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PLURALISM IN ISLAM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE THOUGHT CONSTRUCTIONS OF IBN ARABI AND FAZLUR RAHMAN

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Abstract

Pluralism in Islam is a crucial issue in contemporary Muslim societies confronted with the reality of religious and belief diversity. This study aims to analyze and compare the concept of pluralism in the thought constructions of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman, and to formulate its implications for the development of Islamic pluralism discourse in the context of modern Muslim societies, particularly in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach with library research. Data were obtained from the construction of the two figures' thoughts, supported by relevant secondary literature, and then analyzed using a comparative-interpretive approach to identify indicators of pluralism in the aspects of interfaith truth, religious freedom, and social ethics. The results show that Ibn Arabi's thought construction interprets pluralism within a spiritual-Sufi framework through the concept of the religion of love, which encourages inclusiveness and respect for differences in belief. Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman positions pluralism as an ethical consequence of the universal message of the Quran through an ethical-historical approach and the double movement method. This study concludes that the relevant pluralism in Islam is theologically limited ethical-social pluralism, which functions to guarantee justice, religious freedom, and respect for human dignity without negating the principles of Islamic faith.
Keywords: *Pluralism, Ibn Arabi, Fazlur Rahman, Religious Tolerance, Social Ethics.*

Abstrak

Pluralisme dalam Islam merupakan isu penting dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer yang dihadapkan pada realitas keberagaman agama dan keyakinan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan membandingkan konsep pluralisme dalam konstruksi pemikiran Ibnu Arabi dan Fazlur Rahman, serta merumuskan implikasinya bagi pengembangan wacana pluralisme dalam konteks masyarakat Muslim modern, khususnya di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian kepustakaan. Data diperoleh dari hasil konstruksi pemikiran kedua tokoh yang didukung oleh literatur sekunder yang relevan, kemudian dianalisis melalui pendekatan komparatif-interpretatif untuk mengidentifikasi indikator pluralisme dalam aspek kebenaran lintas iman, kebebasan beragama, dan etika sosial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konstruksi pemikiran Ibnu Arabi memaknai pluralisme dalam kerangka spiritual-sufistik melalui konsep agama cinta yang mendorong sikap inklusif dan penghormatan terhadap perbedaan keyakinan. Sementara itu, Fazlur Rahman menempatkan pluralisme sebagai konsekuensi etis dari pesan universal Al-Qur'an melalui pendekatan etis-historis dan metode double movement. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pluralisme dalam Islam yang relevan adalah pluralisme etis-sosial yang berbatas secara teologis, yang berfungsi untuk menjamin keadilan, kebebasan beragama, dan penghormatan terhadap martabat manusia tanpa menegasikan prinsip akidah Islam.
Kata Kunci: *Pluralisme, Ibnu Arabi, Fazlur Rahman, Toleransi Beragama, Etika Sosial.*

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INTRODUCTION

Pluralism and tolerance between religious communities are crucial issues in the context of modern, multicultural, and multireligious societies. Religious diversity is not simply a social fact, but a theological reality that demands serious management to prevent it from escalating into social conflict. Amidst globalization, interactions between religious communities are becoming increasingly intense and complex, making recognition of diversity and acceptance of differences an absolute prerequisite for peaceful coexistence.

In the Indonesian context, misunderstandings of religious teachings often trigger interfaith tensions. As the country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia faces real challenges in the form of intolerance, discrimination, and the ongoing politicization of religion. The main problems in interfaith relations are often rooted in a narrow perspective on religious texts that ignores the ethical goals and social benefits of religious teachings themselves.[1]

The Qur'an explicitly recognizes diversity as a sunnatullah, as emphasized in QS. Yunus [10]:99 and QS. al-Hujurat [49]:13. This diversity is not intended to give rise to the domination of one group over another, but rather as a basis for building just and harmonious social relations.[2] Within this framework, tolerance is not merely a passive attitude, but an active principle in building a shared life.

From its inception, Islam has offered a normative framework for tolerance through the principles of justice, equality, and religious freedom, as reflected in the Medina Charter and the social practices of the Prophet Muhammad.[3] These principles show that pluralism in Islam does not contradict the creed, as long as it is limited to the social and humanitarian realms, not to theological mixing.

Although the Quran explicitly recognizes diversity as a divine law (Surah Yunus [10]:99), differing epistemic and hermeneutic approaches to the text have given rise to a variety of contradictory attitudes. A theological controversy has arisen between those supporting

[1] Moh. Abdul Kholiq Hasan, "Interfaith Tolerance and Its Relevance to the Indonesian Diversity: A Study on Ibn 'Āshūr's al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr," *Ulumuna* 22, no. 2 (2018): 333–62, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v22i2.301.

[2] Moh. Abdul Kholiq Hasan, "Merajut Kerukunan dalam Keragaman Agama di Indonesia (Perspektif Nilai-Nilai Al-Qur'an)," *Profetika: Jurnal Studi Islam* 14, no. 1 (2013): 66–77, https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v14i1.2008.

