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Islamic Inclusivism: Insights From Abu Dhabi, Silaturahmi Tunnel, and Walisanga-Ende

Hendrikus Maku

Ledaleo Institute of Philosophy and Creative Technology, Maumere, Indonesia;
Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta, Indonesia

Asep Saepudin Jahar

Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta, Indonesia

Stephen Bevans

Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA

Ambros Leonangung Edu

Catholic University of St. Paul Ruteng, Ruteng, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This article responds to the claim that Islam is a religion of violence, which has fostered a generation afflicted with Islamophobia. To support their argument, the authors present several historical instances that showcase Islam's benevolent aspects. These historical instances, elaborated upon in this article, include the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration (A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together), the Silaturahmi Tunnel connecting the Istiqlal Mosque and the Catholic Cathedral of Jakarta, and the interreligious cooperation occurring at the Walisanga Islamic Boarding School in Ende, Flores, Indonesia. Quraish Shihab's Quranic exegesis serves as an analytical tool to examine these three instances. Data were collected through documentation, participant observation, and interviews, then qualitatively analyzed. Through this methodology, the study demonstrates that Islamic ethics and inclusive communal life have manifested an inclusive nature within Islam. By employing this selected method, the study demonstrates how elements of Islamic ethics and

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Stephen Bevans, Ambros Leonangung Edu

abunahendrik@gmail.com, asepjahar@uinjkt.ac.id,
sbevans@ctu.edu, ambros.leonangung@gmail.com

the ongoing inclusive communal life ingrained among people illustrate the inclusive nature of Islam.

KEYWORDS

Islamic Inclusivism, the Abu Dhabi Declaration, the Silaturahmi Tunnel

Introduction

“Islam rahmah li al-‘ālamīn” [Islam is a mercy to the universe] is an appealing and inspirational saying, resonating with Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This concise statement is among the many universal Islamic expressions that serve as gifts to the world. Those moved by this saying often seek to fully grasp its meaning (Meslec et al., 2020). In 1973, the French existentialist Gabriel Marcel remarked, *“esse est co-esse et esse est pro-esse”* [to be is to be for another] elucidating that “to be” signifies not only existing with another but also existing for another (Ningsih et al., 2022). It is inevitable that those enlightened by this saying perceive themselves not solely as passive observers amidst others (*“esse est percipere”*), but rather as individuals striving for the collective welfare of the community. The concept of “to be for another” can also contribute positively by deepening faith, reinforcing religious identity, broadening understanding of other religions, fostering tolerance, and embracing diversity (Muttaqin, 2020).

We could mention any scholar as a model of “to be for another.” One of the most outstanding academics is the late Azyumardi Azra, CBE. Azra dedicated all his writings to concretizing the vision of Islam as a mercy to the universe. His entire life reflects his belief that he is not merely an observer amidst humanity but also someone who strives for the greater good. Azra’s *Relevansi Islam Wasathiyah: Dari Melindungi Kampus Hingga Mengaktualisasikan Kesalehan* [The Relevance of the Islam of Wasathiya: From Protecting the Campus to Actualizing Piety] (2020), Masykuri’s *Islam Agama Kedamaian* [Islam, a Religion of Peace] (2021), and Hendrikus Maku’s *Peace in Islam According to Muhammad Šarif Ahmad* (2019), are publications that elaborate on this theme of Islam being a mercy to the universe (Ivana, 2022). These authors, approaching from different angles, conceptually converge at the highest point of consciousness that Islam is a holistic religion whose teachings have become a source of motivation to act, to promote tolerance amidst diversity, and to demonstrate what Azra refers to as “the smiling and colorful Islam.”

Academics, in their respective capacities, have collaborated to demonstrate that Islam truly embodies mercy to the universe (Khamdan & Wiharyani, 2018). However, there are others who, under the guise of Islam, propagate debates regarding whether Islam is genuinely a religion of peace. Some argue that there exists a dichotomy within Islam: it is friendly, yet not entirely so; it is great, yet not entirely so. This perception emanates from two distinct sources: Muslims themselves and non-Muslims. Irfan Amalee, the co-founder of PeaceGeneration Indonesia, asserts that Islam is a frequently misunderstood religion by outsiders and its adherents (Ja’afar, 2022).

According to CNN Indonesia's report on the findings of the Public Virtue Research Institute, there have been 19 terrorist bombing incidents in Indonesia over the past 20 years (Daftar Kasus Ledakan, 2021). These include Bali I (2002), JW Marriott (2003), Bali II (2005), Ritz Carlton (2009), Az-Dzikra Cirebon Mosque (2011), Sarinah (2016), Mapolresta Solo (2016), Kampung Melayu (2017), and Surabaya and Sidoarjo (2018). Additionally, the public still recalls incidents such as Thamrin (2016), Samarinda (2016), Bandung (2017), Mako Brimob (2018), and the husband-and-wife suicide bombers at the Makassar Cathedral (2021).

