Shura in Mixed-Faith Family Relations: An Approach to Strengthen Family Bonds in Sabah

Shura dalam Hubungan Keluarga Beza Agama: Satu Pendekatan untuk Memperkukuh Ikatan Kekeluargaan di Sabah

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ABSTRACT

Shura is an ideal Islamic approach in negotiations, meetings and decision-making characterized by an inclusive consensus mechanism. Shura allows all parties to speak and is not biased perspectives, prejudiced or monopolizing individuals. Therefore, this shura approach is potentially being practiced in mixed-faith family relations between new Muslims and non-Muslim families. This is because the relations between new Muslims and non-Muslim families show apparent contradictions due to religious mixing and conversion to Islam. Therefore, this study aims to discuss the experiences of mixed-faith families through the experiences of new Muslims and non-Muslim families to strengthen family bonds. A total of 10 informants were interviewed in depth in various places around Sabah. The findings explain that the experiences of mixed-faith families in managing religious differences align with the highlighted concept of shura. These approaches include joint decision-making, hikmah-based (wisdom) dialogue, and continuous gatherings in various activities. Through this shura approach, family bonds do not only strive to avoid disputes due to religious differences. But also aim to strengthen the family bond that is to be maintained. Therefore, the shura approach through the experiences of mixed-faith families need to be upheld as an initiative to manage differences within a multi-religious and multi-cultural society.

Keywords: Shura; consultation; new Muslim; mixed-faith family; family bond

ABSTRAK

Shura ialah pedekatan Islam yang ideal dalam rundingan, mesyuarat dan membuat keputusan yang dicirikan oleh mekanisme konsensus inklusif. Shura membenarkan semua pihak yang terlibat untuk bersuara dan bukannya pihak yang berpandangan berat sebelah, prejudis atau memonopoli individu. Oleh itu, pendekatan shura ini dilihat berpotensi untuk dipraktikkan dalam hubungan keluarga beza agama antara saudara baru dengan keluarga bukan Islam. Hal ini disebabkan, hubungan antara saudara baru dengan keluarga bukan Islam memperlihatkan kontradiksi jelas akibat percampuran dan penukaran agama kepada Islam. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan membincangkan pengalaman keluarga beza agama melalui pengalaman saudara baru dengan keluarga bukan Islam dalam usaha memperkukuh hubungan keluarga. Sebanyak 10 orang informan ditemu bual secara mendalam di pelbagai tempat sekitar Sabah. Hasil dapatan menjelaskan, pengalaman yang dilalui oleh keluarga beza agama dalam menguruskan perbezaan agama menepati dengan konsep shura yang diketengahkan. Antara pendekatan tersebut ialah membuat keputusan bersama, dialog berasaskan hikmah (wisdom), dan perjumpaan berterusan dalam melaksanakan pelbagai aktiviti. Melalui pendekatan shura ini, hubungan keluarga tidak hanya berusaha untuk mengelakkan persengketaan akibat perbezaan agama. Tetapi turut berusaha untuk memperkukuh ikatan kekeluargaan yang hendak dipertahankan. Oleh yang demikian, pendekatan shura melalui pengalaman keluarga beza agama ini perlu dimartabatkan sebagai inisiatif menguruskan perbezaan dalam kalangan masyarakat yang multi agama dan budaya.

Kata kunci: Syura; perundingan; saudara baru; keluarga beza agama; ikatan kekeluargaan

INTRODUCTION

Every family desire tranquil coexistence and harmonious living. Nevertheless, family life is not always without challenges. Misunderstandings, disputes, and conflicts often occur among family members. When these happen, family members desire to strengthen with each other. Although faced with many challenges, it should not be a reason for family members to quarrel, separate, or sever family bonds. However, the situation is more challenging when there are family members of different religions, known as mixed-faith families. A mixed-faith family requires a high level of understanding and tolerance among its members to maintain family peace (Mohd Nazmi et al. 2024). Mixed-faith families are a phenomenon that has increasingly become a trend due to globalization and transnational interactions (Birtwistle, 2006). As a result, this phenomenon is fast becoming a global norm, as it is no longer an oddity in the eyes of local communities (Arweck 2019).

There are also mixed-faith family relations involving new Muslims and non-Muslim families. The relations show differences that result from the conversion of one of the family members, either due to marital factors or their own will, which is not due to matrimonial factors. The formation of these relations clearly shows the conflict that stems from religious differences. These factors drastically transform the initially harmonious family relations into a strained one as new Muslims and non-Muslim families confront conflicts.

In Malaysia, specifically in the Malaysian state of Sabah, mixed-faith families are prevalent because harmonious relations among religions are regarded as usual and have been occurring for a long time (Mohd Nazmi et al. 2021; Suraya et al. 2022c; Mohd Nazmi 2022). Among the evidence that can be explained is that the state of Sabah has many converts yearly, as of the 2019 report issued by the Department of Islamic Religious Affairs of Sabah (JHEAINS) in 2020. According to Mohd Nazmi et al. (2024), the increasing number of new Muslims indirectly expands the group of mixed-faith families. In addition, mixed relations between religions, whether in the family or society, are not foreign to the people of Sabah. This is because, according to Suraya et al. (2022a; b), this high level of friendliness and acceptance is due to language factors and daily interactions practiced for a long time.

