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Promoting the Middle Way:
Intercultural Communication, Governmental Systems, and Religious Solidarity
(Ukhuwah Islamiyah) in the Islamic Countries

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Article Information	Abstract
	This paper seeks to broaden our understanding on (i) how the Islamic political paradigm shapes political expression and different systems of government in Islamic or Muslim-based countries in the context of intercultural communication and foreign policy, as well as (ii) opportunities and challenges related to the complexity of relations between Islamic countries in realizing the concept of unity (ukhuwah Islamiyah) in both intercultural communication and international relations, as well as he factors involved behind the complexity of the relationship. This paper also goes beyond the observation that religious actors are competitive and have interests to more novel findings that draw on empirical studies beyond East Asia and Middle East and that religion exists within a matrix of power relations, which is shaped by the modern state, and how state formation is generated in spaces of disorder. ***Keywords :*** *Intercultural communication; Islamic countries; constructivism; international relations; cultural dimensions*

Abstrak

Artikel ini berupaya memperluas pemahaman kita tentang (i) bagaimana paradigma politik Islam membentuk ekspresi politik dan sistem pemerintahan yang berbeda di negara-negara Islam atau berbasis Muslim dalam konteks komunikasi antar budaya dan kebijakan luar negeri, serta (ii) peluang dan tantangan terkait dengan kompleksitas hubungan antar negara Islam dalam mewujudkan konsep persatuan *(ukhuwah Islamiyah)* baik dalam komunikasi antar budaya maupun hubungan internasional, serta faktor-faktor yang melatarbelakangi rumitnya hubungan tersebut. Artikel ini juga memberikan perspektif baru dari studi empiris di luar Asia Timur dan Timur Tengah bahwa aktor-aktor agama tidak selalu bersaing, namun melihat bahwa agama berada dalam matriks hubungan kekuasaan yang dibentuk oleh negara modern.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi antarbudaya; negara Islam; konstruktivisme; hubungan Internasional; dimensi budaya

INTRODUCTION

This article begins with the introduction of religion, particularly in the context of intercultural communication, and relevancy of political identity in the Islamic countries. In this regard, religion serve as one of the key cultural factors in global communication and international relations. Spinks and Wells (1997), for example, indicated that religion played the greatest influence on cultural customs and that failure to address religion in communication have created major blunders.

These texts will then move beyond theories of the classic constructivism, clash of civilization, secularism and political competition in the Islamic world. The intention to apply constructivism in this article is to highlight the innovations of the newest entry of constructivism and Islamic politics and to learn from the shortcomings of the prior generation means recognizing that religion, like other aspects of culture and identity, is heterogeneous over time and space, multifaceted in practice, and its relevance to politics is dependent on context.

Government in Islam is an instrument of implementing the Shari'ah so that humanity may achieve peace and happiness in this world and the next. Islamism is a potent political force and, in many ways, it was developed as a response to Western-style nationalism. The idea that Islam can guide nation states or new kinds of states is much older than 2011. However, it became much more relevant to the global world upon the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Since then, increasing attention has been paid to the argument that Islam and Western civilization were at-best incompatible and at-worst locked in a mortal clash of civilization. That clash of civilization introduced by Huntington (1996) has become so ingrained.

Through the centuries the formation of nation states has been a dream and a fundamental political goal for many nations. In the Islamic world, there are many types of nation states. Islam is universal religion that is supposed to transcend ethnic identity according to the Quran, "The believers indeed are brothers" (Quran 49:10). From the beginning being a Muslim meant being part of political community because unlike Jesus or Buddha, Muhammad was also a political leader in addition being a religious one. In the contemporary Islamism, political freedom is not generally held in particularly high esteem and Islamism emphasizes the rule of law. In relation to the political freedom, Fukuyama (1992) claimed that (1) democracy is the last political system and the winner in international political discourse and (2) Islam is not compatible with democracy. After World War II, Islam returned but with a negative tone, especially regarding terrorism and war in the Middle East.

