The role of nusantara ulama's da'wah in islamic moderation: A critique of blackwater and peripheral in Islamic studies

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to analyze the role of Nusantara ulama's da'wah in promoting Islamic moderation as a response to global narratives that often marginalize peripheral Islamic traditions, as represented by the Blackwater symbol.

Method – This research employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. Data were collected from various literature sources and analyzed descriptively and analytically.

Result – The findings indicate that Nusantara ulama play a significant role in fostering Islamic moderation by integrating Islamic values with local wisdom. Nusantara Islam, characterized by its tolerance, inclusiveness, and flexibility, has proven to be a relevant model for Islamic moderation in global discourse. The narrative of Nusantara Islam addresses critiques of the marginalization of Southeast Asia as "peripheral Islam". It demonstrates that Islam can develop peacefully through processes of vernacularization and indigenization without losing its universal essence.

Implication – This study underscores the importance of strengthening the study of Nusantara Islam in global discourse to offer an alternative to Islam's often conflictual and homogenizing narratives.

Originality/Value – This research contributes by linking the da'wah of Nusantara ulama and the concept of Islamic moderation with critiques of global symbolism, such as Blackwater.

Abstrak

Tujuan - Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran da'wah ulama Nusantara dalam mempromosikan moderasi Islam sebagai respons terhadap narasi global yang seringkali mengabaikan tradisi Islam di pinggiran, sebagaimana diwakili oleh simbol Blackwater.

Metode - Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode penelitian perpustakaan. Data dikumpulkan dari berbagai sumber literatur dan dianalisis secara deskriptif dan analitis.

Hasil - Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ulama Nusantara memainkan peran penting dalam memajukan moderasi Islam dengan mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam dengan kebijaksanaan lokal. Islam Nusantara, yang ditandai dengan toleransi, inklusivitas, dan fleksibilitas, telah terbukti menjadi model yang relevan untuk moderasi Islam dalam diskursus global. Narasi Islam Nusantara menanggapi kritik terhadap marginalisasi Asia Tenggara sebagai "Islam periferal". Ia menunjukkan bahwa Islam dapat berkembang secara damai melalui proses vernacularisasi dan indigenisasi tanpa kehilangan esensi universalnya.

Implikasi – Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya memperkuat studi Islam Nusantara dalam diskursus global untuk menawarkan alternatif terhadap narasi Islam yang seringkali konflik dan homogenisasi.

Orisinalitas/Nilai – Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan menghubungkan dakwah ulama Nusantara dan konsep moderasi Islam dengan kritik terhadap simbolisme global, seperti Blackwater.

Introduction

The global discourse on Islam has long been dominated by narratives originating from the Middle East, often framing Islam through a monolithic lens that overlooks the richness and diversity of Islamic traditions in other regions. One such overlooked tradition is Islam Nusantara, the expression of Islam that has flourished in Indonesia and surrounding areas (Hidayatulloh, 2024). Characterized by inclusivity, tolerance, and deep-rooted interaction with local cultures, Islam Nusantara offers a model of Islamic moderation highly relevant in today's world of rising radicalism and global misunderstandings about Islam (Umar, 2021).

Despite its significance, studies on the contribution of ulama (Islamic scholars) from the Nusantara region in promoting Islamic moderation remain scarce and underrepresented in global academic discourse. Islamic studies often concentrate on the intellectual and political traditions of the Arab world, marginalizing contributions from the periphery, including Southeast Asia. This gap reflects academic neglect and the broader global imbalance in how Islamic traditions are perceived and recognized (Alwi, 2021).

In an era where Islam is frequently associated with radicalism and conflict, often fueled by global narratives and political power dynamics, the role of Nusantara ulama in advocating peaceful and inclusive interpretations of Islam becomes increasingly important. The dominance of narratives shaped by Western political and military interests, symbolized by institutions like Blackwater, has reinforced negative stereotypes of Islam (Mostafa, 2007). These narratives often ignore the pluralistic and moderate Islamic experiences in regions like the Nusantara (Masud & Salvatore, 2009).

Scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Azyumardi Azra have introduced the concept of eight global Islamic spheres, emphasizing the diversity of Islamic civilizations shaped by local cultures and histories. The Nusantara sphere is distinguished by its accommodative and peaceful approach. It represents a living example of how Islamic values coexist harmoniously with indigenous traditions and modern pluralistic societies (Hajam & Saumantri, 2022).

