

# The Potential of Localized Islamic Concepts in the Human Sciences: The Example of *Silaturahmi* for the Field of Diplomacy

Claudia SEISE<sup>1</sup>

1. Postdoctoral fellow, Berlin Institute for Islamic Theology, Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany.  
Email: [claudia.seise@hu-berlin.de](mailto:claudia.seise@hu-berlin.de)

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## Abstract

*Silaturahmi* is a localized Islamic concept in Indonesia that is derived from what God and the Prophet Muhammad said about keeping or mending ties between family or kin. With the situated concept and practice of *silaturahmi*, I will illustrate how localized Islamic concepts have the potential to contribute to an existing body of knowledge. Combining two methodological approaches, those of new area studies and those of the “integration of knowledge”, I aim to make an addition to the field of diplomacy and its connection to Islam. I propose that *silaturahmi* can be used to beautify and enrich the secular field of diplomacy. I will also show that *silaturahmi* as a conceptional framework for diplomacy has the potential to enhance international relations.

**Keywords:** diplomacy, *silaturahmi*, new area studies, Islamic concepts, localized concepts, Indonesia



# 1 Introduction

With around 200 million Muslims, Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country in the world. At the same time, its location on the Maritime Silk Road has made the archipelago a major hub in international commerce since ancient times (Freitag, 1997; Freitag & von Oppen, 2010). This has resulted in a vibrant culture that nowadays officially accommodates six major religions, as well as different local belief systems, under the umbrella of the national ideology of Pancasila, in which the first pillar is the belief in “the One and only God”<sup>1</sup>.

Diplomacy has been defined variously. Sharp (2005), for instance, understands diplomacy as “the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented.” Hans N. Tuch (1990) defines public diplomacy as “a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture as well as its national goals and policies” (p. 3). In addition,

*diplomacy is a reflection of the values of nations and peoples, their cultural and civilizational specificities, political choices, and their religious precepts and traditions. It is a portrait of the past, a reflection of the present and a vision of the future.*  
(Dar & Sayed, 2017, p. 5616)

Built around the principles governing the political structure of the state it represents, diplomacy refers to international relations and how to keep good ties with other states. *Silaturahmi*, as will be elaborated in detail below, is a concept based on what God and the Prophet Muhammad said about keeping or mending ties between family or kin. Therefore, I propose that diplomacy is similar to *silaturahmi* in the sense that it is concerned about keeping or mending ties. Below, I will introduce the concept of *silaturahmi* and what it actually entails, and how the socio-religious concept of *silaturahmi* can speak back to the field of diplomacy.

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<sup>1</sup> “Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa”

Trained in area studies and focusing on Southeast Asia, I learned early to incorporate local or so-called emic concepts in my theoretical and analytical framework. In my research, I make use of different research methods as reflected in the specific research methods of situational analysis (Clarke et al., [2015](#)) and ‘new’ area studies (Houben, [2017](#)). Taking a view from the inside, emic or local concepts are an important part of new area studies. These concepts must be translated and used to analyze and further explain research findings. Local and localized concepts can best be analyzed with a new area studies perspective that takes a certain space as a venture point rather than using preconceived knowledge, including aims and methods, as its point of departure (Houben, [2015](#), p. 4). The methodological framework of new area studies includes the mastery of the local language and long-term immersion in qualitative field research by being in the local and arriving in the field without the preconceived aims, methods, and knowledge of particular fields of study or disciplines. Between 2013 and 2020, during my long-term immersion in qualitative field research, I found different localized Islamic concepts in Indonesia that are, in the way they are understood and practiced, unique to the region. Some of the most prominent concepts in this regard are *silaturahmi* [kinship], *barokah* [divine blessing], the quest for harmony, and *rasa* [flavor] (Seise, [2017](#), [2021](#)).

Such localized Islamic concepts are not only relevant to area studies but can also be applied to other fields of research and studies. What I mean when I use the term “localized Islamic concepts” is the fact that Indonesia, as a majority Muslim country, has historically contributed to the knowledge world<sup>2</sup> of Islam (e.g. Azra, [2004](#); Laffan, [2011](#)) and is seen as a major center of Islamic knowledge by many Indonesian Muslims (Lukens-Bull, [2005](#); Seise, [2017](#); Srimulyani, [2012](#); Woodward, [2011](#)), although it is commonly perceived elsewhere as being located in the periphery of the Muslim world (Eickelman & Piscatori, [1990](#); Feener, [2010](#); Joll, [2012](#)). When I use the term “localized Islamic concept” to refer to *silaturahmi*, I talk about a concept that is rooted in the orthodox Islamic tradition and that can be found in the Qur’an and Sunnah<sup>3</sup>. This orthodox Islamic concept was then adapted to the specific situatedness and traditional epistemological framework of the Nusantara region—and especially present-day Indonesia. Through the process of situated adaption and embodiment, these localized concepts received an additional layer of meaning and orthopraxy.

