Developing A Conceptual Framework of Constitutive Moderation: Evidence from the Rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad in Singapore

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Abstract.. There is a lack of studies exploring the rejection of Indonesian local spirituals in Southeast Asia countries. This article investigates closing this gap. It examines the rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad, the most popular Indonesian local spiritual denied in Singapore on May 16, 2022. This article aims to develop the concept of constitutive localization through the new idea of moderation. This article used the case study research method with 5 elements, design, preparation, collecting evidence, analysis, and report. The case study reports the rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad because of Singapore's national interest in constructing a multiracial and multi-religious society. Unfortunately, there is a paradoxical rule in the Singapore Religious Harmony Act 1990 which states that the principle adopted is moderation and separation between religion and politics. This is counterproductive and double standards because Ustad Abdul Somad's refusal is a political process through a decision-making process. Therefore, this article recommends constitutive moderation as an idea and norm in Singapore and beyond (ASEAN).

Keywords: constitutive localization, constitutive moderation, Ustad Abdul Somad

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a lack of studies exploring the rejection of Indonesian local spiritual in Southeast Asia countries. This article investigates how to contribute to closing this gap. It examines the rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad, the most popular Indonesian local spiritual denied in Singapore on May 16, 2022. Ustad Abdul Somad and six of his travel companions were denied entry into Singapore's Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal from Batam. An Indonesian denied it because the Ministry of Home Affairs suggests that he has been known to preach extremist and segregationist teachings, which are unacceptable in Singapore's multiracial and multi-religious society (Baharudin, 2022). Tan (2008) argues that the Singapore government manage the crisis by using the mass media, and administrative regulations.

The rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad by the secularist Singapore state is a political decision to manage the Islamophobia crisis. However, it is indicates that the Islamophobia crisis originates from the group of elite with the authority (Mohamed Nasir et al., 2010), not from the Singaporean majority. Based on a survey by the Institute of Policy Studies and Onepeople.sg to 4,015 permanent residents. Singaporeans believe that there is a good level of racial and religious harmony in Singapore. In 2018, more than 59 percent of respondents said they could trust either more than half, or all or mostly all, Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, or those with no religion, to help if there was a national crisis. Singaporeans also appreciate cultural diversity and agree that accommodation for religious and cultural practices is needed (Institute of Policy Studies, 2020). However, religious practices can be carried out in an environment that does not invite religious tension, such as in public areas and neighborhoods.

Theoretically, Amitav Acharya (2004, 2009) uses the concept of 'constitutive localization' to constructing a security community in Southeast Asia. In empirical terms, it pushes the matter further into the depth of regional history (Ryoma, 2009). The key aspect of the localization is the agency of the norm recipients, who are not merely passive norm takers, paving the way to a wholesale cognitive transformation. Much more often, they respond proactively to normative challenges through framing (Rüland, 2014). Framing is about understanding human communication in broad terms of structure and agency (Goffman, 1974). Frames are used to emphasize and magnify a specific portion of 'perceived reality'. If the media framing has greater access to several communication channels which can influence how populist issues are raised in news media (Snow, 2009, p. 4).

Based on the concept of constitutive localization and framing, these articles reconstruct religious moderation to the nature of the constructivist paradigm which is called 'constitutive moderation". The word 'moderate' or 'moderation' in English (moderation), Arabic (*wasaṭ* or *wasaṭīyah*) by and large means to promote balance in terms of beliefs, morals, and characters both when treating others as individuals and when dealing with state institutions (Irham et al., 2021). The idea of "constitutive moderation" is addressed with the principle of *wasaṭīyah* (moderation), in terms of binary opposition, rejection, and acceptance. A few studies show that religious moderation only focuses on literacy campaigns (Anwar & Haq, 2019; Kurniawati & Maemonah, 2021), strengthening inclusion values in social institutions (Syatar, 2020), and implementing religious moderation in local traditions and culture (Haryanto, 2022). In that sense, this article aims to develop the concept of constitutive localization through the idea of moderation toward ASEAN Norms. Constitutive moderation is the main argument in this article as well as being a novelty in the Southeast Asian and Islamic Studies. Therefore, this article consists of two research questions: 1) Why Ustad Abdul Somad denied entry to Singapore? 2) How is Ustad Abdul Somad's rejection seen from constitutive localization and constitutive moderation point of view ?

