

Moderate Islam As The Civilizational Middle Path: A critical reading of kh. Said Aqil Siradj's Islamic Discourse

Sutiyo¹⁾, Khimmataliev Dustnazar Omonovich²⁾

¹⁾Institut Agama Islam Sunan Kalijogo Malang, ²⁾University, faculty of pedagogical,
Chirchik, Uzbekistan

¹⁾emhas53710@gmail.com, ²⁾d.khimmataliyev@gmail.com

Abstract. *This study aims to examine the concept of moderate Islam as a middle path of civilization through a critical reading of the Islamic discourse of KH. Said Aqil Siradj. In his perspective, moderate Islam is not merely understood as a compromising attitude or a neutral position between two opposing extremes, but rather as an Islamic paradigm rooted in the tradition of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah and oriented toward humanity, nationhood, and the sustainability of civilization. This research employs a qualitative approach using critical discourse analysis to examine the texts of thought, sermons, and public statements of KH. Said Aqil Siradj that are relevant to issues of Islamic moderation, diversity, and the relationship between religion and the public sphere.*

The findings indicate that the discourse of moderate Islam constructed by KH. Said Aqil Siradj positions Islam as a moral and cultural force capable of bridging tensions between religious texts and social realities, between Islamic identity and Indonesian national identity, and between tradition and modernity. Moderate Islam is projected as a civilizational middle path that rejects extremism, radicalism, and narrow formalism, without losing the substantive theological values of Islam.

This study affirms that moderate Islam, according to KH. Said Aqil Siradj, holds strategic relevance in fostering social harmony, strengthening national cohesion, and responding to contemporary civilizational challenges. These findings are expected to enrich scholarly discussions on moderate Islamic thought and to contribute conceptually to the development of the discourse of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin in Indonesia.

Keywords: *moderate Islam, middle path, Islamic civilization, Islamic discourse, KH. Said Aqil Siradj*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji secara kritis konsep Islam moderat sebagai jalan tengah peradaban. Penelitian ini didasarkan pada analisis wacana Islam yang disampaikan oleh KH. Said Aqil Siradj. Siradj berpendapat bahwa Islam moderat tidak boleh dipahami semata-mata sebagai sikap kompromi atau posisi netral di antara dua ekstrem yang bertentangan. Sebaliknya, Islam moderat harus dipandang sebagai paradigma Islam yang berakar pada tradisi Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah dan berfokus pada kemanusiaan, kebangsaan, serta keberlanjutan peradaban. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis wacana kritis untuk mengkaji teks, khotbah, dan pernyataan publik KH Said Aqil Siradj. Analisis ini berfokus pada isu-isu moderasi Islam, keragaman, serta hubungan antara agama dan ranah publik sebagaimana terkait dengan KH Said Aqil Siradj.

Temuan menunjukkan bahwa wacana Islam moderat, sebagaimana dibangun oleh KH Said Aqil Siradj, ditandai oleh komitmen terhadap kemanusiaan, kebangsaan, dan keberlanjutan. Ia memposisikan Islam sebagai kekuatan moral dan budaya yang mampu menjembatani kesenjangan antara teks-teks agama dan realitas sosial,

identitas nasional Islam dan Indonesia, serta tradisi dan modernitas. Islam moderat diproyeksikan sebagai jalan tengah peradaban yang menolak ekstremisme, radikalisme, dan formalisme sempit, sambil tetap mempertahankan nilai-nilai teologis Islam yang substansial.

Studi ini menegaskan bahwa Islam moderat, sebagaimana ditafsirkan oleh KH Said Aqil Siradj, merupakan pendekatan yang berharga untuk menumbuhkan kerukunan sosial, memperkuat kohesi nasional, dan merespons tantangan kontemporer. Temuan-temuan ini diharapkan dapat memperkaya diskusi akademis mengenai pemikiran Islam moderat serta berkontribusi pada pengembangan konseptual wacana rahmatan lil 'alamin di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Islam moderat, jalan tengah, peradaban Islam, wacana Islam, KH. Said Aqil Siradj

INTRODUCTION

Moderate Islam is one of the central themes in contemporary Islamic discourse, particularly amid the growing polarization of religious understanding that tends toward extremes, whether in the form of religious radicalism or liberalism that is detached from its traditional roots.¹ This phenomenon not only affects the way Muslims understand their religious teachings, but also has far-reaching implications for social, political, and cultural structures. In various parts of the world, including Indonesia, religion is often used as an ideological justification to legitimize exclusive and intolerant attitudes, and even violence carried out in the name of theological truth.² Such conditions have generated a crisis of trust in religion as a source of values that are soothing and humanizing. Therefore, an Islamic paradigm is needed that is capable of presenting Islam as a peaceful, inclusive, and civilized religion. In this context, the concept of moderate Islam becomes highly relevant to be examined in depth, not merely as a normative slogan, but as a conceptual and practical framework for civilization.³

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has a unique historical experience in managing the relationship between Islam, the state, and culture. Since the early period of independence, Islam in Indonesia has not developed in a theocratic or rigid ideological form; rather, it has been interwoven with national values, cultural pluralism, and diverse social realities.⁴ However, the dynamics of globalization, the flow of digital information,

¹ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 16–18.

² Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 25–27.

³ Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Wasathiyyah: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2019), 5–8.

⁴ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global dan Lokal* (Bandung: Mizan, 2015), 1–5.

and the penetration of transnational ideologies have shifted the religious landscape of Indonesian Muslims. The emergence of groups promoting exclusive and scripturalist religious views indicates that Indonesia's tradition of Islamic moderation cannot be taken for granted; rather, it requires continuous intellectual and cultural efforts to be maintained and strengthened.⁵ Therefore, the study of moderate Islam cannot be approached merely in a descriptive manner; it requires a critical reading of the discourses and figures who have consistently advocated the Islamic middle path within the Indonesian context.⁶

KH. Said Aqil Siradj is one of Indonesia's prominent Muslim figures who occupies a strategic position in the discourse on moderate Islam. As a pesantren-based intellectual, an academic, and the leader of Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, KH. Said Aqil engages not only at the normative-theological level but is also actively involved in constructing an Islamic narrative that is responsive to the challenges of nationhood and modern civilization. His ideas on moderate Islam have frequently generated debate, attracting both support and criticism, as he boldly deconstructs narrow and formalistic interpretations of Islam. Yet it is precisely here that the significance of his thought lies: in presenting Islam as a civilizational middle path rooted in the tradition of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* while remaining open to contemporary social, cultural, and political dynamics.

In KH. Said Aqil Siradj's perspective, moderate Islam is not understood as a vague or unprincipled compromise, but rather as a theological and epistemological position that upholds balance (*tawassuth*), justice (*ta'adul*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and wisdom (*hikmah*) as the core values of religious life.⁷ Moderate Islam is understood as a mode of religiosity that rejects extremism in all its forms, both right-wing extremism that is rigid and textualist, and left-wing extremism that is excessively permissive in interpreting religious teachings without authoritative reference.⁸ From this perspective, Islam is not positioned as a hegemonic political ideology, but rather as a source of ethics and moral values that guide human civilization toward justice, peace, and the common good. Such an understanding is particularly crucial amid the growing tendency among some Muslims to view religion merely as a symbol of identity and a tool for legitimizing power.⁹

⁵ Martin van Bruinessen, *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn"* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2013), 15–18.