The attacks in various parts of the world have been devastating. On November 13, 2015, in France, 137 people were killed and 368 wounded. Another tragic incident occurred in the Philippines on January 27, 2019, when a suicide bomber killed 20 people at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic Church in Jolo (Rizky et al., 2022). Moreover, Sri Lanka suffered a grievous attack of suicide bomber on April 21, 2019, resulting in the deaths of 259 people. In the United States, on August 3, 2019, 22 people were killed in El Paso, and another 10 lost their lives in Dayton. These attacks deeply disturbed the public (Al Qurtuby, 2015). Although not all mass media sensationalized these events, public opinion often associated Islam with violence due to media reports highlighting terrorists inspired by Islamic teachings. Islam bore the blame for these tragic occurrences (Hafidh et al., 2022).

Unfair reporting on Islam perpetuated a negative perception, challenging the belief of Islamic academics who view Islam as a religion of peace. Hendrikus Maku, an interreligious dialogue activist, faced opposition from both Islamophobic individuals and fellow academics with negative views of Islam during a seminar where he advocated for Islam's peaceful nature (Madakir et al., 2022).

The main focus of this study revolves around several key points, notably: "Is Islam an inclusive religion?" The authors aim to illustrate the concept of inclusiveness within Islam, particularly in Indonesia. This inclusiveness is not confined solely to ideological realms but extends into tangible social manifestations. The study centers on three specific subjects: the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration as written in *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* (2019), the Silaturahmi Tunnel [Tunnel of Friendship], and the Walisanga Islamic Boarding School in Ende.

The systematic exploration of Islamic inclusiveness encompasses the following components:

1. A concise overview of the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration (hereinafter—the Declaration).
2. A brief description of the Silaturahmi Tunnel.
3. A detailed profile of the Walisanga Islamic Boarding School in Ende.
4. Insights from Quraish Shihab concerning Islamic inclusiveness are juxtaposed with the three focal points of the study.

In this study, the central argument is that Islam is an "inclusive" religion, receptive to dialogue and collaboration with other faiths worldwide. This argument is substantiated by delineating three illustrative examples: the *Declaration* co-signed by Grand Mufti Al-Azar, Dr. Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, and Pope Francis in 2019; the Silaturahmi Tunnel linking

the Istiqlal Mosque and the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Jakarta, Indonesia; and the notable interreligious cooperation initiatives at the Walisanga Islamic Boarding School in Ende, Flores, Indonesia. Each of these examples, a formal declaration, a physical infrastructure, and a successful communal practice, converges to support the contention that, at its finest manifestations, Islam should not be typecast as a religion characterized by intolerance and violence. Instead, it should be recognized as a faith that fosters and thrives in dialogue and collaboration (Rahmatullah, 2021).

Methodology

This study uses a literature review methodology to respond to the assertion that Islam is inherently violent, leading to the proliferation of Islamophobia. It begins by introducing the central argument and purpose of the article. To support this argument, the authors draw upon various historical instances that showcase Islam's benevolent and peaceful aspects. These instances include the Declaration, the Silaturahmi Tunnel connecting the Istiqlal Mosque and the Catholic Cathedral of Jakarta, and the interreligious cooperation at the Walisanga Islamic Boarding School in Ende, Flores (Nur Isnaini et al., 2019).

Quraish Shihab's Quranic exegesis is employed as an analytical tool to delve into these historical instances and provide deeper insights. Furthermore, the authors detail the methodology used in the study, which involves data collection through documentation, participant observation, and interviews. The collected data are qualitatively analyzed to extract meaningful conclusions (Supratman et al., 2021).

Through this rigorous methodology, the study aims to demonstrate that Islamic ethics and the inclusive communal life among adherents reflect the inclusive nature of Islam. By employing a literature review approach, this study synthesizes existing knowledge and presents a compelling argument that challenges prevailing misconceptions about Islam's propensity for violence.

Finding and Discussions

A. The Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration

This declaration, co-signed by Grand Mufti Al-Azhar, Dr. Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, and Pope Francis in Abu Dhabi on February 4th, 2019, was preceded by an international conference themed "The Brotherhood of Humanity." Hosted by the Council of Muslim Elders and chaired by Grand Mufti Al-Azhar, the conference included clergy and intellectuals from various countries. Father Markus Solo Kewuta, SVD, from the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, emphasized the declaration's importance for two reasons (Al-Latif et al., 2023). First, the conception of the declaration, described as revolutionary, employs language that challenges conventional ideas about religious relationships previously veiled by diplomatic theories. Second, the declaration was signed by Pope Francis, the supreme head of the Universal Roman Catholic Church, and Dr. Ahmed Al-Tayyeb, Grand Mufti Al-Azhar (Burhani et al., 2021).

