

## Islamic Values in the World Today – Indonesia and the Islamic World

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### Abstract

*The present paper is dedicated to answer the question on how Islamic values contribute to today's multicultural societies. In this context, Indonesia is a good example with its basic tenets of Indonesian state ideology. I argue that this state ideology is coined by Islamic values, but the Indonesian state does not fully live up to these values, because there is no proper input of Islam. Learning from the Indonesian model, I am sure that Islam is not only fully compatible with democracy and a multicultural society, it is also the religion which, if applied in its true sense, can best deal with multicultural and multi religious societies as was stated in the Bhineka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity) principle.*

**Keywords:** Islamic values, Indonesia, multiculturalism, democracy, progressive Islam.

### A. A Word Before

With over 270 million inhabitants Indonesia is the 4th most populous country in the world. With almost 90% of its population of Muslim faith it is the largest Muslim country on earth.

Yet, saying it is a Muslim country is not quite correct. Indonesia does not define itself as a Muslim state, it never did. Although the Indonesian state ideology does not use the term secular, using the common terminology of western States one would call it - with all due caution - a secular state.

This fact has rather more wide reaching implications than is commonly acknowledged today. Critics of Islam all over the world

repeat over and over again that Islam is a religion which excludes the separation of state and religion. Indonesia is the most evident proof that this is not true. Of course, the state ideology called *pancasila* has a long history, originating in the beginnings of the Indonesian independence movement. There were those who favoured a Muslim state based on sharia law<sup>1</sup>, however, in the end a formula won which aims at its essence at the well known principle of unity in diversity.

Indonesia is a country with over 700 languages and over 1300 ethnic groups; moreover it is vital to know that Indonesia includes provinces where Christianity is very prominent or even the religion with the most adherents. And although Hindus make only a tiny percentage of Indonesia's total population there are some districts where Hindus form the majority, even outside the Hindu heartland, Bali, where Hindus have a majority of 88%.

Even a brief look makes it evident that Indonesia cannot exist as a national unity without respect for cultural and religious diversity, and what could be the alternative to national unity for Indonesia? Certainly there is none; and thus there is none to the principles enshrined in the *pancasila*: it is crystal clear that Indonesia can only exist as a multicultural and multireligious society. Every deviation from the state ideology, enshrined in Indonesia's constitution, would lead in the end to the destruction of the Indonesian state and thus is without alternative.

Of course, this implies that the multicultural and multicultural principles of the *pancasila* of mutual respect and equality among all citizens must be respected above all by the state, otherwise this state cannot survive.

Now, I think everyone knows that Indonesia had its difficulties and often during its history did not live up to the principles of its constitution: there was disunity, terrible crimes happened in the past and problems persist until the present day. Nevertheless: Indonesia

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<sup>1</sup> Sharia is a term continuously used in political discourse today, without the participants of this discourse having a clear idea what sharia means. I have argued in recent paper that sharia law (not sharia!) is rather not a useful basis of Islamic states; cf. H.-C. Günther, *Papers on Religion, East & West* 9, Nordhausen 2020, pp. 75ff.; the rules of the sharia are a universal law, governing all parts of the life of the believer. To follow these rules is in the modern world the task of the individual, it is not the task of the state to enshrine some rules in law.

survived as a unity and even is on a good way to become the economic powerhouse of south east Asia, even of the world. Indonesia is at present on place 16 ranked by GDP; in Asia only behind China, Japan India and South Korea, and it was projected to become nr. 4 after China, India and the US by 2030. This success is only endangered now by the absolutely intolerable Covid hysteria of the last time which destroyed Indonesia's economy and the folly of the media fuels this decline further. I can only hope the Indonesian government unites and stops this as soon as possible.

Thus: despite all problems Indonesia never completely lost its way and I trust it will not loose its proper way now it has become - without bloodshed - a stable and working democracy.

Thus the aim of this paper is to show how the principles of Islam, the majority religion can contribute to the future success of Indonesia's multicultural society and how Indonesia can even contribute to a better realisation of Islamic principles in Islamic States proper.

## **B. The present state of the Islamic world**

If one looks at the present situation of states with a Muslim majority one must at a first glance utterly despair. The Muslim world is littered with utterly corrupt regimes, even with criminal dictatorships. There is not the slightest sense for Muslim unity. Muslims are the people who suffer hardest in the present world, be it by persecution in non Muslim states, be it by their own criminal governments or terrorist pseudomuslim organisations, created by the west with the help of their criminal Muslim allies. I think what I mean is so widely known that I need not go into this matter further.

