

## The Role of Ulama and Muslim Networks on Reducing Religious Excessiveness

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### ABSTRACT

The accumulation of religious temperament can affect human interaction. In the context of religious behavior, Islam addresses two terms known as *al-ifrāt* (excess) and *al-tafrīt* (neglect). The first refers to the exorbitance of the individual in experiencing and expressing his religiosity, while the second means ignoring a certain religious order easily. Both are conflictual. In terms of inter-religious interaction, believers' excessive religiosity could neglect others' religiosity. In this regard, some people tend to avoid the presence of others due to their excessive religious confession. This research explores religious networks conducted by Muslim organizations in Pamekasan, Madura, that could bridge inter-religious relations between Muslims and others, especially between Muslims and Christians. Through observation and in-depth interviews, this research describes the so-called religious excessiveness that could lead religious believers to respect different religions and faiths. The paper found that the ulama network could become an effective medium to reduce religious excessiveness and promote religious moderation.

### KEYWORDS

Madura, Muslim networks, Radicalism, Religious excessiveness, Ulama



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## Introduction

Madurese people are perceived as a Muslim community who inherently practice and express Islamic values within their lives (Mansurnoor, 1990). Islam has become an innate character of the Madurese (Kusumah, 2003). In his article “*Islam Nusantara: Analisis Relasi Islam Dan Kearifan Lokal Budaya Madura* (Islam Nusantara: The analysis on the relation of Islam and local wisdom)”, Nasrullah discusses how Islam is integrated with local wisdom in Madura. The article highlights how Islam Nusantara—as a form of adaptation of Islamic teachings to local culture—is seen in religious practices in Madura. Nasrullah outlines how Madurese culture and traditions influence and shape Islamic practice, demonstrating the process of acculturation that creates a unique form of Islam in the region. The article emphasizes that the relationship between Islam and Madurese culture is symbiotic, with both influencing and enriching each other.

Meanwhile, Pribadi explores the complex relationship between state, society, and local power in Madura. The book analyses how political structures, government policies, and local actors influence social and political dynamics in the region. Pribadi shows that local politics in Madura is influenced by distinctive cultural and social factors, and how changes in national politics affect local realities. With its in-depth approach, this book provides insights into how political and economic power operates at the local level, and how interactions between the state and society shape politics and daily life in Madura (Pribadi, 2018).

Rifa’i supposed that the spread of Islam in Madura has not been occurring easily (Rifa’i, 1993, 24). Some of the local governments in Madura continued practicing their *Shiwa-Buddha* as Majapahit legacy at the beginning of Islamic expansion. In his book, *Sedjarah Madura: Selayang Pandang*, Abdurachman elucidates that before the Sunan Giri era, several traders from Gujarat reached Madura Island, namely Kalianget, Sumenep (Abdurrahman, 1988, 16). There was no significant resistance from Madurese people to accept and practice Islamic values.

Some local traditions—such as *Rokat Tase’* (ocean festival), *Toron Tana* (cultural celebration for the certain period of baby’s growth), *Ater-ater* (sharing and exchanging foods with neighbors), *Tajin Sorah*, and *Tajin Sappar* (celebrating the first and the second month in Islam), and other traditions—have been adjusting local wisdom and Islamic value. However, there have been several tensions on the process of integrating what is so-called “Islamic” and “local wisdom” into Madurese tradition. For instance, there is a rigidity between the Madurese ulama and the owner of *Sapeh Kerap* (bull racer) on the bull race festival. The first attempted to modify and release *Kerapan Sapi* (a unique bull racing competition) based on a traditional form, while the second argued that such stuff is traditionally a part of cultural practice and Madurese tradition. In traditional practice, a jockey in the bull race uses several stuffs (e.g. nails and chilis) to make the bull crazy and run rapidly. For the owner, eliminating this stuff means excluding the essential element of the *Kerapan Sapi* festival. As a result of this tension,

based on ulama recommendation, since 2012 the local government in Madura revealed to conduct the first official *Kerapan Sapi* without animal torture (Taufiqurrahman, 2013). To some degree, this phenomenon signifies the influential role and strong power of the ulama in Madurese society.