However, mixed-faith family relations between new Muslims and non-Muslim families necessitate an approach that not only avoids conflicts but also strengthens family relations over time. Therefore, this paper presents an Islamic approach practiced for a long time when involving two or more parties to be reconciled. The method is called *shura* and is based on the framework applied from the Islamic perspective. The study highlighted the *shura* approach in the context of mixed-faith families, namely those involving new Muslims and non-Muslim families.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

A mixed-faith family is a family that involves mixing religions in family adoption. In this regard, such families show contradictions, not only from the perspective of internal beliefs and convictions. These families also exhibit variations in their religious practices, which are influenced by various religious factors. Therefore, this study discusses the reality of mixed-faith families involving new Muslims from non-Muslim families. Family relations that were initially peaceful then changed drastically to tense relationships due to the conversion to Islam among family members. The presence of new Muslims has brought about various negative perceptions and

actions from non-Muslim families regarding the change in their lives that is different from their previous way of life (Kamarulzaman & Nur A'thiroh; Nur Najwa et al. 2020).

The problem that often occurs starts with the negative perception and misunderstanding of non-Muslim families towards Islam (Muhamat & Saringat 2014). A small number of non-Muslim communities assume that 'new Muslims', referring to individuals who have recently converted to Islam, are labelled as traitors (Azarudin & Khadijah 2014) and defectors (Suraya & Khadijah 2014) to their race, which causes some family members to feel ashamed of having family members who have converted to Islam. The problem stems from non-Muslims' perception of Islam as a religion that is troublesome, not easy to compromise with, likes to discriminate, and is difficult to adapt to current culture and needs, in addition to severing ties and being too attached to the Malay way of life (Shaharuddin et al. 2016).

Based on negative perceptions, the relations between new Muslims and non-Muslim families began to experience conflict. Family relations became increasingly strained, estranged, and prone to fighting (Rahmawati & Desiningrum 2018). This caused some new Muslims to have their family ties severed with family members and to be ostracized, abused, and expelled; there were also a few who were driven from their homes (Samuri et al. 2018). The situation worsened when family problems escalated to the point of bringing cases to the court level. It was necessary to involve outside parties to resolve family issues that could not be resolved internally. When such cases occur, the complexity will increase due to the involvement of multiple parties, such as the Sharia and civil courts and the religious department (Mogana 2018). Among the cases that have been in the media are cases involving custody of children from couples of different religions (Zin et al. 2019), cases involving property rights (Baharudin & Said 2018), and cases involving the burial of a new Muslim by a non-Muslim family (Bakar & Ismail 2018). These cases underscore the urgent need for a middle-path solution that can reconcile family relations even if they are of different religions, offering hope for a more harmonious future.

The same thing happens in Sabah when conflicts in the relations between new Muslims and non-Muslim families are also a concern. The studies by Mohd Nazmi (2022) explain that converting to Islam in Sabah shows four relationship situations: opposition, support, accommodation, and neutrality between new Muslims and non-Muslim families. However, the study found that oppositional relationships are the most common. The survey by Mohd Nazmi et al. (2024), on the other hand, says that at least three of the biggest problems mixed-faith families in Sabah face are related to religious conversion, psychological issues between new Muslim families and non-Muslim families, and ultimately, tense relations between the families. These problems disrupt family relations, necessitating their repair and strengthen among members.

However, as Suraya et al. (a, b, d) point out, mixed-faith family relations in Sabah, particularly those involving new Muslims with non-Muslim families, are generally calm. This calmness is fostered by a mutual association that helps maintain family bonds. It is also influenced by societal norms and the current situation, which do not exacerbate the issue of mixed-faith family relations, thereby contributing to the overall calmness. Therefore, examining mixed-faith family relations in the context of society in Sabah shows two situations: temporary tension and calm. Thus, to explore both situations, the study adapts the *shura* framework as one of the approaches that can strengthen family bonds. *Shura* aims to celebrate different opinions and foster an inclusive environment that can neutralize the situation for the better. In the context of this study, the *shura* approach in mixed-faith family relations is not only an effort to create an understanding of differences. Nonetheless, it can also make a peaceful situation due to family bonds that want to be maintained.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AN APPROACH FOR STRENGTHENING MIXED-FAITH FAMILY RELATIONS

There has been extensive discussion of mixed-faith families in the past. Studies that explore methods or approaches for strengthening family relations affected by religious differences bear significant similarities to the objectives of this study. Among them are Istikmaliya (2018), Khasanah (2018), and Achmad (2019), who explain essential elements that serve as the foundation of harmony in family relations, which experience religious differences based on love, tolerance, and cooperation between family members of different religions. However, these studies involved couples or families of fundamentally different religions without involving conversion to Islam.

