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Promoting Indonesian Moderate Islam on the Global Stage: Non-State Actors' Soft Power Diplomacy in the Post-New Order Era

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Abstract

This paper investigates why and how Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) have engaged in the soft power diplomacy of Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia and how they mobilise their vast resources and networks to do so. The nefarious effects of radical extremism have invited the Muslim world, including Indonesia, to revert to the notion of Islamic moderation, a justly balanced Islam (wasatiyyat Islam), and to promote it nationally and globally. In this sense, both state and non-state actors, such as Muhammadiyah and NU, have pulled themselves into soft power diplomacy. Drawing upon the lens of soft power and public diplomacy theory, this paper finds that Muhammadiyah and NU's involvement in Indonesia's soft power and public diplomacy is generated by shared interests in reinstalling a moderate identity at home and abroad.

Keywords: *Wasatiyyat* Islam, soft power diplomacy, Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

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Introduction

Shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States of America (US), the Muslim world rushed to revert to the doctrine of *wasatiyyat Islam* (a just and balanced 'middle way' of Islam), theologically and historically inscribed in the Qur'an and Muhammad's traditions, as well as the long historical manifestations of Islamic civilisation.[2] Muslim leaders, intellectuals, and scholars are of the conviction to promote this Islamic doctrine to combat radical obscurantist ideology and challenge the widely circulated perception that Islam is the source of radical extremism.[3] Along this line, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Türkiye, Malaysia, and other parts of the Muslim world have brought *wasatiyyat Islam* into their domestic and foreign policies to combat radicalism and polish their credibility as friendly and peaceful Muslim countries in the eyes of the international community.[4]

With Indonesia suffering severely from terrorist attacks in Bali, Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and Makassar, the state was called upon to bring Islamic moderation (*Islam moderat*) into their soft power and public diplomacy. In so doing, the state invited non-state actors Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), respectively founded by Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta on November 18, 1912, and by Hasyim Asy'ari in Surabaya on January 31, 1926, into this global endeavour. In this case, the state's involvement of the two Islamic non-state actors is likely due to their incredible records in crafting 'positive peace' through moderate ways in education, health, social welfare, philanthropy, disaster, civil society, and democracy. Moreover, they participated actively in peacebuilding and

[2] The notion of *wasatiyyat Islam* is related to the concept of "*ummatan wasaṭan*" in the al-Baqarah (2), 142-147. The notion is a modern combination of the Greek philosophy of Aristotle and Islam, whose best meaning is "to mediate" or "to be just and balanced", not "to moderate". Manẓūr 1993, 426-432; Hanafi 2014, 7.

[3] Elias 2017, 133 -155.

[4] Meddeb 2011, 112-124; Baylocq and Hlaoua 2016, 113-128; Rabasa 2007.

conflict resolution in some countries, including southern Thailand, southern Philippines, Myanmar, and Afghanistan.[5]

In this regard, Muhammadiyah and NU's 'peace diplomacy' demonstrates how Islam and its institutions have been actively involved in Post Suharto Indonesia's diplomacy and foreign policy. In discussing this issue, Fanani found that, during the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) (2004-2014), Islam became an invaluable diplomatic asset in SBY's foreign policy, specifically in cultural diplomacy, conflict resolution, and maintaining peace.[6] Additionally, still in SBY's era, by emphasising the role of transnational networks of Muslim diplomats and civil society leaders, Hoesterey concluded that Indonesia could pursue the intertwined political projects of democratisation and internationalisation of Indonesian Islam, notably in their response to the Arab Spring as a way to increase the country's profile on the geopolitical stage as a champion of democracy and exemplar of authentic Islam.[7] Ultimately, taking a socio-historical perspective, Allès examined the growing role of Islamic non-state actors Muhammadiyah and NU in post-Suharto foreign policy and scrutinised Indonesia's foreign policy response to their parallel diplomacy to polish the country's international reputation.[8]

Based on the existing literature, close studies on Muhammadiyah and NU's involvement in post-Suharto Indonesia's soft power and public diplomacy are insufficient in number and scope. This paper, therefore, seeks to analyse the role of Muhammadiyah and NU in contemporary Indonesian soft power diplomacy. This paper investigates how and why Muhammadiyah and NU have been engaged in the soft power diplomacy of Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia and how they mobilise their vast resources and networks to do so. This paper, finally, unearths the impact of their soft power diplomacy on *wasatiyyat Islam* nationally and globally. It finds that Muhammadiyah and NU's involvement in Indonesian Islam's

[5] Azka 2019.
[6] Fanani 2012.
[7] Hoesterey 2013, 157-165.
[8] Allès 2015.

soft power and public diplomacy is vehemently generated by shared interests in restoring Indonesian international credibility, which has been tarnished by extremism. Although confronted by some limitations and constraints, such global endeavour has gained appreciation from international communities and sparked continuous efforts among Indonesian Muslims to enable Indonesia as a 'new centre of Islamic civilisation' for the Muslim world.

Islam, Democracy, and Soft Power Diplomacy

After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the 1990s, Islam – along with China – was portrayed by Samuel Huntington as a potential new threat to Western civilisation. Huntington argued that Islam contradicts the Western concept of liberal democracy. In Islam, whatever its tendency and religious strain, he argued, there is no place for democracy and democratic culture. Huntington concluded that the lack of democracy in the Muslim world is partly due to the nature of Islamic culture and society, which is inimical and inhospitable to Western liberal concepts.[9] Despite the post-Cold War democratic trends in many countries, Freedom House revealed in 2010 that there remain authoritarian and anti-democratic regimes that fail to uphold democracy and civil liberties; of the 57 Muslim countries, 35 countries are considered to be under authoritarian regimes, with only 12 countries are categorised as semi-democratic states. Moreover, eight of the world's 15 most repressive countries are Muslim.[10]

These facts have provoked hot debate on the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Lewis opined that Islam and democracy are incompatible, as their incompatibility comes from Islam's perfection, self-sufficiency, and uniqueness. To him, in Islamic tradition, the idea of separation between religion and politics, as the basis of modern political democracy, cannot be accepted by Muslims. The words 'secular' and 'secularism' in

[9] Huntington 1997, 112.
[10] Buehler 2010.

contemporary Islamic languages are either loanwords or neologisms. Lewis also argued that Islam was a holistic and comprehensive single entity whose long history and traditions differ from those of Western liberal democracies.[11] As discussed by Mujani, Lewis and Huntington's central arguments on Islam and democracy are centralised in three points: (1) Islam is a total way of life defined by *sharia*, which regulates all individual and collective aspects of Muslim life, and therefore there is no distinction between religion and politics; (2) this way of life is not extremist but mainstream and pervasive; and (3) it is antagonistic to democracy, therefore democracy in the Muslim community is unlikely to be accepted.[12]

Lewis' and Huntington's pessimistic views have been widely criticised as monolithic. Fuller and Voll have stated that Islam and democracy are contested concepts within the Muslim community. Instead of being pessimistic, the pessimists should have observed the plurality and multifaceted Islam and Muslim countries, composed of a mosaic of ideas, history, traditions, and religious thoughts.[13] Muslim scholars such as Ahmad Shawqi al-Fanjar and Islamist leader Rachid Gannouchi are convinced that Islam is compatible with democracy, as the democratic values can be found in the universal principles of Islam, such as justice (*'adl*), right (*haqq*), consultation (*shura*), and equality (*musawat*). Gannouchi, furthermore, argued that in the conditions of the contemporary era, "pluralistic parliamentary democracy" is "the ideal instrument to put God's *Sharia* into practice."[14] Hefner observed that the compatibility of Islam and democracy could be traced back to the traditions and practices of Indonesian Islam. It is not surprising, therefore, that post-Suharto Indonesia has adopted democratisation "by denying the wisdom of a monolithic Islamic state and instead affirming democracy,

