ISLAM AND POLITICS IN MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze religion's roles related to the political activities in the contemporary Middle East. Constructivism is a framework that offers the way to understand the phenomenon. Constructivism provides a place for the influence of non-material factors such as the value, identity, and purpose of actor behavior in politics. In this article, the author examines through two levels of analysis, ie state level and regional level. At the state level, Islamic political ideology grows in a modern state and often confronts democracy. The debate over the application of Islamic law, the involvement in elections, and the adaptation of Islamic justice principles and the principle of equality are the discourses that characterize political activity in the Middle East. At the regional level, Islam exerts impact in foreign policy in the region. The regional tensions between Sunni and Shiite groups, the resistance in the context of jihad, and the emergence of ISIS are part of the conflict that contributes to regional instability. These political behaviors shows that Islam is not a religion with a single interpretation.

ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran agama yang terkait dengan kegiatan politik di Timur Tengah kontemporer. Konstruktivisme adalah kerangka yang menawarkan cara untuk memahami fenomena tersebut. Konstruktivisme menyediakan tempat untuk pengaruh faktor-faktor non-material seperti nilai, identitas, dan tujuan perilaku aktor dalam politik. Dalam artikel ini, penulis meneliti melalui dua tingkat analisis, yaitu tingkat negara bagian dan regional. Di tingkat negara, ideologi politik Islam tumbuh di negara modern dan sering berhadapan dengan demokrasi. Perdebatan tentang penerapan hukum Islam, keterlibatan dalam pemilihan, dan adaptasi prinsip-prinsip keadilan Islam dan prinsip kesetaraan adalah wacana yang menjadi ciri kegiatan politik di Timur Tengah. Di tingkat regional, Islam memberikan dampak dalam kebijakan luar negeri di wilayah tersebut. Ketegangan regional antara kelompok Sunni dan Syiah, perlawanan dalam konteks jihad, dan munculnya ISIS adalah bagian dari konflik yang berkontribusi pada ketidakstabilan regional. Perilaku politik ini menunjukkan bahwa Islam bukanlah agama dengan interpretasi tunggal

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INTRODUCTION

As the dominant religion in the Middle East, Islam is a significant factor in determining the behavior of countries and other actors in the region.[1] In the context of Islam, the events of the September 11, 2011 attacks that occurred in New York, United States, has made Islamic movements and politics into the world spotlight. Five days after the incident, September 16, US President George W. Bush declared a "war on terrorism". According to Bush, all countries must participate in the US campaign. There is no place for neutrality.[2] In the attack itself, the aircraft hijackers are from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Lebanon and allegedly linked to Al-Qaeda. The US government accuses Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda based in Afghanistan as the mastermind of the attack. The Islamic movements soon gained attention in global politics. The issue of Islam itself had become a heated discussion in Islamic countries and Europe when in September 2005 the Jyllands Posten newspaper in Denmark published a cartoon depicting Muhammad, the Muslim Prophet. The cartoon created a debate between freedom of expression and respect for different cultures.[3]

By looking at the origin of US target actors and targets, the Middle East became one of the most important US foreign policy arenas. Moreover, in a regional context, academics and the global community are also increasingly viewing the Middle East as a place

[1] Mandaville, 2016.
[2] Daalder & Linsday, 2003.
[3] Mandaville, 2008.

for the development of radical Islamic thought and groups. The contemporary Middle East is also interesting to observe because this area is still a region prone to conflict and violence. When in the 21st century the international political situation in general is no longer a lot of talk about the invasion of the sovereign borders of the country, the Middle East region may still bring up a new state. For example, in 2011 South Sudan stood after declaring a breakaway from Sudan through a referendum. In 2013, Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi declared the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) controlling parts of Iraq and Syria in political instability.[4] In the future, it is not impossible if the Middle East border map changes.

Although violence and wars in the Middle East have various causes, radical Islamic movements are often involved in some regional conflicts or tensions. The words of jihad inherent with Islam are not rarely interpreted as Islamic holy war against other religions. However, this paper does not seek to find a correlation or an answer to whether the war on terrorism is a religious war and vice versa. This paper highlights how Islam influences contemporary political activity in the Middle East and its consequences for domestic and regional politics. In answering the question, the author focuses on the influence of Islam at the country and regional level. The author argues that the role of Islam comes in two ways, namely the role of Islam as an instrument to achieve specific goals and the role of Islam as a medium of expression. The relationship between Islam and

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[4] BBC, 2015.

democracy and the response of Islamic leaders to the development of the modern state is a point that needs to be further analyzed.

