

## Harmonization of Religious Moderation on the Aceh-Sumatra Border and Local Traditions

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**Abstract** This study aims to explain the existence of border community harmony in multicultural and religious social interactions. The border areas of Aceh and North Sumatra in this mountainous community are known to have ethnic and cultural diversity that influences the social dynamics and religiosity of the local community. This study uses a qualitative approach through participatory observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The study results indicate that socio-religious harmony in this area is realized through religious moderation values, which are indicated by tolerance of religious communities, positive dialogue between religious communities, and respect for local traditions. Religious figures, community leaders, and educational institutions are important in educating and advocating for an understanding of religious harmony.

**Abstrak** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan adanya harmonisasi masyarakat perbatasan dalam berinteraksi sosial yang multikultur dan agama. Daerah perbatasan Aceh dan Sumatera Utara pada masyarakat pegunungan ini dikenal memiliki keberagaman etnis dan budaya yang mempengaruhi dinamika sosial dan keberagamaan masyarakat setempat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui teknik observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa harmonisasi sosial keagamaan di wilayah ini diwujudkan melalui pengamalan nilai-nilai moderasi beragama yang indikasinya adanya toleransi umat beragama, dialog yang positif antar umat beragama dan penghormatan kepada tradisi lokal. Tokoh agama, pemimpin masyarakat, dan lembaga pendidikan memainkan peran penting dalam mengedukasi dan mengadvokasi pemahaman tentang kerukunan umat beragama.

**Keywords** religious moderation; border Muslims; tolerance; communication; local traditions

### Introduction

Religious harmony in the Muslim community on the border of Aceh and North Sumatra is realized due to the practice of moderation in religion. The movement of religious moderation discourse has recently become a central issue in the religious discourse issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion. Religious moderation has pros and cons, which some people consider to be a shallowing of faith.<sup>1</sup> Lack of socialization makes the issue of religious moderation not clearly understood by the community. The

<sup>1</sup> Yudhi Kawangung, "Religious Moderation Discourse in Plurality of Social Harmony in Indonesia," *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 1 (April 25, 2019): 160–70, <https://doi.org/10.29332/ijssh.v3n1.277>.



existence of religious conflict in Indonesia is partly due to radical and extreme religious understanding that requires counter-narratives to balance it.<sup>2</sup> The dynamics of pros and cons regarding religious moderation in the border community are important to follow up on through in-depth research in the form of scientific journals. This article attempts to show the existence of religious moderation values in the activities of the Aceh and North Sumatra mountain border communities.

The discourse of religious moderation in Islam, called *wasatiyyah*, is a moderate character or nature that establishes relationships between humans. Social interactions built with *wasatiyyah* give birth to social values: tolerance, compromise, politeness, respect, and cooperation. Religious moderation, or *wasatiyyah*, is used to maintain peace and build prosperity in the social environment.<sup>3</sup> One of the causes of deviation or social conflict in religious life (radicalism, extremism, and terrorism) is due to the nature of *ghuluw*, or excessive nature.<sup>4</sup> Excessive nature is contrary to the perspective of QS. al-Baqarah: 143, which describes a Muslim figure with a *wasatiyyah/moderate* nature following universal principles and ethical and moral behaviour.<sup>5</sup> The concrete form of the *wasatiyyah* concept can be seen in forgiving mistakes between humans<sup>6</sup> and having sympathy for others.<sup>7</sup> Obtaining a *wasatiyyah* or moderate character in religious life must be based on spiritual awareness, an effective source of resilience.<sup>8</sup> The polarization of radical understanding that occurs in society needs to be countered by an understanding of *waṣāṭiyyah/moderation* based on spiritual awareness.<sup>9</sup> Articles on implementing religious moderation have not studied border areas with different religious and ethnic polarizations.

This article aims to fill the knowledge gap related to studying the mountainous border of Aceh and North Sumatra. The border of two regions with different religious majorities is prone to conflict, but the border area of Aceh and North Sumatra is relatively safe. This article aims, first, to examine the form of implementation of religious moderation in border communities in the mountains of Aceh and

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<sup>2</sup> Shinta Dewi Rismawati et al., "The Legal Politics of Religious Moderation in Indonesia: Responsive or Repressive?," *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues* 24, no. 4 (May 8, 2021): 1–8.

<sup>3</sup> Khadijah Mohd Khambali@Hambali et al., "Al-Wasatiyyah in the Practice of Religious Tolerance among the Families of New Muslims in Sustaining a Well-Being Society," *Humanomics* 33, no. 2 (2017): 211–20, <https://doi.org/10.1108/H-02-2017-0025>.

