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The Epistemic Discourse of Religious Moderation (*Moderasi Beragama*) in Indonesia

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Abstract

Since its early beginning, the “Religious Moderation” (*Moderasi Beragama*) has been a disputed controversy in the making of its epistemic discourses among parties of religious authorities of Islamic organisations, particularly *Nahdlatul Ulama (N.U.)*, *Muhammadiyah*, and Islamic-based political parties. The issues following controversies are political bias due to the principles of Religious Moderation that are close to the characteristics of *Islam Nusantara* (Archipelagic Islam) of Nahdlatul Ulama, the close ally of the ruling regime. This research discusses the epistemic discourse of Religious Moderation based on the genealogical studies of Michel Foucault. Joko Widodo’s administration constructed “Religious Moderation” as a system of knowledge and political ethics, even a “state ideology” in maintaining a peaceful religious life and articulating Indonesian Islam. This research reveals that “Religious Moderation” epistemically refers to ethical values for Indonesian politics concerning the nature of Indonesian history and its societal identities of diversity (*Kebhinekaan*), ethnicity, religion, languages, and beliefs, including varieties of Indonesian Islam. *Nahdlatul Ulama* and Joko Widodo’s administration share the same interests in maintaining a peaceful religious life and nationalism.

Keywords

religion, moderation, genealogy, epistemology, Islam Nusantara

1 Introduction

In the early stages of his leadership in 2014, Joko Widodo had to handle political Islam, religious extremism, and conservatism. At the same time, Islamic transnational ideologies or political Islam and the emergence of a global terrorist network of Islamic groups have influenced the rise of terror attacks, fear, and tension in Indonesian religious life. Jokowi worked hard to handle these problems in many ways using power in his hand. This article mainly focuses on Jokowi’s ways of dealing with religious life within the complicated world of his reign since his first term of leadership and whether his policy regarding this issue would be a legacy for the next leadership of Indonesia.

It is well considered that negotiations between secular nationalism and Islamic ideas have been going throughout Indonesian history from Dutch occupation, at the making of the national ideas, toward independence, during the reign of the first and second presidents (Sukarno and Suharto) until the coming new era of Reformation (*Reformasi*), which transformed almost the entire aspect of Indonesian political and social life—in the formation of the national ideology and philosophy of the state, Pancasila, the initiators and founders of Indonesia, represented the diverse society of religious, ethnic, tribal, and racial groups, forming a unity, the Indonesian nation. The figures finally agreed to create the 1945 Constitution, which ignored the foundation of the Islamic state. For the founding fathers, Pancasila, which has five principles reflecting the state’s philosophy, is the final result of national character building that reflects the nature of Indonesia, which is a multicultural, multifaith or multireligious, and democratic society. According to Yudi Latif (2019), the founding fathers came to an agreement on the chaotic notion of figures that describe the inner mood of the nation (p. 143-145).

The “Indonesian Reformation” (*Reformasi*) in 1998-1999 encouraged political liberation and a more democratic process, deconstructed state orders, for instance, in the judicial, law, state bodies, and institutions, and changed many parts of the Indonesian constitution. According to Indrayana (2007), these changes reflect significant societal shifts due to increasingly solid demands for politics and freedom of

expression (p. 87-88). Community groups with various sociopolitical and religious views have emerged, including radical and primordial identities. In the age of liberation after the reformation, the negotiation and contest of nationalism, secular ideas, and practices, Islamism took different ways through political arenas, public spheres, and intellectual debates, both online and on the grounds. Clearly, "*reformasi*" discouraged the authoritarian model of the New Order regime ruled by Suharto, who has been a president for more than 30 years. Some terms regarding Islamic ideas and movements such as "Islamism" or political Islam (i.e. promoting formalisation or implementing Islamic law (sharia), Islamic caliphate (*Khilafah Islamiyah*), and Islamic state) were assumed as opponents to the constitution or national ideology (Pancasila), so they can be subversive!.