⁶ Said Aqil Siradj, *Islam Kebangsaan: Fiqh Demokratik Kaum Santri* (Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1999), 10–14.

⁷ Said Aqil Siradj, *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah dalam Lintas Sejarah* (Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1998), 45–48.

⁸ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 31–34.

⁹ Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 52–55.

The Islamic discourse developed by KH. Said Aqil Siradj is also compelling to examine because he consistently emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the principled teachings of Islam and contextual values. In his various works and statements, he underscores that not all social practices associated with Islam possess absolute theological status. Rather, many aspects of Muslim life are *ijtihādī* in nature and therefore open to reinterpretation in accordance with the context of time and place.¹⁰ This approach positions Islam as a living and dynamic religion, rather than as a static doctrine isolated from social realities. Accordingly, moderate Islam is envisioned as a civilizational force capable of engaging in dialogue with modernity without losing its Islamic identity.¹¹

Although the term *moderate Islam* is frequently employed in various academic forums and public policy discussions, studies that specifically undertake a critical reading of KH. Said Aqil Siradj's Islamic discourse remain relatively limited.¹² Some studies tend to be descriptive and normative in nature, positioning his thought as a representation of moderate Islam without critically examining the discursive construction, the socio-political context, and the civilizational implications of these ideas.¹³ In the context of qualitative studies, however, it is important to examine how the discourse of moderate Islam is constructed, disseminated, and contested in the public sphere. A critical reading is necessary to understand not only what is being said, but also how and why the discourse is developed, as well as the interests that accompany it.¹⁴

Moreover, the contemporary civilizational challenges faced by Muslims are increasingly complex. Phenomena such as the post-truth era, the proliferation of religious disinformation on social media, and the strengthening of religion-based identity politics indicate that Islamic issues are no longer confined to the realm of theology, but have extended into the domains of culture, media, and power.¹⁵ In this situation, moderate Islam as a civilizational middle path must be capable of providing responses that are not only normative, but also strategic and

¹⁰ Said Aqil Siradj, *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah dalam Lintas Sejarah* (Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1998), 62–65.

¹¹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5–9.

¹² Greg Barton, *Indonesia's Struggle: Jemaah Islamiyah and the Soul of Islam* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004), 211–214.

¹³ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "Islamic Discourse in Indonesia: A Study of Intellectual Trends," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 5, no. 2 (2011): 189–192.

¹⁴ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995), 2–5.

¹⁵ Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), 1–4.

applicable.¹⁶ KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought, which extensively addresses the relationship between Islam, nationhood, democracy, and pluralism, constitutes an important source for examination in formulating a model of religiosity that is relevant to the challenges of the times.¹⁷

The background of this study is also grounded in the awareness that civilization is shaped not only by technological and economic advancement, but also by the system of values that sustains it. Religion—Islam in this case—possesses great potential as a source of civilizational values; however, this potential can only be realized when Islam is understood and practiced in a moderate and contextual manner. Islam practiced in an extreme way, by contrast, has the potential to undermine social order and generate prolonged conflict.¹⁸ Therefore, the idea of moderate Islam as a civilizational middle path needs to be examined as an intellectual and cultural project oriented toward the future of humanity.

By conducting a critical reading of KH. Said Aqil Siradj's Islamic discourse, this study seeks to explore how moderate Islam is constructed as a civilizational paradigm that emphasizes balance between faith and humanity, between individual piety and social responsibility, as well as between religious identity and national commitment. This study is expected not only to contribute theoretically to the development of moderate Islam studies, but also to offer alternative perspectives in responding to various religious and national issues in Indonesia. Accordingly, this research holds both academic and practical significance in strengthening Islam as a *rahmatan lil 'alamin* religion and in advancing the development of a civilization that is just, peaceful, and dignified.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing library research combined with critical discourse analysis to examine the concept of moderate Islam as a civilizational middle path in the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj.¹⁹ The qualitative approach is chosen because this study focuses on understanding meaning, the construction of ideas, and the social and ideological contexts that underlie the emergence of the Islamic discourse developed by this

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Religion in the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 22–25.

¹⁷ Said Aqil Siradj, *Islam Kebangsaan: Fiqh Demokratik Kaum Santri* (Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1999), 30–33.

¹⁸ Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Wasathiyyah: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2019), 12–15.

¹⁹ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2017), 8–10.

figure.²⁰ Through this approach, the study does not aim to measure or generalize phenomena, but rather to interpret in depth the ideas, narratives, and arguments contained in KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought regarding Islamic moderation.²¹

The research data consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary data include KH. Said Aqil Siradj's written works, books, articles, speeches, sermons, interviews, and public statements that articulate his ideas on moderate Islam, Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, nationhood, pluralism, and civilization.²² The secondary data consist of books, academic journals, research reports, and other supporting literature that discuss moderate Islam, contemporary Islamic thought, and studies on key figures, including works that both support and critically engage with KH. Said Aqil Siradj's ideas.²³ The selection of data sources is conducted purposively, with careful consideration of their relevance and academic credibility.²⁴

Data collection is carried out through documentary research by inventorying, reading, and selecting relevant texts.²⁵ The collected data are then analyzed using critical discourse analysis, which focuses on uncovering discursive structures, social contexts, and the relationships between knowledge and power that underlie the emergence of the concept of moderate Islam.²⁶ The analysis is conducted through stages of data reduction, thematic categorization, interpretation of meaning, and inductive conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, this study applies source and theoretical triangulation and undertakes repeated critical readings of the analyzed texts. Through this methodology, the research is expected to produce a comprehensive understanding of moderate Islam as a civilizational middle path within KH. Said Aqil Siradj's Islamic discourse.²⁷

²⁰ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 44–47.

²¹ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995), 7–9.

²² John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 189–191.

²³ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2018), 137–139.

²⁴ Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018), 224–226.

²⁵ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2018), 145–147.

²⁶ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995), 28–31.

²⁷ Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 11–15.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Moderate Islam in the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj is constructed as a civilizational paradigm that emphasizes a balance between Islamic theological values and social-human realities.