2. METHODS

This article used the case study research method. The case study is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context" (Hollweck, 2016a). The limitations of this case study are the data obtained only through documents and newspapers. However, theory and theoretical propositions in doing case studies can be an immense aid in defining the appropriate research design and data to be collected (Yin, 2014, p. 77). The case study provides practical and technical discussions on elements of case study research: design, preparation, collecting evidence, analysis, and report (Hollweck, 2016b).

1. Research Design.
   1) Research questions are described at the end of the introduction to this article.
   2) Unit Analysis: Country`s law and Individual (State and Ustad Abdul Somad)
   3) The logic linking data to the preposition used pattern matching (Yin, 2014, p. 224), that several pieces of information from the same case may be related to the preposition of constitutive localization and constitutive moderation.
2. Preparation
   1) Introduction to the case study of the rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad in Singapore?
   2) Data collection procedure: name of websites to be visited, periods for the visits, identify specific documents.
   3) Outline of the case study report.
3. Collecting Evidence
   1) Documentation: Administrative documents, supporting textbooks, progress report, formal studies, newspaper reports in the mass media.
4. Analysis
   1) Analysis based on theoretical prepositions: constitutive localization and constitutive moderation.
   2) Simple time series analysis. The essential logic underlying a time series is a match between a trend of data points compared to a theoretical significant trend specified before the onset of investigation before some rival theory or different theory (Yin, 2014, p. 231).
5. Reporting.
   1) Case identities.
   2) Alternative perspectives: from constitutive localization to constitutive moderation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Why Ustad Abdul Somad rejected in Singapore?

Ustad Abdul Somad is known by the public in Indonesia with the abbreviation UAS. The term UAS was pinned by the public after the da'wah content through the Youtube channel under the name Ustad Abdul Somad was watched by Muslims in Indonesia. The name UAS is also increasingly known because it is often invited by political elites such as governors and regents in various regions.

Along with the popularity of Ustad Abdul Somad which is increasingly known to the public, his biography is also widely written and published through scientific publications, newspapers, and the most searched on Wikipedia. Therefore, this article will not describe in detail the biography of Ustad Abdul Somad.

His real full name is H. Abdul Somad Batubara, Lc., MA. Born in Silo Lama, Asahan, North Sumatra on Wednesday, 30 Jumada al-Ula 1397 Hijra, coinciding with 18 May 1977M, completed his senior high school at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Falah Air Molek Indragiri Hulu Riau in 1996. Received a scholarship from Al-Azhar University Egypt in 1998 and got his License (S1) in 2002. In 2004 received a scholarship from AMCI (Agence Marocaine Cooperation Internationale), and received a Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieure Approfondi (S2) degree at Dar al-Hadith al-Hassania Institute, an institute of Islamic education specialized in Hadith founded by King Hasan II, King of Morocco in Rabat in 1964 (Somad, 2014, p. 246).

Ustad Abdul Somad is a lecturer at Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University (UIN Suska) since 2008 until now. Ustad Abdul Somad is also listed in several organizations such as a Member of the Commission for the Study of the Indonesian Ulema Council in Riau Province. Member of the Fatwa Commission of the Indonesian Ulema Council of Pekanbaru Municipality for the period 2012 – 2017. Member of the Commission for the Development of the Amil Zakat Agency of Riau Province for the period 2009 – 2013 (Somad, 2014).

In Indonesia, Ustad Abdul Somad (UAS) is the most popular contemporary local spiritual on social media, a version of the online newspaper tempo.co (Group Tempo) published on 19 June 2018. In that year, UAS was the most popular on the youtube channel, followed by Ustad Khalid Basalamah, Ustad Hanan Atakki, and Ustad Adi Hidayat (Triantoro, 2019, p. 1). UAS becomes a religious celebrity, which also constructs the audience as a new idea that forms the norm of piety for the audience. Ustad Abdul Somad constructing new perceptions of Islamic life in Indonesia and beyond.

In Indonesia and the Malay world, newspapers and Youtube records that Ustad Abdul Somad has visited Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. Several cities in Malaysia that UAS visited include Kuala Lumpur (KL), Melaka, Selangor, and Putra Jaya, and Bandar Seri Begawan in Brunei. This proves that the mobility of Ustad Abdul Somad's da'wah is affirmed by Muslims in the Malay world to spread the ideas of contemporary Islamic thought. Thus, Ustad Abdul Somad has been legitimized by the government in Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam.

