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Transformation of Religious Moderation through the Deepening of Kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah in the Women's Pesantren

Arifuddin[1]✉, Syahruddin[2], M. Ilham[3], Abdul Rahim Karim[4], Muhammad Irfan Hasanuddin[5]

Universitas Islam Negeri Palopo, Indonesia[1,2,3,4]
University of Aberdeen, Scotland, United Kingdom[5]

✉Corresponding Email: arifuddin_arif@uinpalopo.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Religious moderation is often a fragile concept and limited to ethical recommendations or fiqh rules without touching on the fundamentals of belief. This study does not merely affirm that santriwati in women's pesantren are moderate, but also uncovers the underlying mechanisms of how moderation is produced, namely through mastery of theological foundations that give them the intellectual authority to reconstruct religious discourse from within. A qualitative approach with a case study research type, as well as data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation review were used in this study. Data analysis and testing were also conducted. The results show that the deepening of the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo goes beyond mere knowledge transfer to become a complex mechanism for intellectual-spiritual empowerment. The santriwati actively negotiated and reconstructed the meaning of religious moderation, transforming it from a normative concept into a critical ideology rooted in their local context. This transformation was supported by the conducive structural foundation of the pesantren, where its vision, mission, and leadership provided significant space for women agents to operate. The pedagogical foundation for this success lies in the key elements of kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah. The teaching of tanzih (divine transcendence) instills intellectual humility by emphasizing the absolute difference between the Creator and creation. The concept of hikmah (divine wisdom) is articulated as a theological affirmation of diversity. Furthermore, the text's rational-dialogical question-and-answer method is maximized to train critical thinking and constructive dialogue skills, fostering a deep-seated respect for diversity.

Keywords: *Kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah, Religious Moderation, Women's Pesantren*

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INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has become a crucial agenda in facing the complexities of a diverse society.[1] Efforts to effectively instill these values require the active role of various agents of transformation, and women hold a strategic position in this process. As central figures in the community and also in the family, women have great potential to become pioneers of inclusion and gender equality, which are at the core of the spirit of moderation itself.[2] One institution that has historically proven effective in shaping women's intellectual cadres is the pesantren. It is within the ecosystem of women's pesantren that the process of internalizing religious values occurs deeply and often through the study of classical texts, one of which is the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah by Syekh Thahir bin Shalih al-Jazairi (d. 1920 M),[3] a concise yet dense theological work on the fundamentals of faith that explicitly teaches respect for differences. This study considers the women's pesantren as the main locus for the empowerment of women in voicing a tolerant Islam.

Empowering women intellectually through mastery of classical theological texts such as al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah is a key mechanism for reconstructing the narrative of religious moderation from its original patriarchal nature to one that is more inclusive and gender-equitable.[4] Traditionally, women have often been positioned as objects in religious discourse.[5] By mastering the basics of theology, women student (santriwati) are no longer just passive recipients, but become active producers and negotiators of discourse. They have the intellectual legitimacy to talk about God, faith, and differences from their perspective. The selection of kalam (theology) kitab touches on the roots of worldview.[6] When the santriwati understand that respect for the differences is part of the foundation of faith, their moderate attitude will not be easily shaken.[7] This is moderation rooted in belief and not just social ethics. Women's pesantren function as autonomous spaces.[8] Within them, the santriwati can freely discuss, debate, and internalize texts without direct intervention from broader religious structures. It is these pesantren that enable fresh

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[1] Sonny Eli Zaluchu, Priyantoro Widodo, and Agus Kriswanto, 'Conceptual Reconstruction of Religious Moderation in the Indonesian Context Based on Previous Research: Bibliometric Analysis', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 11 (2025), p. 101552, doi:10.1016/J.SSAHO.2025.101552.

[2] Adis Duderija, 'Contemporary Muslim Male Reformist Thought and Gender Equality Affirmative Interpretations of Islam', *Feminist Theology*, 28.2 (2020), pp. 161–81, doi:10.1177/0966735019886076.

[3] Joseph H. Escovitz, '"He Was the Muhammad 'Abduh of Syria" A Study of Tāhir Al-Jazā'irī and His Influence', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 18.3 (2009), pp. 293–310, doi:10.1017/S002074380049049X.

[4] Jess MacArthur, Naomi Carrard, and Juliet Willetts, 'Exploring Gendered Change: Concepts and Trends in Gender Equality Assessments', *Third World Quarterly*, 42.9 (2021), pp. 2189–208, doi:10.1080/01436597.2021.1911636.

[5] Anna Piela, '"Women Are Believers in Their Own Right": One Muslim Woman's Challenge to Dominant Discourses Shaping Gender Relations in Islam', *The Muslim World*, 103.3 (2013), pp. 389–403, doi:10.1111/MUWO.12021.

[6] Muhammad Husni Mohd Amin, 'Solidification of Worldview, Liberation Strategy and Revival of Sunnism Leading to the 12th Century A.D. / 6th Century A.H. Muslim Liberation of Jerusalem', *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 26.1 (2024), pp. 121–66, doi:10.22452/AFKAR.VOL26NO1.4.

[7] Husnul Amin, 'Value-Based Frameworks and Peace Education in Faith-Neutral, Faith-Based and Faith-Inspired Schools in Islamabad: A Comparative Analysis', *Journal of Peace Education*, 21.1 (2024), pp. 54–81, doi:10.1080/17400201.2023.2289655.

[8] Siti Nur Hidayah and Ahmad Arifi, 'Women in Islamic Education Management: Learning from Pesantren Practices', *Ulumuna*, 21.1 (2017), pp. 129–50, doi:10.20414/UJIS.V21I1.1178.

interpretations and authentic empowerment.

