

# Exploring Angelou's human family through the lens of Islamic humanism

Aulia Mar'atussolekhah

Program Studi Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang  
e-mail: 210302110001@student.uin-malang.ac.id

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## ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi tema-tema universal tentang persatuan dan keberagaman yang melampaui batas-batas budaya dan agama dengan mengkaji puisi terkenal Maya Angelou, "Keluarga Manusia," dari perspektif Humanisme Islam. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana ekspresi puitis Angelou tentang keberagaman manusia sejalan dengan prinsip Humanisme Islam seperti yang diutarakan oleh Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi. Pengakuan puisi ini atas perbedaan individu dan kemanusiaan bersama dikaji bersama

dengan ajaran Al-Qur'an dan Hadits yang menekankan keberagaman dan keterhubungan semua orang. Pendekatan interdisipliner ini tidak hanya mendorong pemahaman lintas budaya, namun juga meruntuhkan stereotip dan berkontribusi pada diskusi yang lebih luas tentang inklusivitas dan keragaman budaya. Studi ini menyoroti relevansi humanisme Islam dalam sastra kontemporer dan potensinya untuk meningkatkan empati dan persatuan dalam dunia yang saling terhubung secara global, sekaligus menyarankan eksplorasi lebih lanjut humanisme Islam dalam konteks sastra yang lebih luas.

## ABSTRACT

This article explores the universal themes of unity and diversity that transcend cultural and religious boundaries by examining Maya Angelou's famous poem, "Human Family," from the perspective of Islamic Humanism. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the study highlights how Angelou's poetic expression of human diversity aligns with the principles of Islamic Humanism as articulated by Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi. The poem's acknowledgment of individual differences and shared humanity is examined alongside Qur'anic and Hadith teachings that emphasize the intentional diversity and interconnectedness of all people. This interdisciplinary approach not only promotes cross-cultural understanding, but also breaks down stereotypes and contributes to broader discussions about inclusivity and cultural diversity. The study highlights the relevance of Islamic humanism in contemporary literature and its potential to promote empathy and unity in a globally interconnected world, while suggesting further exploration of Islamic humanism in broader literary contexts.

## Pendahuluan

Have you ever pondered the common thread that unites us, irrespective of our diverse backgrounds? The shared connection among us, transcending our varied origins, can be thoroughly examined through the perspective of humanism (Daiber, 2013), specifically in this context, Islamic humanism. By embracing Islamic humanism, we recognize universal ties that transcend borders and differences. It promotes the idea



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that every individual deserves respect, dignity, and the opportunity to live a meaningful life (Mohd, 2019). Islamic humanism encourages us to recognize the interconnectedness of our experiences and to work together toward the common goals of justice, equality, and prosperity for all (Yusuf, Imtiyaz & Ismail R. Al-Faruqi, 2012).

Basically, Islamic Humanism is a philosophical and ethical approach rooted in Islamic teachings that emphasizes the inherent dignity of every individual and promotes the idea of a shared humanity (Adinugraha, 2021). Grounded in the principles of justice, compassion, and social responsibility, Islamic Humanism encourages a holistic understanding of the human experience, transcending cultural and religious boundaries. One of the well-known theories about Islamic humanism is a theory by Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi. An integral part of al-Faruqi's theory of humanism is the Islamic concept of Tawhid, which emphasizes the oneness of God (Khuza'i et al., 2020). Tawhid serves as a foundational principle, implying the unity of humanity under a single divine authority. This concept fosters a sense of commonality and connectedness among all people, transcending differences of race, culture and language.

