

The International Branch of NU and Cultural-Religious Diplomacy in Egypt

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Abstract: This study discusses the role of Nahdlatul Ulama Special Branch Boards (PCINU) in Egypt as a transnational organization in public diplomacy. The PCINU of Egypt, as one of the earliest PCINU, has a historical presence that influences *Nahdliyyin*. The similarity in understanding religious moderation makes PCINU Egypt acceptable to citizens and the Egyptian government, especially by Al-Azhar. PCINU also established cultural cooperation with various institutions in Egypt. By using this type of descriptive analysis research with a qualitative approach. This research concludes that PCINU Egypt has an active role in public diplomacy efforts in Egypt. PCINU Egypt has a positive influence felt by *Nahdliyyin* and Indonesian citizens in Egypt. In addition to being an affiliated PBNU, PCINU can play a role as a representative of the Indonesian government. PCINU conducts public diplomacy, specifically the introduction of *Ahlus-sunnahwaljamaah an-Nahdliyyah* culture-religion in Egypt.

Keyword: Al Azhar, Egypt, NU, *Nahdliyyin*, Nahdlatul Ulama Special Branch Boards Egypt (PCINU Egypt).

I. INTRODUCTION

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is the largest Islamic-style community organization in Indonesia. Since its founding in 1926, NU has become a community organization that is home to traditionalist Islam [1]. NU's long history is not only focused on traditional education; pesantren and yellow book (*Kitab Turats*). The NU transformed from a community organization and then joined the political party of the Indonesian SyuroMuslimin Council (Masyumi) in 1943 [2]. According to history, the founders of NU, starting from KH Hasyim Asyari, KH Wahab Hasbullah, KH Falak Pagentongan, studied in Mecca. The historical relationship between Middle Eastern scholars and scholars or students from the archipelago has long existed. Scholars from Indonesia have been imams in the Grand Mosque or *Masjidil Haram*, namely, Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani, Sheikh Junaid Betawi, Sheikh Khatib Minangkabawi. Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani is a teacher from KH Hasyim Asyari[3].

The idea of NU to develop overseas realized through the Nahdlatul Ulama Special Branch Boards (PCINU), first established in the KH Hasyim Muzadi Leadership Era (Chairperson of PBNU 1999-2010) [4]. PCINU is a branch manager of NU outside Indonesia. PCINU was the answer to the times that NU had to face, to accommodate the presence of NU members abroad. The Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU) noted that up to December 2019, there was 29 official PCINU affiliated with PBNU [5]. Meanwhile, there are still several NU communities outside of the 29 PCINU who are in the stage of submitting a legalization process to the PBNU or the management of PCINU, and there are proposing updates to the legal status or *Surat Keputusan*(SK). Indonesian citizens who are abroad, ranging from expatriates, students, students, or Indonesian Workers (TKI), many are *Nahdliyyin*¹, no exception in the Middle East. Therefore, these 29 affiliated PCINU should be able to play a role as an initial identifier of NU in other countries. PCINU must be the foremost organization in carrying out the four principles of NU. Four principles of NU *aretasamuhor* tolerance, *tawazun* or balanced, *tawasut* or moderate, and *adiktidal* or justice[6].

II. METHOD

This research is a qualitative research. This type of research is descriptive-analytical. The data analysis was carried out by using the inductive-descriptive method. Regarding data collection, the authors conducted in-depth interviews and looked for literature sources.

III. PCINU

PCINU is a specialized branch of PBNU. This privilege exists because of discrepancies between ordinary branch managers in Indonesia and abroad. The PCINU period lasted only two years, while the NU branch

¹*Nahdliyyin* is a term for someone who feels connected to the Nahdlatul Ulama organization, both in membership and not.

in Indonesia had a five-year term [7]. PBNU has the idea that PCINU can promote Islam in the style of *Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah An-Nahdliyyah*² and become a representative of NU outside Indonesia. The values contained in *Ahlussunnah An-Nahdliyyah* are values that uphold the purity of Islamic teachings accompanied by acceptance or accommodation of traditions that do not conflict with Islamic teachings.

According to Nora Burhanuddin (Chair of PCINU Egypt 2018-2020), the Executive Board of the Nahdlatul Ulama Special Branch of the Arab Republic of Egypt is an affiliated organization of the PBNU. PCINU Egypt is domiciled in Cairo, with the power of the PBNU, then PCINU Egypt can run the organization following the Nahdlatul Ulama Statutes / By-Laws. In Egypt, the management and members of PCINU are mostly students [8].

