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Exploring the evolution of religious moderation leadership from the local to national level

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Religious conflicts in Indonesia are prevalent, with endless debates, provocations, and strains among religious groups. Therefore, promoting moderation is crucial to alleviate, minimize, or even eradicate such tensions. Based on the country's history related to the monarchy system, as well as the jumbled existence of political, religious, and social leaders in society, the role of a leader is significant. Unfortunately, Western, religious, and secular values of leadership have limited opportunities for implementation because of Indonesia's heterogenous community. Therefore, this article argued that the native leadership knowledge of tona'as from Minahasa is a promising area to explore for religious moderation. To achieve the desired result, descriptive, analytical, and argumentative methods were employed. In conclusion, the responsibility, requirements, and praxis of a tona'as offers alternative insights into leadership in relation to religious moderation in Indonesia.

Contribution: This article contributes the values of leadership model in Minahasa that could be a constructive contribution to the religious moderation in Indonesia. The knowledge and insight of tona'as as an original culture and tradition offers leadership philosophy that could bring harmony and peace.

Keywords: religious; moderation; leadership; Indonesia; Minahasa.

Introduction

Indonesia is a country with a heterogenous context, where religion plays a significant role in defining the identity of its people. This diversity leads to distinctions among Indonesians, which eventually creates possibilities of tensions among religious communities. Unfortunately, these tensions are often fueled by stereotypes and biases towards a certain religion, which are maintained by some people. A qualitative study has shown that intolerance is prevalent in some places in this country, but it is rarely exhibited publicly. For example, some religious communities prefer not to have neighbours from other religions (Wahid 2020; Muhdina 2015), and they are probably not willing to sell their properties to non-muslims. On the other hand, visible tensions among religious communities are also present, where religious leaders provoke their followers with hate speech that promotes hostility and enmity among other groups. Openly, public speeches often encourage exclusivity and mistreatment of other groups, exacerbating the tensions between religious communities (Ash-Shidiq & Pratama 2021; Bakri, Zulhazmi & Laksono 2019).

However, religious leaders play a significant role in Indonesia because the country is not a secular or religious state. Legally, the state and religion are separated, but in some cases or fields, the state can engage in religious activities. This unique blend of state and religion has led to a perception of Indonesians as spiritual people who belong to certain religious communities. Historically, most parts of *Nusantara* practiced a monarchy system where the king is both a political and religious leader. Therefore, it is not surprising that religious leaders are respected and considered political leaders by their followers, and in some cases, even more influential than the actual state leaders (Abdillah 2014; Dahlan 2014; Firdaus 2014). This implies that religious leaders have significant authority and can play a crucial role in resolving religious conflicts in Indonesia. They can either promote chaos or moderation, depending on the circumstances. This authority enables religious leaders to contribute significantly to maintaining peace and resolving conflicts in the country.

Conflicts and tensions among religions persist, but efforts have been made to reduce and cure them through religious moderation. For example, Triposa and Yulianto (2022) explored religious moderation from a Christian perspective by analysing the biblical text of Matthew 23:25–32. They argued that a hospitable religion, according to God's teachings, contains a noble element, namely self-awareness as an inferior creature who is completely dependent on God. The main principle

of hospitable religion, as contained in Matthew 23, is the need for a foundation that is in accordance with the truth of God's word. This includes a perspective on oneself as a sinful creature and a perspective on others, including other religious groups, as siblings who need to be loved and appreciated as God loves. Similarly, Siagian (2022) proposes the teachings of Jesus, summarised in the 'blessed' sayings in Matthew 5:1–12, as a component in building religious moderation in a Christian context. Prakosa (2022) argued from a religious studies perspective that religious moderation is balanced on two things, namely understanding religious texts (scriptures) in context and upholding humanity as the essence of religion. From an Islamic perspective, Shihab (2019) insists that the teachings of religious moderation are promising. On the flip side, from Christianic perspective proposed religious moderation by comparing the peaceful integration insights of Islam and Protestant traditions called Islam and *Kristen Nusantara* (Hutagalung, Rumbay & Ferinia 2022). Meanwhile, Abror (2020) emphasises that religious harmony has to be achieved through moderation. To manage Indonesia's diverse religious situation, Abror argued that visions and solutions can create harmony and peace in carrying out religious life, namely by prioritising religious moderation, respecting diversity, avoiding intolerance, extremism, and radicalism. Religious tolerance does not require a melting pot of beliefs or exchanging beliefs with different religious groups. Rather, it involves *mu'amalah* [social interaction] and shared boundaries that may and may not be violated. The essence of moderation lies in mutual respect's uniqueness without feeling threatened by one's beliefs or rights. Finally, in the Western theory of leadership, Muhdyanto (2019) presented Max Weber's role in authority and leadership for local people in Indonesia. Kholis (2020) attempted to combine Western thought with the local issue in order to produce a religious moderation.