For the Madurese, Ulama (Muslim leaders) attain respectable roles, that is, based on their socio-religious position and function. Madurese people respect their proverb, *bhepha bhebhu' guruh ratoh* (father, mother, teacher [*ulama*] and ruler), to express their esteem toward ulama. They recognized ulama and local *kiai* as representative of practicing and performing everyday activities: religiously, culturally, economically, educationally, and even medically.

Another example to see how the role of Madurese ulama could inspire and influence social order within Madurese society is the case of *Jembatan Suramadu*, a bridge connecting Madura and Surabaya. Muthmainnah elucidates that one of the cultural obstacles to realizing Suramadu Bridge is ulama's resistance to the project (Muthmainnah, 1998). It needs more than 25 years to "negotiate" and "convince" Madurese ulama about the necessity and social need of the bridge. Yanwar Pribadi states that the government used an undemocratic approach to implement its plan for Suramadu Bridge which caused Madurese people to behave Islamic symbols in resisting the plan (Pribadi, 2015).

Living in this socio-religious privilege, Ulama continues to perform and strengthen their position among themselves. For instance, they tend to have limited and internal marriage among the ulama family, to keep their wealth or kinship (Jonge, 1989, 239-265). Referring to Pierre Bourdieu, they attempted to preserve their *habitus* and retain charismatic leadership among the ulama network (Bourdieu, 1980). Iik Arifin Mansurnoor classified ulama of Madura into two limited categories: local kyai and supra-local kyai. The first signifies Madurese ulama who has limited relation with the outside world, while the second implies Madurese ulama with broader access to the outside (Mansurnoor, 1990, 335). Although Mansurnoor focuses more on ulama's economic access to the outside, to some extent, it also addresses different phenomena between *mak kaeh* (little ulama) and *keyaeh* (big ulama). This classification suggests an existing competition between the Madurese ulama themselves.

In this regard, BASRA (Badan Silaturrahmi Ulama Madura) represents some supra-local ulama that initiated to (1) build relationships among Madurese ulama, (2) improve the curriculum of pesantren (Islamic boarding school), and (3) respond to social problems of Madurese people (Sattar, 2014, 222-224). In its previous movement, this council officially became the first ulama network in Madura which is concerned with investigating and responding to the project of Suramada Bridge. Eventually, the existence of BASRA drives other supra-local and local ulama to create such Islamic organizations for advocating and achieving their own goals. This organization has been originated to strengthen the ulama network and is grounded on the Islamic foundation.

Currently, there are several Islamic organizations in Madura managed by the ulama intending to achieve different purposes. Just to mention few of them: AUMA (Aliansi Ulama Madura), FKM (Forum Kiai Muda), FAAS (Front Anti Aliran Sesat), FOKUS (Forum Komunikasi Ormas Islam), LPUI (Lembaga Pemersatu Umat Islam), Gasper (Gerakan Santri dan Pemuda Rahmatan lil Alamin), HP3M (Harakat Pimpinan Pondok Pesantren se-Madura), etc. These organizations accommodate various issues and in general concern more on defending Islam and Muslim affairs, as their vision and mission.

These organizations do not only restrain their program on religious and cultural manners but also expand their program into economic and political matters. For instance, AUMA and HP3M announced their official support to a certain candidate in the local election of Jakarta 2017 and their resistance to certain projects of non-Muslim figures. These organizations tend to be reactive in front of several issues outside Madura as long as they relate (in their opinion) to Islam and Muslim affairs. In this context, it is noteworthy to explain the dynamics of Islamic organization and its movement in Madura, especially its connection with radicalism and radical movement.

However, although Islam is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Madurese society, it cannot deny the lives of non-Muslims in Madura. In his book, *Kristen Madura: Agama, Identitas, dan Pergulatan Sosial*, Siddiq explores the life of the Christian community in Madura and how Christianity shapes identity and also plays a role in influencing social interaction. The book reveals the challenges faced by the Christian community in a Muslim-majority environment, including social conflict and discrimination, and how they try to maintain their identity while integrating into local society. Relations between the Christian and Muslim communities in Madura are often marked by tension, but the book also highlights efforts to build tolerance and cooperation. Through analyses of identity, social interactions, and coping strategies, this book provides insights into the complex religious dynamics in Madura and how Christian communities are adapting in a pluralistic context (Siddiq, 2023).

