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Araştırma Makalesi

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN INDONESIA: THE CASE OF HUMANITARIAN ISLAM*

Endonezya'da Din ve Siyaset: İnsani İslam Örneği

Murat KAÇER**

Abstract

Islam has been a primary socio-political force in Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. This study aims to analyze the concept of Humanitarian Islam introduced by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 2017 in Indonesia. It involves an analysis of Humanitarian Islam's core mission, the challenges it addresses, and the comprehensive solutions it offers. Additionally, the study explores potential challenges that NU may encounter when implementing Humanitarian Islam and provides assessments of possible solutions to overcome these obstacles. The research methodology involves examining events and initiatives from 2014 to 2018 using the Bayt-ar Rahmah website and primarily employs a descriptive approach. This study holds significance as it investigates a relatively new concept that is anticipated to be a prominent subject in the literature, thoroughly exploring it from multiple perspectives.

Keywords: *Nahdlatul Ulama, Humanitarian Islam, Indonesia, Islam, Reform.*

Öz

İslam, dünyanın en büyük Müslüman nüfusuna sahip ülkesi Endonezya'da önemli bir sosyo-politik güçtür. Bu çalışma, Endonezya'da 2017 yılında Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) tarafından tanıtılan İnsani İslam kavramını incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Çalışma, İnsani İslam'ın temel misyonunu, ele aldığı sorunları ve sunduğu kapsamlı çözümleri analiz etmeyi içermektedir. Ayrıca, çalışma, NU'nun İnsani İslam'ı uygularken karşılaşabileceği olası zorlukları ve bu engelleri aşma noktasında çözüm önerilerini ele almaktadır. Bu amaçla, 2014 ile 2018 yılları arasındaki bildiriler, faaliyetler ve raporlar Bayt-ar Rahmah web sitesi kullanılarak betimsel analiz yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Bu çalışma, görece yeni olan ve aynı zamanda literatürde sıkça tartışılacak olması muhtemel bu kavramı, tüm yönleriyle ele alıp incelemesi açısından önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Nehdatü'l Ulema, İnsani İslam, Endonezya, İslam, Reform.*

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Introduction

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), established in 1926, stands as the largest and most influential Islamic organization in Indonesia. It follows Sunni traditions and promotes Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaat, emphasizing unity among the four major Sunni sects. NU has a multifaceted mission encompassing religious, educational, cultural, and socio-economic goals. It supports religious education, traditional culture, and addresses social justice through cooperatives and trade. NU launched Humanitarian Islam in 2017, a concept emphasizing mercy, compassion, and a human-centered approach within Islam. This concept emerged from initiatives carried out by NU from 2014 to 2018.

This study aims to explore the concept of Humanitarian Islam from various angles. I will provide a detailed analysis of what Humanitarian Islam stands for, the challenges it tries to address, and the solutions it proposes. Additionally, I will highlight the potential obstacles that might hinder its realization and suggest ways to overcome them. To better understand Humanitarian Islam, I will explain its fundamental mission, uncovering the underlying principles and ideologies that guide it. I will also clarify its main objectives. In addition to understanding its mission and challenges, I will look into potential barriers that could hinder the effective implementation of Humanitarian Islam. Finally, I will provide potential solutions to address these challenges.

This study can be divided into four main parts. The first part includes the study's objectives, significance, and research methodology. The second part provides a historical overview of NU. Moving on to the third part, it explores Humanitarian Islam, its identified challenges, and the proposed solutions. Finally, the fourth part addresses potential obstacles and offers solutions related to Humanitarian Islam.

The Purpose, Significance, and Method of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the concept of Humanitarian Islam introduced by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 2017. The study will analyze the core mission of Humanitarian Islam, the challenges it addresses, and the comprehensive solutions it provides. Furthermore, it will examine the potential challenges that NU might encounter while implementing the concept of Humanitarian Islam and offer assessments of possible solutions to overcome these obstacles.

When considering the significance of this research, it is essential to acknowledge that NU stands as the largest and most influential Islamic organization, not solely within Indonesia but on a global scale (Kuru, 2023: 129). This study deals with a concept, Humanitarian Islam that was first introduced by NU. One of the most pressing concerns in the Islamic world is the misuse of religion, which leads to the emergence of radical movements and acts of terrorism. Islam is often misrepresented and misinterpreted to further political, social, or personal agendas, often to the detriment of its true teachings and values. Humanitarian Islam claims to offer a solution to these issues. When considering the identity of Nahdatul Ulama and the content of this concept, it is expected that it will provoke extensive debates in the literature from both positive and negative perspectives. This study is considered significant as it thoroughly analyzes this relatively new concept and also discusses the challenges and potential solutions that Nahdlatul Ulama may face.