While acknowledging the significance of the co-signatories of the Declaration, it is important to recognize that neither individual represented Christianity or Islam in their entirety. Dr. Ahmed Al-Tayyeb is a Sunni Muslim but did not speak for the entire Sunni world. Similarly, Pope Francis is the supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, but he did not encompass all of Christianity. Both Islam and Christianity encompass numerous sects and denominations, each with its leadership structures (Solihah, 2020).

Explaining the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration comprehensively is challenging. With this complexity in mind, the authors highlight several points raised in the document itself, guided by the wisdom of Quraish Shihab: “What cannot be completely achieved should not be completely disregarded.” These points are presented here without evaluation, and there is no intention to judge other aspects that have not been addressed.

The Setting for the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration. Since 1998, there has been a working relationship between the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt. This relationship was formally and permanently established through a pact signed by the Vatican and the Permanent Commission of Al-Azhar for Interreligious Cooperation Between Monotheistic Faiths on May 28th, 1998. This pact signifies a shared commitment to enhance peaceful relations between the Catholic Church and Sunni Muslims worldwide and collaborate in alleviating human suffering. The cooperation between these entities has been effective, fostering a spirit of brotherhood through regular bilateral meetings held every two years.

The Leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Said Agil Siradj (Syiafuddin & Fahyuni, 2019) appreciates the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration. He says that the spirit of *A the Document on Human Fraternity* has been inspiring NU since 1984 when they officially declared the three categories of brotherhood including a brotherhood of fellow Muslims (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*), the brotherhood of fellow citizens (*ukhuwahwathaniyah*), and brotherhood of fellow humans (*ukhuwahbasyariyah*). In addition, Siradj emphasizes the contributions of that conception, namely (a) stopping the hostility between Muslims and non-Muslims; (b) accepting the nation-state and rejecting the concept of the caliphate; and (c) accepting the legal constitution (Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution) and not contradicting sharia and finally realizing world peace (Anshori et al., 2022).

This cooperation faced a crisis when Pope Benedict XVI gave an open lecture at the University of Regensburg, Germany, on 12th September 2006. In that lecture, Pope Benedict quoted a statement from a medieval ruler who said Muhammad’s innovations were “evil and inhuman,” offending Muslim people. One hundred and thirty-eight Muslim clerics from around the world signed a letter titled *A Common Word Between Us and You*, which was sent to the Pope on October 13th, 2006. Pope Benedict responded by tasking the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to establish a forum together with the Muslim clerics who had written to him. After that, this forum was formed. In November 2008, members of the forum came to the Vatican and discussed efforts towards reconciliation, mutual understanding, and mutual respect. After that meeting, the relationship between Catholics and Muslims slowly but surely

was restored (Karwadi & Indrawan, 2023). The crisis, which had gone on for a long time, ended on April 28th to 29th, 2017, when Pope Francis visited Cairo, with a special mission to promote interreligious dialogue as a means of realizing peace. During the meeting, Pope Francis noted the problem of the violence promulgated by ISIS¹. He said, “Christian–Muslim Dialogue is the only way ISIS can be defeated. I come here as a messenger of peace at a time when the world is being blindly torn apart by violence.”

The Brotherhood of Humanity Declaration. The Declaration was signed by the Pope and the Grand Mufti, declaring that every person, from whatever religious background, is required to study and reflect deeply on the plurality of society and the deep differences that can often cause misunderstandings. A concrete suggestion in the declaration is addressing the importance of education. Poor education can blind people to the reality of life around them. Both leaders called on Christians and Muslims, as well as all people, to adopt a culture of dialogue as the best way of building up religious cooperation.

Pope Francis, in his sermon at the occasion of the launching of the declaration, said that there is no alternative: “We must build a future together. If not, there will be no future for us.” He then emphasized, “Religions cannot disregard this vital task of building bridges between peoples and cultures.” One Indonesian Muslim scholar, Komaruddin Hidayat, also said: “No peace among nations without peace among religions. No peace among religions without dialogue between religions. No dialogue between religions without investigation of the foundation of religions” (Ihsan, 2018).

There is a prophetic dimension of the Brotherhood of Humanity Declaration. The linguistic style of the declaration has a certain innocence, addressing several problems that haunt the way of peace between religions. In addition, another prophetic aspect is the emphasis on time and process, and not on place or venue, reflecting, perhaps, an often-quoted principle of Pope Francis². Furthermore, the declaration truly stresses the need to pass over from tolerance to fraternal coexistence to pass over from the status of the guest to brother or sister, and pass over from tolerance to the level of love. This is because love makes it possible for people to live side by side in peace and harmony. In this way, perhaps, the declaration anticipates Francis’s emphasis on brother and sisterly love articulated in depth in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (Yanto, 2021).

