

ISLAM AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

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Abstract: *Islam is a religion whose values are compatible with the development of the times. In the era of globalization, contemporary issues such as Islam and Democracy, Islam and Gender, Islam and Pluralism, and Islam and Science have become important topics of collective discussion. This paper aims to explain these four contemporary issues from the perspective of Islamic teachings. Using a qualitative approach with data sourced from books, journals, and scientific writings, this study presents a narrative, analytical, and descriptive discussion. The findings show that: (1) Islam upholds gender equality between men and women based on the principles of merit and piety; (2) Democracy is compatible with Islamic values, especially in the Indonesian context as Dar al-'Ahdi; (3) Islam recognizes religious pluralism and promotes inter-religious tolerance based on humanitarian brotherhood; (4) Islam strongly encourages the pursuit of knowledge and sees science as inseparable from Islamic values. Through ijihad and a multidisciplinary approach, Islam is able to respond contextually to contemporary issues while maintaining the fundamental principles of its teachings.*

Keywords: *Contemporary Issues, Democracy, Gender, Islam, Pluralism, Science*

Introduction

The Qur'an and al-Sunnah are the main sources of reference in making various decisions. Apart from these two sources, scholars continue to develop ijihad to give new meaning to the Qur'an and al-Sunnah (Yusuf al-Qaradawi, 2018).

The era of globalization, marked by advances in science and technology, has brought conveniences to life. Naturally, the effects of these advances have impacted various human activities, including religion. Along with this, contemporary issues have emerged and become topics of discussion, not only local but also national and international. Issues such as Islam and Gender, Islam and Democracy, Islam and Pluralism, and Islam and Science have become urgent topics of collective discussion (Azyumardi Azra, 2020).

This paper outlines the Islamic religion and explains various contemporary issues from an Islamic perspective. It employs a qualitative approach. Data is compiled from the writings of experts, various books, journals, and popular scientific articles, both in print and online. The data is grouped by theme, analyzed, and cited as relevant. The paper is presented narratively, analytically, and descriptively (Moleong, 2019).

Literature Review

THE NATURE OF ISLAM

All the teachings brought by the Prophets and Apostles constitute Islam. The substance is the same: faith in Allah, faith in the Last Day, and righteous deeds. Islam is a continuous religion (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2012). Islam before the Prophet Muhammad was a general Islam, which was then perfected in the Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad.

Islam is a religion revealed by Allah as contained in the Koran and Hadith. Islam contains commands, prohibitions and instructions, so that humanity can obtain happiness in this world and in the afterlife (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah., 2012).

There is a distinction between Islam as a religion, Islamic knowledge, and Islamic practice. Islam as a religion is a teaching that originates from God, is absolute, and is absolutely true. Meanwhile, Islamic knowledge and Islamic practice are historical (Amin Abdullah, 2015).

The complex development of society, textually and in detail, is not explained in the Qur'an and Hadith. In this context, *ijtihad* is necessary. *Ijtihad* is substantively understood as an effort to explore Islamic teachings to ensure they are contextual and in line with current developments (Fazlur Rahman, 2017). Currently, *ijtihad* utilizes not only Islamic sciences but is also enriched by various multidisciplinary fields.

In Islam, there are four interrelated aspects of teaching: faith, morals, worship, and worldly transactions. Faith relates to faith, which concerns a personal relationship with God. Morals regulate relationships between humans and their surroundings. Worship concerns a personal relationship with God through the performance of rituals, while *mu'amalah duniawiyah* regulates the relationship between Muslims and all humans (Hasan Langgulang, 2016).

In Islam, several terms for brotherhood are known, namely *ukhuwah islamiyah* (brotherhood among Muslims), *ukhuwah wathaniyah* (brotherhood among the nation), and *ukhuwah basyariyah* (brotherhood among humanity). These three *ukhuwahs* demonstrate that Islam is a humanitarian religion that encourages collaboration across civilizations (Said Aqil Siradj, 2019).

There are at least three approaches to understanding Islam: the *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani* approaches. The *bayani* approach is based on the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions. The *burhani* approach utilizes science and technology with multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches.

Meanwhile, the *Irfani* approach prioritizes social aspects to complement both (Abid al-Jabiri, 2015). These three approaches support each other in producing a comprehensive Islamic perspective.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

The issues in this paper are understood as the main ideas or objects of thought that are being studied and are urgent. Meanwhile, contemporary means contemporaneous, current, and ongoing. Therefore, contemporary issues can be defined as things that are ongoing and contemporary with our current lives (Nurcholish Madjid, 2019). This paper is limited to four contemporary issues deemed important: Islam and Gender, Islam and Democracy, Islam and Pluralism, and Islam and Science.

Along with the rapid development of society, these issues have become an interesting topic of discussion and influence the religious attitudes of Muslims.

There are at least three groups of Muslims when responding to these contemporary issues: those who accept, those who reject, and those who accept with a critical attitude (Khaled Abou El Fadl, 2021).

