

The Humanist Islam Concept in Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Thought and Its Relevance to Indonesian Identity in the Post-Reform Era

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the integrative concept of Islamic humanism formulated by Ahmad Syafii Maarif in the context of Indonesian socio-political dynamics and religious pluralism. The research addresses the critical need to bridge Islamic values, Indonesian identity, and humanitarian ethics in response to the rise of religious exclusivism and secular-liberal tendencies. Employing a qualitative approach with a library research design, this study applies thematic coding to analyze primary texts by Syafii Maarif and relevant scholarly interpretations. The findings reveal that Syafii Maarif offers a paradigm of substantive Islam that harmonizes rationality, democracy, and social ethics while rejecting formalistic and doctrinaire approaches to religion. His thought draws inspiration from reformist figures such as Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Iqbal, but is distinct in its contextual application within Indonesian democracy and civil society. The implications of this study suggest the need for a reorientation of Islamic discourse in Indonesia toward inclusivity, pluralism, and active citizenship. This research contributes to the development of Islamic thought by presenting a comprehensive and contextualized interpretation of Islam that affirms both national identity and universal humanitarian values. The originality of this research lies in its integration of philosophical, theological, and political dimensions within a single conceptual framework, offering new insights into the role of Islam in fostering democratic ethics and social cohesion in plural societies.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konsep integratif tentang Islam humanis yang dirumuskan oleh Ahmad Syafii Maarif dalam konteks dinamika sosial-politik Indonesia dan pluralisme keagamaan. Penelitian ini merespons kebutuhan mendesak untuk menjembatani nilai-nilai Islam, identitas keindonesiaan, dan etika kemanusiaan di tengah meningkatnya eksklusivisme keagamaan dan kecenderungan sekuler-liberal. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui desain penelitian kepustakaan, studi ini menerapkan teknik thematic coding untuk menganalisis teks-teks

primer karya Syafii Maarif serta interpretasi akademik yang relevan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Syafii Maarif menawarkan paradigma Islam substantif yang memadukan rasionalitas, demokrasi, dan etika sosial, sambil menolak pendekatan keagamaan yang formalis dan doktriner. Pemikirannya terinspirasi oleh tokoh-tokoh pembaharu seperti Fazlur Rahman dan Muhammad Iqbal, namun memiliki kekhasan dalam penerapannya yang kontekstual dalam demokrasi dan masyarakat sipil Indonesia. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menunjukkan perlunya reorientasi wacana keislaman di Indonesia ke arah inklusivitas, pluralisme, dan kewargaan aktif. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengembangan pemikiran Islam dengan menghadirkan interpretasi Islam yang komprehensif dan kontekstual, yang menegaskan identitas kebangsaan sekaligus nilai-nilai kemanusiaan universal. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi dimensi filosofis, teologis, dan politis dalam satu kerangka konseptual, yang menawarkan wawasan baru mengenai peran Islam dalam mendorong etika demokratis dan kohesi sosial di masyarakat plural.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Islam and Indonesian-ness is a fundamental issue that continues to spark debate in public discourse and among Muslim intellectuals (Chalik, 2010; Haq et al., 2024). Amid the dynamics of religious life in Indonesia, a critical question arises: are Islam and Indonesian identity inherently in conflict, positioned diametrically, or can they instead coexist harmoniously and complement one another? This question becomes particularly significant in the context of how Indonesian Muslims understand and practice their faith (Badrin et al., 2023; Setia & Haq, 2023). In social reality, some still argue that Islamic practices in Indonesia must be purified of local cultural elements to achieve a supposedly authentic form of Islam, as practiced in its birthplace, Mecca (Rohayana, 2021). This purification discourse affects not only the religious sphere but also has serious implications for social cohesion and the cultural diversity that characterizes Indonesian society.

In academic circles, scholars have examined the discourse on Islamic purification through various approaches. First, some studies explore Islamic purist movements that attempt to separate religion from cultural elements (Mas'ari & Syamsuatir, 2017), often grounded in a normative paradigm that treats religion as a transhistorical and uncontaminated entity. Second, another group of studies highlights the historical and sociological dimensions of Islam, emphasizing that religion always interacts with local cultural contexts (Nasir, 2019; Rahman et al., 2023), resulting in diverse expressions of Islam across regions (Woodward, 2010). Third, recent studies examine how Muslim intellectuals have responded to the tension between Islam and Indonesian-ness, including efforts to reorient Islamic thought in the modern era (Madjid, 2020; Nurdin, 2016). However, few studies have specifically examined the intellectual contribution of leading Indonesian Muslim thinkers—such as Ahmad Syafii Maarif—in constructing a constructive and inclusive relationship between Islam and the Indonesian national identity.

