



A Behaviour of Religious Moderation Among Salafi in Ambon

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Article History	Abstract
Received August 31, 2023	<i>Salafi community in Ambon have developed since the arrival of Laskar Jihad during the 1999 Ambon Conflict. Social dan religious competition has divided them, which is not only triggered by their interpretation of Islam but also by their efforts to gain religious influence and socio-religious dominance within the Islamic society. The research method used in this research is qualitative phenomenology. The research results found that for the Salafis, love for their homeland was proven during the COVID-19 pandemic; Salafi groups in Ambon also implement all policies issued by the Indonesian government without exception. Religious moderation is a fair and balanced attitude that does not exaggerate or belittle religion. Another characteristic of the moderation attitude shown is constantly repairing and avoiding damage. Salafi community in Ambon continue try to protect their faith, soul, reason, honor, lineage, and property. They respect fellow religious people, regardless their religious background and beliefs.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

This article explores the behavior of Salafi religious moderation in Ambon City. This study aims to understand to what extent the behavior of citizens is considered radical, extreme, and contrary to the character of Indonesian Islam towards the concept of religious moderation.

As a missionary movement in Indonesia, Salafi has existed since the 1980s. Although relatively small, the Salafi community has proliferated in Indonesia in the last few

decades (Chaplin 2018, Hasan 2007). Finally, it formed a current of Islamic exclusivism whose goal was to organize various open da'wah movements (Hasan 2007). This is reflected in the creation of educational institutions, radio stations, and social media they founded (Abacioglu, Volman and Fischer 2020, Chaplin 2018, Iqbal 2014, Nisa 2013, Sunarwoto 2016, Wahid 2014a). Another finding that is the mushrooming of Salafi preachers who are active in mediascape digital Islam has created a religious forum that is far more plural and optative (Husein 2021). In



addition, many young people are dissatisfied with Islamic groups in Indonesia, which are impure and less authoritative, so they join forces with Salafi, who are considered pure and authoritative (Arifin, Sofia and Hidayah 2022).

Salafi is often considered to be contrary to the character of Indonesian Islam, which know to be harmonious with the local traditions (Husein 2021). Not only that, Salafi is also always associated with radical and extreme groups. This happens because of the understanding of Salafi (ism) is more directed to one group, namely Salafi Jihadists. This Salafi group is considered threatening because they often do damage and start fighting against the authorities or government (Wahid 2014b).

According to Sanjeev Kumar (2018), the negative and distorted image of Salafi is the arrogance of Islamic epistemological space by extremist organizations in efforts to mainstream violence and terror. This then led to widespread propaganda about the phenomenon of Islamophobia. This is what underlies the Western view of the idea of Islamic demonology. In line with this, Bernard Lewis, a prominent historian of Islam, said that most Muslims are not fundamentalists, and most fundamentalists are not terrorists. The media influence the image of terrorist acts attached to Islam. Meanwhile, acts of terrorism and terrorism, such as those that occurred in Ireland or the Basques, are not seen as Christian acts. Why? The answer is simple because newsmakers do not interested to categorize these actions as acts of terrorism and terrorism (Sanjeev Kumar 2018). The media has been central in shaping public opinion since the last quarter of the 20th century (McCombs and Valenzuela 2014). In modern society, domestic and international events are regulated in such detail in television programs (Kiryakova, Kolga, Yumatov et al. 2020). Public opinion can be manipulated by changing one's opinion and state of expression, which can then be interpreted as a spiral of silence phenomena in social psychology (Cheng, Luo, Yu et al. 2022).

Researchers have stressed that the main

characteristic of Salafi lies in upholding social-conservative boundaries that separate Salafis from other Islamic groups, including non-Muslims. This aims to return its followers to religious teachings that imitate *manhaj of Salaf al-Salih* or the methodology of previous pious ancestors of Muslim community (the first three generations of Islam: *Sahabat, Tabi'un, Tabi' al-Tabi'in*) (Bruinessen 2009, Chaplin 2020, Scott 2016). Salafism is seen as a movement that is by no means homogeneous or coherent, although it provides evidence of clear characteristics. However, there is also evidence of diverse, even contradictory, trends and emphases that can be seen in regions where Salafism is growing. So far, Salafism expresses an exclusive Islamic fundamentalist mindset (Meijer 2011). The legal methodology of the Salafi movement is selective literalism from the Qur'an and Sunnah. They place more emphasis on theological issues and lack an understanding of modern politics and economics. This situation creates stagnation on issues in the field, causing instability in *da'wah* (Wright 2012). However, Salafi in Indonesia has succeeded in framing the concept of *da'wah* following Islamic standards, rationality, and modernity to answer the people's needs (Zaenuri and Yusuf 2019).