In addition, other studies that discuss aspects of strengthened mixed-faith families involving new Muslims' relations with non-Muslim families, such as a culture of tolerance (Suraya et al. 2013), a dialogue of *hikmah*-based (Azarudin & Khadijah 2017), based on the concept of *al-wasatiyyah* (Khadijah et al. 2017), the value of family solidarity (Mohd Nazmi et al. 2021; Suraya et al. 2022d), based on the idea of *rahmah* (Mohd Nazmi 2022), and human fraternal relations (Suraya et al. 2022b). However, the studies only describe the "situation" of strengthened mixed-faith family relations. This study, on the other hand, discusses an "approach" for strengthening between new Muslims and non-Muslim families, specifically experienced by mixed-faith families in Sabah.

Furthermore, other discussions, such as Yonatan and Mercedes (2020) and Kamarulzaman and Nur A'thiroh (2020), explain the experiences of new Muslims from diverse religious backgrounds. However, the gap identified in this study only discusses sharing experiences from new Muslims. The findings in these studies also do not positively explain the recovery and strengthening of the relations between new Muslim and non-Muslim families. As for the discussion about family relations, it only describes the situation of conflict between new Muslim and non-Muslim families. A quantitative study by Sarip (2015) explores the jurisprudence of family interaction in the relations between converts and non-Muslim families, focusing solely on respondents from the West Coast of Sabah. Similarly, Azarudin's (2015) study used a quantitative and qualitative mixed method to explain life dialogue with new Muslim and non-Muslim families in Terengganu. However, these studies have limitations in that they do not provide a comprehensive approach to strengthening mixed-faith families, particularly those involving new Muslims. This underscores the need for comprehensive studies in this area.

Thus, this study takes a unique approach by adapting the idea of *shura* from an Islamic point of view. It was reached by comparing the attitudes and best practices of new Muslim and non-Muslim families to improve family relations. The framework of the *shura* here is explained based on the values of harmony in the context of mixed-faith families, which are values of recovery and strengthening of the relations between new Muslim and non-Muslim families.

THE NEED OF *SHURA* APPROACH

Since the days of the Prophet Muhammad Sallah 'alaihi Wassalam (SAW), the tradition of mutual consultation or *shura* has become a fundamental part of early Islamic governance. In the early Islamic polity, *shura* was so supreme that Allah requested the Prophet to consult the believers on matters of state and government (Khel 1980). The most significant of the views put forward is that Allah advised the Prophet to consult with the believers on all matters when there was no

specific injunction in the Qur'an. The generations preceding his death would obey his state and government relations precepts. The primary purpose of the directives concerning *shura* was to create an eventual and lasting institutionalization of the form of consultation in Islamic polity (al-Tabari 1886). The shift brought on by the divine word broadened the *shura's* participation. Everyone who believed in Islam had made resources to support the cause of Islam and detailed insights into state affairs. Besides, the government could also attend the meetings, irrespective of one's race, color, caste, and social status. This was a definite improvement over the institutional framework of pre-Islamism (Mohiuddin 2016).

Khel (1980) stated that opinions should be consulted for Muslims' religious and temporal affairs. However, he believed that the counsellor (*mustashar*) must be well-versed in religious sciences if advice following religious injunctions is required. On the contrary, if the issues sought concern Muslims' mundane affairs for the council, the consultant should be wise enough to give a sound opinion. A glance at the pages of early Islamic history shows that the Prophet's general practice was to consult with the leading companions and others. He usually sent for the city-state of Medina's most prominent men and sought their advice on all relevant state matters. Therefore, in history, the details of *shura* could not be explicitly found. However, it owes to the actions of the Prophet that *shura*, in a way, aimed at eliciting popular sentiment and educating the issue under consideration.

According to Mohiuddin (1999), consultative management is performed by the Prophet SAW, such as 1) Battle of Badar: The Prophet SAW called the Muhajir and Ansar before the Badar battle and briefed them on the situation. The Prophet SAW did not declare his decision but was waiting to listen to the Ansars' opinions. 2) Battle of Uhud: As the unbelievers entered close to the Uhud range, the Prophet SAW sat down with his followers for a meeting. The older disciples suggested defending themselves in this consultation meeting by staying inside Medina. But the younger disciples insisted that the battle should proceed from Medina. 3) Battle of Khandaq: The whole battle implemented the policy on Salman Al-Farisi's assertion that, in the pre-Islamic polity, a formerly enslaved Persian should never possess the ordinary privileges of citizenship.

