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## Bhinneka Tunggal Ika: Indonesia Circumscribed Norm Multiculturalism

Priskila Shendy Hartanti

*Department of International Relations, FISIP University of Indonesia, priskila.shendy@gmail.com*

Dwi Ardhana

*Department of International Relations, FISIP University of Indonesia, riris.sundrijo@ui.ac.id*

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## **BHINNEKA TUNGGAL IKA: INDONESIA CIRCUMSCRIBED NORM OF MULTICULTURALISM**

**Priskila Shendy Hartanti & Dwi Ardhanariswari Sundrijo**

**Department of International Relations  
Universitas Indonesia**

**Email:** priskila.shendy@gmail.com, riris.sundrijo@ui.ac.id.

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### **Abstrak**

*Norma Multikulturalisme memberikan prinsip-prinsip penerimaan dan penyesuaian perbedaan dalam masyarakat dalam satu negara. Di negara Barat, multikulturalisme adalah pendekatan yang digunakan untuk menjamin kesetaraan hak antara penduduk kulit putih pendatang, penduduk asli, dan para imigran lainnya. Multikulturalisme memberikan ide bahwa setiap orang dengan latar belakang budaya dan asal usul yang berbeda dapat hidup bersama dalam harmoni. Negara di Asia pada umumnya memiliki narasi multikulturalisme yang berbeda karena dari sejak awal sudah terbangun di atas realitas heterogenitas budaya yang membuat mereka terbiasa hidup dalam perbedaan. Dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif, artikel ini menyajikan konsep baru 'multikulturalisme terbatas' yang dirumuskan berdasarkan implementasi Bhinneka Tunggal Ika di Indonesia. Bhinneka Tunggal Ika adalah slogan resmi yang menggambarkan keterbukaan Indonesia terhadap berbagai perbedaan budaya, namun diikuti beberapa syarat yang membatasi keterbukaan tersebut. Multikulturalisme terbatas ini tidak hanya menjaga identitas nasional Indonesia dari intervensi nilai-barat dan nilai eksternal lainnya, melainkan juga membatasi berkembangnya praktik lokal yang tidak dapat diterima secara luas.*

### **Kata kunci:**

*Multikulturalisme, Perbedaan, Identitas, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*

### **Abstract**

*Norm of Multiculturalism deals with the acceptance and accommodation of differences in society. In the West, it is an approach that guarantees equal rights among white settlers, indigenous people, and the immigrants. It provides the idea that everyone can live together in harmony despite differences in their cultural background. Asian countries have different narratives of multiculturalism as – most of them - were built upon heterogeneity, hence they were accustomed to living in diversity. By utilising qualitative research method, this paper presents a new conception of 'circumscribed multiculturalism' based on the practice of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika in Indonesia. Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is the country's official slogan that describes the openness of the country to cultural differences, but with certain conditions that limit the openness. This article concludes that the circumscribed multiculturalism not only preserves Indonesia's national identity from the intervention of western and other external values but also withholds some traditional/local practices that might not be accepted by wider society.*

### **Keywords:**

*Multiculturalism, Diversity, Identity, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Globalisation has affected many aspects of society. It has increased people's interactions and made the flow of goods, people, services, values, and cultures go beyond the borders of countries. Globalisation also results in the rapid growth of transportation and communication industries, leading to bigger opportunities for people to migrate easily from one place to another. It then explains the formation of multicultural societies in many countries in the world. According to Zarbaliyev (2017), in more than 150 states in the world, national minorities and diversities are common cases to find. There are only 30 states which are homogenous, which means they do not have ethnicities that can be categorised as national minorities. Therefore, a good understanding of the construction of multiculturalism both at the national and international level has become increasingly important in this globalisation era.

Multiculturalism has been used as an approach to explain the cultural diversity in one nation. It refers to the coexistence of several cultures within a single society (Eriksen, 2015, p. 29). According to Parekh, culture is a historically-created system of meaning and significance or a system of belief and practices in which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual and collective lives (Parekh, 2000, p. 143). In a multiculturalist nation, different cultures are usually embraced and accommodated by states. Multiculturalism also explains civil rights for all people within a nation. These rights include the rights of women, genders, minority groups, and immigrants (Nagy, 2013, p. 2). Multiculturalism also refers to the idea that everyone from different cultural backgrounds can live together, side by side, while holding the uniqueness of their own culture without significant conflict (Sundrijo, 2007, p. 169).

The multicultural approach was used in western countries to accommodate their citizens' different identities. The identities include gender, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, social class, and culture (Kang, 2018, p. 19). The term multiculturalism was academically developed around the end of the twentieth century. It was used to describe phenomena when immigrants come either by force or by their own will to a country which traditionally a culturally homogeneous society. In these countries, globalisation and migration phenomena could transform the homogenous society into a multicultural society. Consequently, this might mean that in non-Western countries, colonisation could be one of the main factors that created a multicultural society.

The understanding of multiculturalism is believed as a way to reduce the potential of intra-ethnic conflict and strengthen national identity. Multiculturalism believes that the

society should not only be based on one set of values of culture but also accommodate and equally recognise other cultures therein (Eriksen, 2015, p. 28). In a multicultural society, all citizens can be expected to participate as equal members of a civic community (Parekh, 2000). The immigrant might be allowed to either follow the new host culture or keep their own (Sundrijo, 2007, p. 169).

