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## Beyond *Islam Nusantara* and “Arabization” – Capitalizing “Arabness” in Madura, East Java

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### Summary

Representatives of one of the world’s largest Muslim organizations, the Indonesian Nahdlatul ‘Ulama (NU), propagate an “Islam of the archipelago” (*Islam Nusantara*) that harmonizes Islamic practices and local culture. They paint a picture of a pluralist and inclusive Indonesian Islam that accommodates diverse local cultures, contrasting it with a potentially homogenizing “Arabization” — a term used in reference to the perceived ideological radicalization of Islamic lifestyle. Strikingly, in Madura, a region that is considered a stronghold of the NU, there is an affinity to “Arabness” that is not primarily dedicated to questions of the right interpretation of Islam but rather to local hierarchies, social life, political influence, and economic activities. Madurese engagement with cultural markers that are labelled as “Arab” is relatively ambivalent in nature. On the one hand, the Madurese treat “Arabness” as a symbol of Islamic piety that illustrates a special connection to the Holy Land, access to religious learnedness, and the power of blessings. On the other hand, the Madurese can be critical of Arabic culture and customs, especially Wahabist ideology. In the context of pilgrimage to the holy Muslim sites of Mecca and Medina, Madurese Muslims newly imagine and localize “Arabness”. By transferring Arabic cultural markers into economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, Madurese Muslims make “Arabness” meaningful beyond debates about *Islam Nusantara* and Arabization.

**Keywords:** *Islam Nusantara*, Indonesia, Madura, Arabization, *haji*, *umroh*, capitalization

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