This article questions why the "Religious Moderation" (R.M.) was promoted as a foundation for political ethics dealing with religious life in Indonesia during Joko Widodo's presidency. What are the roles of The Nahdlatul Ulama (N.U.) as the most prominent Muslim organisation that has been an ally of Joko Widodo's presidency for the two periods?

2 Methods

This research is an epistemological investigation of "Religious Moderation", which is recognised as an Indonesian way of calling harmony on religious pluralism, mainly promoting Indonesian Islam. In 2019, the Ministry of Religious Affairs launched a book titled "Moderasi Beragama" which is inspired by the ideas of scholars and religious authorities, particularly of Nahdlatul Ulama, as they revealed "Islam Nusantara" and proposed it as the foundation of "Religious Moderation." This was the starting point for the formation of the discourse on *Moderasi Beragama*.

Two kinds of genealogy are deployed, namely, the historical (conventional) and power-relation approach and the interpretation of Michel Foucault, which both agree in finding the historical roots of a discourse of knowledge or a historical narrative (Savant & de Felipe, 2014). According to May (1993, p. 53), Foucault stated that knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, and transposition. In addition, Foucault stated that one can also capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates its effects. He demonstrated the administration of knowledge, politics of knowledge, and power relations that pass via expertise and which, if one tries to transcribe them, one must consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region, and territory. According to Foucault, genealogical analysis explains changes in discourse systems by connecting them to changes in the non-discursive practices of social power structures. This research examines the genealogy of Religious Moderation dealing with power relations during Jokowi's administration since he came to power in 2014.

3 Discussion

3.1 Political Landscape and Religious Life in the Reign of Joko Widodo

Indonesia is diverse in racial and ethnic groups, religions, beliefs, and cultures. In this sense, Indonesian nationalism and character building were rarely founded based on a consensus of all figures representing the different groups during the formation of the constitution. As a democratic state, Indonesia should maintain all of these differences and accept the consequences of tensions and conflicts among parties and groups. At the very beginning of his administration, Joko Widodo dealt with two main challenges, namely, the tensions among different groups of interest in particular ethnicities and religions (ethnoreligious). Next are the challenges of the rising groups of political Islam, figures, and religious authorities who tended to oppose his leadership, particularly in the post-*reformasi* era (1997-1998). In his research from the 1990s to 2000, Intan (2006: p. 08-10) described the successive "ethno-religious" riots and tensions that had spread in mainland Java, including inter-community social conflicts, especially the interreligious conflict in the Moluccas islands.

The rise of Islamic revivalists in post-*Reformasi* transformed their movements and attempted to restore Islamic ideas along with the democratic process and freedom of expression. The global Islamic movements, for instance, the Islamic Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al Muslimin*) of Egypt, contributed to the spread of the "*Tarbiyah movement*" in the 1990s in Indonesia and inspired the formation of transnational organizations,

like Hizbut Tahrir/Indonesia, which promoted "*Khilafah Islamiyah*" and some other radical groups. On the other hand, according to Bruinessen (2013, p.14), the roots of most of the radical Muslim groups in Indonesia are relatively "indigenous" political movements that date back to the 1940's-the *Darul Islam* movement and the Masjumi Party-and to some more recent transnational Islamic networks. He identified the conservative turn of Indonesian Islam as he found many conservative ideas confronting the progressive Islam or "liberal Islam" in many fields regarded by religious authorities like Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), prominent religious figures, and political leaders of Islamic-based parties.

Meanwhile, the global resurgence of extremism and the spread of *jihadist* ideology and movements to fight Western interests have inspired Islamist groups in Indonesia. Later on, the propagation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attracted many radicalised Indonesians to join and even participate in movements, links, and terror attacks. The most extraordinary terror attack was the Bali bombing on 12 October 2002 which caused more than 200 deaths and injured more than 200 people, followed by several attacks in some cities. The actors in the Bali bombing were recognised as members of a group named *Jema'ah Islamiyah* (J.I.) that had a link to al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia. The series of attacks and violence challenge political stability and even national ideology, where many hardliners or radical Islamist groups have received more attention in the public arena. The last terror attack by ISIS-inspired *jihadists* was in a police station in Bandung, West Java, on November 7th, 2022, killing the terrorist suspect and causing some people injured. The national police arrested at least 25 people against the attack.