Based on the above, this research aims to explain how Islamic organizational networks grow together and complement each other, especially those based in Pamekasan. This research argues that the ulama network could be a peaceful initiative to build harmony within and between religions. The ulama network could eliminate radicalism and promote peaceful Islam.

## Results and Discussions

### Madurese Ulama and Religious Network

The foundation of the ulama network in Madura, referring to Mansurnoor, has been constructed at least on four sources: kinship, collegiate friendship, the spirit of Islamization, and socio-religious organization (Mansurnoor, 305-313). For Madurese people, to be *kiai* or ulama is to have access to well-known family or honorable kinship among the ulama network. The history of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Madura

involves the history of lineage and ancestry. Almost every *pesantren* in Madura is attached within linear kinship and identical origin. For example, most of *pesantren* in Sumenep will be assumed to be descended from Kiai Syarqowi, a charismatic ulama who spread in Prenduan and its around (Jonge, 1989, 239). In Pamekasan, some big *pesantren* such as Banyuanyar, Bata-Bata, Panyebben, and Bettet share the same ancestor and appear from the same *bujuk* (forefather). To keep this connection, the ulama prefers to have internal marriage among their families and make a friendship between the *kiai*.

The Madurese ulama build religious links among *pesantren* and *kiai* based on the spirit of *da'wa*. Having this connection, they commonly announced the socio-religious organization in its distinguish variance to manage their movement. *Sarikat Islam* (SI) and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) could be perceived as the very preceding organization in which the Madurese Ulama was involved. In Pamekasan, this socio-religious network could be portrayed until today where the ulama of NU and the ulama of SI-affiliation have different orientations and visions concerning cultural and political issues.

In Madura, local elections (and other political ceremonies) may lead to political tension among the ulama, depending on their provision for certain candidates. In this regard, some *kiai* would break the lineage and ulama-ship to place other *kiai* in the position of the opposite and the “enemy” of the group. To some extent, personal ties affect and influence the relationship between ulama and *kiai*. Some frictions and conflicts among Madurese ulama, both ideological and political, have been occurring because of personal tension (Lailurrahman, 2017). It could be approved through internal conflict and misperception between some *kiai* in AUMA who eventually create another organization. In other words, kinship, friendship, and ideological and political interest interchangeably affect the progressiveness and effectiveness of the ulama network (Islamic organization). In a wider context, political conflict could arise between *kiai* as *santri*-Muslim authority and other authorities, such as *klebun* (village heads) and *blater* (local strongmen) (Pribadi, 2013, 3-4).

Discussing the history of Islamic organizations in Madura, especially in Pamekasan, we will find that the main reason for making the organization is—besides the goal of the organization—keeping the ulama network. For instance, BASRA put “building the ulama network” as its primary purpose. It means that Islamic organizations in Madura are concerned with strengthening the existence of the ulama connection. It is logical to manage the organization by sameness and oneness, both in vision and background, including collecting and embracing members based on kinship and friendship. However, it signifies that the organization remains exclusive and for a limited group of the ulama.

In the following paragraph, we describe several organizations in Pamekasan which is conducted based on the ulama network. These organizations exist and somehow influence into social life of the Madurese.

## 1. BASRA: Negotiating Madurese Morality

BASRA was founded in 1991 when several Madurese ulama (most of them were passed away) gathered and discussed Madura's future concerning the government's plan of industrialization. They criticized the Government's plan and avoided *Jembatan Suramadu* (Sattar, 2014, 222-224). To accelerate the movement, they arranged to have an organization called Badan Silaturahmi Ulama Madura. It is worth noting that the word *ulama* has been used consciously in the organization. The *kiais* working in the organization realize and identify themselves as *ulama* and restrict the organization only to the *ulama* (*kiai*). Until today, the members of BASRA are the *kiais* and the ulama.

From the beginning BASRA was very active in advocating mediating, on behalf of the Madurese people, to discuss the industrialization project with the government. It represented Madurese's response toward industrialization by giving several reasons. *Firstly*, industrialization must be constructed gradually and not massively. *Secondly*, it must accommodate local people in its process. *Thirdly*, Madurese people are not ready yet to host industrialization: it needs more time to implement. *Fourthly*, Madurese people are warned of the negative impact of the industrialization. Industrialization has been assumed as the slow movement to destroy Madurese morality (Sattar, 2014). It is not a matter of rejection but a matter of timing. However, some people supposed that the rejection of BASRA toward industrialization was to keep and save their socio-religious position in Madurese society (Muthmainnah, 1998).

