

TRACING THE DYNAMIC SPECTRUM OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN THE LOCAL CUSTOM OF NORTH SUMATERA

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Abstract

As a miniature of Indonesia's diversity, North Sumatra requires a long transformation within the framework of religious moderation to build harmony and maturity. This study aims to reveal the dynamic spectrum of religious moderation in the bubble of North Sumatra's local wisdom. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method by involving six subjects who were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Subject criteria are natives of North Sumatra and have sufficient knowledge of religious moderation in the local custom of North Sumatra. In-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis were used to collect the required data. This study reveals a vast spectrum of diversity among the North Sumatrans. In the meantime, religious moderation

is evidence of upholding religious ideals integrated with the local culture. Moreover, this research also shows how the people of North Sumatra from the following three regions, (1) Padangsidempuan and South Tapanuli, (2) Central Tapanuli and Sibolga City, and (3) Tarutung, practice the values of religious moderation in their daily activities. They performed this practice because of the desire to maintain unity in diversity and high aspirations to build a society that is peaceful, harmonious, and free from all conflicts.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Local wisdom, Unity in Diversity.

A. Introduction

People living in North Sumatra exhibit multicultural and pluralistic tendencies in their attitudes and behaviors (Sidi, 2020) *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). They come from a variety of ethnic groups, religious traditions, and cultural backgrounds (Harahap & Hamka, 2023). From a social, economic, cultural, and religious perspective, the province of North Sumatra is referred to as a miniature of Indonesia because it lives and develops into a population with a plurality of ethnic cultures and religions from various religions found in all provinces throughout Indonesia (Jaya, 2020). He further explained, from ethnic diversity in North Sumatra, eight major tribes inhabit the area; they are Malay, Batak (Toba Batak, Karo Batak, Mandailing Batak, Simalungun Batak, and Dairi Batak), Nias, Javanese, Minangkabau, Sundanese, Acehnese, immigrant ethnicities such as Chinese, Arabs, Indians, and others. The majority ethnic group in North Sumatra is the Batak or Ethnic Batak.

The native of North Sumatra cannot disengage their routines from the religious and cultural values because they uphold them as a way of life (Akrapuna *et al.*, 2020). The people of Indonesia, particularly those living in North Sumatra, place a high level of importance on several values, such as habituation, role model, internalization, integration in learning, and cultural values (Hidayati *et al.*, 2020). They closely carry those values into their daily activities. Napitupulu *et al.* (2017) support this statement, who stated that the Batak Toba community recognizes their social life as an inseparable part of their culture. In addition, the concept of human life in the Batak Toba community is always correlated and governed by traditional values. They also found that the Simalungun tribe who inhabit North Sumatra believe in the doctrine of God, Man, and Nature that God Almighty is the beginning of everything that exists. In light of this, people live with reverence for their progenitors as a link in the chain that perpetuates the commandments of God the Almighty. Even, in education, people in North Sumatra include regional cultural attributes such as belief in God Almighty and ancestral spirits as subjects. Another example found by Brakel-Papenhuyzen (2010) is that Karo and Pakpak-Dairi have songs, prayers, and stories as oral traditions that are closely related to their social life. These spoken genres are often part of rituals and contain important information or messages about local customs and religious concepts.

For example, societies developing tolerance based on local wisdom have the same ability to be tolerant (Toharudin & Kurniawan, 2017). South Tapanuli is known as a 'Civilized Muslim Community' whose people still maintain the traditions of their ancestors and, at the same time,

understand religious traditions very well. In addition, North Sumatra has hitherto established itself as a region that is friendly to diversity in various ethnicities, religions, races, cultures, and views on religion. The Batak tribe has a well-known concept or principle: *Dalihan Na Tolu* (three social or kinship structure). This concept has been passed down orally from generation to generation as local wisdom (Harahap & Hamka, 2023). Another potential aim of *Dalihan Na Tolu* is to support religious moderation in the people of North Sumatra, especially in South Tapanuli.

North Sumatrans embrace and tolerate diversity with an open mind. This statement was put forward by Jaya's research findings (2020) that prolonged conflicts related to diversity, especially religion, did not occur in North Sumatra because essential characteristics such as local wisdom were maintained and preserved to maintain harmony. Sumper and Hamka (Harahap & Hamka, 2023) investigate the roles of philosophy, culture, language, and Islam in Angkola's local wisdom of 'Dalihan Na Tolu'. The research proves that this local wisdom harmonizes with people dominantly in North Sumatra. This is demonstrated by allowing adherents of various religions to practice their respective religions. For example, they allow some religious activities to be held by different Islamic organizations such as Nahdatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Al-Washliyah, and Jamaah Tabligh.

Amri (2018) states that an oral tradition of the Angkola community maintains that people respect their culture. Likewise, religious activities are also held by non-Islamic organizations such as Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (HKBP), Indonesian Methodist Church (GMI), Batak Karo Protestant

Church (GBKP), Pentecostal Church, and the Catholic Church. Moreover, adherents of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are also allowed to carry out these religious activities in the North Sumatra region. This phenomenon is in line with the statement of the Governor of North Sumatra, Erry Nuradi, who stated that special efforts are needed to improve the quality of religious understanding and practice to understand religious harmony (Jaya, 2020).