This study aims to critically examine Ahmad Syafii Maarif's construction of the relationship between Islam, Indonesian-ness, and humanity, in order to respond to the challenges of religious life in a plural society. It focuses on how Maarif conceptualizes Islam as a moral force that not only

aligns with national and democratic values but also upholds universal humanistic ethics. This research is grounded in the view that Maarif's thought offers an alternative to two extreme positions: Islamic purism that promotes exclusivity and liberal secularism that neglects the ethical dimension of religion. By analyzing Maarif's writings and the works of influential thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Iqbal, this study seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of humanistic Islam as an ethical foundation for Indonesia's socio-political life.

Within this framework, the study asserts that separating Islam from Indonesia's cultural context represents a reductive and ahistorical approach. In contrast, Syafii Maarif offers an integrative paradigm that presents Islam as a transformative teaching that operates substantively within a plural and democratic nation. Therefore, the central hypothesis of this study is that Syafii Maarif's humanistic Islamic thought provides a conceptual and practical foundation for shaping an inclusive, tolerant, and civil Islamic identity—one that navigates between exclusivism and the advancement of national and humanitarian values in a balanced and coherent way.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses its unit of analysis on the thought of a prominent figure, Ahmad Syafii Maarif, particularly in his formulation of the relationship between Islam and Indonesian-ness. The unit of analysis consists of texts and written works, including both primary sources authored by Syafii Maarif himself and secondary academic sources that examine or interpret his ideas within the socio-religious context of Indonesia.

The research design is qualitative, employing a library research approach (Connaway & Radford, 2021). This method is appropriate for the study's objective, which is to understand and interpret the construction of a thinker's ideas as expressed through texts (Haq et al., 2023). This approach enables the researcher to explore the discourse on Islam and Indonesian-ness through a conceptual and critical examination of Syafii Maarif's writings. It is especially suitable for addressing philosophical and theoretical issues that cannot be adequately investigated using empirical methods.

The data for this research comes from secondary sources, particularly relevant literature. The primary data includes books, scholarly articles, essays, and speeches authored by Ahmad Syafii Maarif. In addition, the researcher gathered secondary data consisting of academic works, journal articles, and credible media commentaries that discuss Syafii Maarif's thought, particularly in relation to Islam, Indonesian identity, and humanity.

The data collection process involved identifying, sorting, and selecting relevant literature (Djunatan et al., 2024). The researcher first identified sources aligned with the research problem, then selected readings based on their relevance. Each source was carefully reviewed to extract pertinent quotations and arguments. This process was conducted systematically to ensure that only high-quality and thematically relevant data were used for analysis.

The researcher conducted data analysis using thematic coding techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The data were organized based on key themes related to Syafii Maarif's construction of Islamic and Indonesian thought. The categorized data were then analyzed descriptively and interpretively to reveal the underlying meaning and logical structure of his ideas. The results of this analysis were presented in a coherent narrative format to help readers grasp the intellectual structure and contributions of Syafii Maarif's thought.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Intellectual Biography of Ahmad Syafii Maarif

Ahmad Syafii Maarif was born on May 31, 1935, in Nagari Calau, Sumpur Kudus, Sijunjung Regency, West Sumatra. He came from a socially respected family; his father, Datuk Rajo Melayu, was a customary leader within the Minangkabau matrilineal kinship system. However, from an early age, he experienced personal adversity that shaped his resilience—his mother, Fatiyah, passed away when he was only 18 months old. As a result, he was raised by his paternal family,

which slightly deviated from Minangkabau's matrilineal tradition. During his childhood, he spent much of his time studying in Muhammadiyah-run *surau* (prayer houses), where he developed a strong interest and passion for religious learning (Maarif & Prasetiawati, 2020).

Maarif began his formal education at a *Sekolah Rakyat* (People's School) and an Islamic elementary school (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*) in his village. He then continued to Madrasah Mu'allimin in Balai Tengah, followed by Mualimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, where he graduated in 1956. He pursued his undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Law, Cokroaminoto University, and continued at IKIP Yogyakarta. He later earned a Master's degree from Ohio University and completed his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in the field of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. During his academic journey abroad, Maarif underwent a significant intellectual transformation. While he had initially leaned toward fundamentalist views and supported the idea of an Islamic state, his thought evolved toward a more rational and pluralist outlook after studying under Fazlur Rahman, a renowned Islamic reformist scholar from Pakistan (Beck, 2016).

