

## STRENGTHENING THE PRINCIPLES OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION TO SUPPRESS RELIGIOUS CONSERVATISM WITH A MULTICULTURALISM APPROACH

<sup>\*1</sup>Syamsul Arifin, <sup>2</sup>Mufiqur Rahman, <sup>3</sup>Ahmad Burhanuddin Haris, <sup>4</sup>Helmi Fuad

<sup>\*1</sup>UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, <sup>2,3,4</sup>IAI Al-Khairat Pamekasan

Email: <sup>\*1,2,3,4</sup>maufiqurrahmansurahman@gmail.com

### Abstract

This research tries to provide an offer in suppressing the issue of religious conservatism through an educational approach. This study uses library research by prioritizing the results of research on religious groups and religious conservatism. The results of this study state that Banks' thinking about multiculturalism can be a principle in strengthening the principles of religious moderation, especially in practical steps of education and learning, how an Islamic educational institution can integrate the principles of religious moderation in a learning curriculum construction in a second educational institution how to build a knowledge process and ensure justice and equality and reduce negative stigma in the life of the nation. The multicultural education approach is very important to be applied in an educational institution, including pesantren, so that this multiculturalism approach can also be carried out in the world of pesantren.

**Keywords:** religious moderation, conservatism, multiculturalism

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini mencoba memberikan sebuah tawaran dalam menekan isu konservatisme beragama melalui sebuah pendekatan pendidikan. Penelitian ini menggunakan library research dengan mengedepankan hasil penelitian tentang kelompok beragama dan konservatisme beragama. Hasil penelitian ini menyatakan bahwa pemikiran Banks tentang multikulturalisme dapat menjadi prinsip dalam penguatan prinsip moderasi beragama terutama dalam langkah praktis pendidikan dan pembelajaran, bagaimana sebuah lembaga pendidikan Islam dapat melakukan integrasi prinsip moderasi beragama dalam sebuah konstruksi kurikulum pembelajaran di sebuah lembaga pendidikan yang kedua bagaimana membangun proses pengetahuan dan memastikan keadilan dan kesetaraan serta mengurangi stigma negatif dalam kehidupan bangsa. Pendekatan pendidikan multikultural tersebut menjadi sangat penting diterapkan dalam sebuah lembaga pendidikan termasuk juga pesantren, sehingga pendekatan multikulturalisme ini juga dapat dilakukan dalam dunia pesantren.*

**Kata Kunci:** moderasi beragama, konservatisme, multikulturalisme

## INTRODUCTION

Islam in Madura has always been a unique phenomenon in the religious map of Indonesia. Madura is often considered one of the strongest bases of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), both culturally and structurally. This is reflected in the number of pesantren that were born and developed with typical NU scientific traditions rooted in the yellow book, the practice of

tahlilan, maulidan, and grave pilgrimage. However, the claim that Madura is an “NU island” does not fully guarantee the homogeneity of the ideology and religious orientation of its people. The socio-religious reality in Madura shows a significant polarization, especially with the emergence of conservative Islamic groups that in many ways reject and even oppose the Islam Nusantara paradigm carried by NU. Rohman, (2021) asserts that the phenomenon he calls conservatism return in Madura marks the return of a conservative religious mindset among people who previously tended to internalize Wasathiyah Islam. According to Rahman, the main factor of this phenomenon is the kyai effect, which is the dominant influence of kyai on people's religious orientation. In Madurese tradition, kyais are not only religious figures, but also social and even political leaders. The kyais' views, attitudes, and directives often provide moral legitimacy for the community to act. This explains why changes in religious orientation in Madura cannot be separated from the authority of the kyai.

The kyai effect is getting stronger when some kyais choose to be outside the structural NU policy line. After the declaration of Islam Nusantara in the 33rd NU Congress in Jombang in 2015, some kyai in Madura showed a rejection attitude. They considered the concept of Islam Nusantara to be too compromising towards local culture and did not emphasize the purification aspect of Islamic teachings. From here, groups such as the Madurese Ulema Alliance (AUMA) and the Madurese Young Kyai Forum (FKM) emerged as a forum for resistance to NU. Interestingly, this group does not stand alone, but has an ideological relationship with the former FPI movement. This can be seen from the affiliation of some Madurese pesantren figures with ex-FPI da'wah, which is oriented towards religious purification.

