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Ethnic Harmony in Islamic Higher Education: Building Religious Moderation in Aceh's Private Islamic Religious Universities

Aria Sandra

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Syariah Nahdlatul Ulama Aceh, Indonesia
aria.sandra.arsa@gmail.com

Tgk. Lina Rahmalia

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Syariah Nahdlatul Ulama Aceh, Indonesia
tgklina@gmail.com

Fakhrul Rijal

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Syariah Nahdlatul Ulama Aceh, Indonesia
fakhrulaceh2016@gmail.com

Muhammad Furqan

Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Indonesia
muhammad.furqan@ar-raniry.ac.id

Abstract: *Ethnic harmony is a significant challenge in the context of religious and cultural diversity, especially in regions with abundant ethnic and cultural wealth such as Aceh. Private Islamic religious universities in Aceh have a crucial role in facilitating inter-ethnic dialogue and promoting religious moderation as a foundation for ethnic harmony. Based on this, this study is interesting for further study in promoting religious moderation and building inter-ethnic harmony. This study uses a qualitative descriptive analysis model with a phenomenological approach as a framework and analytical method. Data sources consist of secondary and primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with lecturers and students from research subjects. The findings show that private Islamic religious universities in Aceh have a role in facilitating inter-ethnic dialogue and promoting religious moderation as a foundation for ethnic harmony. Through educational programs and extracurricular activities, as well as the establishment of the Religious Moderation House*

(RMB), the college provides space for open discussions about religious and cultural differences, encourages inclusive attitudes, and broadens cross-cultural horizons among students.

Keywords: *Ethnic Harmony, Islamic Religious College, Religious Moderation.*

A. Introduction

Indonesia is a country with extraordinary diversity, including various religions, cultures, languages, skin colors and ethnicities.¹ This diversity is reflected in the daily lives of Indonesian people, starting from the different traditions and customs in each region. Diversity of religions and beliefs also enriches the spiritual and social life of this nation. This diversity makes Indonesia a unique and dynamic country, where differences are valued and upheld. Through an adaptive, inclusive and tolerant attitude, Indonesian society can utilize this diversity as a strong social force, capable of creating synergy and cooperation in building the nation.² However, to maintain integrity and harmony, wise management of this diversity is needed so that potential conflicts can be avoided and a harmonious and peaceful national and state life can be created.

Aceh, as a province in Indonesia, has diversity that reflects national diversity. Aceh's diversity is reflected in various aspects of its people's lives which are rich in tradition, culture and religion. Known by the nickname "Veranda of Mecca",³ Aceh has a strong Islamic cultural heritage, seen in Indonesia's unique application of

¹ Rizal Mubit, "Peran Agama dalam Multikulturalisme Masyarakat Indonesia," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (June 9, 2016): 165, <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2016.11.1.163-184>; See also Lutfatul Azizah and Purjatian Azhar, "Islam di Tengah Masyarakat Multikultural Indonesia (Studi Atas Konsep Multikultural Abdul aziz Sachedina)," *Toleransi: Media Ilmiah Komunikasi Umat Beragama* 7, no. 1 (February 8, 2016): 72, <https://doi.org/10.24014/trs.v7i1.1422>.

² Muhiddinur Kamal and Junaidi, "Pengembangan Materi PAI Berwawasan Multikultural dalam Upaya Menanamkan Nilai Keragaman bagi Siswa," *Edukasia : Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam* 13, no. 1 (December 8, 2018): 182, <https://doi.org/10.21043/edukasia.v13i1.3798>.

³ Ali Geno Berutu, *Formalisasi Syariat Islam Aceh dalam Tatanan Politik Nasional* (Jawa Tengah: Pena Persada, 2020), 5; See also Usman Husein and M. Hasbi Amiruddin, eds., *Aceh Serambi Mekkah*, Cet. 1 (Banda Aceh: Pemerintah Provinsi Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, 2008), 389.

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Islamic Sharia.⁴ The people of Aceh are known to be friendly and religious⁵ maintaining local wisdom values while remaining open to current developments, creating harmony between tradition and modernity.

However, the diversity of races, ethnicities, religions and cultural differences in Acehnese society often leads to social conflicts between different community groups. Therefore, in a pluralistic and multicultural society like Aceh, the intensity of interaction between fellow citizens is quite high. Every member of society needs to have good social skills in interacting to avoid conflict and division. These abilities include cooperation in resolving conflicts, friendliness, attention and affection between others.

The vast diversity of Acehnese society, although a valuable cultural asset, faces various challenges in the modern era. Differences in race, ethnicity, religion and culture often trigger social conflict, prejudice and discrimination which can disrupt the stability and harmony of society, and can even result in loss of life.⁶ This challenge demands higher social abilities from each individual, including communication, cooperation and conflict resolution skills. Therefore, continued efforts are needed in multicultural education, increasing awareness of the importance of tolerance, as well as supporting government policies for inclusion and social harmony so that the people of Aceh can better face the challenges of diversity in the modern era.

