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Religious Identity Polarization from a Qur'anic Perspective: An Exegetical Analysis of Qur'an 49:10–13 On the Ethics of Difference

Abdurrahman Sulaimana Saputra[1], Muhammad Ridho[2], Habibullah[3], Ali Akbar[4]
[1234] UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia
Email Correspondence: rahman130821@gmail.com

Abstract
Religious identity polarization is a social phenomenon that emerges when differences in religious beliefs and group affiliations develop into prejudice, stigmatization, and antagonism that undermine intergroup relations. This study aims to examine the construction of the ethics of difference in Qur'an 49:10–13 and reconstruct its relevance as a normative framework for critically assessing religious identity polarization. Employing a qualitative library-based approach, the study adopts a textual-hermeneutical research design using the comparative method of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr muqāran*). The analysis integrates linguistic examination, intratextual reading, comparative analysis of classical and modern Qur'anic interpretations, and conceptual engagement with scholarship on social identity and polarization. The findings indicate that these verses establish four interconnected ethical principles: justice-oriented reconciliation (*iṣlāḥ*), the protection of social dignity, epistemic responsibility in restraining prejudice, and the recognition of human diversity through mutual understanding (*taʿāruf*). These findings demonstrate that religious solidarity is not inherently incompatible with respect for difference but requires ethical constraints to prevent its transformation into group superiority and social exclusion. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in developing a framework of *Qur'anic ethics of difference* that distinguishes religious identity and legitimate theological critique from antagonistic practices that undermine the dignity of others. This framework extends Qur'anic exegetical inquiry beyond the identification of individual moral values toward a reconstruction of normative relationships among verses relevant to plural societies. It also provides a conceptual foundation for further scholarship on social reconciliation, religious communication, and education for diversity.
Keywords: religious identity polarization; Qur'anic ethics of difference; exegesis of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt; social reconciliation; *taʿāruf*.

Abstrak
Polarisasi identitas keagamaan merupakan persoalan sosial yang muncul ketika perbedaan keyakinan dan afiliasi kelompok berkembang menjadi prasangka, stigmatisasi, dan antagonisme yang merusak hubungan antarkelompok. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konstruksi etika perbedaan dalam QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 10–13 serta merekonstruksi relevansinya sebagai kerangka kritik normatif terhadap polarisasi identitas keagamaan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan desain tekstual-hermeneutis dan metode tafsir komparatif (tafsīr muqāran). Analisis dilakukan melalui penelaahan linguistik, pembacaan intratekstual, perbandingan penafsiran klasik dan modern, serta dialog konseptual dengan literatur mengenai identitas sosial dan polarisasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rangkaian ayat tersebut membentuk empat prinsip etika yang saling berkaitan, yaitu rekonsiliasi berkeadilan (iṣlāḥ), perlindungan kehormatan sosial, tanggung jawab epistemik dalam mengendalikan prasangka, dan pengakuan terhadap keragaman manusia (taʿāruf). Temuan ini memperlihatkan bahwa solidaritas keagamaan tidak secara inheren bertentangan dengan penghormatan terhadap perbedaan, tetapi memerlukan pembatasan etis agar tidak berkembang menjadi superioritas kelompok dan eksklusi sosial. Kontribusi teoretis penelitian terletak pada pengembangan kerangka Qur'anic ethics of difference yang membedakan identitas keagamaan dan kritik teologis yang sah dari praktik antagonistik yang merendahkan martabat pihak lain. Kerangka tersebut memperluas kajian tafsir dari identifikasi nilai moral individual menuju rekonstruksi hubungan normatif antarayat yang relevan bagi masyarakat majemuk, sekaligus menyediakan landasan konseptual bagi kajian rekonsiliasi sosial, komunikasi keagamaan, dan pendidikan keberagaman.
Kata kunci: *polarisasi identitas keagamaan, etika perbedaan qur'ani, tafsir al-hujurat, rekonsiliasi sosial, taʿāruf*

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Introduction

Religious identity polarization represents one of the significant challenges facing contemporary societies, as it demonstrates how identity, initially functioning as a source of meaning, solidarity, and moral orientation, can become a social boundary that intensifies divisions between groups. This issue concerns not merely the existence of religious diversity or differences in belief but also the processes through which religious affiliations are employed to construct antagonistic social categorizations, reinforce prejudice against other groups, and justify exclusionary practices in public life. Scholarship on *affective polarization* demonstrates that polarization extends beyond differences in opinion or ideological orientation to encompass the emergence of distrust, negative sentiments, and social rejection directed toward groups perceived as opposing or adversarial.[1] Smith further emphasizes the importance of distinguishing polarization as a division between groups from group polarization as a psychological process that drives the intensification of collective positions.[2] This conceptual distinction is particularly relevant to religious studies because differences in identity do not inherently generate conflict but may develop into antagonism when group identity is positioned as a basis for moral superiority and as a justification for denigrating others.

In religiously plural societies, the issue of identity polarization reveals the complex relationships among personal beliefs, communal solidarity, power relations, and the recognition of different religious groups. Indonesia provides a significant context for examining this issue, as its social landscape is characterized by interactions among diverse religious traditions alongside ongoing debates concerning the role of religion in national identity. According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2022 and published in 2023, Indonesian attitudes toward religious diversity exhibit patterns that are not entirely uniform. A substantial proportion of respondents expressed openness to coexistence with members of other religious communities, while certain exclusionary attitudes remained evident in perceptions of the compatibility of other religions with national culture and the boundaries of acceptance toward differences in religious belief.[3] Further analysis indicates that 49% of Indonesian Muslim respondents considered religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity to make their country a better place to live, while 43% believed that such diversity made no significant difference. Among Christian respondents, the proportion who viewed diversity positively reached 67%.[4] These findings highlight the importance of distinguishing general acceptance of diversity from attitudes toward specific groups, indicating that polarization cannot be reduced to a simple division between tolerant and intolerant segments of society.

This complexity becomes even more apparent when religious identity intersects with political contestation and the formation of group loyalties. Aspinall and Mietzner demonstrate that Indonesia's political dynamics reveal tensions among pluralism, electoral competition, and the mobilization of socioreligious identities.[5] Meanwhile,

[1] Shanto Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129–46, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034.

[2] D Grant-Smith and T Weiler, "Recognising the Value of Non-Professional Part-Time Work in Assessing Graduate Employability: A Challenge to Employers," *Industry and Higher Education* 38, no. 4 (2024): 325–35, https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222231208435.

[3] Pew Research Center, "Buddhism, Islam and Religious Pluralism in South and Southeast Asia" (Pew Research Center, 2023), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/09/12/buddhism-islam-and-religious-pluralism-in-south-and-southeast-asia/.

[4] Pew Research Center, "5 Facts about Muslims and Christians in Indonesia" (Pew Research Center, 2024), https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/03/28/5-facts-about-muslims-and-christians-in-indonesia/.

