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Fakultas Agama Islam  
Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari Tebuireng Jombang

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## **Religious Moderatism versus Conservatism in Indonesia: Controversy of 'Islam Nusantara' during Joko Widodo's Administration**

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### **Abstract**

The current trend of social and political fracture among Indonesian people has permeated many aspects of life, including religious domain. While moderate Muslims are still majority, the voice of conservative and also element of radical Muslim groups has shown a great militancy in campaigning for their agenda. Rivalry among those groups in the public discourse is unavoidable. This study examines the contested idea of 'Islam Nusantara' in the effort to campaign for moderate and friendly Islam in the early of Joko Widodo's administration. Since conservative and radical factions have rejected the idea of Pancasila state, accusing of other Muslims of being kafir (apostasy) and the spirit to eliminate local cultures, their counterparts use different agenda and approach. The moderate Muslims use the concept of Islam Nusantara to campaign for the concept of Islam and nationalism, respect for diversity and cultural approaches. This study reveals the different point of view of Muslim groups regarding the concept and practice of Islam Nusantara which has become a controversy since the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) used it as the main theme in the 33rd congress. Although 'Islam Nusantara' is not a new term in the discourse of Indonesian Islam, the contestation and consensus have produced a new fragmentation of religious opinions among Indonesian Muslims. This research aims to explore the sociology of knowledge among Indonesian Muslims whose inclination has been divided into two big streams of moderate and conservative wing.

**Keywords:** Islam Nusantara, moderate Islam, conservative Muslim, contested discourse.



## Introduction

Since the New Order regime, the characteristic of Indonesian Muslims has been known moderate. The involvement of Muslim actors in social and political life shows their inclusive way of thinking in the implementation of religious teachings in accordance with social and political realities. Religious tolerance can be found in many parts of Indonesia in a peaceful coexistence. Mosque and church can be built in a close distance. The Istiqlal mosque and Cathedral church in Central Jakarta is the national icon of religious tolerance. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah representing the dominant Muslim organization in Indonesia live together and respect each other. They were (and still are) the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> In terms of political movement, both NU and Muhammadiyah share their common platform to maintain the Pancasila state where pluralism and multiculturalism are guaranteed by national constitution. Commitment of the NU to the Indonesia nation state (NKRI) has been declared in the 1984 NU Congress in Situbondo, while Muhammadiyah has strengthened its commitment to Pancasila in the 2015 Congress in Makasar.

The growing trend of radicalism, at certain level, has decreased a moderate facade of Indonesian Islam. After the collapse of Suharto regime, some militant Islamist groups have emerged with a notorious reputation. They are Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Jihad Paramilitary Force (LJ, Laskar Jihad), Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) and Jama'ah Islamiyah (JI), which fight for the implementation of shari'a, raiding cafes, discotheques, casinos brothels and other reputed dens of iniquity.<sup>2</sup> Islamic radical movement has also precluded aspiration of religious minorities to obtain their rights of religious freedom.<sup>3</sup> Ahmadiyah mosque and Christian churches are becoming contested

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<sup>1</sup> Azyumardi Azra, "Religious-Based Civil Society and Anti-Corruption Campaign: The Indonesian Experience in the Creation of Good Governance," in *Civil Society, Religion and Global Governance: Paradigms of Power and Persuasion*, ed. Helen James (London: Routledge, 2007), 290.

<sup>2</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, "Reformasi, Religious Diversity, and Islamic Radicalism after Suharto," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 1 (2009): 37.

<sup>3</sup> Hamdani, "Radical Muslim Groups and Confrontation to Church (Unresolved Conflict of Taman Yasmin Indonesian Christian Church [GKI] Bogor, West Java)," in *International Symposium on The Strategic Role of Religious Education in the Development of Culture of Peace* (Bogor: Ministry of Religious Affairs of The Republic of Indonesia, 2012), 324.

arena of tension and violence.<sup>4</sup> Based on the data of KWI (Konferensi Wali Gereja Indonesia/Bishops' Conference of Indonesian) and PGI (Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Indonesia/Council of Churches in Indonesia), there have been 108 churches closed, attacked and destroyed since 2004-2007.<sup>5</sup> This new development certainly distorted a friendly image of Indonesian Islam.

The support and involvement of Indonesian Muslims in the Islamic state movement represented by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) has challenged the moderate nature of Indonesian Islam. This Islamist group does not only declare an imagined-Islamic state, but also apply unusual policies to the followers and supporters. Many reports show that ISIS agents conducted brutal punishment to many people.<sup>6</sup> In many aspects, this Islamic state movement does not represent the Islamic teachings. However, national media reports that some Indonesian Muslims have joined the violence-based group, such as Wildan Mukholad, Abu Muhammad and Salim Mubarak Attamimi. A short video which campaigns for joining ISIS in youtube attracted people attention.<sup>7</sup> Chep Hermawan claimed that he is the representative of ISIS in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> Abu Bakar Bashir supported ISIS from the prison.<sup>9</sup> It was also reported that sixteen Indonesia radical groups join the ISIS.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of moderatism itself is basically understood differently by scholars, albeit it mostly leads to a positive inclination of interpretation of Islamic doctrine. Mohamad Hashim Kamali argues that moderation in Islam is a moral virtue to develop social harmony and equilibrium not only in personal affairs, but

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<sup>4</sup> Melissa Crouch, "Regulating Places of Worship in Indonesia: Upholding Freedom of Religion for Religious Minorities," *Sing. J. Legal Stud.*, 2007, 116.