<sup>4</sup> M.Y.Y.B. Md. Yusoff, "The Concept of Ghuluw in Islam: An Analysis on Its Manifestations and Causes in the Modern World," *Intellectual Discourse* 28, no. 2 (2021): 433–57.

<sup>5</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, "THE HERMENEUTICS OF INTER-FAITH RELATIONS: RETRIEVING MODERATION AND PLURALISM AS UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES IN QUR'ANIC EXEGESES," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 2 (June 2009): 331–54, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2009.00389.x>.

<sup>6</sup> Dariusz Krok and Beata Zarzycka, "Interpersonal Forgiveness and Meaning in Life in Older Adults: The Mediating and Moderating Roles of the Religious Meaning System," *Religions* 12, no. 1 (January 7, 2021): 37, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12010037>.

<sup>7</sup> Cécile Rousseau et al., "A Repeated Cross-Sectional Study of Sympathy for Violent Radicalization in Canadian College Students," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 90, no. 4 (2020): 406–18, <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000444>.

<sup>8</sup> As'ad, D. I. Ansusa Putra, and Arfan, "Being Al-Wasatiyah Agents: The Role of Azharite Organization in the Moderation of Indonesian Religious Constellation," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 11, no. 2 (September 16, 2021): 124–45, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.112.07>.

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Kalim Ullah Khan and Zahoor Ullah Al-Azhari, "Radicalization and Academia: Its Impacts on Students and Counter-Radicalization Strategies," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 09, no. 01 (March 2019): 165–76, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.91.11>.

North Sumatra. Second, we will examine the factors that influence the attitude of religious moderation toward border communities in the mountains of Aceh and North Sumatra. Third, we will examine the implications of the attitude of religious moderation of border communities in national and social life.

The relatively safe conditions from religious conflict are due to moderate and spiritual characteristics dominating the Aceh and North Sumatra mountain border communities. Harmony on the border of Aceh and North Sumatra has three forms, namely, tolerance of the majority and minority, positive communication from various parties, and the attitude of the community toward respecting local cultural traditions. The harmony of religious communities in the border communities of Aceh and North Sumatra can be seen from the high tolerance level in beliefs and practices of religious values. Religious differences are not an obstacle in socializing and interacting; the community has mutually understood their beliefs.

### **1. Respect Local Cultural Traditions**

According to Ahmad Yunus,<sup>10</sup> the communities residing along the mountainous border of Aceh and North Sumatra hold local cultural traditions in high regard. This character of respect for local cultural traditions influences their moderate character. As stated by religious figures in Dairi, Wahlin Munthe<sup>11</sup> explains that Dairi society is shaped by the Batak Dalihan Natolu tradition, which serves as a bonding and unifying force. This kinship system plays a key role in resolving various socio-religious issues. Besides kinship ties, the Dairi community also maintains a tradition of exchanging gifts during various customary events to strengthen relationships. In traditional ceremonies such as marriages and funerals, the three main parties—Father, Mother, and Son-in-law—work closely together. These practices are carried out regardless of religious affiliation.<sup>12</sup>

Dalihan Natolu is a kinship system or social structure in Batak customs. Dalihan Natolu symbolizes the Batak people's attitude in society. Through this custom, every problem is resolved with a spirit of mutual respect and mutual assistance. Through this activity, there is interaction between religions in traditional events (weddings or deaths). The Dalihan Natolu tradition is a glue between members of society with different religions.<sup>13</sup>

Under the Batak traditional culture above, the same thing happens to the people of Southeast Aceh through the Sitelu Tungku culture. According to the Chairman of the Southeast Aceh Traditional Council, Thalib Akbar<sup>14</sup> states that various community issues, whether tied to traditional ceremonies or

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<sup>10</sup> Ahmad Yunus, (Akademisi) *Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara*, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Wahlin Munthe, (Ketua MUI Dairi) *Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara*, n.d.

<sup>12</sup> Yunus, (Akademisi) *Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara*.

<sup>13</sup> Munthe, (Ketua MUI Dairi) *Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara*.

<sup>14</sup> Thalib Akbar, (Ketua Majelis Adat Aceh Tenggara) *Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara*, 2023.

social conflicts, are traditionally addressed through the deliberative culture of *Sitelu Tungku*. In the philosophy of Southeast Acehese customs, the consensus of the three parties is the balance that causes the fire of community solidarity to ignite in carrying out customs. They, *Sitelu Tungku*, must look after each other for the implementation of customary events to avoid embarrassing things in customary events.