[5] Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, "Southeast Asia's Troubling Elections: Nondemocratic Pluralism in Indonesia," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 4 (2019): 104–18, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0055.

Mietzner and Muhtadi examine the mobilization of intolerance toward religious and ethnic minorities as an issue that must be understood in relation to the interplay between public attitudes and political developments.[6] Based on a survey of 1,520 Indonesian respondents conducted in the lead-up to the 2019 general elections, Soderborg and Muhtadi identified associations between political preferences and various forms of group-based sentiment, including religious sentiments.[7] Their findings suggest that political polarization is not merely an elite-driven phenomenon but is also associated with social dispositions that have developed within society. At the level of interreligious relations, Setiawan, in a study involving 2,026 Muslim and Christian respondents in Indonesia, demonstrates the relevance of religiosity and social identity in explaining support for various forms of interreligious group conflict.[8] Taken together, these studies demonstrate that religion must be understood not only as a normative system of beliefs but also as a form of social identity that interacts with political dynamics, group psychology, and intercommunity relations.

The development of digital communication has introduced a new dimension to the formation and dissemination of identity boundaries. Social media interactions enable group representations, moral judgments, and expressions of identity to circulate rapidly, while simultaneously expanding the space for symbolic contestation. However, the relationship between digital media and polarization must be examined with appropriate nuance. Research on exposure to information sources sharing similar political orientations indicates that homogeneous communication environments do not necessarily lead directly to increased polarization.[9] Budak also cautions against overstating the effects of misinformation and social media algorithms on social divisions without considering variations in exposure, user characteristics, and communication contexts.[10] Thus, the more fundamental issue is not merely the existence of digital technology but how identity, perceptions of others, and practices of social communication interact in shaping intergroup relations. This perspective provides an opportunity for normative religious scholarship to examine ethical principles that can be employed to critically evaluate antagonistic communication practices and forms of identity construction.

Within the discourse of *Uṣūl al-Dīn* and Islamic Studies, this phenomenon raises questions concerning the relationship between the particularity of religious identity and the universality of human ethics. On the one hand, religious traditions possess systems of belief, symbols, and normative boundaries that shape the identities of their adherents. On the other hand, life in plural societies requires recognition of human dignity, the restraint of prejudice, and a willingness to establish social relationships with those who hold different beliefs. This tension need not be understood as an absolute contradiction

[6] Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "The Mobilisation of Intolerance and Its Trajectories: Indonesian Muslims' Views of Religious Minorities and Ethnic Chinese," in *Contentious Belonging: The Place of Minorities in Indonesia*, ed. Greg Fealy and Ronit Ricci (ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019), https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/contentious-belonging/mobilisation-of-intolerance-and-its-trajectories-indonesian-muslims-views-of-religious-minorities-and-ethnic-chinese/309F0A2C5E1B56B7EF9DD92A022F05D7.

[7] S Soderborg and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "Resentment and Polarization in Indonesia," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 23, no. 3 (2023): 439–67, https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2023.17.

[8] T Setiawan et al., "The Relation between Religiosity Dimensions and Support for Interreligious Conflict in Indonesia," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 42, no. 2 (2020): 244–61, https://doi.org/10.1177/0084672419878824.

[9] Brendan Nyhan, Jaime Settle, and Emily Thorson, "Like-Minded Sources on Facebook Are Prevalent but Not Polarizing," *Nature* 620 (2023): 137–44, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06297-w.

[10] Ceren Budak et al., "Misunderstanding the Harms of Online Misinformation," *Nature* 630 (2024): 45–53, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07417-w.

between commitment to theological truth and respect for social plurality. Rather, the central academic question concerns how boundaries of religious belief can be understood without being transformed into justifications for humiliation, discrimination, or the denial of the dignity of other groups. Scholarship on pluralism and Qur'anic interpretation reveals diverse approaches to understanding the relationship between Islamic beliefs and the acceptance of religious differences, including inclusive, pluralist, and dialogical approaches.[11] This diversity of perspectives demonstrates that the relationship between theological identity and social ethics remains a subject of hermeneutical debate, requiring an integrated textual, conceptual, and contextual analysis.

One Qur'anic passage particularly relevant to this discussion is Qur'an 49:10–13. These verses articulate several principles concerning the formation of social relationships: brotherhood and reconciliation (*ukhuwwah* and *iṣlāḥ*) in verse 10; the prohibition against ridicule, insult, and derogatory name-calling in verse 11; the prohibition against negative suspicion, seeking out others' faults, and backbiting in verse 12; and the recognition of human diversity and the principle of mutual acquaintance (*taʿāruf*) in verse 13. Textually, these verses contain interconnected, though not entirely identical, addressees, prohibitions, and ethical orientations. Qur'an 49:10 explicitly addresses brotherhood among believers, whereas Qur'an 49:13 employs the universal address to humanity (*yā ayyuhā al-nās*). This shift in the addressee raises an important interpretive question: how does the ethic of solidarity within the community of believers relate to the universal recognition of human diversity, and to what extent can these two orientations be constructed as a coherent ethical framework?

This question becomes increasingly significant when the passage is examined through the dynamics of social identity formation. The injunction to pursue reconciliation in verse 10 can be understood as a means of restraining conflict within the community of believers, but it does not, in itself, explain the full range of interreligious relations. The prohibitions against ridicule in verse 11 and negative suspicion in verse 12 concern social behaviors that may reinforce intergroup categorization and hostility. Meanwhile, the recognition of human diversity in verse 13 provides a basis for examining the relationship between particular identities and universal human dignity. The principle of *li-taʿārafū* should not be understood merely as an invitation to become acquainted with the existence of other groups; rather, it requires further examination to determine whether it also entails ethical obligations involving respect, reciprocity, and the restriction of claims to superiority based on ancestry or social identity. Accordingly, an analysis of Qur'an 49:10–13 requires an approach that moves beyond identifying the moral values of each verse in isolation and instead elucidates the conceptual relationships among the verses and their implications for the construction of identity boundaries in plural societies.

Several previous studies have contributed to understanding social ethics and diversity in Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt. Hakim and Bayyinah, through their examination of *Tafsīr al-Ibrīz*, identify principles of justice, conflict resolution, respect, openness, and appreciation of differences in Qur'an 49:9–13.[12] Siregar and Jamil examine the concept of multiculturalism in Qur'an 49:13 based on Ibn Kathīr's interpretation, emphasizing the recognition of ethnic and national diversity and the rejection of distinctions in human

[11] Holili, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Dan Pluralisme Agama: Kajian Atas Ayat-Ayat Toleransi Dalam Perspektif Mufasir Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Qur'an and Tafsir Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023), https://journal.dinamedia.org/index.php/ijqts/article/view/79.

