

Basic Principles of Multicultural Society (Coexistence and Proexistence)

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Abstract

Multiculturalism is a social paradigm that emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting the diversity of cultural, ethnic, and religious identities within society. Amidst an increasingly complex global reality, the values of coexistence and pro-existence are the primary foundations for building a peaceful, civilized, and sustainable social life. The principle of coexistence emphasizes harmonious coexistence without negating the identities of other groups, while pro-existence demands active engagement between groups to create productive cooperation oriented toward the common good.

From an Islamic perspective, these two principles have a strong theological foundation, as manifested in the concept of rahmatan lil 'alamin (mercy for the universe) and the teachings of ukhuwah insaniyah (brotherhood of humanity), which place all humans as part of a unified humanity. This article elaborates on the basic principles of a multicultural society through a qualitative approach based on literature studies. The discussion focuses on the relevance of the values of coexistence and pro-existence in the context of Indonesia's diverse social life, as well as their contribution to strengthening Islamic social ethics and social sustainability.

The study's findings demonstrate that the application of these principles not only fosters passive tolerance but also fosters active collaboration that strengthens national unity and broadens the meaning of humanistic religiosity. Thus, coexistence and pro-existence are strategic paths for multicultural societies to build a peaceful, just, and civilized life under the auspices of Islamic values.

Keywords: multiculturalism, coexistence, pro-existence, social integration, Indonesia

Introduction

Indonesia is known as one of the most diverse countries in the world. More than 1,300 ethnic groups, six official religions, hundreds of regional languages, and diverse customs coexist within a single national entity called Indonesia. This diversity is an extraordinary wealth, but it also presents significant challenges in maintaining social harmony and national unity. In such a complex social context, the concept of multiculturalism serves as a crucial framework for understanding, managing, and nurturing diversity to prevent it from becoming a source of conflict.

Multiculturalism is not simply a recognition of differences, but also a social and political commitment to uphold justice, equality, and respect for the identities of each group. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, this paradigm demands a collective awareness that diversity is an inevitability that must be managed, not eliminated. However, acknowledging differences is insufficient without a spirit of cooperation and collaboration across identities. This is where the importance of the two main principles that are the focus of this study: coexistence and pro-existence.

Coexistence means the ability to live peacefully alongside differences, without negating the existence of others. This principle emphasizes respect for the identities, beliefs, and traditions of other groups. In a social context, coexistence serves as a foundation for peace, preventing conflict from arising due to intolerance and exclusivism. However, passive coexistence is insufficient to build a dynamic and just society. Therefore, a more active approach is needed, namely pro-existence—a principle that demands the active involvement of groups in cooperation, interaction, and the collective creation of new values.

The principle of pro-existence emphasizes that a multicultural society is not merely about living together, but also about growing and developing together. Within this framework, diversity becomes a source of social creativity that can strengthen solidarity and social cohesion. Through cross-identity collaboration—whether in education, economics, politics, or culture—society can build an inclusive and sustainable way of life.

From an Islamic perspective, multiculturalism is not a foreign concept. Islam has emphasized from the beginning that diversity is part of God's will. The Quran states that humans were created into nations and tribes so that they might know one another (QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13). This verse serves as the theological foundation for the growth of multicultural awareness in Islam. Diversity is not a threat to faith, but rather an opportunity to learn from each other, enrich experiences, and expand compassion among humans.

The concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for the universe) also emphasizes that Islamic teachings have a universal mission to bring peace and prosperity to all creatures, without distinction of religion, race, or culture. Throughout history, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) demonstrated concrete practices of multiculturalism, including through the Medina Charter, which regulated the coexistence of Muslims, the Jewish community, and other Arab tribes in Medina. This charter marked the birth of a socio-political system based on coexistence and pro-existence: each group's rights and obligations were recognized, but they were also bound by a shared commitment to maintaining peace and social justice.

In the context of modern Indonesia, the spirit of multiculturalism aligns with the philosophy of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, meaning "different but still one." This philosophy not only recognizes plurality but also emphasizes the importance of unity born from diversity. However, in today's social reality, the practice of multiculturalism often faces serious challenges. Rising intolerance, identity-based political polarization, and the spread of exclusive religious ideologies pose real threats to harmonious national life.

