



Contesting the Discourse of Moderation: An Analysis of the MUI and Ministry of Religious Affairs' Arguments on Interfaith Greetings

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Abstrak:

Kami akan mengkaji perbedaan pendapat mengenai salam antar agama antara Kementerian Agama dan MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia). Oleh karena itu, kami membahas perdebatan ini dan mengaitkannya dengan wacana moderasi. Kami akan melakukan analisis wacana kritis dengan menggunakan teori Norman Fairclough. Kami mengkodekan data dari masing-masing situs web dua lembaga tersebut dan media berita untuk menyelidiki latar belakang sosial dan budaya, serta tiga dimensi wacana: teks, praktik diskursif, dan praktik sosial. Terakhir, saya akan melihat proses produksi dan konsumsi wacana. Hasilnya, MUI memproduksi wacana ini berdasarkan warisan ideologi mereka yang cenderung melakukan sekuritisasi terhadap pandangan-pandangan teologis yang cenderung liberal. Namun, dalam fatwa yang dikeluarkan pada tahun 2024 ini, MUI cenderung terbatas ke arah “menghargai perbedaan” saja. Hal ini berbeda dengan Kementerian Agama yang lebih cenderung merangkul pluralisme agama.

Kata Kunci: Kementerian Agama, MUI, Salam lintas agama, Toleransi, Moderasi

Abstract:

We will examine the differences of opinion regarding interfaith greetings between the (MoRA) Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). Therefore, we discuss this debate and relate it to the discourse of moderation. We will conduct a critical discourse analysis using Norman Fairclough's theory. We will code data from the websites of both institutions and news media to investigate the social and cultural background, as well as the three dimensions of discourse: text, discursive practice, and social practice. Finally, we will examine the process of discourse production and consumption. The results show that the MUI produces this discourse based on its ideological heritage, which tends to securitize theological views that are more liberal. However, in the fatwa issued in 2024, the MUI tends to limit itself to “respecting differences” alone. This differs from the Ministry of Religion, which is more inclined to embrace religious pluralism.

Keywords: The Ministry of Religious Affairs, MUI, Interfaith greetings, Tolerance, and Moderation

Introduction

On May 30, 2024, MUI issued the fatwa which prohibited the interreligious greetings. And it involves prayers of other religions which are then practiced by Muslims where it is forbidden. Just one day after the MUI conference, the Ministry of Religious Affairs issued an article on the rebuttal of the MUI's fatwa. The article, published on May 31, focused on the culture of interfaith greetings as an effort to respect and tolerance each other. This statement by the Ministry of Religious Affairs was deliberately aimed at the MUI fatwa issued one day ago. For Kamaruddin Amin, Director General of Islamic Public Guidance at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in the article above, interfaith greetings can be a means of spreading peace, and not an attempt to mix religions.¹

Not long after, other articles published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (hereinafter referred to as MoRA) about interfaith greetings were also published. There were at least four follow-up articles, after the one published on May 31, 2024, which were written to refute the MUI fatwa.² This looks like a massive discourse resistance effort from the Ministry of Religious Affairs against MUI's discourse. The discourse of religious moderation is one of the main priorities of the MoRA in the Jokowi era.³ It is not strange if the discourse that is intertwined with moderation, such as the issue of tolerance, becomes urgent to be raised. Included in this case is a discourse that is the antithesis of tolerance, namely the matter of prohibiting interfaith greetings.

This research will focus on reading the discourse of both parties (MUI and the MoRA) who are contesting in the discourse struggle. In this research, I ask a question about how to read the contestation of MUI and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in the discourse of interreligious greetings and its relation with wasatiyah or religious moderation? This discourse is important to be seen and analyzed further, especially in the era of Joko Widodo (Jokowi), the MoRA and MUI are fighting over the discourse of tolerance and radicalism.⁴

¹ Kemenag, "Kemenag: Salam Lintas Agama Praktik Baik Kerukunan Umat Perkuat Toleransi," <https://kemenag.go.id>, accessed January 8, 2025, <https://kemenag.go.id/nasional/kemenag-salam-lintas-agama-praktik-baik-kerukunan-umat-perkuat-toleransi-KtLNx>.

