Social Transformation of Solo City: From the Stigma of Radicalism to a Symbol of Moderate

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**Abstract**

This study examines the social transformation of Solo City, Indonesia, from a past marked by religious radicalism to its present identity as a symbol of moderate Islam. Using a social constructivist framework and qualitative-descriptive method, the research draws on interviews and document analysis to understand how religious organizations, community leaders, and local government reshaped Solo’s image. The city’s former association with extremism stemmed from its socio-political history, including the presence of radical networks and sectarian conflicts. However, strategic symbolic actions such as the construction of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and the organization of interfaith events have shifted public perception. Key contributions from Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and local governance reframed the city’s narrative toward peace and tolerance. This study highlights the role of symbolic politics and narrative construction in transforming religious identity at the urban level, offering insights into how cities with radical pasts can be repositioned as models of religious pluralism.

**Keywords** : Social Constructivism, Urban Transformation, Narrative Politics

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia is widely recognized as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, and it holds an international reputation as a proponent of moderate, tolerant, and democratic Islam. However, the journey toward establishing this narrative of moderate Islam has not always been smooth or consistent across its regions. The city of Surakarta, more commonly known as Solo, exemplifies the complex and evolving Islamic identity shaped by interactions between radicalism and discourses of moderation.

During the late 20th century and the early 21st century, Solo frequently appeared in the media as a hub of radical movements, even being labeled a center of religious radicalism in Indonesia. Several Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), prominent figures, and networks associated with religiously motivated violence contributed to the city's stigmatization on both national and international stages (Baidhawy, 2015; Haryanto, 2015). Events such as the involvement of local actors in international terrorist networks, hardline organizations conducting sweeping actions, and interreligious conflicts further reinforced this bleak narrative (Azca et al., 2019; Kafid, 2016).

Nevertheless, in recent years, Solo's image has undergone a significant transformation. The construction of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque a symbol of diplomatic collaboration between Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates along with the growing promotion of interfaith and intercultural dialogue in public spaces, signals an intriguing process of social transformation worthy of scholarly attention (Kemenag, 2021). Local government authorities, religious organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as well as civil society groups, have played crucial roles in reconstructing the city's identity as a representation of moderate Islam in Indonesia (Saifuddin, 2019; Syafieh & Anzhaikan, 2023).

Although the discourse of moderate Islam has become part of national policy and international advocacy (Umar, 2016; Zuhdi, 2018), studies specifically focusing on how this social transformation unfolds at the city level particularly through a social constructivist lens remain limited (Ageeva, 2016; Jung, 2019; Erbas, 2021). A local-level analysis can, in fact, offer concrete insights into how ideologies, narratives, and religious symbols are negotiated within specific socio-political contexts (McKinley, 2015; Febriansyah & El-Alami, 2021).

* 1. **Objectives**

1. How does the discourse of Islamic moderation evolve in the city of Solo?
2. Who are the key actors involved in constructing the values of moderate Islam amidst the city's historical legacy of radicalism?
   1. **Rationale of the study**

***Studies on Radicalism and Moderate Islam in Indonesia***

The discourse on Islamic radicalism in Indonesia has gained significant scholarly attention, particularly since the post-Reformation era of 1998. Studies by scholars such as Baidhawy (2015) and Wildan (2016) have mapped the emergence of radical Islamic groups in the Solo Raya region, including the role of certain pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), transnational ideological networks, and their impact on national security. These studies highlight that radicalism is not merely a religious issue but is deeply rooted in social inequality, political marginalization, and identity exclusion.

Conversely, research on moderate Islam seeks to emphasize the importance of an inclusive, tolerant, and context-sensitive approach in addressing both global and local challenges. Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, during his tenure as Indonesia’s Minister of Religious Affairs (2014–2019), introduced the concept of religious moderation, which explicitly rejects all forms of extremism whether in the form of radical liberalism or exclusive fundamentalism (Aziz et al., 2024). This concept underscores the values of wasathiyah (moderation), balance, and acceptance of diversity as the foundation of a pluralistic society.