The facts above are interesting to study because the diversity of ethnicities, religions, mass organizations, and cultures is vulnerable to becoming a focal point for inter-community conflict. This is relevant in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious regions of Padangsidempuan and South Tapanuli, Central Tapanuli, Sibolga City, and Tarutung. However, the people of North Sumatra have succeeded in displaying a sense of unity, solidarity, and harmony in their diversity through religious moderation within the framework of local culture.

This study aims to reveal the dynamics of religious moderation within the framework of local customs in North Sumatra. This study is intended to present an overview of how religious and cultural aspects in North Sumatra are moderated and mixed to create harmony. The findings of this study are useful for enriching the portrait of the phenomenon regarding the dynamics of moderation in religious and cultural characteristics in the life of North Sumatran because previous research conducted to focus on this topic was very limited. Furthermore, the findings of this study will contribute to stakeholders, leaders, decision-makers, and community leaders in North Sumatra to consider religious and cultural

values in maintaining harmony among multicultural and multi-religious societies.

B. Method

This study aims to reveal the dynamics implementation of religious moderation within the framework of local culture in North Sumatra, focusing on describing certain phenomena to gain better insight. Because of that, this study uses a descriptive research design through a qualitative approach to gain a thorough understanding of human behavior or certain social phenomena using contextual and naturalistic inquiry methods (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, qualitative research is a descriptive way of describing complex phenomena (Miles *et al.*, 2013). This research provides an in-depth study and analysis of the phenomenon of local culture-based religious moderation in the context of real life in North Sumatra – in this case, religious moderation in the people of North Sumatra, Indonesia, especially in the region of (1) Padangsidempuan and South Tapanuli, (2) Tapanuli City Tengah and Sibolga, and (3) Tarutung.

This study involved six subjects. In selecting subjects, purposive sampling was applied. Subjects were selected based on two criteria; (1) indigenous people from the location to be researched, and (2) well understanding of religious moderation related to local culture. In the data collection process, several methods were carried out, namely in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis which focused on the analysis of religious moderation in North Sumatra. The in-depth interviews aim to understand the subject of research on forms of religious moderation within

the local cultural framework in North Sumatra, including religious tolerance in Padangsidempuan and South Tapanuli, accommodation, and religion and culture in South Tapanuli, the social balance of the '*barbing koum*' community in Central Tapanuli and Sibolga, as well as tradition as a medium of moderation between religious believers in Tarutung area. The interviews were conducted in six different sessions with six subjects representing the indigenous people of North Sumatra, such as Central Tapanuli and Tarutung. Meanwhile, observations were made casually on moderation in religious activities within the spectrum of local culture in North Sumatra. Data taken from observation supports the primary data collected from in-depth interviews. In addition, supporting data is used to confirm the reliability of the data, while conflicting data is utilized to enrich the perspective of the phenomenon. Therefore, data bias can be maintained.

C. Forms of Religious Moderation Within the Frame of Local Culture in North Sumatra

1. Religious Tolerance in Padangsidempuan and South Tapanuli

Tolerance allows others to hold beliefs and respects their ability to express those beliefs and opinions. Consequently, tolerance is defined as approachable, agreeable, and compassionate behavior that accepts diversity. This statement is in line with Hjerm et al. (2020) that tolerance is often referred to as something that individuals and society should aspire to, especially given that diversity, in all its forms, is increasingly a feature of

contemporary democracy. Thinking positively, respecting and accepting individuals from different backgrounds, and seeing them as an integral part of whom we have come after tolerance. The key component of religious tolerance is tolerance, both within religions and between religious communities,

On the other hand, interfaith tolerance refers to the openness of adherents of one religion to interact with adherents of other religions through dialogue, cooperation, building houses of worship, and other means (Jati, 2014). Differences in religious interpretation cannot be avoided in reality. Those differences show potential, and they also run the risk of creating certain problems. If disparities are appropriately understood and managed, these differences can potentially improve people's quality of life. If differences are handled primarily and not tolerated, it becomes a serious problem (Dauda, 2021). Tolerance of interreligious relations in South Tapanuli is more likely to be profitable when mass organizations (other than prohibited organizations) work together, get along well, and understand each other. In the context of Christianity, they have a forum for religious harmony (Forum for Religious Harmony: FKUB), which is a mediator to encourage interfaith cooperation. The forum includes Catholics, Protestants, and some other religious sections.

Culture also protects all religions under the shared consciousness of 'Culture belongs to everyone'. This aligns with what the King of Kuria Muaratais, H. Suangkupon Harahap, said as 'cultured religion'. The diversity of religions among the Batak ethnic groups strengthens

the social system under the '*Dalina Na Tolu*' framework. This is realized through inter-religious dialogue and joint prayer. The glitter of the church's pine lamps symbolizes minority rights; in this case, Christians must live side by side with the majority, namely Muslims. The annual Nusantara Cultural Festival event can connect relations between religious communities by presenting culinary festivals, dance performances, and traditional clothing shows. The multicultural society in South Tapanuli is an inspiration for religious tolerance. This festival was held to foster community and preserve artistic and culinary culture. In South Tapanuli, diversity is a blessing for fostering inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony and cooperation.