Western multiculturalism is based on the emergence of the immigrant movement. It is well-known as liberal multiculturalism. Liberal multiculturalism is usually referred to in describing the multicultural phenomena that happened in Canada, Australia, the United States, British, and many Anglo-phone countries in the West. It stresses the initiative the white authority took to include the indigenous people and the immigrants to have equal civil rights. It ensures the rights of all cultural, ethnic, religious, and racial groups through a legal framework applied to government policies, which can protect all citizens from discrimination (Nagy, 2013, p. 2). Liberal multiculturalism holds the basic principle of multiculturalism that each group of people can live side by side, despite the differences in their background

The perspective was first introduced by Kymlicka (1995) before it has long been argued and developed by many multiculturalist scholars based on their empirical studies. According to Young (2001), Kymlicka describes that ethnic groups usually have negative relations with the nation-state. Young argued that liberal multiculturalism concerns more on the normative principles of the establishment of the larger nationstate as opposed to the national minorities. It also gives no attention to how the much-needed public support and recognition can be given to the ethnic groups within the nation (Young, 2001). Young is in agreement with Parekh (2000) about the importance of the practice of democracy in a multicultural society. Multiculturalism is in line with democracy in a way that values cultural diversity and facilitates dialogue among different groups.

This article explores the characteristics of Indonesia's multiculturalism to contribute to the debate on multiculturalism. Liberal multiculturalism might not be suitable to explain Indonesia's kind of multiculturalism for some reasons. First of all, Indonesia, as part of Asian countries, is not the main destination for immigration. Therefore, multiculturalism in Indonesia might not be based mainly on the acceptance of immigrants and their traditional culture. Secondly, as one of the largest archipelagos in the world, Indonesia is naturally heterogeneous – formed by different ethnicities, cultures, and religions – even far before the country entered colonisation. This article presents a new way of looking at Indonesian multiculturalism, taking into account its unique

processes of formation, which, unlike liberal multiculturalism, was not very much influenced by both colonialism and the flow of migration. The multiculturalism of Indonesia is represented in its national slogan, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which means Unity in Diversity. The slogan is still used at present by the government. It unites different ethnicities, cultures, and religions into one nation of Indonesia. This article aims to analyse the multicultural character of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and to find out the uniqueness of the characteristic when putting it within the broader conceptual debate of multiculturalism. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* emphasises the sense of belonging to the nation, hence is widely used as a representation of one solid national identity, despite the differences.

Unlike Western multiculturalism, we argue that the force of Indonesia multiculturalism came from within the nation (bottom-up forces). We also argue that Indonesian multiculturalism under *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* aiming only at the acceptance of the diversity. Diversity has long been existed within the nation, in a sense that the notion and discourse of multiculturalism in Indonesia are mostly about the difference of ethnicities and culture originally formed the Nusantara.<sup>1</sup> Multiculturalism in Indonesia is not so easy to include other ethnics and cultures that come through migration to the post-colonialisation Indonesia, particularly in this era of globalisation. We further argue that under *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, both the state and the nation are still not ready to accept the practices of some local traditions which are considered as against the interest of the dominant and/or the majority.

Based on our assessment of the practice of multiculturalism in Indonesia, we propose a new version of multiculturalism: **circumscribed multiculturalism**. We argue that *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is a finite Indonesian version of multiculturalism. It is circumscribed because *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* aims to keep Indonesia's national identity pure with less or no influence from the West and other external values. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* also promotes the acceptance of diversity within the nation but is limited to the ethnicities that are historically part of Indonesia. Finally, we argue that *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* differs from liberal multiculturalism. To some extent, it might agree with the accommodative multiculturalism proposed by Sundrijo (2007). However, unlike the accommodative multiculturalism, the role of the majority groups is not clearly identified within the context of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

### ***ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK***

The conception of liberal multiculturalism is academically developed in Western countries where liberal democracy takes place. The basic commitment of liberal democracy is to the freedom of individual and equality of every individual citizen (Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 1995, p. 34). Some well-known countries with multicultural societies are Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. A number of scholars referred to those countries as case studies when elaborating the influential factors which trigger multiculturalism or when defining different types of multiculturalism.

Liberal multiculturalism identified four different trends which deals with ethnocultural diversity. The trends includes minority nationalism, indigenous people, immigrant groups, and metics<sup>2</sup> (Kymlicka, 2005, p. 28). It is expected that all those groups will assimilate one day, for examples in language and traditional culture, following the culture of the dominant society, in this case, the white settler. Furthermore, Kymlicka also argues that the liberal model of multiculturalism emerged in the West triggered by the effect of demographics, rights-consciousness, democracy, national minorities' de-securitisation, and the consensus of liberal-democratic (Kymlicka, 2005, pp. 31-35).

For immigrants in Western countries, liberal multiculturalism offers two adjustment strategies to live in the host country. The first strategy is through assimilation. This strategy aims to make the immigrant adapt, shift identity and cultural membership, and political naturalisation. (Brubaker, 2003, p. 42). Assimilation might result in the elimination of cultural differences in society. The second strategy is through integration. It recognises the importance of individual identities, and the identities must be accommodated (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000). Integration means the immigrants can both maintain their culture and interact with other society group without being discriminated.

