

Promoting Moderate Islam Through Educational Institution

(The case of faculty of Ushuluddin, UIN Bandung)

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Abstract—This paper focuses on the participation of educational institution, Faculty of Ushuluddin, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung in promoting moderate and tolerance Islam in Indonesia. The paper also attempts to close reading of the discourse of moderate Islam itself in order to raise fundamental questions about what they attempt to do, can do, and cannot be expected to do. The paper takes the position that this institution has significant impact in promoting moderate and tolerant Islam in the country. To address the research questions, we conducted a qualitative study. We employed “ethnographic methods” to explore conceptions and responses of members of this institution in Indonesia with respect to moderate Islam, tolerance, and multiculturalism.

Keywords—*ushuluddin; moderate islam; multiculturalism; institutional education*

I. INTRODUCTION

Islam has many brands, ranging from radical, moderate to liberal. In the global fight against radicalism and terrorism in the world, it has become a matter of some urgency to study how Islamic groups are making their contribution [1]. These moderate groups have yet to be the focus of Western media in the same way that radical Islam is. Nurdin further noted that most scholarly research on contemporary Islam is focused on the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism or fundamentalism [1]. There are myriad books and articles discussed Islamic fundamentalism such as A. S. Sidahmed and A. Ehteshami [2], Y. Choueiri, [3], L. Davidson [4]. This means that Moderate Islam’s contribution to promote tolerance, pluralism and, has been inadequately explored.

This study deals with the phenomenon of agent of moderate Islam in Indonesia, especially as proposed and promoted by educational Institutions: Faculty of Ushuluddin, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung-Indonesia (Ushuluddin-UIN). This study will address the issue on how this institution deal with the promotion of moderate and peaceful Islam, tolerance, and compatibility between Islam and multiculturalism?

In this study, we argue that the Ushuluddin-UIN in Bandung-Indonesia would have great potentials to actively participate in promoting and popularizing ideas of moderate, peaceful and tolerance Islam. The study of Ushuluddin-UIN is worth doing due to several reasons: First, Ushuluddin-UIN is

still suffer from a lack of scholarly attention. Only limited attention has been given to the Ushuluddin-UIN by scholars who study the Indonesian higher education institution role in promoting a peaceful Islam in the country.

The second reason is Ushuluddin-UIN represented an educational institution in the country that promotes and struggles for moderate and tolerance Islam. Ushuluddin-UIN has significant role in promoting moderate and tolerance Islam to young university students in Bandung. Their role could have significant impact in building a “good image” of Islam, which is mostly perceived by Western media as a radical and un-peaceful religion [6]. The third reason is Ushuluddin-UIN has a very wide network throughout Indonesia in disseminating its ideas particularly through its educational institutions in the country.

In its attempt to seek an accurate and comprehensive account of the moderate Islam and their role in promoting the ideas of tolerance and peaceful this particular educational Institutions, Ushuluddin-UIN, will be examined as a case study. Pribadi argues that moderate and tolerance Islam in the world were promoted and popularized by three Islamic moderate agents that are Islamic intellectual networks, Islamic educational institutions and Islamic publishers [6]. We have chosen Ushuluddin-UIN as a representative of Islamic educational institution. The role of educational institution in Indonesia could be considered as the pioneer and agent in promoting a peaceful face of Islam in the country. As far as we are aware, not comprehensive work has been done to examine Ushuluddin-UIN as ‘an agent of moderate Islam’. Thus, this examination is crucial to determine the kinds of strategy, aims, target groups and ideas promoted by the group. Thus, the questions would be: What were its aims, strategy, objectives, and target groups? What were its channels and media? How this group responded to the issues or ideas of tolerance and, multiculturalism, pluralism as main values of democracy in the light of the interpretability of Islam during the period in which Islamic political groups (both moderate and radical) appeared in Southeast Asia region.

To answer these questions above, we employed “ethnographic methods” to explore conceptions and responses of members of this institution in Indonesia respect to moderate Islam, tolerance, and multiculturalism. This study was based on

primary and secondary sources. As for primary resources, interviews have been conducted with main figures and founding fathers as well as students of Ushuluddin-UIN and the staff members or the supporters of the group in Bandung. Interviews were also be conducted with selected Muslim scholars in Bandung to capture their opinions and thoughts on Islam moderate participation in the tolerance Islam discourse in Indonesia.

Secondary resources were used such as official documents of Ushuluddin-UIN, the journal or mass media (used by these educational institutions to promote their ideas), books, newspapers, magazines, and Internet resources. These activities have been conducted at Ushuluddin-UIN offices in Bandung.

II. METHODS

To address the research questions, we conducted a qualitative study. We employed “ethnographic methods” to explore conceptions and responses of members of this institution in Indonesia with respect to moderate Islam, tolerance, and multiculturalism.

