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Globalization and Islamic Indigenization in Southeast Asian Muslim Communities

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Abstract

This study identifies the major challenges faced by Islam Nusantara in responding to political Islam in the contemporary world. It also aims to map the relationships and dynamics among three major currents of Islamic thought in Indonesia, traditional Islam, liberal Islam, and religious reformism, while explaining the role of Islam Nusantara in addressing contemporary crises through the intellectual legacy of Abdurrahman Wahid. The study employs a qualitative approach based on library research. Its analysis draws on historical scholarship and Indonesian Islamic thought in order to trace the genealogies and transmission of reformist ideas, the development of liberal Islamic discourse, and the responses articulated within traditionalist Islam. The findings show that Islamic reformism in Indonesia was shaped through the influence of major intellectual centers in the Middle East, including Mecca, Medina, and Cairo. Traditional Islam, by contrast, developed as a local Islamic cultural inheritance that emphasizes continuity of tradition and religious authority. Liberal Islam emerged through engagement with modern Muslim thinkers, including Fazlur Rahman. The study further demonstrates that the convergence between reformism and traditionalism has remained dynamic, involving ongoing negotiation, adaptation, and sustained forms of resistance, all of which have contributed to shaping the configuration of Indonesian Islam in the contemporary landscape. This article contributes to scholarship on the history of Indonesian Islamic thought by affirming Islam Nusantara as a conceptual framework for strengthening pluralism, mitigating the polarization produced by political Islam, and sustaining cultural-intellectual strategies for addressing current socio-religious crises.

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Abstrak

Studi ini mengidentifikasi tantangan utama yang dihadapi Islam Nusantara dalam menanggapi Islam politik di dunia kontemporer. Studi ini juga bertujuan untuk memetakan hubungan dan dinamika di antara tiga arus utama pemikiran Islam di Indonesia, yaitu Islam tradisional, Islam liberal, dan reformisme agama, sekaligus menjelaskan peran Islam Nusantara dalam mengatasi krisis kontemporer melalui warisan intelektual Abdurrahman Wahid. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan riset pustaka. Analisisnya mengacu pada kajian sejarah dan pemikiran Islam Indonesia untuk menelusuri silsilah dan transmisi gagasan reformis, perkembangan wacana Islam liberal, dan tanggapan yang diartikulasikan dalam Islam tradisionalis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa reformisme Islam di Indonesia dibentuk melalui pengaruh pusat-pusat intelektual utama di Timur Tengah, termasuk Mekah, Madinah, dan Kairo. Islam tradisional, sebaliknya, berkembang sebagai warisan budaya Islam lokal yang menekankan kesinambungan tradisi dan otoritas agama. Islam liberal muncul melalui keterlibatan dengan para pemikir Muslim modern, termasuk Fazlur Rahman. Studi ini lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa konvergensi antara reformisme dan tradisionalisme tetap dinamis, melibatkan negosiasi, adaptasi, dan bentuk-bentuk perlawanan yang berkelanjutan, yang semuanya telah berkontribusi dalam membentuk konfigurasi Islam Indonesia dalam lanskap kontemporer. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada kajian sejarah pemikiran Islam Indonesia dengan menegaskan Islam Nusantara sebagai kerangka konseptual untuk memperkuat pluralisme, mengurangi polarisasi yang dihasilkan oleh Islam politik, dan mempertahankan strategi budaya-intelektual untuk mengatasi krisis sosial-agama saat ini.

Kata Kunci:

Globalisasi, Indonesia, Islam Nusantara, Islam, Pribumisasi Islam

Introduction

For centuries, what is now commonly referred to in the Cold War-inflected English parlance as “Southeast Asia” has been connected to various regions of the world -- from the transmission of Islam from diverse places in the Middle East, South Asia, and China, to engagements with European colonialism and,

more recently, post-independence foreign relations in various regional, multilateral, and global contexts. From the eighth century Muslim traders were traversing the ports of what is now called Southeast Asia, and by the turn of the fourteenth century there is evidence for indigenous Muslim communities (Feener, 2019). Such economic, cultural, and religious exchange over the centuries has not, despite the warnings of some globalization theorists, led to a homogenization of Southeast Asia, much less a homogenization of Islamic ideas and practices. Rather than coming as a single, homogenous and authoritative source, the spread of Islam – and Muslim leaders -- across mainland and island Southeast Asia came from many directions and influences from Mecca and Medina to the Swahili Coast, Yemen, India, the Persian Gulf, Patani networks, and as far as China. Whereas some transmission of Islamic ideas from the Middle East (often led by Southeast Asians, or *Jawi*, pilgrims, scholars, and travelers who return home) have led to contentious debates and power struggles in particular moments and places, such as the struggle between "old" and "young" movements among Minangkabau in West Sumatra, more recently Southeast Asia – especially Muslim Southeast Asia – has experienced other forms of cultural influence and exchange with East Asian countries like Japan and Korea as well as Western countries from the United States to former European colonial powers (Heryanto, 2014; Peletz, 2020). As a nation-state, Indonesia has also begun to come to terms with Chinese Muslims as part of the long histories of Islam and Muslims in the archipelago. Along the way, Southeast Asia's ethnic communities have retained a sense of cultural, national, and religious identities that are influenced, yet never entirely determined, by outside forces.

