

Multiculturalism in Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis of Practices and Policy Implementation in Indonesia and Malaysia

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Abstract: This study examines and compares the practice of multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia by situating it within their respective historical trajectories, policy frameworks, and implementation patterns in social and educational contexts. The research employs a qualitative library research design, drawing on relevant scholarly literature in the social sciences, religious studies, and the humanities. Data were analyzed using content analysis and a comparative approach, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The findings indicate that multicultural practices in Indonesia and Malaysia exhibit both similarities and differences shaped by each country's historical, cultural, and political contexts. In Indonesia, multiculturalism is grounded in the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, whereas in Malaysia it is articulated through the principle of unity embodied in the *Rukun Negara*. At the policy level, Indonesia constitutionally recognizes diversity through inclusive measures, such as the public recognition of religious holidays and support for the preservation of local cultures. In contrast, Malaysia adopts a National Cultural Policy, which some groups have criticized for its limited sensitivity to cultural diversity. Linguistically, Indonesian functions as a unifying national language across diverse ethnic groups, while Malaysia recognizes Malay, English, and Chinese as official languages, reflecting its multicultural composition and educational arrangements. In terms of religion, Indonesia formally acknowledges and protects multiple religions and the rights of religious minorities. In contrast, Malaysia grants Islam a privileged position as the state's official religion.

Keywords: Multicultural Governance, Comparative Multiculturalism, Policy Implementation, Plural Societies, Southeast Asia.

Introduction

The term multiculturalism is relatively new. It emerged in the rapidly growing 20th century as an interesting topic to research and discuss.¹ This is interesting because it discusses ethnic and cultural

¹ Essy Syam, Qori Islami Aris, and Vita Amelia, "REPRESENTATION OF

diversity and its acceptance. According to Claude Levi-Strauss, culture is the result of the universal biological structure of the human mind. In this view, culture not only emerges but is formed through a group of people's thinking to understand, give meaning, and define themselves.

This makes the group's identity clearly different from that of other groups. Meanwhile, according to Clifford Geertz, culture is a way that all members of a community group understand themselves and give meaning to their lives. From the perspectives of Levi-Strauss and Geertz, we can see that culture not only exists but also results from collective efforts to establish an identity that distinguishes the group from others.²

In this era of global multiculturalism, local communities face a complex dilemma.³ On the one hand, they are known for being a strong community in maintaining traditions and cultural values. However, they are also encouraged to pursue value-free advances in the field of science and technology. Ironically, in David C. Korten's view, the 21st century is a nightmare for humanity in the 21st century because it will face three major crises: poverty, environmental destruction, and social violence. Meanwhile, according to Azra, Multiculturalism is a cultural foundation that aims to achieve a higher civilization, which is directly related to the realization of civilized democracy.

Two views have developed in response to multiculturalism: positive and negative. For those with a positive outlook, multiculturalism is a reality, an inevitability. Meanwhile, those who have negative views tend to see multiculturalism as an ideology. However, in fact, multiculturalism in the global era has the potential to shape the development of human culture and civilization worldwide. In a more limited socio-cultural sphere, one of the impacts of globalization is the emergence of new patterns in culture, in various forms and structures. Cultures with these new characteristics are often referred to as post-

MULTICULTURAL MALAYSIAN SOCIETY IN THE STORY OF 'UPIN AND IPIN,'" *PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL SEMINAR OF CENDEKIAWAN*, 31 October 2019, 396, <https://doi.org/10.25105/semnas.v0i0.5870>.

² Rina Rehayati, "Malay Identity and Multiculturalism: Contextualization of Malay Identity in the Global Era," *TOLERANCE: Scientific Media of Religious Communication* 5, no. 1 (June 2, 2013): 12, <https://doi.org/10.24014/trs.v5i1.71>.

³ Carlos Alberto Torres and Massimiliano Tarozzi, "Multiculturalism in the World System: Towards a Social Justice Model of Intercultural/Multicultural Education," *Globalization, Society and Education* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2019.1690729>.

industrial, postmodern, or postmodern cultures.⁴

In addition, the principles of freedom also protect multiculturalism, as John Locke saw that human beings have common sense, liberty, and tolerance for difference. When viewed through the lens of multiculturalism, each country certainly differs in how it applies it. The emergence of the concept of multiculturalism did not occur only in Indonesia but also in America. In America, the idea of multiculturalism emerged in response to ethnic discrimination, which in turn led to the formation of the Cultural Equality Movement (MCE) in the country. According to the writer, MCE began with the Human Rights movement in the late 1960s, in which various ethnic groups faced historical oppression and injustice, and continued through individual, institutional, and structural discrimination.⁵

The face of multiculturalism in Europe, as outlined by the historical facts already mentioned, is not alien to European society.⁶ In the past, they have interacted with people from different cultures and religions. More than just interacting, they even accept diversity as an integral part of their culture. In other words, the attitudes of European societies in the past tended to be open to people and cultural elements from outside, without fear or suspicion.⁷

However, recently, some people in Europe have shown rejection and even an anti-attitude towards immigrant groups and the culture they bring with them. They fear that this group of immigrants could threaten the survival of European culture. This attitude shocked many, including the European and international communities. Over time, the group became increasingly consistent in its views, eventually accommodating extreme conservative ideology in some European

⁴ Nurjannah Nurjannah, Taklimudin Taklimudin, and Busra Febriyarni, "Study Multiculturalism Based on The Koran," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (May 29, 2023): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v8i1.5534>.