<sup>5</sup> Hamdani, "Radical Muslim Groups and Confrontation to Church (Unresolved Conflict of Taman Yasmin Indonesian Christian Church [GKI] Bogor, West Java)," 325.

<sup>6</sup> Nimer Sultany, "Three Theses on ISIS: The Universal, the Millenarian, and the Philistine," August 4, 2015, <http://thedisorderofthings.com/2015/07/31/three-theses-on-isis-the-universal-the-millenarian-and-the-philistine/>.

<sup>7</sup> Nur Alfiyah, "Video WNI Ajak Ikut ISIS, Ini Tindakan Polri," *Tempo.co*, July 31, 2014, <http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2014/07/31/078596527/Video-WNI-Ajak-Ikut-ISIS-Ini-Tindakan-Polri>.

<sup>8</sup> Study Group Writer, "Efforts to Establish an Official Islamic State Affiliate in SE Asia: Myths and Reality," August 19, 2015, <http://isisstudygroup.com/?p=8320>.

<sup>9</sup> Tika Primandari, "Beredar Foto Ba'asyir Dibaiaat Dukung ISIS," *Tempo.co*, August 2, 2014, [http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2014/08/02/078596788/Beredar-Foto-Baasyir-Dibaiaat-Dukung-ISIS?utm\\_source=twitterfeed&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2014/08/02/078596788/Beredar-Foto-Baasyir-Dibaiaat-Dukung-ISIS?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter).

<sup>10</sup> Faiq Hidayat, "Ini 16 Kelompok Radikal Indonesia Yang Dibai'at Pemimpin ISIS," *Merdeka.com*, March 23, 2015, <http://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/ini-16-kelompok-radikal-indonesia-yang-dibaiaat-pemimpin-isis.html>.

also within the family, society and wider spectrum of human relations.<sup>11</sup> That's why, Tariq Ramadhan believes that "centrality of Islamic message relies upon the correct interpretation and practice of moderation".<sup>12</sup> Among Indonesian Muslim, the label of moderate Islam seemingly refers to their inclination to maintain social harmony and equilibrium in society. Among Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)'s community, it is presumably a continuation of the long-held religious position of the NU in religio-cultural aspect of life, i.e. emphasizing the attribute of the NU as traditionalist Islam.<sup>13</sup> In Indonesian Muslim context, Islamic moderatism is generally used to indicate a particular religious thought or practice that adopts neither two poles of Islamic thought: the typically-Western liberal thought and radical Islamism thought.<sup>14</sup> In the post 9/11, moderate Islam has been understood as the opposite of fundamentalist, radical, puritan, extremest and terrorist Islam.<sup>15</sup>

Element of moderate Muslim groups have tried to respond the situation by rebranding the old religious ethos in a seminal concept which is called Islam Nusantara (IN). For many people, this concept is seemingly new. But for researchers of Indonesian Islam, this terminology has been frequently mentioned referring to the practiced Islam in Malay world which has distinctive character because of a long dialectic with indigenous cultures. Among the advocate, Islam Nusantara is intended to offer a religiosity which prioritizes wisdom and virtue rather than symbolic and formal aspects.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the growing trend among radicals, Islam Nusantara learns from historical facts concerning the spread of Islam in archipelago which used cultural approach, not by means of harsh and strict doctrine.<sup>17</sup> Islam Nusantara which promotes peaceful, moderate, just and

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<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Quranic Principle of Wasatiyya* (New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Al-Tawassuṭ Wa-l i 'tidāl: The NU and Moderatism in Indonesian Islam," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 40, no. 5-6 (2012): 578.

<sup>14</sup> Masdar Hilmy, "Whither Indonesia's Islamic Moderatism? A Reexamination on the Moderate Vision of Muhammadiyah and NU," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013): 24-48.

<sup>15</sup> Burhani, "Al-Tawassuṭ Wa-l i 'tidāl," 578.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Zastrouw Ngatawi, "Menembus Sekat Melintas Batas: Strategi Mengarusutamakan Konsep Dan Gerakan Islam Nusantara" (Seminar of Islam Nusantara, Jombang: STAINU Jakarta, 2015), 50.

