

RAKUT SITELU AS A BRAND OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION MEDIA IN NORTH SUMATRA

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research is to analyze the existing Rakut Sitelu system in the social life of the Karo ethnic group in North Sumatra and to synthesize the values of Rakut Sitelu as a means of religious moderation in North Sumatra. The method used in this research is ethnography and reference tracing, involving data collection from interviews, books, journals, and manuscripts for further analysis. The results of this research conclude that Rakut Sitelu has deep roots in the Karo ethnic kinship, where the three bonds of kalimbubu, senina, and anak beru coexist in daily activities with an attitude of mutual respect, assistance, and cooperation based on their respective structures, without distinguishing religion. Rakut Sitelu also exhibits manifestations of religious moderation values, such as high tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of their own culture. This can serve as a reference for implementing moderate values in North Sumatra, especially for the Karo ethnic group.*
Keyword: *Rakut Sitelu; Brand Media; Cultural Value; Religious Moderation; North Sumatra*

Introduction

In the context of religion, moderation is understood as the middle path,¹ a balanced approach to practicing religious principles. This concept is seen as essential in understanding the essence of religious practice, especially in a plural and multicultural society, where tolerance is considered crucial.² For Indonesia, diversity is perceived as destiny, bestowed by God, not to be questioned but accepted as a given (taken for granted).

The Arabic term for moderate, "*wasathiyah*," is inseparable from the keywords balanced and just (*adl*).³ Balance and justice are the core principles of religious moderation.⁴ Religious adherents should avoid extreme or radical views, instead

¹Craig Larkin and Mansour Nasasra, "The 'Inclusion-Moderation' Illusion: Re-Framing the Islamic Movement inside Israel," *Democratization* 28, no. 4 (2021): 742-61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1865315>.

²David Speed and Ken Fowler, "One Size Doesn't Fit All: Religious/Spiritual Identities Moderate Salutory Effects of Religion," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 24, no. 2 (2021): 111-27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2020.1863934>.

³Maimun dan Mohammad Kosim, *MODERASI ISLAM DI INDONESIA* (Yogyakarta: LKis, 2019).

⁴Esen Kirdi, "Similar Contexts, Different Behaviour: Explaining the Non-Linear Moderation and Immoderation of Islamic Political Parties in Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 20, no. 4 (2019): 467-83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2019.1698421>.

striving to understand and appreciate both sides of an issue, fostering harmonious and happy relations among different religious communities.⁵

Religious moderation does not imply compromising the quality of religious principles, but rather enhancing the quality of tolerance towards followers of other religions.⁶ In other words, moderation involves a simple commitment to maintain the essence of religious teachings while avoiding excessive love or disrespect that could lead to insulting or engaging in violent acts against adherents of other religions.

Based on the above definition, religious moderation requires acceptance, openness, and cooperation. To promote religious moderation, it is essential to understand the different groups involved. Therefore, individuals related to religion, ethnicity, culture, and politics should be ready to support each other, learn from one another, uplift one another, and educate one another.

Religious moderation is an important solution amidst the problems of intolerance and national disintegration. Currently, issues of intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism still persist massively in various regions of Indonesia. The situation in North Sumatra Province is also not exempt from these challenges. Based on research conducted by the SETARA Institute from 2015 to 2020,⁷ cities in North Sumatra were included in the study called "Tolerance City Index." The findings showed that from 2015 to 2018, cities like Pematang Siantar, Sibolga, Binjai, and Tebing Tinggi were often categorized among the top 10 tolerant cities in Indonesia.⁸ However, the results differed in the 2020 research, where not a single city from North Sumatra was categorized as tolerant. Instead, in the years 2018 to 2020, both Medan and Tanjung Balai were listed among the top 10 intolerant cities in Indonesia. This situation poses a distinct problem in North Sumatra regarding the issue of intolerance, which has not been effectively addressed.

Efforts to promote religious moderation have been advocated in North Sumatra, with the Ministry of Religious Affairs issuing indicators related to religious moderation, including love for the homeland, high tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture.⁹ However, these values are still too general and

⁵Imam Subchi et al., "Religious Moderation in Indonesian Muslims," *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050451>.

⁶Agus Akhmadi, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Keragaman Indonesia Religious Moderation in Indonesia ' S Diversity," *Jurnal Diklat Keagamaan* 13, no. 2 (2019): 45-55.

⁷SETARA Institute, "Ringkasan Eksekutif IKT 2021," <https://Setara-Institute.Org>, 2021, 47.