While existing literature has acknowledged the distinctiveness of Islam Nusantara, it remains largely descriptive. There is a lack of critical investigation into how Nusantara ulama engage in da'wah (Islamic outreach) that promotes moderation and addresses contemporary global issues such as extremism, cultural homogenization, and the stereotyping of Islam. Moreover, literature such as Edward Said's Orientalism and critiques by Esposito have highlighted how Western-centric discourse has further narrowed the global understanding of Islam, contributing to the marginalization of peaceful Islamic expressions (Esposito, 2010).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the contribution of Nusantara ulama in promoting Islamic moderation through da'wah practices and how their efforts can respond to global challenges, including negative stereotypes about Islam and the marginalization of peripheral Islamic traditions. By focusing on the Nusantara model, the research offers an alternative framework for understanding and practicing moderate Islam in diverse cultural contexts. This research is significant for enriching academic discourse on Islam in Southeast Asia and its potential practical contributions. Insights from this study can inform inclusive da'wah strategies and religious

policymaking, particularly in multicultural societies like Indonesia, and offer a viable model of Islamic moderation to the broader Muslim world.

Academic studies on global Islam remain centered on the Middle East as the primary hub of Islamic civilization. Researchers like John L. Esposito explain that Islam is often perceived monolithically, with an emphasis on the social, political, and cultural experiences that have developed in the Middle East. This dominance tends to overlook the dynamics of Islam in peripheral regions, such as Nusantara, Sub-Saharan Africa, or South Asia, which, despite having distinct Islamic traditions, continue to make significant contributions to global Islamic civilization (Esposito, 2010).

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Research conducted by Azra (2021) and Madjid (2007) demonstrates that Nusantara Islam possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it from other Islamic traditions. Nusantara Islam is known for its inclusivity, accommodative nature, and tolerance, as reflected in its interaction with local cultures. However, most studies on Nusantara Islam are primarily descriptive, lacking in-depth exploration of how this tradition can respond to global challenges such as narratives of radicalism, conflict, or the marginalization of peripheral regions in Islamic discourse.

In this study, several key concepts form the foundation of the analysis and are essential to understanding the broader context. Islam Nusantara is a culturally rooted and adaptive expression of Islam that has developed organically in Indonesia and its surrounding regions. Shaped by centuries of interaction with local traditions, it embodies a peaceful, inclusive, and community-oriented approach to religious life, making it a distinctive model within the global Islamic landscape. Closely related to this is Islamic moderation, which emphasizes a balanced *(wasathiyah)* perspective in religious understanding, upholds tolerance, respects pluralism, and firmly rejects all forms of extremism. This approach positions Islam not as a force of division but as a unifying element in diverse societies. As examined in this context, the practice of da'wah extends beyond traditional religious preaching. It encompasses a broader engagement with cultural and social realities to build mutual understanding, foster peace, and promote harmonious coexistence across communities (Saumantri, 2022).

Moreover, the dominance of global narratives, often illustrated by symbols like Blackwater, has perpetuated stereotypes of Islam as a religion associated with conflict, militarism, and radicalism. Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, and Esposito criticize the tendency of Western discourse to reduce Islam to a political or military phenomenon, thereby neglecting its peaceful and moderate traditions. This discourse has influenced global perceptions of Islam, rendering it homogeneous and failing to reflect the diversity of its traditions (Anjum, 2019).

Although *da'wah* has long been recognized as a primary means of spreading religion, previous research has rarely explored *da'wah* as a tool for moderation in addressing global challenges. Research conducted by Hefner (2000) provides a theoretical framework suggesting that inclusive *da'wah* can foster social harmony and tolerance in multicultural societies.

This study aims to uncover the role of Nusantara ulama's *da'wah* in promoting Islamic moderation. This role is considered significant in the local context and in addressing global challenges, including the dominance of homogenizing narratives and the marginalization of peripheral Islamic traditions. Through this study, the role of Nusantara ulama in promoting a globally relevant model of Islamic moderation will be critically examined, highlighting their strategic significance in countering radicalism and redefining Islamic narratives beyond the Middle Eastern-centric paradigm.

Research Methods

This study employs a conceptual library research design, chosen specifically for its relevance in analyzing theoretical frameworks and the documented contributions of Nusantara ulama to Islamic moderation. Unlike empirical or qualitative field-based research, this approach is more appropriate given that the research does not rely on primary data collection such as interviews or field observations (Patton, 2012). A descriptive-analytical approach underpins the research process. This approach allows for a detailed examination of textual data to interpret the values, messages, and patterns embedded in the works of Nusantara scholars. The research proceeds in stages: first, a mapping of relevant literature is conducted to identify texts that discuss Islamic moderation, da'wah strategies, and the role of local traditions in shaping religious expression. Second, a thematic analysis is applied to these texts to identify recurring ideas or frameworks that reflect the distinctive characteristics of Nusantara Islam, especially as they relate to tolerance, pluralism, and anti-radicalism.