Studies commonly discuss *shura* in the context of politics or state affairs. For example, Abdullah and Harun (2018) refer to al-Qaradawi (1997), who have identified *shura* as a key principle in the Islamic political system. Similarly, Mohiuddin (2016) also studied *shura* in state politics since the time of the Prophet (SAW) and his companions. For example, throughout the reign of Abu Bakr RA, reported by Ibn Sa'd, "whenever a major problem broke with Abu Bakr RA, he called on the Muhajirin and Ansar, and, invited 'Umar RA, 'Ali RA, 'Uthman RA, Abu Ubaydah, Abd. Rahman b. Mu'adh b. Auf. Jabal and Ubayy b. Ka'b et Zaid b. Thabit for advising". During Abu Bakr's reign, these counsellors pronounced verdicts on law matters, and the people relied on them for their legal opinion. In addition to people of immense ability and experience, Abu Bakr RA often received friendly advice from only ordinary men.

Discussions of the conciliatory approach using the concept of *shura* are still limited, especially in the context of family relations between new Muslim and non-Muslim families. In the meantime, studies have found that concepts such as *sulh* and mediation are used in family relations for eliminating disputes (e.g. Sayyaf 2023). According to Shah et al. (2022), *sulh* and mediation are an approach that reconciles the parties in dispute and is suitable for family relations. In addition, these *sulh* and mediations make a mediator a solution in disputes to make peace, such as involving a *hakam* (arbitrator), conciliator, and negotiator. In other words, the *sulh* and mediation approaches require third party to manage the conflict for the party in trouble.

On the contrary, in this study, *shura* is a strengthened tool to resolve differences that may not necessarily stem from a dispute. There is no doubt that in the relations of mixed-faith families, there is a tense situation, but it is temporary and returns to normal. This is confirmed by the experiences of mixed-faith families in the studies conducted by Mohd Nazmi (2022), Mohd Nazmi et al. (2022; 2024), and Suraya et al. (2022c; d). These studies have explained that the usual factor in the relations of mixed-faith families in Sabah makes the tension temporary, and they can carry out various activities together. Therefore, the concept of *shura* discussed in this study is not only in managing differences that can invite conflict. It also recognizes the realities of impartial association and unity among new Muslims and non-Muslim families. Furthermore, implementing the *shura* approach does not require a third party or intermediary to manage the differences between new Muslim and non-Muslim families. Instead, the *shura* approach, which involves the participation of all parties, allows a mutual agreement and consultation to be reached without involving a mediator to manage it.

METHODOLOGY

The study design used a case study of specific locations in Sabah to obtain the data. Accordingly, this qualitative study focuses on two methods: in-depth interviews and literature. Interviews are a direct method of acquiring information in the form of views from informants. It involves answers from the informant through specific questions based on the study's objectives (Puvenesvary et al. 2011). The informants were purposefully selected but randomly located, namely mixed-faith families involving new Muslims with non-Muslim families in Sabah. Five mixed-faith families were chosen, representing a new Muslim and one representative from a non-Muslim family. So, the number of informants who will be interviewed is ten people. The interview aims not only to discuss the experiences of new Muslims but also to present the experiences of non-Muslim families in line with the objectives of this paper. However, the study did not disclose the name of informant for maintaining the confidentiality of them. Thus, the study uses codes such as Inf01–Inf05 for new Muslims and Inf06–Inf10 for representatives from non-Muslim families. The following is a list of informants, and the interview questions asked.

TABLE 1. List of informants

Code informant	Religion	Race	Origin	Interviewed
Inf01	New Muslim	Kadazan	Penampang	February 2020
Inf02	New Muslim	Kadazan	Keningau	February 2020
Inf03	New Muslim	Rungus	Kudat	Mac 2020
Inf04	New Muslim	Dusun	Ranau	Mac 2020
Inf05	New Muslim	Kadazan	Kota Marudu	Mac 2020
Inf06	Christian	Kadazan	Penampang	February 2020
Inf07	Christian	Kadazan	Keningau	February 2020
Inf08	Christian	Rungus	Kudat	Mac 2020
Inf09	Christian	Dusun	Ranau	Mac 2020
Inf10	Buddha	Kadazan	Keningau	Mac 2020

TABLE 2. List of interview questions

No.	Translation from Bahasa
1.	What approach is often implemented to avoid disputes between family members?
2.	What approach is often used to reach a common understanding?
3.	What activities are often carried out together?
4.	How do family relations manage religious differences between its members?
5.	How do families of different religions want to maintain family relations?

In addition, the library method was also used to strengthen case study discussions in the field further. This method is essential for obtaining accurate information based on studies that have been conducted. The information obtained will improve or renew the current research and highlight the differences and uniqueness of the survey conducted (Othman 2017). The use of the previous discussion is based on keywords such as *shura*, new Muslim, and non-Muslim family. Afterwards, thematic analysis was used to determine the themes appropriate to the study's context. Such an analysis is used because thematic analysis is one way to analyze data to identify patterns, concepts, and variables or find themes through data collected by researchers (Braun & Clarke 2019). Finally, this qualitative case study with a small sample size (n = 10) was not intended to generalize the study's findings to any population.