However, much of the existing literature remains normative and descriptive, focusing primarily on the promotion of moderation values without providing a detailed account of how social and political processes reshape religious identity at the local level. This is the analytical gap that the present study seeks to address.

***Social Constructivism and Religious Identity***

The theoretical framework of social constructivism offers a valuable lens through which to understand how religious identity is shaped, negotiated, and symbolized through social interaction. As emphasized by Jung (2019) and McKinley (2015), constructivism rejects essentialist views of social reality, arguing instead that meaning including religious meaning is created through discourse, practices, and dynamic social structures.

Within this framework, the identity of moderate Islam is not a fixed or inherent entity; rather, it is the result of ongoing construction by social actors such as religious leaders, government institutions, media, and local communities. This approach also allows for an exploration of how symbols, language, and representations play critical roles in generating new social realities for instance, through the construction of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque or the organization of interfaith festivals.

Erbas (2021) underscores that social construction is relational in nature, wherein the interaction between structure and agency creates opportunities for the transformation of collective identity. In the context of Solo, this approach is particularly relevant for understanding how a city once stigmatized as a hub of radicalism can gradually adopt a new image as a center of moderate Islam.

***Recent Studies on Islamic Moderation at the Local Level***

Several recent studies have begun to explore how Islamic moderation is articulated within local contexts. For instance, Syafieh and Anzhaikan (2023) analyzed the emergence of moderate practices within interfaith communities in Indonesia, while Zuhdi (2018) highlighted the challenges posed by rising conservatism in Islamic schools. However, few studies have specifically focused on the transformation of cities as the primary unit of analysis particularly those with a history of religious conflict or radicalism.

A study by Azca et al. (2019), which compared narratives of intolerance in Yogyakarta and Solo, represents an early effort to examine how local dynamics influence religious discourse. Nonetheless, this study does not sufficiently delve into the constructive and symbolic processes through which local actors actively reshape the social narrative.

***Research Gaps***

Based on the literature reviewed above, this study seeks to address three main research gaps: (1) the scarcity of studies on the transformation of urban-based religious identity following the stigmatization of radicalism; (2) the lack of integration between social constructivist approaches and studies on Islamic moderation within urban contexts; and (3) the limited scholarly attention given to the symbolic and narrative roles such as mosques, festivals, and media in collectively shaping a moderate Islamic identity. By bridging these gaps, this research not only contributes to the discourse on Islamic moderation, but also offers a new perspective on the engineered construction of religious identity through social processes.

1. **METHOD** 
   1. **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach with an explanatory method to understand the complex social processes involved in reshaping the religious identity of the city of Solo. This approach is chosen for its suitability in exploring narratives, symbols, and social actions that cannot be reduced to quantitative measures, while allowing for an in-depth analysis of the dynamics unfolding within a local context. The objective of this approach is not merely to describe the phenomenon, but to explain how and why the transformation toward Islamic moderation occurs both socially and symbolically through the lens of social constructivism.

* 1. **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework employed in this study is social constructivism, which views social reality including religious identity as the product of active construction arising from the interaction between agents and social structures. This approach emphasizes the significance of social interaction, the use of symbols, and shared narratives in shaping the collective understanding held by a community. In this context, religious identity such as moderate Islam is not regarded as a fixed or static entity, but rather as the outcome of an ongoing process of social construction through various forms of communication and interaction. According to Jung (2019) and McKinley (2015), social constructivism offers a nuanced perspective for tracing how meanings and understandings of a phenomenon evolve through narratives and symbols disseminated in the public sphere. This framework allows the researcher to analyze how the narrative of Islamic moderation is produced and circulated, who the key actors involved in the construction of this new identity are, and how specific symbols such as mosques, media, and public spaces are utilized to shape and influence public perceptions of moderate Islam.