This contrasts with the Gayo Lues community, which maintains community harmony through the *Bejamu Saman* culture. An expression of ethnic dance and music. Gayo Lues traditional figures said, According to Syamsul,<sup>15</sup> the *Bejamu Saman* cultural tradition strengthens community unity by building friendships between villages through art. The *Bejamu Saman* dance performance starts with the remembrance of Allah and a prayer, reflecting Islamic values. So, it can be said that *Bejamu Saman*'s art embraces the unification of elements of art and Sufi spirituality because of the many words of remembrance in the lyrics of the *Saman* song. The history of the *Bejamu Saman* dance is an acculturation of Islamic preaching and Gayo culture initiated by Syeh Saman, a figure who spread Islam in Gayo Lues. Sufi dance arts education has grown within the community and is popular among residents as a means of guiding teenagers away from negative influences. Religious values and cultural traditions have become established norms in the Gayo Lues community. The accompanying songs, which were once merely complementary, have now shifted to carry strong Islamic religious messages.<sup>16</sup>

## **2. Tolerance of Majorities and Minorities between Religious Communities**

As evidence of the high tolerance of the Dairi community, in an interview with one of the Heads of Madrasahs in Dairi, he said, the Dairi community demonstrates a strong sense of interfaith tolerance, with Muslims often residing near churches and Christians living close to mosques. They coexist peacefully, respecting each other's presence without interference."<sup>17</sup>

Tolerance toward diverse beliefs fosters cultural exchange, which can be seen in aspects like clothing and social interaction. Observations show that mosques and Islamic boarding schools offering Islamic religious education are often situated within Christian communities. Interestingly, the *peci*, traditionally a symbol of Islam, is also worn by Christians in markets and at public gatherings. Based on interviews with religious instructors, they said, workers from the Dairi hinterland employed in plantation companies often leave their children behind. To maintain peace and order, many of these children are brought to study religion at the Dairi Islamic boarding school.<sup>18</sup> Economically, most of the community works on plantations far from housing, so many of their children attend Islamic boarding

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<sup>15</sup> Syamsul Bahri, (Tokoh Adat) *Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara*, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Bahri.

<sup>17</sup> Yuko, (Pimpinan Pesantren) *Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara*, 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Nuraida, (Penyuluh Agama, Dairi) *Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara*, 2023.

schools. Good cooperation between Islamic educational institutions and the community creates good relations between religious communities and increases the tolerance of the Dairi community towards different beliefs and cultures.

Interfaith marriages often trigger social conflict, particularly when they lead to the exclusion of entire families from the church community, prompting many couples to elope. Within the Dairi society, if an individual passes away after converting to a different religion, customary rules dictate that they should not receive traditional mourning rites. To avoid being cast out of the community, many couples choose to marry secretly or elope.<sup>19</sup>

Another problem is the lack of understanding of different religious beliefs, which causes acts of intolerance. According to Nuraida's statement, a socio-religious conflict occurred in Dairi when a Muslim school principal was pressured to slaughter a pig in an attempt to change the status of pork from haram to halal, leading to unrest within the community. The conflict stemmed from differing beliefs, particularly Islam's prohibition against consuming pork and drinking palm wine. The tradition of consuming pork and palm wine among the Christian majority caused Muslim residents to feel isolated from the broader community, which escalated into social tensions. The Muslim community faces particular difficulties concerning the halal status of food. Converts to Islam often struggle to abandon previous religious practices because of the strong social ties within their communities.<sup>20</sup>

The chairman of the Dairi Regency Ulema Council said, "Conflicts in society are resolved through customary law by the Dalihan Natolu customary kinship institution and the FKUB of Dairi Regency. Various socio-religious conflicts can be resolved through positive dialogue between religious communities.<sup>21</sup> The high tolerance of the Muslim community in Dairi is influenced by the dominant Sufi and moderate religious understanding of the Dairi community in maintaining harmony and interfaith harmony.

The worship practices of the Dairi Muslim community were initially shaped by the teachings of Sufism, as explained by the Chairman of the MUI, influenced by early religious figures who focused on faith and belief. Later, their religious practices evolved through interactions with Minangkabau traders. Despite religious differences, daily interactions at places like schools and markets foster close relationships among people of different faiths, leading to a blending of their social lives.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Nuraida.

<sup>20</sup> Nuraida.

<sup>21</sup> Munthe, (Ketua MUI Dairi) Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara.

<sup>22</sup> Munthe.