Interfaith engagement is fluid and dynamic (Ropi, 2019). Everyone respects each other's limitations and understands their beliefs. For example, Muslims and Christians may visit each other at weddings or funerals. The most interesting example is when a Muslim visit a Christian relative, and the Christian host offers Muslim special dishes and cutlery (plates, glasses, spoons, and so forth). As a result, they take good care of it to maintain tolerance in South Tapanuli (Abdullah, 2001). Christians recognize that important differences between Muslims and Christians must be respected, especially concerning utensils and food.

2. Religious and Cultural Accommodation in South Tapanuli

Culture in South Tapanuli is formed from ancestral traditions that have been maintained and preserved to this day. Religion is a source of cultural inspiration for implementing social-community activities (Gultom, 2010). Oral traditions that are continuously conveyed become guidelines for practicing religion. This is expressed in the statement *'hombar adat dohot ibadat'*, meaning that adat (custom) and religion could coexist. Some traditions originate from religion, such as the reading of al-Barzanji in the practical tradition of *mangayun* (just like traditional ceremonies celebrating the birth of a baby).

Culture and religion have been assimilated into the South Tapanuli civilization since the spread of Islam during the *Paderi* War in West Sumatra. This assertion is supported by the fact that individuals learn the religion from preachers and Islamic scholars when they are lecturing on religious teachings. Consequently, the principles of Islamic teachings significantly impact social norms (Kurniawan, 2014). The addition of local traditions makes the tradition more Islamic.

The Batak ethnic feels confident and believes in their system because tradition not only guides them to survive by holding the norms and etiquette in life but also believes in reducing the threat of misery for anyone who violates it (Gultom, 2010). The integration of religion and culture in the social life of the people of South Tapanuli

can be seen in the philosophy, which says: *'hombar adat dohot ibadat'*. It becomes the basic order, guide, and value system. Its implementation stems from five basic principles: *adat sadalan dohot ugamo*, which means that a tradition must be in line with religion as a fundamental law originating from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Local socio-cultural realities will be reached through universal Islamic teachings (Ritonga, 2002). Undoubtedly, Islam is practiced in Batak lands due to its cultural compatibility and affable demeanor. Islam was disseminated through peaceful means, not through coercion. Islam also respects contemporary cultural forms without losing their characteristics. This element influences Indonesians to become Muslims. Islam and local culture are actively involved locally. Local culture is influenced and strengthened by Islamic beliefs.

As expected, the multicultural society of South Tapanuli will never coexist peacefully forever. Challenges faced by a community because of its cultural, racial, and religious diversity can sometimes become a big issue. Some of the tragedies that occurred in South Tapanuli were the result of an unfair diversity organization that encouraged horizontal conflicts that led to divisions and conflicts. It also turned into a painful experience (Gultom, 2010). The ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup (SARA) case in Aek Badak Julu Village, Sayur Matinggi District, is the proof. This case arose in 2016 as a result of violence between Muslims and non-Muslims that left four men injured and one person's home ransacked.

An accommodative attitude towards local culture will lead society to a permissive attitude towards diversity that is inclusive and tolerant and creates a religious atmosphere that is peaceful, dynamic, and full of enthusiasm (Rahyono, 2009). Local wisdom is a concept that focuses on local knowledge and local wisdom (Pahrudin & Halim, 2019). Local wisdom is an alternative to framing diversity in a pluralistic society. Local wisdom is thus interpreted as local ideas that can develop wisdom and goodness and are followed and practiced by the community from generation to generation. It also binds the togetherness of groups within society at the internal level or between groups between ethnic groups, races, and religions.

This thinking provides an alternative opportunity outside of thinking that positions Islam as a choice in the context of nationality and statehood (Suprpto, 2013). Religious existence does not eliminate the local variant itself. Instead, the presence of religion is only to decorate the face of culture without losing its identity. However, religion and culture bind and complement each other to realize religious-cultural wisdom and religion-based culture. The relationship between Islam and local traditions becomes interesting when viewed through the theory promoted by Abdurahman Wahid or Gusdur in 1980, namely 'Indigenization of Islam'. Gusdur's thinking replaced the term 'indigenization'. According to him, the indigenization of Islam was born in the context of efforts to revitalize cultural roots that position religiously devout humans.

Pluralism does not only recognize diversity or heterogeneity, but pluralism also demands acceptance of diversity and how to realize active tolerance because of the realization of harmony in diversity (Gultom, 2010). Religious conflicts often occur in a pluralistic society (Manshur & Husni, 2020) because every religion has its characteristics, even though all religions teach the right way. It is undeniable that religion can have an impact on disintegration if each religion declares a claim of truth over other religions. Pluralism is a challenge to religion. Therefore, looking for similar points from these religions is very important. Religious pluralism is a social fact that ultimately reflects many paths leading to one path. The perspective of pluralism does not mean the same point in faith. However, that is merely an acknowledgment of the existence of those religions.