[11] Lewis 2002, 52-63.
[12] The hotly debated topic on Islam and democracy is substantially discussed and mapped by Mujani 2003, 14-32.
[13] Fuller 2002, 48-60; Voll 2007, 170-178.
[14] Voll 2007, 170–178.

voluntarism, and a balance of countervailing powers in a state and society".[15]

Along with the rising tide of violent extremism and radicalism, there has been a much-debated discourse on whether *wasatiyyat Islam*, a justly balanced Islam, could be an antidote to religious extremism. Some do not believe in any form of moderate Islam, due to Islam's alleged aversion to civic and democratic values. On the other hand, the Muslim world has begun to extract the Qur'anic notion of *wasatiyyat*. Persuaded by this doctrine, some Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Morocco, Türkiye, and Malaysia, began to promote moderate Islam in their soft power and public diplomacy efforts.[16] However, the possibility or impossibility of bringing religions, including religious institutions, into explaining international issues has been a hotly debated topic in international relations. In European and Western centrism, religion is excluded as an important factor in explaining international relations. Instead of religious elements, Western centrism considers material power, economics, the state, and the nation as causal influences in international relations theory.[17] However, Huntington's theory of the *Clash of Civilisation* (1993) and Jurgensmeyer's *The New Cold War* (1993) discussed religion as a fundamental factor in explaining the new world order configuration after the Cold War.[18]

Although Huntington's theory was heavily criticised for not considering Islam as a religion but as a civilisation, this new development in the post-Cold War era triggered Fox and Slanders further to argue that it is possible to bring religions into international conflict resolution, clashes of civilisations, and global debates, such as Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks, tensions between India and Pakistan, sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland, religious revolutions in Iran and Afghanistan, the Arab Spring, the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and emergence and

[15] Hefner 2000, 12-13.

[16] Elias 2017, 133-155; Rabasa 2007; Kalin 2011, 5-23; Kamali 2015, 73-77.

[17] Fox and Slanders 2004, 2-3.

[18] Huntington 1997; Juergensmeyer 1993.

invasions of Islamic State (Daesh).[19] This new theoretical development of the role in international relations should have been based on the two new approaches: neoliberalism and constructivism.[20] In this context, Nye gives an example of how the US brings religion as a decisive factor in addressing global issues and relations. In Nye's opinion, the US has incorporated non-state actors, including religious institutions and civil society, into its soft power diplomacy to counter growing anti-Americanism in many countries, especially in the Muslim world.[21]

Public diplomacy is an arsenal of soft power utilised by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviour, to build and manage relationships, to influence thoughts, and to mobilise actions to advance their interests and values. Such collaborative public diplomacy is more flexible and results-oriented than when actors work independently, as public diplomacy presupposes that this domain does not merely consist of high-profile and invisible state actors, but also non-state actors, such as activists of NGOs, journalists, and business people.[22] In this new development, Nye defined soft power diplomacy as the ability of states and non-state actors to influence others to obtain outcomes through attraction that makes others "want what they want" based on its resource of culture, values, and policies to struggling against transnational terrorism. In this regard, states and non-state actors, including religious institutions, may collaborate to win 'hearts and minds' through a multi-track diplomacy approach. Still, public diplomacy requires understanding the role of credibility, self-criticism, and civil society in generating soft power.[23]

[19] Fox and Slanders 2004, 1-7.

[20] In stark contrast to neorealists, who see international order as solely connected to the balance of power, neoliberals allowed an independent role for norms in promoting international order or international institutions. Fox and Slanders 2004, 29.

[21] Nye 2004.

[22] Melissen 2011, 22.

[23] Nye 2008, 94-109.

Diplomats, academics, activists, members of civil society, media, and religious institutions can engage in interpersonal contact to enhance cooperation and collaboration, steering away from coercion, incentives, or demands for public debt repayments. Mandaville has observed the growing integration of religion and its institutions into international political affairs, both in the Western and Muslim worlds. During the Cold War, US foreign policy utilised religion to counter atheistic communism by promoting religious activities in countries deemed susceptible to pro-Soviet uprisings.

Saudi Arabia, in a parallel effort, sought to propagate Wahhabism to counter the influence of Egyptian Arab nationalism in the 1960s and the Iranian Shiite revolution of 1979. Summarising this trend in international relations and politics, Mandaville writes:

> The point here is that periods of world political time marked by a global order in flux—its formations, norms, and organising thematics highly uncertain—represent moments in which narratives offering meaning, purpose, and vision tend to gain currency. If, as many observers claim we are today shifting away from a liberal international order (never perfectly formed and very far from perfectly liberal) and towards an unclear but very likely post-Western world order, religion will continue to feature prominently in the evolving geopolitical landscape.[24]

In the Amman Message of November 2004, King Abdallah II bin Al-Hussein of Jordan called upon the international community to work seriously to eradicate the causes of violence, fanatism, extremism and Islamophobia by stopping all kinds of oppression through a path of tolerance and moderation.[25] In this vein, in December 2005, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) endorsed the Mecca

[24] Mandaville 2022.

[25] The Amman Message 2004.

Declaration, urging member countries to intensify and coordinate international efforts to combat terrorism and Islamophobia by promoting the fundamental values of Islam as a religion of moderation.[26] Then, in July 2006, in Istanbul, Turkey, the Muslim of Europe Conference condemned and abhorred, through the Topkapi Declaration, the violent actions of a tiny minority of Muslims who have unleashed violence and terror—by distorting the teachings of Islam—upon innocent neighbours and fellow citizens. The Declaration calls for solidarity between Muslims and upholding Islam's universal vision of peace, fraternity, tolerance and social harmony.[27] Building upon these declarations, Indonesia, along with other Muslim-majority countries, commenced employing the concept of *wasatiyyat Islam* in its soft power and public diplomacy efforts to combat radicalism, terrorism, and Islamophobia. It is in this vein that the incorporation of non-state actors into the practice of Indonesian public diplomacy serves as a significant hallmark in Indonesia's post-Suharto diplomacy.[28]

Post-Suharto Indonesian Diplomacy

During an official trip to Jakarta, Indonesia, in March 2017, the petrodollar monarch of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, King Salman Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, called on all Muslim nations to unite against terrorism and the "clash of civilisation" threat, explicitly referring to the Huntington's theory that juxtaposes Islam and the West.[29] Many are convinced that the US-led global war on terrorism is a horrifying manifestation of Huntington's prediction. In this sense, King Salman's calling is monumental. Under his leadership, since 2017, Saudi Arabia has undertaken numerous socio-political domestic reforms aiming at reverting Saudi Arabia to *wasatiyyat Islam*. The country has also

[26] The Mecca Al Mukarramah Declaration 2005.
[27] The Topkapi Declaration 2006.
[28] Allès 2016, 64-65.
[29] Ramadhani 2017.

incorporated *wasatiyyat Islam* into its foreign policy, intending to eliminate its image as a global terrorist exporter.[30] Furthermore, through its soft power diplomacy on Islam, King Salman has diligently sent a positive message that his country is not likely a supporter of radicalism and transnational Islamism but most likely a supporter of a friendly version of moderate Islam. Saudi Arabia is trying to win the hearts and minds of the international community by conducting soft diplomacy rather than the hard diplomacy of military coercion or economic inducement and payment.

Since the 2000s, when terrorist attacks affected its reputation as a 'smiling and tolerant' Muslim nation in the eyes of the international community, Indonesia has been engaged in counterterrorism and deradicalisation programs. At the same time, Indonesia began positioning *Islam moderat* (moderate Islam) as the authentic identity of Indonesian Islam. In so doing, Indonesia is portraying itself as a predominantly moderate Muslim country that allows its citizens to adopt democracy and modernity amid multiple socioreligious and political backgrounds and ideologies. This state initiative is defended by local Muslim intellectuals who regard Islam and democracy as easily and harmoniously go hand in hand. Madjid observed that "the universal principles of Islam, such as equality (*al-musawah*), justice (*al-'adl*), and so forth, are the fundamental basis for establishing a civic culture and democratic system in Indonesia".[31] Therefore, it is unsurprising that after the breakdown of Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime in 1998, Indonesia was precipitately prompted to adopt democracy. This democratic turn was profoundly rooted in the old tradition of democratic culture and civil rights embraced by moderate mainstream Islam, which "insist[s] that there is a middle path between liberalism's privatisation and conservative Islam's bully state".[32]

[30] To study further Saudi's attempts to incorporate *wasatiyyat Islam* into its religious soft diplomacy power, see Mouline 2020, 43-55; Meddeb 2011, 112-124.
[31] Madjid 2008.
[32] Hefner 2000, 218.

