *Usul al-fiqh*, know *syar'u man qablana* (knowledge of previous rulings), and *al'urf* (customary law) are employed in this regard (Moqsith, 2016; Nasrullah, 2019).

However, the dynamics of Islam Nusantara have encountered significant challenges in the context of colonialism. Islam Nusantara has experienced a phenomenon referred to as mimicry, as articulated by Homi K. Bhabha. This phenomenon involves the imitation or exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas. Mimicry, according to Bhabha, entails the appropriation of a culture, resulting in a double articulation that is simultaneously similar and different. Furthermore, mimicry can also entail an element of mockery (Baso, 2005). Ahmad Baso argues that mimicry always occurs within the interplay between what is known and allowed to be known, and what is forbidden and must be concealed. The encounter between Islam Nusantara and the influences of colonial powers has had a detrimental impact on both Islam and local wisdom. On one hand, there exists an aspiration for an Islamic ideal influenced by Arab traditions (Makkah-Madinah), while on the other hand, local customs hold the hearts of the people tightly bound to their ancestral traditions. This tension gives rise to a fractured relationship between local wisdom and the demands of a changing society. Islam and local wisdom have been manipulated as political tools to legitimize colonial powers, and this legacy has persisted even after Indonesia's independence. The underlying motive behind these actions was to create a controlled space that encapsulates Islamic values and local wisdom, while ostensibly upholding the law (Baso, 2005).

In the realm of orthodox Islam, Islam Nusantara can be characterized by three main elements. Firstly, it adheres to the theological teachings of Asy'ariyah. Secondly, it follows the Shafi'i school of fiqh, while also incorporating elements from the other three Sunni schools of fiqh. Thirdly, it embraces the Sufi tradition influenced by al-Ghazali, which can be practiced individually or communally, often through structured Sufi orders that include mursyids (spiritual leaders), caliphs, pupils, and specific rituals of remembrance. Ultimately, the discourses initiated by Gus Dur have gradually safeguarded the archipelago's cultural heritage in the face of foreign cultural hegemony. The process of indigenizing Islam and the concept of Islam Nusantara have become defining characteristics of Indonesian Islam, promoting values of pluralism, tolerance, and *rahmatan lil alamin* (mercy to all creation).

Discussions

Based on the preceding exposition, it is evident that Islam Nusantara does not deviate from the fundamental tenets of Islam. Indeed, adherents in the Nusantara region continue to uphold the core teachings of Islam, wherein the shahada (declaration of faith), salah (prayer), sawm (fasting), zakat (almsgiving), and hajj (pilgrimage) are practiced by Indonesian Muslims. Additionally, the Quran and Hadith remain the primary sources for Islamic jurisprudence. Consequently, the distinctiveness of Islam Nusantara does not reside within the core teachings of Islam itself. Rather, it is rooted in extraneous elements. Several salient characteristics of Islam Nusantara include:

Acceptance and reverence for diversity: Islam Nusantara esteems and acknowledges the diversity in religious practices and cultural traditions throughout Indonesia. This perspective underscores the significance of tolerance, respecting divergent beliefs, and cultivating harmonious relations among religious communities.

Assimilation with local culture: Islam Nusantara amalgamates elements of local culture with Islamic teachings. Certain values inherent in local customs that are incongruent with Islamic teachings are supplanted with Islamic values, while preserving the broader cultural fabric. Religious practices are imbued with customs, arts, music, and local traditions that are harmoniously aligned with Islamic values. This reflects the adaptability of the faith to Indonesia's social and cultural milieu.

Emphasis on openness and inclusivity in interpretation: Islam Nusantara adopts an inclusive approach to the interpretation of Islamic teachings. This religious perspective encompasses various sects, schools of thought, and diverse religious viewpoints. Such an approach respects differences of opinion and fosters interreligious and inter-sect dialogue.

Emphasis on the values of tolerance and harmony: Islam Nusantara places significant emphasis on tolerance, harmony, and mutual understanding among religious communities. This perspective underscores the importance of respecting human rights, religious freedom, and social justice as fundamental Islamic principles (Wahid, 2008; 1998; 1989; Darajat, 2020; Burhani, 2018; Hosen, 2016).