Recently, people have been able to live side by side in diversity because of the robust theology that was built on the wisdom of the ancestors of the pluralistic people of South Tapanuli. The people of South Tapanuli use the *Dalihan Na Tolu* understanding as a source of cultural and social strength in their daily activities. The idea of *Dalihan Na Tolu* developed into a cohesive social unit that brings people together in harmony and heals their past differences and conflicts.

Batak people generally understand what it means to be family and loved because they adhere to the principles of the same clan/family name. Living in harmony with one another is a sacred tradition that is consistently practiced in traditional civilizations. Brotherhood within

the framework of *Dalihan Na Tolu* is a way of life for the indigenous people of South Tapanuli which prioritizes common interests. They are described as siblings who must look after each other, love, and get along despite their different ethnicities, religions, languages, and cultures. When Muslims and Christians collaborate (*gotong royong*), they are two different brotherhoods.

The spirit of tolerance is a family system that has been passed down throughout Indonesian history and has become a great ethnic and religious unit that eliminates conflict or rifts between people (Kawangung, 2019). There are 3 (three) sub-indicators to understand equality. First, there is no discrimination between superiority and inferiority. Second, equal opportunity is delivered for everyone. Third, the current democratic system opens wide spaces and opportunities for all elements of society to participate in politics.

3. Social Balance of Berbilah Koum Communities in Central Tapanuli and Sibolga

The picture of the positive potential of the people of Central Tapanuli and Sibolga is a miniature of a harmonious social life amidst the diversity of ethnicities and religions. This potential is the reason for the reality of being safe away from inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts. One of the natives, known as Andersen, eloquently spoke about the natural harmony of religious moderation in Central Tapanuli in an interview. He conducted that diversity is a certainty for the people

of Central Tapanuli (Tapteng) and Sibolga. Society lives in a diversity of traditions, groups, languages, and beliefs. The diversity of the people in Sibolga is natural and has been a source of cultural wealth since ancient times. Differences in religion, ethnicity, and culture are realities that must be understood and empowered for common development.

Sibolga is a small port located in Tapan Nauli Bay. Along the way, Sibolga was transformed into a trading center for goods and services. Based on history, trading in Sibolga was carried out between Sibolga people, people from other regions in North Sumatra, and even foreigners from abroad. Trade developed and was dominated by large ships from Portugal, England, China, Thailand, and Myanmar, which docked in Sibolga to buy spices and other agricultural commodities.

The Sibolga community is a complex society. The multi-ethnic composition of its people is the reason for the naming of Sibolga as *Negeri Berbilang Koom* (Land of Many Ethnicities). This is a separate point for researchers to examine the picture and pattern of managing social harmony between Central Tapanuli and Sibolga. Social harmony is a sociological concept that is difficult to define its boundaries. The problem is that, in reality, the essence and intensity of the harmonics are not the same.

The results of this study show a picture of the social harmony of the *Berbilang Koom* community in Central Tapanuli and Sibolga. First, the coastal language of Sibolga can positively support social harmony. The role of the coastal language is to become a unifying language in every

social interaction of the Sibolga people. This is proved by other ethnic groups who speak fluent coastal languages. In addition, the existence of the Batak language is also the language of communication in Sibolga, especially within the Batak community. Moreover, the existence of the Batak language is also very well spoken by other ethnicities such as Nias, Javanese, and Chinese.

Second, the people of Central Tapanuli and Sibolga show solidarity and togetherness through their involvement in the moment of celebrating the big day. One of the ritual moments is *kenduri laut* (sea ritual). Everyone looked enthusiastic and unified and worked together to make the event successful. The marine *kenduri* celebration is an important annual event in Sibolga and aims to remind the younger generation about Sibolga's civilization, culture, history, and cultural values.

Moreover, the celebration of the Sibolga Anniversary also colored religious moderation. They promote and declare Sibolga as a city of harmony, unity, and togetherness, connected regardless of race, ethnicity, and religion. Sibolga Anniversary is always celebrated on April 2. The same spirit can also be found in various other formal celebrations in this city, such as wedding ceremonies and religious celebrations.

Third is the process of assimilation of the people of Central Tapanuli and Sibolga. This form of assimilation is realized through mixed marriages by many different ethnicities. The process of assimilation is closely related to historical records in the past. This was due to trade interactions at that time, where interactions did not

only occur between the people of Central Tapanuli and Sibolga with foreigners from England, Portugal, and other overseas people but also with other people throughout Indonesia. Assimilation itself gave birth to a new culture, for example, the Sumando tradition which originated from mixed marriages between the descendants of Datuk Itam and the descendants of Datu Ompu Hurinjom Hutagalung who lived in Sibolga. The Sumando tradition emerged for the first time due to a clash of traditions in the marriage proposal process.