The context of political identity has emerged since 2011 after the events of 9/11. This trend also continued with the election of President Trump, as well the emergence of anti-Islam and anti-Asian groups in Europe (especially in the Netherlands) and Australia who supports white supremacy. Another example is in the United Kingdom, where this trend continues to shape the stereotypical representations as well as the implications for intercultural communication and terrorism prevention after the 7/7 London terror attack (Shaw, 2012). To respond to the failure of Fukuyama's initial claim about the end of history with democracy, Fukuyama (1992) stated that nationalism and religion will not disappear in the context of international politics. What Fukuyama said confirms the constructivism point of view. Fukuyama (2018) adopted Nietzsche's concept that these issues would not go away for three reasons: contemporary liberal democracies had not fully solved the problem of thymos. Thymos is the part of the soul that craves recognition of dignity; isothymia is the demand to be respected on an equal basis with other people; while megalothymia is the desire to be recognized as superior. These three aspects lead to the formation of governmental system and competition in many Islamic countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cohen (1987) examined an intercultural approach on international communication and identified that where states, whether by virtue of a shared history, religion or language, enjoy a reasonable degree of cultural congruence, the factor of intercultural misunderstanding is unlikely to affect communication between them. This is similar to most of the arguments from constructivist that states can have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with other actors. Identities are representations of an actor's understanding of who they are, which in

turn signals their interests. In a constructivist view, social construction and interaction between agents and structures are important in international politics. Structure can sharpen the social and political behavior of actors. Second, constructivists consider identity, values, and intentions to be things that need to be considered in problem analysis, not just interests as trusted by rationalist groups.

In this article, constructivists are a framework for dissecting non-material factors, in the form of Islam, in the world of politics. The term "Islamic politics" is a term used by academics to identify the difference between the entry of Islam into a political or secular area with certain individual practices of teachings or rituals that are more appropriate in the term "Islam". According to Mandaville (2016), interaction between political communities has become a tradition in Islam.

Huntington (1996) explained that the population explosion in Muslim countries and the economic rise of East Asia are changing global politics. These developments challenge Western dominance, promote opposition to supposedly "universal" Western ideals, and intensify inter-civilization conflict over such issues as nuclear proliferation, immigration, human rights, and democracy. The Muslim population surge has led to many small wars throughout Eurasia, and the rise of China could lead to a global war of civilizations. Huntington set forth a strategy for the West to preserve its unique culture and emphasizes the need for people everywhere to learn to coexist in a complex, multipolar, multicivilizational world.

Constructivists change the position of national interests before as if they just appeared by asking where they came from, whether from norms, identities, and so on. In this case, these aspects also lay the ground for the discussion in the development of the governmental system and protection of religious solidarity in the Islamic countries.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Relevancy of Political Identity in the Islamic Countries

Islam is described through various approaches, ranging from constitutional or from outside the power of the state by non-state actors. Hegel said that human history was driven by a struggle of recognition and described an encounter between two self-consciousnesses which both seek to affirm the certainty of their being for themselves (Hegel, 1807). A country wants to be considered more than another and this is what then gives rise to war. In this case, old issues such as nationalism and religion could trigger wars. Therefore, the state always struggles of power in politics, economy and other aspects. In this regards, political identity is very relevant particularly in the various Islamic countries or Muslim-based countries.

Further, many people mistakenly interpret the definition of political Islam. Political Islam is the phrase used to discuss associations, parties, and governments dedicated to the transformation of state and society so as to make them "Islamic." These movements are a response to the contemporary world of nation states. There is no common perception in defining Islamic politics itself. If the proposed concept is on the structural aspect, of course it will be different. During Prophet Muhammad's era, the concept of monarchy was not introduced yet. The election in *Khulafaur Rasyidin* (the first four caliphs who led the Muslim community following the death of the Islamic prophet Muhammad: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali)'s era is considered as *Syuro* (a way to decide their affairs in consultation with each other). The hereditary monarchy was introduced after the end of the *Khulafaur Rasyidin*'s

era. This explanation reiterates the point that no common perception in defining Islamic politics and the debate on this matter could be ended when we focus more on the people's welfare.

Further, "Islamic politics" refers to concept of policy making system (_Syuro_), Justice, Freedom, Equality, Obedience to leader (_Ulil Amri)_, as well as the concept of peace and conflict based on Islamic values. In the Quran there are many verses that have justification in relation to Islam itself, including _the As-sirah Nabawiyyah._ The main element in Islamic politics is Islamic values which have universal teachings in the context of humanity, including in the context of politics and power. We must be careful in interpreting that Islam is a religion and also a state and should always refer to the universal Islamic values. In general, concept of Islamic State based on _Fiqh Siyasah_ believes that leadership is not hereditary and should be elected by the people. The public policy should also implement the Islamic law and concept of _Syuro_.

What contribute to the different political systems in the Islamic countries or Muslim-based countries?

