

# RELIGIOUS ETHICS FOR APPRECIATING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** Appreciating cultural diversity is the seventh target of Quality Education (SDG 4). Although connections worldwide are increasing, cultural diversity among people has become challenging. Islam sees cultural disparity as natural; *al-'adl* (non-bias), the central concept of Islamic ethics not only promotes cultural appreciation but makes it compulsory for just leadership. This research explores the association between *al-'adl* and cultural appreciation in Islamic religious texts and its implication in history. The objective of this research is to highlight the obligatory stance of Islam on cultural diversity appreciation in a multicultural context. The researchers recommend that Islamic religious leaders and religious institutions promote cultural appreciation as a fundamental obligation to ensure justice (*al-'adl*) in a society.

**Keywords:** *Al-'adl*, Islamic Ethics, Quality Education, Religious Commitments (*taqwa*), Religious Diversity.

## 1. Introduction

There is no homogenous society in the world. Therefore, a country's resilience and development depend on positive perception of others and cultural appreciation. The strained

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relations among people and cultural rejection threaten the nation's progress, safety and security (Guillaumont 45). Hence, cultural appreciation is fundamental for prosperity in a multi-racial society.

Cultural diversity is at the heart of SDG. Culture contributes to the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainability. On the other hand, the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development contribute to safeguarding the cultural heritage. Culture, therefore, is, directly and indirectly, connected to SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 10, SDG 11 and SDG 16. For instance, SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, is impossible without the cultural infrastructure (Hosagrahar). The gender equality that is targeted through SDG 5 depends on the appreciation of cultural diversity. The cultural policies that promote equal treatment among locally-produced goods are discussed in SDG 10, while SDG 3, which ensures health and well-being, cannot be achieved without cultural appreciation. SDG 4: Quality education is effective when it is discussed through the cultural context, particularly under target 4.7, which emphasises a culture of peace and non-violence. Similarly, cultural appreciation is the basic to achieving SDG 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions prevent conflicts and protect the rights of marginalised groups. Hence, cultural diversity is at the core of SDGs.

Although cultural diversity is an asset for sustainable development in various aspects, it becomes a challenge when it fails to recognise cultural and religious differences. Failure to appreciate cultural diversity creates inter-racial and inter-religious disputes (Welsh 42). Sometimes, these disputes lead to protracted wars and impede the nation's economic, social, and political stability.

Moreover, unstable social and political conditions due to racial disharmony have direct impacts on a country's economic growth as it affects the domestic and foreign investments and capital outflows and disrupts long-term international trades (Alesina and Perotti 1203). The World Economic Forum's Global Risks 2015 report elaborates on the impact of social disharmony on economic development. According to this report, culture-based violence and

social instability are major challenges to economic development (World Economic Forum).

Realising these grave consequences, UNESCO, in 2001, adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity; the UN General Assembly, in its resolution 57/249, declared 21 May to be the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development in December 2002; the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the resolution on Culture and Sustainable Development A/C.2/70/L. 59 in 2015, affirming the contribution of culture to sustainable development from three dimensions; acknowledging the cultural diversity, recognising the cultural and civilisational contribution, and distinguishing culture as crucial enablers of sustainable development (United Nations, "General Assembly Report").

Since Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, it has recognised cultural diversity and promoted cultural appreciation for a long time (Semam 42). Article 11 of the Malaysian Constitution provides freedom of religion and culture by choice for every person (Masum and Nehaluddin 435). From the social aspect, Rukun Negara was introduced by Tun Abdul Razak (1922 – 1976) with five pillars, namely; (i) Belief in Tuhan, (ii) Loyalty to King and Country, (iii) Upholding the Constitution, (iv) Rule of Law, and (v) Good Behaviour and Morality (Khoo 93).

In addition to these initiatives, the Malaysian Government introduced policies and strategies to improve social appreciation and social cohesion. It includes policies such as the National Language Act (1963) that enacted Bahasa Malaysia as the official national language and the New Economic Policy (1971-1990), which was later replaced by the National Development Policy (1991), which aimed at eradicating poverty among all Malaysians irrespective of their race, culture, language, and religions, National Social Policy (2003), and National Unity Policy (2021).