Canada was influenced by liberal and communitarian ideas to involve and accommodate the minority groups - who are mostly the immigrants trying to claim their rights (Eriksen, 2015, p. 28). One of the characteristics of liberal multiculturalism is the existence of a dominant group that creates the law and controls the other social communities in the country. In the Canadian liberal multiculturalism setting, the dominant group is the white settlers (British or France descendants). Initially, there were unbalanced power relations between Europeans and Native Canadians (Thobani, 2007). Although they were the minority in number, with their power, the white settlers ruled the nation and built their own civilisation in Canada. The indigenous people are considered

as uncivilised and lawless. Therefore, Canada's multiculturalism consists of three layers of social structure. First, the white as the authority holder; second, the indigenous people of Canadians; and third, what Thobani calls the 'undesired' immigrants (consisting of the Chinese, Japanese, and Indians).

After applying the multiculturalism policy in 1971, the government of Canada kept developing the policy, and in 1988, the country announced its *Multiculturalism Act*. This Act requires the government to accommodate differences in Canadian society and protect every Canadian, no matter their cultural background (Sundrijo, 2007, p. 170). However, there were still some documents, such as the Immigration Policy Review (IPR) and Social Security Review (SSR), which strengthened the position of the white settlers as the dominant group (Thobani, 2007). These documents act as the shield for the first layer (the white settlers) in preserving their authority upon the second and third layers of the society.

Australia is the next country after Canada which adopted a multiculturalism policy. The policy was first introduced to the nation in 1973 by Al Grassby, Australia Immigration Minister, in the paper he presented titled *A Multicultural Society for the Future*. Australia also had the British and European diaspora who came through colonisation and imagined themselves as the host of Australia (Anderson K. , 2000). They settled, made the rule, and became the dominant group. White was also positioned in the first layer of society. The Aborigines – the indigenous people of Australia, need to fight for their right of their lands to be acknowledged as the second layer of the social structure. The third layer was the other immigrants, who mainly come from Asian region. A study found that becoming a legal citizen in Australia does not necessarily make the perception of 'migrants' for Asians disappear. Formally, multiculturalism in Australia was institutionalised in the *1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia and Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity (2003)*. The documents explain the common responsibilities, equality in law and social opportunities, and benefits of living together in diversity (Sundrijo, 2007, p. 171).

In both Canada and Australia, the practice of multiculturalism still contains dilemmas. In Canada, some majority groups still expect the return of a bicultural society. It refers to the white culture of Britain and France. They also preferred the immigrant to give their traditional values and follow the origin of Canadian culture. A similar case also happened in Australia. Some white ethnics still want Australia to be a homogeneous society where only white people rule. Moreover, they denied the existence of the

indigenous people of Australia and would prefer only to accept white immigrants from Western countries (Sundrijo, 2007, p. 171).

The multiculturalism practised in both countries describes the characteristics of liberal multiculturalism. The social structure of the society consists of first, the domination of the whites, second, the minority groups of indigenous people, and third, other immigrant groups. The relations between the groups are constructed following the liberal standpoint on rights of individual persons (individualism) which includes the social, political, and economic rights. Basically, liberal multiculturalism involves some norms that the white try to apply in their colonies. According to Finnemore and Sikkink, norm can be defined as a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Liberal multiculturalism explains how processes of norm transfer happen in a multicultural country led by white settlers. First, the whites internalise the idea that they have a better standard of life than indigenous people. They then apply it and show that under the better standard that they introduced, they can live side by side with the indigenous in harmony. By doing this, the white settlers portray themselves as actors spreading the global human rights norms. They claim that they bring betterment to the indigenous by redefining their rights, in a way that they “accommodate” the traditional rights of the minority, while at the same time preserving their privileged position as the dominant authority. : The bottom line is that liberal multiculturalism allows the development of a social system that promotes individual freedom, including the freedom to state opinions, ideas, and own identity.

### **Multicultural Nationalism: The British Model**

Recently, some multiculturalists have investigated the compatibility of liberal multiculturalism in some western countries. England could also be one of good examples of a multicultural society. Modood (2020) proposed multicultural nationalism in explaining British multicultural society. He stresses the importance of a sense of belonging when becoming British. Therefore, accommodating minorities will benefit national identity.

“The accommodation of minorities should not be seen as a drag on the national identity but as a positive resource; not as diluting the national culture but vivifying and enriching it.” (Modood, 2020, p. 310).

Britain has a different story of multiculturalism. This country is the origin of most white settlers in Western multicultural societies. While the British live as a homogenous society for quite a long time, modern history shows how Britain has always been one of the destinations of migration. It is then necessary for the country to redefine their understanding of their national identity to make Britain inclusive for everyone. Church of England, as the dominant traditional feature in British society, plays a significant role in promoting multiculturalist national identity, state, and society. The main aim is to strengthen the sense of belonging of British citizens regardless of their cultural background. The whites, as the indigenous people and the majority, play decisive roles as the authority as well as the provider of the accommodation for diversity.

### **Accommodative Multiculturalism: An Asian Alternative**

It is generally argued that liberal multiculturalism represents the model of a multicultural nation in the West. Asian scholars argue that the concept is unable to explain the multiculturalism of Asia, which even before colonisation and flow of migrations has been highly heterogeneous in culture. According to Nagy (2014, p. 162), such liberal approach is “not the preferred model utilized in East Asia”. Models of multiculturalism practised in different Asian societies based on their population composition, immigration policies, social integration policies and political frameworks. Hence, they came up with different versions of it. One of them is accommodative multiculturalism (Sundrijo, 2007, p. 176).