Figure 1. World Map - Muslim Distribution
(Source: Islam101, n.d)

As presented in the figure above, an overwhelming majority of Muslims are Sunnis, while an estimated 10-13% are Shias. The name "Sunni" is derived from the phrase "_Ahl al-Sunnah_", or "People of the Tradition". The tradition in this case refers to practices based on what the Prophet Muhammad said, did, agreed to or condemned (BBC News, 2016).

Shia Muslims are in the majority in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Azerbaijan and, according to some estimates, Yemen. There are also large Shia communities in Afghanistan, India, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Qatar, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In early Islamic history, the Shia were a movement - literally "Shiat Ali" or the "Party of Ali". They claimed that Ali was the rightful successor to the Prophet Muhammad as leader (imam) of the Muslim community following his death in 632 (BBC News, 2016).

The question is, does understanding in Islamic politics give birth to a standardized system? The answer is no. Looking at the number of population of Muslims, main sects, main _fiqh_ and relations between religion and government in the Islamic countries, each country has their own type of government. For example, the strength of the Islamic group which became the backbone of decolonization gives special recognition to a department in the Indonesia's government, namely the Ministry of Religious Affairs and not all countries have such department within their governmental structure.

Another example, Pakistan follows *Hanafi school (Mazhab Hanafi)*, where the concept of the country is an Islamic state, the type of government is parliamentary democracy. Bangladesh also follows *Hanafi (Mazhab Hanafi)*, is categorized as a religious state (not an Islamic state) and implements parliamentary democracy. Egypt with semi presidential republic follows the *Shafi'i school (Mazhab Syafi'i)*. Turkey with the main *Sunni/Shia* schools runs a parliamentary democracy type of government (Pew Research Center, 2013).

In Southeast Asia, the monarchy in Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia are also different. While Brunei Darussalam believes in absolute monarchy, Malaysia adopts constitutional monarchy. In Indonesia, all monarchies abolish their aristocratic systems and are subject to the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia.

There are various kinds of Islamic countries and Muslim-based countries (about 50 countries) which in fact have very different expressions and relations between the religion and the state as well as their political systems, ranging from absolute monarchies to military juntas. The question is which one is more Islamic? If we return to the debate on the structure of government, international politics currently do not have a common structure in interpreting the concept of Islamic politics. However, what should be measured is the actualization of Islamic values itself: justice, freedom, equality, or the universal values of Islam, including democracy. Huntington (1996) and Fukuyama (1992)'s claim that Islam is incompatible with democracy and modernity is false. In fact, in Indonesia and Malaysia, the great democracy was born from the womb of the largest Muslim community in the world. That is, Islam is compatible with democracy. Of course, there are many records of the quality of democracy in Indonesia, but at least as a system and a basis of political beliefs, the Indonesians generally believe that democracy is the best system in the midst of the multiculturalism of its people.

Many scholars, excluding Huntington and Fukuyama, understand that Islam cannot be referred to as one form. True, the ideal, authentic religion has its own political doctrine, but the Islam that is practiced by Muslims around the world may not necessarily adhere to this. Some doctrines such as *din wa daulah* believe that Islam is a religion and a state power system or in short Islam is a religion and a state. In Sunni Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the term appears in the phrase *siyasa shar'iyya*, which literally means governance according to *sharia*. As indicated in the following phrase *Layas Takh Lifan Nahum,* Islam should be the foundation of a government or political system and Islam believes that a power structure based on the religion must exist.

Many scholars believe that Islam is one and each person or institution and organization should involve in this mission, even if they have different backgrounds, but there is a meeting point that unites them as *ummatan wahidah*. According to Ali Shari'ati, the word *ummah* is the similarity in one leadership so that the individuals move towards the same Qibla. However, each country has their own type of governmental system or structure such as absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy, presidential, military junta, and semi presidential, etc. This means that expressions in the context of the state are very diverse.

Countries in the Middle East were not able to understand the concept of nationalism so that there are divisions lead to a creation of small countries in the Middle East. There was no collective consciousness in forming a state. Political identity thus encompassed a large part of the political struggles of the contemporary world, from democratic revolutions to new social movements, from nationalism and Islamism to the politics on contemporary American university campuses. In the contemporary Muslim world, collective identity is taking the form of Islamism—that is, the demand for recognition of a special status for Islam as the basis of political community. Both nationalism and Islamism, political Islam can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Both are expressions of a hidden or suppressed group identity that seeks public recognition. These partial identities could be based on

nation, or they could be based on religion. Because they demanded recognition of the dignity of the group in question, they turned into political movements that we label nationalism or Islamism.