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2 See Liam C. Kelley’s ([2011](#)) keynote speech on “Localization and Knowledge Worlds” for his coining of the term “knowledge worlds”.

3 A compilation of the transmitted practices and sayings of Prophet Muhammad.



Following, I will illustrate how the concept of *silaturahmi* can enhance the topic of diplomacy in the greater Muslim and non-Muslim world. By proposing the inclusion of the localized Islamic concept of *silaturahmi* in the field of diplomacy, I join new area studies' methodology with the conceptional framework of the Islamic worldview and the "integration of knowledge". It is in such a conceptional framework that scholars have tried to include Islamic concepts in human sciences as well as to adapt human sciences to the Islamic worldview.<sup>4</sup> The inclusion of Islamic concepts in human sciences is referred to as the "integration of knowledge". The integration of knowledge serves as a methodological tool of an Islamic epistemology, as understood and developed by different contemporary Muslim scholars closely related to International Islamic University Malaysia (al-Attas, [1999](#); Badri, [2016](#); Bakar, [2014](#); Hassan, [2013](#)).

Integrating Islamic concepts into human sciences, as a form of enriching human sciences with religious wisdom and values, provides a means of returning knowledge to the realm of values (al-Attas, [1999](#); Hassan, [2010](#)). The methodology of the "integration of knowledge", as developed by Kamal Hassan ([2010](#)), aims to "purify" human knowledge from influences perceived as un-Islamic or traits that are not in line with the Islamic worldview. Enrichment with relevant references or concepts from Qur'an and Sunnah forms the second important element of Hassan's method (Hashim & Ssekamanya, [2013](#)). Both methods aim to de-secularize human sciences and reconnect knowledge with Islam.

Therefore, I propose broadening the framework of the "integration of knowledge" to also include localized Islamic concepts such as *silaturahmi*. I view the way that certain Islamic concepts have been localized as having the potential to add an extra layer of wisdom to the original concept. In the case of Islamic diplomacy in Indonesia, for example, one needs to consider the local context and wisdom of the region to extract the greatest benefit of the theme under discussion. The detailed discussion below will illustrate this point further. As such, localized Islamic concepts can be included in the category of "Islamic legacy" in the methodological framework of the "integration of knowledge" that is applied to enhance or "beautify" bodies of secular knowledge. First, however, I will introduce the concept and practice of *silaturahmi* as well as Islam and diplomacy.

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4 On the Islamic worldview, see AbuSulayman ([2011](#)), Badri ([2016](#)), and Berghout ([2009, 2017](#)).

## 2 *Silaturahmi*

*Silaturahmi*<sup>5</sup> is a concept based on what God and the Prophet Muhammad said about keeping or mending ties between family or kin. There are several verses from the Qur'an that are usually used to explain the concept of *silaturahmi*.<sup>6</sup> In addition, different hadiths<sup>7</sup> are quoted to underline its importance.<sup>8</sup> However, I have found that the use of *silaturahmi* as described in this article is unique to Indonesia and, arguably, the greater Nusantara region, which can include Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, and Southern Thailand.<sup>9</sup> According to my observations, the concept of *silaturahmi* can be found everywhere among the Muslim community and non-Muslim communities in Indonesia. Visiting a friend, family member, or teacher is often referred to as *silaturahmi*, not as *berkunjung* [visit]. During my research, I found that *silaturahmi* consists of two levels: it is both a practice and an intention (*niat*). Without the intention of practicing *silaturahmi*, the act of visiting (this can also include telephone calls, e-mails, etc.) is not considered *silaturahmi*. In addition, it always takes into account the person that visits as well as the person that receives the visiting party.

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5 Some Indonesians Muslims (like those that belong to Muhammadiyah or in groups related to the Muslim Brotherhood) prefer "*silaturahmi*" instead of "*silaturahmi*". However, I have found they refer the same concept and practice, and that the majority use "*silaturahmi*".