<sup>17</sup> Heyder Affan, "Polemik Di Balik Istilah 'Islam Nusantara,'" BBC.com, June 15, 2015, [http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita\\_indonesia/2015/06/150614\\_indonesia\\_islam\\_nusantara](http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150614_indonesia_islam_nusantara).

tolerant teachings are required for Indonesian Muslims since the nusantara values have been undermined by new and problematic doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

However, the campaign for Islam Nusantara is resisted by certain Muslim factions. This idea has been criticized, questioned and challenged by other Muslims who felt that the idea will degrade the universality of Islam. The Islam Nusantara has been assumed by its opponent as a misleading concept of Islam which has link with liberal ideas and anti-Arab movement. This accusation, according to the defender, has been addressed to agents of Islam Nusantara who counter the conservative and radical ideas of Islam. Those people assume themselves as a target of the criticism. According to Rumadi Ahmad, they come from Muslim factions that against the concept of Pancasila nation-state, try to purify Islamic teachings by keeping a distance with any innovations, and those who force strict ideas by conducting destructive actions and intimidate heretic groups.<sup>19</sup> Another scholar found that opposition to the discourse of Islam Nusantara stems from vested interest groups who gain benefit from the conflict of Muslim communities and from intellectual mastermind whose legitimacy will be threatened by the progressive ideas.<sup>20</sup>

The opposition of certain Muslim groups to campaign for friendly and moderate Islam which is promulgated by Islam Nusantara has arisen a question, to what extent does the criticism of IN opponents against the IN ideas? How do the agents of IN response the criticism? The identification of supporting and opposing ideas on the concept of Islam Nusantara is important to measure the weakness and strength of respective group. I argue that the dispute between moderate and conservative groups is a continuation of rivalry which has lasted since the formative period of Indonesian nation state. Islam Nusantara has been a contested arena to criticize and counter one another in a changing constellation of contested religious authority. Whether the debate on the concept Islam Nusantara will create mutual understanding among Muslims or not, it will be determined by the quality of argument and intensity of dialogue.

### **What is Islam Nusantara Anyway?**

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<sup>18</sup> Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, "Islam Dan Akulturasi Budaya," *Koran Tempo*, May 26, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Rumadi, "Islam Nusantara: Mengapa Diributkan," *SatuHarapan.com*, July 13, 2015, <http://www.satuHarapan.com/read-detail/read/islam-nusantara-mengapa-diributkan>.

<sup>20</sup> Ngatawi, "Menembus Sekat Melintas Batas: Strategi Mengarusutamakan Konsep Dan Gerakan Islam Nusantara," 52.

Although Islam Nusantara is not a new terminology among researchers of Indonesian Islam, it is important to present its complexity to understand the scope and relevance of the concept with the promotion of moderate Islam. From various literatures, the definition of Islam Nusantara is seemingly not monolithic. It comprises territorial aspect, systemic practice of religiosity and scientific paradigm. According to Isom Yusqi, Islam Nusantara is the practice of Islam in the territory of archipelago. It can also mean the Islamic teachings which have been understood, practiced and internalized in daily life of Muslim in nusantara. In terms of its output, Islam Nusantara is the great and noble Islamic teaching which is expected to have benefit to all creatures in nusantara. It leads to the manifestation of peace, tolerant and polite Islamic teachings.<sup>21</sup> At this level, the definition resembles with the concept delivered by Said Aqil Siradj. He argues that Islam Nusantara is an Islamic way of thinking that engages cultural approach rather than rigid and severe approaches. It is friendly and polite Islam, and integrated into local culture.<sup>22</sup>

Although the concept is not exclusively affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community, Islam Nusantara has been formulated by nahdliyyin scholars through an authoritative forum which is called Bahsul Masa'il (forum discussing religious and social problems). Based on this institution, Islam Nusantara is perceived as Islam based on Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Sunni Islamic sect of Islam) which is practiced, propagated and developed by its propagators in accordance with characteristic of people and its culture in the nusantara's territory. It aims to anticipate and to guard Muslim from radicalism, liberalism and shi'ism, Wahabism and other ideology which contradict to Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah doctrine. Islam Nusantara also means a method of Islamic preaching with polite and peaceful approaches in Nusantara whose society has a diverse ethnic, culture and religion.<sup>23</sup>

As the systemic practice of religiosity, Islam Nusantara has been defined comprehensively by Azyumardi Azra. He found that Islam Nusantara is a distinctive Islam resulting from vivid, intense and vibrant interaction, contextualization, indigenization and vernacularization of universal Islam with

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<sup>21</sup> M. Isom Yusqi, *Mengenal Konsep Islam Nusantara* (Pustaka STAINU, 2015), 5.

<sup>22</sup> Said Aqil Siraj, "Urgensi Kajian Islam Nusantara," in *Dalam Islam Nusantara: Meluruskan Kesalahpahaman*, ed. Oghie Haryanto and Fathu Yasik (Jakarta: LP Ma'arif NU, 2015), 37.

<sup>23</sup> Tim PW LBM NU Jawa Timur, *Islam Nusantara: Manhaj Dakwah Islam Aswaja Di Nusantara* (Surabaya: PW LTNU dan LBMNU Jawa Timur, n.d.), 5-6.