In the development phase of Eastern Europe, especially the Ottoman Empire, the power that represented the power of Islam based in Turkey and had strategic coordination lines, including the Arabian Peninsula. In the post-World War II phase, when European countries lashed out, the efforts made were balance of power. The absence of an adequate pattern of relations between the leader and his people.

Thomas Edward Lawrence (who is also known as *Lawrence of Arabia*), an archeologist and former army officer from England who has a very good understanding of Islam and has good relationships with the *Emirs* in Arabia understands that political economy conflicts in a realist context are certainly real, but this arises because there is one factor of constructivism, one of which is identity. Lawrence took advantage of this situation by trying to convince the Saudi *Emir*s that the Arabs were a different group and the Turks a different group. Turkey is neither Arab nor European. Huntington refers to countries that are seeking to affiliate with another civilization as "torn countries". Turkey, whose political leadership has systematically tried to Westernize the country since the 1920s, is his chief example. Islam was born in Mecca. So, if Arab countries have to submit to the Ottoman Empire, this is a blasphemy against the authority of Arab culture itself (Lawrence, 1935).

In 1919 – 1921, the Ottomans were said to be destroyed and new states emerged. After the destruction of the Ottomans, there were powers outside of Arabia, not only Britain, but also France and Germany and even America entered the Arabian Peninsula.

In the context of governance and politics, the Islamic political system even though it has the same roots and the same theological justification, its political expression used in each political system could be different. In the contemporary Islamic world, there are almost all types of state administrations, from absolute monarchies (Brunei Darussalam and Saudi Arabia) to constitutional monarchies (Malaysia), there is also a government system that adheres to presidentialism or parliamentarism, to political junta. Even if each Islamic country has a different political system, but the principles of each government should require universal political values.

How to Maintain Islamic Solidarity (*Ukhuwah Islamiyah*)

In the present days, maintaining Islamic solidarity is a challenge given the negative image of terrorism acts for certain groups that identifies themselves with Islam. For example, Sandberg and Andersen (2019) examined that various efforts were made to oppose violent extremism through the use of counternarratives. Benjamin (2009) also noted that in the case of East and Northeast Africa, the Islamic communities has advanced the restoring of the culture of peace through both social and political sphere. It is not always easy, however, given the politics of interpretation and the various approaches to reading intercultural communication in the Quran and Islamic teaching itself (Ibrahim, 2014). In this regard, while the root of terrorism acts are mainly the radicalism and fundamentalism aspects, these terrorism acts are also often affiliated with political identity. From the constructivists' point of view, the issue of identity is not only the context of religion but also the context of identity, race, culture but also the things that are attached to us.

It is also important to note that terrorism is not necessarily based on a religious context. After the 9/11 incident, it is evident that Islam are sometimes interpreted in various and wild ways which produce a radical perspective. The view that *Al islamu ummatan wahidah* becomes irrelevant, hence the importance of understanding and promoting

tolerance and peace in Islam. The sounds of the verses in the Qur'an will of course be determined by the perspective and interpretation of the actors who interpret these verses. There are several interpretations that consider that the pattern of relations in Islam is that there is always a confrontation between Islam and Christianity. So, if the logic implanted in them is confrontation, then their interaction pattern is confrontational.

Conceptually, the emergence of diverse Islam *da'wah* or missionary organizations and institutions is a blessing that provides an opportunity for more effective treatment and management of mission in the community. However, at the operational level, it is not rare that *da'wah* activity may lead to jealousy, discord and conflict due to the radical interpretation of the Quran and hadiths. In this case, Prophet Muhammad has given very clear guidelines in his words:

ال تباغضوا وال تحاسدوا وال تدابروا وكوووا عباد هللا اخواوا (رواه مسلم

(Meaning: *"You do not hate each other, do not envy each other, do not turn away from each other, but rather be servants of Allah as brothers."* (H. R. Muslim).

The ways so that Muslims can maintain *ukhuwah Islamiyah* are as follows: be careful in interpreting religious texts and mapping out fundamentalist (practice) or radicalist actors and make sure that there must be real evidence before claiming that one actor belongs to any radical group.

Historical and sociological reality shows that Muslims consist of various sects, various understandings, and various religious practices. This diversity is increasingly colorful when Islam is brought into the wider realm of people's lives: political, economic, and socio-cultural. This fact of diversity has been going on for more than a few centuries. In Indonesia, this is unavoidable.