In 1991, then Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamed announced *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020) to achieve a self-sufficient industrialised nation by 2020, encompassing all aspects of social well-being, including economic prosperity, political stability, and world-class prosperity education. Among the nine challenges

outlined to realise this vision is the establishment of “a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny,” which was described as the “most fundamental and most basic” (Hamid 404-405). During the premiership of Najib Abdul Razak, this has been further elaborated with “One Malaysia,” that “seeks to strengthen relationship and cooperation among the multi-ethnic people in the country as the main instrument to thwart the various threats and challenges that aim to threaten and disrupt the sanctity of their lives” (PEMANDU 8). These initiatives indicate that national unity remains a matter of official concern throughout history.

Although the efforts of the Government and civil society organisations helped Malaysia to maintain social harmony for more than 50 years without having a record of violence (Hussein and Hamid 3), recent research reports underline a threat to social harmony from religious groups (International Commission of Jurists 3). This situation encouraged the researchers to study cultural diversity from an Islamic religious perspective.

## **2. Cultural Diversity and Islamic Ethical Paradigm**

Diversity is natural, and it is an inevitable reality of the universe. Each and every creation in this universe is diverse, and it is designed by God (Q 5:48). God, although He is able to create everyone and everything the same and similar, He has created diversity among people for a purpose. Quran explains this purpose, “O people, we created you all from a single man and a single woman and made you into races and tribes so that you should get to know one another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is All Knowing, All Aware (49:13). The objective of diversity, according to this verse, is not to assert one’s superiority over others or to pride one group over another based on race, culture, language, or religion. Rather the purpose of diversity is to make people understand each other and increase interaction and corporation among them.

Hence, diversity is neutral, and its constructive or destructive role on the perception (Lebaron). Political and cultural experts like Huntington and Malcolm Waters highlighted the destructive role

of plurality (Waters 7). Huntington, for instance, said cultural and religious identities that create fault lines among individuals shapes social relationship. Hence, the diversity of culture inevitably falls into serious conflicts (Huntington 187).

Lebaron further elaborated on this aspect and said, "culture is always a factor in conflict, whether it plays a central role or influences it subtly and gently" (Lebaron). According to him, the cultural component is necessary in every conflict that tempts disagreement. He justified his finding with the conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian or India-Pakistan over Kashmir. These conflicts are not just territorial; they are legitimisation of cultural identities. Hence, for him, cultural differences necessarily play a negative role in a multicultural society.

However, others perceive culture as a necessary resource to develop the world and its sustainability. A group considered social integrity an inevitable requirement and found culture as an appliance system to ensure individuals' integration into society (Snodgrass 4). Other groups perceived the cultural differences as resources for social control and managing economic activities, as shown in Karl Marx's analysis of the Bourgeois and proletariat (Al-Khalifah 1). In both cases, cultural diversity has a significant role in shaping individual integrity and social activities. Hence, religion is a solid basis for promoting diversity and cultural appreciation.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the scholars who studied culture in association with politics found cultural differences as threats. On the other hand, the scholars who studied culture as a means to promote individual integrity and social control found culture and religion valuable and beneficial as it helps promote social integrity through norms and conducts. This paper, therefore, investigates how does Islamic religious concept of *Al-'adl* (justice) promotes cultural appreciation in a multicultural society.

### **3. Islamic Cultural Diversity and Religious Commitment**

*Al-'adl* is a concept that ensures equal opportunity for everyone to live and develop their knowledge and skills while promising equal treatment for everyone without referring to one's religious,

cultural, language, or other backgrounds. *Al-'adl* is an Arabic term with various meanings (Al-Ansariy 456; Al-Tabatabaiy 330). Yuwanda classified these meanings into seven: appropriate, equal, peaceful, perfect, right, balanced, and placing something in its proper place (42). The most popular among them is "placing something in its proper place"(39). According to Yuwanda, the majority of Muslim scholars, including Zamarkhshari (1075-1144), Aalusi (1802-1854), Ibn 'Asur (1879-1973), Said Nursi (1878), Jamil Saliba (1970), and Thabathabai (1904-1981) hold "placing something in its proper place" (43).

Naquib al-Attas defined '*al-'adl*' similarly and said, "justice is putting something in the actual place or putting something proportions and give someone something be his right" (Yuwanda 5). Hence, the concept of *Al-'adl* requests every Muslim to ensure giving the right people to the right place regardless of his or her culture, religion, and other variations. Thus, the concept of *Al-'adl* is a fundamental concept of Islamic moral philosophy (*falsafat al-akhlaq*) (Al-Ghazali 112) while it is one of the values of humanity (Kemetrician 18). According to Al-Ghazzali, *al-'adl* is one of the cardinal virtues produced by the interaction of intellect, self-assertion, and appetite (Umaruddin 197). Mohamed found *Al-'adl* as an important aspect of Islamic ethics. He said, "the main principles that make up the moral worldview of the Quran: responsibility and accountability; justice and benevolence; sin and repentance; and intention and sincerity" (Mohamed). *Al-'adl* is the fundamental virtue of Islamic ethics and the main principle of the Quranic worldview.

