

The Dialectic of Islam Nusantara and Its Contribution To The Development of Religious Moderation In Indonesia

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Abstract. Islam Nusantara refers to identity and religious character. The archipelago people accept Islam because of the close relationship between Islam and the fundamental cultural values of the Indonesian people. The dialectic of Islam Nusantara can be seen through the characteristics of religion that make it different from the religious patterns in some parts of the world, including showing a moderate attitude. Moderation, a guide for maintaining balance and justice in the nation's unity, can become harmony for religion, culture, and politics. In Islam, moderation is the middle *wasatha ummah*, namely moderate people who adhere to the principle of the *bainiyyah* (in between). The research method was library research by making books and library materials about Islam Nusantara a reference and primary source. The research results reported that Islam Nusantara, with its moderation movement, has brought together the universal Islam fundamental values by accumulating local values that make the beauty of religious moderation in Indonesia.

Keywords: Islam , Nusantara, Moderation.

Introduction

Intellectual scholars believe that Islam that grows in the archipelago has different characteristics from Islam in the eastern hemisphere. Various research on Islam Nusantara eventually generated the diversity characteristics in the archipelago. The discourse results by intellectuals then coined several terms, such as inclusive Islam, diversity fiqh by Muhammadiyah, and Islam Nusantara by Nahdlatul Ulama (Umar, 2021). Islam Nusantara also actually refers to identity and religious character. Almost every country with a majority Muslim population has a particular term to characterize the particularity of Muslims in their country. The term Islam Nusantara also refers to the religious pattern of Indonesian Muslims who live side by side with the diversity of the nation and state (Astuti, 2018).

Islam has basic and non-basic teachings. The basic teachings are absolute, universal, and eternal, such as the pillars of faith and the pillars of Islam. Meanwhile, non-basic teachings are flexible, contemporary, and generally discuss matters of a branch nature (*furu'iyah*) (Samsudin, 2015). The dialectic of Islam Nusantara is in the realm of non-basic teachings, as long as Islam in the archipelago is still in the discourse of non-basic teachings. There is no need to worry about ambiguous teachings because Islam as a *rahmatan lil alamin* religion always opens itself to 'acceptance' and does not conflict with its basic teachings (Tanabora, 2020).

Islam as an open religion has a dialectical pattern with its working environment has limits of tolerance, and the power of adaptation allows itself to be accepted by

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everyone and local culture (Suaedy, 2018). The uniqueness of Islam, like other religions in general, is that it often deals with complex contextual and contemporary problems. However, it should be noted that even though Islam has the strength and adaptation to local wisdom values, it stands on basic teaching principles. It is the basis of the *wasathiyah* concept (H. Mohammad Hasan, 2017). In terms of religion, *Wasathiyah* Islam is often considered moderate Islam. Moderate Islam is Islam is the middle way, which always tries to display teachings that are full of compassion (*rahmah*), justice (*'adalah*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), emphasizes aspects of meeting, meeting points, and encounters (*kalimah sawa'*) instead of showing violence (*tasyaddud*) and terrorism. Islam can stay upright above or beside local-cultural values (Massoweang, 2020).

The former chairman of the General Manager of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) for two periods, Aqil Siradj, emphasized that Islam Nusantara refers to the historical facts of early Islam's spread through a cultural approach, not with rigid and stiff doctrines. Islam Nusantara is conveyed by embracing and preserving culture in the archipelago, respecting and not suppressing culture (Kamil, 2022). Indeed, what is meant is not contrary to monotheism and the central teachings of Islam, as seen in the pattern of Islam in NU, or even other Islamic' organizations.

Moderation must be understood more profoundly and cultivated and developed as a standard guideline to maintain balance and justice in national unity and become harmony for religion, culture, and politics (Ali Muhtarom, Sahlul Fuad, n.d.). Thus, a Muslim who adheres to moderation in all aspects of his life, even in worship activities, is true. Islam Nusantara is synonymous with Islam in line with moderation. Morality in Islam, among other things, is based on justice, namely placing everything on its axis (Qomar, 2016).

The moderate pattern of Islam is the pattern of fundamental Islam, not local in the archipelago. Moderate Islam in the Qur'an is evident in the expression that Muslims must appear as *wasatha ummatan* (QS. 2.142), the middle ummah, namely moderate people who adhere to the principle of *bainiyyah* (*in between*) (Imam Syafi'i, 2021).

