

The struggle of Nahdlatul Ulama in Maintaining a Sustainable Scientific Tradition in a Complex Transdisciplinary Era

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Abstract: Nahdlatul Ulama has recently been aggressively promoting the “Islam Nusantara” paradigm. This of course caused a polemic in the Indonesian public and received various criticisms, especially from those who have different points of view with Nahdlatul Ulama. The problems raised in this research are why it is important to actualize scientific traditions in a sustainable manner and how is the mechanism of the ulama-santri affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama in maintaining a sustainable scientific tradition in a complex transdisciplinary era. The purpose of this research is to explore the struggles of Nahdlatul Ulama teachers-students in maintaining scientific traditions in a complex transdisciplinary era and to describe these struggles in a mechanism consisting of pesantrens and the “Islam Nusantara” paradigm. The results of this study indicate that pesantren is a forum and basis for Nahdlatul Ulama in maintaining scientific traditions in the complex transdisciplinary era. What is in the pesantren is the result of a mixture of religious architects who really understand how to maintain scientific traditions in a sustainable manner. The scientific tradition of pesantren actually departs from small recitations in the *surau* in the context of guidance for worship, which is later able to grow and develop, even being reborn into a socio-religious institution that has succeeded in playing an active role in shaping the morality and values of a great nation, namely Nusantara and now Indonesia. The pesantren is fully committed to its own values to be widely used in the community. The mechanism for Nahdlatul Ulama scholars in maintaining the scientific tradition in pesantrens is carried out by framing the “Islami Nusantara” paradigm. This is very closely related to the tradition of pesantrens such as those built by Walisongo and the preachers in the next period until they arrived at the complex transdisciplinary era today.

Keywords: Islam Nusantara, Nahdlatul Ulama, pesantren.

Introduction

Talking about the Islamic scientific tradition in pesantren, it starts with two waves. First, the wave of Islamic knowledge that came to the territory of Nusantara in the 13th century AD, along with the entry of Islam in Nusantara in a broad scope. Second, the wave when scholars from Nusantara studied religious scholarship in the Arabian Peninsula, especially in Mecca and after that returned to Indonesia to establish large pesantrens. These two waves are the source of the Islamic scientific tradition that developed in the pesantren (Wahid, 2001). Pesantren, as a classical education system that has existed since the Hindu era, has

also become an important forum in maintaining and spreading Islam in Nusantara. After hundreds of years, the Islamic values that were brought by the preachers continue to grow and are maintained by the pesantren. Many pesantrens that develop the scientific spirit of “Islam Nusantara” are widespread in Java, with each pesantren having a teacher who is highly respected by his students, KH. Hasyim Asy’ari is one of them. He took part in maintaining Islamic relations with local Indonesian culture, even though he had studied in Arabic, it did not mean that he was someone who was easily influenced by the Islamic reform movement that was starting to develop in Saudi Arabia. He finally tried to defend the teachings of the four religious

sects of Islam that had long been rooted in Nusantara. He and other teachers finally founded Nahdlatul Ulama on January 31, 1926 (Matanasi, 2016).

KH. Bisri Syansuri, is one of the founders of Nahdlatul Ulama who built a pesantren around a sugar factory which is considered a den of immorality in the Jombang area, East Java. In dealing with all of this, he uses a very flexible approach in attitude but is firm in his stance. He remains in the position of a citizen who does not separate himself from the general path of life. If there is a difference between his morality and values from what is happening around him, it is done by not confronting his morality and values head-on, but only by setting an example for those who want to follow. He did not then “strike out” but rather be accepting in his own place for those who wish to change themselves gradually (Baso, 2012). Nahdlatul Ulama, through Said Aqil Siradj, promised to continue to care for Islamic teachings according to the traditions and culture of the people in Nusantara. Walisongo himself is a pioneer of Islamic transmission which has been able to create a relay of struggle to introduce Islam to various corners of the country. Walisongo then passed on the pattern of *da'wah* and teachings to Nahdlatul Ulama by not shifting and marginalizing local culture. Therefore, Nahdlatul Ulama has always been moderate and tolerant of local culture (Kurniawan, 2012). So it is very important to explore the struggles of Nahdlatul Ulama scholars in maintaining scientific traditions in a complex transdisciplinary era and to describe these struggles in a mechanism consisting of pesantren institutions and the “Islam Nusantara” paradigm. Nahdlatul Ulama scholars continue to try to strengthen the belief that the scientific tradition in the Islamic boarding schools is a reflection of religious attitudes that are guided by the right guidance, namely the scientific tradition that fully follows Islamic teachings from the previous scholars whose scientific genealogies are continued to the Prophet Muhammad.