The disparity between the secular and religious approaches to the issue of moderation is quite apparent because of varying contexts and different objectives. Meanwhile, Western theories of leadership offer intriguing formulas that can aid in religious moderation, context, purpose, and issues addressed in the Western world are different from those in Indonesia. Western leadership models are primarily concerned with topics such as authoritarian leaders, freedom of speech, and unlimited power, while the focus of this article is on religious moderation. Although religious themes share valuable ideas that contribute to the development of religion, applying a specific leadership model from a particular religion can be problematic and opposed by other groups.

Therefore, given the limitations of secular and religious perspectives, local culture as an alternative source of knowledge for constructive contributions to religious moderation is worth exploring. This approach is particularly suitable for Indonesia and some scholars already proposed local models of leadership for religious moderation (Kosasih, Putro & Mardimin 2021; Suarnaya 2021). However, as the local cultures of some regions have been discussed, such as

Buleleng, the leadership traditions of other regions such as Minahasa have been overlooked in academic discourse. Minahasa is part of North Sulawesi province and has a rich tradition of leadership that offers an alternative perspective for religious leaders to reconsider their behaviour and beliefs in line with local values. Moreover, local knowledge is more neutral compared to secular or religious knowledge on leadership. This article argued that the leading idea of tona'as Minahasa is an alternative contribution to religious moderation in Indonesia, in contrast to relying solely on religious doctrine or Western knowledge. Consequently, the primary study question driving this work is, what can be learned from the leadership idea of tona'as that can contribute to religious moderation in Indonesia? This article is a qualitative work that focuses on argumentative-descriptive analysis. Books, articles, and any related sources are the main backbone to construct the idea. Additionally, some significant informations are gained from prospective informants who display the originality of Minahasans philosophy on leadership.

Discussion
Religious conflict

After Indonesia gained independence, the country went through three important periods, namely *orde lama*, *orde baru*, and reformation. *Orde lama* was a period focused on state construction and took place during the early days of their freedom from colonialism. *Orde baru*, on the other hand, played a significant role in religious development. During this era, president Soeharto, known as the 'dictator leader' ruled with authoritarian sovereignty (Marijan 2019). Religions and religious communities had the right to live out their beliefs without criticism of the state. Extreme and radical religious groups had no place as the state suppressed any movement that endangers the harmony and socio-political environment. *Orde baru* lasted for 30 years, during which the religious community lived under government control. In 1998, Indonesia transitioned from orde baru to a monumental period of reformation where the marginal-religious community gained the freedom to express their ideology, sometimes provoking enmity among the people. The situation created tension among religious groups and desperately requires religious moderation.

The heterogeneity of Indonesia's religious context creates tension among different and also the same religious group. For example, conflicts between Islam and Ahmadia, and between the charismatic and reform tradition within the church, add to the already existing tensions (Andi Muh. Taqiyuddin, Misbahuddin & Kurniati 2022). The majority-minority dynamic between the local religions or 'penghayat kepercayaan', Adventists, and those who abstain from unclean food also contribute to this discord (Rumbay 2021b). Unfortunately, conflicts between different religions are even worse, such as those between: (1) Islam and Hinduism in Bali, (2) Protestants and Catholics in Nusa Tenggara Timur, (3) Islam and Protestants in Java, etc. (Prasojo & Pabbajah 2023). As a result of the large population of religious

communities and the wide gap between them, it is difficult to facilitate discussions and promote religious moderation. However, religious leaders can act as mediators, bringing harmony and peace among their followers or congregations.