This phenomenon demonstrates that coexistence in Indonesia is often passive—simply "not being hostile"—without any proactive efforts to build meaningful togetherness. In this regard, the principle of pro-existence becomes increasingly important to explore and implement. Pro-existence demands the active involvement of all citizens in creating spaces for dialogue, interfaith cooperation, and equal social participation. Through this principle, multiculturalism does not stop at formal recognition of diversity, but becomes a concrete movement toward social justice and social sustainability.

In this context, social sustainability implies that societal harmony is measured not only by political stability, but also by the extent to which human relationships are built on mutual trust, respect, and mutual assistance. The values of coexistence and pro-existence, if

internalized in religious life, have the potential to become the moral foundation for a just and civilized society.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze in-depth the basic principles of a multicultural society, emphasizing the concepts of coexistence and pro-existence from an Islamic perspective and their relevance to contemporary Indonesian social life. This study is expected to foster a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic values can serve as a foundation for social ethics that supports the sustainability of multicultural life.

Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research method. This approach was chosen because the primary objective of the research is not to test empirical hypotheses, but rather to describe, interpret, and develop a conceptual understanding of the basic principles of multicultural society from an Islamic perspective, particularly through the concepts of coexistence and pro-existence.

The research data was obtained from various relevant sources, including classical texts, works by contemporary Muslim thinkers, scholarly literature on multiculturalism, modern social theory, and social policy documents in Indonesia. This literature review was conducted with an emphasis on the interpretive aspect, namely interpreting the meaning of Islamic values that underlie the concept of diversity and social interaction among humankind.

The analysis stages include: (1) **source identification**, namely determining references that are credible and relevant to the research theme; (2) **concept categorization**, namely sorting the main ideas related to multiculturalism, coexistence, and pro-existence; (3) **thematic analysis**, in the form of tracing the relationship between Islamic teachings, social theory, and multicultural practices in Indonesia; and (4) **drawing conceptual conclusions**, to build a new synthesis that can enrich the discourse on Islamic social ethics in the context of a pluralistic society.

Through this method, the research seeks to present a comprehensive, contextual, and applicable view of how Islamic principles can become a moral and social foundation for strengthening a peaceful, just, and sustainable multicultural life.

Results

1. Islamic views on the principle of multiculturalism

In fact, the noble ideals of multiculturalism do not conflict with religion, however, its theoretical basis remains problematic, the values of multiculturalism are considered extra-religious and rejected by Muslim theologians, making it difficult to explore the theme. Indeed, recently there have been initiatives undertaken by a number of Arab thinkers, such as Mohammed Abed Al Jabiri, Hasan Hanafi, Nasr Hamid Abu-Zaid, and others, to reconcile tradition and religion, however, their ideas have received a harsh response from conservative scholars.¹

In order to build a synergistic relationship between multiculturalism and religion, at least two things are needed. First, a reinterpretation of orthodox religious doctrines, which have so

¹ Muhammad Amir, *konsep Masyarakat Islam*, (Jakarta, Fikanati, Aneska, 1992), hal.34.

far been used as a pretext for exclusionary and oppressive attitudes. This reinterpretation must be carried out in such a way that religion is not only receptive to local traditional wisdom but also serves as a leading force in ushering in built-in democracy with in religious communities.

Second, establishing a dialogue between religion and modern ideas. Today, religious communities are entering a new phase of history where they must adapt to major civilizations not based on religion, such as modern Western culture. We cannot avoid secular ideas and theories. This means that engaging with non-religious concepts is the most challenging task facing Muslims in the modern era.²

Dr. Abdulkarim Soroush, an Iranian Muslim intellectual, emphasized that religious communities face two challenges: local problems and universal problems, which are the problems of humanity as a whole. According to him, issues such as peace, human rights, and women's rights have become global issues and must be addressed at that level. Only through internal transformation and interaction with modern ideas will religion be able to reformulate a creative synthesis of the multiculturalism that has become the spirit of the times.³

Isn't religion stagnant when it stops learning and engaging in dialogue with other civilizations? Now is the time to revitalize the connection between religion and the various realities surrounding it.