Salafi in Indonesia has variants and varieties that are fragmented into several groups (Chaplin 2018, Wahid 2014b). This is based on the transformation of life experiences, disputes, and how they perceive the reality of everyday life through a series of social interactions (Chaplin 2018). In his dissertation summary, Din Wahid divides Salafi into three significant categories: Salafi Purists, Salafi Haraki, and Salafi Jihadist (Wahid 2014a). This last category is the most contrasting Salafi group from the previous two groups. This last group is also considered extreme and rigid, called Radical Salafi.

Compared to Salafi Purists, who tend to be silent, or Salafi Haraki, who only choose to criticize the government verbally, Salafi Jihadists prefer to take up arms against the government and attack anyone who contradicts

them. Not only that, even among fellow Salafists, they kill each other because of differences in sects or points of view (Rochmat and A 2017). The anatomy of radical Salafi, especially in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, was formed through several organizations, namely Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT), and Hizbut Tahrir (Abdullah and Salleh 2015).

Long before Din Wahid argued for the division of the Salafi group into several variants as mentioned above, Salafi (ism) in Indonesia emerged in the 20th century. It emerged under various names, such as the Salafi Movement (Gerakan Salafi), the Modernist Movement (Gerakan Modernis), and the Political Islam Movement (Gerakan Islam Politik). Some of these movements disappeared because they could not stand the test, but some survived and even became one of the mainstream Islamic movements in Indonesia (Qodim 2007).

The Salafi group splits in Indonesia with regards to the dispute between Ja'far Umar Thalib and several other Salafi figures, such as Abu Nida. Ja'far raised the issue of Sururiyah and claimed those who oppose it as followers of Ibn Surur, who are dangerous for Indonesia. Meanwhile, Ja'far and Abu Nida jointly founded the as-Sunnah Foundation in 1992. Finally, this case divided Salafi in Indonesia into Ja'far defenders and opponents (Wahid 2007). It is well known that later, Ja'far Umar Thalib became the Commander of the Laskar Jihad in the 1999-2002 Ambon riots.

Besides that. In state life in Indonesia, which has pluralism of religions, cultures, traditions, and so on, a moderate attitude is needed from all elements of the nation, including the Salafi group in Ambon. Religious moderation is considered a consistent understanding of being in a fair position without taking sides with radical or liberal religious ideologies (Sumarto 2021). Religious moderation is a person's stance or attitude, manifested in a willingness to accept various views, even if they differ (Lubis, Ependi, Tumiran et al. 2023). Moderation is the most ideal, wise, and superior attitude among all

human life attitudes. This is the antithesis of extreme attitudes in religion, politics, and society, both the extreme right and extreme left (Arif 2021).

In carrying out deradicalization, several factors must be considered. First, there is a need for awareness of human nature to do good and live amidst heterogeneity without cultural, religious, and national boundaries. Second, one must understand being a citizen and part of the world. Third, a moderate, fair, balanced mental attitude is crucial in managing diversity. Fourth, religious moderation is essential because it creates constructive relationships between different religions and harmony between various sects within one religion (Arifin et al. 2022).

Taking the above phenomena into accounts, it is essential to research groups or citizens who are often considered radical and extreme and do not blend with local traditions of responding to religious moderation in a pluralistic society. It is important to emphasize here that researchers only focus on studying the obedience of Salafis in Ambon, who tend to belong to the Purist Salafi group, which advocates obedience to the authorities or government. However, the Puritan Salafi group in Ambon were former Laskar Jihad militants during the 1999 Ambon conflict.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The author found out six articles that were relevant to this research:

First is the article by Sunarwoto titled "Online Salafi Rivalries in Indonesia: Between Sectarianism and 'Good' Citizensnship." The research results found that Salafi sectarianism occurred not because of authoritarianism but was bridged by the democratic system in Indonesia. The pretext determining sectarianism is not caused by theology but by competition among Salafis to demonstrate their 'good' religious identity, authority, and citizenship (Sunarwoto 2021).

Second, research was conducted by Andar Nubowo with the title "Indonesian

Hybrid Salafism: Wahdah Islamiyah's Rise, Ideology and Utopia." The study found that Wahdah is a hybrid and eclectic organization combining Salafi and Islamic ideologies, methods, and transnational systems. Within the framework of the unitary state of Indonesia (NKRI), Wahdah advocates the implementation of sharia by taking a moderate and non-confrontational path. Wahdah's ideological hybridism and non-confrontational attitude allowed them to become a new conservative Islamic organization that could compete with Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in creating the future of Islam in Indonesia (Nubowo 2020).

Third, an article that was written by Chris Chaplin with the title "Communal Salafi Learning and Islamic Selfhood: Examining Religious Boundaries through Ethnographic Encounters in Indonesia." The research results found that Salafis are considered very rigid and strict in spreading Islamic teachings. Ultimately, it creates tension in everyday life because it does not depend on the Islamic holy book but depends on how its adherents interpret the holy book at a particular time and space (Chaplin 2020).

