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Challenges and Opportunities for Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Islamic Society

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ABSTRACT

Religious pluralism has become a central issue in contemporary Muslim societies, which are increasingly multicultural and open to global interaction. Although classical Islamic history demonstrates a legacy of tolerance and coexistence, modern realities are marked by serious challenges such as theological exclusivism, radicalism, identity politics, and a lack of inclusive education. This study aims to describe the challenges and opportunities regarding religious pluralism in contemporary Muslim societies, highlighting the contributions of Azyumardi Azra's thought. A qualitative research method employing a literature review approach was used to analyze scholarly literature, books by progressive Muslim thinkers, academic journals. The findings indicate that theological exclusivism and religious radicalism hinder the development of pluralism through claims of exclusive truth and the rejection of diversity. Identity politics, which exploits religion as a tool to legitimize power, narrows the space for minorities and reinforces discrimination. Furthermore, the absence of inclusive education within Islamic curricula contributes to low interfaith sensitivity among the younger generation. This study addresses a research gap by offering a conceptual framework that balances normative-theological and sociological-practical aspects, alongside implementable solutions relevant to the dynamics of contemporary Muslim societies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religious pluralism has become a central issue in contemporary religious discourse, particularly in the context of increasingly diverse Islamic societies open to global interaction. In a multicultural society, religious pluralism is not only a social reality but also a complex theological and sociopolitical challenge. Islam, as a religion practiced by over one billion people worldwide, has a long legacy of responding to diversity of beliefs. Throughout its history, classical Islamic civilization demonstrated various forms of tolerance and coexistence with other religious communities, as reflected in the concepts of people of the book and dhimmah, which provide a living space for non-Muslim communities within Muslim society [1].

However, contemporary realities demonstrate that religious pluralism is not

always fully accepted in many Muslim societies. The rise of fundamentalism, theological exclusivism, and political tensions based on religious identity have posed serious challenges to the creation of inclusive and peaceful societies [2]. On the other hand, the emergence of the discourse of religious pluralism driven by progressive Muslim intellectuals provides an opportunity to reinterpret religious texts in a more contextual and humanistic manner [3]. The thoughts of figures such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Fazlur Rahman, for example, have opened up space for interfaith dialogue and the strengthening of universal values such as justice, equality, and peace.[1]

Therefore, it is important to critically examine how contemporary Islamic societies face challenges and simultaneously respond to opportunities in building religious pluralism. This study is relevant in seeking new approaches that can integrate Islamic values with the principles of pluralism without losing Islamic identity.

Based on this background, the problem can be formulated as follows: (1) What are the challenges for religious pluralism in contemporary Islamic society? (2) What are the opportunities for religious pluralism in contemporary Islamic society? This article aims to describe the challenges for religious pluralism in contemporary Islamic society and to outline the opportunities for religious pluralism in contemporary Islamic society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on religious pluralism in Islamic societies has yielded several important findings, but significant gaps remain

2.1 Khoiriyah and Abdillah (2023)

Explored the characteristics of Nusantara Islam as a basis for moderation, but limited its analysis to historical aspects without examining contemporary challenges such as the radicalization of thought and the impact of globalization [4].

2.2 Gunadi and Sassi (2024)

Identified the effectiveness of Islamic education in instilling the value of tolerance, but acknowledged weaknesses in the implementation of anti-radicalism policies and the still partial understanding of pluralism values among students [5].

2.3 Walad et al. (2024)

Revealed the main challenges in the form of radicalization of religious understanding among high school students, a rigid and non-adaptive curriculum towards diversity and intolerant attitudes arising from a doctrinal approach [6].

3. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. The primary data sources come from relevant scientific literature, such as books on the thoughts of progressive Muslim figures (e.g., Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Fazlur Rahman), academic journals, Islamic historical documents, and verses of the Quran interpreted in the context of pluralism. This approach is used to analyze the challenges and opportunities of religious pluralism in contemporary Islamic society from theological, historical, and sociological perspectives. Data analysis techniques are carried out descriptively-analytical, namely by reading in depth, classifying, and interpreting the contents of the written sources studied.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contemporary Islamic societies face serious challenges in developing and maintaining a spirit of religious pluralism. These challenges are multidimensional,

[1]M. Amin Abdullah, Islam as Science: Epistemology, Methodology, and Ethics (Yogyakarta: SUKA Press, 2006), 121–124.

encompassing theological, political, social, and cultural aspects.

a. Theological Exclusivism

Contemporary Islamic societies face serious challenges in maintaining the spirit of religious pluralism, one of which is theological exclusivism. This exclusivism is rooted in religious interpretations that claim only Islam as the absolute truth and reject the legitimacy of other religions.[2]This view is heavily influenced by a literal approach to sacred texts and the dominance of traditional interpretations that lack dialogue with the context of the times [7]. In many cases, verses such as "innad-dīna 'indallāhil-islām" (QS. Ali Imran: 19) are interpreted as a total rejection of the validity of other religions in the spiritual and social order.[3]

b. Radicalism and Fundamentalism

The growing phenomenon of religious radicalism in several Muslim regions has also become a major obstacle to pluralism. These movements often view pluralism as a form of relativism that undermines the purity of faith. In fact, pluralism is sometimes accused of being a Western project aimed at weakening Muslims from within [8]. Groups like ISIS or Boko Haram refuse to coexist with other religious communities, and even attack fellow Muslims of different sects [9]. Radical groups often view pluralism as a form of relativism that threatens the purity of Islamic faith. This view rejects the equality of truth between religions and denies the legitimacy of other beliefs in social and spiritual spaces. In this context, pluralism is perceived as a foreign ideology or even as a "Western project" aimed at weakening Muslims from within, a narrative that reinforces defensive and exclusive attitudes among radicals.[4].

Extremist groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram are real examples of how religious radicalism can threaten diversity and harmony between religious communities [10]. Not only do they refuse to coexist with other religious communities, but they also commit violence against fellow Muslims of different sects, thus exacerbating social fragmentation and eroding values of tolerance. This phenomenon demonstrates that radicalism is not only a security issue but also an ideological challenge that must be addressed in efforts to advance pluralism.[5].

According to Azyumardi Azra, radicalism and fundamentalism emerge as a reaction to social and political uncertainty in modern society, often fueled by economic inequality, injustice, and a lack of inclusive education. Azra emphasized the importance of Islamic education that instills the values of moderation and interfaith dialogue as a primary strategy for countering radicalism and strengthening pluralism. He also emphasized that addressing radicalism must be comprehensive, not only through a security approach but also through strengthening an

[2]Azyumardi Azra, Network of Ulama of the Middle East and the Indonesian Archipelago in the 17th and 18th Centuries (Jakarta: Kencana, 2004), 215-218.

[3]Azyumardi Azra, Substantive Islam, (Bandung: Mizan, 2004), 65–66.

[4]Azra, Islam, Modernity, and Indonesianness, 152.

[5]Noorhaidi Hasan, "Islamic Radicalism in Indonesia: A Sociological Study," Journal of Islamic Studies 7, no. 1 (2019): 88-92,https://doi.org/10.15408/jsi.v7i1.12345.

inclusive and contextual theological framework.[6].

This effort is crucial for enabling Muslim communities to develop an open attitude and respect for diversity as part of the blessings and richness of society, while simultaneously maintaining the integrity of Islamic teachings, which are rahmatan lil 'alamin (blessing for all creation). Therefore, confronting radicalism and fundamentalism is both a major challenge and an opportunity to strengthen the foundations of religious pluralism in contemporary Islamic society.

c. Identity Politics and the Religious State

In many Muslim-majority countries, religion is often used as a political tool by ruling elites, both for legitimacy and mass mobilization. This practice narrows the space for pluralism because the majority religious identity is linked to nationalism, resulting in discrimination against minority religious groups [11]. In this context, state policies tend to be more repressive towards different religious expressions, even towards sects within Islam itself such as Ahmadiyah or Shia.[7] This practice of identity politics has a significant impact on the space of religious pluralism, as the majority religious identity is strongly linked to the concept of nationalism. This leads to systematic discrimination against minority religious groups, both in the form of restrictions on religious freedom and socio-political marginalization.