### **3. Positive Communication between Religious Communities**

Communication between religious communities in the mountainous border areas of Aceh and North Sumatra is positive and mutually respectful. According to Mukhlisin, the head of the border Islamic boarding school, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are generally smooth, with no significant issues except for slight unease concerning the sale of wild pigs. Overall, interactions remain harmonious, with both sides showing mutual care and effort to maintain peace.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, Bukhari Husni, Chairman of the Southeast Aceh Ulema Consultative Assembly, said, A current socio-religious issue involves a small segment of the Muslim community that holds a rigid interpretation of Islamic texts, leading to difficulties in reconciling Islamic law with tradition. This rigidity stems from a traditional Islamic educational background that is less receptive to new ideas.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, the Chairman of the Southeast Aceh Traditional Council said, the Regional Leadership Communication Forum works together to disseminate religious and customary policies to the public. Religious and traditional leaders also cooperate in promoting a culture of religious moderation through public dialogue. Meanwhile, the matter concerning the tradition of raising and consuming pigs among non-Muslim communities has been addressed by the Southeast Aceh MUI, the Islamic Sharia Office, and FKUB.<sup>25</sup>

The Head of the Dairi Regency Interfaith Harmony Forum said, muslim and non-Muslim interactions remain harmonious, with both sides maintaining mutual respect to avoid causing disturbances. Cooperation between the community and government officials, particularly through FKUB, helps promote religious harmony and strengthens social control over potential conflict. (Head of FKUB Southeast Aceh)

Mukhlisin (leader of the border Islamic boarding school) said the same thing, muslims adjust to their environment while staying alert to practices that conflict with Islamic law. In Southeast Aceh, the majority of the community embraces a moderate religious perspective. This is reflected in the strong interest in enrolling children in integrated Islamic boarding schools with educational facilities. Only a few traditional boarding schools maintain conservative views.<sup>26</sup>

### **Religious Patterns of the Aceh and North Sumatra Border Mountain Communities**

The tolerant Muslim communities on the border of the mountains of Aceh and North Sumatra live harmoniously, side by side, despite their different beliefs and cultures. Life in social interactions is built

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<sup>23</sup> Mukhlisin, (Pimpinan Pesantren Perbatasan Aceh Tenggara) Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Bukhori Husni, (Ketua MPU Aceh Tenggara) Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Akbar, (Ketua Majelis Adat Aceh Tenggara) Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara.

<sup>26</sup> Mukhlisin, (Pimpinan Pesantren Perbatasan Aceh Tenggara) Moderasi Beragama di Perbatasan Aceh-Sumatera Utara.

with a moderate nature that gives birth to social values: tolerance, compromise, politeness, respect, and cooperation.<sup>27</sup> Religious moderation, in this case, tolerance towards different beliefs, creates a cultural exchange. This can be seen in clothing and social interactions.<sup>28</sup> The existence of cooperation between Islamic educational institutions creates relations and dialogue between religious communities that increase community tolerance.<sup>29</sup> The phenomenon of interfaith marriage and religious conversion results in conflicts that are resolved by customary law.<sup>30</sup> The harmony of the Dairi Muslim community is realized due to its moderate, tolerant, and spiritual character.

Border communities in the mountains of Aceh and North Sumatra establish positive communication between ethnicities and religions. Some religious communities are textual in understanding religion as a problem in society.<sup>31</sup> Religious figures of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah who are members of FKUB play an active role in building positive communication between religious communities.<sup>32</sup> The communicative attitude of the community reflects an understanding of religious moderation. The adaptive and moderate attitudes of the community are influenced by popular religious discourses that are Sufi and moderate.<sup>33</sup> Muslim communities in the mountains of Aceh and North Sumatra adapt to religious differences.

Respect for local traditions is also the key to the harmony of religious moderation in border communities. The character of respect for local traditions is one of the pillars of religious moderation.<sup>34</sup> Muslim border communities use the customs of Dalihan Natolu, Sitelu Tungku, and Bejambu Saman as a medium for building society and resolving conflicts.<sup>35</sup> Various societal problems, both traditional events and social conflicts, are resolved traditionally through a culture of deliberation.<sup>36</sup> The characteristics of the customs and culture of Muslim communities are closely related to respect for local traditional cultures. The customs and traditions that develop in Muslim communities on the border of

<sup>27</sup> Mohd Khambali@Hambali et al., "Al-Wasatiyyah in the Practice of Religious Tolerance among the Families of New Muslims in Sustaining a Well-Being Society."

<sup>28</sup> Krok and Zarzycka, "Interpersonal Forgiveness and Meaning in Life in Older Adults."