[12] L N Hakim and I Bayyinah, "Etika Sosial Perspektif Mufassir Nusantara: Kajian QS. Al-Hujurat Ayat 9–13 Dalam Tafsir Al-Ibriz," *Al-Shamela: Journal of Quranic and Hadith Studies* 1, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.61994/alshamela.v1i1.33.

dignity based on social origin.[13] Khairunisa and Kusnadi discuss religious moderation and multiculturalism in *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ*,[14] Meanwhile, Syelviana and Rezwandi employ Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* approach to contextualize the values of diversity articulated in Qur'an 49:13.[15] These studies reinforce the argument that Qur'anic verses provide an important foundation for respecting diversity, although their primary focus lies in elucidating the values of multiculturalism, religious moderation, or the social relevance of the verses under examination.

More recent scholarship indicates that discussions of the social ethics articulated in Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt have continued to expand. Pahlevi and Nasution (2026) compare the interpretations of al-Ṭabarī and M. Quraish Shihab concerning Qur'an 49:13 to examine the relationship between human diversity, equality, and the values of multiculturalism.[16] Hasanah specifically examines Qur'an 49:10–13 through the *double movement* hermeneutical approach, situating brotherhood, reconciliation, respect for human dignity, responsible communication, and recognition of diversity within a framework of contextual social ethics.[17] These two studies demonstrate that the ethical interpretation of this Qur'anic passage is not an entirely unexplored area of scholarship. Therefore, the contribution of a new study cannot rest merely on examining the same verses or attempting to relate their ethical values to contemporary social conditions. Instead, a more specific research problem must be formulated, namely, explaining how the normative structure of these verses relates to the mechanisms through which religious identity antagonism is formed, intensified, and constrained.

Based on these developments in the literature, three issues warrant further investigation. First, exegetical studies of Qur'an 49:10–13 have identified various principles of social ethics; however, the relationship between these principles and the concept of identity polarization as a sociopsychological process has not been a primary focus of the studies reviewed. Second, scholarship on religious polarization has examined the relationships among social identity, group-based sentiments, political behavior, and conflict, but has not specifically developed an analytical dialogue with the ethical structure of Qur'an 49:10–13.[18] Third, an unresolved hermeneutical issue remains concerning the relationship between solidarity within the community of believers, prohibitions against conduct that undermines social dignity, and the universal recognition of human diversity. These three issues highlight the need for an interpretive approach that connects exegetical analysis with concepts of group identity, without reducing the Qur'anic message to a theory of social psychology or imposing modern social categories upon the historical meaning of the text.

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[13] R R Siregar and M Jamil, "Konsep Multikulturalisme Dalam Surah Al-Hujurat Ayat 13 Perspektif Tafsir Ibnu Katsir," *Jurnal Semiotika-Q: Kajian Ilmu Al-Quran Dan Tafsir* 4, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.19109/jsq.v4i1.25099.

[14] N Khairunisa and Kusnadi, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dan Multikultural Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13 Dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah," *ATLAS: Journal of Research and Islamic Thought Studies*, 2025, https://jurnal.radenfatah.ac.id/index.php/atlas/article/view/29223.

[15] A Syelviana and Rezwandi, "The Values of Diversity in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13: A Hermeneutical Study of Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement," *Al-Misykah: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 6, no. 2 (2025), https://doi.org/10.19109/almisykah.v6i2.31466.

[16] R Pahlevi and H B Nasution, "Religious Pluralism in Tafsir Muqaran: A Comparative Study of Al-Tabari Jami Al-Bayan and Quraish Shihab Tafsir Al-Misbah," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research of Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (2026): 920–32, https://doi.org/10.24036/ijmurhica.v9i3.595.

[17] Z Hasanah, M Azmi, and S Maryam, "Reconstructing Qur'anic Social Ethics: A Double-Movement Hermeneutical Reading of Q.S. Al-Ḥujurāt: 10–13," *AHKAM: Jurnal Hukum Islam Dan Humaniora* 5, no. 4 (2026): 4116–30, https://doi.org/10.58578/ahkam.v5i4.11731.

[18] Soderborg and Muhtadi, "Resentment and Polarization in Indonesia"; Setiawan et al., "The Relation between Religiosity Dimensions and Support for Interreligious Conflict in Indonesia."

Building on these issues, this study addresses three principal research questions: (1) How do Qur'anic exegetes explain the semantic structure and intratextual relationships of Qur'an 49:10–13, particularly concerning *ukhuwwah*, *iṣlāḥ*, the prohibitions against ridicule and prejudice, and *taʿāruf*? (2) How can these principles be critically examined in relation to the construction of group boundaries, intergroup prejudice, and religious identity polarization? (3) How can the relationship between particularistic religious solidarity and the universal recognition of human dignity be formulated into a Qur'an-based framework for the ethics of difference? In accordance with these questions, this study aims to analyze the exegetical structure of Qur'an 49:10–13, elucidate its conceptual relevance to identity polarization, and reconstruct principles for an ethics of difference that acknowledge the existence of religious identities and theological commitments without legitimizing antagonism, humiliation, or social exclusion.

The academic significance of this study lies in its attempt to establish a dialogue between Qur'anic exegesis and contemporary scholarship on identity polarization through an interpretive approach attentive to differences in historical contexts, linguistic structures, and the normative scope of the verses. Conceptually, the study proposes a framework for the ethics of difference that integrates internal reconciliation (*iṣlāḥ*), the protection of social dignity, the restraint of prejudice, and the recognition of human diversity (*taʿāruf*) as interconnected principles for evaluating intergroup antagonism. Its originality lies not in identifying the values of brotherhood or tolerance in Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, but in critically examining the relationships among these values as a framework for the ethical critique of religious identity polarization. Accordingly, this study seeks to contribute to the development of Qur'anic studies and exegesis by moving beyond the explanation of the text's normative messages and placing them in critical dialogue with contemporary questions of identity, recognition, and social cohesion.

Method

This study employs a qualitative, library-based approach (*library research*), adopting a textual-hermeneutical analytical design and the comparative method of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr muqāran*). This approach was selected to examine the construction of the ethics of difference in Qur'an 49:10–13 by exploring the relationships among linguistic meanings, the historical context of revelation, developments in exegetical interpretation, and their relevance to contemporary religious identity polarization. The research design integrates classical and modern Qur'anic exegesis with contextual interpretation to identify continuities and changes in exegetical reasoning while preserving the historical specificity of the text. This methodological choice is consistent with the principles of qualitative research, which emphasize interpretive depth, analytical traceability, and alignment between research questions and the methodological framework.[19] The contextual approach is employed in a limited capacity as an analytical tool to distinguish between the historical meanings of the verses, the interpretive constructions developed by Qur'anic exegetes, and the potential application of their ethical principles in different social contexts.

The primary sources of this study comprise Qur'an 49:10–13 and four exegetical works representing diverse interpretive approaches and intellectual periods: *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* by al-Ṭabarī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* by Ibn ʿĀshūr, and *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* by M. Quraish Shihab. These sources were purposively selected based on their scholarly authority, differences in interpretive orientation,

[19] John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Sage Publications, 2018).

relevance to discussions of social ethics, and capacity to illustrate developments in interpretation from the classical exegetical tradition to modern Qur'anic exegesis. Secondary sources consist of scholarly journal articles, academic monographs, and empirical studies published between 2015 and 2026 addressing identity polarization, intergroup relations, social prejudice, multiculturalism, and Qur'anic ethics. The literature search was conducted through Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and relevant academic databases using combinations of the keywords *religious identity polarization*, *intergroup prejudice*, *social identity*, *Qur'anic ethics*, *taʿāruf*, *ukhuwwah*, and *al-Hujurat*. The literature was selected according to its direct relevance to the research questions, methodological clarity, publisher credibility, and contribution to the development of the theoretical argument.