From that moment, BASRA has been identical to *Suramadu* and the industrialization plan of Madura. That was the main issue where Madurese ulama had the stage and played the role in terms of national governmental issues. Because BASRA in principle focuses on social issues and Madurese life, when the conflict of Shia in Sampang emerged in 2012, BASRA became one of the Islamic organizations involved in the reconciliation process. Along with MUI, NU, IJABI, ABI, and FKUB, BASRA intensely encouraged conflicting parties (Sunni and Shia) to find a solution. However, the role of BASRA and its representation in this process has been questioned and biased (Salahuddin, 2022).

To realize its programs, BASRA has no formal structure and staff. It grows with one coordinator in each municipality (Sumenep, Pamekasan, Sampang, Bangkalan) in Madura. The heads of BASRA are limited (only eight *kiais*) and not chosen through formal elections. At the time when one *kiai* member of BASRA passes away, his successor (generally his son of him) will replace his position. In this regard, BASRA is very exclusive organization which builds and

keeps kiai-ship and the ulama network throughout kinship (and friendship). BASRA has been well-known among Madurese not only because of its programs and activities but also because of its members, who hold extensive connections and strong power among the Madurese ulama. Until today, BASRA remains a respectable and influential organization. This strategic position will be meaningful to utilize Islamic discourse and disseminate peaceful Islam, including avoiding radicalism among Madurese Muslim society.

## 2. FOKUS: Communicating Ideas

FOKUS (Forum Komunikasi Ormas Islam) was initiated by *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) Pamekasan to provide a resilient network among established Islamic organizations. The idea occurred when the executive board of these organizations gathered in 2003. As a result, the board declared that forum in September 2003. There are six Islamic organizations involved in the forum: *Nahdlatul Ulama*, *Muhammadiyah*, *Persatuan Islam*, *Sarikat Islam*, *Al-Irsyad*, and *Hidayatullah*.

The forum does not explicitly recognize itself as the forum of the *ulama*, but it is arranged to make connections between Islamic organizations which are commonly managed by *kiai* and *ulama*. This forum attempted to fill an empty spot when the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) in Pamekasan was inactive (Hasan, 2014, 263). The idea emerged from religious concern to preserve *silaturahmi* (good relationship) among Islamic organizations. This forum has no regular program or perpetual meeting, but it always generates provisional meetings to discuss social problems within Madurese society in Pamekasan. There are at least three basic concerns in this forum: good communication (among Islamic organizations), good role-model (*ulama*), and good belief (Islam) (Hasan, 2014).

Initiatives to have good connections and build a network between ulama and Islamic organizations have become keywords for several Islamic organizations in Madura, and they occur from the elite of Muslim scholars. It means that they realize their position as Muslim public figures who are responsible for leading Madurese Muslims and possessing Islamic practice. However, it is worth noting that some ulama involved in such organizations eventually entangled with political exercise. In this regard, there is a suspicious perception that to make a network is only to expand social power and to reach political authority among Madurese people.

## 3. AUMA: Purifying Islam

AUMA was established in October 2015. It has a more formal structure than BASRA, and follows the common form of modern organization. However, this organization still has its restrictions on selecting members: they are

dominated by ulama and *kiai*. Furthermore, it explicitly cites the word *ulama* in its name to designate its reference to the exclusive group of Madurese society. Like BASRA, the organization involves large numbers of ulama from each region in Madura. Having members from every district in Madura, it aims to be representative of all Muslims in Madura. Some of executive board of AUMA is listed as followed: General chair is KH Ali Karrar Sinhaji (Pamekasan), board of the chair are KH Sholeh Abdurrahman (Pamekasan), KH Fahri Suyuthi (Sumenep), KH Buchori Ma'shum (Sampang), KH Dahlawi Syarkasyi (Bangkalan).