In terms of the study's methodology, I examine a sequence of events, declarations, and initiatives carried out by Nahdlatul Ulama from 2014 to 2018[1], through the Bayt-ar Rahmah website, which was specifically established for this purpose. The analysis of these materials was predominantly carried out through a descriptive approach.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was established in 1926, in Surabaya, Java, by religious scholars Hashim Ash'ari and Abdulwahhab Hasbullah. This movement, imbued with the principles of Ahl al-Sunnah

[1] 33rd National Congress of Nahdlatul Ulama (August 2015); 15th National Congress of GP Ansor (November 2015); International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) (May 2016); First Global Unity Forum (May 2016); First Global Unity Forum (May 2016); Promotion of Humanitarian Islam (March 2017); XXIst National Conference of GP Ansor (April 2017); International Gathering of Muslim Scholars (May 2017); Kirab Satu Negeri Campaign (September 2018).

wal-Jamaat, highlights a strong dedication to the four major Sunni sects (Saenong, 2021: 130; Ismail, 2011).

It can be argued that the genesis and establishment of Nahdlatul Ulama were influenced by two fundamental dynamics one at the national (local) level and the other on the international stage. On a national level, the proponents of religious reform and innovation in Indonesia rallied around a movement known as Muhammadiyah, resulting in its growing influence across the country (Göksoy, 2006: 541; Ismail, 2011: 253).

The international dimension is echoed by socio-political advancements in other Islamic nations, reverberating within Indonesia. Of notable significance is the rise of Wahhabi influence in the Hejaz region, culminating in a shift of power. Furthermore, the establishment of a new state in Turkey and its subsequent abolishment of the caliphate underpins another critical event. These occurrences deeply resonated with traditional and conservative scholars in Java, triggering reflections and discussions (Göksoy, 2006: 541; Ismail, 2011: 250).

In addition to unfolding developments abroad, an ever-strengthening movement within the nation, spearheaded by the Muhammadiyah movement and echoing the call to return to the Quran and Sunnah, emerged as a significant concern for scholars upholding traditional values. At the Bandung Congress held on January 8-10, 1926, Abdul Wahab Hasbullah, on behalf of conservative scholars, made an offer to participate in the congress to be held in Mecca and to continue traditional religious practices from the Saudi administration that had seized power in the Hejaz. However, the majority of scholars present at the congress were innovative and reformist, leading to the rejection of this proposition. In response, Abdul Wahab Hasbullah and his associates withdrew from the congress and established a new committee, known as the Hejaz Committee, which became the foundation of Nahdlatul Ulama. The committee established this organization at its first meeting in Surabaya on January 31, 1926. The organization, headed by Hasyim Asy'ari, was officially recognized by the Dutch colonial government only on January 6, 1930 (Göksoy, 2006: 541; Ismail, 2011: 256; Saenong, 2021: 131-132).

The goals of Nahdlatul Ulama during its formation shed light on the organization's structure. First and foremost, the organization is primarily defined by its religious identity and its adherence to the Sunni tradition, particularly the Shafi'i school of thought. Within this core framework, the organization aimed to engage in various activities across the religious, educational, cultural, and socio-economic spheres. These activities encompassed activities like spreading religious education, promoting traditional culture, strengthening connections among scholars, ensuring that religious publications aligned with the Sunni tradition, propagating Islam in line with the teachings of the four main Sunni schools of thought, publishing religious books, establishing religious schools, overseeing the maintenance and repair of institutions such as mosques and madrasas, and managing the affairs of foundations and religious organizations. These goals primarily pertained to the fields of religion, education, and culture (Göksoy, 2006: 541; Ismail, 2011: 260-261).

Furthermore, the organization also sought to address issues of social justice by safeguarding the rights of the poor and orphans, stimulating economic activities through cooperatives and trade, and setting up the necessary infrastructure to ensure that activities in agriculture, trade, and industry were in accordance with Islamic principles within society. These were the socio-economic objectives pursued by the organization (Göksoy, 2006: 541).

The emblem of NU is also a feature that summarizes all of the above, containing symbols representing its theology, characters, and ideals. The elements in the emblem:

The Globe: The globe represents the Earth, where human beings live and come from, as mentioned in Quranic verse Q. 20:55 (*From the earth We created you, and into it We will return you, and from it We will bring you back again*). This symbolizes NU's commitment to the conservation and protection of the Earth for the well-being of current and future generations. It reflects a universal ideal, indicating that NU's mission extends beyond its members and communities to encompass all of humankind.

Indonesian Map: The map of Indonesia on the globe emphasizes that NU was founded and established in Indonesia. This symbolizes the organization's deep roots in the country.

Ropes: The ropes surrounding the globe signify NU's ideals of tying the population of the Earth in terms of humanity, as mentioned in Quranic verse Q. 3:103 (*And hold firmly together to the rope of Allah and do not be divided. Remember Allah's favour upon you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts, so you—by His grace—became brothers. And you were at the brink of a fiery pit, and He saved you from it. This is how Allah makes His revelations clear to you, so that you may be 'rightly' guided*). The number of lines on the rope corresponds to the 99 beautiful names of Allah. These ropes represent the concept of brotherhood and unity among human beings and are categorized into three types: ukhuwwa bashariya (human brotherhood), ukhuwwa wataniya (national brotherhood), and ukhuwwa Islamiyya (Islamic brotherhood).

