

## THE INSPIRATIONAL FEMALE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN PEACE-BUILDING VIEWED FROM A RELIGIOUS MODERATION PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract.** Females in this era have the same roles and functions as males in peace-building. A survey from Wahid Foundation showed that females are more tolerant of differences and are relatively less likely to use violence against groups than males. Based on theological aspects of gender roles in society, they have the ability to unite differences, lead nonviolent communities, and mobilize peaceful communities. This research is a qualitative descriptive study that focuses on revealing the role of three inspiring female religious leaders in Salatiga, consisting of Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism in building peace viewed from a religious moderation perspective and how they teach tolerance to their followers. Therefore, Krathwohl's Taxonomy is used to analyze the findings. The instruments used in this study were interviews, observation, and documentation. The results showed that the three female religious leaders had been able to influence their followers on 5 levels; *receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and characterization*. Moreover, the three inspirational female religious leaders were able to introduce religious moderation through the internalization of peace values, such as tolerance and inter-religious harmony based on the perspective of their respective beliefs. Some activities they did: (1) inspiring the followers to love the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), unity in diversity (*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*) and religious moderation, (2) teaching the followers to respect differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, and religion, (3) engaging the followers to join in social activities, (4) persuading the followers to care all the human (5) holding sharing and discussion activities between religious communities such as "*sarasehan* and interfaith dialogue such as "live in" activity in *Pondok Pesantren* Edi Mancoro regularly, (7) introducing the culture and tradition from their religions, (6) holding charity activities that involve others religious, (7) inviting the followers of other religions when having universal events.

**Key words:** female, religious leaders, peace-building, religious moderation

## Introduction

Indonesia is a pluralist country which consists of various tribes, religions, and cultures. As a multi-religious state, creating peace in diversity is not an easy thing (Zarbaliyev, 2017; Wani et al., 2015). Recently, religious intolerance in Indonesia is on the rise. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Indonesian has experienced massive conflicts at the hands of inter-religious community (Setio, 2021; Irawan, 2018). Many religious conflicts occur, including conflict in Poso district (1998), conflict in Ambon (1999), conflict in Maluku Island (2000), conflict in Kalimantan Province (2001), and conflict in Bali (2002). One of the large demonstration also took place in Jakarta (2016) led by one of the largest social organizations in Indonesia, Islamic Defenders Front (Indonesian acronym: FPI) which was also triggered by alleged blasphemy. The non-violent and organized demonstration began around noon with a march from Istiqlal Mosque to the Presidential palace. Around 50,000 to 200,000 people participated in this demonstration. Unfortunately, after nightfall, groups of violent demonstrators provoked a riot and clashed with the police. One elderly man died in the riots, and at least 160 demonstrators and 79 police officers were injured in this demonstration. In this situation, strengthening the value of tolerance is a noble concept that will become an organic part of Indonesia (Suradi et al., 2020). One solution to overcome this religious conflict is to reinforce the values of religious moderation.

Meanwhile, Wahid Foundation in 2017 released the survey about the potential for intolerance to unwelcome groups. The data of survey showed that 57.1 percent of the majority of Muslims were intolerant towards the disliked group (Sari et al., 2019). This data increased compared to the survey of intolerance was 51.0 percent in 2016. Normatively, religion always teaches kindness, love and harmony. Unfortunately, right now, religion can be the source of conflict both internal and external (Fox, 2000). Creating inter-religious life in the midst of plurality can be done by understanding each other's religions in social life without questioning their respective religions or creeds (*aqidah*). Mietzner & Muhtadi (2018) explained the causes of conflict between religious communities caused by two things; the weak

ideology of harmony in one or each religious community so that it affects the outlook and attitude towards other religions with a suspicious pattern, accusing, debriding, even getting rid of, secondly, broadcasting religion as a form of provocation and distortion of the teachings of other religions, resulting in a backlash from other provoked religious communities. Therefore, peace-building is very crucial to do to save this nation from conflicts caused by religious differences.

Peace-building is an effort to realize the values, attitudes or behavior, and ways of life that support life peacefully. Moreover, it aims to foster awareness and understanding of the roots of conflict, violence and peace in a personal, interpersonal, community / group, national, regional and international scope (Cuga et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Suparno in his book "Peace Education" stated that peace education refers to the characteristics of peace, which includes: 1) peace is dynamic, 2) peace is a just solution to problems without violence, 3) peace shows the results of a balance in social interaction, so that people live in harmony, 4) peace is friendly (good) for the community, 5) if violence is rampant, peace certainly will not be created, 6) aims to create a balance in the dynamics of social interaction, peace must be grounded in justice and freedom (justice and liberty), 7) if justice is ignored and freedom is paralyzed, then peace will not be created (Suparno in Bustomi et al., 2021). Recognizing religious pluralism that exists in Indonesia, inter-religious harmony is something that must be considered for shaping national unity. It is required the role of all elements in this country to participate.