The national police and security officer identified some Islamist radical groups linked to the ISIS network, namely *Jama'ah Ansharu Tauhid*, *Jema'ah Ansharu Daulat*, *Jema'ah Islamiyah*, and individuals who were inspired or self-radicalised (lone wolf) and committed attacks. The Indonesian government has been working hard to address the rise of religious violence, extremism, and terrorism in many ways. Some new laws and regulations have been implemented since 2002 to eradicate it; for instance, the Anti-terrorism Law signed by President Megawati. The government reviewed and revised many times as terror attacks escalated over the last two decades. The latest revision was signed in 2018 by President Joko Widodo, which made the government, through the national police, special forces squad of anti-terror measures, and other national bodies, have more power for law enforcement regarding terrorist suspects. In addition, some national bodies or institutions, for instance, the National Counter-terrorism Agency and Pancasila Ideology Development Agency, are made to counter terrorism and to maintain the spirit of nationalism, as well as the program named "de-radicalization" to reduce Islamic radicalised people and reinforce the sense of nationalism and ideology among them, particularly those who have been arrested due to their engagement in terror attacks and terrorist groups and their affiliations.

3.2 Discourse Formation

3.2.1 Knowledge and Power in Islamic Discourse

It is a grand narrative in Islamic history that after the death of the holy messenger Muhammad SAW., the early Muslim community split into Sunni and Shia. They have different paths for reconstructing leadership, power, and knowledge. In this regard, religious authority played a central role in sustaining a community and was one of the pillars that kept the community surviving, especially for a religious community. According to Kasimov (2014, p. 112-113), no religious community can exist without religious authority that determines the principles of organisation and ensures the adaptation of religious systems to changing historical circumstances.

The Prophet Muhammad received revelation, which ultimately constituted the only source of religious authority. It is the Quran that any claim on religious authority must prove its link to this revelation. The secondary one is *al-Hadith* (the tradition), which contains accounts of the words and deeds of the Prophet, gradually edited in canonical compilations. In the following periods, religious knowledge was raised and constructed by the heirs of the Prophet, religious scholars committed to mastering Islamic teaching, and jurists (*faqih* pl. *fuqahā*).

The Shia refers to Ali ibn Abu Talib, the husband of the Prophet's lovely daughter, Fatimah Az Zahra. Shia, which means followers of Ali, regarded Ali as a true successor of Muhammad, had notable roles in maintaining Muhammad's teaching, as the door and light of revealed knowledge, and inherited the revelation and miracles of prophecy. Shia found the Quranic verses that proved the prophetic qualities and insistent bloodline for being a leader (Moezzi, 2011, p. 74). Therefore, for Shia, Ali is a leader of the community and spirituality, as well as representing the attributes of the prophecy who holds the sacred authority of the Prophet for the sake of God. These attributes are genealogical through Ali, named *Ahl al*

bait, transmitted in the belief of the messianic term of Imam Mahdi (*Mahdavy* theology). In the late modern Shia in Iran, the *Imamat* was represented by the power of jurists who acted as deputy of the last imam in the belief of Twelver's Imam (*Itsna'ashar*). Ayatollah Imam Khomeini (1902-1989), the leader of the Islamic revolution in 1979, invented the Islamic government (*Hukumate-Islami*) and deployed it to replace the Persian monarch tradition. Khomeini has given a series of lectures based on teachings and the foundation of Islamic governance, adjusting the power of jurists (*Velayate faqih*) to implement the mission of prophets to execute laws and God's ordinances.

