



Interrupting Voice in Cyber Media: Standing and Rationales of Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of West Sumatera in Rejecting Religious Moderation Campaign

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Abstract

This article discusses legal position of West Sumatera's Indonesian Ulema Council in responding to religious moderation campaign offered by Government. On many occasions, West Sumatera's Ulema Council has shown their rejection and objection to various religious concepts popularized by State Institution. This rejection was not only given to the people of West Sumatera, but also propagated through other cyber channels, such as social media and their official online platforms. This study is based on library research and field data. Using Jürgen Habermas' public sphere theory, this article explains how such their standings might be viewed as dialogical challenges to keep the public sphere remains an enabling venue for religious dialogue. The arguments they present through various cybermedia channels have an intrinsic correlation to the conceptions they criticize. Through cyberspace, responses, confirmations, and arguments between communication subjects can also be seen, which keeps the religious discourse being discussed relevant. By not confirming which standing is the strongest and most universal in religious moderation, this article demonstrates that the robustness and universality of a religious campaign require public sphere, such as this cyberspace, and those who use that space as a means of rational consideration can then be accepted and evaluated by the public at large.

Keyword:

Religious Moderation, MUI, West Sumatera, Cyber Media

Abstrak

Artikel ini akan mendiskusikan sikap Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) Sumatera Barat dalam merespons konsepsi moderasi beragama. MUI Sumatera Barat dalam banyak kesempatan telah menunjukkan penolakan dan kesangsian mereka atas beragam konsep keagamaan yang dipopulerkan Lembaga Negara. Penolakan tersebut tidak hanya disampaikan pada masyarakat Sumatera Barat, tetapi juga disebarluaskan di pelbagai kanal siber, seperti media sosial dan platform daring resmi mereka. Riset ini adalah penelitian pustaka yang didukung dengan data lapangan. Data utama penelitian ini adalah ceramah, opini, dan pemberitaan yang dipublikasikan di media siber seperti website dan Youtube. Data penelitian didukung dengan wawancara pada ulama MUI Sumatera untuk mendapatkan gambaran yang lebih utuh atas sikap keagamaan yang disampaikan. Dengan menggunakan kerangka teori ruang publik (*public sphere*) yang dipopulerkan Jurgen Habermas, artikel ini memperlihatkan sikap tersebut dapat dimaknai sebagai tantangan dialogis untuk menjaga agar ruang publik tetap menjadi arena yang memungkinkan untuk dialog keagamaan. Argumentasi yang mereka sampaikan melalui berbagai kanal media siber memiliki korelasi intrinsik pada konsepsi yang mereka kritik. Melalui media siber tersebut pula terlihat respons, konfirmasi, dan argumentasi antar subjek komunikasi yang membuat wacana keagamaan yang diskusikan tetap relevan. Dengan tidak meneguhkan pandangan mana yang paling kukuh dan universal atas moderasi beragama, artikel ini juga akan memperlihatkan bahwa kekukuhan dan universalitas satu pandangan keagamaan membutuhkan ruang publik, seperti ruang siber ini, dan pihak-pihak yang memanfaatkan ruang tersebut sebagai sarana pertimbangan rasional untuk selanjutnya dapat diterima dan dinilai publik secara luas.

Kata Kunci:

Moderasi Beragama, MUI, Sumatera Barat, Rasionalisasi, Media Siber

Introduction

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of West Sumatra not only rejected the concepts of Islam Nusantara (Damarjati 2018), the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers (MUI West Sumatra, 2021), but also criticized religious moderation campaign (Ilahi 2022) which has been promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs since 2019 (Kementerian Agama RI 2019a). By using the religious authority it has in the activities of the Regional Working Meeting (Mukerda) and Ijtima' of the West Sumatra MUI Fatwa Commission and Regency/City MUIs throughout West Sumatra on March 25–27, 2022 (IslamToday 2022), the religious moderation campaign emphasized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs

Republic of Indonesia is criticized as a concept ridden by issues of secularism, pluralism, liberalism, and the infiltration of Islam Nusantara in West Sumatra (Islam Today, 2022). This West Sumatra MUI decision concluded with a joint pledge to reinstate the “Sati Bukik Marapalam Oath” (MUI West Sumatra, 2022)