Islam and Politics

The author uses constructivism as a framework for understanding the role of Islam as a non-material factor that influences political activity in the Middle East. The constructivism perspective can be traced from the Third Debate between rationalists and critical theory which dominated the international relations discipline in the 1980s.[5] The rationalists use the dominant view of realism post-World War II.[6] The realism perspective has two main assumptions, namely (1) state actors are "atomic egoistic" which has interests, and (2) the international world is an anarchic world. In an anarchic world, there is no single power above the state. In this anarchy situation, the state strengthens military weaponry in order to maintain its existence (struggle for power). This does not just ignore the potential for cooperation in the perspective of realism. In the realist view, the state can build cooperation between them based on rationality, namely the calculation of actions based on profit and loss (cost and benefit or payoff). In other words, rationalists rely on material things. Critical theory rejects such assumptions. According to critical theory, non-material matters are important in understanding the world. Critical theories such as modernism from the Frankish school, for example, embrace the idea of critical

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[5] Philips, 2007.
[6] Sterling-Foker, 2005.

interpretation to see whether a claim makes sense or not. Meanwhile, postmodernism brought by Derrida adheres to radical interpretation (radical interpretivism) which believes that everything can be very subjective, and the freedom of our thinking is part of an effort to postpone the truth that can be infinite.

In the debate, constructivists are in the midst of rationalist and critical theory. Constructivists believe that material structures and non-material structures are very useful in constructing a problem. First, 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. [7] Constructivists also emphasize analysis on the logic of appropriateness rather than consequential logic as understood by realists. That is, the actions of actors in international relations are not always based on the calculation of profit and loss on material interests. 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.

The effect of the main constructivist view is the understanding that power is no longer based on what we have (material factors), but the extent to which emerging ideas (non-material factors) can

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[7] Hadiwinata, 2017.

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convince and move. For example, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the past was not due to the greatness of the United States (US), but because the Soviet leader at the time, Gorbachev, had the idea that the Soviet Union must change with the idea of glasnost and perestroika. Another example, realists explain the reason the US is hostile to Iran is because Iran has nuclear. But only limited to that. Realists cannot explain why the US is hostile to Iran but is not hostile to Britain or Israel who share nuclear power. Constructivists are able to explain this by drawing on democratic or pro-Western ideas in the construction of problems. Iran used to be not an enemy of the US because Iran is still pro-Western. Therefore the US is even willing to help Iran build a nuclear installation. However, at present, Iran is considered undemocratic and tends to be anti-Western, so that it has helped change US policies and actions against Iran.

In this article, constructivists are a framework for dissecting non-material factors, in the form of Islam, in the world of politics in the Middle East. The most concise definition of Islamic politics is "Islam used to political end".[8] 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, interaction between political communities has become a tradition in Islam.[9] The holy book of Islam has

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[8] Knudsen, 2003.
[9] Mandaville, 2016.

mentioned several concepts in international relations, such as nation, power, political authority, and also political agreements. Islamic political leaders, since the beginning of the emergence of Islam, actively participated in diplomacy, trade negotiations and warfare.

With this background, there are several important concepts that need to be learned when discussing Islam and politics. First, Islam recognizes the union between religion and politics. [10] Tafsir which states that Islamic Shari'ah must be run by the government of a country has a foundation in the Qur'an. First, Surat Al-Baqarah (2) verse 208 which reads, "O you who believe! Come, one and all (or wholeheartedly), into surrender (Islam), and follow not the footsteps of Satan". Second, the letter Al-Maidah (5) verse 49 which reads, "And judge, [O Muhammad], between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations and beware of them, lest they tempt you away from some of what Allah has revealed to you". This understanding is then opposed to a secular view that rejects the entry of religion in politics or a democratic view that gives place to individual rights. The basis of the view of democracy is the verses of musyawarah in Al-Qur'an which indicate the approval of the majority of the people in choosing leaders. First, the letter Ali Imran (3) verse 159 which reads, "It was by the Mercy from Allah that you were lenient with them. Had you been rough and harsh-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you; pardon them therefore and ask forgiveness for them; and take counsel with them in the affair;

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[10] Esposito, Rahim, & Ghobadzadeh, 2018; Mandaville, 2016; Knudsen, 2003.

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then when you are resolved, put your trust in Allah, certainly, Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him)". Second, the letter of Asy-Shuro (42) verse 38 which reads, "And (for) those who receive (obey) the appeal God and establish prayers, their affairs are decided by deliberation between them, and they spend part of the sustenance we give them..." With the latter, many academics doubt the commitment of Islamic movements to the idea ofdemocracy. Two arguments that emerge are, first, that Islamic groups choose procedural democracy because there is no other way to gain power, and secondly, Islamic groups continue to look for ways to implement sharia which for secular parties are too discriminatory against women and non-Muslims, so that if in power is considered will adopt an undemocratic policy.

