

# Islam Nusantara

*Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture*



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## **Shi'i Communities in Southeast Asia: Religious Harmony Institutions and Peaceful Sunni-Shia Relations in Singapore**

*Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff S. dan Muhammad Haziq Bin Jani*

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## **Book Review Dialektika Politik dan Agama Kerajaan Bima Tahun 1775-1882**

*Hilmy Firdausy*

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**Fakultas Islam Nusantara**  
**Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia**



# مجلد اسلامك

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# مہمان نواز ملک



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*Hilmy Firdausy*



*Mitsuo Nakamura*

## **Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia, a New Era with the "New Gus Dur"**

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### **Abstract:**

Islam spread throughout the “*Nusantara*”, one of which was through the missionary work of Wali Songo and other clerics, who accepted, inserted and integrated Islamic teachings with the original pre-existing culture which was then known as “*Islam Nusantara*” which was characterized by moderation, justice, progress, middle ground and harmony. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) can be classify as the largest Islamic organization worldwide, with around 121 million members. NU upholds Pancasila and the unity of diversity, namely religious and cultural pluralism. This is the line of indigenization and Indonesianization of Islam that was propagated by Gus Dur. Gus Yahya’s new leadership acknowledged as able to absorb Gus Dur’s ideology of tolerance, openness, the middle way, gradualism, pluralism, humanity, and the flexible application of Islamic law (fiqh). Gus Yahya was also able to take charge of Abdurrahman’s controversial visit to Israel and has toured to promote dialogue between the two sides. Israelis and Palestinians, believe that “reconciliation and coexistence between them” is one of the keys to peace. That is the reason why Gus Yahya is called as the reincarnation of Gus Dur. The new leadership aims to strengthen NU’s vitality and independence as an organization. Improving management capabilities and improving the standard of living of the NU support base, namely farmers and fishermen, as well as increasing the micro, small and medium enterprises, trade, and industry. All NU members

are expected to act as social reform promoters (agents of change). The composition of the new leadership proved as fully rich in diversity, including the appointment of women leaders, local activists, young intellectuals, influential *Habib* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), and Chinese Muslims. In particular, the inclusion of 11 women in the central leadership was a milestone for NU.

**Keywords:** a new era, new Gus Dur, Nahdlatul Ulama, Humanity, Pluralism

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) bisa disebut sebagai organisasi Islam terbesar di Indonesia, karena memiliki 121 juta orang anggota. Islam menyebar ke seluruh nusantara melalui kerja misionaris Wali Songo dan ulama lainnya, yang menerima, memadukan dan menyatu dengan budaya asli yang sudah ada sebelumnya untuk menciptakan Islam Nusantara yang bercirikan moderasi, keadilan, kemajuan, jalan tengah, dan harmoni. NU menjunjung tinggi Pancasila serta kesatuan keberagaman, yakni pluralisme agama dan budaya. Inilah garis pribumisasi dan pengindonesiaan Islam yang dipropagandakan oleh Gus Dur. Kepemimpinan baru Gus Yahya mampu menyerap ideologi Gus Dur tentang toleransi, keterbukaan, jalan tengah, gradualisme, pluralisme, kemanusiaan, dan penerapan hukum Islam (fikih) yang fleksibel. Gus Yahya juga mampu mengambil alih kunjungan kontroversial Gus Dur ke Israel dan telah melakukan tur untuk mempromosikan dialog antara kedua belah pihak. Israel dan Palestina, percaya bahwa “rekonsiliasi dan koeksistensi di antara mereka” adalah salah satu kunci perdamaian. Itulah alasan mengapa Gus Yahya disebut sebagai reinkarnasi Gus Dur. Kepemimpinan baru bertujuan memperkuat vitalitas dan kemandirian NU sebagai sebuah organisasi. Meningkatkan kemampuan manajemen dan meningkatkan taraf hidup basis pendukung NU, yaitu petani dan nelayan, serta meningkatkan usaha mikro, kecil, dan menengah, perdagangan dan industri. Seluruh NU diharapkan akan berperan sebagai promotor reformasi sosial (agen perubahan). Komposisi kepemimpinan baru kaya akan keberagaman, antara lain penunjukan tokoh perempuan, aktivis lokal, cendekiawan muda, *Habib* (keturunan Muhammad) yang berpengaruh, dan Muslim Tionghoa. Secara khusus, masuknya 11 perempuan dalam kepemimpinan pusat merupakan tonggak sejarah.