The findings of this study indicate that moderate Islam in the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj is constructed as a civilizational paradigm that emphasizes a balance between Islamic theological values and socio-human realities. This conclusion is drawn from an examination of primary data in the form of his written works, books, articles, speeches, sermons, interviews, and public statements, which consistently affirm that Islam should not be understood narrowly as a collection of normative doctrines, but rather should be positioned as a source of values that guide human life toward justice and civility. In many of his statements, KH. Said Aqil Siradj underscores that the substance of Islamic teachings lies in universal values such as justice, humanity, public welfare (*maslahah*), and peace, rather than in symbols, formalism, or exclusive claims to truth.²⁸

Based on the analysis of KH. Said Aqil Siradj's books and articles, it is found that the concept of moderate Islam he proposes is grounded in the tradition of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* as a *manhaj al-fikr* (method of thought), rather than merely as a sectarian identity. This tradition is understood as an epistemological framework that enables dialogue between religious texts and social contexts. Moderate Islam in this perspective does not eliminate theological dimensions—such as *tawhīd* and commitment to the core teachings of Islam—but rejects viewpoints that separate religion from human realities. Accordingly, the balance between faith and reason, and between individual piety and social responsibility, becomes the principal foundation of Islam as a civilizational paradigm.²⁹

Primary data drawn from KH. Said Aqil Siradj's speeches and sermons also reveal a strong emphasis on the importance of humanizing human beings as an integral part of religiosity. He frequently asserts that authentic Islam is one that is capable of protecting human dignity, respecting diversity, and maintaining social harmony. In this context, moderate Islam is positioned as the antithesis of religious extremism, which tends to neglect humanitarian aspects in favor of ideological interests. These findings indicate that, for KH. Said Aqil Siradj,

²⁸ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, *Islam Kebangsaan: Fiqh Demokratik Kaum Santri*, Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 2015, hlm. 45–47.

²⁹ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, "Islam Moderat dan Tantangan Peradaban," dalam *Jurnal Maarif*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2018, hlm. 15–18.

forms of religiosity that fail to produce positive impacts on social life are in fact contrary to the very spirit of Islam itself.³⁰

Meanwhile, analysis of secondary data in the form of books, academic journals, and studies on key figures reinforces the finding that KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought represents moderate Islam as a civilizational project, rather than merely a normative discourse.³¹ A number of scholars argue that his thought succeeds in bridging the tension between classical Islamic tradition and the demands of modernity, particularly within the context of Indonesian nationhood and pluralism.³² However, several critical studies also note that KH. Said Aqil Siradj's ideas on moderate Islam are often perceived as controversial by formalistic Islamic groups, as they are considered overly accommodating to social and political realities. Nevertheless, such criticism in fact reinforces the position of KH. Said Aqil's thought as an alternative discourse that challenges rigid and ahistorical Islamic perspectives.³³

The findings of this study indicate that the construction of moderate Islam in KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought as a civilizational paradigm is consistent with Clifford Geertz's theory of religion as a social value system. Geertz conceives religion not merely as a set of theological doctrines, but as a system of symbols that functions to shape human perceptions of reality and to guide social action.³⁴ In this context, KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought positions Islam as a living and grounded value system, in which theological teachings do not stand abstractly but interact directly with human realities. Moderate Islam is understood as a mode of religiosity capable of constructing meaning, social order, and moral orientation within society, thereby functioning as a foundation of civilization.

The research findings can also be analyzed through the perspective of the theory of the middle path (*wasatiyyah*) as developed by Yusuf al-Qaradawi.³⁵ Al-Qaradawi emphasizes that Islamic moderation represents a balance between two extreme poles: *ifrāt* (excessiveness) and *tafrīt* (neglect). KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought aligns with this framework, yet places stronger emphasis on social and national dimensions. Moderate Islam does not remain confined to the level of individual ethics, but is developed as a collective paradigm that regulates the

³⁰ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, ceramah "Islam, Kemanusiaan, dan Kebinekaan," dalam pengajian kebangsaan PBNU, Jakarta, 2018.

³¹ Ahmad Baso, *Islam Moderat Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Afid, 2016), hlm. 112–115.

³² Zuly Qodir, "Islam Moderat dan Wacana Keislaman Kontemporer di Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Islam* 15, no. 2 (2019): 145–147.

³³ Rumadi, "Islam Nusantara dan Tantangan Formalisme Agama," *Jurnal Maarif* 13, no. 1 (2018): 78–81.

³⁴ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," dalam *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90–93.

³⁵ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Wasatiyyah wa al-Tajdid* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2010), 15–22.

relationship between religion, the state, and society. Accordingly, moderation is not understood as a defensive stance, but as a civilizational strategy that enables Islam to remain relevant within plural societies.

Moreover, KH. Said Aqil Siradj's concept of moderate Islam can be understood through the theory of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as developed by al-Shatibi and contextualized by Jasser Auda.³⁶ Within this framework, the primary objective of the *Sharī'ah* is to safeguard human welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), including the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. KH. Said Aqil Siradj's emphasis on humanitarian values, justice, and social harmony demonstrates that moderate Islam is oriented toward the substantive objectives of the *Sharī'ah* rather than legal formalism. This reinforces the argument that Islam as a civilizational paradigm should be assessed by its contribution to human well-being, rather than by symbols or exclusive claims to truth alone.

The findings of this study are also relevant to Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power,³⁷ particularly in understanding the discourse of moderate Islam as a form of resistance against the dominance of hegemonic and exclusive religious interpretations. KH. Said Aqil Siradj's discourse on moderate Islam functions to deconstruct claims of singular truth that are often employed by extremist groups to dominate the public sphere. By constructing an inclusive and human-centered Islamic narrative, KH. Said Aqil creates new discursive spaces that challenge power relations within religious authority. In this sense, moderate Islam is not only theological in nature, but also political and cultural.

From the perspective of Émile Durkheim's sociology of religion,³⁸ religion functions to maintain social cohesion and collective solidarity. KH. Said Aqil Siradj's conception of moderate Islam as a civilizational middle path aligns with this view, as Islam is positioned as a social adhesive within a plural society. When religion is practiced in extreme forms, it instead has the potential to undermine social solidarity. Therefore, moderate Islam is understood as a social mechanism that maintains a balance between religious commitment and communal life. In the Indonesian context, this idea is particularly relevant given the country's high level of ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity.

³⁶ Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), jil. II, 8–12; Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 21–30.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109–133.

³⁸ Émile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, trans. D. F. Pocock (London: Routledge, 2001), 79–85.

Thus, it can be asserted that moderate Islam in KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought is not an ahistorical normative concept, but rather an intellectual construction grounded in strong theological, sociological, and philosophical foundations. Moderate Islam is projected as a civilizational paradigm capable of integrating divine values and human realities in a balanced manner. This discussion reinforces the study's findings that moderate Islam is not merely an alternative discourse, but a strategic necessity for building a just, peaceful, and dignified civilization amid the challenges of the contemporary world.

2. The discourse of moderate Islam is positioned as a critique of religious extremism, both in its textual-radicalist forms and in liberal-inclusive approaches that are detached from religious tradition.