Furthermore, in an effort to build peace, we need an attitude of tolerance. Chairilisyah (2019) stated that tolerance comes from the Latin language *tolerare* which means to refrain, be patient, let others think differently, be generous, and be considerate towards people of different views, beliefs, and religions. In addition, Hjerm et al., (2020) describe that tolerance is the readiness and inner ability with others who are fundamentally different even though there is a conflict with your understanding of the good and the proper way of life. Tolerance here is not in the field of the Islamic creed, because the creed is clearly outlined in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Tolerance must be shaped and developed in social life in Indonesia. Salatiga got the predicate as the most tolerant city in Indonesia from Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace in 2021. The city of Salatiga is known as the miniature of

Indonesia where the community lives side by side with inter-religious harmony and ethnicity. In order to internalize the values of peace and tolerance in inter-religious communities, it takes the participation of all elements of society. Not only from the government, but religious leaders also have a very important role in peace-building.

Women in this era have the same role and function as men in peace-building. In 2018, the Wahid Foundation supported by UN Women released research on the first gender-sensitive issue to see the threat of radicalism and intolerance among Indonesians. The results of the study show that there is tremendous potential among Indonesian women to promote peace (Susilawati, 2019). When compared to men, women are more tolerant of differences and relatively have no tendency to use violence against groups that are not liked. The survey shows 80.7% of women support the right to freedom of religion and belief, while 80.8% of women do not support radicalism. This percentage is higher than men, only referring to the figure of 76.7%. There are many inspirational figures of women religious leaders who actively participate in efforts to create inter-religious harmony in Indonesia. They have abilities to unite the differences, lead nonviolent community, mobilize peace communities, as well as their engagement with the theological aspects of gender roles in peace. In addition, the role of women religious leader can also be accepted by their community because of their attitude that is able to touch the hearts of their communities and becomes role mode in peace-building.

On the other side, the cultural spectrum of Indonesian society is very diverse and has become a challenge for everyone in order to deal with these differences as into an asset, not a source of conflict. Religious moderation is believed to be one way to prevent the conflict that can happen because of disharmony in society. It can be the alternative in overcome socio-cultural conflict. Then, Arifinsyah et al., (2020) believed that religious moderation is the most appropriate content and practice to prevent radicalism and preserve harmony in Indonesian. Actually, religious moderation is developed by referring to three aspects of moderation, namely being moderate in thinking and understanding, being moderate in behavior, and religious method. Values of moderate attitude that can be developed, namely 1) *Tawassuth*, 2) *Tawazun*, 3) *I'tidal*, 4) *Tasamuh*, 5) *Musawah*, 6) *Syura*, 7) *Ishlah*, 8) *Aulawiyah*, 9) *Tathawwir wa Ibtikar*, 10) *Tahadhdhur* (Ali, 2020).

This research focused on exposing the role of inspirational women religious leader in peace-building viewed from religious moderation perspective, a case study in Salatiga as the most tolerant city in Indonesia. This study involved three women religious leaders, namely *bu Nyai* (Rosyidah), a female monk (Bhikunni Sammodana) and also a female priest (Pdt. Esther Helena Tulung) in an interfaith dialogue that was held in “live in” program at the Edi Mancoro Islamic boarding school (*pondok pesantren*). “Live in” was an activity that was held at *Pondok Pesantren* Edi Mancoro, which was attended by various religious leaders and foreigners. In this program there was an interfaith dialogue activity which mostly discussed tolerance and inter-religious harmony. The purpose of this activity was to enhance national unity and integrity, respect among religious communities and introduce local cultural wisdom in this *pesantren*, and also support Salatiga as the most tolerant city in Indonesia.

There are several previous studies that are used as the references in this research. The research conducted by Mila & Suryatina (2021) on “Women’s Role in Religious Moderate Education (An Overview of Feminism-Theology)”, exposed that women have a crucial role, in society as “agents of change” in education in building religious moderation. Moreover, the research conducted by Huriani et al., (2022) entitled “Women's Issues in the Conception of Religious Moderation Among Female Religious Counselors in Greater Bandung” showed that the religious moderation is a fundamental concept for women to prevent and radicalism in this era since they are easily exposed to radicalism and terrorism. Meanwhile the research also showed that religious moderation in *da'wah* communication by female religious leaders can counter the narratives circulating on social media that related to intolerance, hate speech, gender inequality, and the influence of extreme trans-national ideologies, conservative and misogynistic (Ummah, 2021).