Sundrijo (2007) argues that liberal multiculturalism does not fit the Asian Values, particularly on the elements of communitarianism and religious influence. As a communitarian society, it emphasises the rights of the state, the community (e.g. religious, ethnic, or economic community). and the family above the rights of an individual (Barr, 2000, p. 311) They aim for communal harmony, which they find in the orderly society. Asian people also value their religion. Religion is one of the components of their self-identity. They make no distinction between religion and secular life relations; Asian sees both as inseparable (Sundrijo, 2021, p. 44). They use religion to solve conflicts and consider it as part of their decision-making process. They buy the idea of *human* (individual) rights; however, they still maintain the interests and the fulfilment of communal rights as a priority (Sundrijo, 2007, pp. 176-177).

Sundrijo argues that *accommodative multiculturalism*, as explained by Lord Bikhu Parekh, might well explain Asian multiculturalism. This model provides ethnics and religious groups with equal freedoms and resources to preserve their own traditional

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identity, norms, values, languages and cultures. There might still be relatively more dominant groups in the society; however, they are meant to provide appropriate accommodation for the more minority ones. It pays great attention to the condition and situation where conflicts happen and applies a bottom-up problem-solving approach for consensus (Sundrijo, 2007, p. 177). Accommodative multiculturalism works based on the principles of diversity awareness and understanding of diversity. Unfortunately, the concept does provide not enough explanation on how these principles would work when the unity of a state is challenged by ethnic groups and their uncharacterised practices. Some people might not be ready in accepting the challenges because they have been comfortable with the dominant essentialist ideology of identity, nationality, race, and ethnicity (Ang, 2001b). The danger of this situation is that the dominant might have the power to impose their influence on the ethnic/cultural groups, so much that it left almost no room for accommodation of differences.

### **Intercultural Dialogue: Proposed Resolution for Multiculturalism**

In response to liberal theories of multiculturalism, Parekh (2000) in *Rethinking of Multilateralism*, argued multiculturalism is more than accommodating cultural differences. Embracing multicultural values and policies is also essential when talking about multiculturalism. According to Parekh, liberal point of view emphasises more on how valuable the cultures are for their members, yet does not clearly argue the value of cultural diversity.

In multicultural politics, Parekh argued that intercultural dialogue is one of the most important values. Intercultural dialogue could be an avenue for debate about human rights, minority practices, educational policy, and the limit of free expression (Young, 2001, p. 19). The European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research define intercultural dialogue as:

“a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organisations with different cultural backgrounds or world views. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes.” (Council of Europe, 2008)

According to this definition, Ganesh and Holmes also argue that intercultural dialogue situate deep shared understanding and that it locates “beyond mere tolerance of the Other” (Ganesh & Holmes, 2011). Dialogue among groups is mostly necessary when some specific practices are considered strange and/or unacceptable, such as female circumcision and polygamy. When conducting the dialogue, society members should see from both sides, the minority’s and the wider society’s ways of life.

According to Parekh, operative public values, which means the larger society groups, provides the only starting point of debate on minority practices. They will respond differently, such as banning, discouraging, tolerating, encouraging, celebrating, or holding the practices up. Minority practices might be part of their way of life. Therefore, operative public values need to find out the meaning of the practices, in what way it affecting way of life, and how valuable the practices are. Since operative public values have the conception of the good life, it cannot negate the conception of good from the minority. In order to know their conception of good, intercultural dialogue is needed. This intercultural dialogue might resulted in a consensus as mentioned in Accommodative Multiculturalism. At some points, it might be difficult to be open minded on certain case of the minority practices. Therefore, postponing the decision would be a wise way in hope that it will be negotiable in the future and it will leave room for understanding the potential dialogic role of conflict (Parekh, 2000, p. 268; Ganesh & Holmes, 2011, p. 81).

Despite the weaknesses of the non-western approach of multiculturalism, we might agree that western liberal multiculturalism does not provide a proper understanding of Asian multiculturalism. In one hand, the white ethnic, if they exist at all, does not play a significant role in Asian society, let alone has the privilege to define and lead the governance system. On the other hand, what is categorised as ‘the indigenous people’ in liberal multiculturalism are completely visible and are in charge of the system. At the same time, as it puts the characteristics of Asian society into consideration, accommodative multiculturalism seems capable of providing a more sophisticated explanation about Asian multiculturalism. However, the concept is still not elaborated enough to capture some particularities found in the structure of Asian multicultural society. By proposing the idea of Circumscribed Multiculturalism, this article aims to fill in the gap left by the three existing concepts, especially in explaining the uniqueness of the Indonesian model of multicultural policy.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

To elaborate *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the concept of multiculturalism in Indonesia, and to explain how it is unique and different from the existing concepts of multiculturalism, this research follows the qualitative research approach. The aim is to identify the particularity of the characteristic of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* specifically when compared to liberal multiculturalism, multicultural nationalism, and accommodative multiculturalism. Some official documents are used as the primary data for this research. Secondary data, information, opinion, and debate we found in books, journal articles, as well as some grey literature from online media were analysed in such a way to develop and justify the arguments proposed in this study.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Origin of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika as an Indonesia Norm of Multiculturalism**

