

Critical Discourse Analysis on Islam Nusantara in Indonesia's Foreign Policy

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Abstract

The concept of Islam Nusantara is a concept and perspective of Islam that *Nahdlatul Ulama* promoted at the NU Congress in 2015. It is used to mention the indigenization of Islamic practice in Indonesia, often contrasted with Arabization. The discourse of Islam Nusantara which is developing well among the government, Islamic organizations, and the community is aging several pros and cons for Indonesia's domestic politics. Furthermore, Islam Nusantara is also often used as the trademark of Indonesia's foreign policy with countries in the Middle East. This study tries to explain how Islam Nusantara Islam as a discourse has been applied in Indonesia's foreign policy towards countries in the Middle East. The study primarily relies on a critical discourse analysis method.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Foreign Policy, Indonesia, Islam, Islam Nusantara

1. INTRODUCTION

The strong relationship between Islam and Indonesia is something that cannot be refuted. Not only because Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world (approximately 229 million people), which is then followed by India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (World Population Review, 2022). However, the penetration of Islam that started in the 7th century (Hamka, 2020) has made Islam become an identity closely related to Indonesian people's social life. This can be seen from the many Islamic-based community organizations that have grown in Indonesia since the colonial era, such as the *Serikat Islam*, *Muhammadiyah*, *Nahdlatul Ulama*, *Persatuan Islam* (Islamic Union), other similar movements that emerged as a response to colonialism in Indonesia, and other Islamic movements that originated from other Muslim countries; such as *Tarbiyah group*, *Hizbut Tahrir*, *Salafy*, *Jama'ah Tabligh*. Among these communities and socio-religious organizations have also metamorphosed into social movements, communities, and political parties that take part in parliament.

Nahdlatul Ulama or NU, which was founded in 1926, is the largest Islamic community organization in Indonesia. Based on statistical data, NU followers in 2019 reached 109 million people, or around 49.5% of the Muslim population in Indonesia (KOMINFO, 2021). NU's influence in the history of politics in Indonesia is quite strong. This can be seen from the establishment of the Nahdlatul Ulama Party in 1952 after breaking away from Masyumi and the return of NU to its *khittah* as a community organization in 1983. Furthermore, some NU figures have influenced Indonesian politics; one of them is Abdurrahman Wahid or Gusdur who introduced pluralism as a narrative to

strengthen relations between religious communities. Under Gusdur's administration, Indonesia experienced a dilemma of identity dualism in its foreign policy. On the one hand, the concept of *'politik bebas aktif'* or free and active politics has become an identity of Indonesian foreign policy with any country, even with Israel. Under Gusdur's administration, Indonesia also maintained a good relationship with the Philippines in the midst of the conflict between the Philippines and Moro, even though it later drew criticism from a number of Muslim groups in Indonesia (Sukma, 2004). Such pros and cons caused the government to continue to show empathy toward the Muslim people globally.

The concept of Nusantara Islam was first introduced at the 33rd NU Conference in 2015 in Jombang, with the tagline *'Meneguhkan Islam Nusantara untuk Membangun Peradaban Indonesia dan Dunia'* (Strengthening Nusantara Islam to Build Indonesian and World Civilization) (Sasongko, 2015). The idea of indigenization of Islam derived from the idea that Islam does not only consists of rituals practiced by Muslims but also social teaching. Islam can be empirically contextualized with social and cultural realities in Indonesia. The term Nusantara which literally means 'archipelago' is taken from the Javanese Kawi language which is heavily influenced by Sanskrit. The term Nusantara in the history of Indonesian civilization is used to refer to the area of Majapahit power which covers almost the entire Southeast Asian region (Evers, 2016). Islam Nusantara is a vernacularization of the concept *'rahmatan lil'alamina'* (mercy to the worlds) which then developed to fit into Indonesia's social, cultural, and historical context.