Currently, awareness and understanding of religious and ethnic diversity is very important for the people of Aceh. Diversity management is also crucial to preventing potential conflicts at all levels of society, including among Acehnese students. The presence

⁴ Hudzaifah Achmad Qotadah, Ali Abdul Wakhid, and Is Susanto, "Problems With the Implementation of Qanun Aceh Number 6 of 2014 Concerning Jinayat Law," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 22, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 116, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v22i1.6556>.

⁵ Hasan Basri, "Potret Islam Aceh: Diskursus Keulamaan dan Tradisi Penulisan Kitab Melayu," *Kalam: Jurnal Agama Dan Sosial Humaniora* 5, no. 2 (December 4, 2017): 5, <https://journal.lsamaaceh.com/index.php/kalam/article/view/34>.

⁶ Agus Akhmadi, "Moderasi Beragama dalam Keragaman Indonesia," *Inovasi-Jurnal Diklat Keagamaan* 13, no. 2 (April 23, 2019): 45.

of conflicts such as brawls or fights between ethnic groups in the campus environment can disrupt harmony and social interaction between students. For example, in 2012, there was a brawl incident between Central Aceh students and South Aceh students which resulted in the burning of 46 motorbikes.⁷ Another case was a brawl between students from the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Engineering, Syuah Kuala University in 2022.⁸ This kind of incident can be avoided if students from different ethnic backgrounds are able to build good communication and strengthen social interactions, and reduce selfish attitudes towards their respective areas of origin.

Positive social interactions can be realized if each student respects each other's differences, including cultural, religious and ethnic differences. An attitude of mutual respect between students who have diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds can strengthen solid relationships and encourage harmonious cooperation, as well as reduce the risk of conflict between fellow students. As the nation's next generation, students who are currently studying at various universities, including in Aceh, need to realize that Indonesia's cultural diversity is a gift that needs to be maintained and managed wisely, so that it can become a source of blessing for the progress of the nation and state.

Ethnic, cultural and religious diversity could be disrupted if extremism and radicalism, which seek to eradicate diversity, are allowed to develop in Indonesia.⁹ Therefore, religious moderation is an urgent need for the Indonesian people in order to avoid radical attitudes that have the potential to threaten the integrity of the country.¹⁰ Religious moderation is a preventive measure in an effort

⁷ Dewi Agustina, "Bentrok Mahasiswa Aceh Selatan dan Tengah 46 Motor Dibakar," *Tribunnews.com*, March 27, 2024, <https://www.tribunnews.com>.

⁸ Raja Umar and Gloria Setyvani Putri, "Kronologi Tawuran Mahasiswa Fakultas Pertanian dan Teknik USK Banda Aceh," *kompas.com*, March 27, 2024, <https://regional.kompas.com>.

⁹ Hamdi Abdul Karim, "Implementasi Moderasi Pendidikan Islam Rahmatallil 'Alamin dengan Nilai-Nilai Islam," *Ri'ayah: Jurnal Sosial dan Keagamaan* 4, no. 01 (July 3, 2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.32332/riayah.v4i01.1486>.

¹⁰ Abiyyah Naufal Maula, *Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama* (Lombok Tengah: Penerbit P4I, 2023), 14; See also Sumper Mulia Harahap, Fatahuddin Aziz Siregar, and Darwis Harahap, *Nilai-Nilai dan Praktik Moderasi Beragama Berbasis Kearifan Lokal di Sumatera Utara* (Medan: Merdeka Kreasi Group, 2022), 199.

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to prevent the spread of radicalism in Indonesia.¹¹ This is crucial, especially for students as the nation's next generation since religious moderation will foster a spirit of cooperation and togetherness in the process of nation and state development.

Higher education as a forum for the younger generation has an important role in managing and promoting ethnic diversity through religious moderation. In a college environment, students from various ethnic backgrounds come together, learn, and interact, create opportunities to understand and appreciate differences in culture, language, and traditions. Through an inclusive curriculum and diverse extracurricular activities, higher education can facilitate intercultural dialogue and strengthen tolerant and inclusive attitudes among students. Thus, higher education, especially Islamic higher education, not only functions as a vehicle for academic development, but it also as an agent of social change¹² which contributes to the creation of harmony in a multiethnic society with Islamic values.

Studies on Higher Education, ethnic harmony and religious moderation have been carried out by various researchers, including Hanani and Nelmaya. The results of the study show that campuses are often places where intolerant movements involving students develop. To overcome this problem, strengthening religious moderation is one possible solution.¹³ Apart from that, Jamaluddin's research results also show that to achieve a harmonious and moderate religious life in a multicultural society, simultaneous efforts are needed from the government and national components. These efforts include religious moderation, strengthening national commitment, and promoting tolerance.¹⁴

¹¹ Andi Saefulloh Anwar *et.al.*, "Internalisasi Nilai-nilai Moderasi Beragama Abad 21 melalui Media Sosial," *Jiip (Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan)* 5, no. 8 (2022): 3047, <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v5i8.795>.

¹² Agus Hermanto *et.al.*, "Religious Moderation in Higher Education in Maslahat Review," *Onomázein*, no. 62 (2023): December (November 26, 2023): 910.