Indonesia has a long history of a multicultural society. Before becoming one nation, Indonesia's archipelago, then called Nusantara, was occupied by two powerful kingdoms, Srivijaya and Majapahit. Srivijaya was a Buddhist kingdom with central administration in what is now known as Sumatera. Majapahit, which held Hinduism, was located in Java. The two kingdoms were different in cultures and traditions, and conflicts constantly occurred between them. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Mpu Tantular wrote the book of Sutasoma, where the term *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* was very mentioned for the first time. As the book explains, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* means “We are of many kinds, but we are one.” Nowadays, it is more translated into “Unity in Diversity”. The slogan was used as a doctrine for reconciliation between Majapahit and Srivijaya (Farisi, 2014).

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Majapahit was a powerful empire in the region, with Hinduism and Javanese cultures acknowledged as the identity of the dominant and majority groups. Not so long after the heyday of Majapahit, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Islam entered the Nusantara and developed widely in Java. Because of the smooth processes of acculturation, the new religion was readily accepted by the people of Majapahit (Wasino, 2013, p. 152). Cultural and traditional differences were highly respected and accommodated. Unfortunately, this harmony ended when the Dutch entered the Nusantara to begin the long period of colonisation.

During their occupation, the Dutch brought with them their norms, cultures and religions (Christianity), which they used as a symbol of domination. They spread the idea that western civilisation was more modern, hence superior, than the indigenous eastern

cultures. Soon it was witnessed how the western ways had marginalised the people of Nusantara, who were given a minimal opportunity, if anything, to develop themselves in their own way. As a result, colonisation created a social structure which placed the indigenous people at the bottom level of the society (Sairin, 2011, pp. 1, 3). They did not have much involvement in economic activities due to the pluralistic society that the Dutch created. They were discriminated against both politically and economically (Absiroh, Isjoni, & Bunari, 2017; Wasino, 2013).

Indonesian nationalism was first initiated by the youths who gathered in the second Youth Congress (*Kongress Pemuda yang Kedua*) in October 1928. They understood the meaning of independence, stood up and brought the big idea of a nation-state which they later called Indonesia. The spirit of freedom from colonisation united them and powered them to start the movement to have an independent Indonesia. The congress participants came from different religious and ethnic groups in Nusantara, particularly Javanese, Minangkabau, Batak, and Minahasan. During the congress, they came up with an agreement known as Youth Pledge (*Sumpah Pemuda*) which consists of three points, i.e., acknowledging one motherland – Indonesia, acknowledging one nation – Indonesia, and upholding one language – *Bahasa Indonesia*.<sup>3</sup> The first two points represented anti-imperial nationalism, and the last point signified that the youth preferred to have their own national language (Reid, 2010, p. 25). They could have chosen Javanese language (the mother tongue of almost half of the population of Indonesia at that time), Dutch (the colonial language), or Malay (the origin of Indonesian language). By saying that they uphold *Bahasa Indonesia*, the youths would like to proclaim that as a nation, they had their own national identity and were proud of it. The event also brought back to life the slogan of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and the spirit of unity in diversity. The Youth Pledge marked the people's decision to rule their own country without any influence from the West. The pledge was considered a solid statement for creating an 'Indonesianness' and seen as the starting point for future Indonesia.

After the 1945 independence, Indonesia's founders realised the nation's diversity, which built the country. Indonesian unity must be preserved, so the people should be fully aware of the country's unique multiculturalism. They kept *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the country's official slogan and conceptualised Indonesia as a multicultural nation-state. The government made the slogan institutionalised in Regulation No. 66/1951 and Law No. 24/2009. Based on these regulations, the people of Indonesia should be open to accepting the different ethnicities, cultures, and religions that have long existed in the country.

Soekarno, the first president of Indonesia, made *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and Pancasila (Indonesia's five basic principles) to be taught at schools to make the students aware of Indonesian nationalism that was built upon diversity.

The New Order regime, which came after Soekarno, used *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* to achieve the leader's ambition. This authoritarian regime was led by Soeharto, who was a Javanese. Some strongly argue that during his presidency – which lasted for 30 years – Soeharto's development programs were driven by the idea of Javanisation. Javanese cultures and ideology were introduced in all textbooks from which students throughout the country learned. Soeharto also divided the national identity into two categories; *pribumi* (native-born Indonesia) and *non-pribumi* (the non-native based, decided by their race and descendants). These categories were specially aimed to make the Chinese people living in Indonesia considered foreigners and would not be accepted as Indonesians (Hoon, 2006, p. 152).

The Reform era after Soeharto opened the opportunity for diversity to blossom again in Indonesia. Minority groups are guaranteed the chance to express their voice and hold on to their own cultures or religion, especially the Chinese-Indonesians. Under President Abdurrahman Wahid, the Chinese-Indonesia felt the fresh air of living in Indonesia. They can use their language in public, keep their native name, and celebrate Chinese New Year and other celebrations openly. However, these initiatives proved to be not very applicable. The New Order had strongly shaped Indonesians' perception of the Chinese Indonesians, so much, that acceptance and openness towards them were not necessarily easy.