Indonesian social, cultural and religious realities—this is Islam embedded. Nusantara Islamic orthodoxy (Ash'arite theology, Shafi'i school of law, and Ghazalian Sufism) nurtures the wasatiyyah character which means a justly balanced and tolerant Islam.<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, definition of Islam Nusantara which concerns on scientific paradigm can be found in these concepts. According to Mustofa Bisri, Islam Nusantara is manifestation of authentic Islam which has scientific and spiritual transmission directly to Prophet Muhammad.<sup>25</sup> By emphasizing on the Islamic law philosophy, Afifuddin Muhajir argues that Islam Nusantara is Islam living in nusantara as the result of dialectic between sacred texts with realities and local cultures.<sup>26</sup> With similar framework, Baso defines Islam Nusantara as a method of selecting school of thought (madzhab) either qauli (individual) and manhaji (institutional) in determining Islamic law from various references which is considered based on the territory, natural condition and the way of implementation of local people.<sup>27</sup>

Above all definition, there is an important concept which will bring our comprehensive understanding to the Islam Nusantara. It is defined as Indonesian Islam comprising the period of early coming of Islam to archipelago where universality of Islamic teachings have been dialogued with cultures and civilization. The living entity of religiosity has created an expression and manifestation of Islam Nusantara. Dialectic between Islamic normativity and historicity of Indonesianess is the methodology and strategy of propagation of Muslim scholars, Nine Saints and other Muslim propagators to provide understanding and apply universality of Islamic teachings (syumuliyah) based on the principle of Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah, in a model that has been interacted with good traditions in nusantara. Or the model that responds bad traditions ('urfun fasid) in the effort to gradually change into a better situation. In order to operate in line with the shari'a principles, the option comprises three models as follows: amputation, assimilation and minimalization. Adaptation of Islamic

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<sup>24</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara, Jaringan Global Dan Lokal* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002), 31.

<sup>25</sup> Mustofa Bisri, "Islam Nusantara: Manifestasi Islam Otentik," in *Islam Nusantara: Meluruskan Kesalahpahaman*, ed. Oghie Haryanto and Fathu Yasik (Jakarta: Lembaga Ma'arif NU, 2015), 24.

<sup>26</sup> Afifuddin Muhadjir, "Islam Nusantara Untuk Peradaban Indonesia Dan Dunia," in *Islam Nusantara: Dari Ushul Fiqh Hingga Paham Kebangsaan*. Bandung: PT Mizan Media Pustaka, ed. Ahmad Sahal and Munawir Aziz (Bandung: Mizan, 2016), 67.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara: Ijtihad Jenius & Ijma' Ulama Indonesia* (Tangerang: Pustaka Afid, 2015), 18.

teachings with local cultures can be tolerated only in the domain of dynamic doctrine (ijtihadi), but it can not be happened to static doctrine (qath'i).<sup>28</sup>

Given the thinking paradigm which proportionally manage the fixed and changeable domain, the center and periphery and the principle and ramification, the product of religious practice and political attitude of Islam Nusantara tends to be moderate and adaptive. One of important decisions of actors of Islam Nusantara dealing with political attitude whether promoting the idea of Islamic state or multicultural state can be found in their acceptance of Pancasila as the political ideology in the formative period of Indonesian nation state.<sup>29</sup> This political attitude is still maintained by agents of Islam Nusantara against Muslim groups who campaign for the establishment of Islamic state and formalization of Islamic shari'a. This moderate way of thinking has also encouraged actors of Islam Nusantara to reproduce fresh ideas in the implementation of Islamic values in daily life. The idea of Gus Dur's 'Pribumisasi Islam' (indigenization of Islam) is one important effort of contextualization of Islamic teachings in the process of culture of contemporary Indonesian Islam.<sup>30</sup> By this approach, most agent of Islam Nusantara easily accept and negotiate the new elements of social and political life such as democracy, human rights, gender equality, pluralism and multiculturalism.

Although Islam Nusantara is not a new concept among scholars, it has been a controversial issue since the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) promoted it in the 33rd congress, as if it is a "new religion". The main theme of NU congress was "Meneguhkan Islam Nusantara untuk Membangun Peradaban Indonesia dan Dunia" (Strengthening Nusantara Islam to develop Indonesia and world civilization). The controversy has emerged on TV, printed and online media, and social media in the last few months. Unlike the discourse of 'Islam Berkemajuan' (Advancement of Islam) which is promoted by Muhammadiyah, the promotion of Islam Nusantara has been criticized by various segments of Muslims. In fact, Islam Nusantara is promoted to respond to the local and global challenges of Muslim practices, which have been frequently perceived to be strongly biased toward radical and intolerant movements. The current image of Indonesian Islam has been marked by unfriendly and intolerant acts in responding to social and

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<sup>28</sup> Isom Yusqi, "Mabadi 'Asyrah Islam Nusantara," in *Proceeding Paper of National Seminar on Islam Nusantara* (Islam Nusantara, Jombang: STAINU Jakarta, 2015), 9.