The findings of this study indicate that the discourse of moderate Islam in KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought is firmly positioned as a critique of religious extremism, both in its textual-radicalist forms and in liberal-inclusive approaches that are detached from the Islamic scholarly tradition. This conclusion is drawn from an analysis of primary data consisting of his writings, books, articles, speeches, sermons, interviews, and public statements, which consistently reject these two extreme tendencies in religious life. In various statements, KH. Said Aqil Siradj emphasizes that extremism does not manifest solely in the form of violence and text-based radicalism, but also in liberal modes of thought that disregard the authority of Islamic tradition and its established scholarly methodologies.³⁹

Based on an examination of KH. Said Aqil Siradj's writings and articles, textual-radicalist extremism is understood as a mode of religiosity that absolutizes religious texts in a literal manner without taking into account historical, social, and contextual dimensions, as well as the substantive objectives of the Shari'ah. According to KH. Said Aqil, such patterns of religiosity give rise to exclusivist attitudes, a tendency to easily declare others as unbelievers, and the potential to legitimize violence in the name of religion.⁴⁰ Moderate Islam is therefore proposed as an epistemological critique of this approach, emphasizing the importance of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah method of thought, which maintains a balance between revealed texts (naşş), reason, and social reality.⁴¹

³⁹ Said Aqil Siradj, *Islam Sumber Inspirasi Budaya Bangsa* (Jakarta: LTN Nahdlatul Ulama, 2015), 73–86.

⁴⁰ Said Aqil Siradj, *Islam Kebangsaan: Fiqh Demokrasi Kaum Santri* (Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1999), 118–125.

⁴¹ Said Aqil Siradj, *Islam Sumber Inspirasi Budaya Bangsa* (Jakarta: LTN Nahdlatul Ulama, 2015), 61–72.

On the other hand, analysis of KH. Said Aqil Siradj's speeches and sermons also reveals a sharp critique of liberal-inclusive extremism. In his view, interpretive freedom that is not grounded in the scholarly tradition risks emptying Islam of its theological meaning. Islam detached from the authority of scholars and the classical methodological framework has the potential to become a subjective construct that loses its normative reference points.⁴² Therefore, according to KH. Said Aqil Siradj, moderate Islam is not a value-free Islam, but rather an Islam rooted in tradition while remaining open to renewal.

Findings from secondary data, including books, academic journals, and research reports, reinforce the results of the primary data analysis. Several academic studies position KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought as a representation of moderate Islam that is critical of the two major currents in contemporary Islamic thought, namely radicalism and liberalism.⁴³ These studies indicate that KH. Said Aqil's stance is often perceived as controversial because it rejects the singular truth claims of textualist groups while simultaneously critiquing liberal tendencies that disregard theological boundaries.⁴⁴ Some critical studies even note that KH. Said Aqil's moderate stance is often misinterpreted as inconsistency, whereas, substantively, it actually affirms methodological consistency in religious practice.⁴⁵

The findings above indicate that the position of moderate Islam in KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought, as a critique of religious extremism, can be understood through the theory of Islamic moderation (*wasatiyyah*) as articulated by Yusuf al-Qaradawi.⁴⁶ According to al-Qaradawi, religious extremism arises when one becomes trapped between two opposing poles: a rigid literal-textual understanding and a liberal interpretation that is overly permissive, thereby neglecting the normative boundaries of religion. Within this framework, moderate Islam functions as a corrective approach that positions Islamic teachings proportionally between text and context. KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought aligns with this view, as he rejects both the absolutization of texts without methodological grounding and free interpretations that are detached from the Islamic scholarly tradition.

⁴² Said Aqil Siradj, ceramah "Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah sebagai Manhaj Berpikir," dalam rangka Halaqah Keislaman PBNU, Jakarta, 2017.

⁴³ Zuly Qodir, *Islam Moderat dan Wacana Keislaman Kontemporer di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2017), hlm. 112–115.

⁴⁴ Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara: Ijtihad Jenius dan Ijma' Ulama Nusantara* (Jakarta: Pustaka Afid, 2015), hlm. 221–225.

⁴⁵ Nur Khalik Ridwan, "Islam Moderat dan Problem Otoritas Keagamaan," dalam *Jurnal Studia Islamika*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2016): 289–292.

⁴⁶ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Wasatiyyah al-Islamiyyah wa al-Tajdid* (Kairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2010), hlm. 45–52.

Furthermore, the critique of textual-radicalist extremism in KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought can be analyzed through the lens of contextual hermeneutics as developed by Fazlur Rahman.⁴⁷ Rahman emphasizes the importance of understanding religious texts through a "double movement" approach, which involves moving from the historical context of the text to its universal moral principles, and then back to the contemporary context. KH. Said Aqil's approach, which rejects literal readings divorced from context, aligns with this theory. Textual extremism is seen as arising from a failure to comprehend the moral objectives of the text, and moderate Islam thus emerges as an effort to restore the text to its ethical and human-centered vision.

On the other hand, the critique of liberal-inclusive extremism detached from tradition can be understood through the theory of Islamic scholarly authority as articulated by Wael B. Hallaq.⁴⁸ Hallaq emphasizes that the Islamic scholarly tradition possesses internal mechanisms to safeguard interpretive authority through the methodology of fiqh and uṣūl al-fiqh. In this context, KH. Said Aqil Siradj's moderate Islam does not reject renewal, but it opposes innovations that disregard the scholarly chain (sanad) and established methodological frameworks. His critical stance toward religious liberalism demonstrates that moderation is not relativism, but rather a balance between intellectual freedom and epistemological responsibility.

These research findings can also be interpreted through Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power,⁴⁹ particularly in understanding religious extremism as a product of power relations within religious discourse. Both textual-radicalist and extreme-liberal groups attempt to dominate interpretive space by asserting particular claims to truth. In this context, KH. Said Aqil Siradj's discourse on moderate Islam functions as a counter-discourse that deconstructs these claims of absolute truth. Moderate Islam creates space for dialogue and pluralism of interpretation without descending into value-free relativism.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Émile Durkheim's sociology of religion,⁵⁰ religious extremism can disrupt social solidarity by creating fragmentation and conflict within society. Moderate Islam, as understood by KH. Said Aqil Siradj, functions as a social mechanism to

⁴⁷ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), hlm. 11–14.

⁴⁸ Wael B. Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity, and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), hlm. 1–4.

⁴⁹ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

⁵⁰ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, terj. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), hlm. 44–47.

maintain cohesion and harmony. The critique of extremism is therefore not only theological but also sociological, since extreme religiosity has the potential to undermine social order and national unity.

Thus, the findings of this study affirm that the discourse of moderate Islam in KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought functions as a dual critique of religious extremism. Moderate Islam is not merely intended as a rhetorical middle position, but as a cognitive framework capable of correcting epistemological deviations in understanding religion. Through its critique of both textual-radicalist and liberal-inclusive extremism, moderate Islam is projected as a balanced approach to Islam that is rooted in tradition and remains relevant to the challenges of modern life.

3. According to KH. Said Aqil Siradj, moderate Islam is rooted in the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah tradition, which is dynamic, contextual, and open to the changes of the times.