The West Sumatra MUI’s standing of the concept of religious moderation is in contrast to the concept of religious moderation previously referred to by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. For the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the religious moderation that was launched was a catalyst that was able to bring together two extreme religious understandings, namely the extreme left and the extreme right (Widodo and Karnawati 2019; Arif 2021b)). The extreme right in question are religious adherents who believe that truth is only absolute in one interpretation of a religious text and justify other interpretations as heretical groups; this group is commonly referred to as conservatives. Meanwhile, on the extreme left are adherents of religions that deify reason, ignore the sanctity of religion, and sacrifice the basic beliefs of religious teachings for the sake of inappropriate tolerance for adherents of other religions (Kementerian Agama RI 2019a). Thus, religious moderation campaign is understood as a form of joint commitment to maintaining a plenary balance between tribes, ethnicities, cultures, and religions in Indonesia (Munir et al. 2020)

The facts above provide an understanding that the structural efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Religious Affairs through the religious moderation campaign are not directly proportional to the existing reality. It means that the idea behind religious moderation campaign that was issued was not entirely accepted by religious authorities, both at the regional and district/city levels. What happens is that religious moderation campaign is rejected and criticized, which is an unavoidable occurrence in the public sphere.

The study of religious moderation has been a very complex one conducted by researchers in recent years. These studies can be grouped into several interrelated topics that are indirectly correlated with this study. Some of them are first, the study of religious moderation, which is reviewed based on normative concepts and values in Islam, In this typology, it is known that religious moderation is a religious discourse that is inseparable from the main values that are built from Islamic teachings through its holy books (Aziz 2021; Nurdin 2021; Monang, Saputra, and ... 2022; Hasan 2021; Wahyudin, Taufiq, and Islamy 2021).

Furthermore, there is a study of religious moderation associated with various religious organizations in Indonesia. This is the second type of study that is relevant to this topic. According to these studies, religious organizations such as Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah provide support and good responses to the development of religious moderation discourse (Nasikhin, Raaharjo, and Nasikhin 2022).

Another issue that experts are focusing on is the sense of urgency. They thought that religious moderation was one of the options worth considering in the middle of contemporary Indonesia's religious issues (Akhmadi 2019; Suratman et al. 2022; Fahri, mohammad 2022; Hadiat and Syamsurijal 2022; Inayatillah 2021). Several similar studies showing the need for a more widespread understanding, practice, and development of religious moderation emphasize the urgency of religious moderation (Adawiyah, Tobing, and Handayani 2021; Arif 2021a; Cristiana 2021; Firdaus et al. 2021; Vika Rahmatika Hidayah 2021; Rahman A 2022; Sumarto 2021; Riniti Rahayu and Surya Wedra Lesmana 2020).

The study developed by the author is inextricably linked to the studies indicated above. They differ, however, in crucial features and the scope of the study. Several studies, including one that determined the need for an examination of the program's mainstreaming, have highlighted this crucial component (Junaedi 2022). Several scholars have investigated

cyberspace, which is the focus of religious moderation studies, as one of the most complex areas to discuss (Dianto 2021; A. Wibowo 2019; R. W. Wibowo and Nurjanah 2021; Agung and Maulana 2021).

The critical points on which this research is based were raised by religious authorities, who have made numerous remarks on the programs of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in recent years. It is the MUI of West Sumatra in this case. The target of this study, cyberspace, serves as a dialogue venue for the MUI of West Sumatra and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to respond to one another.

Unlike other critical studies' results on religious moderation, this article will demonstrate that disagreements regarding religious moderation have become an essential dialogic feature in the development of religious dialogue and discourse. The discussion has also benefited from the use of cyberspace. In this space, with the smooth flow of information that is its significant feature, both the responses and the remarks from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the West Sumatra MUI can be interpreted as an effort to assess each other and clarify so that the public can further examine and consider this dialogue in very broad perspective.

This article uses a qualitative study based on literature analysis and field data. The library data, which is the primary source of this study, is documentation of the MUI of West Sumatra Province's remarks and responses as documented in various cyber media channels, such as their official online media and news coverage in the mass media. Documentation was also carried out on the Youtube channel, where first-hand lectures, descriptions, and explanations from the Chairman of the West Sumatra MUI on their religious attitudes were recorded and viewed. Each of these documents is required as material to examine the patterns and forms of statements presented by the MUI about religious moderation and the parties involved.

The primary data is supported by the field. This was done through interviews with representatives of West Sumatra MUI scholars. Interviews

were conducted in a structured manner to explain internal conditions, attitudes expressed by the West Sumatra MUI and a general description of religion in the province. The latter data is also useful for confirming the factors behind the West Sumatra MUI's position statement.

