

# INDONESIA: FROM PLURALISM TO MULTICULTURALISM

Wasino

History Department, Faculty of Social Sciences, Semarang State University  
[wasinow@yahoo.com](mailto:wasinow@yahoo.com)

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## ABSTRACT

*Indonesia was not a new entity when started to become national country. It was called a continuation of the history of the Dutch East Indies. The people lived under western colonial was a pluralistic society, people separated by social class, ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group. Between the authorities and the people separated along racial lines. In addition there was the separation of ethnic groups associated with the economic, educational and social relations. After Indonesian independence the pluralistic society situation continues. The end of the New Order has opened a Pandora's Box of poor relations between ethnic and inter-religious. As a result many conflicts occurred based on religious and ethnic differences. The conflict heated up as the influx of political interests. The process of political reform gave birth to a new awareness of the relationship between ethnicity and religion. The starting point of this change was when the President Abdurrahman Wahid unlocked barriers on multicultural relationship that respects the differences of cultural orientation among the existing ethnic. From that moment the concept of multiculturalism experienced socialization process within Indonesian society.*

*Key words: pluralism, multiculturalism, colonial, new order, socialization*

## ABSTRAK

*Ketika Indonesia lahir sebagai negara nasional, Indonesia bukanlah entitas yang baru. Ia merupakan kelanjutan sejarah dari masyarakat yang disebut Hindia Belanda. Masyarakat di bawah penjajah Barat ini merupakan masyarakat majemuk, masyarakat yang terpisah-pisah berdasarkan kelas sosial, suku, agama, ras, dan antar golongan. Antara penguasa dan rakyat terpisah secara garis rasial. Selain itu ada pemisahan suku bangsa terkait dengan ekonomi, pendidikan, dan hubungan-hubungan sosial. Setelah Indonesia merdeka situasi masyarakat majemuk terus berlangsung. Berakhirnya Orde Baru telah membuka kotak pandora buruknya hubungan antar etnik dan antar agama. Akibatnya banyak terjadi konflik-konflik yang berdasarkan perbedaan etnik dan agama. Hal itu semakin meruncing ketika kepentingan-kepentingan politik masuk. Proses reformasi politik melahirkan kesadaran baru tentang hubungan antar etnik dan agama. Titik awal perubahan ini ketika Presiden Abdurrahman Wahid membuka sekat-sekat hubungan multikultural yang menghormati perbedaan dalam orientasi budaya di kalangan etnik yang ada. Sejak itu konsep multikulturalisme mengalami proses sosialisasi dalam masyarakat Indonesia.*

**Kata Kunci:** Pluralisme, Multikultural, Kolonial, Orde Baru, Sosialisasi.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since Independence of Indonesia, the founder of our nation has thought between their reality and expectation cleverly. In the fact Indonesian people has no single nation but it has pluralistic nation which consists of various ethnic groups, religious beliefs,

languages and political view believe. In diversity, it is expected to be unity, achieve strong nation and improve people welfare. The thinking of historic track is reflected in ribbon which is gripped by state emblem of Republic of Indonesia (look like a hawk).

*Bhineka Tunggal Ika (unity in diversity) concept is not always happened*

commensurately. *Bhineka* has been existed long time ago before Independence day of Indonesia and continued until now. While “Ika” concept is an expectation which has still to be struggled. Since its independence, there was only small part of Indonesian people thought “Keikaan Indonesia”, especially figure of resurgence nation and freedom fighter. Related with those, in Indonesian history, there were many efforts to expand nationalism as a nation in many ways. During the reign of Sukarno until Suharto, the schools taught specifically about the important meaning of “*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*”. Socialization of it became a part of history and civic education. As a result of those process is the idea of Indonesian nationality estimated of Indonesian people who understand and perceive as Indonesian nation.

In the global society like now, Indonesian establisher thought is very relevant. There are some idea of revitalization and modification from diversity honor as the honor form of cultural differences. Multiculturalism is an understanding from foreign which can be cross-cultural with understanding diversity from Indonesian establishers. So it can create civil community who are democratic, respect of human right and its culture.

