



# **ISLAM NUSANTARA: ITS DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE (INTELLECTUAL INSIGHT AND CULTURAL EXPERIMENT OF NGATAWI AL-ZASTROUW)**

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Since 'Islam Nusantara' has been contested by Indonesian Muslims, the idea has been conceptualized in a variety of understanding among scholars. Although it is claimed by its defender as not a new school of thought, the concept is basically a new discourse with old legitimacy of living practices of Indonesian Muslims. However, the constructed ideas of Islam Nusantara are frequently scattered and separated from its agents whose views are campaigned and demonstrated in certain forums. This study examines a prototype of Islam Nusantara through a personal experience and insight of Ngatawi Al-Zastrouw, a Javanese artist and prolific academician. As the leader of Kiai Ganjur's music group, Al-Al-Zastrouw attempts to demonstrate the way of 'Walisongo' (lit. Nine Saints) in propagating Islam and show to public how Islam respects the local culture. At the same time, he expresses his ideas in a more academic ways through seminars, regular class and various articles. By focusing on his intellectual insights and experience, this study attempts to capture ideas of Islam Nusantara which are conveyed at the level of discourse and practice of daily life of Al-Zastrouw. According to him, Islam Nusantara is a form of

actualization and contextualization of Islamic teachings by means of Islamic school of thought (*madzhab*) and cultural approaches. This study investigates complexity of Islam Nusantara which is built over the process of reasoning through academic interactions and cultural experiment of an important agent of Islam Nusantara.

**Keywords:** *Islam Nusantara, Ngatawi Al-Zastrouw, culture, Islamic school of thought (madzhab), discourse.*

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## Introduction

Since the idea of Islam Nusantara has been promulgated by the 'Nahdlatul Ulama (NU),' it has sparked a controversy among some Muslim groups. Some people argue that Islam is so great religion that it cannot be degraded into a local system of belief. Islam is only one entity which is universal and compatible with any kind of culture. For this group, "localization or regionalization" of Islam will contaminate the pure aspect of Islamic teachings. However, such opinion received a warm response from the opposite groups. Those who support the idea of Islam Nusantara believe that Muslims can express their locality as long as it does not contravene Islamic teachings. The interaction between Islam and local cultures has been lasted under peaceful process and has resulted distinct Islam which accommodates existing traditions and has Islamized them at a certain level. Among this group, local expression of Islamness indicates a natural process of dialectic between new culture with the existing culture. The dialectic certainly reflects a "normal practice" in the daily life of human being.

In many parts of the world, manifestation of Islam frequently has a distance with the origin Islam. The existence of old traditions and way of life also play significant role in

responding the novel ideas of Islam which is later on interpreted in different ways or adjusted with the existing local cultures. The interpretation and practice of Muslim agents in non-Arab countries have successfully applied the universal principles of Islam and, at the same time, reproduced religious knowledge in everyday life. Therefore, Marshall Hudgson differentiates what is Islamic (properly religious), what is the product of regions in which Muslims were culturally dominant (Islamicate phenomena) and what is constructed by Muslim society as civilization (Islamdom).<sup>1</sup> At similar tone, Pipes argues that Islam began as a religion, developed a legal system, and eventually included elements affecting all aspects of human existence. It can be traced from the minimal relations between the sexes, severe problems of political succession, and a cultural emphasis on memorization characterized premodern Islamicate life in nearly all places and times.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of Islamicate has been strengthened by M. Hakan Yafuz who captured many kinds of Islam throughout the world. He identified some forms of Islam which have been vernacularized and localized in specific narratives. He argues that there is no universal model or single highway to salvation, but there are multiple ways of being and becoming a Muslim. The Arab Islam, for example, certainly reflects the history and social-political atmosphere. The trend of powerful state in Arabic countries has created an unequal society where society is oppressed by the state, centralized religious education and ineffective religious bureaucracy of the ulama. In other words, the position of ulama tends to serve the state rather than the

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall G.S. Hudgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, (Chichago: Unversity of Chichago Press, 1974), p. 23

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam The Genesis of A Military System*, (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1981), p. 13.