Religious moderation often stops at the level of ethical recommendations or fiqh rules.[9] This approach is sometimes fragile because it does not touch on the foundations of belief. The study of classical texts is also often philological or historical in nature, treating texts as artifacts of the past that are analyzed rigidly.[10] On the other hand, sociological studies often ignore the role of texts in shaping behavior.[11] The Kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah is not a dead object, but a living and active agent that interacts with the santriwati of today. The focus is on the process of transformation so that the text shapes their perspective, fosters critical thinking, and ultimately motivates the santriwati to become agents of change. Moderation born from a foundation of faith will be much stronger and less susceptible to provocation.[12] This study does not merely affirm that women in the pesantren are moderate, but also uncovers the underlying mechanism of how moderation is produced, namely through mastery of theological foundations that give them the intellectual authority to reconstruct religious discourse from within.

Women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo is a unique socio-historical and cultural context, established on August 17, 1982, and is one of the leading Islamic educational institutions in Eastern Indonesia.[13] The name of "Datok Sulaiman" is taken from the name of a preacher from Minangkabau who first spread Islam in the Kingdom of Luwu, demonstrating the pesantren's commitment to respecting local history and cultural roots.[14] The uniqueness of this pesantren lies in its position as a representation of Islam in the "periphery" (in the sense of being outside the center of Javanese Islamic studies hegemony) which has its own history and dynamics. Gayatri Spivak's idea of "subaltern" (a group whose voice is silenced by the dominant structure) is very relevant. "Subaltern" can have a double meaning, namely women in patriarchal religious structures, or pesantren outside Java in the national Islamic discourse, which is often Java-centric.[15] The women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo can be positioned as an "arena" where these double "subaltern" groups (the women of Palopo) are no longer silent. They actively speak through the most legitimate medium in Islamic tradition through the interpretation of classical

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[9] Kurnia Muhajarah and Moh. Erfan Soebahar, 'Fiqh of Tolerance and Religious Moderation: A Study towards Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand', *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 11.1 (2024), p. 2303817, doi:10.1080/23311983.2024.2303817.

[10] Julia Nitz, 'History, a Literary Artifact? The Traveling Concept of Narrative in/on Historiographic Discourse', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 15.1 (2013), pp. 69–85, doi:10.5325/INTELITESTUD.15.1.0069.

[11] Elisabeth Walsh, 'Exploring Human Behavior Through the Lens of Cultural Studies: A Sociological Perspective', *The Journal of International Social Research*, 17.119 (2024), doi:10.1097/JFN.0000000000000287.

[12] Ahmad Hasan Ridwan and others, 'Implementing and Interpreting Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Moderation Concept in the Indonesian Context', *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 12.2 (2022), pp. 58–73, doi:10.32350/JITC.122.05.

[13] Bulu', *Reformasi Pendidikan (Studi Kasus Pesantren Modern Datok Sulaiman Palopo)*, ed. by Nuryani (Makassar: Alauddin Press, 2012) <https://repositori.uin-alauddin.ac.id/12176/1/Reformasi%20pendidikan%20studi%20kasus%20pesantren%20modern%20Datok%20Sulaiman%20Palopo.pdf>; PMDS Palopo, 'Sejarah Pondok Pesantren Modern Datok Sulaiman Palopo', 2025 <https://pmdspalopo.id/sejarah/>.

[14] Bulu', *Reformasi Pendidikan (Studi Kasus Pesantren Modern Datok Sulaiman Palopo)*.

[15] Piermarco Piu, 'The Journey of Subalternity in Gayatri Spivak's Work: Its Sociological Relevance', *The Sociological Review*, 71.6 (2023), pp. 1258–76, doi:10.1177/00380261231194495; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular', *Postcolonial Studies*, 8.4 (2005), pp. 475–86, doi:10.1080/13688790500375132.

texts. The study of the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah becomes their medium for voicing their views on moderation, inclusion, and equality rooted in their local experiences and context in South Sulawesi. This approach sharpens the role of women as transformation agents. The transformation they are undertaking is not only at the local community level, but also has the potential to challenge the singular narrative of Indonesian Islam. They prove that centers of Islamic intellectual excellence are not only found in Java.

The deepening of the classical theological kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo is not merely a process of knowledge transfer, but a complex mechanism of intellectual-spiritual empowerment. In this process, the santriwati actively negotiate and reconstruct the meaning of religious moderation, transforming it from a normative concept in the text into a critical ideology that is alive and rooted in their local context.[16] Through this mechanism, the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo functions as an incubator that gives birth to women who are not only moderate but also have epistemic authority (knowledge-based authority) to challenge narrow and patriarchal religious narratives.[17] By studying the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah, the santriwati gain intellectual legitimacy. They are no longer merely objects or targets of moderation programs, but have become subjects or producers of the discourse of moderation itself. At the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo, the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah is transformed from intellectual heritage into spiritual capital and a tool of liberation for santriwati to assert their role as agents of moderation that are authentic, inclusive, and deeply rooted in their Sulawesi context.[18]

Various studies have discussed religious moderation, Indonesian Gender-Just ʿUlamāʾ, Islamic feminism, and overcoming the stereotypes of the past. Findings from research by Imam Subchi, Zulkifli, Rena Latifa & Sholikatus Sa'diyah reaffirm the positive role of comprehensive religiosity in shaping moderate attitudes. Unlike several previous studies that linked religiosity with intolerance, this research shows that a deep understanding and practice of religion is actually a defense against intolerance and radicalism. The combination of all the factors tested (religiosity and socio-economics) was able to explain 8.6% of the variation in religious moderation, while the rest was influenced by other variables outside the scope of the study.[19] Teaching religious moderation to pre-service teachers (an Indonesian case study) researched by Yedi Purwanto, Endis Firdaus & Achmad Faqihuddin also found that prospective teachers increased their awareness of religious tolerance, felt empowered to act as tolerant teachers, and considered leadership (both male and female) important for living a peaceful life.[20]

Relegitimizing religious authority (Indonesian Gender-Just *ʿUlamāʾ* amid COVID-19),

[16] Imam Subchi and others, 'Religious Moderation in Indonesian Muslims', *Religions*, 13.5 (2022), p. 451, doi:10.3390/RE13050451.