The best action of the good soul is delivering *al-'adl* justice. The repetition of *al-'adl* in the Quran and its explanation in different contexts explain the significant role of *al-'adl* in the Islamic ethical system. *Al-'adl* is mentioned 78 times in the Quran in different terms; *al-'adl* 28 times, *al-qisth* (measure) 27 times, and *al-mizan* (balance) 23 times (Yuwanda 42). Hence, *al-'adl* is not only an important ethical value of Islam but also is the cardinal principle of Islamic moral teaching (Yuwanda 32). Muslim scholars have shown its application in different contexts, including medicine (Khan and Iqbal), politics (Nashihah), economics (Jaelani),

education (Al-Attas), and gender equality (Hassan ). This research discusses the implication of *al-'adl* in cultural diversity.

From the above elaboration of *al-'adl*, it is clear that *al-'adl* in Islam does not just mean equal share or equal division (Yuwanda 31), but appropriate share among two or more people (Al-Attas 9). *Al-'adl*, in the sense of 'placing someone or something in proper place,' in the context of inter-religious and intercultural diversity, is respecting people with different cultures and religions appropriately and ensuring their individual rights in the society in all affairs of life, including practising religion and culture by their choice. According to the Quran 42:15, Allah requested Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) to assure *al-'adl* to all, including non-Muslims, although they differ in religion and culture.

It is further elaborated in the Quran 5:58: "You who believe, stand in front of Allah as witnesses of equity (*shuhad bi al-qist*); [do not allow] your hatred for other men to turn you away from acting justly (*'alā allā ta'dilū*)." Acting justly (*i'dilū*) is nearest to piety. This verse explains delivering justice by connecting one's religious commitment (*taqwa*). This verse demands the person or the authority to ensure *al-'adl* in dealing with people regardless of their religious or cultural affiliations. Therefore, Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said the best person to God is the ruler who delivered *al-'adl* without giving any importance to his personal preferences (Al-Bukhari: Hadith No: 660, Al-Muslim: Hadith No, 1031).

*Al-'adl* with non-Muslims and their culture is further elaborated in the Quran 60:8: "He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you on account of your faith or driven you out of your homes: God loves the just." In this verse, Allah not only allows Muslims to deal with non-Muslims justly but also demands showing kindness. Hence, dealing justly (*al-'adl*) and kindly (*al-Birr*) with non-Muslims reflects the state of one's religious commitment. A good Muslim will ensure *al-'adl* and *al-Birr* in dealing with other non-Muslims and people with different cultures. On the other, dealing with non-Muslims unjustly (*Zulm*) or rude (*qillat al-adab*), shows one's weak state of *taqwa* (religious commitment). Therefore, there is a correlation between cultural appreciation and religious commitment.

#### 4. Islamic Cultural Diversity Appreciation Framework

According to Islamic Cultural Diversity Appreciation Framework (ICDAF) *taqwa* in Iman (religious belief) is fundamental. *Al-'adl*-justice in a person will increase when *taqwa* of a person or the authority increases, and when *taqwa* of a person decreases, executing *al-'adl* also will decrease. The appreciation of cultural diversity will increase when *al-'adl* increases, and it decreases when *al-'adl* decreases. Hence, there is a positive correlation between *taqwa*, *al-'adl*, and cultural appreciation. The level of religious commitment (*taqwa*) impacts the seriousness of executing *al-'adl*. As far as cultural appreciation is a part of *al-'adl*, the level of appreciating other cultures reflects the level of executing *al-'adl*. The highest level of executing *al-'adl* can be expected from a person who gained the highest level of *taqwa*. As far as cultural appreciation is a part of executing *al-'adl*, the level of appreciating other cultures also reflects the level of *taqwa*.

Since Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is the role model for Muslims in every aspect (Quran 33:21), his way of executing *al-'adl* in cultural diversity makes a benchmark. This research, therefore, discusses the Prophet's (pbuh) model of cultural appreciation in (i) official declarations on cultural appreciation and (ii) practical examples for the implementation of cultural appreciation. In the first theme, the Madina treaty, Hudaibiyah treaty, and Mecca declarations are discussed, while practical examples for the implementation of cultural appreciation are discussed under religious, racial, and social status differences.