interest of societal groups.<sup>3</sup> It is different with Persian Islam where society tried to reinterpret Islam based on tradition of a highly developed civilization and Shi'i perspective. Persian Islam has distinct culture which respect not only to the old tradition of Zoroastrianism, but also Judaism and Christianity. Because those religion had existed before the coming of Islam. When Islam was introduced, the Persians adapted it to their own distinct culture and way of life.<sup>4</sup> Considering the production of cultural norms and modes of thinking, Turkish Islam also distinguish itself with Arab and Persian Islam. Turkish Islam put the universal principles of Islam to operate in terms of building institutions, ideas, practices, arts and vernacularized morality. It is a particular way of crafting and creating one's own way of being Muslim. As other kind of Islam, Turkish Islam implies religio-social modes of reasoning that are forged by time and space in given society.<sup>5</sup>

As an academic topic, the discourse of Islam Nusantara has developed in a wax and wane conversation in public. But as living practices, Islam Nusantara has been applied as daily life among traditional Muslims whose views are accommodative to local cultures as long as they do not contravene the principles of Islamic teachings. Although perspective of Islam Nusantara is not exclusively hold by *nahdliyyin* (NU) community, it is practically applied and mostly campaigned by *nahdliyyin* agents. Since the paradigm has been introduced by NU elite, it was discussed in many forum. Some academic works have been published to explain the complexity of Islam Nusantara and enrich Indonesian public on understanding the distinct Islam.

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<sup>3</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "Is There a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus". *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 2, October, p. 215.

<sup>4</sup> Yavuz, p. 216.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 218.

However, it is very rare to find someone who concern on the conceptualization of Islam Nusantara and at the same time capable of demonstrating the pattern of conveying messages (*dakwah*) by means of Walisongo's method. This pattern has been claimed by the actors as a cultural strategy in conserving local wisdoms and strengthen self-identity of nation.

Ngatawi Al-Zastrouw is one of Islam Nusantara advocates. His activism has introduced him to many social, religious and political thoughts through a variety of intellectual works. He wrote several books concerning history, education, political and sociological issues. His experience with Gus Dur has brought him to the world of intellectual and spiritual. When discourse of Islam Nusantara has arisen in public, he is one of the intellectual agent whose thoughts have strengthened the understanding of Islam Nusantara. As a teaching staff of the Graduate Program of STAINU/UNUSIA Jakarta, he has played significant role in constructing ideas of Islam Nusantara based on his intellectual and spiritual journey. At the same time, he is a Javanese artist who involves in many cultural events and communities. Through Ki Ageng Ganjur Music Group, Al-Zastrouw has applied a cultural experiment in combining music and religious messages. He believes that his effort is the manifestation of interaction between Islam and culture as exemplified by Walisongo (lit. Nine Saints).

This research attempts to explore the complexity of Islam Nusantara through one of its propagators who concerns on its discourse and practice. I argue that discourse of Islam Nusantara relies on the construction of ideas of its agents who explore them from the earliest propagators of Islam in nusantara which presumably have distinct method and paradigm. The sufism way of thinking which surpasses formalist paradigm in Islam Nusantara has led the supporters of Islam Nusantara to think and act liberally, while the

determination to use the madzhab to understand Islamic teachings has impressed them as conservative Muslims. Through the perspective and experience of Ngatawi Al-Zastrouw, it is revealed the discourse and practice of Islam Nusantara in a simple prototype but it is important to explore. What Al-Zastrouw has demonstrated in his cultural experiment is an important effort of reminding the legacy of the earliest actors of nusantara Muslims which is continuously actualized.

### **Definition of Islam Nusantara**

Since the term of 'Islam Nusantara' has been understood with various concepts, there has been many definitions of Islam Nusantara which is defined by various scholars. Considering the plural understanding of the concept, I found there are three main patterns of definition which emphasize the empirical practice of Muslim in the archipelago (*nusantara*), the systemic practice of religiosity and the scientific framework of Islamic studies. The first definition tends to understand the concept of Islam Nusantara with territorial and practical aspect of implementation of Islam in nusantara. As defined by Isom Yusqi, Islam Nusantara is the practice of Islam in the territory of archipelago. It can also mean the Islamic teachings which have been understood, practiced and internalized in daily life of Muslim in nusantara. In terms of its output, Islam Nusantara is the great and noble Islamic teaching which is expected to have benefit to all creatures in nusantara. It leads to the manifestation of peace, tolerant and polite Islamic teachings.<sup>6</sup> Similar empirical practice of Islam has been also defined by Aqil Siroj. He argues that Islam Nusantara is an Islamic way of thinking that engages cultural approach rather than rigid and