III. DEFINING MODERATE ISLAM

Making a categorization and definition of Indonesian Muslim is a very difficult task because varied and complex groups have appeared in the Indonesian. However, to help to understand the Muslim cleavage in Indonesia and to simplify the complexity, it has become a matter of some importance to define and categorize Muslim community.

Ariel Cohen pointed out to the Muslims who precedence a dialogue and compromise not only with the Muslim, but also non-Muslim who has different opinion and interpretations of the holy book, as a moderate people. He says:

“A moderate Muslim is one who is searching for a dialogue and a compromise with people who adhere to other interpretations of the Qur’an, and with those who are not Muslim. A moderate Sunni, for example, will not support terror attacks on Shi`ahs or Sufis, or on Christians, Jews, or Hindus” [7].

John L. Esposito has different opinion with Cohen’s above. He even criticized the branding of moderate Islam from the Western point of view which is very complicated. Although, Esposito believes that the term of Moderate Islam is complicated, he gives a ‘minimal’ definition of moderate Islam. He says:

“Minimally, moderate Muslims are those who live and work “within” societies, seek change from below, reject religious extremism, and consider violence and terrorism to be illegitimate” [8].

Almost in line with Esposito’s view of moderate Islam (Muslim), Graham E. Fuller, believes that the definition of moderate Islam would depend on whom we ask and what that person’s (or government’s) agenda is [9]. According to Fuller, most non-Muslims would probably define a moderate Muslim as anyone who believes in compatibility between Islam and democracy, women equality status and, using political party as a vehicle to gain power or change the authoritarian regime

instead of using ‘street parliament’ approach or radicalism [10].

From the above discussion, it is clear that the term moderate Islam (Muslims) is highly contested and has myriad interpretations. It will highly depend on who define it and for what purposes he defines it. However, as a working definition, a moderate Muslim could be defined as one who cares for freedom of speech and thinking while recognizing the urgency of belief or faith. He/she has ambitious plan for change, but through the power of idea and not through military action. For moderate Muslims, the middle base, the humanitarian principles, is the most straightforward way of life. Thus, moderate Islam (Muslim) would include liberal, progressive, traditional and even conservative Muslims as long as they believe and respect equal dignity of others, even when they disagree with them.

Using the moderate Islam definition above, this study shows that Ushuluddin-UIN could be considered as an educational institution which has had a moderate view on Islam. Thus, in the following paragraphs, we will examine the efforts and struggle of Ushuluddin-UIN in promoting and popularizing moderate and tolerance Islam in Indonesian context.

IV. USHULUDDIN’S STRUGGLE

Faculty of Ushuluddin is one of the most important faculty among other seven faculties (Faculty of Tarbiyah and Education, Syariah and Law, Dakwah and Communication, Adab and Humanity, Social and Political Sciences, Sains and Technology and Psychology) at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) or State Islamic Universities, Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. We could say so because this faculty remains the only faculty in UIN Bandung that offers fully pledged all-inclusive major themes of Islamic theological education. The faculty offers Quranic Studies Department, Hadith Department, Religious Studies Department, Islamic Philosophy Department and Tasawuf or Islamic Mysticism Department (Interview with Mulyana in Bandung, 20 November 2017).

The faculty could play significant role in promoting moderate or tolerance Islam in Bandung West Java where it located. As popularly known by Indonesian, West Java is considered as the most intolerance province compare to other provinces in Indonesia. According to survey result reported by the Moderate Muslim Society (MMS), West Java occupies the top rank in intolerance action [11]. Meanwhile, when the Wahid Institute Jakarta released their research findings on cases related to violation against religious freedom in 2011 in Indonesia, it shows that again West Java is among the province in Indonesia that has high rate on violation against religious freedom cases. There were forty-nine cases in West Java (58%), followed by Banten Province, nine cases (10%) and Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, five cases (5%) [12]. The same as MMS and Wahid Institute, the Setara Institute noted that there are five provinces in Indonesia that their rate of intolerance actions are very high in 2011. These five provinces are West Java (with 57 cases), South Sulawesi (45 cases), East Java (31 cases), South Sumatera (24 cases) and Banten (12 cases) [13].

For the above reason, Ushuluddin-UIN took more action to promote and popularize moderate and peaceful Islam in Bandung, West Java. Ushuluddin-UIN's efforts and struggle for moderate Islam, could be seen in the mission of the faculty. The missions are as follows: a) to organize education and do research in the field of sciences of Ushuluddin under its theological bases slogan that *Islam as a blessing for the all universe*; b) to conduct education, research, and community service in the field of sciences of Ushuluddin that have a level of relevance to socio-religious changes and developments in society; and c) to promote *Tri Dharma* products to the public broadly with the principle of promoting peaceful Islam as a blessing to all the worlds [14].