The main objective of AUMA is to release Madura from *Syibilip* (*Syiah, Wahabi, Liberal, dan Penista Agama*: Shiite, Wahhabism, liberalism, and religious blasphemy). For this organization, *Syibilip* was "religious disease" that could harm Muslim mind and spirituality. For this organization, every item in *Syibilip* has its logical root of rejection. *Shiite* refers to underlying religious tension between Sunni and Shia in Sampang, which exploded decisively in 2012. *Wahabi* refers to the Salafi movement that is commonly perceived as a cultural attack toward Sunni teaching practiced by Madurese people in their daily lives. *Liberal* refers to liberal thoughts which endorse pluralism and progressive thinking on religion. It has various interpretations but generally, it was understood among AUMA's members based on the fatwa of MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council).

AUMA has a special response for the case of Basuki Tjahya Purnama, concerning his speech in *Kepulaun Seribu* and his candidacy in the local election of Jakarta. AUMA released an official letter relating to this case: it points out the topic of religious blasphemy and non-Muslim identity. AUMA's activism, to some extent, criticizes inter-religious dialogue and strengthens Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism among the Madurese Muslims (A'la and Zamzami, 2023).

#### 4. FKM: Young Muslim Leader and Islamization

FKM is an under-bow organization of AUMA. The chair of FKM is the son of AUMA's director and the general secretary of it is the son of AUMA's secretary. The chair of FKM is Umar Hamdan bin Ali Karrar Sinhaji and the secretary is Mohammad Imaduddin bin KH Fudholi Ruham. In this context, cross-cutting affiliation between kinship, friendship, and organization emerges in its flawless form. This organization extends the same vision with AUMA which is focusing on strengthening Sunni teaching and avoiding heretical thought among the Madurese. Focusing on young Muslim leader segmentation, the organization attempts to challenge the standpoint of other organizations that compete with FKM idea. In terms of Habib Rizieq, for



instance, when there is an Islamic organization officially rejected his coming to Madura, FKM countered by setting up some flyers to welcome and celebrate Habib's arrival into Pamekasan (Koranmadura, 2017). In analogical framing, we may identify FKM as strikers and AUMA as defenders.

Although this organization has been centered in Pamekasan, FKM connection attains another region in Madura. It follows AUMA's connection and range and enhances its activities among *lora* (the young leader in *pesantren*) in Madura. FKM also focuses on "Islamization" through controlling and criticizing social activities supposed to be immoral and heretical (Maduranews, 2016).

Besides the previous organizations, other Islamic organizations in Pamekasan has been steered by ulama and young Muslim scholars. Some of them are: First is HP3M (*Harakat Pengasuh Pondok Pesantren se-Madura: Islamic Boarding School Leader Movement*). This forum was initiated by KH Lailurrahman who was formerly being active in AUMA and BASRA. He initiated this forum with KH Jakfar Shodik as a general secretary, after having internal tension with another ulama of AUMA. LP3M aims to focus on *Pesantren* development and capacity building by making extensive communication with ulama and *kiai pesantren* in Madura. However, as a new-coming organization within the ulama network, LP3M needs more socialization and alteration.

Second is LPUI (*Lembaga Pemersatu Umat Islam*). This organization has been announced within existing religious tension between Shia and Sunni in Sampang. It was KH Nuruttamam who initiated and managed the forum. This forum has been engaged in the reconciliation process of the Sunni-Shia conflict in Sampang, together with BASRA. In this case, LPUI actively communicated with ABI (*Ahlul Bait Indonesia*) and IJABI (*Ikatan Jamaah ahlulbait Indonesia*)—two Shia-affiliated organizations—during the process of reconciliation. From this process, KH Nuruttamam was expected as Shiite (or defender of Shia) by several ulama and *kiai*, especially by AUMA affiliation. The forum has a prodigious vision to resolve religious conflict within Muslim society in Madura, but it cannot be implemented easily because of the limited network and negative stigma (of being Shiite) labeled it.

Third is Gasper (*Gerakan Santri dan Pemuda Rahmatan lil Alamin*). This forum was declared under the supervision of GP Anshor Pamekasan. Almost all young Moslem activists working in this movement are NU-affiliated *lora*. The Spirit of this movement is based on moderate teaching (*wasathiyah*) of Islam. One of the remarkable movements of Gasper is its refusal toward at least two Salafi preachers invited to give speeches in certain mosques in Pamekasan. In this movement, Gasper argued that religious speech given by

them attacks the mainstream faith and creed of the Sunni Muslim in Madura (timesindonesia, 2016).