6 For example:

*O mankind! Be wary of your Lord who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and from the two of them, scattered numerous men and women. [Be wary of Allah and observe the rights of the blood relations and beware of breaking the ties of kinship]. Indeed Allah is watchful over you. (The Quran, 2003/n.d., 4:1)*

*[If] you were to wield authority / [do not] cause corruption in the land / and ill-treat your blood relations (47:22)*

7 "Hadith" refers to what Muslims believe to be a record of the words, actions, and silent approval of Prophet Muhammad.

8 For example:

*Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should not hurt his neighbor and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should serve his guest generously and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should speak what is good or keep silent.*  
(Sahih al-Bukhari, 1971/n.d., No. 6136)

9 Evers (2016) notes "Nusantara" means "Indonesia" in Indonesia and "Malay World" in Malaysia, but different meanings have been attached over Southeast Asian history.



Furthermore, *silaturahmi* seems to be understood by the majority of Indonesia's Muslims. The word is used daily during everyday conversations, during religious talks, in print and online media, and even during political campaigns. For example, the term *silaturahmi* was used during the 2014 elections. At the time, a huge political campaign poster next to a traffic light in Yogyakarta read "The Virtues of Silaturahmi"<sup>10</sup>. The poster was erected by the Islamic Prosperous Justice Party<sup>11</sup>, and used a famous hadith that in Indonesia can be translated as: "Silaturahmi strengthens brotherhood, extends age, and increases sustenance"<sup>12</sup>. President Joko Widodo, while a presidential candidate, also repeatedly used the word *silaturahmi* when referring to his many visits around Indonesia. Both examples of its use in the political arena also point to the potential of including *silaturahmi* in the theoretical framework of diplomacy. My definition of *silaturahmi* in the Indonesian context reads as follows:

*Silaturahmi is a religiously motivated form of social interaction (practice) through which, consciously or unconsciously, translocal relations are maintained on various scales from the local to the global and on different societal levels, including kinship, educational, economic, and religious connections. Silaturahmi is also an intention (niat) that can serve as a religious motivator, as well as a reminder, and is mostly, although not exclusively, used by and between Indonesian Muslims.*

One of my main informants, Kyai Abdul Muhaimin from Pondok Pesantren<sup>13</sup> Putri Nurul Ummahat in Kotagede, Yogyakarta, regularly refers to the importance of *silaturahmi* in his religious lectures. For him, *silaturahmi* means "connecting people". An important annual religious event that is often connected to *silaturahmi* is Halal Bi Halal during the Islamic month of Shawwal (*Syawal*), after the end of Ramadan. During Halal Bi Halal celebrations, also referred to as "*Syawalan*", different communities meet, listen to religious talks, and eat together. Such celebrations, embodied forms of *silaturahmi*, are organized throughout the entire month. They can take place in a village, a neighborhood, or among members of the same political party, religious circle, university, school, etc. Important elements of these events include asking each other's forgiveness<sup>14</sup> and greeting other members of one's community.

<sup>10</sup> "Keutamaan Silaturahmi"

<sup>11</sup> Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS)

<sup>12</sup> "Siapa yang suka dilapangkan rezekinya dan dipanjangkan umurnya, hendaklah ia menyambung silaturahmi."

<sup>13</sup> In the Indonesian context, "(pondak) pesantren" usually refers to an Islamic boarding school.

<sup>14</sup> with the phrase "*Mohon Maaf Lahir dan Batin*"

*Silaturahmi* is also used for official purposes. For example, Pondok Pesantren Assalam Al-Islami in South Sumatra—and several other Islamic boarding schools—uses *silaturahmi* in the name of its alumni organization: Forum Silaturahmi Alumni Pondok Pesantren Assalam (FORSILAM). The importance of connecting fellow pesantren students (*santri*) after graduation through this organization across Indonesia and the world is expressed through the localized concept of *silaturahmi*. Another organization, Forum Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Selatan (FORPESS), has a strong focus on connecting different pesantren in South Sumatra through *silaturahmi*. Especially when *silaturahmi* is used for official purposes, as in the example of FORSILAM and FORPESS, I argue, its potential to be applied to the conceptional framework of diplomacy becomes viable.