The narrative of moderation or *'wasathiyah'* in religion is actually not a new thing in Indonesia. The two major streams of Muslim society represented by NU and Muhammadiyah have often made moderate, modern, and inclusive Islamic narratives become the trademarks of their da'wah (Maarif, 2009). However, Islam Nusantara often experiences rejection from the Muslim community in Indonesia, one of which is rejection from the West Sumatra MUI or *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Muthmainah, 2018). The rejection was due to the use of the term Islam Nusantara which became an antagonistic tool for NU to contrast NU's approach in da'wah with other Muslim communities who were considered extremist, intolerant, and too Arab-oriented. In addition, the concept of Islam Nusantara is often seen as an Islamic idea that only represents NU or Islam in the Java region.

Regardless of the pros and cons of the concept of Islam Nusantara, the vernacularization of Islam with the archipelago continues to develop and affect Indonesia's domestic and international politics. Considering that some of the international conflicts occurred in the Muslim World (Mehmet & Rezeg, 2019), especially in several countries in the Arabian Peninsula, Islam Nusantara is used by NU and the government to contrast with social and political practices in other Islamic countries. The narrative of Islam Nusantara has often become jargon for the government and NU figures to build relations with Islamic countries, to become a mediator in international conflicts, and to become an initiative in a number of high-level meetings related to interreligious relations. This article tries to discuss how the discourse on Islam Nusantara develops and is discussed in Indonesian foreign policy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is not much literature discussing the relationship between those two concepts 'Islam Nusantara' and 'foreign policy'. Most of the articles related to these keywords were published in 2019. Based on the search results for publications in the last six years, using the two keywords 'Islam Nusantara' and 'Foreign Policy', and 'Critical Discourse Analysis', there has been no research that applies critical discourse analysis in its method, and another concept that frequently used in these publications is 'Moderate Islam' (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Corpus of Publication Related to Islam Nusantara and Foreign Policy



Source: processed by researches

The manual search results for the latest publications related to Islam Nusantara and Foreign Policy show that there are several related publications. One of them is a journal written by Khamdan and Wiharyani on Islam Nusantara Political Identity Contestation in Indonesia tries to explain political contestation in Indonesia between Islam Wasathi and the transnational Islamic movement. The study elaborates on the dynamics of the transnational Islamic movement in Indonesia and how they can combine religious narratives with national narratives. NU is mentioned as a religious-based organization that can perceive the Islamic teachings in Pancasila. The study also highlights The article also highlights that Islam as a religion can synergically work with culture through religious moderation (Khamdan & Wiharyani, 2018).

An article written by Schmidt; Aesthetics of Authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'Radicalism' in Indonesian Film and Social Media, tries to explain how NU frames Islam Nusantara in social media as the counternarrative for radicalism using the documentary Rahmat Islam Nusantara and Cyber Warriors. The result of the research shows that those two 'Rahmat Islam Nusantara' and 'Cyber Warriors really apply this binary perspective in countering terrorism (Schmidt, 2021).

From the publications above, we can see that the two publications focus on explaining identity politics that occurs internally in Indonesia (domestic). Even though the second article can apply discourse analysis well and comprehensively, research on the discourse of slam Nusantara in current Indonesia's foreign policy; after 2015, is still rarely discussed, hence the doors to dig research novelty in the studies are still open.

3. METHODS

Critical Discourse Analysis is a method developed from Discourse Analysis. The early beginning of Discourse Analysis, first introduced by Z Harris in 1951, was very distinctive to the linguistic sciences (Jumadi, 2017). However, Discourse Analysis is now commonly applied as a method in various scientific disciplines; such as literary studies, social and political studies, and international relations studies (Bakry, 2019). According to Foucault, discourse is a group of statements displayed to speak or represent a particular topic at a specific historical time. In short, discourse is the product of knowledge through language (Jumadi, 2017). According to M.H Abrams and Geoffrey G Harpham, Discourse Analysis is the study of how language is used in texts and contexts. Discourse Analysis focuses on explaining the use of language in ongoing discourse, and the use of sentences that involve interactions between the communicators, the communicant, and the context (Bakry, 2019).