[3] Hasan, "Merajut Kerukunan."

theological-humanist pluralism and those rejecting it as a threat to Islam's claim to absolute truth.[4] This tension between exclusivism and inclusivism demands a re-examination of Islamic intellectual heritage to find a relevant middle ground.[5]

A literature review shows that within the Islamic intellectual tradition, Ibn Arabi (1165–1240 CE) offered a unique perspective on pluralism through a spiritual-Sufi dimension. Through the concept of the "Religion of Love" *(Din al-Hubb),* Ibn Arabi described a heart capable of accepting all manifestations of God's truth beyond the formal boundaries of religion. For Ibn Arabi, religious diversity is understood as the varying manifestations of Divine love within the cosmological structure of reality.

On the other hand, Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988 CE), a neo-modernist thinker, emphasized a reformation of thought based on Qur'anic ethics. In his conceptualization, pluralism is viewed from the perspective of the ethical consequences of monotheism, which demands social justice and freedom of conscience. Using the double movement method, he sought to derive universal moral principles from the historical context of revelation for application in modern multicultural societies.

The discourse on pluralism in Indonesia has undergone significant development through the thinking of key figures such as Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur), and Abdul Moqsith Ghazali. Gus Dur positioned pluralism as the embodiment of universal humanitarian values that align with the values of the Indonesian nation's personality.[6] For him, cooperation between various belief systems is essential in managing social life, because each has the obligation to create prosperity in shared life, even though the forms vary. This is where similarities between religions will eventually be formed, not in the teachings or creeds they adhere to, but only at the level of material achievement.[7]

Nurcholish Madjid reinforced this with theological arguments that pluralism is a natural law (sunnatullah) that must be accepted positively, not merely a social fact.[8] Meanwhile, Abdul Moqsith Ghazali emphasized that Islam recognizes religious diversity as part of God's will, so the best attitude is to respect each other and build a just life amidst differences. This statement

[4] Hasruddin Dute, M. Zainul Hasani Syarif, and Yunus, "Islam dan Pluralisme Pendidikan Agama," *Al-Riwayah: Jurnal Kependidikan* 13 (2021): 225–412, https://e-jurnal.iainsorong.ac.id/index.php/Al-Riwayah.

[5] Kholid Karomi, "Penolakan Ibnu Arabi terhadap Pluralisme Agama," *Kalimah* 12 (2014): 49–66, https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v12i1.218.

[6] Zainal Fikri, *Gus Dur, Pluralisme Agama, dan Demokrasi* (Banjarmasin: IAIN Antasari Press, 2013).

[7] Abdurrahman Wahid, *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: The Wahid Institute, 2006).

[8] Dian et al., "Nurcholish Madjid's Perspective About Thought of Religious Pluralism," *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 2 (2022): 139–48, https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v3i2.242.

demonstrates that pluralism is not a threat to Islamic faith but rather a way to strengthen universal humanity.[9] The presence of these local ideas is a fundamental reason why reconstructing the thoughts of world figures such as Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman is necessary to strengthen the epistemic basis of pluralism in the Indonesian context.

Previous research on pluralism in Islam has been extensive, but most of the literature tends to discuss the thoughts of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman separately or in a general descriptive format, such as those by Farobi & Ulya.[10] and Hidayatullah et al[11] To date, no studies have been found that specifically compare indicators of pluralism in Islam based directly on the construction of the thoughts of these two figures within a systematic comparative framework.

Furthermore, there is a dichotomy in previous studies, with Ibn Arabi predominantly studied from a Sufi perspective, as in Haris,[12] while Fazlur Rahman is viewed from a Quranic hermeneutic perspective, as in Rozaq.[13] A systematic mapping linking the differences between these two epistemic bases—the esoteric and the exoteric-ethical—to formulate a more comprehensive concept of pluralism for contemporary Muslim society is rare.

This research differs from previous studies because it goes beyond normative discussions, but rather classifies pluralism into theological, socio-political, and ethical dimensions in a structured manner. While other studies tend to be theoretical, this study seeks to link the results of conceptual analysis with the practical realities of Muslim society in Indonesia to offer solutions to conflicts of identity and exclusivism.

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to synthesize two major currents of Islamic thought that are polar opposites: Ibn Arabi's ontological-spiritual foundations and Fazlur Rahman's ethical-historical foundations. Researchers have formulated indicators of pluralism in Islam that encompass aspects of interfaith truth, religious freedom, and social ethics as a unified and applicable pluralism paradigm.

Based on this academic gap, this article aims to comparatively analyze the conceptualizations of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman's thoughts on pluralism. The significance of this research is expected to contribute to strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia through

[9] Fauzan Hidayatullah, "Analisis Pandangan Abdul Moqsith Ghazali dan Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi terhadap Pluralisme Agama dalam Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Al-Quran," *Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 3, no. 1 (2023): 28–39, https://doi.org/10.22373/JPI.V3I1.16858.

[10] Al Muhammad Farobi and Ulya Zahrotul Firdaus, "Multikulturalisme Indonesia Perspektif Fazlur Rahman," *Realita: Jurnal Penelitian dan Kebudayaan Islam* 22, no. 1 (2024): 112–28, https://doi.org/10.30762/REALITA.V22I1.289.