<sup>29</sup> Muhadjir, "Islam Nusantara Untuk Peradaban Indonesia Dan Dunia," 67.

<sup>30</sup> Syaiful Arif, *Humanisme Gus Dur: Pergumulan Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* (Ar-Ruzz Media, 2013), 112.

political realities.<sup>31</sup> The controversy of Islam Nusantara was also triggered by the recitation of the Qur'an with Javanese rhythm during the celebration of Isro Mi'roj (ascension of Prophet Muhammad) at the President palace in May 15, 2015.<sup>32</sup>

### **Contested Discourse of Islam Nusantara**

Since the idea of Islam Nusantara has been campaigned by moderate Muslim groups, those who oppose the idea criticized several aspects of Islam Nusantara with a debate and sometimes making black campaigns. The warm debate occurred through various media, not only on TV stations, but also online, printed and social media. Debate on media, for example, involved some academicians who support and against the idea of Islam Nusantara. One of topics in the debate was the terminology of Islam Nusantara which was questioned by some critics as a misleading concept. According to Faisal Ismail, terminology of Islam Nusantara is problematic. He argues that Islam is a universal religion which crosses the border of ethnicity, locality and nationality. By creating locality-based Islam, he is afraid that there will be more local Islam such as Central Java Islam, West Java Islam, Sunda Islam, Minangkabau Islam, Kalimantan Islam, Sumatera Islam and many others. Instead of naming Islam Nusantara, he prefers the straight path Islam (*shiratal mustaqim*) or Islam of 'rahmatan lil 'alamin' (blessing for all creatures).<sup>33</sup>

Another objection with the term of Islam Nusantara comes from Ahmad Sastra. He does not only criticize the use of terminology, but also offer another terminology which actually resembles. In order to avoid "intellectual perplexity", mixture of thinking and culture and to find each legal resources, he believes that, Islam Nusantara should be named separately: Islam and Nusantara. For him, the Islam Nusantara leads to distortion and shallowing process of Islam. Moreover, he argues that the term of Islam Nusantara is not mentioned in the Qur'an and hadith. Since the concept of Islam Nusantara tends to subordinating Islam, according to Sastra, this effort reduces the meaning of Islam as a guideline for

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<sup>31</sup> Deny Hamdani, "'Raison d'Etire' of Islam Nusantara," Jakarta Post, August 6, 2015, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/08/06/raison-d-etire-islam-nusantara.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Tempo.co, "Quran Langgam Jawa, Menteri Agama: Untuk Pelihara Tradisi," Tempo.co, May 18, 2015, <http://nasional.tempo.co/read/news/2015/05/18/078666985/quran-langgam-jawa-menteri-agama-untuk-pelihara-tradisi>.

<sup>33</sup> Faisal Ismail, "Menyoal Islam Nusantara," Koran Sindo, July 1, 2015, <http://nasional.sindonews.com/read/1018749/18/menyoal-islam-nusantara-1435717482>.



human being. Because subordinating Islam will lead to the rejection of Islamic symbols that are not compatible with nusantara cultures.<sup>34</sup>

Criticism to the concept of Islam Nusantara has been also delivered by Muhammad Hanif Al-Hakim. His critique basically uses linguistic approach, but the discussion covers several aspects of Islamic studies. He questions whether the phrase of Islam Nusantara is intended to be a genitive or adjective construction? For him, if it is formed as the genitive structure, it means origin, material, part, place and belonging. While if it is formed as adjective structure, it explains character, quality, quantity and some others. The first structure implies that Islam comes from nusantara, made of nusantara, part of/for or belongs to nusantara. Whereas, Islam does not stem from nusantara, not made of nusantara and not part of nusantara as well. Because nusantara is the word referring to Indonesia archipelago, including Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Philippines. Meanwhile, Islam is not the name of islands. Consequently, it can not be claimed that Islam is part of nusantara and belongs to nusantara. Islam is a religion of Allah and He is the one who descend and maintain it.<sup>35</sup>

Those criticisms have been responded by defenders of Islam Nusantara. One of important explanations delivered by Sulton Fathoni. The phrase of Islam Nusantara, according to Fathoni, comprises two words which have meaning respectively. The compound word has strong relations one another in relations with the 'head-modifier' (DM, diterangkan-menerangkan), without raising a new meaning. In Indonesia grammar, this compound word is called 'aneksi'. Therefore, Islam Nusantara means Islam in nusantara (Malay archipelago). In terms of Arabic grammar, the Islam Nusantara can be understood as 'idlofah' structure (compound word) rather than 'shifat-mausuf' (adjective-noun) relations. Between two words, it contains preposition such as 'min' (from) or 'fi' (in). For example: 'qiyamul lail', meaning the prayer at night. That's why, Islam Nusantara does not mean Islam as adjective of nusantara, but it means Islam living in