Method

This research design was *library research*, which aimed to trace and examine data or information regarding the research topic. The data sources were books about Islam Nusantara and Islamic moderation as a reference and primary data, and the secondary data sources were taken from articles, information, and notes from previous research results. This research was descriptive-analytic, where the researchers described the construction of Islam Nusantara and its contribution to the development of religious moderation in Indonesia, then analyzed critically and comprehensively. The research data were collected through the documentation method, namely looking for written data in the form of quotations, written documents, written answers, books, etc., then analyzed using the content analysis method, which was a set of procedures to draw correct conclusions from a book or document (Albi Anggito, 2018).

Results and Discussion

An Overview of Islam Nusantara

The term Islam Nusantara was re-emerged at the 33rd NU congress in Jombang, East Java, in 2015. With the theme: "Confirming Islam Nusantara for Indonesian civilization", NU reaffirmed the long history of Islamic moderation that has been going on since its arrival (Yulyanah, 2015). It is why Islam Nusantara is not a new term. Experts frequently have mentioned it before. However, Islam Nusantara reverberated as the theme of the 33rd NU congress.

There are also various responses about Islam Nusantara on social media. Some think that NU is making a significant breakthrough to give a positive image of Islam in Indonesia after Islam has been tarnished by a group of people who have imposed their will by making Islam a concept of life in the state and society, without paying attention to the objective conditions of the area where Islam exists (Sapriallah, 2019). Some even responded that the NU residents who initiated the Islam Nusantara had deviated from the doctrine of the founder of NU itself. They never introduced the term Islam Nusantara. They developed *Islam Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah* which was later shortened to ASWAJA (Yulyanah, 2015).

In understanding Islam Nusantara, it is better to distinguish between Islam in the archipelago and Islam Nusantara. The connotation of Islam in the archipelago describes the existing Islam in the archipelago, including the history of development, population, and characteristics of Islam in the nusantara (Basori, 2017). Meanwhile, Islam Nusantara shows Islam's unique nature and characteristics in the archipelago itself. Islam Nusantara involves various scientific disciplines such as *ushul fiqh* and religious texts or *nash* interpretation (Baso, 2018). Islam Nusantara is more related to the phenomenon of Islam "*as the Islam*" rather than "*Islam as an Islam*".

Religious Character

The arrival of Islam and acceptance by the archipelago people did not just happen. The people of the archipelago accept Islam because of the close relationship between Islam and the fundamental cultural values of the Indonesian people (Husain, 2017). History records that the Islamic teachings that developed in Indonesia were more connected to the noble traditions of the Indonesian nation than their differences. It is an essential factor in people's acceptance of Islam. The *da'wah* pattern that has succeeded in bringing Islam and the culture of the Indonesian people closer has created a *da'wah* pattern that can be identified as an essential factor in the development of Islamic moderation in the archipelago. Inclusive, adaptive, and tolerant *da'wah* patterns are some important notes that strengthen the success of Islamic *da'wah* (Adib, 2021).

The dialectic of Islam in the archipelago can be seen through the characteristics of religion that make it different from the religious patterns in some parts of the world. *First*, it shows a moderate attitude (Susanto & Abadi, 2016). In the historical trajectory of the development of Islam, it is known that there are two patterns of understanding and appreciation of Islam, namely the exclusive style and the inclusive style (Muhammedi, 2017). The exclusive style of understanding is too text-oriented in understanding religious arguments, so it tends to be "black and white" and formalistic in understanding Islamic teachings. In comparison, the inclusive style is more context-oriented (Hanafi, 2017). Therefore, it seems more flexible in

understanding Islamic teachings, both are Muslims and hold fast to Islamic values. However, both of them have differences in non-basic matters (*furu'iyah*). The first emphasizes the *fiqh* aspect (*madzahib oriented*), and the second emphasizes *ushul fiqh* (*maqashid oriented*) (Nugroho & Hadi, 2020).

Islam Nusantara is engaged in practicing Islamic teachings and in the *furu'iyah* area; therefore, Islam Nusantara is not an *anti-Arab* pattern of Islam. It is also not shirked sharia or a new model of Islam that is only committed to the archipelago culture as a rival to recognized Islamic sharia (Prasetawati & Asnawi, 2018). Moreover, it is also not shirked theology or the theology recognized as a counter to Islam.

