

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT AND CONCEPT OF ISLAM NUSANTARA

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Abstract: Over the past few decades, specific approaches and conceptualisations of Islam have been promoted in Southeast Asia, notably Islam Nusantara (IN) in Indonesia and Islam Hadhari in Malaysia. In Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), a prominent Indonesian Islamic organisation, currently allied with the ruling government, champions the IN concept. However, IN is conceptualised and viewed in many ways, both positively and negatively. This article seeks to provide a broad context for discussions concerning IN in post-Reformasi Indonesia. It will identify and discuss significant factors and developments, both historical and factual, internal and external, that have impacted Islam in Indonesia and are relevant to these issues in order to understand why Islam Nusantara is addressed and conceptualised in such distinctive ways.

Keywords: Islam Nusantara, Islam Hadhari, local culture, *'adat*, shariah, religious extremism, neo-modernism, Nahdlatul Ulama.

Islam Nusantara: Definition and Contested Nature

The term Islam Nusantara (IN) was officially introduced and formally debated for the first time during the 33rd Conference of Nahdlatul Ulama in Jombang, East Java, in 2015, under the title “Affirming Islam Nusantara Concept for the Indonesian and World Civilisation.”¹ Since this proclamation, scholars have defined IN in various ways. IN is defined by Woodward as “the Islam of [the] Southeast Asian Archipelago”. It generally refers to Islam as practised by Indonesian traditionalists. However, IN can also refer to Islam as practised by Muslims with similar religious orientations in other Southeast Asian countries.² After numerous interpretations of the term emerged, in 2018 NU formally defined IN as:

Sunni Islam (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*) that is practised, preached, and developed by its indigenous preachers in accordance with the characteristics of the society and culture of the archipelago.³

The concept, according to its proponents, is deeply rooted in Indonesian Islamic history.⁴ In this view, IN is neither a new school of thought (*madhhab*) nor a way of perceiving Islam that contradicts its universal teachings. Instead, it denotes a way of implementing Islam in a multi-cultural Indonesian context.⁵

The notion of IN emphasises moderation, tolerance, and cultural adaptability.⁶ However, being a newly introduced concept, IN creates considerable heated debate and disagreement between those who support it and those who oppose it. One of the reasons for these disputes is that some observers believe the term IN lacks conceptual clarity.⁷ The nature and scope of IN is still debated, for example, amongst supporters of NU.⁸ To understand the current controversies surrounding the concept of IN in Indonesia, it is useful to review some pertinent literature on the study of Islam in Southeast Asia.

Islam Nusantara and Indonesian *Fiqh*

Many academics trace the genealogy of IN back to the arrival of Islam in the archipelago via merchants who attracted the local people with their culture. The most well-known example is Wali Songo (nine saints), who promoted Islam in Java by incorporating Islamic values into pre-Islamic culture, such as the stories or plots of *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet performances).⁹ This approach allowed the promotion of Islam in an active dialectical manner while preserving pre-Islamic traditions. Many existing IN research studies refer to this fact as the origin of the concept.

Moqsith, a notable proponent of IN, argues that IN only operates in the realm of Islamic teaching, from three perspectives: *i'tiqadiyyah* (belief), *khuluqiyyah* (ethics), and *'amaliyyah* (praxis). According to Moqsith, IN functions solely in this small area of Islamic law, which is basically derived from *ijtihad*. Three important concepts in Islamic jurisprudence, *maslahah mursalah* (public interest), *istihsan* (discretion), and *'urf* (custom) are extremely significant to IN principles as they operate more in *ijtihad tathbiqy* (applied legal reasoning) than derived legal reasoning (*ijtihad istinbathy*).¹⁰