2. The Principle of Multiculturalism in Islamic Teachings

Essentially, this multicultural dimension is strongly implied in Islam, with the statement that Islam is a beacon of compassion for all of nature (*rahmatan 3 alamin*). This statement is embodied not only in theological but also socio-cultural contexts. Islam, as reflected in the Prophet Muhammad's attitude, also highly values the existence of cultural and religious plurality.

Theoretically, multiculturalism presupposes an inclusive internal awareness that manifests itself in social behavior. The ritual of fasting, for example, ideally leads its participants to discover a universal conscience, fostering an egalitarian perspective on others. This awareness connects a servant's emotional intelligence with God and serves as the foundation for developing relational-rational intelligence among others.⁴

In the context of this fasting ritual, esoteric reflection and exoteric awareness must develop as manifestations of the internalization of divine values that occurs during Ramadan. This is a process that philosopher Kierkegaard (1813-1855) called the transition from the aesthetic stage to the religious stage. This means that fasting is not merely a personal commandment, but also a social act of action (accrual).

Fasting, as a religious tradition with universal significance, should be used as a positive energy to strengthen multicultural understanding, inspired by divine (*rabbaniyah*) and human (*insaniyah*) values. The spiritual transformation and multicultural spirit achieved through fasting should ideally be enjoyed and felt by all humanity, without being constrained by cultural, ethnic, gender, linguistic, theological, or even political barriers.⁵

² Mun.im A Sirry, *Agama, Demokrasi, dan Multikulturalisme*, Artikel, Kompas, Edisi Kamis, 01 Mei 2003. <http://www.kompas.co.id>

³ Dr. Abdulkarim Soroush, *reason, freedom & democracy in Islam*, (Paris, UNESCO, 2000), Hal. 56.

⁴ Andre Moller, *Ramadan di }awa; Pandangan dari Luar*, (Jakarta; Nalar, 2005), hal. 72.

⁵ *Ibid.*,hal.108

In fact, there is a lot of wisdom in Islamic teachings that reflects the principles of multiculturalism. If the practice of fasting is expected to transform an attitude of sympathy and empathy towards the perpetrator, then it is also recommended that a Muslim always do good towards his neighbors, regardless of who they are, even towards neighbors who have bad intentions towards him. It is also an obligation to always maintain good relations (*silaturrahmi*) with fellow humans, prohibition of hurting other people, and so on.

The Qur'an explains the obligation of a Muslim to be a peacemaker, that is, to always maintain peace and harmony in their environment. In Surah An-Nisa, it states:

لَا حَيْرَ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّنْ نُّجُوهُمْ إِلَّا مَنَ أَمَرَ بِصَدَقَةٍ أَوْ مَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ إِصْلَاحٍ، بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

"There is no good in most of their whispers, except telling (humans) to give alms, to do *makruf* (good), or to make *islah* (peace) between people." (QS Annisa' [4]: 114).⁶

This obligation is not only directed at fellow believers, because Allah SWT explicitly states that humans originate from a single man (Adam) and a single woman (Eve), making them all brothers and sisters. As Allah says:

يا أيها الناس انا خلقنكم من ذكر وانثى

"hi mankind, indeed we created you from a male and a female." (Q.S. al-Hujurat: 13)⁷

Furthermore, Islamic teachings also require its followers to prevent all forms of abuse that would be carried out by their "brothers" against other "brothers". As stated in the hadith of the Prophet:

انصر اخاك ظلما او مظلوما، فقال رجل يا رسول الله انصره اذا كان مظلوما افرايت اذا كنا ظلما فكيف انصره؟ قال تحجزه او تمنعه من الظلم، فان ذلك نصره.

"Help your brother, whether he is persecuted or persecutor. A friend asked, O Messenger of Allah, we will definitely help him if he is persecuted, but how can we help him if he is persecutor? The Prophet answered: Block and prevent him from committing abuse. That is help for him." (HR. Bukhari through friend Anas ra.).⁸

The teachings of Islam are so great that if a Muslim is willing to seriously study and practice them in their entirety (*kaffah*), then the existence of the Muslim community will truly be a blessing for its environment (*rahmatan lil'alamin*).