## INDONESIA AS PLURALISTIC SOCIETY COLONIAL LEGACY

When Indonesia gained its independence, its society was a colonial legacy which is known as pluralistic society. This society is a colonial legacy before independence that is began since Dutch East Indies era. Pluralistic society was defined by Furnivall (1944) as a society consisting of two or more elements living alone without mixing with others in the political unity. As a plurality soci-

ety, Indonesia is seen as a type of tropical society which is between person who hold authority and person who is held authority have racial differences. Person who holds authority is minority class, the Dutch, and people who are held authority consist of some different races. Indigenous society as majority inhabitant place lower class and became third class citizen in their own country. Meanwhile, Chinese is the largest middle class among the other eastern (Arab, India).

Furnivall’s conception is not absolutely relevant with plural society condition in post-independence of Indonesia, moreover with society condition in Indonesia nowadays. It can be seen from its concrete embodiment, like there are no minority races who control majority races. However, according to Nasikun (1987:35), Furnivall’s conception still has continuity until now. By ignoring concrete realization, we can get the essence of conception which regardless of space and time.

Plural society is a society with value system which is adopted by various social unity becoming its parts so the members of society have less loyalty towards society as a whole, less cultural homogeneity or even less basic to understand each other.

A society is called plural if it has subs that are diverse structurally. Those societies are characterized by undeveloped system of values or consensus by all members of society developing value system from their social unites into their parts. The members of social unity adopt their value system firmly with pure form. In this situation, there is always characterized by social conflicts or at least by lack of integration and interdependence among social unities belong.

In more assertive, the conception of plural society has been stated by

Geertz (1981: 105-157) as a society divided into sub-systems which stand themselves and each of them bonds into primordial bond. Primordial bond is a bond which comes from congenital factor. The bond is defined as a feeling born from "something is considered to exist" in the social life. The bond includes cognation: their family, relative, or ethnic, racial similarity or type of nation, common language or certain dialect, regionalism, religious bond or certain religious sect, and even certain habits (Geertz in Sudarsono, 1985:5-7).

A plural society has particular characteristics compared with homogeneous society sociologically. According to Pieter L van den Berghe (in Nasikun, 1987:36) the characteristics of plural society are ; (1) the segmentation into groups which often have differences of sub-culture among others ; (2) it has social structure divided into non-complementary institutions; (3) less developing consensus among its members towards basic values; (4) it often runs into conflicts among one group to another groups relatively; (5) social integration raises because of coercion and economic interdependence relatively; and (6) the existence of political domination from a group towards another groups.

## **RESPECTING OTHER CULTURE AS A BASIS OF MULTICULTURALISM**

Etymologically, multiculturalism derived from words 'multicultural' and 'ism'. Word 'multicultural' has meaning as multi or many cultures. Meanwhile, suffix 'ism' has meaning as ideology, concept or tenet. Thus the meaning of multiculturalism is ideology or concept of multi-cultural.

Based on the literal meaning, then primary understanding of the concept

must start from various cultures. Meanwhile, the meaning of the culture has variety of restrictions or concepts. Nowadays many cultural experts have many different arguments about definition of culture. The difference is not just problem formulating but it came to conceptual level. The conceptual level gives implication of operational definition for cultural researcher. Tylor (1871) gives restrictions that culture is a complex whole included knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and other abilities and habits learned by man as the members of society. Ralph Linton (1940) gives definition rather similar than Tylor, culture as a whole knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors is owned and inherited habits by the members of society. Koentjaraningrat (1979) said that culture is a whole human knowledge as social beings used for understand environment, their experiences and behavior guidelines. Culture consists of universal elements, namely languages, technology, economic system, social organization, knowledge, religion, and arts. Koentjaraningrat (1979) also detailed culture of three forms, which are idea, activity and cultural object.

Some cultural restriction shows how complicated the cultural concepts are. Those complicated till don't give space for other researchers to get into their studied sectors. Nowadays the cultural concepts criticism from cultural scientists themselves because it is very difficult for them to research culture in framework of such concepts.

Culture and society is seen as a system. Each has defined range itself. Culture refers to everything which is abstract form such system, values, ideas, beliefs, symbols, ideology conceived by a community or certain society. Culture and community describes as system. The community can be a group of people living in the small clans or large

group of people living in the wider area called tribe or nation.

Goedenoegh (in Keesing,1989:68) stated that culture is a pattern of life from a society - activity and material and social arrangement regularly becoming identity of a certain group. In this case, culture is a content of observed objects and events. Culture also defined as a system of knowledge and beliefs used as guidance in organizing their experiences and perceptions, decisive actions and choose alternatives.

Every society has cultures which are used as behavior guidelines. Because of the basic thinking underlying their different culture, the form of their daily behavior is also not same. Those affect the existence of multicultural in the world society, including Indonesia.