IN proponents also claim that the idea is based on the notions of 'Fiqh Mazhab Nasional' and 'Fiqh Indonesia', introduced by Hazairin (former Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs) and Hasbi As-Shiddiqy (a prominent Muslim scholar with no ties to NU). However, since many NU supporters opposed Hazairin's conception of 'Fiqh Mazhab Nasional', the concept required further development. Hazairin intended to unite Islamic law with positive and *'adat* (customary) laws, avoiding a clash between them.¹¹ Ahmad Baso, a well-known Islam Nusantara expert, proposed that IN is a form of creative *ijtihad*

(juristic independent reasoning) and, at the same time, represents the *ijma'* (consensus) of Indonesian *ulama'*.¹²

In a separate article, Baso describes IN as a view of Islam that takes into account Indonesia's local culture and customs while developing its Islamic jurisprudence.¹³ Similarly, Harisuddin argues that Indonesian Islamic jurisprudence is the most critical aspect of the IN idea. This approach is based on the achievement of adopting the customary law of *harta gono gini* (ownership of marital property) into positive law.¹⁴

What changes have occurred in Indonesian *fiqh* since the introduction of Islam Nusantara? There are limited references to the practices and rituals of IN because its conceptualisation is still new. Nevertheless, among the examples of Islam Nusantara that have manifested are customary marriage law, *tahlilan* (a form of *dhikr* that involves praising God), and *mauludan* (celebrating the Prophet's birthday).^{15,16} But most important are its conceptions of moderation, inclusivity, and anti-radicalism. The justification of these concepts, however, as discussed long before the introduction of IN. Consequently, we will discuss the Islam-culture integration and how it affects the development of Islam in Indonesia.

The Dialectic of Islam and Local Culture in Southeast Asia

The emphasis on accommodating local culture is one of the hallmarks of the Islam Nusantara concept and has its historical origins in the development of Islam in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia. For almost a millennium,¹⁷ Islam has been prevalent throughout Southeast Asia, interacting with local culture over three periods: pre-modern, colonial, and nation-states.

According to the literature on Islam in Southeast Asia, Islam was firmly incorporated into indigenous customary practice in the pre-modern era. Previously, the rulers only incorporated into *'adat* those elements of Islamic jurisprudence that they considered suitable, and as was in the case with Minangkabau and Mataram laws. In Mataram, Islamic law and regulations were assimilated into Javanese culture. They would not become part of the law unless indigenous *'adat* accommodated them,¹⁸ which would be deemed anathema to classical *fiqh*.¹⁹

Hooker states that after analysing legal documents from Southeast Asia, he discovered that the region's legal history has always seen clashes between shariah and *'adat*.²⁰ According to Hooker, these conflicts do not imply that Muslims have been less devout. Instead, it shows that the contradictions between Islamic principles and local norms were a basic feature of Islam in Southeast

Asia,²¹ making it distinct from other regions.²² In other words, classical Islamic laws were not regarded as the exclusive source of law in Southeast Asia.²³ For example, while the Melakan laws (including maritime law, Muslim marriage law, law of sale, and the law of state) contained distinctive Islamic values,²⁴ the reference was mainly to Islamic ethics rather than legal interpretations.

In Minangkabau and Java, Islamic jurisprudence was adopted to strengthen the existing customary laws. In the case of Minangkabau, Islamic law underpins the legitimacy of *'adat* law, which includes marriage, divorce, and inheritance. A Minangkabau maxim perfectly describes the integration: “*Adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah, syarak mengata, adat memakai*” (*'Adat* is based on shariah, and shariah is based on the book of Allah, thus *'adat* follows what shariah commands).²⁵ In Java, Islamic jurisprudence appeared to justify those pre-Islamic cultural values that suited the Javanese political and administrative system as well as its cultural traditions, and there were constant ongoing efforts to eliminate (perceived) contradictions between Islamic legislation and *'adat*.