Materials and Methods

Study area

Researchers choose to use a phenomenological approach which is part of philosophy as well as a methodological approach that includes various methods. As a philosophy, phenomenology is one of the main intellectual traditions that have influenced qualitative research. As a methodological approach, phenomenology is welcomed by researchers from various social sciences, especially sociology and psychology, who make phenomenology as a branch of philosophy (Rorong, 2020). Based on the view of the phenomenon that has occurred, this research will focus on exploring how to find common ground on how scholars or ulama from the pesantren laboratory affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama organization are able to contribute so much in the process of transmitting Islamic teachings through various *da'wah* methods and appropriate cultural strategies according to the reality of the socio-cultural conditions of Indonesian society. So that the effect of its success is able to survive and continue to be maintained until the complex transdisciplinary era as it is today, even showing its global influence on an international scale. This study uses a type of library research, which is a series of activities related to the methods of collecting library data, reading, and taking notes and processing research materials. There are four stages of library research activities, namely: (1) preparing the necessary equipment; (2) preparing a work bibliography; (3) organizing or managing time, and fourth is reading and recording research material (Zed, 2004).

Prosedur

Research activities will not be separated from the existence of data which is the raw material for information to provide a specific description of the object of research (Siyoto and Sodik, 2015). As for this study, it only uses secondary data obtained from other parties and not directly from the object of research (Hardani et al. 2020). Secondary data is obtained through books, publications, organizational documents, reports, journals, to various sites related to the information being

sought (Prabandari, 2020). The secondary data in this study were sourced from three main research materials which included primary materials, secondary materials, and tertiary materials. Collecting data in this study using documentation techniques. In this documentation technique, the researcher holds a check-list to search for predetermined variables. If the required variables are found, the next researcher puts a check or tally on the list of available variables. To record things that are independent or have not been determined in the list of variables, the researcher can use independent sentences (Siyoto and Sodik, 2015). In this study, many related variables were found in various sources such as those written by Abdurrahman Wahid, Ahmad Baso, etc.

Data analysis

The data collected from data collection activities may be too few in number, or may be too large. Even though the amount is sufficient, the data or information must be processed or processed so that it becomes meaningful information (Suwartono, 2014). The data are then classified and organized systematically and processed logically according to the research design that has been determined. Data processing is directed to provide arguments or explanations regarding the thesis proposed in the study, based on the data or facts obtained. If there is a hypothesis, data processing is directed to confirm or reject the hypothesis (Kurniawan, 2012). Meanwhile, in this study using interpretive descriptive data analysis techniques. The interpretive descriptive data analysis process is carried out by organizing and sorting the data into patterns, categories, and units to make it easier to draw conclusions. The descriptive data analysis process is carried out in three stages, namely: (1) Classification, grouping the data obtained based on data collection techniques while digging data in the field. At the end of the analysis during data collection, the objectives of data collection were determined. The data collected from both informants, situations, and documents are determined; (2) Reduction, it is a process of selecting, focusing on simplification, abstraction, and transformation of rough data, which emerges from field notes. Data reduction took place

continuously during the research; (3) Interpretation, interpretation is carried out during the research process starting from data collection aimed at obtaining meaning, especially those related to social, cultural, and religious practices (Wirawan et al. 2016).