Data analysis was conducted through four interconnected stages. First, linguistic and intratextual analyses were undertaken to identify semantic structures, relationships among the verses, and key concepts, including *ukhuwwah*, *iṣlāḥ*, *sukhriyyah*, *ẓann*, *tajassus*, *ghībah*, and *taʿāruf*. Second, a historical-contextual analysis examined information concerning *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), the communicative contexts of the verses, and differences in the scope of their addresses to the community of believers and to humanity as a whole. Third, a comparative analysis of the interpretations offered by the four exegetes was conducted, focusing on their similarities, differences, argumentative foundations, and respective normative implications. Fourth, a thematic synthesis was developed to connect the interpretive findings with the concepts of identity polarization, social categorization, intergroup prejudice, and social exclusion. The coding process combined a deductive approach based on preliminary theoretical categories with an inductive approach to accommodate themes emerging from the exegetical texts, drawing on Saldaña's principles of qualitative coding[20] and the development of interpretive themes as outlined by Braun and Clarke.[21] This framework is employed as a technique for organizing and synthesizing the findings rather than as a substitute for established procedures of Qur'anic interpretation.

Interpretive validity is maintained through triangulation of exegetical sources, examination of the consistency between linguistic analysis and exegetical reasoning, and verification of each conclusion against its textual foundations. Differences in interpretation are not forced into a single conclusion but are analyzed in light of the methodological backgrounds and intellectual orientations of the respective exegetes. Analytical transparency is strengthened through systematic documentation of textual units, coding categories, interpretive foundations, and the rationale underlying each conclusion in a comparative matrix. This study also explicitly distinguishes between the meanings articulated by the exegetes and the analytical constructions developed by the researcher to avoid the anachronistic projection of modern concepts of polarization onto the Qur'anic text. Through these procedures, the study seeks to develop a conceptual reconstruction of the ethics of difference that is grounded in exegetical sources, maintains hermeneutical coherence, and can serve as a framework for the normative critique of religious identity polarization, without claiming empirical causal relationships that have not been examined in this research.

Results and Discussion

The Construction of Religious Brotherhood and Social Reconciliation in Qur'an 49:10

Religious brotherhood in Qur'an 49:10 not only represents the unity of believers' collective identity but also establishes a normative obligation to manage conflicts through

[20] Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Sage, 2021).
[21] V Braun and V Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (London: Sage, 2022).

justice-oriented reconciliation. This principle is significant for understanding religious identity polarization because group solidarity can serve as a source of social integration while, under certain circumstances, also interacting with prejudice, exclusivism, and intergroup antagonism. The Qur'an positions brotherhood as a foundation of social relations that must be translated into concrete action, as stated in Qur'an 49:10:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

"*Sesungguhnya orang-orang mukmin itu bersaudara. Karena itu, damaikanlah antara kedua saudaramu dan bertakwalah kepada Allah agar kamu mendapat rahmat.*"

Linguistically, the construction *innamā al-muʾminūna ikhwatun* employs a restrictive expression (*qaṣr*) that establishes brotherhood as a normative relationship among believers. In his *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, Ibn ʿĀshūr explains that this expression serves as the argumentative foundation for the obligation of reconciliation. The use of the term *ikhwatun* indicates that the bond of faith is likened to the closeness of familial brotherhood, such that disputes do not nullify the mutual responsibilities of the parties involved.[22] This interpretation highlights the relationship between identity and moral obligation: identifying oneself as a member of the community of believers must be accompanied by a willingness to preserve social relationships rather than merely uphold group loyalty.

In his *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabarī interprets this brotherhood as *ukhuwwah fī al-dīn*, namely, brotherhood grounded in a shared religious faith. The command *fa-aṣliḥū bayna akhawaykum* is understood as an obligation to reconcile disputing believers by referring the resolution of their conflicts to the teachings of Allah and His Messenger. Al-Ṭabarī also associates the injunction to exercise *taqwā* (God-consciousness) with the obligation to pursue reconciliation justly.[23] Thus, *iṣlāḥ* cannot be reduced to the formal cessation of conflict but requires a resolution grounded in justice and moral responsibility. This interpretation reinforces the argument that Qur'anic brotherhood is prescriptive in nature: it establishes how members of the community ought to treat one another when disputes arise.

This reading is further supported by the intratextual relationship between verses 9 and 10. Qur'an 49:9 commands the resolution of disputes between two groups of believers according to the principles of *al-ʿadl* (justice) and *al-qisṭ* (equity), while verse 10 articulates the normative foundation of this obligation. Ibn ʿĀshūr interprets verse 10 as providing the underlying rationale for the preceding command to pursue reconciliation. Furthermore, the use of the term *akhawaykum* following the affirmation of *ikhwatun* reinforces the status of the disputing parties as members of a brotherhood whose bonds remain intact despite their conflict.[24] Thus, justice is not merely an additional element in the peacebuilding process but a fundamental principle that distinguishes substantive reconciliation from a compromise that simply ends hostilities without addressing inequalities in the relationships between the parties involved.

This perspective is relevant to social identity theory and developments in polarization research. Iyengar explains that *affective polarization* is characterized by increasing negative sentiments toward groups perceived as opposing or adversarial, even

[22] M al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr Al-Maʿnā Al-Sadīd Wa-Tanwīr Al-ʿaql Al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-Majīd NV - 30* (Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-al-Nashr, 1984).

[23] A J M ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*, ed. A M N V - 24 Shākir (Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 2000).

[24] Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr Al-Maʿnā Al-Sadīd Wa-Tanwīr Al-ʿaql Al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-Majīd NV - 30*.

when substantive differences are not necessarily the determining factor.[25] However, this framework was primarily developed within political studies; therefore, its application to religious identity requires conceptual adaptation. In the Indonesian context, Setiawan found that the relationship between religiosity and support for interreligious conflict depends on the specific dimensions of religiosity being examined.[26] Based on a survey of 2,026 Muslim and Christian respondents, the study found that religiocentrism was positively associated with support for interreligious group protests, including those involving violence. Conversely, the centrality of religion in individuals' lives was negatively associated with support for violent protests. These findings demonstrate that the strength of religious identity cannot be regarded as the sole cause of antagonism.