Islamic transmission always occurred in local contexts across the archipelago, yet also intimately connected to global changes such as trade routes, political patronage of foreign scholars, and later the invention of the steamboat and opening of the Suez Canal (Tagliocozzo, 2013; Formichi, 2020). In this chapter I would like to explore what the late scholar and former Indonesian president, KH Abdurahman Wahid, referred to as *pribumisasi Islam* – or, the "indigenization of Islam." Such an endeavor requires understanding diverse social contexts of transmission of Islamic concepts that, on occasion, are considered at odds with local custom and social institutions, while also understanding how the tremendous commensurability of Islam and local customs allowed Islam to spread across much of the archipelago relatively peacefully. Arguably the most classic example of this in the popular imagination of contemporary Indonesian Muslims are the stories of the nine saints (*walisongo*) who spread Islamic principles within the conceptual and cosmological frameworks of local Hindu-Buddhist and animist traditions.

The indigenization of Islam, however, is not simply a matter of the past. As I will explore in detail, Indonesian Muslims today still must reconcile religious devotion with historical links and contemporary ritual practice in present-day Saudi Arabia, while also understanding themselves as citizen-believers in the modern, postcolonial nation-state of Indonesia. To this end, I also consider more recent historical formations of what contemporary Indonesians refer to as unique forms of "Indonesian Islam," variously described in current parlance by a variety of religious leaders as "Islam of the Archipelago" (*Islam Nusantara*), "Progressive Islam" (*Islam Berkemajuan*), "Smiling Islam," and still many other descriptors. After considering local contexts contiguous with particular ethnic groups or political kingdoms, in the latter sections of the chapter I am more concerned with how Indonesians – as citizens from diverse ethnic groups -- articulate and identify with a national, even exceptional, form of Indonesian Islam.

Proponents of an Indonesian Islam maintain that Islam itself is one, and that they are decidedly *not* forming a new school of thought (*madhab*). Instead, they maintain the importance of diversity within the everyday realization of Islam's oneness. Drawing from the Qur'anic notion of Islam is a "blessing for all worlds," since the early 2000s the government of democratic Indonesia has strategically deployed Islamic theological reasoning to understand and to manage the multi-ethnic, multi-religious nation – with hundreds of ethnic groups and different languages – that now represents the largest, Muslim-majority democracy in the world. Moreover, the idea of a "moderate" Indonesian Islam has also served as one of the pillars of Indonesian foreign policy and public diplomacy over the last two decades (Alles, 2015). Indeed, despite the politicization of Islam during recent decades, the fact that nearly all variants of Islamic expression are indeed present in contemporary Indonesia is a testament to possible futures of Indonesia's democratic turn. Also, indicative of this growing indigenous sense of religious authority, some in Malaysia and Indonesia now wonder publicly about what they view as the *Arabisasi*, or "Arabization," of local customary tradition (*adat*). Building on the work of theorists of globalization, I will demonstrate how global transmissions can be multi-directional and counter-hegemonic. Whatever the position to other authoritative voices within Islam, what is clear is that Islam continues to serve as an ethical model of everyday life for the 250 million Southeast Asian Muslims who comprise approximately a quarter of all Muslims worldwide.

As theories of globalization have developed, scholars have increasingly recognized the multi-directional nature of globalization, as well as local resistance to various forms of global hegemonic (and purportedly homogenizing) capitalism. As a conceptual frame for this chapter -- for

understanding integration, indigenization, and globalization – I find it useful to draw from a collection of scholars across the social sciences and humanities who think in terms of "global assemblages" – unique, multivalent, and multi-directional moments of economic, cultural, religious, and political currents that find traction (or don't) in decidedly local contexts (Ong and Collier, 2005). With such an approach, we can begin to account for both specific local practices as well as broader regional and global transformations and flows of people, ideas, and capital. As the process of Islamization has been neither seamless nor singular, the concept of "global assemblages" affords an analytical lens to understand the multiple waves and transformations brought by the spread of Islam over the long course of history and wider sense of a global Islamic umma, whilst also attending to the very specific cultural contexts, civic organizations, and political contexts.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach that integrates a literature-based inquiry with contextual historical analysis. This methodological choice is directly related to the study's aim of examining the dynamics of Islamic globalization and the processes of Islam's localization (pribumisasi) within Southeast Asian Muslim communities, particularly in relation to religious discourses, practices, and the responses of local actors to transnational ideas. The data are drawn from a wide range of sources, including academic books, scholarly journal articles, publications by religious institutions and civil society organizations, as well as relevant policy documents. These sources were selected purposively in order to capture a diversity of perspectives while also representing historical periods that are closely linked to interactions between global Islamic currents and local contexts.

Data were analyzed thematically by identifying key concepts such as globalization, the indigenization of Islam, religious moderation, and religious authority. The analysis was conducted in a critical and contextual manner to trace shifts in religious expressions and Islamic practices in Southeast Asia, as well as to identify patterns of continuity that persist over time. The validity of the study is ensured through source triangulation, achieved by comparing multiple academic viewpoints and bodies of literature. Overall, this study is dedicated to developing a comprehensive understanding of Islam as a global tradition that continuously adapts to local realities in the Southeast Asian region.