⁵ Nashrul Wahyu Suryawan and Endang Danial, "The Implementation of the Spirit of Unity in Multicultural Communities Through the Agenda of the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) of Malang Regency," *HUMANIKA* 23, no. 1 (June 1, 2016): 46–60, <https://doi.org/10.14710/humanika.23.1.46-60>.

⁶ Jessica Walton, Anita Harris, and Koichi Iwabuchi, "Introduction: Everyday Multiculturalism in/across Asia," *Ethnic and Race Studies* 43, no. 5 (April 8, 2020): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1707842>.

⁷ S. Safdar, S. Chahar Mahali, and C. Scott, "A Critical Review of Multiculturalism and Interculturalism as a Framework for Integration: The Case of Canada," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 93 (March 2023): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2023.101756>.

Parliaments. However, at first glance, support for this group with its extreme conservative ideology is still limited among Europeans.⁸

In contrast to Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesia and Malaysia are two countries that are part of the same family. However, along with the different collective experiences of history in the colonial era, the two countries exhibited different characteristics. Malaysia has a geographical area in the form of a peninsula, while Indonesia is an archipelagic country. Therefore, both Indonesia and Malaysia have a multicultural mosaic in the form of ethnicity, culture, language, and religion. Moreover, the majority of the population in Indonesia and Malaysia is Muslim and is still in the process of becoming a democratic country.⁹ These two countries certainly have different practices and concepts of multiculturalism. The two countries have different ideologies and political cultures. Therefore, departing from the differences in multiculturalism in each country, the author wants to reveal a comparison of multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia, to find out the extent of the application of multiculturalism in both countries, and the extent of the comparison in terms of practice and concept.¹⁰

Based on the author's research, Multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia has been extensively studied, but no specific research has compared Multiculturalism practices between the two countries. *First*, research on instilling the values of multiculturalism through formal education (e.g., schools and madrasas) and informal education through community institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. This research reveals that Indonesia and Malaysia both face the challenge of multiculturalism. As nation-states built on the principle of diversity, both are examples of multicultural countries. This research was conducted using a normative research approach, with a literature review of various sources, including books, journals, papers, articles, and news media.

This study proposes efforts to instill the values of multiculturalism through formal education in schools and madrasas, as

⁸ Siswanto, "The Face of European Multiculturalism: Threats to the Socio-Political Life of Muslim Immigrants in the UK," *Journal of Regional Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017).

⁹ Fathur Rokhman et al., "Deradicalization Programs Through Multicultural Education in Higher Education in Indonesia and Malaysia," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 11, no. 9 (September 14, 2021): Pages 458-468, <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i9/11029>.

¹⁰ Kikue Hamayotsu, "Islam and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia: Malaysia and Indonesia in Comparative Perspective," *Pacific Affairs* 75, no. 3 (2002): 353-75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4127290>.

well as informal education through community institutions.¹¹ *Second*, this study focuses on the analysis of popular Malaysia animations, namely Upin and Ipin. The analysis highlights the diversity of Malaysian society, consisting of various ethnicities that coexist harmoniously. The study found that the animation depicted Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Indonesians. With figures on different ethnicities, Malaysia depicts the diversity of its society, showing the face of its multiculturalism.¹² *Third*, research on ethnic groups in Malaysia presents an impression of Malaysia as a country rich in political insight, one that builds the state's sovereign strength. The results show that history education plays an essential role in strengthening Malaysia's national identity. By drawing on Malaya's history, this education helps eliminate ethnic, racial, and other differences. It also increases political awareness among the younger generation and strengthens the spirit of nationalism, which is an integral part of the formation of good citizens. History education also guides the younger generation to respect the symbols, the Constitution, and the state of Malaysia.¹³ From the studies mentioned above, the author has not found any research that compares the practice of multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia from the perspectives of the history of multiculturalism in both countries and the practice of multiculturalism.

The purpose of this study is to uncover and analyze the practice of multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia. This study will present the results of an exploration of the existing literature on how and to what extent the practical comparison of multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia is conducted. The research results are hoped to serve as a public reading of the comparison of multiculturalism practices in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Literature Review

Takari reviews a national cultural approach encompassing values, education, and the development of multiculturalism in Indonesia and

¹¹ Firdaus, Yasin, and Anggreta, "Instilling Multiculturalism Values Through Education to Overcome Multicultural Problems in Indonesia & Malaysia. In ASEAN Comparative Education Research Conference (ACER-N 2015) (pp. 1755–1767).," 2016, 1755–67.

¹² Syam, Aris, and Amelia, "REPRESENTATION OF A MULTICULTURAL MALAYSIAN SOCIETY IN THE STORY OF 'UPIN AND IPIN.'"

¹³ Ahmad Ali Bin Seman, "Fostering Patriotism through Multicultural Education in History Education in Malaysia: A Perspective Review," *Lanterna: Journal of Historical, Cultural and Social Sciences* 1, no. 02 (2009): 28–49.