The field data supports the primary data. This was accomplished through interviews with West Sumatra MUI scholars. Structured interviews were performed to describe internal conditions and attitudes performed by the West Sumatra MUI, and a broad description of religion in the region. The latter data can also be used to substantiate the factors underlying the West Sumatra MUI's position statement.

Each data is then analyzed using several steps described by Miles and Habermen (Sugiyono 2018). The first step is data reduction, which is the process of transcribing and managing data gathered from various online sources relating to the West Sumatra MUI's critique of religious moderation. Second, presentation of data is the process of presenting data in various ways, such as quoting interview data, news, video/lecture excerpts, and so on, to support thoughts. Third, verification is carried out by matching each data set, both primary and supporting, to find points of similarity and difference; and fourth, interpretation of data and drawing conclusions is carried out by interpreting the data presented using Jurgen Habermas' spatial and ethical discourse approach.

History and Religious Authority of the Indonesian Ulema Council, West Sumatra

West Sumatra MUI is a confederation of religious organizations in West Sumatra, including NU, Muhammadiyah, Perti, and others. Prior to being the parent organization of the Central MUI, which was founded in 1975 and maintains an office in Jakarta, the West Sumatra MUI arose from an association of scholars known as the Central Sumatran Council of Ulamas, which was founded on May 27, 1968. The latter institution was

founded by a group of scholars in Birugo, Bukittinggi. West Sumatra was still part of the Central Sumatra region at the time.

The chairman of the High Ulama Council at that time was Buya Mansur Datuak Panglimo Kayo. Gusrizal Gazahar said that in 1974, in the same place, in Birugo, the scholars also convened and, according to the news he got, were also attended by Buya Hamka. Buya Hamka was inspired to use the same method at the national level in West Sumatra. With the next agreement, after the establishment of the central MUI, with Buya Hamka as chairman, the West Sumatra Ulema Council automatically became the West Sumatra MUI. Without forgetting its historical context, May 27 was used as the birthday of MUI of West Sumatra (Surau Buya Gusrizal 2018).

The same thing was also conveyed by Nufrodi (Mudzhar, 2012). In the section of his article about the ulama council in the region, he added that the purpose of establishing the West Sumatra ulama council at that time was:

..... to realize unity of movement, in facing challenges coming from outside Islam to West Sumatra, especially the arrival of Baptist Christian Missions to Bukittinggi. The purpose of the establishment of the Council was to carry out the da'wa of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* in West Sumatra.

Like the Central MUI, the West Sumatra MUI is a quasi-nongovernmental organization (Quango). Quango is a form of supporting institution in the constitutional system. Quango is like a non-governmental organization (NGO). However, it has a difference with most NGOs because it acts as a public institution. Quango is a publicly funded non-governmental organization, or also a government. However, its position as an institution remains independent. Usually Quango carries out one or several public policy tasks, but does not have a direct relationship with the department or ministry that is in charge of them (Abdillah and Novianto 2019).

The existence of the MUI as a public institution, however—to use Gusrizal’s term—the government donating its “blood,” makes this organization quite underdeveloped. When the government no longer provides financial assistance, operations are financed by public assistance. The impact was the closure of the West Sumatra MUI office in 2017 (Firmansyah 2017). However, for Gusrizal, the cessation of aid from the government was not an obstacle. In fact, he said, “MUI does not belong to the government. Ulama must return to their roots, recognizing that they (MUI) belong to the people (Surau Buya Gusrizal 2018).

Even though they don’t belong to the government, their “close” relationship is not a secret. In its early history, the MUI has had many successful government programs. The Family Planning (KB) program promoted by the New Order government, which had sparked polemics at the clerical level, was supported and campaigned for by the Assembly. The MUI was even lenient and adaptive to the New Order government’s “official gambling” accusations.

As an institution consisting of scholars from various mass organizations and *harakahs*, there is no single religious view that can represent MUI compared to other religious organizations. Even so, Moch. Ichwan saw changes in the MUI’s perspective before and after the reform. During Gus Dur’s government, the MUI changed its role from serving the government (*Khadim al-Hukumah*) to serving the people (*Khadim al-Ummah*).