This distinction further underscores the importance of differentiating religious solidarity from hostile exclusivism. Solidarity can foster collective responsibility, whereas religiocentrism accompanied by negative evaluations of other groups may reinforce antagonistic group boundaries. Soderborg and Muhtadi's research on polarization in Indonesia demonstrates that group-based sentiments and social identities interact with political preferences in the aftermath of religious and ethnic identity mobilization during various electoral contests.[27] Aspinall and Mietzner also identify tensions among political pluralism, identity mobilization, and the development of democracy in Indonesia.[28] These findings demonstrate that polarization cannot be adequately explained solely in terms of differences in religious beliefs but must also be examined through the relationships among group identification, political interests, and the formation of perceptions of others.

Within this framework, the principle of *iṣlāḥ* offers a normative orientation that differs from tendencies to reinforce group boundaries. If polarization is characterized by increasing distrust and hostility, Qur'anic reconciliation requires acknowledging that differences and disputes do not automatically eliminate social responsibility. Nevertheless, reconciliation should not be interpreted as an obligation to homogenize all perspectives or suppress criticism of unjust actions. The relationship between Qur'an 49:9 and 49:10 demonstrates that restoring social relationships must be accompanied by the establishment of justice. Therefore, interpreting *ukhuwwah* as solidarity without considering justice risks overlooking the corrective dimension inherent in the injunction to pursue *iṣlāḥ*.

The interpretive contribution of this discussion lies in conceptualizing *ukhuwwah* as ethically responsible solidarity rather than unconditional group loyalty. Unlike approaches that merely identify brotherhood as a value promoting unity, the comparative analysis demonstrates that religious identity, the obligation of reconciliation, and justice constitute mutually reinforcing principles. Although Qur'an 49:10 explicitly addresses brotherhood within the community of believers, reading it alongside verse 13 provides a basis for examining the relationship between particularistic solidarity and respect for human diversity. Thus, religious brotherhood need not be positioned in opposition to the ethics of difference, provided that collective identity is not employed to justify humiliation, injustice, or hostility toward other groups. This framework contributes conceptually to Qur'anic exegesis by establishing justice-oriented reconciliation as a principle for the normative critique of religious identity polarization.

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[25] Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States."

[26] Setiawan et al., "The Relation between Religiosity Dimensions and Support for Interreligious Conflict in Indonesia."

[27] Soderborg and Muhtadi, "Resentment and Polarization in Indonesia."

[28] Mietzner and Muhtadi, "The Mobilisation of Intolerance and Its Trajectories: Indonesian Muslims' Views of Religious Minorities and Ethnic Chinese."

Ridicule, Prejudice, and Stigmatization as Mechanisms of Identity Polarization in Qur'an 49:11–12

Qur'an 49:11–12 demonstrates that the deterioration of social relationships arises not only from conflicting interests and differences in identity but also from communication practices that undermine human dignity, the formation of negative prejudices, and the dissemination of unsubstantiated judgments. In the context of religious polarization, ridicule and stigmatization may reinforce distinctions between the *ingroup* and the *outgroup*, while prejudice can transform differences in religious belief into collective suspicion. Although the Qur'an does not formulate a theory of polarization in the modern social-psychological sense, these two verses provide a normative foundation for evaluating behaviors that exacerbate intergroup relations.

Allah, the Exalted, states in Qur'an 49:11:

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا لَا يَسْخَرْ قَوْمٌ مِّنْ قَوْمٍ عَسٰٓى اَنْ يَّكُوْنُوْا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاۤءٌ مِّنْ نِّسَاۤءٍ عَسٰٓى اَنْ يَّكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّۚ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوْٓا اَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوْا بِالْاَلْقَابِۗ بِئْسَ الِاسْمُ الْفُسُوْقُ بَعْدَ الْاِيْمَانِۚ وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَاُولٰۤىِٕكَ هُمُ الظّٰلِمُوْنَ

Artinya: "Wahai orang-orang yang beriman, janganlah suatu kaum mengolok-olok kaum yang lain (karena) boleh jadi mereka (yang diolok-olok itu) lebih baik daripada mereka (yang mengolok-olok) dan jangan pula perempuan-perempuan (mengolok-olok) perempuan lain (karena) boleh jadi perempuan (yang diolok-olok itu) lebih baik daripada perempuan (yang mengolok-olok). Janganlah kamu saling mencela dan saling memanggil dengan julukan yang buruk. Seburuk-buruk panggilan adalah (panggilan) fasik setelah beriman. Siapa yang tidak bertobat, mereka itulah orang-orang zalim."

This verse prohibits three forms of behavior that undermine social dignity: *sukhriyyah* (ridicule), *lamz* (insult or disparagement), and *tanābuz bi al-alqāb* (the use of derogatory epithets). These prohibitions are accompanied by the expression *ʿasā an yakūnū khayran minhum*, which challenges the assumption that those who engage in ridicule occupy a position of greater moral worth than those they ridicule. In his *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabarī explains that the prohibition against ridicule encompasses acts of belittling individuals on the basis of their social circumstances or perceived shortcomings. The expression *wa lā talmizū anfusakum* is interpreted as a prohibition against mutual disparagement, since relationships among believers entail a responsibility to safeguard one another's dignity.[29] Meanwhile, in his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī connects the prohibition against insulting others with the cultivation of social relationships following the affirmation of brotherhood in the preceding verse.[30] Thus, ridicule and disparagement are not merely forms of individual communicative misconduct but also constitute practices that contradict the principle of religious solidarity.

From the perspective of social identity, acts of ridicule and disparagement can function as mechanisms through which symbolic hierarchies are constructed between groups. Iyengar explains that *affective polarization* involves the development of negative attitudes toward groups perceived as opposing or adversarial.[31] Putra, in a study conducted in Indonesia, demonstrates that national and religious identification can coexist with support for unity, although, under certain circumstances, they may still be

[29] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*.
[30] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981).
[31] Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States."

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accompanied by exclusionary attitudes toward minority groups.[32] These findings indicate that the normative affirmation of unity does not necessarily translate into equal social acceptance. Therefore, the prohibitions against *sukhriyyah* and *tanābuz bi al-alqāb* can be interpreted as an ethical critique of delegitimizing practices that use differences in identity as a justification for denigrating others.

Furthermore, Qur'an 49:12 extends the discussion from overt forms of disparagement to prejudice and covert practices that can undermine social relationships. Allah, the Exalted, states:

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوْا كَثِيْرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّۖ اِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ اِثْمٌ وَّلَا تَجَسَّسُوْا وَلَا يَغْتَبْ بَّعْضُكُمْ بَعْضًاۗ اَيُحِبُّ اَحَدُكُمْ اَنْ يَّأْكُلَ لَحْمَ اَخِيْهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوْهُۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللّٰهَۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيْمٌ

Artinya: "Wahai orang-orang yang beriman, jauhilah banyak prasangka! Sesungguhnya sebagian prasangka itu dosa. Janganlah mencari-cari kesalahan orang lain dan janganlah ada di antara kamu yang menggunjing sebagian yang lain. Apakah ada di antara kamu yang suka memakan daging saudaranya yang sudah mati? Tentu kamu merasa jijik. Bertakwalah kepada Allah! Sesungguhnya Allah Maha Penerima Tobat lagi Maha Penyayang."