Malaysia. In the context of education, the authors compare how each country develops a curriculum that reflects ethnic and cultural diversity and the challenges of its implementation.¹⁴ Robert Hefner also highlights essential works on the politics of multiculturalism in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. This book is a critical foundation for understanding pluralism and citizenship in Southeast Asia.¹⁵ Patras also explores the approaches and outcomes of multiculturalism in Singapore and Malaysia, with case studies that also mention the Indonesian and Philippine contexts.¹⁶ Sunesti discussed the phenomenon of wearing the hijab as a social and political expression of multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia, with a focus on social imagination and symbolic resistance, in the midst of pluralistic societal dynamics. This study aims to understand how the hijab functions as a symbol of identity and a cultural statement in both countries. Go through the book *Race and Multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, and analyze how race and colonial history shape the structure of multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore, which differs from Indonesia's. This research aims to understand how the historical context and racial policies in Malaysia and Singapore contribute to different ethnic stability compared to Indonesia.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach and a comparative design. This approach was chosen because it can explain socio-political phenomena in depth, especially in understanding the policies and practices of multiculturalism in two countries with pluralistic societies, namely Indonesia and Malaysia. Comparative research allows researchers to explore the similarities and differences in the approaches of the two countries in managing cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity as part of the nation-building process.¹⁷ The data collection technique involved a literature review of the theory of multiculturalism, especially

¹⁴ Muhammad Takari et al., "Indonesian and Malayasi National Culture: Applied Ideas and Comparisons," October 1, 2013.

¹⁵ Rita Smith Kipp, "The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Edited by Robert W. Hefner. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001. 410 pp. 27.95 (paper).," *Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 2 (May 2002): 776-78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2700368>.

¹⁶ Yuyun Elizabeth Patras et al., "Understanding Multiculturalism Education from Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand," *Manage: Journal of Education Management* 9, no. 2 (December 19, 2022): 125-35, <https://doi.org/10.24246/j.jk.2022.v9.i2.p125-135>.

¹⁷ Sugiono's Research Methods, *Qualitative, Quantitative, and R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2006).

Will Kymlicka's thoughts on liberal multiculturalism, as well as the theory of nation-building, which serves as the basis for the analysis of state policies in shaping national identity. In addition, this study uses document analysis to systematically examine the content of government policies and programs related to diversity management across the educational, political, and socio-cultural levels.

In analyzing the data, this study uses content *analysis* and comparative analysis. Content analysis was used to identify and categorize indicators of multiculturalism, including local cultural recognition, affirmative policies, protection of minority groups, and multicultural education curricula. Furthermore, a comparative analysis was carried out by comparing these indicators between Indonesia and Malaysia to see the patterns, similarities, and differences. The analysis results were then interpreted to assess the effectiveness of each approach in fostering social cohesion and national integration.¹⁸

With this method, the research is expected to make a conceptual and practical contribution in understanding how multiculturalism policies are developed and implemented in two countries with different historical, cultural, and political backgrounds. In addition, the results of this research can also be a reflection for policymakers in formulating strategies for managing diversity that are more inclusive and equitable in a multicultural society.

Results and Discussions

History of Multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia

1. Indonesian Multiculturalism

Etymologically, multiculturalism comes from the words "multicultural" and "ism". "Multicultural" means multiple cultures or cultural diversity.¹⁹ Ayumardi Azra stated that multiculturalism can be interpreted as a recognition of cultural diversity and as a response to demographic and cultural changes in a particular community and globally. "Ism" refers to an ideology, concept, or teaching. So, multiculturalism can be interpreted as an ideology or concept that

¹⁸ Amir Hamzah, *Qualitative Research Methods: Reconstruction of Basic Thinking of Natural Research* (Malang: Literasi Nusantara, 2020).

¹⁹ Riwanto Tirtosudarmo, "Managing a Multicultural Society in Indonesia," *ISLAM NUSANTARA: Journal of Islamic History and Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (July 31, 2022): 23, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i2.311>.

recognizes and respects cultural diversity. This concept of multiculturalism includes respect for cultural differences arising from diverse groups that support cultural diversity.²⁰ According to Azyumardi Azra, multiculturalism is an eclectic and pluralistic country or society. This means accepting the reality of diversity and plurality, which are inherent in society's life.

Taylor said that multiculturalism is a concept for managing diversity, grounded in the principle of diversity recognition (recognition politics). It involves regulating relationships between majority and minority groups, as well as the existence of immigrant groups, indigenous peoples, and others. In other words, Azyumardi Azra, Multiculturalism can also be understood as a worldview that is then implemented in political consciousness.²¹ From the opinions of these experts, it can be concluded that multiculturalism is a concept or worldview that emphasizes cultural diversity in a nation or community group. This diversity is a pride that must be preserved by upholding the principle that diversity is togetherness.

Indonesia is one of the world's largest multicultural countries, reflected in its vast socio-cultural and geographical diversity. With about 13,000 large and small islands and a population of about 230 million, the country is home to 300 tribes that speak nearly 200 languages. In addition, Indonesia has a diverse range of religions and beliefs, including Islam, Catholicism, Protestant Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and other beliefs.²²

In its history, Indonesia has experienced a transition from a pluralistic to a multicultural society, one that cannot be separated from the demand to become a unitary country despite its diversity. The formation of Indonesia was not based on the same skin color, class, race, or religion, but on a strong sense of unity rooted in the spirit of true peace and independence. Indonesia, as a country rich in diversity, encompasses a wide range of ethnicities, cultures, and languages. This diversity and complexity of culture require Indonesia to have an

²⁰ Babul Bahrudin and Fika Anjana, "INDONESIAN HISTORY: THE TRANSITION OF THE CONCEPT OF A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY INTO A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY," *Madani : Journal of Social Sciences and Social Sciences Education* 1, no. 1 (2023): 55–67, <https://doi.org/10.55210/f41m4x48>.