¹³ Silfia Hanani and Nelmaya, "Penguatan Moderasi Beragama untuk Mengatasi Intoleransi di Kalangan Intelektual Kampus," *Kontekstualita* 35, no. 02 (December 17, 2020): 99, <https://doi.org/10.30631/35.02.91-102>.

¹⁴ Jamaluddin, "Implementasi Moderasi Beragama di Tengah Multikulturalitas Indonesia," *As-Salam: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 7, no. 1 (February 28, 2022): 2.

In contrast to previous studies, this research focuses more on efforts to build ethnic harmony through religious moderation at private Islamic Religious Universities in Aceh, a region with a unique social and cultural context. In addition, this research will use phenomenology and social interaction theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of interactions between individuals and groups in forming social norms, values and behavior.¹⁵ In this context, theory will be used to understand how students from various ethnic and religious backgrounds interact in the campus environment. Through these interactions, they can understand each other, respect differences, and build cooperation, which are important aspects in promoting ethnic harmony and religious moderation.

This research has significant relevance in promoting religious moderation and building inter-ethnic harmony. This is important since Aceh as a region with abundant ethnic and cultural wealth, has great potential through Islamic higher education to strengthen tolerance, understanding and cooperation between various community groups. It is hoped that this research will provide in-depth insight into how Islamic higher education institutions in Aceh can become a driving force for creating an inclusive, diverse and harmonious environment, as well as producing young leaders who promote moderation and peace in society.

The choice of universities in Aceh is based on the fact that students studying at various universities in Aceh come from various ethnicities in Indonesia, both from tribes in Aceh such as Gayo, Kluet, Aneuk Jamee, Tamiang, Alas, as well as from tribes originating from outside Aceh such as Malay, Batak, Minang, Javanese, Sundanese, Papuan, and others. It can be seen that students from various ethnicities and religions have strong ties with fellow students from the same ethnicity. Ethnic differences often make interactions between students difficult, especially because students' characteristics vary according to their ethnicity.

¹⁵ Girang Permata Gusti and Hilda, *Metode Penelitian Eksperimen untuk Pemula*, Edisi Pertama (Jawa Tengah: wawasan Ilmu, 2023), 91; See also Bagja Waluya, *Sosiologi: Menyelami Fenomena Sosial di Masyarakat* (Bandung: PT Grafindo Media Pratama, 2007), 66.

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This research applies a qualitative descriptive analysis model,¹⁶ by using a phenomenological approach as a framework and analytical method for understanding and investigating human life.¹⁷ The data sources consist of secondary and primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with lecturers and students from research subjects, the STAI Syekh Abdur Rauf Singkil campus, STAI Tapaktuan South Aceh and STAI Tgk. Chik Pante Kulu Banda Aceh. Data processing is carried out through data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions.¹⁸ Conclusions are drawn inductively by analyzing in-depth interview data and adapting them to the theory used to obtain general conclusions.

B. Concept and Meaning of Religious Moderation

Religious moderation is an attempt to resolve conflicts in diverse societies.¹⁹ The aim is to bridge and invite both extreme sides in religious practice to move towards the middle or return to the essence of religious teachings that humanize humans.²⁰ Religious moderation is an approach that takes the middle path in religion. Thus, explicitly, religious moderation requires religious adherents to think correctly in understanding relevant religions throughout time and place, without exaggerating or reducing its essence.²¹

Religious moderation in Arabic is known as *wasath* or *wasathiyah*, which is equivalent to the word *tawassuth* and has the meaning of being in the middle, *i'tidal* (fair), *tawazun* (balanced).²² In

¹⁶ Burhan Bungin, *Analisis Data Penelitian* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2017), 83.

¹⁷ George Ritzer and Douglas J. Goodman, *Modern Sociological Theory*, Terj. Alimandan (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2018), 75.

¹⁸ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R & D*, Cet. Ke-14 (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2014), 247.

¹⁹ Betria Zarpina Yanti and Doli Witro, "Islamic Moderation as A Resolution of Different Conflicts of Religion," *Andragogi: Jurnal Diklat Teknis Pendidikan Dan Keagamaan* 8, no. 1 (July 16, 2020): 446, <https://doi.org/10.36052/andragogi.v8i1.127>.

²⁰ Mustaqim Hasan, "Prinsip Moderasi Beragama dalam Kehidupan Berbangsa," *Jurnal Muftadiin* 7, no. 02 (September 16, 2021): 110–123.

²¹ Rimanto *et.al.*, "Examining Piil Pesenggiri Philosophy of Life Concept in the Context of Religious Moderation," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 22, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 140, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v22i1.12445>.

²² Kementerian Agama RI., *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), 7.