The data sources include books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous research published in Islamic studies, religious moderation, and Southeast Asian Islam. The criteria for selecting these sources include their academic credibility, relevance to the central themes of the research, and their contribution to understanding the uniqueness of Nusantara Islam. Both contemporary literature and historical sources are utilized, from classical Islamic texts to modern analyses, ensuring depth and contextual accuracy.

To process the data, Content Analysis is applied. The process involves manual coding of textual content to identify key themes such as moderation *(wasathiyah),* cultural integration in da'wah, resistance to radical ideologies, and models of peaceful coexistence. The research applies source triangulation to ensure data validity by comparing texts from different schools of thought, periods, and geographic perspectives. One notable limitation of this research is its reliance on secondary data, which may constrain the depth of context-specific insights that field-based research could provide. Additionally, the subjectivity in selecting and interpreting texts presents a risk of bias. These limitations are acknowledged and mitigated through careful literature selection, clear definition of terms, and methodological transparency (Bowen, 2009).

Results and Discussion

The Role of Nusantara Ulama in the Arabian Peninsula in the Transmission of Islam

The presence of Nusantara ulama in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in Mecca and Medina, holds historical significance in strengthening Islamic moderation worldwide. As centers of Islamic religiosity and education, these two holy cities have long been primary destinations for Muslims,

including those from the Nusantara region. Since the 16th century, migrants from Southeast Asia, known as *mukimin Jawi*, have settled in Mecca and Medina to perform the pilgrimage, engage in trade, and pursue religious studies. According to Lodovico de Varthema's accounts, *mukimin Jawi* were already present in Mecca in 1502 CE (Muhammad, 2012).

The presence of *mukimin Jawi* grew significantly during the 18th and 19th centuries, facilitated by advancements in sea transportation. This community assimilated with the local society while maintaining their Nusantara cultural identity, as reflected in titles such as *al-Bantani* (from Banten), *al-Maqassari* (from Makassar), *al-Minangkabawi* (from Minangkabau), and others. The *mukimin Jawi* ulama played a significant role in transmitting Islamic knowledge through teaching in *halaqah* sessions at the Masjid al-Haram and scholarly works (Rohmana, 2021).

Nusantara ulama who studied in Mecca and Medina are renowned for their inclusive, tolerant, and accommodative *da'wah* approach. Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani, for instance, was one of the great scholars who produced numerous scholarly works that became references in the Islamic world, particularly in the fields of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tasawuf* (Islamic mysticism), and *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis). Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, as a prominent imam at the Masjid al-Haram, made significant contributions to the development of Islamic education in Nusantara with a moderation approach that aligned with local traditions (Iswanto, 2013). Other scholars, such as KH. Hasyim Asy'ari and KH. Ahmad Dahlan continued this tradition by founding Islamic organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which have become pillars of Islamic moderation in Indonesia (Nasikhin et al., 2022; Karim et al., 2025).

Azyumardi Azra explains that Nusantara Islam possesses inclusive and flexible characteristics, enabling this tradition to interact with local socio-cultural contexts without losing the essence of Islamic teachings. This became the strength of the *mukimin Jawi* ulama in promoting Islamic moderation both in the Arabian Peninsula and in their homeland (Azra, 2009). Similarly, Robert W. Hefner highlights that the Islamic education brought by Nusantara ulama could foster social harmony grounded in local and universal values (Hefner, 2000).

In the late 19th century, the Pan-Islamism movement emerging in the Middle East significantly influenced the *mukimin Jawi*. The Dutch colonial government feared that the Pan-Islamism ideas propagated by the *mukimin Jawi* might incite resistance in Nusantara. As a result, the Dutch began tightening travel permits to Mecca and Medina, limiting the number of pilgrims, and monitoring the activities of returning students (*santri*) (Dwijayanto, 2020). Entering the 20th century, motivations for traveling to Mecca began to shift. Many people from Nusantara did not seek knowledge but to earn a livelihood. Meanwhile, the Saudi Arabian government started restricting student visas to those receiving scholarships. These policies, combined with the expansion of the Masjid al-Haram complex, led to the displacement and decline of *mukimin Jawi* communities, such as those residing in Jabal Abu Qubais (Siswanto & Fakhruddin, 2022).