Stars: There are nine stars on the emblem, each symbolizing significant personalities and figures in the history of Islam and Indonesian traditionalist Islamic ideology: The largest star at the top represents the Prophet Muhammad. Four stars on the top right and left represent the four Khulafa' Rashidun, the first four "rightfully guided" caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali. Four stars at the lower right and left denote the four great Imams of madhhabs (schools of Islamic law): Shafi'i, Maliki, Ḥanafi, and Ḥanbali. These stars symbolize NU's adherence to the teachings and principles of these great figures and its commitment to Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah, a mainstream Islamic theological stance.

Colors: The emblem consists of two primary colors: The green color symbolizes the fertile and luxuriant land of the Indonesian archipelago where NU originated and was established. The white color represents chastity and the saintliness of NU's characters.

Text: The Arabic writing on the emblem reads "Nahdhatul Ulama", which is the full name of the organization, while the Roman text "NU" is the acronym (Saenong, 2021: 133-134).

Figure 1. NU's Emblem

Source: (https://www.brandsoftheworld.com/logo/nahdlatul-ulama).

During the 1930s, Nahdlatul Ulama experienced significant growth and became one of the two major religious organizations and movements in Indonesia before the outbreak of World War II. This period also witnessed an increase in the organization's economic activities. In each of its branches, various cooperative initiatives were established. These cooperatives were responsible for managing donated lands and selling their products. The organization's foundation was primarily rooted in traditional religious educational institutions known as "pesantren" (Islamic boarding schools). This traditional educational background played a pivotal role in empowering the organization within society and contributed to its growth both in terms of quality and quantity. Initially, the organization

established branches in various cities in Java and later extended its presence to the Kalimantan region. As the organization continued to expand, smaller-scale structures and local organizations also became part of it (Göksoy, 2006: 541-542; Ismail, 2011: 262).

In the second half of the 1930s, sharp divisions between conservative religious scholars and innovative Muslim circles gave way to a more tolerant atmosphere. Hasyim Ash'ari played a significant role in the establishment of the Indonesia High Islamic Council during this period. In 1937, he represented Nahdlatul Ulama in this council and was elected as its president. While this organization preferred to stay away from politics during the colonial period, it focused its activities primarily on religious and socio-economic areas. It also showed sensitivity to national issues and reacted against certain government regulations related to religion. Additionally, it vehemently opposed the 1925 Guru Law, which restricted private religious education activities, and the transfer of inheritance cases from religious courts to civil courts in 1935 (Göksoy, 2006: 542).

During the Japanese occupation period (1942-1945), Islamic organizations and other religious institutions in Indonesia witnessed significant changes in their relationship with the government. The Japanese military administration saw religious communities and conservative scholars as a means to mobilize the populace against Western powers. Consequently, they united all Islamic organizations under the umbrella of the Indonesian Muslim Consultative Council (MASYUMI) and appointed Hasyim Ash'ari as its leader. A declaration of jihad was made against the Allies, and a militia force named Hizbullah, trained by Japanese officers, was formed. Additionally, the Native Affairs Bureau from the Dutch colonial era was transformed into the Religious Affairs Department, with Ash'ari as its head (Saenong, 2021: 139-141; Ismail, 2011: 268).

As the Japanese occupation came to an end in 1945, representatives of Nahdlatul Ulama joined constitutional drafting efforts alongside other leaders in the struggle for independence. However, despite their efforts to base the newly established Indonesian Republic on Islam, they eventually had to accept the "Five Principles" (pancasila- *Belief in the one and only God, Just and civilized humanity, The unity of Indonesia, Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia, Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives*) put forward by President Sukarno (Saenong, 2021: 129; Ismail, 2011: 274).

Nahdlatul Ulama, in October 1945, issued a fatwa stating that it was a religious duty to participate in the military struggle initiated against the Dutch, who sought to reassert colonial rule in the country after World War II. This fatwa played a significant role in the major battle that ensued when Surabaya was invaded by the Allies one month later. In November 1945, when the Indonesian Muslim Consultative Council transformed into a political party with the participation of all religious organizations and Islamic groups, Nahdlatul Ulama became a part of this entity. However, in 1952, it separated from this party and independently participated in the 1955 elections. In 1973, along with other Islamist parties, it joined the United Development Party according to a government decision, and its members continued their political activities within the framework of this party. In the course of this evolution, Nahdlatul Ulama also expanded its organizational framework. It established the youth's branch, Ansor, in 1934, followed by the women's branch, Muslimat (Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama-Muslim Women of the Nahdlatul Ulama), in 1946, and the girls' branch, Fatayat, in 1950. Nahdlatul Ulama decided to completely withdraw from political activities and return to its status from its founding years in 1984 (Göksoy, 2006: 542; Saenong, 2021: 139-141; Ismail, 2011: 266).