Latin, moderation means moderation or not being excessive or lacking,²³ and can be interpreted as self-mastery.²⁴ Moderation means moderate, the opposite of extreme or excessive in responding to differences and diversity. Religious moderation is a middle way approach amidst religious diversity in Indonesia. This moderation is an Indonesian culture that goes hand in hand with local wisdom without negating each other.²⁵ Religious moderation does not pit religion against local wisdom, but seeks a tolerant solution

The term *wasathiyyah* has been mentioned with several similar words and has a broad meaning, with one of the main meanings being justice. Justice is a fundamental principle that every individual must have, especially in a legal context. Without fair witnesses, testimony cannot be accepted, and justice in the law is society's greatest hope. Justice requires a neutral attitude between disputing parties and the provision of rights in a balanced manner without taking sides.²⁶

Wasathiyyah does not mean being indecisive or unclear about everything, such as a passive neutral attitude. Moderation also does not mean "middle" which can give the impression that *wasathiyyah* does not encourage people to strive to achieve goodness and positive things such as worship, knowledge and wealth. Apart from that, moderation does not mean being gentle. In this context, *wasathiyyah* means maintaining balance in all aspects of life, both worldly and spiritual. This balance must always be accompanied by efforts to adapt to the situation at hand, based on religious guidance and existing objective conditions.²⁷

²³ Kementerian Agama RI., 15; See also Samsul Ar, "Peran Guru Agama dalam Menanamkan Moderasi Beragama," *Al-Irfan : Journal of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 27, 2020): 40, <https://doi.org/10.36835/al-irfan.v3i1.3715>.

²⁴ Evans Dusep Dongoran *et.al.*, "Mananamkan Sikap Moderasi Beragama melalui Pendidikan Agama Kristen di SMAN 1 Bintan Timur," *Real Coster : Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 3, no. 1 (2020): 7–11, <https://doi.org/10.53547/rcj.v3i1.117>.

²⁵ Akhmadi, "Moderasi Beragama dalam Keragaman Indonesia," 45–55; See also Pribadyo Prakosa, "Moderasi Beragama: Praksis Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama," *Jurnal Ilmiah Religiosity Entity Humanity (JIREH)* 4, no. 1 (June 20, 2022): 53, <https://doi.org/10.37364/jireh.v4i1.69>.

²⁶ Maimun and Mohammad Kosim, *Moderasi Islam Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2019), 22–23.

²⁷ M. Quraisih Shihab, *Wasathiyyah Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama* (Tangerang Selatan: Lentera Hati Group, 2019), xi and 43.

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A Muslim who avoids violence and does not have extreme tendencies towards certain parties, who does not ignore spiritualism but also does not only focus on materialism, who balances attention between spiritual and physical aspects, and cares about individuals and social aspects, can be considered to have the qualities of *wasathiyyah* or moderate.²⁸

Moderation in religion is a process of strengthening truth and belief in the religion one adheres to, while providing space for individuals or other religious groups to practice their own beliefs. Individuals who have the character of moderation in religion will feel free to strengthen their beliefs and practice their religious teachings, while providing opportunities for individuals from various religions to worship according to their beliefs. Appreciation and acceptance of the existence of other religious communities is demonstrated through interaction and involvement in joint social activities.²⁹

Moderation must be understood and developed as a shared commitment to maintaining a harmonious balance.³⁰ Every member of society, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, religion or political choice, needs to be willing to listen to each other and learn to manage differences. This includes the ability to overcome differences that have the potential to give rise to conflict and division. This commitment not only promotes tolerance, but also strengthens social cohesion and creates an environment conducive to constructive dialogue. Thus, moderation becomes the basis for building an inclusive and peaceful society,³¹ where every individual feels valued and heard, and able to contribute positively to collective progress.

²⁸ Maimun and Kosim, *Moderasi Islam Indonesia*, 20.

²⁹ Kementerian Agama RI., *Gerak Langkah Pendidikan Islam untuk Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Diktis Kemenag RI dan Indonesian Muslim Crisis Center (IMCC), 2019), 10.

³⁰ Choirul Muna and Puji Lestari, "Penguatan Agama dan Wawasan Budaya sebagai Upaya dalam Menumbuhkan Spirit Moderasi Beragama," *Al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 20, 2023): 236–251, <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v6i1.483>.

³¹ Marde Christian Stenly Mawikere and Sudiria Hura, "Rekonsiliasi dalam Ajaran Kristen: Kontribusi terhadap Harmoni Multireligius dalam Kerangka Moderasi Beragama," *Jurnal Teologi Berita Hidup* 6, no. 2 (2023): 462–279, <https://doi.org/10.38189/jtbh.v6i2.575>.

Moderation requires an approach to religion that is always in the middle position, not leaning to the right or left. This does not mean simply opposing the extreme right and becoming synonymous with liberalism or the left. This view is wrong, because moderation actually invites groups, right and left, to act fairly and in balance. A moderate view must be able to respond to both sides, identify the negative aspects of each, and pull them into the middle to realize the values of balance and mutual respect.³²

C. Religious Moderation in the Context of Ethnic Diversity

The Indonesian nation is a pluralistic nation with various tribes, ethnicities, cultures and religions. This diversity needs to be managed well otherwise it can cause divisions that threaten the integrity of the nation and state.³³ Therefore, it is an obligation for all Indonesian people to maintain and care for diversity to the best of their abilities. The slightest friction in the name of religion must be avoided, because conflict can destroy the integrity of the Indonesian nation. All forms of disputes, debates, hostility, as well as acts of insulting and bringing down each other are calamities that are detrimental and bring disaster to the Indonesian nation. Therefore, the Indonesian nation must be united in cultural, ethnic and religious diversity.³⁴ Every Indonesian citizen, regardless of religion, culture and ethnicity, must avoid actions that could cause divisions that are detrimental to the nation.