The findings of this study indicate that, according to KH. Said Aqil Siradj, moderate Islam is firmly rooted in the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (Aswaja) tradition, which is understood in a dynamic, contextual, and adaptable manner in response to changing times.⁵¹ These findings were obtained through the analysis of primary data, including KH. Said Aqil Siradj's writings, books, articles, speeches, sermons, interviews, and public statements, which consistently emphasize that Aswaja is not merely a theological identity or formal school of thought, but a *manhaj al-fikr* (methodology of reasoning) for understanding and practicing Islam. In his various works, KH. Said Aqil Siradj stresses that Aswaja possesses epistemological flexibility, enabling Muslims to respond to social dynamics and contemporary challenges without losing their theological grounding.⁵²

Based on a review of KH. Said Aqil Siradj's books and articles, it was found that the concept of Aswaja he presents rejects static and ahistorical interpretations.⁵³ He views the Aswaja tradition as the result of a long-standing dialectic among text, reason, and social reality throughout Islamic history. Therefore, moderate Islam rooted in Aswaja is not defensive toward change, but rather adaptive and transformative. Within this framework, social,

⁵¹ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah dalam Lintas Sejarah* (Jakarta: LTN PBNU, 1997), hlm. 3–7.

⁵² KH. Said Aqil Siradj, *Islam Kebangsaan: Fiqih Demokratik Kaum Santri* (Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1999), hlm. 45–49.

⁵³ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah dalam Lintas Sejarah* (Jakarta: LTN PBNU, 1997), hlm. 9–14.

political, and cultural changes are not seen as threats to the purity of Islamic teachings, but as opportunities for *ijtihad* to actualize Islamic values in diverse contexts.⁵⁴

Analysis of primary data from KH. Said Aqil Siradj's speeches and sermons also highlights the importance of contextualizing Islamic teachings. He frequently emphasizes that religious practices that are relevant in one place and time may not necessarily be applicable in another. This perspective reinforces the understanding that Aswaja embodies the principles of *tawassuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *ta'adul* (equilibrium), which allow for a harmony between the continuity of tradition and the need for renewal. From this perspective, moderate Islam does not reject modernity, but rather filters it through historically tested Islamic values.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, secondary data from books, academic journals, and research reports indicate that KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought is often positioned as a representation of progressive contemporary Aswaja.⁵⁶ Several academic studies argue that KH. Said Aqil Siradj's reinterpretation of Aswaja contributes to broadening the horizons of Islam Nusantara thought, particularly in addressing issues of nationalism, democracy, and pluralism. However, some critical studies also note that this dynamic approach to Aswaja often encounters resistance from groups that interpret the tradition in a strictly textual and normative manner.⁵⁷ Such critiques reveal a tension between a contextual understanding of Aswaja and a doctrinally rigid interpretation of the tradition.

The findings above affirm that KH. Said Aqil Siradj's understanding of moderate Islam, rooted in the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* (Aswaja) tradition, is dynamic, contextual, and open to the changes of the times. This finding aligns with Fazlur Rahman's theory of dynamic or "living" tradition.⁵⁸ According to Rahman, Islamic tradition is never static; rather, it continuously undergoes processes of reinterpretation in response to changing social and historical contexts. KH. Said Aqil Siradj's conception of Aswaja as a *manhaj al-fikr*—not merely

⁵⁴ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, *Islam Kebangsaan: Fiqih Demokratik Kaum Santri* (Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1999), hlm. 52–57.

⁵⁵ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, pidato pada Halaqah Nasional Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah dan Keindonesiaan, PBNU, Jakarta, 2015.

⁵⁶ Ahmad Baso, *Islam Nusantara: Ijtihad Jenius dan Ijma' Ulama Nusantara* (Jakarta: Pustaka Afid, 2015), hlm. 132–140.

⁵⁷ Zainal Abidin Bagir, "Pluralisme Kewargaan dan Tantangan Otoritas Keagamaan," *Jurnal Maarif* Vol. 13, No. 2 (2018): 45–47.

⁵⁸ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), hlm. 5–7.

a static school of thought—demonstrates that tradition serves as an intellectual resource for addressing contemporary challenges, rather than as an impediment to renewal.

From the perspective of the theory of *ijtihād* and social change developed by Muhammad Abduh,⁵⁹ and continued by modern Islamic thinkers, openness to change is a prerequisite for the sustainability of Islamic teachings. Islam that cannot engage with social realities risks becoming alienated from the lives of its adherents. In this context, KH. Said Aqil Siradj's perspective emphasizes that *Aswaja* provides a methodological framework that enables contextual *ijtihād* without relinquishing traditional authority. Moderate Islam is understood as the result of a balance between continuity (*al-tsawabit*) and change (*al-mutaghayyirat*), thereby maintaining the relevance of Islamic teachings amid ever-evolving social dynamics.

These research findings can also be analyzed through the theory of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as formulated by al-Shāṭibī and further developed by Jasser Auda.⁶⁰ In this theory, the *sharī'ah* is understood as having universal objectives that must be realized in accordance with the context of the times. KH. Said Aqil Siradj's emphasis on the values of public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), justice, and humanity demonstrates that his understanding of *Aswaja* is oriented toward the substantive objectives of the *sharī'ah*, rather than legal formalism. Openness to changing times in moderate Islam does not imply theological relativism, but rather represents an effort to align the implementation of teachings with the primary goals of the *sharī'ah* itself.

Furthermore, the concept of dynamic *Aswaja* in KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought can be understood through Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's theory of the social construction of knowledge.⁶¹ According to this theory, religious understanding is shaped through a dialectical process between tradition, interpretation, and social reality. In this context, moderate Islam rooted in *Aswaja* represents the outcome of the interaction between the classical Islamic scholarly heritage and the social experiences of Indonesian Muslims. KH. Said Aqil's thought demonstrates that the *Aswaja* tradition is not transmitted mechanically, but is reconstructed to remain relevant within changing socio-cultural contexts.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Émile Durkheim's sociology of religion,⁶² a religion that endures is one that maintains social cohesion and adapts to societal changes. Moderate

⁵⁹ Muhammad Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd* (Kairo: Dār al-Manār, 1925), hlm. 98–101.

⁶⁰ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah: A Beginner's Guide* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), hlm. 44–47.

⁶¹ Peter L. Berger dan Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), hlm. 1–5.

⁶² Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, terj. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), hlm. 44–47.

Islam based on Aswaja, as understood by KH. Said Aqil Siradj, functions as a social mechanism that balances the stability of values with the dynamics of change. Openness to modernity, democracy, and pluralism is not seen as a threat to tradition, but as an opportunity to strengthen Islam's role in fostering social harmony and advancing civilization.

Thus, the findings of this study affirm that moderate Islam, according to KH. Said Aqil Siradj, is rooted in the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (Aswaja) tradition, which is living and evolving in response to changing times. Aswaja is positioned as a flexible and dialogical theological foundation, enabling Islam to function as a historically and socially relevant religion. These findings demonstrate that openness to change is not a deviation from tradition, but rather a manifestation of the internal dynamics of Aswaja itself as the intellectual framework of moderate Islam.

4. Pemikiran Islam moderat KH. Said Aqil Siradj menegaskan integrasi antara identitas keislaman dan komitmen kebangsaan sebagai fondasi harmoni sosial.