The theological approach looks at Islamic doctrines and argues that the all-encompassing nature of the Qur'an encourages Muslims to be obedient to religious authority. Such sweeping perception overlooks the reality that Muslims across the world live and understand their religion differently (Sadowski, 2006). A theological approach that attributes poor interfaith relations in Muslim countries to the Qur'an may inadvertently give legitimacy to a certain view in Islam that is intolerant and discredit the more tolerant views as illegitimate.

Two institutional factors are of interest in the context of the current study: secularism and political competition. These factors shape interfaith relations through a similar mechanism, namely open competition. The more open a polity is, the greater the opportunity for citizens to encounter diverse viewpoints. This exposure to diversity, along with the learning process individuals experience in responding to that diversity, in turn helps to internalize tolerance in the society (Peffley and Rohrschneider, 2003).

The level of secularism is concerned with how well separated the state and religious institutions are. A state's neutrality in religious affairs opens up space for religions to compete in attracting believers (Iannaccone, 1998). The resulting religious life is more vibrant with believers actively engaging each other. A strict regulation of religion, on the other hand, may privilege certain faiths over others or privilege believers over unbelievers (Grim and Finke, 2010). It would be difficult for citizens to tolerate each other when even the government demonstrates through its laws that not all citizens are equal. As such, the poor interfaith relations in Muslim countries are driven by laws that advantage Islam over the other faiths.

What both perspectives miss, however, is that although free competition can induce moderation, it can also induce religious populism (Tanuwidjaja, 2010; Lorch, 2019). As opposed to moderating themselves, parties may choose to outflank each other. Another limitation of the institutional explanations is that their level of analysis makes them more suited to explain country-level differences than individual-level ones. They are mute when it comes to answering why different individuals in the same country have different interfaith attitudes despite being exposed to the same institutional arrangements. The social relationships-based argument on the other hand, is capable of explaining variations in interfaith relations at both the individual and country levels.

In addition to the aforementioned country-level factors, individual-level variables also affect how individuals approach intergroup relations. Three of these variables have been heavily studied (Sullivan and Transue,1999). The first relates to cognitive ability and includes factors such as education and political expertise. More politically sophisticated people tend to be more tolerant (Fish, 2011), presumably because they are exposed to dissonant views more often and have a better internalization of democratic values. The second variable is threat perception (Marcus et al, 1995; Muluk, Sumaktoyo, and Ruth, 2013). Individuals are more likely to have positive attitudes toward an outgroup if they perceive the group as posing little or no threat to them or their way of life. Politicization of social cleavages can affect this threat perception. When certain groups are portrayed as ancient enemies, members of each group would perceive the other group as threatening, making intolerance more likely.

Third, in terms of personality type, negative intergroup attitudes are linked to closed-mindedness and dogmatism (Anderson and Koc, 2015). These predispositions increase the likelihood of individuals conforming to established social norms while rejecting dissenting views. Since religiosity involves a strong adherence to beliefs (Saroglou, 2002), these predispositions can also explain why religious people tend to have more negative interfaith attitudes (Gibson et al, 2010). Thus, Muslim societies' high levels of religiosity might explain their poor interfaith relations and this condition makes it difficult to protect the Islamic solidarity (*Ukhuwah Islamiyah*).

CONCLUSION

This work is looking beyond East Asia and Middle East countries, based on the implicit or explicit recognition on the development, significance, and complexities of religion and world politics. In the context of intercultural communication, it is also evident that religion somehow shapes the political identities as well religious solidarity in the Islamic countries. The challenge for the approach used in this paper is to go beyond the observation that religious actors are competitive and have interests to more novel findings that draw on empirical studies beyond East Asia and Middle East and that religion exists within a matrix of power relations, which is shaped by the modern state, and how state formation is generated in spaces of disorder.

This study also attempts to identify the relevance of political identity and factors contributing to the different political systems in Islamic countries or in Muslim-based countries. Based on the existing literatures, the different interpretation of Islam could be the main factors in determining the varied adoption of political systems in these countries. In addition, identities and local factors also shape the varied understanding of Islam and its attribution to the governmental system. With the various understanding of Islam and the present factors such as local identities, the need to maintain the Islamic solidarity (Ukhuwah Islamiyah) remains significant. Further research should be undertaken to investigate undermining factors for countries to maintain the Islamic solidarity beyond territorial borders.

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