

Multicultural Education from an Islamic Perspective and Its Relevance to the Lives of the People of Papua

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Abstract

This article specifically examines the concept of multiculturalism from an Islamic perspective by relating it to the social realities of communities in Papua. Based on a conceptual and normative study, Islam views plurality as *sunnatullah*, meaning that diversity is part of God's natural order; therefore, universal values such as justice, brotherhood (*ukhuwah insaniyyah*), and tolerance constitute important foundations for peaceful social life amid differences. Through an integrative approach that connects the teachings of the Qur'an with the social phenomena of Papuan communities, this study explores the relevance of Islamic multicultural values in addressing diversity. This research employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. Data were collected through the identification and analysis of various relevant literature sources, including scholarly books, national and international journal articles, educational policy documents, and previous studies addressing multicultural education and the socio-cultural context of Papuan communities. Data analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically by examining concepts, theories, and empirical findings to identify the relevance of multicultural education to the social life of Papuan communities. The article further emphasizes that Islam regards diversity not as a source of conflict, but as a means of enriching humanity and strengthening unity amid differences. Therefore, the values of multiculturalism embedded in Islamic teachings can serve as an ethical and spiritual foundation for managing diversity and fostering peaceful, inclusive, and harmonious social relations in Papua.

Keywords

Multiculturalism, Islam, Papua, Plurality, Tolerance, Diversity



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INTRODUCTION

T Papua is one of the easternmost regions of Indonesia, characterized by an exceptionally high level of social and cultural diversity. With more than 250 ethnic groups and hundreds of local languages, Papua, with its diverse mountainous, coastal, and archipelagic ecosystems, represents a vivid example of Indonesia's multicultural diversity. This characteristic is reflected

in various aspects of linguistic practices, customary traditions, belief systems, and religious practices, which collectively create a unique social identity for Papuan communities. However, behind this rich cultural and linguistic heritage, there are several forms of social antagonism. Papua also faces a number of serious challenges related to the management of diversity, particularly in the context of interethnic relations, social integration, and disparities in human resource development.

One of the greatest challenges facing Papuan society is the social and economic disparity between Indigenous Papuans and migrant communities. Large-scale migration through the Indonesian government's transmigration programs during the 1970s led to significant demographic changes. Migrant groups from various regions of Indonesia, including Java, Bugis, Buton, and Makassar, have played substantial roles in economic activities and bureaucratic institutions, while Indigenous Papuans, or Orang Asli Papua (OAP), have remained comparatively disadvantaged in terms of access to education, healthcare, and welfare. These disparities have generated social resentment, feelings of marginalization, and social tensions that have the potential to trigger horizontal conflicts within communities (Setyaningsih, 2019).

Multicultural issues in Papua are also closely associated with identity and social acceptance. Cultural and religious differences often generate stereotypes and prejudice among groups. In urban areas such as Jayapura and Sorong, for example, Muslim and Christian communities live side by side through complex forms of social interaction. Nevertheless, social harmony remains maintained in many parts of Papua, although the potential for friction persists, particularly when political, economic, and religious interests intersect and influence community-level relations.

In this context, the implementation of multicultural values and tolerance is highly important as a foundation for building socially just and peaceful relationships. Multiculturalism encourages communities to recognize diversity as a social reality that must be managed through dialogue, mutual respect, equality, and cooperation. Therefore, strengthening multicultural values can contribute to the development of social cohesion and reduce the potential for conflict arising from differences in ethnicity, religion, culture, and social background.

From an Islamic perspective, multicultural issues can be understood through the concept of **rahmatan lil-'alamin**, which positions Islam as a source of mercy for all creation. Islam explicitly recognizes diversity as part of the will of Allah. As stated in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13, Allah created human beings into nations and tribes so that they may know one another rather than reject or eliminate one another (The Qur'an, 49:13). The principles of **ta'aruf** (mutual acquaintance), **tasamuh** (tolerance), and **al-'adl** (justice) constitute fundamental values that are highly relevant to the social conditions of Papua's diverse communities.

The correlation between Islamic values and multiculturalism can provide an important solution for managing diversity in Papua. Both perspectives promote the development of inclusive communities that respect differences and uphold social justice regardless of ethnic, racial, or religious background. Therefore, strengthening multiculturalism based on Islamic

values should not merely be regarded as a social approach but also as a moral and spiritual strategy for promoting sustainable peace in Papua. Through the internalization of values such as justice, tolerance, mutual respect, and **ukhuwah insaniyyah**, multiculturalism based on Islamic principles can contribute to strengthening social cohesion and building peaceful relations among the diverse communities of Tanah Papua..

