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Putting Religion into Multiculturalism: Conceptualising Religious Multiculturalism in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the ways in which multiculturalism as a policy, discourse and practice has been conceptualised, implemented and applied in Indonesia. The post-Suharto democratisation process has allowed new space for the expression of previously oppressed identities. While literature on multiculturalism focuses mainly on ethnic and racial difference, this article endeavours to broaden the scope of the term to include religious difference, and evaluate the possibility of “religious multiculturalism”. It addresses the following questions: What are the different interpretations of multiculturalism? How is multiculturalism different from pluralism? How is multiculturalism understood and implemented in Indonesia? How is the Western discourse of multiculturalism different from Indonesian discourses of diversity (kebhinekaan or kemajemukan), heterogeneity (keberagaman) and unity-in-diversity (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika)? And lastly, in what ways can the concept of multiculturalism be expanded to accommodate multi-religiosity?

Introduction
The nation of Indonesia was born in a symbolic event that took place in 1928 when young people from different parts of the archipelago gathered to proclaim an oath, known as Sumpah Pemuda (The Youth Pledge) on the basis of one land, one nation and one language. As one of the most diverse countries in the world, to unify Indonesia as one nation, or in Anderson’s term – an “imagined community” (2006) – is an insurmountable task. Furthermore, nation building in Indonesia is an unfinished common project, which is often met with contestations from various primordial identities (Anderson, 1999).

The state ideology of Pancasila plays a pivotal role in the unification of the diverse religious, ethnic and linguistic groups of Indonesia. The first principle of the ideology states the “Belief in One Supreme God”, and promises a safe environment for religions to develop, with the expectation that religions would play a public role in defining and maintaining social ethics (Latif, 2011, pp. 42–43). Pancasila can be hailed as an archetype for the diverse communities in the archipelago to imagine themselves as a nation. To borrow Charles Taylor’s notion of “social imaginary” (2007, p. 171), which he refers to as the ways in which
people imagine their social existence in relation to the existence of their fellows, *Pancasila* embodies the “modern social imaginary” of Indonesians. This social imaginary proposes an ideal social order that can determine how members of a moral community should live. Since every community, and arguably every individual, is entangled in a web of varying and contested social imaginaries, there will always be resistance, in varying degrees, to any injunctions to conform. Thus, *Pancasila*, although an important social imaginary, is subject to reception and rejection. Consequently, the idealism of ethnic and religious harmony, as incorporated in the state ideology and proclaimed in the national motto “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” or “Unity in Diversity,” in time had to be realised on the ground through state and institutional intervention (Hoon, 2013).

On an ideological level, *Pancasila* articulates the philosophical foundation and noble aspiration of the nation, but on the ground it is far from being reflective of the social reality of Indonesia. This is partly a result of the abuse of this national ideology by the New Order government. Ethnic and religious plurality were never seriously dealt with during Suharto’s New Order period (1966–98). The regime officially prohibited any public discourses on social differences, or SARA (ethnic, religious, racial and inter-group differences). To utilise *Pancasila* for political purposes, the ideology was promoted as the sole basis for all mass organisations and social-political groups (Morfit, 1986, p. 42). The dominant discourse then was for Indonesians to assimilate into a state-defined national identity, based on the regime’s interpretation of *Pancasila* in its own interests. Opponents of the regime were conveniently labelled “anti-*Pancasila*”, which justified their persecution. The spirit of pluralism that the national ideology was created to espouse became instead the main tool of an oppressive authoritarian regime. Given such manipulation of *Pancasila* by the New Order government, the ideology faded with the downfall of Suharto in 1998.

As part and parcel of the democratisation process, the discourse of multiculturalism emerged in Indonesia in the aftermath of Suharto’s resignation in 1998 (Hoon, 2006). Nonetheless, the lifting of the top-down strong arm tactics deployed in the interminable 32 years of New Order government, for example in the freedom to express ethnic and religious diversity, also meant the opening of the door to inter-communal challenges. Various episodes of ethnic, religious and communal violence erupted across Indonesia (Sidel, 2007). *Pancasila* began to falter in the face of new individualistic and group ideologies, as well as contesting social and religious imaginaries that vigorously emerged during the Reformasi era.