²¹ Nofal Liata and Khairil Fazal, "MULTICULTURAL SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES," *Religion of Abraham: Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 2 (September 30, 2021): 188–201, <https://doi.org/10.22373/arj.v1i2.11213>.

²² Imam Bukhari, "Grounding Multiculturalism," *HUMANISTICS: Islamic Journal* 5, no. 1 (March 23, 2020): 13–40, <https://doi.org/10.36835/humanistika.v5i1.40>.

ideology that can unite these differences. Although differences can be a source of friction, when they are overcome through national ideology, they can give color and become a unique national identity in its journey as a unitary state.²³

Political and cultural issues in Indonesia have come to prominence and have grown rapidly since the reforms began in 1998. After the issue of democracy, which was realized through the delegation of part of central power to the regions known as regional autonomy, it began to be implemented in 1999. The issue of multiculturalism began to emerge in 2002 as a powerful alternative to become the new glue of national unity ²⁴. The emergence of the problem of multiculturalism is triggered by the realization that national unity and national integration, previously maintained through uniform cultural politics, are no longer relevant to the conditions and spirit of regional autonomy, as well as by the increasing local sentiment that develops alongside political reforms.

The national political decision to decentralize power turns out to have a counterproductive impact when viewed from the perspective of national unity and national integration, which are very diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, economic ability, and even race, spread across a wide geographical area. ²⁵ The contrast in these attributes makes the situation even more complicated, especially if majority-minority and non-dominant issues are included in this analysis ²⁶.

In the past, the binding force of this diversity was the politics of centralization, driven by the power of authoritarian government. However, in the context of the decentralization of power or regional autonomy, such authoritarian binding power is deconstructed and must be replaced by a new relevant binder. Therefore, multiculturalism is

²³ Bahrudin and Anjana, "INDONESIAN HISTORY."

²⁴ Abdullah Aziz et al., "The Relevance of the Value of Religious Moderation in the World of Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Education," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (June 11, 2024): 189–212, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v9i1.9024>.

²⁵ Johan Lindquist, "The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Edited by ROBERT W. HEFNER. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001. p. ix, 319. Notes, Bibliography, Index," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (June 2003): 363–65, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463403220300>.

²⁶ Nur Azizah and Karliana Indrawari, "The Implementation of Religious Values and Their Relevance to Religious Moderation (Study at SMP IT Khoiru Ummah)," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (July 30, 2022): 177–94, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v7i1.4191>.

considered an appropriate alternative to address this new complexity and maintain national unity and integration in the present and the future.²⁷

The dynamics of Indonesian society after the 1998 reform movement have brought a new understanding of the importance of universal values that can unite differences in various aspects of social, political, economic, cultural, and religious life. The reform movement also fosters diverse cultural identities and values to unite the nation. In Islam, universal values are reflected in the concept of Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin as a noble mission carried out by the Prophet Muhammad SAW.²⁸

For Indonesia, multiculturalism is a social integration strategy in which cultural diversity is recognized and respected, so that it can be used effectively to address the problems of separatism and social disintegration. Multiculturalism fosters the spirit of unity (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika) and has excellent potential to build strong unity. However, the recognition of the nation's cultural plurality further guarantees the nation's unity²⁹.

Indonesia also has the Bineka Tunggal Ika pillar, which is contained in the state emblem and has a different meaning but remains one. The motto Bhineka Tunggal Ika has considerable meaning for the Indonesian nation because it binds together the differences in society. This motto emphasizes that differences are not obstacles or causes of division, but rather a factor in the unification of all existing differences. Interactions with others can have a positive or negative impact. A positive impact will occur if the interaction is based on mutual respect and maintaining a balance between personal and social interests, while still prioritizing social interests.

To achieve harmony between personal or group interests and the interests of the nation and state, the motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika has a significant meaning for the Indonesian nation. Bhinneka Tunggal Ika means that although the Indonesian nation and state consist of various

²⁷ Achmad Fedyani Syaifudin, "Grounding Multiculturalism in Indonesia," *ETNOVISI Socio-Cultural Anthropology*. 21, no. 1 (2017).

²⁸ Muhammad Turhan Yani et al., "Islam and Multiculturalism: Urgency, Transformation, and Implementation in Formal Education," *Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 8, no. 1 (July 31, 2020): 59–74, <https://doi.org/10.15642/jpai.2020.8.1.59-74>.

²⁹ Azhar Ibrahim, "Denial, Underestimation and Degradation of Pluralism: The Challenges of Managing Diversity in Malaysia and Multi-Religious Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 19, no. 3 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v19i3.355>.

ethnic groups with diverse cultures and customs, and are spread across multiple islands in Indonesia, they remain a complete unit.