Despite various challenges, Nusantara ulama left a significant legacy through scholarly works. Books such as *Tasynif al-Asma'* by Sheikh Mahmud al-Masri document around 30 Nusantara ulama who contributed to the Masjid al-Haram. Additionally, ancient catalogs in international libraries, such as Dar al-Kutub al-Mishriyyah in Cairo, record the works of prominent Nusantara scholars published in the Middle East, including Sheikh Abdul Hamid Kudus al-Jawi, Sheikh Abu Hamid Kendal al-Jawi, and Sheikh Abdul Quddus Tuban. These works, written in Arabic, are

evidence of Nusantara ulama's contributions to the development of global Islamic civilization (Hajam et al., 2024).

In the context of this study, the contributions of Nusantara ulama in the Arabian Peninsula strengthen the position of peripheral Islamic traditions as a force for moderation amidst the dominance of homogenizing global narratives. Symbols such as Blackwater, which often associate Islam with radicalism and conflict, narrow the global understanding of Islam. In contrast, Nusantara ulama introduced an Islam that is inclusive, peaceful, and oriented toward harmony—a model of moderation that challenges these negative stereotypes.

As noted by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, Western discourse often reduces Islam to a political or military phenomenon, neglecting its peaceful religious traditions. The presence of Nusantara ulama in the Arabian Peninsula demonstrates that peripheral Islamic traditions can significantly contribute to fostering global peace and harmony, while also serving as a counterbalance to the monolithic narratives of Islam (Said, 2013).

The Significance of Locality in the Islamization of Nusantara

Studies on the Islamization of the Nusantara archipelago often focus on historical artifacts and travel records that depict the early interactions with Muslim communities in the region. Various theories have been proposed to explain the origins and processes of Islam's arrival in Nusantara, each offering perspectives based on empirical and theoretical evidence (Saumantri, 2022).

The arrival of Islam in the Nusantara archipelago has long been debated through various theories that reflect historical, cultural, and geopolitical dynamics. Among the most influential is the Gujarat Theory, which argues that Islam entered the region in the 13th century via trading routes from Gujarat, India. This theory, supported by scholars like Snouck Hurgronje and W.F. Stutterheim, relies on the discovery of gravestones such as that of Sultan Malik al-Saleh (1297) in Samudra Pasai, bearing stylistic features linked to Gujarat (Hakim, 2018). However, critics argue that this theory underestimates the direct influence of Arab and Middle Eastern Islamic traditions.

The Persian Theory highlights the role of Sufi-oriented Persian missionaries. Cultural parallels such as the commemoration of Ashura (e.g., Tabuik in West Sumatra, Bubur Syura in Java) and the influence of Persian terminology in early Islamic education suggest deep cultural integration (Amin & Ananda, 2019). Figures like Maulana Malik Ibrahim and the teachings of Siti Jenar further reinforce this narrative, showing resonance with Persian Sufism, particularly the mystical approach of Al-Hallaj.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Theory, advocated by Slamet Mulyana, posits that Chinese Muslims played a role in the Islamization process, as evidenced by records in the Chronicles of Sam Po Kong. However, this theory remains weak due to limited evidence and historical reliability issues stemming from the transliteration of foreign names in Chinese records (Baiti & Razzaq, 2014). In contrast, the Arab Theory argues for a much earlier introduction of Islam, as early as the 7th century, brought by Arab merchants. Tang Dynasty records in 674 CE report Muslim communities on the west coast of Sumatra, while the adoption of the Shafi'i madhhab in Samudra Pasai and the usage of titles like Al-Malik reflect strong Arab and Egyptian influence (Abdul Gani Jamora Nasution et al., 2023).

Theories that focus excessively on artifact-based evidence often lead to reductive conclusions about the Islamization of Nusantara. Some Orientalists, such as van Leur, argue that Islam only influenced the surface layers of Nusantara culture and did not bring fundamental changes compared to the earlier Hindu-Buddhist civilizations. This perspective has been criticized by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who, in his book *Islam in the History and Culture of the Malays*, asserts that Islam introduced substantial changes to Malay society's culture and intellectual framework (Al-Attas, 2012).

Critical Reflection on Theories and Islam Nusantara

The terminology *"Islam Nusantara"* has sparked diverse perspectives. Abdel-Moneem Fouad from Al-Azhar University rejects this concept, arguing that Islam is a unified whole that should not be reduced based on regional distinctions. This perspective is supported by Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, who views the term "Islam Nusantara" as a narrowing of the universal concept of Islam.