THE CONCEPT OF *SHURA*

Shura is derived from the original word ش، و، ر, which means taking honey, indicating the correct way, decorating, counselling, advising, and signalling, or it may even mean explaining or saying something (Ibn Manzur 1956). However, *shura* is also derived from *syawara-yusyawiru*, which means explaining, stating, or proposing and taking it. Other forms came from *syawara* verbs, including *asyara* (gesturing), *tasyawara* (consulting), *syawir* (deliberations), and *mutasyir* (asking for the opinions of others). It can also be said that *shura* or consultation should clarify, discuss, inquire, or exchange views on a matter (Ichsan 2014). The term *shura* itself has multiple meanings. Its definitions vary from deploying honey from the wax disk to 'to examine the human body when acquiring' and 'study itself on the frontline' (Al-Khalidi 1980).

Nonetheless, the nominal usage has generally interpreted the word to indicate 'mutual agreement.' The classical Muslim and contemporary scholars proposed several terminological definitions of *shura*. Ibn Arabi (1957) defined it as "a group meeting on a concern whereby each member consults and seeks advice from others." It implies "exchanging views by dialogue to obtain the facts" (al-Tabari 1886). al-Badawi (1994) described *shura* as "referring such topics to a group of experts so they can express their thoughts and thoughts and eventually bring them closest to the truth." The practice of mutual consultation alluded to two verses of the Qur'an, which address the practice of joint consultation known as *shura*. The first mention is given in verse 159 of Ali 'Imran:

> *"It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them wart thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so, pass over (their faults), and ask for Allah's forgiveness for them; Consult them on (at the moment) did matter. Then, place your trust in Allah when you have reached a decision. Even so, Allah loves those of us who have faith in Him."*

According to classical Muslims, the containing unveiled the verse after the crippling Muslim failure at Uhud, where Allah ordered the Prophet SAW to forgive all his companions responsible for it. Before the battle, the Prophet SAW had talked about the combat plan with his followers. The Prophet's vision had been to live in Medina, while most of the companions proposed pursuing combat beyond the city. This was a *shura* event, and the the Prophet SAW revered it himself (Al-Ansari 1996). The second verse of the Qur'an, which deals directly with *shura*, is found in a surah usually referred to in verse 38 of al-Shura. Its practice is referred to as one of the characteristics of a just society:

> *"All who listen to their Lord and make regular prayers; others who conduct their business by mutual consultation; those of us who spend on sustenance on what We give them."*

The whole verse indicates the Ansar community, who embraced the mission of the Prophet with all their heart and turned their society into a model society (Al-Zuhaili 2005). Thus, these two Qur'anic verses prove that *shura* or mutual consultation is the most acceptable and effective means of finding consensus within society. It also ensures that if a decision is agreed upon, it is supported by all. Hence, it results from a fruitful discussion and debate effort.

The Prophet SAW urged his followers to adhere to *shura* practice in public interest matters. He also clarified the purpose and advantage of doing this, namely "the emergence of assistance," which meant exchanging thoughts and free dialogues that would allow them to come together to the best solution possible. Abu Hurayrah RA narrated another hadith that reported the Prophet SAW was to have said: "Reliable is mutual consultation" (Sunan Abu Dawud 1965). In other words, the results produced from mutual consulting must be trusted in their correctness and effectiveness. Two parts of the Qur'an specifically relate to mutual consultation as a legitimate way of reaching a consensus on community matters (Ali Imran, 3: 159). In relation, verse 30 of the Qur'an chapter al-Baqarah also states:

> *"Behold thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? While we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name). He said: "I know what ye know not."*

Allah consulted with the angels in appointing a man as His vicegerent on Earth (*khalifah*). In this regard, prominent commentators such as al-Zamakhshari, al-Razi, and al-Baidawi asserted that "here, Allah the exalted wanted to teach man the importance of conducting *mushawarah* and presented the task of conducting *shura* to the experts and leaders" (Al-Khatib 1985). The *shura* practice allows the community to regulate its affairs peacefully and achieve an acceptable outcome for all individuals or groups engaged in decision-making. A matter of significance mentioned the concern for discussing issues among a chosen group of experts who have the freedom to articulate their perspectives and suggestions. This mutual consultation is not feasible without general regard for multiple views. Regardless of whether the appointed leader makes the final decision, it is unbiased based on the various opinions, recommendations, and cautionary remarks provided from all quarters, which reduces the risk of it being the wrong decision to the disadvantage of the community's interests significantly. Specifically, the human imagination or the intellectual potential (*'aql*) may be related to the 'light'. As the many lights of multiple minds are connected, they rise in power and illuminate the path.

Besides, the application of *shura* was used for more than just administrative matters. Therefore, finding consensus and dialogues to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts was essential. The approach to *shura* requires freedom; if freedom, particularly the release of thinking

and expression, is lost, then the outcome is tyranny. *Shura* frees the entity, the family, and society. *Shura* spans the distance between a person's independence and community structure. It offers an incentive to pursue success in every community where the *shura's* aims and objectives have been adhered. Therefore, the range of viewpoints and opinions is focused on the organization. This cycle will only contribute to the wellness of people, communities, and the broader society.