Al-Faruqi's humanism recognizes and respects the myriad differences among humanity (Yusuf, Imtiyaz & Ismail R. Al-Faruqi, 2012). Despite these differences, the theory advocates the unity of humanity, emphasizing shared values, ethics, and a common humanity that transcends cultural boundaries. This principle encourages harmonious coexistence that celebrates diversity within the framework of Islamic principles. In addition, it is worth noting that Social Justice and Compassion emerge as key principles of Islamic humanism, in line with Islamic teachings that advocate fair treatment of all individuals and the establishment of a just and equal society (Badrudin, 2020). This emphasis on social justice underscores the interconnectedness of humanity and the collective responsibility to ensure the well-being of others. Al-Faruqi's theory of Islamic humanism provides a comprehensive perspective that integrates spirituality, ethics and a sense of common humanity (Adinugraha, 2021). It emphasizes the unity of humanity while respecting and celebrating its diversity within the framework of Islamic principles and values.

In the world of literature, Maya Angelou's excellent poem, "Human Family" is one of famous poem that provides a compelling exploration of the shared humanity that unites individuals across diverse backgrounds. Maya Angelou, a prominent American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist, has left an indelible mark on literature through her works that explore identity, resilience, and the human spirit (Du, 2014). "Human Family" stands out as a testament to Angelou's commitment to celebrating diversity and unity amidst differences.

When the researcher tries to explore into the layers of this literary masterpiece, many scholars have conducted research on the poetry written by Maya Angelou. One such study by Indiani Eka Permatasi in 2016 explores the various facets of feminism present in Angelou's poems. The study probes into Angelou's personal encounters, including instances of discrimination and sexual abuse, elucidating how these experiences shape her utilization of feminist themes within her poetic works (Permatasari, 2016). Similarly, Ellita Permata Widjayanti's research in 2019 investigates the application of seven selected poems by Maya Angelou as tools for imparting

universal human values, with a specific emphasis on themes related to discrimination and racism. This analysis employs semiotic theory and the sociology of literature to unravel the intricate layers of meaning embedded in Angelou's verses (Widjayanti & Jakarta, n.d.).

Furthermore, Juan Du's study in 2014 contributes to the exploration of Angelou's poetry by concentrating on the theme of self-actualization. Du's research delves into how Angelou articulates and explores the concept of self-realization within her poetic expressions (Du, 2014). Each of these scholarly pursuits adds a unique perspective to the comprehensive understanding of Maya Angelou's poetry, collectively shedding light on the profound impact of her personal experiences and the thematic richness that permeates her literary creations.

Nevertheless, one perspective that is very useful for examining the deep themes in Maya Angelou's work, which has never been used, is through the lens of Islamic humanism. This article aims to shed special light on Angelou's —Human Familyll by detailing the principles of Islamic Humanism using descriptive qualitative method, providing new insights about cross cultural borders and develop a deeper understanding of the common human condition.

Researchers consider the analysis of Maya Angelou's Human Family through the lens of Islamic Humanism to be very important for several reasons. First, exploration in the context of Islamic Humanism acting as a bridge, fostering cross-cultural understanding and emphasizing a sense of humanity amidst global connectedness. Additionally, it dispels stereotypes and encourages a different understanding of Islamic thought, contributing to broader discussions regarding cultural diversity and inclusivity. This interdisciplinary journey increases our understanding of Angelou's impact, encouraging a holistic approach that goes beyond traditional academic boundaries, ultimately cultivating empathy and breaking down barriers in our interconnected world.

## Pembahasan

"Human Family" by Maya Angelou is a powerful poem that celebrates the diversity of the human experience. Analyzing it line by line through the lens of Islamic Humanism reveals a harmonious convergence of themes. With diction choices of words beautifully arranged in rhyme of Human Family, researcher find Maya Angelou describes humanism as follows.

*I note the obvious differences*

The poet begins by acknowledging the apparent distinctions among individuals. This resonates with the Islamic belief in the oneness of humanity. Angelou's recognition of apparent distinctions among individuals aligns seamlessly with Al-Faruqi's assertion that Islamic Humanism encompasses an understanding of unity amid diversity. Al-Faruqi emphasizes the idea that human diversity is not a source of division but a manifestation of God's intentional creation (Yusuf, Imtiyaz & Ismail R. Al-Faruqi, 2012). In "Human Family," this perspective is akin to the Islamic belief in the oneness of humanity, exemplified in the Quranic verse: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male

and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another" (Qur'an 49:13).