### **Bhinneka Tunggal Ika: A Circumscribed Multiculturalism**

The long history of multiculturalism shows how Indonesians have been used to living side by side in diversity. Diversity is taken as the strength and uniqueness of the country. Referring to Tjarsono (2013), *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is a need for Indonesia because of its geographical location and culturally heterogeneous society (p. 889). During the Reform Era, this slogan was even more necessary to be internalised in the daily life of the people. The government expects the citizens to understand this slogan well and absorb it as a national identity representing multicultural Indonesia.

*Indonesia's ancestors had adopted Bhinneka Tunggal Ika as the idea of living together in diversity.* Although this concept was initially expressed to bring harmony between Hinduism and Buddhism, which were in conflict during the Majapahit and

Srivijaya Empires. During the colonisation era, the meaning was broadened by the ethnic groups in Nusantara who fought for independence. The diversity in ethnic groups, religions, and cultures was mentioned mostly when talking about *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. The aim was to strengthen the idea that the native-born Indonesians have more rights in their motherland than the colonial Dutch, who tried to implement their civilisation to the Indonesian. Indonesian preferred to live without the domination of the West. Decolonisation resulted in a new demand for broader political participation from the citizens, and the democratic slogans replaced the ideology of the colonial empire (Eriksen, 2015, p. 30). At this point, we would argue that *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is a different type of Western multiculturalism in which the notion of decolonisation never exists.

In addition, liberal multiculturalism's idea of having white settlers to accommodate the national minorities, indigenous people, and immigrant groups does not fit the characteristic of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. In contrast, Indonesia's multiculturalism consists of mostly indigenous (native-born) people who live in the whole area of the country. Some Indonesians are also immigrants from Chinese, Arabian, and Indian descendants and they have now been acknowledged as Indonesia's national minorities. As a result, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is a concept of multiculturalism without the white or the west.

Apart from the lack of the element of the involvement of West, the post-colonialism Indonesian multiculturalism, as represented in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, is also unique with its "undemocratic" way of dealing with national's cultural heterogeneity. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* serves the needs of the state to maintain unity and nationalism, hence allowing the government to put down some of the local ethnic practices and interests for the state's "national interest". In this article, we bring up three cultural groups who have been seen as the victim of the project of Indonesia's nation-building, i.e., the indigenous people, the Acehnese, and the Chinese.

### *The Indigenous People*

The Indonesian government denies the existence of the indigenous people. Instead of allowing them to practice their daily traditions, the government aims to 'civilise' them, and make them to live in modernity, hence endangering their traditional culture, values, and practices (Bertrand, 2011, p. 258). The people are also denied ownership of their own land. According to the state, indigenous land is state land (Hall, Hirsch, & Li, 2011);

their forest is also claimed under state land (Dewi, 2016, p. 89). Even in this reformation era, the struggles for land and forest recognition and protection have still become unsolved issues. Negotiation for recognition for the rights of indigenous people seems to go not according to their expectations.

One indigenous group that struggles the most for recognition is the Papuans. As a region, Papua officially became part of Indonesia in 1969. Indonesian government denied the Papuans' desire to be classified as indigenous. The government considered them to live in isolation in a very traditional way. In certain situations, the Papuans were labelled as “backward” (King, 2005, p. 94). In some cases, the Papuans might find it difficult to preserve some cultural practices due to some national policy that has also be applied in Papua. One example of the cases is the the endangerment of Papuan language cause by national language policy which requires them to speak Bahasa Indonesia. It caused the lost of some local language such as Hoti, Kamarian, and Batumerah. The official language policy has made the local languages lost their opportunities to be used in their daily conversation and in economic transaction (Septiyana & Margiansyah, 2018, p. 86).

As faced by other indigenous groups, one of the main issues the Papuans have faced until now is the denial of the traditional land rights. Since the day of the integration, the territory has been made into regencies, districts, and villages. This border arrangement is problematic to the Papuans. Referring to one of the biggest Papua tribes in Merauke, known as Marind Anim, the people have set the border of their land-based on the agreement among tribe leaders passed on from one generation to another. Government ‘modern’ land arrangements have stolen their land and, most importantly, destroyed their traditional systems, which have been part of their identities for long.

Despite the constant and consistent negative news by the network of *Free Papua Movement*, which demanded international support for the independent Papua, we argue that what happened to the indigenous people of Papua is part of the weaknesses of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the Indonesian multicultural principles. The case also shows that, more like liberal multiculturalism, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is also about serving the interest of the dominant, particularly the government. In the case of liberal multiculturalism, the dominant is the white settlers who need justification and approval from the indigenous people to govern the states for the sake of everyone. In the case of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, the dominant is the central government, regardless of their ethnicity and cultural background. However, unlike the liberal multiculturalism that tried to develop the nation by well-engaging the indigenous people, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*

applied quite the opposite approaches by not acknowledging them and denying their rights. This then makes *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* a 'unique' model of multiculturalism, which differs from the existing models.

*The Unique Story of the Acehnese*

The people of Aceh have a long history of autonomy. They have never been colonised. Hence, compared to other ethnic and cultural groups in the Nusantara archipelago, Acehnese might have a unique history related to the development of the 'Indonesianess.' Before *Sumpah Pemuda*, Acehnese already perceived themselves as a nation or 'bangsa'. At that time, Aceh was a big trading port well known by many trading countries, such as Turkey, British Empire, Arab, and Gurajati. Their fight for independence was basically to prevent foreign rulers from entering and occupying their land. They were enthusiastic about the idea of Indonesian nationalism, but – as some might argue – they misunderstood the idea (Reid, 2010; Anderson B. R., 1999).