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method to examine multiculturalism from an Islamic perspective in the context of Papua's diverse society. Data were collected through the identification, selection, and analysis of relevant literature, including scholarly books, national and international journal articles, Qur'anic references, educational policy documents, and previous research addressing multiculturalism, Islamic values, social diversity, tolerance, and the socio-cultural conditions of Papuan communities. The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical technique by systematically examining concepts, theories, and empirical findings from the selected sources to identify the relevance of Islamic multicultural values, particularly justice, tolerance mutual understanding (**ta'aruf**), and human brotherhood in managing social and cultural diversity in Papua. The analysis was conducted through stages of data identification, classification, interpretation, comparison, and synthesis to formulate a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic values can contribute to strengthening social cohesion, intergroup tolerance, and sustainable peace within Papua's multicultural society..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Islamic Perspectives on Multiculturalism and the Plurality of Human Life

Islam provides a comprehensive perspective on the reality of human life and recognizes plurality (*ta'addudiyyah*) as an integral part of *sunnatullah*, namely the divine order governing human existence. From an Islamic perspective, diversity in religion, ethnicity, culture, language, and thought is not a deviation from God's will but rather a manifestation of His wisdom and purpose. Therefore, differences among human beings should not automatically be perceived as sources of conflict, but as part of the natural conditions of human society that require mutual understanding, respect, and constructive interaction.

The Qur'an explicitly acknowledges the existence of human diversity in QS. Hud 11:118–119: "If your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community, but they continue to differ, except those upon whom your Lord has mercy." This verse indicates that differences are part of the divine plan and are related to the human capacity to think, choose, and express different perspectives. In the context of multiculturalism, this principle provides theological recognition of diverse human identities. Islam does not require absolute uniformity in social life; rather, it promotes spiritual and humanitarian unity amid social, cultural, and religious diversity (Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, 2010).

This perspective can also be understood through the concept of transcendental integralism, which emphasizes that absolute truth belongs to God, whereas human understanding of truth remains limited and relative. Consequently, human beings should recognize the limitations of their own perspectives while maintaining their religious convictions. Such an understanding creates an ethical foundation for respecting other people without necessarily denying one's own beliefs. Differences can therefore become opportunities to broaden spiritual, intellectual, and humanitarian understanding rather than sources of hostility (Wahid, 2006).

The historical experience of Islam also demonstrates the practical implementation of pluralism through the Constitution of Medina. The Prophet Muhammad established a social and political agreement that recognized Muslims, Jews, and various Arab tribes as communities living within a shared political order. The agreement emphasized religious freedom, mutual responsibility, and social cooperation. This historical experience demonstrates that multicultural social relations are not foreign to Islamic teachings but were incorporated into the Prophet's approach to community governance and social coexistence. Multiculturalism in Islam, therefore, is not merely a theoretical concept but also has historical roots in the formation of an inclusive and cooperative society (Rohman, 2018).

B. Fundamental Values of Multiculturalism in Islam and the Multicultural Reality of Papua

The first fundamental value of Islamic multiculturalism is tawhid, or the oneness of God, which establishes the philosophical basis for the unity of humanity. Within the framework of tawhid, all human beings are creatures of the same God and therefore possess equal human dignity. The principle can be expressed through the idea of "One God, Many Names; One Humanity, Many Nations," emphasizing that diversity does not negate the common divine origin of humanity. This principle corresponds with QS. Al-Hujurat 49:13, which states that God created human beings from a male and a female and made them into different nations and tribes "so that you may know one another." The concept of *lita'arafu* emphasizes that diversity should encourage mutual recognition, interaction, and cooperation rather than domination or discrimination (Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, 2010).

The second fundamental value is al-'adl, or social justice. Justice is a central principle in Islam that requires rights and responsibilities to be distributed fairly and proportionally. Allah commands human beings to uphold justice and goodness, as stated in QS. An-Nahl 16:90. In a multicultural society, justice requires the elimination of discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, cultural background, or social status. In Papua, this principle is particularly significant because differences in socioeconomic conditions, access to education, employment opportunities, and public services may contribute to perceptions of inequality between Indigenous communities and migrant populations. Islamic teachings therefore require

development policies to provide equitable opportunities and protect the rights of all communities without structural discrimination.

The third value is *tasamuh*, or active tolerance. Islamic tolerance does not necessarily mean relativizing religious beliefs; rather, it refers to the ability to live peacefully with differences while maintaining one's own religious identity. Active tolerance requires respect for the rights of others to hold different beliefs and encourages cooperation in areas of shared humanitarian and social interests. In Papua, this principle is particularly relevant to relations between Muslim and Christian communities. Fakfak, for example, is described as a region where Muslims and Christians have historically lived side by side. Such coexistence illustrates that religious differences can be managed through mutual respect, social interaction, and cooperation.

The fourth value is *ukhuwah insaniyyah*, or universal human brotherhood. Islamic thought recognizes several dimensions of brotherhood, including *ukhuwah Islamiyyah* among Muslims, *ukhuwah wathaniyyah* within the same nation, and *ukhuwah insaniyyah* among humanity as a whole (Qaradawi, 1997). The third dimension is particularly relevant to Papua because it provides an ethical foundation for cooperation across ethnic and religious boundaries. When universal human brotherhood is prioritized, differences in religion, ethnicity, language, and cultural identity become bridges for cooperation rather than barriers to social solidarity. This principle is also consistent with the Indonesian national ideal of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which emphasizes unity within diversity.