The role of religious leaders

Kiayi is a highly respected personality in the Islamic tradition in Indonesia, particularly in Java. The term 'Kyai' exclusively refers to a person who has religious knowledge and is respected as a leader in a community. *Kyai* is a local term that is familiar among Muslims and is similar to '*Ulama*', a person with extensive knowledge of Islam, or '*Ustadz*', a teacher with a specific authority in teaching Islam (Assiroji 2020). These terms are considered leaders in the Muslim community as they are involved in religious activities, such as preaching, sharing *tausiyah*, and giving advice to their followers. As Indonesia has a history of a monarchy system, a religious leader is also respected as a political leader, and in some cases, even as a state leader. In odd moments, these leaders can also share their political thought and connect with other groups for religious moderation motifs. Similarly, pastors and church leaders also have a significant role in dealing with religious tensions and secular issues within the Christian community. In some cases, they can participate in politics and align with a particular party to defend their ideologies. Currently, the vice president of Indonesia, Kyai Haji Ma'aruf Amin, is a former religious leader of Nahdatul Ulama and Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI). Some local state leaders, such as governors, regents, and majors are also active religious leaders. Given their social power and control over the community, religious leaders in Indonesia have a significant role in influencing both political and religious policies, making their role crucial in promoting religious moderation in the country.

According to Farild (2002), *Kyai* holds a position of the elite in society and has a major influence on the development of the Muslim community. *Kyai* is a strategic figure who possesses extensive knowledge of Islamic teachings and has the potential to contribute to religious moderation. However, at times, Kyai can also become a source of legitimacy for various problems faced by the people. Despite this, this personality plays a crucial role in the socio-political aspect, particularly in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia. Another important religious leader in this regard is the *Ulama* and the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, Nahdatul Ulama (NU), is made up of Ulamas who promote religious moderation. Nahdatul Ulama's strength lies in its moderate pattern of thought, which has been rooted since its founding. This inclusive Islam is presently called Islam *Wasathiyah* or religious moderation and it is integrated in several ways, such as accepting one of the four schools of thought, following the teachings of the Asy'ariyah Aqidah, finalising the pattern of relations between Islam and nationality, as well as promoting interfaith dialogue. NU's moderation value is also demonstrated through the attitudes of *tasāmuh*, *tawasuth*,

tawāzun, and the synergy of the *ukhuwah* trilogy, including *Islamiyah, Insaniyah,* and *Wathaniyah*. With its moderate tradition, *Ulama* in NU plays an essential role in caring for the diversity of the Indonesian nation (Mohammad Ashif 2022:22).

Several Islamic leaders are actively advocating for religious moderation in Indonesia. One of them is Muhammad Yusuf Kalla, who strongly emphasises the importance of brotherhood among all religions, ethnicities, and races without discrimination. According to Abu, Wekke and Mokodenso (2020), Kalla believes that religious moderation starts with a strong sense of brotherhood. Meanwhile, Astutik, Al-habsyi and Polamolo (2022) promote the spiritual leadership of K.H. Abdul Ghofir Nawawi as a model for religious moderation. They highlighted the importance of honesty, faith, and humility in fostering religious moderation. Ferdian (2021) draws inspiration from Dainawi Geretan Bumi, applying an instructional and demonstration framework to promote religious moderation. He provides three examples, namely special parenting plans, demonstration designs, and student designs to help build and shape religious character. Overall, these Islamic leaders offer valuable insights and guidance in promoting religious moderation and strengthening unity among diverse communities in Indonesia.

In addition to the essential roles played by Kyai, Ulama, and other religious leaders, pastor leadership in Christianity is crucial. Arifianto (2020) argues that church leaders have a duty entrusted by God to be carried out in accordance with His instructions and provisions. To begin promoting the value of harmony, which has an impact on spiritual progress and tolerance among fellow religious communities, a pastor needs to serve willingly, self-devotedly, humbly, and be a good example. Church leader has a significant role in providing spiritual growth to God's congregation, which can share harmony and peace with non-Christians. Pastors also have a role as educators to teach and guide the congregation to grow spiritually and to lead with a soul that serves the followers. Leaders are expected to recognise that God's congregation, as part of a multicultural society, increasingly understands the importance of religious moderation and lives it effectively, becoming doers of God's Word. Through this, they can contribute to the spiritual growth of the congregation and affect the quality and quantity of God's church consistently, awakening the responsibility of religious moderation. Besides internal matters, the role of church leaders also includes public issues. Berhitu (2014) suggested that church leaders have a social responsibility to reach out and establish relationships with other groups, promoting peaceful and harmonious relations.

The responsibility of a pastor or church leader goes beyond the ecclesiastical scope and encompasses a broad range of responsibilities that involve religious moderation and socio-political development. Consequently, pastors, shepherds, and elders have the opportunity to share their religious

moderation with followers. The main question is, how do religious leaders effectively share their moderation knowledge with their followers? What is the formula? Is it possible to adopt a secular or religious approach?