[11] Taufik Hidayatulloh et al., "Ibn Arabi's Hermeneutics as an Alternative Religious Exegesis for Contemporary Urban Muslim Communities," *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 30, no. 1 (2025): 61–76, https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v30i1.10082.

[12] Haris Fakhrudi, "Perspektif Ibnu Arabi tentang Konsep Kebebasan dalam Tasawuf," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 2, no. 2 (2012): 248–64.

[13] Abd. Rozaq, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Its Applications by Fazlur Rahman," *International Journal of Islamicate Social Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023): 121–31, https://doi.org/10.62039/ijiss.v1i2.27.

a framework of ethical-social pluralism that maintains clear theological boundaries. Thus, pluralism is no longer viewed as a threat to faith, but rather as a path to justice and social harmony.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is a qualitative study using a library research approach. The primary focus of this research lies in the interpretation, understanding of meaning, and critical analysis of the construction of the figures thoughts.[14] Therefore, the data used is descriptive-qualitative, not numerical or statistical.[15] Primary sources of information were obtained from the fundamental works of both figures: Ibn Arabi's *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* and *Tarjuman al-Asywaq*, as well as Fazlur Rahman's *Islam and Modernity*, and *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. This primary data was then supported by secondary literature in the form of scientific journals, books, and previous research relevant to the discourse of pluralism and contemporary Islamic thought.

To sharpen the analysis, this study uses a comparative-interpretive approach supported by the theory of pluralism in Islam. The analysis of Ibn Arabi's thoughts is dissected through the lens of the concept of "Religion of Love" *(Din al-Hubb)* to examine how the spiritual-Sufi dimension underlies his inclusivism. Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman's thoughts are analyzed using an ethical-historical approach using the double movement method. This method is used to extract universal moral principles from the historical context of revelation and then apply them to modern socio-religious realities. The integration of these two approaches allows researchers to produce a critical synthesis of a model of pluralism relevant to modern Muslim society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ibn Arabi's Thought Construction: Spiritual-Sufi Pluralism

Ibn Arabi's thought construction on pluralism rests on a spiritual-Sufi dimension that positions diversity as an ontological necessity and a manifestation of Divine will. The essence of this thought is encapsulated in the doctrine of the "Religion of Love" *(Din al-Hubb)* from his poetic verse, *"My heart has been able to accept various shapes and forms; it is a pasture for deer, a monastery for monks, a shrine for idols, the Kaaba for circumambulation, a tablet for the Torah, and a Mushaf for the Qur'an. My religion is the religion of love, which I follow wherever it takes me; such is my religion and my faith."*.[16]

Ibn Arabi provides an explicit explanation of this verse in his commentary, *Dzakha'ir al-A'laq Syarh Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq*. He emphasized that what is meant by "religion of love" *(din al-*

[14] Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2008).
[15] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014).
[16] Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *Diwan Tarjuman al-Asywaq* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'arif, 2005).

hubb) is the religion of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This meaning is based on QS. Ali Imran [3]: 31, who emphasizes that the proof of love for Allah is by following *(ittiba')* the message of Rasulullah SAW.[17] Furthermore, in *Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* in the *Fii Maqam al-Mahabbah* chapter, Ibn Arabi stated: *"Love for Allah must be proven by following the Shari'a and Sunnah of His Messenger in what has been prescribed (al-ittiba' li-rasulihi saw fima syara'a)."*,[18]

In his poetic work, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, Ibn Arabi depicts radical spiritual openness through the personification of a heart capable of accepting all forms of faith—from the monastery for monks to the Kaaba for pilgrims. This demonstrates that true devotion transcends the formal boundaries of external religion and focuses on the servant's longing for the All-Loving One *(Al-Wadud)*. For him, rejecting religious diversity is tantamount to rejecting the breadth of God's infinite mercy and will.

Esoterically, Ibn Arabi, through the concept of *din al-hubb,* views the heart of a wise person as a flexible vessel capable of capturing traces of divinity behind various dogmas. Pluralism in this context is defined as the recognition that every human being, within their limitations, responds to God's call through different loci of belief. Therefore, Ibn Arabi firmly rejects the exclusivist stance that holds a monopoly on truth by a single formal institution.

This spiritual approach shifts the focus of the community from a defensive religious identity to an ethical-affective transformation that prioritizes compassion and empathy. Ibn Arabi's spirituality of love provides the basis that differences should not be a barrier to harmonious relationships, but rather a reflection of the vastness of God's grace, which transcends formal boundaries. Thus, this Sufi pluralism offers an inclusivism rooted in the depths of the soul.

Finally, Ibn Arabi emphasized that God's truth cannot be monopolized by a single dogma, because God's absolute nature cannot be limited by relative human understanding. This construction of thought provides a foundation for Muslims to be open without losing their Islamic identity, because Islam itself is seen as the primary means of returning to God through the door of love opened by the message of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Fazlur Rahman's Thought Construction: Ethical-Historical Pluralism

Fazlur Rahman's conceptualization of pluralism is based on an ethical-historical approach rooted in the universal message of the Quran. In his book *Major Themes of the Quran*[19] he asserts that the Quran recognizes religious diversity as part of the sunnatullah (the law of God) and emphasizes that the primary criteria for salvation are faith, righteous deeds, and justice, not

[17] Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *Dzakha'ir al-A'laq Syarh Tarjuman al-Asywaq* (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1995).
[18] Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Turath, 1980).
[19] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980).

merely a label of religious identity. For him, pluralism is the active recognition of diversity as a means to build a just society.