Another important point in the declaration is a call to know oneself, as well as to know one’s sister or brother. The Pope, at that historic moment, underlined the importance of knowing the history of our sisters and brothers, knowing their culture, and knowing their religious beliefs (Yunus et al., 2020). Along the same lines, Komaruddin Hidayat says that in these times, believers cannot live, are cut off from others, and are excluded. They must be involved in dialogue with people of other religions. He says, “To be religious, someone has to be interreligious.”

¹ISIS has been designated a terrorist organisation and is banned from all activities by the United Nations, United States, European Union, Russia, and many others. We condemn all forms of terrorism, particularly this organisation's activities. ИГИЛ была признана террористической организацией; любая деятельность ИГИЛ запрещена в России, США, Европейском Союзе и многих других странах. Мы осуждаем любые формы терроризма, в том числе деятельность этой организации.

² See, e.g., EG 222–225 (Apostolic exhortation, n.d.).

Quraish Shihab speaks of the brotherhood of humanity as being both a religious teaching and a simple demand of social life. Imam Ali bin Abi Thalib (559–661 M), the fourth caliph after the death of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, said, “The person you meet who is not of your brother in religion is your brother as a fellow human being.” There is social oneness that can assist a person to have a positive view in the way they relate to their fellow human beings. Different views of brotherhood do not have to be in opposition. A wise person will always find meeting points in the middle of diversity.

B. The Silaturahmi Tunnel

“If people build a wall, they will be imprisoned behind it. If people build a bridge, they open the way for a long journey.” The following description of the Silaturahmi Tunnel is the result of a conversation between Hasiholan, a journalist from the weekly magazine *Hidup* [Life], and Markus Solo Kewuta, SVD, a staff member of the Pontifical Commission for Interreligious Dialogue. The results of this conversation were published in three consecutive issues of *Hidup*, on October 24th and 31st, 2021, and November 7th, 2021 (Badry & Rahman, 2021).

The Silaturahmi Tunnel (ST) connects the Istiqlal Mosque and the Catholic Cathedral in Jakarta. It attracts much comment and triggers the presence of a new religious perspective. According to Markus, ST will increasingly strengthen interreligious dialogue in Indonesia. He says, “I am truly moved by the extraordinary initiative of Muslim and Catholic leaders, particularly those based at the Istiqlal Mosque and the Catholic Cathedral in Jakarta, who have worked hard and succeeded in building this tunnel. As far as I know, it is unique, in the entire world. Firstly, and primarily, I really do appreciate this unique project. This is not just an underground tunnel that allows people to walk from one place to another. Rather, it is a symbol that speaks a thousand words” (Anshori et al., 2022). According to Markus Solo, there are several symbolic meanings of ST (Anshori et al., 2022):

1. It is a pathway, nothing more, nothing less. However, it is a pathway that opens possibilities for meeting and dialogue. By building this tunnel, both parties—the Christian Catholic faithful and the Muslim faithful—show that they want to intensify their relationship and open more ways of meeting and carrying out dialogue.
2. It proposes that interreligious dialogue and the relationship between Christians and Muslims are not stuck in a static, old-fashioned form that cannot change. It shows that it is a dynamic activity that can break through barriers.
3. In the spirit of the Abu Dhabi Declaration, signed by the Pope and the Grand Mufti in 2019, this tunnel expresses the special fraternal relationship between Indonesian Muslims and Catholic Christians. This relationship is so close that this tunnel symbolically concretizes it.
4. It is similar to a bridge. It connects two points that previously were separated. Now, they are joined.
5. It symbolizes the success of dialogue and cooperation, which are pillars of dialogue within the Catholic Church. The others are life, theology, and spirituality. This construction shows dialogue can always be realized by working together for the common good. Interreligious cooperation is clearly a matter of urgency and is always possible. Openness and goodwill are needed to make it happen.

There is a common thread that connects ST with the Abu Dhabi Declaration. The essence of the Declaration revolves around fostering fraternal relationships and straightforward cooperation in various ways to oppose evil. This includes combating the exploitation of religion and faith for selfish agendas, which are destructive, as well as the exploitation of nature and the poor for personal gain, leading to poverty and limited educational opportunities, among other issues. Working together for the common good is always preferable among brothers and sisters. ST and the Abu Dhabi Declaration are great inspirations for advocating religious moderation and interfaith dialogue. In their research, Wasisto Raharjo Jati et al. (2022) discovered that promoting interfaith dialogues within communities is more effective for younger generations, as recent interfaith dialogues among young people have proven to be intimate and impactful. Moreover, they emphasize the need to critically assess the religious moderation discourse and campaign propagated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia. These findings highlight the involvement of conservatives eager to participate in interfaith campaigns to counteract hardliner stigmas (Arifin et al., 2023).