The expressions *ijtanibū kathīran mina al-ẓann* and *inna baʿḍa al-ẓanni ithmun* indicate that not all forms of conjecture are morally reprehensible. In his *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, Ibn ʿĀshūr distinguishes unfounded negative suspicion from judgments supported by reasonable and justifiable grounds.[33] Reprehensible suspicion may develop into accusations, hostility, and actions that harm others. This explanation underscores that the prohibition against suspicion does not constitute a prohibition against critical thinking; rather, it places ethical constraints on negative judgments that lack an evidentiary basis. In the context of identity polarization, this principle is relevant to distinguishing reasoned criticism of particular viewpoints from negative generalizations directed at all members of a religious group.

The subsequent prohibitions against *tajassus* and *ghībah* further highlight the relationship between suspicion, violations of privacy, and reputational harm. Al-Ṭabarī explains *tajassus* as the act of seeking out the faults or concealed affairs of others, whereas *ghībah* refers to speaking about someone in a manner that the person would find objectionable. Ibn ʿĀshūr also associates suspicion with the inclination to seek information in order to substantiate preexisting suspicions. Taken together, these prohibitions demonstrate that unchecked suspicion may develop into behaviors that undermine social dignity and damage interpersonal relationships.[34] In digital communication environments, this principle can be applied to critically evaluate the dissemination of accusations, negative labeling, and the perpetuation of stereotypes directed at different groups.

The relevance of this interpretation can be examined in dialogue with empirical research on intergroup relations. Banas, in a meta-analysis encompassing 79 research cases involving 21,857 participants, found that positive mediated contact was associated with reduced prejudice ($r = -0.23$), whereas negative mediated contact was associated

[32] Andri Azis Putra, "How To Create Social Cohesion During Pandemic? A Sociological Analysis of Digital Voluntarism As the Path of the Reconstruction of Religious Consciousness in Indonesia," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 16, no. 2 (2022): 317–38, https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v16i2.2360.

[33] Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr Al-Maʿnā Al-Sadīd Wa-Tanwīr Al-ʿaql Al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-Majīd NV - 30*.

[34] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*; Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *Al-Tahrir Wa Al-Tanwir* (Al-Dar al-Tunisiyyah li al-Nashr, 1984).

with increased prejudice ($r = 0.31$). These findings indicate that the quality of interactions and group representations influences the nature and direction of intergroup relations.[35] Although this study does not specifically examine Qur'anic communication ethics, its findings highlight the importance of avoiding interactions that normalize derogatory behavior and stereotyping in intergroup relations.

Thus, Qur'an 49:11–12 provides a normative foundation for understanding three mechanisms that may exacerbate identity polarization: symbolic delegitimization through ridicule and disparagement, the cultivation of suspicion through unfounded prejudice, and the reproduction of stigma through the dissemination of information that undermines social dignity. The interpretive contribution of this study lies in integrating these three dimensions into a framework of Qur'anic communication ethics. Unlike interpretations that focus exclusively on prohibitions against individual misconduct, this analysis demonstrates the relevance of these principles to the formation and maintenance of intergroup relations. Nevertheless, this framework is not intended to eliminate theological differences or restrict legitimate academic criticism. Ethical concerns arise when differences are invoked to justify collective humiliation, unsubstantiated prejudice, and the stigmatization of other groups' identities. Accordingly, the protection of human dignity, epistemic responsibility, and the restraint of prejudice constitute essential principles for developing an ethics of difference capable of critically addressing religious polarization.

Taʿāruf, Equality of Dignity and the Deconstruction of Identity-Based Superiority in Qur'an 49:13

Qur'an 49:13 demonstrates that human diversity is a reality acknowledged by the Qur'an, while differences in ancestry, ethnicity, and social status cannot serve as legitimate grounds for claiming moral superiority before Allah. This principle is particularly relevant to religious identity polarization because intergroup antagonism arises not merely from the existence of differences but also from the construction of social hierarchies that position one's own group as superior to others. Accordingly, the recognition of diversity must be distinguished from the acceptance of equal human dignity, as reflected in research findings concerning national identity, religious identity, and social exclusion in Indonesia. The Qur'an affirms this principle in Qur'an 49:13:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقۡنَٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٖ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلۡنَٰكُمۡ شُعُوبٗا وَقَبَآئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوٓاْۚ إِنَّ أَكۡرَمَكُمۡ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَتۡقَىٰكُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٞ

"*Wahai manusia, sesungguhnya Kami telah menciptakan kamu dari seorang laki-laki dan seorang perempuan. Kemudian, Kami menjadikan kamu berbangsa-bangsa dan bersuku-suku agar kamu saling mengenal. Sesungguhnya yang paling mulia di antara kamu di sisi Allah ialah orang yang paling bertakwa. Sesungguhnya Allah Maha Mengetahui lagi Mahateliti*."

Hermeneutically, the use of the address *yā ayyuhā al-nās* indicates an expansion of the intended audience from the community of believers to humanity as a whole. Ibn ʿĀshūr (1984) explains that this shift in the form of address is associated with the affirmation of humanity's common origin in creation. According to his interpretation, the verse also challenges the tradition of tribal pride prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabian society, in which claims of genealogical superiority were used to disparage other groups. This explanation demonstrates that the recognition of diversity is not merely a descriptive

[35] J A Banas, E Bessarabova, and Z B Massey, "Meta-Analysis on Mediated Contact and Prejudice," *Human Communication Research* 46, no. 2–3 (2020): 120–60, https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqaa004.

statement about social reality but also constitutes a critique of identity-based hierarchies constructed on the basis of ancestry and group status. Ibn ʿĀshūr further associates tribal pride with the emergence of ridicule, disparagement, prejudice, and hostility, as prohibited in verses 11–12.[36]

In his *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabarī interprets the terms *shuʿūb* and *qabāʾil* as referring to human groupings organized according to genealogical structures. He explains the phrase *li-taʿārafū* as a means by which people may recognize their kinship ties, ancestral origins, and genealogical relationships. However, such classifications do not confer intrinsic superiority in the sight of Allah, since the criterion of nobility is determined by *taqwā* (God-consciousness). Al-Ṭabarī's interpretation highlights the distinction between identity as a marker of social relationships and its misuse as a justification for claims of superiority. Accordingly, the development of *taʿāruf* into a principle of interreligious dialogue should not be presented as the primary literal meaning established in al-Ṭabarī's exegesis; rather, it must be understood as a contextual extension grounded in the normative structure of the verse.[37]

This explanation acquires a further argumentative dimension through al-Rāzī's interpretation in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. Al-Rāzī questions the legitimacy of pride based on lineage, since human ancestry is not the result of individual achievement and therefore cannot serve as a valid basis for claims of superiority. According to his interpretation, differentiation among groups enables people to recognize one another, whereas true nobility is determined by religious and moral qualities rather than ancestry or wealth.[38] Nevertheless, al-Rāzī maintains normative distinctions based on religion and faith. This indicates that the critique of genealogical superiority in classical Qur'anic exegesis does not necessarily entail the elimination of theological differences. Therefore, an analysis of the ethics of difference must distinguish the rejection of discrimination based on ancestry from claims concerning the theological equality of all religious beliefs, which are not explicitly articulated in the verse.