Fourth, the article was written by Sunarwoto with the title "Negotiating Salafi Islam and the State: The Madkhaliyya in Indonesia." The research results found that there is ambiguity in Salafi Madkhaliyyah in Indonesia. The basic principle that causes this difficult-to-resolve ambiguity occurs because of the unconditional "fiqh of obedience" to the government of Indonesia, which adheres to the ideology of democracy (Sunarwoto 2020).

Fifth, an article written by Din Wahid titled (2014) "Nurturing Salafi Manhaj; A Study of Salafi Islamic Boarding Schools in Contemporary Indonesia". Research conducted in 2014 found that Salafis in Indonesia are divided into three large groups, namely: 1) the Purist group that advocates absolute and unconditional obedience to the authorities or government. They took more peaceful paths to preach and develop education. This group is divided into three sub-

groups: Rejectionist, Cooperationist, and Tanzimi or Organization. 2) Salafi Haraki (absorbed from Arabic, which means movement) or what the group usually calls "Politicos" (because they choose to struggle through parliament). 3) Salafi Jihadist, the most contrasting Salafi group from the two previous groups. This last group is also considered extreme and rigid, called Radical Salafis (Wahid 2014b).

The last article is the work of Bernard Haykel (2022) entitled: On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action. This article finds that the appeal of Salafism lies in the forms of authority it promotes and reproduces. According to Bernard Haykel, what is interesting about Salafism is not what is called "deterritorialization" and "fundamentalism" or the "globalized" conditions of modern life, but rather Salafism's claim to religious certainty and the ability to quote scripture as the basis of their theological arguments. The typical Salafi argument is that Salafis, unlike other Muslims, rely exclusively on solid evidence from revelation as the basis for their views. To strengthen this argument, Salafis add relevant verses or traditions every time they express a judgment or opinion. In support of this, they state that these texts, especially the hadith, are unconditionally authoritative regarding the elaboration of Islamic teachings. Salafi's characteristic is the claim to the true certainty of Allah's law through a hypertextual methodology. According to Bernard Haykel, what is implied in this claim is that denying the Salafi view means denying the probability value of the revealed texts and the hadiths (Haykel 2022).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Religious Moderation

The emergence of the religious moderation movement cannot be separated from Indonesia's increasing threat of religious radicalism. This idea emerged to ward off the increasingly widespread movement of religious radicalism. Radicalism in religion arises

because religious expression is often carried out excessively. Violence and hatred in the name of God or religion seem to be deep-rooted beliefs that are difficult to heal (Wibowo 2019).

Moderation is the most ideal, wise, fair, and superior attitude among all human life attitudes. Moderation is the antithesis of extreme attitudes in religion, politics, and society in extreme right and radical left groups (Arif 2021). According to Azyumardi Azra, religious moderation is actualizing the values of moderation in the Al-Qur'an to achieve peace and contribute to civilization, civility, and progress in a pluralistic society (Putra, Homsatun, Jamhari et al. 2021). Religious moderation is a person's stance or attitude, which is manifested in a willingness to accept various views even if they differ because moderation is closely related to freedom and human rights (Lubis et al. 2023). Religious moderation is considered a consistent understanding of being in a fair position without taking sides with radical or liberal religious ideologies (Sumarto 2021).

Islam in Indonesia is more familiar with Islam with an understanding that always tries to present Islam as a moderate religious teaching. Islam in Indonesia provides space for local wisdom. The presence of Islam does not have to eliminate local cultural values and even become a forum for the diversity of values and norms that live in society. Even though Islam is full of universal values, the concept of universality is not closed but open (Saumantri 2022).

The construction of ideas in formulating four indicators of religious moderation by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion is based on universal-normative values, namely the ideology of the Indonesian nation, not the ideology of a particular religion or group (Azis, Saihu, Hsb et al. 2021). These four indicators are contained in the Roadmap for Strengthening Religious Moderation of the Ministry of Religion 2020-2024, namely (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia 2020): 1) National Commitment. This indicator is usually called "Love of the

motherland (Cinta tanah air)," which is characterized by the high acceptance of religious communities towards the national principles of the 1945 Constitution and its regulations. 2) Tolerance. The measure of success of this indicator is the high level of respect for differences, providing space for other people to freely choose their beliefs and express their views, freedom of opinion, respect for equality, and the willingness to work together. 3) Non-violence. The measure of success of religious moderation can be measured by the high level of rejection of the actions of specific individuals or groups who use violent methods, both physical and verbal, to bring about the desired change. 4) Acceptance of tradition. An indicator of success is the high acceptance of local customs and culture in religious behavior if they do not conflict with central spiritual teachings.

The implementation of religious moderation at the Salafiyah Islamic Boarding School is carried out through the attitudes and behavior of students who are guided by two principles of thought: First, as a provision for self and general knowledge in dealing with society, students must have special knowledge. Second, the process of resolving social problems always refers to the four pillars of the nation (Pancasila, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), and the Undang-Undang Dasar 1945) (Ibad 2021, Nurdin and Syahrotin Naqqiyah 2019).