In addition to Rahman, Maarif greatly admired Mohammad Hatta, Indonesia's first Vice President and a national independence leader. He described Hatta as a true moralist who was never afraid to challenge authority in defense of ethical principles. Hatta's thought became a pivotal reference point for Maarif in formulating Islam as a substantive ethical doctrine, rather than a merely formalistic one. From there, Maarif's intellectual character developed into a nationalist-religious synthesis, emphasizing Islam's universal values while strongly supporting Indonesia's integrity as a multicultural nation.

Maarif is also widely recognized as a highly productive intellectual. His numerous works illustrate the ongoing evolution of his thought across various periods. Among his major writings are: *Mengapa Vietnam Jatuh Seluruhnya ke Tangan Komunis* (1975), reflecting his concern for global political developments; *Dinamika Islam* and *Islam, Mengapa Tidak?* (1984), both of which represent his early engagement with socio-political realities in the Muslim world; *Al-Qur'an, Realitas Sosial, dan Limbo Sejarah* (1985), showcasing his hermeneutical approach to contextualizing Qur'anic interpretation; *Peta Bumi Intelektualisme Islam di Indonesia* (1993), a significant mapping of Islamic intellectual developments in Indonesia; *Membumikan Islam* (1995) and *Islam dalam Bingkai Keindonesiaan dan Kemanusiaan* (2009), two ideological manifestos that articulate his vision of integrating religion with national identity; and his autobiography, *Titik-Titik Kisar di Perjalanan* (2009), which reveals how his personal reflections are inseparable from his intellectual expression (Sofjan, 2020).

"Syafii Maarif abandoned his aspiration to turn Indonesia into an Islamic state when he studied under Fazlur Rahman in the United States. From that point on, his religious thought became more rational, respectful of diversity, and centered on humanitarian and Indonesian values as integral components of his Islamic worldview" (Wahdini, 2020, p. 24).

Ahmad Syafii Maarif's biography demonstrates a dynamic intellectual journey—from a scriptural and exclusivist understanding of Islam toward an inclusive, rational, and humanistic approach. This transformation unfolded through his exposure to global education and mentorship, which enriched his perspective on Islam's relationship with local and global socio-political contexts. His ideas did not remain theoretical; he actively implemented them during his tenure as Chairman of Muhammadiyah's Central Executive Board from 2000 to 2005 (A. S. Maarif, 2009).

From this narrative, we can identify several key patterns in Maarif's intellectual trajectory. First, he experienced a major shift in thinking influenced by early life challenges and global academic exposure. Since childhood, he faced personal adversity that shaped his resilience and reflective mindset, while his international education—especially under Fazlur Rahman—opened his perspective to rational and contextual approaches in interpreting Islam. Second, Maarif clearly viewed religious and national values as mutually reinforcing. In his view, Islam and Indonesian identity could coexist within a shared framework of inclusive and pluralistic nationalism (A. S. Maarif, 2009).

Third, Maarif stands out as a prolific intellectual. His body of work is not only voluminous but also reveals a responsive and evolving engagement with public issues, ranging from social and political problems to humanism and Islamic discourse on national identity. Fourth, Maarif's thought was not confined to theory; he translated his ideas into practice. During his leadership of Muhammadiyah, he exemplified how theoretical reflections could be operationalized into ethical and social action. For this reason, Amin Abdullah referred to him as an "organic intellectual"—a thinker capable of bridging theoretical insight with practical social and political engagement.

These findings confirm that Ahmad Syafii Maarif's intellectual journey laid the foundation for his formulation of the relationship between Islam and Indonesian identity. His transformation from scripturalism to a contextual and inclusive Islam positions him as a key figure offering an alternative to the exclusivist puritanical movements in Islam (Nuraini, 2019). Through his reflective writings and progressive leadership, Maarif offered a model of Islam that aligns with universal values and remains compatible with Indonesia's multicultural reality. His legacy affirms that Islam and Indonesian-ness are not mutually exclusive but can enrich one another within a framework of pluralist nationalism.