In the context of Islam Nusantara, the ulama, who are revered Islamic scholars, assume a pivotal role as spiritual and intellectual leaders. They fulfill responsibilities such as providing religious guidance, delivering contextual advice, and promoting a moderate and inclusive interpretation of Islam. Islam Nusantara represents the adaptation of Islam in Indonesia by harmonizing Islamic values with the local cultural milieu. This concept places significant emphasis on fostering tolerance, harmony, and reverence for diversity in the practice of Islamic teachings (Wahid, 2008; 1998; 1989; Darajat, 2020; Burhani, 2018).

The fundamental characteristics of Islam Nusantara profoundly demonstrate its potential to be further developed as a suitable approach for cultivating religious tolerance and establishing a framework for religious moderation in Indonesia. Several key factors contribute to the suitability of Islam Nusantara as a concept and approach in building a framework of religious tolerance and moderation in Indonesia:

Historical Roots in the Nusantara: Islam Nusantara originates from the same approach employed by the Walisongo in propagating Islam throughout the Nusantara region. This approach emphasizes the critical importance of adapting Islam to local customs and traditions without compromising its fundamental principles. The concept of Islam Nusantara embodies the long-standing process of Islam's adaptation in Indonesia, having evolved within the rich cultural and historical context of the nation. By synergizing Islamic values with indigenous traditions, Islam Nusantara attains relevance and an intricate comprehension of the social and religious dynamics in Indonesia, a country inherently characterized by cultural diversity, customs, traditions, and interpretations.

Inclusivity: Islam Nusantara highlights the inclusive nature of Islam, capable of accommodating changes and embracing differences. Consequently, it places great significance on tolerance, societal pluralism, and the earnest pursuit of interreligious harmony. Islam Nusantara adopts an inclusive approach in interpreting Islamic teachings, recognizing the existence of diverse sects, schools of thought, and religious perspectives within Indonesia. Within the context of religious moderation, this inclusive approach allows for broad comprehension, inter-sect dialogues, and acknowledgment of varying interpretations of religion.

Tolerance: The concept of Islam Nusantara emanates from a profound recognition of the importance of fostering harmony amidst societal differences. In essence, it seeks to

enhance awareness of diversity and foster respect for differing beliefs as integral components of Indonesian identity. Within the framework of religious moderation, Islam Nusantara serves as a foundation for promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaboration among religious communities. In this context, the ulama play a crucial role in advocating for a moderate, inclusive, and harmony-oriented understanding of Islam. They function as agents of change, exerting influence over Muslims and broader society, thereby encouraging the practice of religious moderation.

Indonesian Identity and Values: Islam Nusantara aligns harmoniously with Indonesia's pluralistic identity, which esteems differences. This concept reflects the spirit of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity), serving as the bedrock for religious coexistence in Indonesia. Consequently, Islam Nusantara provides a firm foundation for establishing a framework of religious moderation that adheres to Indonesia's national values (Wahid, 2008; 1998; 1989; Burhani, 2018; Hosen, 2016).

Islam Nusantara exhibits significant uniqueness and relevance within the Indonesian context by harmonizing Islamic teachings with local culture, prioritizing tolerance, and advocating for religious moderation. This concept offers a comprehensive and fitting framework for fostering an inclusive, harmonious, and just society in Indonesia. Consequently, Islam Nusantara emerges as an effective strategy for fortifying religious moderation in the country. Several strategies that can be implemented to achieve this objective include:

Education on the cultural richness and societal pluralism of Indonesia: Augmenting education and raising awareness regarding the diversity and richness of Indonesian society as a valuable asset that necessitates preservation. This can be effectively achieved through inclusive religious education curricula, which heighten consciousness about the significance of tolerance and openness to differences. Teaching the values of tolerance, harmony, and the acceptance of diverse interpretations within the context of Islam Nusantara can facilitate a transformation of perspectives and cultivate an understanding of the crucial role religious moderation plays in society.