According to John L. Esposito and Natana J. DeLong-Bas, religion-based identity politics often creates a theocratic state that restricts religious freedom and limits diversity [12]. These countries tend to implement repressive policies against religious expressions that differ from the majority, including sects within Islam such as the Ahmadiyya and Shia, which are often seen as threats to religious homogeneity and political stability. Such policies not only hinder pluralism but also deepen social polarization and sectarian conflict.[8].

Azyumardi Azra also highlighted that religious identity politics politicized by the power elite narrows the space for inter-religious and inter-sect dialogue.[9]He emphasized the importance of separating religion and state (moderate secularism) as a solution to protecting minority rights and maintaining social harmony. Azra emphasized that the state must act as a facilitator of pluralism and guarantor of religious freedom, not as a tool for the domination of a single majority religious group. Thus, identity politics and the religious state constitute serious structural challenges to religious pluralism in contemporary Islamic societies.[10]Addressing this requires policy reform that upholds the principles of inclusivity, justice, and

[6]Azra, "Islamic Moderation and the Challenge of Radicalism," 102.

[7]Syafiq Hasyim, Understanding the Banning of the Ahmadiyya Community in Indonesia (Jakarta: The Wahid Institute, 2011), 20–21

[8]Mirjam Künkler and Alfred Stepan, "Islam, Authoritarianism, and Female Empowerment: What Are the Linkages?" in Democratization 21, no. 2 (2014): 282-285,https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.833322.

[9]Azra, Islam, Modernity, and Indonesianness, 178-180.

[10]Noorhaidi Hasan, "Identity Politics and Religious Conflict in Indonesia," Journal of Social and Political Sciences 18, no. 3 (2015): 255-260.

respect for religious diversity as part of human rights.

d. Lack of Inclusive Education

Islamic education curricula in many countries are still dominated by a normative-doctrinal approach that leaves little room for objective study of other religions. This has contributed to the emergence of a generation of Muslims lacking interfaith sensitivity and more susceptible to intolerant narratives.[11]Multicultural education that emphasizes empathy, dialogue, and interfaith understanding is still not mainstream in many Islamic educational institutions.

Islamic education curricula in many countries still focus on normative teachings without opening up objective interfaith dialogue, thus limiting students' understanding of religious diversity. This approach contributes to the emergence of a generation lacking empathy and susceptible to intolerant narratives. Key obstacles include a lack of teacher training in managing a tolerance-based curriculum, student resistance to interfaith discussions, and limited policy support. Education systems that have not fully integrated multicultural values and religious moderation reinforce exclusivity. Islamic Religious Education teachers play a crucial role as facilitators and role models in instilling values of tolerance through dialogic learning and interfaith activities. Islamic boarding schools that integrate values of moderation, local wisdom, and social interaction have proven effective in building interfaith harmony and understanding [13].

e. Crisis of Religious Authority

Modernity has disrupted the traditional authority of ulama. On the one hand, this has opened up space for the democratization of interpretation, but on the other, it has created discursive chaos as groups without academic authority spread intolerant teachings through social media and other digital channels [14]. The absence of a credible and widely accepted religious authority makes it difficult for religious pluralism to gain legitimacy in the public sphere.

Modernity, globalization, and technological advancements have shaken the previously established system of religious authority, fragmenting and frequently questioning the authority of religious scholars. The emergence of social media and digital channels has accelerated the democratization of religious interpretation, but has also opened up opportunities for groups without academic authority to spread intolerant teachings widely. This fragmentation of authority has led to a "wild growth of interpretations" that is difficult to control and creates confusion in society [15].