Federspiel writes insightfully about the dynamics of Islam-local culture interaction in Southeast Asia from 1300s until 1800s: “The mores and customs of each area and locality were recognised as important and as constituting a living tradition to be protected and allowed great expression. Islam was expected to be molded to these customs, contribute to the culture by helping to cleanse it of unworthy aspects and elevate custom with its blessing and sanction. Islam did just that, but in part, it also began to question the underlying assumptions of some customs and traditions, causing some long-term erosion and open ruptures in those cultures. So, although Islam was expected to integrate with local customs, often it was the local custom that adapted to Islam so that a dynamic process was set in motion—one that was not altogether clear in its direction at this particular juncture. Cultural accommodations still being worked out in the next era (1800-1945), and the differences between Islam and custom became much more of an issue at that time.”²⁶

Western researchers studying the development of Islam in this era, such as Geertz and Hurgronje, commonly portrayed Islam in the region as difficult due to discrepancies between classical-era Islam and local customs.²⁷ They saw these cultural traits as impurities and departures from true Islam.²⁸ In Bowen’s view, intellectuals like Geertz and Hurgronje founded their stance on their tendency to radically separate what they perceived to be normative

Islam from embodied or lived Islam.²⁹ According to Bowen, this approach fails to understand the complex relationship between the reality of lived Islam, creative interpretation processes, and normative texts. Bowen further explains that Islamic jurisprudence is established using a wide range of sacred texts and practices recognised by consensus (*ijma'*) and custom (*'urf*). For example, in the case of inheritance, classical Islamic law has clear procedures and rulings for sharing estates. People, on the other hand, may choose how to apply those rules, and the regulations are “facilitative” in the sense that people can consent to do something with their wealth that is opposed to those principles.³⁰ Moreover, throughout the Middle East and Southeast Asia, religious jurists also take account of customs while making their legal decisions,³¹ and such decisions are not regarded as un-Islamic.³²

In the colonial and nation-states eras, the (perceived) discrepancies between normative and lived Islam took a different direction.³³ During the colonial period, contradictions were resolved by restricting the application of Islamic law to family law only, while other concerns were governed by secular colonial law.³⁴ Although there was some effort to provide a legal manifestation of Islam in the Dutch East Indies, overall legal theory was almost exclusively based on *'adat*, making shariah dependent on *'adat* recognition. This is evident in the Dutch Colonial's Subordination policy, which subjugated Islamic legal aspects to *'adat*.³⁵ This so-called ‘subordination or reception theory’ has long dominated the administration of Islamic law in Indonesia, being still evident until today.³⁶

However, in the post-colonial period, the antagonism between Islam and culture became more intense, calling for a more direct reference to Islamic principles rather than nation-state secular or *'adat*-based ones.³⁷ These developments led to another debate in Indonesia over the validity of *'adat* in private law, resulting in an unresolved impasse between supporters of strict adherence to classical Islamic law, supporters of *'adat*, and secularists. Another issue occurred in the Indonesian setting with the expansion of reformist movements in the Middle East in the second half of the 20th century. The issue centred on whether Indonesian religious authorities should adhere to one of four *madhhabs*, or exercise further *ijtihad* in order to construct a distinctive Indonesian *madhhab* outside of the *'ibadat* (worship) part of Islamic jurisprudence.³⁸

As previously stated, the integration of local culture with Islamic law, as suggested by IN, has a solid historical precedent. IN proponents aspire to build on and expand this in the context of twenty-first century Indonesia.

Islam Nusantara: Global, National, and Intra-NU Contests

The story behind the emergence of IN can be seen as a struggle for the hearts and minds of Indonesian Muslims.³⁹ Since the 1970s, transnational Islamic movements have changed the Indonesian Islamic landscape. This is evident in Saudi Arabia's ambitious drive to promote Wahhabism throughout the global Muslim community. The rise of Shi'a Iran after the 1979 revolution also influence Indonesian religious thinking.⁴⁰ These developments challenged the dominance of mainstream local Islamic movements, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah.⁴¹ In this regard, observers like Woodward argue that the promotion of IN aims to minimise the influence of radical groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. The promotion of IN seems to be motivated by the need to establish the image of a distinct and moderate indigenous Indonesian Islam.⁴²