² Kemenag, "Salam Lintas Agama dan Harmoni Keberagaman," <https://kemenag.go.id>, accessed January 8, 2025, <https://kemenag.go.id/kolom/salam-lintas-agama-dan-harmoni-keberagaman-iTBaA>; Kemenag, "Menimbang Salam Lintas Agama," <https://balitbangdiklat.kemenag.go.id/berita/menimbang-salam-lintas-agama>, accessed January 8, 2025, <https://balitbangdiklat.kemenag.go.id/berita/menimbang-salam-lintas-agama>.

³ Syafiq Hasyim, "Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs under Joko Widodo," n.d.; Syafiq Hasyim, *Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs under Joko Widodo* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020), 13.

⁴ The massive growth of HTI and FPI, which are inclusive and establish legal sharia, even HTI wants the establishment of the khilafah. A'an Suryana, "The Intersection Between Islamic Populism and Radicalism in Indonesia: The Riise and Fall Aksi Bela Islam Movement, Studies

Unfortunately, research on moderation in general or specifically within the Ministry of Religious Affairs is not massive. Even if there are, some of these studies are rather far from the standard of writing a complete article. At least Syafiq Hasyim's report in a book published by the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute⁵ --which looks at the history of the MoRA since the colonial period and how the role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs under Jokowi -- can be a reference for data on religious moderation.

Unlike the research about the MoRA on moderation --even though religious moderation was first embodied into the agenda in Indonesia by this institution--, research about MUI and religious moderation is written more massively by various scholars. Broadly speaking, the research about MUI and its relation to religious moderation is studied --by some scholars such as Nur Ichwan⁶, Syafiq Hasyim⁷, and some others--to see how shariatization, radicalization, conservative turn, and the role of MUI.

Moreover, some of scholars also attempt to approach the religious discourse through the Critical Discourse analysis (CDA)—which this analysis is used in this article. These studies raised are more focused on the discusses that lead to intolerance. For example, Fariz Alnizar who talked a lot about MUI's fatwa in the Ahmadiyya issue which actually led to violence or Andi Irawan who also raised the issue of Ahmadiyya but from other objects such as FPI.⁸ Another discourse

in Conflict and Terrorism,” 2025, 1-17; Masdar Hilmy, *The Rise and Fall of "Transnational" Islam in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2020).

⁵ Hasyim, *Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs under Joko Widodo*, 2020.

⁶ Nur Ichwan, *Towards a Puritanical Moderate Islam: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia and the Politics of Religious Orthodox* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2013).

⁷ Syafiq Hasyim, “MUI and Religious Pluralism in Indonesia, Philosophy and Social Criticism,” *Sage Journals* 41, no. 4-5 (2015), 1-9.

⁸ Fariz Alnizar, “Pretext for Religious Violence in Indonesia: An Anthropolinguistic Analysis on Fatwas on Ahmadiyya,” *Studia Islamika* Vol. 26, no. 3 (2019); Amir Maruf Faris Alnizar, “The Language of Fatwa: Understanding Linguistic Violence in the Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwa on Ahmadiyya,” *Ahkam* Vol. 21, no. 1 (2021); Fariz Alnizar, “The Language of Exclusion: Ideology and Power in the Fatwa of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia on Ahmadiyah,” *Journal of Islamic Law* 6, no. 1 (February 20, 2025): 67-88, <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v6i1.3338>; Andi Muhammad Irawan, *Discrimination and Resistance: A Critical Analyses of the Ahmadiyya Sect Issue in Indonesia* (Australia: Dissertation in University of New England, 2016); Andi Muhammad Irawan, ““They Are Not Muslims”: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Ahmadiyya Sect Issue in Indonesia,” *Discourse & Society* 28, no. 2 (March 2017): 162-81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926516685462>; Andi Muhammad Irawan et al., “Arguing against Political and Religious Discriminations: Critical Discourse Analysis of Indonesian Ahmadiyya,” *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 19, no. 1 (September 27, 2022): 53-76, <https://doi.org/10.1515/mwjhr-2021-0024>; Andi Muhammad Irawan and Zifirdaus Adnan, “The Ahmadiyya, Blasphemy and Religious Freedom: The Institutional Discourse Analysis of Religious Discrimination in Indonesia,” *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 1 (September 27, 2021): 79-102, <https://doi.org/10.1515/mwjhr-2020-0034>.