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<sup>34</sup> Ahmad Sastra, "Islam Dan Nusantara," *Republika*, June 24, 2015, <http://www.republika.co.id/berita/koran/opini-koran/15/06/24/nqfss911-islam-dan-nusantara>.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad Hanif al-Hakim, "Menguak Logika Islam Nusantara," *Hidayatullah.com*, July 2, 2015, <http://www.hidayatullah.com/artikel/ghazwul-fikr/read/2015/07/02/73453/menguak-logika-islam-nusantara.html>.

nusantara. In other words, the word of nusantara is not adjective, but idlofah (compound word).<sup>36</sup>

Due to the proposal of replacing Islam Nusantara with the concept of straight-path Islam or shiratal mustaqim or rahmatan lil 'alamin, Fatonu argues that the analogy of the straight-path Islam with the concept of shiratal mustaqim which is mentioned in the 6th of Surah Al-Fatihah, is inappropriate. The meaning of shirath (way) in the Surah is Islamic religion, while the mustaqim (straight) means establishment without any distortion. If it is combined in a compound word of Islam of shiratal mustaqim, it can distort the meaning stemmed from the error in combining words. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad argues that Islam is a testimony to God, Muhammad and commitment to observe prayer, paying almsgiving, fasting and conducting pilgrimage to Mecca. It is similar in the combining Islam with the concept of rahmatan lil 'alamin (mercy for the 'alam: mankind, jin and all that exists) as mentioned in the 107th of Surah Al-Anbiya. The words refer to Prophet Muhammad as the subject, while all human being become the object. In this respect, the concept of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin also raises fallacy because of the error in combining words.<sup>37</sup>

The assumption that Islam Nusantara subordinated the universality of Islam has been warded off by Isom Yusqi. He argues that Islam Nusantara is a term used to meet Islamic teachings with culture and local wisdom which is principally not contravene Islamic doctrine. It is a perspective confirming about the existence of Islam in nusantara with distinct characteristic. Muslims who lost their identity and prefer performing Western or Arabic style, they have reduced their traditions and culture, whereas it is more relevant with Islamic teaching. This kind of people can not be referred as Nusantara Muslim. According to Yusqi, Islam Nusantara is not intended to reduce Islamic teachings such as obligatory to take up the veil (*jilbab*), delivering salam (assalamu'alaikum) and other Arabic-based habits. Instead, Islam Nusantara is very accommodative and inclusive to any good habits as long as it does not contravene Islamic teachings. The domain of Islam Nusantara is integration between Islamic universal values and local tradition

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<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Sulton Fatonu, "Islam Nusantara Perspektif Tradisi Pemikiran NU," Detiknews.com, July 29, 2015, <http://news.detik.com/kolom/2977748/islam-nusantara-perspektif-tradisi-pemikiran-nu>.

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Sulton Fatonu, "Menjawab Islam Nusantara," Koran Sindo, July 6, 2015, <http://nasional.sindonews.com/read/1020536/18/menjawab-islam-nusantara-1436153324>.

and cultures.<sup>38</sup> It is also strengthened by the explanation from Afifuddin Muhajir. He argues that Islam Nusantara is understanding and application of Islamic doctrine as a result of dialectic between religious texts and realities and local cultures. There is no sentiment to any nation and ethnic, let alone Arabic where Islam was born and the language becomes the language of the Qur'an.<sup>39</sup>

Beside criticism, there are strong resistance from certain Muslim groups which regard Islam Nusantara as a misleading concept and practice of Islam. The leader of Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Front for Defence of Islam), Rizieq Shihab, for example, expressed his rejection to Islam Nusantara by making statement in media and a kultwit (long statement of twit). In principle, Shihab argues that Islam Nusantara is a misleading teaching and it is not part of Islamic community. That's why, it should be rejected, opposed and corrected. However, it is interesting that the way of Shihab's campaign against Islam Nusantara tends to be pejorative statements and did not show a form of correction. Under the title of "@DPP\_FPI: Jemaat Islam Nusantara (JIN) Paham Sesat & Menyesatkan Bukan Ajaran Islam. Tolak, Lawan dan Luruskan!", Shihab condemned the presumably doctrine of Islam Nusantara.<sup>40</sup>

From 76 kultwit, there are eight overlapping issues highlighted. It is unclear how the eight issues are connected with the concept of Islam Nusantara. But it seems that the ideas assumed a strong relation between the current movement of Islam Nusantara with the liberal Muslim groups which they called the advocate of SEPILIS (Sekularism, Pluralism and Liberalism). In the kultwit, Shihab assumed that Islam Nusantara regards Islam as not an indigenous religion. He believes that Islam comes from heaven, not from Arab. Shihab also presumed that Islam Nusantara tried to subjugate Islamic teachings under indigenous cultures. He regards it as a misleading idea and not based on scientific analysis. Shihab thought that advocates of Islam Nusantara reject the Arabization of Islam, while he believes that there is no Arabization of Islam. This trend, according to Shihab, fosters racism, fascism, anti-Arab and Anti-Islam. He also accused that

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<sup>38</sup> Isom Yusqi, "Islam, NU, Dan Nusantara," NU Online, June 25, 2015, <http://www.nu.or.id/a,public-m,dinamic-s,detail-ids,4-id,60392-lang,id-c,kolom-t,Islam++NU+dan+Nusantara-phpx>.