It is hard to distinguish what differentiates Discourse Analysis from Critical Discourse Analysis because both terms are often used interchangeably in social research. However, Critical Discourse Analysis examines the relationship between text (written or spoken text) and power or ideology in discourse, since language is an essential tool in social and political domination (*Olga Brusylovska - Critical discourse analysis (CDA) in International Relations / ПЕТОРИКА И КОМУНИКАЦИИ*, 2015).

To get a more comprehensive understanding of the Islam Nusantara discourse in Indonesia's foreign policy, the research applies the following step; first, to elaborate the meaning and vernacularization process of the term 'Islam Nusantara', second, to identify events and contexts where 'Islam Nusantara' used as the core value of Indonesia's foreign policy agenda, third, to elaborate the meaning behind the use of the term Islam Nusantara and how the communicants respond to the use of the word.

4. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

a. Understanding Islam Nusantara

Defining the concept of Nusantara is not an easy thing, bearing in mind that the concept of Islam Nusantara is not just a term that was developed based on its linguistic meaning, but it is a term that was generated from the philosophical thoughts of some NU figures. Etymologically, the word 'Islam' is rooted in the word '*salima*', which in Arabic has the following meanings; to surrender, to make peace or reconcile, and to be saved (Nursita & Sahide, 2019), and Nusantara; as it was mentioned in the introduction, is the Javanese language that means archipelago and has been often used to mention the territory of Majapahit Empire in the early history of Indonesia that covers almost all Southeast Asia region.

The use of the term Islam Nusantara has been rejected by some Muslim communities, due to its unclear terminology. However, NU figures repeatedly mention that Islam Nusantara is not a new sect but is a condensation or *hadzfu* of the phrase 'Islam in Nusantara'. Hence, understanding the term Islam Nusantara also requires an understanding of the historical, social, and political contexts of Islam in Indonesia, which is always contrasted with the Islamic practices of Muslims outside Southeast Asia. Islam Nusantara can be interpreted terminologically as an Islamic practice with a nationalist or even regionalist perspective, a midline Islam that teaches justice and tolerance. Such an interpretation can be concluded from the speech delivered by KH. Said Aqil Siraj; Chairman of NU for 2010-2021, during the meeting with Grand Sheikh al-Azhar Prof. Ahmad Muhammad at-Thayyib from Egypt. In his remarks, Said Aqil said:

“... وبعض عندنا موضوع مهمّ شعار مهمّ ال هو إسلام نوسانتارا، ما هو إسلام نوسانتارا؟ ليس مذهبًا جديدًا ولكن خصائص ومميزات مسلمين يسكنون في نوسانتارا: اندونيسيا، ماليزيا، وبروناي هذه اسمها نوسانتارا. ال هو أیه الإسلام، التوسط، والتوازن، و التسامح، على أساس أخوة إسلامية، أخوة وطنية، أخوة إنسانية... ضدّ *extremism* ، ضدّ التشدّد، والتطرف، بل ضدّ الإرهاب هذا اسمه إسلام نوسانتارا...”

“...After that, we have an important theme (to be discussed) and important” message and that's 'Islam Nusantara', it is not a new school of thought in Islam but a feature of Muslims in Nusantara; Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, they are all known as Nusantara. Islam that promotes *tawassuth* (middle way), *tawazun* (balance), and tolerance under Islamic brotherhood principles, and nationalism, humanity; the opposite of extremism, fanaticism, and furthermore terrorism, and this is Islam Nusantara...” (TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama, 2018)