Once the hotspot of crimes against Muslims was the criminal state of Israel, which should never have been founded, which was first given a lifeline by the west and in the meantime advanced to a nuclear power. However, today Israel is not the only perpetrator of crimes against Muslims. In the meantime China is by far more dangerous, cruel and devious. Powerful as Israel is: it can't compare to one of the world's three superpowers, and by that the rising superpower, which holds in the meantime the whole world hostage.

Moreover, we have to deal with India and Myanmar. But at the same time we see Muslims slaughtering each other in the Near and Middle East. We have devious dictatorships, not lacking in criminal energy behind Israel or China like Saudi Arabia or Egypt for example, where every sincere Muslim cleric is imprisoned, tortured and killed. We have states like Kuwait, UAE and Qatar which built their well-being on the slave labour of a majority of foreign Muslims treated like animals. So how can anyone be surprised that almost the whole Muslim world actively supports the slaughter of Muslims in China and ever more Muslim states make peace with Israel.

As regards the state of the Ummah today I cannot do better than cite a word of the former Malaysian prime minister, Mahattir Muhammad; he hit the nail on the top by saying in a recent interview: “What is happening is that most Muslims have forsaken the religion. They don’t follow the religion at all. Yes, they pray, they fast, they give alms to people, they perform the hajj, but beyond that they are not Muslim. All the teachings of the Quran they reject. You see, one of the first things that is said in the Quran, that all Muslims are brothers. Brothers don’t go and kill each other. That’s what they are doing. They disobey the Quran. And also, Islam forbids killing. You can’t kill even non-Muslim. If you kill a Muslim, your place in hell is reserved for you there. But you don’t care. You are doing these things, all that is forbidden by Islam.”<sup>2</sup>

In my opinion Mahathir is the only living Muslim politician, once and hopefully again soon in power, who is both a highly experienced realist and a sincere Muslim believer, who tries to unite political realism with a moral compass.

And here we are not only at the point where I shall elaborate of what this statement means for the role of Islam in every society actually, but I think it is indicative that such a statement comes from a politician of a Muslim country in south east Asia.

As I outlined above for Indonesia Malaysia too had its difficulties to find to a stable democratic order, however it did so, and it did so under the government of the very politician I cited

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<sup>2</sup> (<https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-prime-minister-mahathir-mohamad-malaysia>).

above. As Indonesia, and even more so, it lives at the moment a period of crisis, also heated up by a silly corona policy of the now outgoing government. But still, Malaysia and Indonesia are at present the only true democracies in the Islamic world. Most countries have never been. Turkey started as an anti-Islamic military dictatorship and was a crypto dictatorship until Erdogan transformed the country into a real democracy, but just his rule has degenerated to a degree in recent years that Turkey certainly is no free society any longer and contributes to instability in the region rather than to stability as it did once.

The vicissitudes of the Indian subcontinent after the independence from British rule are too complicated to be discussed here. Certainly the outcome, as it presents itself today, is not a positive one and it shows that formal democracy does not guarantee good government at all.

And precisely this is the point where Islamic values come in.

### **C. The role of Islamic values in Indonesia**

The preamble to the constitution of Indonesia from 1945 says: Whereas independence is a genuine right of all nations and any form of alien occupation should thus be erased from the earth as not in conformity with humanity and justice,

Whereas the struggle of the Indonesian independence movement has reached the blissful point of leading the Indonesian people safely and well before the monumental gate of an independent Indonesian State which shall be free, united, sovereign, just and prosperous,

By the grace of God Almighty and urged by the lofty aspiration to exist as a free nation, Now therefore, the people of Indonesia declare herewith their independence,

Pursuant to which, in order to form a Government of the State of Indonesia that shall protect the whole people of Indonesia and the entire homeland of Indonesia, and in order to advance general prosperity, to develop the nation's intellectual life, and to contribute to the implementation of a world order based on freedom, lasting peace and social justice, Indonesia's National Independence shall be

laid down in a Constitution of the State of Indonesia, which is to be established as the State of the Republic of Indonesia with sovereignty of the people and based on the belief in the One and Only God, on just and civilized humanity, on the unity of Indonesia and on democratic rule that is guided by the strength of wisdom resulting from deliberation / representation, so as to realize social justice for all the people of Indonesia.<sup>3</sup>

The principle points to note are: the Indonesian state is based on the belief in God, and from this belief springs on the one hand the respect for different religious beliefs, and the rejection of any discrimination on whatever grounds, and also the obligation of the state to advance by democratic rule general prosperity, and to contribute on a world order based on lasting peace, freedom and social justice.