The Pope and the Grand Mufti caused a stir when they called on their respective faith communities to regard each other as brothers and sisters. They emphasized shared humanity, common historical destiny, and citizenship despite religious differences. Simply tolerating one another is insufficient; love is necessary among brothers and sisters. In Indonesia, it is time to usher in a new era, echoing the spirit of Abu Dhabi, where mutual love among brothers and sisters is embraced. The Grand Mufti suggests that to prevent interreligious conflicts, mere interreligious dialogue falls short; instead, fostering multiculturalism and practicing mutual respect are essential (Famularsihet et al., 2022).

Implementation of ST's inspiration transcends geographical and age barriers. Markus Solo suggests that at the grassroots level, individuals of different faiths need to reflect together before they embark on building bridges for common life. Markus challenges the youth to consider what bridges they wish to construct. Ideally, what sort of bridges would they like to see? He asserts that young people need not fear other religions. Previous generations have demonstrated some effective ways of harmoniously and peacefully living together. They collaborated for the nation's freedom and showcased this freedom through commendable deeds, of which we are proud today.

C. The Walisanga Muslim Boarding School, Ende, Indonesia

A Profile of Walisanga. Established in 1982 by Mahmud EK, Siti Fatimah Nganda, Siti Khadijah Abubakar, and Muhammed Fakheuddin Razi, the school initially served Muslim children from Flores, Lembata, and Timor. After seven years, it gained government recognition and became Walisanga Muslim Boarding School.

According to J. Habermas, everything in this world and history has its place. With this in mind, the founders of the school and the madrasah faced some contextual challenges, which were seen later as the background for this project. These include:

1. The growing Islamic population in Flores, Lembata, and Timor showed the need for Islamic institutes.

2. Mahmud EK, a Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia official, decided to establish a Muslim boarding school in Ende due to the low quality of religious life among Muslims. The curriculum of ordinary madrasahs did not meet the needs of the Muslim community, particularly the “Identity Card Muslims” phenomenon.
3. The problem of poverty. Many Muslims were living below the poverty line. Mahmud EK wanted to open an institute for school-age children from poor families who would receive free tuition.
4. The senior madrasah would accept students from the junior madrasah, while not being close to accepting other students from elsewhere.
5. The heterogeneous nature of the society inspired the founder of the institute to build interreligious relationships, particularly with Catholics. He saw the institute as a venue for interfaith cooperation.

Walisanga Muslim Boarding School operates two curricula, one mandated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs and the other by the Ministry of Education and Sport. A defining characteristic of this institute is its commitment to serving the underprivileged. According to Mahmud EK, prioritizing this demographic was the primary impetus behind the school's establishment. The founder aimed to establish an institution focusing on improving impoverished youth, achieved through collaboration with individuals from various religious backgrounds, including the Catholic Church. The institute is guided by several overarching visions:

- Fostering the development of faith and genuine belief in God.
 - Guiding individuals to follow the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
 - Cultivating individuals with noble character traits akin to those exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
- To actualize these visions, the institute has set forth the following mission:
- Empowering the institute as a safe, well-maintained, beloved, and complete sanctuary.
 - Creating an environment where students can elevate their ethical standards.
 - Helping students comprehend the necessities of life and the purpose of existence, recognizing that true happiness and success are attainable only through devotion to the Divine and the practice of faith.

The Walisanga Muslim Boarding School, Ende, as a Meeting House. The following section delves into the inquiry, “Is Walisanga truly a meeting house?” If so, “Who convenes there?” and “What fosters these gatherings?” Prior to conceiving the institute, the founders of Walisanga were deeply engaged in interreligious dialogue. Mahmud EK’s encounter with Catholics during a leadership training program at Ende Social Development Institute led to a new perspective on interfaith collaboration, valuing its importance in a diverse society. They align with the sentiment expressed by Ary Roest Crollius, affirming that “a religion that rejects pluralism in society isolates itself and stunts its growth. Plurality raises thought, ethics, cultural creativity, and religious perspective” (Hidayat et al., 2022).

During a meeting with the St. Michael Education Trust, Mahmud EK expressed his vision for interreligious collaboration in education. He founded an educational trust

with dialogue partners, including Dami Mukese, Jon Paul Asa, and Hubert Embu. The institute aims to foster harmony among Muslim and Catholic educators.

In line with the insights provided by Muhammad Fahmi et al., the pesantren fosters an organic tolerance deeply ingrained in its core principles. This endeavor requires ongoing efforts to nurture harmony, managed with professionalism. The pesantren places a premium on the essence of Islamic orthodoxy, prioritizing it over outward religious symbols while simultaneously embracing diversity without scrutiny of ethnic, racial, cultural, or religious distinctions among its educators. For them, pursuing excellence and professionalism in their roles outweighs all other considerations (Riinawati, 2022).

Since 1998, nearly every year, witnesses candidates for the Catholic priesthood (seminarians) has been engaging in a year of pastoral work at Walisanga. They actively contribute to teaching and assist in the administration of the dormitory, leaving a profoundly positive impact on the institute and society. Despite some holding a prejudicial view that the involvement of seminarians harbors an ulterior motive, such as Christian proselytization, the reality contradicts this assumption. Not a single individual at Walisanga has renounced their Muslim faith due to the presence and activities of the seminarians (Thohir, 2022). Historical data shows that 26 seminarians dedicated their lives to Walisanga from the beginning.