Islamic Conservatism

As a multi-religious country, the rise of Islamic conservatism presents a difficult challenge. Because this awakening hurts the social, cultural, and political order that has lasted for a long time, Islamic conservatism will bring Indonesia closer to religious exclusivity (Pribadi 2021). For example, identifying or supporting conservative Islamic groups prioritizes social identity and political-economic issues (Muhtadi and Halida 2020). Alternatively, the results of other studies find that the rise of Islamic conservatism, which has

monopolized Islamic discourse at the regional level, is caused by religious orthodoxy. This created “other” (not me/the other) who stated that the main enemies of Islam were Shia, Ahmadiyya, and the Liberal Islamic Network (Darmadi 2020).

Martin Van Bruinessen argues that conservative Islam rejects a liberal and progressive reinterpretation of Islamic teachings and tends to maintain a standard interpretation and social system (Wahid 2014b). Conservatism emerged in Indonesia through several explanations. First, the relationship between democratization and the waning influence of liberal and progressive Islamic views. Second, strengthening the influence of the Middle East (Wahid 2014a).

Researchers have emphasized that the Salafi Group's main characteristic lies in enforcing social-conservative boundaries that separate Salafis from other Islamic groups, including non-Muslims. This aims to return its followers to religious teachings that imitate manhaj Salaf al-Shalih or the methodology of pious ancestors (the first three generations of Islam: *Sahabat, Tabi'un, Tabi' al-Tabi'in*) (Bruinessen 2009, Chaplin 2020, Scott 2016).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. With a qualitative approach, this study seeks to understand or interpret phenomena in terms of meaning or understanding (Silverman 2019). Qualitative research involves using and collecting various empirical studies (Aspers and Corte 2019). Qualitative research tries to reveal problems with a subjective perspective (T and Van Grootel 2019). At the same time, the case study method is a qualitative approach that examines a particular case in a contemporary real-life context or setting (Creswell 2007). The stages in this research began with collecting data or documents sourced from primary data obtained from interviews and observations of Salafi figures, as well as the results of observations in Kampung Muhajirin.

Kampung Muhajirin is a village in Ambon City that is inhabited by 99% of the Salafi community. Next is secondary data obtained through the media in the form of articles, books, notes, or archives on a few documents related to Salafis in Ambon City.

Next, the researcher carried out source triangulation, namely comparing data from interviews with Salafi Ustadz as the main figure and the policy target group with data from observations. In this process, researchers also compare information obtained through interviews and observations with documents in the form of articles and documents from other sources that have a direct connection with this research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Salafi and the 1999 Ambon Conflict: Arrival, Preaching and Development, and Splitting

Many Salafis in Ambon live in Kampung Muhajirin, better known as Kampung Laskar Batu Merah Village, Ambon City. Salafis were already in Ambon long before the arrival of the Laskar Jihad (Holy Warriors) in the 1999 Religious conflict (Islam vs. Christianity). The ustadz who preached Salafi were Ustadz Iqrom Ibrahim and Ustadz Abdul Aziz Arbi. However, the development of Salafi in Ambon and forming a community began with the arrival of Laskar Jihad in 2000. A Salafi group formed Laskar Jihad under the command of Ja'far Umar Thalib. Laskar Jihad was formed in Yogyakarta on January 30, 2000, as a wing organization of the Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah Communication Forum (FKAWJ). The majority of those who join Laskar Jihad are students and youth. The initial goal of establishing Laskar Jihad was a form of internal response by Indonesian Muslims, especially Salafi, to the arrogance and incompetence of the Abdurrahman Wahid/Gus Dur government which ignored the cries of Muslims in Ambon (Sholeh 2008).

Through conspiratorial rhetoric blaming international Zionist and Christian powers for

the escalation of the Ambon conflict, Ja'far creates pretexts for collective action that encourage an analytical shift from the individual to the group. Based on this pretext, Salafis created a new collective identity as heroes for their religion and as patriots for their beloved country. From April 2000 until its disbandment in October 2002, Laskar Jihad sent more than 7,000 fighters to Ambon. Ironically, most Laskar Jihad fighters are unskilled fighters arriving in Ambon with limited experience and untested abilities (Cammack 2008).

The formation of Laskar Jihad is based on the fatwa of Islamic scholars in the Middle East (Medina and Yemen). This fatwa is the basis for sharia (law), which is why many students and youth in Indonesia, especially in Java, join as Laskar Jihad fighters. It needs to be underlined that the arrival of Laskar Jihad troops in Ambon was mostly not due to following Ja'far but because of a religious scholar's fatwa obliging Muslims to help their persecuted brothers so that the dissolution of Laskar Jihad also followed a religious scholar's fatwa as well.