Oman Fathurrahman and Azyumardi Azra; prominent Muslim academics in Indonesia, viewed Islam Nusantara as a product of Islamic civilization in Indonesia. It is a distinctive concept resulting from the contextualization and vernacularization of Islam. Islam promotes universality, *wasathiyah*, tolerance, and moderation (NU Online, n.d., 2015). Yahya Staquf said that those who opposed Islam Nusantara should understand the historical basis of the concept because Islam Nusantara is authentic and authoritative or *'mu'tabar'* (Asrori & Fathoni, 2015). To strengthen the previous arguments on the relevance of Islam Nusantara, KH. Afifuddin Muhajir, dean of Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Islamic Boarding School Situbondo, the term 'Islam Nusantara' may sound weird to some Muslims because Islamic teachings come from the divine source of Islam (revelation). However, Islam comprises those two aspects; *ilahiyyah* and *insaniyyah* that should be applied in the daily practices of Muslims (NU Online, 2015). Based on what NU figures and Muslim scholars interpreted about Islam Nusantara, it can be said that there are nine terms that are always associated with Islam Nusantara (see Table 1).

Table 1. Key Features of Islam Nusantara

No	Related Terms
1	Wasathiyah or Tawassuth
2	Tolerance
3	Tawazun or Middle way
4	Moderation
5	Against Extremism and Terrorism
6	Indonesia
7	Southeast Asia
8	Vernacularization
9	Indigenization
10	Authentic and Authoritative (Mu'tabar)

Source : NU Online, 2015

b. Discourse on Islam Nusantara in International Conflict Resolution

It is not astonishing for NU as a large religious organization in Indonesia to contribute to Indonesian foreign policy. Gusdur's very strong character, not only among the NU community, but also among Muslim scholars worldwide has made Gusdur become a strong actor in Indonesian diplomacy. During Gusdur's leadership, Indonesian political orientation was very outward-looking, despite the fact that he was also criticized by the government for having too frequent trips abroad. Gusdur could easily build relationships with various communities regardless of their religion and ethnicity. He could easily blend in with non-Muslims and secular-nationalist groups. Hence Indonesia has to face the dilemma of identity dualism in its foreign policy. On the one hand, Indonesia had to be consistent with its *'politik bebas aktif'* or 'independent and active foreign policy'. This is

reflected in Gusdur's foreign policy of establishing formal diplomatic relations with Israel. On the other hand, as a Muslim cleric and also president of a country that has the highest Muslim population in the world, establishing Indonesia-Israel diplomatic relations will only hurt Indonesian Muslims expectations.

Even though the term Islam Nusantara had not yet been established at that time, Gusdur's idea was that Indonesia should take a moderate stance regarding the conflict in Palestine. When there were a number of conflicts between the Philippines and Moro, by being friends with both parties, Indonesia could actually be more flexible and even had the potential to reconcile the parties involved in the conflict. This policy of course then raises pros and cons from within the country. A number of religious sermons and demonstrations against Wahid's policies were carried out by a number of Islamic groups, such as the Indonesian Committee for World Islamic Solidarity (KISDI) and KAMMI (Sukma, 2004). Gusdur furthermore released a book about Islamic movements that were considered a threat to the unity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, which consisted of radical Islamic movements, transnational Islam, and jihadists.

When it is developed under the new political context, Islam Nusantara has become the hallmark of Indonesia's approach to Islamic countries globally. One of the proofs is the establishment of NU in Afghanistan. Afghan clerics who for several years have had to face political unrest seem interested in the idea of Nusantara Islam which offers a moderate, tolerant, *tawazun*, just, and participative Islamic perspective. In 2014, NU together with a number of religious leaders from Afghanistan founded NUA (Nahdlatul Ulama Afghanistan) which has a mission to promote peace, reconciliation, tolerance, non-extremism, and Islamic brotherhood. NUA even then gets the support of 6000 religious leaders in Afghanistan (*Selesaikan Konflik, NU Afghanistan Dorong Diplomasi Islam Nusantara*, n.d.).