Seminarians' presence at Walisanga has sparked mixed reactions within the Muslim community, but it has also positively impacted cooperation and the social fabric, including:

- facilitating the formation of discussion groups comprising religious leaders who collaboratively address social issues and challenges;
- organizing interreligious meetings involving representatives from diverse faiths to strategize ways to combat radical ideologies threatening religious harmony in Ende;
- proactively guiding and fostering dialogue to promote peaceful coexistence among people of different faiths.

D. Insights From Quraish Shihab Concerning Islamic Inclusiveness

The term "inclusivism" gained popularity through Alan Race's seminal work "Christians and Religious Pluralism" (Khamdan & Wiharyani, 2018), which identified three perspectives within Christianity: exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism. Exclusivists assert their religion as the sole truth, rejecting all others as false. Inclusivists acknowledge truths in other religions while regarding their own as superior, while pluralists see diverse religions as paths to the same salvation.

Studying the theme of inclusive Islam as mirrored in the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration, the Silaturahmi Tunnel, and the Walisanga Islamic Boarding School, the perspective of religious inclusivism of Quraish Shihab, as will be discussed below, is relevant in the modern era.

Plurality: A Part of The Divine Plan. "If it is God's will, it is correct that He makes you one people. However, God can deceive whomever He wishes and guide

whomever He wishes. Truly, you will be asked to be accountable for what you have done” (QS. An-Nah1 [16]:93). Shihab interprets this as indicating that God does not intend for there to be just one homogeneous humanity, sharing a single inclination, thought pattern, religion, or set of principles. Rather, he suggests that God creates humanity with diverse characteristics and attributes, allowing individuals to excel and compete in virtue, fostering creativity and innovation. Constructively, individuals can cultivate the inherent qualities of their nature as stewards of creation. Healthy competition, according to Shihab, does not diminish respect for others. Instead, it is founded on fraternal love and is characterized by a culture of mutual respect; as emphasized in the preamble to the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration, faith inspires individuals to see themselves as interconnected siblings, supported and loved. Through belief in God’s grace, they are compelled to express fraternity by caring for the environment and supporting the most vulnerable. This call to action aims to alleviate poverty, mitigate conflicts, and address various global challenges, fostering unity and cooperation among people of faith for the betterment of future generations.

The construction of the Silaturahmi Tunnel and the interreligious collaboration at Walisanga exemplify a profound sense of shared fraternity. “Faith urges believers to regard each other as siblings.” The tunnel linking the Istiqlal Mosque and the Cathedral, along with Walisanga, exemplifies what occurs when people of faith genuinely perceive each other as kin. The desire to engage with others is a reaffirmation of one’s faith. However, not everyone seeks such encounters. Only those who recognize the uniqueness of others, acknowledging this diversity as divinely ordained, demonstrate a willingness to bridge the gap (van Es et al., 2021).

Globalization has transformed our world into a global village, facilitating the construction of bridges of encounter while diminishing the potential for erecting barriers. It can be argued that the tide of globalization, which encompasses the globe, is unstoppable. Islam advocates for the prohibition of all forms of coercion. The genuine propagation of faith always highlights the role of God, who grants individuals the utmost freedom to chart their paths. The primary function of religion is to instill a sense of security among its adherents. Therefore, there exists an inherent relationship between faith and security. A disrupted belief system undermines one’s sense of security and well-being.

Freedom of Religion. The Quran and Sunnah stress that the validity of religion must be based on sincere submission to God. The source of religion is in the soul and human conscience. If there is a compulsion to believe, this goes against the conscience. Religious leaders and teachers are responsible for sharing their beliefs, while the individuals who hear their message are free to make their own decisions. “No one can be forced to embrace a religion (Islam). The true way is clearly distinct from the false way. Whoever turns from evil and has faith in God truly has taken hold of a very strong rope that will not break. God hears everything and knows everything” (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:256).

According to Shihab, the phrase “No one can be forced to embrace a religion” means that God wants every person to have peace. In this case, peace cannot be experienced if one’s soul is not at peace.

A claim of superiority is triggered by a different kind of disturbance. Consciousness of equality becomes unclear and could disappear from a person’s awareness if they think they are superior to others. This goes against the thrust of the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration, which calls on everyone to recognize each other as equals. “In the name of the Lord, who created humanity with equal rights, responsibilities, and status, who has called us to live as sisters and brothers, to fill the earth and to acknowledge the values of goodness, love, and peace.” The Declaration continues, stating that freedom is a universal human right: Every person has a right to enjoy the freedom to believe, to think, to express themselves, and to act. Pluralism and the variety of religions, different races and skin colors, different sexes, and different languages are part of the Divine plan for humanity, which has been created by God. The Divine wisdom is the source from which comes the right to be free to believe, and to be different. Because of this, the use of force in religion and cultural usage must be rejected (Khoirurrijal, 2018).