Fourth, the cultural mix between Central Tapanuli and Sibolga people is also found in the similarities in the language and culture of several ethnic groups in Sibolga. For example, in coastal Sibolga, the coastal language has similarities with the Minangkabau language. The difference between the two is the accent and dialect, where one speaks loudly, like the Batak language. Furthermore, the existence of culture in this area developed through an acculturation process in which the Sumando Sibolga tradition has similarities with the Minangkabau tradition. Similarities are also found in marriage contracts that use the same term, procession, and sequence of wedding traditions, for example, in the proposed agenda. In Minang custom, the proposal is called *maminang*, while in the language of the Sibolga coast, it is also called *maminang*. The term delivering *pitih* (paying a dowry) in the Minang language is similar to the term *manganta hepeng* in the language of the Sibolga coast. Similarities are also found in fashion. The two cultures (Minang and Sibolga) wear a mixture of Batak and Minang customs.

Fifth is democratic leadership. The culture of tolerance is seen in democratic parties and leadership succession. In each regional head election, candidates are always paired with figures of different religions, especially pairs of candidates with Muslim and Christian religious backgrounds. For example, when a candidate for mayor is an Islamic figure, then he is paired with a representative from a Christian figure and vice versa. The portrait of harmony and tolerance in Sibolga proves that the people of Central Tapanuli and Sibolga can manage and maintain diversity in society. Thus, Central Tapanuli and Sibolga become pilot projects for other regions in managing diversity in society.

Apart from social harmony, as mentioned above, several problems and conflicts have occurred in the people of Central Tapanuli and Sibolga. These problems have the potential to cause friction or even new conflicts. This is concluded based on a complex society that is dynamic, open, and fluid. As a result, it is difficult to stop the dynamics of society that trigger conflicts and divisions. Explaining the potential problems that could lead to conflict, another resource person, identified as Mr. Harisman, mentioned several potential problems in society that must be eliminated. He said the problems and potential conflicts in Central Tapanuli and Sibolga were summarized in three categories. First, stereotypes are branded on certain ethnicities. For example, ethnic Chinese or ethnic Chinese are stereotyped as people who are cunning and clever at deceiving. In addition, Nias ethnic are stereotyped as people who are rude,

troublesome, stubborn, and have other bad habits. Worse, some people in Central Tapanuli and Sibolga think they are not human. Second, there was a conflict based on the 2010 regional election. The conflict was triggered by a candidate's dissatisfaction with the election results. Candidates claim that competitors are using money politics to win elections. Third, there was blasphemy of religion done by Metro Tapanuli Sibolga. A fatal mistake began in writing the prophet from 'Prophet Muhammad' into 'Babi Muhammad' (Muhammad Pig). As a result of this mistype, hundreds of people staged protests and demonstrations right in front of the Harian Metro Tapanuli Sibolga newspaper office, protesting news content that hurts the hearts of Muslims and is categorized as religious blasphemy. In the end, the masses disrupted the office and inventory of Harian Metro Tapanuli Sibolga. The effect is that the Harian Metro Tapanuli newspaper has changed its name to New Tapanuli.

In the spirit of building unity and togetherness, each ethnic group in this area forms an association. In associations based on ethnicity, each has sub-associations based on the same clan, the same place of origin, and so on. In addition, to ensure the maintenance of harmonious inter-tribal and inter-traditional relations, the people of Sibolga formed an organization called the Traditional Institutions Communication Forum (*Forum Komunikasi Lembaga Adat - FORKALA*) in the city of Sibolga.

In addition, some ethnicities in central Tapanuli and Sibolga formed associations based on ethnicity; for example, coastal ethnic groups established cultural

institutions on the west coast of North Sumatra in Sibolga. Batak tribes also formed associations of traditions, and Batak Sibolga - Tapanuli Tengah people called LAMBASA-TT (*Lembaga Adat Masyarakat Batak Sibolga -Tapanuli Tengah*). Ethnic Minangs founded an association called Minangkabau Indonesian Community Budi (BUMIM), Chinese or ethnic Chinese also founded an association called the Indonesian Chinese Marga Social Association (PSMTI) in Sibolga city and also formed the Tjinta Friends Association (HTT) in Sibolga City. To manage the development of inter-religious harmony, the community jointly established the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) in Sibolga City.

Community harmony in Sibolga is supported by several factors. First is the historical factor since visitors from various regions and different ethnicities have visited its establishment Sibolga City. Since then, harmonious social interaction has been well established, making the city of Sibolga dynamic and open. This also makes the city well-established in managing diversity in society. The second is the adaptation factor. The people of Sibolga City have good coastal language skills in their daily activities. Adaptive ability strengthens people's lives to be harmonious and compatible. Then, the third is demographic factors and settlement patterns. The high population density in Sibolga City causes settlements to mingle and speck on the borders. In addition, it also eliminates the limitations of communication, thereby positively increasing contact and social interaction in society.

The condition of the social harmony of the *Berbilang Koum* community in Sibolga City is also supported by the role of the coastal language as a lingua franca in every interaction and social contact among the people living in Sibolga City. In addition, mixed marriages (merging) in the Sumando tradition also play a role in creating harmony in society. The existence of this tradition is a unifying tradition in every marriage. When people of different ethnic groups adopt and follow the Sumando tradition in an Islamic way, the language and culture of those people immediately become impacted by and representative of the Sumando tradition.