Aini, (2024) reveals that the tension between NU and AUMA in Pamekasan has even led to violent incidents, such as the burning of tourist attractions and the siege of officials' houses. This phenomenon marks that resistance is no longer just an ideological discourse, but is also realized in social actions that threaten public order. The resistance can be read through the ideological conversion theory proposed by Huda, (2018), which highlights the transition of some Muhammadiyah cadres to the FPI movement. According to Huda, ideological conversion occurs due to the infiltration of thought triggered by disappointment with Muhammadiyah elites. In the case of Madura, a similar thing happened to people who were disappointed with the structural NU elite, thus opening up space for the entry of conservative ideology.

Furthermore, historiographic research conducted by Juniarti & H. Abubakar, (2021) mentioned that Muhammadiyah and Wahabi have similarities in the purification movement. This strengthens the argument that the infiltration of Wahabiism in Madura finds fertile ground, especially among non-NU-affiliated pesantren. The case in Pamekasan in 2023, when a Muhammadiyah preacher called the celebration of the Prophet's Maulid an innovation, became clear evidence of how Wahabiism caused controversy. The mass demonstrations that followed the statement revealed a sharp polarization between traditionalists who defended NU's distinctive practices and

conservatives who rejected local religious traditions. This phenomenon shows the importance of viewing pesantren as entities that are not monolithic. Many pesantren in Madura are affiliated with NU, but there are also non-affiliated pesantren under Muhammadiyah, Hidayatullah, PKS, and even Wahabi. These pesantrens do not necessarily accept the concept of religious moderation mainstreamed by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. In some cases, they even become important actors in spreading conservatism.

Research reports by Zamzami, (2017) reinforce this finding by showing that in Pamekasan, the number of religious groups is far greater than in other districts in Madura. These groups are not only present as da'wah organizations, but also establish educational institutions, including pesantren, which play a significant role in internalizing religious ideology. This explains why the current of conservatism in Madura is relatively stronger than in other regions. In the context of strengthening religious moderation, the concept of mainstreaming introduced by Alfazri, (2021) becomes very relevant. Mainstreaming is defined as the process of conveying, socializing, implementing, and grounding an idea in everyday life. When associated with religious moderation, mainstreaming means making the values of Wasathiyah Islam a principle that is mainstreamed in pesantren education. Pesantren not only teaches religious knowledge, but also becomes an agent of communication of national values, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture.

The four indicators of religious moderation formulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia need to be the main footing in seeing how non-NU-affiliated pesantren in Madura respond to the issue of moderation. First, national commitment. This is related to the willingness of pesantren to instill the values of nationalism and Pancasila in religious education. Second, tolerance, which is reflected in the attitude of respecting both intra- and inter-religious differences. Third, anti-violence, which is the rejection of radical acts or terrorism in the name of religion. Fourth, accommodation of local traditions, namely the recognition of cultural practices that do not conflict with Islamic principles. In practice, the commitment to nationality in non-NU-affiliated pesantren is often a problematic point. Wahabi pesantren, for example, tend to reject national symbols such as the flag ceremony because it is considered a practice that has no basis in Islam. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah pesantren are relatively more accommodating to national values, although they remain critical of local traditions such as tahlilan or Maulid Nabi celebrations. Hidayatullah and PKS pesantrens are in an in-between position, where they recognize the importance of nationality but often carry an exclusive Islamic political agenda.

Indicators of tolerance also face challenges in non-NU-affiliated pesantren. Rejection of local religious traditions is often seen as a form of intra-religious intolerance. In contrast, NU pesantren tend to be more inclusive by accommodating local traditions as part of cultural da'wah. The case of the heresy statement on the Prophet's Maulid in Pamekasan shows that intra-religious intolerance can trigger horizontal conflict. In the anti-violence

aspect, some non-NU-affiliated pesantren still show ambiguity. Although they formally reject terrorism, in practice, they often give legitimacy to mass actions carried out in the name of religion. This is different from NU pesantren, which firmly rejects all forms of violence. Accommodation of local culture is an indicator that is most difficult to accept by non-NU-affiliated pesantren, especially those affiliated with Wahabi. Puritan views reject all forms of local cultural practices that are considered heresy. Meanwhile, NU pesantrens actually make local culture an effective medium for da'wah. This difference further widens the polarization gap between NU and non-NU pesantren in Madura.