Humanitarian Islam

Humanitarian Islam (al-islam li al-insaniyyah) is a concept pioneered by Nahdlatul Ulama, which fundamentally embodies an Islam with a focus on mercy, compassion, and a human-centered approach. It emphasizes Islam's orientation towards people, their hearts, and compassion. The concept of Humanitarian Islam is defined as follows on the Bayt ar-Rahmah website, which was established in 2014.

"*Humanitarian Islam is a global movement that seeks to restore raḥmah (universal love and compassion) to its rightful place as the primary message of Islam, by addressing obsolete and problematic elements within Islamic orthodoxy that lend themselves to tyranny, while positioning these efforts within a much broader initiative to reject any and all forms of tyranny, and foster the*

emergence of a global civilization endowed with nobility of character" (Baytarrahmah: Humanitarian Islam.)

Humanitarian Islam emerged as the result of a sequence of events, declarations, and initiatives carried out by Nahdlatul Ulama from 2014 to 2018 (https://civilizationalvalues.org/all-political-communiques-present-to-2014/).

1. Establishment of Bayt ar-Rahmah (December 2014): In December 2014, Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri, Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, F. Borden Hanes, Jr., and C. Holland Taylor founded Bayt ar-Rahmah in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. This organization aimed to support the global expansion of Nahdlatul Ulama's activities and combat the misuse of religion to incite hatred and violence.

2. 33rd National Congress of Nahdlatul Ulama (August 2015): The 33rd National Congress of the Nahdlatul Ulama took place in Jombang, East Java, in August 2015. During this event, new leadership was elected, and organizational priorities for the next five years were established. The overarching theme of the Congress was "*Strengthening Islam Nusantara for the Sake of Indonesian and Global Civilization*".

3. 15th National Congress of GP Ansor (November 2015): On November 26, 2015, the 15th National Congress of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor (GP Ansor), the world's largest Muslim young adult's organization, opened with the screening of a film called "Rahmat Islam Nusantara". The film was praised by The New York Times for being a religious repudiation of the Islamic State (IS) and the start of a global campaign by GP Ansor to challenge IS's ideology.

4. International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) (May 2016): In May 2016, the Nahdlatul Ulama organized the International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) in Jakarta, attended by around 400 Muslim scholars from 30 countries. At the summit's conclusion, a 16-point declaration was issued, identifying factors driving Islamist extremism, calling for a global consensus against the politicization of Islam, and emphasizing the NU's commitment to consolidating the global Sunni Muslim community for the betterment of humanity.

5. First Global Unity Forum (May 2016): On May 12, 2016, the First Global Unity Forum, jointly sponsored by GP Ansor and Bayt ar-Rahmah, issued a statement calling for an end to religious conflict and encouraging qualified religious scholars to reexamine elements of classical Islamic law that promote segregation, discrimination, or violence against non-Muslims.

6. Promotion of Humanitarian Islam (March 2017): On March 30, 2017, GP Ansor and Bayt ar-Rahmah announced their effort to promote Humanitarian Islam by recontextualizing orthodox, authoritative Islamic teachings to reconcile certain aspects of classical Islamic law with contemporary civilization. This holds significance because the concept of Humanitarian Islam has begun to be actively discussed as a result of this event.

7. XXIst National Conference of GP Ansor (April 2017): GP Ansor issued a formal decree in April 2017 that highlighted the religious crisis facing the Islamic world and emphasized the need for a delicate approach to address issues related to extremism and religious conflict.

8. International Gathering of Muslim Scholars (May 2017): On May 22, 2017, GP Ansor and Bayt ar-Rahmah hosted an international gathering of nearly 300 Muslim scholars in East Java to develop a strategy to present Islam as a blessing for global civilization. They issued the Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam, which discussed the nature of religious norms, the manipulation of religion by political actors, and the need for a just and harmonious world order.

9. Kirab Satu Negeri Campaign (September 2018): On September 16, 2018, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor launched the Kirab Satu Negeri campaign in Indonesia. This campaign aimed to revive pluralistic and tolerant values, promote the understanding of religion as universal love and compassion, and address the spread of ethnic and religious hatred and violence globally, which poses a threat to international peace and security.

The Primary Problem Zones

We can assess Humanitarian Islam by considering the challenges they have observed and encountered throughout history.

Abuse of Religion for Harmful Purposes

One of the most significant issues in the Islamic world is the abuse of religion, leading to the rise of radical movements and terrorist activities. Nahdlatul Ulama acknowledges that religion is being manipulated for harmful purposes and that faith is being weaponized. Nahdlatul Ulama recognizes that Islam is being manipulated, distorted, and misinterpreted for purposes that deviate from its authentic teachings and values. Islam is often exploited as a means to achieve political, social, or personal gains, frequently at the expense of others (Baytarrahma October 2016; Baytarrahma, November 2017; Baytarrahma October 2018a).