Furthermore, Pajarianto (2022) in his research entitled “Interreligious relation: Position of women in strengthening Christian and Muslim bonds” revealed that the relationship between Muslim and Christian research showed a positive direction with collaboration in various religious, social and customary social activities in maintaining interreligious harmony in Indonesia. Based on the previous research above, some novelty aspects of this research are: (1) there is no research

related to the role of women religious leaders in peace-building from the relationship among Muslim-Hindu-Cristian. This research is not only describes the existing forms of tolerance in society, but also gets the data about the role of women religious leaders in educating their followers to introduce religious moderation and tolerance in practical life, (2) this research strengthen how gender responsive leadership patterns (women religious leaders) has a big role in determine the future of their followers to build communication in peace- building.

From the sociological theory explained that the role of religious leaders is very important in determining the future of the group. Leadership is an attempt to break the relationship in the organization and eradicate conflict between followers in order to create a good cooperation. If the leader in the organization is a best cadre, then the future of the organization can be expected for its success (Nusari et al., 2018; Suong et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the presence of women religious leaders is a reflection of a gender responsive leadership. The women leadership style is more democratic compared to men (Engen & Willemsen, 2009). Therefore, the role of women religious leaders needs to be studied more deeply, whether it is real significant or not in peace-building.

Religious leaders are the important component in society who play a role in realizing religious moderation. Religious moderation can be defined as being confident in the essence of the religious teachings that it embraces, which teaches the principles of justice and balance, but shares the truth as far as religious interpretations are concerned (Mahmud, 2022). It is a value system or policy that respects diversity in a society based on a willingness to accept and respect others based on different ethnic, gender, and religious differences. Religious leaders have a function inherent in themselves as representatives, as contributors, as communicators, as mediators and facilitators, and as integrators. Meanwhile, religious moderation is a process of developing all potential humans who value their plurality and heterogeneity as consequences diversity of culture, ethnicity, and flow (religion). Then, it can be concluded that religious leaders have a very important role in teaching multicultural education to build inter-religious harmony and world peace.

While in conducting the analysis viewed from moderation perspective,

Krathwohl Taxonomy was used in which there was the component of scientific attitude or affective component. There are five levels of the affective domain in Krathwohl Taxonomy namely; (1) Receiving (attending) which describes the stage of being aware of or sensitive to the existence of certain ideas, material, or phenomena and then being willing to tolerate them. The ability is as such: to differentiate, to accept, to listen (for) to respond to, (2) Responding which describes the commitment in some small measure to the ideas, materials, or phenomena involved by actively responding to them such as: to comply with, to follow, to commend, to volunteer, to spend leisure time, to acclaim, (3) Valuing means being willing to be perceived by others as valuing certain ideas, materials, or phenomena. The attitude are : to increase measured proficiency in, to relinquish, to subsidize, to support, to debate, (4) Organization means involve relating the new value to those one already holds and bringing it into a harmonious and internally consistent philosophy. People do it by: to discuss, to theorize, to formulate, to balance, to examine, and (5) Characterization are done by acting consistently in accordance with the values the individual has internalized. He or she would: to revise, to require, to be rated high in the value, to avoid, to resist, to manage, and to resolve (Leslie, 2016).

### **Methodology**

This research was a descriptive qualitative research using a sociological approach which was an approach about the interrelation of religion and society as well as forms of interactions that occurred between them. In addition, this research took the form of a case study that discussed about the efforts of women religious leader in peace-building in Salatiga. This research was field research using objective facts. Data sources in this study included primary data and secondary data. Primary data was data which was obtained by observations during the "live in" activity in *Pondok Pesantren* Edi Mancoro and strengthened by the results of interviews with three women religious leaders in Salatiga. Whereas secondary data was data that was related to the literatures such as books, journal articles, and others.

The data of this study were collected using participant observation techniques that involved researchers directly at the object of the study. The interview was conducted informally together with the participatory observation

method. Literature studies or documentation were used to complement and strengthen the data obtained both from interviews and observations. After the data was collected, the data was tested for validity by using data triangulation techniques. Then, it was edited, sorted and analyzed with an interactive model.