⁸SETARA Institute, "Ringkasan Eksekutif Indeks Kota Toleran Tahun 2018," 2019, 5-6, <http://setara-institute.org/indeks-kota-toleran-tahun-2018/>.

⁹Ni Wayan Apriani and Ni Komang Aryani, *Moderasi Beragama, Kalangwan Jurnal Pendidikan Agama, Bahasa Dan Sastra*, vol. 12, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.25078/kalangwan.v12i1.737>.

abstract to be applied in diverse regions with different cultural patterns.¹⁰ Therefore, a local formulation is needed to implement religious moderation effectively.¹¹

The researcher chose to analyze *Rakut Sitelu* among the Karo ethnic group, who inhabit North Sumatra. The Karo people, distributed around the Karo Regency, Deli Serdang, and even Medan, have always coexisted harmoniously regardless of religious differences.¹² Their cultural values emphasize tolerance, especially in daily life and rituals. *Rakut Sitelu*, as a threefold bond, helps preserve the Karo cultural values without discriminating based on religion. This becomes particularly interesting when observing how the Karo ethnic group lives in tolerance despite differing beliefs, even within nuclear families.

Rakut Sitelu exists within the cultural space of the Karo people, understood and practiced in their daily lives. Its representation is noteworthy, considering its role in reducing religious tensions within the Karo ethnic group. This situation becomes even more compelling when considering how the Karo way of life can be applied more broadly to promote religious tolerance, especially in North Sumatra.

In particular, the recognition of *Dalihan Natolu* as a local wisdom for religious moderation in North Sumatra is significant.¹³ However, it is mainly observed in marriage rituals and less evident in the daily lives of the Toba ethnic group.¹⁴ By comparison, *Rakut Sitelu* has the potential to become a more comprehensive synthesis.

The urgency of this research lies in the need for a more adaptive model for implementing religious moderation, rooted in local pride and cultural entities. Thus, the *Rakut Sitelu* model of religious moderation offers a fresh perspective, providing a valuable local wisdom that can be applied to promote religious moderation in North Sumatra. Based on this view, the researcher perceives it as a potential brand of media to promote religious moderation.

¹⁰N.M Al-Mujtahid, M Alfikri, and S.T Sumanti, "Penguatan Harmoni Sosial Melalui Moderasi Beragama Dalam Surah Al-Kafirun Perspektif Komunikasi Pembangunan," *Al-Kalam* 5, no. 2 (2022): 531-44, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i01.2042>.

¹¹Akhmad Fajron and Dr. H. Naf'an Tarihoran M. Hum, "Moderasi Beragama (Perspektif Quraish Shihab Dan Syeikh Nawawi Al-Batani: Kajian Analisis Ayat Tentang Wasatiyyah Di Wilayah Banten)," 2020, [http://repository.uinbanten.ac.id/5990/1/Scan Buku Dr. Naf'an Moderasi Beragama.pdf](http://repository.uinbanten.ac.id/5990/1/Scan%20Buku%20Dr.%20Naf%27an%20Moderasi%20Beragama.pdf).

¹²Roy Fachraby Ginting et al., *Bunga Rampai Kisah Perjalanan Guru Pa Timpus Sembiring Pelawi Pendiri Kota Medan Dan Eksistensi Masyarakat Karo Di Kota Medan*, <https://Medium.Com/>, 2022, <https://medium.com/@arifwicaksanaa/pengertian-use-case-a7e576e1b6bf>.

¹³Sarjani Tarigan, *Dinamika Orang Karo, Budaya Dan Modernisme* (Medan: Ttp, 2008).

¹⁴Martin L Peranginangin, *Orang Karo Diantara Orang Batak : Catatan-Catatan Penting Tentang Eksistensi Masyarakat Karo* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sora Mido, 2004).

Method

The method used by the researcher in this study is ethnographic research. The ethnographic research model emphasizes efforts to explore how different societies organize their cultures in their minds and then apply them in their lives. The most important way to understand a culture is by studying its language. Ethnographic research, contrary to the explanation above, is a work that describes the culture of a group of people. It means understanding life from the perspective of the local community. In other words, the researcher aims to unravel the meaning of *Rakut Sitelu* within the Karo cultural space, and then analyze its relevance and application within the Karo ethnic community.¹⁵

This research was conducted in Kuala Dekah Village, Biru-biru Sub-district, Deli Serdang Regency. The specific choice of this location is due to its strong rooted kinship system and the harmonious relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in the village. The main informants in this study include customary leaders and religious figures of the Karo ethnic community in Kuala Dekah Village. The categorization of informants is based on their understanding of Karo customs, especially regarding *Rakut Sitelu* and its application in daily life. Cultural and religious perspectives are elaborated upon to synthesize a brand of religious moderation media from *Rakut Sitelu*.

