



Towards Moderate Urban Muslim Students: Perceptions of Sufi Student Movement Elite Members

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Abstrac. This study aims to describe the perspective of urban university students on religiosity moderation expressions. It seeks to understand how students manage to possess a moderate view of religiosity that is related to social interaction and nationalism in a multicultural society which will be a glimmer of light in facing social and political challenges in the future. It is hoped that young university students with moderate religious attitudes can become active members providing social cohesion of nationalism in a multicultural country. This research was conducted qualitatively employing observation instruments and in-depth interviews as data collection tools among elite members of MATAN of Universitas Negeri Jakarta. The research finding illustrates that MATAN elite members have moderate attitudes and views in aspects of moderatism (at-Tawasuth), tolerance (at-Tasamuh), and nationalism (al-Muwathanah). These perspectives have been implemented in the students based Sufi organization (MATAN) at university level. If these religiosity moderation attitudes are able to be replicated in other universities, many will see this as hope for responding to the future social and political challenges.

Keywords: Religiosity Moderation, Urban Sufism among Students, Tolerance, Nationalism.

1 Introduction

Religiosity moderation [1] [2] in the higher education institution has been an important topic in the academia regarding to face the challenges of social and political dynamics [2]. The challenge includes the data of survey that stated around 31% of Indonesian students were intolerant [3]. This shows a low sense of tolerance (intolerance) between and among religious communities [4]. Factors contributing to low levels of religious moderation include frequent religious conflicts, which are often sparked by exclusive attitudes within religions. Additionally, competition between religious groups for public support—without a spirit of tolerance—further exacerbates tensions, as each group leverages its power to dominate, leading to conflicts within society [1]. Another contributing factor is related to the ideological and perspectives as the causes of the emergence of radicalism among students. This could be ignited from various factors including communication and interaction between students that formed the perspectives of the students at university related activities [5].

Higher education institutions are a glimmer of hope for society to bring better change in the future of this situation. The phenomenon of radicalism and intolerance in educational institutions, including public university campuses, has become a hot topic

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of discourse and deep concern from academics, religious scholars, civil society, as well as governments [6] and this has to be responded by the elements of higher education institutions. This study offers an explanation of the MATAN (*Mahasiswa Ahlith Thoriqoh Al-Mu'tabaroh An-Nahdliyyah*) [7]. As the name suggests, MATAN includes students who are studying and practicing knowledge in mostly tertiary educational institutions with focus and interest to Thoriqoh and Sufism. It is the organization that formed active Tasawuf performers in the midst of campus life by prioritizing moderate thoughts and perspective in understanding and applying Islam. MATAN could be one of the examples that students can maintain moderate views. This research seeks to understand how the Universitas Negeri Jakarta MATAN administrators perceive the value of religiosity moderation, especially in the aspects of *at-Tawassuth*, *at-Tasamuh*, and *al-Muwathanah*.

2 Research Methods

This research used a qualitative approach [8][9] and was conducted through a case study [10] involving members of MATAN [7] at Universitas Negeri Jakarta. MATAN aims to nurture the next generation and future leaders of the nation with intellectual acuity, wisdom, and spiritual depth. It also seeks to uphold the glory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Additionally, MATAN is dedicated to preserving Islam as characterized by *Ahlussunnah Wal-Jama'ah*, which is moderate, tolerant, and inclusively aligned with *shari'a*, nature, and *ma'rifat* within the context of Indonesia's framework based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.

This research employed a qualitative approach [8][9] carried out with case study [10] among MATAN [7] members at Universitas Negeri Jakarta. MATAN has a vision, namely the birth of the next generation and future leaders of the nation who have intellectual sharpness and wisdom as well as spiritual depth as a basis. Also, to build and uphold the glory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Apart from that, it also seeks to preserve Islam which is characterized by *Ahlussunnah Wal-Jama'ah* which is moderate, tolerant, and consistently inclusive in the fields of *shari'a*, nature and *ma'rifat* in society within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia which is based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.