The building of the tunnel between the Mosque and the Cathedral and the model of interreligious cooperation at Walisanga show the Islamic belief that humanity precedes a religious code. Religion is for the benefit of humanity, not vice versa. In addition, God does not need it. The tunnel and the school have not primarily been built to promote religion but to strengthen human ties. It is hoped that these constructions enable people to meet in a deep sense of this word. With this in mind, the words of Imam Ali bin Abi Thalib (559–661) have particular relevance: “The person whom you meet who is not a brother in religion is certainly a brother in human being.”

Relationships. Do good and act justly with everybody. This command is found in verse 8 of the Surah al-Mumthahinah. “God does not forbid you to do good and act justly towards those who do not attack you for religious reasons and do not expel you from your land. Truly, God favors those who act justly” (QS. Al-Mumthahinah [60]:8).

According to Shihab, there is no obligation to view non-Muslims as adversaries. Muslims are encouraged to engage with anyone, as God has commanded fair treatment towards all good individuals, regardless of their religious affiliation. Religious identity should not obstruct objective assessment of issues. Muslims are instructed to pursue truth even in matters involving individuals of different faiths. Moreover, Muslims are directed to assist non-believers as long as they do not attack Islam or coerce them to abandon their homeland. The path of love should be embraced to ensure the dignity of all humanity, a principle emphasized in the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration (Ja’afar, 2022).

The visions of Walisanga consist of fostering genuine faith and understanding of the One God, guiding people to emulate the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and establishing a robust religious foundation for life. They aim to educate discerning youth who embody justice in their perspectives and actions towards all.

The tunnel linking the two religious institutions of Islam and Catholic Christianity serves as inspiration for believers to forge new connections and break down the exclusivity and primordialism associated with religion. Believers are encouraged to take proactive steps in fostering healthy dialogue and a culture of tolerance and acceptance of differences. A proactive approach can help alleviate social and political tensions that burden any community.

Faith and Good Works Are the Way to Salvation. “Truly, believers, Jews, Christians, followers of Shabiin ... Anyone who truly believes in God and has led a good life on Judgement Day will receive a reward from their Lord. They should not doubt, nor should they be down-hearted” (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:62). According to Shihab, this verse is speaking about the compassion of God who always opens the door for the faithful. God makes the right path known to all peoples, who believe and put their faith into practice. The role of the prophets, Moses, Jesus, and Muhamad PUBH, in the lives of the faithful, according to their respective faith traditions, is presumed.

The Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration echoes the same sentiments: a dialogical approach stresses that dialogue between the faithful of different religions means coming together and sharing spiritual, human, and social values. The following step is giving precedence to the highest moral values that are the ideal of all faiths. This also means avoiding unproductive debates.

It should be noted that terrorists have a claim on truth. They say their acts of terror are an integral part of faith and that they are putting that faith into practice. Responding to this claim, the Declaration says that what the terrorists are doing is not a religious act; but rather, the terrorists have hijacked religion for their cause. They have misinterpreted sacred texts and have played upon the negatives of life, such as hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression, and pride, which people experience. It is so important for financial and military support to be withdrawn from terrorist groups and to prevent them from using mass media to promote their cause. This is an international evil that threatens security and world peace. All forms and expressions of terrorism must be opposed (Basyir, 2020).

Evangelization. “Tell people about the way of your Lord wisely and teach well. Discuss with them in appropriate ways. Truly, your Lord knows who has gone astray along the path. The Lord knows best those who can receive guidance” (QS. An-Nahl [16]:125).

According to Shihab, this verse points to three kinds of evangelization that need to be adapted to different situations. Highly qualified experts are called to propagate their faith intelligently, using wise words appropriately. Lay people should use simpler methods, such as giving advice and using parables to teach. Those who follow other religious traditions are called to debate in fitting ways that avoid negativity, as virtue and evil compete in a person’s soul (Hoesterey, 2020).

Good evangelization will bear lasting fruit. According to the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration, a firm conviction invites people to be rooted in values of peace, maintain mutually held values, and promote human fraternity and a harmonious lifestyle.

It calls people to re-strengthen bonds of wisdom, justice, and love, to resurrect religious awareness in the youth so that future generations will be protected from the evils of materialism, not succumbing to the law of power but following the power of law.

The Walisanga School has outlined three primary missions:

1. To empower the school as a secure, well-maintained, and beloved institution with all necessary resources.
2. To foster an environment where students actively practice the virtues inherent in their faith.
3. To facilitate a deep understanding of life's true purpose, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing God and responding to His calling in the best possible manner. The success of these missions will be evident in the quality of evangelization that ensues.