The Concept of Islam and Indonesian-ness in Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Thought

Ahmad Syafii Maarif developed the idea of Islam and Indonesian-ness as two entities that should not be placed in opposition but harmonized. In his view, Islam, Indonesian identity, and humanity can not only coexist but also unify within a single breath to build a just, peaceful, and pluralistic society. He rejected the purist view that sought to detach Islam from local cultural elements. Instead, Maarif asserted that religion always exists within concrete historical and social contexts. Therefore, Islamic practice in Indonesia must be embraced within the framework of Indonesian-ness—not the other way around (Dewi, 2021).

Moreover, Maarif acknowledged the pluralistic nature of Indonesian society as a historical and social reality that cannot be denied. In this context, he viewed democracy as a foundational mechanism for maintaining harmony among diverse groups. According to Maarif, Islam is not at odds with democracy; rather, it contains fundamental values such as justice, deliberation (*musyawarah*), and respect for human dignity—all of which align with democratic principles. He believed that the Qur'anic vision of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation) should manifest through the active role of Muslims in safeguarding the rights of all citizens, including minorities and even those who choose not to embrace any religion (Majid et al., 2022).

Maarif also connected his vision of Islam and Indonesian-ness with the values of Pancasila. He emphasized that Pancasila is not a secular ideology that threatens Islam but rather a national ethical framework that remains open to religious values. In his view, Islam and Pancasila share fundamental principles. Therefore, Muslims should not only accept Pancasila but actively contribute to enriching its practical implementation on moral and social grounds.

"In Indonesia, Islam, Indonesian-ness, and humanity are not only able to coexist and walk side by side, but the three can integrate and enrich one another in building a garden of civilization unique to Indonesia" (Qodir & Nashir, 2019).

"For Syafii Maarif, not a single principle within Pancasila contradicts the fundamental values of Islam" (A. S. Maarif, 2018a, p. 220).

"Indonesian Muslims must also protect those who choose not to follow any religion. This is part of Islam's responsibility in the context of a Pancasila-based state" (A. S. Maarif, 2018b, pp. 218–219).

From various statements and works by Syafii Maarif, it becomes clear that he viewed the integration of Islam and Indonesian-ness as both a strategic necessity and an ethical imperative. He opposed exclusivist views that demanded the purification of Islam from Indonesian cultural influence. On the contrary, he regarded pluralism as a richness that makes Islam in Indonesia more contextual, humanistic, and peaceful. In his perspective, Islam is not merely a doctrinal system but a public moral compass that aligns with democratic values and the ethical foundations of Pancasila.

The data reveal several significant tendencies in Ahmad Syafii Maarif's formulation of the Islam–Indonesian-ness relationship. First, he positioned Islam as a public moral force that guides not only individual spirituality but also plays an active role in shaping social and national life. For Maarif, Islam must serve as a source of ethical values such as justice, equality, and humanity, contributing to societal improvement. Second, he acknowledged Indonesia's pluralism as both a social fact and an ethical potential. In this regard, democracy functioned as the most suitable political mechanism to preserve harmony among religious groups and citizens. In his framework, Islam shares core values with democracy, such as consultation, respect for diversity, and social justice (A. S. Maarif, 2018a).

Third, Maarif firmly rejected the tendency of religious formalism, which focuses merely on symbolic or external expressions of religion. He emphasized that Muslims should prioritize the substance of religious teachings—universal values that uphold human dignity. When Islamic practice becomes overly fixated on form, Maarif argued, it weakens the moral integrity of the Muslim community. Fourth, he viewed no contradiction between Islam and Pancasila. Instead, he affirmed that Islam's core values align with those found in Pancasila's principles. Accordingly, Muslims must play an active role in cultivating the moral vision of Pancasila within national life. In this sense, Islam and Indonesian-ness should not be perceived as conflicting entities but as ethically and practically interwoven frameworks for building the nation.

The concept of Islam and Indonesian-ness articulated by Ahmad Syafii Maarif represents a critical response to the wave of Islamic purism and exclusivist religious movements. His perspective offers an alternative model of religious life that is inclusive, nationalist, and ethically grounded. This vision is not only relevant to the ongoing discourse on religion and state relations but also highly pertinent in addressing the challenges of globalization, religious intolerance, and social fragmentation. His thought enriches the intellectual tradition of *Islam Nusantara* while reinforcing the role of Indonesian Muslims as ethical guardians of public life who are capable of engaging constructively with national realities.