<sup>29</sup> Candra Wijaya et al., "Management of Islamic Education Based on Interreligious Dialogue in The Learning Process in Schools as An Effort to Moderate Religion in Indonesia," *Rigeo* 11, no. 5 (October 7, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.48047/rigeo.11.05.310>.

<sup>30</sup> E.L. Damanik and Y. Ndona, "Alignment: Conflict Resolution through Sulang-Silima among Pakpaknese, Indonesia," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 50, no. 2 (June 2022): 96–103, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajss.2021.10.002>.

<sup>31</sup> Muhd Imran Abd Razak et al., "THE MISINTERPRETATION OF THE JIHAD JURISPRUDENCE BY EXTREMIST GROUP: AN ANALYSIS," *Journal of Critical Reviews* 7, no. 8 (2020): 1012–16, <https://doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.08.212>.

<sup>32</sup> Imam Kanafi et al., "The Contribution of Ahlul-sunnah Waljamaah's Theology in Establishing Moderate Islam in Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (May 20, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6437>.

<sup>33</sup> Musawar et al., "MODERATE ISLAM AS A SOLUTION TO PLURALISM IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD: THE EXPERIENCE OF INDONESIA," *Al-Shajarah* 24, no. Special (November 2019): 1–24.

<sup>34</sup> Arbanur Rasyid et al., "Local Wisdom Recognition in Inter-Ethnic Religious Conflict Resolution in Indonesia from Islah Perspective," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 22, no. 1 (June 13, 2023): 13–26, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v22i1.8432>.

<sup>35</sup> Sumper M. Harahap and Hamka Hamka, "Investigating the Roles of Philosophy, Culture, Language and Islam in Angkola's Local Wisdom of 'Dalihan Na Tolu,'" *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (March 14, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8164>.

<sup>36</sup> Hadi Pajarianto, Imam Pribadi, and Puspa Sari, "Tolerance between Religions through the Role of Local Wisdom and Religious Moderation," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (January 1, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7043>.

the mountains of Aceh and North Sumatra are an assimilation of local culture with Islamic religious values that aim to create a harmonious social order.

### **Factors Influencing the Harmonization of Religious Moderation**

The characteristic form of religious moderation in the religious patterns of the Muslim community in the mountainous border of Aceh and North Sumatra, which is built from Islamic customs and laws, is influenced by religious, social, and cultural factors.<sup>37</sup>

#### **1. Religion Factor**

The problem of socio-religious conflict, in addition to being caused by economic and socio-cultural factors, can also occur due to extreme and radical understandings of religion.<sup>38</sup> The people on the border of the mountains of Aceh and North Sumatra use the concept of interreligious dialogue and the cultivation of mature wisdom to create goodness and peace, all of which are reflected in everyday life.<sup>39</sup> In Islamic theology developed in the border area, the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah Sufism applies moderation in its religious teachings.<sup>40</sup> This understanding of religious moderation is a solution to the pluralism represented in the border area of Aceh and North Sumatra.<sup>41</sup> The development of community religiosity through an understanding of interfaith in social interaction reflects an act of moderation in religion.<sup>42</sup> Religious moderation is also implied in the border, which teaches tolerance through understanding other religious beliefs.<sup>43</sup> The religious factor that developed Sufism, which emphasizes God's love, relationships based on love, tolerance, and compassion, can be a fortress against social conflict.<sup>44</sup>

#### **2. Policy and Social Factors**

The social factors that influence the development of religious doctrine are spread mainly by religious actors who spread moderate and Sufi beliefs as the basis for religious moderation.<sup>45</sup> The role of religious leaders, local customs, and government officials actively socializing the discourse of

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<sup>37</sup> Montgomery McFate, "Useful Knowledge: Snouck Hurgronje and Islamic Insurgency in Aceh," *Orbis* 63, no. 3 (2019): 416–39, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2019.05.005>.

<sup>38</sup> Wisnu Setiawan and Amar, "Spatial Perception towards Social Conflicts and the Built Environment in Indonesia," *International Review for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development* 9, no. 2 (April 15, 2021): 134–50, [https://doi.org/10.14246/irspdc.9.2\\_134](https://doi.org/10.14246/irspdc.9.2_134).

<sup>39</sup> Wijaya et al., "Management of Islamic Education Based on Interreligious Dialogue in The Learning Process in Schools as An Effort to Moderate Religion in Indonesia."

<sup>40</sup> Kanafi et al., "The Contribution of Ahlussunnah Waljamaah's Theology in Establishing Moderate Islam in Indonesia."