Consequences of Exploiting Islam

Exploiting Islam in such a manner gives rise to a myriad of pressing concerns and consequences, each carrying its own profound implications. These encompass the ignition of brutal conflicts leading to societal destabilization, the cultivation of conditions for social unrest and upheaval, the rapid propagation of religious extremism, the perpetuation of terrorism across various regions, and the regrettable consequence of exacerbating Islamophobia among non-Muslim communities. These repercussions create a domino effect, impacting not only the security and well-being of individuals in Muslim-majority regions but also resonating globally, shaping international relations, policies, and perceptions. The misappropriation of Islam, thus, extends its ramifications far beyond the religious realm, influencing geopolitics, human rights, and social cohesion (Baytarrahma October 2016; Baytarrahma October 2018a).

Problematic Tenets of Islamic Orthodoxy

Embedded within the core tenets of Islamic orthodoxy are certain principles that possess a noteworthy capacity to be misinterpreted, inadvertently or intentionally, resulting in the emergence of issues such as the spread of religious hatred, the proclamation of religious supremacy, and the gravest concern of all, acts of violence committed in the name of religion. So, what are certain tenets of Islamic orthodoxy that cause problems? One of these thenets is norms that encourage enmity towards non-Muslims. These norms often involve the misinterpretation of Quranic verses and Hadiths, taken out of context to promote a hostile attitude towards non-Muslims. This misinterpretation can lead to discrimination, prejudice, or violence against non-Muslim individuals or communities, and may foster an “us versus them” mentality (Baytarrahma October 2016; Baytarrahma May 2017; Baytarrahma October 2018a; Baytarrahma March 2019; Baytarrahma October 2019).

The second tenet is establishment of a single, unified Islamic state governed by a caliph, who serves as both a spiritual and political leader for the Muslim community. This concept draws inspiration from historical Islamic governance models, particularly the early Caliphates, such as the Rashidun Caliphate. Proponents of this idea argue that a caliphate is necessary for Muslims to fully practice their faith and to establish Islamic law (Sharia) as the primary legal system (Baytarrahma October 2016; Baytarrahma May 2017; Baytarrahma October 2018a).

The third tenet is rejection laws derived from modern political processes. This perspective entails the rejection of legal systems that are not rooted in Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia). In this context, it is possible to provide an example of the approach that views the democratic system as a blasphemous system, considering voting as blasphemy, and those who vote as unbelievers (kafir). (Baytarrahma October 2016; Baytarrahma March 2017; Baytarrahma April 2017; Baytarrahma May 2017; Baytarrahma October 2018a).

Solution Proposals and Policies

A comprehensive exploration of the solution suggestions and policies formulated by Humanitarian Islam is essential for acquiring a deeper and more profound understanding of this concept.

Recontextualize (Reform) The Teaching of Orthodox Islam

Nahdlatul Ulama has identified that Islam is being exploited, and it attributes this exploitation to specific approaches within Islamic orthodoxy as the root cause of the problem. As a response to this issue, Nahdlatul Ulama suggests that one possible solution is to reform Islamic orthodoxy. In other words, they believe that by addressing and reforming these problematic aspects of Islamic orthodoxy, the exploitation of Islam can be mitigated or resolved.

One of the challenges of Islamic Orthodoxy was its approach to the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. In this context, Humanitarian Islam aims to find solutions and peaceful resolutions to the conflicts or tensions that may exist between individuals or groups who are Muslims and those who are not Muslims. The ultimate goal is to create a global environment characterized by harmony and absence of conflicts, where people of different religious backgrounds, in this case, Muslims and non-Muslims, can coexist peacefully without hostilities or disputes on a worldwide scale. For this reason, Humanitarian Islam highlights the verses and Haditgs in Islam that emphasize mercy, love and compassion, including the principle of rahmah (universal love and compassion) (Baytarrahma October 2016; Baytarrahma October 2018a; Baytarrahma March 2019).

Providing two examples would be beneficial in illustrating the human-centered approach of Humanitarian Islam. At its 27th national congress in 1984, hosted in Situbondo, East Java, Achmad Shiddiq, the elected chairman of the NU Supreme Council, formulated a theological framework for the idea of brotherhood. This concept extended beyond the confines of Islam (ukhuwwah islamiyah) and encompassed not only the citizens of a nation (ukhuwwah wathaniyah) but also the broader brotherhood of all humanity (ukhuwwah basyariyah) (Baytarrahma May 2017). The inscription on the tombstone of President Wahid in Jombang, which reads "Here Rests a Humanist," also symbolizes the values of love and compassion within the Humanitarian Islam movement (Baytarrahmah: Humanitarian Islam).

According to Nahdlatul Ulama, the second problematic tenet centers around the discussion of establishing a single, unified Islamic state governed by a caliph, who serves as both a spiritual and political leader for the Muslim community. At this juncture, NU's approach emphasizes the compatibility of the concept of the nation-state with Islam. In other words, NU recognized the theological legitimacy of the nation-state. This aspect of NU's approach is significant because it demonstrates their ability to harmonize their religious beliefs and values with the growing importance of the nation-state concept in the post-World War II era. Nahdlatul Ulama acknowledges that the post-World War II era witnessed the emergence of numerous new nation states and the recognition of their sovereignty on the global stage. NU's acceptance of the nation-state concept aligned with the broader international trends during this period. Consequently, NU did not advocate for the transformation of Indonesia into an Islamic state. Instead, they embraced a path that endorsed the idea of a multi-religious and pluralistic nation. NU's leadership displayed a profound appreciation for Indonesia's rich cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity Baytarrahma May 2017; Baytarrahma October 2018a; Baytarrahma March 2019).