Differing from Shia's path in leadership, attaining power and knowledge, Sunni Islam (*Ahlu Sunnah*) did not admit Ali bin Abi Thalib as the immediate successor of the Prophet or as the center of spiritual knowledge and power. Instead, soon after Muhammad SAW died, his closest companions, namely Abu Bakar, Umar ibn Khattab, and Usman ibn Affan, discussed finding the most proper of them who could be Muhammad's successor. This consensus resulted in Abu Bakar being given authority as the first successor, signifying the beginning of the caliphate tradition. Umar ibn Khattab, Usman ibn Affan, and Ali ibn Abi Thalib were the successive *caliphs* whom the Sunni tradition called the guided chalipaths (*Khulafaa ar Rasyidin*). Sunnis trusted that religious authority was in the hands of trusted people who inherited the teachings of the Prophet, transmitted their teachings, and acquired them as religious scholars or *ulama*. At the same time, political power or leaders remained at the caliphs (Crone et al., 2003, p.56). Sunni separated the religious or spiritual leader from the political power and ruler.

On many issues, Shia and Sunni share similar paths in attaining knowledge, religious authority, and power. Mysticism is one of the common grounds where religious authority and knowledge contribute to power construction, even though the sources are still different. As mentioned, Shia refers to the path and must, genealogically, have a link with Ali and his descendants (*Ahl al bait*), particularly the twelve Imam, Imam Mahdi. Similarly, with different links, Sunni respected the genealogical links or bloodlines that ultimately led to the Prophet Muhammad (p. 67). In Indonesia in particular, Arab descendants, whom Muslims believed to be *habibs* (the loved of Prophet descendants), are respected and have a unique position dealing with religious knowledge and spiritual power. Both Sunni and Shia respected individuals who had nobility and prophetic qualities; *the Sufis*, who lived in mystical ways, were sincere and recognised for their knowledge of religious sciences. This mysticism could be the common ground on which the Sunni-Shia shared knowledge and experiences.

The development of classical philosophical theology (*kalam*) was also closely related to the post-death of Muhammad SAW. Montgomery (1985, p.2-3) explained that theological thought in early Islam became political in certain disputes that took place among the supporters of Ali ibn Abi Thalib, particularly in times of conflict with Mu'awiyah after the death of the third caliph, Usman ibn Affan. He stated that the epistemic discourses of Islamic classical thought relate to some topics, namely, the attributes of God, the roles of reason and revelation, free will, and predestination (*ikhtiyar wa-qadha-qadhar*), including the construction of religious authorities and leadership. On this basis, beyond the Sunni-Shia split, many more sects, paths of thought (*madzahib*), and modes of religious or scriptural interpretation emerged, in line with the development and modernity of Islamic societies. The classical thoughts that emerged were *Khawarijism*, *Mutazilism*, and *Mariah*, and later on, also implied the development of Islamic thoughts and philosophy. In the third century, after Hijrah (9th century C.E.), *Mu'tazilism* became an official theology of the state. Due to this status, *Mu'tazilism* triggered the enmity of many prominent scholars of theology and jurisprudence (Thuhaymeen, 2013, p. xviii). Abu al Hasan Ali al 'Ash'ari (AH 260/873 CE-AH 324/935 CE) founded the Ash'ari school of theology in the 5th century after hijrah as a reaction against Mu'tazilism, defending *Sunni* theology. The powerful vizier Nizam al Mulk (AH 408/1017 CE-AH 485/1092 CE), whom the Seljuk sultan appointed, subscribed to the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence and the *Ash'ari* school of jurisprudence. He was widely considered the principal defender of Sunni Islam against the propaganda and activism of various Shi'a groups, such as the Fatimid Chalips of Egypt and the Isma'ili militants.

3.2.2 Contesting Discourses

Along with the rise of Religious Moderation in contemporary Islamic discourse in the reign of Joko Widodo, the following discourses are close parts of it, namely political Islam or Islamism, religious radicalism, *Islam Nusantara*, and *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressing Islam). Suaedy (2022) described Religious Moderation as a public discourse before being successfully driven to the political program of the ruling government. KH Lukman Hakim Saefuddin, the minister of religious affairs (2014-2019), advocated the concept of Religious Moderation in Joko Widodo's administration.