NU's role in continuing to contribute to mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also remains a frequent discourse during the years of the development of the concept of Islam Nusantara. One of them is by holding a national dialogue with ambassadors from countries in the Middle East to discuss the Palestine-Israel conflict on 22 December 2017. NU or more specifically the Islam Nusantara Foundation or INF; a research and research institute that aims to build understanding and promote Islam and nationality from the perspective of *rahmatan il'alam*, inviting representatives from Egypt, Palestine, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen to discuss the fate of Palestine after Donald Trump's claim on Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (Sukoyo, 2017).

In recent years, NU has also built cooperation with the United Arab Emirates government in several sectors; economy, development, education, and peace. In the economic sector, Indonesia and the UAE have agreed on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement or IUAE-CEPA; between the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia and the Ministry of Economy of the United Arab Emirates on July 2022. The agreement comprises various partnerships; such as trade, Islamic economy, investment, patent, taxation, and MSME (Ditjenppi Kemendag, 2022). Indonesia is also often seen as a role model in world peace, in the groundbreaking event of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in 2021, the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructures of UAE stated that Indonesia can be a role model in moderation, and moderation is a common ground for both UAE and Indonesia in establishing economic welfare (Sunaryo, 2021). Besides, the Vice President of Indonesia, KH. Ma'ruf Amin has been invited to deliver the speech at the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace held on December 2022 (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara, 2022). In education, Nahdlatul Ulama University (UNU) has agreed on an MoU for developing schools of future studies (Indraphasa, 2022).

c. Islam Nusantara: Contending Islam in the Middle East

The peace narrative for Palestine continues to be developed by NU by making Islam Nusantara an alternative or solution. Islam Nusantara has also become the discourse to contend the practice of Islam in the Middle East. This can be seen from some speech texts given by NU figures regarding Nusantara Islam and Islam in the Arab World (more details can be viewed in Table 2).

Table 2. Discourse on Islam Nusantara Contending Islam in the Middle East

No	Speaker	Text
1	Said Aqil Siraj	<p>"...إسلام نوسانتارا غير إسلام العرب...الآن... لا... الإسلام جميع العرب، التشدد والتطرف، والإرهاب. جامع العرب برضو مسلم مصر من عرب يعني. وهذا العصر، عصر الفتن، منذ الآن وصل إلينا الإرهاب...IT مليئة بالفتن، والمحن، والفتنة، والهمز، واللمز، وسوء الظن، وهذا خلاص، انتشرت في كلّ عالم حتى ربيع عرب، ببركات هذه Iphone، بدأ من تونس ثم إلى مصر وليبيا ثم الآن في سوريا، وكلنا نعرف الأوضاع السياسية أو اجتماعية غير محصود في العالم الإسلامي..."</p> <p>"...Islam Nusantara is not like Islam in the Arab, now....no...Islam in the whole Arab region is full of extremism, fanaticism, and terrorism. The whole Arab (region), Muslim in Egypt is also Arab by the way. And this era, is the era of chaos, and starting from now, we have to face terrorism. IT's (social media) are nowadays full of chaos, problems, slander, sedition, slurs, and mistrust, and it has spread throughout the world or Arab Spring, that's because of this iPhone. It (Arab Spring) started in Tunisia, then spread to Egypt, Libya, and now in Syria, and we all know that political and social approach could not solve the problem in the Islamic world..." (TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama, 2018).</p>
2	Said Aqil Siraj	<p>"... إن شاء الله في اندونيسيا والان اندونيسيا تتكوّن ١٧٠٠٠ جزيرة، ٦ أديان، ٧٤٠ قبيلة، ٤٠٠ لغة، الحمدلله نحن مازلنا موحدة بسبب إسلام نوسانتارا وبركة "Pancasila ..."</p> <p>"...<i>inshaaAllah</i> (if Allah wills) Indonesia now has 17.000 Islands, 6 religions, 740 ethnic groups, and 400 languages, <i>alhamdulillah</i> (praise to Allah), we (Indonesian) are still together in peace is thank to Islam Nusantara and Pancasila..." (TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama, 2018).</p>
3	Syaikh Ahmad Muhammad ath-Thayyib	<p>"وفقد أنا أداعبه بأنّ الله لو علم أنّ إندونيسياً أهل رسالته خاتمة لما نزلت على محمد العربي، ولكن لأنّه علم سبحانه الله أعلم حيث يجعل رسالته لأنّه علم أنّ هذا العربي هو الذي يستطيع أن تقوم بهذه المهمة."</p> <p>"And I joked with him, that if only Allah had known that Indonesian was the people of His Message (religion), it would not have been revealed to Muhammad who was an Arab. He chose Muhammad instead because He knew only Muhammad could carry this important message (Islam)." (TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama, 2018)</p>
4	Yahya Staquf	<p>"Sebetulnya itu bukan hanya ancaman bagi Indonesia. Kita merasa terancam karena kita akan kehilangan identitas dan pada</p>