Furthermore, in an effort to test the validity of the data, the researcher also conducted reference tracing.¹⁶ This aspect was used to specify expert views and research on religious moderation and *Rakut Sitelu* as a cultural value. The sources used by the researcher include journals, books, both national and international, published within the last five years,¹⁷ and some core sources related to *Rakut Sitelu* published more than five years ago that are still relevant to the study's theme. After collecting the reference sources, the researcher conducted qualitative analysis of the available sources and derived an analysis used to examine a model that can be adopted as an alternative media for religious moderation in North Sumatra, with reference to the cultural values present in *Rakut Sitelu*.

Result and Discussion

Rakut Sitelu in the Cultural Space of the Karo Ethnicity

The Karo ethnic group is part of the Indonesian nation and is known for its rich cultural diversity.¹⁸ One aspect of this cultural richness is related to *Rakut Sitelu*. Based on the patterns of kinship established by the Karo ethnic group, there are at

¹⁵James Spredley, *Metode Etnografi* (Sleman: Tiara Wacana, 2007).

¹⁶Syharuddin et al., "Penelusuran Referensi Berbasis Digital Sebagai Peningkatan" 3 (2020): 151-55.

¹⁷Heriyanto Heriyanto, "Memahami Bagaimana Mahasiswa Melakukan Penelusuran Informasi Melalui Academic Databases," *Anuva* 2, no. 4 (2018): 369, <https://doi.org/10.14710/anuva.2.4.369-376>.

¹⁸Brahma Putro, *Sejarah Karo Dari Zaman Ke Zaman* (Medan: Ulih Saber, 1981).

least two patterns that form their kinship. These patterns arise from direct lineage and relationships through marriage. In this context, marriage refers to the union between family members (*jabu*) and individuals outside the family. These elements form *kade-kade*, which represents a strong bond within the Karo ethnic kinship space.¹⁹

Literally, *Rakut Sitelu* means "the three bonds" consisting of *kalimbubu*, *senina*, and *anak beru*. This concept is different from the everyday social interactions of the Karo ethnic group.²⁰ Another distinct aspect of the *Rakut Sitelu* system is its presence in the public space, transcending religious boundaries. This is evident in the understanding that the three bonds are stronger than anything else. This condition enables all religions to coexist side by side and respect one another within the cultural context.

Karo ethnicity's kinship is deeply ingrained in their customary cosmology. The Karo people cannot be separated from their binding status, where each individual remains within the *adat* (customary) circle.²¹ This is intriguing as these unwritten rules continue to be followed through daily habits, carried out with full awareness. *Adat* (customary) practices are used throughout the day and during various events.

One distinctive feature of the Karo ethnicity is their pride in their *marga* or *beru* (patrilineal lineage). The Karo have five major *marga* known as "*Merga Si Lima*." These five major *marga* form the foundation of their kinship.²² *Merga Si Lima*, as mentioned above, comprises *ikat nan tiga* (*kalimbubu*, *sembuyak*, and *anak beru*), and eight kinship relationships (*sembuyak*, *senina sipemerren*, *anak beru*, *anak beru menteri*, *kalimbubu*, and *puang kalimbubu*).²³ The close connection between the *marga*, the three bonds, and the eight kinship relationships means that discussions in gatherings are always related to *marga*, *beru*, and *nasal keluarga* (family lineage). This allows one to ascertain the position of *Rakut Sitelu* and *Sulang Simaluh*, making the *tertur* (way of speaking) clear.

According to the Karo philosophy, which states, "*adi la beluh ertutur, labo siat ku jape pe*" (if one cannot speak well, they won't have a place to go),²⁴ speaking ability is crucial in the Karo society, as it upholds the value of kinship. This reinforces the practice of the *Rakut Sitelu* system, as individuals are continuously connected and

¹⁹Neumann, *Sejarah Batak Karo: Sebuah Sumbanga* (Jakarta: Bhatara, 1972).

²⁰Peranginangin, *Orang Karo Diantara Orang Batak: Catatan-Catatan Penting Tentang Eksistensi Masyarakat Karo*.

²¹Tarigan, *Dinamika Orang Karo, Budaya Dan Modernisme*.

²²Tarigan.