The Concept of Humanity in Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Thought

Ahmad Syafii Maarif positioned humanity as a fundamental dimension of Islamic faith (A. S. Maarif, 2018a). For Maarif, Islam is not merely a religion that regulates ritual worship but a universal value system that upholds human dignity, protects human rights, and promotes interreligious tolerance. His perspective responds to the tendency among Muslims to overly emphasize ritual-formal aspects of religion while neglecting its social and humanitarian dimensions. In his various works, Maarif emphasized the urgency of cultivating collective awareness among Muslims to become key actors in building a just, inclusive, and pluralistic society.

This idea did not emerge in a vacuum. Maarif developed his concept of Islamic humanism by drawing from the progressive tradition of Islamic reform. He found deep inspiration in figures such as Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Iqbal, who viewed human beings as moral agents responsible for shaping civilization. Maarif argued that Islamic civilization had declined due to the overly textual orientation of the Muslim community and its loss of social vitality. He insisted that Islam must be transformed into an ethical force capable of addressing the challenges of the modern age without compromising its spiritual integrity.

"Islam is not merely a religion of ritual worship but a faith that teaches universal human values" (A. S. Maarif, 2019).

"Muslims continue to focus on issues of the hereafter and ritual worship while neglecting the real social problems occurring in their communities. As a result, Muslims have become marginalized in modern civilization" (Rachman, 2018).

"Western humanism's excessive focus on the individual and materialism must be complemented by Islam's spiritual dimension to cultivate human consciousness as God's vicegerent on earth" (Iqbal, 2013, p. 32).

Maarif identified the humanitarian crisis in the Muslim world as stemming from the reduction of religion to mere ritual. He argued that Islam should serve as a moral and social foundation that enables people to act justly, embrace difference, and uphold human dignity for all. His humanistic concept of Islam did not imitate Western humanism but sought to correct its shortcomings, particularly its neglect of spiritual depth. For Maarif, Islamic humanism is rooted in divine revelation while remaining open to modern developments (Dewi, 2021).

The data reveal several key tendencies in Ahmad Syafii Maarif's conceptualization of humanity. First, he emphasized that Islam must be understood as a universal moral force—not limited to worship rituals—but as an ethical compass that shapes social relations and structures. In his view, Islam brings a message of justice, equality, and compassion that transcends religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. Second, he critiqued the formalism that has led many Muslims to overlook urgent social problems. This ritualistic reduction of religious life, he argued, has caused Muslims to fall behind in responding to the demands of modern civilization. He called for a renewal of Islamic thinking so that religion does not become alienated from lived reality.

Third, Maarif constructed his humanistic ideas based on the intellectual legacy of figures such as Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Iqbal, both of whom appreciated the strengths of Western humanism—especially its defense of human dignity, rationality, and human rights (Rahman, 1984). However, both thinkers also sharply critiqued Western humanism's tendencies toward excessive individualism, secularism, and materialism. Building on these critiques, Maarif emphasized the need for Islam to engage modern public life as a force that can reconcile spiritual values with democratic principles. Fourth, he made a sustained effort to reconcile Islamic values with modernity through an ethical dialectic. He did not advocate outright rejection of modernity; rather, he called for a critical filtering process that retains moral direction. Within this framework, Islam is not merely a religious identity but a moral compass that guides the construction of a plural and civilized society.

These findings show that Ahmad Syafii Maarif's concept of humanity represents a synthesis between Islamic tradition and modern discourse on human rights and social justice. He did not reject modernity but invited Muslims to respond to it critically and creatively, while staying grounded in Islamic spiritual values. His approach avoided extremes—whether in the form of religious purism or secular liberalism. This concept is crucial for shaping an inclusive and civilized renewal of Islam in Indonesia. His thought enriches the discourse of *Islam Nusantara* by affirming that Islam can serve as an ethical and humanistic solution to the global challenges of the contemporary era.

The Concept of Humanist Islam in Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Thought

Ahmad Syafii Maarif's idea of humanist Islam emerged as a critical response to the sociopolitical dynamics of the New Order regime, which marginalized Islam's role in public life and relegated Muslims to the periphery. The 1982 Pancasila single-principle policy triggered tensions between the Muslim community and the state, sparking a variety of Islamization movements ranging from conservative to moderate. Within this context, Maarif positioned himself as a representative of moderate Islam—one that did not reject modernity outright but sought to filter and align it with Islamic values. This transformation in perspective was strongly influenced by his intellectual experiences in the United States, particularly under the mentorship of Fazlur Rahman. Rahman's ideas on progressive Islam and the contextual reinterpretation of religious texts inspired Maarif to develop a concept of humanist Islam—an approach to faith grounded in rationality, human dignity, and social responsibility (A. S. Maarif, 2010).