## Result and Discussion

In this study examined three inspirational figures of women religious leaders in Salatiga. The first was *Nyai Rosyidah*. *Nyai* is a term for the *Kyai's* wife or the leader of an Islamic boarding school (*Pondok Pesantren*). *Nyai Rosyidah* was a woman leader in *pondok pesantren* Edi Mancoro. Aside from being a partner from her husband, *Nyai Rosyidah* also had an important role in this *pesantren*, including as a teacher in the *tahfidz* program and also the principal in Edi Mancoro Kindergarten. In the community, *Nyai Rosyidah* was also active in *dakwah* (preaching) activities. Moreover, her views on the issue of preventing radicalism and being tolerance in inter-religious community had inspired her *santri* (students) to behave in the same manner as her. The role of *bu Nyai* in *pesantren* generally was respected because of her position as the wife of *Kyai* (Adisti et al., 2020). In fact, *Nyai Rosyidah* can be a role model of women Muslim leader who inspire through teaching, values, and views. Below was the transcription of the thought and perspective of *Nyai Rosyidah* about inter- religious harmony:

*“A pesantren will bring the ideology to the santri, it is clear. When Kyai has radical understanding or uphold the state of “sharia” then automatically santri without prompted will be carried away. Kyai and bu Nyai have the ability to influence the santri ideology as this is called as the scientific ethics, since santri must be “sami’na wa atho’na” (I listen, then I do). For example, recently, the issue of 212 and sharia NKRI movement appeared, certainly the ideology of Kyai will influence his santri. Pesantren has role in the society to enforce the shariah but still they must also maintain the peace. Supporting pluralism does not mean to equate but it can be interpreted as our ability to live well side by side with non-Muslims. In Edi Mancoro, there is a program called “Live in” where the priest stay in this pesantren for several days. This program also introduces and shows that we love peace and can live side by side with the followers of other religions. This program*



*involves santri to mingle with them, having lectures, doing activities and religious discussions together. The pesantren Edi Mancoro is against radical Islam. I learned from my grandfather, Prof KH. Anwar Musaddad who was one of ulama' that opposed sharia NKRI and the Islamic state. Obligation and sunna must be hold. For instance, we must not denounce the veiling of women because they are firm in the sharia, nor we must criticize the bearded man for that reason. The main point is that we must not impose the Republic state by taking the law of the sharia state. Sharia is not for politics. We do have to enforce sharia lawfully on worship and muamalah but it does not mean that we are not communicating with non-Muslims and even caliphs like Umar bin Khatab cooperated with Jews.” (Nyai Rosyidah at Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro).*

Based on the views and thoughts of Nyai Rosyidah, it showed the firmness of bu Nyai in opposing the understanding of radicalism. She also invited all *santri* and society to be able to live peacefully side by side with non- Muslims. In addition, she also explained the importance of upholding the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) by rejecting the establishment of a sharia-based state.

Meanwhile, the second figure who became an inspiring women religious leaders was female monk, named Bhikunni Sammodana. Aside from being a monk, she was also a lecturer in Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Agama Budha Samratungga. Even in society, she had a role of being an agent of peace by having many interactions with various social organizations in introducing inter- religious harmony. Her tolerant attitude made her often invited to interfaith dialogue in strengthening nationalism especially in Salatiga. Below was the transcription of the thought and perspective of Bhikunni Sammodana about inter-religious harmony.

*In my view, I believe that all religious teachings are good. As I have learned about Islam, that even if there is a war a Muslim will not hurt women and children. But unfortunately there are Muslims who do not have a broad understanding of it. They actually act according to their own will, not from the teachings. From the results of the dialogue we have today it turns out that it is extraordinary. It is very useful especially for me personally because we can get knowledge and get an extraordinary welcome with a very warm and loving. This is what is meant by a life full of harmony where fellow human beings must love one*

*another and live peacefully side by side.” (Bhikunni Sammodana: at Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro)*

From the views of Bhikunni above showed that she respected all religions, especially Islam. She believed that a Muslim who cannot be tolerant to other religions followers means that they do not understand their teachings. Bhikunni also invited the entire community to be able to live peacefully side by side, one of them with doing the interfaith dialogue activities that she did at *Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro*.

Moreover, the third inspirational figure of woman religious leader was a female priest, named Pdt. Esther Helena Tulung. Aside from being a priest, she was also the lecturer at Satya Wacana Christian University (Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana) in Salatiga. In her daily life, she was also a peace activist who had contribution to promote tolerance among religious communities. One of the activity was being active in interfaith discussion with all the elements of society especially in Salatiga. Below was the transcription of the thought and perspective of Pdt. Esther Helena Tulung about inter-religious harmony.