On the other hand, the Ambon conflict is seen as a momentum to rediscover the long-lost identity of Muslims. This is because long before Laskar Jihad was formed, the modernization carried out by the authoritarian government of Soeharto since the 1970s has marginalized the economic and political role of Muslims in many ways. Therefore, when there was a conflict in Ambon, they did not let this opportunity pass. This is what later gave birth to militancy. Militancy provides an alternative to Islam as a solution and a willingness to engage in violent confrontation under the pretext of protecting oppressed Muslims. This attitude of militancy indicates the Islamic political movement in Indonesian politics. Political Islam here does not only make Islam the moral foundation of individuals but more than that, political Islam is used as the state's ideology so that there is no separation between religion and the state (Wahid 2007).

The sending of Laskar Jihad to the

Ambon conflict further exacerbated the antagonism among Indonesian Salafists. For some Salafists, such as Abu Nida and his followers, sending Laskar Jihad contradicts the Salafi manhaj (ideology), which puts forward calls for peace. This Salafi group considers that loyalty and obedience to the government are carried out thoroughly and unconditionally (Wahid 2014b). In this regard, sending Laskar Jihad troops to conflict areas, Ambon and Poso, was against the government's wishes and was considered a form of rebellion (Wahid 2007). This happened because some Salaf scholars in the Middle East, such as Sheikh Huasimin, stated that there was no obligation to carry out jihad in Ambon.

The opposition did not stop there. Even within Laskar Jihad, when they arrived during the Ambon conflict, they had a different mission. Information from CNN reported that the goal of Laskar Jihad at that time had a hidden agenda: establishing an Islamic state (CNN 2002). This opinion is based on allegations that Ja'far Umar Thalib was affiliated with Al-Qaeda and participated in jihad in Afghanistan between 1987 and 1989 to oppose the invasion of the Soviet Union. During this jihad in Afghanistan, Ja'far met Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda (Wahid 2007). Other sources say Ja'far was a mature militant who fought with the mujahids in Afghanistan (Cammack 2008). So, it is not surprising that the suspicion of establishing an Islamic State emerged along with the sending of Laskar Jihad troops to Ambon.

However, this evidence was contradicted by Ustadz Abu Farhan Husain. Ustadz Abu Farhan Husain is a former Jihad soldier who lives in Ambon. When Laskar Jihad was disbanded in 2002, he was appointed to take care of Laskar Jihad's debts. This alumnus of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (Fisipol) Universitas Gadjah Mada is the founder of the Abu Bakar Foundation. This foundation now oversees Salafi educational and da'wah activities in Ambon. According to him, the Laskar Jihad that was formed was not an international jihad movement but an inner

calling for the suffering of Muslims in Ambon. This is because it is based on the fatwa of the Ulama, which makes Jihad obligatory. At the same time, Ja'far was followed at that time only because the scholars appointed him to lead the Laskar Jihad troops. Ja'far is considered the "oldest" in the Salafi body in Indonesia. However, there may be Ja'far followers who joined the jihad in Ambon not because of the fatwas of the scholars but because Ja'far followers are loyal. This was proven when the clerics disbanded Laskar Jihad; there was a Ja'far sculptor who ignored the ulema's fatwa. They are still loyal to follow Ja'far to continue the jihad in Ambon. However, this lasted only a short time because the Malino Agreement had taken place in South Sulawesi. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ustadz Abu Farhan Husain:

"Most of the Laskar Jihad troops who came to the Ambon conflict were not following Ja'far. However, because of the fatwa of the Salaf scholars from Saudi Arabia and Yemen obliges Muslims in Indonesia to help their brothers who are being slaughtered in Ambon. It was this fatwa that made many students and youths join the Laskar Jihad troop at that time". (R1. Wednesday, February 1, 2023)

On the other hand, the Malino Agreement was an idea by political figures in Indonesia to democratically reconcile the Ambon (and Poso) conflicts (Tomsa 2009). The Agreement, which were also attended by the two warring parties (Islam and Christianity), resulted in 11 points of peace agreement. However, these Agreement have yet to substantively resolve the various problems that gave rise to the conflict in Ambon (Ernas 2012, Hasudungan 2021).

Some people think the dissolution of Laskar Jihad was due to the Malino Agreement. However, different things were found from the results of interviews conducted with Ustadz Abu Farhan Husain. The dissolution of Laskar

Jihad has nothing to do with the Malino Agreement. The dissolution of Laskar Jihad was due to following the fatwa of Saudi Arabia and Yemen scholars. It is just that when the ulema's fatwa came out, it coincided with the Malino Agreement. The following is an excerpt from the interview:

"The formation and dissolution of Laskar Jihad follows the fatwa of Islamic scholars in the Middle East. The purpose of forming Laskar Jihad is to help Muslims who are being fought for nothing else. Likewise, with the dissolution of Laskar Jihad following the fatwa of the clergy, not because of the Malino Agreement. Laskar Jihad does not care about the Malino Agreement." (R1. Wednesday, February 1, 2023)