The application of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika values in daily life can create a society that fairly and equitably ensures the fulfillment and improvement of people's welfare. For this reason, the application of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika values must encourage the development of social life that interacts harmoniously between various regions that have differences in culture, ethnicity, language, religion, and social strata, to achieve national integration that improves the welfare of all citizens as well as the competitiveness of the nation. Some examples of the application of the spirit of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika in the environment around us include: (1) Respecting the religion and beliefs of others; (2) Raising funds to help the sick poor; (3) Holding competitions between RTs; (4) Conducting meetings between residents; (5) Stay away from spreading fake news; (6) Establish friendships with people of different religions.³⁰

2. Multikulturalisme Malaysia

Malaysia's independence in 1957 brought the reality of the multiethnic people living together in the country. The emergence of a multiethnic society in Malaysia was influenced by British colonial policies that sought to regulate politics and the economy. The main motive of British colonialism in Malaysia was to control the economy by regulating education policies, implemented through a vernacular school system that used the local language as the medium of instruction.³¹

This reinforces the separation between the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia. Differences in learning media, curriculum, and school systems cause the younger generation of these three ethnic groups to continue to be separated, which in turn deepens the divisions between groups. The formation of communal political parties also reinforces a '*sense of ethnicity*' that emphasizes group interests rather than shared interests. The implementation of education policies by the British colonial government showed an intention to separate the various ethnic

³⁰ Hani Alifa Muhammad Mansyur et al., "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika as a Unifier of the Indonesian Nation from the Past to the Present," *Journal of Transformative Education* 2, no. 2 (June 3, 2023): 183–94, <https://doi.org/10.9000/jpt.v2i2.331>.

³¹ Aris Munandar and Endang Susanti, "Identity Politics in Multicultural Societies: (Case Study of Social Politics in Indonesia)," *Journal of Education, Social and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–14.

groups in Malaysia ³².

Malaysia's current population consists of three main ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese, and Indians, all of whom have a rich cultural heritage from Asian civilizations. Their ethnic identity is reflected in traditional Malay customs, the use of the Malay language, and the observance of Islam among the Malays. ³³ Religion is significant in the context of Malaysia's ethnic identity, with Islam being the main binding factor. The Malay community consistently emphasizes the importance of religious and ethnic identity in all aspects of their lives, including in social, economic, and political interactions. As a result, Malaysia experienced ethnic tensions and conflicts that have persisted since the end of British colonial rule and continue to this day ³⁴.

Malaysia is a rich country with diverse cultures, as its population comprises people of various ethnicities and religions. Malaysian society is known as a multicultural society that lives in harmony in diversity, where each ethnic group is well-received and lives together in Malaysia. Since its independence and establishment as a sovereign state, Malaysia has aimed to build a prosperous multicultural society, with three dominant ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Each of these ethnic groups fought for social rights to preserve their traditions and cultures.³⁵

Malaysia has the same socio-cultural environment as Indonesia. But on the other hand, they have different political systems, which create differences. They differ historically as well as in their cultural diversity. According to Maaruf & Abdul Rahman, Malaysia has always been the focus of various cultural groups, and this is strongly reflected in the overall population census, which classifies the country by race: Malay, Chinese, Indian, Orang Asli, Kadazan, Iban, etc. In general, tribes in

³² Stephen Robert Nagy, "The Politics of Multiculturalism in East Asia: Reinterpreting Multiculturalism," *Ethnicity* 14, no. 1 (February 1, 2014): 160–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796813498078>.

³³ Noraini M. Noor and Chan-Hoong Leong, "Multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore: Competing Models," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Multiculturalism, Transcending Ethnocultural Diversity and Contestation, 37, no. 6 (November 1, 2013): 714–26, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.09.009>.

³⁴ Hendra Harmi, "Analysis of Multicultural Understanding in Sindang Jaya, Sindang Jati, and Suro Bali Villages," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 263–76, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v6i2.3536>.

³⁵ Rozita Ibrahim, "Multiculturalism and Education in Malaysia," *Culture and Religion* 8, no. 2 (July 1, 2007): 155–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610701424024>.

Malaysia are divided into three groups.³⁶

Fundamental differences in multicultural societies, especially related to cultural identities such as ethnicity, have significant social and political impacts. This impact has been evident since the British colonial period, which then influenced the country's politics and people's lives. Malaysia has experienced protracted ethnic conflict since the beginning of its independence, and the Malaysian government has been committed to addressing inter-ethnic disputes. To date, multiculturalism remains a key focus of the Malaysian government.³⁷ However, the government's strategy in dealing with multiculturalism through the formation of a national collective identity faces several obstacles. One of them is the difference in Malaysian people's views of national culture, where one ethnic group tends to consider its cultural values more important than the other.

According to Embong, diversity in Malaysia is caused by migration, especially transnational migration during the colonial era and in recent decades. This has been one of the key factors in the formation of modern pluralism in Malaysia. Pluralism in Malaysia, in all its aspects such as ethnicity, language, religion, and culture, was mainly formed during the colonial period. However, it also has roots in the pre-colonial period.

According to Hefner, the structure of Malaysian society has been influenced by the colonial government to compete in a triangle between the nobility, Islamic groups, and popular nationalists. However, at the end of the colonial period, the three were unsure about which cultural currents should be dominant. The royal family and nobility held the highest leadership positions in Malay political organizations. After World War II, they dominated key positions within UMNO. This coalition-leading party has ruled Malaysia since independence. The growing citizenship system in Malaysia was asymmetrical, granting fundamental citizenship rights to the Chinese and Indians, but in exchange for legal, political, and economic privileges to the Malays. Islam is made the national religion, while Malay is designated as the national language.³⁸

From the history of ethnic tensions in Malaysia, it is evident that

³⁶ Rokhman et al., "Deradicalization Programs Through Multicultural Education in Higher Education in Indonesia and Malaysia."