Religious moderation in the context of ethnic diversity in Indonesia is an approach that emphasizes balance, tolerance and respect for differences. Indonesia, as a country with diverse tribes, ethnicities, cultures and religions, needs religious moderation to create national harmony and unity. Religious moderation teaches the importance of being in the middle, where no group feels dominant or

³² Ma'arif Syamsul, *Sekolah Harmoni Restorasi Pendidikan Moderasi Pesantren* (Wonogiri: Pilar Nusantara, 2020), 72.

³³ Ali Muhtarom, Sahlul Fuad, and Tsabit Latif, *Moderasi Beragama: Konsep, Nilai, dan Strategi Pengembangannya di Pesantren* (Jakarta Selatan: Yayasan Talibuna Nusantara, 2020), 16.

³⁴ Muhammad Sulton Fatoni, *Buku Pintar Islam Nusantra* (Tangerang Selatan: IIMaN, 2017), 111.

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marginalized, but all parties play a role in creating an inclusive environment.

In the context of ethnic diversity in Indonesia, religious moderation encourages each individual to respect the traditions and religious beliefs of others, while remaining firm in their own religious beliefs.³⁵ This approach avoids extremism, both in the form of religious radicalism and excessive secularism, and encourages constructive interfaith dialogue. Thus, religious moderation becomes the basis for cooperation and solidarity among various ethnic and religious groups, which in turn strengthens social integration and national stability.

Religious moderation also means recognizing and celebrating the rich culture of various tribes and ethnicities in Indonesia. This involves seeking to understand and respect various religious practices and customs, as well as collaborating in activities that promote unity and peace. Through education, media and public policies that support inclusivity, religious moderation can be strengthened and made a main pillar in maintaining the integrity of the Indonesian nation. This is important because religion is one of the unifying factors of the Indonesian nation.³⁶

Religious moderation is one of the keys to maintaining the integrity and stability of the diverse Indonesian nation.³⁷ By promoting inclusive education, responsible media, fair public policies, and active participation from civil society and religious organizations, religious moderation can become a strong foundation in building a peaceful and harmonious society. In the context of ethnic diversity in Indonesia, religious moderation is not only a choice, but also a necessity to create a better future for all.

³⁵ Asniah and Rifki Rosyad, "Implementasi Moderasi Beragama dalam Meningkatkan Kerukunan Suku Anak dalam di Desa Dwi Karya Bakti Jambi," *Refleksi* 22, no. 1 (June 9, 2023): 101–128, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ref.v22i1.32513>.

³⁶ Arhanuddin Salim *et.al.*, *Moderasi Beragama: Implementasi dalam Pendidikan, Agama dan Budaya Lokal* (Malang: Selaras Media Kreasindo, 2023), 14.

³⁷ Rasina Padeni Nasution *et.al.*, "Moderasi Beragama: Upaya Mengatasi Pemahaman Konservatif pada Masyarakat Muslim di Indonesia," *Al-Usrah: Jurnal Al Ahwal As Syakhsiyah* 10, no. 2 (December 20, 2022): 53–70, <https://doi.org/10.30821/al-usrah.v10i2.14675>.

In a society rich in ethnic diversity such as Indonesia, religious moderation plays a key role in maintaining social harmony and peaceful coexistence. As a central principle in practicing religious beliefs, religious moderation has profound implications in the context of ethnic diversity.³⁸ This is especially relevant in areas such as Aceh, which has a variety of ethnic and religious groups. In the context of ethnic diversity, religious moderation plays an important role in shaping individual and community attitudes towards religious differences.

Religious moderation teaches the importance of respecting and appreciating religious differences among various ethnic groups. This approach allows individuals to practice their religious beliefs without fear of discrimination or persecution. In an ethnically diverse environment, religious moderation also encourages open and constructive interfaith dialogue.³⁹ This dialogue helps strengthen inter-ethnic understanding and promotes tolerance and cooperation among them.

It should be emphasized that one important aspect of religious moderation in the context of ethnic diversity is a moderate attitude in carrying out religious beliefs. This attitude emphasizes the importance of avoiding extremism and religious fundamentalism which can threaten social harmony and stability. By maintaining a middle stance, individuals can prevent interreligious conflict and promote peace amidst cultural and religious diversity.

In addition, education and awareness about religious moderation also have a significant role in shaping individual attitudes towards religious differences. Through inclusive education and interfaith dialogue, individuals can better understand the values of inter-ethnic tolerance, understanding and cooperation. This helps build positive relations among various ethnic groups, as well as promote peace and stability amidst cultural and religious diversity.

³⁸ Alfrida Taruk Ponso *et.al.*, “Penanaman Nilai-nilai Moderasi Beragama dalam Lingkup Masyarakat Majemuk,” *Jurnal Salome : Multidisipliner Keilmuan* 1, no. 5 (September 19, 2023): 357, <https://salome.joln.org/index.php/4/article/view/40>.