Although post-Suharto Indonesia is a more open and democratic society, religious pluralism is circumscribed by restrictive governmental regulations, rising Islamism and religious intolerance (Sakai & Fauzia, 2014). In the past decade, religious harmony and freedom of religion have been undermined by radical religious groups. Pluralism is often viewed with suspicion by religious fundamentalists, and paranoia is spread by extremists for their own ends. Radical Islamic groups have used the new democratic space to promote and politicise their religious agendas and to attack marginalised minorities such as the Shi’a and Ahmadiyya communities and Christian churches, culminating in an alarming increase in intra- and inter-religious conflict and violence (Arifin, 2010; Ali-Fauzi & Lindsey, 2011). Rising conservatism within mainstream Islam is also increasingly evident. For example, in 2005, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) prohibited Muslims from
praying with non-Muslims; in the same year it issued a fatwa forbidding Muslims from marrying non-Muslims and outlawed the Islamic minority sect, Ahmadiyya. The Council also openly condemned pluralism, secularism and liberalism (Gillespie, 2007; Munawar-Rachman, 2010; Sirry, 2013).

The 2016 Annual Report published by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) shows that even though the new Joko Widodo administration is more vocal in speaking out against religious-based violence than its predecessors, religious discrimination and attacks on minorities continue to occur across Indonesia. The report cited the results of a survey conducted by the Setara Institute, pointing to a 33 per cent increase in the number of incidences of violence over the previous year, including those committed by state functionaries such as the police. Such violations, whether committed by radical mob groups or the police, are rarely investigated (USCIRF, 2016). This shows that religious difference is still a fault line that could flare up at any time when incited, and that the need to reconsider a multicultural framework for peaceful coexistence could not be more urgent.

This article recognises that multiculturalism takes on different meanings depending on the context under discussion, whether as a discourse, policy or practice. Referring to the context of Asia, He and Kymlicka (2005, p. 6) argue that “the discourse of [Western liberal] multiculturalism has penetrated more quickly and deeply than any actual practice of multiculturalism”. This is a reference to the rights-based approach to liberal multiculturalism that is commonly practised in the West; upon examining various manifestations of multiculturalism in East and Southeast Asian countries, Nagy (2014, p. 162) concluded that such an approach is “not the preferred model utilized in East Asia”. Nagy proceeded to discuss different models of multiculturalism practised in different Asian societies based on their population composition, immigration policies, social integration policies and political frameworks. This shows that careful consideration of contextual particularities is pivotal when considering the particular framework of multiculturalism for individual societies.

In the case of Indonesia, Lyn Parker argues, in her article in this issue, that the discourse of multiculturalism is limited largely to English-speaking expatriate circles and media. On a daily basis, terms such as kemajemukan (diversity) and, to a lesser extent, pluralisme (pluralism) are used. Following on from such logic, we may argue that while Indonesia is “naturally” culturally diverse, it is not yet a multiculturalist society: there is ostensibly a lack of multiculturalism in practice in Indonesia, especially in public policy, civic consciousness and minority rights.

The aim of the present article is to invite critical discussions on the possibility of conceptualising a version of multiculturalism apposite to Indonesia. It takes into consideration the following questions: What are the different interpretations of multiculturalism? How is multiculturalism different from pluralism? How is multiculturalism understood and implemented in Indonesia? How can we conceptualise “religious multiculturalism” that features and accommodates Indonesia’s multi-religiosity? The article draws its data from secondary literature as well as interviews and participant observations conducted by the author at various higher education institutions and interfaith NGOs in several cities in Indonesia, including Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Malang. The fieldwork was carried out intermittently during 2011 and 2012.
Contested Understandings of Pluralism

Pluralism is a contested concept in the religious sphere. While the term is usually taken to mean diversity, tolerance and peaceful coexistence of difference, it often conjures up the fear of relativism, secularism and liberalism among religious communities (see, for example, Lumintang, 2009; Munawar-Rachman, 2010). True to its name, pluralism has plural meanings: 1) it can be an empirical fact of a diverse society; 2) it can be the recognition of diversity and accommodation of difference; or 3) it can be a normative value based on philosophical pluralism (Carson, 1996). These three definitions are not watertight and often overlap, as will be discussed below. Pluralism is seen as a matter of fact when there are more than two cultural groups in a society. For such a society, recognition and the accommodation of difference should be encouraged for the purpose of including minority groups within the political community.