*Some of us are serious,*

*Some thrive on comedy.*

Maya Angelou's observation that "Some of us are serious, some thrive on comedy" extends beyond a mere acknowledgment of individual temperament; it reflects a deeper understanding of human diversity, resonating particularly with the principles of Islamic Humanism as expounded by Ismail Al-Faruqi. Al-Faruqi's theory emphasizes the acceptance of diversity and the recognition of the unique disposition of each individual within the broader framework of a shared humanity (Murutha, n.d.).

In Al-Faruqi's Islamic Humanism, the acceptance of diversity is not just a passive acknowledgment but an active engagement with the varying temperaments, preferences, and inclinations that characterize human beings (Khuza'i et al., 2020). The Qur'anic verse, "And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community, but they will not cease to differ" (Qur'an 11:118), cited in the context of Islamic Humanism, underscores the intentional diversity among individuals. Al-Faruqi argues that this intentional diversity is a manifestation of God's wisdom, providing humanity with the opportunity to learn and grow through their differences (Daiber, 2013).

*The variety of our skin tones*

*can confuse, bemuse, delight,*

*brown and pink and beige and purple,*

*tan and blue and white.*

Maya Angelou's poignant reflection on the variety of skin tones in the lines above, resonates profoundly with the principles of Islamic Humanism, particularly as elucidated by Ismail Al-Faruqi. Al-Faruqi's theory underscores the significance of appreciating diversity, and the poem's recognition of the beauty in the spectrum of skin tones aligns seamlessly with this perspective.

In Al-Faruqi's Islamic Humanism, diversity is not merely a consequence of human existence but a deliberate and purposeful aspect of creation (Rahmah et al., n.d.). Angelou's acknowledgment of the various skin tones reflects a celebration of this intentional diversity, recognizing it as a source of confusion, bemusement, and delight. Al-Faruqi's framework emphasizes that this diversity is not a random occurrence but a manifestation of God's wisdom, inviting humanity to ponder the significance of such variations (Adinugraha, 2021).

The Quranic verse cited, "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors. Surely, there are signs in this for the learned" (Qur'an 30:22), aligns perfectly with the sentiments expressed in Angelou's poem. For Al-Faruqi, Islamic Humanism calls for a deep appreciation of the diverse elements within the human experience, including physical attributes such as skin color. The recognition of this diversity is not limited to mere tolerance but extends to

finding beauty and meaning in the differences that characterize human existence (Yusuf, Imtiyaz & Ismail R. Al-Faruqi, 2012). In the Islamic tradition, the Qur'anic verse implies that those who engage in thoughtful contemplation will find signs and wisdom in the diversity of languages and colors.

*Mirror twins are different  
although their features jibe,  
and lovers think quite different thoughts  
while lying side by side.*

The acknowledgment of differences even in seemingly identical situations aligns with the Qur'anic concept that human beings are created with distinct characteristics and inclinations. In Al-Faruqi's Islamic Humanism (Yusuf, Imtiyaz & Ismail R. Al-Faruqi, 2012), the acknowledgment of diversity extends beyond visible disparities to encompass the nuanced differences in thoughts, inclinations, and individual predispositions. Angelou's reference to mirror twins, who share similar physical features but harbor differences, aligns seamlessly with the Qur'anic concept that human beings are intentionally created with distinct characteristics. The Qur'an states, "To each of you, We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good" (Qur'an 5:48).

*We love and lose in China,  
we weep on England's moors,  
and laugh and moan in Guinea,  
and thrive on Spanish shores.*

This line highlights the universality of human experiences across diverse cultures, resonating with the Islamic principle that all humans are part of one global community. In Al-Faruqi's framework, Islamic Humanism underscores the notion of a shared humanity that surpasses cultural, ethnic, or national distinctions (Rahmah et al., n.d.). Angelou's depiction of diverse emotional experiences in different corners of the world aligns with the Islamic concept that believers, regardless of their backgrounds, are like one body. This idea finds expression in the Hadith, "The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion, and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever."