²³Sri Ulina Beru Ginting & Efendi Barus, *Bentuk Kesantunan Dalam Tindak Tutur Perkawinan Adat Karo* (Tangerang: Mahara Publishing, 2017).

²⁴Tridah Bangun, *Penelitian Dan Pencatatan Adat Istiadat Karo* (Jakarta: Yayasan Merga Silima, 2008).

uphold this system. When the communication is clear, the level of the three bonds (*Rakut Sitelu*) becomes apparent.

The concept of *Rakut Sitelu* emphasizes that as long as there is a direct or indirect marriage between Karo individuals and individuals from other ethnicities, no one can detach themselves from the kinship system. Furthermore, the Karo people tend to seek the same kinship bonds through close social interactions with other individuals or community groups, using the approach of marga or family members' marriages. Based on this common thread, the nearest marga that is considered appropriate for an individual is identified. It is evident that every Karo individual, wherever they may be, has kinship or marriage ties, as this represents "kade-kade" (blood ties).

After understanding kinship and family ties, the next essential aspect is the three bonds consisting of *senina*, *kalibubu*, and *anak beru*. *Senina* represents the origin unit of ego's patrilineal self. *Anak beru* is the origin unit of individuals who marry the ego's female family members, while *kalimbubu* is the origin unit of individuals who give their female family members to the ego's group as wives. These three categories form one entity, manifested as the complete three bonds or *Rakut Sitelu*, also known as *daliken sitelu* (the three hearths). This unity is a prerequisite for peacefully coexisting with fellow human beings. Kinship bonds encompass not only individuals but also groups classified based on kinship. In this way, all Karo people are connected within the kinship system.

The main point to convey is that, in Karo society, *Rakut Sitelu* is the driving force. Each bond has different tasks and roles, but they work together. In customary events, the presence of *sembuyak* or *senia* is the primary factor for the event's success.²⁵ *Kalimbubu* plays the role of guard, advisor, and guide to ensure the smooth running and success of the event. Although *kalimbubu* does not have an active role, their presence is essential to maintain the event's reputation. On the other hand, *anak beru* serves as the direct organizer of the event. *Anak beru* is a field worker in a customary event.

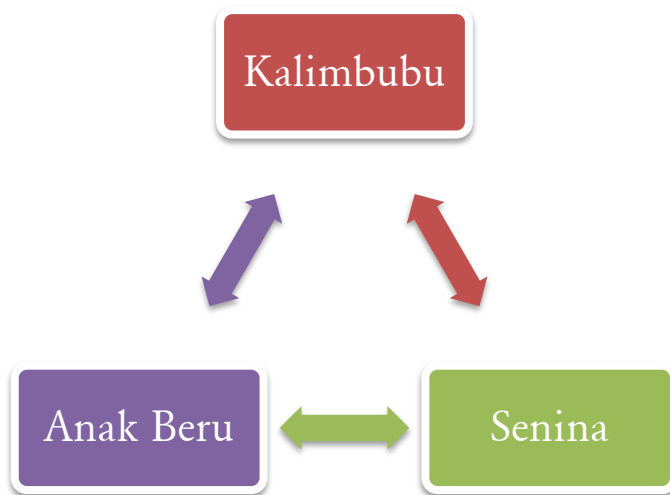
Interestingly, the role of *Anak Beru* or *Kalimbubu* is not a permanent position held by individuals in the Karo ethnic group forever.²⁶ Someone who holds the status of *Anak Beru* in a particular ceremony may act as *Kalimbubu* at another time. Both *Kalimbubu* and *Anak Beru* belong to their respective clans (*Sembuyak* or *Senia*). Therefore, each person experiences a specific role. To ensure that the mechanism of the *Rakut Sitelu* system works well, understanding of each designation is essential and must become deeply ingrained values. This condition is in line with the Karo philosophy: *mehamat erkalimbubu, metenget ersembuyak/ersenina, metami man*

²⁵Peranginangin, *Orang Karo Diantara Orang Batak: Catatan-Catatan Penting Tentang Eksistensi Masyarakat Karo*.

²⁶Bangun, *Penelitian Dan Pencatatan Adat Istiadat Karo*.

Anak beru.²⁷ These expressions, though slightly different, convey the meaning of respect and courtesy towards *Kalimbubu*, concern for *Senia*, and appreciation for *Anak Beru*.