[17] Faiza J. Khokhar, 'Reclaiming the Narrative: Gendered Islamophobia, Its Impacts and Responses from Muslim Women', *Social Identities*, 28.2 (2022), pp. 267–81, doi:10.1080/13504630.2021.2006624.

[18] Fatmawati and others, 'Transformation of Women's Leadership in Pesantren from Fiqh Siyāsah Perspective: Social Dynamics in the Patriarchal Culture of South Sulawesi', *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 8.3 (2024), pp. 1800–17, doi:10.22373/SJHK.V8I3.18647.

[19] Subchi and others, 'Religious Moderation in Indonesian Muslims'.

[20] Yedi Purwanto, Endis Firdaus, and Achmad Faqihuddin, 'Teaching Religious Moderation to Pre-Service Teachers: An Indonesian Case Study', *Religious Education*, 119.4 (2024), pp. 307–20, doi:10.1080/00344087.2024.2385174.

also researched by Eva F. Nisa & Farid F. Saenong, analyzed how female religious authorities who color the daily landscape of daʿwa (spreading religion) in Indonesia faced the uncertainty caused by the pandemic. The landscape of daʿwa in Indonesia has long been an arena of conflict between competing ideological understandings. The pandemic and the spread of digital religion have encouraged gender-perspective ulama to reclaim the legitimacy of their authority through online presence, enabling them to compete with and counter technologically savvy conservative Muslim narratives.[21] Islamic feminism and the renegotiation of new knowledge through translation, also researched by Doaa Embabi, reveals that language can be an important starting point for unraveling misunderstandings about feminism. By analyzing works in English by Islamic feminists, these concepts are used to show that language, meaning, and translation must be considered when discussing their debates on enforcing gender equality.[22] Not to forget Asma Barlas in her research on developing a dialogue between Muslim and Catholic educators (overcoming the stereotypes of the past), also reveals that sincere dialogue between Muslim and Catholic educators can only be achieved if both parties consciously dismantle and overcome historical stereotypes rooted in the colonial era, and if Muslims themselves reclaim interpretations of the Qur'an that liberate them from patriarchy.[23]

The relevant previous research tends to focus on large institutions and pesantren in Java as the main locus of study on Islamic moderation and intellectualism. This creates a narrative that tends to be Java-centric, as if the dynamics of Indonesian Islamic intellectualism only occur there. In fact, experiences from the "periphery" such as the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo are often overlooked. The reason for this is not merely geographical differences, but rather a theoretical statement that religious moderation has unique and autonomous roots and articulations outside the center of hegemony, shaped by the socio-cultural context of Bugis-Luwu. This research is at the rare intersection of Islamic studies, gender studies, and pesantren studies. This shows that theological texts actively shape gender agency in a specific Islamic educational institution, thereby making a substantive contribution to all three fields simultaneously. This research also affirms the role and intellectual contribution of the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo in the national Islamic discourse. It is hoped that this will increase confidence and become a source of pride for the local community, showing that they are also significant producers of knowledge and not merely consumers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach with a case study research type was used in this research. The location is in the Women's Pesantren Datok Sulaiman in the city of Palopo, South Sulawesi province. The data sources in this study consisted of primary data which included the Person in Charge of the Women's Pesantren Datok Sulaiman, and the Caregiver of the Recitation of Kitab

[21] Eva F. Nisa and Farid F. Saenong, 'Relegitimizing Religious Authority: Indonesian Gender-Just ʿUlamāʾ Amid COVID-19', *Religions*, 13.6 (2022), p. 485, doi:10.3390/REL13060485.

[22] Doaa Embabi, 'Islamic Feminism and The Renegotiation of New Knowledge Through Translation', *Translation Studies*, 15.1 (2021), pp. 21–36, doi:10.1080/14781700.2021.1927817.

[23] Asma Barlas, 'Developing a Dialogue Between Muslim and Catholic Educators: Overcoming The Stereotypes of The Past', *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 14.1 (2021), pp. 54–67, doi:10.1080/19422539.2021.1942683.

al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah, as well as secondary data which included relevant literature studies, such as books, articles, and previous research that discussed religious moderation, women's pesantren, and kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah, including various relevant information that supports the understanding of the transformation of religious moderation through the deepening of kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah in women's pesantren.

Data collection techniques were carried out using non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews with in-depth interview categories, and documentation studies.[24] Each of which has an important role in exploring comprehensive data and information about the issues in this study. The data analysis technique was carried out using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, namely data condensation, data presentation, and verification/conclusion drawing.[25] Meanwhile, the data validity testing was carried out through several criteria, namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability tests.[26]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women's Contribution to the Transformation of Religious Moderation in the Women's Pesantren

1. Women as Transformation Agents

Pesantren as the oldest Islamic educational institutions spread across rural areas have a very strategic position in the dissemination and internalization of religious moderation values.[27] However, in the broader discourse on the role of pesantren, the significant contributions of women actors such as *Nyai*, *Ustadzah*, and majelis taklim organizers often receive less attention than they deserve. In fact, they are very effective agents in instilling values of moderation.[28] Women in the pesantren environment (with the various roles they play) are transformation agents who hold the key to the successful implementation of religious moderation at the grassroots level.[29] Their effectiveness stems from several strategic factors, such as their proximity to family education with actualizing the adage "*al-ummu madrasah al-ula*" or "the mother is the first school", higher social sensitivity, and consistent interaction with the santriwati community and the surrounding community. These roles are often not explicitly articulated in national policy blueprints, making

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[24] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Sage Publications, 2016).