The concept of "Islam Nusantara" also holds a significant place in studying Islamization in Nusantara. According to Siraj (2006), Islam Nusantara is not a new form of Islam but rather a typology that reflects Islam's adaptation to the local culture of Nusantara while maintaining the universal principles of Islam. Islam Nusantara emphasizes *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (uprightness), making it an inclusive model of Islamic moderation that is highly relevant in a global context (Saumantri, 2022).

These varied theories reveal how Islamization in the region was not a linear or homogenous process. Rather than viewing them as mutually exclusive, it is more productive to see them as complementary trajectories reflecting Islam's syncretic and pluralistic nature in Nusantara. While the Gujarat and Persian theories emphasize cultural integration, the Arab theory stresses early orthodoxy and doctrinal lineage. This complexity provides a fertile ground for understanding Islam Nusantara as a localized expression of Islam that remains connected to its universal origins.

Scholars such as Azyumardi Azra have argued that the strength of Islam Nusantara lies in its adaptability and non-confrontational approach, allowing Islamic values to be internalized within existing cultural frameworks. This supports Al-Attas's argument that Islam brought fundamental changes to the intellectual and spiritual fabric of the Malay world, contrary to Orientalist claims that Islam only penetrated the surface layer of indigenous cultures (Al-Attas, 2012). At the same time, critics such as Abdel-Moneem Fouad and Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi warn against regionalizing Islam, fearing that the concept of Islam Nusantara undermines the universal unity of Islam. However, scholars like Ismail Fajrie Alatas counter this by pointing out that Islam's global success precisely stems from its capacity to engage with local contexts, without compromising its doctrinal core (Bizawie, 2015).

This locality element plays a key role in shaping the face of moderate Islam in Nusantara. In Islamization, local traditions are not obstacles but mediums for integrating Islamic values into local cultures. This concept aligns with the perspective of Robert W. Hefner, who highlights how education and local traditions in Indonesia have fostered an inclusive and harmonious form of Islam, contributing to social stability (Hefner, 2000).

The process of Islamization in Nusantara, which occurred through peaceful avenues such as trade, education, and cultural interaction, serves as an antithesis to the narrative of conflict often associated with Islam, as represented by Blackwater. Islamization in Nusantara did not involve military force or political domination; instead, it was inclusive and adaptive to local contexts. Locality played a key role in integrating universal Islamic values into local cultural contexts, resulting in a harmonious Islamic tradition oriented toward moderation (Hidayatulloh et al., 2024). This tradition stands in contrast to homogenizing narratives that frame Islam within the context of violence and radicalism, while simultaneously demonstrating that peripheral Islam has a significant capacity to serve as a model for global peace.

The dominance of global narratives, as represented by Blackwater, tends to overlook the contributions of peripheral Islamic traditions, including Islam Nusantara, within global discourse. These narratives view Islam as a uniform phenomenon centered on the Middle East, failing to appreciate the diversity of Islamic expressions in other regions. In this context, Islam Nusantara offers a moderate approach capable of countering such stereotypes.

Locality serves as a medium for integrating Islamic values with local culture and contributes to the development of Islamic moderation capable of addressing global challenges. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphasizes that the Islamization of Nusantara brought fundamental changes to the culture and mindset of local communities, making it a model that can offer solutions to global issues, including radicalism and intolerance (Al-Attas, 2015).

The Role of Nusantara Ulama in Da'wah and Islamic Moderation

Nusantara ulama play a vital role in spreading Islamic *da'wah* through an approach that upholds humanistic values, respects local cultures, and appreciates indigenous wisdom. Islam arrived in Nusantara with the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, a teaching that brings mercy and well-being to all of creation, including humans, animals, plants, and even jinn. This concept is reflected in the words of Allah SWT:

"And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds" (QS. al-Anbiyā: 107).

As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia holds strong legitimacy to initiate peace efforts and promote Islamic values that foster peace. The perspective of Nusantara Islam is a tangible reflection of this principle, prioritizing social harmony and creativity in engaging Islamic teachings with local socio-cultural contexts (Prasetawati & Asnawi, 2018). Nusantara Islam emphasizes the importance of moderation and tolerance, aligning with Islam's essence as a mercy to all creation.

Sirajuddin explains that Islam arrived in Nusantara not by erasing local cultures, but by dialoging *shari'ah* with existing traditions (Sirajuddin, 2020). In Islam, the truth of a culture is measured by its alignment with *shari'ah*, which derives from the revelations of Allah SWT and the teachings of His Messenger. This principle ensures that Islam does not submit to human culture; rather, it is culture that must align with Islamic values (Yahya, 2018).