##### 4.1 Official Declarations on Cultural Appreciation

As a leader and political decision-maker, the Prophet Mohammad had taken the initiative to appreciate all others and their cultures without discriminating against any ethnic or religious group. Although the implementation of *al-'adl* in cultural diversity can be explained in various incidences, this research briefly discusses three remarkable treaties that were signed in different power dynamics (Sertkaya and Keskin 587).

Madina Treaty, the first international accord in human history on human rights and cultural appreciation, signed by different religious and cultural communities (Hamidullah 12), reveals the

Prophet's perception of others and his implication of *al-'adl* in cultural diversity. This treaty is a model for cultural diversity that unites all for mutually beneficial purposes in a multicultural community (Emerick 131).

After Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) was appointed as the chief of Madina in 623 AD, his first concentration was establishing a peaceful environment that ensured freedom for everyone to practice their religion and culture. During that time, there were three main groups in Madina; Arab polytheist tribes (45%), Muslims (15%), and Jewish tribes (40%) (Sertkaya and Keskin 589). The Prophet invited the leaders of all religious and cultural communities in Madina and explained the importance of unity for the benefit of the people in the region. They all agreed to work with the Prophet and to respect cultural diversity by signing the Madina Treaty. The primary objective of this treaty was to ensure the protection of people and their cultures from any foreign influences. This document encompasses two main parts; (a) agreement between Prophet Muhammad as an authority with non-Muslim citizens and (b) commitments, rights and the duties of Muslims and others (Hamidullah, 13).

Referring to the custom of Madina during that time, the Prophet had the opportunity to challenge other cultures and destroy them after becoming the chief of Madina (Jani, Harun, Mansor, and Zen 94). However, the Prophets' commitment to executing *al-'adl* in a multicultural context made him appreciate the diversity and inspired him to invite others to sign an official document. As far as the Prophet is considered an exemplar for the highest state of *taqwa* and executing *al-'adl*, the cultural appreciation in Madina Treaty is considered the source of reference to understand the cultural disparity and to ensure non-Muslims' rights in Muslim rule.

The Hudaibiya Treaty is another important document that explains the execution of *al-'adl* in diversity context. At the time of Prophet Mohammad, a common custom was allowing anyone to perform religious rituals in Kaaba during four forbidden months, *Ashur al-Hurum*. Violent activities were strictly prohibited during these four months. Referring to this custom, six years after Prophet

Mohammad's migration from Mecca to Madina, the Prophet and 1400 followers went to Mecca to perform Umrah (Ibn Hisham 230). Although the Prophet's mission was clearly communicated, Meccan leadership interrupted the Prophet and his companions by overstating this custom in Hudaibiyah, approximately 15 KM from Mecca (Waqidi 76). After several discussions, the Prophet and the Meccan people came to an agreement in this place, namely Hudaibiya Treaty. Although many conditions in this treaty were not fair and not beneficial for Muslims (Sertkaya and Keskin 595), the Prophet agreed to sign in this treaty considering social harmony.

According to this agreement, Muslims should return to Madina without performing the ritual (Umrah) that year. As far as this condition was against existing Arab customs, the Prophet could have argued for his and his followers' rights. However, the Prophet agreed to this condition and returned to Madinah without performing the Umrah (Al-Mubarakfuri 215). Another condition in this treaty was for anyone of the Meccan people who professes Islam without the permission of his or her parents or guardian should return to their family, whereas this condition was not applicable to Muslims who profess without the permission of the parents or guardians (Al-Mubarakfuri 215). Although it was also an unfair condition, the Prophet agreed to this condition too.

Although Mohammad was the Prophet and was the popular leader among Arabs, he sacrificed his dignity. Sertkaya and Keskin described this situation and said,

Under customary Arabian circumstances, this incident could have easily led to a battle. With the number of Muslims present, they were in a good position to have won a war. However, the Prophet chose peace over war. It was not easy for the companions to digest this path to peace, just as it was not easy to do nothing in the face of ridicule, slander, and attempted assassinations (595).

As the Prophet had many people who were experienced in winning wars against the Meccan people, war was a simpler solution for them. However, he respected the relationship with

non-Muslims and sacrificed their dignity in the process of implementing *al-'adl*.