raised by Hasan Labiqul Aqil who raised the Shia Sampang through online local news is still the same, which is more focused on the issue of intolerance.⁹

It is interesting to compare two arguments from two institutions in society. MoRA itself is part of the government so that the discourses produced may have a relationship with political discourse. As for MUI, although it is not an official state institution at this time, but its relationship with society, political movements and the state is very massive, such as halal certificate affairs, fatwas, and the 212 movement. In addition, instead of raising the issue of intolerance discourse, this research raises the discourse of tolerance and moderation formed by MUI and MoRA. We will explain this interesting discussion further in this paper. Therefore, this research is needed to see the contestation of discourse in these two institutions.

Method

To answer this research question we asked above, then we will focus on data objects: MUI's fatwa no. 2 in *Ijtima Ulama* 2024 about the law of interfaith greetings; MUI official channel; articles published by the MoRA as many as 5 in May-June 2024 period and 1 article before the debate in public space; MORA official notes on tolerance; official news from trusted news channels that conducted interviews with MUI or MORA.

In analyzing the discourse built by MUI and the MoRA, we will use Fairclough's critical discourse analysis that considers the social and cultural background aspects, as well as the three dimensions of discourse: texts, discursive practices, and social practices. Finally, we will look into the discourse production and consumption processes.¹⁰

Result and Discussion

Interfaith Greetings

Interfaith Greetings here is a way for someone to convey interfaith greetings, such as 'Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh', Good morning, Peace be upon us all, Shalom, Oom Swastiastu, Namo Buddhaya, Wei De Dong Tian, Greetings of virtue." This is a new culture adopted and popularized during the Jokowi era. Historically, during Sukarno's time, when someone started their speech or talk in front of the public, they said, "Salam Merdeka". However, Sukarno when opening the session of the People's

⁹ Hasan Labiqul Aqil, "Analisis Wacana Kritis Pemberitaan Kelompok Syiah Sampang Dalam Media Daring Lokal Madura H" (Yogyakarta, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2023).

¹⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006); Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London-New York: Longman Group, 1995), 21-70.

Consultative Assembly on June 22, 1966 opened his greeting with ‘*assalamualaikum*’. Not much different from Sukarno, Suharto sometimes did not use ‘*assalamualaikum*’, but sometimes he also did the greeting, ‘*assalamualaikum*’. Our assumption is that Suharto started using this Islamic greeting more since he became closer to Islam.

During the time of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). He added the words, “*Salam sejahtera bagi kita*” (prosperity for all of us) which is the usual Christian greeting. He then added the phrase ‘*om swastiastu*’ (roughly means “I wish good upon you”) which is a Hindu greeting. In turn, Buddhists also received attention from Susilo Bambang Yudoyono where he added ‘*namo buddhaya*’, roughly meaning ‘praise be to all Buddhas’, and ‘*salam kebajikan*’ meaning ‘greetings of virtue’. The adoption of this greeting has become controversial since the tension of the Islamist movement has grown under Jokowi. In addition, MUI, which is an organization that is not directly under the state, has also become an opposition to controversial discourses presented by the government.¹¹

On the contrary, MoRA which was under the government, at that time Jokowi, actually had a view that was contrary to MUI. It should be noted that in the context of Jokowi's time, there was an idea of religious moderation. This idea was then adopted and manifested into many forms, one of which was interfaith greetings. Therefore, for them, interfaith greetings are part of religious moderation. MoRA adopted this idea to counter the MUI's Idea.