* 1. **Data Sources**

This study utilizes two main sources of data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the construction of moderate Islamic identity in Solo. The first source is primary data, collected through in-depth interviews with key actors who play significant roles in the city’s social and religious dynamics. These interviews involve several important figures, such as representatives from Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Solo, municipal government officials particularly those from the departments of welfare and culture managers of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, interfaith and intercultural community activists, as well as caretakers of local palaces (keraton) and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). Informants were selected using the snowball sampling method, in which initial respondents recommended other relevant individuals with substantial insight into the research topic. This approach allows for a deeper and broader exploration of the roles played by these actors in shaping and disseminating the narrative of moderate Islam.

Meanwhile, the secondary data used in this study includes regional policy documents, local media archives, academic publications, historical records, and reports from relevant institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), and the Solo City Government. These documents provide broader context regarding government and institutional efforts to shape the religious and social atmosphere in Solo and offer deeper insights into the structural factors influencing the construction of moderate Islamic identity in the region. By combining both types of data, this study aims to present a more holistic understanding of the processes and dynamics involved in the formation of moderate religious identity in Solo.

* 1. **Data Collection Techniques**

The data collection techniques in this study employed three primary approaches to obtain in-depth and comprehensive information regarding moderate Islam and the social dynamics in Solo. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions, narratives, and strategies developed by social actors concerning religious moderation. This method provided the researcher with the flexibility to engage in open-ended discussions while maintaining a clear focus on key issues aligned with the research objectives. Second, participant observation was carried out during public events related to the themes of moderate Islam and interfaith interaction. Through this approach, the researcher directly engaged in these activities to observe firsthand the social dynamics, communicative practices, and symbolic expressions used to promote religious moderation. This observational method offered richer insights into how moderate Islam is practiced within broader social and cultural contexts. Third, document analysis was performed on official narratives produced by governmental and religious institutions concerning themes of moderation and tolerance. These documents included government policies, publications by religious organizations, and media archives that provided perspectives on the efforts made to construct and disseminate the discourse of moderate Islam. All interviews conducted during this research were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of the collected data, thereby providing a reliable foundation for subsequent analysis. These data collection techniques were intended to generate a clear and nuanced understanding of the construction process of moderate Islamic identity in Solo.

* 1. **Data Analysis**

The data analysis in this study was conducted using thematic analysis, which involved three main stages to identify thematic patterns within the collected data. The first stage was open coding, during which the researcher identified initial categories from interview transcripts and gathered documents. In this phase, various statements, phrases, or ideas related to key themes such as moderate Islamic narratives, social actors, and symbolic elements in the construction process were coded. These initial categories provided a foundational structure for the data and offered early insight into which themes warranted further examination.

The second stage was axial coding, aimed at linking the thematic categories identified in the previous step with specific actors, narratives, and symbols present in the data. Here, the researcher examined how categories intersected and how different elements interacted in shaping the moderate Islamic identity in Solo. This process allowed for the development of clearer connections between the social components involved in constructing moderate Islamic narratives, as well as the ways certain symbols were strategically used to influence public perception.

The final stage, selective coding, involved synthesizing a coherent narrative that illustrates the broader social construction of moderate Islam in Solo. In this phase, the researcher selected the most relevant and significant thematic categories and crafted a storyline that portrayed the social dynamics, discourses, and symbolic practices contributing to religious identity formation. The analysis was conducted inductively, allowing patterns and themes to emerge organically from the data. Nevertheless, the interpretation remained grounded in the framework of social constructivism, which guided the understanding of how social realities particularly moderate Islamic identity are constructed and given meaning by social actors in the context of Solo.

* 1. **Trustworthiness and Rigor**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative data in this study, several strategies were employed to enhance the accuracy and consistency of the findings. First, source triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from various actors and documents. This approach enabled the researcher to verify the credibility of the data by examining consistencies or discrepancies across different sources, including interviews with community leaders, government officials, and relevant official documents. Triangulation served as a means to reduce bias and strengthen the overall credibility of the analysis.