The primary method used in Fazlur Rahman's conceptualization is the double movement: understanding the historical context of revelation and then extracting its universal moral message for application in a modern context.[20] Through this method, pluralism is understood as an ethical consequence of the principle of monotheism, which demands moral responsibility and social justice in communal life. Rahman rejected absolute exclusivism that closed the door to goodness for other communities, as it was considered contrary to the spirit of the Quran.

Fazlur Rahman viewed religions as moral communities embodying the values of freedom and responsibility. He emphasized the importance of transitioning from formal obedience (legal culture) to substantive justice as a concrete manifestation of Islamic values in a pluralistic society. Pluralism, in Rahman's conceptualization, demands that Muslims compete in social virtue rather than become entangled in unproductive theological conflicts.

In contrast to the Sufi approach, Fazlur Rahman addressed the practical-social realm, where religious texts must be understood in accordance with the moral needs of modern society. In *Islam and Modernity*,[21] he stated that the primary goal of sharia is to uphold justice and the welfare of humanity. Therefore, interfaith interaction should be directed toward cooperation for justice and societal development. His primary focus is the moral and social transformation of society toward a more civilized and just life.

Thus, Fazlur Rahman's conceptualization offers a methodology that combines theological fidelity with social creativity. Pluralism is positioned as an ethical-social agenda aimed at guaranteeing freedom of conscience and equality before the law. This provides a foundation for the Muslim community to actively participate in interfaith humanitarian work for the common good.

Meeting Points in the Thought Constructions of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman

Although they come from different intellectual backgrounds—classical Sufism and neo-modernism—these two figures share a fundamental common ground in their conceptualization of pluralism as an objective reality that must be accepted positively. Both agree that religious diversity is God's will and an unavoidable part of the structure of reality. Both Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman reject claims of absolute exclusivism that deny the value of truth and goodness in other religions.

[20] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[21] Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*.

A second point of common ground lies in the view that the substance of goodness and the inner qualities of humankind are far more important than formal outward forms. For Ibn Arabi, this is manifested in a spiritual awareness of universal love, while for Fazlur Rahman, it is reflected in an emphasis on righteous deeds and social justice. The construction of both ideas emphasizes that pluralism does not mean syncretism or theological relativism, but rather a recognition of human dignity and the right to be different.

Furthermore, these two thinkers positioned Islam as an inclusive and proactive religion in building bridges of peace. They shared the same vision that religion should be a means for social unity and harmony, not a tool for division or oppression of minority groups. This similarity strongly suggests that the Islamic tradition possesses the intellectual richness to address the challenges of multiculturalism from various perspectives.

Finally, both Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman provided a foundation for Muslims to face the modern world with confidence. Their thoughts complement each other functionally: Ibn Arabi provided a deep spiritual foundation for deeply rooted tolerance, while Fazlur Rahman provided practical direction for these values to manifest in just social regulations. This intersection creates a comprehensive paradigm of pluralism in Islam, combining transcendental awareness with a social agenda.

Table 1**.** Differences in Approach between Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman

Aspect	Ibn Arabi (Religion of Love)	Fazlur Rahman (Ethical-Historical)
Basis of Thought	Tawhid: Understanding that Allah is the source of all love. Islamic law is not practiced out of fear, but as a path of love for the Creator.	Ethical-historical, with the *double movement method*: understanding the context of revelation when it was revealed and then applying it to the modern context.
Source of Emphasis	*Tazkiyatun Nafs*: Focus on cleansing the heart to be able to be close to Allah in interacting with His creatures.	Moral-social, focuses on the application of Qur'anic values in community life.
Views on Religion	Islam is a means for humans to return to God through the door of love opened by the message of the Prophet Muhammad SAW	Religions are moral communities that contain the values of justice, freedom, and human responsibility.
Forms of Pluralism	Realizing that every human being has a natural longing for God, so that we view differences with a sense of love.	Pluralism is a consequence of Qur'anic ethics, which demands openness in social interactions.
Main Orientation	Make every act of worship (prayer, zakat, etc.) a meeting of love between the servant and his Creator.	Socio-political ethics to build a just and harmonious plural society.
Practical Implications	Love-Based Piety: Drawing closer to God by loving and serving His creation.	Promote inclusive policies, pluralist education, and healthy interfaith dialogue.

Source: Authors' analysis.

Conceptual Synthesis: Theologically-Bounded Ethical-Social Pluralism

The synthesis of Ibn Arabi's spiritual perspective and Fazlur Rahman's ethical perspective produces a paradigm known as "Theologically Bounded Ethical-Social Pluralism." This concept positions pluralism not as a relativism of truth that equates all beliefs, but rather as a moral commitment to managing diversity fairly and with dignity. Within this framework, Ibn Arabi's inner inclusivism serves as a "vaccine" against narrow-minded fanaticism, while Fazlur Rahman's social ethics serve as practical guidelines for interfaith interactions.