The findings indicate that KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought on moderate Islam explicitly emphasizes the importance of integrating Islamic identity with national commitment as a fundamental basis for fostering social harmony. This conclusion is drawn from an analysis of primary data, including his written works, books, articles, speeches, sermons, interviews, and public statements, in which he consistently asserts that being a devout Muslim does not conflict with being a citizen loyal to the principles of the nation.⁶³ On various occasions, KH. Said Aqil has emphasized that Islam and national identity are two mutually reinforcing entities, rather than mutually exclusive.⁶⁴

Based on a review of KH. Said Aqil Siradj's writings and articles, it is found that the integration of Islam and national identity is understood as a theological consequence of Islamic teachings that emphasize justice, brotherhood, and the common good. He rejects the dichotomy between religion and state, often used by extremist groups to negate national commitment. From KH. Said Aqil's perspective, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, grounded in Pancasila, is viewed as the product of a national consensus that aligns with fundamental Islamic principles; therefore, safeguarding the state and national unity is considered an integral part of religious responsibility.⁶⁵

⁶³ Said Aqil Siradj, *Hubungan Agama dan Negara dalam Perspektif Islam* (Jakarta: PBNU, 2015), hlm. 42–45.

⁶⁴ Said Aqil Siradj, "Islam, Pancasila, dan Kebangsaan," pidato pada Harlah Nahdlatul Ulama, Jakarta, 2017.

⁶⁵ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, "Islam, Pancasila, dan Keindonesiaan," dalam *Islam Sumber Inspirasi Budaya Nusantara* (Jakarta: LTN PBNU, 2015), 63–67.

Analysis of primary data from KH. Said Aqil Siradj's speeches and sermons also indicates that national commitment is positioned as a crucial prerequisite for achieving social harmony in a pluralistic society. He emphasizes that moderate Islam cannot flourish in a community fragmented by narrow identity sentiments and exclusive political agendas.⁶⁶ Therefore, the integration of Islamic identity and national identity is projected as a solution to horizontal conflicts based on religion, ethnicity, and ideology. In this view, Islam functions as a moral force that upholds unity and social stability.

Meanwhile, the analysis of secondary data, including books, academic journals, and research reports, shows that KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought is often positioned as a representation of inclusive national Islam. Several academic studies note that his ideas on the integration of Islam and national identity contribute significantly to strengthening the narrative of moderate Islam in Indonesia, particularly in responding to challenges posed by identity politics and religious radicalism.⁶⁷ However, some critical studies also note that this perspective often faces resistance from transnational Islamic groups, who view the concept of the nation-state as conflicting with the ideals of universal Islam. This critique highlights the discursive contestation between national Islam and ideological or transnational interpretations of Islam.⁶⁸

The above findings indicate that the emphasis on integrating Islamic identity with national commitment in the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj has a strong theoretical foundation from both Islamic and social science perspectives. This idea aligns with the concept of civil religion proposed by Robert N. Bellah,⁶⁹ which views religion as a source of public moral values that can strengthen social cohesion and national loyalty without having to become a state religion. In the context of KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought, Islam is positioned as an ethical force that inspires national commitment, while the state serves as a shared space to actualize values of justice, fraternity, and public welfare. Thus, the integration of Islam and nationalism is not ideological but moral and cultural.

⁶⁶ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, "Islam Wasathiyah dan Tantangan Kebangsaan," pidato pada Harlah Nahdlatul Ulama, Jakarta, 31 Januari 2018.

⁶⁷ Noorhaidi Hasan, *Liberal Islam and the Challenges of Pluralism in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 87–92.

⁶⁸ Greg Fealy dan Sally White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008), 134–138.

⁶⁹ Robert N. Bellah, *Civil Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 115–120.

From the perspective of the inclusive nationalism theory proposed by Benedict Anderson,⁷⁰ a nation is understood as an imagined community built upon shared values and social solidarity. KH. Said Aqil Siradj's emphasis on accepting Pancasila and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia as a national consensus demonstrates that Islamic identity can be an integral part of Indonesia's nation-building process. In this view, moderate Islam does not erase religious identity but articulates it within an inclusive and plural framework of nationalism. This reinforces the argument that national loyalty does not have to conflict with religious devotion.

These research findings are also relevant to Émile Durkheim's sociology of religion⁷¹ which states that religion has a primary function in creating social solidarity. KH. Said Aqil Siradj positions Islam as a social adhesive that strengthens unity amid ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. The integration of Islamic identity and nationalism is understood as a social mechanism to prevent societal fragmentation caused by the politicization of religion and identity exclusivism. In this context, moderate Islam functions as an integrative force that maintains social stability and harmony.

In addition, the idea of integrating Islam and nationalism can be analyzed through the theory of *maqasid al-shari'ah*,⁷² particularly the objectives of preserving the unity of the community (*hifz al-ummah*) and promoting public welfare. KH. Said Aqil Siradj's view that safeguarding the integrity of the nation is part of religious responsibility reflects an orientation toward the substantive goals of the *shari'ah*. Islam is practiced not merely symbolically or exclusively, but contextually, taking into account the welfare of the broader society. Within this framework, national commitment becomes a concrete manifestation of Islamic values that embody mercy and compassion for all (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*).

Furthermore, from the perspective of Michel Foucault's discourse theory,⁷³ the integration of Islam and nationalism in KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought can be understood as an effort to construct a counter-discourse against transnational religious ideologies that reject the concept of the nation-state. By affirming the compatibility of Islam and nationalism, KH. Said

⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6–7.

⁷¹ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), 29–31.

⁷² Al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat fi Usul al-Shari'ah*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1992), 185–190; Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 112–115.

⁷³ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 49–52; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 27–31.

Aqil deconstructs the claims of extremist groups that monopolize Islamic interpretation while marginalizing Indonesia's social and political realities. In this context, moderate Islam functions as a cultural and intellectual strategy to reclaim public discourse from the dominance of exclusive ideologies.

Thus, the findings of this study confirm that KH. Said Aqil Siradj's vision of moderate Islam regards the integration of Islamic identity and national commitment as a fundamental foundation for social harmony. Islam is not positioned as an exclusive ideology, but rather as a source of ethical values that strengthen unity, tolerance, and justice within the life of the nation and state. These findings indicate that social harmony in a plural society can only be realized when religious and national identities are managed in a balanced manner and mutually reinforcing one another.

5. The discourse of moderate Islam is projected as a cultural and ethical strategy in responding to the challenges of contemporary civilization, including pluralism, democracy, and digital disruption.