However, Islam did not arrive in a confrontational manner. As exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in his *da'wah*, Islam in Nusantara accommodated local cultures that did not conflict with *shari'ah*. The Prophet only abolished pre-Islamic practices (*jahiliyah*) that

contained elements of polytheism, immorality, and sin. In contrast, cultural elements aligned with Islamic principles were preserved and refined to reflect the values of *tawhid* (monotheism) (Suryan, 2017). This acculturation process became a hallmark of Islamic *da'wah* in Nusantara, where Islam blended with local cultures without losing its essence.

The principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* upheld in Nusantara Islam emphasizes that *da'wah* should be delivered with a peaceful, friendly approach that respects diversity. These values make Islam in Nusantara a unique model of Islamic moderation, where the harmony between religious teachings and local cultures serves as the foundation for creating an inclusive and peaceful society.

From various studies, it can be concluded that Islam and culture do not need to be in opposition as long as the culture does not conflict with Islamic values. Islam recognizes the existence of culture as a characteristic, identity, and integral part of a society. Islam does not teach its followers to abandon all the traditions of their ancestors but rather guides them to align these cultural practices with Islamic *shari'ah*. Thus, any culture can be preserved if it does not violate the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings.

The concept of Nusantara Islam has proven its resilience in guiding Indonesia's Muslim society toward a modern and democratic socio-political order (Saumantri, 2022; Riyadi & Karim, 2023). As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has successfully integrated Islamic values with local cultures, creating social harmony that contributes to fostering religious moderation. Nusantara Islam inspires the Islamic world to develop a model of peaceful interaction relevant to the modern context while providing constructive contributions to global civilization.

In practical terms, the moderation model of Nusantara Islam offers an effective and adaptable framework for religious education by weaving wasathiyah values into both the content and teaching methods. This approach is reflected in classical and contemporary Nusantara Islamic texts, highlighting the deep compatibility between Islamic teachings and local wisdom. Educators and da'i are equipped with pluralistic and context-sensitive perspectives grounded in the socio-cultural realities of their communities, allowing them to deliver more inclusive and relevant instruction (Hajam et al., 2022). Furthermore, the model promotes interfaith literacy and dialogue as essential elements of moral and civic education, fostering a more tolerant and harmonious society.

Additionally, this model can guide state religious policies. For instance, formal recognition and support to traditional Islamic institutions like pesantren and Islamic community-based organizations can strengthen inclusive religious narratives nationally. Policymakers should also elevate the role of Nusantara ulama in international religious diplomacy, enabling them to serve as ambassadors of peace and moderation across the Muslim world.

From a global standpoint, Nusantara Islam also offers a counter-narrative to dominant stereotypes of Islam as violent, rigid, or intolerant stereotypes often reinforced by Western media representations, such as those symbolized by militarized terms like Blackwater. Unlike these portrayals, Islam in Nusantara has evolved within a multicultural, democratic society, demonstrating that Islam can coexist peacefully with pluralism, democracy, and modernity. The model of Indonesian Islam shows the world that Islam can be both devout and democratic, both rooted and open-minded.

This has strategic implications for global media and political discourse. Promoting the Nusantara Islam narrative through international forums (e.g., G20 Religion Forum, interfaith summits), academic collaborations, and digital diplomacy can help reshape global perceptions. Rather than viewing Islam as a monolithic or confrontational force, the global community can begin to recognize its diversity and humanism.

Fazlur Rahman, a prominent Muslim thinker, highlights that Islam in Nusantara is often overlooked in global Islamic studies, despite its vast potential. In his view, Islam in Nusantara is frequently regarded as a "backwater" or underdeveloped region. Azyumardi Azra also emphasizes this area as peripheral in global Islamic discourse. Rahman states:

"It is notorious that in general accounts of Islam, let alone accounts of specific areas like Islamic law and education, Indonesia is severely ignored even though it is the most populous Muslim country, the general impression being that it is some sort of a 'backwater' of Islam" (Rahman, 1998).

This perspective overlooks the fact that Sufi ulama in Nusantara are progressive scholars who have played a significant role in shaping the unique character and identity of Islam in the region. Nusantara ulama not only actively engage in the lives of their communities but also contribute positively to Islamic civilization in a peaceful manner (Anam et al., 2019). Fazlur Rahman specifically highlights the role of organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in establishing the Arabic language in Nusantara. Proficiency in Arabic is essential for accessing primary Islamic sources, making Islamic education in Nusantara more progressive. Rahman states:

"... even the Nahdlat al-'Ulama gives an excellent training in Arabic, at least in some of the major schools..." (Rahman, 1998).