Could there be a better description of what core Islamic values mean for the good governance of an Islamic state? precisely of these values the Muslim establishment of today has forgotten: equality, freedom from discrimination is based on the brotherhood between human beings, willed by a merciful benevolent God. Respect for diversity is willed by a God who created human beings as different among each other: being different among each other is precisely what the multitude of humans distinguishes from the oneness of God. It is the sign of their imperfection: imperfection is in need of mercy, of the mercy of God, and equally of mercy, benevolence, forgiveness of shortcomings among men, otherwise peace and happiness are impossible among imperfect beings.

At the same time imperfection cannot but desire perfection. The diversity between man must - according to God's will - be a stimulus for every individual and every different group to do his/her/their best to achieve perfection. God gave us - in the words of the Holy Quran - different communities so that they compete among each other for perfection.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Zitiert nach [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution\\_of\\_Indonesia#Preamble](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Indonesia#Preamble).

<sup>4</sup> Had God wanted, He could have made you into one nation, but He wanted to see who are the more pious ones among you. Compete with each other in righteousness. All of you will return to God who will tell you the truth in the matter of your differences (5:48).

This means: Islam is the religion of respect: respect of God which leads to respect for his creation, a creation which is marked by diversity, and thus leads to respect of otherness among human beings. Moreover the respect for God, who created and thus wanted and accepts a world of imperfection in love and infinite mercy, inspires the recipients of his love and mercy to benevolence, mercy and brotherhood. They inspire those who are conscious of God's benevolence and mercy to be the instruments of God's mercy by being merciful and benevolent towards their brothers.<sup>5</sup>

What I have said here is only expressing the content of the Indonesian constitution in the words of Islamic ethics.

However, this attitude cannot remain empty: it must lead to mutual assistance and solidarity. Of course, this mutual assistance starts at the individual and private basis.

Now, surely it is of enormous value that there are charitable organisations who provide help to those in need. The world will never be in a state so perfect as to eliminate human suffering and imperfection.

Charitable organisations which involve people at a voluntary, individual basis do exist in Indonesia and elsewhere, they do an essential and necessary work, however, if we talk of Islamic values - in fact of any values in politics, social justice can not be left to charitable organisations: to leave it to charitable organisations is an insult to the people and the acknowledgment of government to be incapable or even unwilling to serve its prime purpose: to serve the common good, the good of all its people, not only those of the establishment of society, an establishment which in a society which

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<sup>5</sup> What I have briefly outlined here falls under what today often is called 'liberal' or 'moderate' Islam (implicitly against 'radical' or 'fundamentalist' Islam). I do not find this a helpful terminology. Religion can never be 'liberal' or 'moderate', it must be 'radical' in its obedience to God; yet, what is incompatible with true religion is 'fanaticism': fanaticism is incompatible with respect for God as the ultimate judge of all matters. I would also find the term 'modern' Islam not very helpful: what I would suggest is 'progressive' Islam. Islam has been for centuries the spearhead of progress wherever it took hold; religion in general is progressive, not in the trite sense the word is commonly used. Religion gives progress a proper purpose: the perfection of man in God. As it gives freedom a proper Purpose, not only as freedom from, but freedom for, freedom for acting not according to one's lower instincts, but in accordance with what makes human beings free and redeemed in God. See also the following note.

does not care social justice has the role of a parasite and oppressor. Or to put it in other words: to leave people mainly to the charity of good willed and individuals takes away people's dignity: all people have the right to be given a chance to earn a decent livelihood by their own work, to be free to participate in the way they think fit in the well-being of the society.

If a state does not care for social justice it makes inner peace impossible. Social justice is the cornerstone of Islamic values in concrete politics, it's the expression of solidarity and brotherhood, without social justice the state fails its principle role.

Social justice and the belief in one God are principles of the pancasila, Indonesia's state ideology.

Indonesia's founding father insisted that these two principles derive from Indonesian indigenous wisdom. This is only true in so far as the definition of the oneness of god is such that it can be adapted to all religions prominent in Indonesia. And if he derived social justice from a messianic principle this is a principle which Islam shares with other religions. Or which in the widest sense is a key principle of religion: the hope of the believer in ultimate redemption.