Nonetheless, Indonesia's democratic transition has been marked by Islamist temptation in social and political fields. Former President Abdurrahman Wahid's plans to revoke the restriction of Marxism, communism, and Leninism and to open diplomatic ties with Israel were firmly opposed by Islamists in the early 2000s. They also despised Wahid's position on the communal conflict in the Moluccas, which restricted Muslims and jihadist groups from undertaking jihad in Ambon and its surroundings. In a meeting with the Salafi-jihadist movement *Laskar Jihad*, Wahid even dared to evict Ja'far Umar Thalib, the group's commander, from the Presidential Palace.[33] Ultimately, Islamist opposition, coupled with political parties, including Islamic parties, and military discontent and resentment, accelerated Wahid's presidential impeachment in July 2001. Prior to this, Wahid had been politically pressured to approve the promulgation of sharia law in the province of Aceh, an Islamist project he had often challenged throughout his intellectual career and activism as a liberal Muslim intellectual. During Wahid's presidency, Islamist groups such as the conservative-traditionalist *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI, Islamic Defenders' Front) and *Laskar Jihad* grew and gained traction in local Muslim communities. They successfully profited from the political pressures facing Wahid and his weaknesses in harnessing several socio-economic and political reforms.[34]

During the subsequent government, led by Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-2004), Islamist groups began to dare to express their ideology. Shortly after the September 11 attacks, she travelled to Washington and stated her support for US President George W. Bush's global campaign against terrorism. Islamists viewed Megawati's declaration as an attack on Islam and Muslims, and her statement was opposed by Muslim groups who demanded it be withdrawn immediately.[35] Faced with such overwhelming opposition, Megawati reversed her stance on Bush's

[33] Barton 2002, 306.
[34] Barton 2002, 330-335.
[35] Anwar 2015, 85-86.

global war on terror and military operations in Afghanistan. At the same time, however, she dismissed pressure to sever diplomatic ties with the US government.[36] She cleverly utilised moderate voices of Islam to express her opposition to Bush's plan for Muslim countries. In October 2001, Megawati hosted a meeting in Bali between Bush and Ahmad Syafii Maarif (chairman of Muhammadiyah), Hasim Muzadi (chairman of NU), and Azyumardi Azra (rector of the State Islamic University [UIN] Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta), who had criticised Bush's attitude and policy of cornering Islam as the culprit of terrorism. Maarif pointed out that the US government had committed a historic suicide and crimes against humanity in Afghanistan.[37] Likewise, Muzadi urged Bush to avoid grossly confusing Islam with terrorism, arguing that, without evidence of Osama bin Laden's involvement, "[retaliation] cannot be justified. If it does happen, the case for an attack will fade and be replaced by a war between Islam and Christianity".[38]

In this case, trapped by the dilemma between Bush's plan and Muslim opposition, Megawati began to align with mainstream Islamic organisations Muhammadiyah and NU. Adopting 'total diplomacy', she promoted harmonious compatibility between Islam, Indonesia's founding principles of *Pancasila*,[39] and democracy. Then-Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda defined total diplomacy as where all segments of society and all domestic stakeholders are involved in formulating and implementing a comprehensive foreign policy based on an intermestic approach (a way to strive for national interests and communicate international developments

[36] Megawati's own Vice-President, Hamzah Haz, a conservative Muslim politician, had Bush and the US government distinguish Muslims and terrorists legitimately. See Smith 2015, 309.
[37] Maarif 2003, 317.
[38] Smith 2015, 309.
[39] Pancasila is composed of five principles : *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in the one and only God), *Kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab* (Just and civilized humanity), *Persatuan Indonesia* (The unity of Indonesia), *Kerakyatan yang dipimpin oleh hikmat kebijaksanaan dalam permusyawaratan /perwakilan* (Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amoing representatives), and *Keadilan sosial bagi seluruh rakyat Indonesia* (Social justice for all the people of Indonesia).

to a domestic audience). Under Megawati's administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs even regularly hosted a 'foreign policy breakfast' event, in which the government received feedback and at the same time had the opportunity to disseminate concepts, ideas, proposals, and policies to broader society, such as parliamentarians and Muslim groups.[40] Before the end of her tenure in 2004, Megawati established a new agency within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Public Diplomacy Directorate, to be responsible for promoting Islam and democracy to the global world, especially Western democratic countries.

Similar to his predecessors, Megawati's successor SBY faced the challenges of radicalism and terrorism. To this end, he implemented counterterrorism programs domestically and conducted promotion of moderate Islam internationally. While his domestic policies were heavily criticised for not toughly handling intolerance and persecution against religious minorities, SBY generated total diplomacy to confidently promote that Islam is inherently in harmony with democracy and modernity. On the international stage, he was very confident in promoting the compatibility of Islam, democracy, and modernity in Indonesia, defending it as an excellent example for the Muslim world amid the poor performance of the democracy index in many other Muslim countries. In 2011, at Cairo's Al-Azhar University and Jakarta's Universitas Indonesia, then-US President Barack Obama referred to Indonesia as a moderate Islamic prototype that could be replicated and emulated in the Muslim world. In his opinion, moderate Islam could be defined as a reasonable understanding of Islamic theology that is friendly, peaceful, tolerant, open, and consistent with the universal principles of democracy.[41]

In response to Obama's statements, SBY delivered a presidential address at Harvard University, declaring that Huntington's theory of the clash of civilisations was obsolete. He confidently asserted that moderate Muslims could work together to be good partners for the West and other

[40] Al-Anshori 2016, 71-72.
[41] See Obama 2009.

cultures.[42] To convince the public of his vision and commitment to democracy, SBY launched the Bali Democracy Forum in 2007, which has since been routinely held to discuss democracy and international-related issues. Crucially, SBY also invited Muhammadiyah and NU to join the ranks of Indonesian soft power and public diplomacy voices, working with them to host interfaith dialogues, peace talks, and peace diplomacy initiatives.[43] During SBY's administration, for instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NU co-organised the International Conference of Islamic Scholars in 2004, while since 2006, the Ministry has co-hosted with Muhammadiyah the biannual international World Peace Forum.

During his first term (2014-2019), President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo let his key advisers direct Indonesia's foreign policy. Jokowi was personally more concerned with domestic political and economic issues.[44] However, after the massive Islamist '212 Movement' emerged in 2016, Jokowi began to embark on a political rapprochement with Muhammadiyah and NU.[45] Jokowi appointed several high-ranking leaders of NU and Muhammadiyah to positions in his government, such as Ma'ruf Amin, Buya Syafii Maarif, Said Aqil Siraj, Yahya Cholil Staquf, Din Syamsuddin, and Muhadjir Effendi. Internationally, Jokowi continued to advance Indonesian diplomacy on moderate Islam. At the High Consultation of International Muslim Scholars and Intellectuals on Wasatiyyat Islam in 2018 in Bogor, West Java,[46] he declared his support for promoting moderate Indonesian Islam globally.[47] He managed visits to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan in 2018, consistently supported Palestinian independence, and rejected US recognition of Jerusalem as

[42] Yudhoyono 2009.
[43] Fanani 2012.
[44] Connelly 2014, 5.
[45] Sebastian and Nubowo 2019.
[46]The Consultation produced the Bogor Message emphasising seven characters of moderation in Islam: *tawassut* (moderation), *i'tidal* (fairness with responsibility), *tasamuh* (recognition and respect for differences), *shura* (consultation in problem-solving), *islah (*reform*), qudwah (*exemplary behaviour), and *muwathanah (*recognition of the nation-state).
[47] Widodo 2018.