		<p>saat yang sama terancam kehancuran sebagaimana yang terjadi di tempat lain.”</p> <p>"Actually, this (ISIS) is not only a threat to Indonesia. We feel threatened because we will lose our identity and simultaneously be threatened with destruction as has happened elsewhere." (Asrori & Fathoni, 2015).</p>
5	Ulil Abshar Abdalla	<p><i>"Islam Nusantara bersaing dengan wacana Islam yang lain untuk memperebutkan pengaruh di publik"</i></p> <p>"Islam Nusantara competes with other Islamic discourses to influence the public." (NF, 2021).</p> <p><i>"Kita punya perhatian besar Timur Tengah, tetapi Timur Tengah tidak pernah memperhitungkan dengan sungguh-sungguh terhadap keberadaan Islam di sini."</i></p> <p>"We have great concern for the Middle East, but the Middle East has never seriously considered the existence of Islam here; in Indonesia." (NF, 2021).</p>

Source : compiled by author from various sources

d. Counter Discourse of Islam Nusantara

Amid the discourse on Islam Nusantara, rejection of the concept is unavoidable. Because it is also often used to contrast NU with groups or factions that have a different understanding of some branches of sharia, hence it is seen as an exclusive and counterproductive concept. Rejections toward the idea of Islam Nusantara were conveyed mostly in the Sumatra region; such as West Sumatra, Aceh, and Riau. The chairman of the West Sumatra MUI, Buya Gusrizal Gazahar refused to accept Islam Nusantara even without Islam Nusantara, Muslims in Minang have been tolerant towards other religious communities. Gusrizal Gazahar stated in his sermon:

"'Islam Nusantara' dalam konsep/pengertian definisi apapun tidak dibutuhkan di Ranah Minang (Sumatera Barat). Bagi kami, nama 'Islam' telah sempurna dan tidak perlu lagi ditambah dengan embel-embel apapun..." (SK, 2018).

"'Islam Nusantara' in any concept or definition is not necessary for Minang land (West Sumatra). For us, 'Islam' is perfect and no need to be added with any frills." (SK, 2018).

He also added his statement with an accentuation:

"Lihat saja, di sana ada rumah ibadah agama lain, di sana ada rumah ibadah lain lagi. Saya tidak akan cabut ini, saya tidak akan geser setapak pun, tidak akan cabut keputusan ini sekejap pun!.....Apabila ingin disampaikan Islam Nusantara, tawarkan sana ke negeri lain, untuk tanah Minang tidak!" (Muthmainah, 2018).

"You may see, there are houses of worship of other religions, there are houses of worship. I will not revoke the permission, not even make one step to do that, the decision will not be revoked even for a moment!... If you want to convey *'Islam Nusantara'*, you can offer this (concept) to other countries, Minang still will say no!" (Muthmainah, 2018).