Referring to the first definition above, pluralism is an empirical fact. This aptly reflects the social reality of ethnic and cultural diversity in Southeast Asia, as famously described by the British colonial administrator and historian, J.S. Furnivall (1944). The plural society of Southeast Asia, according to Furnivall (1944, p. 446), comprised “two or more elements of social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit”, and these different cultures were living in segregation without a “common social will”. The problems associated with such segregation are in no small part a result of colonial divide-and-rule policy and internalisation of the colonial culture of chauvinism and racial hierarchy (Hefner, 2001). With a diverse population that is “living apart together” (Ang, 2001), it is imperative to think about how such diversity can coexist so that difference will not be a source of conflict.

This leads us to the second context in which the term “pluralism” is used, where it refers to conditions that allow different religious, ethnic and cultural groups to coexist in a society. Pluralism is concerned with creating a society that is inclusive and accommodative, which recognises diversity and accommodates difference. The Rawlsian idea of “reasonable pluralism” is a common departure point for political philosophers to conceptualise a diverse society where genuine tolerance and mutual respect are practised:

Rawls hopes … that the religious, moral, and philosophical doctrines that citizens accept will themselves endorse toleration and accept the essentials of a democratic regime. In the religious sphere for example a reasonable pluralism might contain a reasonable Catholicism, a reasonable interpretation of Islam, a reasonable atheism, and so on. Being reasonable, none of these doctrines will advocate the use of coercive political power to impose conformity on non-believers (Wenar, 2012).

Scholars have further debated Rawls’ ideas on the parameters of modus vivendi and reasonableness of tolerance, to attempt to ground tolerance as a principled practice (see, for example, McKinnon & Castiglione, 2009). The “limit” to tolerance, however, remains debatable.

It can be argued that the third definition based on philosophical pluralism is the most controversial within the religious sphere. This is where religious people equate pluralism with relativism of truth and affirmation of all beliefs as equally valid. For instance, D.A Carson, a prominent Canadian evangelical Christian professor and author of the book The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism (1996), argues,
Philosophical pluralism has generated many approaches in support of one stance: namely, that any notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is necessarily wrong. The only absolute creed is the creed of pluralism. No religion has the right to pronounce itself right or true, and the others false, or even (in the majority view) relatively inferior (Carson, 1996, p. 19).

Similar sentiments towards pluralism are held by evangelical Christian theologians in Indonesia. A case in point is the vehement attack on pluralism by Rev. Stevri Lumintang, the former rector of the Indonesia Bible Institute. In his 706-page volume entitled *Gray Theology: Religious Pluralism – Challenges and Threats of the Poison of Pluralism in Christian Theology Today* (2009), Lumintang argues that “Pluralism clearly rejects the concepts of finality, normative exclusivism and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Christ is no longer the only saviour but one of the saviours” (p. 15, my translation). He also identifies relativism and secularism as the engines of pluralism, and refers to Christians who advocate pluralism as “liberal” Christians – i.e. those who no longer believe in the key tenets of the faith.

In a similar vein, the treatment of pluralism, liberalism and secularism by conservative Muslims mirrors that described above. They perceive pluralism, liberalism and secularism as the foremost enemy of their faith because these notions threaten their absolute truth claim. This is demonstrated in the *fatwa* issued by the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) in prohibition of the three “-isms” above. The MUI defines pluralism as a “dangerous” affirmation of the following: “all religions are the same, truth is relative and can be found in all religions, no religion can claim absolute truth, and followers of all religions can enter into and live together in heaven” (Munawar-Rachman, 2010, pp. 6–7, my translation).

The usage of the term “pluralism” within the social sciences appears to be less contentious. For example, in the edited volume *Religious Pluralism in Democratic Societies*, the editor refers to “religious pluralism” as a normative notion of diversity, and as an aspiration towards tolerance and acceptance of difference (Nathan, 2007). Interestingly, none of the chapters in the volume – including those that discuss Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity in different societies – problematise the concept of religious pluralism in the conservative fashion discussed above. Southeast Asian Muslim scholars such as Hussin Mutalib (2007) and Azyumardi Azra (2007) who contributed to the volume have even defended religious pluralism and documented its roots in Islam.