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<sup>6</sup> Isom Yusqi, *Mengenal Konsep Islam Nusantara*, (Jakarta: Pustaka STAINU, 2015), p.5.

severe approaches. It is friendly and polite Islam, and integrated into local culture.<sup>7</sup>

The second type of definition refers to a systemic practice of Muslim religiosity which also involves theological, school of Islamic law and sufism aspect. This definition has been expressed by Azyumardi Azra, a prominent historian whose works discuss many issues on the role and contribution nusantara agents in the Muslim World. In this definition, Islam is not only conceived as historical entity, but also as the specific implementation of Islam which is “distinguished” from other Muslim in many parts of the world. He said that Islam Nusantara is a distinctive Islam resulting from vivid, intense and vibrant interaction, contextualization, indigenization and vernacularization of universal Islam with Indonesian social, cultural and religious realities--this is Islam embedded. Nusantara Islamic orthodoxy (Ash'arite theology, Shafi'i school of law, and Ghazalian Sufism) nurtures the *wasatiyyah* character which means a justly balanced and tolerant Islam.<sup>8</sup>

The third definition attempts to elaborate the scientific paradigm which relates to exploration of Islamic studies. This type of definition will support and enrich the scientific definition of Islam Nusantara which is developed in this project. These definitions will be presented as connecting and completing concepts of plural definition of Islam Nusantara. In a philosophical rhetoric, Islam Nusantara is defined as Islam living in nusantara which is the result of dialectic between

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<sup>7</sup> Aqil Siroj, “Urgensi Kajian Islam Nusantara”, in Oghie, Haryanto and Yasik, Fathu (ed), *Islam Nusantara: Meluruskan Kesalahpahaman*, (Jakarta: Lembaga Pendidikan Ma'arif NU, 2015), p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara* (1), Republika, 18 June 2015. See also <http://fah.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/20-articles/kolom-fahim/197-islam-nusantara-adalah-kita>

sacred texts with realities and local cultures.<sup>9</sup> Islam Nusantara can be also a manifestation of authentic Islam which has scientific and spiritual transmission directly to Prophet Muhammad.<sup>10</sup> The Islam Nusantara, in terms of Islamic law system, refers to a method of selecting school of thought (*madzhab*) either *qauli* (individual) and *manhaji* (institutional) in determining Islamic law from various references which is considered based on the territory, natural condition and the way of implementation of local people.<sup>11</sup> In a wide-range of coverage, Islam Nusantara is the experience of Indonesian Islam comprising the period of early coming of Islam to archipelago where universality of Islamic teachings have been dialogued with cultures and civilization. The living entity of religiosity has created an expression and manifestation of Islam in Malay Archipelago. Dialectic between Islamic normativity and historicity of Indonesianess is the methodology and strategy of propagation of Muslim scholars, Nine Saints and other Muslim propagators to provide understanding and apply universality of Islamic teachings (*syumuliyah*) based on the principle of *Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah*, in a model that has been interacted with good traditions in nusantara. Or the model that responds bad traditions (*'urfun fasid*) in the effort to gradually change into a better situation. In order to operate in line with the shari'a principles, the option comprises three models as

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<sup>9</sup> Afifuddin Muhajir, "Islam Nusantara untuk Peradaban Indonesia dan Dunia", in Sahal, Ahmad and Aziz, Munawir (ed), *Islam Nusantara: Dari Ushul Fiqh Hingga Paham Kebangsaan*, (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2015), p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Mustofa Bisri, "Islam Nusantara: Manifestasi Islam Otentik", in Oghie, Haryanto and Yasik, Fathu (ed), *Islam Nusantara: Meluruskan Kesalahpahaman*, (Jakarta: Lembaga Pendidikan Ma'arif NU, 2015), p.24.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara: Ijtihad Jenius dan Ijma Ulama Indonesia Jilid 1*, (Tangerang: Pustaka Afid, 2015), p. 18.