Islam Nusantara is more familiar with inclusive Islam or an understanding that always tries to present Islam as moderate religious teaching. Islam provides space for local wisdom, even Islam that can become a melting pot for the plurality of values and norms that live in society (Lukito, 2012). Moderate Islam is also friendly to the internal environment and social environment. The presence of Islam does not have to get rid of local values and cultures. Although Islam is full of universal values, the concept of universality is not closed but open. It is one of the bases for religious moderation (Bedong, 2020).

Second, it can be cross-flow. Before Islam came, the majority religion adopted by the archipelago people was Hinduism and local beliefs. The archipelago people were familiar with the religious system and believed in the existence of supernatural powers and a system of worshiping these supernatural powers. Thus, the archipelago has been accustomed to the plurality of religions and beliefs. Although the religious system is different, the community remains united because local cultural values bind it (Adib, 2021). The schools of religion and thought that have developed in this archipelago seem to be tiered and systematic, especially the schools of Islamic thought. The *Ash'ariyah* sect was the first to exist in the archipelago because it continued fatalistic teachings (*jabariyah*), which had many similarities with Hinduism and existing local beliefs (Riyadi, 2014). Later, scholars from the middle-east and the western world participated in enlivening their country's Islamic treasures after returning to the archipelago. They bring a new world of thought that is a little more rational and moderate (Hasbullah, 2017).

Third, it shows an anti-violence attitude. The preachers bring Islam into the archipelago without being accompanied by violence for any purpose, on behalf of and with anyone, even for the sake of Allah. "*There is no compulsion in religion*", (QS al-Baqarah 2: 256). The obligation to convey the truth is indeed obligatory, no matter how bitter the risk, but in conveying it, we are still asked to be full of wisdom: "*Call people to the path of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and argue with them most courteously, for your Lord knows best who strays from His path, and knows best who is rightly guided*", (QS an-nahl/16:125) (Imam Syafi'i, 2021).

Fourth, one of the moderations of Islam in the archipelago is that it is easy to accommodate (*tawaquf*) but remains critical. *Tawaquf* means to stop questioning a problem by taking one of the best options or alternatives among the available options, even though that option has not satisfied all parties (Agis et al., 2018). *Tawaquf* can also be interpreted as an effort to integrate the elements of truth that exist in various options and then set as a quick guide. If the grip has been proven to

bring harmony to various parties, then the grip can become permanent and legitimate (HS, 2021).

Tawaquf can be a solution to a crucial problem that occurs in society. *Tawaquf* in Islam must be accompanied by criteria and applied critically. *Tawaquf*, without being based on a critical attitude, can trap us into an attitude of syncretism, heresy, and superstition (Khoiri, 2019). Syncretism is the amalgamation of some external values with Islamic values that have been held so far. The syncretism emphasized in this research is the term religious syncretism, which incorporates several unitary notions and works as a new system of religious values in a person or a society (Krisdiyanto et al., 2019).

Characteristics of Islam Nusantara

Islamization did not only create a great Islamic civilization, but it also emphasized the characteristics of Islam that could not be separated from local values. The process of Islamization is in direct contact with local customs and culture. Islam is present in the archipelago not only to bring sharia values but also to provide a vast space for local culture to exist (Agis et al., 2018). This dialectic of the two generated the uniqueness of the Islam Nusantara.

The uniqueness of the Islam Nusantara, which was born from the long process of Islamization, becomes an interesting study. The archipelago, which is rich in customs and culture, has a significant influence on the religious style of Muslims in Indonesia. One of the peculiarities of Islam Nusantara is to give space to what is called cultural rights. Cultural rights are an inseparable part of human rights. From birth, humans are picked up and fostered by the culture of their people. Thus, humans and local culture cannot be separated (Cornelis Anthonie van Peursen, 2006). Separating humans from their local culture means alienating humans from something fundamental to them. From this, the *ulama* formulated a very well-known rule: "*al-adah muhakkamah*" (customs are recognized as a source of law). Customs are a core part of the culture. Every society has its own culture. Once the importance of the meaning of culture, almost every nation-state provides rights and protection (Buhori, 2017).