The Silaturahmi Tunnel serves as a symbol of the innovative approaches taken by evangelists to foster opportunities for new evangelization. Just as there are multiple paths to Mecca, various forms and methods of evangelization exist. However, evangelization in the digital age presents unique challenges. In a webinar themed "Islamic Evangelization and Change in Society in the Digital Era" (November 21, 2021), Gus Mus noted that some individuals possess a strong understanding of religion but lack proficiency in information technology (IT). In contrast, others are proficient in IT but possess minimal religious knowledge.

Discussions

Indonesia is uniquely fortunate due to the development of *wasathiyah* Islam, or the middle path Islam, since its Islamization period in the mid-13th century. This form of Islam is characterized by qualities such as moderation (*tawashut*), balance (*tawazun*), justice (*i'tidal*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), reformism (*islah*), mutual cooperation (*ta'awun*), consultation (*syura/musyawaharah*), love for the homeland (*muwathanah*), equality (*musawa*), and exemplariness (*qudwah*) (Rafi'i et al., 2020).

Implementing *wasathiyah* Islam in Indonesia extends beyond doctrinal matters and is evident in empirical, historical, sociological, and cultural realms. This is exemplified by the presence of various Islamic organizations across the archipelago, including but not limited to Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), al-Washaliyah, Persatuan Tarbiyah Islam (Perti), Mathla'ul Anwar, Persatuan Islam (Persis), Persatuan Umat Islam (PUI), Jamiatul Khair, al-Irsyad, Nahdlatul Wathan (NW), Alkhairaat, Yayasan Pendidikan Islam (Yapis), and many others. These organizations not only serve as the main pillars of Islam in Indonesia but also act as strongholds for upholding *wasathiyah* Islam in the region (Yanto, 2021).

Currently, *wasathiyah* Islam in Indonesia faces challenges from transnational Islam, which adheres to rigid, literal, and radical religious ideologies and practices. These ideologies and practices have infiltrated various *wasathiyah* Islamic institutions in Indonesia. Consequently, *wasathiyah* Islam in Indonesia requires ongoing revitalization and renewal. By pursuing these two aspects, *wasathiyah* Islam in Indonesia can become resilient against attempts to undermine it.

Despite undergoing revitalization and renewal, anomalies within Islam persist. Islam, revered as a religion of mercy to the universe (*rahmatan lil'alam*), paradoxically exhibits hostility towards followers of other religions. As the majority religion tasked with protecting minorities, Islam often oppresses them. Notable instances include the dissolution of Catholic student groups praying the Rosary in South Tangerang, Banten (May 5, 2024). Similarly, three days later (Wednesday, May 8th, 2024), the congregation of the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB) Benowo in Cerme Indah Housing Complex Blok P, Betiting Village, Cerme District, Gresik Regency, East Java, faced a similar incident. Minority Christians celebrating Christmas in Batu Gede Village, Cilebut District, Sukaraja Subdistrict, Bogor Regency, West Java (December 25, 2022) also experience oppression from the majority. These incidents and various others are digitally recorded and easily accessible. Notably, the series of bombings targeting several churches in Surabaya in May 2018 stands out as a grim reminder of such occurrences (Woodward, 2019).

The aforementioned anarchic actions attributed to Islam, as highlighted in the study, are believed to stem from external influences. Transnational ideologies, fostered by the impact of globalization, often target individuals who lack strong roots in Nusantara culture. Nusantara culture embodies Indonesian *wasathiyah* Islam, characterized by its friendly and inclusive nature, capable of accommodating diversity (Al Qurtuby, 2015).

This Indonesian Islamic ethos finds its foundation in verse 48 of Surah Al-Maidah in the Quran: “For each [religious following] We have appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had willed, He could have made you [of] one religion, but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so, race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ” (Quran 5:48).

Conclusion

“Islam as a mercy to the universe” always presumes an inclusive character of Islam. This inclusive character is mirrored in the Abu Dhabi Brotherhood Declaration, signed by the Grand Mufti Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, and the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis. The Silaturahmi Tunnel connecting the Istiqlal Mosque and the Catholic Cathedral in Jakarta also mirrors this, as does the Walisanga Muslim Boarding School in Ende, Flores, Indonesia.

The study of these three distinct entities yields several important insights.

Firstly, plurality is a deliberate creation of the Creator, emphasizing the diversity among human beings.

Secondly, fostering a wise attitude that respects and appreciates freedom of religion is crucial in promoting harmony and understanding among different religious communities.

Thirdly, it is imperative for individuals to treat others with justice and fairness, regardless of their religious beliefs or backgrounds.

Fourthly, recognizing the significance of faith and good deeds as pathways to salvation underscores the importance of spiritual practice in one's life.

Finally, effective evangelization efforts should embrace a multicultural approach, acknowledging and respecting the diverse cultural contexts in which it takes place.

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