3.2.2.1 Political Islam

This term is one of the classical disputes in Islam regarding whether Islam is merely a spiritual guide or inherently political due to the details of Islamic teaching that regard the entire human life, including the creation of society and state, a comprehensive ideological system. Calvert (2004) described political Islam as an ideological movement that ultimately establishes an Islamic state, implementing the Islamic laws (sharia), the divine law for Islamic society. He identified Muslim scholars of medieval Islam up to the modern era, particularly in postcolonial Islamic societies, who contributed to the fundamental theories on Islam as an ideology (p. 85).

Calvert referred to Ali Abd al-Raziq (1888-1966), who said, "*I do not believe that the Islamic law is merely spiritual; Islam is a legislative religion. The application of Islamic law is obligatory for Muslims*". Similarly, Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) and Abu al-a'La Mawdudi (d.1973) both pointed out that Islam, *by its very nature, is a political religion*. Earlier explanations, such as ibn Kathir (d.774/1383), in his commentaries upon Qur'anic verse 4:59, points out "*the sovereign is Allah, He alone is the legislator*," al Jassas (d.370/9987) refers to the Qur'anic verse; 4:65, states that the role of *shari'ah* is firmly bound with the Islamic creed and there is no Islam without the role of sharia. Al Nawawi, *Shaikh al Azhar* (1896-1900), says, "*Yes, Islam is a state and possesses a clear political theory; Muslims must know that sovereignty belongs to none but Allah. His shari'ah is the constitution of the Islamic polity since the Prophet's time*".

In the Indonesian context, Formichi (2012, p. 15) explored political Islam genealogically in the postcolonial era when a political group declared the Islamic State of Indonesian (*Negara Islam Indonesia/NII*), *Darul Islam*-Islamic, Indonesian Military (DI-TII) led by Kartosuwiryo (1948-1962). The idea of NII was then revived and expressed in the *Reformasi* era of 1998, along with the fall of authoritarian Suharto, where progressive Islam, liberal, moderate, and radical-conservative, became more prominent. Bruinessen (2013: 3-6) summarizes the evolution of contemporary Islamic thought as reflecting a 'conservative turn' in which not only progressive liberal thought but other moderate voices in mainstream Islamic organizations have been disempowered.

3.2.2.2 Radicalism

Radicalism came to account in Islamic countries in response to the West's reading on Islam and Islamic societies. Roy (2004, p. 46) stated that Muslim reactions to the "Orientalist" discourse are often stereotypical and can be sorted into three categories: (1) the nostalgia argument ("*it was Islam that brought civilization to the West*"); (2) rejection of the hypothesis ("*in what way are Western values superior?*"), combined with a denunciation of Western doubletalk, which applies its strict requirements only to others, and (3) the apologia for Islam ("*everything is in the Quran and the Sunna, and Islam is the best religion*"). The first two are defensive: they evade the question while accepting that modernity produces its values.

Esposito, John L. and John O Voll (2001) found that broader indigenous factors encouraged the growth of Islamic revivalism or influence. Among the more important were dissatisfaction with Western secular solutions to social and political problems, a rejection of what were seen to be undesirable aspects of modern Western value systems, a greater sense of pride and identity among Muslims fostered by the Islamic world's greater prominence in global economic and political affairs; and the expansion of efforts by foreign Muslim governments and groups to spread the faith.

In the Indonesian context, the following arguments clarified the emergence of religious radicalism, as Bouchier's (2003) explanation that 'Radicalism' is the intention among some, but certainly not all, of the contributors to reclaim the radical nationalist, populist, and socialist traditions of pre-New Order Indonesia. It also refers to a propensity to argue for alternatives requiring considerable unravelling and overhaul of Indonesian (if not global) social, political, and economic structures. Radical political actors often vociferously criticised capitalist development and the democratisation of life in all spheres. Similarly, Azra (2003) summarised the rise of political Islam in post-Soviet Indonesia, which can be observed in several tendencies. First, the number of Islamic parties that wanted to replace Pancasila with Islam as the sole ideological basis of their organisations was increasing. Second, the rising demands from certain Muslim groups for the official adoption and implementation of *shari'a* (Islamic law) particularly calls for reintroducing the so-called "Jakarta Charter" into the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution. Lastly, the proliferation of radical Muslim groups such as the *Lasykar Jihad*, *Front Pembela Islam* or Islamic Defender Front, *Hizb al-Tahrir*, and the *Angkatan Mujahidin Indonesia* (Jihad Fighters' Group of Indonesia) has also been observed (Azra, 2003, p. 42).