The word '*Sumando*' in the Batak language means beautiful and suitable. In a broader scope, it means son-in-law of his children, or in the local language, it is called *besan bebesan*. The Sumando tradition begins with the stages of *marisik to tapanggi*. Several stages featured dances from handkerchiefs, umbrellas, *adok*, *sampaya*, and *sikambang* botan to the stage of parading the bride and groom with a welcoming wave from the *baleh duo* and the *dampeng* dance.

Besides, the existence of people who live in harmony is also assessed from the aspect of tolerance that is well established in the people of Sibolga City. This is proved by the wedding parties held by people where they visit each other despite their different ethnicities and religions. Another proof of tolerance is during the election to find a new leader in Sibolga City. At that time, the candidates for mayor and deputy mayor were a combination of two figures from different religious backgrounds.

The general description of the social harmony of the people of Sibolga City is inseparable from several factors: history, adaptation, demography, and settlement patterns. In addition, ethnic-based associations positively and significantly contribute to maintaining and protecting unity, togetherness, and solidarity within one ethnicity or between ethnicities. Therefore, the presence of ethnic-based associations awakens collective awareness in maintaining good inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations so that Sibolga's identity as the 'Negeri Berbilang Kaum' is well protected and avoids potential conflicts.

The suggestion in this research is to encourage the people of the city of Sibolga to improve the interactive process to maintain the harmony that has been established. In addition, all elements of society in Sibolga City must remember history because historical factors greatly influence the development of Sibolga society to be harmonious in diversity. In addition, cooperation between the government, traditional institutions, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and the entire community is required to preserve harmony in Sibolga City in order to manage and eliminate potential conflicts. Thus, Sibolga, with its motto 'Land of Many People', will be suitable and appropriate.

4. Tradition as a Moderation Media for Interfaith Communities in Tarutung

The Tarutung area is a unique example in the context of the dynamics of religious moderation. It

is considered a miniature of Indonesia because it represents various elements of religion and ethnicity. Moreover, the dynamics of relations between religious communities are indeed unique. Therefore, even though the Tarutung area had experienced several conflicts, the community managed to reduce and minimize them by utilizing their traditions and values. In some cases, local traditions are massively reproduced and used to build harmony in society. Religious moments are used to unite different races and religions. Even so, several big jargons for building harmony are officially echoed, impregnated, internalized, and socialized in society (Vergouwen, 2004).

Based on the efforts and realities mentioned above, it is no exaggeration if Tarutung is called a harmonious and exotic area. In the context of socio-cultural diversity, the existence of community life that can increase the harmony of living together through local wisdom removes all plurality barriers in diversity (Simanjuntak, 2009).

Each religious group has its place of worship and is free to carry out its worship or religious rituals there. These life patterns last a long time and become the uniqueness of a cultural-religious society. Harmonious interactions, competitive encounters, collaborative endeavors, and amicable compromises typically characterize the dynamics of social life. This basic assumption confirms that the success of each social group in living side by side with other groups is an achievement to minimize the potential for conflict. The internal and external success factor is to develop constructive local wisdom to achieve harmony, cooperation, and integration of a pluralistic society.

Tarutung people could live with diverse religions and beliefs. They coexist without awkwardness. They can also interact very well with each other in various social, economic, and religious activities. Two communities (Muslim and Christian) can live together. They, as neighbors, invited each other when one of them had a party. They try to help and support each other in joy and sorrow. From an economic point of view, they work together without suspicion and without arrogance to dominate each other. The Tarutung community maintains harmony among adherents of religions such as Islam, Protestant Christianity, and Catholic Christianity. At the same time, they protect and respect each other.

Dalihan Na Tolu has a vital role of in the Tarutung community. The Tarutung people have certain cultural uniqueness compared to other ethnic communities in Indonesia. *Dalihan Na Tolu* serves as their authentic customary law. Its content is very high, and it is claimed to have come long before the arrival of the major religions. The custom of *Dalihan Na Tolu* is lived, respected, protected, preserved, and obeyed by the Tarutung people. Some cases in the Tarutung community are resolved through customary law. *Dalihan Na Tolu* has the basic principles of tradition. The values in the customary law of *Dalihan Na Tolu* are believed to be able to maintain order and kinship, cooperation, and harmony among residents.

Tarutung also has a very important local wisdom, namely *marsiadapari*. WS explained that the core function of Marsiadapari in the Tarutung community is cooperation. The goal is that the heavy work becomes lighter because

it is done jointly by a group. The implementation of *marsiadapari* is very effective in many activities, such as building houses (*pajongjong jabu*), mourning, parties, and others. The *Marsiadapari* principle extends to various economic classes. Poor or rich (*na mora manang na pogos*), and strong or weak (*na gumugo manang na gale*) have the intelligence to work together to ease the burden on other community members.