Israel's new capital.[48] In this sense, Indonesia's promotion of moderate Islam entered a new chapter. Agitated by the need to reinstall moderate Islam to cope with conservative turn, Jokowi excluded non-moderate Muslim groups from state recognition, such as Islamist Muslim groups *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI) and FPI, who Jokowi's administration banned in 2017 and 2020, respectively.

Inversely, it is interesting that Jokowi has recognised NU's and Muhammadiyah's tremendous contributions to pluralistic Indonesia by adorning their founding fathers and former leaders as national heroes. He also acknowledged NU's contribution to Indonesian independence by establishing *Hari Santri* (Day of Islamic Students). Furthermore, in line with his socio-political vision, Jokowi launched a project of religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*), financed by the national budget to the cost of trillions of rupiah and under the direction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.[49] The project is part of the 2020-2024 National Mid-Term Development Plan, intended to be an integrated cultural strategy to advance human resources following religious teachings compatible with national values.[50] The former Minister of Religious Affairs who initiated the project, Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, noted that it is only the state's responsibility, but rather that all non-state actors, including religious organisations, should take up responsibility for advancing the agenda of religious moderation.[51]

It is noteworthy that the participation of Islamic civil society in Indonesian foreign policy and diplomacy has become more evident in the last two decades. Lacking the skills and authority to define whether Islam is moderate or radical, the state should work with moderate mainstream Islam. After all, the right to determine theologically 'who is a good Muslim and who is a bad Muslim' is in the hands of Muslims, not the state. In this logic, the Indonesian state, Muhammadiyah, and NU all mobilise their

[48] Nubowo 2018.
[49] Republika 2021.
[50] Kementerian Agama 2019, vi-vii.
[51] Saifuddin, interview, 2022.

resources and networks to reinstate the moderate identity of Indonesian Muslims nationally and globally through numerous agendas and activities such as international dialogues, peace and diplomacy talks, and conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance.[52]

Moderate Identity of Indonesian Islam

After the fall of Suharto, Islam in Indonesia became a contested arena of newly establishing Muslim groups, with the *tarbiyah* movement, the Salafi-Wahhabi network, and the caliphate movement all vying for religious authority against the well-established Muhammadiyah and NU. To topple the centennial authority of these two latter organisations, Islamists have tirelessly developed effective strategies. In so doing, they put their tactics into strategically taking over these two organisations' assets and congregations, such as mosques, schools, and *madrasah* in regions of Java such as Yogyakarta, Surakarta, and Wonogiri, among others.[53] Furthermore, under the banner of the Islamic doctrines of *dakwah* (proselytisation) and Islamic solidarity, they managed to ideologically infiltrate and penetrate congregations to convert them to their conservative Islamist ideology.[54] Greatly shocked by this radical infiltration, Muhammadiyah and NU attempted to implement counter-narratives and actions. For example, in 2006, Muhammadiyah issued a decree to block conservative and radical Islamic ideologies of an Islamic state or caliphate.[55] NU did the same by thwarting toughly any radical ideology brandishing the banner of *sharia* or a caliphate.[56]

Muhammadiyah and NU developed a joint counter-narrative against Islamist ideology and movements. Instead of the banner of *sharia* or Islamic state and caliphate, they advocated publicly that Pancasila is in total harmony with the teachings of Islam, including *al-tawhid* (divinity),

[52] Hadi 2022.
[53] Subari 2017; Assegaf 2014.
[54] Ali 2017.
[55] Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2006.
[56] See Wahid 2009, p.264-265.

al-musawah baina al-nas (equality and humanity), *al-Ittih*ad (of unity), *al-shura* (deliberation), and *al-ʿadalah* (justice). They stated that Pancasila was not, as Islamist movements argued, against any teachings of Islam. Former Muhammadiyah President, Syafii Maarif, firmly stated that applying Islamic law in Indonesia would endanger Pancasila and the heterogeneity of Indonesian society.[57] Similarly, the former President of NU, Hasyim Muzadi, asked local governments to refrain from enacting any local ordinance based only on *sharia*.[58] Concomitantly, young Muslim intellectuals of the Liberal Islam Network (*Jaringan Islam Liberal*, JIL) and Muhammadiyah Young Intellectual Network (*Jaringan Intelektual Muda Muhammadiyah*, JIMM) corroborated the stances of their Muhammadiyah and NU leaders.[59]

To affirm its stance on Pancasila, Muhammadiyah, at its 47th Muktamar in 2015 declared Pancasila to be *Darul Ahdi wa Syahadah* (a state of consensus or agreement), encouraging Indonesian Muslims to abide by Pancasila and contribute to Indonesia's development. This manifesto represents Muhammadiyah's nationalistic vision of a pluralist Indonesia and its commitment to Pancasila and NKRI:

> The unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia (*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*, NKRI), proclaimed independent on August 17, 1945, is a state of Pancasila standing on the philosophy suitable with the doctrine of Islam. Therefore, belief in one God, just and civilisational humanity, Indonesian unity, the sovereignty of the people directed by consultation/representative wisdom, and social justice for all Indonesians are essentially in line with the values of Islamic teachings and can be applied in an aspired life of Muslims, namely *baldatun thayyibatun wa rabbun ghafur* (a godly blessed and forgiven country).[60]

[57] Maarif 2006.
[58] Muzadi 2006.
[59] On Indonesian young liberal Muslim grouped in JIL and JIMM, see Ali 2005; Burhani 2005.
[60] Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2015a, 12.

Muhammadiyah asked all Indonesian citizens to implement Pancasila for the sake of a safe and peaceful nation as well as a progressive, just, prosperous, dignified, and sustainable life under the blessing of God. Such a vision echoes the Islamic ideals of *baldatun thayyibatun wa rabun ghafurun* that Muhammadiyah wanted to achieve; that people who believe in God, cultivate good spiritual and interpersonal relationships harmoniously, develop balanced international relations, and accelerate the building of a valued and better nation (*khayru umma*).[61] Muhammadiyah also published a manifesto of *Islam berkemajuan* ('progressive Islam'), representing *its new strategy in response to the burgeoning socio-political problems of radicalism and globalisation.*[62] *Through these two manifestos, Muhammadiyah supports* the full integration of Islam with modernity, including science and technology, democracy, human rights, and rational thought. Adopting a hermeneutic approach to understanding the founding texts of Islam, the Qur'an, and the tradition of Muhammad, Muhammadiyah disseminates Islamic moderation to enlighten all human civilisation, with *Pancasila as the ideological bedrock of the state from which all citizens are inspired.*[63]

In this orchestra of moderation, NU coined their version of moderate Islam under the term *Islam Nusantara* ('archipelagic Islam') at the 33rd NU Congress in Jombang, East Java, in 2015. NU defines *Islam Nusantara* as a "cultural approach", as opposed to the strict and violent Islamic

[61] Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2015a, 12.

[62] The manifesto of *Islam berkemajuan* consists of 13 strategic items for (1) establishing Centres of Excellence and Technopreneurship, (2) fostering inter-religious tolerance and harmony, (3) increasing the competitiveness of human resources, (4) unifying the Islamic calendar, (5) empowering the disabled groups, (6) combating drugs, (7) mitigating disasters, (8) optimising the demography bonus, (9) eradicating corruption and installing good corporate governance, (10) reviewing the constitution (*jihad konstitusi*), (11) eliminating climate change impacts, (12) optimising the invention of information, communication, and technology (ICT), and (13) combating human trafficking and protecting migrant workers. *See* Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2015b.