Mehamat means showing respect, courtesy, both in words and actions. This concept is a manner that Anak Beru must adopt towards their *Kalimbubu*, as *Kalimbubu* is seen as *Dibata Ni idab* (the visible God), who will bestow blessings upon *Anak Beru*. *Medes* means having the same feelings, not distinguishing between one another, being equal, and mutually respecting and honoring one another. This concept is used among fellow members of the *Senina* group. *Metami* means showing appreciation for others, praising their work and efforts. This concept is practiced in the relationship between *Kalimbubu* and *Anak Beru*.



Picture 1. Rakut Sitelu in Karo's Culture

This condition becomes interesting when we observe the cultural space of *Rakut Sitelu*, where an individual can assume the role of *Kalimbubu* in one family setting, and at the same time, become *Senina* in another family setting. For example, if someone belongs to the *Tarigan beru*, they may hold the position of *Kalimbubu* in their father's family space, but on the other hand, they can also become *Anak Beru* in their mother's family space and even become *Senina*.

Experiencing these three positions within one individual ultimately leads to them behaving wisely, responsibly, and with humility in different family spaces. However, in all three roles encompassed within the *Rakut Sitelu* system, they live with utmost respect, love, and care. This condition transcends religious boundaries, as despite having different religions, the system bound within *Rakut Sitelu* still connects them.

²⁷Putro, *Sejarah Karo Dari Zaman Ke Zaman*.

The kinship system in Karo society, when adhering to the agreed-upon principles, fosters social life that runs in an orderly, peaceful, and systematic manner.²⁸ Every person lives in harmony and supports one another. In accordance with the *Rakut Sitelu* framework, no community, group, or even Karo family is marginalized due to social or economic reasons.

***Rakut Sitelu* as a Brand Media of Religious Moderation**

Levi-Strauss stated that simple societies are usually dominated by kinship systems, and people in these societies interact with each other based on symbolic systems that determine their attitudes towards at least three kinship categories (blood, marriage, and lineage).²⁹ A cultural system often becomes the worldview (word image) for those who believe in it. The worldview often includes some of the societal values that are selectively chosen by individuals and groups within the community.³⁰

Essentially, the effort to revitalize local culture is one aspect of implementing the spirit of multiculturalism.³¹ The study of local wisdom means studying and optimizing the cultural potential as a result of the creativity of the cultural community, not as a unit (monopoly).³² Discovering and optimizing local wisdom also means strengthening the knowledge of local culture, including its values, social systems, and physical cultural aspects.³³

If society is still dominated by customary rules, it will naturally be orderly. Other symbols and identities fade within the structure of customs. Adherence to customs, kinship systems, and ancestral traditions lead to religious understanding and practices adapting to the values of the local community.³⁴ As mentioned by Bruner, the harmony in society is due to the fear of minority groups towards the power of the majority, but in the context of the Karo ethnic customs, this is more directed towards compliance with the system rather than mass power. Therefore, there are other balancing mechanisms to eliminate the sense of superiority of the minority, known as *Rakut Sitelu* in the formation of the Karo community.³⁵

This study is very unique and interesting, as it reveals the richness of Indonesian society's culture, which shares common cultural values that uphold unity

²⁸Ginting et al., *Bunga Rampai Kisah Perjalanan Guru Pa Timpus Sembiring Pelawi Pendiri Kota Medan Dan Eksistensi Masyarakat Karo Di Kota Medan*.

²⁹Barus, *Bentuk Kesantunan Dalam Tindak Tutur Perkawinan Adat Karo*.

³⁰Ginting et al., *Bunga Rampai Kisah Perjalanan Guru Pa Timpus Sembiring Pelawi Pendiri Kota Medan Dan Eksistensi Masyarakat Karo Di Kota Medan*.

³¹Usman Pelly, *Etnisitas Dalam Politik Dan Multikultural* (Medan: Casa Mesra Publisher, 2015).

³²Surya Adi Sahfutra, "Pendekatan Budaya Dalam Harmonisasi Relasi Muslim Dan Non Muslim," *IBDA : Jurnal Kajian Islam Dan Budaya* 10, no. 2 (2012): 270-78, <https://doi.org/10.24090/ibda.v10i2.63>.

³³Pelly, *Etnisitas Dalam Politik Dan Multikultural*.

³⁴Pelly.

³⁵Fitriani, "Membangun Bina Damai Melalui Sistem Kekerabatan (Dalihan Na Tolu Dan Rakut Sitelu) Di Kabanjahe Kabupaten Tanah Karo," *Studia Sosia Religia* 1 (2019): 40-49.

and peace through kinship systems.³⁶ It becomes a vessel for maintaining peace in a multicultural and multireligious society, as it proves the existence of shared cultural values that prioritize unity and peace in the form of kinship systems.³⁷ Despite religious tensions, the importance of mutual respect is evident within the cultural context.