### Religious Excessiveness

Abdullah ibn Jibrin describes three different groups of people based on their thinking and practice of religion (Jibrin, 2007). First, people with a neglectful attitude toward their religiosity ignore and disregard religious teaching easily. These people see religious doctrine as "profane" object. In Islamic tradition, this standpoint is called *tafrit*. Second, people with excessive obedience toward religious order. They attempt to perform not only an obligatory order of religion but also another voluntary practice of it: without scrutinizing and examining the validity of the order. Islamic tradition calls this approach *ifrat*. Two practices are pleonastic. In terms of intra and inter-religious interaction, excessive religiosity could neglect the religiosity of others. This approach may create demonization of others when they feel oppressed or suffered (Juergensmeyer, 2000, 171-172). Third, people with moderate thinking and practice. They perform religious practice as it is ordered without ignoring or rejecting the different religious practices of others. Referring to Paul Knitter, this approach can be classified as "the acceptance model" where believers respect and understand the religious beliefs of others as it is (Knitter, 2002).

In practice, the first two groups mentioned above dominated our social and religious sphere. What I want to highlight here is the second (*ifrat*), since it relates to religious fundamentalism and radicalism. In his book, *Defenders of God*, Lawrence argued that fundamentalism engages with public space: it encounters political power, economic justice, and social status (Lawrence, 1989, 1). In other words, spirituality and religiosity cannot be separated from the actual experiences of humans.

To cite technical terms of medical science, this *ifrat* behavior can be called "religious obesity". In medical science, *obesity* can be identified as having a high percentage of body fat. It distinguishes than *overweight* which means having more body weight than is considered normal (Stern and Kazaks, 2009, 4). The first may increase the risk of body health, while the second may only overlook the ideal weight of the body. In this regard, fundamentalism and radicalism could be classified as having a high percentage of excessive religiosity that may defeat the religiosity of others. Religious fundamentalism and radicalism (*ifrat*) cover both-sided threats of communication: inside and outside. Internally, fundamentalism may damage harmony between the same religious believers (Muslim with Muslim), and externally it may destroy peaceful relations among different believers (Muslim with non-Muslim).

Lawrence argued that fundamentalism opposes modernity and its proponents. Otherwise, he stated that fundamentalists are modern but they are not modernists (Lawrence, 1989, 1). He referred to Berman's idea that to be modernist it is not a simple way. It requires the skill of adaptation and flexibility to play with modern reality. Berman

said, “To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one’s own, to move within its currents in search of the form of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows” (Berman, 1982, 345-346).

Following Berman’s idea, I see that some responses from the ulama network in Pamekasan appeared because of tension between religiosity and modernity: between ulama’s ideological understanding and developmental goal of modernity (such as Suramadu Bridge case) or between ideologically excessive devotion and pluralistic realism of religions (such as AUMA’s response toward Shiite community). Radicalism follows a fundamental view on practicing religious doctrine, and it creates a judgmental mind and truth-claiming intellectual.

Looking at the movement of Islamic organizations in Pamekasan, I presume that the existence of those Islamic organizations influences (and could be influenced by) the ideological, social, economic, and political interests of the ulama—as leaders and members of it. It is easy to bring such organizations to support religious radicalism and extremism. Here, moderation is needed in the ways to control lop-sided spirit among excessive religious believers. Jillian Schwedler comments that many scholars tried to conceptualize how radical or extremist Muslims become more moderate by giving arguments and mechanisms to produce moderate behavior, and he finds it unproblematic as long as that inclusion moderation was acknowledged and examined through logical structure and analysis. However, he suggests keeping in mind that putting and perceiving Islamists as “the pantheon of historical bad guys” is part of a must-be-avoided binary mindset, because we have nothing about their expressed democratic commitments (Schwedler, 2011, 371).