This pluralism has clear "theological boundaries," whereby Muslim identity is maintained but not used to discriminate against others. This approach aligns with the principles of *Maqasid Sharia*, particularly in protecting life *(hifz an-nafs)* and honor *(hifz al-'irdh)* through the rejection of all forms of violence and discrimination in the name of religion.[22] Thus, pluralism in Islam is understood as the unity between individual spiritual awareness and collective social responsibility.

Several contemporary Muslim scholars offer this kind of limited approach to pluralism. For example, one asserts that pluralism must be situated within the social and public ethical spheres, rather than within the realm of theological truth.[23] Another limited approach allows for peaceful coexistence without sacrificing religious identity, namely when the idea of pluralism is rooted in the Qur'anic values of justice, religious freedom, and respect for human dignity, without necessarily erasing differences of belief.[24]

Another limited approach is also proposed by Tariq Ramadan, who emphasizes the importance of civic ethics in a pluralistic society. According to him, Muslims can actively participate in the public sphere with adherents of other religions based on universal values such as justice and welfare, without having to agree on different theological aspects.[25]

Implications of the Comparison of Ibn Arabi's and Fazlur Rahman's Thought for the Development of Pluralism Discourse in Modern Indonesian Muslim Society

In the Indonesian context, the implications of this comparative thinking are significant for strengthening religious moderation and the motto *"Bhinneka Tunggal Ika"* (Unity in Diversity). Ibn Arabi's thoughts can be internalized in the character curriculum to build empathy and epistemic humility among youth, thus preventing early radicalization. Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman's ideas of social justice inspire the development of public policies that guarantee minority rights and equality before the law.

[22] Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law* (London: IIIT, 2008).

[23] Mohammad Fadel, "Political Liberalism, Islamic Family Law, and Family Law Pluralism," *Wake Forest Law Review* (2012): 130–33.

[24] Abdullah Saeed, *Islam and Religious Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[25] Tariq Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999).

The thoughts of these two figures also serve as a bridge for the formulation of practices previously proposed by national figures such as Gus Dur, who linked inclusive spirituality with constitutional democracy. For him, interfaith cooperation aims not to unify faiths, but rather to unite efforts to achieve justice and social welfare for all.[26] The application of this paradigm demands interfaith dialogue that is not merely formal but also collaborative in addressing humanitarian issues such as poverty and social injustice. Furthermore, Fazlur Rahman's double movement method strongly resonates with the thinking of Nurcholish Madjid, who emphasized the importance of integrating universal Islamic values into a democratic and pluralistic public sphere, thus viewing pluralism as a moral and spiritual foundation for national unity.[27]

Furthermore, the "theologically limited" synthesis of pluralism in this study aligns with Abdul Moqsith Ghazali's opinion in his work *"Arguments for Religious Pluralism."* Moqsith emphasized that pluralism does not mean syncretism or the equalization of all religions, but rather a willingness to coexist fairly based on the Qur'anic mandate.[28] Thus, the integration of the perspectives of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman is not merely theoretical but provides additional intellectual legitimacy to the model of pluralism championed by Indonesian Muslim thinkers. The implication is that religious moderation in Indonesia is doubly strengthened: by esoteric depth (spirituality) and methodological acumen (modernism), both of which lead to a recognition of human dignity in diversity. By combining spiritual depth and ethical acumen, Indonesian Muslims can build a unique model of pluralism: firmly rooted in Islamic tradition while relevant to the demands of the modern era.

Evaluation of the Relevance and Application of the Concept of Pluralism in Modern Muslim Society

Pluralism in Islam is a perspective that emphasizes the recognition of religious, cultural, and traditional diversity. The thoughts of Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) and Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988) have made significant contributions to the understanding of pluralism, both from a spiritual, ethical, and socio-political perspective. Evaluation of the application of this concept must take into account the realities of modern Muslim society, the challenges of globalization, and multicultural dynamics.

The Theological Foundations and Spirituality of Ibn Arabi

Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) is known as one of the greatest Sufi figures who developed the concept of din al-hubb or "the religion of love" as a primary principle in interacting with fellow human beings. Within this framework, love becomes the basis of a spiritual ethic that transcends

[26] Wahid, *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita*.

[27] Muhyidin Azmi, "Interpretasi Nurcholish Madjid atas Ayat-Ayat Al-Qur'an tentang Pluralisme Agama," *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 5, no. 2 (2023): 101–12, https://doi.org/10.20871/TJSQ.V5I2.232.

[28] Abdul Moqsith Ghazali, *Argumen Pluralisme Agama* (Depok: Kata Kita, 2009).

the dogmatic boundaries of any particular religion. He argued that the human heart must be able to accommodate all creatures and all forms of faith as a manifestation of God's love.[29] Thus, relations between religious communities are no longer understood as a competition to prove absolute truth, but rather as a spiritual path to foster compassion, understanding, and respect for differences.

This principle of the religion of love is relevant to the message of the Quran, particularly Surah Al-Maidah [5]:48, which emphasizes that humans are tested through differences and diversity. Allah says:

> *"And We have sent down to you the Book (the Quran) with the truth, confirming what was before it and being a judge over it. So compete among yourselves in goodness..."* (Q. al-Mā'idah 5:48)

This verse emphasizes that the primary focus is not on doctrinal uniformity, but rather on human efforts to do good within an ethical and spiritual framework. Ibn Arabi interpreted this verse as theological legitimacy for respecting plurality, while emphasizing that every belief is a path to knowing God, as long as it is based on sincere intentions and ethical awareness.