Result and Discussion

Power, Mobility, and Islam's longue durée in the Malay Archipelago

Historians have traced several links between the historical origins of Islam in Mecca and Medina and the varied faraway ports, places, and institutions in

which Islam began to spread and eventually thrive in the Malay Archipelago (Bruinessen, 1994; Ricci, 2004; Azra, 2004; Feener and Laffan, 2005; Ho, 2006; Tagliocozzo, 2016;). Without the space to elaborate in great detail, it is worth noting that various theories have accounted for the early spread and socio-religious transformations related to the spread of Islam and its consolidation into myriad political and economic systems in Southeast Asia (Alatas, 1985). Unfortunately, strong historical evidence is lacking for the earlier centuries of contact and transmission. By the time one of Islam's more renowned traveling scholars, Ibn Battuta, spent time in the Malay Archipelago as part of his own voyages during the fourteenth century, there already had been centuries of uneven transmission in localized settings of port cities and, eventually, the court systems of various kingdoms and rulers.

The very global nature of Islam as coming from elsewhere resonates quite well with the contours of theories of political power across Southeast Asia that privilege what is perceived as "foreign" (Tambiah, 1997). As historian of religions Michael Feener reminds us, however, Islam in contemporary Indonesia came from multiple elsewheres and was transmitted in diverse settings across the archipelago. Whereas one can trace important connections to Mecca and Medina, some of the earliest textual evidence was written in Persian (which suggests genealogies to Shi'i thought, even if not explicitly so) (Feener, 2019; Muwahidah, 2020). Whilst once Indonesian students in Cairo's Al-Azhar University helped forge a nationalist, anti-colonial spirit, more recently Indonesian diplomats, politicians, and journalists have trained their Egyptian friends in matters of democratization, de-militarization, and civil society. Indeed, from various religious and cultural trends one realizes Indonesians feel an increasing sense of confidence in Indonesian Islam. In what follows, I offer several brief case studies of the global transmission and local constitution – as well as contestation – of Islamic ideas about family law, customary inheritance, religious authority, and everyday practice of Islamic ethics.

The Role of Sufism in the Spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago

One of the looming questions in the historiography of the spread of Islam among indigenous Malay communities of the archipelago concerns the role of Sufism, or *tasawuf* (Johns, 1975). In what has become a classic article in the study of Islam in Southeast Asia, anthropologist-historian Martin van Bruinessen challenges earlier theories that make a strong case for the role of Sufism and tarekat networks in the spread of Islam. van Bruinessen cedes that the early centuries of Islamization across the archipelago most likely did happen around the same time as the growth of Sufism in the medieval period. van Bruinessen also acknowledges the role of various tarekat in the

genealogies of religious authority and practice over the last few centuries. In particular van Bruinessen acknowledges the claims of A.C. Milner that "the cosmological and metaphysical doctrines of Ibn Arabi's Sufism could easily be assimilated to Indic and autochthonous mystical ideas prevalent in the region," but goes on to argue that the historical data does not support the thesis that Sufism played a vital role in the early centuries of Islamization, maintaining instead that, observing that "[i]t is only later in Javanese writings that we encounter a much stronger presence of mystical teachings. As for the Sufi orders, it appears that these did not find a mass following before the late 18th and 19th centuries" (Bruinessen, 1994). This is not to say, however, that Sufi orders and non-tarekat-based mystical practices did not play important roles in more recent centuries, especially with respect to the anti-colonial struggle.

van Bruinessen -- in his important contribution published in the inaugural issue of what has become one of the most prominent Indonesian journals in Islamic studies -- does a masterful job recounting the various Sufi leaders whose ideas flourished in various parts of the archipelago. In particular, van Bruinessen examines the legacy of Hamzah Fansuri, famed Sufi poet whose work carried on Ibn Arabi's concept of the "oneness of being." Although Sufism, tarekat, and trade guilds may not have been the main structural drivers of the early periods of Islamization, van Bruinessen observes that such mystical ideas, as expressed in Fansuri's rhythmic poetic style (*sya'ir*), "easily lend themselves to a pantheistic interpretation" (Bruinessen, 1994). In this respect, one can better comprehend the broader theological shifts from Indic and Hindu-Buddhist traditions into the profound monotheism of Islam.

To better understand these historical shifts with respect to Islam among the Javanese, the late eminent historian M.C. Ricklefs has argued that the very idea of Javanese Islam – stated as such a matter of fact through the work of Clifford Geertz and others -- does not actually have deep historical roots (Geertz, 1976). Ricklefs observes that it was only around the beginning of the eighteenth century that Javanese-speaking peoples on Java began to think of themselves as a singular ethnic entity defined also in terms of their adherence to Islam whilst also making concessions for local Javanese spirits and cosmology, what Ricklefs famously referred to as the "Mystic Synthesis" (Ricklefs, 2006). As Indonesian travel to Mecca and Medina increased during the nineteenth century, some pilgrims and scholars returned espousing reformist beliefs acquired abroad and were eager to "purify" what they deemed as cultural practices with no basis in Islamic scripture. The following section provides a case study of reformist transformations in which a new generation of religious scholars staked claims on religious and political authority among

the Muslim, yet also matrilineal, ethnic group of the Minangkabau in West Sumatra.