In addition to NU, organizations like Muhammadiyah play a crucial role in developing modern Islamic thought based on the principle of *wasathiyah* (moderation). With its modern religiosity model, Indonesian Islam offers a peaceful and harmonious approach to addressing global challenges. This makes Indonesia one of the key centers of modern Islamic civilization, capable of making significant contributions to the world (Bisri et al., 2024).

As a civilization rooted in harmony and peace, Nusantara Islam provides local solutions to challenges such as radicalism and conflict. He offers a global approach that can serve as a model for other parts of the Islamic world. Indonesia's contribution to building a peaceful and harmonious global civilization, as represented by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, strengthens the position of Nusantara Islam within global Islamic discourse.

Vernacularization and Indigenization in Shaping Islamic Moderation

The processes of vernacularization and indigenization are crucial steps in shaping the character of Nusantara Islam as a model of Islamic moderation. Azyumardi Azra explains that vernacularization refers to translating key concepts from Arabic into local languages, such as Malay, Javanese, Sundanese, and Indonesian. Azra (2021) emphasizes that this linguistic transformation enhances understanding and embeds Islamic values into the cultural fabric of local communities. Once these concepts are vernacularized, they undergo a process of indigenization, where Islamic teachings are adapted to align with the local population's traditions, customs, and worldviews.

Rather than diluting the religion, this adaptation enables Islam to harmonize with the identity and values of Nusantara societies while preserving its doctrinal integrity (Azra, 2021).

Islam in the Nusantara region has thus evolved not as a rigid doctrine imposed from outside but as a dynamic faith that embraces local wisdom. This evolution contrasts with certain expressions of Islam in Arab regions that remain closely tied to tribal and socio-political structures. The Islam practiced in Nusantara emerges through a peaceful and adaptive process that embodies the Qur'anic principle of rahmatan lil 'alamin, or a mercy to all creation. As such, it is a tangible example of how Islam can thrive in diverse cultural contexts while maintaining its core teachings (Hajam et al., 2022).

Hajam et al. argue that Nusantara Islam is grounded in a distinctive orthodoxy shaped by a harmonious integration of three theological pillars. The theology of Asy'ariyah forms the intellectual foundation by balancing reason and revelation, enabling a nuanced engagement with sacred texts and rational inquiry. This is supported by the jurisprudence of the Shafi'i school, which provides a structured yet flexible approach to legal interpretation, allowing for practical implementation in everyday life. The Sufism of al-Ghazali enriches the ethical and spiritual dimensions, which internalizes Islamic values through personal purification and moral discipline. This synthesis of theology, law, and mysticism gives rise to an Islamic tradition characterized by moderation, inclusivity, and tolerance (Hajam et al., 2020).

In order to ensure international readers can grasp these foundational ideas, it is essential to clarify key terms. *Wasathiyah* refers to a moderate approach to life and religion that avoids extremes. *Tawasuth* emphasizes the middle path, *tasamuh* highlights the importance of tolerance and respect for difference, and *tawazun* signifies balance in priorities and ethical choices. All these principles are rooted in the overarching Islamic vision of mercy and harmony (Saumantri, 2023; Mudhofi et al., 2023). The relevance of Nusantara Islam becomes even more evident when linked to global issues such as radicalization, terrorism, and the exclusivism promoted by extremist groups. Organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda represent a stark departure from the tolerant, culturally adaptive Islam of the Nusantara. These radical groups advocate a literalist and exclusionary ideology that disregards cultural diversity and often resorts to violence. In stark contrast, Nusantara Islam offers a model grounded in peaceful coexistence, intellectual openness, and social compassion (Qomar, 2016). This model is actively promoted through Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren, which nurture generations of religious leaders who embody values of pluralism and social responsibility.

Moreover, the vernacularization of Islamic discourse allows communities to access religious teachings in their native cultural language, minimizing the alienation that radical groups often exploit to attract followers. Indigenization ensures that Islam is experienced not as an external force but as a native part of everyday life, deeply embedded in customs, festivals, and social ethics. This way, Nusantara Islam is a resilient defense against ideological extremism (Susanti, 2022).