MUI and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA): History, Ideology, and Social-Political

A. MUI

In 1972, the Islamic party failed to gain support in the general election. In fact, in media reports, Golkar, the government's newly formed party, intimidated Muslim leaders, especially in rural areas. Even so, Soeharto still wanted to get more attention from Muslims. In addition, Soeharto received a proposal from Ibrahim Hosen (Rector of Perguruan Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Tafsir) to create a collective ijtihad institution.¹² For this reason, Soeharto created the MUI through an order from the Ministry of Housing Affairs to create ulama councils in their respective regions.¹³

Then, the Ministry of Religious Affairs held preparations for a national congress of ulama councils which - already formed on a regional scale - was later

¹¹ Syafiq Hasyim, “Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) and Rising Conservative, TRaNS: Trans Regional and National Studies in Southeast Asia,” *Cambridge University Press* 8, no. 1 (2019).

¹² Nadirsyah Hosen, “Behind the Scene: Fatwas of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (1975-1998),” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15 (2004), 149.

¹³ Hasyim, *Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs under Joko Widodo*, 2020, 10.

called the MUI National Conference. Prof. Hamka was appointed as the first chairman of MUI. The reason Hamka accepted the offer was because Muslims had to cooperate with Soeharto since he was anti-communist and the establishment of MUI could improve the relationship between the government and Muslims. Hamka also chose to become Chairman of the MUI because at that time the Minister of Religious Affairs was held by the modernist Muhammadiyah. Tendencies between NU and Muhammadiyah were still felt at that time where there were differences in religious ideology between Muhammadiyah and NU. Muhammadiyah considered NU as a maker of heresy and NU considered Muhammadiyah as a modernist organization that leaned towards liberalism.¹⁴

Soeharto came to the gathering and gave a speech. One thing that needs to be highlighted from his speech is about the purpose of MUI establishment. For Soeharto, the establishment of MUI aimed to translate concepts and activities of national or local development for the people, give advice and opinion to the government concerning religious life, mediate between the government and the ulama and to discuss the problems related to the duties of the ulama¹⁵

MUI is an institution that is independent from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. When it was still in the New Order era, MUI took requests from the state. As for the post New Order era, MUI focuses more on taking and deciding fatwa. Frequently this is done every time there is a general assembly (Munas). Besides that, MUI also gives some suggestions in the form of advice (*tausiyah*), admonition (*tadzkirah*), appeal, and contribution thought.¹⁶

According to Nur Ichwan, the articulation of MUI's relationship with the government is not only through the fatwa issued during the New Order, but also the silence of MUI in several cases. For example, the Tanjung Priok massacre in which many Muslims were killed by the army in 1984. However, it should also be noted that not all fatwas support the government because the majority of fatwas are neutral, even some fatwas are in opposition to the government. For example, the fatwa that opposes the government is about celebrating Christmas where the government encourages people (Muslims or Christians) to celebrate Christmas, but MUI's fatwa says otherwise.¹⁷

Then how does MUI actually build fatwa? There are at least three categories in MUI's fatwa: first, based on the topic, such as insurance, health or others - which has been stated in the fiqh book that has been written before. The Qur'an

¹⁴ Hosen, "Behind the Scene: Fatwas of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (1975-1998)."

¹⁵ Nur Ichwan, "Ulama, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto, Islamic Law and Society," *Brill*, 2005, 48.

¹⁶ Norshahril Saat, *The State, Ulama, and Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 71.