A local culture that is in line with or does not conflict with the substance of Islamic teachings can be a factor in the wealth of Islamic teachings themselves. The Prophet Muhammad was sent not to clean up local culture and then replace it with a new culture. The Messenger of Allah emphatically said: "*Indeed, I was only sent to perfect the akhlaq karimah*" (HR Bukhari). What is meant by *akhlaq karimah* is polite manners under the noble values of humanity and, indeed, in line with the basic teachings of Islam. Everything that does not conflict with Islam then its values can be accepted as complementary values in Islam (Prasetawati & Asnawi, 2018).

The existence of Sunni Islam also contributed significantly to the development of this republic. About 90% of Muslims in Indonesia are Sunni Muslims. The sunni ideology is accommodative to local wisdom and local culture. The Muslims found by Sunnis always display an attitude of tolerance towards local values (Gunawan, 2018).

Islamic values interact positively with the traditions and culture of the local community. Indonesian Sunni Islam has a multicultural perspective, in the sense that its social policy is not to protect local traditions or culture but to recognize the

manifestations of local traditions and cultures that have *cultural rights* in Indonesia. With its moderation movement, Islam Nusantara has brought together the fundamental values of Islam that are universal and accumulated local Indonesian values.

Islam Moderation in Indonesia

The attitude of religious moderation in Indonesia is strongly affected by historical awareness, namely that there are similarities as citizens of the nation who have lived in the colonialism of foreign countries for centuries. This sense of sharing the same fate is inherent in the subconscious of all citizens of the nation. Even though they have different religions and ethnicities, they both feel the hardships of living under foreign occupation. The community fought together and worked hand-in-hand to fight for independence. They both sacrificed to achieve independence and won it in the end (Huda, 2007).

After Indonesia's independence was declared, everything became easy to resolve. Including formulating the basic principles of the state. Even though most Muslims inhabit Indonesia, they do not want to live selfishly because they know that Indonesian independence was achieved jointly by all Indonesian people. All ethnic and religious groups felt the impact of colonialism while simultaneously fighting for the independence they had achieved (Husain, 2017).

Islam Moderation in Indonesia occurred from the beginning, even long before Indonesia's independence. Likewise, the attitude of tolerance and tolerance, among others, has happened long before Indonesia's independence. At the time of the local kingdoms, the archipelago people were familiar with and even moderated.

Then, the thing that stands out the most in the moderation of religion in Indonesia is the factor of comprehensive religious education consumed by Indonesian Muslims, which has a significant influence. The earliest religious education fills the minds and subconscious of children. Islam and people of other religions also indoctrinate religious education from an early age. It is assumed that it is too late if religious education begins when the child is an adult (Ade Imelda Frimayanti, 2017). Religious education is undoubtedly based on the religion adopted by parents who have accompanied the child. After going to school age, educators, namely teachers, are involved. Religious education and teaching are based on parents' and teachers' religious knowledge and experience who educate children early (Shaifudin, 2020).

The Islamization of civilization in the archipelago has brought Indonesia a nation with a moderate Islamic character. It can be understood that Islamic moderation continues sustainably between generations (Qomar, 2016). Moderate Islam or Islamic moderation is often interpreted as an understanding of Islam that is open to accepting and acknowledging truth values that come from outside itself without questioning where the data comes from. Indeed, these values do not conflict as long as they do not conflict with the substance of the teachings that come from the Qur'an and hadith. Moderate Islam is often associated with several other terms: inclusive Islam, Islam Nusantara, Islam *Wasathiyah*, and *mainstream* Islam (Bagir,

2017). Moderate Islam is often confronted with exclusive Islam or hard-line Islam, which is critical and strict in accepting the truth from outside.

Moderate Islam is often considered closer to the understanding of inclusive Islam because it emphasizes the *principle of identity* with other groups (Abidin, 2014). Moreover, a group categorizes it as a liberal group. On the other hand, hard-line Islam is often considered closer to a complete understanding of Islam because it emphasizes the principle of negation with other religious groups. These two groups each claim to be accurate by basing their views on the Qur'an and hadith (Lukito, 2012).

Moderate Islamic groups or inclusive Islam often refer to: "*Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve*", (QS. Al-Baqarah/2:62). Likewise, with another verse: "*Indeed, the believers, Jews, Sabians, and Christians—whomever truly believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve.*" (Q.S. Al-Maidah/5: 69) (Kamil, 2022).