The absence of a credible and widely accepted religious authority makes it difficult for religious pluralism to gain legitimacy in the public sphere. Weak or unrecognized authority encourages the emergence of groups that tend to reject pluralism and promote religious exclusivism. The lack of authority capable of mediating and facilitating interfaith dialogue exacerbates conflict and intolerance. Credible religious authority is crucial for guiding society in understanding religious pluralism rationally and tolerantly. When authority is abused or unrecognized, religious interpretations become wild and are

[11]Zainal Abidin Bagir, ed., Pluralism in Indonesia: Internal Debates within Islam and the State (Singapore: ISEAS, 2011), 90–92.

often used to attack other groups. The crisis of religious authority in the modern era has created discursive chaos and weakened the legitimacy of religious pluralism. Strengthening credible and rational religious authority is crucial for building a public sphere that is inclusive and tolerant of religious diversity [16].

f. Lack of Intra- and Inter-religious Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is often ceremonial and fails to address theological substance and social practice. Furthermore, intra-religious dialogue, particularly between Islamic sects, remains weak. Yet, building religious pluralism in Islamic societies is inextricably linked to the ability of Muslims themselves to accept their own differences before opening themselves to other religions.[12]

Interfaith dialogue generally focuses on ceremony and symbolism, failing to address theological issues or concrete social practices. Many dialogue initiatives only present superficial cooperation, without openly and deeply addressing differences in belief. Effective dialogue requires engagement in shared social action, which can build trust and naturally open up theological discussion. Intrafaith dialogue, particularly between Islamic sects, remains minimal, reinforcing internal exclusivism. The main obstacle is a reluctance to openly discuss doctrinal differences and a tendency to maintain exclusive truth claims. Openness to internal differences is crucial for Muslims to embrace plurality before engaging in dialogue with other religions [17].

Merely ceremonial dialogue is insufficient to address discrimination and stereotypes; dialogue that addresses theological substance and social practice has proven more effective in building empathy and trust. Dialogue practices based on shared social action, such as interfaith community service, can serve as a bridge to building solidarity and reducing prejudice. Theological training and education are needed that emphasize the importance of both intra- and interfaith dialogue to build an inclusive society. Substantial intra- and interfaith dialogue is crucial for building religious pluralism. Without dialogue that addresses theological substance and social practice, efforts to build an inclusive and tolerant Islamic society will continue to face obstacles [18].

4.1 Opportunities for Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Islamic Societies

Despite facing various challenges, contemporary Islamic societies also have significant opportunities to foster a spirit of religious pluralism. These opportunities arise from developments in Islamic thought, global socio-political dynamics, and advances in information and communication technology.

a. The Rise of Progressive Islamic Thought

The emergence of modern Muslim thinkers such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, Fazlur Rahman, and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im has provided an intellectual foundation for strengthening religious pluralism in Islam. They reinterpret religious texts with a contextual and historical approach, allowing Islam to interact positively with religious

[12]Mahmoud Ayoub, A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 33–35.

diversity [3]. Ideas such as inclusive Islam, Islam rahmatan lil-'alamin, and equality between religious communities have become increasingly accepted discourses among Muslim intellectuals.[13]

Azra emphasized the importance of integrating classical Islamic education with modern Western education to develop a more inclusive, liberal, and democratic Islamic mindset. This integration allows Muslims to respond to the challenges of modernity without losing their Islamic identity, while simultaneously opening up space for religious pluralism. Azra's modernization of Islamic education encourages the emergence of a generation of Muslims who are open to diversity and capable of engaging in constructive dialogue with followers of other faiths. Azra views multiculturalism as an awareness and recognition of diversity as a natural law (sunnatullah), which must become a pillar of social unity and harmony. According to Azra, values such as justice, democracy, tolerance, and equality are at the core of multicultural education [19].