The distinction between the recognition of identity and claims of group superiority gains empirical relevance through Putra's research.[39] Based on two studies conducted in Indonesia involving 1,005 and 236 participants, respectively, the research demonstrates that strong national identification and high levels of religious identification may coexist with support for the values of unity while simultaneously being associated with exclusionary attitudes toward the participation of certain minority groups in political and economic spheres. These findings indicate that symbolic support for diversity does not necessarily translate into substantive recognition of social equality. Data from the Pew Research Center also reveal variations in attitudes toward diversity in Indonesia: 49% of Muslim respondents and 67% of Christian respondents considered religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity to make Indonesia a better place to live.[40] These differences indicate that acceptance of plurality is a context-dependent social attitude and cannot be assumed to be uniform across different groups.

From the perspective of intergroup relations, the concept of *taʿāruf* can be brought into dialogue with research on social contact and prejudice reduction. Paluck, through an evaluation of 27 experimental studies, found that intergroup contact was generally consistent with a tendency toward reduced prejudice, although its effectiveness varied

[36] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*; Ibn Ashur, *Al-Tahrir Wa Al-Tanwir*.

[37] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*.

[38] al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb*.

[39] Putra, "How To Create Social Cohesion During Pandemic? A Sociological Analysis of Digital Voluntarism As the Path of the Reconstruction of Religious Consciousness in Indonesia."

[40] Center, "5 Facts about Muslims and Christians in Indonesia."

according to group characteristics and the contexts of interaction. This research does not directly demonstrate the effectiveness of *taʿāruf* as a Qur'anic concept but suggests that efforts to promote mutual understanding between groups must consider the quality of communication, experiences of interaction, and the conditions shaping social relationships.

Based on this synthesis, *taʿāruf* can be developed as a principle of mutual recognition that extends beyond mere awareness of the existence of other groups and encourages social relationships grounded in respect for differences. However, this interpretive extension must take into account the expression *inna akramakum ʿinda Allāhi atqākum*, which establishes *taqwā* (God-consciousness) as the criterion of nobility in the sight of Allah. Ibn ʿĀshūr explains that determining the degree of an individual's *taqwā* ultimately belongs to Allah's knowledge, as affirmed in the concluding declaration of the verse, *inna Allāha ʿalīmun khabīr*. Accordingly, *taqwā* cannot be arbitrarily invoked by individuals or groups to justify claims of their own superiority or to denigrate others.

The theoretical contribution of this discussion lies in reconstructing the relationship between identity differentiation, social recognition, and the restriction of claims to superiority. Unlike interpretations that present Qur'an 49:13 merely as a justification for multiculturalism, the comparative analysis demonstrates that *taʿāruf* has a genealogical foundation in classical Qur'anic exegesis, whereas its application to interreligious relations represents a hermeneutical extension requiring further justification. Thus, the Qur'anic ethics of difference does not demand the elimination of identities or the equivalence of religious beliefs but instead establishes ethical constraints on the use of social differences as grounds for humiliation and exclusion. This framework contributes to Qur'anic exegetical studies by positioning the recognition of diversity and the responsibility to uphold human dignity as foundations for a normative critique of religious identity polarization.

Reconstructing the Qur'anic Ethics of Difference as a Framework for Critiquing Religious Identity Polarization

The analysis of Qur'an 49:10–13 demonstrates that the Qur'anic ethics of difference is constructed not merely through the principles of tolerance and brotherhood but through the interrelationship among reconciliation, the protection of social dignity, the restraint of prejudice, and the recognition of human diversity. These four principles constitute a normative framework through which religious identities can be maintained without being employed to legitimize hostility or social exclusion. From the perspective of identity polarization, the fundamental issue lies not in the existence of theological differences but in the processes through which group identification develops into prejudice, delegitimization, and discriminatory treatment. This distinction is consistent with Iyengar's scholarship, which explains that *affective polarization* encompasses negative sentiments toward other groups rather than merely disagreements over differing viewpoints.[41] Although developed within political studies, this concept provides an analytical framework for distinguishing identity diversity from intergroup antagonism.

Intratextually, Qur'an 49:10–13 demonstrates a coherent progression of ethical arguments. Verse 10 affirms brotherhood among believers through the injunction to pursue *iṣlāḥ* (reconciliation); verse 11 prohibits *sukhriyyah*, *lamz*, and *tanābuz bi al-alqāb* as forms of ridicule and disparagement; verse 12 places ethical constraints on *ẓann*, *tajassus*, and *ghībah*, which undermine social dignity; while verse 13 affirms the diversity of human origins through the principle of *taʿāruf* (mutual recognition). In his *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, Ibn ʿĀshūr establishes a connection between verse 13 and the preceding

[41] Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States."

prohibitions. He explains that tribal pride may develop into ridicule, prejudice, fault-finding, and hostility.[42] This explanation demonstrates that the sequence of verses not only regulates individual behavior but also challenges the tendency to use collective identity as a basis for claims of social superiority.

A comparative reading reveals differences in exegetical emphasis. Al-Ṭabarī underscores brotherhood grounded in faith, the prohibition against conduct that undermines social dignity, and the genealogical function of *taʿāruf*. Al-Rāzī develops a broader argument concerning the relationship between social conduct, moral worth, and the critique of pride based on ancestry. Meanwhile, Ibn ʿĀshūr more explicitly connects the prohibitions against harmful social behavior with the historical roots of tribal pride. These differences in emphasis demonstrate that the construction of an ethics of difference cannot be grounded in a single term or an isolated verse. Rather, it requires an interpretive approach attentive to textual relationships, exegetical reasoning, and differences in normative scope between brotherhood among believers and the recognition of human diversity.

The relevance of this framework is further supported by research on identity and social conflict in Indonesia. Setiawan demonstrates that different dimensions of religiosity exhibit distinct relationships with support for interreligious conflict. Religiocentrism is positively associated with support for violent protests, whereas the centrality of religion in individuals' lives exhibits a negative association with support for violence.[43] Putra found that support for unity can coexist with exclusionary attitudes toward certain minority groups. Soderborg and Muhtadi also demonstrate the relationship between group-based sentiments and political polarization in Indonesia. These findings indicate that the intensity of religious identification does not, in itself, determine the quality of social relationships; attitudes toward other groups and the broader context of intergroup relations must also be taken into account.[44]

Based on this textual and conceptual synthesis, this study identifies four dimensions of the Qur'anic ethics of difference. The first dimension is justice-oriented reconciliation, which positions *iṣlāḥ* as a responsibility to restore social relationships without compromising justice, as emphasized in Qur'an 49:9–10. The second dimension is the protection of social dignity, which entails ethical constraints on ridicule, disparagement, and the use of derogatory labels. The third dimension is epistemic responsibility, namely, the obligation to distinguish judgments supported by adequate evidence from negative prejudices that encourage accusations and fault-finding. The fourth dimension is the recognition of diversity, which establishes *taʿāruf* as a foundation for developing reciprocal relationships without treating group origins as a measure of moral superiority. These four dimensions constitute analytical constructs developed in this study rather than a classification explicitly formulated by all the exegetes.