According to Ustadz Abu Farhan Husain, when Shiekh Rabi' bin Hadi al-Madkhali (a contemporary hadith scholar who is quite influential. He is a professor of hadith at the Islamic University of Medina. He is also the Salaf cleric who is most listened to among Salafi circles today) announced the disbandment of Laskar Jihad, most of the Laskar Jihad troops immediately obeyed the fatwa by disbanding. However, Ja'far refused and did not want to disband Laskar Jihad. Even though the formation of Laskar Jihad was due to the scholars' fatwa, this is where the split in the Salafi body occurred for the umpteenth time. Most of them followed the fatwa of the clergy and ended the war, then returned to their respective areas, and some survived in Ambon. The goal of those who survived was not to wage jihad but to continue their da'wah in the field of education, which had been established when they first arrived in Ambon. When Laskar Jihad troops arrived in Ambon, it was not only to fight but also to develop Salafi teachings by establishing educational institutions and preaching from mosque to mosque. When the conflict was going on, Laskar Jihad established an Integrated Islamic Elementary School (Sekolah Dasar Islam

Terpadu, SD-IT).

When Laskar Jihad was disbanded, parents and guardians of students who sent their children to this school did not want the teachers (Ustadz) who came from Laskar Jihad to return to their respective regions. However, ask them to survive and continue preaching in the field of education. This school finally developed and became the forerunner of the Al-Manshuroh Islamic Boarding School located on Jln. Air Kuning, Desa Batu Merah. The distance of the Islamic Boarding School from the Muhajirin village (Kampung Salafi) is about 800m. This Islamic boarding school is under the legal umbrella of the Abu Bakar Foundation. The purpose of establishing the foundation is for this Salafi da'wah to be open. In addition, with the existence of a foundation the activities of Salafi are monitored by the government so that they are not considered as khawarij or extremist groups. Another goal is to show the public that Salafi preaching is not preaching "underground" but preaching that is open and obedient to the government.

The formation of this foundation reaped pros and cons within the Salafi body in Ambon so that it was added to the list of Salafi divisions. Until now, the Salafis in Ambon who have developed since the arrival of Laskar Jihad have split into three major groups. Of the three groups with many followers are the Salafis under the auspices of the Abu Bakar Foundation. Competition has divided them, fueled not only by their interpretation of Islam but also by their attempts to gain religious influence as well as socio-religious domination in Islamic societies. This struggle often has implications for sectarian conflict through the revival of old theological debates. Another exciting thing about this conflict is who is a true Salafi or not a Salafi (Sunarwoto 2021).

Salafi and Religious Moderation?

As citizens and Muslims, the understanding, and attitudes of Salafis in Ambon regarding religious moderation have different characteristics. For Salafis in Ambon, "ummatan wasathan" characteristics are

justice and balance or a middle way and away from acts of injustice. There is no injustice or excess in Islam. Balance means the rules and regulations of Allah SWT for Muslim society. The sum of the following insights is the path of the stars, meaning that all the guidance of the Islamic religion leads to an attitude of justice and balance or middleness. Therefore, anyone who studies Islam well will be a middle person (not excessive) and will stay within the extreme right and extreme left groups. Exaggeration is an understatement. If someone studies religion well and is in the middle position, then the religion shown is a religion that makes things easier. As the results of an interview with Abu Hajar (One of the Salafi figures in Ambon) stated that:

"The Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam mentioned many characteristics of this religion in his hadiths, one of which is that this religion is easy, don't complicate it, don't go to extremes. Establishing that this ummah was a people of the middle ages, there were those who wanted to direct those who became radical; there will be people who remind them of this mistake until the day of resurrection." (R2. Sunday, December 9, 2023)

Islam is a religion that gives blessings to all natures. Because Allah SWT has made this religion a religion of "grace" since the revelation of the Qur'an and the sending of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The characteristic and characteristic of this medieval society was its commitment to the Koran and Sunnah. According to Abu Hajar, Muslims who do not practice their religion correctly mean they are people who follow their desires. Then, the nature and character of the Middle People provided a sense of security for followers of other religions, even humans. Because Islam is a religion that offers a sense of security, both believers and non-believers must feel safe in all things. Be it security in thinking, security in life, security in transactions, security in trading

and so on. Therefore, people with a "*wasatiyyah*" character think about security in protecting a country.

Another characteristic of a middle attitude is always making improvements and avoiding destructive and damaging actions. One of the characteristics of a believer is understanding how great the gift of Islam is and how Islam is built for the benefit of fellow human beings and anti-corruption. Therefore, Allah SWT says: You destroy earth after earth. Allah corrected this and made the land fertile with the sending of the Prophets and Apostles. According to Abu Hajar, that:

"All the Prophets and Apostles who were sent called for making improvements, not causing damage. Therefore, the middle attitude must emerge from people who like to do good, not people who like to do evil and destroy the earth." (R2. Sunday, December 9, 2023)

Not doing damage also means teaching the Shari'a or teachings and protecting against emergencies. Protect your religion, soul, reason, honour, lineage, and property. This attitude is also found in other research, namely that in solving problems, it is necessary to refer to the four pillars of the nation, namely Pancasila, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), and the Constitution 1945 (Undang-Undang Dasar 1945) (Ibad 2021, Nurdin and Syahrotin Naqqiyah 2019). Remember that the preamble to the Constitution states that the main aim of Indonesian independence is to protect the entire nation and the entire bloodshed in Indonesia.