Second, member checking was conducted by presenting preliminary interpretations to selected informants for clarification. This step aimed to ensure that the researcher’s understanding of the collected data accurately reflected the perspectives of the informants. By soliciting direct feedback, the researcher was able to verify whether the interpretations aligned with the intended meanings and experiences of those involved, thus reinforcing the authenticity of the findings.

Third, researcher reflexivity was adopted as a strategy to acknowledge and account for the researcher’s positionality and potential biases throughout the interpretive process. The researcher was expected to critically reflect on how their background, experiences, and perspectives might influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This ongoing self-awareness was essential for maintaining objectivity and mitigating the influence of subjectivity that could compromise the trustworthiness of the research outcomes.

* 1. **Ethical Considerations**

This study adheres to fundamental principles of social research ethics to ensure that all research procedures are conducted ethically and with respect for participants' rights. First, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interviews or any form of data collection. Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. This ensured that their participation was based on full awareness and voluntary agreement. Second, the confidentiality of participants’ identities was maintained in accordance with their preferences. The researcher was committed to upholding anonymity and safeguarding personal information, ensuring that no individual could be directly identified in the published findings. This measure was taken to protect participants’ privacy and minimize potential risks. In addition, the study received formal approval from the institutional research ethics committee, which verified that all procedures complied with established ethical standards and underwent rigorous review. As such, the research was conducted with careful consideration for participants’ well-being, rights, and privacy, and followed professional ethical guidelines throughout the process.

1. **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION** 
   1. **Historical Narratives: Solo as a Tinderbox**

For many years, the city of Solo has been known as an area with a relatively high level of religion-based conflict, reflecting its complex and often tense social dynamics. The long history of ethnic conflict between Chinese and Javanese communities, dating back to the 18th century, has significantly shaped the city’s social interaction patterns. Although this ethnic tension has not been continuously eruptive, it has often resurfaced in the form of deep-rooted distrust and social friction among specific societal groups. In the post-reform era, Solo also emerged as one of the regions experiencing the rise and proliferation of radical religious organizations, further exacerbating the city's vulnerability to extremism. Groups such as Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), and Laskar Jihad formed in the wake of political reforms contributed to an increasingly volatile situation by promoting militant ideologies that often clashed with the city's traditions of pluralism and social harmony (Baidhawy, 2015; Kafid, 2016).

Various reports have portrayed Solo as a tinderbox, or as it is locally referred to as a 'short fuse,' a metaphor highlighting its high susceptibility to sudden outbreaks of conflict. Accumulated religious, ethnic, and political tensions over the years have intensified the city’s potential for social instability. Solo has often been described as a volatile space where social unrest can quickly escalate into violence involving fragmented groups divided by religious, ethnic, or ideological lines (Azca et al., 2019; Dahniel, 2023).

This situation has been further aggravated by the frequency of raids conducted by radical mass organizations targeting communities or individuals they perceive as deviating from their rigid interpretations of religious teachings. Moreover, the presence of Islamic boarding schools associated with global terrorist networks, such as Pondok Al-Mukmin Ngruki, has reinforced Solo’s negative image as a breeding ground for radicalization. This particular school is widely known for its ties to prominent terrorist figures like Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, who played a significant role in shaping extremist thought in Indonesia (Haryanto, 2015; Dahniel, 2023).

The involvement of several Solo residents in international terrorism networks such as connections to Noordin M. Top and Abu Bakar Ba’asyir has further entrenched the stigma that Solo is fertile ground for the growth of extremist ideologies. These cases have received extensive media coverage, intensifying the negative portrayal of the city both nationally and internationally. Media outlets play a substantial role in shaping and reinforcing this narrative, contributing to the collective perception of Solo as vulnerable to radical actions and terrorism.