[63] Ali 2015, 378-379.

teachings adopted and espoused by radical Muslim groups.[64] For clarity, former NU leader Said Aqil Siraj said *Islam Nusantara* was a friendly, non-violent, inclusive, and tolerant form of Islam. Moreover, he found this pattern to be different from what he called 'Arab Islam', which was always at odds with fellow Muslims and plunged societies into bloodshed and civil war.[65] The tenets of Indonesian Islam differ historically and sociologically from Islam in other Muslim regions, especially in the Middle East and South Asia. According to Ulil Abshar Abdalla, NU needs to defend its tradition of Islam from the emergence of a 'radical' and rigorous outlook of Islam alien to the local culture.[66] In this regard, *Islam Nusantara* is convinced to defend Islam in Indonesia from the invasion of violent extremism and radicalism by proposing 'Islamic value systems' such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (harmony), *tawassut* (moderation), *ta'addul* (justice) and *'amr ma'ruf nahi munkar* (compelling the good and rejecting the evil).[67]

However, without an official document clearly defining the concept, the notion of *Islam Nusantara* has sparked controversy. Conservative Muslim groups have accused *Islam Nusantara* of being an anti-Arab ideology which contradicts *sharia*, strictly confining itself to a single group of Muslims and identical to syncretic Javanese Islam (*Islam kejawen*). They also considered the notion to be instrumental in damaging religious and moral order. To address such accusations, the 2019 National Conference of *Alim Ulama Nahdlatul Ulama* in Banjar, West Java, defined *Islam Nusantara* as an integral part of the Sunni theological school, implemented and developed according to the sociological and cultural characteristics of the Indonesian archipelago.[68] The chairman of NU and

[64] The notion of *Islam Nusantara* was already used eventually to describe Islam in the archipelago and maritime continent in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Sabah dan Sarawak, Thailand Selatan (Patani), Singapura, Filipina Selatan (Moro), dan juga Champ (Kampuchea). See Azra 2022, 2.

[65] Azra 2002.

[66] Abdalla 2021.

[67] Luthfi, 2016, 4.

[68] PBNU 2019.

the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI), Ma'ruf Amin, asserted that Islam Nusantara constituted "a path and identity" of *Ahlus Sunah wa al-Jamaah* (Sunni Islam) implemented by the founders of the NU. For Ma'ruf Amin, Islam Nusantara is understood as a means by which all members can identify with NU's ideology and characters.[69]

However, despite their equal dedication to Islamic moderation, the terms *Islam berkemajuan* and *Islam Nusantara* have sparked semantic and ideological debates and contention, highlighting an unquenchable competition and dispute between them.[70] Drawing on the ideology of reformism and modernism in Islam, Muhammadiyah integrates its version of moderation into an ideology of progress, oriented towards modernity, rationalism, scientific and technological advancements, and the principles of universalism and cosmopolitanism within Islam.[71] The ideology of *dakwah kultural* ('cultural *dakwah*') advocated by Muhammadiyah appears to differ from that developed through the decision of NU Java's *Bahtsul Masail* in 2016. The latter consolidated the concept of *Islam Nusantara*, which promotes an approach to *dakwah* within a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multireligious population. This approach is founded on courtesy and pacifism, reflecting the preaching style of Sayyid Rahmat (Sunan Ampel), one of the members of the council of nine Javanese Muslim saints (*walisongo*).[72]

This divergence between the two organisations reflects their differing perspectives regarding the relationship between Islam and local culture, with significant consequences for their perception and socio-organizational position concerning Jokowi's national project of religious moderation. Religious moderation is defined as the Indonesian citizen's ability to be tolerant and open-minded towards local traditions and culture.[73] At the local level, ideological and religious disputes among the

[69] *Kompas* 2015.
[70] Burhani 2016.
[71] Mu'ti 2022.
[72] PWNU Jawa Timur 2016, 4.
[73] Kementerian Agama 2019, 43-46.

members of Muhammadiyah and NU has persisted in various regions in Indonesia. In Bireuen, Aceh, a Muhammadiyah mosque was set on fire in 2017 and again in 2023 by a mob who rejected its presence, deeming it inconsistent with the religious doctrine of Shafi'i Islam and traditional Islam. Despite its establishment in Aceh in 1923, Muhammadiyah is still perceived as Salafi-Wahhabi and opposed to the doctrine of traditional Islam (*Aswaja*).[74] Meanwhile, in Banyuwangi, East Java, NU members demolished the signboard of a Muhammadiyah mosque in Tampo Sraten in 2022.[75] The religious and ideological disputes also regularly clash on determining the dates of the major Muslim celebrations of *Idul Fitri* (*Eid al-Fitr*) and *Idul Adha* (*Eid al-Adha*), as the modernist and traditionalist organisations have their own distinct and different astronomical methods in determining the start and end dates of the months in the Islamic calendar.[76]

Moreover, moderate Islamic campaigns, in their respective versions, often come into conflict with the attitudes and decisions of Muhammadiyah and NU regarding minority groups in Indonesia. In 2011, the national and East Java branches of NU supported provincial decree No. 188/94/KPTS/013/2011, prohibiting the existence of the Ahmadiyya community in the region. This decision was endorsed by former NU presidents Hasyim Muzadi and Said Aqil Siraj, who declared that all Ahmadiyya activities should be banned in Indonesia through an inter-ministerial decree between the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry

[74] Antara 2017.

[75] PP 2022.

[76] During the 2023 Eid al-Fitr celebration, a scientific controversy escalated into animosity, marked by death threats directed at the Muhammadiyah, an Islamic organization intending to observe Eid without adhering to the government's decision. The incident was triggered by the perspective of Thomas Djamaluddin, who, for a decade, criticized the Muhammadiyah's employment of an astronomical calculation method, deeming it outdated. In response to a death threat, the Muhammadiyah filed a complaint with the police, citing charges of hatred and death threats against a young researcher-civil servant. Consequently, the individual in question was dismissed from their position as a researcher-civil servant at BRIN (Indonesian Research and Innovation Agency). Wiryono 2023.

of Home Affairs, and the Attorney General's Office.[77] Similarly, Muhammadiyah holds the view that anyone who believes in a prophet who came after Prophet Muhammad (in reference to Ahmadiyya doctrine) is considered an infidel (*kafir*). Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah condemns any forms of aggression, violence, and persecution directed at the Ahmadiyya community, as exemplified by an incident on February 6, 2011 in Cikeusik where 3 Ahmadis were killed and 5 were severely injured. Similarly, it holds that Shia Islam is a distinct group that does not follow the Islamic teachings (that is, Sunni Islam) as understood by Muhammadiyah. Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah advocates for intensive dialogue between Sunni and Shia Muslims to enhance "mutual understanding of similarities and differences".[78] Meanwhile, in response to the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, both NU and Muhammadiyah have unequivocally stated that the promotion and advocacy of LGBT rights are considered forbidden (*haram*). They further assert, respectively, that although LGBT people need "rehabilitation" and should be treated as "objects of religious *dakwah*", their rights and duties should duly be acknowledged and protected.[79]

In this context, the ideological-theological issues and schism between these two organisations and their religious perspectives towards religious minority groups, as discussed above, indicate that the implementation or institutionalisation of *Islam berkemajuan* and *Islam Nusantara* should be more deeply scrutinised. Muhammadiyah's and NU's fatwas and policies towards minority groups and communities such as Ahmadiyya, Shia, and LGBT, for instance, serve as a test of the extent to which their claims of *tasâmuḥ* (tolerance), *tawassuṭ* (moderation), and *ta'addul* (balance) are or are not merely luxurious slogans. One might consider that the two organisations have shown commendable

[77] On October 26, 2009, the NU Regional Executive Board (PCNU) of Sampang, along with ulama and community leaders, issued a joint letter prohibiting all Shiite activities, leading to the expulsion of hundreds of Shiites from their village. See Ya'kub 2011; Kontras 2012, 5.

[78] Majalah SM 2021.