1. Islam and Gender

Islam's presence is to honor humanity and elevate its dignity. Humans were created by God with equal status. There is no distinction between men and women. The principle of meritocracy is the primary standard; people are not distinguished by gender or social status, but by the good deeds they perform in their daily lives (Nasaruddin Umar, 2022).

The arrival of Islam in the early days was intended to break down the patriarchal culture of Arab society. They treated women as commodities and objects for male gratification. Patriarchal culture was interpreted in a gender-biased religious manner.

Interpretations of verses from the Quran and the Prophet's Hadith seem to favor men (Fatima Mernissi, 2015). Within Islam itself, many religious leaders still hold the view that women should play a role in domestic activities.

The presence of the Prophet Muhammad elevated the status of women. During Muhammad's time, many women's potential was empowered in public spaces. Khadijah, Muhammad's wife, was the head of the household and managed wealth exceptionally well. Aisha, another of Muhammad's wives, was known for her intelligence and narrated numerous hadith. History also records Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's role as a star in the world of Sufism (Leila Ahmed, 2018).

There are two Surahs in the Qur'an that use women's names, namely Surah al-Nisa' and Surah Maryam. In the midst of a very high patriarchal tradition, Islam actually elevates women. The emergence of female Hadith transmitters such as Umu Salamah, Maimunah, Hafsa, Umm Habibah, Zainab, Shafiyah, Juwairiyah, and Saudah shows that the intellectual space provides equal opportunities for men and women (Syamsul Anwar, 2021).

The Qur'an explains that men and women will have the same opportunities in life as long as they both fulfill the requirements of faith and good deeds (QS al-Nahl [16]: 97). The presence of men will not function well without the company of women (QS al-Nisa [4]: 1). The difference between men and women is seen qualitatively, namely the quality of their piety to Allah (QS al-Hujurat [49]: 13).

Men and women become helpers to each other to create a civilized society (QS al-Taubah [9]: 71).

A woman's position before her children is extremely noble. The Prophet Muhammad explained that a child's devotion to their mother is three times greater than their devotion to their father (Bukhari and Muslim). In any context, there is no justification for women being unequal to men (Zaitunah Subhan, 2022).

The term *qawwamuna 'ala al-nisa'* (QS al-Nisa' [4]: 34) has long been interpreted as male leadership over women. This interpretation is not contextual and does not align with the spirit of the Qur'an and Hadith, which explain that men and women have equal status. The success or failure of a person's leadership is not determined by their gender, but by their competence (Musdah Mulia, 2023).

2. Islam and Democracy

There are two issues that must be considered: the *ushul* (basic principles) of religious teachings and the *furu'* (sub-branches) within religious teachings. The issue of democracy falls under this category. This is a matter of *ijtihad*, and the Prophet was not sent to explain it in detail. The Prophet Muhammad emphasized that each of us is more knowledgeable about our worldly affairs (Yusuf al-Qaradawi, 2018).

Simply put, democracy comes from the Latin words "*demos*," meaning "people," and "*kratein*," meaning "government." Democracy means government originating from the people, run by the people, and serving the interests of the people. The essence of democracy is justice, where everyone has equal opportunities (Abdulaziz Sachedina, 2019). While the word "democracy" is not found in the Quran or Hadith, its substance aligns closely with Islamic values.

In Islam there are areas of religion that must be taken for granted, there are also areas of *ijtihad* in the form of reasoning and development of thought. The form of government in Islam was never determined by the Prophet Muhammad, as this is considered an area of *ijtihad* (M. Amien Rais, 2020). Muslims are given ample opportunity to determine their own form of government. In the Indonesian context, a democratic system is more appropriate to the spirit and culture of its diverse society.

The nation's founders made a wise decision when determining the form of the Indonesian state. They decided not on a state based on a particular religion, nor on a monarchy, but on a Pancasila state that utilizes democracy as its governing body. In a democracy, there are at least three interrelated branches: the executive, legislative, and judiciary (Bahtiar Effendy, 2021).

Indonesia is *Dar al-'Ahd*, meaning a nation born from mutual agreement. The nation's founders came from all over Indonesia with diverse backgrounds, yet all were bound by a social agreement to establish a sovereign state that would be the common home of all Indonesians. The spirit of democracy was woven into the thoughts and movements of these founders (Azyumardi Azra, 2020).

As an integral part of the Indonesian nation, every individual is obligated, both individually and collectively, to contribute positively to the life of the nation and state. Contributing positively to national life is a crucial part of the *Shahadah* (Prophetic Faith). In a democracy, the values of justice are the primary goal that must be realized. Justice is the primary factor that enables society to prosper, and without it, society will experience turmoil (Nurcholish Madjid, 2019).

3. Islam and Pluralism

Pluralism comes from the word plural, meaning multiple or many. Religious pluralism refers to the recognition of the diversity of religions and beliefs in social life. The issue of pluralism is crucial in the context of Indonesia's diverse society, encompassing religion, ethnicity, and culture (Alwi Shihab, 2019).

In Islam, pluralism is understood not as the equality of all religions, but rather as the recognition of diversity and respect for differences. The Qur'an firmly states that Allah created humans into tribes and nations so that they might know one another (QS al-Hujurat [49]: 13). This verse provides a strong theological foundation for pluralism in Islam (Nurcholish Madjid, 2019).