**Keywords:** Era Baru, Gus Dur baru, Nahdlatul Ulama, Kemanusiaan, Pluralisme

## **Groundbreaking National Convention of Nahdlatul Ulama, December 2021**

Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), holds a national convention every five years. After two years of postponement due to the Corona disaster, the 34th National Congress was held late last year, December 23-24, in Lampung City, South Sumatra. In 1979, I was invited by Gus Dur (NU's Executive Committee Chairperson 1984-99 and the 4th President of the Republic), who was then emerging as a young Islamic intellectual, to attend the 26th National Congress held in Semarang as an observer for the first time. Since then, I have attended and observed the NU's National Convention every five years without fail. However, due to the Corona disaster, I was forced to miss the conference for the first time this year. I had no choice but to cover the event remotely via YouTube, TV, and newspaper reports. At the convention site in Lampung, President Jokowi appeared at the opening ceremony wearing a green sarong (the color of Islam), thanked NU for its cooperation in vaccination, the key to fighting Covid-19, and declared the convention open with a wish for its success. The 550-plus delegates, consisting of central officers and regional representatives, completed the adoption of the convention resolutions and the election of top leadership through two days of face-to-face, late-night proceedings under strict pandemic control measures.

According to my observation, this year's convention was a landmark comparable to the 27th National Convention in 1984, which had accepted the sole principle of Pancasila and chose the pair of President Ahmad Siddiq and Chairperson Gus Dur for its leadership. The reasons were (1) the reaffirmation of the line of "Islam of Nusantara" and the revitalized effort for the independence of NU, (2) the selection of Gus Yahya, "the second coming of Gus Dur," as the new chairperson and the composition of a new leadership team rich in diversity, in which women were officially appointed as officers for the first time in NU history, and (3) the adoption of the goal to internationalize the NU by expanding and strengthening its overseas branches and by enhancing its ability to contribute to conflict resolution and world peace.

### **The world's largest Islamic organization with 121 million members and supporters**

Nahdlatul Ulama in Arabic means "the awakening of the Islamic scholars." As a result of World War I, the Ottoman Sultanate collapsed in 1922, and the caliphate (successor to the Prophet Muhammad), which governed Sunni Muslims throughout the world, also disappeared in 1924. Under these circumstances, the traditionalist ulama of the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) "awakened" to the need to inherit Muhammad's role in the guidance, education, and welfare of Muslims, and formed the NU in 1926. The exact number of the current NU members and supporters is unknown, as the organization does not have a strict membership registration system unlike Muhammadiyah, its modernist rival and the second largest Muslim organization in Indonesia. Nevertheless, it is estimated from various public opinion polls that about half of the Muslim population, which accounts for 88% of the total population, are NU members and supporters and those feeling affinity with it. That would mean that about 121 million people are "the NU people." There are indeed many people who say "I am NU" in government offices, companies, factories, schools, hospitals, malls, stores, restaurants, and even *warung* (food stalls). NU may be regarded as the largest Islamic organization not only in Indonesia but also in the world today.



The organizational symbol of NU. It was hanging on the front door of Yenny Wahid's house. Photo by the author

NU's philosophy is expressed in the symbol of the organization adopted at its inception. Almighty God = Allah, who has 99 aliases, including Compassion, Creation, Justice, Kingship, Tolerance, etc. This is represented in the symbol as a chain of 99 twists, protecting the earth and all of God's creatures on it, including mankind. The large star in the upper center is the Prophet Muhammad, the four stars around him are the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs," the four stars below are the Four Sunni Schools, and the nine stars in total are the Nine Saints who contributed to the early Islamization of Java = "Wali Songo". Guided by these nine stars, Nahdlatul Ulama in Arabic letters surrounds and operates around the globe. Thus, in the NU's consciousness, the global and the local are one and the same.