³⁷ Efit Fitria Agustianty, "MULTICULTURALISM IN INDONESIA," 5 February 2021, <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/tejgv>.

³⁸ Kipp, "The Politics of Multiculturalism."

economic and political interests are the dominant factors, in addition to the ideological factors that are the triggers. The ongoing tension then creates a paradigm that is not aligned between the groups in how they understand differences.

Perbandingan Praktik Multikulturalisme di Indonesia dan Malaysia

1. Figures of Multiculturalism Practice in Indonesia

Indonesian society is a multicultural society. In this context, treating conflict as something negative and avoiding it is irrelevant. Conflict cannot be avoided or hidden; it must be acknowledged, managed, and transformed into a force for positive change.

Indonesia has long been recognized as a country that adheres to the principle of multiculturalism because of its rich diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and religions. This principle is reflected in Pancasila, which recognizes diversity as a wealth that must be maintained. Multiculturalism in Indonesia fosters coexistence in harmony, respect for cultural and religious values, and equality among all citizens regardless of background.

The Republic of Indonesia is a clear example of a multicultural country that represents the diversity of ethnicities, religions, languages, and cultures in Indonesia. Indonesia's success in maintaining its identity is supported by the implementation of Pancasila, which is known internationally through the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. This motto comes from the ancient poem *Sutasoma* by Mpu Tantular, which means "different but one". However, relations between religious communities often experience obstacles.³⁹

However, there are still challenges in realizing ideal multiculturalism. Horizontal conflicts, religious intolerance, and discrimination are still serious problems. Therefore, the role of society, social institutions, and the government is significant in strengthening the practice of multiculturalism in Indonesia. The practice of multiculturalism in Indonesia is not just a slogan, but a real commitment to building an inclusive, just, and civilized society. By respecting differences and promoting intercultural dialogue, Indonesia can set an example for other countries in managing diversity and achieving

³⁹ Choirul Anwar and Roy Kulyawan, "The Role of Multicultural Education in Building a Nationalist and Religious Nation," *PIJAR: Journal of Education and Teaching* 1, no. 1 (December 29, 2022): 87–93, <https://doi.org/10.58540/pijar.v1i1.110>.

sustainable peace.⁴⁰

Ada beberapa faktor yang menjadi dasar praktik multikulturalisme di Indonesia, yaitu:

a. Pancasila

Pancasila is the foundation of the state that includes the values of tolerance and respect for diversity in Indonesia. These values are manifested in an effort to maintain the unity of the nation. Multiculturalism in Indonesia views diversity as an implementation of Pancasila values. Diversity is not a source of debate or division, but an integral part of making up unity.

Pancasila for the Indonesian people functions as a filter for things that are not in accordance with the life of the Indonesian people. Pancasila is also considered able to accommodate various forms of diversity in Indonesia, including ethnicity, nation, religion, language, and others. This reflects the characteristics of Indonesia as a pluralistic nation with its peculiarities. Pancasila contains values that have long been part of the Indonesian people's lives and are integral to the nation's character. The application of Pancasila values in social, national, and state life must come from the Indonesian people themselves, showing that Pancasila is an essential guideline in everyday life as a nation.

Since its inception, the Indonesian nation has been aware of and confronted with the fact that it lives in a multicultural society. This encouraged the country's founders to set aside their differences and formulate Pancasila as the foundation of state development. The founders of the state recognized the cultural values that characterized Indonesian society at that time as the foundation of the state. They see Pancasila as the core of the nation's identity, as a doctrine that is most in line with the condition of Indonesia, which consists of various tribes and religions. With Pancasila in existence, it is hoped that the interests and desires of all Indonesian people can be considered. Pancasila is also expected to be an inherent characteristic of every Indonesian individual. The values contained in Pancasila are regarded as the answer to the various challenges faced by the Indonesian people. In addition, these values can also adapt to the times.

b. Bhineka Tunggal Ika

⁴⁰ Agus Riyan Oktori, "Multicultural-Based Islamic Education as a Foundation for Reducing Religious Radicalism," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 30, 2017): 49–66, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v2i1.167>.

Diversity in Indonesia is one of its riches. The motto of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika unites various kinds of diversity as the wealth of the Indonesian nation. In Indonesia, many ethnic groups can coexist while maintaining their own cultures and traditions.

The Indonesian people believe that unity is fundamental; therefore, they chose Bhinneka Tunggal Ika as the state motto. This concept shows that Indonesia accepts all forms of differences, including ethnicity, religion, race, and thought. Nevertheless, the Indonesian nation remains united despite these differences. Multiculturalism in Indonesia is based on the principle of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. Previously, on October 28, 1928, the youth had carried the motto "one nation, one homeland, and one language" as an effort to unite in the everyday struggle. Primordial identities are combined into one identity called Indonesia.

Multiculturalism in Indonesia is unique because it is based on nationalism. This is reflected in the recognition of cultural diversity among various ethnic groups.⁴¹ This cultural diversity is the foundation of Indonesia's rich diversity. Ethnic culture does not cause separation, but is an integral part of the unity of Indonesia. Therefore, cultural diversity must be maintained, preserved, and developed with the principle of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. This development process allows regional culture to contribute to national culture through communication and dialogue in the language of unity, namely Indonesian.