¹⁷ Ichwan, "Ulama, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto, Islamic Law and Society."

and Sunna are not needed for this. Second, fatwas that are issued to adapt to existing legal rulings from the past to the present, such as fatwas on zakah of income, the place of *miqāt* of Indonesian Muslim pilgrims, and several others. Third, fatwas that repeat the results of books without any interpretation. This is a summary of the category of fatwa --from Nadirsyah Hosen's interview with Ibrahim Hosen--that MUI did before the Reformation period.¹⁸ During the Reformation period, Syafiq divided it into five categories, namely Islamic doctrine and deviant sects; religious practices; social and cultural issues; halal issues; and sharia economics.¹⁹

It is also worth noting the technique of composing fatwas on the fatwa sheet. During the New Order period before the 1990s, fatwas did not include the basis of the Qur'an and Sunna. Then, during the early 1990s until the early Reformation period, the fatwa was inserted with the basis of the Qur'an, without any sub-title about what was explained in the verse, such as the fatwa "the sect that rejects the Sunna and the Messenger (1994)" and the fatwa "pluralism, liberalism, and religious secularism (2005)".

Turning to the Reformation period, at this time, MUI was completely independent from the government. According to Syafiq, when Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah switched from Islamic ideology to Pancasila, MUI was the opposite where ideologically switched from Pancasila to Islam in early 1998. Even so, MUI still accepts the Pancasila state. For MUI, Islamic government development does not need to use sharia because sharia can still be used in a democratic system.²⁰ It can also be said that MUI changed its orientation from state-oriented to umma-oriented (servant of the umma).²¹

During Habibie's time, MUI was still on his side because Habibie represented him as a Muslim. This was different from the president after him, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), where MUI became the opposition of Gus Dur because of conflicting ideologies. MUI considered Gus Dur to be a liberal. From Gus Dur's point of view, MUI was too conservative.

Nur Ichwan assessed that MUI's fatwa, although not binding, has a big influence on social life and society.²² An example is MUI's fatwa on Ahmadiyya which states that (all) Ahmadiyya are heretical groups. This fatwa actually developed from the previous fatwa which stated that Ahmadiyya Qadiyan was

¹⁸ Hosen, "Behind the Scene: Fatwas of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (1975-1998)."

¹⁹ Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) and Rising Conservative, TRaNS: Trans Regional and National Studies in Southeast Asia."

²⁰ Hasyim.

²¹ Hasyim.

²² Ichwan, "Ulama, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto, Islamic Law and Society."

heretical. As a result, many repressive things happened to Ahmadiyya people, ranging from dissolution to murder because the sect was considered heretical.

We think, although MUI experienced changes in political nuances, procedures and approaches from the New Order to the Reformation, but there are similarities in ideological roots, namely inclusion of ideological differences and rigid on theological matters so that MUI - to borrow Syafiq Hasyim's term - became the police of faith for Muslims.²³ If compared with some fatwas of MUI either since the New Order or Reformation, the fatwas that developed on *mu'amalah* and *munākahāt*, although there was controversy, did not experience great turmoil, but on the issue of creed and sectarianism, MUI fatwas were more frontal.

However, unfortunately, the dynamics of MUI during the Reformation period has not been significantly discussed in the Jokowi era, let alone in the second period. Therefore, we will discuss it further and in detail in the next discussion. Broadly speaking, the political dynamics during Jokowi's era were twists and turns which would also affect the issue of MUI.

B. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA)

MORA's pioneering work dates back to the Dutch colonial period. At that time the Dutch created the Office for Hajj, marriage, and religious education. The aim was for the colonials to benefit from the Hajj and regulate the lives of Muslims. After switching to Japanese colonialism, they established two institutions for religious affairs in Indonesia: The Religious Affairs Bureau (*shumubu*) and the Religious Office. When on August 19, 1945 - after Indonesian independence - it was proposed in a parliamentary meeting to establish MoRA, the effort failed due to opposition from delegates from Maluku who feared a Christian-Muslim feud.²⁴

Efforts were made to create a Ministry of Religion. Until KH Saleh Suedy made a strong proposal to appoint a Ministry of Religion on the grounds that religious affairs at that time were too much broken down into several parts of the Ministry (such as education, justice, etc.). Sukarno accepted the proposal and Rasjidi was appointed as Indonesia's first Minister of Religious Affairs on January 3, 1946.²⁵ In that year, the Ministry of Religious Affairs had eight departments:

²³ Hasyim, "MUI and Religious Pluralism in Indonesia, Philosophy and Social Criticism."