From a contemporary perspective, Ibn Arabi's views can be applied to heterogeneous social interactions. For example, Muslim communities living side by side with other religious groups can view differences as a source of spiritual richness, not conflict. This approach is also relevant in modern religious education, where the values of universal love, tolerance, and respect for differences can be taught as part of the moral and spiritual curriculum.[30] Thus, Ibn Arabi's principles provide a philosophical and spiritual framework that enables the formation of an inclusive, harmonious, and humanistic society.

Practically, the application of these principles in modern society can be achieved through interfaith dialogue that emphasizes inner experiences and shared human values, participation in interfaith social activities, and the promotion of the values of love, justice, and respect for human dignity. Thus, the spiritual value of Ibn Arabi's thought provides a solid theological foundation in the application of the concept of pluralism that is relevant to the dynamics of globalization, multiculturalism, and interfaith interactions in the 21st century.

Fazlur Rahman's Ethical-Historical Perspective

Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988) was a modern Islamic thinker who emphasized the importance of reinterpreting Quranic texts to make them relevant to the socio-historical context of modern society. One of the main focuses of his thinking was the universality of the Quran's

[29] Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabi* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

[30] Souad Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn Arabi: A Humanist Perspective," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* (2004): 41–52.

ethical values, which include the principles of justice, compassion, equality, and social responsibility.[31] According to him, Islamic teachings should not be understood narrowly or dogmatically, but must be able to respond to the moral and ethical needs of humanity across all ages. This serves as an important foundation for building applicable pluralism in modern Muslim society.

Fazlur Rahman rejected theological exclusivism that denies the rights of other groups. He argued that claims to absolute truth often lead to discrimination, social conflict, and injustice. Therefore, he encouraged Muslims to engage in ijtihad, or contextual reinterpretation of texts, to ensure the moral principles of the Quran remain relevant. This approach is not merely theoretical but has significant practical implications for the social, political, and cultural life of contemporary Muslims.[32]

In the modern context, Muslim societies face the challenges of religious, ethnic, and cultural plurality. Conflicts often arise from claims of a single truth that negate others. The ethical-historical perspective of Fazlur Rahman's thought provides a framework for understanding pluralism as a moral and social principle, not merely formal tolerance. He emphasizes that all social interactions between religious communities must be based on justice and respect for human rights, including those of minority groups.[33]

Fazlur Rahman's views align with Surah Al-Hujurat [49]:13, which emphasizes that humans were created differently so that we may know one another, not to belittle one another. Allah says:

> *"O mankind, indeed We created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is the most pious of you."* (Q. al-Ḥujurāt 49:13)

This verse reinforces Rahman's view that diversity is part of God's will, and that interfaith relations should be directed toward mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation. In this regard, Rahman emphasizes the moral and practical aspects of the Quran, so that pluralism is not only normative but also manifested in social policies, legal protections, and the development of an inclusive society.

In social practice, Rahman's approach can be implemented through various strategies. First, inclusive religious education based on the ethics of pluralism, where students are taught to respect diversity as part of the sunnatullah (God's law) and to build interfaith solidarity. Second, interfaith dialogue that prioritizes ethics and moral values, rather than mere ceremonial, fosters a

[31] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*.
[32] Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*.
[33] Moh Rafi Irvanul Vaza Wasurip and Zaenul Mahmudi, "Implementasi Keadilan Sosial Double Movement Fazlur Rahman dalam Pembagian Harta Waris Keluarga Adat Jawa," *Al-Manhaj: Journal of Indonesian Islamic Family Law* 6, no. 2 (2024): 198–213, https://doi.org/10.19105/al-manhaj.v6i2.16200.

deeper understanding of the principles of justice, compassion, and social responsibility. Third, public policies that uphold minority rights, distribute social justice, and provide legal protection for vulnerable groups.

Fazlur Rahman's conceptual framework also emphasizes that pluralism must be applied in a concrete socio-political context. In many Muslim countries, religion is often politicized for pragmatic interests, diminishing the principle of pluralism. Rahman's ethical-historical approach provides a framework for addressing the instrumentalization of religion: the moral principles of the Quran serve as a guide for legislation, social regulations, and policies that uphold justice and the common good. Thus, pluralism is not merely an intellectual discourse but is embodied in everyday social practices.

Furthermore, Rahman's thinking is relevant in the context of Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population and diverse ethnicities, cultures, and religions. The implementation of pluralism requires a collective awareness that differences are not threats, but rather social and spiritual riches. Rahman's ethical-historical approach encourages policies that uphold minority rights, build interfaith social cooperation, and emphasize justice and equality in community life.

Conceptually, Fazlur Rahman's perspective emphasizes the balance between religious texts and socio-historical realities. He emphasizes that pluralism is part of the universal ethics of Islam that can be applied across all eras and cultural contexts. This concept broadens the understanding that diversity need not lead to conflict, as long as all parties understand and consistently implement the principles of justice, compassion, and social responsibility. This approach also serves as an important foundation for interfaith dialogue, social cooperation, and religious moderation, relevant to global challenges and the dynamics of modern society.