Muslims, Matriarchs, and Muhammadiyah

The Minangkabau people of West Sumatra speak with great pride about their unique combination of their religion of Islam and customary tradition of matriliny. As one Minangkabau couplets states, "Customary law depends on religious law, religious law is based on the Qur'an." As the historian Jeffrey Hadler so wonderfully demonstrated, for centuries each generation of Minangkabau have given their own meaning(s) to this couplet, often in conversation with religio-political conflict -- from the Padri Wars of the early nineteenth century, where Muslim clerics championing their version of shariah battled with the elder, traditionalist clerics and nobility who eventually solicited Dutch intervention to ensure victory, to the *Kaum Muda* reformist movement that sought to purify Islamic practice from Sufism and customary traditions, or *adat* (Hadler, 2013).

For the Minangkabau, the rice fields and family "great house" (*rumah gadang*) are passed down to the daughters of the family. Minangkabau are also matrilocal, where the customary pattern (thought certainly with exceptions) is for the husband to move in with his wife's family. As Minangkabau sociologist Mochtar Naim described, by early adolescence young Minangkabau men would begin to sleep in the prayer house where they learned Qur'anic recitation in the evenings (Naim, 1971). With no home or land of their own, young men were expected to venture away from the homeland – *merantau* – as a rite of passage to prove their worth, fulfill their moral and financial obligations to family and homeland, and eventually return home to marry. During the nineteenth century, many young Minangkabau men sought their fortunes in Mecca and Medina. Some, such as Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi, went on to become a well-known scholar in Mecca during late nineteenth-early twentieth century, and inspired many leaders of what would later become the reformist movement Muhammadiyah.

As renowned Minangkabau historian Taufik Abdullah has argued, the perceived incongruity between Islam and matrilineal inheritance was one of the concerns of young reformist Minangkabau men – *kaum muda* -- who had gone abroad to centers of Islamic learning in the Middle East, were inspired by the reformist thought of Muhammad Abduh and others, and later returned with a modernist paradigm, intent to "purify" local custom of its traditionalist and Sufi elements and institutions (Abdullah, 1971). For this youth movement, Abdullah observes, "The purification and the rejection of *taqlid* were considered the first steps toward the rediscovery of the true ethics of Islam, which in the past had brought Muslims to the peak of civilization and temporal

power. …As part of the conflict with the traditionalist, *Kaum Tua* religious scholars, the modernists began to attack traditional religious practices, such as the way to celebrate the Prophet's birthday" (Abdullah, 1971).

We must also recall that such reform movements were happening during the colonial and early nationalist and revolutionary period of the early twentieth-century that pitted not just colonial subjects against the Dutch, but also created religio-political cleavages between rival visions of Islam and against various strands of communist peasants who had their own plans for this nation-in-waiting. Somewhat to their own chagrin, the Dutch found themselves being pulled into religio-political contestations they had hoped to avoid. The reformist Muslim youth across the Dutch East Indies, a burgeoning but also varied and internally divided bunch, were decidedly anti-colonial in approach. Abdoel Muis, a prominent young reformist and Minangkabau literary figure, was also involved in the Dutch East Indies-wide voluntary organization-turned-political party *Sarekat Islam*, or "Islamic Union."

As Taufik Abdullah astutely recognizes, this historical moment witnessed the flourishing of voluntary organizations, a modern moment in which "the voluntary association was now seen as the best method for achieving economic and educational progress… [it] as idealized as the best instrument through which the objectives of its members could be advanced" (Abdullah, 1971). The young reformists set out to establish a network of schools and social institutions. By 1912, diverse reformist movements across the archipelago united under arguably the most important reformist organization in modern Indonesia – the nearly thirty million members who make up Muhammadiyah. Whereas Muhammadiyah was founded by Ahmad Dahlan in the Central Javanese royal court city of Yogyakarta, its founding must be understood amidst the broader emphasis on voluntary (often anti-colonial) associations of that time.

Over a century later, Muhammadiyah -- as an overarching, yet internally diverse organization -- continues to articulate both a reformist theology and social justice advocacy in terms of a broad network of thousands of schools, clinics, and hospitals. Further still, through *zakat* donations Muhammadiyah has become one of the largest providers of emergency and philanthropic donations (Latief, 2017). Muhammadiyah has survived colonial, revolutionary, independence, authoritarian, and most recently democratic institutions, all the while maintaining its vision for progressive approaches and reformist ideology. During the latter years of Suharto's authoritarian New Order (1966-1998), Muhammadiyah opted to engage the regime for various reasons, among them was the ability to advance Islamic principles into state governance and civil society (Hefner, 2000). Suharto was famously known for his adherence to Javanese understandings of power, the cultivation of inner

potency, and the management of rival factions. As his political leverage with the army and other powerful factions began to ebb during the last decade of his rule, however, Suharto emboldened some of the very same religious reformist leaders he had previously held in check, and by the early 1990s Suharto went on a symbolic hajj pilgrimage, added "Muhammad" to his name, and made possible the founding of the nation's first Islamic bank, newspaper, and intellectual organization.