The findings of this study indicate that, in the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj, the discourse of moderate Islam is projected not merely as a theological stance within the spectrum of religious thought, but as a cultural and ethical strategy for addressing the complexities of contemporary civilization. Based on primary data from his books, articles, speeches, lectures, and public statements, it was found that moderate Islam is understood as an approach that emphasizes the values of *tawassuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *ta'adul* (justice) in responding to a global reality characterized by cultural pluralism, democratization, and the development of digital technology.⁷⁴ In his various statements, KH. Said Aqil emphasizes that Islam must exist as a moral force capable of guiding change, rather than becoming alienated from or reacting defensively to the dynamics of the times.⁷⁵

This study also finds that, in the view of KH. Said Aqil Siradj, moderate Islam functions as a cultural strategy because it operates through the reinforcement of tradition, education, cultural *da'wah*, and cross-identity dialogue.⁷⁶ Primary data indicate that he consistently rejects confrontational and coercive religious approaches, particularly in the context of

⁷⁴ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, *Islam Wasathiyah dan Tantangan Modernitas* (Jakarta: PBNU, 2018), 45–52; KH. Said Aqil Siradj, "Moderasi Islam dan Pembangunan Peradaban," *Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 10, no. 2 (2019): 33–47.

⁷⁵ Hasil pengamatan terhadap pidato publik dan wawancara KH. Said Aqil Siradj (2020–2022).

⁷⁶ Hasil analisis data primer berupa karya tulis, buku, artikel, pidato, ceramah, dan pernyataan publik KH. Said Aqil Siradj mengenai prinsip Islam moderat.

pluralistic societies. Moderate Islam is projected as a social ethic capable of nurturing pluralism without compromising Islamic principles.⁷⁷ On issues of democracy, for example, KH. Said Aqil views democracy as compatible with Islam, provided it is practiced with the values of justice, deliberation (*musyawarah*), and respect for human dignity.⁷⁸ Thus, moderate Islam becomes an ethical means to integrate Islamic values with modern socio-political systems.

Meanwhile, based on secondary data such as books, scholarly journals, and studies on key figures, KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought is understood as a critical response to the challenges of digital disruption that affect contemporary patterns of religious practice.⁷⁹ The study finds that moderate Islam is projected as an ethical framework for responding to the flood of information, fragmented religious authority, and social-media-based radicalization.⁸⁰ In this context, moderate Islam functions not merely as a normative discourse but also as a practical guide for cultivating a religious literacy that is critical, civilized, and responsible. Thus, the discourse of moderate Islam according to KH. Said Aqil Siradj can be understood as a civilizational strategy aimed at shaping a society that is religious, inclusive, and adaptive to the changing times without losing its moral and spiritual foundations.⁸¹

The research findings indicate that the discourse of moderate Islam in the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj can be understood as a cultural and ethical strategy for responding to the challenges of contemporary civilization, such as pluralism, democracy, and digital disruption.⁸² These findings align with the perspective of Arnold Toynbee,⁸³ who stated that the survival of a civilization is largely determined by the ability of its creative minorities to respond to challenges (challenge and response). In this context, moderate Islam functions as a creative response of the Muslim community to global social changes—not by rejecting modernity, but by managing it ethically and meaningfully. KH. Said Aqil's thought demonstrates that religion

⁷⁷ KH. Said Aqil Siradj, *Moderasi Islam dalam Masyarakat Majemuk* (Jakarta: PBNU, 2020), 78–85.

⁷⁸ Hasil studi dokumentasi pidato publik dan wawancara KH. Said Aqil Siradj (2019–2022) terkait pandangan demokrasi dan nilai Islam.

⁷⁹ Abdul Muiz, *Islam Moderat dan Literasi Keagamaan di Era Digital*, *Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 13, no. 2 (2022): 45–60.

⁸⁰ Hendra Gunawan, *Disrupsi Digital dan Tantangan Keagamaan Kontemporer* (Jakarta: LP3M, 2021), 102–118.

⁸¹ Analisis data sekunder dari kajian akademik dan laporan penelitian terkait Islam moderat dan literasi digital keagamaan.

⁸² Analisis data primer berupa buku, artikel, pidato, ceramah, dan pernyataan publik KH. Said Aqil Siradj terkait moderasi Islam dan respons terhadap perubahan sosial kontemporer.

⁸³ Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 45–48.

should not act as a stagnant, resistive force, but rather as a source of values guiding the direction of civilizational change.⁸⁴

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought can also be interpreted through Peter L. Berger's theory,⁸⁵ regarding the social construction of reality, Berger emphasizes that religion plays a crucial role in legitimizing meaning within an ever-changing social reality. In this context, moderate Islam functions as a symbolic framework that interprets pluralism, democracy, and digital technological developments through the lens of Islamic values. KH. Said Aqil does not view pluralism as a threat to faith but as a social fact that must be addressed with ethics of tolerance and dialogue. Thus, moderate Islam serves as a cultural instrument that maintains social cohesion while preventing identity-based conflicts.

In the context of democracy, these research findings are relevant to the ideas of Nurcholish Madjid,⁸⁶ regarding the compatibility of Islam with universal human values, democracy is understood not as a Western import opposing Islam, but as a social mechanism aligned with the principles of shura (consultation), justice, and equality. KH. Said Aqil's thought reinforces the argument that moderate Islam functions as a public ethic capable of bridging religious values and modern political systems. Thus, Islam is not reduced to a formal symbol of power, but emerges as a moral source guiding democratic practices to remain civil, ethical, and humane.

Meanwhile, in addressing digital disruption, the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj can be associated with Manuel Castells' network society theory.⁸⁷ Digital disruption has transformed religious authority from a hierarchical structure into a more fluid and fragmented one. In this context, moderate Islam functions as a framework for digital literacy ethics, requiring critical thinking, verification (tabayyun), and moral responsibility in both the production and consumption of religious discourse. KH. Said Aqil emphasizes the importance of deep knowledge and the scholarly tradition to counterbalance the rapid flow of digital information, which often fosters instant radicalism that is shallow epistemologically.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Jürgen Habermas' discourse ethics,⁸⁸ Moderate Islam can be understood as an effort to construct a communicative and rational public sphere.

⁸⁴ Data sekunder berupa buku dan jurnal yang membahas Islam moderat sebagai strategi etis menghadapi modernitas dan pluralitas.

⁸⁵ Peter L. Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 33–35.

⁸⁶ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999), 45–48.

⁸⁷ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 3–15.

⁸⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 109–115.

Habermas emphasizes the importance of dialogue free from domination and symbolic violence. KH. Said Aqil's rejection of hate speech, takfirism, and claims of absolute truth demonstrates that moderate Islam functions as an ethical framework for religious communication in the public sphere. In this context, religion is not imposed through power or social pressure, but is presented through moral reasoning and social exemplarity.

Thus, this discussion affirms that the discourse of moderate Islam in the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj goes beyond normative frameworks and operates as a cultural and ethical civilizational strategy. Moderate Islam functions as an instrument to maintain the balance between the continuity of tradition and the demands of change, between faith and humanity, as well as between moral authority and public freedom. These findings reinforce the position of moderate Islam as a relevant and contextual paradigm in addressing the increasingly complex and dynamic challenges of contemporary civilization.

CLOSING

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that moderate Islam in the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj represents a comprehensive, contextual, and civilization-oriented Islamic construct. Moderate Islam is not merely understood as a compromise or a neutral stance between two extreme poles; rather, it is a paradigm that consciously balances Islamic theological values with the continuously evolving social and human realities. This balance positions religion as a source of moral and public ethical values capable of guiding human life in society without losing its spiritual depth.