*In minor ways we differ,  
in major we're the same.*

Acknowledging both minor differences and major similarities, this line reflects the Islamic Humanist perspective on the unity of humanity despite surface distinctions. In Al-Faruqi's framework, Islamic Humanism advocates for an understanding of human diversity that goes beyond superficial disparities. Angelou's recognition of "minor ways" in which individuals differ aligns with the Islamic Humanist perspective that acknowledges the intentional diversity in human creation. However, the subsequent

assertion that "in major, we're the same" underscores the fundamental unity that exists at a deeper level.

The Qur'anic verse cited, "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women" (Qur'an 4:1), emphasizes the common origin of humanity. Al-Faruqi would likely interpret this verse as a foundational concept in Islamic Humanism, highlighting that despite the dispersion of human beings into diverse nations, tribes, and cultures, they share a common ancestry. This common origin becomes the basis for recognizing the fundamental similarities that unite humanity.

*We are more alike, my friends,  
than we are unlike.*

*We are more alike, my friends,  
than we are unlike.*

Angelou's assertion, "We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike," harmonizes with ismail al-faruqi's Islamic humanism concept that, fundamentally, humans share commonalities transcending outward differences. This alignment finds resonance in the Hadith: "All of you are Adam's offspring, and Adam was created from dust" (Hadith, Sahih Muslim), emphasizing our shared origin as the basis for inherent similarities.

Furthermore, this line resonates with the Quranic teaching that diversity is intentional in God's wisdom: "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors. Surely, there are signs in this for the learned" (Qur'an 30:22). The verse underscores that differences serve as intentional signs for those who reflect and seek knowledge. Al-Faruqi's Islamic Humanism theory posit that recognizing this intentional diversity leads to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of humanity.

The repetition of the line, "We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike," serves to underscore the Islamic Humanist principle of unity in diversity. This repetition is not merely for emphasis but aligns with the broader Islamic Humanist vision that emphasizes unity among humans despite surface distinctions. Prophet Muhammad's farewell sermon, as quoted, further reinforces this principle by explicitly stating that no particular race or ethnicity holds superiority over another. This aligns with Al-Faruqi's vision of Islamic Humanism as a force that promotes equality, justice, and fairness among all individuals (Khuza'i et al., 2019).

In the context of Al-Faruqi's Islamic Humanism, the repetition becomes a call to transcend divisive factors and embrace the shared values that bind humanity together. The Hadith, "None of you has faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself" (Hadith, Sahih Muslim), viewed through the lens of Islamic Humanism, contributes to a cohesive understanding of the shared values and interconnectedness that bind humanity together.

## Kesimpulan dan Saran

Maya Angelou's "Human Family," when viewed through the lens of Islamic Humanism, transcends its verses to offer a profound reflection on the shared humanity that unites us all. In exploring the diverse facets of the human experience, the poem echoes the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, emphasizing the intentional diversity in creation and the interconnectedness of all individuals. The acknowledgment of differences in temperament, appearance, and experiences is complemented by an overarching recognition of our fundamental unity.

The Qur'anic verses cited underscore the divine wisdom behind the diverse creation of languages, colors, and individual characteristics, promoting a holistic understanding of the human family. Angelou's poetic tribute to the multitude expressions of human life aligns with the Islamic principle that, despite apparent disparities, we are all interconnected and part of a larger global community.

In essence, "Human Family" echoes the spirit of Islamic Humanism, promoting tolerance, compassion, and the appreciation of diversity (Widjayanti & Jakarta, n.d.). The poem serves as a testament to the universal values embedded in Islamic teachings that emphasize the shared origin of humanity and the interconnectedness of our individual experiences. As we navigate the complexities of the human condition, Angelou's verses, enriched by the wisdom of Islamic Humanism, remind us that, ultimately, we are more alike than unlike — a timeless truth that resonates across cultures, religions, and backgrounds. Future study can look more deeply into Islamic Humanism, not limited to a poetry, but also broader literary works such as short story, novel, drama, etc.

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