Another example from my field research in Indonesia also illustrates the diplomatic component attached to the concept and practice of *silaturahmi*. One of the regional meetings of the inter-religious dialogue initiative Forum for Brotherhood of People with Faith<sup>15</sup> that I attended in Yogyakarta was titled “Silaturahmi Forum for the People from Different Faiths”<sup>16</sup>. Representatives from different religions and beliefs in Yogyakarta, Central Java, and the surrounding areas were present. Interestingly, the idea of *silaturahmi* was extended to all members of the forum. The use of *silaturahmi* here points to the possibility of an almost universal use of the concept, especially to express the idea of tolerance and inclusion.

Going beyond Indonesia, but staying closely connected to the Indonesian context, the Indonesian mosque Al-Falah<sup>17</sup> and restaurant Nusantara<sup>18</sup> in Berlin, Germany, are both places where *silaturahmi* is practiced. For example, for Irfan and Ilham—two former Indonesian students completing their master’s studies in Berlin—the first place to “land” was Al-Falah. They explained that practicing *silaturahmi* and meeting other Indonesians would make their time in Berlin easier and blessed (*berkah*) (personal communication, October 2011).

“Sate Somay”, an annual food festival organized by the Indonesian mosque in Berlin, is similarly an activity where *silaturahmi* plays an extremely important role. As explained to me during a short field study in 2010, the festival’s main objective is *silaturahmi*. This multi-religious and multi-ethnic event brings together Indonesians and non-Indonesians from all parts of Germany. Everybody can bring family and friends, and profit goes towards the maintenance of the Indonesian mosque. Furthermore, one of my informants, a mosque committee

<sup>15</sup> *Forum Persaudaraan Umat Beriman*

<sup>16</sup> “*Forum Silaturahmi Masyarakat Lintas Iman*”

<sup>17</sup> Also found under the name “Indonesische Weisheit und Kultur Zentrum” (IWKZ).

<sup>18</sup> Nusantara Restaurant: <https://goo.gl/maps/xfeKGJYDmsKkzjTX8>



member at the time, explained to me that *silaturahmi* is one of the Indonesian mosque's main contributions to German society. He further explained that *silaturahmi* is used to avoid conflict and to invite people to get to know Indonesian people and Islam. In this sense, similar to the inter-religious dialogue example above, *silaturahmi* is extended beyond Islam and the Muslim community and serves as a localized Islamic concept that has the potential to contribute to a harmonious society. This illustrates again that *silaturahmi*, as understood and practiced by Indonesians, has a diplomatic component attached to it.

In conclusion, *silaturahmi* is a concept unique to Indonesia. Although grounded in a hadith, its practice, use, and meaning in everyday language among Indonesian Muslims is unique to Indonesia. It is through *silaturahmi* and its social reality that we understand annual Islamic celebrations such as Halal Bi Halal (*Syawalan*) and ritual feasts (*slametan*). However, it is also through the social reality of Indonesian societies, which are based on the community rather than the individual, that *silaturahmi* has been adapted to the Indonesian context and become an important concept and value for Indonesian Muslims.

### 3 Diplomacy and Islam

This section of the article provides a short basic introduction to diplomacy and how Muslim scholars have tried to find proof that diplomacy is taught in Islam by presenting various verses from the Qur'an and different points from the Islamic tradition. In general, it can be said that diplomacy as a part of international relations, is divided into two main schools of thought: idealism and realism (Wright, 1952). In international relations, idealism focuses on morality and ethics, which also includes religious values, while realism proposes that the international system of nations and the relations between them is a power struggle that is determined by different elements of power (Fernandes, 2016; Mearsheimer, 2005; Nesimi, 2018; Thorpe, 2016). Grotius, Kant, and Bentham<sup>19</sup> are considered idealists, as their thinking suggests that an established authority can maintain peace by simply rejecting the 'right' to war (Nesimi, 2018). Because they understand war to be detrimental to the interests of the wider population, they argue that wars are driven mainly by the egoistic interests of leaders.

On the other hand, classical realists such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau<sup>20</sup> consider conflict to be a natural state, rather than something to be ascribed to wicked leaders, disturbed socio-political systems, historical circumstances, or international disagreements (Nesimi, 2018). Taking

<sup>19</sup> See Neff (2012), Kant (1998), and Bentham (1843/n.d.).

<sup>20</sup> See Rousseau (1913/n.d.).



this short overview into account, I suggest including *silaturahmi*, as a localized Islamic concept, into the framework of diplomacy. My suggestion fits well the proponents of idealism in international relations, whose aim is to establish an authority capable of maintaining peace. In this sense, *silaturahmi* (as described above) can be used as a conceptional framework.