Results and Discussion

Pesantren: the basis of Nahdlatul Ulama's struggle to maintain scientific traditions

National education has become the general education culture of the Indonesian nation by adopting a partial system. As for the pesantren, it shows the characteristics of a unique culture. This can be proven that the pesantren education system has similarities with military academies or monasteries, where both institutions are conditions for total utilization of the situation. Pesantren itself shows a phrase which means environment and climate comprehensively on the definition of where the students live (Wahid, 2001). Negative issues and slanted assessments often occur to pesantrens. For example, what is common is that pesantrens cannot be separated from the term "old-fashioned" or in more polite language, they are old, less orderly, living below the standard of eligibility, storage warehouses for naughty children, etc. So that the pesantren has more or less experienced challenges and twists and turns of a journey that is quite difficult from time to time. Therefore, the challenges of the times have made pesantren continue and are always excited to stay grounded in this world with all the consequences. Because after all, pesantren stands on two different legs. Besides pesantren, they must be able to transform, on the other hand, pesantren must also maintain traditions that some consider backward (Shiddiq, 2015).

The general definition explains that pesantren is an educational institution that focuses on the field of Islam through a non-classical system. The figure of the pesantren teacher becomes the central figure as a leader who guides his students by using references from various textbooks written by previous scholars in Arabic (Hambali, 2014). As for the students at the same time studying and

returning to rest in the pesantren environment, which is also the dormitory where they live. It is different from dormitories in general, pesantrens have unique characteristics. The pattern of pesantren life is separated from the reality of life in the surrounding environment. Inside there are several important buildings that support the life of the pesantren, namely the residence of the teacher as the highest leader of the pesantren, a mosque or *surau*, a *madrasa*, and of course the dormitory where the students live (Wahid, 2001). Pesantren is an educational institution that is included in the internal structure of Islamic education in Nusantara. The implementation is carried out using a traditional system and using the principles of living according to Islamic teachings. Pesantren can function optimally in its orientation as an educational institution, besides being oriented as a *da'wah* institution, social society, and even a forum for struggle (Junaidi, 2016). Apart from being a *da'wah* institution and a forum for struggle, pesantrens carry out their roles and functions as non-formal Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia quite well through the education system and traditional teaching patterns. The students must be fully universal in spirit, in the sense that the santri in the pesantren are educated consistently and independently so that they have independent principles by not relying on any elements in profane life (Nurmadiansyah, 2016).

So in the pattern of teaching, pesantrens are able to enter the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains effectively by being guided by the order of values and strong moral standards. In practice, the teacher figure functions as a guide for his students to succeed in achieving the plenary goals in many aspects such as spiritual, religious, moral, etc. (Maiumun, 2017). In some ways, the teacher's position can provide a mission like in action films or battlefields, this can be found in classic references such as Prince Diponegoro who received orders from his teachers in the Java war of 1825-1830 (Baso, 2012). Social problems and religious issues have become part of the pesantren journey to play its function by being actively involved in people's lives, apart from the main function of pesantren as a center for learning science and religion. The figure of a pesantren teacher who is

highly respected and has great authority, is often a reference and mediator from the disputing camps to bloody conflicts involving ethnicity and religion. In addition, pesantren teachers are also active in preaching to remote villages and city corners to spread Islamic teachings and instill a love for the homeland as good fellow citizens (Umar, 2014). Pesantren which originally originated from recitation in a *surau* for the purpose of guidance for worship, later was able to grow and develop and even be reborn into a socio-religious institution that succeeded in playing an active role in shaping morality and values. So that the pesantren has its own place and a sense of trust from the community because it is able to change the situation for the better and even in some cases can totally make changes in a positive direction. This success is supported by several factors, including the fact that the pesantren is fully committed to the values it adheres to which will then be widely used in the community (Wahid, 2001). In the end, the various problems that occur in society can be well captured by the pesantren as their social role. This can happen because both the pesantren and the community need each other. In some cases it can even reach the realm of politics, because politics has become an inseparable part of society. For this reason, society needs guidance in politics regarding who deserves a political position and what consequences will occur if political power is held by parties who are not experts in it. Because after all, political contestation will be very influential in people's lives and they need mentors in this case are pesantren people (Umar, 2014).