This condition is considered important because dissonance is often caused by the inability of cultural tools to manage societal diversity, sometimes due to the superiority complex of indigenous communities over newcomers, and the lack of nomadic adaptation models. Knowing this, the Karo ethnic group is very open to anyone who wants to connect with them as native inhabitants, without questioning religion, culture, and the origins of other ethnicities. Because religion, culture, and ethnicity do not determine one's place in society.

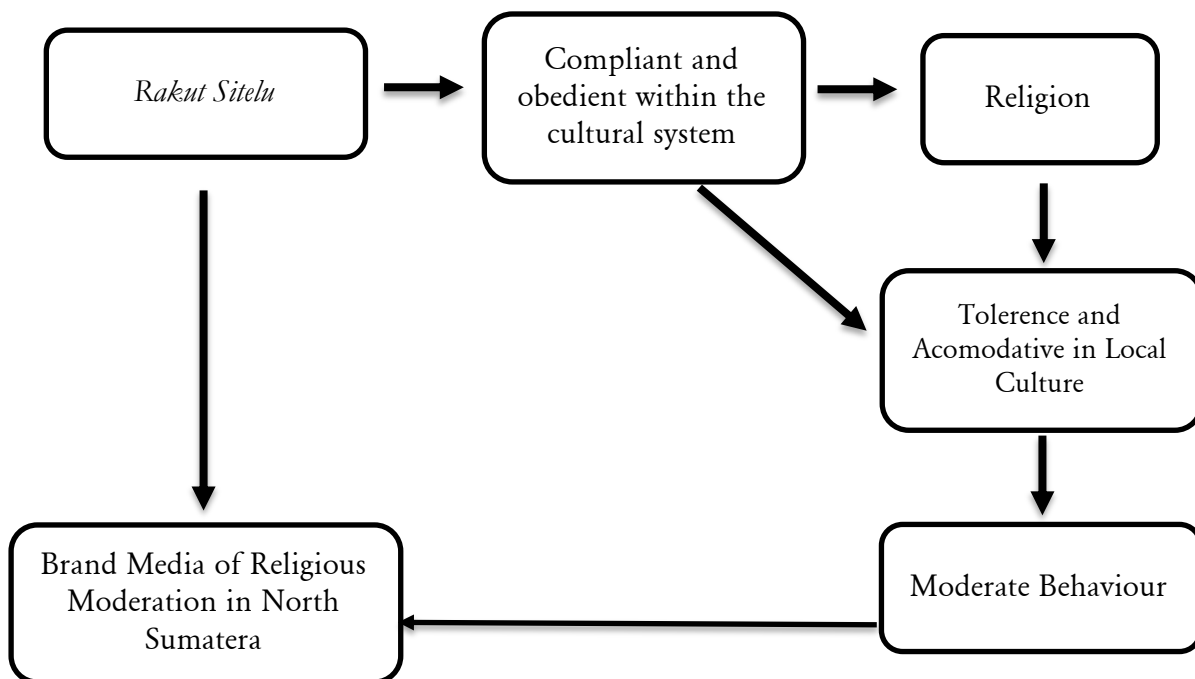
Various methods are employed to unite communities, and each region has its own unique approach to achieve common goals. It is believed that knowledge always carries its own religious dimension based on ancient heritage. Currently, the religious aspect increasingly dominates all customary activities. Besides traditional ceremonies, religious ceremonies such as birth, baptism, and death, communal invitations, accompaniment, and speeches are also held.

As discussed earlier, the Karo ethnic group with the *Rakut Sitelu* system can transcend religious boundaries, demonstrating the existence of a space for moderation. This is evident within the *Rakut Sitelu* system itself, where each individual bound by it provides support, assistance, and listens to guidance, even with different religions present in the system.

For example, in a marriage ritual, there may be a *Kalimbubu* who is a Christian, while the *Anak Beru* and *Senina* are Muslims. In the Karo cultural context, the *Anak Beru* must still work to ensure a smooth marriage ceremony, while the *Senina* must respectfully listen to the advice from the *Kalimbubu* of a different religion. Similarly, if there is a Muslim *Kalimbubu*, while the *Anak Beru* and *Senina* are Christians, the *Anak Beru* must provide halal food for the *Kalimbubu*, and the *Senina* must listen respectfully to the guidance from the *Kalimbubu* of a different religion.