The third problematic tenet is rejection laws derived from modern political processes. Nahdlatul Ulama is deeply engaged in a comprehensive and reflective examination of the intricate connection between state constitutions and the body of laws that have evolved as a result of contemporary political dynamics, particularly in relation to Islamic law (sharia). They are fundamentally committed to resolving this complex issue by acknowledging and asserting that a nation's constitution, the structures of its political institutions, and the legal systems that have emerged from modern political processes can exist in harmony with the foundational principles of Islamic jurisprudence. In their pursuit, Nahdlatul Ulama endeavors to convey a message of compatibility, emphasizing that the existence of Islamic state laws should not be regarded as a source of conflict or contradiction when viewed from a sharia perspective. Their aim is to establish a framework that encourages the coexistence of modern state structures and Islamic principles, dispelling any concerns about potential incongruities and promoting a harmonious relationship between contemporary legal systems and Islamic values. This different approach reflects NU's commitment to bridging the gap between traditional Islamic jurisprudence and the realities of the modern world, particularly in the context of

governance, constitutionalism, and the rule of law (Baytarrahma May 2017; Baytarrahma October 2018a; Baytarrahma March 2019).

These intellectual and theological discussions and practices share common objectives, including the transformation of ingrained prejudices and negative perceptions toward non-Muslims within the Muslim community. They also seek to reshape perspectives on matters such as the concept of a single Islamic state, the idea of a caliphate, and the rejection of legal principles derived from modern political processes. This transformation is primarily pursued at a theological level by reinterpreting the teachings of Islamic orthodoxy. To achieve this, they employ the very same principles found in usul al-fiqh, which were historically used to develop Islamic law during the Middle Ages.

How will this reform, characterized by a recontextualization, take place? Nahdlatul Ulama initially distinguishes between sharia and fiqh. while Shari'a is seen as expressing perennial values, Islamic law (fiqh) is the product of interpretation (ijtihad) and needs to adapt continuously to changing circumstances to remain relevant and in line with these values (alhukm yadur ma'a al-'illah wujudan wa 'adaman-Law co-exists with, and is inseparable from, the reason for its existence) (Baytarrahma October 2016; Baytarrahma April 2017; Baytarrahma October 2018a; Baytarrahma January 2019).

This differentiation between sharia and fiqh can be further elucidated through an alternative categorization that essentially conveys the same meaning. Islam is a dynamic and multifaceted religion, consisting of both transcendent (immutable) elements and contingent responses to historical reality. Transcendent elements (Thawabit) are the immutable and timeless values and principles of Islam, often found in scripture (shari'ah), which apply to all Muslims regardless of time or place. They are considered eternal and noble and are the core values of the religion of Islam. Temporal elements (Mutaghayyirat) are responses to specific historical circumstances and are not universally applicable. They are shaped by the particular historical context in which they emerged, often in regions such as the Arab, Persian, and Turkish cultural basins. They were developed in response to issues like armed conflicts, governance of conquered territories, and the needs of the time (Baytarrahma October 2018a).

Nahdlatul Ulama acknowledges that certain aspects of Islam can be adapted to changing times, as they recognize that the world's conditions are constantly evolving. They argue that significant global changes, particularly since the First World War, have influenced how Muslims practice their faith. These changes encompass a profound transformation in global politics, shifts in demographics, the evolution of social norms, and the impact of globalization driven by scientific and technological advancements. However, the organization points out that despite these global transformations, Islamic authorities have not yet systematically adjusted traditional Islamic teachings to address these changes. This lack of adaptation contributes to the ongoing crisis in the Muslim world, which is evident in the struggles to establish an Islamic Caliphate, resistance to engaging with modern political processes, and the failure to address critical issues like aggressive jihad, slavery, interactions with non-believers, and the application of severe punishments for various crimes. Nahdlatul Ulama emphasizes that addressing this crisis can be achieved by applying principles such as fiqh and Mutaghayyirāt, as mentioned earlier.

Global Alliance

Nahdlatul Ulama invites individuals of positive intentions from all walks of life, irrespective of their faith or nationality, to join in the effort to establish a worldwide agreement. The primary objective of this endeavor is to prevent the exploitation of Islam for political purposes, regardless of whether those responsible are Muslims or not. Furthermore, it aims to counteract the spread of hostility and division within communities. Their overarching vision is to facilitate the development of a fair and harmonious global order firmly rooted in the unwavering principles of respecting the equal rights and inherent dignity of every individual. In this vision, they aspire to create a world where people can coexist peacefully, free from discrimination, and where every person's worth and rights are recognized and upheld as universal values (Baytarrahma October 2018a; Baytarrahma October 2018b).