<sup>41</sup> Musawar et al., "(PDF) MODERATE ISLAM AS A SOLUTION TO PLURALISM IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD."

<sup>42</sup> Afsaruddin, "THE HERMENEUTICS OF INTER-FAITH RELATIONS."

<sup>43</sup> Muhammad Irfan Helmi, Ahmad Darajat Jumadil Kubro, and Muhammad Ali, "The Understanding of Islamic Moderation (Wasatiyyah al-Islam) and the Hadiths on Inter-Religious Relations in the Javanese Pesantrens," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.351-376>.

<sup>44</sup> Maghfur Ahmad et al., "The Sufi Order against Religious Radicalism in Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (May 18, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6417>.

<sup>45</sup> Bambang Yuniarto, "Developing Democratic Culture through Civic Education," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 27, no. 2 (2019): 915–24.



religious moderation is the key to its success. The patronage of religious figures in the mountainous areas of Aceh plays a role in counteracting the conflict between radical and conservative Islamic ideologies that are currently developing.<sup>46</sup> The process of socializing moderate religious beliefs is actively carried out by the Interfaith Harmony Forum, supported by the local Regional Leadership Communication Forum, which can be seen from the issuance of several moderate regulations.<sup>47</sup> The ideas of religious moderation that are developed include the spiritual values of the social teachings of Muslim border communities, which include compassion, patience, helpfulness, generosity, humanity, sensitivity, and social responsibility, including upholding honesty, sincerity, and respecting humanity as the main pillars of social piety.<sup>48</sup> The entry of religious radicalization beliefs results in extreme behavior being prevented through increasing the understanding of religious moderation by religious leaders and moderate academics in border communities.<sup>49</sup> The role of religious, traditional, and government officials is to foster harmony between religious communities through the involvement of border communities without discrimination in social activities.<sup>50</sup>

The high religiosity or moderate belief in religion correlates with increasing religious harmony. A moderate or non-excessive culture in religion fosters tolerance.<sup>51</sup> The culture of behaving peacefully and forgiving others is a form of religious moderation.<sup>52</sup> Intense spirituality as a commitment to the religious identity of the Muslim community has a positive impact on welfare.<sup>53</sup> The people on the border of Aceh and the North Sumatra mountains apply religious moderation through a flexible, straightforward social communication model. This implementation pattern encourages religious people to develop and maintain healthy social relationships.<sup>54</sup> One of the causes of conflict is

<sup>46</sup> Ward Berenschot, "Patterned Pogroms: Patronage Networks as Infrastructure for Electoral Violence in India and Indonesia," *Journal of Peace Research* 57, no. 1 (January 2020): 171–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319889678>.

<sup>47</sup> Mhd. Syahnan and Ja'far Ja'far, "EXAMINING RELIGIOUS MODERATION OF THE AL-JAM'İYATUL WASHLIYAH FATWA COUNCIL," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 15, no. 1 (June 1, 2021): 21, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2021.15.1.21-46>; Maulana Andi Surya, "THE DECLINING ASWAJA THEOLOGY KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION: A Case Study of al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah in Medan City," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 23, no. 2 (November 28, 2023): 415–36, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v23i2.6145>.

<sup>48</sup> Harun Prayitno et al., "The Progressivist Value of Character Education Regarding Social Piety of K.H.A. Dahlan's Teachings in Sang Pencerah's Novel: A Prophetic Socio- Pragmatic Study" 12 (May 6, 2022): 66–90.

<sup>49</sup> Khan and Al-Azhari, "Radicalization and Academia."

<sup>50</sup> Punya Tepsing, Kasetchai Laeheem, and Azizskul Hasbullah, "Roles of Buddhist Monks in Strengthening Relationships between Muslims and Buddhists in the Three Southern Border Provinces," *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* 43, no. 3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.34044/j.kjss.2022.43.3.05>.

<sup>51</sup> Ryszard F. Sadowski, "The Role of Catholicism in Shaping a Culture of Sustainable Consumption," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (August 3, 2021): 598, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080598>.

<sup>52</sup> Krok and Zarzycka, "Interpersonal Forgiveness and Meaning in Life in Older Adults."

<sup>53</sup> Daniela Villani et al., "The Role of Spirituality and Religiosity in Subjective Well-Being of Individuals With Different Religious Status," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (July 9, 2019): 1525, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01525>.