Data collection was carried out in the period February to May 2022 using observation and interview techniques [11]. The researcher used non-participatory observation, that is, the researcher did not take part in the activity, but the researcher only observed the process of the activity. This observation was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, so many activities were carried out online such as using Zoom or Gmeet applications. Interviews conducted by researcher in this study consisted of several informants, namely the chairman, deputy chairman, and secretary of MATAN of Universitas Negeri Jakarta; In addition to the above, four other MATAN members were also included in the in-depth interview process. Therefore, it can be concluded that the perspective studied comes from elite members of MATAN Universitas Negeri Jakarta.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1. Perceptions of at-Tawassuth

At-Tawassuth means a middle or moderate attitude that mediate between two extreme poles of textualism and liberalism, in terms of thoughts or actions in society's social life. This attitude fosters the attitude (*I'tidal*) to realize justice. According to KH. Said Aqil Siradj, at-Tawassuth is applied in the steps of taking law of religion between text and reasoning. This at-Tawassuth attitude contributes to reduce textual and intellectual extremists [12].

According to Azhar Rajab, member of MATAN, the perceived value of at-Tawassuth (middle) in religiosity moderation is that our nature and behavior are in the middle, neither extreme left (liberals) nor extreme right (textual). Always maintains a balance between the two, neither more nor less in religion and in its way of thinking. One example is MATAN, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, which can put life in the world and the afterlife in balance and can play a role in how to balance individual worship with social activities, and balance the religious doctrine obtained and academic knowledge. This was implemented through studying a Sufi book known as *Kimiyatussa'adah*. The book is not only focusing on Sufism but also on Fiqh. This will maintain balance between *hakikat* and *syariat*. In addition to that, MATAN Universitas Negeri Jakarta maintains the balance between both individual and social worship. In addition to practicing thariqah [13] or Sufism, the students also maintain worship in the lights of social related activities. According to Bilal Ramadhan, another member of MATAN, at-tawassuth is the attitude of a person who is moderate or in the middle, that is, he is not too free or strict in sticking to his own opinion. So that this at-tawassuth attitude can be accepted by all levels of society, and at-tawassuth is a middle-of-the-road attitude that is not too fundamentalist or liberal. In essence, it is based on the principle of life that upholds the obligation to behave fairly and straightly for life together. As deputy chairman, Muhammad Faqih argues that at-tawassuth is synonymous with moderate. According to him, MATAN, Universitas Negeri Jakarta is a group that holds its perspective in the middle. In addition to the above, according to Suci Hadiyatni Putri's opinion, the value of religiosity moderation at-tawassuth is a characteristic of the teachings adhered to by Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah [14].

The principles and character of *at-tawassuth*, which have become the character of Islam, must be applied in all fields in general [15]. MATAN UNJ has applied this in terms of way of thinking, religiosity and rituals, as well as the application of social activities among students who later could be the figure of future ulama [16].

3.2. Perceptions of At-Tasamuh

At-Tasamuh, or tolerance, is a fundamental principle in Islam and is considered both a religious and moral duty. It does not imply a lack of principles or commitment to one's beliefs. Tolerance is sometimes thought of as accepting things one is indifferent about, but in the Al-Muhith and al-Munawir Dictionary, at-tasamuh is derived from the word *tasahala* (to facilitate), which means allowing individuals to practice their

beliefs without pressure or interference. The term at-tasamuh is often used interchangeably with tolerance, which refers to the ability to coexist peacefully despite ideological and conceptual differences. Although at-tasamuh and tolerance have different connotations, at-tasamuh is frequently applied in religious, socio-cultural, and political contexts, reflecting an unavoidable blending of cultures today (religious moderation based on Islamic values). At-Tasamuh signifies mutual respect and understanding. Tolerance involves allowing others the freedom to practice their beliefs and acknowledging their rights [12].