Interreligious dialogue and cooperation: Encouraging and facilitating regular and open interreligious dialogues that provide a platform for religious leaders, academics, and adherents to exchange viewpoints, foster trust, and promote an inclusive and tolerant understanding. Active engagement and cooperation among diverse religious communities are pivotal in dispelling baseless suspicions, unfounded hostilities, and establishing a harmonious social fabric. Strengthening interfaith collaboration is also vital in developing effective communication channels that enhance harmony and solidarity among adherents. Joint initiatives, such as the development of social infrastructure, community services, and humanitarian programs, can serve as avenues for fostering mutual understanding and positive collaboration.

Policy and legal advocacy: Advocating for policies and laws that endorse religious moderation, encompassing the protection of human rights and freedom of religion. By actively participating in policy formulation processes, engaging in public advocacy, and collaborating with governmental institutions, a conducive environment for practicing religious moderation can be cultivated.

Utilization of technology: Harnessing media platforms and communication channels to disseminate messages promoting religious moderation based on the principles of Islam Nusantara. Utilizing mass media outlets, social networks, and generating

constructive content that supports harmony can contribute to the development of a more inclusive and tolerant public opinion.

Enrichment of academic research and literature: Encouraging in-depth research and scholarly studies on Islam Nusantara, encompassing its historical, theological, and social aspects. The findings of these investigations can form the foundation for developing a comprehensive understanding of the concept of Islam Nusantara and its role in promoting religious moderation. Furthermore, the development of literature, guides, and educational materials that support the comprehension and practice of religious moderation rooted in Islam Nusantara can prove invaluable when incorporated into formal education curricula, training programs, and non-formal education platforms to achieve broader dissemination.

Participatory follow-up actions: Organizing training and continuing education programs targeted at religious leaders, educators, and policymakers. These initiatives aim to strengthen their understanding of the concept of Islam Nusantara, religious moderation, and the practical strategies for integrating them into everyday life. Such knowledge is essential for reinforcing religious moderation throughout Indonesia.

By implementing these strategies in a holistic and continuous manner, Islam Nusantara can serve as a robust foundation for establishing an effective and sustainable framework for religious moderation in Indonesia. This framework has the potential to strengthen harmony, tolerance, and interreligious coexistence. Despite the controversies and debates surrounding Islam Nusantara, this concept holds significant importance as a response from the Muslim community in Indonesia, aimed at preserving their Islamic and local identities in the face of globalization, modernity, and the pervasive influence of technology. These factors often result in societal confusion and an inclination towards adopting religious interpretations and practices that are incongruent with the diverse conditions of the society. Islam, at its core, is a benevolent and adaptable religion that transcends temporal and geographical boundaries (*sholihun li kulli zaman wa makan*). Nevertheless, its true essence can only be realized when its followers are able to foster an inclusive, open-minded, and constructive understanding of Islam that enhances their way of life.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significance of understanding Nusantara Islam in the context of evolution, pluralism, and religious tolerance in Indonesia. The research reveals that Nusantara Islam serves as a robust response from the Indonesian Muslim community to the challenges posed by globalization, modernity, and technological advancements, which can often confuse individuals and lead them towards religious understandings and practices that are incompatible with the diverse societal conditions. Within the realm of religious moderation in Indonesia, understanding Nusantara Islam provides a strong foundation for establishing an effective and sustainable framework. Nusantara Islam has the capacity to strengthen harmony, tolerance, and interreligious coexistence by promoting an inclusive, open-minded, and contributive understanding of Islam.

The exploration conducted in this study also unveils the inherent adaptability of Islam and its principles that support moderation. By comprehending the evolution of Islam in Indonesia and the values embraced within Nusantara Islam, religious moderation practices can be implemented more effectively and widely throughout the country. This study provides a theoretical foundation and deep understanding of Nusantara Islam, its

evolution, pluralism, and tolerance within Indonesian Islam. The implications of this research can inform public policies, the development of religious education, and efforts to build harmonious and sustainable interreligious cooperation in Indonesia.

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