[79] NU Online 2016; Muhammadiyah 2021; Muhammadiyah 2023.

moderation, tolerance, and openness toward ethnic and religious diversities and pluralism since their inception in the country. However, their religious stances (fatwas) towards minority groups could be interpreted by radicals as legitimising acts of violence and persecution against minority groups regarded as 'deviant' or '*kafir*'. In this context, the 'moderate Islam', *Islam berkemajuan*, and *Islam Nusantara* advocated for by both institutions seem to have been applied selectively, meaning that one could consider them as 'contingent moderates', borrowing Menchik's terminology of 'contingent democrats'.[80]

Nevertheless, under the respective leaderships of Haedar Nashir and Yahya Cholil Staquf, Muhammadiyah and NU remain committed to mainstream *Islam berkemajuan* and *Islam Nusantara* nationally and globally. They are also committed to putting forward the smiling face of Indonesian Islam in the global arena. Appreciative of their civilisational commitment, Azra stated that Indonesia's two solid bastions and strong guardians of Islam provide a good model for promoting a peaceful, open, tolerant, and moderate Islam addressing socio-religious and political pluralism and differences.[81] One prominent Muslim thinker, Fazlur Rahman, expected Indonesian Islam to enable a more peaceful and harmonious global world. However, this expectation seems to emerge amidst the endless conflicts and atrocities in many parts of the Muslim world, such as in the Arab world, South Asia, West Asia, and Africa, over the past two decades.[82] Thus, against this dire socio-political backdrop, Muhammadiyah and NU must transfer their moderate and cosmopolitan understanding of Islam to both the Muslim world and the whole world.

Ambassadors of Indonesian Islam

Despite Indonesia's large Muslim population, Indonesian Islam has been mostly invisible in the Muslim world. Geographically, Indonesia is on

[80] Menchik 2019, 1-19.
[81] See Azra 2015.
[82] Rahman 1982, 129.

the edge of the Muslim world, far from the centre of Muslim civilisation, meaning Indonesian Islam does not share the Arab Muslim culture and considers itself less 'Arabized' due to not having Arabic as a lingua franca. Furthermore, Indonesian Islam is not theologically regarded as 'valid', as it incorporates non-Islamic local traditions. Consequently, the intellectual transformation occurred (and occurs) in the context of an unequal relationship between the centre of Arab-Muslim countries and the periphery of *Nusantara*. For instance, the triumph of Ghazali Sufism over Averroes rationalism in the 13th century, pan Islamism and Islamic reformism in the early 20th century, and transnational Islam lie in this logic of knowledge transformation. Subsequently, the long-term role and contributions of Muhammadiyah and NU are less visible and known outside Indonesia.

Although Indonesian Muslim leaders and scholars such as Sukarno and Mohammad Natsir, Shaikh Nawawi Banteni, and Buya Hamka were sufficiently influential in Muslim countries and the international community, it is interesting to observe that in contemporary Indonesia, unfortunately, Muhammadiyah, NU, and Muslim intellectuals such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Ahmad Syafii Maarif and others are not particularly visible in the Muslim world. This invisibility is because it is considered that they 'should' have written down their ideas, thoughts, views, and attitudes in foreign languages like Arabic or English. Instead, they wrote their ideas in the Indonesian language and within the context of Indonesian socio-religious and political issues.[83] In this regard, Bruinessen rightly observed:

> They have not written great synthesising works but numerous shorter pieces, often in response to questions or circumstances that may not immediately make sense to foreign audiences, even if inspired by universal ideas. The thrust of much of their discourse concerns the defence of pluralism, variety, and local colour in the cultural

[83] Burhani 2015, 253-254.

> expressions of Islam against the homogenising tendencies of transnational Islamism. It is too inherently local to be exportable.[84]

Realising such global invisibility, coupled with the flooding transnational Islam from Middle Eastern and South Asian countries (Salafi-Wahabi networks, *tarbiyah* movements, *Hizbut Tahrir*, Ahmadiyya, and *Jamaat Tabligh*),[85] Muhammadiyah and NU need to disseminate their thoughts and activities through languages other than Indonesian. Hence, geared by their ideals, best practices, and networks, Muhammadiyah has participated in interfaith dialogues, peace alliances, and cooperation with various religious groups. As president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) in New York and the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) in Japan since 2005, Chairman Din Syamsuddin has been heavily involved in interfaith seminars and conferences in various parts of the world, such as with Catholic communities in Russia, Italy, the US, France, Kosovo, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, Nigeria, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, China, Austria, and the Vatican. Since 2006, Muhammadiyah has also collaborated with the Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilisations (CDCC), the Cheng Ho Multiculture Trust of Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, and the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in organising the biannual World Peace Forum (WPF),[86] including in 2022, when the 8th WPF focused on discussions of how to craft the fulcrum of *wasatiyyat Islam*.

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[84] Bruinessen 2012, 117-140.

[85] Radicalism in Indonesia is not a recent phenomenon. In the modern history of Indonesia, Islamic radicalism first emerged with the rebellious group Darul Islam (DI) in 1949-1962. Despite its dissolution in 1962, the ideology of DI's radicalism continued to grow and influence the contemporary radical Islamist movement in Indonesia. Andrée Feillard and Rémy Madinier observed that radicalism in the name of Islam cannot be equated with radical Islam, as found elsewhere. This is because radical Islamism in Indonesia draws from the religious history of the archipelago, characterised by a series of conflicts and reconciliations, thereby distinguishing itself from Islamic radicalism in the Middle East. See, Feillard et Madinier 2006.

[86] Amirrachman 2015, 289-306.

NU has a similar concern with interfaith dialogue and global peace. Through the International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS), established in 2004 by President Hasyim Muzadi, NU endeavoured to introduce moderate and cosmopolitan Islam, NU's traditions, and Pancasila to the world community.[87] Since Yahya Cholil Staquf's leadership, NU has initiated many activities intended to have global implications by orchestrating religious meetings on Islamic civilisational law (*Halaqah Fikih Peradaban*) aimed at contributing to international dialogue, cooperation, and civilisational diplomacy[88] and to involve NU in global diplomacy, introducing the Aswaja-style of Islam to the international world.[89] In addition, in collaboration with the Muslim World League of Saudi Arabia and the Government of Indonesian, NU organised the 2022 Forum of Religion (R-20) in Bali to help bring the world's geopolitical and economic power structures into alignment with the highest moral and spiritual values for the sake of all humanity.[90] Although R-20 garnered some some criticism for inviting Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an Indian Hindu hardline group affiliated with the ultra-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), allegedly involved in anti-Muslim violence and riots in India, R-20 represents NU's commitment to global peace diplomacy and conflict resolution.[91]

Muhammadiyah and NU also actively promote peace and conflict resolution by acting as international mediators. As a member of the International Contact Group (ICG), Muhammadiyah has been active in peace efforts in the southern Philippines and southern Thailand since 2009. The ICG served as a peace platform between the Government of Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).[92] During Din Syamsuddin's time, Muhammadiyah tried to resolve the conflict between

[87] Izharuddin 2022.
[88] Staquf 2022.
[89] Abdalla 2022.
[90] Website R20.
[91] Mandaville 2022.
[92] Kraft 2010, 237–258; Bush 2015, 33–48; Latief and Nashir 2020, 302

the Bangsamoro Muslims in Mindanao and the Government of Philippines, with Din Syamsudin and Sudibyo Markus, then-vice Chairman of Muhammadiyah, acting as the Muhammadiyah delegation in the peace talks. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah mediated with the Government of Thailand and the Muslim community to create peace in Pattani and Yala in southern Thailand. Muhammadiyah has also provided scholarships for the younger generation of Thai conflict victims to study at Muhammadiyah universities since 2008.[93] Under the Muhammadiyah and Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC) of Thailand collaboration project, Thai students take courses in English language, international relations, Arabic, Islamic studies, economics, and dentistry.[94]