²⁴ Kevin w. fogg, *Indonesia's Islam Political Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

²⁵ Nur Ichwan, *Official Reform of Islam, State Islam and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Contemporary Indonesia: 1996-2004* (Tilburg: In eigen beheer, 2006).

Finance, Islamic Marriage, the Secretariat, Islamic Education, Protestant, Catholic, and Personnel.²⁶

In the early period, the Ministry of Religious Affairs became a rivalry between NU and Muhammadiyah due to the issue of competition in becoming a Minister, as well as the process of recruiting personnel from the top to the bottom positions in the bureaucracy. In addition, the issue of disbursement of funds for schools for each organization was also a problem in the emergence of competition. Sukarno, as president, rotated the leadership position of the Minister of Religion between NU and Muhammadiyah.²⁷

Therefore, Soeharto changed course from selecting NU-affiliated ministers to selecting technocrats after the election of Mukti Ali. In addition, Soeharto had a preference for sending students to study Islam to modern Western and Middle Eastern universities. He was not interested in choosing traditional Islamic universities, such as al-Azhar. In fact, in the 1980s, the Ministry sent more students to study Islam to the West than to the Middle East.

However, due to political struggles and interests, Soeharto then began to involve Islamic revivalist groups to neutralize the military faction. The MoRA was not yet an Islamic body. Finally, to support the dissemination of his political orientation, Soeharto established the MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/Council of Indonesian Ulama).²⁸

When Soeharto fell, this became the transition from the New Order era to the Reformation Era. This era began with the ascension of B.J. Habibie as president who then appointed Malik Fadjar, a representative of Muhammadiyah, as Minister of Religious Affairs. According to Syafiq Hasyim, Habibie continued Soeharto's relay of not choosing a Minister of Religion from among NU and preferring Muhammadiyah members.²⁹ When Gus Dur (nicknamed Abdurrahman Wahid) became president, this preference changed, with the Minister of Religious Affairs appointed by Gus Dur coming from Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) (Tolchah Hasan) because Gus Dur himself came from NU, even becoming Chairman of the PBNU (Nahdhatul Ulama Executive Board).

Under the leadership of Tolchah Hasan, it dealt with the inter-religious conflict in Ambon. The MoRA then proposed the passing of a law on harmonious relations between religious communities in Indonesia. The hope is that religious conflicts in Indonesia can be resolved. Gus Dur himself always emphasized

²⁶ *Administration of Islam in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia, Cornell University, 1978).

²⁷ Ichwan, "Ulama, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto, Islamic Law and Society."

²⁸ Hasyim, *Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs under Joko Widodo*, 2020.

²⁹ Hasyim.

tolerance and unity in ethnic and religious diversity until he was nicknamed the 'Father of Pluralism'.³⁰

In the next era, Megawati and Susilo Bambang Yudoyono were still the same as Gus Dur in choosing a Minister of Religious Affairs affiliated with NU. The discourse of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in these two eras or before Jokowi was mostly filled with issues or work in the development of madrasah, pesantren, hajj, waqf, and translation of the Qur'an.