In contrast to what happened in Malaysia and Brunei, Ustadz Abdul Somad was rejected in Singapore. The news of his rejection was first reported by the *Strait Times*, the oldest print and online newspaper in Singapore. News of Ustad Abdul Somad's rejection was published online on the morning of Singapore time, 17 May 2022, by the *Straits Times* Assistant News Editor Hariz Bahruddin.

With the popularity of UAS in Indonesia and the Malay world, as well as the influence of the modern media system, the idea of rejecting UAS spread quickly, which was reported by other media groups such as Channel News Asia, Voice of Indonesia, Republika, Tempo Group, Media Indonesia, Kompas Group, and others national media. On the first day of reporting on UAS, only 2 media were published which were based in Singapore, the Strait Times, and Channel News Asia. The next day, news of the UAS rejection spread quickly in Indonesia. Media coverage, especially media from Indonesia, shows how important Ustad Abdul Somad is in the context of power and relations, as an individual and agents of diplomacy.
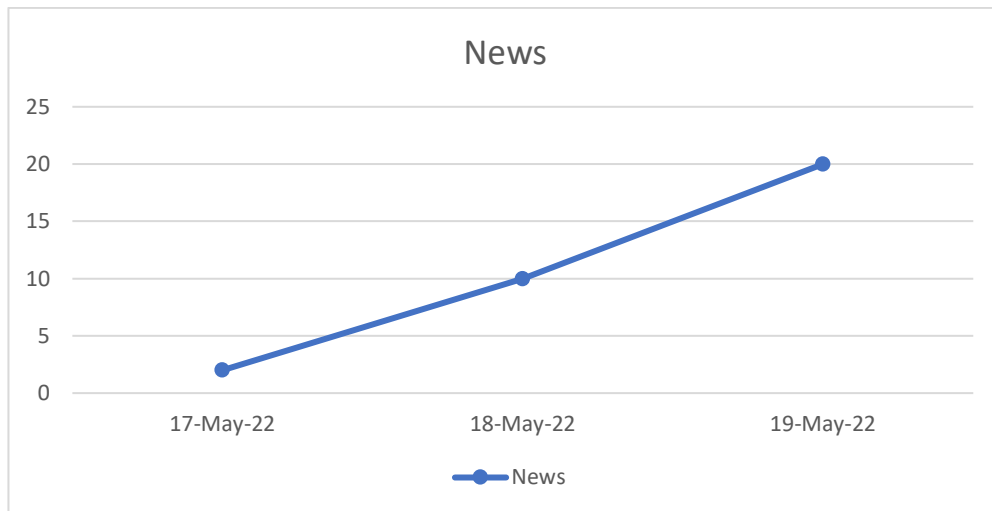
Fig. 1. Time series of Ustad Abdul reported in newspapers.

The importance of Ustad Abdul Somad's position as a regional public figure can be agreed upon. This argument is based on how the Singapore government, as a social structure and institution, rejects the idea of UAS in Singapore. This refusal of course has reasons, which in Morgenthau's view of political realism is called the national interest (Manan, 2017). Singapore's national interest can be seen from interviews in the strait times through the Ministry of Home Affairs, which constitutive localization.

> *"Somad has been known to preach extremist and segregationist teachings, which are unacceptable in Singapore's multiracial and multi-religious society."*(Baharudin, 2022)

Based on the interview evidence, Singapore's national interest in constructing the UAS rejection is Singapore as a multiracial and multi-religious society. Stephen Ormann (2009) argues Singaporeans have developed their unique conceptions of the city-state's national identity, which sometimes contradict the official nation-building efforts and thus constitute a subtle form of opposition. However, this needs to be explored more deeply whether it is sourced from domestic constitutional norms.

Singapore's sources of constitutional norms was enacted in 1990 to provide for powers to maintain religious harmony and updated on 7 October 2019 to help MHA respond more effectively to incidents of religious disharmony, and strengthen our safeguards against foreign influence that threaten our religious harmony (Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act 1990, 1990). Singapore had a commitment to pluralism requires a regulated space where law provides a critical expressive role in setting out the boundaries of appropriate conduct as well as in modifying social norms (Neo, 2020). Surprisingly, there are two main principles that are paradoxical as social norms to Abdul Somad's rejection in Singapore.

1) Followers of different religions should exercise moderation and tolerance towards each other and their beliefs, and not instigate religious enmity or hatred.
2) Religion and politics should be kept separate.