Connecting diplomacy with Islamic teachings, the following selections from verses of various chapters in the Qur'an are usually cited to prove that diplomacy is in fact part of Islamic teachings and firmly established by the Creator (Allah) in the Qur'an:<sup>21</sup>

1. *I [Allah] am going to place a successive ... authority on earth. (The Quran, [2003/n.d.](#), 2:30)*
2. *He [Allah] is the One Who smoothed out the earth for you, so move about in its regions and eat from His provisions. (67:15)*
3. *We have sent you ... only as a mercy for the whole world. (21:107)*
4. *O humanity! Indeed, We [Allah] created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may ... know one another. (49:13)*
5. *Indeed, Allah commands justice, grace, as well as courtesy to close relatives. He forbids indecency, wickedness, and aggression. He instructs you so perhaps you will be mindful. (16:90)*

If considered within the framework of diplomacy, the Qur'anic verses above point to a diplomatic framework of seeking peace through understanding (as in number four), fulfilling responsibility (as in number one and two), and spreading kindness (as in number three). The fourth verse (49:13) can also be interpreted to mean that diversity justifies mutual understanding between nations and peoples (Hassan, [2013](#), slide 13). These verses, especially numbers three, four, and five, speak back to the idealist framework of international relations. According to Hassan, justice and moral excellence should be guiding principles in soft-power diplomacy. Hassan also mentions several other verses from the Qur'an that emphasize the need for a Muslim nation to be just and balanced (2:143) and underscore the importance of establishing harmonious relationships with others (60:8–9). Furthermore, Hassan sees inviting others to God's way with wisdom and decent dialogue (16:125) as part of Islamic diplomacy.

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21 The first four verses were shared by Saptomo ([2020](#), p. 17), a previous Indonesian diplomat.



In addition to these verses, several Islamic concepts have also been referenced by Muslim intellectuals when discussing diplomacy and Islam. Classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), for example, offers concepts such as “territory of Islam” (*dar al-Islam*), “–of war” (*dar al-harb*), “–of truce” (*dar al-’ahd*), and “–of treaty” (*dar al-sulh*)<sup>22</sup> in the framework of a binary world (Hassan, 2013, slide 12). However, Hassan notes that contemporary Muslim scholars are critical of these time-bound concepts and offer new ones, such as “territory of calling to Islam” (*dar al-da’wah*) and “territory where Muslims can practice their religion freely” (*dar al-shahada*), to suit the contemporary realities of nation-states and Muslim presence in so-called Western and pluralist societies.

Historically, the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah (628 CE)—a turning point in the history of Islam—is an example of early Islamic diplomacy. The Prophet Muhammad signed a treaty with the non-Muslims of Makkah (Mecca), and he observed the terms of the treaty to the letter (Watt, 1961, pp. 182–188). In *Diplomacy in Early Islam*, Iqbal (1961/1988) provides an important overview of early Islamic diplomacy. Vaiou (2019) also gives a profound analysis of diplomacy in the early Islamic world by analyzing the historical chronicles within *Tarikh al-Tabari*<sup>23</sup> from the tenth century. According to her, these historical annals are extremely significant as it uniquely enhances our insights in the early Islamic world and the history of international diplomacy.

While the Qur’anic verses, Islamic concepts, and historical treaties above are commonly cited to support the opinion that diplomacy (with regards to international relations) is an important part of Islamic teachings, localized Islamic concepts as lived socio-religious realities have not found mention to support the idea that Islam as a way of life can also contribute to the field of diplomacy. In his three-step methodological framework of the “integration of knowledge”, Kamal Hassan (2010) suggests the beautification and enrichment of the secular body of knowledge with relevant Qur’anic concepts and verses, prophetic traditions, and Islamic legacies. *Silaturahmi* is both a prophetic tradition as well as, in its lived reality in Indonesia, an Islamic legacy or tradition. After providing a brief overview of Indonesian diplomacy and Islam, I will focus on discussing in more detail how *silaturahmi* can be applied to the field of diplomacy.

22 “Territory of treaty” means those that have a treaty of non-aggression or peace with Muslims.