Since then, according to Ichwan, MUI has begun to position itself in a political transition by defending the interests and aspirations of more conservative Muslims. Even though he said he presented moderate Islam, for Ichwan, MUI would be more accurately described as displaying “Puritan Moderate Islam” (Budiman, Baiquni, Bruinessen, & Nur Ichwan, 2014). Regarding this term, Ichwan describes:

Puritan moderate Islam is Islamic thought and practice that is basically moderate but is influenced by several aspects of puritan Islamic teachings that emphasize purity of faith, namely that which is free from shirk and other related beliefs, including blasphemy, deviation, heresy, and apostasy, as well as liberalism, secularism, and religious pluralism (usually in the sense of religious relativism); adopt a strict legal orientation in matters of worship; be more sensitive to moral issues, such as pornography and gambling, which are defined as “munkarat” (sin); be aware of the exclusive political interests of Muslims; but at the same time agreeing to the development of an Islamic economy through the Islamic banking system and the halal market, as well as recognizing and even supporting countries with non-Islamic ideologies.

In West Sumatra, by not generalizing the views of the MUI, Duski Samad said that the style of thought of the MUI depends on the composition of the ulama who are currently members of it. Duski, Chairman of MUI Padang, said that the composition of the MUI clergy in West Sumatra has changed from time to time. Not only the origin of the organization but also the educational background of the Islamic scholars.

“In the past, if you weren’t from UIN (IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang/PTAIN), the composition of the MUI was Tarbiyah-Perti people. Now, almost half of them (in terms of educational background) are Middle Eastern,” said Duski. He saw that scholars who were born from the last-mentioned background had their own uniqueness. Scholars with Middle Eastern backgrounds have networks that extend far down, down to the district and city levels. “They are accommodated by organizations and schools. And it (their number) is not one. And their efforts are stronger (Budiman et al. 2014).

Duski does not deny that there are some puritanical views in MUI’s standings and positions. He did see that there were many views developing in West Sumatra, including within the MUI. Not only were they puritans,

but they were explicitly called it *salafi-wahabi*. However, for him, as an institution composed of many scholars, the views issued should be general views. He called it the big picture:

As the Ulema Council, we must see the “big picture”. It is impossible for us to look at the “small picture”. If we look at the big picture, this is (in relation to) the organization; this is the political party. If we see the small picture, there will be an intersection with our personal understanding.” (Interview with Duski Samad, Chairman of MUI Padang)

Lately, not a few attitudes toward MUI West Sumatra have raised heated discussions to the national level. The rejection of Islam Nusantara and the appeal not to vote for parties that reject sharia regional regulations are some of them. Duski sees these persistent standing as the courage of MUI scholars in issuing fatwas, giving statements, and making appeals. The courage, for him, is because the main figures of West Sumatra MUI are not bound by the government (Candra and Maharani 2018). Duski Samad, Chairman of MUI Padang, said that the consistency of MUI West Sumatera in dealing with its opponents is also liked by some people in West Sumatera.

Religious Moderation as Discourse

The religious moderation campaign finds its momentum in the National Medium-Term Plan (RPJMN), which was approved by President Jokowi through Presidential Regulation (Perpres) Number 18 of 2020. The RPJMN states that religious moderation is one of the agendas that must be promoted by the government in an effort to build intra- and inter-religious harmonization in Indonesia. These efforts are then derived in various strategic programs. Several ministries and institutions are also involved in pursuing the religious moderation campaign, including the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs (Kemenko PMK) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

However, if traced back, the legitimacy of religious moderation as a strategic program has been built through a series of thought formulations so that it can become a conception that can be actualized. The Ministry of Religious Affairs Republic of Indonesia is one of the ministries that most aggressively builds the formulation. Dozens of books and programs have been intensified as of 2019. One of the most prominent efforts to build this concept of thought is a book entitled “Religious Moderation,” published by Research, Development, Training, and Education Agency the Ministry of Religious Affairs. From the book, it is known that the concept of moderation is derived from four main indicators, namely national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and respect for tradition (RI 2019)

Indeed, religious moderation as concept continues to evolve. Beyond the four indicators, there are also several values that are placed next as derivatives of religious moderation. These values are *Rahamutiyah*, *Insyaniyah*, *Adliyyah*, *Mubadalah*, *Mashlahab*, *Mu’ahadah Wathaniyah*, *Dusturiyah*, *Tasamubiyah*, and *Urfiyah*. As with the previous four indicators, these nine values are elaborated by official Ministry of Religious Affairs literature (Tim Penyusun Ditjen Bimas Islam, 2022).