In a broader context, Islamic radicalism is rooted in a teaching of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), "*Ma'aalim fi al Tariq*" (milestones), where he explained that Islamic teaching against a Western-dominated world order which caused the spiritual decline and decadence (Calvert, 2004: p. 62). He further explains the culture of materialism and selfish individualism, which are the features of Western secular societies that have been destroying the Muslim world order. He then raised the spirit of true Muslims, who will fight to challenge this global decadence, restoring the complete God's sovereignty in every aspect of life. The teaching of Sayyid Qutb inspired the Islamic movement globally, particularly in the construction of the ideology of radical Islam (jihadism).

3.2.2.3. *Islam Nusantara (IN)*-(Archipelagical Islam)

The discourse regarding *IN* emerged and sparked controversies in contemporary Islamic studies since it came into account at the 33rd conference of the *Nahdlatul Ulama (N.U.)* in Jombang 2015, East Java. The theme of the 33rd Congress is "*Affirming Archipelagical Islam (Islam Nusantara) for the World and Indonesian Civilization*", as a narrative that reacts to and emphasises the rejection of the extreme Islamic views of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syariah (ISIS) network group. The dispute over this term dealt with the theological, objective, and scientific origin and enquiries among intellectuals and scholars working in Indonesian Islamic studies. Several works related to this term and its disputes include (Kamil, 2022), which summarises textual, contextual, and modern dimensions. Nugroho (2022), Noorhaidi (2020), Hasyim (2018), Romli (2016), and many other scholars traced the historical and genealogical studies and made efforts to compile and assemble the epistemological roots. In general, the so-called *IN* refers to the identity formation of the historical narrative of Indonesian Islam with the following characteristics: namely, the acceptance of the local culture, mystical (Sufi) practices, and mainly regarded *Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah* as the core creed, orthodoxies, and jurisprudence.

Azra's (1994, 2004) work mainly traced the network of Islamic scholars in the 17th and 18th centuries in Mecca and Medina (*Haramayn*), which inspired the style of Islam in the Archipelago. This work is one of the primary references and the genealogical basis of Islamic ideas attached to the Archipelago, including some Southeast Asian nations, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore. Abdurrahman Wahid's idea of localizing Islam is also another primary reference for constructing *Islam Nusantara*.

Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) is well-considered for his authoritative intellectual and genealogical aspects, as he has the bloodline of the founder of *N.U.*, K.H. Wachid Hasyim. He represented traditional figures and thinkers, but at the same time, modern ones who accommodated contemporary thoughts and ideas such as pluralism, liberalism, and nationalism well. He is also well known as a social and political activist who ultimately reached the top of his political career as a leader and the fourth president of Indonesia (1999-2001). Syahid (2019) claimed that *IN* is genealogically rooted in the practices (*aliyah*) of *N.U.*, theology, and political and psychological views. Syahid identified *IN* as the political action of *N.U.*'s structural elite in safeguarding the interests of the "*Nahdliyyin*" and national ideology (p. 47).