As a result, the narrative of Solo as a “short fuse” has become deeply embedded in the collective consciousness at both local and global levels, forming part of the city’s identity. Local and international media have reinforced this image through frequent reporting on conflicts, violent incidents, and the presence of radical groups in the region (Azca et al., 2019; Baidhawy, 2015). Although Solo is historically rich in religious traditions and cultural heritage, public discourse often reduces its identity to that of a conflict-prone city, perpetuating a social stigma that continues to shape its image domestically and abroad.

* 1. **The Emergence of New Symbols and Narratives**

In the last decade, Solo has undergone a significant identity transformation, marked by systematic efforts from local actors, the community, and the government to change the city's image, which was once known as the epicenter of radicalism. This transformation has been more focused on cultivating a new image that highlights moderate Islam, tolerance, and diversity, driven by several factors, one of which was the construction of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in 2021.

***The Construction of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque***

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque has become a significant symbol in the transformation of Solo's identity. This mosque, a gift from the United Arab Emirates, was built with the purpose of strengthening bilateral relations between Indonesia and the UAE, but its impact extends far beyond political diplomacy. It functions as a project of religious diplomacy, presenting an image of peaceful and moderate Islam, while also making a substantial contribution to Solo's image as a friendly, inclusive, and open city that embraces diversity.

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque serves not only as a place of worship but also as a symbol of religious harmony in Solo. Additionally, the mosque reflects Solo's ability to adapt to the times while preserving its traditional roots. The mosque's construction also marks a turning point in building a new image for a city that has often been associated with radicalization. With this magnificent mosque, Solo is now recognized as a city that embodies moderate Islam, which is more tolerant and open to various social and cultural changes.

As a symbol of international relations, the mosque also carries a message about the importance of cooperation between countries in promoting peace and tolerance. By highlighting religious diplomacy, the mosque sends a powerful message to the world that Solo is committed to upholding peaceful values in all aspects of its social life, thus strengthening Indonesia’s image as a country with a tradition of moderate Islam.

***Public Spaces and Interfaith Activities***

In addition to the symbolic construction of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, another effort that strengthens the narrative of Solo's identity transformation is the utilization of public spaces, such as Gladak and the Surakarta City Hall, as centers for interfaith cultural expression. These public spaces have increasingly been used to host various events that involve many elements of society from different religious and cultural backgrounds. The organization of interfaith events in these public spaces creates an inclusive atmosphere, where various religious and cultural groups can interact, discuss, and share experiences in a mutually respectful and tolerant environment. Activities such as cultural festivals, interfaith dialogues, and joint religious celebrations have become key platforms in strengthening religious harmony in Solo.

***The Politics of Symbolic Representation***

The transformation of Solo's identity, emphasizing moderate Islam and religious harmony, is closely linked to the important role of symbolic representation politics, which aims to modify how society perceives and understands the city's identity. Symbolic representation politics refers to the ways in which certain symbols are used to shape, alter, or reconstruct public perceptions of a place or social group. In the context of Solo, symbols such as the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, public spaces open to all religions, and various interfaith events function as tools to introduce and reinforce the city's new, more moderate and inclusive identity.

According to McKinley (2015) and Jung (2019), these symbols play a crucial role in creating a social narrative that leads to the normalization of values such as peace and tolerance. By effectively utilizing these symbols, Solo has successfully shaped its image as a city that is not only safe and welcoming but also one that embraces diversity as a strength. These symbols have become powerful tools in building trust among religious communities and reinforcing the spirit of togetherness among Solo's residents, both locally and globally.

***Impact and Implications of Identity Transformation***

The transformation of Solo's identity has had a significant impact on the public's understanding of moderate Islam and interfaith harmony. By making symbols such as the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and interfaith events part of its public representation, Solo has created a social space where religious diversity is seen as something valuable and worthy of respect. This represents a crucial step in changing the public perception of Solo from a city once associated with the potential for radicalization to one with an identity as a model of diversity and tolerance.