The Road to Humanitarian Islam: Challenges and Solutions

In this section, I will examine the potential challenges that Nahdlatul Ulama may face in implementing the concept of Humanitarian Islam and offer evaluations of potential solutions to address these issues.

Nahdlatul Ulama's Traditional Sunni Identity: Realignment or Dealignment?

In our discussion about Nahdlatul Ulama, it was highlighted that this organization adheres to traditional ahlussunnah wal jamaah (Sunni Muslim) principles, following both Ashar'i and Maturidi theology, recognizing the four major Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence, and embracing tasawwuf, or Islamic mysticism. Notably, its establishment is closely connected to the perceived challenges posed to this traditional interpretation of ahlussunnah wal jamaah by the Muhammadiyah and Wahhabism movements.

Nahdlatul Ulama has been dedicated to engaging in a thoughtful dialogue promoting reforms (recontextualizing) within Islamic jurisprudence while embracing Humanitarian Islam. Nevertheless, it is notable that groups, sects, and other entities aligned with the Ahl al-Sunnah community often exhibit a notably resistant stance towards discussions on reform within the Islamic faith.

The central belief of these groups revolves around a profound understanding of the Quran as a manifestation of Allah's eternal attribute of speech, characterized by its timeless and transcendent nature. According to this perspective, the Quran is perceived as a divine and immutable entity, one that possesses the remarkable quality of being able to address the concerns and complexities of all times and situations. This belief is deeply rooted in the conviction that the core essence of the religion remains unchanging and unaltered, primarily because the Quran is considered a divine revelation that has already comprehensively accounted for all questions and challenges posed by humanity. Within this doctrinal framework, numerous groups, including tariqats (orders) and members of the Ahli sünnet velcemaat, assert that those advocating for religious reform pose a considerable threat to the authenticity and integrity of Islam. They are seen as introducing non-Islamic value judgments into the religion, thereby challenging its intrinsic character. These proponents argue that the Quran and the Sunnah (comprising the sayings and actions of the Prophet) are inherently unchangeable, and any endeavor to reform or reinterpret them is viewed as an indirect assault on the very essence of the religion. Furthermore, they express strong reservations about the idea of separating religious matters from worldly concerns and the secularization of Islamic society, drawing parallels to the Protestant Reformation in Christianity. They contend that Islam's vitality and resilience stem from its unchanging nature, and any attempt at reform is regarded as a significant threat to the preservation of the authentic and unaltered Islamic tradition. In essence, their belief is firmly grounded in the idea that Islam's strength lies in its unwavering and timeless character, and any form of reform is seen as potentially undermining this tradition's genuineness and resilience (Sifil, 2005; Sezen, 2006: 91; Oruç, 2004: 227; Eygi, 2008; Öztürk, 2009: 9).

Yet another potential source of tension between those rooted in the Sunni tradition and Nahdlatul Ulama is the collaboration with non-Muslims and other religious communities, which forms an integral component of the ongoing reform discourse. Within the Ahl al-Sunnah and the community tradition, there exists a significant opposition to the concept of interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Firstly, interreligious dialogue and cooperation activities are viewed as having a hidden agenda. These initiatives are perceived as a covert strategy to weaken, encircle, and eventually take control of Muslim countries and their people. This hidden agenda is believed to permeate fundamental aspects of life, especially in the domains of religion and culture. It implies that these activities are not what they appear to be on the surface, raising concerns about their true intentions. Secondly, the use of conceptual terms as a mask is a prominent point in the passage. It is argued that terms such as tolerance, love, peace, pluralism, tolerance of differences, unity of Abrahamic religions are employed in interreligious dialogue and missionary efforts to create a facade of innocence and civility. These terms are believed to serve as a camouflage to conceal the underlying motivations behind these activities (Sezen, 2006: 120; Oruç, 2004: 24-25). Additionally, there is skepticism expressed about justifying dialogue with a peace and justice discourse. They contend that justifications aiming to "establish peace and justice on earth" through interreligious dialogue are met with doubt. Such

justifications are seen as either indicative of extreme naivety or a deliberate avoidance of acknowledging that the People of the Book (Ahl al-kitab-Jews and Christians) are considered the primary obstacle to achieving peace and justice. Moreover, they accuse organizations involved in interreligious dialogue of erasing the Muslim nation's memory and damaging its sensitivity. They argue that these activities harm the cultural and historical memory of the Muslim community, undermine their monotheistic sensitivity, and threaten their cultural and social identity. Lastly, they criticize concepts like "Abrahamic/celestial religions" and "transcendental unity of religions." They suggest that recent concepts attempting to promote unity between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity is problematic. These concepts are believed to either diminish or obscure the fundamental conflicts that exist between Islam and these other religions, casting doubt on their validity (Sifil, 2005; Sezen, 2006: 10-11; Karabacak, 2005: 91-92; Oruç, 2004: 45; Özcan, 2008: 36; Eygi, 2008).