3.2.2.4. Progressing Islam

Islam Nusantara (IN) resulted from discussions on issues (Bahtsul masa'il) among *N.U.*'s thinkers, then offered to the realm of power discourse and sparked much criticism. The emerged critics could be described in several categories based on their origins. The first criticism is based on academic or theoretical raised within the *N.U.* itself, kyai, intellectuals, Islamic boarding school students, and outside the *N.U.* Second, critics from the counterpart organisation, Muhammadiyah, offered and promoted modernist thoughts, declaring the concept of "Progressing Islam" (*Islam Berkemajuan*) to represent Indonesian Islam (Amirrahman, 2015, p. 36). In many aspects, Muhammadiyah differs from *N.U.* in articulating Indonesian Islam, for instance, dealing with local traditions, educational and social services, and relationships with the state.

3.3 Religious Moderation, Knowledge, and Power

In almost all modern Islamic countries and nations with the majority of the population being Muslim, there would always be issues on the state-religion (Islam) relationship as groups were trying to transform Islamic norms, values, and even theological references into the state policies. Nasr (2003, p. 78) identified these

movements as Islamization, which struggled and even forced their ideology on ruling regimes and other hapless social actors. Their ideological and political directions guided the Islamists to challenge the ruling regimes. In Indonesia, as mentioned earlier in this paper, the Islamist movement and the secular nationalists have been negotiating since the early formation of the state's foundations.

Religious Moderation is not a new term in Islamic theological discourse, but it has also been revived in modern times when Islam intertwines with modern life, particularly modern politics. The proponents of moderate principles in Islam referred to Quranic sources, particularly the Q.S. 2; 143, "Thus, we have made of you a community just balance" (وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا). Kamali (2015, p. 13) interpreted that everything within the Islamic tradition is actually based on moderation. He connected to the works of Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani, using different fundamental concepts, namely wisdom (*al-hikmah*), purity (*al'iffah*), courage (*as shari'ah*), and justice (*al'adl*). The principles of moderation are the result of the School of *Maqasid* (the higher objectives of Islam), reflecting the entire message of *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law). Based on this reason, Kamali concludes that moderation includes the rejection of extremism and extremist interpretations of scriptures.

Indonesian scholars who proposed the notion of Moderation in conceptualising the "*Moderasi Beragama*" (Religious Moderation) referred to the sources and Kamali's views. In the book "*Moderasi Beragama*" (M.B.), published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019), the principles of M.B. rely on Kamali's work with some additional principles relating to the local and Indonesian cultural politics of religious pluralism. Theologically speaking, M.B. in this book is not specifically Islamic but includes all recognised religions in Indonesia, namely Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity/Catholicism, and Confucianism. However, some norms regarded the principles of *Islam Nusantara* declared by the N.U. and represented the *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah's* (*Aswaja*) orthodoxy, another call for Sunni. In the work of al-Ghazali, one of the *Ahl Sunna's* (Sunni) theological defenders, Yaqub, Aladdin M. (2013; p.15) claimed that Sunni aims at Moderation in the belief that lies between two extremes: excess and deficiency in relying on reason. He says that moderation should balance in reasoning relying on the scripture. In the Middle East, Muasher and Marwan (2008) described that Religious Moderation meant a political point of view regarding the conflict between Arab countries and Israel, seeking peace or peace position-two-state solutions (p. 75).

In 2019, at the end of the first period of Joko Widodo's administration, the Minister of Religious Affairs, KH Lukman H. Saifuddin, proposed the "M.B." concept in the National Medium Term of Development Plan 2020-2024, he acknowledged as part of a strategy to develop one of the Jokowi's national leadership visions, the Mental Revolution (*Revolusi Mental*). In short, this policy was intended to become an ethical and political foundation for Indonesian religious life, which is diverse in terms of expression, sects, beliefs, and modes of spirituality. To achieve this goal, Jokowi emphasised that Religious Moderation should be implemented as guidance and a state policy through the Ministry. The research centre in the Ministry developed a set of principles and programs into a road map, which was disseminated and propagated to the wider level of society.

One of the main principles of the road map is the state-religion relation, where the state is the shared house belonging to all groups, regardless of the background of religion or belief. In this sense, religion and the state coexist and share mutual support. The state does not force the religious law as the law's state; religion is a political force for the sake of the common good, and the state allows and guarantees free expression of belief in public life as long as it fits the law. In this notion, *Moderasi Beragama* is defined as "Religious viewpoints, attitudes, and practices living together in harmony, embodying the essence of religious teachings that protect human dignity, and build public benefits based on the principles of fairness, balance, and compliance with the constitution as a national consensus."