* 1. **The Role of Local Actors in Constructing Moderation**

The social transformation in Solo did not unfold naturally but through the active involvement of key actors who played strategic roles in designing and directing these changes. Among these key actors, two major religious organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), have a central role in shaping the new narrative regarding moderate Islam and bridging the gap between religious discourse and the social realities on the ground. Both organizations are widely influential in Solo and have played a crucial balancing role in addressing the challenges of radicalization in the region (Febriansyah & El-Alami, 2021; Saifuddin, 2019).

Muhammadiyah and NU consistently introduce and disseminate messages of moderation, wasathiyah, tolerance, and contextuality through their various activities, such as education, da'wah (preaching), and community empowerment. These organizations create programs that emphasize the importance of living harmoniously in diversity, respecting differences, and upholding inclusive Islamic values. For instance, Muhammadiyah, through its educational institutions, spreads values of social justice and moderation that prioritize a balance between spiritual and social aspects in community life. On the other hand, NU, through its network of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), teaches tolerance and interfaith harmony. Their educational and da’wah activities are not limited to religious contexts but also cover broader social, political, and cultural aspects that strengthen diversity and mutual respect in society (Syafieh & Anzhaikan, 2023; Zuhdi, 2018).

In addition to the important roles of these religious organizations, the Solo city government also plays a significant part in this transformation process. The local government not only acts as a regulator and supervisor but also as a key driver in creating spaces for constructive and understanding interfaith dialogue. One important initiative the government has undertaken is supporting projects that promote inclusivity and tolerance, such as the Festival of Religious Harmony. This festival serves as a platform to celebrate religious and cultural diversity in Solo while reinforcing the narrative of interfaith harmony and cooperation. Furthermore, the city government collaborates with international institutions to promote peaceful Islam, aiming to introduce Solo as an example of a city that thrives in diversity and upholds the principles of tolerance in religious life (Kemenag, 2021; Kusnandar, 2021).

The role of local media is equally crucial in this social change process. Media plays a strategic function in shaping public opinion and constructing a more positive and inclusive narrative. Initially, media coverage often highlighted Solo as a city vulnerable to radicalization and extremism. However, over time, local media began to highlight Solo’s new face, emphasizing diversity and tolerance as the main values upheld by its people. The narrative that once focused on the threat of radicalism has shifted to a narrative that prioritizes social diversity and interfaith tolerance. This shift is reflected in various media reports that highlight positive activities promoting inclusivity, harmony, and interfaith cooperation in Solo (Azca et al., 2019; Umar, 2016).

Overall, the social transformation in Solo is the result of collaboration among various social actors, including religious organizations, the government, and the media, who collectively designed a new narrative of diversity, tolerance, and moderation as part of Solo’s new identity. This effort has not only succeeded in mitigating the potential for religiously-based conflict but has also made Solo a model for other cities in Indonesia in managing diversity and promoting values of tolerance in social life.

* 1. **The Reconstruction of the City's Identity within the Framework of Social Constructivism**

The process of identity transformation in Solo reflects the core principles of social constructivism, which emphasizes that social reality, including religious identity, is not static or determined by fixed external factors. Instead, this social reality is shaped and constructed through interactions, symbols, and narratives that evolve within society (Ageeva, 2016; Jung, 2019). In the case of Solo, the moderate Islam identity that now characterizes the city is the result of an active construction involving various social actors, religious discourse, and social structures that interact and influence each other (Syafieh & Anzhaikan, 2023; Febriansyah & El-Alami, 2021).