All of this demonstrates the contested nature of the concept of pluralism, and shows that its acceptability is contingent upon the context in which the term is used. This is echoed in the assertion by the executive director of a Christian think-tank in Jakarta:

I think different people will understand pluralism differently. If you mean pluralism by syncretism, by uniformity, then that’s not the right way anyway. But if you are talking about the plurality of religions and ethnicities in Indonesia, I think it’s a fact that we have to [live with]. That is why we have Pancasila; it is how we need to find a way that we can live together (Interview, 17 November 2011).

The Director of the Harvard Pluralism Project, Diana Eck (2006), provided a comprehensive four-point definition of pluralism, which is paraphrased below:

First, pluralism is not just diversity but “the energetic engagement with diversity”. Diversity is often manifest in the creation of “religious ghettos” with little interaction between or among them. Religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is an achievement.
Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but “the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference”. While tolerance is a necessary public virtue, it does not require the religious and the non-religious to know anything about one another. The consequence of mere tolerance is “ignorance of one another”, “stereotype”, “fears” and “half-truths” about the other. Third, pluralism is not relativism, but “the encounter of commitments”. Pluralism does not mean a compromise on identities and religious commitments, but means holding one’s deepest differences “in relationship to one another”. Lastly, pluralism is “based on dialogue”. The language of pluralism is that of “dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism”, which means both speaking and listening, and in the process reveals both common understandings and real differences.

Eck’s definition of pluralism may perhaps provide an effective alternative to the normative understanding of pluralism, which at times can be seen as synonymous with an uncritical acceptance of diversity, and with the haunting fear of the slippery slope of relativism of which the conservatives are afraid.

**Multiculturalism and Pluralism Compared**

In essence, there is not much difference between multiculturalism and pluralism – it’s only how you package the value or message. But in definition, there may be some differences because pluralism is more [directed] towards religion while multiculturalism, culture. In reality, religion and culture overlap. According to me, multiculturalism is more general than pluralism as it includes ethnicity, culture, morals and religion… [Referring to the MUI fatwa] It is safer to use the term multiculturalism or diversity [than pluralism] (Interview with academic at an Islamic University, Jogjakarta, 12 September 2011).

Depending on the context under discussion, multiculturalism can be an empty signifier that is taken to mean anything. Fleras (2009) provides a useful typology of multiculturalism that allows us to identify the different levels of meaning associated with the discourse. He catalogued five levels of meaning for multiculturalism:

1. Multiculturalism as an empirical fact that describes the increasingly diverse world we live in.
2. Multiculturalism as an ideology or philosophy, which believes in the righteousness of respecting cultural differences and promoting social equality.
3. Multiculturalism as official policy and program, which endorses a mosaic of fixed identities and identifiable ethnicities.
4. Multiculturalism as a practice, which reflects the convergence of policy and philosophy at a grounded level.
5. Multiculturalism as counter-hegemony, which challenges the Eurocentric racialised constitutional order.

The “multiple modes of multiculturalism” also encompass measures as diverse as public recognition, education, social services, public materials, law, religious accommodation, food and broadcasting and media (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p. 3). Although multifaceted in its rubric and definition, multiculturalism can be defined as “a broad set of mutually reinforcing approaches or methodologies concerning the incorporation and participation of
immigrants and ethnic minorities and their modes of cultural/religious difference” (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p. 4).