In Islamic thought, it is relevant to refer to what Abu Zayd said as *al-fahm al-‘ilmi* (scientific knowledge) and *al-istikhdam an-nafi* (interest-oriented procedure) of religion, namely Islam (Zayd, 1995, 29). Zayd reminds us that inside radical and fundamental religious thoughts and movements there is always ambitious power to demonize others: it aims to reach its own (ideological and political) objective in the name of religion, in the name of Islam. In line with Zayd, Rifat Said comes with term *al-ta’aslum* (Islamization) to describe a political movement which is concealed within Islamic teachings and values (Said, 1995).

The ulama network in Pamekasan could be derived typically into two general movements: fundamental/radical and moderate. The first tends to examine religious others by using its paradigm and victimizing somewhat contradictory beliefs. It can be seen in the basic articles of association (AD/ART). The second attempts to build harmonious connections among Muslims and support cordial relationships with non-Muslims. It does not focus officially on criticizing or investigating other organizations and persons. BASRA, for instance, focuses more on social issues while FOKUS emphasizes more on strengthening the connection between Islamic organizations. This approach

influences and energies the ulama network for not having a radical approach toward different groups or individuals.

In terms of the inter-religious network in Pamekasan, above all these organizations, FKUB (Interreligious Froum) becomes a locomotive for accommodating the needs and interests of religious groups. FKUB, as an official board under the Department of Religious Affairs, performs glowing actions to unite different religious group in the city. It succeeds in making and keeping peaceful connections between Muslims, Christians, Catholics, Buddhists, Hindus, and other religious believers in Pamekasan (Uktolseja, 2017). Kiai Muidz, a chief of FKUB Pamekasan, organizes this organization based on contemporary and contextual needs. In sum, kiai and ulama network could play an important role on preventing and sidestepping radicalism through its activities and programs. Islamic organizations such as BASRA, FOKUS, LPUI, and Gasper may participate to endorse moderate teaching on Islam and uphold contextual practice within the Islamic movement.

Justin E Lane offers an optimistic thought that religious extremism and radicalism can be prevented and predicted. He wrote that “predicting religious extremism could—in principle—allow us to respond to, mediate, or eliminate threats more efficiently” (Lane, 2017, 299). He argues that the prediction will come when social and biological environments could be possibly incorporated into multi-agent artificial intelligence. Even though this prediction might not be easily realized in the near time, it gives the positive idea that the moderation process endures through a multidisciplinary approach.

## Conclusion

This study examines the phenomenon of “religious excessiveness,” a new academic term that reflects excessive religiosity leading to the exclusion and demonization of others. Abdullah ibn Jibrin distinguishes between three types of religious attitudes: those who neglect religious teachings (*tafrīt*), those who excessively adhere to them without critical examination (*ifrat*), and those who practice moderation by respecting different beliefs. The latter approach, described by Paul Knitter as the “acceptance model,” fosters constructive inter-religious relations. However, in practice, the *ifrat* approach, characterized by extreme and unchecked religiosity, is prevalent, often resulting in radicalism and fundamentalism that jeopardize both intra-religious and inter-religious harmony.

In the context of Pamekasan, the role of the ulama network is pivotal in either perpetuating radicalism or promoting moderation. Islamic organizations such as BASRA and FOKUS focus on addressing social issues and strengthening internal cohesion, while others may lean towards more fundamentalist stances. The FKUB (Interreligious Forum) plays a significant role in fostering peace and cooperation among diverse religious communities. By addressing contemporary issues and facilitating dialogue, the ulama

network can mitigate radical tendencies and support a more moderate religious discourse. The potential for predicting and preventing extremism, as suggested by Justin E. Lane, highlights the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach to sustain religious moderation and prevent radicalization.

In conclusion, this research highlights that excessive religious zeal, or “religious excessiveness”, can lead to the exclusion and demonization of those with differing beliefs. Adherents of this extreme religiosity often adopt a truth-claiming paradigm, dismissing others as infidels or heretics when their values diverge. Upholding the fundamental principle of respecting others, central to human rights, is essential for fostering peaceful internal and external relations. Promoting moderation within religious communities, particularly through established networks such as the ulama, is crucial. The ulama network in Madura, especially in Pamekasan, has demonstrated its effectiveness in endorsing moderate movements and fostering inter-religious harmony. Ulama and Kiai remain influential role models, guiding the Madurese people in both cultural and religious practices, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and balanced approach to religiosity.

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