Second, in the context of war and armed conflict in international relations, it is important to mention the idea and role of jihad in Islam.[11] Jihad has different meanings. Some understand jihad as "holy war". However, according to Peter Mandaville, interpreting jihad as a holy war is a misunderstanding.[12] The root of the word jihad is "striving with all effort and power". Thus, jihad has broad and narrow meanings. As a broad meaning, the term jihad is generally associated with armed struggle, for example when Muslims try to survive the attacks of other countries. The argument is written in the Qur'an the letter Al-Hajj (22) verse 39: "It has been permitted [to fight] for those

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[11] Mandaville, 2016; Knudsen, 2003.
[12] Mandaville, 2016.

who are fought, because indeed they have been persecuted." In a narrower sense, the term jihad is used for a Muslim who study hard, for example. Jihad also has a persuasive meaning, as mentioned in the Qur'an the letter An-Nahl (16) verse 125: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided". The concepts above are the knife of analysis to find out answers to the influence of Islam in political activities in the Middle East.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive-interpretive approach to answer the formulation of the problem. Through a descriptive-interpretive approach, the author regulates, unites, and checks data by trying to find patterns and relations regarding the role or influence of Islam in political activities in the Middle East.[13] The author uses secondary data as a reference source, namely academic journals and printed and electronic documents. The analysis unit is divided into two, namely country level and regional level analysis. In this analysis, the author tries to connect the data with the concept, take generalizations, then identify patterns and relations between Islam and politics in the Middle East. Thus, after collecting data, the author begins to

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[13] Neuman, 2014.

interpret the data.[14] Data processing and analysis techniques use qualitative analysis methods. In qualitative analysis, data usually uses more words than numbers and has meaning that can be interpreted into several meanings based on a particular context. In qualitative analysis, during the process of data collection, the authors have initiated data analysis to determine the direction of research.[15]

Islam Role in Regional Politics

In general, we can say that the Middle East stretches from Turkey in the north to Ethiopia in the south, from Morocco in the west to Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east. Although the term Middle East has been relatively widely used in various international literature, both in scientific and journalistic news, academics and observers still do not have the same agreement regarding the boundaries of the Middle East region. Carl Brown argues that the Middle East is a term used to refer to the entire Arab world, from Morocco to the Gulf region, coupled with regions that were once under the Ottoman Empire, such as Turkey, Israel and Iran.[16] According to Brown, the definition of the Middle East can still be expanded by considering Afghanistan and the Soviet Union which is geographically located in Central Asia, such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. The addition is called the "New Middle East". The Middle East, in other words, has

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[14] Spray & Roselle, 2012.
[15] Neuman, 2014.
[16] Brown, 2004.

several geographical parts, namely northern Africa, western Asia, and central Asia.

Thus, the mention of the Middle East based on geographical maps has an inappropriate context. The mention of Middle Eastern terms is more appropriate when considering at least two important factors, namely ethno-cultural and ethno-religious.[17] By observing ethno-cultural factors, Arabs dominate the population in countries in the Middle East region. Whereas in ethno-religious factors, Islam is the dominant belief. Ento-cultural and ethno-religious factors become one character inherent in the definition of the Middle East region. Therefore, some academics refer to the Middle East region with the "Arab and Islamic world". Through the dominant ethno-cultural and ethno-religious factors, the term Middle East covers some countries in the northern African continent, such as Morocco, Mauriaia, Algeria, Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Djibouti. The Middle East also includes countries in the Asian continent, which include Turkey, Palestine, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Qatar, Oman, U.E.A., Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait and Iran. Countries called Carl Brown also entered because the population is inhabited by Muslims and is an Arab nation.

In 2010, Islam was the second largest population in the world after Christianity with a population of about 1.6 billion people. That number is equivalent to 23.2 percent of the total world population.[18]

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[17] Umar, Darmawan, Sufa, & Ndadari, 2014.
[18] Pew Research Center, 2015.

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Of the 1.6 billion Muslims, around 19.8 percent or 317 million people are in the Middle East region. In the Middle East itself, Islam became the dominant religion. Islam was in the first place taking 93 percent of the total population. If calculated simply, 9 out of 10 Middle Eastern residents embrace Islam. The figure is expected to continue rising. By 2050, Islam is projected to increase from 317 million to 552 million. [19] Islam is the largest religion in the population in the Middle East.

As followers of a religion with a dominance of about 93% of the entire Middle Eastern community, Islam has a significant relationship with how the state and other actors in the region think and act in international relations.[20] The relevance between Islam and international relations in the Middle East can be said to begin with the emergence of a modern international system and the formation of nation states in the region. In 1979, this was compounded by several developments in the region that entered a new phase, in which Islam sought to gain momentum.[21] The Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, sharia law in Pakistan, and the Egyptian and Israeli peace agreements show that in that year Islam played an important role in regional political change and postcolonial political order. The influence of Islam continues to be a factor that determines the regional political constellation to date.