Culture established by its supporting groups , because of the differences of their origin, cultural conception and view will be different. There are some groups of cultural supporters, namely race, religion, ethnic group, gender, social rank, wealth and education level.

Multicultural concept or multiculturalism appreciates cultural differences which was born from the cultural support groups. The form of appreciation is the tolerance among them to create harmonious world society characterized by respect for human rights and human dignity indiscriminately.

#### **FROM PLURALISM TO MULTICULTURALISM, CROSS-CULTURAL HISTORY OF ARCHIPELAGO**

The history of Archipelago which was turned into Indonesia's history shows the cross-cultural continuity. That is why in the Java case, Denys Lombard (2000) wrote book cleverly translated by Nusa Jawa in Cross-Cultural. In fact, Indonesia's history is

never deserted from its relationship inter-ethnic, inter-race bringing different cultures.

Since Indonesia classical era reached its heyday in Majapahit era, The Archipelago has been inhabited by various ethnics and races which interacted by bringing their own cultures. Surely the dominant ethnic is Javanese with Hindu culture as dominant culture. However, there didn't happen imposition of the will from dominant ethnic toward minorities who were not Hindus. According to the number of records shows that there were many ethnics living in the Majapahit era such as Chinese, Arabic, Persian, and Indian who are mostly Moslem. They lived in the Northern coast of Java and then they brought out economic center and Islamic power center in Java. Thus there was pluralism in Majapahit society at the time.

When Islam arrived in Java and replaced itself as generating dominant culture, the relationship among ethnics and races was still occur. Sultanate of Malacca which is one of the most important Islamic power center in the archipelago became a symbol of multi-ethnic society. Tome Pires, a Portuguese traveller, in his writings "Suma Oriental" wrote that in Malacca tow, there were 80 languages used by traders to interact each other. Languages as cultural identity in there indicate existence of nations from multi-ethnic cultural support which interact each other with common interest, which is trade.

In Java, inter-ethnic relations are still seen in the development of Islam. There are many heritages such as graves, places of worship indicating inter-ethnic relations. In addition, there are cultural products such as batik, traditional arts showing cross cultural intra-ethnics. In Lasem, there are still seen the remains of buildings, batik art repre-

senting cross cultural between Tionghoa (Chinese) ethnic and Java. Similarly, it happened to the former Sultanate of Demak leaving cross-cultural heritages between Hinduism, Confucianism, Javaism and Islam. They lived in a harmonious intra-ethnic relation, no domination from one cultural support towards other cultures, there is a cross-cultural acculturation

Harmonious multicultural relationship became upset during Dutch Colonialism era. Dutch authorities brought western culture as domination symbol. Western Culture was seen more great than other eastern culture, especially from indigenous people. Their duty did civilizing the colonized people who considered still "traditional". The duty was known as "white man burden" sourced from the western ways of life and Christian religion happens.

Although there was not many population of white skin people (especially Dutchman in Indonesia), ideology of power which they were hold had made dominant culture that is western culture. Beyond adopted culture by the rulers, there were many cultures adopted by resident-controlled. They came from different ethnics and social classes. The society was named as plural society.

Plural society concept used to name diversity of Indonesia occurred until The New Order. The government recognized those and followed politic-cultural assimilation concept to solve ethnical problems. Ethnic minorities directed to do assimilation towards majority ethnic. It was happen especially in Chinese-ethnic society.

In The New Order, the country became primary interpreter of culture putting "Appreciation and Practical of Pancasila Guidance or shorten into "P4" as a single cultural symbol. As an idea, "P4" concept is indeed a cultural inter-

pretation of Pancasila by Suharto regime which is must appreciated. The problem is when the interpretation was used as indoctrination in the form of state politic making all cultural supports and they must followed the single interpretation. There was neglect of interpretation in this case.

The single interpretation in the form of indoctrination "P4" which is considered as "Javanization" by some people borne resistance feeling from other cultural groups support. The resistance became anti-climax after Suharto's resignation made effect for the threat of national disintegration. The combining process of Indonesian way of thinking often made cultural clash problems. The state dominance and cultural dominant groups support have been refused diversity which was God's will.