This framework must be critically examined in dialogue with previous scholarship. Hasanah has reconstructed the social ethics of Qur'an 49:10–13 through the *double movement* hermeneutical approach, emphasizing brotherhood, reconciliation, human dignity, responsible communication, and acceptance of diversity.[45] Munauwarah has also developed a contextual interpretation of Qur'anic verses concerning unity to address

[42] Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr* (Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-al-Nashr, 1984).

[43] Setiawan et al., "The Relation between Religiosity Dimensions and Support for Interreligious Conflict in Indonesia."

[44] Soderborg and Muhtadi, "Resentment and Polarization in Indonesia."

[45] Ummatul hasanah Riski Suriani Lubis, Jesimawati, "Reframing Qur'anic Hermeneutics Beyond the Text–Context Binary: A Dialogical Model for Contemporary Interpretation," *Dialogues in Qur'anic and Hadith Studies* 01, no. 1 (2026): 27–49.

polarization among Muslims on social media, particularly stigmatizing labels and mutual delegitimization.[46] Therefore, the originality of this study cannot be grounded in the claim that the integration of Qur'anic ethics and the issue of polarization has never been undertaken. Rather, its more specific contribution lies in establishing normative boundaries between legitimate differences in identity and antagonistic practices that violate social dignity, through a comparative reading and structural analysis of Qur'an 49:10–13.

This distinction has important theoretical implications. Commitment to theological beliefs, criticism of religious viewpoints, and academic debate are not inherently incompatible with the ethics of difference. Normative concerns arise when differences are invoked to justify collective humiliation, unfounded prejudice, violations of human dignity, or discriminatory practices. Thus, the ethics of difference does not require the elimination of identity or the equivalence of all religious beliefs but instead establishes moral boundaries governing how identities are expressed and maintained. Within this framework, the principle of *taʿāruf* is not understood as eliminating religious particularity, while *ukhuwwah* cannot be invoked to justify forms of exclusivism that denigrate others.

Methodologically, this study distinguishes between textual meanings, the historical arguments advanced by Qur'anic exegetes, and contemporary ethical reconstruction. This distinction is essential for avoiding anachronism, particularly when concepts of polarization developed within social psychology are employed to interpret the Qur'anic text. Empirical findings concerning the relationships between religiosity and conflict, as well as political polarization, serve to contextualize the social issues under investigation rather than to demonstrate that Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt directly explains modern psychological mechanisms. Accordingly, the resulting framework of *Qur'anic ethics of difference* constitutes a normative-hermeneutical synthesis rather than an empirically validated causal model.

The academic contribution of this study lies in developing a framework for the ethics of difference that connects religious identity, communicative responsibility, the restraint of prejudice, and the recognition of human dignity. This framework may provide a conceptual foundation for further research on interreligious dialogue, education for diversity, community reconciliation, and digital religious communication. However, its effectiveness in reducing polarization remains to be empirically tested. Thus, Qur'an 49:10–13 offers a foundation for understanding religious identity in a manner that does not eliminate differences but instead establishes reconciliation, dignity, epistemic responsibility, and the recognition of diversity as ethical constraints on social antagonism.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Qur'an 49:10–13 establishes a framework for the ethics of difference that connects religious solidarity with the responsibility to maintain social relationships and respect human diversity. The textual-hermeneutical analysis demonstrates that brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*) in verse 10 extends beyond a shared identity of faith to encompass the obligation of reconciliation (*iṣlāḥ*) grounded in justice. Meanwhile, the prohibitions against ridicule, disparagement, derogatory labeling, unfounded suspicion, fault-finding, and backbiting in verses 11–12 establish ethical boundaries against practices that undermine social dignity. The principle of *taʿāruf* in verse 13 affirms that diversity in human origins provides a basis for mutual recognition

[46] H H Munauwarah, "Contextual Exegesis of Qur'anic Verses of Unity through Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement: Responding to Muslim Polarization in the Age of Social Media," *Ulumul Qur'an: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 6, no. 2 (2026): 278–300, https://doi.org/10.58404/juq.v6i2.885.

rather than a justification for claims of superiority based on ancestry or social identity. The relationships among these verses demonstrate that Qur'anic ethics does not demand the elimination of differences but rather their management through moral responsibility and respect for the dignity of others.

In relation to religious identity polarization, this study finds that the central ethical concern lies not in the strength of religious identification or the existence of differences in belief but in the transformation of identity into a basis for antagonism, collective prejudice, and social exclusion. A comparative reading of the exegetical tradition demonstrates that solidarity within the community of believers and the recognition of human diversity possess distinct normative scopes, yet they can be connected through the principle of respect for social dignity. Accordingly, commitment to theological truth need not conflict with the obligation to treat members of different groups with dignity. Criticism of religious beliefs or practices remains legitimate, provided that it is grounded in defensible arguments and does not develop into humiliation, stigmatization, or discrimination. This distinction affirms that the Qur'anic ethics of difference is neither equivalent to theological relativism nor dependent on eliminating the boundaries of religious identity.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in reconstructing the framework of *Qur'anic ethics of difference* through four interconnected dimensions: justice-oriented reconciliation, the protection of social dignity, epistemic responsibility in restraining prejudice, and the recognition of human diversity. Together, these dimensions establish a normative framework for critique that distinguishes religious identity as a legitimate form of affiliation from polarizing practices that undermine the dignity of other groups. Within the discipline of Qur'anic Studies and Exegesis, this contribution extends the interpretation of social ethics beyond the isolated identification of moral values toward an analysis of the structural relationships among verses and their relevance to contemporary questions of identity. Methodologically, the study also emphasizes the importance of distinguishing the historical meanings of the text, the arguments developed by exegetes, and the formulation of contextual interpretations to prevent the application of modern polarization theories from producing anachronistic readings.

The implications of this study include the development of a conceptual foundation for interreligious dialogue, education for diversity, social reconciliation, and responsible religious communication, including in digital environments. However, because this research employs a library-based and textual-hermeneutical approach, the proposed ethical framework has not yet been empirically demonstrated to reduce identity polarization. Future research may examine the relevance of these four dimensions through empirical studies of intergroup interactions, digital communication practices, or the implementation of religious education in plural societies. Ultimately, the principal contribution of this study is to demonstrate that Qur'an 49:10–13 provides an ethical foundation for maintaining religious identity without legitimizing social antagonism, while positioning justice, dignity, epistemic responsibility, and recognition of difference as mutually complementary principles for coexistence.

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