The mechanism of Nahdlatul Ulama scholars in maintaining scientific traditions

Tracing the Nahdlatul Ulama teacher-student network of course starts from the genealogy of the relationships and ties that exist within the network. Genealogy itself comes from the Greek tradition which if reviewed in terms of language, *genea* and *logos*, means descent and knowledge. So genealogy in this case is research on the family and genealogy of offspring in its historical roots. In Greek tradition, Genealogy uses a verbal system to channel its knowledge to generation to generation. In the modern era now, Genealogy experts use

historical records, genetic instruments, and recording tools to obtain data on family history along with their descendants. The results of research are usually made genealogy chart or in other forms such as narratives that explain in detail (Zaini and Mahsun, 2019). This genealogy of “Islam Nusantara” has become a tradition in the form of a *sanad* culture where a teacher mentions his teachers until it ends in *mushannif*. This tradition is very well preserved in many *salaf* pesantrens in Indonesia such as Langitan, Tebuireng, Lirboyo, Buntet, Krapyak, Sarang, Sidogiri, etc. The teachers will provide their *sanad* lanes to his students after the review of religious textbooks. This sanad inheritance was carried out by the teacher by giving a diploma to all students who participated in the study of religious text books with him. In the sense, the disciples can later practice the teachings while can teach the book to others exactly as when his teacher teaches it to him (Karyadi, 2013).

It can be seen, for example, in the sanad of the school of thought brought by Imam Shafi’i, as passed down to Sheikh Yasin Isa Al-Fadani; starting from Allah revealed to the Angel Gabriel, delivered to the Prophet Muhammad, then bequeathed to Abdullah bin Mas’ud, to Alqamah, to Imam Ibrahim An-Nakha’i, to Hammad bin Abi Sulaiman, to Imam Abu Hanifah, to Imam Malik, to Imam Shafi’i, kepada Ar-Rabi’ bin Sulaiman Al-Muradi, to Abu Al-Abbas Muhammad bin Ya’qub Al-Asham, to Abu Nuaim Al-Asfahani, to Abu Ali bin Ahmad Al-Haddad, to Al-Qadhi Abu Al-Makarim Ahmad bin Muhammad Al-Labban, to Al-Fakhr Abu Al-Hasan Ali bin Ahmad ibn Al-Bukhari, to Ash-Shalah Muhammad bin Abi Umar, to Imam Al-Hafizh Ahmad bin Ali bin Hajar Al-Asqalani, to Al-Qadhi Zakariya bin Muhammad Al-Anshari, to Sheikh Najmuddin Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Ghaithi, to Sheikh Salim bin Muhammad As-Sanhuri, to Sheikh Syamsuddin Muhammad bin Ala Al-Babili, to Sheikh Abdul Aziz Az-Ziyadi, to Sheikh Syamsuddin Muhammad bin Salim Al-Hifni, to Sheikh Abdullah bin Hijazi Syarqawi, to Sheikh Usman bin Hasan Ad-Dimyathi, to Sheikh Sayid Ahmad Zaini Dahlan, to Sheikh Bakri Syatha, to Sheikh Muhammad Ali Al-Maliki + Sheikh Umar Hamdan

Al-Mahrusi + Sheikh Umar bin Husain Ad-Daghistani + Sheikh Hasan bin Sa’id Yamani, to Sheikh Yasin Isa Al-Fadani (Baso, 2012). The methodology in this case refers to “Islam Nusantara” which is a form of practicing Islamic teachings in a typological and socio-cultural way in Indonesia or furthermore in the early eras, namely Islam with Nusantara characteristics, a unique blend of Islamic theological values with local traditional values. The characteristics of Nusantara’s personality are based on local wisdom, values, and customs which are then manifested in the culture of the community which has many similarities with the spirit of Islamic teachings which are full of noble values (Astuti, 2017).