<sup>39</sup> Afifuddin Muhajir, "Maksud Islam Nusantara," NU Online, June 27, 2015, <http://nu.or.id/a,public-m,dinamic-s,detail-ids,4-id,60458-lang,id-c,kolom-t,Maksud+Istilah+Islam+Nusantara-phpx>.

<sup>40</sup> DPP FPI, "Jemaat Islam Nusantara (JIN) Paham Sesat & Menyesatkan Bukan Ajaran Islam | Tolak, Lawan, Dan Luruskan!," n.d., <http://chirpstory.com/li/272922>.

Islam Nusantara adopts the idea to reject the obligation of wearing the veil (jilbab) for Muslim women. Based on this assumption, he accused the propagators of Islam Nusantara as ignoring historical background of veiling. During the Jahiliyah period, Shihab twits that the women did not wear the veil, but allowing their parts of body visible. Islam came to oblige women to cover their head as religious obligation, he remarked. Dealing with the recitation of the Qur'an with Javanese accent, Shihab also concludes that agents of Islam Nusantara reject the Arabic style of recitation. He believes that reading Qur'an with non-Arabic accent will distort the meaning of sacred book. In conclusion, Shihab states that Islam Nusantara is a heretic stream and not part of Islam. The idea should be rejected, opposed and corrected.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Challenge of Islam Nusantara**

Among conservative and conservative groups, progressive ideas in Islam Nusantara are often suspected as having relations with liberal ideas and promote anti-Arab movement. Although most arguments were not supported with convincing data, many statements or short articles in media are available in the internet. For them, the IN movement has been assumed as part of project to liberalize Islamic teachings in Indonesia.<sup>42</sup> Among other opponent, the IN is only a game of liberals who have plan to eradicate the true Islamic shari'a by keeping a distance from anything related to Arab.<sup>43</sup> The IN is also imagined by its competitors as the reincarnation of "Liberal Islam", "Moderate Islam" or "Indonesian Islam" another label affiliated with Islam. Because the previous advocate has failed to promote it.<sup>44</sup> In a more sophisticated term, the IN has been presumed as a neo-liberalization

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Abdullah al-Mustofa, "JIN, Islam Nusantara Dan Neo Liberalisasi," Hidayatullah.com, June 8, 2015, <http://www.hidayatullah.com/artikel/ghazwul-fikr/read/2015/06/08/71527/jin-islam-nusantara-dan-neo-liberalisasi-2.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Anonim, "Islam Nusantara' Hanya Mainan Orang Liberal Saja," Indonesiatanpajil.org, August 21, 2015, <http://indonesiatanpajil.org/2015/08/21/islam-nusantara-hanya-mainan-orang-liberal-saja/>.

<sup>44</sup> Abu Muhtadi, "Proyek Islam Nusantara: Mencegah Bersatunya Ummat Islam Di Seluruh Dunia," Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, September 14, 2015, <http://hizbut-tahrir.or.id/2015/09/14/proyek-islam-nusantara-mencegah-bersatunya-ummat-islam-di-seluruh-dunia/>.

of Islam which uses new method to intensify the project of liberalizing Islamic teachings and Indonesian Muslims.<sup>45</sup>

It is true that some liberal Muslims show their support to the ideas of Islam Nusantara. Ulil Absar Abdalla, for example, is one of the so-called liberal Muslim who has taken part in the promotion of the IN. In his tweet, he tried to protect the Shiite community by using the characteristic of Islam Nusantara which he assumed protecting religious minorities. "Islam Nusantara does not put Shiite as enemy. The IN regards them as part of Islamic community. It is the characteristic of IN that is not the same with Wahabi and the sympathizers", Ulil once remarked.<sup>46</sup> In another occasion, Ulil compared the tradition of Islam Nusantara with other religious tradition. His tweet, "Here are several analogies that I have made: Islam Nusantara is parallel with Catholicism, liberal Islam is same with liberal protestant and 'Jonru Islam' resembles with fundamentalist protestant".<sup>47</sup> Those statements seemingly become reference for people to assume that Islam Nusantara has strong connection with Ulil's ideas.