After the independence, in 1955, Daud Beureu'eh, one of Acehnese scholars and leaders, announced that Aceh would be a federal state with Islamic principles. He invited Acehnese to be martyrs of Aceh and fight for the Land of Aceh. Central government tried to negotiate and promised to make it a special region with its own authority regarding the practice of religion, custom, tradition, and education in 1959.

In 1976, Hasan Tiro, the leader of the Aceh separatist movement, proclaimed that Aceh was their fatherland. He claimed that after being part of Indonesia, Aceh no longer belonged to the Acehnese; it now belonged to the Javanese, who were alien and foreign to the people. The *Free Aceh Movement*, which emerged in the 1980s, might be an expression of disappointment that the central government assigned Javanese to govern Acehnese (Anderson B. R., 1999). In the 1990s, military operations were deployed in Aceh to stop the separatist movement. Misguided integrationist, assimilationist, and repressive state policies had caused community of Acehnese to turn away from Indonesia nationalism (Bertrand, 2007).

In 2001, Aceh was awarded the status of Special Autonomy Law by the central government, but it failed to be adequately implemented and caused more armed conflicts. In 2006, the Special Autonomy Law for Aceh was broadened. The Aceh government was granted authority in all sectors, including the implementation of Islamic law. It brings satisfaction to the Acehnese and the Aceh government (Bertrand, 2007).

*Chinese Immigrants Recognition*

The Chinese have long been part of Indonesian history since they first came to Indonesia for trading. They brought along their cultures, values, and languages to the archipelago. In the colonisation era, the Chinese were in the second layer of social structure. The Chinese also took the role of the economic supporter of the group in the first layer, which was the colonial (Budiyani, 2004, p. 90). The relationship between the Chinese and the Indonesians was perceived as a threat to the Dutch existence in Nusantara. Because of that, the Dutch limited their interactions with native-born Indonesia. Elite Chinese were allowed by the Dutch to have a western education to give them a sense of superiority compared to the Indonesian native (Hoon & Kuntjara, 2020, pp. 205, 209).

After the independence, the Chinese continued to stay and make a living in Indonesia. However, their path to living in peace under the Indonesian government was not continuously easy. Without the Dutch's presence, the Chinese' social status changed; they were no longer the “second layer” to the ruler. As mentioned earlier, the New Order regime was when all the discrimination against the Chinese ethnic in Indonesia started. Any activity related to Chinese culture was forbidden until the regime ended with the 1998 riots. This riot became a traumatic experience for most Chinese Indonesians as the anti-Chinese notion was widely spread and resulted in discrimination against the rights of the Chinese Indonesians.

Two decades passed after the riots, and Indonesian perceptions of the Chinese-Indonesian changed in a more positive direction. The change in perception was mainly initiated by the elite Indonesians, who opened and maintained more communication and connection with the Chinese. The elites appreciate the involvement of the Chinese Indonesians in politics and economics, which might bring benefits to the country (Herlijanto, 2016).

In Indonesia's multiculturalism, Chinese Indonesians are a minority group who gained wider places in society now as people start to see how the Chinese Indonesians support the country economically. However, the acceptance of Chinese Indonesians is found more within the elite native-born Indonesians who have more interactions with them. The doubt of the majority of the people about their loyalty towards Indonesian nationalism – as the Soeharto constructed it – might be a challenge for Indonesian multiculturalism at large. This is where accommodative multiculturalism cannot explain the relations between different ethnicities in Indonesia. A Communitarian society might bring more tolerance to the people. However, communitarianism might only work under

the “approval” of the dominant majority. It means that collective interests can be achievable only when representing the dominant majority's interests. The case where the elites fail to promote the acceptance of the Chinese Indonesian also proves that liberal multiculturalism cannot explain the multiculturalism of Indonesia.

Some cases mentioned above have shown that *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* has a particularity that differs from liberal multiculturalism, multicultural nationalism, and even accommodative multiculturalism. Therefore, we propose a more reasonable type of multiculturalism which we conceptualised as **circumscribed multiculturalism**. We argue that, based on the process of its development, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* acknowledges the diversity of the nation, but under some – very circumscribed – circumstances. First, those who can be considered part of Indonesia’s multiculturalism are limited only to the native-born Indonesians, who carry ethnicities, cultures and religious beliefs that historically have long been part of the nation. Referring back to history, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* aims to keep an ‘Indonesianess’ and the nation's identity purely about Indonesia. The Western culture and domination are still considered colonisation (although soft), and the Chinese cultures are still – to some extent – regarded as a different ethnic from the Indonesian. Society might accept the non-native-born; however, the stigma of the foreigner in Indonesian is called “*orang asing*” or “*keturunan asing*” might stick to that person. This characteristic of circumscribed multiculturalism is different from liberal multiculturalism in accepting white settlers and immigrants.