The values and concept of at-tasamuh in Islam are derived from the Qur'an and Hadith [15]. The principle of tolerance in Islam is reflected in the Qur'anic verse "laa ikraaha fi al-diin," meaning "there is no compulsion in religion," though this does not negate the role of Islamic invitation, which is to encourage rather than coerce. In worship, Islam practices tolerance by accommodating individuals with limitations, such as allowing tayamum instead of ablution when water is unavailable, praying while sitting if ill, or postponing fasting if unable due to health or travel. In public relations (muamalah), Islam emphasizes doing good and being fair to all people, regardless of their beliefs, and helping those in need, even if they do not share our faith. Western concepts of tolerance, shaped by historical contexts, differ from the Islamic understanding of tolerance.

Azhar Rajab says regarding the value of religiosity moderation at-tasamuh or tolerance that at MATAN Universitas Negeri Jakarta [7], it provides the opportunities and spaces for other people who may have different religious expressions to be able to express their opinions. Therefore, people in the MATAN organization never feel hesitant in their religious expressions. These includes in the rituals such as *maulid*, *ziarah kubur*, and other related rituals in Islam. Likewise, according to Muhammad Yovan about the value of moderation in the at-tasamuh religion. Regarding tolerance, it has existed since Rasulullah SAW was sent to earth, Rasulullah has practiced tolerance, tolerance in beliefs, measures, actions and so on, the essence of tolerance itself is not only to respect but also not to hurt, this is one of the points of tolerance or at-tasamuh. At MATAN, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, tolerance is taught a lot in discussion activities, and there is an advanced level, namely study activities, directly researching phenomena or creating them yourself, but it is more dominant through cultivation through discussions.

In addition to the above, Bilal Ramadhan said that at-tasamuh or tolerance is an attitude that everyone should have, because with at-tasamuh itself it is hoped that someone can live a life side by side in a society that is heterogeneous or has different characteristics. And it can also be interpreted as an attitude of tolerance for differences, both in religion and society or culture. Then according to Muhammad Faqih, when talking about tolerance, which is freeing other people to have their own thoughts and paths, what needs to be underlined is that it must be in accordance with the Shari'a, for example, being tolerant of LGBT is a mistake. Because what is meant by tolerance here is a difference that is built from above, namely in accordance with the Shari'a. And tolerance according to Muhammad Faqih is not for deviation but for differences. And according to Suci Hadiyatni Putri's opinion regarding the value of

religiosity moderation, at-tasamuh means respect, or tolerance towards others. This means that every human being who adheres to a religion needs to apply the at-tasamuh attitude in everyday life as a form of providing a sense of security towards fellow humans even though they have different religions.

In MATAN, Universitas Negeri Jakarta has implemented an attitude of respect for people on campus, namely towards students with different beliefs or religious understanding. From the perception above, it can be concluded that at-tawasuh is an attitude that upholds a sense of respect and appreciation for differences, which in MATAN Universitas Negeri Jakarta is widely implemented to have a tolerant attitude in campus life, because we know, on campus there are many religions regarding beliefs, or in terms of one's understanding.

3.3. Perceptions of Al-Muwathanah

Patriotism is essentially understood as nationalism. In essence, nationalism represents an individual's deepest allegiance to their nation and homeland. Love for one's country is an inherent part of every person. As previously defined, love for the country is synonymous with nationalism. According to KBBI, nationalism is an ideology that requires an individual's highest loyalty to be directed towards the national state. Loving one's homeland involves taking pride in being an Indonesian citizen with a rich cultural heritage, adhering to established norms and laws, and embracing differences with a spirit of tolerance [17]. In this sense, religious moderation could take perspective. The value of religiosity moderation is a commitment to maintaining national unity with an attitude of taking a "middle path", namely respect for differences, with the aim of harmony, harmony and peace in the life of the nation and state while still respecting the existence of traditional values and local wisdom [18].