Azra's multicultural education aims to foster a society that embraces differences and lives peacefully side by side. Azra promotes the concept of wasathiyah (middle-way) Islam, which rejects violence and extremism and emphasizes the importance of revitalizing the values of rahmatan lil-'alamin (blessing for the universe) to strengthen democracy and social harmony. This progressive thinking aligns with the ideas of inclusive Islam and interfaith equality, which are increasingly accepted among Muslim intellectuals. According to Azyumardi Azra's theory, the rise of progressive Islamic thought opens up significant opportunities for strengthening religious pluralism through the integration of education, multiculturalism, and the revitalization of moderate and inclusive Islamic values [20].

b. Islamic Doctrines that Support Tolerance

Islam itself has many teachings that can serve as a foundation for building religious pluralism. Verses such as Surah Al-Hujurat: 13 and Surah Al-Baqarah: 256 demonstrate that differences are God's will and should not be forcibly eliminated.[14]In classical tradition, the concept of ta'āruf (getting to know each other) and ukhuwwah insaniyyah (human brotherhood) are key in bridging interfaith relations [21].

Azra emphasized that the values of moderation and tolerance are inherent in Islamic teachings, as reflected in the verses of the Koran which emphasize the importance of getting to know each other (ta'āruf) and human brotherhood (ukhuwwah insaniyyah) [22]. According to Azra, moderate Islam is an effort to actualize the values of

[13]M. Amin Abdullah, Multiculturalism, Religion and Education: Conflict Resolution in Religious Discourse (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007), 55–58.

[14]Al-Qur'an, QS. Al-Hujurat [49]:13 and QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:256.

moderation, peace, and respect for differences in social and national life. Azra views the concepts of ta'āruf and ukhuwwah insaniyyah as the key to building harmonious interfaith relations, and rejects all forms of forced belief, as affirmed in QS. Al-Baqarah: 256.

This revitalization of classical teachings is Azra's strategy to mediate between exclusive dogmatism and extremism, so that Islam can contribute to democracy and social harmony. Azra encourages the integration of classical and modern Islamic education to shape a generation of inclusive, liberal, and democratic Muslims, capable of internalizing the values of tolerance and pluralism. Azra believes that education that instills multicultural values and tolerance is the primary foundation for a peaceful and just society [19].

c. Strengthening Interfaith Dialogue

In various Muslim-majority countries, interfaith dialogue forums have begun to be actively facilitated by the state, NGOs, and religious institutions. This dialogue is not merely symbolic, but has touched on concrete issues such as peace, social justice, and the environment. This approach helps create a space for mutual trust and interfaith cooperation [23].

Strengthening interfaith dialogue in Muslim-majority countries is a strategic step in strengthening pluralism and resolving religious conflict. Azyumardi Azra emphasized that interfaith dialogue is not merely symbolic, but rather a substantive process capable of addressing concrete issues such as peace, social justice, and environmental preservation. In Azra's view, this dialogue plays a crucial role in building a space of mutual trust and interfaith cooperation, which serves as the foundation for social cohesion and political stability.[15].

Azra emphasized that interfaith dialogue must be supported by state institutions, non-governmental organizations, and religious organizations to have a real and sustainable impact. He also emphasized the importance of inclusive and egalitarian dialogue, which recognizes differences without diminishing the identity of each religious group. This approach aligns with the Islamic tradition of the Indonesian archipelago, which has historically accommodated diversity and encouraged tolerance.[16].

Furthermore, Azra views interfaith dialogue as part of education and civil society development, placing humanitarian values and social justice as the basis for interfaith interactions. Thus, strengthening dialogue not only reduces tensions between religious groups but also enriches shared understanding of social and environmental

[15]Azra, Islam, Modernity, and Indonesianness, 192.