³⁹ Titin Wulandari Malau, “Dialog Antaragama dan Kontribusi Tokoh Agama dalam Penyelesaian Konflik dan Implementasinya untuk Memperkuat Toleransi,” *Jurnal Magistra* 2, no. 1 (2024): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.62200/magistra.v2i1.70>.

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Referring to various existing opinions, religious moderation in the context of overall ethnic diversity is a principle that supports harmony, tolerance and respect for religious differences. By applying the values of religious moderation in everyday life, society can build positive relationships and promote peace and stability amidst cultural and religious diversity.

Overall, religious moderation in the context of ethnic diversity is a principle that supports harmony, tolerance and respect for religious differences. By applying the values of religious moderation in everyday life, society can build positive relationships and promote peace and stability amidst cultural and religious diversity.

D. Building Ethnic Harmony through Religious Moderation in Aceh Private Islamic Religious Universities

Before we go any further, it is important to emphasize that this study aims to explore the urgency of building ethnic harmony and implementing religious moderation within private Islamic religious colleges in Aceh Province. This study highlights two key concepts, ethnic harmony and religious moderation. Ethnic harmony refers to efforts to achieve harmony, cooperation, and integration between various ethnic groups within the campus community (especially students), while religious moderation emphasizes the importance of middle attitudes, tolerance, and respect for diversity in a religious context.

This study is rooted in the fact that Aceh is a region rich in diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and has a complex history, especially related to ethnic and religious conflicts. Therefore, students, as agents of change and the next generation in society, play an important role in shaping the future and make a significant contribution in forming an inclusive, tolerant and peaceful social environment in society.

Thus, Islamic universities in Aceh can become agents of positive change in shaping student attitudes and behavior and influencing social dynamics in wider society. This reflects the awareness that Islamic higher education is not only about religious knowledge, but

also about forming a tolerant and inclusive character in facing differences. This university can become a vehicle for promoting ethnic harmony and religious moderation, showing that Islamic higher education in the region not only aims to spread religious knowledge, but also to play an important role in building peace, tolerance and inter-ethnic cooperation in society.

The research results show that in an effort to build ethnic harmony through religious moderation, private Islamic campuses in Aceh, such as STAI Syekh Abdur Rauf Singkil, STAI Tapaktuan, and STAI Tgk. Chik Pante Kulu, implements various programs and activities aimed at promoting ethnic harmony and religious moderation. The main steps taken include improving the curriculum by including material on tolerance and interfaith dialogue, as well as organizing social activities involving various ethnic groups of students. In addition, they strive to create a campus environment that is inclusive and friendly to differences.

In its implementation, the stages of building ethnic harmony through religious moderation at Private Islamic Religious Universities in Aceh are implemented through several steps:

1. Curriculum Development

Private Islamic Religious Universities in Aceh are Islamic higher education institutions that have an important role in forming a moderate understanding of religion and promoting ethnic harmony in the multicultural society in Aceh. In the curriculum development process, several informants emphasized that special attention was given to ensuring that the education delivered not only included religious aspects, but also strengthened the values of tolerance, diversity and interfaith dialogue.

This data is strengthened by information from other informants who explain that curriculum development at private Islamic campuses in Aceh takes into account the need for a deep understanding of the culture, history and traditions of various ethnic and religious groups. Learning materials are carefully selected to reflect the diversity of society and to foster respect for differences. Lecturers and instructors on campus are encouraged to set examples and become facilitators in forming open and tolerant thinking for students.

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According to one informant, curriculum development also pays attention to the importance of interpersonal skills training. Students are given the opportunity to develop effective communication skills, empathy, and the ability to resolve conflicts. This is considered important so that they are able to interact positively with individuals from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, and can act as mediators in resolving tensions and conflicts between groups.

Apart from offering a structured curriculum, private Islamic campuses in Aceh also empower students to play an active role in building ethnic harmony and religious moderation. This can be realized through various extracurricular activities, social projects, or volunteer programs that emphasize the values of tolerance, cross-cultural cooperation, and peace. Thus, through this holistic approach, private Islamic campuses in Aceh act as educational institutions that not only produce graduates who believe, but also have noble character and are able to bring peace to society.

2. Education and Training

Education and training play a central role in building ethnic harmony through religious moderation on private Islamic campuses in Aceh. Through this approach, higher education aims to create an inclusive learning environment, where students not only gain academic knowledge but are also given the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the values of tolerance, diversity and interfaith dialogue.

According to field data, private Islamic campuses in Aceh, such as STAI Syekh Abdur Rauf Singkil, STAI Tapaktuan, and STAI Tgk. Chik Pante Kulu, first developed a curriculum with specific content that included courses and teaching programs that promoted a holistic understanding of different religions and diverse cultures. Learning materials are designed to encourage critical reflection, open dialogue, and respect for differences. Through this learning, students are given a strong foundation to understand the importance of moderation in religion and internalize universal human values.

Apart from a comprehensive curriculum, education is also integrated with various extracurricular activities, workshops and

seminars aimed at broadening students' insight into ethnic and religious diversity. Interpersonal skills training are also an integral part of education at private Islamic campuses in Aceh. Students are encouraged to develop effective communication skills, empathy, and the ability to resolve conflict. This allows them to interact with individuals from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in an open and understanding manner, as well as to act as mediators in conflict resolution.