Seeing this complexity, a study on the mainstreaming of religious moderation in non-NU-affiliated pesantren is very urgent. This study is not only important to understand the internal dynamics of pesantren, but also to make a practical contribution to the formulation of policies to strengthen religious moderation. Without the involvement of non-affiliated NU pesantrens, efforts to mainstream religious moderation in Madura will be difficult to succeed. This research departs from the assumption that non-NU-affiliated pesantren have a strategic role in determining the direction of religious conservatism and moderation in Madura. By using a mainstreaming approach, this research seeks to see the extent to which the principles of national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture are implemented in non-NU-affiliated pesantren. More than that, this study aims to formulate a mainstreaming implementation model that is in accordance with the characteristics of pesantren in Madura, so that pesantren can transform into effective agents of religious moderation. Thus, this study is not only academic but also practical. Academically, this study enriches the literature on the relationship between pesantren, religious conservatism, and religious moderation. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for the Ministry of Religious Affairs in formulating more specific and targeted policies in strengthening religious moderation in Madura. Pesantren, both NU-affiliated and non-NU-affiliated, should be seen as strategic partners in building a society that is tolerant, inclusive, and committed to national values.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a library research approach with qualitative methodology. Literature study was chosen because it is relevant to examine various literatures related to the issue of religious moderation in Madurese pesantren. According to Moleong (2017), library research can be understood as a form of qualitative study conducted by searching for meaning through various literature to produce descriptive data in the form of writing and words. In this research, the author traces, collects, and reviews relevant sources, both in the form of books, journal articles, and research reports that have relevance to the theme. In addition, this research also seeks to conduct an in-depth analysis of the practice of religious moderation in Madurese pesantren by utilizing perspectives obtained from the literature. Data analysis is carried out using an interdisciplinary approach, especially the sociology of religion and politics, to understand how the dynamics of religious conservatism and moderation take place in non-NU-affiliated pesantren. Thus, this

research not only describes the findings from the literature but also interprets and contextualizes them in the socio-political framework of religion in Madura.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Religious Phenomena in Madura, Non-NU Affiliated Pesantren, and Mainstreaming Religious Moderation**

The religious phenomenon in Madura represents a unique socio-religious dynamic in Indonesia. Madura Island is known as one of the regions with a very strong Islamic identity, marked by the dominance of pesantren as the center of religious education, influential kiai networks, and religious practices that are full of traditional values. Madura has a reputation as a religious region, where almost all aspects of community life cannot be separated from the role of religion and kiai leadership. From the perspective of Clifford Geertz (1960), religion in the archipelago is not only present in the form of normative teachings but also as a social practice embedded in cultural structures. This context makes Madura an important locus to study the interaction between pesantren, religious identity, and contemporary social dynamics.

One of the distinctive features of the Madurese religious community is the dominance of the pesantren tradition, which has close ties with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). NU, since its inception in 1926, has established strong roots in rural areas, including Madura, by developing traditional and cultural Islam (Bruinessen, 1994). The religious tradition of the Madurese people attached to NU affirms the model of Islam Nusantara based on the principles of *tawassuth* (moderate), *tasamuh* (tolerant), *tawazun* (balanced), and *i'tidal* (fair). However, in recent decades, a phenomenon has emerged that shows the diversity of religious orientations in Madura, including the growth of non-NU-affiliated pesantren, some of which even have close ties with transnational Islamic groups and contemporary religious organizations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI).

The phenomenon of the presence of non-NU-affiliated pesantren in Madura raises significant academic questions. Pesantren that are not affiliated with NU generally present a different religious orientation from the mainstream of Madurese traditional Islam. Some of these pesantren try to build a distance from the dominance of NU, either due to ideological, social, or political factors. Alwi Hs, (2021) research on lived religion can help understand this phenomenon, because religion in daily practice is never monolithic, but always socially constructed and influenced by local dynamics. Thus, the presence of non-NU-affiliated pesantren in Madura can be seen as another expression of religious plurality in Indonesia.

One important factor that explains the different orientations of pesantren in Madura is the intersection of religion and politics. Turban et al., (2020) emphasize that religion in modern society cannot be separated from the social and political dimensions, because religious practices are always connected to authority, legitimacy, and power dynamics. In Madura, this is reflected in how kiai not only act as spiritual leaders, but also as political figures who have a great influence on people's choices. Hasan, (2025) asserts that the

relationship between kiai and the Madurese community is patron-client, where the obedience of santri and the community is not only in the ritual aspect, but also in the socio-political aspect. This condition makes differences in pesantren religious affiliation can have implications for the political orientation of the community.