However, Islam Nusantara is not the same with liberal Islam. From the supporters of Islam Nusantara, we know that the concept of Islam Nusantara is not monolithic. In the discourse of Islam Nusantara, some proponents has conceptualized at least three aspects of Islam from the perspective of empirical practice of Muslims in the archipelago (nusantara), systemic practice of Islamic religiosity until the scientific framework of Islamic studies. While Islam Nusantara tries to interpret Islamic teachings by considering the local wisdom, liberal Islam uses critical interpretation to customs and local cultures. This point can be traced from Charles Kurzman's opinion when he compared three different religious traditions such as customary Islam, revivalist Islam and liberal Islam. He argues that customary Islam is characterized by the combination of regional practices and those that are shared throughout the Islamic world and this tradition tends to be justified in local terms along with distinctive characteristic of identity, prudence and linkages to the past. Meanwhile, revivalist Islam rejects locality and customary interpretation of Islam and urges bringing Islam back to its purity. On the other hand, liberal Islam is a tradition of critical interpretation of both customary and

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<sup>45</sup> Abdullah al-Mustofa, "Islam Nusantara Dan Neo Liberalisasi," June 10, 2015, <http://wiemasen.com/islam-nusantara-dan-neo-liberalisasi/>.

<sup>46</sup> Ulil's tweet in 26 June 2015. See <https://twitter.com/ulil/status/614434940386586624>.

<sup>47</sup> Ulil's tweet in 21 August 2015. See <https://twitter.com/ulil/status/634917285971398656>.

revivalist Islam, as those traditions have hindered Muslim from living in and benefiting from modernity.<sup>48</sup>

Another black campaign to the Islam Nusantara stems from internal faction of Nahdlatul Ulama agents, which is called 'NU Garis Lurus' (straight line NU). This "NU splinter" is a social media (facebook and twitter) account which expresses its antagonistic position with the mainstream NU. Since the idea of Islam Nusantara has been campaigned by the proponents, the NU Garis Lurus has tried to criticize the discourse of Islam Nusantara with negative responses. As another opponent of Islam Nusantara, the NU Garis Lurus accused the IN as part of the so-called liberal groups and hijacker of Islamic faith which assumes that the current Islam is dried, restrained, Arab-minded religion. It is anti-arts, anti-culture, anti-progress and anti-women emancipation. According to the account owner, there is misleading doctrine behind the inception of Islam Nusantara. By using the concept of IN, they invite Muslims to recognize and accept any culture, albeit it is non-believer habits such as praying together with inter-religious community, cross-religion marriage, guarding church, celebrating the imlek (Chinese New Year) and Christmas. Also, there is a mission of "religious pluralism" and political agenda behind the terminology of Islam Nusantara. It is clear that the idea has triggered conflict, degradation of faith and disintegration among Muslims.<sup>49</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Since the Nahdlatul Ulama has decided to promote the Islam Nusantara as the main theme of the 33rd Congress, Islam Nusantara has been controversy among Indonesian Muslims. Some elements of conservative groups reacted and uttered serious criticism. They are not happy if Islam is treated with new approach and method. The opponent of Islam Nusantara does not only attack the terminology, but also question the substance and reference of the concept in the sacred texts. Some proposals emerged dealing with the more appropriate terminology of Indonesian Islam such as Islam of rahmatan lil alamin and Islam and Nusantara. When it has been responded by the proponent of Islam Nusantara, the debate created productive learning process among Indonesian Muslims. Many aspects of

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Source Book* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Muhammad Najih Maimoen, ""Islam Nusantara' Dan Konspirasi Liberal," NU Garis Lurus, September 30, 2015, <http://www.nugarislurus.com/2015/09/makalah-lengkap-kh-muhammad-najih-maemoen-islam-nusantara-dan-konspirasi-liberal.html#axzz3nIqaOkRP>.

criticism of the opponent of IN has been countered by the defender of IN with various arguments, although it has never satisfied their counterpart.

While many people assume the obscure definition, the explanation of some scholars shows the complex meaning of Islam Nusantara. It deals not only with the distinctive Islam in the territory of Malay world in Southeast Asia, but also refers to a systemic practice of Islamic religiosity and the scientific framework of Muslim agents. In the context of changing Muslim world, the existence of old traditions and way of life also play significant role in responding the novel ideas of Islam which is later on interpreted in different ways or adjusted with the existing local cultures. Therefore, Marshall Hudgson differentiates what is Islamic (properly religious), what is the product of regions in which Muslims were culturally dominant (Islamicate phenomena) and what is constructed by Muslim society as civilization (Islamdom).

Among laymen and conservative groups, it is not easy to differentiate between the concept of Islamic, Islamicate and Islamdom phenomena. Consequently, they respond a new development of moderate Islam with strong resistance and tended to create black campaigns. Although they declare to correct the new trend of Islamic concept, paradoxically, their statements show the other way around. The labeling of misleading sect and takfir to the heretic groups have been spread through the internet. This trend has become a great challenge for moderate groups to campaign for friendly and progressive Islam in the so-called 'conservative turn' and the growing trend of radicalization in Indonesia. Whether Islam Nusantara will pass the test of resistance and criticism from the fellow Muslims, it depends on significance of the concept to respond social and cultural problems with convincing arguments.

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