23 Also known by the title *History of the Prophets and Kings*.

## 4 Indonesian Diplomacy and Islam

Indonesia, though a Muslim-majority country with the largest Muslim population in the world, is not a Muslim state. Nevertheless, Islam has been a source of social values and norms in Indonesian society and plays an important role in political legitimation (Murphy, [2020](#)). Furthermore, Indonesian diplomacy is partly influenced by Islam and by the endeavor to represent Indonesian Islam as the exemplar of moderate Islam (Hoesterey, [2020](#)). The international community has looked to Indonesia to provide an “alternative face” of Islam amid rising religious extremism and terrorism (Anwar, [2010a](#)). Indonesia aspires to be a bridge-builder between so-called Western countries and the Muslim world and it likes to project itself as a role model for other Muslim countries (Al-Anshori, [2016](#)).

Al-Anshori ([2016](#)) noticed that scholars on Indonesia have generally focused on Islam and democracy in Indonesia (see Azra, [2006](#); Hefner, [2000](#); Hilmy, [2010](#)) as well as Indonesian political life, its democratization, and its foreign policy (see Anwar, [2010b](#); Dosch, [2006](#); Gindarsah, [2012](#)). Few studies, Al-Anshori ([2016](#)) argues, solely address the relationship between Islam and foreign policy. Analysis of the role of Islam in Indonesia’s foreign policy under Sukarno<sup>24</sup> and beyond concluded that Indonesia’s foreign policy has rarely been shaped by Islamic considerations (see Leifer, [1983](#); Perwita, [2007](#); Sukma, [2003](#)). However, according to Al-Anshori ([2016](#)),

*[the] non-Islamic character of Indonesia’s foreign policy is not necessarily contradictory to Islamic interests. Indonesian foreign policy has not fully served Islamic aspirations, but nor has it produced a predicament for Muslim groups. ... foreign policy has entertained Islamic aspirations not in substance but in form. (p. 22)*

One major issue facing Indonesia’s foreign policy and public diplomacy has been described as the twin challenge of incorporating democracy and Islam into foreign policy in ways that uphold the country’s official state identity as a non-theocratic state while simultaneously preserving its international image as a moderate Muslim country. In this sense, Islam is construed as an element of soft power in foreign policy (Hoesterey, [2014](#); Sukma, [2011](#)).<sup>25</sup> The same holds true

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<sup>24</sup> The first Indonesian president, 1945–1967.

<sup>25</sup> Though, Islam is also a topic to be negotiated when it comes to sensitive global issues pertaining to Muslim minorities like the Rohingya people or Uyghurs, where Indonesia usually maintains its policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries (Murphy, [2020](#)).



for the rather new term “Islam Nusantara”<sup>26</sup> (Saiman, 2019). In my view, as elements of soft power, moderate Islam and Islam Nusantara can also be interpreted as tools to strengthen Indonesia’s above-mentioned roles as a bridge-builder and a role model for other Muslim countries. To my knowledge, the localized Islamic concept of *silaturahmi* has so far not been discussed in the context of Indonesian diplomacy. *Silaturahmi* as a localized Islamic concept unique to Indonesia has the potential to add to Indonesia’s goal of promoting its image of adherents to a moderate Islam.

## 5 *Silaturahmi* in Diplomatic Relations

I have argued above that *silaturahmi*, in its localized form, has attached to it a diplomatic component. Therefore, I propose that the socio-religious concept of *silaturahmi* can enrich the field of diplomacy. As illustrated above, *silaturahmi* is a socio-religious concept and practice deeply ingrained in the people of Indonesia. It is referred to and prevalent in different social and religious spheres. According to my observations, the motivation is to please God and seek reward. This necessitates an intention of practicing *silaturahmi* by the practitioner. Understanding that diplomacy reflects the values of nations and peoples, cultural and civilizational specificities, and their religious precepts and traditions (Dar & Sayed, 2017)—including *silaturahmi* as part of Indonesia’s framework of diplomacy—forms an important contribution towards a uniquely colored Indonesian diplomacy. At the same time, the conceptional framework of *silaturahmi* can enhance the idealist framework of international relations and provide a tool for soft-power diplomacy.