³⁶Suryo Adi Sahfutra, "Konstruksi Konflik Dan Bina-Damai Dalam Keberagaman Masyarakat Jawa," *MUKADIMAH: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sejarah, Dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 2, no. 1 (2018): 28-43, <https://doi.org/10.30743/mkd.v2i1.659>.

³⁷Abdul Rahman Matondang, "Wahdatul Ulum Sebagai Respon Dan Solusi Terhadap Dikotomi Keilmuan" 3307 (2022): 66-71.



Picture 2. The Implementation Model of Rakut Sitelu Towards Religious Moderation

The image above provides an overview that the main foundation of *Rakut Sitelu* is compliance and obedience to the cultural system. This system is not forced, but rather a natural aspect that is believed in and respected as part of the cultural identity. Such compliance is not confined by religion. Religion here is not a factor that erodes obedience to culture, nor does it turn it into a cult and abandon religious values. Instead, the existence of the cultural system can enhance the value of tolerance and an accommodative or accepting attitude towards local culture. Acceptance of local cultural aspects is a derivative of the implementation of religious moderation, where the indicators of moderation from the Ministry of Religious Affairs include national commitment, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture.³⁸

³⁸Apriani and Aryani, *Moderasi Beragama*.

This condition aligns with Surah Al Imran verse 64, where Allah emphasizes:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا
نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا
مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

“artinya: “Katakan olehmu (ya Muhamad), Wabai Abli Kitab! Marilah menuju ke titik pertemuan antara kami dan kamu, yaitu bahwa kita tidak menyembah selain Allah dan tidak pula memperserikatkan-Nya kepada apa pun, dan bahwa sebagian dari kita tidak mengangkat sebagian yang lain sebagai “tuban-tuban” selain Allah!”

The conclusion from the above verse provides an illustration that in the process of practicing religion related to social and community activities, human values and tolerance beyond religious perspectives regarding the oneness of Allah SWT are essential, and there should be no attempt to create conflict.

This form is also evident in daily life, where a *Kalimbubu* who serves as a preacher or religious teacher (*ustadz*) continues to maintain a relationship with their *Senina* and *Anak Beru*, who are Christians, during their Sunday worship. Likewise, the reverse is true. In other words, the *Rakut Sitelu* system strengthens the value of tolerance, which serves as a strong foundation for promoting religious moderation.

Based on interviews with *Karo* cultural figures, *Rakut Sitelu* is described as the point of convergence that demonstrates the unity of *Karo* culture as a whole. *Rakut Sitelu*, as a form of religious moderation, reflects values that prioritize cooperation, mutual respect, tolerance, and a sense of brotherhood in fostering relationships among people of different religions.

According to the results of the above interviews, *Rakut Sitelu* represents a form of religious moderation and embodies values that emphasize cooperation, mutual respect, tolerance, and a sense of brotherhood in maintaining relationships among people of different religions. This can be observed through their participation in these activities, where they show mutual respect for each other regardless of their religious differences. Therefore, *Rakut Sitelu* plays a significant role in realizing and maintaining harmony among people of different religions and cultural differences in *Karo* society, and it should be appreciated as a positive example for Indonesian society as a whole.

This fact is also affirmed by one of the religious figures in North Sumatra who stated that:

We should take pride in our cultural traditions, which are fundamentally strong in maintaining harmony, especially concerning *Rakut Sitelu*. The Karo ethnic group has proven how they can preserve harmony despite different religions. They sit on equal ground when they are at a certain level that they regulate and exhibit tolerance when other ethnic groups in North Sumatra are starting to lose their traditions and elevating their religious egos as a form of devotion. Speaking about moderation means discussing social life, not matters of faith and worship, as there is no compromise between the two since their laws are clear. However, speaking about moderation as a middle path requires us to continue engaging with each other.

The well-maintained cultural traditions in preserving harmony should be appreciated, especially regarding *Rakut Sitelu*, which has demonstrated its ability to maintain harmony despite religious differences among the Karo ethnic group. The ethic of viewing others as equals, being tolerant, and collaborating without sidelining their religious differences are deeply ingrained in Karo culture. This is crucial in promoting religious moderation in society, particularly in responding to challenges arising in the era of technological and informational advancement.

However, the concept of moderation is not about questioning religious teachings; it is about discussing social life. This approach is necessary in addressing issues of harmony in a multicultural society, encompassing both religious and cultural aspects. To confront these challenges, it is essential to embrace a mindset of mutual respect and moderate attitudes in appreciating cultural and religious differences, without elevating individual egos. A moderate approach to practicing religion and social interaction should be seen as an effort to build a harmonious and peaceful society.