To implement its missions above, Ushuluddin-UIN hosted a meeting of the Deans of Ushuluddin Faculties around Indonesia in Bandung on 6-8 August 2017. This meeting encourages that all Ushuluddin faculties in Indonesia should have moderate Islam values embedded in their curriculum (Interview with Dean of Ushuluddin, 28 November 2017).

The meeting of the Deans of Ushuluddin Faculties also recommended that the faculty should become a pioneer in promoting moderate Islam in Islamic Higher Education institution around Indonesia. There are several reasons why Ushuluddin Faculty should become the pioneer of this campaign, as follows.

- *First*, the Faculty of Ushuluddin is a faculty that guides, teach and develop the basics of religion (Ushuluddin) of Islam in both text and context. That is why in the scientific paradigm, Ushuluddin, as a science, is a pure science. In addition, it became mother of Islamic science. That is why the role of this Faculty in framing the concept of moderate Islam is important.
- *Second*, in this Faculty, we studied materials related to the body of Islam, such as Qur'anic, Hadith, Sufism and Aqidah/Theology studies. These are the materials that immediately formed the paradigm of the students' lives, or that shape the students' understanding of Islam. Framing and construction of moderate Islam begins with the studies above. In this Faculty (especially Ilmu al-Qur'an and Tafsir department), Al-Qur'an is studied not only limited to the understanding, but also studied in the context of the struggle of thought *mufasir*, so that the wisdom of "wealthy treasures" in interpretation of the Qur'an can be found.
- *Third*, in this Faculty there is Religious Studies department. This department has the main purpose to introduce religious diversity in Indonesia. Therefore, students are expected to become a wise person in dealing with such diversity. Furthermore, students can make the diversity as a binding for unity.

In addition, the Ushuluddin-UIN Bandung, cooperated with other Islamic Higher Education Institutions have made four declarations to fight against radicalism and terrorism in Indonesia. First, the Declaration of Aceh on April 26, 2017 signed by 55 rectors or vice chancellors of the State Islamic Religious College (PTKIN) throughout Indonesia. The declaration contains the rejection of all forms of intolerance,

radicalism, and terrorism that endanger Pancasila and the unity of NKRI. Second, Anti-Radicalism Declaration on July 6, 2017 in Surabaya signed by several universities' rectors. Third, the Declaration of Anti-Radicalism on July 14, 2017 in Bandung which was signed by 44 rectors of state and private universities in West Java. The contents are more or less the same, namely, preventing radical movement and thought in several campuses. Fourth, Moderate Islam Declaration of Bandung on August 6, 2017 which was signed by 23 Deans of Ushuluddin Faculty of PTKIN in Indonesia. This declaration is more specifically committed to realizing moderate Islamic values in higher education.

To implement its declarations above, Ushuluddin-UIN then formulated its curriculum to promote moderate and peaceful Islam through educational institutions. Anti-Radicalism Curriculum or, more specifically the Curriculum of Moderate Religions, will be formulated immediately. The formulation of the curriculum should, of course, involve various parties and should cooperate with the inter-agency. In this context, for example, it is necessary to cooperate with Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Technology and Higher Education, and the Ministry of Defense to establish a cooperation in the de-radicalization program at the Public Higher Education (PTU).

There are several important references to be considered in formulating a moderate Islamic curriculum.

- *First*, teaching materials should cover all dimensions of Islamic teachings. It should not only limited to *aqidah/ideology-tauhidi* dimension, but also other subjects such as Sufism, fiqh, and even political teachings. *Ummatan washatiah* (middle line) is the term taken by the Qur'an which gives a picture of moderation in all Islamic teachings. The preparation of this comprehensive material should be accompanied by appropriate learning strategies and should touch all levels of education, both in formal and informal institutions. These moderate and tolerant attitudes should be promoted to students since his/her early age.
- *Secondly*, it is necessary to be affirmed in the public spaces that moderate Islam provides a place for tolerance. It is important to note that the formulated curriculum does not produce graduates who are soft or helpless in dealing with various deviations. Islam not only teaches *ruhama* (tenderness, politeness, and tolerance), but also *asyidda'* (assertiveness of deviation). Moderate Islam actually does not deny the persistence in holding the principles taught by Islam itself.

V. CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, it is clear that the Ushuluddin-UIN has significant role in promoting moderate Islam in West Java in particular and in Indonesia in general. This institution has its struggle and efforts by emphasizing educational institutions as an effective tool to promote moderate Islam in the.

Ushuluddin-UIN believes that reformation and modification of curriculum is important to assert moderate values into materials of teaching. However, due to social and political context of Indonesia and there are myriad cleavages of Muslim in Indonesia, the institution should follow the rule enacted by the government. Since they are myriad interpretability of Islam in Indonesia, this is a most difficult challenge for Ushuluddin-UIN to cope with. The stereotyping of Muslim as being radical and intolerance is still the biggest challenge faced by Ushuluddin-UIN as well.

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