If we refer to the religious moderation indicators issued by the Ministry of Religion, providing a sense of security is another form of non-violence. The measure of non-violence is the rejection of actions that use violent means, both physical and verbal, to produce desired changes (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia 2020).

One of the religious moderation practices

carried out by Salafis in Ambon is by complying with the policies for handling COVID-19 set by the Indonesian government.

The Salaf Group in Kampung Muhajirin of Ambon City, who were former Laskar Jihad militants during the 1999 Ambon conflict, responded to all problems by returning to the Al-Qur'an and As-Sunnah. When the pandemic occurred, and the government enforced the PSBB policy, the Salaf in Ambon also implemented the policy. However, before implementing this policy, they deliberated to address it. The outcome of the deliberations is to perform prayers in each other's homes. At the mosque, it is only permissible to sing the call to prayer, and after that, the muezzin (the person who calls the call to prayer) must go home and perform the prayers in their respective homes. So, there is no prayer activity carried out in the mosque.

Another outcome of the deliberations was that they held a rice barn and provided nine staple food items for fellow Salaf because many worked as daily casual workers, such as motorcycle taxi drivers, construction workers, and traditional massagers. They do *ta'awun* (mutual help) to fellow Salafi to lighten the burden. This mutual helping attitude does not only occur during a pandemic but also almost every day with different problems. Social solidarity is the basis of resilience in facing crises. This happens because awareness, empathy, and a sense of humanity arise because of calm and comfort (Luqman and Ilhamdi 2023).

Even though the pandemic is challenging because the policy limits their daily activities in earning a living, obedience to the government (*wali l-amr* or *ulul-amr*) is a fundamental part of religion. For the Salaf, the health affairs of citizens are public affairs, so the authority to handle them must be left to the government. This matter must be seen from various points of view, whether the matter is related to state secrets or the public good, so it is impossible to convey this matter widely because it will have far greater dangerous implications. The following is an excerpt from an interview with

Ustadz Abu Farhan Husain:

"For us, health matters are the government's business, so those who have the authority to handle them must also be handed over to the government. Because in this matter, it must be seen from various points of view to not cause a far greater danger to all of us." (R1. Tuesday, August 23, 2022)

Another manifestation of the Salaf's obedience to the government is that almost all Salaf in Ambon (under the auspices of the Abu Bakar Foundation) have been vaccinated, and there is no doubt about the vaccine. In addressing the vaccine issue, which is considered unlawful for some circles, the Salaf use the concept of *istihalah*, namely changes in substance and properties that are affected by time. For example, the origin of feces is haram, but it has changed over time, so it cannot be considered haram. However, this only applies to some of what is forbidden; this law does not apply to others. For example, the unclean law on swine has undergone a total change, but it has not changed to become unlawful.

For Salaf, the government's efforts are considered good because it wants to break the chain of the spread of COVID-19, which is currently sweeping the world. This effort aligns with Sharia principles, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah: Do not endanger yourself and others. The Prophet SAW has provided a way to solve public affairs like this. As the words of the Prophet SAW in the hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari, you are with the congregation of the Muslims and their Imam. Salaf interpreted this hadith in the context of COVID-19 to mean that this matter (handling of COVID-19) must be returned to the person in authority, namely the government. In addition, there are no worries in implementing the policy. They assume that if it rains, a Muslim doesn't need to pray in congregation at the mosque. However, the rain will not make people die. Moreover, a matter that is more dangerous than that like Covid-19.

It is emphasized that the characteristic of

a good Muslim is that he will not be happy to see his fellow Muslims being hit by a disaster. So, if a Muslim sees in himself that there is a reason that endangers other Muslim brothers, then praying at home is much better. This is based on the hadith narrated by Imam al-Bukhari as follows:

"When a person eats garlic or shallots, it is best not to approach the mosque." (R1. Tuesday, August 23, 2022)

Actions like this will make other people feel disturbed because of the unpleasant aroma resulting from eating the raw onion. Meanwhile, eating onions is only limited to emitting an unpleasant aroma, not to harm other people. However, what about Covid-19, which can harm other people? If the health protocol is not implemented, then risk will be borne by that person and others.

If there is a business that can harm him, then someone may choose an easier way to worship because refusing danger takes precedence over guarding something that is *sunnah* (praiseworthy path). Therefore, for Salafis, worship must be with knowledge, not with lust. Not also thinking about yourself but endangering others. People who often go to the mosque should be more concerned about health protocols than other people.