Second, in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, diversity is respected and accommodated as long as it does not threaten the unity of the state and the territory that “belongs” to it. If the interests of any (cultural) groups are against those of the states, the government will deny their right to national stability. Under these circumstances, diversity is accepted as long as it is not against government policy, which, unfortunately, is not always in harmony with the idea of promoting and protecting individual human rights. Circumscribed multiculturalism might agree with accommodative multiculturalism in promoting communal rights above individual rights. However, frequently, there would be cases where the state becomes the violator of communal rights to achieve harmony in society. This then led to practices where ethnic/cultural/indigenous groups and those with non-local descendants decided to stop doing their traditional practice because they have no other choices or do not have the power to defend themselves.

Third, we argue that *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as Indonesian model of multiculturalism, is still limited to acknowledging and respecting differences and still far

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from accommodating and preserving them. We argue that Indonesia prefers for different ethnic and cultural groups to assimilate under the notion of “one nation”. Although has been conducted every now and then, the intercultural dialogue, as proposed by Parekh, is still not constantly, continuously, and effectively applied. The norm of multiculturalism is still very much defined by the economic and political interests of the state.

### **CONCLUSION**

Multiculturalism is an approach that explains the phenomena of various cultures living in peace in one place. In Indonesia, such an approach has long been known as *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. This article argues that *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is Indonesia’s conception of multiculturalism, with its own particularity and unique characteristics that differentiate it from the commonly known concept of (liberal) multiculturalism and the British’ multicultural nationalism, as well as the Asian’s accommodative multiculturalism. For reasons that have been elaborated in this article, we conceptualised this unique characteristic as ‘Circumscribed Multiculturalism’.

Since it was officially pronounced in 1928, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* has helped Indonesian to transform from a pluralistic to one multicultural nation. When declaring its independence from colonialism, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* was used by Indonesia’s founding fathers to put the diversity of the people living in the country’s territory in one whole context of Indonesia as a nation. Since then, the notion of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* has been taken as a national identity. It highlights how Indonesians respect those from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. More than just a way to construct a fortress for Indonesia national identity, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* has also served the country as a vital development approach, as well as a tool for achieving harmony in society.

One of its key features that make *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* distinct from other multiculturalism conceptions is how it explains the formation process of a multicultural nation. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* represents a process in which being multicultural results from internal – bottom-up driven –processes. This is unlike liberal multiculturalism, which portrays the construction of multicultural nations as a top-down process, as it is initiated more by the white settlers as part of their attempt to justify their colonial presence in the area traditionally occupied by an indigenous group. In the case of Indonesia’s *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, the force to unify came within the nation to strengthen its identity and keep the nation from mixing up with colonisation. When liberal multiculturalism accommodates various other cultural groups settling down in a country (through

migration), *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* accommodates the native-born Indonesian exclusively with given culture, ethnicity, and religion as their traditional identity. It rejects 'new addition' to the historical formation, including migrants. From this perspective, the idea of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* can be seen more as a way to preserve the nation's traditional multicultural nature and protect it from changing. Hence, we argue that it is more appropriately characterised as a "circumscribed multiculturalism," which is different from the liberal nationalist and accommodative ones.

As Indonesian, we are made to believe that *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is all about living with diversity in harmony, without any limit. The fact that it is circumscribed seems to devalue the whole idea. As a nation, we want to be portrayed as inclusive and accepting of identity differences. Still, our underlying ideas of how to process our national identity construction had – directly or indirectly – led us to be an exclusive nation. Whether in the long term to keep it that way or be more accommodative, especially in recognition of individual identity, it is the younger generation of the nation to decide. Related to this, we identify at least two topics to be elaborated on for further research. First, to see the impact of regional dynamics in accepting and promoting the global values to the domestic/national policies in dealing with multicultural identities. Second, and more interestingly, to see the challenges faced by the idea of multicultural education adopted in Indonesia National Curriculum, and the possibility for the curriculum to trigger the swift perception of Indonesian youth towards Indonesian multiculturalism. Both pieces of research will enrich our understanding of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as Indonesia's unique conception of multiculturalism.

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**Note:**

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Nusantara' itself has been a conflict in the Southeast Asia region. It was originally made of two Sanskrit words. *Nusa* means 'island', and *antara* means 'in between' or 'including'. It was found in Javanese manuscripts dated back to 1305. The story was about Gadjah Mada, the chief minister of Majapahit Empire who swore to forbear from eating spices until he could unite kingdoms in Nusantara under Majapahit control. The kingdoms that he referred to were located in Southeast Asia which include Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand (at the present time). In another book titled *Nusantara: A History of Indonesia*, written by Bernhard Vlekke, *Nusantara* was defined as 'the other islands' or 'the outside world'. This word

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remained as part of Gadjah Mada tale until it became an alternative name for Netherlands India in colonisation era. (Evers, 2016, pp. 4-6)

<sup>2</sup> Migrants who are not admitted as permanent residents and future citizens (Kymlicka, 2005, p. 26)

<sup>3</sup> The choosing of *Bahasa Indonesia* as the national language is considered as special and problematic at the same time due to Indonesian cultural and language diversity at that time. It was explained in *Komisi Besar Indonesia Muda* (The Great Commission of Young Indonesia) that Indonesian Language was not aimed to disrespect the culture but to make a new culture. The language would be used in the process of sharing thoughts and discussions in order to reach *toedjoen jang satoe* (one goal) which is the unity of Indonesia (Foulcher, 2000, p. 383)