In addition, being grounded in Islamic teachings, Indonesia has the potential to “export” the uniquely localized concept of *silaturahmi* to the wider Muslim and non-Muslim world, thereby improving and enhancing international relations and inter-Muslim relations and diplomacy in particular. This is in line with Indonesia’s above-mentioned aims to act as a role model for other Muslim countries (Al-Anshori, 2016) and as a bridge-builder between countries with a Muslim-majority population and countries without a Muslim-majority population. Using the concept of *silaturahmi* in inter-Muslim state relations and diplomacy can strengthen the idea of understanding the Muslim community,

<sup>26</sup> Here, “Islam Nusantara” is not intentioned to serve as an alternative to established Islamic orthodoxy—including adherence to respective schools of Islamic law (Sharia) and established schools of doctrine (*aqidah*). Rather, Islam Nusantara is about the way Islam is practiced: moderate, tolerant, and non-violent—stressing the importance of being a mercy to all creation (*rahmatan lil ‘alamin*).

independently of their national belonging, as one entity and one family.<sup>27</sup> The same holds true for other countries and international relations in general. Following this train of thought, all countries can be envisioned as belonging to the family of humanity. With regards to Islam and the Muslim community, we can further specify that all countries with a Muslim population can be envisioned as belonging to one Muslim family. However, what is true for both scenarios is the idea that *silaturahmi* should be the driving force of keeping relations, improving relations, and mending ties (if necessary), just as it is in the smaller entity of the nuclear and extended family. Placing *silaturahmi* at the center of diplomacy between states with a Muslim population has the potential to improve these relations because the intention of keeping diplomatic ties has shifted to a religiously and morally motivated intention.

Furthermore, using *silaturahmi* within the field of diplomatic relations can change how other states are viewed. Through the concept of *silaturahmi*, state relations will be viewed similarly to extended family relations. What does that entail? What is the Islamic and cultural etiquette people are taught in Indonesia to behave towards extended family members? According to my research and long-term stay in Indonesia, Indonesian people are taught to show courtesy and friendliness. They are taught to overlook people's faults. When they receive visits from family members, they treat them the best way possible. When they are invited by extended family members, they accept their invitation. During times of grief, Indonesian people will try to relieve the burden of their family members and entertain them. In case of bad treatment, it is good etiquette to try to overlook the faults of the kin and to still treat them nicely. When family members ask for help, Indonesians are taught to try to help. When family members break up ties, Islamic teachings remind Indonesian Muslims to mend these ties again. And it is important to note that these cultural and religious teachings and values are ideally adhered to because people seek God's pleasure and reward, rather than worldly gains. Again, this illustrates, as I stated in my definition of *silaturahmi*, the religious motivation inherent in the practice of *silaturahmi*.

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27 This reflects the Prophetic narration:

*The believers ... being merciful among themselves and showing love among themselves and being kind, resembling one body, so that, if any part of the body is not well then the whole body shares the sleeplessness (insomnia) and fever with it.* (Sahih al-Bukhari, [1971/n.d.](#), No. 6011)



In this sense, practicing the concept of *silaturahmi* in diplomatic relations has the potential to improve and strengthen relations between states based on the intention to please God and follow the guidelines He has provided for the Muslim community and humanity in general. That is why it is important to note that, as in the use of *silaturahmi* in Indonesia, *silaturahmi* is not limited to Muslims, but has the potential to include all of humanity.

Likewise, an additional advantage of proposing *silaturahmi* as a core concept in diplomacy is the potential to uplift the role of Indonesia as a key player among other Muslim-majority countries. Historically, the region of Nusantara has been perceived as being located in the periphery of the Muslim world for diverse reasons. Including a localized Islamic concept that has its origin in Qur'an and Sunnah has the potential, among other things, to challenge this center-periphery bias.

## 6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the localized Islamic concept of *silaturahmi* is essential in understanding Muslim identity in Indonesia. Combining two different methodological approaches, those of new area studies and those of the integration of knowledge, I have argued for including the localized Islamic concept of *silaturahmi*, as practiced in Indonesia, as an essential concept in the framing of diplomacy as part of the idealist school of international relations. Using the methodological framework of the integration of knowledge, as developed by Kamal Hassan, I have further argued that *silaturahmi*, as part of Islamic legacy, can enrich Islamic diplomacy and be used to beautify and enrich the secular field of diplomacy. Looking beyond diplomacy, the localized Islamic concept of *silaturahmi* as a social practice and reality of the people of Indonesia provides a concept that can enrich our modern human sciences in a positive, thought-provoking, and substantial way. Furthermore, since the common global perception of Indonesia is one of being located in the Islamic periphery, 'exporting' a localized Islamic concept has the potential to position the country as a player that contributes to global Islamic discourses. It is my humble hope that the ideas introduced in this article can be an inspiration for academic scholars to develop further the concept of *silaturahmi* for the field of diplomacy and beyond.

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