Maarif also drew heavily from the thought of Muhammad Iqbal, especially Iqbal's critique of Western humanism, which he viewed as excessively secular, materialistic, and individualistic (Lidinillah et al., 2023). Iqbal offered an alternative vision of a holistic Islam that integrates the physical, spiritual, and social dimensions of human existence (Arshad et al., 2023; Noorani, 2014). Maarif built upon this approach by emphasizing that spiritual awareness must not neglect social issues. Therefore, Islam must function as a transformative force in the sociopolitical life of society. Maarif implemented these principles in initiatives such as the founding of the Maarif Institute, which promotes values of inclusivity, pluralism, and civility in Indonesian society.

"His views on inclusive Islam, pluralist Islam, tolerant Islam, humanist and civilized Islam, are all crucial for supporting democracy and social justice..." (Rachman, 2010, p. 105).

"Faith in God must be mediated by conscious reason and sincere heart... that awareness must never arise from coercion or propaganda" (A. S. Maarif, 2019, p. 52).

"Western humanism emphasizes the material world too much... leading to social and environmental crises... Thus, we must return to Qur'anic consciousness" (A. S. Maarif, 2018a, p. 23).

Maarif's concept of humanist Islam stemmed from his critique of Islamic formalism and the spiritual void in Western humanism (Beck, 2016). He encouraged Muslims to move beyond rigid, scripturalist approaches to religion and instead highlighted the importance of rationality and morality in social praxis. His intellectual journey in the West and engagement with major thinkers like Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Iqbal shaped a worldview that rejected the dichotomy between religion and humanity. Maarif believed that Islam should not only address the afterlife but also engage actively in worldly affairs through a humanitarian ethic grounded in Qur'anic values.

From this analysis, we can identify several dominant patterns in Ahmad Syafii Maarif's concept of humanist Islam. First, he strongly oriented his thought toward a substantialist approach to understanding Islam—as a moral force and ethical guide for life, rather than merely a legal or ritual system. Second, he sought to integrate rationality and spirituality, emphasizing that freedom of thought and belief forms the foundation of genuine faith. Third, he stressed the social dimension of religious consciousness. His model of Islamic humanism was not merely personal but also collective, manifested in his advocacy for democracy, social justice, and the protection of minorities. Fourth, Maarif systematically critiqued Western humanism for marginalizing religion and ethical values. In response, he underscored the necessity of religious ethical foundations for building sustainable democracy and humanity.

Maarif's concept of humanist Islam serves as both an intellectual and practical alternative to two extremes: conservative Islamic exclusivism and Western secular liberalism. With his inclusive and holistic approach, he asserted that Islam must act as a liberating and transformative force for social change. His thought provided not only a theoretical foundation but also a concrete institutional embodiment through initiatives such as the Maarif Institute, which actively engages in education, interfaith advocacy, and the promotion of peace values. This vision is not only relevant to Indonesia's context but also makes a significant contribution to the global renewal of contemporary Islamic thought (Dewi, 2021). By positioning the human being as a complete ethical and social subject, Maarif succeeded in harmonizing faith, rationality, and public responsibility within a dynamic and grounded framework of Islam.

Discussion

This study reveals that Ahmad Syafii Maarif's thought on the relationship between Islam, Indonesian identity, and humanity is rooted in an effort to synthesize religious values with the pluralistic reality of the Indonesian nation. The findings highlight three interconnected insights. First, Maarif's intellectual biography demonstrates a transformation from scripturalist thinking to a rational and humanistic worldview, culminating in his rejection of exclusive Islam. Second, in his concept of Islamic-Indonesian identity, Maarif affirmed that Islam does not contradict either Pancasila or democracy. Instead, Islam must emerge as an ethical force in the public sphere. Third, his idea of humanist Islam grew out of his critique of both religious formalism and Western secularism, formulated within an ethical framework that integrates spirituality and social responsibility.

Maarif's view of the interplay between Islam, Indonesian identity, and humanity reflects the historical experiences of Muslims in Indonesia as well as the challenges of modernity. The substantive Islam he advocated emphasized freedom of thought, respect for diversity, and ethical accountability toward others. His rejection of coercive faith and fanaticism illustrates his belief that religious and intellectual freedom are fundamental prerequisites for meaningful

religiosity. Therefore, his concept of humanist Islam responds not only to Indonesia's sociopolitical landscape, particularly in the post-New Order era, but also to the epistemological crisis facing Muslims amid globalization.