Papua represents one of Indonesia's most significant multicultural social environments, characterized by extensive ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. This diversity creates both challenges and opportunities for social integration. One major challenge is social and economic inequality. Historical migration and changes in demographic structures have influenced economic and bureaucratic relations between Indigenous communities and migrant populations. When particular groups are perceived as having greater access to economic resources, employment, or public institutions, feelings of inequality and social injustice may emerge. From an Islamic perspective, such conditions should be addressed through *al-'adl* and *al-mas'uliyah al-ijtima'iyyah*, or social responsibility, which emphasize equitable development and collective concern for social welfare (Wahid, 2006).

Another challenge is identity politics and the potential for social fragmentation. Ethnic and religious identities can become politically mobilized and may strengthen divisions between groups. Islamic principles of *ta'aruf* and *tasamuh* offer a normative framework for addressing this challenge by encouraging mutual recognition and peaceful interaction. Islam rejects the superiority of one ethnic group over another and emphasizes that human dignity is not determined by ethnicity or social origin but by moral and spiritual quality, as reflected in QS. Al-Hujurat 49:13. At the same time, Papua possesses considerable potential for harmony and social integration. Areas such as Fakfak, Sorong, and Kaimana demonstrate traditions of interreligious coexistence. The local philosophy of "one furnace, three stones" (*satu tungku tiga batu*) in Fakfak symbolizes cooperation among Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant

communities and illustrates how local cultural values can complement Islamic principles of brotherhood, justice, and peaceful coexistence.

C. Relevance of Islamic Multicultural Values to Papua's Social Development

Islamic multiculturalism can serve as an ethical and spiritual framework for developing a peaceful, inclusive, and socially cohesive Papuan society. Its principles are particularly relevant to education, socioeconomic development, political leadership, and interreligious engagement. In the field of education, Islamic religious education in Papua should adopt an inclusive and humanistic approach that develops tolerance, mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and appreciation of cultural diversity from an early age. Islamic schools, madrasahs, and pesantren can function not only as institutions for religious instruction but also as centers of intercultural learning that promote the values of rahmatan lil 'alamin, or Islam as a source of mercy and benefit for all creation.

In the social and economic fields, the principle of social justice requires government institutions and religious organizations to promote equitable development and improve access to social and economic opportunities. Islamic teachings emphasize the balance between individual rights and collective interests through the concept of *maslahah 'ammah*, or public benefit. This principle is relevant to Papua because sustainable social development requires attention to the welfare of Indigenous communities as well as other populations living in the region. Development should therefore be designed to reduce inequality, strengthen social participation, and ensure that public services and economic opportunities are accessible to different social groups.

In the field of politics and leadership, multicultural societies require leaders who are capable of embracing diverse groups and prioritizing social cohesion over narrow sectoral interests. Islamic principles of *syura*, or deliberative consultation, and *'adl*, or justice, provide an ethical foundation for inclusive leadership. Political decision-making should involve meaningful participation from different communities, particularly groups whose voices may have historically been marginalized. Such leadership can contribute to building trust between communities and reducing the potential for identity-based conflict.

In the area of religious preaching and interfaith dialogue, Islamic *dakwah* in Papua should emphasize humanitarian values, peaceful communication, and social cooperation rather than confrontational theological approaches. The principle of *ta'aruf* can serve as a bridge for strengthening communication between religious communities through joint activities in education, social welfare, humanitarian assistance, and community development. Multiculturalism therefore requires not only recognition of differences but also the creation of concrete spaces in which different communities can work together for common social goals (Rohman, 2018).

Overall, the application of Islamic multicultural values can contribute to strengthening social cohesion in Papua by integrating religious ethics with local cultural wisdom and

inclusive development policies. The principles of tawhid, al-'adl, tasamuh, ta'aruf, and ukhuwah insaniyyah provide a normative framework for transforming diversity into a source of social strength. Through inclusive education, equitable socioeconomic development, participatory leadership, and constructive interfaith dialogue, multiculturalism from an Islamic perspective can support the development of a peaceful and harmonious Papua. In this sense, diversity should not be treated as an obstacle to development but as a social resource that can enrich collective identity and strengthen the foundations of a just and inclusive society..

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Islamic multiculturalism provides a theological, ethical, and social framework for understanding and managing diversity in Papua by recognizing plurality as part of sunnatullah and emphasizing the principles of tawhid, al-'adl, tasamuh, ta'aruf, and ukhuwah insaniyyah. These values affirm the equal dignity of human beings, encourage justice and active tolerance, strengthen solidarity across ethnic and religious boundaries, and promote peaceful coexistence without requiring the elimination of religious or cultural differences. In the context of Papua, where ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity creates both challenges and opportunities, Islamic multicultural values are relevant to addressing social and economic inequality, identity-based tensions, and potential social fragmentation while strengthening existing traditions of interreligious harmony. Their implementation through inclusive education, equitable socioeconomic development, participatory and just leadership, and constructive interfaith dialogue can contribute to strengthening social cohesion and creating a peaceful, inclusive, and harmonious society. Thus, Islamic multiculturalism can serve as an ethical and spiritual foundation for transforming Papua's diversity from a potential source of conflict into a source of social solidarity, cooperation, and sustainable human development..

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