Woodward explains that IN initiative aims to build coherent historical and ideological narratives against extremism. However, according to Woodward, this momentum has created disagreement because the term IN itself is rather ambiguous for at least two reasons. First, recognising a regional Islam may appear to contradict Islam's inherent universality. Second, the features generally associated with IN, such as sufism (Islamic mysticism), interfaith tolerance, and symbiosis with local culture can be found in Muslim societies outside Southeast Asia,⁴³ hence, they are not unique to IN. As a result, this term has been described as "reductionist and monolithic in perceiving diverse realities of Islam in Nusantara."⁴⁴ Unlike Burhani, who optimistically considered IN to be a favourable response to radicalism,⁴⁵ Woodward's study implied that the project is ineffective because Salafism in Indonesia rejects violent extremism, just like the proponents of IN. For Woodward reframing the struggle against violent extremism by evoking the idea of IN is unlikely to evoke unity in combating extremism between these two groups.⁴⁶

At the national level, the discourse on IN is a battlefield between mainstream Islamic movements, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, and emerging transnational Islamic movements.⁴⁷ Within the context of internal NU dynamics, efforts to promote the middle path and religious tolerance in Indonesia are being challenged by several clerics and activists from among NU's followers. This resistance might be linked to NU factional rivalries, particularly between current chairman Said Aqil and prior chairman Hasyim Muzadi. This conflict resulted in the formation of a new movement called the 'True Path NU' (NU Garis Lurus) in 2015 by young NU clerics. According to the movement's founder and head, Kyai Muhammad Idrus Ramli, NU Garis Lurus seeks to eliminate 'liberal' doctrinal influence from NU intellectuals such as Ulil Abshar Abdalla and Abdurrahman Wahid. They are thought to have tainted NU's original identity as an Islamic organisation adhering to Sunni principles.⁴⁸

The Challenges to National Islam

After colonialism, discussions about the relationship between religion and politics prompted new debates, mainly regarding the role and position of Islam in governance and the escalating rivalry between competing Islamic political ideologies.⁴⁹ Some Muslims affiliated with particular organisations propagated a holistic Islam that included legislation, politics, and governance.⁵⁰ In what follows, we will discuss the now banned HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) and Salafi Wahhabi transnational movements in Indonesia, which carry *khilafah* and jihadist ideologies that threaten Indonesian democracy and Pancasila. However, as a comparative case study, we begin with the experiences of Indonesia's neighbour, Malaysia, and the notion of Islam Hadhari, which is similar to the concept of Islam Nusantara, especially in terms of ideology and politics.

Experience from the Neighbour: Islam Hadhari in Malaysia

Prior to the introduction of Islam Nusantara, the emergence of Islam Hadhari in Malaysia was identified as a political move to counter-balance challenges to the ruling political establishment from the opposition Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS: Parti Islam Se-Malaysia) and independent social movements, such as the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia) and Tablighi Jama'at.⁵¹ The concept of Islam Hadhari was developed as an electorally appealing conception of Islam that differed from PAS's ideology. In 2002, a committee of *ulama'* and intellectuals discussed the concept of Islam Hadhari to find a way to construct an 'Islamic State' in accordance with Malaysian civilisation.⁵² In 2004, new Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced the concept of Islam Hadhari in his speech at the 55th UMNO General Assembly as being suitable to Malaysia's context, especially its objective of being an Islamic state.⁵³ Proponents of the Islam Hadhari concept have asserted that it is not a new religion or new Islamic thought, but an effort to bring Muslims back to the foundation of Islam, the Qur'an and Sunnah, which were the core orientations of Islam Hadhari.⁵⁴