On the other hand, hard-line Islam or exclusive Islam always identifies a more closed and defensive understanding of Islam. Exclusive followers of Islam tend to reject or be very critical of truth that comes from outside, especially if some of the elements in it contain doubts or are syncretic (Lukito, 2012). Exclusive Islamic groups emphasize differences (*principle of negation*) rather than the meeting point (*principle of negation*) with other sources of truth from outside themselves. This group is more concerned with maintaining the purity of the teachings rather than accepting teachings from outside them. Due to his firm attitude, some call him a *hard-liner* group.

There were differences of opinion about the history of the birth and development of exclusive Islamic groups. Some said that part of the swelling quality of the people who reached a more profound religious understanding, then concluded that there were brilliant ideal ideas in it. At the same time, they read that there was saturation and injustice everywhere, going on a long time later by using established values. Finally, they struggled to reform those values in their way. In response to this development, all parties, including the government, need to keep a cool head and sit down together. As a nation based on Pancasila, namely a civilized and religious nation, everything can be resolved civilized (Majid, 2019).

Moderation of Indonesian Islam is open to religious values that came before and the values of customs relevant and in line with Islamic teachings to be taken as accessories (*tahsiniyat*) of Islamic teachings (M. Hasan, 2021). It is the beauty of Indonesian religious moderation.

However, it should be noted that Islamic moderation within the framework of Islam Nusantara is not an empty basket that all kinds of religious beliefs can fill. It is also not a forum to legitimize a teaching concept that deviates from Islam's basic teachings and is no less important, nor is it a place to accommodate a short-term interest by attaching oneself to the Islam Nusantara (Buhori, 2017).

However, several moral teachings in the archipelago cannot necessarily be considered Islam Nusantara. The criteria for teaching that can be claimed as Islam Nusantara are the values of the teachings under the basic teachings of Islam as

monotheistic teachings (Baso, 2018). Suppose some teachings openly invite polytheism, namely acknowledging the existence of great powers and powers other than Allah. In that case, it cannot be called Islam Nusantara, including the practice of animism, an understanding, and belief that considers everything has a spirit that humans must respect. The spirits of all things can be good and can be bad. To maintain the goodness of the spirit, humans must respect and adore them (R. Hasan, 2012). If the spirits are angry, they can negatively affect humans, such as the disease's arrival, calamity, failure, and disappointment. According to those who believe in it, the way to overcome these problems is to worship the spirits that are thought to be the cause of life's difficulties.

Animism was an old belief when humans were still utterly submissive to the universe. They think that this universe has tremendous power that can destroy humans (R. Hasan, 2012). Humans must worship all creatures judged to have more extraordinary supernatural powers. Apart from animism, there are still doctrinal values that need to be observed, namely the practice of heresy, superstition, and other shirk practices (Tomo Parangrangi, 2014). *Bid'ah* is a ritual custom carried out by someone who was never done or ordered by the prophet. Meanwhile, *khurafat* is a belief practice that tends to be syncretic because it combines religious teachings and animistic practices, as is often done in several places in Indonesia. The brand uses Islamic rituals but is carried out in front of large stones, large trees, old graves, foothills, and other traditional ritual ceremonies that tend or openly acknowledge the existence of an almighty other than Allah SWT. Moreover, the most dangerous practice is shirk, which is an act that is considered to associate God with something else, and the sin is unforgivable (Tomo Parangrangi, 2014). *Shirk*, *bid'ah*, and syncretism can become teachings that pollute the understanding of Islamic moderation in Islam Nusantara if you are not aware of them.

Conclusion

Islam as an open religion has a dialectical pattern with its working environment. Besides, it also has limits of tolerance and the power of adaptation that allows itself to be accepted by everyone and local culture. The archipelago, which is rich in customs and culture, has significant effects on the religious style of Muslims in Indonesia. Islam Nusantara, which is more familiar with the term inclusive Islam, is an understanding that always tries to present Islam as moderate religious teaching. Moderate Islam or Islamic moderation is often interpreted as an understanding of Islam that is open to accepting and acknowledging truth values that come from outside itself without questioning where the data comes from. Indeed, these values do not conflict as long as they do not conflict with the substance of the teachings from the Al-Quran and Hadith. Islam provides space for local wisdom, even Islam that can become a *melting pot* for the plurality of values and norms that live in society. With its moderation movement, Islam Nusantara has brought together the fundamental values of Islam that are universal and accumulated local Indonesian values.

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