This identity construction process occurs dynamically through symbolic strategies, namely the use of symbols and symbolic actions that shape the public's perception of an identity. For instance, in Solo’s case, the use of religious symbols representing peaceful and moderate Islam, such as interfaith events, religious harmony festivals, or educational programs emphasizing tolerance and equality among religious communities, plays a crucial role in creating a positive image of the city. Policy engineering by the city government has also supported this change. Through policies promoting inclusivity and creating spaces for interfaith dialogue, the government has laid a solid foundation for the creation of a new, more moderate city identity. Additionally, the consolidation of social actors, including religious organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as well as local media, has been instrumental in strengthening the growing narrative of diversity and moderation in Solo.

More importantly, this identity transformation process shows that the dark history that once shaped Solo's image as a hotbed of radicalism is no longer an absolute determinant in shaping the city's identity. Although Solo has a long history filled with ethnic tensions and religious conflicts, particularly related to radical groups like Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), the city has successfully redefined its public image through the collective efforts of various social actors and policies that support the development of a new, more inclusive identity. With strong symbolic strategies, such as holding large-scale events involving all levels of society and religions, as well as policies that emphasize the importance of coexistence in diversity, Solo has demonstrated that a city's dark history does not have to determine its future. On the contrary, through social consolidation and narrative engineering, Solo has successfully changed perceptions and created a new, more positive identity.

Solo, once known as a city with high potential for religion-based conflict, now stands as a model city with tolerant, moderate Islam that is adaptive to modernity. This is not only reflected in public discourse but also in concrete actions that can be seen in the city's social and cultural life. Through educational programs that teach the importance of tolerance and harmony, as well as government policies that support diversity, Solo is now recognized as a city capable of countering the potential for radicalization while upholding values of moderation and peace. Over time, Solo has not only successfully overcome the major challenges related to radicalization but has also positioned itself as an example of a city that can adapt to changing times without losing its moderate religious roots. The moderate Islam that has become the city's identity is not just a discourse but a living reality manifested in a more peaceful and inclusive social life (Haryanto, 2015; Kafid, 2016).

1. **CONCLUSION**

This research demonstrates that the transformation of Solo's identity from a center of radicalism to a symbol of moderate Islam was not an instantaneous or entirely linear process. Instead, this change is the result of a complex constructive process involving various elements, ranging from narrative engineering to social symbols, policy interventions, and the active roles of strategic actors at the local level. Religious organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), community leaders, and local governments played a crucial role in this process. They were not only involved in religious activities but also acted as social actors guiding changes in the way society perceives religion and diversity. Through this approach, they played a strategic role in shaping the city's identity to be more moderate, tolerant, and inclusive.

Using the social constructivism approach, this study highlights that religious reality is not static or solely determined by rigid religious doctrines. Rather, this reality is shaped and negotiated within the social and cultural realm. In other words, the religious identity of a city or society is not the result of a single interpretation of religious teachings but rather a process of negotiation influenced by social interactions, historical experiences, and the political and socio-cultural dynamics at play. In this context, the moderate Islam that has developed in Solo is the result of a reinterpretation of history, social context, and the challenges of the times. This process involves a profound shift in perspective, allowing the people of Solo to redefine and reinterpret Islamic teachings according to the needs of the times and the values of diversity that have evolved.

The development of new symbols, such as the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, which represents peaceful and moderate Islam, along with the organization of interfaith events such as religious harmony festivals and interfaith dialogues, has become a powerful tool in reforming the public perception of Solo's religious identity. These symbols not only serve as physical representations but also as markers of the ongoing social and cultural changes. For example, the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, with its magnificent architecture and open concept for all religious communities, becomes a symbol of openness and tolerance. The interfaith events held in Solo also promote values of harmony and peace, in line with the principles of moderate Islam that the city aims to instill in its society. Through these symbols, the people of Solo are presented with an alternative understanding of Islam, one that is not confined to violence or extremism, but emphasizes peace, tolerance, and inclusivity.