Furthermore, strengthening student leadership in promoting religious moderation and ethnic harmony at private Islamic campuses in Aceh is also a main focus. Students are encouraged to take an active role in organizations and initiatives that champion the values of tolerance, cross-cultural cooperation and peace. This not only gives them practical experience in applying these values, but also allows them to become effective agents of change in society, both during their studies and after becoming alumni of private Islamic campuses in Aceh.

Referring to existing data, overall, education and training in building ethnic harmony through religious moderation at private Islamic campuses in Aceh not only offers opportunities to gain academic knowledge, but also aims to form character and attitudes that support diversity and peace in an increasingly complex and multicultural.

3. Dialogue and Discussion

Dialogue and discussion are a very important part of building ethnic harmony through religious moderation on private Islamic campuses in Aceh. This forum allows students and lecturers to openly share their views, experiences and understanding of issues related to ethnic and religious diversity. Through this forum, students are given the opportunity to listen to each other and understand various perspectives. Students from various ethnic and religious backgrounds can share their experiences, including challenges and successes in establishing cross-cultural relationships.

According to various informants, the campuses of STAI Syekh Abdur Rauf Singkil, STAI Tapaktuan, and STAI Tgk. Chik Pante

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Kulu regularly holds dialogues and discussions to become a forum that facilitates the exchange of ideas and in-depth knowledge about the values of tolerance, diversity and religious moderation among students. This activity is reinforced by various lecturer opinions, thereby enabling participants to develop a broader understanding of these concepts and how to apply them in everyday life during the study period.

During dialogue and discussion, students have the opportunity to ask questions, stimulate reflection, and build strong arguments based on understanding gained from the learning material and personal experience. This activity is an important part of developing critical and analytical thinking skills that are crucial in promoting religious moderation. Apart from that, dialogue and discussion also function as an opportunity to resolve misperceptions and conflicts that may arise between students. By speaking openly and honestly, students can resolve tensions and misunderstandings, and build more harmonious and inclusive relationships between students from different ethnic, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

4. Establishment of the House of Religious Moderation

The establishment of Religious Moderation Houses (RMB) at various private Islamic campuses in Aceh is a strategic step designed to promote ethnic harmony through religious moderation. According to informants, RMB functions as a center for activities and discussions that allow students and lecturers to interact intensively, share ideas, and deepen understanding of religious and cultural diversity. The main aim of establishing RMB is to create an inclusive academic environment, where the values of tolerance and mutual respect can develop among students.

The establishment of RMB in various private Islamic religious universities in Aceh is a strategic initiative aimed at building ethnic harmony through a religious moderation approach. As explained by various informants, RMB acts as a center for academic and social activities dedicated to promoting the values of moderation, tolerance and mutual respect in the campus environment, both among lecturers and students.

This is confirmed by other sources which explain that at RMB, students and lecturers are involved in various activities, such as discussions and seminars that focus on religious and cultural diversity. RMB has become a space for intensive dialogue, enabling the exchange of ideas and a deep understanding of the plurality that exists in Acehese society. In this way, the RMB helps instill the values of inclusivity and harmony that are essential in building social cohesion in Aceh.

In addition, the existence of RMB can create an inclusive academic environment, where every individual feels valued and accepted, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. By promoting constructive and educative interactions, RMB contributes to students' personal and professional development, as well as strengthening harmonious social ties among the campus community. It is hoped that this initiative can become a model for other institutions in their efforts to build a peaceful and tolerant society through education and continuous dialogue.

Referring to the various explanations above, private Islamic religious universities in Aceh have a strategic role in building ethnic harmony and implementing religious moderation in a heterogeneous society. Through an inclusive approach and inter-religious dialogue, this university has become an important place for cross-cultural encounters, where students from various ethnic and religious backgrounds can interact with each other and understand each other's differences. The educational programs, seminars and extracurricular activities held by the college provide a platform for open discussions about religious moderation and the importance of ethnic harmony in Aceh's multicultural society.

Not only as learning centers, but private Islamic religious colleges in Aceh also act as agents of social change. They encourage awareness of the values of religious moderation, such as tolerance, understanding and mutual respect, and promote active participation of students in efforts to build ethnic harmony. Thus, private Islamic religious colleges in Aceh are not only places of education, but also laboratories for the formation of attitudes and values that support religious moderation and ethnic harmony in Acehese society.

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Religious moderation in the context of ethnic diversity is an approach that seeks to create harmony and social cohesion amidst differences. By emphasizing tolerance, inclusiveness, dialogue, education, and efforts to overcome extremism, religious moderation can be a strong basis for building a peaceful and harmonious society. Effective implementation of religious moderation will help maintain unity and integrity amidst ethnic diversity, as well as create an environment of mutual respect and respect.