In this respect, Muhammadiyah represents an institutional example of how Islamic factions can exist in both spaces of precarity and preference under authoritarian regimes, courting political favor as part of a broader vision to Islamize society, whilst also working to purify Islam from local custom. While this may seem paradoxical, Muhammadiyah provides an interesting historical example of a religious institution's capacity to make political accommodations to local power structures whilst also advocating for the erasure of local customs and cosmologies. As the New Order regime collapsed, and B.J. Habibie became President, Muhammadiyah intellectuals and clerics embraced the democratic experiment with great fervor. Rather than espousing the merits of an Islamic state, the central board of Muhammadiyah joined with international NGO The Asia Foundation to create civic education textbooks on democracy, pluralism, and civic society (Rozak, et al, 2000). Importantly, these textbooks presented these concepts with Qur'anic referents and examples from the hadith tradition, thereby rejecting the notion that these principles were simply Western imports. To this day, Muhammadiyah's network of schools and civic institutions continue as an important bedrock of Indonesian civil society.

The theme chosen for Muhammadiyah's 2015 Congress (held every five years) was "Progressive Islam" – *Islam Berkemajuan* – a message that aspires to unite its own internal divisions representative of theological and political gradations of reformism. Whereas the reformist and traditionalists strands of Islam do indeed vie for religious authority, the national narrative about Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama is that they serve complementary roles as examples of what Islamic civil society might look like in a democratic, Muslim-majority nation. Importantly, Muhammadiyah intellectual leaders have formulated what some refer to as *fikih kebinekaan* -- a "jurisprudence of diversity" – as a way to reconcile Islamic jurisprudence, national citizenship, religious pluralism, and non-Muslim leadership (Gunawan, et al, 2015). While both NU and Muhammadiyah have been integral civil society organizations from the colonial period, their central boards have often taken different approaches and regional variation certainly exists. Tensions do remain regarding innovation and correct practice. As detailed below, the formation and subsequent religious and political activities of each organization reflect a broader competition for religious legitimacy and authority.

Nahdlatul Ulama and the Traditionalist Response

The reformist messages of Muslims returning home from study in the Middle East did not resonate equally across the archipelago. As we learned in the case of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, existing networks of power and patronage contested reformist theological claims, and until today there is great diversity of Islamic practice and ideology even within a particular region. Traditionalist scholars who served as religious teachers in Islamic boarding schools maintained the importance of learning classical treatises on Islamic philosophy, theology, and law. In 1926 (fourteen years after the founding of Muhammadiyah), traditionalist clerics in the eastern Javanese city of Jombang founded what is now the world's largest Islamic organization – Nahdlatul Ulama, or "Revival of the Ulama." Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) articulated a classicalist-traditionalist response to reformist clerics that emphasized how Islamic ethics have historically shown great respect for local traditions as long as they did not explicitly conflict with Islamic teachings. NU leaders glorified the "nine saints" whose respect for local traditions was precisely the avenue for Islamization. The important NU cleric Abdurrahman Wahid later articulated this concept of localizing and indigenizing Islam with the now well-known phrase in Indonesia, *pribumisasi Islam*, "the indigenization of Islam" (Wahid, 2015). Wahid's concept builds on a longer historical connection between Islam and nation, rooted in the anti-colonial efforts of Wahid's own grandfather Hasyim Asy'ari, who issued a fatwa proclaiming that "love for one's homeland is part of one's faith." In this section I explore how NU leaders in contemporary Indonesia leverage a form of classicalist, traditionalist Islam that seeks to both honor local practices that do not explicitly contradict Islam and to eradicate what they feel are extremist views of various strains of Salafist political Islam.

Well beyond Muhammadiyah reformist circles, the very notion of reformist Islam has broadened over the last several decades. Once authoritarian rule fell and new political parties began to flourish, an emerging amalgam of devout urban professionals that had been forming religious gatherings and prayer groups eventually founded the Islamic political party PKS, the Prosperity and Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*), modeled on the political Islam of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (Fealy and Bubalo, 2005). Although global networks have long informed Islamic practices and ideologies in what we now call Indonesia, more recently traditionalist leaders invoke the term *Islam transnasional* (transnational Islam) to refer to what they describe as current impact of transnational political Islam and Islamic reformism – as manifest, for example, in Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia or other forms of Islamic practice endorsed by some monarchies of the Middle East -- that traditionalist

leaders feel is incompatible with the cultural and historical context of the archipelago.

At the 2015 NU National Congress (*muktamar*), NU leaders and young intellectuals launched the concept of *Islam Nusantara*, or "Islam of the Archipelago" as a bulwark against what they feel to be the threat of various conservative, Salafist trends in the practice of Indonesian Islam (and its power within the mechanisms of the nation-state) (Sahal, et al, 2015). As the most recent iteration of the indigenization of Islam in Indonesia, NU leaders emphasize that this concept does not in any respect aim to offer a new *madhab*, and is fully within the purview of the Shafi'i school of Sunni thought. *Islam Nusantara* is not a typology, rather an affirmation of the very processes of localization that have occurred across the globe as people have converted to Islam and practiced the faith.

At the same time, however, the concept became the locus of great debate in Indonesia, especially on social media. As Saskia Schaefer astutely observes, "The term Islam Nusantara does not float in any non-political space, nor does it have only one meaning. It stands for a group of contemporary religious authorities who internally debate its exact meaning and externally take a stance against strict or "radical" interpretations of Islam" (Schaefer, 2021) Drawing on Goffman's notion of framing, Anthropologist Mark Woodward also contextualizes this concept within always-local political contexts, noting that "Islam Nusantara is a symbology created by leading NU *ulama* and academics that combines aspects of traditional Sunni Islam, including Sufism, Javanese and to a much lesser degree other Indonesian cultures in an attempt to counter Salafi-Wahhabi efforts to transform Indonesian Islam" (Woodward, 2017).