follows: amputation, assimilation and minimalization. Adaptation of Islamic teachings with local cultures can be tolerated only in the domain of dynamic doctrine (*ijtihadi*), but it can not be happened to static doctrine (*qath'i*).<sup>12</sup>

Given those definitions, the concept of Islam Nusantara can be developed as scientific paradigm which accommodates relevant elements of reproduction of Islamic knowledge. By this scientific ethos, Islam Nusantara can be conceived as intellectual framework which has been formed through a long process of history concerning interaction of Muslim propagation, and intellectual agents with social, political, and cultural realities under the principle of genealogy or transmission of knowledge (*sanad*), its sufficient nature, significance and its scientific construction. This scientific entity encompasses the ethos of thinking and acting based on the balance between rationality and spirituality to solve problems or respond the problems of human life. The characteristic of Islam Nusantara refers to open mind, moderate (*wasathiyyah*) standing point and welcomes any changes as an effort to build culture and world civilization under the corridor of public good (*maslahat*). As a discipline, study of Islam Nusantara encourages Muslims to understand social, economic and political problems through interdisciplinary approaches which is projected to build a scientific argument by involving both '*ayat qauliyah*' (sacred texts) and '*ayat kauniyah*' (empirical data).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Isom Yusqi, Mabadi 'Asyrah Islam Nusantara, Proceeding Paper of National Seminar on Islam Nusantara conducted by Graduate Program of Islam Nusantara, STAINU Jakarta, Tambak Beras Jombang, 2 August 2015, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Hamdani, Ulinnuha and Any Rufaedah, *The Mapping of Body of Knowledge of Islam Nusantara (Study of Genealogy, Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology)*, Unpublished Academic Report of International Collaborative Research (KNI) for DIKTIS, 2015, p. 19.

## **Islam Nusantara: Al-Zastrouw's Perspective**

As another advocate of Islam Nusantara,<sup>14</sup> Al-Zastrouw argues that Islam Nusantara is not a new sect of Islam nor new religion which substitutes or narrow the sacred and universal teachings of Islam. It is a method to understand and apply Islamic teachings among Nusantara people which become value system, tradition and typical Islamic culture.<sup>15</sup> It is a worldview of Muslims in understanding the Qur'an and hadith based on sufism framework and wisdom.<sup>16</sup> Instead of replacing Islamic teachings with local cultures, Islam Nusantara basically maintains basic tenets of Islamic teachings and tries to apply them in daily life. It is a strategy to actualize Islamic teachings among people in nusantara by remain safeguarding the core of Islam as written in the Qur'an and hadith.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting that Al-Zastrouw makes analogy about the position of Islam Nusantara in the context of hierarchy of national laws. As other Muslim scholars, he argues that the Qur'an and hadith only contain basic principle of Islamic teachings. That's why both sacred texts need a practical guideline based on the context and reality of society. For Al-Zastrouw, Islam Nusantara equals the regional by-law (Perda) or rules of organization (AD/ART) which becomes operational guideline or manual of constitution. It operates to understand and apply the higher level and complicated rule of law (sacred texts). For him, it is very inappropriate if someone directly

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<sup>14</sup> Zainul Milal Bizawi, *Masterpiece Islam Nusantara: Sanad dan Jejaring Ulama-Santri (1830-1945)*, (Tangerang: Pustaka Compass, 2016), p.1.