It was only after Jokowi ascended to the presidency that there were some significant changes, especially in the deradicalization agenda. Under Jokowi, Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, the Minister of Religious Affairs, launched the 'practicing moderate religiosity' program. Lukman distinguishes between 'religious moderation' and 'religious moderation'. Religious moderation is only practicing in one faith, such as Islam that adopts from the Qur'an (*ummatan wasata*). Religious moderation is practicing the behaviour with respect and harmony in diversity. This 'religious moderation' program became Jokowi's five-year program or RPJMN (National Medium-Term Development Plan) 2020-2024).³¹

Reading the MUI's fatwa and the MoRA Discourse in Interfaith greetings

There is something that needs to be highlighted in the MUI fatwa published in May 2024, which was produced as the result of *ijtihad* from the fatwa commission VIII of MUI in the National Conference. First, the fatwa is written under the big title "guidelines of Interfaith Relations" which contains 3 main discussions: Principles of interfaith relations, *fiqh* of interfaith greetings, and *fiqh* of tolerance in celebrating other religions' holidays. The three discussions are actually a unity that discusses "how to behave towards adherents of other religions and their relationship with the dimensions of worship and worship".

The word '*ibadah*/worship' is very important to be mentioned here because MUI's discussion is to decide the law of greeting and following other religious celebrations because there is an element of "worship" there. Interfaith greetings in the fatwa are positioned as part of prayers that are worship that should not be confused with other religious beliefs.

Second, in the issue of interfaith greetings, MUI relates it to the issue of religious moderation, even in the two main issues. We deliberately show the Indonesian language in the sentences in this fatwa to show the selection of words in Indonesian because basically this fatwa was written in Indonesian so that the analysis of word selection is important to be shown in Indonesian.

³⁰ Atas Nalar, "Presiden Gus Dur: Bapak Pluralisme," July 19, 2022, <https://museumkepresidenan.id/artikel/bapak-pluralisme/>.

³¹ Hasyim, *Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs under Joko Widodo*, 2020.

a. *Penggabungan ajaran agama, termasuk pengucapan salam dengan menyertakan salam berbagai agama, dengan alasan toleransi dan/atau moderasi beragama bukanlah makna toleransi yang dibenarkan* (“The incorporation of religious teachings, including the pronunciation of greetings by including the greetings of various religions, on the grounds of tolerance and/or religious moderation is not a justified meaning of tolerance”)

b. *Pengucapan salam dengan cara menyertakan salam berbagai agama bukan merupakan implementasi dari toleransi dan/atau moderasi beragama yang dibenarkan* (“The expression of greetings by including the greetings of various religions is not an implementation of tolerance and/or religious moderation that is justified”).³²

It is interesting to see the two sentences above where instead of MUI only discussing how the law of saying interfaith greetings, MUI actually relates it to the issue of religious moderation. This means that not saying interfaith greetings is still part of religious tolerance and moderation. However, what then becomes interesting is how the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Minister of Religious Affairs responded when they found out about this discourse. A day after the MUI fatwa was published, the Director General of Community Guidance responded by linking it to the principle of religious moderation and considered interfaith greetings as part of social practice in the nation.³³ Another response came from the Director of KSKK Madrasah MORA, who corroborated the previous article in which interfaith greetings were positioned as part of social practices that can create harmony. The article also strengthens its argument with the *maqāsid* sharia approach, where the practice of interfaith greetings is part of humanism which is the central goal of religion.³⁴ In addition to the response through the MORA web, the Minister of Religious Affairs, Yaqut, also responded to this matter. For Yaqut, interfaith greetings are part of good social practice in society. Yaqut also said, “*apakah iya misalnya saya yang Muslim menyampaikan salam agama lain keimanan saya terganggu?* (Is it true that for example, if I, a Muslim, send greetings to other religions, my faith will be disturbed?)”³⁵

It can be concluded that there is a difference in approach: MUI takes a theological approach, but MORA takes a sociological approach. However, the next question is why does the Ministry of Religious Affairs have to respond to

³² Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Konsensus Ulama Fatwa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Komisi Fatwa MUI, 2024).

³³ Kemenag, “Kemenag: Salam Lintas Agama Praktik Baik Kerukunan Umat Perkuat Toleransi.”