### **Over 30,000 boarding schools are the social foundation of NU**

The social basis of NU is the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) scattered throughout the rural areas. Young male and female *santri* (students) live day and night (separately in gender) with ulama and *ustaz/ustaza* (male and female teachers) under the guidance of *kyai* (headmaster) and *nyai* (wife of the headmaster). The main teaching place is the mosque, where the *santri* study traditional Islamic subjects, mainly the Holy Book "Qur'an" and "Hadith" (Records of the sayings and doings of the Prophet). There are also *pesantren* dedicated to the practice of Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*).

According to recent statistics from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there are 31,385 *pesantren* throughout the country, bringing the total number of *santri* to 4.29 million. Many *pesantren* have *madrasas* that also provide general education at the elementary and high school levels. Recently, NU's universities have been established in 30 locations. Those *pesantren* are the hub of the local community's devotees, and *kyai* and *ulama* have been influential in many fields as informal social leaders including central and local politics. *Pesantren* has thus far produced a president and two vice-presidents, many ministers, high-level officials, central and local legislators, and local district chiefs and village heads.

### **Islam supporting religious and cultural pluralism**

Recently, the new capital to be built in East Kalimantan has been named "Nusantara," and the word, Nusantara, is often heard publicly. The word means "archipelago" in the ancient Javanese language and was used as another name for "Indonesia" during the independence

movement in the first half of the 20th century. In response to President Jokowi's plan to build a new capital and name it "Nusantara," Gus Yahya, the new chairperson of the NU, praised the idea as "a wonderful idea" and expressed his intention to establish the NU headquarters in the new capital. In fact, even before President Jokowi's idea, the word "Nusantara" had been used to describe the NU's basic line, "Islam of Nusantara." Behind the idea of "Islam of Nusantara" advocated by NU is the theological belief that Islam is God's cosmic benevolence, as indicated by the afore-mentioned NU organizational symbol, and that Islam brings God's benevolence throughout the earth. Islam spread throughout the Indonesian archipelago through the missionary work of the Nine Saints and others, merging with pre-existing and indigenous cultures to create the "Islam of Nusantara," characterized by moderation, justice, progress, middle way, and harmony. NU advocates that the country as a whole embraces an Islam that upheld the five founding principles of the Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution and the unity of diversity, i.e., religious and cultural pluralism. This was the line of "indigenization and Indonesianization of Islam" propagated by Gus Dur.

In their daily religious life, the NU people practice *tahlilan* (memorial ritual for the dead), pilgrimage to the saints' graves, return home after the fasting month, and communal feast (*selametan*) at such life-cycle rituals as births, weddings, funerals, etc., and all this is regarded as the "marker" of the NU people. Incidentally, shortly after Gus Yahya was elected as the new chairperson, as the first step of his post-convention activities, he took the entire new leadership and local branch officers on a pilgrimage to the tombs of NU's founding elders located on Madura Island and in East Java. This was meant to communicate with and to inherit the soul of the elders.

### **"The New Gus Dur," the new chairperson, Gus Yahya.**

The new chairperson, Gus Yahya, whose full name is Yahya Cholil Staquf, was born in Rembang, Central Java, in 1966 as the eldest son of Kyai Cholil Bisri, a renowned kyai and one of the founders of the National Awakening Party (PKB). "Gus" is a Javanese nickname for the son of a kyai, with the nuance of "young master." Gus Yakut (Yaqut Cholil Qoumas), the current Minister of Religious Affairs, is his younger brother. Both of them were educated in public elementary and secondary schools while studying traditional Islamic studies in *pesantren*, and both of them also attended public universities, Gadjah Mada University for the elder brother and the University of Indonesia for the younger one.

In 1999, Gus Yahya was appointed spokesperson for Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), who was elected the fourth President of the Republic. Through this role, Gus Yahya fully absorbed Gus Dur's ideology of "tolerance, openness, middle way, gradualism, pluralism, humanitarianism, and flexible application of Islamic law (*fiqh*)" for these purposes. Personality-wise, he inherited the fresh image of Indonesian Islam embodied by Gus Dur, i.e., "friendly Islam," rather than "angry Islam." He has also learned from Gus Dur the pattern of behavior of asserting and implementing what he believes to be righteous ideas without fear. One example of this is that he has taken over Gus Dur's controversial visit to Israel and has been on a tour to promote dialogue between the two sides, Israel and Palestine, believing that "reconciliation and coexistence between them" is one of the keys to world peace. Those are the reasons why Gus Yahya is called "The Reincarnation of Gus Dur" (Ahmad Najib Burhani, *Kompas*, 2022.02.12).