[25] M. B. Miles, A. M. Huberman, and J. Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook (3rd Ed.)* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2014); Hans-Gerd Ridder and others, 'Book Review: Qualitative Data Analysis', *German Journal of Human Resource Management: Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung*, 28.4 (2014), pp. 485–87, doi:10.1177/239700221402800402.

[26] Nurul Ulfatin, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Di Bidang Pendidikan: Teori Dan Aplikasinya* (Malang: Media Nusa Creative, 2015).

[27] Miftahul Huda, 'Strengthening Religious Moderation Through the Core Values of Islamic Boarding School Education', *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education*, 8.1 (2024), pp. 59–71, doi:10.35723/AJIE.V8I1.458.

[28] Herlina Herlina and Munawara Munawara, 'Nyai Leadership: The Role of Women in Maintaining the Tradition of Santri Literacy in Islamic Boarding Schools', *An-Nisa: Journal of Gender Studies*, 18.1 (2025), pp. 85–98, doi:10.35719/ANNISA.V18I1.319.

[29] Zunly Nadia and Nur Faizah, 'Female Ulamā and Religious Moderation in Indonesia: A Study on the Agency and Authority of KUPI and JP3M', *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 25.2 (2024), pp. 76–95, doi:10.14421/esensia.v26i1.5907.

them a "hidden force" that drives the transformation of moderation from within the pesantren ecosystem itself.

The theory of structuration with the concept of Duality of Structure, as initiated by the sociologist Anthony Giddens allows us to see the women leaders not only as products of the system, but also as active architects of the system itself. Giddens rejects the dualistic view that strictly separates agents (acting individuals) and structures (rules and resources in the social system). Instead, he proposes a duality, where agents and structures are two sides of the same coin, mutually presupposing and reproducing each other continuously.[30] Social structures such as norms, hierarchies, and curricula in a pesantren are not something external that forces individuals. Instead, structures are both the medium and the result of the actions of agents.[31] Structure provides the rules and resources that agents utilize in their actions, such as an *Ustadzah* using the curriculum (rules) and her authority (resources) to teach. However, through the repeated actions of teaching (recursive practices), she not only transmits knowledge, but also reproduces and reinforces the validity of the curriculum and the hierarchy of authority. At the same time, she has the potential to slowly reinterpret, adapt, and even change the structure. Thus, structure is both constraining and enabling.[32] Agents are never completely free, because their actions are always constrained by historical and social contexts that they did not choose, but they are also never completely determined by the structure.[33]

In the women's pesantren, *Nyai*, *Ustadzah*, teachers, principals, and caregivers are agents of change par excellence. They are individuals who are trusted to design, implement, and evaluate the learning process with the ultimate goal of bringing about change in santriwati and ultimately in society. The role of women leaders as agents of change in pesantren is also realized through a series of distinctive pedagogical and psychological methods.[34] Methods such as exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), heartfelt advice (*mauidzah*), habituation and discipline (*tarbiyah bi al-'adah*), and a motherly approach (*motherhood*) are the modalities they use to instill values deeply into the santriwati.[35] These methods which are dominated by personal and affective approaches, have significant advantages in instilling values of moderation. Indicators of moderation such as tolerance, empathy, and anti-violence are not merely cognitive knowledge that

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[30] Ira Chatterjee, Jagat Kunwar, and Frank Den Hond, 'Anthony Giddens and Structuration Theory', in *Management, Organizations and Contemporary Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 60–79, doi:10.4324/9780429279591-4/ANTHONY-GIDDENS-STRUCTURATION-THEORY-IRA-CHATTERJEE-JAGAT-KUNWAR-FRANK-DEN-HOND.

[31] Ahmad Taufiq and Djoko Suryo, 'Educational Development of Indonesian Pesantren in the Perspective of Anthony Giddens' Duality Social Change', Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education, 5.4 (2024), pp. 765–84, doi:10.31538/TIJIE.V5I4.2365.

[32] Flor Avelino, 'Theories of Power and Social Change: Power Contestations and Their Implications for Research on Social Change and Innovation', *Journal of Political Power*, 14.3 (2021), pp. 425–48, doi:10.1080/2158379X.2021.1875307.

[33] Chatterjee, Kunwar, and Den Hond, 'Anthony Giddens and Structuration Theory'.

[34] Nizma Armila, 'Women's Leadership in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Comparative Study of Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam', *Eduprof : Islamic Education Journal*, 5.2 (2023), pp. 1–14, doi:10.47453/EDUPROF.V5I2.210.

[35] Sekar Harum Pratiwi and others, 'Filsafat Pendidikan Islam: Telaah Mengenai Makna Pendidikan (Tarbiyah, Ta'lim, Ta'dib, Tadris, Da'wah, Irsyad, Tadbiir, Tazkiyah, Uswah)', *JIIP - Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 7.2 (2024), pp. 2116–24, doi:10.54371/JIIP.V7I2.3397.

can be memorized from books or kitabs, but rather character and emotional intelligence that must be cultivated.[36] The methods of exemplary role *uswah hasanah* and *motherhood* approaches work on a personal and emotional level, which is far more effective in shaping character than rigid and formal doctrinal teaching. When an *Ustadzah* directly exemplifies how to resolve disputes between santriwati with a cool head and fairness, she is actually reproducing a "structure of tolerance and anti-violence" in practice. The process has a much greater causal impact in shaping moderate santriwati.