The Application of Pluralism in a Socio-Political Context

The application of the concept of pluralism in modern society requires a transformation from mere theoretical discourse to functional socio-political practice. This effort can be articulated through three strategic pillars that integrate the thoughts of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman:

1. **Interfaith Dialogue and Inclusive Education**: Interfaith dialogue should not be trapped in formality, but rather based on Ibn Arabi's principle of universal love to foster inner respect. Methodologically, Fazlur Rahman emphasized that this interaction must be grounded in ethical awareness for the common good. Pedagogically, integrating the principles of social justice and moral responsibility into an inclusive curriculum is key to developing a generation that values diversity.[34]

[34] Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn Arabi."

2. **Public Policy and Minority Protection**: Pluralism requires institutional legitimacy through the state's role in guaranteeing religious freedom. This aligns with Fazlur Rahman's social ethics, which emphasizes that the substance of sharia is justice. The implementation of non-discriminatory public policies and legal protection for minority groups are operational manifestations of pluralism, which guarantees equal citizenship rights.
3. **Interfaith Social Movements**: Concrete actions on humanitarian, economic, and environmental issues provide a space where Ibn Arabi's perspectives of universal love and Fazlur Rahman's social justice converge concretely. This grassroots movement serves as a driving force for solidarity, capable of eroding social prejudice and offering solutions to global challenges such as radicalism and economic inequality.

Holistically, the synergy between Ibn Arabi's spiritual depth and Fazlur Rahman's ethical-historical rationality creates a holistic paradigm of pluralism. In Indonesia, this synthesis is highly relevant for strengthening the foundation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) amidst the challenges of intolerance. By making love and justice central pillars, modern Muslim societies can position themselves as agents of global peace, demonstrating that Islam is an inclusive, humanistic, and just religion.

The Author's Critical Position on the Concept of Pluralism in the Thought Constructions of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman

In conducting a comparative study of the construction of pluralism in the thought of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman, the author believes that both figures have made significant contributions to enriching the discourse on pluralism in Islam. However, both are not free from a number of conceptual and methodological limitations that require academic critique.

The author assesses that the contributions of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman to the concept of pluralism in Islam are complementary but have their own limitations. Ibn Arabi's approach excels in the spiritual dimension through the concept of the "religion of love" *(din al-hubb),* but is weak in practical socio-political implementation. Conversely, Fazlur Rahman, through his *"double movement"* method, offers a strong ethical-historical framework for modern reality, but risks diminishing the transcendental dimension of revelation.

The author positions himself on an ethical-social pluralism approach with theological boundaries. The construction of pluralism within this framework is not intended to equate all religions in terms of faith, but rather to guarantee religious freedom, social justice, and respect for human dignity in communal life. This synthesis integrates Ibn Arabi's spiritual depth with Fazlur Rahman's ethical rationality as the foundation for developing a contextual pluralism discourse in Indonesia.

A number of scholars have even firmly rejected the label of religious pluralism applied to Ibn Arabi. This refers to another of Ibn Arabi's doctrines, Wahdat al-wujud. Karomi, for example, asserts that Ibn Arabi's concept of Wahdat al-wujud was never intended to equate all religions. religions, but rather as a framework of a hierarchy of being that maintains Muhammad's law as the final norm. The accusation of pluralism against Ibn Arabi, he argues, stems more from distorted interpretations and a dismantling of the context of Sufi texts.[35]

Claims that position Ibn Arabi as the theological legitimator of modern religious pluralism demonstrate serious methodological problems. This reading tends to simplify the concept of wahdat al-wujūd by removing it from its ontological and Sufi framework and forcing it into the realm of comparative theology and public ethics. This distortion ignores the fact that wahdat al-wujūd speaks of the hierarchy of being and the ontological relationship between Al-Haqq and creatures, not about the equality of religious truth in the normative realm. Thus, the use of Ibn Arabi as the foundation of religious pluralism is more an ideological appropriation than a responsible textual reading.

Furthermore, the pluralization of meaning in Ibn Arabi's Sufi expressions, especially poetry, The interpretation of the “religion of love” is often carried out through contextual deconstruction and neglect of the hermeneutic discipline of Sufism. This approach is not only philologically flawed but also theologically problematic, as it negates Ibn Arabi's strong commitment to Muhammad's law as the final norm of religious practice. Rather than demonstrating religious pluralism, Ibn Arabi's texts emphasize a strict integration between reality and law, where metaphysical awareness was never intended to invalidate Islam's normative claims. Therefore, the accusation that Ibn Arabi embraced religious pluralism lacks a solid textual basis and reflects more the agenda of contemporary readers than the author's intent.[36]

In fact, as previously mentioned, Ibn Arabi provided an explicit clarification of the verse in his commentary, *Dzakha'ir al-A'laq.* He emphasized that what is meant by "the religion of love" *(din al-hubb)* is the religion of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This interpretation is based on Surah Ali Imran, verse 31, which emphasizes that proof of love for Allah is by following *(ittiba')* the message of the Prophet Muhammad.[37]

Furthermore, in *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* in the *Fi Maqam al-Mahabbah* chapter, Ibn Arabi stated: *“Love for Allah must be proven by following the Shari'a and Sunnah of His Messenger in what has been prescribed (al-ittiba' li-rasulihi saw fima syara'a).”*.[38] Thus, the

[35] Karomi, “Penolakan Ibnu Arabi.”
[36] Karomi, “Penolakan Ibnu Arabi.”
[37] Ibn Arabi, *Dzakha’ir al-A‘laq*.
[38] Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah*.