Noting the flexibility implied in the concept of moderation, NU intellectual Ahmad Sahal notes – in a book launched as part of the 2015 NU congress -- that "NU and Muhammadiyah welcomed the [Indonesian] state ideology of *Pancasila* as a political system that not only does not contradict shariah, rather should be considered as an Islamic system in accordance with shariah" (Sahal, et al, 2015). In this book, editors solicited exegetical analysis from both traditionalist religious scholars *within* NU as well as others with more reformist affiliations with Muhammadiyah, such as Dr. Azyumardi Azra and Dr. Din Syamsuddin, who are trained historians who have studied the networks of Islamic scholarship and the development and adaptations of religious thought in the archipelago over the last several centuries. In this respect, NU leaders think of *Islam Nusantara* as a concept that Indonesia can promote on the global stage, not to be replicated elsewhere but instead as an exegetical commentary on the relationship between religion and homeland in Islamic theology and philosophy (Umar, 2019).

Islam, Public Diplomacy, and the Indonesian State

During the early years of post-authoritarian and democratic Indonesia, the state was also working to re-brand global narratives about both Islam and Indonesia. In fact, before Gymnastiar's fall from grace, Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs would frequently bring foreign journalists, diplomats, and businesspeople to visit Daarut Tauhiid to witness a side of Islam beyond the security preoccupations of terrorists, bombs, and veils. Following Suharto's fall in May of 1998, various Western observers fretted about the imminent "balkanization" of Indonesia. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. as well as a 2002 bomb blast in Bali, Indonesian diplomats were keen to provide alternative narratives about Indonesia as proof that Islam was compatible with democracy and that Indonesia was the model for so-called "moderate Islam."

In 2001, Dr. Hasan Wirajuda became Minister of Foreign Affairs and launched a soft power program of "total diplomacy" in order to recast Indonesia's image on the global stage (Wirajuda, 2016). By 2002, Wirajuda founded the new Directorate of Public Diplomacy within the foreign ministry and devoted much time and effort to bringing Muslim leaders into the broader vision for foreign policy, soft power, and public diplomacy. To this end, Wirajuda invited key religious leaders from the main Islamic organizations in Indonesia (especially NU and Muhammadiyah) in order to collectively brainstorm how they might position Indonesia as the exemplary model of the Qur'anic injunction that the Prophet brought Islam as a "blessing for all worlds." Drawing on other Qur'anic passages (such as al-Hujrat 49:13), Indonesian diplomats and religious leaders also discussed inter-religious tolerance in Indonesia in the ethical terms of getting to know one another and respecting "people of the book." This monotheistic rendering of religious authenticity has long haunted religious politics of citizenship in Indonesia. It has been especially burdensome for non-Muslim religious minorities such as Buddhists and Hindus, but also for Muslim minority groups such as Shi'a and Ahmadiyyah communities.

Nonetheless, the Indonesian government proudly touted the success stories of democratization and religious moderation. To be sure, Indonesia stands today as the most convincing example of the mutual compatibility between Islam and democracy, standing against Samuel Huntington's thesis about civilizational conflict (Hefner, 2000). Indonesian diplomats also wanted to restore Indonesia's past role in global geopolitics when they served as host of the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung. To this end, in 2007 Wirajuda and other politicians and diplomats (including then-President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) founded the Bali Democracy Forum as a way to invite leaders and diplomats of Asia and Africa in order to share lessons from Indonesia's own experience of democratization. So, too, Indonesian leaders had certain

regional, even "great power" aspirations that, they hoped, would invite foreign investment who had previously been concerned with political stability in Indonesia.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched several other programs to pursue similar goals. With respect to assuaging Western fears about Muslim terrorist Others, Indonesia and the United States began cultural exchange programs in which Indonesian clerics would travel to America to learn about citizenship and democracy in action. Likewise, American diplomats and religious leaders toured Indonesia's Islamic schools and esteemed institutes of higher education to witness the very real strides Indonesia has made in the realm of higher education, especially among young women. As one diplomat recounted, Indonesia was very keen to promote a kind of Indonesian Islam consistent with Western notions of modernity, freedom, and women's rights (however neo-colonial some of those Western ideas might be) (Ahmed, 1992).

As the Arab Uprising gained traction in 2010-2011, Indonesian leaders under the auspices of the Bali Democracy forum invited Egyptian and Tunisian journalists, politicians, and civil society leaders to gather in Indonesia to "share lessons" about Indonesia's relatively successful transition to (and consolidation of) democracy (Wirajuda, 2011). On several occasions in both Indonesia and Cairo, leaders met to discuss topics ranging from drafting constitutions to gracefully removing the military from political power. Clearly, Egypt had since gone in a different direction under military leadership and the Tunisian case remains fragile, with room for optimism. Whatever the global effects of such soft power, cultural diplomacy, these diplomatic efforts illustrate yet another example of how "Indonesian" Islam is articulated and understood vis-à-vis global and local political currents. In this case, the indigenization of Islam in Indonesia is both local and global, and the integration of religion into public diplomacy demonstrates how Islam itself becomes a focal point by which Indonesians connect with co-religionists in other countries, yet also distinguish their understanding and practice of Islam from that of the political contexts of countries in the Middle East.