Religious moderation discourse has also continued to grow in the public realm to this day. This discussion also included some religious individuals and organizations. Take, for example, Ahmad Najib Burhani. As one of the Muhammadiyah intellectuals, according to him, religious moderation is a religious viewpoint that must be constantly maintained and developed. He also mentioned that the organization created by KH. Ahmad Dahlan advocates moderate religious attitudes as a solution to community challenges (Burhani 2021).

Masar Hilmy stated the same thing. He does not dispute that moderation is a fixed concept. As stated by Burhani, he supports the government’s efforts to maintain this moderate religious attitude in society. More strategically, he stated that this concept needed to be clarified and

detailed in multiple programs, both within and outside of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Hilmy 2019).

In addition to support, a critical view is also seen on this conception. Some of these criticisms conclude that religious moderation is a thought that is close to pluralism, religious freedom, democracy, modernization, and Islamic liberalism (Pribadi 2019).

Seno Sigit also made sarcastic remarks regarding the tendency toward and mainstreaming of religious moderation. He stated that by including it in the Ministry of Religious Affairs's 2022 international conference on religious moderation, the government has become the most basic feature of the religious moderation discourse, namely understanding religion itself.

For Sigit, the government failed to finalize a definition of religion that could embrace all Indonesian citizens. He sees that the government tends to interpret religion in terms of the six religions in Indonesia. Whereas interpreting religion from the perspective of the majority also perpetuates discriminatory nuances. Plural groups of adherents and beliefs become victims in the dynamics of interreligious relations and are not accommodated in this case. Even though tolerance between adherents of religions, including beliefs, is one of the indicators of success that will be pursued in the mainstreaming of religious moderation (Sigit 2022).

D. Q. Tungkagi even emphasizes the presence of ambiguity and misunderstanding in this conception. Examining the relationship between religious moderation and religious freedom, he discovered that the national agenda had things in common with religious freedom. Anti-violence and cultural acceptance, for example, which are indicators of religious moderation, are also signs of a commitment to religious freedom in the form of local religious acknowledgment. Tungkagi remarked, "These equating sides not only make religious moderation difficult, but they are not dissimilar to religious freedom." However, it also creates additional

issues that are inherent in this conception, such as the liberal limitations that religious moderation opposes (Tungkagi 2022).

These various criticisms demonstrate moderation in an open discourse and have the possibility of continuing to be analyzed. This is even seen in recent Hilmi articles. Although he acknowledged the need for the mainstreaming of religious moderation as mentioned above, he also realized that the policy of religious moderation had never been thoroughly evaluated. The relationship between the majority and minorities and how the state treats them as a reflection of the achievements of the mainstreaming of religious moderation programs is still a problem. Not to mention, he also sees challenges in the social construction of religious moderation, such as presenting a sense of authenticity to this concept (Hilmy 2023).

As a result, the dynamics of religious moderation will persist. Furthermore, its inclusion in a national priority program will definitely inspire numerous parties to join and comment. Although numerous individuals and intellectuals have expressed support, criticism, and even rejection, as demonstrated by the West Sumatra MUI, as detailed in the next section, this is an unavoidable response and reaction, and it is not the only one. A critique has been linked to numerous other criticisms of religious moderation as support. At this level, it is known that moderation has become an increasingly important subject among Indonesians.

Religious Moderation in Public Sphere

Dialogue regarding religious moderation can be found in numerous spaces and channels of public communication as a widely consumed discourse. As engagement instruments that are inseparable in this era, cyber channels are no exception. In reality, shades are gaining popularity as they reach a wider spectrum of areas and personalities. Discourse becomes an essential aspect of public space at this level.

Habermas even identifies discourse as a consequence of the existence of a public sphere. The term was explained in a number of key words, such as a space that allows for balanced conversations to occur, the existence of freedom with guaranteed rights to communicate freely with each other, and the aspect of public interest, which is the goal of the communication (Habermas et al., 1974).

Religious discourse cannot be separated from this term. Religious discourse, as it is stated, actually grows along with the dynamics in the public sphere. The freedom of the community to convey their arguments is a way to reach public consensus on a religious standing that is relevant and rational to practice (Gunawan & Bangun, 2020).

But of course, the keywords mentioned by Habermas above support aspects that cannot be eliminated in the public sphere. It is undeniable that cybermedia has opened up a wider space for communicating and exchanging messages. On the one hand, “virtual space” can be a temporary image of public sphere that supports public interests as expected. But on the other hand, this virtual space also has the potential to distort public interests if the keywords rights and freedom of communication are not realized (Haezer 2018).