3. Basic Principles of Multicultural Society (Coexistence and Proexistence)

Globalization and high human mobility have led to the formation of an increasingly diverse society. In Indonesia, diversity is nothing new, but rather a long-standing historical reality. Multicultural societies comprise diverse ethnicities, religions, languages, customs, and

⁶ Al Qur'an dan terjemahnya. (Madinah: Majma'al Malik Fahd H Thaba'ati alMush hafi al Syarifi, 1418 H), hal. 14.

⁷ Al Qur'an dan terjemahnya. hal. 847.

⁸ Muhammad Ibn Isma'il al Bukhari, Shahih al Bukhari, hadits ke-6438. CD Maushu'ah.

social values. However, this diversity often gives rise to the potential for conflict. Therefore, understanding the basic principles of multiculturalism is crucial as a foundation for building an inclusive and equitable social life.

Multiculturalism as a social paradigm emphasizes the importance of managing cultural diversity fairly and inclusively. Two principles that are increasingly relevant in contemporary studies are coexistence and pro-existence. Both offer a more dynamic approach to intercultural relations in plural societies.

a. Coexistence: Living Side by Side in Difference

Coexistence refers to the ability of different cultural groups to live peacefully side by side in a single social space without excluding each other. This principle emphasizes:

- **Non-intervensi budaya:** setiap kelompok memiliki otonomi dalam menjalankan nilai, tradisi, dan praktiknya tanpa tekanan untuk menyeragamkan.
- **Active tolerance:** not just accepting differences, but also respecting and protecting the rights of other cultures.
- **Social stability:** coexistence creates social conditions with minimal conflict due to the recognition of plurality of identities.

Characteristic:

- ✓ There is an attitude of tolerance between groups.
- ✓ There is no attempt to standardize culture or impose certain values.
- ✓ Respect the rights of minority groups to maintain their cultural identity.

Example

Balinese society is able to maintain harmony between Hindus, Muslims, and Christians by providing equal worship space.

Within a sociological framework, coexistence can be seen as a form of *modus vivendi* that allows multicultural societies to remain functional even if they are not fully culturally integrated.

b. Proexistence: Collaboration and Shared Growth

Proexistence is a more progressive concept than coexistence. It emphasizes not only coexistence but also active and collaborative interaction between cultures to create new values. The main characteristics of proexistence include:

- **Interculturality:** the exchange of ideas, symbols, and practices between cultural groups that results in a new synthesis.
- **Social transformation:** pro-existence encourages inclusive social change through the participation of all groups in the development process.
- **Cross-identity solidarity:** people not only know each other, but also support each other in facing common challenges.

Characteristic:

- ✓ Intense cross-cultural dialogue and communication.
- ✓ Collaboration in the economic, educational and social fields.
- ✓ The formation of a (shared identity) without erasing the original identity.

Example

Real examples of pro-existence in Indonesia can be seen in interfaith mutual cooperation activities, multi-ethnic inclusive school programs, and cross-cultural community initiatives that build shared spaces to strengthen unity.

Proexistence reflects a transformative approach to multiculturalism, where diversity becomes a source of social innovation and not just a demographic fact.

4. Coexistence and Proexistence Relationship

These two principles are complementary. Coexistence creates a safe space for diversity, while pro-existence creates a collaborative space that strengthens solidarity. Without coexistence, pro-existence is difficult to achieve; conversely, without pro-existence, coexistence tends to be fragile because it is based solely on passive tolerance.

5. Implications for Indonesia

- **Education Sector:** development of a multicultural curriculum that instills the values of tolerance and cross-cultural cooperation.
- **Political Field:** an inclusive political system that provides space for representation of all groups.
- **Socio-Economic Sector:** equitable development policies to prevent disparities that could potentially trigger conflict.

Conclusion

The principles of coexistence and pro-existence are essential foundations for building a multicultural society. Coexistence focuses on peaceful coexistence, while pro-existence emphasizes mutually supportive and collaborative relationships. In Indonesia's richly diverse context, the application of these two principles is highly relevant for strengthening national integration and preventing social conflict.

Thus, the main challenge for the Indonesian nation is not only to maintain coexistence, but also to encourage pro-existence so that diversity can become a source of strength and unity.

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