Furthermore, the discourse of moderate Islam is positioned as both an epistemological and practical critique of two forms of religious extremism: rigid, textual radicalism and religious liberalism detached from traditional roots. KH. Said Aqil Siradj emphasizes that both extremes have the potential to diminish the essence of Islamic teachings. Therefore, moderate Islam emerges as a middle path that preserves textual authority, rationality, and traditional wisdom in equilibrium.

The study also concludes that KH. Said Aqil Siradj's moderate Islam is firmly rooted in the Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) tradition, which is dynamic, contextual, and adaptive to changing times. This tradition is not understood statically, but as a methodological framework for Islamic thinking that is open to *ijtihad*, dialogue, and the development of

knowledge. With this foundation, moderate Islam is able to respond to the challenges of modernity without losing its scholarly identity.

In addition, KH. Said Aqil Siradj's thought emphasizes the importance of integrating Islamic identity with national commitment. Islam and nationalism are not seen as opposing entities but as mutually reinforcing forces that build social harmony, maintain unity, and nurture diversity. This integration forms an ethical basis for a peaceful and civilized life in the nation-state.

Finally, the discourse of moderate Islam is projected as a cultural and ethical strategy for addressing contemporary civilizational challenges, such as pluralism, democracy, and digital disruption. Moderate Islam serves as a moral guide in managing differences, strengthening ethical democracy, and responding to technological changes critically and responsibly. Thus, KH. Said Aqil Siradj positions moderate Islam as a relevant, visionary, and sustainable civilizational paradigm in the context of modern society.

Recommendations

First, for academics and researchers, it is recommended to expand empirical studies on the implementation of moderate Islam in society, particularly within the context of pluralism and contemporary social dynamics. This will ensure that the thought of KH. Said Aqil Siradj is not only a theoretical discourse but also measurable in practice.

Second, for Islamic educational institutions and pesantrens, it is advised to internalize the values of moderate Islam in curricula, teaching, and community activities. This is crucial to prevent young generations from falling into textual extremism or liberalism detached from tradition, while enabling them to balance religious identity with civic responsibility.

Third, for policymakers and community leaders, it is suggested to adopt moderate Islam as a framework for building social harmony, maintaining tolerance, and managing differences within the nation. This strategy can also be applied to respond to contemporary civilizational challenges, such as inclusive democracy, digital disruption, and other socio-cultural dynamics.

Fourth, for the general public, it is recommended to embrace moderate Islam as an ethical and cultural guideline in daily life, so that Islamic values can be realized contextually, wisely, and in a manner relevant to the changing times.

REFERENCES

- Abduh, Muhammad. *Risālat al-Tawhīd*. Kairo: Dār al-Manār, 1925.
- Abou El Fadl, Khaled. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. London: Verso, 2006.
- Auda, Jasser. *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach*. London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008.
- Auda, Jasser. *Maqasid al-Shariah: A Beginner's Guide*. London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008.
- Azra, Azyumardi. *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global dan Lokal*. Bandung: Mizan, 2015.
- Bagir, Zainal Abidin. "Pluralisme Kewargaan dan Tantangan Otoritas Keagamaan." *Jurnal Maarif* 13, no. 2 (2018).
- Baso, Ahmad. *Islam Moderat Indonesia*. Jakarta: Pustaka Afid, 2016.
- Baso, Ahmad. *Islam Nusantara: Ijtihad Jenius dan Ijma' Ulama Nusantara*. Jakarta: Pustaka Afid, 2015.
- Barton, Greg. *Indonesia's Struggle: Jemaah Islamiyah and the Soul of Islam*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004.
- Bellah, Robert N. *Civil Religion in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- Berger, Peter L., dan Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books, 1966.
- Bruinessen, Martin van. *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn"*. Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2013.
- Bustamam-Ahmad, Kamaruzzaman. "Islamic Discourse in Indonesia: A Study of Intellectual Trends." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 5, no. 2 (2011).
- Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.
- Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014.
- Durkheim, Émile. *Sociology and Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Durkheim, Émile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, terj. Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press, 1995.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman, 1995.
- Fealy, Greg, dan Sally White. *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008.

- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage, 1995.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Hallaq, Wael B. *Authority, Continuity, and Change in Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Religion in the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987.
- Hasan, Noorhaidi. *Liberal Islam and the Challenges of Pluralism in Indonesia*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010.
- McIntyre, Lee. *Post-Truth*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018.
- Moleong, Lexy J. *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018.
- Madjid, Nurcholish. *Islam, Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan*. Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999.
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Ridwan, Nur Khalik. "Islam Moderat dan Problem Otoritas Keagamaan." *Jurnal Studia Islamika* 23, no. 2 (2016).
- Roy, Olivier. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Shihab, Muhammad Quraish. *Wasathiyah: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama*. Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2019.
- Siradj, KH. Said Aqil. *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah dalam Lintas Sejarah*. Jakarta: LTN PBNU, 1997.
- Siradj, KH. Said Aqil. *Islam Kebangsaan: Fiqih Demokratik Kaum Santri*. Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1999.
- Siradj, KH. Said Aqil. *Islam Moderat dan Tantangan Peradaban*. Dalam *Jurnal Maarif* 13, no. 2, 2018.
- Siradj, KH. Said Aqil. *Islam Wasathiyah dan Tantangan Modernitas*. Jakarta: PBNU, 2018.
- Siradj, KH. Said Aqil. *Moderasi Islam dalam Masyarakat Majemuk*. Jakarta: PBNU, 2020.
- Siradj, KH. Said Aqil. *Islam, Pancasila, dan Keindonesiaan*. Dalam *Islam Sumber Inspirasi Budaya Nusantara*. Jakarta: LTN PBNU, 2015.
- Siradj, KH. Said Aqil. Ceramah "Islam, Kemanusiaan, dan Kebinekaan." Jakarta, 2018.
- Siradj, KH. Said Aqil. Ceramah "Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah sebagai Manhaj Berpikir." Jakarta, 2017.
- Siradj, Said Aqil. *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah dalam Lintas Sejarah*. Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1998.

Siradj, Said Aqil. *Islam Kebangsaan: Fiqh Demokratik Kaum Santri*. Jakarta: Pustaka Ciganjur, 1999.

Siradj, Said Aqil. *Islam Sumber Inspirasi Budaya Bangsa*. Jakarta: LTN Nahdlatul Ulama, 2015.

Siradj, Said Aqil. "Islam, Pancasila, dan Kebangsaan." Pidato, Harlah Nahdlatul Ulama, Jakarta, 2017.

Tibi, Bassam. *Islamism and Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

Toynbee, Arnold. *A Study of History*, vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934.

van Bruinessen, Martin. *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn"*. Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2013.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi. *Fiqh al-Wasatīyyah al-Islāmiyyah wa al-Tajdīd*. Kairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2010.