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[19] Pew Research Center, 2015.
[20] Mandaville, 2016.
[21] Berger, 2010.

The author describes the role in two levels, namely the state level and regional level. Islam has political influence in the Middle East through at least three ways. *First, reformulation between Islamic groups, intellectuals, and moderate Muslim political actors who emphasize that the foundations of religion are in democratic values.* The actors then made the argument that, to a certain extent, a democratic secular state is consistent or in accordance with Islamic principles. *Second, the involvement of Islamic parties and movements in politics and the electoral process.* Islamic parties and movements also participate in building coalitions with non-Islamic parties and actors. Examples of such Islamic parties and movements, among them, the IM in Egypt and the Ennahda Party in Tunisia. IM is a political movement that believes that Islam is the solution to various problems, whether individual, social, or political. As one of the greatest movements in the Middle East, IM's success stems from a combination of ideology and political and social actions. Using Islamic ideology, IM is seen as a response to Western hegemony and occupation in the Middle East. *Third, the Islamic leadership made adjustments between the principles of justice in Islam with the principle of equal rights to women, minority groups and non-Muslims.* For example, after the Arab Spring, the Saudi Arabian government was forced to carry out political reforms.[22] Nine months after the Arab Spring erupted in Tunisia, King Abdullah announced that women were allowed to participate in politics for the first time in history. During this time, in accordance with the

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[22] Khalid, 2013.

teachings of Islamic law, women contributed more to domestic domestic affairs. Men are the ones who are obliged to make a living, making them more free to move outside the home to work. Women's protest movements, although limited, began to take place, such as in Tabuk, Jeddah and Riyadh.

Islamic participation or influence in foreign policy in the Middle East can be observed in several forms. First, Islamic ideology sharpens the contestation or political conflict between two adherents of the largest sect in the region, namely between Sunnis represented by Saudi Arabia and Shia represented by Iran. The contestation leads to a coalition of interactors and movements in the region that adjust geopolitical considerations and their respective interests.[23] Second, jihad as a form of Islamic religious teachings gives meaning and spirit of struggle for the Islamic state or political movement against Western colonialism or imperialism. It is here that jihad has a place in political activity in the Middle East and is often seen as a source of legitimacy for violence in Islam. Because of differences in ideology, IM has been tough on Israel which is seen as having no rights to Palestinian land. Therefore, IM always promotes jihad against Israel. Third, the emergence of armed movements across countries with Islamic ideology that seeks to realize a new Islamic state. The radical movement in question is the development of ISIS into a powerful organization that controls several regions in Iraq and Syria. By utilizing the weakness of domestic institutions in Iraq and domestic

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[23] Luomi, 2008.

instability in Syria, ISIS conquered city after city to be under ISIS control. Although ISIS views the United States as a major threat, ISIS under the leadership of Abu Musab Al Zarqawi has declared that Shia is the main target of the ISIS group because it has the potential to threaten the Sunni group.[24]

CONCLUSION

The role or influence of Islam in politics in the Middle East is an issue that is always relevant to seeing the contemporary situation of the region. In some phenomena, the influence of Islam as a source of consideration in political activities still persists. For example, the debate between Islamic law and democracy at the state level and the political struggle between Shiites and Sunnis at the regional level. However, the shift also occurs at some points. For example, Ennahda's success in Tunisia is a victory of moderate Islamic groups who are no longer trying to place Islamic law as the highest law of the country. Islamic political parties and movements take part in general elections, giving women greater political rights and working with non-Islamic actors. With the death of the Islamic Shari'a struggle, can we say that Islamic politics is dead? It can produce different answers, depending on various points of view. If Islamic ideology is tightly understood, Islamic politics may be dead. But if it is understood that the idea can be elastic and flexible in practice, we see that Islamic

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[24] Esposito, 2018.

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politics is not only a single meaning. So, when talking about Islamic politics, we are talking about ideology with many interpretations.

The jihad issue is also an important factor in political activity in the Middle East, both at the country and regional level. Iran's leadership under Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Hamas said the armed struggle against Israel was a jihad that Muslims had to do. Frequently asked questions, does Islam provide ideological justification for violence and extremism? Looking back at the early history of the establishment, the Islamic movement does not merely use violence in its daily activities. While not rejecting the possibility of using violent means, such as for survival of enemy attacks, violence is not the main objective of Islam. Thus, the idea ofIslamic politics is not a call to use violence or justification of violence. The political concept of Islam is also not a theological category derived from the teachings of Islam itself. The practices of Islamic teachings do not necessarily make a person automatically join in Islamic politics. Islamic political movements can be said to be rarely led by scholars. Hasan Al Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, was a teacher of calligraphy at a school. The mix between the struggle of the Islamic political movement through the channels of democracy and armed resistance will continue in the next few years.

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