THE APPLICATIONS OF *SHURA* IN MIXED-FAITH FAMILY

The culture of reconciliation is a common desire in people, especially in mixed-faith family relations. Living in peace allows individuals to feel their freedom and build a harmonious life together. Research results show that the main goal of a mixed-faith family is to create a peaceful, harmonious life, mutual acceptance of strengths and weaknesses, and mutual respect. However, conflicts remain part of human life and overcoming them peacefully can lead to happiness. This paper presents the *shura* approach, a practical method for mixed-faith family relations, based on Islam and aimed at establishing just peace. This approach fosters a family's spirit to live harmoniously and maintain harmony.

DECISION-MAKING

While explaining decision-making, reflecting on a decision-making mechanism or the decision itself is common. Simon (2000) defined it as a mechanism related to the whole management cycle. In his words: "There are three main phases of decision-making: finding decision-making opportunities, finding possible courses of action, choosing between courses of action." The decisions that need to be made depending on the new Muslim's needs and the non-Muslim family's concerns and priorities make decisions on topics as varied as the challenges they might encounter. Law et al. (2003) stated that the decisions involve two steps: first, deciding which issue is most important to tackle. Identifying the critical point is essential in achieving positive results for new Muslims and non-Muslim families. This ensures that everyone is focused on the same goal (Tuchman 1996); second, deciding which strategy will best address the priority issue. Service providers and their families should collaborate to develop and use the process. Any team members should be encouraged to offer ideas, including new Muslim and non-Muslim families. Both (the new Muslim and non-Muslim families) will feel comfortable only when there is an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. The experience of the interview with the informant is described as follows:

> *"I converted to Islam, and my family didn't say anything. Alhamdulillah. Yes, they are very welcome. Even after I converted to Islam, they got better with me because they didn't want us to quarrel or upset. **For example, the simplest is during the festival, no matter Aidilfitri or Christmas, we gather, and after that, we can still discuss the activities we want to do.**" (Inf01, New Muslim, Kadazan, 2020)*
> *"My family had no problem when I said I wanted to convert to Islam. **Because some of my aunts and uncles are already Muslims, and they (non-Muslim families) see that even though they are already Muslims, any festive event, we still decide and discuss to do together**. It's as if we no longer feel the religious differences between us." (Inf02, New Muslim, Kadazan, 2020)*

The example above is an informant from a new Muslim. It can be observed that joint discussion is their priority before holding any public activities such as festivals and feasts (Inf01, Inf02). Next, examples from non-Muslim families are as follows:

> *"For us, the most obvious is that food matters. It doesn't matter during a mediocre, festive meal, and the important thing is we can get together. **So, we divide the tasks among those who are Muslims. Usually, Muslims are cooked because everyone can eat, which we can help anyone who deserves it.**" (Inf06, Kadazan, Christian, 2020)*
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> *"If it's like a festival, sometimes we can't prepare the food, so what do we do? **We try to talk first with the Muslims and ask if they want to eat what we order. The important thing is that we can gather in large numbers.**" (Inf07, Kadazan, Christian, 2020)*

Non-Muslim families practice the same: divide the tasks according to suitability (Inf06) and hold discussions to celebrate joint activities (Inf07). Based on the new Muslims and non-Muslims above, prioritize the decisions made for mutual benefit. This is also because family members do their best to gather to enjoy this togetherness. Lee and Collins (2000) examined family members' influence in the decision-making process over three distinct stages: configuration, negotiation, and outcome in a situation like this. "Configuration" describes the stage in the decision-making process where family members prepare themselves for the decision. Thus, if a discussion has occurred, the configuration is deemed to have accepted the position. The argument is also a determinant of how the decision is made. "Negotiation" defines the point in the decision-making phase where family members discuss the proposed options and bring out reasons for and against the specific choices. Negotiation may include using several techniques for decision-making, such as expertise, authority, sentiment, alliance, or negotiation. "Outcome", i.e., the final stage of the decision-making process, measures the number of recommendations each delegate submitted to the party effectively.

Therefore, decision-making in a mixed-faith family is the main thing that needs to be done by involving new Muslims with non-Muslim families. Such a situation aligns with the *shura* procedure, which requires all its members to be involved and determine the agreement. Rasulullah SAW and his companions only carried out an instruction or view involving the participation of various parties (Mohiuddin 1999). Therefore, in the context of a mixed-faith family, the demands of this joint discussion align with the application of *shura* that its members of other religions should practice. This is to avoid partiality that eventually breaks down due to the lack of agreement between family members.