As a result, when situating virtual space as a public sphere, it is critical to consider factors that can sustain the continuance of democratic dialogue in that area. This is demonstrated by ensuring that conditions exist that allow the community to provide input and communicate dynamically with one another. Furthermore, even when studying it, the social context should not be neglected (Barlas & Çalışkan, 2006).

By ensuring both, Habermas’ definition of discourse as public sphere formed through balanced and reasonable interaction has the potential to be present in virtual space. Democratization is a significant factor in this regard. In a democracy, different reactions, such as discussions and the interchange of ideas, can be positioned as expressions and processes of

developing ideas. This exchange of ideas becomes an important indicator of the prevalence of democratic debate in cyberspace (Lau 2010).

It is also in similar position in religious discourse, in this case, the discourse of religious moderation. Various things that can reduce the democracy of religious discourse, such as polarization, exclusivism, and religious conflict, should be avoided. Avoiding this, the ethics of discourse in the public sphere, by examining the rationality in every argument and discourse regarding religious moderation in the public sphere, is an inevitable effort.

Discourse ethics, as stated by Habermas, emphasizes the conditions of rational discussion and intersubjective agreements. Both of them are ways to find what is known as a view of universality. By looking at the extent to which arguments are presented, how these arguments are criticized, and confirmed until they are agreed upon as mutually acceptable arguments, a view or argument can increase in strength to become a consensus (Habermas, 2004).

In this case, religious moderation can be read as a religious concept. Starting from a religious argument formulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs with a series of regulations and supporting literature, it then receives a “dialogical challenge” in cyberspace through criticism and rebuttal so that it has the opportunity to become a religious view and argument that can be accepted by the public or, on the contrary, is annulled by other sets of views or principles that are more acceptable as a religious consensus.

It is through this perspective that the West Sumatra MUI’s position finds its relevance. The West Sumatra MUI’s “attack” on religious moderation in cyberspace can be interpreted as an effort to keep the public sphere open as an arena for consensus and also the growth of religious discourse itself. By taking a position that is called “opposite” to religious formulations in the campaign of religious moderation, the public broadly has the opportunity to consider the extent to which religious moderation can be agreed upon as a view that can be widely accepted and actualized.

The West Sumatra MUI's Rationalization of Critique on Religious Moderation Campaign

Having described in the previous section how religious moderation was built as a discourse by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, this section will try to elaborate on the West Sumatra MUI's standing in responding to the discourse, especially in cyberspace. The West Sumatra MUI's rejection was not based solely on their disagreement with the overall concept of religious moderation. This can be seen in the results of the working meeting and Ijma of MUI of West Sumatra in March 2022.

The results of the deliberations show how the West Sumatra MUI criticizes the discourse surrounding religious moderation. In their view, the idea behind religious moderation campaign is strongly colored by liberalism and secularism. In fact, the two views mentioned later have received a fatwa ruling from the Central MUI (MUI 2005). Doubts over religious moderation have also not been shown this time. In several incidents, the West Sumatra MUI also alluded to religious moderation. These incidents were full of debates on religious understanding. Among them is the debate on the obligation to dress Muslim in West Sumatra, which has attracted attention in 2021. In responding to criticism of the Muslim Dress Regulations, the Chairperson of the West Sumatra MUI said:

That is among the poisons that you wrap in “religious moderation,” which is actually “secularism, liberalism, and pluralism” that has been forbidden by MUI. Hopefully, the scholars and intellectuals will wake up from the stupor caused by the modernization of divine guidance (MUI West Sumatra, 2021)

The MUI of West Sumatra has always openly criticized liberalism, secularism, and pluralism. Not only in the sharia regional regulation case as shown above, the West Sumatra MUI's disagreement over this understanding is also shown in the *Islamic Life Style* guidelines, which were

previously formulated by the West Sumatra MUI (MUI West Sumatra, 2021b).

In the Islamic lifestyle guide, it is stated that this understanding will distance a person from Islam. One of the contents of the guide is, “Strengthening the belief in monotheism by rejecting all understandings that distance people from Islamic teachings such as secularism, liberalism, pluralism, communism, Shia, and the like (MUI West Sumatra, 2020).

The closeness of religious moderation to the notions that the MUI has disproved as haram is not normatively confirmed. Although in some literature it is stated that there is a close relationship between the conceptual building of religious moderation and liberalism, the Ministry of Religious Affairs itself, in the main book on religious moderation, states that liberalism is the opposite side of religious extremism. Both liberalism and extremism are rejected by religious moderation (Kementerian Agama RI 2019b).