Mecca declaration is a very good example to explain the execution of *al-'adl* in diversity context. Following the violation of the Meccan people and breaking the peace agreement, the Prophet (pbuh) set out to Mecca with 10,000 companions in January 630 AD and conquered Mecca (Al-Mubarakfuri 250). Unlike the victorious in history, Prophet Mohammad promised the amnesty to all those who entered the house of Abu Sufiyan, the leader of the Mecca or the leader of the opponent, regardless of who accepted or rejected Islam (Abu Dawood: Hadith No, 3024). After the conquest, people, including Abu Sufiyan, the leader of the Meccan people, in front of Kaaba and announced the Prophet's victory. On this occasion, he asked,

"O Quraish, what do you think that I am about to do with you?" They replied, "good. You are a noble and generous brother, son of a noble and generous brother. It is thine to command." Then he spoke to them words of forgiveness and recited, "Verily, I say as my brother Joseph said, 'This day there shall be no upbraiding of you nor reproach. God forgiveth you, for He is most Merciful of the merciful'" (Quran 12:92).

He said, "Go your way, for you are the freed ones"(Al-Ghazali 382). According to this report, after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet announced freedom to choose religion and culture and did not force anyone to embrace Islam. He also gave full protection to those who wanted to continue their religion and culture without changing their religion.

Taking revenge for killing or torture was an accepted practice then. Although the Prophet and his companions were tortured by their opponents a few years back simply because of changing their religion, he did not take revenge on anyone, including the wife of Abu Sufiyan, who chewed the heart of his uncle Hamza in the battle of Uhad (Ahmad, Hadith No, 1:463; Ibn Shibah, Hadith No, 8: 492). Hence, the Prophet's attitude toward the Meccan people during the conquest of Mecca shows his broadmindedness and execution of *al-'adl* in the context of cultural diversity, leaving his own preferences. This shows the highest state of *taqwa* and

executing *al-'adl* and explains the Islamic perspective on the cultural appreciation.

These are some official declarations on cultural diversity in Islam. These declarations provide fundamental references to learn about policies and perspectives of *al-'adl* in different cultural contexts. In the next section, we discuss the implementation of these policies and perspectives in real-life situations.

## **4.2. Implementation of Cultural Appreciation**

There are enough examples and incidents in the life of the Prophet (pbuh) to explain the practical aspects of cultural appreciation and the implication of *al-'adl* in cultural diversity. The Prophet's relationship with non-Muslims in the capacity of an advisor (Maslum), intimate friends (Al-Bukhari, Hadith No, 2069), servant at his home (Al-Bukhari, Hadith No, 1356), trusted guide during migration from Mecca to Madina (Al-Bukhari, Hadith No, 2263), faithful bankers (Al-Bukhari, Hadith No, 2069), etc. are models for Muslims in the context of cultural diversity. This research discusses only three incidents that explicitly reveal the Prophet's perception and implication of *al-'adl* in a multicultural society under three sub-topics; Religious Differences, Racial Differences, and Social Status Differences.

### **4.2.1. Cultural Appreciation: Social Differences**

The reaction of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) to Said Bin Sa'anah, a Jewish scholar who came to the Prophet when he was with his companions, highlights the perception of cultural appreciation in Islam. According to this incident, the Prophet had borrowed some money from Said Bin Sa'anah, who pulled him with his shirt collar violently and wanted the money back before the due date. His violent attitude and rude words toward the Prophet made his companions lose temper, and some of them approached Said Bin Sa'anah to stop. However, the Prophet asked them to be relaxed and calm. Later, Said Bin Sa'anah said that he acted violently to check Prophet's patience (Sahih Ibn Hibban, Hadith No, 1:521; Tabarani, Hadith No, 5:222; Hakim, Hadith No, 3:604).

This incident shows the Prophet's relationship with Jews and others and the implication of *al-'adl* in appreciating others and their culture. Although this Jew had no right to ask the Prophet to give the money back before the due date as per the agreement and pull him by the collar in front of others, the Prophet did not lose his temper; he did not even allow his companions to help him against this Jew. Since this happened to the person, who is considered an exemplar for the highest state of *taqwa*, this incident highlights the relation between *taqwa* and cultural appreciation.