The structure of an organization, including its vision and mission, provides a framework that legitimizes and directs the actions of the agents within it.[37] Analysis of the vision and mission of the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo shows that there is a structural foundation that is very conducive to instilling values of moderation. The vision of the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo is "*to become a high-quality, independent, and competitive pesantren, as well as a center of excellence for Islamic education and community development in an effort to produce a generation of Muslims who are faithful, knowledgeable, and charitable, as well as responsible citizens*".[38] If this vision is analyzed, several key elements will become apparent, such as the phrase "*high-quality, independent, and competitive*". The phrase indicates a modern orientation that is open to change, innovation, and healthy competition, which distances the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo from the image of a closed and exclusive pesantren. In addition, the phrase "*becoming responsible citizens*" is also explicitly and strongly linked to the first indicator of religious moderation, namely National Commitment. This vision consciously places the educational goals of the pesantren within the framework of Indonesian nationality. The mission of the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo further strengthens this foundation. The mission to "*prepare a quality and professional workforce in the fields of religion and general knowledge*" and "*produce graduates who are capable of independence*",[39] demonstrates the principle of balance (*tawazun*) between the spiritual (*ukhrawi*) and socio-economic (*duniawi*) dimensions. This balance is one of the main pillars of the concept of religious moderation.

The leadership structure at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo provides significant space for women's agencies to operate and carry out transformations. This can be seen from the women figures who occupy strategic positions. The most prominent central figure is Dr. Hj. A. Ria Warda Makkulasse, M.Ag., whose appointment as Director of the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo is an important event. Her strong academic background (Doctorate) and her experience as an official at the State Islamic University of Palopo signify a paradigm shift in leadership. This shows a transition from a traditional leadership model, which is often based on lineage, to professional leadership based on meritocracy (competence). The appointment of Ria Warda can be interpreted as a deliberate structural intervention by the foundation's leadership. It was a conscious act by agents at the top level to change the leadership structure at the women's

[36] Arman Sharbatdaran and Omer A. Awan, 'Teaching Empathy and Emotional Intelligence', *Academic Radiology*, 30.11 (2023), pp. 2793–95, doi:10.1016/j.acra.2023.05.013.

[37] Georg von Krogh, Ikujiro Nonaka, and Lise Rechsteiner, 'Leadership in Organizational Knowledge Creation: A Review and Framework', *Journal of Management Studies*, 49.1 (2012), pp. 240–77, doi:10.1111/J.1467-6486.2010.00978.X.

[38] Arifuddin and others, 'Documentation Review by the Author', preprint, Palopo, 2022.

[39] Arifuddin and others, 'Documentation Review by the Author'.

pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo, which in turn created conditions more conducive for women's transformative agency to flourish and implement a vision of modernization.

2. Women as Pioneers of Inclusion and Gender Equality

Women in Islam are often trapped in stereotypes of subordination and domestication.[40] However, when examined through the framework of Islamic feminism, women actually have transformative potential as pioneers of inclusion and gender equality.[41] This idea is based on a reinterpretation of sacred texts and historical practices that demonstrate women's agency. Islamic feminism does not reject religion, but rather advocates for equality (*musawah*) and justice (*'adalah*) which are embedded in the fundamental principle of tawhid, namely the belief in the oneness of God which necessitates the equality of all human beings before God. Islamic feminism is fundamentally different from Western secular feminism.[42] While some strands of Western feminism view religion as an inherent source of patriarchy, Islamic feminism argues that the basic principles of Islam are in fact deeply egalitarian. Its goal is not to abandon Islam, but to reclaim the core of Islam's teachings of justice and equality. The movement is described as integrative post-Islamic feminism that places women as partners with men in human liberation, not as opponents.[43] Muslim feminists argue that the Qur'an emphasizes the principles of justice and equality, but their implementation is hampered by gender-biased interpretations.[44]

The theories of Islamic feminism proposed by thinkers such as Asma Barlas focus on showing that the Qur'an does not support patriarchy. She further argues that Islam is an egalitarian religion in which men and women have equal standing before God, and the only difference between them is their level of piety.[45] Other thinkers such as Amina Wadud, with her hermeneutic approach, have emphasized the importance of reading the Qur'an from a women's perspective in order to uncover the messages of justice and equality contained within it. She challenges traditional interpretations that are male-centered and ignore women's experiences.[46] In Indonesia, scholars such as K.H. Husein Muhammad have been actively involved in reinterpreting religious texts from a gender perspective within the framework of traditional Islamic scholarship. This

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[40] Nasrin Khandoker, Đermana Kurić, and James Carr, 'Rethinking Gendered Anti-Muslim Racism in A Relational Matrix of Race and Gender', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 107 (2024), p. 102983, doi:10.1016/J.WSIF.2024.102983.

[41] Suud Sarim Karimullah and Siti Rutbatul Aliyah, 'Feminist Criticism of Traditional Understanding of Women's Roles in Islam', *An-Nisa: Journal of Gender Studies*, 16.2 (2023), pp. 195–214, doi:10.35719/ANNISA.V16I2.177.

[42] Mustafa A. Rahman, 'Feminism: A Discursive Analysis of The Western And Islamic Perspectives', *The Annual International Conference of the Association of Lecturers in Adab Sciences (ADIA)* (Banda Aceh), 2024, pp. 663–76.

[43] Barbara Henry, 'Islamic Feminism(s) in the Mediterranean Area: A Hermeneutical Approach', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 19.5 (2017), pp. 464–82, doi:10.1080/19448953.2017.1296254.

[44] Aksin Wijaya, Ibnu Muchlis, and Dawam Multazam Rohmatulloh, 'Rethinking Gender Justice in the Quran: A Critical Exploration of Muslim Feminist Perspectives', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis*, 26.1 (2025), pp. 77–98, doi:10.14421/qh.v26i1.5704.