The concept of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is not only an ideological principle, but a shared experience in togetherness and diversity. Nationality is not only about equality of blood and residence, but also about how every citizen feels bound by the same desire to advance in the midst of diversity.

c. Religious Moderation

The Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia defines religious moderation as an approach that puts religion as the middle way. This is marked by refraining from excessive or extreme actions in spiritual practices, in accordance with the views of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia in 2019.

Moderation in the context of Islamic thought is to prioritize

⁴¹ Dwi Mariyono, "Indonesian Mosaic: Essential Needs for Multicultural Education," *Quality Education for All* 1, no. 1 (December 16, 2024): 301-25, <https://doi.org/10.1108/QEA-05-2024-0042>.

tolerance for differences, be it differences in religious schools or differences between religions. This attitude affirms that differences are not an obstacle to cooperation within humanity. Believing in the truth of Islam does not mean demeaning other religions. This moderate attitude is considered necessary in building brotherhood between religions, as explained by Akhmadi 2019. Religion is often part of the scope of multiculturalism because religion is integrated with a particular culture. For example, in India, Hinduism is an essential part of culture, in the Middle East, Islam is also an integral part of culture, and in Europe, Christianity has a strong role in shaping local culture.

Religious moderation is an essential key in creating tolerance and harmony, both at the local, national, and global levels. Choosing a moderate approach by rejecting extremism and liberalism in religion is considered the key to maintaining balance, ultimately contributing to the sustainability of civilization and the creation of peace. Through this approach, religious people are expected to respect others, accept differences, and live together in peace and harmony. In a multicultural society like Indonesia, religious moderation is not only an option but a must.⁴²

One of the basic principles in religious moderation is to maintain a balance between various things, such as between reason and revelation, physical and spiritual, rights and obligations, individual interests and communal benefits, needs and awareness, religious texts and ijthad of religious figures, ideal ideas and realities, and a balance between the past and the future.

Religious moderation serves as an effort to achieve balance in religion. In the context of Indonesia's vibrant diversity, this diversity must be appropriately managed to yield positive impacts, such as peace. However, if this diversity is not handled correctly, it can become a source of conflict.

In implementing religious moderation, the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, under Lukman Hakim Saefuddin, used several principles as indicators of moderation, including: first, national commitment; second, tolerance; third, rejection of violence; and fourth, accommodation to local culture. This is an essential indicator of religious

⁴² Anatansyah Ayomi Anandari and Dwi Afriyanto, "The Concept of Brotherhood and Tolerance in Building Religious Moderation in Multicultural Societies in Indonesia from the Perspective of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari," *Religi: Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 64–86, <https://doi.org/10.14421/rejusta.2022.1802-05>.

moderation. Commitment to the state refers to the extent to which a person's spiritual practice is in line with the values of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, and the regulations under it, and does not contradict those values.⁴³

d. Multicultural Education

Orientation in multicultural education can be divided into three main aspects: attitude, knowledge, and learning. First, attitude aspects include developing socio-cultural awareness and sensitivity, tolerance for cultural diversity, respect for cultural identity, responsiveness to culture, conflict-resolution skills, and the like. Second, the knowledge aspect involves understanding the language and culture of others, as well as the ability to analyze and translate behavior and knowledge in a cultural context. Third, the learning aspect refers to efforts to reduce distortions, stereotypes, and misconceptions about ethnic groups in learning materials such as textbooks or Kahiriyah learning media (2020).

Azyumardi Azra stated that to understand how multicultural Islamic education should be implemented, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of the values in entails. Some of these values include:

The first value is *tasamuh* (tolerance). This value is considered a fundamental element in the realization of multicultural educational activities. The presence of tolerance in practice emphasizes the importance of forming an attitude of mutual respect toward others, regardless in ethnic, religious, or racial differences, which applies to both individuals and groups.

The second value is *wasathiyah* (medium). In the context of multicultural Islamic education in Indonesia, this moderate value has become a strong part of the character and personality of Indonesian people, who tend to be mild. This is especially true for Muslims in Indonesia, given its teachings that emphasize a middle-of-the-road attitude, which does not lean towards the extreme right or left.

The third value is humanity. In practice, multicultural Islamic education can serve as a basis for the formation of individual ethics and morals in social interaction. This is because the ultimate goal of education is to foster a paradigm and attitude that respects human values. The fourth value is peace. The spirit or value that emphasizes the importance of realizing peace in human life is a very authentic Islamic

⁴³ Bayu Risqi Ardianta Putra, "Religious moderation in the form of tolerance," October 7, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/hmf9t>.

teaching (Islamy, 2022).

Based on the description above, it can be understood that the various values contained in the concept of multicultural Islamic education reflect universal teachings in Islam, which can serve as a basis for the formation of social paradigms and attitudes in multicultural life.

2. The Practice of Multiculturalism in Malaysia

The practice of multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia has differences and similarities that reflect the historical, cultural, and political context of each country. In Malaysia, the evolving citizenship system recognized the fundamental rights of citizens for Chinese and Indians, yet granted privileges to the Malays in law, politics, and economics. Islam was made the state religion, while Malay was adopted as the national language. Malaysia also has a rich ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. The concept of "Rukun Negara" underlines the basic principles of Malaysian unity by valuing diversity as a national asset.⁴⁴

In Malaysia, a "National Cultural Base" policy was adopted that emphasized cultural integration based on Islamic, Indonesian, Chinese, and Indian principles.⁴⁵ However, this policy has also been criticized because some groups consider it less sensitive to diversity. The idea of national culture in Malaysia has been an essential topic of discussion since its independence on August 31, 1957, though it had been debated earlier. In the end, this idea was ratified by the Government of Malaysia through the National Cultural Congress on August 16 to 20, 1971, which also affirmed the intention of the 1957-1958 Congress to recognize and respect the diversity of races, cultures, languages, and religions.