<sup>15</sup> Ngatawi Al-Zastrouw, "Mengenal Sepintas Islam Nusantara", *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Januari 2017, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Ngatawi Al-Zastrow in January 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Zastrow, *Mengenal Sepintas*, p.3.

access the general form of constitution which does not provide the detail of regulation. Based on such a need to interpret general words of the Qur'an, many intellectual works on various discipline have been produced such as *fiqh*, *ushul fiqh*, *tauhid*, etc. Those works present to be explanation of the general statement of the sacred texts.<sup>18</sup>

Islam Nusantara as distinct Islam has found its justification in the inclination of an opened and dynamic characteristic of Islam itself. According to Al-Zastrouw, this inclination can be found in the development of Islamic school of thought (*madzhab*) of Islamic law (*fiqh*). Many *madzhab* in Islam reflects the opened text of Islamic teachings and diversity in its interpretation. Al-Zastrouw found that different interpretation in Islamic law is very natural because different interpreter has different background and opinion. However, they are different not at the level of core (*ushul*) of Islam, but only at the level of ramification (*furu'iyah*). The changing interpretation, according to Al-Zastrouw, basically reflects the dynamic of Islamic teaching under the corridor of actualization of Islamic law. The experience of Imam Syafi'i in producing the *qaul qadim* (old opinion) and the *qaul jadid* (new opinion) shows how dynamic of Islamic law was. The opened and dynamic of Islamic teachings dealing social, cultural and political realities are key factors to understand Islam Nusantara.

In his work, Al-Zastrouw argues that there are two methods of Islam Nusantara: cultural and school of thought (*madzhab*) method. The first method refers to the practice of using culture and tradition as media to teach and embed a variety of values and Islamic doctrine. This method was applied by Walisongo whose strategy of Islamizing Nusantara relied partly on the use of various traditions and local cultures

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

to preach Islam. The involvement of wayang in the early Islamization process, for example, is a proof how walisongo agents use local performance to teach Islam. Although it is the legacy of previous religions, walisongo agents could modify and reconstruct the form, performance and scenario of wayang. For example, they modified from the scenario of '*alam kadewatan*' (Hinduism godly world) to '*kamangnusan*' (human world), inserted Islamic sufism and tauhid (monotheism) into the scenario such as the story of '*Dewa Ruci*', '*Jimat Kalimasodho*' and some other stories. The walisongo agents also created '*tembang*' (Javanese songs) which contain full of spiritual messages such as the '*Lir-ilir*' and '*Kidung Rumekso*'.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from using the performing arts, Walisongo agents also used literary works to introduce Islamic tenets such as '*Serat Linglung*' and '*Lontar Ferrara*'. These works contain a guidance of life to be a good Muslim (*kaffah*), tips for new Muslims and expectation for Javanese people to leave a habit of worshipping idol. Another literary works written by Sunan Bonang such as *Suluk Wujil*, *Suluk Khalifah*, *Suluk Kaderesan*, *Suluk Regol*, *Suluk Bentur*, *Suluk Wasiyat*, *Suluk Pipiringan*, *Gita Suluk Latri*, *Gita Suluk Linglung*, *Gita Suluk ing Aewuh*, *Gita Suluk Jebang* and *Suluk Wregol*. In the post walisongo era, some literary works were also written by ulama Nusantara (Muslim scholars in nusantara) such as *Salatus Salatin*, *Tuhfah an-Nafs*, *Hikayat Siak*, *Hikayat Abdullah*. Also, some works of Acehese ulama which were written by Hamzah Fansuri and Nuruddin Ar-Raniri. All of them contributed significant role in explaining Islam through literary works.<sup>20</sup> Likewise in the '*Sejarah Melayu*' (Malay History), which become an important

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

work of historical literature, Islam becomes a driven factor of the story.<sup>21</sup>

The second method of Islam Nusantara is the use of the school of thought (*madzhab*) to understand Islamic teachings. This religious paradigm, according to Al-Zastrouw, is an effort of Muslim scholars to carefully treat the sacred texts and avoid to interpret them arbitrarily. He makes an interesting analogy of those who access the sacred texts directly with those who read medical books without qualification of medical doctor. It will be misleading and trapped into a chaos of interpretation. That's why, the method of using *madzhab* for Al-Zastrouw is the most secure for Muslims to easily understand and apply Islamic teachings through those who have qualification and competence. This method also guarantees the consistence of thought due to having genealogical reference which links to the Prophet Muhammad. In other words, the paradigm of interpreting Islam through *madzhab* is a wise option to actualize Islam and at the same time maintain its authenticity.