[45] Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'ān* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019).

[46] Amina Wadud, 'Reflections on Islamic Feminist Exegesis of the Qur'an', *Religions*, 12.7 (2021), p. 497, doi:10.3390/REL12070497.

shows that the idea of Islamic feminism resonates and is being adapted in the local context.[47] By framing their struggle as an effort to purify religious teachings, Muslim feminists claim a more authentic religious authority than the traditional patriarchal structures they criticize.

One example of the implementation of gender-inclusive moderation at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo is the consistent and diverse achievements of its santriwati. These are not isolated victories, but a clear pattern that shows that the institution systematically fosters female excellence in various domains. The educational model at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo does not only teach subjects, but is a holistic pedagogy that aims to develop women's competencies in various domains such as spiritual, intellectual, physical, and economic. When viewed separately, achievements in karate, accounting, tahfizh, and financial literacy may seem impressive but unrelated.[48] However, when viewed as a whole, they reveal a deliberate educational strategy. This strategy aims to develop "well-rounded individuals" who are not only pious or intelligent, but also competent and confident in every aspect of life. The holistic competence is the foundation for effective leadership. A leader needs intellectual acuity, a spiritual foundation, physical endurance, and practical means to be independent.[49] The women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo systematically cultivates these pillars to create truly empowered individuals.

The long-term impact of the educational model at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo is most clearly seen in the life trajectories of its graduates. Their success in various professional fields is clear evidence of the effectiveness of the holistic approach. Women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo has a strong track record in producing thousands of alums who are spread throughout Indonesia and are able to compete in various sectors. Its graduates have successfully pursued careers in academia (lecturers), public service (government officials), businesswomen, and law enforcement (police and military). Many of them have successfully continued their education at their favorite state universities, demonstrating the quality of the basic education they received.[50] The existence of the active alums association of the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo also indicates a strong institutional identity and provides a support network that continues to strengthen the collective impact of the alums.

Evidence of the success of the alums empowerment model at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo is the appointment of Dr. Hj. A. Ria Warda Makkulasse, M.Ag. (an alums from the class of 1989) as the new Director of the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo in 2023. This event marks an important moment. The Chairman of the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo Foundation, Dr. K.H. Syarifuddin Daud, M.A., called it a "new chapter" because leadership is now held by the first alums of the women's pesantren itself.[51] The appointment of an alums to lead her alma mater transformed the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo from

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[47] Yusuf Rahman, 'Feminist Kyai, K.H. Husein Muhammad: The Feminist Interpretation on Gendered Verses and the Qur'ān-Based Activism', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 55.2 (2017), pp. 293–326, doi:10.14421/AJIS.2017.552.293-326.

[48] Arifuddin and others, 'Documentation Review by the Author'.

[49] Louis W Fry, 'Toward a Theory of Spiritual Leadership', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14.6 (2003), pp. 693–727, doi:10.1016/J.LEAQUA.2003.09.001.

[50] Arifuddin and others, 'Documentation Review by the Author'.

[51] Rukman Abdul Rahman Said, 'Interview', Palopo, 2022.

merely a "producer" of empowered women into a cyclical and sustainable system of women's leadership. When a graduate returns to lead the institution, she becomes a living example for the current santriwati. She is the embodiment of the ultimate goal of their education. Her leadership shaped by her own experience as a santriwati, will reinforce and deepen the pedagogy of empowerment that enabled her to achieve success. This creates a positive cycle, whereby the institution empowers a women, who then returns to empower the next generation of women, who in turn will become leaders and potentially return again. This mechanism institutionalizes women's leadership and ensures its continuity, making the model resilient and self-sustaining.

Respect for Diversity as a Value of Religious Moderation in the Kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah at the Women's Pesantren

The most prominent feature of the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah is its format which is arranged in the form of questions and answers (*su'al wa jawab*) and consists of systematic theological questions, followed by straightforward and rational answers.[52] This methodological choice is not merely a style of writing, but a profound pedagogical strategy. By presenting the material in a dialogue format, Syekh Thahir al-Jazairi implicitly encourages readers or santriwatis not to simply accept teachings passively, but to engage in an active thinking process. The fundamental theological teachings in the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah can be easily understood and can be reinterpreted as the foundation for moderate social ethics.[53] The most central teaching in this regard is the concept of *tanzih*, namely the purification of God from any form of resemblance to His creatures. The kitab repeatedly emphasizes the nature of Allah as *mukhalafah lil hawadits* (different from all that is new/created). The pedagogical implications of this emphasis on *tanzih* are profound. Its main theological purpose is to cleanse the understanding of God from all traces of anthropomorphism (*tasybih*), which is likening God to His creatures. However, the process of purifying theological concepts has direct ethical and social consequences, it also purifies the soul of a believer from the disease of intellectual arrogance and claims of absolute ownership of divine truth. Theological awareness fosters "epistemological humility".[54] A santriwati who truly internalizes the teachings of *tanzih* will realize that no matter how strong the arguments of the madhhab or theological views she adheres to they remain limited human attempts to approach infinite truth. This awareness is the most solid psychological foundation for an attitude of tolerance (*tasamuh*).

A nother relevant teaching in the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah is about the nature of Allah's Hikmah (Wisdom) and Iradah (Will). The kitab explains that Allah does not create anything in vain (*'abatsan*), because Allah is All-Wise, and everything that happens in this universe cannot happen without Allah's will. If these two teachings are contemplated in the context of social reality, then the diversity we see in the world, whether it be diversity of ethnicity, language, culture, or even spiritual paths, can be understood not as a "mistake" or "deviation" that

[52] Muhaemin, 'Interview', Palopo, 2022.
[53] Mustafa Yalçınkaya and İlhan Selçuk Kasırga, 'Tâhir El-Cezâirî'nin İtikadi Eserlerdeki Telif Metodu', *Erzincan University Journal of Graduate School of Social Sciences*, 15.2 (2022), pp. 252–63, doi:10.46790/ERZISOSBIL.1199098.
[54] Said, 'Interview'.

must be standardized.[55] On the contrary, diversity itself is a manifestation of Divine Wisdom and Will. God, in His infinite wisdom, wills plurality as part of the grand design of creation.