Against secular and religion ideas of leadership

The context of Western knowledge is vastly different from that of Indonesia, considering demographic, anthropological, and cultural disparities. The homogenous population of most Western countries contrasts sharply with Indonesia's diverse populace, which is made up of hundreds of ethnicities, languages, dialects, and cultural backgrounds. To develop a model of leadership that is suited to Indonesia's context, a comprehensive and holistic approach is required. Anthropologically, there are significant differences between Western and Indonesian contexts. For example, Hiebert (1985:54) argued that as American prefers to speak the truth, Asians tend to encourage and avoid causing harm to people. In airports, Americans often opt for chairs to preserve their dignity, while Asians choose to sleep on the floor for comfort. Cultural gaps also exist, with Indonesia embracing ancestral spirits while Western cultures focusing on technological and scientific advancement. These disparities underscore the unlikelihood of a Western leadership model being advantageous or effective in promoting religious moderation. Therefore, it is essential to understand and adopt the values and features that are unique to the local context.

On the other hand, while religion offers a perspective on leadership, it does not apply to all religious leaders. For example, Rumbay et al. (2022a) proposed a Pauline leadership approach that aims to bridge the gap between Christianity and local concepts of leadership, but its adoption among Muslims or other religions at a national level is unlikely. Issues have also been raised regarding the leadership of Muhammad S.A.W. from an Islamic perspective (Sulaiman 2017; Tyas 2019; Umam 2018), but it does not apply to other religious groups. Therefore, local knowledge of leadership offers promising opportunities for discussion, as it is not hindered by demographic, anthropological, or cultural differences. Furthermore, it can be applied to all ethnic and religious communities. It is crucial to raise awareness and foster the growth and development of local identity. Leadership formulations that are rooted in local culture are more likely to contribute to the advancement of science compared to other sources, and they can help to promote harmony and peace among followers of different religions. Therefore, leadership values that are derived from the local context are essential.

The possibilities of Tona'as leadership

Minahasa, as a native ethnicity in Indonesia, boosts a rich culture that offers ample material for academic discussion. Its diverse cultures, values, and contextual nuances serve as a promising laboratory for scholarly exploration. In fact, several studies have already been conducted on various facets of Minahasa including its culinary identity (Rumbay 2021b), ancestral spirits (Rumbay 2021a), religious traditions (Rumbay & Siahaya 2023) (Rumbay, Hartonio & Siahaya 2022), cultural practices (Rumbay et al. 2022b), etc.

The cultural heritage of Minahasa offers various models of leadership, with one of the most prominent being the tona'as. Tona'as is a leadership form that is embedded in the life of Minahasans. As a local form, it applies to national compared to Western or any other strange leadership model. Moreover, tona'as has successfully promoted moderation, harmony, and peace among Minahasans. With this in mind, it has possibilities that could contribute to religious moderation in Indonesia. This term refers to a respected individual with exceptional abilities, often possessing supernatural powers in a particular area of expertise. Renwarin (2006:361) explained that the term tona'as is derived from the word *tou*, meaning people, and *nahas* or *ta'as*, referring to the palm fruit, symbolising strength, prowess, ability, experience, and victory. It can therefore be concluded that tona'as is someone who has supernatural powers above the average other people in a particular area of expertise. Interestingly, the term *tona'as* has also been associated with the hardwood used to build houses in Minahasa, with certain types of wood such as *cempaka utang* or *cempaka mareno* being particularly renowned for their strength, hardness, and influence.

According to Sual (2021), tona'as serves significant political, social, and economic functions, which suggests a close link to the prevailing leadership hierarchy in society. Sual further emphasized that tona'as serve as a representation of individual abilities, and the Minahasans community usually chooses or appoints an individual as tona'as based on honour or respectability. On the other hand, Pinontoan (2022) categorised tona'as as a title rather than a position within the social structure. To be considered tona'as, one needs to possess expertise in hunting animals in the forest or *panumaan*, farming or *mangundang*, knowledge of astrology, proficiency in forest work or *manalun*, and the ability to detect bird sounds or *manalingga*. In addition to these qualifications, a tona'as is also expected to possess spiritual qualities.