PCINU Egypt is home to *Nahdliyyin*, studying in Egypt. The Egyptian PCINU activities are indeed focused on the congregation of *Nahdliyyin* so that the academic, social, economic activities are based on the *Nahdliyyin*. They take care of the Egyptian PCINU. The Egyptian NU PCI actively carries out various activities that are not only for internal *Nahdliyyin* but also for Indonesian citizens in general, even for the Indonesian NU besides Indonesian citizens. The activities carried out starting from academic activities such as seminars or public discussions, cultural activities such as open art performances, *terbangantor* tambourine, economic events through the PCINU Egypt business unit, and other activities.

Egypt is a country that has relations with Indonesia since both are still in colonialism. The relationships between the two countries are represented in the teaching-learning procession. The role of religious scholars who have NU culture in public diplomacy related to culture, religion has been carried out since the earliest times of students from Indonesia (Nusantara) to Egypt. K.H. FathurrahmanKafrawi, Minister of Religion in 1946, was an Al Azhar student who came from a pesantren tradition [9]. PCINU as the successor to the scientific family tree of NU scholars should play an active role in continuing good relations that have existed for a long time.

In this study, the authors focus on Indonesian transnational organizations in Egypt, PCINU Egypt. PCINU Egypt is known to accommodate students, especially Al-Azhar students, plus several expatriates, for example, the staff at the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI). Also, the authors add data related to PCINU in the other Middle East as additional material for research.

Many Indonesian (Nusantara) students in Egypt have been *Nahdliyyin* since before Indonesian independence. They built many organizations that became aspirations both within the framework of the community to political ambitions. Then, where is Egypt's current PCINU in cultural-religious diplomacy? What is the bond between PCINU and Egyptian or Al-Azhar.

IV. CULTURE-RELIGION DIPLOMACY BY NAHDLIYYIN EGYPT

The author had the opportunity to interview Prof. Huzaemah T Yanggo (chairman of KMNU in the field of welfare and princess 1978-1980, currently the Chancellor of IIQ Jakarta). According to his statement, KMNU is a place for Indonesian students, especially *Nahdliyyin* students.

KMNU is an organization where students gather. NU's activities at the time of the management of Huzaemah, focused on scientific discussion and regeneration activities. KMNU actively guides students who lack Arabic. KMNU held language education to answer the problem of language difficulties, which participated not only in *Nahdliyyin* but also among other Indonesian students. Other activities undertaken by KMNU are translation training, Fauriyah Arabic translation [10].

The writer then tries to interview KH AchmadSudrajat, Chairman of KMNU 1996-1998, now as chairman of PP NUCARE-LAZISNU 2015-2020). Regarding religious diplomacy, *Nahdliyyin* has also succeeded in spreading cultural activities, according to AchmadSudrajat, the tradition of *Nahdliyyin* who likes to make pilgrimages at least affects the Egyptian community. Pilgrimage activities, for example, is history that gives reflection on civilization in Egypt is *Nahdliyyin*[11]. Especially with the popularity of the term *Sarkub*³, which became a term for some *Nahdliyyin* in Egypt. According to AchmadSudrajat, even religious Egyptians rarely made pilgrimages. It was *Nahdliyyin* who started, from KMNU to becoming PCINU, every year the *Nahdliyyin* of Egypt has an annual agenda of pilgrimage to the tombs of scholars; SayyidinaHusein, Imam Syafii, Ibn Hajar Asqolani and other scholars [12].

For AchmadSudrajat, Egyptians who rarely make pilgrimages because they feel that they are close enough to the living cleric, Al Azhar has many sheiks to visit. In contrast to *Nahdliyyin*, who felt the need to see the

²*AhlussunnahwalJamaah an-Nahdliyyah* is a theological group in Islam. This group emphasizes the implementation of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. This group recognized the leadership of the caliph after the Prophets Muhammad, Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali. *AhlussunnahwalJamaah an-Nahdliyyah* following the theology of Abu Hasan Asyari and Imam Maturidi, in the field of Jurisprudence following Imam Malik, Imam Hanafi, Imam Syaffi, Imam Hambali, and the Tasawuf field following Ghazali and Junaid Baghdadi.

³Sarkub means sarjanakuburan. This word refers to someone who likes to make pilgrimages, so they are more often seen visiting pilgrims graves.

grave in the context of carrying out Islamic teachings as well as a recollection of the ulama pilgrimage . The pilgrimage/ziarah was later made into a routine called "Holy Tour". The Holy Tour is followed by not only *Nahdliyyin* but also students from other countries, and this activity is sometimes able to attract hundreds of pilgrims. PCINU rented ten large buses to accommodate Holy Tour activities. The pilgrimage visited the ulama's tomb, not only for Indonesians. But also by students from Malaysia and Thailand, this cultural closeness should be the strength of *Ahlusunnah* [13]. The continuation of the cultural-religion relationship between PCINU Egypt and other residents was the effort to restore the graves of Ulama, Imam Waki 'bin al-Jarrah and SyekhIzzuddin bin Abdussalam, this program launched since October 2020.