As a policy first introduced in the US in the 1960s, multiculturalism signified a shift in the ways identity was constructed within Western modernity. Multicultural policy generates a return to roots and leads to a strengthening of ethnic identities (Friedman, 1997). Multiculturalism espouses postmodern theories that accentuate the notion that people’s differences are more important than their similarities (Agger, 1998). The demand for recognition of minority rights, culture and identity, or what Charles Taylor (1994) famously refers to as a “politics of recognition”, is at the core of the discourse of multiculturalism. Liberal multiculturalism in the West has been mainly concerned with minority nationalisms, indigenous peoples, immigrants and resident aliens. It later expanded to women’s rights, gay movements and racial desegregation. Kymlicka (2005) identified three pre-conditions for multicultural policy to succeed: demographics (immigration), rights consciousness and democracy. He also observed the difference in trajectories of minority rights in Asia and the West, and concluded that we need to factor local particularities into our discussion of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism attempts to subvert cultural homogenisation by acknowledging the coexistence and equal representation of different cultures and peoples within a nation-state. Like pluralism, multiculturalism promotes ethnic and cultural diversity. While both discourses focus on how different cultures can live together peacefully, multiculturalism takes a step further to address the issues of citizenship rights: i.e. how cultural collectivities can enjoy the freedom to express themselves but also be mindful of the rights of other groups. In a policy based on multiculturalism, citizens have different needs as members of groups with specific characteristics and social situations, and at the same time, equal rights as individuals (Castles, 1997).

Unlike the organic and bottom-up structure of pluralism, multiculturalism is often translated into policies that govern the diversity and multiplicity of multi-cultural societies (Hall, 2000; see also Fleras, 2009). Citing Foucault, Ien Ang (2010) argues that multiculturalism is a mode of “governmentality” aimed at regulating and reconciling tensions and conflicts resulting from cultural, racial or ethnic differences. Referring to the role of government in multiculturalism, Modood argues that “Multiculturalism is clearly beyond toleration and state neutrality for it involves active support for cultural difference, active discouragement against hostility and disapproval and the remaking of the public sphere in order to fully include marginalized identities” (Modood, 2007, p. 64).

The differences between pluralism and multiculturalism can be summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Pluralism and Multiculturalism Compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pluralism</th>
<th>Multiculturalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Different cultures allowed in a separate cultural sphere but with little interaction</td>
<td>• Different cultures are encouraged. Multiculturalism gives expression to experiences of cultural groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Little or no structural support from society and state. Efforts largely depend on bottom-up efforts of engagement and dialogue</td>
<td>• State policies of inclusion and recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focuses on finding common ground and seeks consensus</td>
<td>• Focuses on rights, citizenship and difference and addresses contestation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Religious pluralism is a contested notion</td>
<td>• Deals mainly with culture, with little emphasis on religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Multiculturalism in Crisis?

Over the past decade, multiculturalism as a policy has been under attack across Europe (see Nye, 2007; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010; Lentin & Titley, 2011) and in Australia (see Noble, 2009). Many leaders of European countries have declared multiculturalism to be a failure. For instance, in commemorating the first anniversary of the London bombings, the British newspaper, Daily Mail, went as far as to publish the headline that “Multiculturalism is dead” (Daily Mail, 7 July 2006). The backlash against multiculturalism was catalysed by the moral panic of 9/11, as well as Europe’s failure to integrate its Muslim immigrants. As Malik aptly puts it, “The real target of much of this criticism, however, is not multiculturalism but immigration and immigrants – especially Muslims” (2011).

To give a more comprehensive picture of the criticisms behind the backlash against multiculturalism, Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010) have outlined the following claims by critics:

1. Multiculturalism is a single “doctrine” – critics have homogenised multiculturalism as a singular, fixed ideology, making it easier to condemn.
2. Multiculturalism stifles debate – critics argue that multiculturalism creates an atmosphere in which political correctness has made subjects pertaining to race and religion taboo and untouchable.
3. Multiculturalism has fostered separateness and rejected common values – critics claim that multiculturalism promotes ethnic separation, rejection of common values and a lack of social integration.
4. Multiculturalism denies problems – critics contend that multiculturalism refuses to acknowledge social problems related to immigrants and ethnic minorities.
5. Multiculturalism supports reprehensible practices – critics attack multiculturalism on the basis of cultural relativism which, they say, advocates equal treatment of all cultures, and assumes that all aspects of every culture are good, including objectionable “backward” practices.
6. Multiculturalism provides a haven for terrorists – critics leverage the fear factor and the discourse of terrorism in their attack on multiculturalism.