Compared to previous research, Maarif's thought affirms the findings of Budhy Munawar-Rachman (2018), who highlighted progressive Islam as inclusive and contextual. However, this study advances further by emphasizing the historical-political dimensions of Maarif's transformation and the practical implications of his work, particularly through the establishment of the Maarif Institute. While many earlier studies focused merely on describing his ideas, this research underscores Maarif's role as an organic intellectual whose influence shaped the ecosystem of moderate Islam in Indonesia (Arifin et al., 2023; Burhani, 2013; Ridwan, 2021; Sholikin, 2013; Wikandono, 2020). Unlike Muhammad Iqbal's more philosophical and metaphysical critique of Western humanism, Maarif contextualized these ideas within Indonesia's sociopolitical landscape in a concrete way.

The ideological implications of Maarif's thought are far-reaching. He offered a paradigm of Islamic religiosity that embraces nationalism and globalization without compromising its transcendent values. In the context of Indonesia's identity politics and vulnerability to polarization, Maarif's humanist Islam provides a bridge for interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Moreover, his contributions broaden the discourse of contemporary Islamic thought, which often swings between conservative and liberal-secular extremes. In Maarif's framework, Islam actively defends universal human values while remaining faithful to the ethical principles of divine revelation (Abas & Gulerce, 2025).

Nonetheless, these findings call for critical reflection. On one hand, Maarif's ideas present a viable alternative to both religious exclusivism and hollow secularism. On the other hand, their implementation faces serious challenges. His thought requires structural support, high literacy culture, and a healthy democratic environment—conditions that remain underdeveloped in many parts of Indonesia. His ideas also confront resistance from groups that reject pluralism in the name of religious purification (Burhani, 2013). Therefore, there is an urgent need for more systematic cultural communication and public education to ensure that humanist Islam does not remain a discourse confined to elite circles.

As a proposed course of action, this study recommends revitalizing Islamic education at all levels to emphasize ethical and humanist interpretations of Islam, rather than focusing solely on legal-formalist teachings. Religious curricula should include the social and humanitarian dimensions of Islam and introduce key figures such as Syafii Maarif, Fazlur Rahman, and Muhammad Iqbal to younger generations. Furthermore, the state should create greater space for institutions like the Maarif Institute to participate in shaping educational policy, promoting religious moderation, and building a tolerant civil society. In this way, Maarif's thought can evolve from an intellectual legacy into a practical force for constructing an inclusive and dignified national civilization.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Ahmad Syafii Maarif's thought on Islam, Indonesian identity, and humanity offers an integrative, substantive, and inclusive approach to religious life. The main findings indicate that Maarif formulated a paradigm of Islamic thought that not only responds contextually to Indonesia's sociopolitical realities but also offers a critical response to both religious exclusivism and liberal secularism. In Maarif's view, Islam must not be trapped in formalism; instead, it must function as an ethical force that safeguards pluralism, upholds human dignity, and strengthens democracy and social justice. These three core elements—Islam, Indonesian identity, and humanity—are united in Maarif's spirit of Islamic intellectual renewal, grounded in rational awareness and social responsibility.

Scientifically, this research makes a significant contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic discourse, particularly in the Indonesian context. It not only maps Maarif's

ideas descriptively but also critically examines the historical, social, and philosophical relationships within his concept of humanist Islam. The research employed a figure-based study using a library research design and thematic coding technique to systematically construct a conceptual map of Maarif's substantive and humanistic Islam. It enriches scholarly knowledge by synthesizing two principal sources: the values of *Pancasila* as a framework for Indonesian identity, and the progressive intellectual traditions of figures such as Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Iqbal.

Nonetheless, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, it focuses primarily on textual analysis and does not comprehensively explore the practical dimensions of Maarif's ideas, such as their implementation at the grassroots level or within Islamic educational institutions. Second, by employing a figure-based approach, the study does not capture broader Muslim societal responses to Maarif's thought. Therefore, future research should expand into field studies that explore the real-world impact of Maarif's humanist Islam in policymaking, education, and religious practice. Additionally, comparative studies between thinkers are necessary to assess the relevance and continuity of Maarif's ideas within the dynamics of contemporary global Islam.

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