<sup>54</sup> Lailial Muhtifah et al., "The Theology of Islamic Moderation Education in Singkawang, Indonesia: The City of Tolerance," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (October 28, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6552>.

miscommunication, which should be overcome with a tolerant, communicative character and respect for the traditions of others.<sup>55</sup>

### 3. Cultural factor

The characteristics of the moderate religious patterns of the Muslim community in the Aceh mountains go hand in hand with local customary traditions in building religious harmony.<sup>56</sup> The strong cultural customs of the Aceh mountain community on the border are a unifying medium between the ethnicities and religions living there.<sup>57</sup> Tolerance of religious events in the border areas of Aceh and the North Sumatra mountains illustrates the practice of religious moderation in society.<sup>58</sup> Efforts to continue to conduct inter-religious dialogue foster wisdom and prudence in responding to differences in belief.<sup>59</sup> Moderate religiosity built with culture, customs, and art can reduce stress levels in society<sup>60</sup> and can moderate stress levels in adolescents.<sup>61</sup> The existence of religious commitment can increase life satisfaction by reducing depression in society.<sup>62</sup>

### Implications of Harmonization of Religious Moderation on the Border

First, social-religious harmonization implies increasing tolerance between religious communities. The phenomenon of the rise of the ideology of Islamism and the politicization of religion has influenced the decline in tolerance towards different beliefs. This is a challenge for the discourse of religious moderation to fight against the ideologization and politicization of religion that tends to be radical. The concept of religious moderation on the border of the mountains of Aceh and North Sumatra was

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<sup>55</sup> Muhammad Adil and Syahril Jamil, "Interfaith Marriage in Indonesia: Polemics and Perspectives of Religious Leaders and Community Organizations," *Religion & Human Rights* 18, no. 1 (March 27, 2023): 31–53, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18710328-bja10031>.

<sup>56</sup> Rasyid et al., "Local Wisdom Recognition in Inter-Ethnic Religious Conflict Resolution in Indonesia from Islamic Perspective."

<sup>57</sup> Ira Patriani and Rasidi Burhan, "Cap Go Meh Festival as a Multicultural Event in Tourism Policy at Singkawang City, Indonesia," *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* 8, no. 6 (2019), <https://philarchive.org/rec/PATCGM>; Suheri Sahputra Rangkuti, Sangkot Sirait, and Moh Soehadha, "Accommodation of Islamic Education Responding to Local Culture," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 21, no. 1 (May 19, 2021): 135–57, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v21i1.2837>.

<sup>58</sup> Muhtifah et al., "The Theology of Islamic Moderation Education in Singkawang, Indonesia."

<sup>59</sup> Wijaya et al., "Management of Islamic Education Based on Interreligious Dialogue in The Learning Process in Schools as An Effort to Moderate Religion in Indonesia."

<sup>60</sup> Marcie C. Goetze-Morey et al., "Adolescents' Relationship with God and Internalizing Adjustment over Time: The Moderating Role of Maternal Religious Coping," *Journal of Family Psychology* 28, no. 6 (2014): 749–58, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037170>; Maulana Mukhlis, Ahmad Robi Ulzabri, and Angger Widiyanto, "The Implementation of Nahdlatul Ulama's Moderation Philosophy in Treating Islamic Fundamentalism in Bandar Lampung," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 21, no. 1 (April 30, 2021): 1–34, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v21i1.2679>.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas P. Carpenter, Tyler Laney, and Amy Mezulis, "Religious Coping, Stress, and Depressive Symptoms among Adolescents: A Prospective Study," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 4, no. 1 (February 2012): 19–30, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023155>.

<sup>62</sup> Orhan Koçak, "How Does Religious Commitment Affect Satisfaction with Life during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Examining Depression, Anxiety, and Stress as Mediators," *Religions* 12, no. 9 (August 30, 2021): 701, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12090701>.

developed through the harmonization of religion and local wisdom.<sup>63</sup> The values of local wisdom of kinship, togetherness, and tenacity are the principles of community life.<sup>64</sup> Institutionally, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and the community encourage peace and unity. Various religious celebrations, traditional ceremonies, and community activities become an arena for socializing and interacting by upholding tolerance towards religious differences.

*The second* implication is that harmonizing religious moderation maintains social stability and community security. Moderate religious patterns harmonizing with local community traditions have implications for resolving socio-religious conflicts.<sup>65</sup> Through religious moderation, it functions as a counterbalance to extreme religious understanding.<sup>66</sup> The concept of wasatiyyah or religious moderation is to maintain peace and build prosperity in the social environment. Sufi religious moderation emphasizes love and affection, and also influences the ability to live in harmony with the environment.<sup>67</sup> A moderate religious attitude implies distancing oneself from group fanaticism and anarchism in the name of a particular religion.