## **Large number of eye-catching female executives**

The composition and direction of the new NU leadership team formed through this national convention boldly reflects the ideals of “Nusantara’s Islam.” The composition is rich in diversity, including the appointment of prominent women, local activists, young intellectuals, influential Habib (descendants of Muhammad), and Chinese Muslims. In particular, the inclusion of 11 women in the central leadership is a milestone. Gus Yahya explains that those women were selected “not because they are women, but because they are competent activists and leaders.” Indeed, Gus Dur’s wife, Mrs. Sinta Nuriyah, a new member of the Supreme Advisory Council of NU, holds a master’s degree from the University of Indonesia (majoring in women’s studies) and is the founding director of a foundation that promotes the protection of women’s rights and advancement in society. The eldest daughter of Gus Dur and Sinta Nuriyah, Ms. Alissa Wahid, who was elected to the executive committee of NU, holds a master’s degree in psychology from Gadjah Mada University and founded the Network of Gusdurian, an NGO which promotes Gus Dur’s ideas and actions nationally. She also served as chairperson of the Convention Resolutions Committee this year. Anita Wahid, the third daughter of Gus Dur/Sinta Nuriyah also helps the Gusdurian. Their second daughter, Yenny Wahid, an MA from the Kennedy School of Harvard, was appointed to head a newly established department for research and development. Inaya Wahid, their fourth and youngest one, is also involved in the leadership of the NU’s department of culture and arts. The presence of those women also symbolizes the continuation and reaffirmation of the Gus Dur line in the NU.

Along with diversity, the new leadership aims to strengthen the vitality and independence of the NU as an organization. Concretely, it is to improve the management ability and upgrade the livelihood of the NU’s support base, i.e., farmers and fishermen, and also enhance micro, small, and medium-sized commercial and industrial enterprises. The new NU leadership places particular emphasis on the improvement and utilization of IT skills of its young people, and President Jokowi, in his congratulatory address at the inauguration ceremony of the new leadership, promised that “financial assistance and subsidies are due” in this regard. Gus Yahya declares that the entire NU will play the role of the promoter for social reform (change agent) under the new leadership.

## **Worldwide human network**

Another direction emphasized at the conference was NU’s direct contribution to world peace via its internationalization. Already, many NU affiliated Indonesians have traveled and resided in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle Eastern and North African countries for generations for the purpose of pilgrimage and the pursuit of Islamic studies, and these people have long served as NU’s overseas bases. Furthermore, an emerging trend over the past few decades has been the increase in the number of NU’s overseas chapters in Western and Asia-Pacific countries. After earning BA/BS degrees from Indonesian universities, many students seek postgraduate education in East and West European countries such as Britain, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Russia; in the United States and Canada; and in East Asian countries such as Japan, China, Taiwan, and Korea; in Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines; and in Australia and New Zealand.

It should also be noted that there are quite a few NU people who, after obtaining their doctoral or master's degrees abroad, continue to be active in teaching, research, or business in their host countries. These people are not only spreading the "Islam of Nusantara" locally as NU's overseas branches but are also providing feedback of their intellectual and technical contributions to their home country, Indonesia. Their contributions have been resulting in the enhancement of the intellectual and organizational strength of NU as a whole and the strengthening of its social presence. NU's international network is also involved in conflict resolution in various regions. Noteworthy are the activities of the NU branch in Afghanistan, which is reportedly engaged in persistent awareness- raising and persuasion activities vis-a-vis the Taliban regime to defend human rights, especially to ensure educational opportunities for women. It is also well known to all concerned that NU ulama/activists have been working behind the scenes and in multiple directions for many years to resolve conflicts and maintain peace in southern Thailand and the southern Philippines. These peace promotion efforts are expected to be further enhanced significantly with the arrival of Gus Yahya.