In one report, the Ministry of Religious Affairs even clearly stated that religious moderation is not a liberal ideology. The Director of Islamic Community Guidance at the Ministry of Religious Affairs affirmed that there is a discourse that is developing in society that tends to equate religious moderation with religious liberalism. He said the government’s priority program for mainstreaming religious moderation was not the same as religious liberalism.

The root of this rejection, conveyed by Gusrizal Gazahar, is due to the use of the term moderation and the misunderstanding of many parties in understanding the difference between *Washiyatul Islam* and *Wasathiyah Islam*. For Gusrizal, the two terms have significant differences. He mentioned:

Some call it Islamic moderation. That’s terrible. Some call it religious moderation. If Islamic moderation means moderate Islam, that is dangerous. If moderation is religious, then (religious) attitude is implied. This (religious moderation) is rather tolerable. The root of the language is *Washiyatul Islam*.

But is it true that “*Washiyatul Islam*” means moderation? In one word, I do not believe in such terms. That (*washiyatul*) is not as simple as interpreting it with moderation (Gazahar 2021)

Furthermore, he added, the existence of the term moderation in religion with Islam *Wasbaty* also confused the concept. For him, the latter term has the consequence of narrowing the broad meaning of Islam. In this regard, he said:

Moreover, the term *Islam Wasbaty* has also emerged. When we use the term in such a manner, of course we comply with the rules of the Indonesian language. The first word is explained. The second word explains. If the word that explains is smaller than what is explained, the meaning is narrowed. I don't agree with labeling Islam in a regional sense, such as Minangkabau Islam. There is no term for me such as Minangkabau Islam. Later, there will be the term Javanese Islam and Acehese Islam. There aren't any. Islam is Islam (Gazahar 2021)

The Ministry of Religious Affairs has actually explained the differences in the use of the term moderation in their published literature. One of the most obvious is related to the difference between religious moderation and moderation of religion. In this case, the Ministry of Religious Affairs stated that the two were not the same. In Questions and Answers on Religious Moderation, it is explained that religion has taught the principle of moderation. Therefore, there is no need for religious moderation. The focus of religious moderation is the way religious adherents carry out their religious activities (Kementrian Agama RI 2020) This is not in dispute with the views of the Chairman of the West Sumatra MUI above.

However, the Ministry of Religious Affairs does not distinguish between religious moderation and the term “Islam Wasatiyah” as an equivalent, which, according to Gusrizal, narrows the meaning of Islam earlier. This can be seen in the news reports of the Ministry of Religious

Affairs since the introduction of religious moderation as a concept of thought, the government's priority program, until now. Among these reports related to the Minister of Religion's invitation for preachers to spread religious moderation (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2018); cooperation between Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates in the development of madrasas (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019): a request by the Deputy Minister of Religion at UIN Jakarta to increase the number of studies on religious moderation (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2020); strengthening moderation in tertiary institutions (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2021) and cooperation with the government of Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2022).

Apart from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the term Islam Wasathiyah is also used by the Central MUI when promoting religious moderation. It is also evident in their reports and publications, including the Ten Characters of Wasathiyah Islam (MUI 2021a); promotion in the digital space (MUI 2021b); making da'wah modules (MUI 2022a); and as a solution to deviations from radicalism and liberalism (MUI, 2022b). This certainly puts MUI of West Sumatra in opposition to its parent company in the capital city of Jakarta.

Gusrizal realized this difference. He has also conveyed these thoughts in several MUI meetings (Gazahar 2021). When viewed from an institutional perspective, the MUI's position as a Quango institution allows the West Sumatra MUI to take different steps from its central leadership. In addition, in the MUI's *ijma'* regarding *taswiyatul manhaj*, differences of opinion within the body of the MUI are possible if this is not related to the main or basic issues of religion (MUI, 2006).

It has also happened before with the rejection of Islam Nusantara. The religious moderation that is being watched out for at this time is none other than what was conveyed in the Mukerda of MUI West Sumatra, which is closely related to Islam Nusantara (MUI West Sumatra, 2022).

Therefore, even though the MUI at the central level campaigns for Islam Nusantara, Religious Moderation, and Wasathiyah Islam, the differences of opinion that are allowed in the MUI's *taswiyatul manhaj* allow the public to hear different voices from the West Sumatra MUI.