It should now have become clear that the foundations of the Indonesian state are principles which do justice to both: the core values of Islam and the diversity of the Indonesian nation. They can do this precisely because Islam is the religion of inclusion, of the respect for diversity and the integration of diversity. The success of the prophet in the early stages of Islam were due to the fact that Islam was a political religion from the very start, but one which had a message, which was perfectly apt to unite all advanced religions of the region in which it grew to power.

Every revelation of divine truth must adapt this divine truth to the time and space when it is revealed because man exists in time and space. It's the task of men to make this revelation speak again and again to their times and spaces. Thus universal respect for religious and cultural diversity and universal brotherhood of human beings is the message of Islam today.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Allow me here again to insert an aside: there are two – in my opinion – fundamentally wrong approaches to Islam today (and to Christianity too for that matter):



If Islam embraces this as its core value Islam will never come in conflict with any force of the good. If these principles were the principles of an Islamic party in Indonesia which religious or ethnic group could not embrace this party? Alas, such a party does not exist. Parties which call themselves Islamic reduce Islam to a dress code for women, sexual ethics and in general to formalities which, if not filled with the core values of Islam, are empty.

Of course, Indonesia has a history where the values of its constitution and the values of Pancasila, let alone the values of Islam counted for nothing under a brutal, criminal dictatorship. This dictatorship in Indonesia came to an end peacefully. And if this led inevitably to not really acknowledging the crimes of the past, to never take the perpetrators of the crimes to account, but cement even their place in society, still, it is a blessing that there was a transition to democracy without blood being spilled. Vengeance or punishment is not a value in itself, mercy and benevolence are more important.

Today Indonesia is a stable democracy, it can afford to look forward and not backwards and try to achieve national unity by offering to all political forces which embrace democracy to participate in a fair competition for power. Indonesia has the ideal foundations for a truly Islamic and harmonious society, yet, it has a long way to go to put them really into practice.

Current Indonesian policy is as far as ever from promoting social justice and brotherhood. The Indonesian people are still cheated by politics of their basic right to equality and respect for the weak. If for example I see an irresponsible press campaign demanding

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One approach insists on a literal interpretation of a Holy Text, pretending that this is the only genuine interpretation. Thus the Holy Text remains empty of answers to the questions of our times. Moreover, this view falls into the trap of not seeing that a literal interpretation is still just one possible interpretation, i.e. the literal one. Every understanding is just one possibility to approach a text. The other extreme is to reduce the Holy Text to that what one wants him to tell us, i.e. to distort it or even to expell from it what one dislikes. This leads to depriving the Holy Text of any rules, any guidance it can give to our lives today. The right approach is: to try to make EVERY word of the God's revelation speak to us today, give us answers how we can better handle the problems of our lives today. There will – inevitably – different interpretations, because no human mind will ever fully grasp the divine truth, however, among those who go about this task of interpretation with humility and in this spirit there will be a noble competition aspiring to the best understanding possible.

that the government should step up restrictions in order to protect people from a cruel pandemic, stopping the death toll of over 100.000 (122.000 on 19,8,2021) dead in a population of 270 million - as a comparison: Italy with 60 million inhabitants has a death toll of 128000<sup>7</sup>, this is an insult to a country which never did anything to distribute the wealth it has achieved as one of the world's prime emerging markets to the majority of its citizens and which now under the pressure of the criminal Covid mafia pushed 3 million Indonesians below the poverty line, and in general made little people pay for the folly of corona restrictions instead of just trying to make the health system as strong as viable under the prevailing circumstances and accept that illness and death are, alas, inevitable events in human lives.

This little example shows that Indonesia has still a long way to go to build the society it's constitution promises the Indonesian people and which is worthy of a country with a population of 90% of good Muslims and quasi 100% of decent and truly religious people.

And btw: is it not obvious that Indonesia could resolve the problems it still has with ethnic unrest, threatening national integrity, if the Indonesian government would try to seriously resolve them in a spirit of respect and brotherhood.