Karundeng (2021) and Sual (2021) identified several characteristics of individuals who can be considered tona'as. Firstly, a tona'as is expected to possess wisdom or *ngaasan*, which refers to intellectual knowledge and the ability to lead specific activities within the community. The term tonas'as is derived from the root word *ngaasan*, which also means brain. Secondly, a tona'as is expected to possess strength or *tumawai*, which refers to the hardness and durability of wood. A tona'as need to be strong and balanced with sensitivity or intention. Finally, these personalities are expected to have supernatural powers or *mawayi*, which enable them to maintain security and fight when necessary. Given the various skills, tona'as are responsible for leading the opening of new plantation land by coordinating several *taranak* groups who prepare, manage, and plant seeds based on their respective tasks. During the time of harvest, tona'as use their expertise to ensure that the harvest is done properly, as it is closely related to the next planting season. Furthermore, they

are responsible for hunting wild animals for consumption, which requires the ability to interpret astrological signs and listen the bird sounds. In practice, tona'as coordinate with others and establish communal cooperation to complete their tasks. Ukung and Walak are other group leaders within the community who regularly consult with tona'as. In some cases, village elders who have experience in hunting but are no longer able to become leaders also participate in hunting.

The leadership of a tona'as is not simply a socio-political position, but rather it is an inherent ability that is bestowed upon an individual. In some cases, a tona'as gains the trust of *taranak* heads and gets appointed to official public positions because of their supernatural powers, but this is not a requirement. The title of tona'as is a gift or label given by society that is carried and attached to the individual without any time determination unless norms are violated. In case a tona'as commits an offense, the community has the authority to restrict or revoke their involvement in social activities.

One significant aspect that draws attention is the responsibility of a tona'as. They are accountable for the socio-political, economic, and religious aspects of their community. Although religious moderation is not a direct responsibility of a tona'as in Indonesia, they hold value in conducting social activities to achieve objectives. Tona'as serve as the foundation of the community's endeavour, but the implementation is carried out collaboratively. Their responsibility includes maintaining peace, harmony, and justice among the people. In order to achieve a well-executed project, a tona'as needs to work with various parties and groups and establish an excellent rapport with the people. For example, in terms of agriculture, tona'as are expected to cooperate with *ukung* and guardians to conduct rituals and clear land. Communication and respect among the people are vital, and tona'as are responsible for maintaining this balance. In certain activities, tona'as and wali work together to perform tasks with the community. They are individuals with social and religious mandates who gather communally to conduct activities. During the agricultural season, a tona'as or *Walian* leads prayers and rituals, requesting the Creator to bless the harvest with fertility and success. Wowor (2021) reported that a tona'as prepares a container and prays for seeds from the sky to fill the prepared area where the religious and spiritual dimensions are implemented. Furthermore, the tona'as who understand astrology instruct on the actual timing to plant and harvest, and he is assisted by other tona'as who have expertise in cultivating the land.

In summary, the knowledge of tona'as leadership encompasses three essential points, namely responsibility, requirement, and praxis. A tona'as is responsible for the social-political, economic, cultural, and religious aspects of their community. Maintaining religious moderation is a social responsibility that a leader needs to undertake, bearing a moral duty to promote harmony and peace among diverse groups. Economic leaders who prioritise profit over social security neglect the importance of cultural identity. Religious moderation is an integral aspect of society, connecting to political activities, cultural identity, and religious harmony. The knowledge of tona'as offers a holistic approach to leadership. Furthermore, the requirements of a tona'as offer valuable insights. A religious moderation leader needs to possess wisdom or *ngaasan*, strength or *tumawai*, and *power* or mawayi. They are expected to formulate ideas that present moderation between distinct religious communities have the strength to promote harmony and possess the power to maintain stability. In practice, a leader needs to implement religious moderation and establish effective communication with all the connected parties. As tona'as originates from Indonesian local culture, it is not directly connected to any particular religion. It is a unique set of values and insights that offer a high potential for religious moderation compared to Western ideas or popular religions in Indonesia. Consequently, it is expected to contribute knowledge to leaders, reducing tensions and conflicts among religious communities.

Conclusion

Religious moderation is essential among Indonesians. Both direct and indirect leaders have a responsibility, or at least a possibility, to promote and share religious moderation. Even though, Western or secular values are not entirely applicable in the Indonesian context, local treasures offer a promising source of guidance. For example, the knowledge of tona'as leaders from Minahasa, which is an original cultural heritage still practiced in modern times, provided valuable insight into the development of religious moderation among leaders. By exploring its responsibility, requirements, and practices, an alternative perspective on leadership discussions related to religious moderation was gained.

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