### **The Art of Conveying Messages a la Islam Nusantara**

As the leader of Ki Ageng Ganjur Music Group, Al-Zastrouw has a lot of experiences on stage. Since 1996, he started his music group in Yogyakarta by collecting undergraduate students who have interest in music. By the initiative and support from Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid), he performed what he believe as spiritual music because it explores spiritual aspects of Islam. His concert was not only presented to Muslim community, but also other religious groups such as Christians, Buddhism and Hinduism. Consequently, he often experiments to perform various lyrics

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<sup>21</sup> Maharsi Resi, *Islam Melayu VS Jawa Islam*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010), p. 100.

from various religions taking place in pesantren, church, temple, and other religious communities. Al-Zastrouw's reputation is seemingly not only recognized at the national level, but also international. His music group also performed in many countries such as Japan, America, Korea, Singapore and Thailand.<sup>22</sup>

There is an interesting experience of Al-Zastrouw dealing with the reason why the group has been named Ki Ageng Ganjur and at the same time it shows an unexplained spiritual dimension. In 1990s, he was invited by Gus Dur to visit a grave of saint in a remote area of Demak, Central Java. At the first visit, they could not reach the grave due to confusing detour of Gus Dur. In short, Gus Dur could not find the location of grave although he tried to find it for several hours. At the second visit, they could also not arrive at the grave. This time, it was because of the bridge connecting to location was broken due to the serious flood and they could only pray from a long distance. At the third time, they could successfully visit the grave after their failure for a few months. To Al-Zastrouw Gus Dur said, "This is the grave of Syekh Abdurrahman who was well-known as Ki Ageng Ganjur. He was a leader of army of Demak Kingdom. But he was also an artist and saint". This Javanese figure later on inspired Gus Dur and Al-Zastrouw to name his music group.<sup>23</sup>

The idea to express Islam through cultural performance by Ngatawi Al-Zastrouw is seemingly manifestation of the Walisongo method which profoundly paid attention to the strategy of conveying messages by means of entertaining ways and relax atmosphere. This pattern of communication certainly becomes an important alternative of Islamic propagation

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<sup>22</sup> Interview Al-Zastrouw in Jakarta, 24 September 2016.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

(*dakwah*) among plural society. I see the inspiration of Al-Zastrouw's experiment comes from Walisongo figure when he told me: Sunan Kalijaga once , said: “ *ajarono agomo nganggo budoyo*” (Please teach religion with culture).<sup>24</sup> This words imply the importance of cultural media to convey spiritual and moral messages. This cultural approach become an option for Al-Zastrouw through Kiai Ageng Ganjur Music Group to combine music and religious messages in the last two decades. This strategy can also mean that arts and cultural performance is not merely entertainment, but it contains spiritual aspect. It is like the ideal of Javanese people who idealize cultural performance with spiritual act (*laku spiritual*).<sup>25</sup>

Religion and aesthetics basically can be joined in the art of conveying messages a la Islam Nusantara under the sufism framework and accommodative standing point to local cultures. Many writers refer the development of wayang as the medium of *dakwah* as the most successful experiment of walisongo in Islamic preaching. The accommodation of walisongo to local aesthetic of wayang performance, *tembang* (traditional songs) and *gamelan* (traditional ensemble music of Java) confirmed a pattern of religious propagation which empower media of folk entertainment in the religious missionary. Following this pattern, Al-Zastrouw and his music group attempt to entertain people and educate them in the informal ways. The use of gamelan and local or traditional songs in Ganjur's performance reflect the spirit of walisongo with the awareness of taking beauty of culture to express the beauty of Islam.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Suwardi Endraswara, *Agama Jawa: Ajaran, Amalan, dan Asal-usul Kejawen*, (Jakarta: Narasi, 2015), p. 69.