Part of the local wisdom of the community is the existence of an intellectual and spiritual product in the form of a pesantren, which has long been a forum and reference for local people who are looking for the authenticity of life and various spiritual achievements. Cultured Islam was born from this tradition, making the character of Islam traditional, with its education and teaching system centered in pesantren. The cadres who have been well prepared by the pesantren teachers are then distributed in various parts of the country, through *da’wah* that is subtle and does not damage the existing traditional order (Wahyudi et al. 2019). Since the presence of Islam in Nusantara, the conversion process from the old religion to the new religion has been very natural and far from bloody conflicts. Precisely in the 7th century AD or in the 1st century Hijri, this new religion has entered Nusantara and reached its peak in the 13th century which is growing rapidly to various parts of Nusantara. The establishment of Islamic kingdoms in Sumatra added to the strength of the religion of Islam being integrated in the joints of people’s lives at that time under the auspices of the king or sultan. The spread of Islam was then continued through trade centers to various regions in Java to the eastern parts of Nusantara (Untung, 2010). Understanding the methodological thinking of “Islam Nusantara” cannot be separated from the pesantren tradition as built by Walisongo and the next generation of preacher (Baso, 2012). The analysis of the elaboration of the “Islam

Nusantara" methodology is contained in the rules of *al-muhafadzah*, *al-akhdzu*, and *maqasid al-syari'ah*. The rules of *al-muhafadzah* and *al-akhdzu* have become the habits of Nusantara scholars to legitimize the capacity of Islamic sciences to match their authentic sources (Salenda, 2016). According to Ma'ruf Amin, this rule needs to be refined and recommends adding a rule, namely *wal ishlah ila ma huwal ashlah tsummal ashlah fal ashlah* (Ghazali, 2017).

Discussion

Reflecting back on how the scientific tradition existed long before the ancient Greeks began, is the fact that advanced mathematics existed with the Chinese hundreds of years before the Babylonians and later on the Greeks, and medical expertise was taught in the early centuries schools in Buddhist temples in Thailand two thousand years ago. Meanwhile Egypt already has a very old (Islamic) law school and that was long before law faculties appeared at Europe's first university in Bologna (Peursen, 2014). Tradition discourse also includes religious fields that exist in society. In Islam itself, since the birth of this religion in the early periods it was a form of accumulation of the various traditions and customs that were prevailing at that time and by Islam they were processed to conform to the principal teachings. Islam did not come to completely eliminate existing norms of life, but Islam came to provide a filter, legitimacy, and prestige for cultural products and human traditions to make them more dignified (Fauzi, 2016). The Greek tradition, which had been popular in various periods before Islam came, also had a lot to do with influencing the framework of Islamic philosophical culture. Some Muslim philosophers among them tried diligently to unite Islam with philosophy, because both are believed to have originated from one source, namely God. The brilliance of civilization that Islam has achieved is also believed to be the fruit of the expertise of Muslim philosophers who mixed brilliantly between Islam and Greek tradition into something unique in Islamic civilization.

The rise of Islam is said to have started from the Arabs who lived primitively in the desert by profession as caravan robbers and always fighting

among their tribes or if they were not busy, they worked as cattle herders. This odd portrait is still common in Western eyes and of course it is very unfortunate because it seems to be distorted from the existing historical facts, where Islam actually emerged from a metropolitan area that was advanced civilized and had existed since previous eras such as Babylon, Egypt, Byzantium, and Persia. The Arabs themselves are located right on the outskirts of these areas. Meanwhile, the golden age of Islam which was so advanced was the fruit of the success of Muslims in establishing relations between their Arab civilization and many different civilizations such as the Greeks, Persians, Indians, and Chinese, where all of these nations had progressed rapidly in many scientific disciplines (Natsir, 2012). The massive intellectual achievements that developed during the Abbasid period became a milestone in the so-called golden age of Islamic civilization. Baghdad became the center of science, research, literature, and science. Intellectuals, writers, and students gathered in centers of learning, the world's first universities, where they made important contributions to the study of astronomy, medicine, mathematics, and chemistry. Muslims, Christians and Jews from all over the world come to share knowledge, collaborate on research, discuss and debate. They translated scientific works from Greece and introduced many original ideas and innovations (Dodge, 2006). There are at least three significant factors behind Islamic civilization being able to influence the European world. First, an improved standard of living and a reinforced material base. Second, the essence of the fundamental Islamic religious values inspires the way of life and character of Europeans, even though some of them are not aware of it. Third, the transmission in the field of literature from the Arabs has been subtly entered, permeated, and accepted by the Europeans which in turn is able to encourage them to imagine and play politics brilliantly, especially with the Roman population.