A declaration against Islam Nusantara was also conveyed in Aceh. In a speech delivered by the Deputy Regent of West Aceh at the commemoration of the National Santri Day, Banta Puteh Syam said that Islam Nusantara is an understanding that is contradictory to Islamic belief (*aqidah*). Banta Puteh Syam also said that this concept has the potential to cause pitting Malays and Arabs against each other. He stated in his speech:

"...Islam Nusantara kalau hanya sekedar penamaan Islam di Nusantara tidak masalah, tapi kalau itu berpotensi untuk mengadu domba antara Melayu dengan Arab, itu tidak boleh....Jangan latah menyebut Islam Nusantara, apalagi sampai dijadikan isme...." (Anwar, 2018).

"...it does not matter if Islam Nusantara is only understood as Islam in Nusantara, however, it can possibly pit Malays and Arabs against each other, and it should not be. Never follow such a trend or make it an ism (ideology)...(Anwar, 2018)"

The Chairman of the Riau MUI in 2018 also stated that they could not accept Islam Nusantara since it is still controverted by many Muslim figures and scholars. The Nusantara itself as a concept is still debatable, hence Nusantara comprises not only Indonesia, rather it spans from the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Debating Islam Nusantara is a waste of time and energy (Tanjung, 2018).

According to some Muslim scholars, Islam Nusantara has become too problematic due to the following reasons. First, Islam Nusantara as a concept is ambiguous, even its proponents have not been able to define Islam Nusantara clearly whether Islam Nusantara is a new *madzhab* (school of thought) or only a buzzword depicting the distinctive social reality of Muslims in Indonesia. Defining Islam Nusantara from a cultural perspective is also irrelevant, bearing in mind that '*Nusantara*' (archipelago) does not only include Indonesia but also Malaysia and Brunei. Second, Islam Nusantara, which is often contrasted with Islamic practices in the Middle East; Middle East that is full of conflicts and violence contains logical fallacy since conflicts that occur in the Middle East are not rooted in their understanding of Islam (Aswar, 2022). Third, the phrase 'Islam Nusantara' contains defects in its arrangement. The word 'Islam' in 'Islam Nusantara', which is a general word then characterized by 'Nusantara', which is actually a 'particular'. The phrase gives the impression that Islam has many variations, such as Arab Islam and Indian Islam, and Islam must fit in Nusantara (Zarkasyi, 2015).

5. CONCLUSION

Islam Nusantara or Islam in the Nusantara is a concept that was extracted by vernacularizing Islamic texts related to the 'kerahmatan' or mercy of Islam for the universe which was promoted by Nahdlatul Ulama figures. Discourses on Nusantara Islam are often associated with the following features; *wastahiyah* or *tawasuth*, *tawazun*, moderation, tolerance, anti-extremism, and non-Arab-oriented. Among Muslim communities in Indonesia, this concept often draws criticism due to its vagueness in its terminology and its contrast with certain Muslim groups who are considered too Arab-oriented and radical. The discourse on Islam Nusantara does not only affect the contestation of identity politics in Indonesia but also Indonesia's foreign policy. In terms of Indonesia's foreign policy, the narrative of Islam Nusantara is exploited in building relations with the Muslim world in addressing the conflicts that occurred in MENA (Arab Spring) and also used to promote reconciliation in Afghanistan and Palestine and establish more comprehensive partnerships with UAE.

Therefore, Islam as a religion and perspective can be a potential means for Indonesia in strengthening its relations with other nations. However, Islam Nusantara seems to be only considered as an attractive jargon that by chance attracted partner

countries. Islam Nusantara further still has some gaps in its conceptual framework, not only because this concept contains ambiguity in its operationalization, but also because it is often used to contrast Indonesian Muslims' understandings and practices of Islam with Muslims' in other countries; e.g Arab or Middle East. Such an operationalization rather shows that Islam Nusantara resists *wasathiyah* and *tawazun*; which are designed as its features. Islam Nusantara has not become a warm topic anymore in recent years, however, Islam as a means and approach in Indonesian diplomacy and foreign policy will not be an outdated discourse to be discussed.

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