The reality shows that Indonesian society is multi-ethnic society with its population around 226 million by the end of the new order, it is multicultural society. There were 300 ethnics and different languages, in this case called "the largest archipelago in the world" group. It was roughly estimated that there was 82,2% people consist of 14 big ethnic groups with more than a billion members in mid 1980s, and in 1986, approximately 99,4% people was followers of four primary religion in the world: Islam (86,9 %), Protestant (6,5%), Catholics (3,1%), Hinduism, (1%) and Buddhist (0,6%) (Liddle, 1997:275). It is also means that traditional rural, coast and ethnical society lived together with metropolitan society which include oriented global multicultural post- modern or modern culture.

From the new order to reform, there has been labeled violent ethnic and religion. The violence occurred in communal race and state violence which is permanent characteristic of Indonesian people. Colombijn dan Lindblad

(2002) said that in the reformation era, violence level in Indonesia increased. Quoting from some sources, they refers to some cases of armed conflict, genocide, murder, extra-judicial murder, decapitations, violating, intimidation, and destruction of public and private property. In addition, in 2001 there were 1,3 million registered as internal evacuees in Indonesia.

Kamanto Sunarto (2004) stated that the impact of granting autonomy for municipalities and districts since 2000 also became source of friction. It was not only between central, provincial and district governments but also it was between local and regional ethnics and religion. While the armed separatist movement threatened the territorial integrity of Indonesia continuously, local and regional movements by social powers led to provincial divisions and as consequences, there was the increasing of ethnical homogeneity for each new province. The recent development raised concern that increasing provincialism and primordial attachment could further weaken Indonesia's national and social integration

Related to the primordial problems, multiculturalism concept becomes important issue to be spread in Indonesia. It is important because after collapse of authoritarianism regime, the new order towards a democratic society must be supported by democratic societies which respect different cultural concept. The idea actually represents revitalization from the thought of Indonesian founder towards integrating Indonesian people regardless skin color, ethnic, religion, and social class.

Nowadays, multiculturalism should be spread to a wider public. The mainstream ways can be political and educational institutions, mass media, family, religious institutions, and tourism. The ways can be achieved if Indo-

nesian people respect for cultural differences without causing social and political conflicts

It is important because the differences still become problems in Indonesia; there are ethnic, religion, race and group conflicts. The destruction of places of worship still happen in most place of Indonesia by other religion followers. Similarly, conflicts of different ethnics such as in Sampit, Solo, Aceh, etc. show that it is still lack of multiculturalism understanding among people.

## **SOCIALIZATION OF MULTICULTURALISM**

Based on explanation above, it shows that there is lack of multiculturalism understanding and awareness among young people in Indonesia. Related with those, the spread of multiculturalism should to be done. Besides multicultural politics must be adopted by the government, multicultural education must be made for their people.

Multicultural education is not restricted in the school. Azra (2002) has been showed that multicultural education was a wide concept, include formal education, non-formal education and informal education

Multicultural education is still considered by many people as controversial issue until now. The critics warned that multicultural education was considered as "divisive" (Aldridge, Calhoun dan Aman, 2000), "foster the cult of ethnicity, destroy public culture, lead to Babel Tower, distort history and undermine social unity" (Parekh, 2002: 230) or it was incompatible with nationalism (Watson, 2000:39).

There are many pessimistic views of the success of multicultural education, however, the historical reality wants its implementation in order that

good relationship among cultural supporters. There will occur a change in multicultural understanding and create tolerant society with different cultures though the way.

Multicultural education starts from political education reflected in education laws and government regulations. In the lower level, Curriculum of educational institutions must be treated in such way, so make it possible to add multiculturalism aspects in educational institutions. Socialization and enculturation do by developing a school system which respects differences. Teaching materials are made in such way to create multicultural understanding. Name domination of a particular ethnic or religion for general lessons must be changed become more diverse.

## CONCLUSION

Multiculturalism is a new concept in Indonesian people's life although the essence has become an idea from Indonesia's establishers. The starting point of this concept was when the President Abdurrahman Wahid unlocked barriers on multicultural relationship that respects the differences of cultural orientation among the existing ethnic. Due to less of multicultural understanding, relationship problems such as races, ethnics, religion, and among groups in Indonesian people is often indicated by less harmonious relationship based on primordial bond. It is often make intolerance attitude and social conflicts. Remembering the lack of multicultural understanding, it is necessary to increase multicultural understanding and awareness. At the macro level, It must be a political desire from government and country to apply multiculturalism. At the micro level, it should be socialization of multicultural understanding and

awareness in all Indonesian people, including though formal education.

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