3.3.1 Ideology and the Ethical Foundation

Recently, on December 1st-3rd, 2023, the N.U. The Congress of Thought (Muktamar Pemikiran) was organised and attended by prominent figures from N.U. scholars, Kyai (leaders of Islamic boarding schools), and Santri (religious students). The central theme of the Congress was "Imagining the Future Society," which concerned the recent issues related to the Indonesian general election 2024. The tension is rising due to the political contests between candidates and their supporters in the public arena, online media, and at the grassroots level. The Congress recommended several ethical points, suggesting that candidates, particularly presidential candidates and politicians, should put public goods and national interests first before merely winning the election. The eleven points of the Congress stressed that the creation of a future society should be referred to as an open society that reflects the norms of the "best-chosen society" (*khair al ummah*) of Islamic teaching (NUOnline, 2023).

Religious scholars (*ulama*) are authorities to whom people refer to attain religious and spiritual guidance, knowledge, or directions, including in political interest or public policies to be issued by the

rulers. The political ethics of ancient Islamic kingdoms can be found in the ethical narratives of the wise kings and sultans who were supported and assisted by wise men (religious scholars) who gave them directions and advice. Suaedy (2023, p.4) also refers to the kings-ulama relation in precolonial Indonesia (Nusantara kingdoms). When Islam was regarded as the official religion, the kings had advisers from religious or spiritual leaders. In modern Indonesia, the term Nusantara is acknowledged as ideologically representing the "diverse Indonesia" and a fundamental norm of the state's philosophy.

After introducing Islam Nusantara (IN), which inspired the birth of "Religious Moderation" as a state policy, NU. has been strengthening the knowledge construction of this term. Nahdlatul Ulama, through its affiliate universities, institutions, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), intellectual forums, and so on, is struggling to make Islam Nusantara an Islamic paradigm representing Indonesian Islam. To some extent, it has attempted to mainstream and colour the Indonesian public arena and even the larger area of the global Islamic world as state diplomacy for promoting religious harmony. Some NU. Scholars criticised the ideologization of IN as the state policy over Jokowi's administration and condemned it for the political and power-sharing of NU. elite interests and the government. However, to some others, it is thought to be dynamic within the N.U. Moreover, it will always be part of the N.U.'s tradition.

4. Conclusions

A state's policy is intended to respond to many aspects of national issues, which ultimately means pursuing people's sovereignty, security, and peaceful life while maintaining the power of the ruling regime. Religious Moderation as the paradigm and state's policy came into account during Joko Widodo's reign. It was constructed based on the power relations of the ruling regime with other parts, namely religious authorities, the mass organisation as supporters and pressure groups, and intellectuals or scholars, particularly *Nahdlatul Ulama* (N.U.), the largest organisation of Indonesian Muslims. In this notion, religious moderation leads people to deal with religious pluralism, sustaining nationalism and harmony, and maintaining Indonesian diversity and social identity. Moderating meant a pathway for all religious or belief adherents in Indonesia to respectfully deal with diversity and national interests. The construction of Religious Moderation showed the intellectual discourse, particularly on Indonesian Islamic discourse, which continues the genealogical study of power-knowledge relations in Indonesia.

Indeed, this study requires further research, mainly because the reign of Joko Widodo is still ongoing and should be monitored until the end of his power in October 2024. One of the main questions to be reflected later, beyond 2024, is whether "Religious Moderation" would be regarded as the next government's mainstream policy and political views. At the time of finalising this article, Indonesia is preparing and welcoming the general election of 2024, which will be challenging for building a better Indonesia in the following decades. The Religious Moderation was designed and issued by the administration of Joko Widodo as part of his goals of a "mental revolution" in "*Nawacita*," which would end with his period of leadership.

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