The seminars carried out, PCINU Egypt, are often visited by students outside of NU's culture, even students from Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei and others. Because what is being discussed is about the issue of Islam, religious moderation, anti-radicalization, so that the seminar can attract the masses from across the community. The National Counter Terrorism Agency (Indonesian: National Counter Terrorism Agency abbreviated as BNPT) is an Indonesian non-ministerial government department that works to prevent terrorism. PCINU Egypt and BNPT held a "Deradicalization Seminar" in March 2018, the aim of this activity is to prevent the possibility of Indonesian students in Egypt becoming radicalized. This activity was appreciated by students in Egypt [14].

PCINU is a formal institution *Nahdliyyin* conducting cultural diplomacy in Egypt, such as maulid activities in the Aswan area, Egypt, which often invites PCINU Egypt to be present with various facilities and hospitality to Aswan residents for PCINU Egypt. Besides, PCINU has good relations with *UsrohDandrowiyah* or أسرة الدندراويّة, a long-standing community in Egypt that is engaged in social activities, but because it is not involved in politics, this community is not heard in public, like IM in Egypt. One of the work programs is Hadrah and Banjari training. Besides, LSBNU actively sent PCINU cadres who were proficient in "terbangan" to the Egyptian community who invited LSBNU as the performers of an event, such as cooperation with *UsrohDandrowiyah*. *Nahdliyyin* Egypt can popularize the art of "Terbangan" which is characterized by native Indonesian. It was starting from the similarity of social solidarity that exists in Egyptian nahdliyyin. They are active in promoting Indonesian cultural activities that are close to NU's theological vision. Cultural activities, such as tradition *terbangan* the attention of Egyptians. Through the culture of *terbangan* solidarity arises between PCINU Egypt and *UsrohDandrowiyah*. Likewise, Al Azhar and NU's relationship formed social solidarity over the theology of *AhlussunnahwajJamaah*.

Another thing that shows the acceptance of native Egyptians. An example is the PCINU Egypt advisory board which is a scholar from Al Azhar from Egypt. The management structure, PCINU Egypt, also includes native Egyptians. This can be seen from the existence of several native Egyptian scholars who served as advisors or PCINU Egypt, among others; Shaykh AmruWardani: DarulIfta Egypt, Shaykh YusriGabr: Murshid ThariqohSyadziliyah, Shaykh Hisham Kamil: Shafifiqh teacher. The existence of these scholars is proof of the acceptance of the Egyptian NU PCI by Egyptians, especially Ulama or religious leaders[15].

The evidence of the success of the public diplomacy carried out by PBNU and PCINU are; NU residents can receive scholarship quota given directly from the Al-Azhar University institution through PBNU as many as 30 people, this agreement occurred after Grand Sheikh Al Azhar's visit to the PBNU office [16]. In addition, PBNU also received training quotas for preachers and "priest" candidates in a program called TadribudDuatwalAimmah. This program is a collaboration between Al-Azhar and PBNU in producing ulama candidates. The quota that PBNU will get in the TadribudDuatwalAimmah program is 60 people in 2019 [17].

The activeness of the members, PCINU in Egypt, made Egyptians recognize the characteristics of Islamic teachings applied in Indonesia, with moderate nuances. Islam in Indonesia is able to advocate for the traditional values of the Nusantara nation. Islam in Indonesia is not radical and terrorist. Therefore, Egyptians feel comfortable hanging out with and making friends with Indonesians, especially NU residents in Egypt.

V. CONCLUSION

PCINU, as a transnational organization, is a continuation of PBNU. That is, PCINU brought PBNU's vision and mission to be spread in the country where PCINU stood. The PCINU action is a follow up to PBNU's strategic policy manifestation abroad. PBNU which has the aim of preserving the understanding of *AhlusunnahwajJamaah* and the welfare of the people, this goal is the duty of PCINU abroad. In carrying out activities, PCINU has a work program implemented during the management period. The work program created by PCINU must be for the benefit of the experts and Muslims. Therefore, PCINU activities indirectly become a form of PCINU in conducting public diplomacy. PCINU activities intersect with Jamaah Al-Azhar, Al Azhar University (Jami'ah), structural and cultural PCINU members, non-*Nahdliyyin* citizens, representatives of the Indonesian Embassy, to foreigners.

Of the various roles performed by PCINU, the authors see PCINU as influencing Egypt. Nahdliyyin in Egypt has certainly benefited from the presence of PCINU in Egypt. Besides, other organizations also benefit from the PCINU of Egypt, and this benefit is present when there is an event that needs help from Indonesian organizations in Egypt.

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