³⁴ Kemenag, “Menimbang Salam Lintas Agama.”

³⁵ Firda Cynthia Anggrainy, “Menag: Apakah Iya Saya Ucap Salam Agama Lain Keimanan Terganggu? Kan Tidak,” *detiknews*, accessed June 19, 2025, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-7374091/menag-apakah-ia-saya-ucap-salam-agama-lain-keimanan-terganggu-kan-tidak>.

this fatwa, when there are many other fatwas that can be responded to? We argue that MORA said this because MUI associated it with the issue of moderation and tolerance, which is MORA's main agenda during Jokowi's five years in office 2020-2024. In addition, Jokowi's agenda in those five years is to make MORA carry out the main task in the issue of maintaining religious harmony.³⁶

The Ministry of Religious Affairs' disapproval is not only based on reactive motives as an institution with ideological differences, but also political motives. Ideological and political motives can actually be traced from the beginning of Jokowi's tenure, where he was reluctant with MUI.³⁷ This is unlike when SBY was in office who was close to the traditionalist-conservative circles. Jokowi prefers traditionalist-pluralist circles such as NU, which is then manifested by choosing the Minister of Religious Affairs according to what he wants.

Syafiq also touches on this issue in his book, where he shows it is not just a matter of discourse, but political tendencies. For example, when MUI did not get funding from the state, and MUI accused the state of being anti-Islam.³⁸ This feud somewhat subsided after Jokowi appointed Maruf Amin, the former chairman of MUI, in the general election contest and won. This made the rivalry between MUI and the state, in this case including MORA, no longer as strong as before. However, the agency factor still makes MUI have ideological differences with MORA. As a result, MUI is still exclusive, although MUI has been heading towards inclusion because of the reduction of conservative ideology tendency.

This is also proven by this fatwa which emphasizes the element of respect with other religions in the selection of verses, hadith, and scholars' opinions. Titles such as “the teaching of the prohibition of seeking other religions, greetings to non-Muslims, religious differences are *sunatullah*” have good nuances. This is different from the fatwas that have theological dimension, which in anthropolinguistics have bad tendency such as when MUI once issued fatwa about the prohibition of following Ahmadiyya teachings, and Ahmadiyya followers are heretics. This tendency is not expressed again in this case. This fatwa is more persuasive, rather than agitative.

Conclusion

³⁶ The Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: MORA, 2019).

³⁷ Syafiq Hasyim, “ISEAS Perspective 2021/3 ‘Indonesia’s MUI Today: Truly Moderate or Merely Pragmatic?,’” accessed June 19, 2025, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/iseas-perspective-2020-3-indonesias-mui-today-truly-moderate-or-merely-pragmatic-by-syafiq-hasyim/>.

³⁸ Ichwan, “Ulama, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto, Islamic Law and Society.”

The main difference between MUI and MORA's discourse is that MUI bases its argument on theological approach, while MORA uses sociological approach. MUI produced this discourse based on their ideological heritage that tends to securitize theological views that have a liberal tendency and is aimed at securitizing the understanding of the unity of religious theology in society. However, in this issue of fatwa issued in 2004, MUI tends to foster more towards “respect in differences”. This is different from the Ministry of Religious Affairs which is more likely to embrace religious pluralism. For MUI and MORA (Ministry of Religious Affairs) moderation is manifested in their respective concepts because they have similarities in respecting differences. This discourse was also spearheaded with political motives.

This research contributes to how religious institutions (MORA and MUI) in Indonesia shape the discourse of moderation and tolerance. This research shows that the discourse of moderation and tolerance produced by religious institutions that have different backgrounds produce different discourses even in the issue of moderation and tolerance. Moderation and tolerance are not only interpreted as a single meaning, but have multiple meanings. The interpretation of each institution is inherent to how the ideology they embrace. These two institutions with different ideologies and backgrounds have not been touched by other researchers for comparison.

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