In this context, the emergence of non-NU-affiliated pesantren that are close to groups such as FPI shows how religious identity politics can shape new religious patterns in Madura. FPI, as an organization that carries puritanical Islam and tends to be scripturalist, has its appeal for some groups, especially in the narrative of sharia enforcement and moral movements. Pribadi, (2020) shows that although FPI is often criticized for its violent approach, the organization has managed to mobilize support through religious symbols and moral rhetoric. When some non-NU-affiliated pesantrens joined the FPI, it signaled a diversification of religious authority in Madura that challenged NU's traditional dominance. This phenomenon has serious implications for the agenda of mainstreaming religious moderation in Indonesia. Religious moderation, as defined by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019), is an effort to strengthen moderate religious views, attitudes, and practices by prioritizing the principles of balance, tolerance, and non-violence (Rofiqi et al., 2023). Pesantren, as Islamic educational institutions, have a central role in mainstreaming religious moderation because of their strategic position in shaping the religious understanding of the younger generation. However, when there are pesantren that tend to get out of the moderation stream and choose to affiliate with puritanical or even radical Islamic groups, this poses its challenges for the religious moderation program.

Banks, (2015) study on multicultural education can be adapted to understand the importance of mainstreaming religious moderation in non-NU-affiliated pesantren. Multicultural education emphasizes the importance of inclusiveness, recognition of diversity, and the development of a tolerant attitude in the educational environment. If these values are integrated in the pesantren curriculum, then santri not only learn religious knowledge normatively, but also internalize the values of diversity and equality. Thus, the main challenge in mainstreaming religious moderation in non-NU-affiliated pesantren in Madura is how to build collective awareness that moderate Islam is more relevant in the context of plural Indonesia.

Several previous studies have provided an overview of this dynamic. Ahmadi, (2023) shows that pesantren in Madura play a significant role in shaping people's social identity. Meanwhile, research by M. A. Hasan, (2017) highlighted the role of pesantren in strengthening NU's tradition-based religious base. However, the phenomenon of non-NU-affiliated pesantrens that are close to groups such as FPI has rarely been studied in depth. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on understanding how non-affiliated NU pesantrens in Madura position themselves in the big flow of religious moderation that is being promoted by the government, as well as its implications for the religious patterns of the community. The presence of non-NU-affiliated pesantren also shows the internal dynamics within the pesantren community itself. Pesantren are no longer homogeneous,



but rather experience fragmentation that reflects the plurality of religious orientations of Muslims in Indonesia. As explained by Harrache, (2020), contemporary Indonesian Islam is characterized by a diversification of religious authorities that challenge the hegemony of old traditions. This fragmentation can be a positive potential if managed with a moderation approach, but it can also be a threat if it leads to exclusivism and intolerance.

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, this phenomenon shows that religion is always in tension between tradition and modernity, between locality and globalization. The glocalization theory proposed by Robertson, (2006) is relevant to explain how non-NU-affiliated pesantren in Madura not only interact with local values, but also with transnational Islamic discourses that enter through media, da'wah, and organizational networks. Thus, mainstreaming religious moderation must consider the global-local dynamics that influence the religious orientation of pesantren. The urgency of this research is even more evident when it is associated with the national agenda to strengthen religious moderation as one of the pillars of development. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019) emphasized that religious moderation is not just a discourse, but a national strategy to maintain social cohesion in the midst of diversity (Amrullah et al., 2021). Therefore, pesantren as socio-religious agents have a great responsibility to ensure that the religious education provided is in line with the principle of moderation. Non-affiliated NU pesantrens in Madura that have different tendencies become important social laboratories to study, because from there it can be understood how variations in religious orientation are formed and how moderation strategies can be designed more inclusively.

In the end, research on non-affiliated NU pesantrens in Madura and their relationship with mainstreaming religious moderation is not only academically important, but also strategic in a policy context. This research is expected to contribute to the development of theories on pesantren plurality and diversification of religious authority, as well as provide practical recommendations for the government's religious moderation program. Thus, this research has a strong novelty and urgency, namely understanding the new face of Madurese Islam, which is plural and dynamic, and reaffirming the importance of moderate Islam in maintaining Indonesia's diversity.

## **CONCLUSION**

To suppress religious conservatism that leads to acts of religious intolerance, Banks' thinking about multiculturalism can be a principle in strengthening the principles of religious moderation, especially in practical steps of education and learning, how an Islamic educational institution can integrate the principles of religious moderation in a learning curriculum construction in a second educational institution how to build a knowledge process and ensure justice and equality and reduce negative stigma in the life of the nation. The multicultural education approach is very important to be applied in an educational institution, including pesantren, so that this multiculturalism approach can also be carried out in the world of pesantren.

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