*“When talking about tolerance in Christianity that is very strong message. When Jesus teaches about loving, he does not only teaches about how to love God, but also when loving God means he must love others. A woman's role in promoting radicalism must begin when she becomes a wife or mother. It turned out that in Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro I saw another role from a Nyai. A nyai takes on an extraordinary role and she will be able to convey the values of goodness especially the value of loving one another, of course through her extraordinary heart as a woman. I am very happy when she is able to be an inspiration and motivation for women in Indonesia. And I'm also happy when we can live peacefully side by side.” (Pdt. Esther Helena Tulung: at Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro).*

From the quote above showed that Pdt. Esther Helena Tulung also had the same concept in tolerance that was not only the relationship between humans and God but also the relationship between humans and others. In addition, she also appreciated the role of *bu Nyai* who was considered capable of instilling the value of kindness, especially in teaching love. She also invited all people to live in harmony.

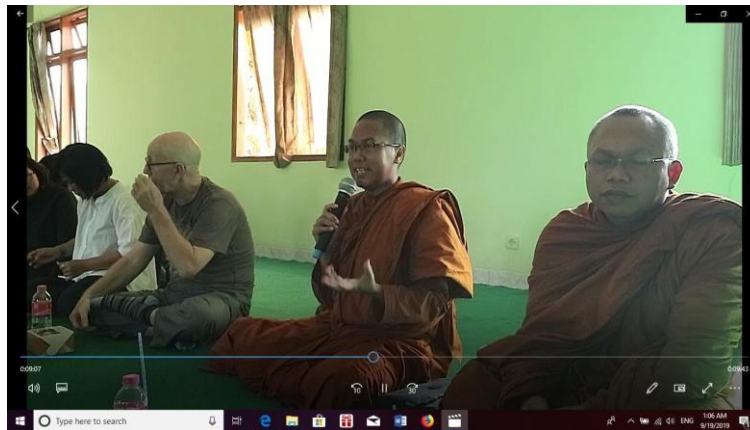
The three women religious leader in this study had the similarities in teachings, that they were agents of change who can be role models in an effort to invite people to live peacefully side by side with tolerance, love human beings, respect each other, and accept a difference as a grace. Furthermore, they also invited people to stay away from radicalism, extremism and narrow fanatics. In interacting during “live in” program, they respected each other's opinions, appreciated the arguments of each religious leader, and showed openness in accepting the views of adherents of other religions. They also equally supported the implementation of Salatiga as a tolerant city in the interfaith dialogue that they did in the “live in” program at *Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro*. They argued that conducting interfaith dialogue in the “live in” program can increase their nationalism and peace-building in the context of unity in diversity. Below were the documentations during “live in” program in *Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro*.



Figure 1. “Live in” program at *Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro*.



Figure 2. *Bu Nyai Rosyidah*



*Figure 3. Bhikunni Sammodana*



*Figure 4. Pdt. Esther Helena Tulung*

In terms of Krathwohl Taxonomy, the three women religious leaders had been able to influence society in 5 levels. In receiving level, they were sensitive to the situation that occurred in Indonesia, especially about many conflicts happen among inter-religious. They also responded to the situation and tried to peace-building through inter-religious harmony. In the level of responding, they were strongly committed to inviting religious adherents to live peacefully side by side by providing examples of good interactions with other religious leaders. In the level of valuing, they expressed their views, opinions and ideas specifically about how to build peace in diversity. In the level of organization, they internalized the new values and belief to the adherents of religion about the importance of increasing nationalism through mutual respect for one another and also considering that all differences as a gift from God. In the level of characterization, the new embedded values had become a strong inherent character in themselves. Thus, those three

women religious leader were able to be categorized as inspirational leaders in peace-building in Salatiga.

In terms of religious moderation perspective, the three women religious leaders have taught religious moderation to their followers through their daily activities. Some activities they did: (1) inspiring the followers to love the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), unity in diversity (*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*) and religious moderation, (2) teaching the followers to respect differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, and religion, (3) engaging the followers to join in social activities, (4) persuading the followers to care all the human (5) holding sharing and discussion activities between religious communities such as “*sarasehan* and interfaith dialogue such as “live in” activity in *Pondok Pesantren* Edi Mancoro regularly, (7) introducing the culture and tradition from their religions, (6) holding charity activities that involve others religious, (7) inviting the followers of other religions when having universal events.

### **Conclusion**

Finally it can be concluded that peace-building is an obligation for all elements of Indonesian society. It is not only concerning the leadership role of men but actually women also have the same role even able to be a good role model for peace-building in Indonesia. This research had shown the role of three inspirational women religious leader who were able to teach religious moderation through internalize the value of peace such as inter-religious harmony and the value of tolerance based on their respective religions, namely Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. Through the values that they had taught give the impact on the attitudes and views of their followers. Therefore, it is time for all societies to imitate the inspirational women religious leader in peace-building and also uphold nationalism.

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