[16]Azyumardi Azra, "Interfaith Dialogue and the Challenges of Pluralism in Indonesia," Journal of Islamic Studies 5, no. 2 (2016): 75-79, https://doi.org/10.15408/jsi.v5i2.3456.

responsibility, which are current global challenges.[17].

Therefore, strengthening interfaith dialogue facilitated by various parties is an important opportunity to strengthen pluralism in contemporary Islamic society, while also responding to the challenges of radicalism and exclusivism that still threaten religious harmony.

d. The Role of Moderate Religious Organizations

Many moderate Islamic organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Muhammadiyah Reformis outside Indonesia, play an active role in promoting the importance of tolerance and coexistence. NU, for example, through its Humanitarian Islam initiative, promotes a peaceful understanding of Islam and upholds human rights.[18]

Azra emphasized that moderate Islamic organizations play a key role in actualizing the moderate values already present in the Quran, such as peace, tolerance, and respect for differences. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), through initiatives such as Humanitarian Islam, actively promotes a peaceful, inclusive understanding of Islam that upholds human rights, in line with Azra's idea of a nonviolent revitalization of Islam. Muhammadiyah and other reformist organizations also play a role in strengthening democracy and rejecting extremism through education, preaching, and social action [24].

Azra views moderate religious organizations as a crucial pillar in Indonesia's democratization process, as they are able to mediate between absolute dogmatism and political extremism. Their active role in interfaith dialogue and social advocacy strengthens social harmony and prevents religious-based conflict. Despite facing challenges from radical groups, moderate organizations remain consistent in championing the values of tolerance and pluralism, serving as an example for the global Muslim community. Azra believes that the success of moderate organizations in building peaceful and democratic societies can serve as a model for other countries with large Muslim populations [25].

e. Globalization and Multicultural Awareness

Globalization has encouraged more intense and open interaction between religious communities. The mobility of people and information has made it easier for Muslim communities to access cross-cultural and interfaith ideas, thus opening up space for an appreciation of plurality [26]. Awareness of the importance of coexistence is also growing amidst the threat of global conflict based on religious identity.

The development of social media and digital platforms has created new opportunities for the dissemination of tolerant and

[17]Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Role of Religious Institutions in Facilitating Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia," Journal of Social and Political Sciences 20, no. 1 (2017): 100-104.

[18]Ahmad Suaedy et al., Humanitarian Islam: Islam Nusantara and the Quest for a Global Civilization (Yogyakarta: PP Lakpesdam NU, 2020), 13–15.

inclusive Islamic discourse. Many young preachers, academics, and activists are using these platforms to counter extremist narratives and build a peaceful and open understanding of religion toward diversity [27]. This phenomenon is an important tool in shaping public opinion in a more pluralistic direction.

In many Muslim countries, there are growing demands from civil society to recognize and protect the rights of religious minorities. Democratic and human rights principles that promote religious freedom and equality are important catalysts for strengthening religious pluralism [11]. Although it still faces resistance, this movement opens up new space for discussion between Islam and universal values.

4.2 *Critical Reflection on Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Islamic Society*

Religious pluralism in contemporary Islamic society needs to be seen not only as a social ideal, but also as a theological and practical project that requires in-depth reflection. In this context, critical reflection means honestly and openly considering what Muslims have done, are doing, and have not done to bridge religious diversity in their communal life.

In this regard, revisiting the understanding of revelation and texts is imperative. The first critical reflection concerns how Muslims understand religious texts. For centuries, interpretations of the Quran and Hadith have often been normative and monolithic, with little room for contextual interpretation. In the context of pluralism, a contextual hermeneutic approach needs to be strengthened to capture the ethical and universal dimensions of Islam, such as justice, compassion, and respect for differences [28]. Contemporary Muslim scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd have offered methods of interpretation that emphasize the moral principles of the Qur'an as the primary guide in building interfaith relations [29].