However, we must sincerely admit that the implementation of *marsiadapari* is not what it used to be in many ways. When someone wants to build a house, they will choose an economical and affordable option by delegating work to contractors and workers (Hutagalung, 1991). It changed due to changing times. Sophisticated and effective tools to help work in the field include tractors and harvesters. In addition, labor wages are also cheap.

Tolerance between religious communities in Tarutung builds positively when mass organizations in Tarutung work together and understand each other. M said that there is no dominant difference between one mass organization and another. For example, Muhammadiyah followers considered an Islamic movement with national character, *da'wah*, and *tajdid* (reformative), still followed local traditions and culture in Tarutung. They still follow many local traditions and cultures related to death ceremonies, weddings, and other holiday events.

The religious tolerance of the people in Tarutung faces several problems. Several events colored the dynamics of religious tolerance. The Al Munawwar

Mosque's construction was rejected; located in Nahornop Marsada Village, Pahe Jae District, Tarutung, North Tapanuli. The purpose of building the mosque is to enlarge it because it is already overloaded, and many visitors come to perform their prayers from five villages; thus, it needs to build bigger and larger. Construction was delayed due to the refusal of non-Muslim members of the Nahornop Marsada Community Alliance for Peace. The problems mentioned above are communicated and coordinated by all related parties. Relevant institutions work together and resolve conflicts by deliberation and consensus.

In social life, humans will never be separated from all conflicts. Rappaport (1999) states that conflict is always present in society. Conflict is a natural phenomenon that involves patterns of human interaction over time. Not every conflict involves violence. The problem arises when a conflict escalates into widespread violence and pandemonium, as well-developed social harmony will deteriorate and lead to disintegration (Rappaport, 1999).

Many theories explain the causes and effects of a conflict. One of them was put forward by Fisher (2020), who mentioned several theories about conflict. The first is the theory of social relations. This theory states that conflict occurs due to the existence of polarity, distrust, and continuous hostility between different groups in society. The second is conflict negotiation theory. This theory reveals that conflicts occur because of different positions and perspectives by all parties. The third is the theory of human needs. This theory states that primary human needs cause conflict. Primary human needs

are mentally and socially unfulfilled. Security, identity, recognition, participation, and autonomy are the main issues that have the potential to trigger conflict. The fourth is identity theory. This theory assumes that conflict is caused by incompatibility in the way of communication in different cultures. Fifth is conflict transformation theory. Conflict occurs because of inequality and injustice in terms of social, cultural, and economic (Fisher, 2000).

Some theories about the causes of the conflict above are still general in nature. Then, a question arose. What about inter-religious conflicts or, rather, inter-religious conflicts? This must be explicitly explained by discussing inter-religious violence, especially between Muslims and Christians.

Islam and Christianity are two different religions based on opposing ideas and concepts. At this point, culture becomes the unifier of the two religions as a manifestation of religious moderation (Malik, 2007). There is a theoretical explanation for the conflict involving Muslims and Christians in Tarutung. Malik maps out two conflicting paradigms, namely, primordial and artificial. The first is the primordial paradigm. Conflict occurs because of differences in basic values between the two.

The second paradigm is artificial. This paradigm states that conflicts that occur are not caused by differences between Islam and Christianity but are caused by the actions of certain individuals. Individuals incite two different religious communities to create hatred and animosity. It happened in the Dutch colonial period until now. According to this paradigm, Islam and

Christianity are fundamentally different. However, their differences did not become a triggering factor for conflict. Potential causes for creating conflict are manipulated and engineered by intellectual actors.

Criticizing the opposing theories, he promotes a more realistic viewpoint between the primordial and artificial paradigms. Islam and Christianity have much in common in terms of religion and society. They can work together in the same community and even in the same political interests. However, they also have their own identity which has the potential to give rise to opposing groupings. In other words, the differences and similarities between the two groups are unavoidable and natural. Problems arise when politicians get involved. These two factors contributed to stimulating friction and conflict between Islam and Christianity.

The phenomenon of social conflict in Indonesia is good if we study the relationship between Islam and Christianity in South Tapanuli. In studying a local conflict, it is necessary to know the phenomenon of conflict at the national level. This is because all problems or conflicts at the local level cannot be separated from the national context.

In addition, violent conflict can also be viewed from the perspective of elite conflict. As we know, apart from several riots after the reformation, the condition of society and politics in Indonesia was marked by two dominant things: political conflict and political violence. The dual interests of political elites bring two contradictory results, namely the positive contribution to democracy and the

negative impact of dividing society into several groups and potentially triggering collective violence (Jamil, 2007). Differences between people are engineered and manipulated to create clear boundaries to separate people into groups and make them fight each other.

There are at least three major theories regarding the phenomenon of massive violent conflict in Indonesia, especially in the last decade. Jacques summarizes three significant groups of analysis on ethnic violence after the collapse of the Soeharto regime. First, the analysis emphasizes elites' involvement in Jakarta (state, military, and opposition). Due to the unknown causes of ethnic violence in the region, this analysis labels the cause of the conflict as a 'provocateur' as the intellectual actor behind the conflict. In addition, this analysis has something in common with conspiracy theories.