These two principles are the constitutional foundation that guides government decision-making. If you refer to this principle, the Singapore government should not prohibit the arrival of Ustad Abdul Somad in Singapore. This prohibition shows that there is an inconsistency between the constitutional basis and the practice of policy making. Despite there being explanatory rules that contain foreign influence, especially donations to organizations. However, Ustad Abdul Somad's motive was not about donations to religious organizations affiliated with radical and extremist organizations.

The Singapore government's argument against Ustad Abdul Somad's rejection because of his controversial da'wah that occurred in Indonesia, not in Malaysia, Brunei, and beyond. Ustad Abdul Somad was recorded as having been reported by non-Islamic organizations for alleged blasphemy. The allegation of blasphemy was published in the Tempo newspaper in August 2019, reporting after a video uploaded on YouTube commenting on Christians. Ustad Abdul Somad (UAS) was reported to the Police in Jakarta by the Bangso Batak Horas Community (Firmansyah, 2019).

UAS comments that offend Christians are a symbol of Christianity which is a pagan symbol. Therefore, UAS was reported by the Brigade MEO in Kupang and the Indonesian Christian Mahsiswa Movement in Jakarta. This shows how the era of digital disruption can make information quickly and affect social movements.

Another controversy occurred on October 2017, Ustad Abdul Somad believes that all consumers of a coffee shop in the United States, Starbucks, will go to hell because the owner is a supporter of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) movement (Febriyan, 2019). Nevertheless, his da'wah on the Christian religious symbol was perhaps the biggest problem Abdul Somad had ever faced. Because he was reported by three institutions at once to the police, but this issue has been clarified and resolved. Mc Donald (1964) suggests that religious language is symbolic, and the state provides space for all religions for the freedom to express religious symbols.

However, what happened in Indonesia should not be used as an indicator for the rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad in Singapore. UAS has never brought controversial propaganda related to religious contestations in Malaysia, Brunei, or outside Indonesia. In that sense, Ustad Abdul Somad's rejection indicated that there was no urgency between the Religious Harmony Act 1990 and the Ministry of Home Singapore's comments that Ustad Abdul Somad was labeled an Islamic extremist. Then the norms of Religious Harmony Act 1990 point two which contains the separation of religion and politics, are normative. Due to the fact, Ustad Abdul Somad's rejection is a political process through an organization's decision-making process. As Mahatma Gandhi said that politics and religion are one unit, and it is impossible to have religion without politics or politics without religion(Lal, 2013).

In that sense, I argue that Singapore needs a reconstruction of ideas and norms in the decision-making process regarding people-to-people relations, which is called constitutive moderation. Developed from Amitav Acharya's concept of constitutive localization.

3.2 Proposed and Developing of Constitutive Localization to Constitutive Moderation

In this section, I discuss the case of Ustad Abdul Somad's (UAS) rejection in Singapore to contribute to the literature norms in two ways. The first, by proposed concept of constitutive localization for investigating norm diffusion on Religious Harmony Act 1990, and then develops constitutive localization to constitutive moderation as a regional norm in Southeast Asia, specifically in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Constitutive localization is defined by Amitav Acharya(2009) to denote processes of re-interpreting and re-representing the external policy norms to make them congruent with existing local beliefs and practices. By conceptualizing ASEAN as such a community, Acharya argues that it has been the conscious construction of a regional collective identity that has mainly been responsible for the absence of war among the ASEAN member states (Ryoma, 2009, p. 3). However, in this context, the rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad is not war, but the point is how to make collective identity from the perceived need to ameliorate the conflict-prone intramural relations to counter challenges to domestic regime stability and insecurity from without.

Before discussing external norms, we need to look at the local text about the principles contained in the 1990 Religious Act, which explains that 1) Followers of different religions should exercise moderation and tolerance towards each other and their beliefs, and not instigate religious enmity or hatred, 2) Religion and politics should be kept separate, (Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act 1990, 1990). There are two important things in the interpretation of the two principal norms, first, the practice of moderation from religious followers, but whether this has been carried out by the government in the context of decision-making as in the case of Ustad Abdul Somad. Second, religion and politics are separated. This is a paradoxical norm because religion is a political process in the context of good governance.

Now let's do a reinterpretation of the paradoxical norm, by using the idea of religious moderation, which was initiated by the former Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia Lukman Hakim Syaiffudin. Religious Moderation is the content of values and practices that are most suitable for realizing the various benefits of the international community (Tim Penyusun Kemenag, 2019). A moderate, fair, and balanced mental attitude is the key to managing the diversity that exists in Southeast Asia. In solemnly building the nation and state, every ASEAN citizen has balanced rights and obligations to develop a peaceful and reassuring life together. If this can be realized, then every citizen can become a full ASEAN human being, as well as a human being who practices religion.

Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2015) stated that moderate consists of two keywords, namely balanced and fair. Moderate does not mean that we compromise with the main principles (*ushuliyah*) in religious teachings that are believed to be worshiped for the sake of being tolerant but being confident in the poles of resistance and appreciation to realize social harmony.

Efforts to realize social harmony that are not apparent are also included in the teachings of *wasathiyah* as one of the characteristics and essence of religious teachings. The word *wasathiyah* has, at least, three meanings, namely: the first means middle; the second means fair; and the third means the best (Siregar, 2020). These three meanings do not mean that they stand alone or are not related to each other, because the attitude of being in the middle often reflects a fair attitude and the best choice (Kosasih, 2019).

Based on religious moderation, I argue that the Religious Harmony Act 1990 needs to be revised. There is a discrepancy between the text and the context of its implementation, as in the case of Ustad Abdul Somad. Local norms are calm in moderation, and the separation between religion and politics is something that needs to be reviewed. The practice of religion and politics should be one unit that applies the moderate principle. In other words, points 1 and 2 in the Religious Harmony Act 1990 are counterproductive, and paradoxical, and the state can apply double standards to foreigners.

By reinterpreting through what I call 'constitutive moderation', Singapore will become a fully moderate country and become a Muslim-friendly country in Southeast Asia.

Singapore is visited not only by tourists and foreigners for leisure and business, but also by Islamic scholars, and scholars of other religions. Because the data show that. Singapore may not be a Muslim-friendly destination. Based on the publication of the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2021, Singapore is not in the top 5 Muslim-friendly tourist destinations. The GMTI index is assessed based on access, communication, environment, and services for tourists or foreigners. Singapore's ranking in GMTI 2021 is 6th with 69 points (GMTI, 2021, p. 20) . The top 5 Muslim-friendly destinations are 1. Malaysia (80), 2. Turkey (77), 3. Saudi Arabia (76), 4. Indonesia (73), and 5. United Arab Emirates (72).

I suggest constitutive moderation as "teachers", whose normative entrepreneurship opens the way for the displacement of the Religious Harmony Act 1990, and beyond (regional). The question is whether norms about social harmony such as religion are moderate in Southeast Asia. What we know as civil society is the slogan of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), "one vision, one identity, one community,"

The "one identity" the ASEAN seeks to develop is founded on an "awareness of the diverse culture and heritage of the region." While this seems like a paradoxical foundation for identity—an awareness of difference—in a region like Southeast Asia, with its many divergences in politics, culture, and religion, and in the absence of a pre-established identity on which to anchor itself, this undetermined and indeterminate approach to identity-formation is fitting for the region, since it is accommodative of plurality (Jereza, 2016, p. 89). Awareness of religious diversity as an ASEAN identity needs to be studied by changing the word into awareness of religious moderation. Religion can be diverse, but can it be practiced in moderation by the government, society, and media? This is what I call constitutive moderation of regional identity in ASEAN.

Therefore, in the case of Ustad Abdul Somad's refusal in the view of constitutive moderation, first, the need for competent authorities in Singapore to reinterpret the principles in the 1990 Religious Harmony Act. Second, if this reinterpretation can be constructed in local norms in Singapore and be able to lobby (reconstruction) against ASEAN institutions, such as religious diversity changed into religious moderation. In that way, the ASEAN community will be a moderate society.

4.   CONCLUSION

This article reveals the reasons for the rejection of Ustaz Abdul Somad by the Ministry of Home Affairs in Singapore. Ustad Abdul Somad's refusal did not come from the people of Singapore but came from the Government for reasons of national interest. Singapore's national interest is related to the national identity of a multi-ethnic and multi-racial country.

However, this national identity is paradoxical to the principles of the Religious Harmony Act 1990. Religion and politics are separated, but in practice, the rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad is a political decision. Ustad Abdul Somad in preaching in Malaysia and Brunei was accepted and

legitimized by the government. This shows that the Singapore government and administrative regulations are not friendly to Ustad Abdul Somad as a foreigner. The Singapore government needs to reinterpret the Religious Harmony Act 1990, with what I called constitutive moderation develops from the concept of constitutive localization (Acharya, 2009).

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