From this perspective, is Nahdlatul Ulama undergoing a departure from its original founding philosophy, or is it redefining its stance within the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah by offering distinct interpretations of the reform issue in line with mainstream Sunni structures? This is a significant question that deserves careful consideration. This brings us to the second important point, which is the need for Nahdlatul Ulama to clearly and persuasively communicate its stance to the global Islamic community. In today's interconnected world, it's crucial for the organization to effectively share its perspective and engage with the broader Islamic world.

Expanding Horizons: Engaging with Muslim World

Nahdlatul Ulama has taken on a crucial mission to introduce itself to the non-Islamic world, with a primary focus on addressing important issues like Islamophobia, religious extremism, and terrorism. Their main goal is to promote a better and more accurate understanding of 'true Islam.' While they claim not to impose ("export") their methods on others (Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration – International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders -ISOMIL), it seems necessary to get involved in the Islamic world due to the complexity of these issues. Because, when Nahdlatul Ulama engages in discussions about reform within the Islamic context, it can provoke preconceived ideas and critical reactions from Muslim communities. This can impact their relationships and collaborative efforts with these communities. That's why it's essential for Nahdlatul Ulama to offer a comprehensive and detailed explanation of their goals and intentions regarding reform. This explanation is particularly important within the Islamic world, where it's highly relevant. Because the Western and non-Muslim world might not be as deeply concerned about the details of Islamic reform. Nonetheless, for the Islamic world, this issue is of utmost importance, and a lack of a clear explanation could lead to hostile attitudes towards Nahdlatul Ulama.

Conclusion

In this study, I focused on the concept of Humanitarian Islam introduced in 2017 as a result of a series of initiatives by Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia.

Humanitarian Islam embodies an Islam centered on mercy, compassion, and a human-centric approach. This concept aims to align Islamic law with its divine spirit, emphasizing God's mercy, compassion, and promoting peace, justice, and tolerance in the contemporary Muslim world. Additionally, Humanitarian Islam seeks to restore universal love and compassion as the primary message of Islam, addressing outdated and problematic elements within Islamic orthodoxy that can lead to tyranny while fostering a global civilization characterized by nobility of character.

Humanitarian Islam addresses the misuse and misinterpretation of Islam in the Islamic world with three primary concerns: First, it focuses on combating the abuse of religion for harmful purposes, where faith is manipulated for political, social, or personal gains, often leading to the emergence of radical movements and terrorism. Second, it seeks to mitigate the negative consequences of this exploitation, such as conflicts, societal destabilization, religious extremism, and the growth of Islamophobia among non-Muslim communities, which can significantly impact international relations and policies. Lastly, Humanitarian Islam highlights problematic aspects of traditional Islamic orthodoxy that can be prone to misinterpretation, including the promotion of enmity towards non-Muslims, advocacy for a unified Islamic state governed by a caliph, and the rejection of legal systems not based on Islamic jurisprudence.

In response, Humanitarian Islam advocates for a reform of Islamic orthodoxy by emphasizing love, compassion, and harmony between religious groups. It recognizes the compatibility of the nation-state concept with Islam, acknowledging the legitimacy of the nation-state. It also stresses the need to harmonize modern state structures and Islamic principles. Humanitarian Islam seeks to transform prejudiced views towards non-Muslims, reinterpret traditional Islamic teachings, and differentiate between sharia (perennial values) and fiqh (interpretation adaptable to changing circumstances). Its ultimate goal is to address the ongoing crisis in the Muslim world by adapting Islam to the realities of the modern world.

After providing an overview of Humanitarian Islam, I also addressed the challenges and contradictions that Nahdlatul Ulama encounters in relation to this concept. Throughout its history, Nahdlatul Ulama has been closely associated with Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaat. Its emergence was prompted by the perceived threat and danger to the Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaat, particularly from movements like Muhammediye and Wahhabi. Presently, Nahdlatul Ulama, in conjunction with Humanitarian Islam, advocates for collaboration and dialogue with non-Muslim groups. It promotes a reformation of fundamental beliefs concerning the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, the concept of caliphate, and other modern theories and institutions, particularly those connected to Islamic orthodoxy. Nevertheless, numerous individuals, institutions, groups, or communities aligned with the Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaat, vehemently oppose the notion of reforming Islam and engaging in collaboration with non-Muslims. In this context, Nahdlatul Ulama may find itself in conflict with these entities. Hence, it is crucial to clarify whether Nahdlatul Ulama is undergoing a departure from its Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaat identity or if it is introducing a new interpretation while remaining within this framework.

Lastly, Nahdlatul Ulama's crucial mission is to introduce itself to the non-Islamic world, addressing issues like Islamophobia, religious extremism, and terrorism. They aim to promote a better understanding of "true Islam" without imposing their methods. While they engage with the Islamic world to tackle complex issues, discussions about reform within Islam can lead to critical reactions from Muslim communities, affecting their relationships and collaborations. Providing a detailed explanation of their reform goals is vital, especially within the Islamic world where it's highly relevant, as the Western and non-Muslim world may not be as concerned about these nuances. A lack of clarity could lead to hostility from the Islamic world.

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