As a Muslim, one should be able to take advantage of the problems happening to him or her because such things are considered part of fortitude (worship or trials). In pursuing salvation, one must choose a safe path. Health protocols and other policies issued by the government must be complied with because they are for safety reasons.

Salafi community in Ambon adheres to a nationalist ideology in Islamic thought, unlike other Salafi group—for example, their perception of obedience to the government or leaders as part of their faith. The basic concept of obedience to government is rooted in Al-Qur'an *Surah An-Nisa* verse 59, which commands Muslims to obey Allah and His messenger and those who are given authority.

Obedience to the government is part of worship. Because obedience to the government is outside political leadership, the government has a substantial religious responsibility to guide people toward salvation (Sunarwoto 2020).

Previous research found that Salafi Puritans held an essential principle of total obedience to the government (*walī l-amr* or *ūlū l-amr*) (Sunarwoto 2020, Wahid 2014a, Wahid 2014b). Like Puritan Salafis, Salafis in Ambon also think that the Indonesian government is *walī l-amr* or *ūlū l-amr* who must be obeyed. However, the Salafi group in Ambon has very different principles regarding obedience to the government because they are former militants in the 1999 Ambon Conflict. For them, obedience to the government is a requirement. Indeed, the manifestation of obedience to the government is complying with all forms of policies issued by the government. However, this obedience is not absolute and has limitations. Because for them, there is no obedience to creatures that are wrong to God. An example of non-absolute obedience is the establishment and dissolution of Laskar Jihad. Why is that? As discussed above, the formation and dissolution of Laskar Jihad was based on the fatwa of Islamic scholars in the Middle East, not because of their adherence to the results of the Malino Agreement. Even though the Malino Agreement were an attempt by the government at that time to reconcile Indonesia, especially Ambon, and Poso, for Salafi this policy was not followed. They are more obedient to the fatwa of the scholars in the Middle East. From the beginning, the formation of Laskar Jihad was an internal Salafi response to the arrogance and incompetence of the government led by Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur, which ignored the cries of Muslims in Ambon (Sholeh 2008).

Furthermore, if the obedience is not in the form of confusion (evil), then obeying is obligatory. Even if there is any doubt about the order issued by the government, it is still mandatory to carry it out until the error

becomes apparent. In an emergency, this can be done. All this is carried out solely to carry out the orders of Allah SWT. Although not supervised by officers, Salafis still implement the policy. Their much more flexible criteria help them avoid the perspective of faith and disbelief. Although obedience to the government was conditional, and they did not comply with the policy, Salafis never demonstrated or committed treason or rebellion. Resistance or rebellion against the government was never done because they thought resisting would cause much more significant damage. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ustadz Abu Farhan Husain:

“Indeed, our obedience to the government is conditional. However, we have never held demonstrations or even revolted. Because if that is done, greater damage will befall us all.” (R1, Tuesday, August 23, 2022)

Conventionally, citizenship is considered an exclusive territory for residents who have formal citizenship (Swerts and Oosterlynck 2021). Good citizens are those who help each other between citizens (Horst, Erdal and Jdid 2020). Responsibility is an important value for a citizen (Tan, Naidu and Osman 2018). In the context of the nation-state, Salafi citizenship is ambiguous. They must come to terms with pluralism and democracy in Indonesia but are against Salafi principles (Meijer and Butenschön 2017, Sunarwoto 2020). Nonetheless, Salafis actively promote “good” citizenship by becoming “agents of change” through their pious activism and, for example, supporting the country's strategic agendas to become good citizens (Chaplin 2018, Sunarwoto 2021). The implementation of health protocols, vaccinations and other accompanying policies is also part of their support for the government's strategic agenda and a form of motherland love (Cinta tanah air).

CONCLUSION

Salafis in Ambon adhere to a nationalist ideology in the Islamic thought even though most of them are former members of the Laskar Jihad, the Muslim militants in the 1999 Ambon conflict. For the Salafis, obedience to the government or leaders is part of love expression for the motherland. The basic concept of obedience to the government (*walī l-amr or ulu l-amr*) is rooted in the Al-Qur'an and As-Sunnah, which command Muslims to obey Allah, The Messenger, and those who are given the authority. This behavior was proven during the COVID-19 pandemic; in fact, during the pandemic, the Salafi members in Ambon also implement all health-related policies issued by the Indonesian government without exception. For the Salafis, the pandemic is a challenging test because this policy limits congregational worship activities and limits their daily activities in earning a living.

Religious moderation is also seen as a fair and balanced or moderate attitude among the Salafis. This attitude is shown by not exaggerating religion or belittling religion. Another characteristic of this balance is the commitment to obey and implement the teachings in the Al-Quran and Sunnah, such as constantly repairing and avoiding damage. They are advised to protect their faith, soul, mind, honor, lineage, and property and respect fellow religious believers, whatever their religious background and beliefs.

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