### **An Increasing Role as Promoter of Social Change**

NU will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2026, during the tenure of the new leadership under Gus Yahya (2022- 2027). Many commemorative events and movements are planned, and a slogan for the campaign has been set: "Caring for the Earth, Developing Civilization! (Merawat jagat, Membangun peradaban!)" "Merawat jagat = caring for the earth" reflects a sense of crisis over the degradation of the global environment and the need for immediate action for the survival of the human race. So, the Conference resolution calls for the promotion of carbon neutrality and greening, as well as concrete contributions to the achievement of the UN's SDGs goals. The latter, "Membangun peradaban = developing civilization" specifically aims to improve the standard of living of the bearers of the Nusantara civilization (i.e., "NU people") and to strengthen their organizational capacity. It also calls for the strengthening of NU's autonomy and independence from political trends, and Gus Yahya has even declared that NU officers would not be allowed to run for president in the 2024 presidential election.

Looking ahead, under the new leadership of Gus Yahya, domestically, NU's role as an agent of social change is expected to increase. In addition, as the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, the chair country of the G20, NU's role in international relations is also expected to increase. Significantly, the ambassadors from Russia and Ukraine were among those diplomats first to visit the newly elected Gus Yahya for congratulation and self-introduction. Appropriate response to and cooperation from the international community with the NU under the new leadership of Gus Yahya is expected to develop fruitfully.

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## Author Guideline

**I**slam Nusantara Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture facilitates publication of article and book review on study of Islam, Muslim culture, social and politics in Southeast Asia (Nusantara) and beyond. It is published twice a year and written in Indonesia, English and Arabic. It aims to present academic insight of social and cultural complexity of Muslim world in Southeast Asia under the frame of dialectic between Islam and local culture or cultural realities.

The journal invites scholars and experts working in various disciplines in the Islamic studies, humanities and social sciences. Articles should be original, research-based, unpublished and not under review for possible publication in other journals. All submitted papers are subject to review of the editors, editorial board, and blind reviewers.

**Papers submitted for publication must conform to the following guidelines:**

1. Papers must be typed in one-half spaced on A4-paper size;
2. Papers' length is about 8,000-10,000 words;
3. All submission must include a 200-300 word abstract;
4. Full name(s) of the author(s) must be stated, along with his/her/their institution and complete e-mail address;
5. All submission should be in Microsoft Word, RTF, or WordPerfect document file format;
6. Arabic words should be transliterated according to the style of 'Islam Nusantara Studies';
7. Bibliographical reference must be noted in footnote and bibliography according to 'Islam Nusantara Studies' style.ain.

### Examples of footnote style:

<sup>1</sup>Ryan Sugiarto, *Psikologi Raos: Saintifikasi Kawruh Jiwa Ki Ageng Suryomentaram*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Ifada, 2015), p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>Nur Syam, *Tarekat Petani: Fenomena Tarekat Syattariyah Lokal*, (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2013), p. 164.

<sup>3</sup>Syam, *Tarekat Petani*, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup>Ubaidillah Achmad dan Yuliyatun Tajuddin, *Suluk Kiai Cebolek Dalam Konflik Keberagamaan dan Kearifan Lokal*, (Jakarta: Prenada, 2014), p. 140.

<sup>5</sup>Nur Syam, *Tarekat Petani*, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup>M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, vol. 14 (Bandung: Lentera Hati, 2013), p. 167.

<sup>7</sup>Deny Hamdani, "Cultural System of Cirebonese People: Tradition of Maulidan in the Kanoman Kraton," *Indonesian Journal of Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (January-June 2012): p.12.

<sup>8</sup>Hamdani, "Cultural System of Cirebonese People," p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>Deny Hamdani, "Raison d'être of Islam Nusantara," *The Jakarta Post*, 06 Agustus 2015, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup>Azyumardi Azra, "Islam di "Negeri Bawah Angin" dalam Masa Perdagangan," *Studia Islamika* 3, no. 2 (1996): h. 191-221, review buku Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

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## **Guidelines for Book Reviews**

Please include, at the beginning of the review:

1. Author, Title, Place, Publisher, Date, number of pages, ISBN E.g., Turabian, Kate L. A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Sixth edition. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 308 + ix pp. ISBN: 0-226-81627-3.
2. The review should begin with a brief overall description of the book.
3. Matters that may be considered in the body of the review include:
  - The strengths and weaknesses of the book.
  - Comments on the author's style and presentation.
  - Whether or not the author's aims have been met.
  - Errors (typographical or other) and usefulness of indices.
  - Who would the book be useful to?
  - Would you recommend it for purchase?
5. The preferred format for submissions is MS-Word.





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