What is important is the way in which Indonesian Muslims articulate multiple understandings and iterations of an "Indonesian Islam" – even if only as soft power discourses of diplomacy with no single corresponding demographic, theological, or sociological referent. More recently other Indonesian diplomats, such as Dr. A.M Fachir, have pursued new avenues for cultural diplomacy. During his illustrious career, Fachir served as Director General of Public Diplomacy; Indonesian Ambassador to Egypt (during the Arab Uprising); Ambassador to Saudi Arabia (during an especially tense era of bilateral relations overshadowed by alleged abuse of Indonesian migrant workers); and, eventually serving as Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (2014-

2019). Important to note is that Fachir was trained as a youth in the modern Islamic school Gontor (where students must become fluent in both Arabic and English), then at university in Arabic literature (with thesis written in Arabic), and for his doctoral dissertation became a specialist on the historical relationship between Egypt and Indonesia during the twentieth century, especially as Indonesian Muslims in Cairo developed nationalist, anti-colonial sentiments. All to say, his understanding of "Indonesian" Islam was constructed vis-à-vis academic learning and lived experiences traveling to and working in the Middle East. His time as ambassador to both Egypt and Saudi Arabia provided the opportunity to see the social injustices of these countries, and thus even though Fachir had great admiration for Islamic literature and arts in the Middle East, he did not hold some utopian vision of the current nation-state that reigns over Muslim holy lands nor its more recent centers of learning such as Al-Azhar University in Cairo (Mandaville and Hamid, 2018).

Despite his global outlook, Fachir did not find himself orienting his understanding of Islam to the cultural moorings of various cultures across the Middle East. Indeed, Fachir's diplomatic efforts reflect a certain pride in "Indonesian Islam," especially insofar as it reflects what he, and many Muslim leaders, believe to be the key Islamic notion of moderation. In the world of Indonesian public diplomacy, leaders have embraced the English language of "moderate Islam" when dealing with their Western counterparts. However, with co-religionists of the Middle East, Indonesian diplomats and religious leaders prefer to evoke more explicitly Islamic-Indonesian language of *wasatiyah*. In terms of promoting Indonesia as a model example of inter-religious dialogue, harmony, and tolerance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a book titled, "A Jewel from Heaven: A Portrait of Religious Life in Indonesia" (*Permata dari Surga: Potret Kehidupan Beragama di Indonesia*). In his forward, then-Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Fachir recalled the backstory of the book based on conversations with Muslim intellectual leaders at the progressive State Islamic University in Ciputat, where Fachir touted Indonesia's leading role in promoting inter-faith dialogue and religious exchange and suggested the need to promote the Indonesian model of inter-religious life in a country that is neither secular nor Islamic (Basnur et. al. 2016).

As Fachir notes, this book is at once outward looking – to show the world how Indonesia has managed religious dialogue in the public square – while also directed inward as a reminder for Indonesians to take pride in the global historical currents that brought Islam to Southeast Asia, and has been embraced as an ethical compass in the contemporary push for democracy, equal rights, and a particular vision of religious coexistence, if not outright freedom.

One final case of public diplomacy provides yet another example of how Indonesian public diplomacy reaffirms an increasing and occasionally strident confidence in an "Indonesian Islam" vis-à-vis the co-called "centers" of Islamic authority and influence in Mecca, Medina, and Cairo. While serving as presidential spokesperson for Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Dr. Dino Patti Djalal (who would later go on to become Ambassador to the United States and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs) had the idea to invite all of the ambassadors in Jakarta – especially those from the Middle East – for a special presidential screening of the new blockbuster Indonesian film, "Verses of Love" (*Ayat Ayat Cinta*), based on a popular novel that tells the story of Fahri, an Indonesian student in Cairo who embodies and exemplifies everyday Islamic virtue and ethical comportment, in stark contradistinction to the Egyptian men in the film whose moral failings include corruption, incest, and domestic violence. In the public imagination of contemporary Indonesia, dueling strains of Arabization and indigenization vie for public legitimacy and political authority. For Indonesian diplomats eager to showcase Indonesian arts and religion on the global stage, this film encapsulates the newfound pride in Indonesian Islam and is based on the increasingly popular notion that Indonesians themselves best exemplify the best of everyday ethics in the Islamic tradition. Djalal referred to the film as the Indonesian "antidote" to the bigotry and xenophobia espoused in anti-Islamic films in the West. Once again, globalization brings some new ideas and experiences, yet indigenous Muslims of the archipelago refigure these influences to articulate Islamic practices, theologies, and philosophies distinct to their particular religio-political context.