The third implication is as a medium for developing a moderate and spiritual national religious identity. A moderate Islamic educational background influences the moderate characteristics of Muslim border communities.<sup>68</sup> Moderate religious understanding prevents deviations or social conflicts in religious life (radicalism, extremism, and terrorism). Education in Islamic boarding schools teaches students in their daily lives to control their mentality to become moderate.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, to obtain a moderate character in religious life, it is necessary to be based on spiritual awareness, which is an effective source of resilience. Spirituality in religion is the key to practicing the attitude of religious moderation in the mountainous border communities of Aceh and North Sumatra.

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<sup>63</sup> Pajarianto, Pribadi, and Sari, "Tolerance between Religions through the Role of Local Wisdom and Religious Moderation"; Rangkuti, Sirait, and Soehadha, "Accommodation of Islamic Education Responding to Local Culture."

<sup>64</sup> Muhammad Aras and Alexander A. S. Gunawan, "Traditional and Conventional Social Communication Processes for Increasing Tolerance and Harmonization of Inter-Religious Communities in Indonesia," *Humaniora* 10, no. 3 (December 20, 2019): 227, <https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v10i3.6021>.

<sup>65</sup> Damanik and Ndong, "Alignment."

<sup>66</sup> Hasse Jubba, Jaffary Awang, and Siti Aisyah Sungkilang, "The Challenges of Islamic Organizations in Promoting Moderation in Indonesia," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama Dan Sosial Budaya* 6, no. 1 (August 10, 2021): 43–54, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v6i1.12948>.

<sup>67</sup> Limas Dodi and Amir Maliki Abitolkha, "From Sufism to Resolution: Examining the Spiritual Teachings of Tarekat Shiddiqiyah as the Theology of Peace in Indonesia," *QIJS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 10, no. 1 (August 19, 2022): 141, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v10i1.11260>.

<sup>68</sup> Kasetchai Laeheim, "Relationships between Islamic Ethical Behavior and Islamic Factors among Muslim Youths in the Three Southern Border Provinces of Thailand," *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* 39, no. 2 (May 2018): 305–11, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.03.005>.

<sup>69</sup> Helmi, Kubro, and Ali, "The Understanding of Islamic Moderation (Wasatiyyah al-Islam) and the Hadiths on Inter-Religious Relations in the Javanese Pesantrens."

## **Conclusion**

This study shows that religious moderation is realized through several strategies, such as strengthening the values of tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and cooperation in social activities. Religious figures, community leaders, and educational institutions are important in educating and advocating for religious moderation. The involvement of customary structures strengthens harmony between religious communities. The values of religious tolerance are a central issue in the religious discourse of Muslim border communities. Socializing religious harmony through positive dialogue between figures and officials creates a conducive society. In addition, the community's character that holds tightly to local traditions becomes cultural capital as a tool to strengthen social interaction. Social harmony is formed on the border of Aceh and North Sumatra through a tolerant, communicative character and strong adherence to tradition.

The scientific contribution of this study reveals that implementing religious moderation can create social harmony in the border areas of Aceh and North Sumatra. The Aceh and North Sumatra border areas, inhabited by various tribes and cultures, do not cause conflict. Social-religious harmony is realized due to a tolerant, communicative culture and respect for local wisdom. This social harmony perspective provides a new perspective for strengthening relations between religious communities. In addition, it also provides a discourse on the implementation of religious moderation, which is the main agenda of the Indonesian Ministry of Religion. The novelty of the approach used in this study is that it combines the sociology of religion and culture. Further research questions can be carried out using a theological or anthropological approach to understand religious themes in this border area more deeply.

The limitations of cases, locations, and methods create shortcomings in revealing religious phenomena in detail. These shortcomings require further research related to religious phenomena occurring in the border areas of Aceh and North Sumatra. This study also found challenges, such as the potential for ethnic and religious conflict and a lack of in-depth understanding of religious moderation in the community. To overcome these challenges, more intensive and systematic efforts are needed in inclusive religious education and the active participation of all elements of society. This study makes an important contribution to understanding the practice of religious moderation in border areas and offers policy recommendations to strengthen social and religious harmony. The key to harmonization is solid cooperation between religious leaders, traditional leaders, and government officials in socializing moderate religious understanding. In conclusion, further studies are needed to strengthen social harmonization through implementing religious moderation. Harmonizing religious moderation in border areas can be a strategic step to create sustainable peace, stability, and prosperity.

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