According to Azhar Rajab regarding the al-muwathanah, as he understands that the understanding of love for the homeland or al-muwathanah firmly holds that loving the homeland is part of faith, you can see for yourself that MATAN UNJ is not a group that believes that Pancasila is not part of religion, or that Pancasila is not taken from the Qur'an and Sunnah. MATAN UNJ is a religious organization that believes in state values or state principles such as Pancasila, the constitution, and state symbols and others. The formation of Pancasila, the youth oath, was initiated directly by homeland fighters, who were people who understood religion. Where are the many contributions of the ulama, how is Ir. Soekarno came to meet Habib Ali Kwitang, this included the fact that the founders of this country were at the same level as the ulama and we can see that in Pancasila the first principle states belief in the Almighty God, which is clear that Pancasila upholds religious values. What is practiced at MATAN Universitas Negeri Jakarta in carrying out activities is singing the song of Indonesia Raya and inserting it into the Yalal Wathon song, and this is part of the proof that MATAN Universitas Negeri Jakarta loves the homeland, because in one of the lyrics "Hubbul Wathon Minal Iman" loves the homeland part of faith [19]. In addition to the above, MATAN Universitas Negeri Jakarta believes that practicing religious teachings is the same as carrying out obligations as a citizen. And conversely, carrying out our

obligations as citizens is a form of practicing religious teachings. Because Rasulullah SAW also told his people to love their own country. Therefore, it can be concluded that MATAN, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, has never conflicted with state values and can be assured of upholding and obeying *ulil amri*. And this is also shown in the MATAN jargon of Universitas Negeri Jakarta where what MATAN brings is nationalism even though the context is a religious organization.

According to Muhammad Yovan regarding the value of al-muwathanah religiosity moderation, namely, the more a person understands religious teachings, the more he will love his country. Love for the homeland is a true red and white person, of course this is formed by building religious awareness, not just singing the song Indonesia Raya or Yalal Wathon [19], moreover only symbolically showing symbols of the archipelago and nationality, the nature of love for the homeland is a characteristic stated in the law. the 1945 constitution, one of which is world peace, the world will be peaceful if humans have a humanitarian spirit, humanity is formed from religious teachings so that the formation of a humanitarian spirit results in the progress of the nation and state. That is a form of love for the homeland and love for the country. In MATAN, Universitas Negeri Jakarta there is not much visible teaching about love of the country, because they are still struggling to convey moderation. Therefore, it hasn't reached the level of love for the country. However, MATAN Universitas Negeri Jakarta always includes a little about love for the country.

Then, according to Muhammad Faqih, the value of religiosity moderation al-muwathanah or love of one's country nowadays, many people are conflicting between the state and religion, even though the state and religion can function by linking each other. Because Indonesia is a country, even though it is not an Islamic country, Pancasila and all existing laws are based on arguments built from Islamic principles. Because we can look further, if it was not based on Islamic principles, it would be impossible for previous scholars to agree on Pancasila. For Muhammad Faqih, Pancasila is a form of implementation of a state built on Islamic foundations.

Suci Hadiyatni Putri also spoke about the value of al-muwathanah religiosity moderation, which is also called citizenship or love of the homeland, which is one of the values of moderation/wasathiyah [20]. This means that a citizen needs to have an al-muwathanah attitude to see the extent of his profession of love for his citizenship. In MATAN, Universitas Negeri Jakarta has implemented an attitude of love for the country, which if you look more closely, at every MATAN event, Universitas Negeri Jakarta always sings the song Indonesia Raya. From the perception above, if we look more deeply, the value of moderation regarding al-muwathanah or love for the homeland. MATAN Universitas Negeri Jakarta has implemented a sense of love for the homeland, because in every work program the values of love for the homeland are always included.

4 Conclusion

This research concludes that students who are members of MATAN at Universitas Negeri Jakarta have a positive perspective in relation to attitudes towards religiosity moderation. This can be seen from at least three aspects. First, the attitude of at-Tawasuth, which means the middle attitude between worldly life and the afterlife, which is manifested in one division of the study of Sufism books such as the book *Kimiyatussa'adah*. Second, the attitude of at-Tasamuh which means tolerance by means of the management providing space for its members to express their beliefs in certain groups or groups so that they carry them out safely and comfortably. Meanwhile, the third is al-Muwathanah's attitude related to nationalism by singing two more songs related to nationalism, namely the song Indonesia Raya and the song Yalal Wathon. Both are related to nationalism and love of the country. By providing examples from members of student organizations at universities located in urban areas, this research hopes to provide a glimmer of hope that a country that lives in a multicultural society can face social and political challenges in the future.

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