DIALOGUE OF *HIKMAH-BASED*

The expression "dialogue of *hikmah*-based" arises from two terms – "dialogue" and "*hikmah*" (wisdom) and can be interpreted by separately describing each phrase and examining the sense of the expression created by integrating them. The Qur'an that dialogues should be built based on respectful, objective communication to understand other parties. Suraya et al. (2013) claimed that the dialogue of *hikmah* is at the root of Muslim–non-Muslim relations, as it features wisdom in verbal and non-verbal communication according to the ethical rules of dialogues. In the context of mixed-faith families, it clarifies misunderstandings, misconceptions, and inaccurate interpretations about the contradictions, such as religious practices. This is very significant to the problems faced by a new Muslim who wants to become Muslim for association (marriage, relationship with other Muslims) or reasonable motives (self-study or self-investigation). Besides, this method is also essential for non-Muslim families to accept willingly and openly when family members embrace Islam. The experience of dialogue of *hikmah*-based can be observed as follows:

> *I keep quiet if they eat 'it's' (pork).* **Like my youngest son said, when they slaughter its stuff, they don't go. I have no problem, need to understand.** *Only those of us have to be good at later asking what meat they cook." (Inf03, New Muslim, Rungus, 2020)*
> *"Even though I did not receive greetings in the beginning, I am also sad. Then I show good manners, like respecting my parents. After that, it's like eating together.* **Even if I don't eat other foods but still join in eating together, we must be very patient. Sometimes there is also sarcasm, but I keep quiet. Like now, it's okay for them, open-minded to tell.**" *(Inf04, New Muslim, Dusun, 2020)*

The example of dialogue of *hikmah*-based as above can be explained by acknowledging differences through asking (Inf03) and respecting non-Muslims by participating in mealtimes even though they vary (Inf04). Such a situation is the initiative of the new Muslim to keep the heart and understand the customary practices of non-Muslim families, especially in food matters. Next, the experiences of non-Muslim family informants are displayed.

> *"Because I'm used to it. It's mixed like this from the beginning. My name is like a Muslim name because my grandfather is a Muslim.* **It's just that we respect them, and they respect us back. Don't make trouble; need to understand which they can and can't".** *(Inf08, Christian, Rungus, 2020)*
> *"The family also, although my father was disappointed when my older brother converted to Islam,* **he understood, he had a special kitchen ready to cook food so as not to mix with halal food for Muslims.** *Because in the beginning, they quarreled about how to prepare different food while eating." (Inf09, Christian, Dusun, 2020)*

The experience of informants from non-Muslim families can be explained by understanding the demands and taboos of new Muslims as the most important basis for maintaining family relationships. As in the example above, food selection for the needs of new Muslims became their priority of providing food (Inf08, Inf09). Although the dialogue in this situation is not fully interpreted verbally, it is essential to show through attitudes and practices used as non-verbal dialogue followed by *hikmah* to ensure the best action is taken. Morgan (2020) stated that parents should use more accommodative strategies to discuss (or not discuss) religious differences with their children. They often mitigate the disparity between the intimate, implemented, and related levels of identification of their infants and thus promote enhanced unity in relation. The difficulties encountered by families of representatives who adhere to different faiths are exacerbated by their different religious beliefs, resulting in issues involving shared empathy and a significant degree of acceptance on other topics. Because of these issues, a dialogue of the *hikmah* approach is essential to clarify misunderstandings about Islam's theological boundaries and responsibilities without separating born Muslims from Muslim converts or new Muslims. Bakar et al. (2009) explained that dialogue ethics encourage disagreement, respect for differences, appreciation of the inability to accept views, sincerity, sympathy, empathy, and patience.

Thus, dialogue of *hikmah*-based is an essential demand in new Muslim relations with their non-Muslim families. This is because the difference factor requires prudent initiatives to manage the difference correctly. Despite the misunderstanding in terms of demands and taboos on religious differences, dialogue with wisdom, either verbally or not, plays a role in managing such matters. Dialogue of *hikmah* ensures that the relationship between new Muslims and non-Muslim families lasts despite different religions. It becomes a platform for them to understand with respect each other. In line with the practice applied throughout the administration of Islam by Rasulullah SAW, the companions and the next generation of Islamic leaders namely using the aspect of the dialogue of *hikmah* verbally and non-verbally to the community and their followers as an effort of unity (Craig 2017; Suhardiman at.al 2023). Therefore, the dialogue of *hikmah*-based in mixed-faith families, either verbally or not, explains the continuity of mutual understanding between different cultures and religions so that family relationships continue to last.

THE GATHERING

The gathering is an activity for all family members to gather. Even though each family member has a busy schedule, they must take the time to form a good relationship in the mixed-faith family. Besides, the time must be adequate to establish togetherness with family members and exchange ideas. As has happened in families with various faiths, individual family members may operate outside the city or their neighborhood and return at some periods. Still, in their case, it is deemed necessary to find family time to improve the importance of staying together by effectively using the time while being together. It is an opportunity to facilitate decision-making and dialogues as a platform in this situation. According to Bossard et al. (2014), family time or gathering is a preparation process that can strengthen the connection between family needs and programs and allow more possibilities for the family to invest in resources and complete the case plan. Also, with the gathering time, mutual engagement and cooperation between the family members are easy because a loving bond will be established when they meet face-to-face. A casework approach to family engagement considers families as experts on unique challenges and seeks to support the development of solutions (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2016). This strength-based approach empowers new Muslim and non-Muslim families to plan the best family services and resources to ensure positive relationships, enhancing outcomes for new Muslim and non-Muslim families. This fact can be further confirmed by the results of the informant interviews as follows:

> *"We are just like normal, the time of the festival is still celebrated together, like that, the cooperation has not changed. When we prepare for Aidilfitri, we prepare as best we can to make sure they come together and eat together. If Christmas is like that, like me, I think there is a family that is not very capable, does not have much money, we donate, rice or others." (Inf05, New Muslim, Kadazan, 2020)*
> *"In the beginning, after I converted to Islam in 2013, my father looked most disappointed and angry. As for my mother, I'm not sure, but she kept quiet, disappointed. Because they have a lot of misunderstandings about Islam, they can't accept me to convert to Islam. So, in the beginning, what I was trying to do was like my Aidilfitri back home. So that they can feel even though I am of a different religion than them, I still help them during the festive season." (Inf03, New Muslim, Rungus, 2020)*

The experience example shows the new Muslim informants' attitude concerning the current situation. Even though they are of different religions, it does not prevent them from gathering. It can be observed that there is cooperation and understanding (Inf05). Apart from that, the new Muslims still maintain their identity as family members by participating in celebrations held by non-Muslim families, especially during the festive season (Inf03). Next, the experiences of non-Muslim family informants are as follows.

> *"Yes, my brother converted to Islam first. I'm not sure why he wants to convert to Islam. But come on, we want to get rid of whomever he is. After all, any of our councils still have flood cooperation. They came to our ceremony, and we came to their ceremony. It's easy, and no one wants to be frown-faced. We are brothers and sisters." (Inf10, Buddha, Kadazan, 2020)*
> *"It's like we're used to it because we've been mixing families with Muslims for a long time, living together, celebrating Eid, Christmas, it's like there's nothing left. Although we are used to it, when we are together, this is an opportunity for us to gather and meet face to face to strengthen our relationship with each other." (Inf08, Christian, Rungus, 2020)*

The example above can be explained by the situation of the mixed-faith family to celebrate family relationships in any gathering events, such as the festive season (Inf10). In addition, some have long practiced a diverse atmosphere and strengthened family ties (Inf08). The mixed situation in a crowded ceremony shows the uniqueness of those who can Unite despite different religions. Thus, looking at the two cases of informant new Muslims and non-Muslim families, a spirit of

unity is exhibited through gatherings. Gathering displayed in family relationships of different religions became their foundations in understanding other cultures and religions.

Besides, McCarthy (2012) stated that everybody can experience and express different emotions while sharing activities when family members gather. Thus, a significant difference arises between how new Muslims and non-Muslim families perceive the demands of family cohesion. Togetherness involves more than just being in the same space and sharing time. It also includes family members who learn about themselves and each other, teach moral lessons, and appreciate family importance (Bahri 2019). Family cohesion is a valuable and essential tool for analyzing social engagement, as it is vital for society (Nash & Patterson 2018). It also further facilitates the discussion process to improve the strained family relationship due to the changes. This method connects with families and is part of essential and substantive discussions. In line with the application of shura during the Prophet SAW, the companions and Muslim leaders have then held face-to-face meetings to discuss reaching a standard solution (Mohd Nazmi et al. 2020). This aims to ensure an agreement can be achieved by paying attention to the rights to be protected. In addition, the gathering opens space for the meeting members to interact with each other.

CONCLUSIONS

The study found that the informant's mixed-faith families can be managed well even if they experience religious differences that can lead to conflict. However, in the context of Sabah, mixed-faith families are not unfamiliar. The harmony in the family relationship also has no problems to the point that they can live together like a common family. Therefore, in this research, the study integrates the concept and practice of *shura* as an approach to mixed-faith family, especially in the context of Sabah. Based on the analysis, the *shura* approach practiced in Islam can generate a peaceful coexistence in the context of mixed-faith families. *Shura*, or consultation decision, adherents are often emotionally dedicated, trustworthy, and faithful, and they make absolute sacrifices to enforce or conduct the organization's judgment; they have many Islamic traditions and sources. Some initiatives are energized based on the *shura* approach in establishing mutual peace in mixed-faith family relations. Firstly, decision-making whereby the consent of all family members is essential through a fair and impartial decision. Secondly, the dialogue of *hikmah*-based is the dialogue that applies wisdom to the family members. Thus, it is essential to understand the reality of the differences, such as differences in religious obligations. Thirdly, the gathering—the need to treat one another—leads to good relations among family members in every attempt to create peace together. With these approaches, a family spirit can be formed to solve difficulties, prevent conflicts, and foster peace. Thus, the *shura* approach applied in family institutions can be an example of practice at the grassroots level, then practiced by the society of different backgrounds. This approach can resolve conflicts in the community and is also helping to settle disputes in the neighborhood.

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