As a result of this backlash, the term “multiculturalism” has been increasingly replaced by the term “diversity” in many states in Europe such that “diversity” in today’s policy documents is wholly interchangeable with earlier uses of ‘multiculturalism” (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p. 19). “Diversity and inclusion” has become a new catchphrase in many corporate structures and industries where differences in culture, religion, ethnicity, physical ability, gender and sexuality are valued and recognised. This signifies a shift from the corporatist, collectivist approach of multiculturalism to a more individual mode of inclusion. Moving away from treating members of a minority as representative of a collective, under “diversity” cultural difference is seen as an individual trait (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p. 18).

While some of the criticisms of multiculturalism outlined above are valid, one has to be mindful of the socioeconomic contexts in which these criticisms were developed. To some extent, the criticisms reflect the anxieties about religious difference brought about by migration, and the backlash campaign was arguably a kneejerk reaction based on the inability to contain such anxieties. This is not to trivialise the claims of the limitations and flaws of multiculturalism policies. Fleras (2009), for instance, offered a fierce but fair critique of what she refers to as “official multiculturalisms”. She summarised her argument
about the “multicultural paradox” in the following phrase: “Not meaning what it says, not saying what it means” – characterised by the disconnect that divides multicultural ideals from multicultural realities.

As a model conceptualised for migrant societies in the West such as Canada, Australia and America to deal, first and foremost, with the diverse backgrounds and cultures of new migrants, multiculturalism has privileged race, culture and ethnicity. As these liberal democracies tend to uphold the principle of secularism wherein religion and politics are kept separate in different spheres, discourses of religion are notably absent from their multiculturalism policies (Baumann, 1999; Levey, 2009). While Peter Berger (2012) has now replaced the notion of secularisation with “pluralisation”, which points out that a state or an individual can be both secular and religious, the neglect of religion within the present multiculturalism discourse still reflects the old paradigm. Scholars such as Levey (2009), Werbner (2012) and Wieviorka (2012) recognise that the “separatist” model of multiculturalism fails to meet the demands of religious citizens for recognition and accommodation as culture becomes a euphemism for religion. Nevertheless, with the growing influx of Muslim migrants in Europe in recent decades, in conjunction with the increase in religiosity and religious fervour in many parts of the world, the demand for recognition and accommodation of religions can no longer be ignored. Hence, in recent years the discussions on multiculturalism have shifted to take into account diverse religious identities within a secular state (see Modood, 2010; Beaman, 2012).

Stuart Hall has rightly pointed out that the real problem of multiculturalism lies in the fact “that the ‘-ism’ tends to convert ‘multiculturalism’ into a political doctrine” (2000, p. 210). In fact, the criticisms of multiculturalism summarised by Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010) above are built on the assumption that multiculturalism is a single doctrine. It is useful to remember that multiculturalism is not a one-size-fits-all policy, but is a work in progress; it is a fluid concept that encompasses a myriad of discourses, policies and practices. Critics tend to homogenise the concept into a singular “ism” in order to conveniently discredit the ideology together with its proponents, namely the liberals and minority activists (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, pp. 6–7).

Multiculturalism is not in a cul-de-sac. It is premature to abandon multiculturalism altogether and throw the baby out with the bath water. Malory Nye (2007, p. 118) puts it this way: “it is not a ‘failure of multiculturalism’ but rather is a failure to develop the context of multiculturalism effectively...”. To adapt to new identity politics in an increasingly globalised and complex world, multiculturalism must be flexible and malleable. Instead of condemning multiculturalism as a failure, the discourse should be rearticulated and reformulated (or “re-enchanted”, to use Wieviorka’s [2012] term) in accordance with the current socio-cultural and politico-economic context of particular societies such as Indonesia. The “new kind of more inclusive multiculturalism” will necessarily give serious consideration to religion, and will need to facilitate “intercultural or inter-faith openness and dialogue” (Werbner, 2012). This new framework of “religious multiculturalism” will be discussed below.