According to Kamaruzzaman Bustamam Ahmad, Islam Hadhari is similar to the neo-modernism promoted by Fazlur Rahman, a strong proponent of modernist Islam in the twentieth century. This interpretation opens the gate of *ijtihad* for Muslims in the contemporary era by integrating classical Islamic scholarship and Islamic civilisation with Western values and rationalism.⁵⁵ Islam Hadhari was promoted as a form of Islam that advocates inclusion, moderation,

and inter-religious tolerance. Islam Hadhari's proponents attempted to address critiques from Islamist conservatives by presenting a more robust form of political Islam with a solid political base and agenda.⁵⁶

Islam Nusantara and the Role of Trans-National Islamic Movements

There are two trans-national groups that are generally perceived as being antagonistic towards Indonesian Islamic political traditions: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and Salafi Wahhabism. HTI is a group linked to the Hizbut Tahrir (HT) movement. This movement, which was founded by Taqiuddin an-Nabhani in the 1950s, a Palestinian Islamic scholar, aims to revive the Islamic caliphate system. Abdullah bin Nuh, a cleric who ran an Islamic boarding school in West Java, was the first to introduce this ideology to Indonesia. He had a son who joined Hizbut Tahrir as a student in Jordan in the early 1980s.⁵⁷ In 2017, the organisation was banned at NU's suggestion, as its ideology was against Pancasila. HTI is also harmful because it contradicts the distinctive identity and local culture of Indonesian Muslims.⁵⁸

The Salafi missionary movement of the mid-1980s was apparent in Indonesia with the rise of what Bruinessen refers to as the Arabisation⁵⁹ of Indonesian society and culture through imitation of early Arabian Muslim traditions (*salaf al-salih*). This puritanical sect of Islam, often known as Wahhabism, is attributed to Muhammad ibn al-Wahhab (1703–92).⁶⁰ This movement reached Indonesia through the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation, DDII), a *da'wah* organisation established in 1967 by Muhammad Natsir, the fifth Indonesian Prime Minister. The idea of Salafi-Wahhabism was also popularised through the publications of organisations like Indonesian Jama'at Islami, as well as LIPIA (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Bahasa Arab), an institute for the study of Islam and the Arabic language. It is important to note that not all Salafists condone violence in their *da'wah*,⁶¹ although certain religious extremist incidents have occurred in Indonesia, for example a call to jihad by Ja'far Umar Thalib in response to a religious conflict between local Christians and Muslims in Molucca in February 1999.⁶²

Additional Factors Leading to the Emergence of Islam Nusantara in the Post-Reformasi Era

Having provided an overview of the current debates pertaining to the concept of Islam Nusantara (IN), we will now look at the factors that contributed to its emergence in the Post-Reformasi era. Several ideas and issues must be considered in order to comprehend IN development in the Post-Reformasi era. This section provides a broad discussion of the ones we believe to be the most important.

The first factor is the historical development of Islam in Indonesia itself, particularly during the Post-Reformasi era, which saw a rise in conservative and puritanical forms of Islam.⁶³ Several events and developments in Indonesian Islam, as well as international issues, have contributed to the emergence of IN. Understanding these developments will provide us with a better understanding of the nature of IN and the debates surrounding it.

The Decline of the Neo-Modernist Movement⁶⁴

Some of the above-mentioned transnational Islamic movements, which are based on a strongly political interpretation of Islam, have paved the way for terrorism.⁶⁵ This situation has contributed to the creation of a more moderate and tolerant form of Islam by religious and political elites, including NU.

The mainstream Islamic narrative in Indonesia from the 1970s to the late 1980s was dominated by neo-modernist liberals,⁶⁶ when the government promoted what Kurzman refers to as Liberal Islam,⁶⁷ a central philosophy based on the compatibility of early Islam with modern values. Neo-modernist liberals agreed on democracy as a political system and Pancasila as an Indonesian ideology that opposed the idea of an Islamic State. Over this period, the majority of *ulama* maintained harmonious relationships with non-Muslim minorities and supported the government's coexistence initiatives.⁶⁸