The understanding then changes the santriwati perspective on diversity. Diversity are no longer seen as a threat, but as a sign of God's greatness that needs to be studied, appreciated, and celebrated. Respecting cultural diversity and local traditions, which is one of the indicators of religious moderation,[56] thus gains its strongest theological justification. It is not merely a sociological demand to maintain harmony, but a theological imperative to respect the traces of God's wisdom scattered throughout His creation. Therefore, appreciating the culture of the Bugis tribe in South Sulawesi (for example) becomes a form of recognition of the manifestation of Divine Will, similar to admiring the beauty of the universe. This perspective gives deep spiritual meaning to practices of moderation that are oriented towards the acceptance of local traditions and cultures.

Research conducted at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo shows that the values of religious moderation are not just discourse, but have been realized in a "lived curriculum" that is integrated into various activities and institutional ethos. The pesantren actively constructs and expresses moderation through concrete practices that are in line with the indicators of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These practices show that the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo has very strong social and cultural capital in terms of moderation. Moderation in this pesantren is not a concept imposed from outside, but a value that has been organically lived and revived, born from the vision of its founders and dynamic interactions with the surrounding community.[57] Specifically, the teaching of the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo has been transformed from the transfer of conceptual knowledge/teachings (*ta'lim*) into a process of character and personality building (*ta'dib* and *tazkiyah*). The focus has shifted from simply ensuring that santriwati memorize and understand the attributes of Allah to instilling a "theological disposition" that inherently produces a moderate attitude. This disposition is a mental and spiritual framework born from deep contemplation of the nature of God and its implications for how humans view themselves, their knowledge, and their fellow human beings.

The idea utilizes three key elements in the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah as a pedagogical foundation for the value of "respect for diversity". *First*, the teaching of *tanzih* (divine transcendence), which affirms the absolute difference between the Creator and creation, has been taught not only as a metaphysical concept, but as a fundamental lesson in intellectual humility. When the santriwati truly understand that the essence of God transcends all human conception, they are theologically encouraged to acknowledge the limitations of their own interpretations and, as a result, become more open and respectful of other interpretations that also seek to approach the same truth. This directly fosters an *anti-takfir* (excommunication of fellow Muslims) attitude and becomes a prerequisite for respecting theological differences.[58] *Second*, the teaching of

[55] Muhaemin, 'Interview'.
[56] Muhammad Alqadri Burga and Muljono Damopolii, 'Reinforcing Religious Moderation through Local Culture-Based Pesantren', *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 8.2 (2022), pp. 145–62, doi:10.15575/JPI.V8I2.19879.
[57] Arifuddin and others, 'Observation by the Author', preprint, Palopo, 2022.
[58] Jane I. Lu, 'Educational Models of Spiritual Formation in Theological Education: Introspection-Based

hikmah (divine wisdom) in creation has been articulated as a theological affirmation of diversity. The plurality of cultures, languages, and traditions that exist in the world, including in the local environment of Palopo, has been taught not as a coincidence or deviation, but as a manifestation of the will of God, who is All-Wise. Therefore, respecting cultural and religious diversity becomes a form of worship, a recognition of the majesty of God's creation. This provides a strong spiritual foundation for the indicator of moderation acceptance of tradition.[59] *Third*, the rational-dialogical method of the kitab in the form of questions and answers has been exploited to the maximum to train critical thinking and constructive dialogue skills. Aqidah forum are no longer a one-way forum, but rather an arena for practicing logical argumentation, empathetic listening, and finding common ground, which are essential skills for living in a pluralistic society.[60] By adopting these approaches, the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo does not change the classical texts that are part of its curriculum. Instead, the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo unlocks and activates the pedagogical potential hidden within them. This model effectively bridges Islamic intellectual heritage (*turats*) with the national agenda of religious moderation, demonstrating that the values of moderation are not foreign concepts, but are deeply rooted in the heart of Sunni Islamic faith.

The teaching of *tanzih* (divine transcendence) at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo is not taught as a theological doctrine to be memorized, but rather internalized as manhaj al-fikr or a fundamental methodology of thinking in every scientific interaction. The implementation is manifested in consistent pedagogical situations. During a session studying the classical texts, madam *Nyai* was discussing the interpretation of mutasyabihat verses (verses whose meanings are vague and often anthropomorphic), such as "*The Hand of Allah is above their hands*" (QS. Al-Fath: 10). A santriwati then asked, "Madam *Nyai*, how do we imagine 'the Hand of Allah' if Allah is not like His creatures?" This is where the lesson of *tanzih* was activated. *Nyai*'s response was not dogmatic, but rather exploratory. She began by affirming the basic tenet of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*, namely "*There is nothing like unto Allah*" (QS. Asy-Syura: 11), which is a process of *tanzih* (divine transcendence) teaching.[61]

The teaching of *hikmah* (divine wisdom) at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo is actively articulated as a theological foundation for celebrating diversity, which in turn fosters indicators of moderation in the form of acceptance of tradition. The concept is not taught abstractly, but is brought to life in educational practices and social interactions. The main foundation refers to "*O mankind! Indeed, Allah has created you from a male and a female, then made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another*" (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13). At the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo, the key phrase "*so that you may know one another*" is interpreted not merely as a sociological recommendation, but as the very purpose of creation itself, that is wisdom (divine wisdom). When santriwati are faced with local traditions such as

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Spiritual Formation', *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 24.1 (2021), pp. 28–41, doi:10.1111/TETH.12560.