Examining it from an Islamic perspective, education at private Islamic religious universities in Aceh is a mandate that must be carried out with great responsibility. This institution is considered a vehicle for developing a moderate understanding of religion, in accordance with Islamic teachings which emphasize mercy and peace. Islam emphasizes the importance of tolerance, diversity and interfaith dialogue in building harmonious relations between individuals and between groups in society.⁴⁰

The importance of respecting ethnic diversity in society is also highlighted in Islam. Islam teaches that all humans were created from one pair (Adam and Eve) and divided into tribes and nations so that they would know each other (Qs. Al-Hujurat verse 13). In this context, religious education that emphasizes respect for cultural and ethnic differences is considered an implementation of Islamic teachings.⁴¹

In addition, providing interpersonal skills training to private Islamic students in Aceh is considered an important aspect of education, in accordance with Islamic principles. Islam teaches the importance of communicating well, having empathy, and resolving conflicts wisely. In this context, students are encouraged to become mediators who are able to manage tensions and conflicts between groups in a way that is in line with Islamic teachings. In doing so,

⁴⁰ Idrus Ruslan, *Kontribusi Lembaga-lembaga Keagamaan dalam Pengembangan Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama di Indonesia* (Bandar Lampung: Arjasa Pratama, 2020), 41–42.

⁴¹ Zur'atun Ni'mah, *Pendidikan Agama Multikultural: Membangun Toleransi Generasi Muda* (Lombok Tengah, NTB: Pusat Pengembangan Pendidikan dan Penelitian Indonesia (P4I), 2022), 61; See also Fita Mustafida, *Pendidikan Islam Multikultural* (Depok: PT. RajaGrafindo Persada, 2021), 19.

they not only develop as academically skilled individuals, but also as members of society capable of promoting harmony and social harmony.

Overall, education and training in building ethnic harmony through religious moderation at private Islamic campuses in Aceh not only offers opportunities to gain academic knowledge, but also aims to shape character and attitudes that support diversity and peace in an increasingly complex and multicultural society. These principles are in line with Islamic teachings which emphasize the importance of peaceful coexistence and respect for differences in society.⁴²

Apart from curriculum development, education and training, dialogue and discussion are important elements in building ethnic harmony through religious moderation on private Islamic campuses in Aceh. This principle is in line with Islamic teachings which encourage its followers to dialogue and exchange ideas in order to achieve a deeper understanding of various issues.⁴³ Dialogue forums allow students and lecturers to openly share their views, experiences and understanding of ethnic and religious diversity. Through this forum, students are given the opportunity to listen and understand various perspectives, as well as share their experiences, including challenges and successes in establishing cross-cultural relationships.

Islam encourages its followers to live in peace and respect each other, as stated in the Qs. Al-Hujurat verse 13. It teaches that humans were created in various tribes and nations so that they could know and understand each other.⁴⁴ Therefore, dialogue and discussion activities that promote religious tolerance and moderation on private Islamic campuses in Aceh are a real implementation of Islamic teachings in building a harmonious and inclusive society.

Regarding the establishment of RMB on private Islamic campuses in Aceh as a strategic step to promote ethnic harmony

⁴² Dian Nafiatul Awaliyah, *Toleransi dan Moderasi untuk Semua* (Demak: Hasfa, 2024), 6.

⁴³ Moh Shofan, *Menegakkan Pluralisme: Fundamentalisme-Konservatif di Tubuh Muhammadiyah* (Yogyakarta: Lembaga Studi Agama dan Filsafat, 2008), 362.

⁴⁴ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsir Fi Zhilalil Qur'an* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2004), 421; See also Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir Ath-Thabari, *Tafsir Ath-Thabari*, Terj. Abdul Somad dan Abdurrahim Supandi (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2009), 767.

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through religious moderation in line with Islamic teachings, as explained in Qs. Al-Hujurat verse 13. RMB's role in promoting the values of moderation, tolerance and mutual respect in the campus environment, as well as its role in helping to instill values of inclusivity and harmony, creating an academic environment that respects every individual regardless of ethnic or religious background, in accordance with the Islamic mission to create a just and peaceful society,⁴⁵ and emphasizes the importance of harmonious relationships between individuals and between groups.

Students' active involvement in building ethnic harmony and religious moderation is considered an implementation of the Islamic mandate. Islam emphasizes the importance of doing good to fellow humans and fighting for goodness in society. Therefore, private Islamic campuses in Aceh are expected to not only produce graduates who are academically intelligent, but also have noble character and are able to bring peace to society, in accordance with Islamic teachings which emphasize peace as the main goal.

E. Conclusion

This research reveals the important role of private Islamic religious universities in Aceh in facilitating inter-ethnic dialogue and promoting religious moderation as a foundation for ethnic harmony. Through educational programs and extracurricular activities, as well as the establishment of the Religious Moderation House (RMB), the college provides space for open discussions about religious and cultural differences, encourages inclusive attitudes, and broadens cross-cultural horizons among students. However, research highlights the challenges faced, such as a lack of awareness of the importance of religious moderation, as well as social tensions that influence the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations. To overcome this, it is necessary to increase education and awareness about tolerance, as well as inter-ethnic cooperation, and active involvement of various parties in supporting efforts to build ethnic harmony through religious moderation in Aceh.

⁴⁵ Abdul Halim, *Relasi Islam, Politik dan Kekuasaan* (Yogyakarta: Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 2013), 213.

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