Second, local elites are involved in competing with national elites (Ninet, 2020). This analysis reveals that violence arises due to the involvement of local elites who compete for state resources, access to public services, and control of local leaders at the provincial and district/city levels. Local elites often mobilize the masses to achieve their political goals. Religious sentiment is always misused because it is the strongest group identity in the social structure. This analysis emerges for some of the riots and violence. According to Bertrand, the two analyzes have weaknesses related to conspiracy theories and issues of provocation. Elites from either local or national will not be able to mobilize society to maintain conflict without mutual discontent.

Third, local communities suffer as a result of government regulations (Hodges *et al.*, 2022). For example, the murder case in West Kalimantan occurred because the Dayak ethnic group felt marginalized by government regulations. Thus, local ethnic groups do not have economic access and power on their land. The conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the central government was caused by the rejection of unfair government regulations. The people of Aceh feel disadvantaged by the government, which exploits all natural resources and is fully allocated to the central government in Jakarta. The hatred towards the Indonesian government, especially towards the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), has grown stronger since Aceh's Military Operations Area (DOM) regulations were effectively implemented.

The rise of various ethnic conflicts in various regions is related to the problems of state and nation development (Walton, 2020). Several national issues and themes that had been kept silent during the New Order have now found momentum for discussion again. What Bertrand did was right, namely by putting forward an argument stating that the conflicts that occurred in Indonesia were correlated with national issues.

Several facts prove the involvement of these three problems. Conflicts that occur in the regions are undeniably related to the involvement of local and national elites (Hodges *et al.*, 2022). The expression of protest from the local community is the discrimination and injustice they have received. Therefore, the most

probable and acceptable argument is that many factors cause conflicts in local areas. Factors involving the elite, the politicization of regional leaders, manifestations of protest in response to social injustice, and the problem of the ongoing construction of nationalism are all discussed.

Modernism and globalism are emphasized because the benefits and threats are not evenly distributed (Manshur & Husni, 2020). This condition creates a gap between the middle, upper, and lower classes (Birnbaum *et al.*, 2021). This kind of gap is exacerbated by threats to the economy, politics, culture, and psychology as the unstoppable influence of modernism. Ultimately, it leads to primordialism and exclusivism towards people outside their group or community.

There are three kinds of attitudes of religious adherents toward other people (Hidayati *et al.*, 2020). All three are inclusive, exclusive, and pluralistic. Exclusive people will usually assert that their religion is the most correct. For this group, truth, safety, and other virtues are only owned by the religion they adhere to and believe in. This paradigm only recognizes religion as the only source of truth. Other beliefs are wrong and do not provide salvation.

Exclusivism is an attitude of believing that the most valid religion is one that has holy books (Shelton & Dwiwardani, 2022). Compared to beliefs without scriptures, those with them are considered superior. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all claim to be the only true religion. Indian religious beliefs, on the other hand, recognize similarities and manifestations of other

religions. In the course of religious history, exclusivism developed due to dichotomous views, such as those separating revelation from God and non-revelation, religions based in heaven and those based on earth, or Semitism or non-Semitism. Christian theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Islamic theologians use this type of categorization (Shelton & Dwiwardani, 2022). The classification method is applied to strengthen the supremacy of one religion over another.

Exclusive attitudes towards religion prevent a person from developing interactions freely with other different groups. It results from a religious belief that its faith is the most authentic. In addition, this attitude serves as a guide to encourage adherents of other religions to acknowledge and acknowledge the truth of religion. Another group is then invited to convert to the new faith once recognition is obtained. Consequently, this mentality causes one to believe that one's own is superior and that the other is untrue.

D. Conclusion

This study aims to reveal the dynamics of religious moderation within the framework of local culture in North Sumatra. Thus, this research finds a massive spectrum of diversity in terms of religious moderation. Religious moderation proves the upholding of religion among the people of North Sumatra. In particular, this study successfully demonstrated the values of religious moderation in daily activities. There is a desire to maintain unity in diversity and

high ideals to build a society that is peaceful, harmonious, and free from all conflicts.

North Sumatran Muslims and Christians both adhere to inclusive religions. This mentality contributes to the formation of harmonious interpersonal relationships. Communal conflicts between Muslim and Christian communities cannot be separated from the effects of strengthening socio-economic and political-religious identities. Religious and community leaders play an important role in encouraging religious moderation and fostering inter-religious harmony. Intensifying interfaith dialogue in terms of forming dialogue patterns between religious communities is a method of resolving conflicts. In addition, interfaith dialogue is motivated by the need for cooperation between religious communities to solve social problems faced by society.

The findings of this study contribute to providing a deeper understanding of the phenomena and dynamics of religious and cultural moderation in the everyday circumstances of the people living in North Sumatra. Previous research has limited focus on this topic. Therefore, the findings of this study will contribute to stakeholders, leaders, decision-makers, and community leaders in North Sumatra to consider religious and cultural values to maintain harmony among multicultural and multi-religious societies.

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