During the New Order (1966-1998), neo-modernist liberal Muslims proliferated among university graduates and NGO activists from traditionalist *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). Nur Cholis Madjid (d.2005) and Abdurrahman Wahid (d.2009)⁶⁹ were two prominent examples of this approach. These two figures are important for understanding the evolution and setting of IN, as Wahid's and Madjid's notions of 'Pribumisasi Islam' and 'Islam Ke-Indonesiaan', respectively, have been identified as recent antecedents of IN.⁷⁰ In the 1970s, Madjid pioneered the Islamic renewal (*pembaharuan*) movement, which was influenced by Fazlur Rahman's modern reform of Islamic thought

and became known as ‘neo-modernism’.⁷¹ Madjid argued that the Islamic worldview is compatible with secular politics and rational epistemologies, and he popularised the provocative slogan: “Islam Yes! Islamic Party No!” He sought to integrate Islam and modernity, proposing an imperative ‘liberal’ reform of Islamic ideas.⁷²

Abdurrahman Wahid was known as a strong supporter of Madjid’s views. Wahid’s political thought was founded on the principles of *maqasid al-shariah*, universal Islamic values manifested by the protection of five basic human needs (*al-dharuriyyat al-khamsah*): (1) protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*) from violation; (2) protection of religion and faith (*hifz al-din*); (3) protection of family and lineage (*hifz al-nasl*); (4) protection of property or wealth (*hifz al-maal*); and (5) protection of intellect (*hifz al-‘aql*).

Such protections imply a deep concern for human dignity, equality before the law, and the protection of the weak. Wahid proposes his idea of ‘*pribumisasi*’, or the contextualisation of Islam, based on the notion that the essence of Islamic culture is cosmopolitan. The idea of ‘*pribumisasi*’ is built on the interdependence of religion and culture in our daily lives.⁷³

The Rise of Conservative and Puritanical International Islamic Movements

In the 1990s, Suharto became a member of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia-ICMI), an organisation comprised of individuals from various backgrounds, including Islamists. This cooperation amplified the influence of previously silenced Islamist voices while suppressing liberal ideas.⁷⁴ Suharto’s swift political shift was a form of religious politicising, in which he sought the support of Muslim leaders and organisations through the ICMI. According to Wanandi, this mindset developed when Suharto became insecure about his military’s opposition to his next presidential campaign.

This transformation had an impact on all levels of Indonesian society. It became obvious through many government practices and policies aimed at Islamisation, such as Suharto’s pilgrimage to Mecca, the establishment of state Islamic banks, and the publication of the periodical *Republika*.⁷⁵ This growing Islamist effort has been dubbed the “Conservative Turn.”⁷⁶ In the following years, political Islam developed a stronger sense of purpose, methodology, and awareness of its activities, exacerbated by external influences, such as the expansion of Wahhabism, the Iranian Revolution, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as Suharto’s inability to control growing extremist activities.⁷⁷

After the fall of Suharto, several Islamist⁷⁸ groups arose to contest the government's declining political authority.⁷⁹ These groups, to some degree, have set an agenda of radical political Islam across the country.⁸⁰ Inter-religious conflicts arose during this period. Jihadist-Salafi movements and terrorist attacks, such as church bombings, occurred in several cities during the 2000s, including Medan, Batam, Pekanbaru, Jakarta, Bekasi, Sukabumi, Bandung, and Bali. This was a temporary trend that arose in reaction to the political tremors of the period.⁸¹

All of the aforementioned developments have made Indonesian Islam more conservative.⁸² This phenomenon takes many forms. According to Bruinessen, among the more prominent examples of conservative trends in Indonesia are the fatwas issued in 2005 by Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), the Indonesian council of Islamic scholars. One fatwa addressed the incompatibility of secularism, pluralism, and religious liberalism with Islam.⁸³ This fatwa is believed to have been prompted by the MUI's new Islamist members. Other related fatwas condemned the practice of inter-religious prayer, the prohibition of interreligious marriage,⁸⁴ and the apostasy of the Ahmadiyah sect.⁸⁵ These developments have eroded support for harmonious inter-religious relations and the rights of religious minorities based on liberal Islamic and secular reasoning. This conservative move prompted IN proponents to find a method to rediscover the indigenous tolerant tradition of Indonesian Islam, which had flourished before the rise of transnational Islamic groups.⁸⁶