The Malaysian National Cultural Congress in 1971 stipulated that the country, as a country with a (multiethnic) population, must have a clear national culture as a basis for achieving the following objectives: (1) strengthening the unity between races and nations through national culture; (2) building and maintaining the nation's identity that grows from national culture, and (3) enriching and improving the quality of human and spiritual life that is balanced with socio-economic development. With this, every Malaysian citizen is expected to have a

⁴⁴ Nurhidayat Nurhidayat, Jamali Syahrodi, and Siti Fatimah, "Multiculturalism in Indonesia: The Experience of the Independence Period," *Al-Mau'izhoh* 5, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 161, <https://doi.org/10.31949/am.v5i1.5071>.

⁴⁵ Maximus Regus, "Multiculturalism under Threats and Strategies in Building Inclusive Spaces in the European and Southeast Asian Region," *Global Focus* 3, no. 2 (October 31, 2023): 96–109, <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.jgf.2023.003.02.2>.

national identity rooted in the national culture.

Malaysia has three official languages (Malay, English, and Chinese) that reflect ethnic diversity. The education system in Malaysia includes a curriculum that reflects ethnic and religious diversity. Malaysia is a country composed of people of various races and religions. Malays are the largest ethnic group, accounting for about 60% of the total population. Ethnic Chinese are the second-largest ethnic group, accounting for about 30% of the population. Ethnic Indians account for about 6.4% of the total population, with most belonging to the Tamil community. In addition, there are also residents from Europe and the Middle East.

The influence of the Chinese community in Malaysia has changed patterns and social systems, as well as Malay society. Meanwhile, ethnic Indians, especially those from South India such as Negapatam and Madras, also made a significant impact. The immigration of Indian residents to Malaysia was driven by difficult economic conditions in their home countries, prompting them to seek a better life abroad, including in Malaya at the time. In addition to migration from China and India, Malaya, Sabah, and Sarawak are also destinations for people from countries such as Indonesia and Ceylon. However, the number of immigrants from these countries is much lower than that of immigrants from China and India. The majority of Indonesian immigrants come from the islands of Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Timor. These migration patterns indicate complex social interactions among different ethnicities in Malaysia, contributing to the country's cultural and economic diversity. This ethnic diversity not only enriches Malaysian culture but also influences the social and economic dynamics that exist in society. This diversity creates both challenges and opportunities in building social harmony in Malaysia, requiring an inclusive approach to achieve shared prosperity.⁴⁶

Malaysia also protects the rights of religious minorities, but some policies support Islam as the country's official religion. In Malaysia, the protection of constitutional rights in religion is regulated in the 1957 Malaysian Constitution. The country recognizes Islam as the official religion. Malaysia officially lists Islam as the state religion. As a result of this decision, there is a relationship between the Federation of Malaysia

⁴⁶ Adetya Nuzuliani Rahma, Nunung Nurwati, and Budi Muhammad Taftazani, "THE EXISTENCE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN INDONESIA, MALAYSIA AND THE UNITED STATES," *Share: Journal of Social Work* 4, no. 2 (December 28, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.24198/share.v4i2.13080>.

and Islam, so Malaysia cannot be called a secular country. In addition, Islamic teachings and laws are recognized and must be applied in Malaysia.

Although the principle of protecting constitutional rights in religion occupies an essential, universal, and affirmative position in the Constitution, in practice, many aspects still need to be aligned with the rule of law in daily life. Examples of violations of religious freedom in the workplace include the prohibition of Muslim domestic workers from fasting, performing prayers, and avoiding pigs and dogs, which are part of their religious beliefs. This is considered harassment and a violation of religious freedom protected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although Islam is officially recognized as the state religion in the Malaysian Constitution, the practice of prohibition and pressure on the implementation of religious obligations in the workplace remains a serious obstacle.

Conclusion

The practice of multiculturalism in Indonesia and Malaysia has differences and similarities that reflect the historical, cultural, and political context of each country. In Indonesia, multiculturalism is reflected in the diversity of ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultures that have existed since the era of archipelago kingdoms. The concept of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" has become a national motto that reflects the spirit of unity in diversity. The Indonesian government formally recognizes cultural and religious diversity in its Constitution. It encourages diversity practices through inclusive policies, such as commemorating religious holidays and supporting the sustainability of local culture. Indonesian is the official language that unites various tribes. The education system in Indonesia also reflects multiculturalism by including material on cultural and religious diversity.

In Malaysia, multiculturalism is also reflected in its ethnic, religious, and cultural richness. The concept of Rukun Negara underlines the basic principles of Malaysian unity by respecting diversity as the nation's wealth. Malaysia adopts a National Cultural Policy that emphasizes cultural integration based on Islamic, Indonesian, Chinese, and Indian principles.

However, the policy has also been criticized for being less sensitive to diversity. Malaysia has three official languages (Malay, English, and Chinese) that reflect ethnic diversity. The education system in Malaysia includes a curriculum that reflects ethnic and religious

diversity. Malaysia also protects the rights of religious minorities, but some policies support Islam as the country's official religion.

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