India is said to be the inspiration for the birth of the pesantren institution because if it refers to the framework and patterns in the pesantren, it is derived from the Hindu tradition of India. Pesantren is commonly used in the Hindu religious

education system that is spread across the island of Java. As for after the entry of Islam on the island of Java, the framework and pattern of pesantren were institutionally adopted and transferred to Islamic religious education. Of course, several important stages were behind the establishment of the pesantren. Because the establishment of an Islamic educational institution or center for religious *da'wah* must go through tense phases filled with feelings of anxiety or worry. However, the spread of Islam in Indonesia is full of intricacies and enormous challenges in accelerating the growth of religion to society (Takdir, 2018). In the year 30 Hijriyah or 651 AD, only about 20 years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Caliph Uthman ibn Affan once sent a delegation to China to introduce the recently established Islamic State. In a journey that took four years, Uthman's envoys actually stopped at the Archipelago Archipelago. Several years later, in 674 AD, the Umayyad dynasty had established a trading base on the west coast of Sumatra. This is the first introduction of the Indonesian population to Islam. Since then the Muslim sailors and traders continued to arrive, century after century. They buy crops from this "green land" while preaching (Sunnara, 2009). Only since the 15th century, Islam began to have a strong influence in Java. The local population gradually embraced Islam and automatically replaced the previous major religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. This success is due to the expertise of Islamic preachers in introducing Islam to the population. Walisongo are the Islamic preachers who are widely known as the front line in the process of converting the old religion to the new religion. However, before the Walisongo era, in previous times there had been Islamic preachers such as Sheikh Jumadil Qubro, Sheikh Datuk Kahfi, Sheikh Maulana Akbar, and Sheikh Quro (Tamaim, 2020).

There are many stages regarding the development of pesantren which color the dynamics of the spread of Islam when it first entered the Land of Java and Madura. The stages of development of pesantrens cannot be separated from the influence of merchants from various countries who carried out trade expansion, accompanied by efforts to carry out *da'wah*

together. Efforts to carry out *da'wah* simultaneously are indeed the initial goal of spreading Islam through trade to the community without having to force them to enter Islam (Takdir, 2018). The scientific tradition of pesantren has developed from time to time and displays manifestations that change from time to time. However, it can still be traced some of the core things that have remained the scientific tradition of pesantrens since the arrival of Islam to Indonesia until now. All of these point to a historical origin, which is the main driving force for the development of the pesantren itself. The pesantren in its current form has a teaching system known as the yellow book recitation. In addition, he was also able to absorb a number of innovations gradually over several centuries. On the basis of such a resilient ability to stay alive, pesantren has its own advantages that do not exist anywhere else (Wahid, 2001). Syamsul Arifin said that in Bruinessen's view, pesantren have succeeded in building a great tradition in teaching Islam based on classical books which are popularly known as the yellow book. The traditions developed by pesantren are unique and different when compared to the traditions of other Islamic entities in Indonesia such as reformists or modernists. The uniqueness of the pesantren can be seen in its persistence in caring for the classical scientific tradition which is almost ignored by modernists (Arifin, 2009).

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that the progressivity of the scientific tradition actually departs from a small recitation in the *surau* in the context of guidance for worship, which is later able to grow and develop and even be reborn into a socio-religious institution that has succeeded in playing an active role in shaping morality and values in a large nation, formerly known as Nusantara, has now become a modern-independent country called Indonesia. Meanwhile, the struggle of Nahdlatul Ulama teachers-students in maintaining the scientific tradition is mechanized in the giant project of establishing strong religious institution and base, namely the

pesantren. This was influenced by the “Islam Nusantara” paradigm, which is the methodology of thought brought by Walisongo, and continued by preachers in the next period until these pesantren were established and Nahdlatul Ulama was formed as a large forum for the struggle to maintain scientific traditions in the complex transdisciplinary era.

Conflict of Interest: I solemnly declare that in the writing of this article there is no conflict of interest. I do not need trust either personally or professionally, nor do I aim to influence the quality or performance that it should be.

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