Moreover, the inclusive cultural narrative also plays a significant role in creating a new image of Solo. The local government, along with religious organizations and community leaders, actively develops a narrative that emphasizes the values of diversity and interfaith harmony. Through this narrative, Solo is not only seen as a city that respects differences but also as a city that can integrate various religious and cultural groups into daily life. One concrete example of this is the organization of various activities involving all sections of society, both Muslim and non-Muslim, which strengthens social solidarity and enhances tolerance.

Thus, this research confirms that Solo has successfully redefined itself from a city with a strong history of radicalism to a symbol of peaceful and inclusive moderate Islam. The city demonstrates that, despite having a past filled with ethnic and religious tensions, through collective efforts and social engineering involving various social actors, Solo has moved towards a new identity that is more peaceful and open to change. This transformation shows that the identity of a city, particularly one associated with religion, can significantly change through a constructive process involving various social, cultural, and political elements. In this way, Solo can serve as an example for other cities seeking to move towards a more moderate and inclusive identity, even when faced with similar challenges related to radicalization and social conflict.

1. **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**
   1. **Academic Implications**

This research contributes significantly to the literature on Islamic moderation in Indonesia by providing new insights into the local approach and social constructivism in understanding the transformation of religious identity. The study opens up opportunities for further exploration of how religious identity is constructed not only through religious doctrines but also through symbols, narratives, and power relations at the city level. Focusing on Solo, this research also demonstrates that the construction of religious identity is heavily influenced by the local socio-cultural context and can change with the ongoing social-political dynamics. This enriches our understanding of how radicalization and moderation are not solely ideological phenomena but are also rooted in social interactions, public policies, and symbolic representations in the public sphere.

Thus, the findings of this study contribute to the broader field of social construction of religious identities, expanding the discourse on diversity and tolerance, and providing a new perspective on the relationship between the state, civil society, and the media in shaping inclusive social narratives. This research also opens up opportunities for further studies on the influence of policy and media in changing public perceptions of religion and radicalization.

* 1. **Practical Implications**

The social transformation model found in Solo can serve as a valuable reference for other regions facing similar challenges, especially in building a tolerant, inclusive, and peaceful religious narrative after periods of conflict or radicalization. This approach demonstrates the importance of the involvement of both state actors and civil society in fostering collaboration to create positive social change, leading to greater harmony in religious diversity within public spaces. In Solo, for example, the contributions of religious organizations, local government, and the media were crucial in creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and policies that support a more moderate religious narrative.

Therefore, other regions facing similar challenges can utilize the model from Solo, adapting relevant policies to their local social and cultural contexts. This approach can also be employed to foster interfaith harmony and address potential conflicts by introducing inclusive symbols and encouraging interfaith dialogue as means to strengthen peace narratives.

* 1. **Policy Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, several policy recommendations are suggested for both central and local governments in efforts to strengthen Islamic moderation and create a more inclusive public space, as follows:

1. Expand support for local-based moderation programs: The government is encouraged to introduce and expand moderation programs rooted in local wisdom and the understanding of the local community. By leveraging local social forces, such as communities, religious organizations, and community leaders, the government can create initiatives that are more relevant to the needs of the people.
2. Empower moderate Islamic organizations as strategic peacebuilding partners: Moderate religious organizations, such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), should be further empowered as strategic partners in peacebuilding efforts. The government can support these organizations to strengthen their capacity to provide moderate religious education and optimize their role in supporting inclusive policies.
3. Promote inclusive religious symbolism in public spaces: Inclusive religious symbols, such as open mosques that promote the face of peaceful and tolerant Islam, should be encouraged to be more widely published and promoted in public spaces. This could involve the construction of religious facilities that show openness to all religions, as well as supporting interfaith activities.
4. Enhance religious literacy and the culture of peace in the education system: Another important recommendation is to strengthen religious literacy and the culture of peace in the education system. The central and local governments need to design curricula that emphasize understanding of moderate religion and teach the values of harmony, tolerance, and diversity. This literacy enhancement can be carried out through teacher training and the development of educational materials that support the formation of positive character among students.

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