NU has also played a significant role in resolving several conflicts in Muslim-majority countries and -minority countries, such as in southern Thailand, the southern Philippines, South Korea, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine-Israel, Iran, and Iraq.[95] Invited by the Government of Thailand to resolve conflicts in its southern region, with the support of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NU conducted peace diplomacy in 2005 and 2006. As Indonesia's largest Islamic mass organisation that accepts democracy and nationalism, peace efforts were a useful contribution, especially as NU members have cultural similarities with Malay Muslims in southern Thailand, who follow Sunni teachings. In a meeting with Thailand's King Bumidol Adulyadej, Hasyim Muzadi stated that Islam is a religion of peace and that the conflict in South Thailand is not religious. NU diplomacy in southern Thailand was conducted through dialogue and cooperation, with Muzadi and his delegation received in Yala by Muslim leaders, congregations, and the government. [96]

Muhammadiyah and NU were both involved by the Jokowi government in the 2018 Afghan Peace Talks in Bogor, known as the Bogor Talks. The talks involved clerics from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Indonesia,

[93] Amirrachman, 292.
[94] Latief and Nashir 2020, 301.
[95] Izharuddin 2022.
[96] Saiman 2022, 144.

and were perceived as a concrete diplomatic endeavour of Jokowi to promote peace in Central and South Asia. The two organisations were also involved in 'humanitarian diplomacy' talks regarding the Rohingya people in Rakhine State, Myanmar, by offering a comprehensive, sustainable solution: humanitarian aid and peace talks with all parties involved in the conflict. The Government of Indonesia partnered with moderate Islamic philanthropic institutions such as Muhammadiyah's Board of Philanthropy (Lazismu) and NU's Board of Philanthropy (Lazisnu) to send humanitarian relief and aid to Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.[97] These examples of peace diplomacy conducted by Muhammadiyah and NU in collaboration with the state through international organisations and dialogues among international stakeholders constitute compelling testaments to the active involvement of religious institutions abroad in the global peace process through the advocacy of moderate Islamic soft power.

Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah and NU have also established special branches (*cabang istimewa*) on all continents of the world. The Muhammadiyah Special Branches (PCIM) and NU Special Branches (PCINU) have become intellectual and cultural oases for the discourse and practice of moderate Indonesian Islam in the Muslim world, including Muslim Western civilisations. For NU, its special branches abroad have a vital role in internationalising *Islam Nusantara* to cope with transnational Islamic movements, in supporting the consolidation of NU members to bring two mandates: *amanah diniyyah* (religious order) in *tafaqquh fi al-din* (studying religion) and role of nationality (*amanah wathaniyyah*). Helmi Faisal, former NU secretary, hoped that PCINU could become ambassadors and agents of global peace by promoting NU's moderate Islam.[98] Similarly, Din Syamsuddin advised that PCIM could be like a "Muhammadiyah embassy", interacting with local people to make people-

[97] Nubowo 2018.
[98] Faisal 2020.

to-people contacts and collaboration in education, economy and trade, local government, and members. [99]

However, both PCIM and PCINU still face limitations in carrying out their missions overseas. This is because Indonesian citizens, such as students, migrant workers, and expatriates, dominate PCIM and PCINU's membership. Therefore, special branches' activities and missions depend on their Indonesian members' availability.[100] Secretary of Muhammadiyah International Relations, Wachid Ridwan, said that Muhammadiyah's special branches suffer from a lack of varied activities, discontinuity, and management vacuums. In addition, although Muhammadiyah has many sister organisations in several countries, they still confront administrative constraints and limitations.[101] Likewise, Helmy Faisal also recognised the limits and restrictions PCINU faces abroad. These situations have restricted the effective promotion of Muhammadiyah and NU's outlooks and traditions both discursively and practically to, for instance, Muslims in America, Europe, or Saudi Arabia or other countries whose form of religiosity and Islamic belief and system have profoundly been shaped and conquered by the transnational Islam such as *Ikhwanul Muslimin*, *Hizbut Tahrir*, and Salafi-Wahabism.

Opportunities and Challenges

Inspired by the indigenisation project of Islam (*pribumisasi Islam*) initiated by the former president of Indonesia and NU, Abdurrahman Wahid, and the former president of Muhammadiyah, Ahmad Syafii Ma'arif, who called upon Muslims to move away from a history of Arab fuelled by theological and political contestation between Sunni and Shia,[102] Muhammadiyah, NU, and Muslim intellectuals have endeavoured in recent years to undertake a project of decentring Islam to place Indonesia as a

[99] Afandi 2022.
[100] Burhani 2015, 257.
[101] Ridwan, 276-277.
[102] Barton 2002, 160; Ma'arif 2018, 15-29.

new centre of Islamic civilisation. Ulil Abshar Abdalla asserted that discourses of *Islam Nusantara*, for instance, play a crucial role in affirming the 'free agency' of non-Arab Muslims to define their own Islam. In his view, the plural and diverse experience of Indonesian 'multicoloured Islam' (*Islam warna-warni)* has, until now, generally been neglected or underestimated by Arab Muslims.[103] Abdul Mu'ti, the secretary of Muhammadiyah, argued that such awareness aimed at creating a "new centre of Islamic civilisation" is based on demographic considerations (Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world) and cultural factors of religiosity coloured by a robust Islamic tradition, encompassing a mastery of classical Islamic sciences. Finally, he pointed out that Islam in Indonesia is perceived as free from conflicts with other Muslim states, allowing it to be politically accepted by all.[104]

In such a global orchestration, we must note that what the Indonesian government, in collaboration with non-state actors, has been undertaking will significantly impact moderate Indonesian Islam in the Islamic world. In this context of the globalisation of Islam, Indonesian Muslim communities overseas, such as Muhammadiyah and NU special branches, are an appropriate way to offer a peaceful and friendly Islam to the world. Besides Indonesian students or migrant workers, the role played by Indonesian diplomats in the movement for Islam in Indonesia is also very strategic. Amin Abdullah, a former rector of State University of Indonesia Jogjakarta, has repeatedly suggested that Indonesian diplomats serving overseas should learn the true face of Islam: non-violence, humanitarianism, and politeness. In addition, he urged Indonesian representative offices abroad to promote moderate Islam to build the image of Indonesia.[105] Indonesian Ambassador in Lebanon, Hajriyanto Y Thohari, has recently assisted Muhammadiyah in humanitarian diplomacy by building a Muhammadiyah-Lazismu school for

[103] Abdalla 2021.
[104] Mu'ti 2022.
[105] Nubowo 2013.

Palestine refugees in Beirut.[106] Similarly, Ambassador and well-known young intellectual NU, Zuhairi Misrawi, has been occupied with introducing Pancasila, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity – the national motto of Indonesia), and Indonesian Islam to the Tunisian people. He translated the writings of Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, on Pancasila into Arabic to promote moderate Indonesian Islam and reactivate Indo-Tunisian bilateral ties, first established by Soekarno and Habib Bourguiba in the 1940s.[107] Their efforts are strong examples of how Indonesian diplomacy abroad intends to win the hearts and minds of international communities.