And here I come to another important point. What Mahathir Muhamad said in the quote above is true for the governments, the elite of Muslim states. It's not true of the people. The Indonesian people in particular do not live so much an Islam of external symbols, many may take some external rules rather lightly, however, the Indonesian people are a very religious people who take the inner values of Islam very seriously even those who do not follow traditional dress codes; they may not pray five times every day, but Indonesia is one of the countries according to the pew index where regular prayer is most frequent and ranked among the world's most religious countries.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> COVID Live Update: 210,726,283 Cases and 4,415,477 Deaths from the Coronavirus - Worldometer (worldometers.info)

<sup>8</sup> <https://alamsyahdjafar.wordpress.com/2020/08/01/indonesia-ranks-among-most-religious-countries-in-pew-study/>

And for ordinary people prayer is not an empty ritual, it is a force which guides them through their often hard and precarious lives. These people have a right to a government which respects their needs. Of course, meet peoples needs presupposes economic growth, not empty words and unrealistic stupid talk of pandemics or climate change; however, economic growth is not a value in itself, economic growth must be a tool to make the lives of the majority of the people better. In this task Indonesia still fails completely, as, I am afraid, almost all countries in the world.

#### **D. Islamic values in Indonesia and the world**

What has been said before shows that Islamic politics, or call it political Islam is something completely different from what most people associate with this watchword commonly. True political Islam, i.e. a policy based on Islam's inner values instead of an empty corset of rules, Islam in the spirit of the leadership of the prophet, is ideally suited for holding together a multicultural, multiethnic, multi religious society. Such societies become ever more prominent in today's world of streams of immigration which cannot be realistically avoided, although, of course, measures to keep them in reasonable limits are necessary and legitimate. The example of Indonesia shows that an Islamic society can even show respect to small minorities. In this it could serve as a model to both intolerant Islamic regimes and intolerant non Islamic regimes.

A proudly democratic free state with Islam as the majority religion, seeing freedom in the true sense<sup>9</sup> as a core Islamic value shows that Islam is not only compatible with the modern world, it is an ideal regulative system for contemporary society. It shows above all: Islam is not seeking domination, Islam is seeking harmony and peace. Islamic values are basically the same with the values of every society based on true values and not on unrestrained, disorderly pseudo - freedom. The chaos, murder and strife in today's world is due to a lack of values - not only in Muslim societies, but worldwide.

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<sup>9</sup> See my paper ‚Freiheit im westlichen Denken‘, in: Spektrum Iran 29/3 (2016) 25-34; also ‚Ethik und Gerechtigkeit‘, für R.H. Yousefi (ed.), Ethik im Weltkontext (Wiesbaden 2014).

What values does the western society possess? A society driven by blind greed, rule of the lowest instincts, destroying the whole world with mass murder and wars in disregard of any international laws. Are these Christian values?

What values does the brutal atheist totalitarianism of the PR of China possess, with its even greater greed for money, power, supremacy and a racism which in the meantime beats European racism? With its extinction not only of people, but of all what is human, its policy of murder, torture and mass surveillance which it now even seeks to expand outside its borders.

All this is not the fault of ordinary European, American or Chinese people. They are victims of the devious establishment of their countries as Muslims are. Ordinary people of all cultures and races have the faculty to distinguish between right and wrong. Their decision to choose the right path is influenced by the example of those who act rightfully. And thus, as the prophet said, who induces people to the good is equal to him who does good.

Ordinary Muslims can be an example of the good in every society. But ordinary people are not enough to make a real difference. States, in particular large states can make a difference. Indonesia is a country of considerable weight at least in Asian politics. It could lead by example, by trying to enact the values it's constitution obliges its government to. Going seriously about it's own problems, stopping injustice and abuse of power, corruption and violations of human rights Indonesia could then also go to quietly take measures against oppressive powers, namely the new major oppressor of the world, China, in order to stabilise east Asia and lead other nations on a good way.

For that it needs politicians with both realism and the capacity to handle power and with a moral compass dictated by true Islamic values. At least Mahathir Muhamad shows that this combination can - if rarely - exist. I can only hope the much larger country of Indonesia will find similar persons too for its future governments.

Islam is - as every religion - neither a corset of external rules nor a theory, but a form of life, a form of life inspired by one's relationship with God. It is the task of every Muslim, of every

religious person to live the values of his religion, to be an example and guide.

As the Holy Quran (28:77) says: But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters.

Politicians are guides by profession, by office. What the world needs is: politicians who have a conscience. Politicians who are truly believing Muslims are particularly apt to fulfil the requirements of good governance precisely because Islam is a religion of a state from its very beginning and there is the perfect model of good leadership with the leadership of the first Muslim community by the prophet.

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