#### 4.2.2. Cultural Appreciation and Racial Differences

The Prophet's advice to Abu Dhar al Giffari (RA) (d. 652) is another incident to explain the implication of *al-'adl* in the context of cultural diversity. Abu Dharr insulted a black African slave (it might be Bilal) (Ibn Asakir 464), saying that "oh, son of a black woman." This was reported to the Prophet (pbuh), and the Prophet immediately corrected him and reminded him of the mission of a Muslim in cultural diversity. Ibn Suwaid narrated this story and said that he found Abu Dhaar with a cloth similar to his slave boy. Since it was not a common practice in Mecca at that time, Ibn Suwaid asked Abu Dhaar about the reason. Abu Dhaar said to him that he abused a man by rebuking his mother. So the Prophet (pbuh) said to him,

Oh, Abu Dhaar? Did you rebuke him for his mother? Verily you have attitudes of the people of the pre-Islamic period (*Jahiliyyah*) in you. Your brothers are slaves of yours, and Allah has placed them under your care. So whomsoever has a brother in his care must feed him with whatever he feeds himself and clothe him with what he clothes himself with, and he should not burden them with what they can't bear. If you give them a difficult burden, help them with it (AI-Bukhari: Hadith No, 2545, AI-Muslim: Hadith No, 1661, Ahmad: Hadith No, 21432).

This incident shows the Prophet's strong perception of cultural diversity and his commitment to executing *al-'adl* in a multicultural context or respecting a person with his appropriate dignity. Further, the Prophet not only corrected Abu Dharr but also taught all the Muslims about cultural appreciation. This incident

underlined that the highest state of *taqwa* and executing *al-'adl* demands cultural appreciation.

### 4.2.3 Cultural Appreciation: Religious Differences

The Prophet's dealing with a Bedouin who urinated in the masjid is another example to show the Islamic perspective of cultural appreciation. One day, a Bedouin came and urinated inside the masjid of the Prophet Mohammad (pubh). The companions of the Prophet stood to stop him. The Prophet asked them to leave him to urinate and to pour a bucket of water over his urine. He said, "you have been raised to be easy on the people, not to be hard on them" (Al-Bukhari, Hadith No, 6128).

Although the masjid is the sacred place where people engage in activities that improve their spiritual connection with Allah, such as remembering him (*Zikr*), praying (*Salat*), making supplications (*Dua*), and reciting the Quran (*Tilawah*) (Al-Muslim: Hadith No, 285), the Prophet advised his companions to understand the Bedouin's background and culture and to deal with him accordingly. Further, the Prophet explained to his companions about their mission and wanted Muslims to understand people's cultural backgrounds before judging and dealing with them. The Prophet's advice in this Hadith also shows the mission of the Muslims in dealing with people justly (*al-'adl*), avoiding their personal feelings or preferences. This shows not only the Islamic perspective of cultural appreciation but also the association between religious commitment (*taqwa*) and cultural appreciation. The racial, religious or other affiliation should not be a deterrent for anyone to appreciate cultural and religious differences.

Although cultural appreciation has been widely discussed in Islamic religious scriptures and there are enough references available in Islamic literature, some Muslim groups deny cultural diversity. It shows their ignorance of Islamic religious scriptures as well as the prophetic traditions. Therefore, it is necessary for the leaders to educate Muslims, particularly the youth, on the Islamic aspects of cultural diversity.

## 5. Conclusion

With the expansion of communication technology, countries are interconnected and interwoven. Therefore, global ideologies and values are shaping the local cultures and traditions. In reaction to this trend, awareness among people on cultural identities is increasing, while some find cultural diversity problematic. Particularly, the globalisation of cultures has created suspicion among the majority communities over the minorities. The distrust of minorities further deteriorated in association with political and religious identities. Hence, racial violence, sometimes, is more vulnerable in religious societies than in non-religious communities. There are groups that claim to have strong religious commitments (*taqwa*) but commit violence. Perhaps this misleads many social researchers to find religion and religious traditions as sources of violence rather than the source of peace and social inclusion.

As far as religions and cultures are influential in societies, particularly in shaping the relationship among people while a group of people are trying to misuse religious sentiment for their individual benefits, highlighting religious perspectives on cultural diversity is essential. Due to various reasons, including misinterpretation, Islam is one of the most misunderstood religions in perceiving others and other cultures; this research discusses appreciating cultural diversity from an Islamic perspective.

It is clear that cultural appreciation is a basic Islamic concept, and it is essential for every Muslim to follow, although its application differs depending on one's authority or social leadership. The level of cultural appreciation reflects one's level of religious commitment (*taqwa*). The highest level of cultural appreciation is observed in the life of the Prophet since he was the exemplar of religious commitment (*taqwa*). Hence, a religious leader who considers himself or herself better in *taqwa* than others necessarily needs to demonstrate a high level of cultural appreciation. Hence, this research recommends that religious leaders and institutions promote cultural appreciation as it is a basic requirement of *al-'adl* in cultural diversity.

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