The Emergence of the Islamic State

NU introduced the concept of IN in 2015, a year after the emergence of the so-called Islamic State (IS) and its expansion in the Middle East. The radical interpretation of Islam promulgated by that group triggered heated debate on the distinctiveness of Indonesian Islam.⁸⁷ The concept of IN was introduced to counteract radicalism by introducing and promoting Islam's tolerant and moderate nature. Further, Muslim leaders in Indonesia expressed concerns about ISIS since it had gained a foothold in Indonesia, eventually becoming a security issue when Indonesia suddenly became the largest supplier of ISIS militants in Southeast Asia.⁸⁸

In this sense, the concept of IN constitutes part of a conflict between mainstream Islamic movements (NU and Muhammadiyah) and emerging transnational Islamic movements, (e.g. Hizbut Tahrir, and Salafist).⁸⁹ Although NU does not consider these new transnational movements to be terrorist groups, they do believe they teach and preach intolerance and exclusive

religiosity, which can promote terrorism.⁹⁰ As a result, IN represents a unique manifestation of Islam based on local traditions and culture.⁹¹

Since its introduction in 2015, the notion of IN has been consistently rejected by numerous organisations, such as HTI, the Tarbiyah movement, and MUI West Sumatra. Unfortunately, it was also rejected by some NU members who see IN as an extension of liberal Islam (Jaringan Islam Liberal),⁹² as associated with Abdurrahman Wahid's idea of 'Pribumisasi Islam' (indigenisation of Islam).

To summarise, in order to understand arguments surrounding IN, we must consider the most significant developments affecting Islam in Indonesia, both from the Indonesian socio-political and global perspectives. The emergence of IN was significant for countering radical Islamist organisations and the so-called 'Islamic State'. IN was designed to promote a pluralistic and peaceful image of Islam in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, that is congruent with the region's culture and history.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this article, we investigated the factors that contributed to the emergence of the IN concept. After providing a brief overview of the development of Islam in Southeast Asia over the last two decades, we argued that the recent introduction of IN by the NU leadership in 2015 was related to both internal developments within Indonesian Islam, such as the decline of neo-modernist approaches, and the rise of conservative political and puritanical groups, such as HTI and Salafism, as well as the rise of global jihadist groups, all of which pose severe challenges to Indonesia and its people. The notion of IN continues to excite academic interest, with debates raging about its aims, functions, and nature.

- Indonesian Government must give equal attention to all moderate Muslim's organisations and affiliations so they do not feel excluded, which later will cause negative impacts on Muslims integration as an *ummah*.
- Representatives of Muslim organisations should be open to hearing NU officials' rationalisations regarding the Islam Nusantara concept. A dialogue between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and different Muslim affiliations is required to engage a clear conceptual framework of IN to avoid misunderstandings that may lead to disagreement and conflict of the *ummah* and society. This includes policy-oriented studies and introducing IN concept into the educational system.

Notes

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62. Hasan, 2018, 83–94.
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 64. Classification of Indonesian Islamic viewpoints is subject to debate. Scholars use labels in different ways, as acknowledged by Riddell (2002). Riddle uses Neo-Modernist Liberals to identify the thinking of scholars like Nur Cholis Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid, while Bruinessen (2011, p. 7) calls the two scholars and others who offer a non-literal reinterpretation of Islamic concepts as “Liberals Progressives.” He criticised Barton (1997) for using Neo-modernism to identify these two thinkers, because to him, it is hardly appropriate to refer to thinkers whose intellectual background is a traditionalist and not the reformist spectrum. However, this term, Neo-Modernist, is also used by many other scholars, such as Saeed (1997), Bakti (2005), Kersten (2015).
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