The global marginalization of Nusantara Islam in academic and media discourses remains a pressing issue. Fazlur Rahman points out that despite Indonesia being the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, it is often omitted from discussions on Islamic law, education, and civilization (Rahman, 1998). Such omission reinforces the perception of Nusantara as a religious "backwater," undermining its potential to contribute meaningfully to global Islamic thought

Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, further critiques how the Western gaze flattens Islamic diversity, presenting Islam as a monolithic and conflict-prone tradition. This distorted portrayal is reinforced by popular narratives that link Islam with militarism and violence, often symbolized by entities like Blackwater (Said, 2013). Against this backdrop, Nusantara Islam offers a compelling counter-narrative. Its emphasis on peaceful coexistence, cultural engagement, and spiritual refinement challenges the stereotype of Islam as inherently confrontational. The historical processes of vernacularization and indigenization affirm that peripheral regions like the Nusantara are not passive recipients of Islamic civilization, but active contributors to its evolution.

The strategic role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah further strengthens the case for Nusantara Islam as a global model. These two organizations have maintained independence from state power while building robust networks of educational, social, and economic institutions. Their pesantren and madrasahs are vital in instilling moderate Islamic values; their universities promote the integration of religious and scientific knowledge; and their hospitals, clinics, and cooperatives embody Islamic ethics in practical community service. Their contributions illustrate that moderate Islam can be institutionalized in socially impactful and theologically authentic ways.

The regional scope of Nusantara Islam also extends beyond Indonesia. Historically known as bilād al-Jawiyyin, or the lands of the Jawi Muslims, this region includes Malaysia, Brunei, southern Thailand (Patani), and parts of the southern Philippines (Mindanao). Within Islamic civilization, it represents a unique religio-cultural zone that is diverse and coherent in its adherence to a moderate, adaptive form of Islam. This uniqueness is rooted in geography and the spiritual, legal, and cultural elements that define Nusantara Islam (Azra, 2009).

In a world increasingly marked by religious conflict, identity politics, and polarization, the values nurtured by Nusantara Islam provide a hopeful alternative. They offer a blueprint for how Islam can contribute positively to multicultural societies and engage with global issues without compromising its foundational truths. This model has already shown its efficacy nationally and holds great promise for broader global dissemination (Munadi & Susilayati, 2016).

However, Rahman notes that academic studies on Islam in Nusantara remain limited and are often overlooked in global discourse. Nusantara Islam is frequently regarded as a "peripheral" or "backwater" region, despite its immense potential to contribute to global Islamic civilization. Nusantara Islam, with its values of *wasathiyah* (moderation), offers an alternative to the ongoing conflicts in Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. In this context, Nusantara Islam demonstrates that Islam can thrive harmoniously in multicultural societies without losing its essence. Criticism of peripheral Islam, as highlighted by Adnan (2008), often views regions like Nusantara as "marginal" within Islamic civilization.

Nevertheless, the academic exploration of Nusantara Islam remains limited, and more systematic studies are needed to highlight its contributions to global Islamic thought. Future research could investigate how the teachings and practices of wasathiyah Islam in the Nusantara influence interfaith relations, counter radical ideologies, and inspire moderate movements in other Muslim-majority contexts. Empirical studies could focus on the societal impact of pesantren-based education, the global reception of NU and Muhammadiyah's outreach, or the integration of Islamic moderation into public policy.

Conclusion

The findings of this study explain that Islam and Nusantara ulama have made significant contributions to realizing Islamic moderation at the local and global levels. Nusantara Islam has developed with distinctive characteristics that include tolerance, respect for local wisdom, and flexibility in religious practices without compromising the essence of its teachings. This form of Islam reflects the harmony between the universal values of Islam and the diversity of local cultures. The contributions of Nusantara ulama are evident in the presence of figures such as as-Singkil (from Singkil), al-Asi (from Aceh), al-Minangkabawi (from Minangkabau), and al-Bantani (from Banten), who emphasized humanistic values and social harmony in their *da'wah*.

The *da'wah* approach used by Nusantara ulama highlights the importance of humanistic values and respect for local wisdom. They propagated Islamic teachings and integrated Islam with local cultures, creating a sustainable harmony between tradition and religion. This process demonstrates that Nusantara Islam can serve as a model of Islamic moderation relevant to addressing global challenges, including the narrative of marginalization often depicted by the term peripheral Islam. Nusantara Islam proves its ability to adapt to local cultures without losing its universal essence, providing an alternative to global narratives such as Blackwater. It stands as a model of Islamic moderation capable of countering critiques of global narratives that portray Islam as a homogeneous and conflictual entity.

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