[59] Bernardus Agus Rukiyanto, Tabita Kartika Christiani, and Syafa'atun Almirzanah, 'Religious Education to Develop Respect for Plurality in Indonesia', *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 46.2 (2025), pp. 365–80, doi:10.1080/13617672.2024.2308982.

[60] Abdul Mu'ti, 'Pluralistic Islamic Religious Education: A Vision for Indonesia', *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 21.2 (2023), pp. 121–27, doi:10.1080/15570274.2023.2200280.

[61] Arifuddin and others, 'Observation by the Author'.

tahlilan ceremonies or grave pilgrimages, they have been equipped with a theological framework to not immediately label them as *bid'ah* (forbidden innovations). Their trained minds will ask, "What is the substance of this tradition? Does it contain prayers to Allah, or respect for ancestors, or strengthening of relationships?" She learns to distinguish between the 'container' (culture) and the 'content' (faith). The understanding that the diversity of cultural 'containers' is a manifestation of divine wisdom enables her to accept these traditions as long as their 'content' does not deviate from tawhid.[62] Thus, respecting ancestral traditions and local culture is no longer seen as a despicable act of syncretism, but has been internalized as a form of worship and an acknowledgment and gratitude for God's infinite wisdom in creating a pluralistic and colorful world.

The learning method at the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo does not stop at the transfer of knowledge, but rather at the formation of critical reasoning, and this is maximally manifested through the exploitation of rational-dialogical methods inherent in the intellectual heritage of Islam (*turats*). Instead of viewing the classical texts of faith as a collection of rigid dogmas, the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo activates the latent pedagogical potential within them, particularly in the form of questions and answers or dialectics (kalam). Therefore, the creed forum has been transformed from a one-way indoctrination forum into an "intellectual gymnasium", a place where the santriwati train their muscles of argument, empathy, and synthesis, which are vital skills for navigating a pluralistic society. Through such routine exercises, the santriwati not only memorize arguments, but they understand the logical architecture behind them. They are accustomed to listening to counterarguments, understanding them empathetically (not as attacks, but as logical positions), and responding with other structured arguments. This is the bridge that effectively connects tradition with religious moderation. The skills honed in forums on faith, such as building arguments, listening carefully, and seeking rational common ground, are exactly the same skills needed to engage in dialogue with people of other faiths or fellow Muslims who hold different views.[63] Thus, the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo proves that the values of moderation, dialogue, and respect for diversity are not concepts imported from outside, but are deeply rooted in the heart of Islamic intellectual and theological tradition itself.

CONCLUSION

Religious moderation often remains a fragile concept, limited to ethical recommendations or fiqh rules without touching the foundations of belief. At the women's pesantren Datok Sulaiman Palopo, the deepening of the classical theological kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah, transcends mere knowledge transfer, becoming a complex mechanism for intellectual-spiritual empowerment. Here, santriwati actively negotiate and reconstruct the meaning of religious moderation, transforming it from a normative concept into a critical ideology rooted in their local context. This transformation is supported by the pesantren's conducive structural foundation, where its vision, mission, and leadership provide significant space for women's agencies to operate. The consistent and diverse achievements of its santriwatis are not isolated victories but a clear pattern of

[62] Arifuddin and others, 'Observation by the Author'.
[63] Arifuddin and others, 'Observation by the Author'.

systematically fostered women excellence. A prime example of this successful empowerment model is the appointment of an alums, Dr. Hj. A. Ria Warda Makkulasse, M.Ag., as the new director. This act transformed the pesantren from simply a "producer" of empowered women into a cyclical and sustainable system of women's leadership, where a graduate returns as a living example for current santriwatis. The pedagogical foundation for this success lies within key elements of kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah. The teaching of *tanzih* (divine transcendence) instills intellectual humility by emphasizing the absolute difference between Creator and creation. The concept of *hikmah* (divine wisdom) is articulated as a theological affirmation of diversity. Furthermore, the text's rational-dialogical question-and-answer method is maximized to train critical thinking and constructive dialogue skills, fostering a deep-seated respect for diversity.

This research provides empirical confirmation of the thesis linking kalam (theology) teachings with the formation of social ethics and challenges secularistic views that often separate the realm of dogmatic beliefs from social behavior. This research reaffirms that in Islamic tradition, theological foundations are the main source for ethical structures and tolerant social interactions. These theoretical implications become significant when placed in the context of gender, and therefore the locus of the research is in women's pesantren. This research effectively enriches the discourse on the role of women in the transmission and internalization of religious knowledge, shifting the narrative from women as passive objects to active subjects who help shape and spread the discourse of moderation. The *Nyai* and *Ustadzah* appear as key intellectual agents, while the santriwati become the heirs and future sowers of the values of religious moderation. However, as a single case study, these findings have limitations in terms of generalization. In addition, by focusing the analysis on the kitab al-Jawahir al-Kalamiyah, this research risks simplifying causality. The formation of moderate attitudes is a multifactorial phenomenon that is also influenced by the study of other texts, the exemplary behavior of central figures, and the "hidden curriculum" in the pesantren ecosystem. Methodological challenges also arise in measuring the qualitative and internal concept of "transformation", and the cross-sectional nature of the research limits claims about the sustainability of moderation after the santriwati graduate. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt a comparative design that compares women's and men's pesantren, or between institutions that use similar theological texts and those that do not. An interdisciplinary approach, particularly ethnography, would be very useful in holistically capturing how all elements of pesantren culture contribute to character formation. Furthermore, longitudinal studies that track alumni could provide valuable insights into the persistence of moderate values amid complex social realities.

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