Similar affectations of increasing Indonesian pride in an Indonesian style of Islam – regardless of which nomenclature one prefers -- whose global outlook is to provide an exemplary model for other non-liberal Muslim-majority nation-states whose claims to religious authority and authenticity are not always matched by an adherence to Islamic ethics or democratic principles. This is especially so with regard to the public diplomacy efforts of NU over the last decade. Whereas our discussion above was from the vantage point of how the foreign ministry south to leverage Indonesian Islam as a soft, business-friendly export, it is important to note that organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah have for a long time maintained their own networks of international relations and, more recently, have prioritized public diplomacy and the promotion of Indonesian Islam. It is in this spirit, in May of 2016, that NU General Chair KH Dr. Said Agil Siraj and other NU leaders held an "International Summit for Moderate Islamic Leaders," or ISOMIL (Ardiantoro, et al. 2016). Building on the momentum of NU's 2015 national congressional theme of "Islam Nusantara," NU's central board wanted to showcase this concept to other Muslim leaders across Europe, North Africa,

and the Middle East. With the financial support of various religious leaders and state agencies (such as the National Commission for the Eradication of Terrorism, BNPT), NU invited (and paid for) over thirty religious leaders from Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Yemen, Turkey, Egypt, and elsewhere. Over the course of two days, these Islamic leaders were introduced to concepts such as Abdurrahman Wahid's notion of the "indigenization of Islam," the anti-colonial fatwa from NU's founder that "love for homeland is a part of faith," and, of course, *Islam Nusantara* as a model of cultural-religious integration that nonetheless maintains the sanctity of a unified Islam.

NU General Chair KH Said Agil Siraj was one of the Indonesians who earned his undergraduate, masters, and doctoral degrees with the help of Saudi scholarships (part of Saudi Arabia's own religious diplomacy efforts from the 1970s until today). Likely to the chagrin of his benefactors, Siraj remained committed to an NU-based understanding of religion and was especially committed to the idea that Sufi orders played a decisive role in the "moderate" nature of Islam in Indonesia. Further still, contrary to many academic accounts of political Islam in Indonesia, Siraj understood recent religious violence in Indonesia (especially that which was targeted at state institutions) to be the byproduct of an "Islam *transnasional*" that he and many others among traditionalist circles believe has infiltrated an otherwise peaceful and moderate *Islam Nusantara* (Mandal, 2017).

As an Indonesian Muslim leader, Siraj is a personal example of the global flows of people and ideas in the contemporary age. These travels have both strengthened his commitment to Islam, but also nurtured a desire to bring Islamic ethics in alignment with national ideologies. Trained in the theological debates of Muslim scholars in the Medieval period, Siraj nonetheless privileges Indonesian articulations of Islamic ideas, devotion, and practice as national citizens. Such an example raises commonly held assumptions about where, exactly, are the centres and peripheries in the Muslim world? In the next section, I bring the multiple historical and ethnographic threads of this chapter into a more cohesive analytical framework to better understand globalization, indigenization, and the historical transformations of religious authority.

Conclusion

Chiara Formichi's magisterial book, *Islam and Asia*, provides an important and nuanced analysis of centuries of Islamic transmission across Asia and the development of Muslim networks in a range of political contexts, from post city kingdoms and sultanates to colonialism and the fomenting of nationalist sentiment (Formichi, 2020). Perhaps more important is Formichi's effort to tell the stories of Islam in Asia as a way to de-center academic understandings of

Islam and the tendency to conflate Islam with the Middle East, even while the majority of Muslims live in Asia. Whereas the Western academic study of Islam often privileges the notion of the holy lands as the obvious historical center, and generations of philologists have privileged the texts of (mostly male) Muslim scholarship, fine-grained historical and ethnographic analyses of the Indonesian case(s) suggests that scholars might, instead, think in terms of multiple centers and peripheries.

Perhaps the simultaneous joy and frustration of studying Islamic history in Southeast Asia is the paucity of evidence necessary to tell a more comprehensive story. With respect to the study of contemporary Indonesia, and perhaps due to the legacy of Clifford Geertz's seminal work on Javanese religion (Geertz, 1976), the gaze of Western scholarship has more often fallen on the histories and peoples of Java and Sumatra, with much less attention to some of the important Muslim networks linking eastern Indonesia to centers of Islamic authority from Mecca and Medina to the Patani area of southern Thailand as well as multiple historical links with Muslim Philippines and even China. To be sure, the present chapter's emphasis on elites in Java and Sumatra does not redress this particular imbalance.

Similar to proponents of *Islam Nusantara* who proclaim the legitimacy and authority of Indonesian Islam (however defined), I offer these stories from the so-called "periphery" of the Islamic world to demonstrate the multi-directional nature of global flows of knowledge and power, as a reminder that there are multiple centers of culture, religion, and capital. Whether in the twelfth century or the modern era, Muslims of the Malay archipelago have drawn from multiple, varied sources of theology, philosophy, and forms of political participation. These efforts have been inspired, but not defined, by Islamic values and virtues. Indonesians feel at once part of a global umma, but their increasing confidence in Indonesian Islam might also be understood as a broader awakening regarding how some co-religionists view Indonesia as on the periphery and, thus, peripheral. As Martin van Bruinessen has lamented, despite the intellectual rigor of Indonesia's Muslim scholars, "the Arab world has shown a remarkable lack of interest in Asia in general, let alone in the social and cultural forms of Islam in Southeast Asia" (Bruinessen, 2012). As a nation that has for centuries adapted Islamic principles with local customs, however, the global assemblage that is "Indonesian Islam" will certainly deserve more attention and respect in the future, from Muslims and Islamicists alike.

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