Islam teaches that there is no compulsion in religion (Quran 2:256). This principle emphasizes that religious belief is a personal matter and that freedom is the right of every human being. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also set an example in building a pluralistic society through the Medina Charter, in which Muslims, Jews, and other groups lived side by side in a single socio-political entity (Munawir Sjadzali, 2020).

Tolerance is a core Islamic value that is relevant in addressing diversity. Islam teaches that religious differences are not an obstacle to cooperation in worldly affairs. Muslims are commanded to be just to everyone, including non-Muslims (QS al-Mumtahanah [60]: 8). In the Indonesian context, this value of tolerance has been practiced by the nation's founders, who came from various religious backgrounds (Said Aqil Siradj, 2019).

The concept of *ukhuwah basyariah* (human brotherhood) in Islam is a crucial foundation for building interfaith relations. Islam never restricts a Muslim from associating and collaborating with anyone, as long as such interactions lead to mutual benefit. By cooperating with everyone, the Muslim community can progress and develop (Abdurrahman Wahid, 2021).

In addressing the issue of pluralism, Islam takes a moderate stance. Islam rejects syncretism, the blending of teachings from various religions, but at the same time, it encourages

interfaith dialogue and interfaith cooperation for the benefit of humanity. Constructive interfaith dialogue can strengthen peace and mutual understanding among diverse communities (Khaled Abou El Fadl, 2021).

The practice of pluralism in the daily lives of Muslims can be seen in various areas, from social life to national and state life. Indonesian Muslims have demonstrated the ability to coexist peacefully with followers of other religions (O Wirian et al., 2025). This is a valuable legacy that must be continuously preserved and developed as the nation's social capital (Azyumardi Azra, 2020).

4. Islam and Science

Islam is a religion that highly values science. The first verse revealed to the Prophet Muhammad was the command to read (QS al-'Alaq [96]: 1-5), which is a strong symbol of Islam's commitment to science. The Qur'an itself mentions the word 'ilm (knowledge) and its derivatives more than 750 times, showing how central knowledge is in the Islamic view (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 2018).

In the history of Islamic civilization, Muslims were once the center of world science from the 8th to 13th centuries AD. Muslim scientists such as Al-Khawarizmi in mathematics, Ibn Sina in medicine, Al-Biruni in astronomy, and Al-Ghazali in philosophy have made significant contributions to the development of global science. The advancement of science in Islamic civilization is inseparable from strong religious motivation (Mehdi Golshani, 2020).

In the Islamic view, science cannot be separated from religious values (Wirian, O., & Jf, NZ (2025, March). Islam does not recognize the dichotomy between religious knowledge and general knowledge. Any knowledge, as long as it brings benefits to humanity and does not conflict with the basic values of Islam, is considered worship.

This concept is known as the term integration of knowledge (Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, 2019). The Burhani approach in understanding Islam uses science and technology as instruments for understanding Allah's verses, both those found in the Al-Qur'an (qauliyah verses) and those found in the universe (kauniyah verses).

This approach encourages Muslims to actively conduct scientific research as a form of gratitude to Allah for the gift of reason given (Abid al-Jabiri, 2015).

Contemporary scientific challenges, such as artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and information technology, require a wise response from Muslims. This is where the role of *ijtihad* becomes crucial. Muslim scholars and scholars need to actively engage in ethical discussions regarding scientific and technological developments to ensure that these advances benefit humanity (Mehdi Golshani, 2020).

Islam encourages its people to become responsible scientists. Muslim scientists are required to possess not only academic competence but also moral integrity and social responsibility. From an Islamic perspective, knowledge without good morals can actually be a source of corruption (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 2018).

To respond to the challenges of contemporary science, Indonesia needs human resources who master science and technology while possessing a strong religious foundation. Islamic educational institutions, including Islamic universities, have a significant responsibility to produce a generation of competitive, innovative, and morally upright Muslim scientists (Azyumardi Azra, 2020).

Conclusion

Islam is a religion that is dynamic and responsive to developments in the times. Through a study of the four contemporary issues above, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, Islam upholds gender equality based on the principles of meritocracy and piety, not on gender. Women have equal standing with men before God. Second, democracy is compatible with Islamic values because it embodies the essence of justice, deliberation, and participation, which align with Islamic teachings. Indonesia, as Dar al-'Ahdī (the land of the most powerful), is a clear example of the harmony between Islam and democracy. Third, Islam recognizes religious pluralism and encourages tolerance and cooperation between religious communities based on human brotherhood (*ukhuwah basyariah*). Islam rejects syncretism but supports constructive interfaith dialogue for the sake of peace and the common good. Fourth, Islam highly values knowledge and encourages its followers to actively participate in the development of science and technology. The integration of science and religion is essential for producing competitive and noble Muslim scientists. These four contemporary issues show that Islam is not a static religion, but rather a religion that is able to dialogue with the developments of the times through wise *ijtihad*, a multidisciplinary approach, and adhering to the principles based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. Thus, Islam will always be relevant and provide solutions to the various challenges of human life in every era.

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