The role of Al-Zastrouw in the Ganjur concert is very crucial, particularly in framing religious and moral messages to be linked with various songs and music. As the leader of music group, he is responsible for selecting an issue of social, religious and even political. On stage, Al-Zastrouw often mentions his short speech as *ngaji* (learning Islamic teachings informally) in a different style with reciting *shalawat* (prayer to Prophet Muhammad). In many occasions, his group often collaborates with popular music group or well-known singers to attract more audience. He usually opens the concert and delivers a short speech to greet and communicate with audience between the song. The topic is selected based on his analysis of social and political problems. When the certain religious groups tended to show superficial symbols, for example, he explained the essence of religiosity which emphasizes more on people's heart, not their performance.<sup>26</sup> In another concert, he rejected an accusation from certain Muslim group that Pancasila (Five Principle) contravenes Islamic teachings. By presenting relevant sacred texts, he could easily prove how Islamic Pancasila is.<sup>27</sup>

Among typical songs performed by Ganjur group is a traditional Javanese song, '*The Lir-ilir*'. The song does not only express deep spiritual messages with Javanese language, but also represent the legacy of Sunan Kalijaga (One of Nine Saints). By presenting this song, Al-Zastrouw basically show the method of *walisongo* which did not directly use the sacred texts (the Qur'an and hadith) in explaining Islamic teachings, but inserting Islamic values and moral in vernacular lyrics of the song. When the *lir-ilir* has been sung, he usually explains religious messages behind the song. It talks about an appeal to

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<sup>26</sup> Ki Ageng ganjur Concert in Lubuk Linggau, South Sumatera, download from youtube in 20 May 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Ki Ageng ganjur Concert in University of Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia (UNISIA), Jakarta, 03 February 2017.



strengthen the faith to Allah by maintaining the cleaning heart and doing prayer five times a day. In this song, people are encouraged to approach Allah and spend time as wise as possible before the death comes. It is extraordinary that Al-Zastrouw can explain all lyrics by finding religious legitimation from the Qur'an and hadith. It also proves that the Sunan Kalijaga's song has a deep meaning and spirit of *dakwah* in a very subtle and sophisticated way.

## Conclusion

The spirit of Indonesian moderate Muslims to respond social and political challenge by promulgating the concept of Islam Nusantara has created a new public discourse on the universal and local Islam. It has also forged Muslim public to rethink their understanding on Islam dealing with new trend of radicalism, puritanism, wahabism, terrorism and even populism. The new challenge of the changing social and political constellation, has encouraged Muslim actors to offer solutions to current problems. Islam Nusantara is expected by many people to be alternative strategy to deal with such a great challenge. That's why, moderate Muslims attempts to reactualize and contextualize Islamic teachings to be able to relevant with social changes. As a result, the discourse of Islam Nusantara is very complex as complex as the relations between religion and culture. However, this new discourse has been continuously discussed and examined by many scholars.

Through the intellectual insight and cultural experience of Ngatawi Al-Zastrouw, it is exposed that Islam Nusantara has been conceptualized as cultural strategy to apply Islamic teachings as exemplified by the early Muslim propagators and their successors who concern on the actualization and contextualization of Islamic teachings. For Al-Zastrouw, the determination to use Islamic school of thought (*madzhab*) is the

most secure and careful to treat sacred texts (the Qur'an and hadith) under the guideline of qualified and competent scholars (*ulama*). It aims to avoid a misleading conclusion and produces an arbitrary interpretation. The paradigm of Islam Nusantara which stems from sufism way of life, according to Al-Zastrouw, has enabled Muslims to accommodate and develop local cultures without facing any problem. This religious framework has performed Islam as the religion which respects aesthetic, while the combination of religion and aesthetics is hardly found among puritan Muslim groups. However, Al-Zastrouw's insight and practice seemingly impress two different inclinations. His opinion on Islamic law tends to represent conservative group, while his cultural views and experiment show a liberal standing point.

The prospect of Islam Nusantara in the development of religious discourse certainly relies on the spirit of proponents and observers who have interest to explore and analyze it further. However, as the discourse which is campaigned by moderate Muslims, the rituals of Islam Nusantara have been practiced by many traditional Muslims, particularly *nahdliyyin* community. It has become daily practice and been accepted as part of people's culture. The paradigm of Islam Nusantara which regards many issues wisely must have been suitable with majority of Indonesian people who have lived in coexistence and harmony. It is true that puritanism and populism have been growing and showing their bargaining position to get religious legitimacy from Indonesian people', but this movement is still minor. To some extent, this opposing groups have a positive impact for moderate Muslims as sparing partner to compete and strengthen the movement of Islam Nusantara.

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## **Interviews**

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