Each party also uses cyberspace as a means to convey, expand, and popularize their standing. The chairman of the West Sumatra MUI also took advantage of this. On his official YouTube channel, he even published a video lecture with a clear title on religious moderation. For him, religious moderation is not a necessity for Muslims. he said:

The moderations that are taking place today, consciously or unconsciously, will lead step by step to the release of Muslims from their Islamic commitment. Because the moderation that is currently running, in my view, is not the need of the people but a political movement carried out by people who want to be in power, both from an organizational perspective and from a political government perspective (Surau Buya Gusrizal, 2022).

This video is an addition that reinforces their previous standing on religious moderation. What is equally important in this debate is MUI West Sumatra's consistency in conveying and disseminating their views in cyberspace. The attitude that is conveyed openly in cyberspace does not rule out the possibility of getting a response back, as they got when rejecting Islam Nusantara. This is because both are rejected for the same reason. If referring to the response received by MUI of West Sumatera for rejecting the Islam Nusantara discourse, their attitude of suspecting Islamic moderation will also get a similar response. MUI of West Sumatra will be evaluated, confirmed, or considered strange (Detik 2021). However, on the other hand, this standing also invites other responses, such as the need for more attention to explore the concept being criticized and to be careful when practicing religion (Jawapos, 2018).

It demonstrates that cyberspace is still an effective tool for the public. The attitude that MUI West Sumatera performed, along with their

arguments in cyberspace, made it possible to restrain the universalism and totalitarianism of a discourse. It also adds significance to seeing other views outside the dominant discourse of religious moderation, such as the Tegalsari Minutes that distinguish between pesantren-style and western-style religious moderation (Forum Komunikasi Pesantren Muadalah 2021); the Rector of Muhammadiyah University Jakarta's opinion that religious moderation is not the right answer to radicalism and extremism as it has been popular solution now (Al-Barbasy 2022)); and the need for criticism in developing religious moderation in mainstreaming programs (Izad, 2022).

Religious Moderation, Is It Universal Discourse?

After explaining the position of the West Sumatra MUI's standing on religious moderation, their similarities and differences with the views of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and how they use cyber tools to build arguments, another part that needs to be explored is their attitude toward the essence of religious moderation as universal values accepted by the general public.

In the previous section, it was explained that the MUI of West Sumatra actually does not reject the essence and values used in the conception of religious moderation introduced, in particular, by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. On the official website of the West Sumatra MUI, including the General Chair's Youtube channel, you can easily find invitations and sermons that outline the importance of the essential values contained in religious moderation, such as tolerance and love for the motherland.

However, preaching that outlines moderate values is not accommodated as part of universal religious moderation, within the ethical framework of Habermas's discourse, due to the absence of intersubjective agreement between communicants who are in dialogue (Habermas 2004).

In this case, it is an agreement between the West Sumatra MUI in particular and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. So, even though each party has stated their reasons, attitudes, and arguments for rational moderation of religion, the rationality put forward has not ended in a meeting point due to the absence of this ethical feature.

This is suspected for political reasons. In the previous section, the West Sumatra MUI considers religious moderation to be part of a “political movement run by the ruler.” Their political position that is often vis-à-vis the government also hinders the chances of this value agreement. In one lecture, Gusrizal also said the Ministry of Religious Affairs had misguided to use the “knife” of tolerance to allow “heretical” groups to develop in Indonesia (Gazahar 2022).

The political factors that hinder the presence of intersubjective agreement in the ethics of discourse as Habermas points out in this regard confirm the position of the MUI in the character of puritanical moderate Islam, as mentioned earlier. On the other hand, it shows the incomplete influence of religious moderation driven by the Ministry of Religious Affairs on strategic groups in society.

Cyberspace as a means of building arguments has not shown the opportunity to knit an agreement between the two. While it plays a role in demonstrating the rationality of each side’s stance on religious moderation, other aspects needed to establish a rational discursive ethic appear to require other steps beyond cyberspace alone.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding discussion, it is clear that the West Sumatra MUI’s rejection of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs’s mainstreaming of religious moderation is more than a binary difference in the actualization of religious life in Indonesia. Cyberspace, as a venue for criticism, clarifies this point of view as an attempt to disrupt by highlighting

areas of the Ministry of Religious Affairs's religious moderation program that need to be rectified. In a particular aspect, this study demonstrated that criticism is required for religious discourse to evolve rationally. However, this study also necessitates additional research into the extent to which criticism in cyberspace correlates with improved dialogue and broad acceptability in society. With these investigations, it is believed that the major goals of religious discourse growth can be evaluated as a whole.

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