As the last divine religion revealed by Allah (SwT.) through the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Islam is perceived to contain moderate teachings, often referred to as Islamic Moderation. Within its teachings, Islam always combines the two opposing extremes. For example, Islamic teachings not only encompass esoteric matters related to the divine but also address various aspects of humanity and their implications in daily life.³⁹ This includes actualizing noble religious and cultural values in personal life, family, society, nation, and state through formal, informal, and non-formal education. The aim is to prevent practical conflicts, injustices, abuses of power, discomfort, and other issues.⁴⁰

³⁹Hasan Sazali, "Komunikasi Pembangunan Agama Dalam Membangun Toleransi Agama (Analisis Sistem Dan Aktor)," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 13, no. 2 (2016): 209, <https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v13i2.767>; Maali Mohammed Jassim Alabdulhadi, "Religious Tolerance in Secondary Islamic Education Textbooks in Kuwait," *British Journal of Religious Education* 41, no. 4 (2019): 422–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2019.1585329>; Larkin and Nasasra, "The 'Inclusion-Moderation' Illusion: Re-Framing the Islamic Movement inside Israel."

⁴⁰Sazali, "Komunikasi Pembangunan Agama Dalam Membangun Toleransi Agama (Analisis Sistem Dan Aktor)."

In Islam, there are moderate teachings implemented within its framework, known as Islamic Moderation. Islamic teachings go beyond esoteric matters of divinity, covering various aspects related to humanity and their implications in daily life. Islam harmonizes the two opposing extremes to prevent conflicts, injustices, abuses of power, and discomfort in practical matters. For instance, teachings on noble religious and cultural values, personal life, family, society, nation, and state are delivered through formal, informal, and non-formal education.

Rakut Sitelu, a cultural tradition from the Karo community in North Sumatra, plays a crucial role in preserving tolerance and respect for religious and cultural differences in society. The model resulting from *Rakut Sitelu* remains region-specific to Karo, but the Karo ethnic group's ability to uphold these cultural values serves as an intriguing inspiration for North Sumatra. To safeguard harmony, the people of North Sumatra should learn the importance of preserving local wisdom and implementing it to create unity and harmony within the community.

In promoting religious moderation, Islam is not solely about matters of faith or worship but also about social life.⁴¹ Therefore, a tolerant and moderate attitude in appreciating cultural and religious differences must be maintained without elevating individual egos. This is necessary to build a harmonious and peaceful society. One of the inspirations to uphold these values can be found in the cultural tradition of *Rakut Sitelu*, practiced by the Karo ethnic group in North Sumatra.

Based on the model described above, it can be concluded that *Rakut Sitelu* has the potential to become a media brand that promotes tolerance and addresses intolerance issues in cities across North Sumatra. Although the model resulting from *Rakut Sitelu* remains region-specific to Karo, the Karo ethnic group's ability to uphold these cultural values can inspire the people of North Sumatra to adopt a tolerant and accommodating approach to the cultural and ethnic diversity in the region. Additionally, preserving local wisdom can be a solution to creating a harmonious and peaceful society amidst the diversity in North Sumatra. Therefore, the development of the *Rakut Sitelu* model can be a significant contribution to promoting tolerance and strengthening harmony in North Sumatran society.

Conclusion

Based on the description and analysis of the cultural value of *Rakut Sitelu*, it can be concluded that *Rakut Sitelu* has deep roots in the kinship of the Karo ethnic group. The three interconnected bonds of *Kalimbubu*, *Senina*, and *Anak Beru* live their daily lives with attitudes of mutual respect, mutual assistance, and cooperation based on their respective structures without discriminating based on religion. This structure

⁴¹Abdul Rahman Matondang, "Udan Potir: Repetoir Yang Penuh Dari Gordang Sambilan Dalam Komunikasi Pembangunan Islam Di Tanah Mandailing," *Jurnal Indonesia : Manajemen Informatika Dan Komunikasi* 4, no. 3 (2023): 872-82, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35870/jimik.v4i3.294>.

is characterized by adhering to respectful speech and behaving according to their bonds without religious discrimination.

Furthermore, the manifestation of *Rakut Sitelu* aligns with the values of religious moderation, as evidenced by high tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of their own culture. This condition is an interesting discovery where *Rakut Sitelu* can serve as a reference for local entities in North Sumatra to apply moderate values, especially within the Karo ethnic group itself.

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