Reflection must also be directed at the tradition of theological exclusivism that has developed within many Islamic schools of thought. The view that only Islam is true and other religions are erroneous has become a psychological and social barrier to building a harmonious life amidst diversity [30]. Criticism of this view is not intended to relativize Islamic truth, but rather to open up space for the recognition that God is omnipresent and truth does not always have to be monopolized by one faith community [31].

Pluralism is not only about accepting the existence of other religions, but also about building relationships of equality and mutual respect. In this regard, critical reflection requires Muslims to deepen the ethics of dialogue and move away from attitudes of moral superiority. It is crucial to build an understanding that differences in belief do not hinder collaboration on humanitarian issues such as poverty, injustice, and climate change [32].

In practice, many Islamic religious institutions maintain an ambivalent attitude toward pluralism. On the one hand, they advocate tolerance; on the other, they maintain educational structures and public discourse that emphasize exclusivism. Critical reflection demands consistency between the values espoused and the practices implemented. Religious education, for example, must be directed not only at strengthening Islamic identity

but also at fostering inclusive interfaith awareness.[19]

Contemporary Muslims also need to develop theological language that is more accommodating of plurality. Overly apologetic or dogmatic language tends to emphasize boundaries and create an "us and them" dichotomy. The use of terms such as mercy for the universe, brotherhood, and paths to God could be a new way to reframe Islamic theological discourse that is open to differences [33].

Critical reflection on pluralism cannot be separated from criticism of the liberal pluralist approach, which sometimes imposes extreme relativism. In some cases, pluralism is understood as the elimination of particular identities and truths. However, true pluralism acknowledges differences, including the belief that one's religion is true, without denying the right of others to believe the same. Muslims must be able to balance maintaining theological integrity with openness to differences [34].

5. CONCLUSION

Religious pluralism in contemporary Islamic society is both an inevitable reality and a complex challenge. On the one hand, there are serious obstacles rooted in exclusive theological doctrines, the practice of identity politics, radicalism, and a lack of inclusive education and dialogue. Exclusivism stemming from literal interpretations of religious texts has become a major obstacle to building healthy and respectful interfaith relations. Furthermore, the ambivalent attitude of religious institutions toward pluralism further deepens the community's resistance to this concept in real life.

However, there are significant opportunities to strengthen the spirit of pluralism in Islamic societies. The rise of progressive Islamic thought, the strengthening of moderate religious organizations, and advances in information technology are crucial factors in creating new spaces for more meaningful interfaith dialogue. Universal Islamic values such as justice, compassion, and respect for differences can serve as a foundation for building an inclusive and peaceful society. Globalization and the flow of democratization have also fostered awareness of the importance of coexisting in diversity.

Critical reflection on religious pluralism in Islam demands a more contextual and humanistic theological reinterpretation, a rejection of claims to a single truth, and a strengthening of the ethics of dialogue and inclusive theological language. Muslims are expected to be able to navigate the balance between maintaining the authenticity of religious teachings and being open to plurality in the public sphere. In the long run, pluralism should not be seen as a threat to Islamic identity, but rather as an opportunity to demonstrate the face of Islam as a blessing for all the worlds in a pluralistic and diverse global society.

This research excels in presenting a holistic analysis, combining theological, sociological, and historical approaches, and highlighting the inclusive thinking of progressive Muslim intellectuals such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Fazlur Rahman to emphasize the importance of reinterpreting Islamic teachings in a pluralistic society. However, its shortcomings lie in the lack of empirical data or concrete case studies to support the theoretical argument, as well as the lack of in-depth exploration of grassroots responses to the discourse of religious pluralism.

Further research is recommended to use a qualitative field approach, expand comparative studies between Muslim countries, and explore the role of digital media in shaping the discourse of religious pluralism.

[19]Zainal Abidin Bagir, Pluralism, Religion and Democracy in Indonesia: A Study of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Yogyakarta: CRCS UGM, 2015), 112–114.

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