"religion of love" in Ibn Arabi's ontology is a form of total obedience to Islamic law and the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

The author argues that using Ibn Arabi's thought as the sole solution to modern pluralism is problematic, because an approach based on individual spiritual awareness fails to address structural issues such as discrimination and power relations in the public sphere. Without regulatory power and normative clarity, reducing pluralism to a mere personal inner attitude risks misleading the formulation of Islamic public ethics. Therefore, academic criticism of the conceptual limitations of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman is crucial so that the discourse on pluralism does not stop at an ideal-normative order but can instead provide institutional guarantees that are theologically accountable and socially relevant.

Pluralism in Ibn Arabi's thought stems from a spiritual foundation through the concept of the religion of love, which views diversity as part of God's will and must be addressed with love. This approach spiritually encourages an inclusive attitude and respect for differences. However, several scholars believe that this kind of pluralism is difficult to translate operationally into modern social and political spaces[39] This approach risks being misunderstood as theological relativism if not normatively constrained, particularly when applied to the context of law, public policy, and power relations between religious groups.

Similar criticisms have emerged from more normative traditions of Islamic thought, which assert that spiritual pluralism cannot simply be used as the basis for public ethics. Al-Attas, for example, emphasized that metaphysical Sufism should be placed within the realm of individual spiritual development, not as a normative foundation for socio-political order.[40] Thus, Ibn Arabi's conceptualization of pluralism is powerful in the inner ethical dimension, but limited in modern institutional and social contexts.

Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman's conceptualization of pluralism offers a more applicable approach through an ethical-historical framework and the double movement method. This approach allows for contextual interpretation of Qur'anic values to address the challenges of modern society, including issues of religious freedom and social justice. However, Rahman's approach is not without criticism. Several thinkers believe that an excessive emphasis on contextualization has the potential to open up too much subjectivity for interpreters, thus weakening the normative certainty of Islamic teachings.[41]

[39] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006).

[40] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

[41] Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Wael B. Hallaq, for example, criticized the tendency of Islamic modernism to overly adapt to a liberal-modern framework without adequate epistemic control.[42] In the context of pluralism, this critique is relevant because ethical pluralism that is not strictly framed risks shifting into normative relativism, where the line between tolerance and the blurring of theological identities becomes blurred.

Based on this critique of both approaches, this study positions pluralism in Islam as a bounded ethical-social concept, rather than an absolute theological pluralism. Pluralism is defined as a moral commitment to guaranteeing justice, religious freedom, and respect for human dignity, without negating Islam's theological truth claims. This position aligns with the view that places pluralism within the framework of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, specifically the protection of life *(hifz al-nafs)*, honor *(hifz al-'ird)*, and social welfare.[43]

Thus, the concept of pluralism in Islam in this study is understood as an ethical strategy for managing diversity in modern Muslim societies. A synthesis between the spiritual depth of Ibn Arabi's thought and the ethical-historical orientation of Fazlur Rahman's thought can only be achieved if pluralism is positioned proportionally: morally sound, theologically clear, and socially relevant.

CONCLUSION

Based on the comparative analysis conducted, it can be concluded that pluralism in Islam has a solid intellectual foundation in both classical Sufi traditions and neo-modernist thought. Ibn Arabi's thought, constructed through a spiritual-Sufi approach, with the doctrine of the "Religion of Love" *(Din al-Hubb)*, views religious diversity as a manifestation of the vastness of God's grace and the flexibility of the human heart in grasping divine truth. Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman's thought constructs a narrative of pluralism through an ethical-historical approach using the double movement method, emphasizing that the Quran recognizes the existence of other religious communities as long as they adhere to the principles of faith, righteous deeds, and social justice.

The main point of agreement between these two thinkers lies in the rejection of rigid, absolute exclusivism and the recognition of human dignity before God. The synthesis of these two ideas produces the paradigm of "Theologically Bounded Ethical-Social Pluralism." This concept offers a middle ground: internally maintaining a firm Islamic creed (theologically bounded), but externally demonstrating spiritual openness and an ethical commitment to collaborating with interfaith groups in realizing social justice (practical inclusivism).

[42] Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[43] Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah*.

The implications of this research indicate that the integration of the thoughts of Ibn Arabi and Fazlur Rahman is highly relevant for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia. Ibn Arabi's spiritual depth plays a role in refining religious attitudes to be more tolerant and empathetic, while Fazlur Rahman's methodological acumen provides a foundation for Muslims to actively participate in a democratic and just national life. Thus, pluralism in Islam is no longer seen as a threat to faith, but rather as a manifestation of Islam, *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*.

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