Indonesian state and moderate Islamic non-state actors' engagements in international issues seem to be broadly appreciated. For example, in 2010, Indonesia was classed by Freedom House as the third most democratic country after the US and India, where the score of accountability and public voices, civil liberties, and rule of law were scored high, respectively, 4.75, 3.58, and 3.00 (out of 5.00). This places Indonesia as the most moderate Muslim country in the world.[108] Similar recognition came from international leaders and intellectuals, such as then-US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who, speaking to NGO activists in Jakarta in 2009, said,

> "I travel around the world over the next years, I will be saying to people: if you want to know whether Islam, democracy, modernity, and women's rights can co-exist, go to Indonesia."[109]

Likewise, amid the social and political engineering for the emergence of a 'French Islam' or an 'enlightened Islam' (*Islam de lumiere*) marrying Islam with democracy and French secularism (*laïcité*), the President of Foundation de l'Islam de France (FIF), Ghaleb Bencheikh, said that Islam

[106] Thohari 2022.
[107] Misrawi 2022.
[108] Buehler 2010.
[109] Mohammed and Davies 2009.

in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, was an excellent example of moderate Islam. He pointed out that Indonesia's national ideology of Pancasila acknowledges freedom of religion and assembly as fundamentally binding laws, enabling this largest Muslim country to resolve any problems, unlike in Arabic countries, even though Indonesia, too, has suffered from terrorist attacks.[110]

Furthermore, such soft power diplomacy of moderate Islam has begun to garner appreciation in several Muslim countries, albeit to a limited extent. As discussed earlier, the Bogor meeting and Peace Talk on Afghanistan and the establishment of NU branches by local Afghan ulama and scholars[111] are strong evidence that this initiative is gaining traction internationally. Likewise, the establishment of Muhammadiyah kindergartens, schools, and universities in Egypt, Lebanon, Australia, and Malaysia, alongside Muhammadiyah sister organisations in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Timor Leste, Mauritius, South Korea, and Japan, show increasing international acceptance.[112]

Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah's and NU's soft power diplomacy faces limitations and challenges that could hinder the successful ramification of moderate Islam globally. Instead of collaborating and working together, for instance, Muhammadiyah and NU orchestrate separate international conferences, dialogues, and peace and conflict resolution efforts. Moreover, both have their own dedicated budgets to conduct parallel soft power diplomacy, albeit limited. These excellent projects could be more successful if diverse funding resources and collaborations exist. In addition to financial constraints, the organisations remain dependent on their top individual leaders' connections and resources. For example, NU's International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS) was possible as it was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs during Megawati's presidency. In 2010, however, once

[110] Bencheikh 2020.
[111] KBRI Afghanistan 2019.
[112] Mu'ti 2015; Iqbal 2015.

Hasyim Muzadi stepped down from NU's chairmanship, the conference he established with Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda had difficulties holding the international meeting. To resolve this, Muzadi asked Megawati to support and reactivate the forum financially and politically.[113] Similarly, when Din Syamsuddin was no longer on the board of Muhammadiyah, Muhammadiyah's international activities of dialogue and peacemaking became less visible.

Inseparable from the orchestration of *wasatiyyat Islam* in the Middle East and non-Arab Muslim countries like Türkiye and Malaysia, the international appreciation for Indonesian Islam undoubtedly presents both opportunities and challenges. Amidst the conflicts affecting many Islamic countries, international leaders like Recep Tayyip Erdogan, former Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad, and Jokowi, for instance, respectively perceive Turkish Islam, Malaysian Islam, and Indonesian Islam as potential models of democratic Islam in a global world. Under President Erdogan, Turkey aims to emerge as a leader of Muslim nations regionally and globally by offering a version of Islam that is modern and progressive based on the values of traditional Islamic Ottoman culture.[114] Similarly, Malaysia has embraced *wasatiyyat Islam* and institutionalised it domestically and internationally as a means to counteract extremism and negative perceptions of Islam in certain communities and Western countries.[115] However, such awareness of 'decentring Islam' is at risk of becoming trapped in the paradox of value superiority or parochial nationalism, including that of Arabic-centric Islam versus peripheric Islam and Islamic values versus Western and Asian values.

Unlike Turkish Islam under President Erdogan or Malaysian Islam under former Prime Minister Mahathir, which are imbued with the Ottoman spirit (Turkey) and Shafiite school of Islam and anti-Western sentiment (Malaysia),[116] the endeavour of recentring Indonesian Islam

[113] Detiknews 2010.
[114] Kalin 2011, 5-23
[115] Kamali 2015, 73-77.
[116] The Age 2002.

tends to distance itself from such claims of value superiority. This is exemplified, for instance, by the project of the International Islamic University of Indonesia (UIII), inaugured on June 26, 2016, by Presidential Decree. The UIII positions itself as a player in moving away from "Arab-centric Islam".[117] UIII aspires to balance sources of academic and intellectual knowledge, by encompassing all areas of Islamic studies, including both Sunni and Shia perspectives, and even the Baha'i religion. It also welcomes lecturers, researchers, and students of diverse faiths, ethnicities, and nationalities, and implements both Western and Islamic teaching methods. By embodying the official Indonesian vision of culture – "promoting Indonesian Islamic cultures within the framework of global civilisation" – UIII represents a serious effort to recentre Indonesian Islam within a global context.[118] After all, Indonesia aims to position itself as a Muslim nation presented as a practically transferable model; other nations may look to it to learn how Islam can coexist with modernity and progress and how Islam can play a significant role in positive societal transformations.

Conclusion

The repercussions of Islamism and violent terrorist attacks in post-Suharto Indonesia prompted the nation to reformulate a soft power diplomacy of Indonesian Islam, which goes hand in hand with Pancasila and democracy. Embracing the notion of *wasatiyyat Islam*, Indonesia had confidently reemerged on the global and Islamic stages. This Quranic notion has enabled the world's largest Muslim community to legitimise, beyond its borders, a highly localised religious model whose extensive genesis in the Indonesian context and continuous actualisation through numerous external debates and power struggles have been observed in this article. Established long before Indonesia's independence, the country's two largest Muslim organisations, Muhammadiyah and NU, are

[117] Ma'ruf 2022.

[118] Allès and Seeth, 2021, 9-10.

excellent representations of local Islam, sharing a common understanding of a peaceful, tolerant, and harmonious Indonesia. Building on this habitus, they advocate for a 'smiling' Indonesian Islam to combat the obscurantist ideology. In so doing, Muhammadiyah and NU work with the state as well as non-state actors at home and abroad to undertake a global extroversion of Indonesian Islam.

The inclusion of Muhammadiyah and NU affirms the theory of soft diplomacy, emboldening state and non-state actors' collaboration in winning hearts and minds through multi-track diplomacy. In post-Suharto Indonesia, stakeholders have been working together to address their weaknesses and limitations: constrained by the non-religious identity of Pancasila, the Indonesian state is incapable of projecting religious ideas and policies in public, while mainstream Islam lacks broader and sufficiently reliable resources and networks.

Inversely, the purely governmental initiative in conducting peace talks and conflict resolution efforts in neighbouring countries seems ineffective, as each country has similar problems, such as separatism, terrorism, violence and communal conflicts that make state neutrality difficult. Commenting on peace diplomacy, for example, former Vice President Jusuf Kalla said,

> "There needs to be a combination of informal and non-formal approaches. Informal first and then formal, namely the state, so that agreement or peace can be formally bound. What NU does, like other informal diplomacy, is only cultural, such as recitation and scholarship, and without touching on the main issue, namely the cessation of conflict and binding peace."[119]

In this vein, notwithstanding religious, ideological, and socio-political disputes, as well as the challenges and limitations they confront, Indonesia's two most significant Islamic non-state actors remain pivotal

[119] Arifi Saiman 2022, 144.

in conducting such initiatives. However, given their insufficient budgets, resources, and networks to carry out this critical 'decentring Islam' project, they should strengthen their cooperation with national and international state and non-state actors and foster people-to-people contacts to build global networks of moderate Islam in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

Thus, instead of being trapped in parochial claims of cultural and value superiority, Indonesia as a middle-power Muslim country might play a pivotal role in the management and the resolution of regional and international conflicts and issues. However, it is interesting to conclude that beyond international conferences, dialogues, forums, special branches, and vast international networks, the influence of such soft power diplomacy of Indonesian state and non-state actors is unclear. Thus far, its perceived success primarily appears to hinge on the democratic stability of the country rather than the influence of Indonesian Islam outside the archipelago. Yet, in a nation continually seeking external legitimacy, the primary function of this soft power likely lies elsewhere: facilitating the reconstruction of national consensus and identity around a notion of moderate Islam as flexible as it is indisputable. It is also pertinent to note here that the project of recentring moderate Indonesian Islam is intricately linked to governmental policy and the stability of Indonesian democracy. In this context, the political, economic, and socioreligious measures undertaken by the next president – who will take office after the 2024 elections – will undoubtedly shape the prospects of the soft power initiative of Indonesian Islam in a global context.

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