“Religious Multiculturalism” for Indonesia

Just before the Suharto regime collapsed in 1998, Thung Ju-lan wrote, “The discursive competition between assimilationism, multiculturalism and the subjectivity of conditional belonging has not
yet taken place in Indonesia. So far an assimilationist discourse rules. The possibility of developing multiculturalism is still remote” (1998, p. 23). She obviously did not expect that the downfall of Suharto would not only end the New Order’s ideology of assimilation, but also open up a new space for the resurgence of identity politics across Indonesia. One of the major changes in post-Suharto government policy was the abandonment of the assimilation policy. Over the past decade or so, scholars have been discussing the usefulness of multiculturalism in the Indonesian context, referring particularly to the urgency of putting in place multicultural education (e.g. Ujan, 2009; Sunarto, Heng, & Saifuddin, 2004; Tilaar, 2004; Yaqin, 2005). While one could not claim that Indonesia is consistently implementing policies of multiculturalism, serious efforts have been made by the Ministry of Education and Culture to promote multiculturalism in schools through the new curriculum implemented in 2013: the explicit inclusion of the word “multiculturalism” in the objectives of subjects such as Citizenship Studies and Anthropology shows the absolute relevance of multiculturalism to Indonesia, and demonstrates a strong internal acknowledgment of the need to promote multiculturalism among children, the future generation of Indonesia. Furthermore, organisations such as the Wahid Institute and the Ma’arif Institute, established by former leaders of the two largest mainstream Muslim organisations – NU and Muhammadiyah – have keenly promoted multiculturalism; and Muhammadiyah schools have initiated a new Religion curriculum based on religious tolerance.

As demonstrated earlier, the meaning and political purpose of multiculturalism varies across different interest groups. The vibrant public sphere in the Reformasi era has allowed previously oppressed voices to emerge. Taking advantage of the new democratic atmosphere, marginalised groups such as the ethnic Chinese, the LGBTIQ community and a number of religious minority groups that were not formally recognised by the state have demanded recognition of their identity and rights. Although there is no clear policy or guideline from the Indonesian state to institutionalise multiculturalism (with the exception of multicultural education), the democratisation process has made such demands possible. Of all the “minority” groups, the nation’s ethnic Chinese have arguably benefited the most from the Reformasi process, as we witness the dissolution of official discriminatory measures and the restoration of their cultural and citizenship rights (see Hoon, 2008). This is also because, of all ethnic groups, the Chinese were among the most marginalised in terms of their cultural, linguistic and citizenship rights (Anggraeni, 2011).

Nevertheless, the optimism about multiculturalism in Indonesia should not be overrated. Some Indonesian leaders have reservations about multiculturalism as it conjures up old fears of federalism, relativism and disunity. Furthermore, advocates of multiculturalism are limited to mainly the newly developed civil society, and the discourse of multiculturalism was introduced as part and parcel of the post-Suharto process of democratisation and decentralisation (see Burhanuddin, 2003). The public discourse on multiculturalism is still limited to major English and Indonesian newspapers. As Lyn Parker observes (in this volume), the notion of “multikulturalisme” still sounds foreign to Indonesia; local terms such as “kemajemukan” (plurality), “keragaman” (heterogeneity) and “kebhinnekaan” (diversity) are preferred. Raihani (2012) made a similar observation based on his ethnographic research on multicultural education in pesantren in Indonesia. He noted that “multiculturalism” was a new word to many respondents, particularly students. Some of these sentiments are reflected in the two interviews below:

The concept of multiculturalism originated from the West [arising from] the process of migration. In contrast, Indonesia has already been multicultural since the beginning. Our society
already has a concept of pluralism: it is part of our local wisdom, or *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, diverse but one (Interview with academic in an Islamic university, Jogjakarta, 13 September 2012).

The term multiculturalism is not known to many people; and it is only appreciated in academic circles… We are not migrants (*pendatang*), we are indigenous but we are diverse. Is the theory of multiculturalism applicable to us? Too many [new] terms have appeared in Indonesia, which sometimes become polemical when different interpretations arise. For example, there are so many different understandings of religious pluralism. We should just take the essence of these notions: *kebhinekaan* [diversity], *keanekaragaman* [heterogeneity] and *Pancasila*, and unite them under one universal identity – such as Indonesian societal norm (Interview with Muslim academic, Jakarta, 15 September 2011).

Another informant shed some light on why he thought multiculturalism might not be suited to the Indonesian context:

I think there are some differences between multiculturalism as a discourse and the practice of multiculturalism which has been ongoing for centuries in the Indonesian society. The multiculturalism [discourse] emphasises individualism but the character of the Indonesian society is very communal (Interview with Professor in a Christian university, Jogjakarta, 12 September 2011).

Two main issues regarding the relevance of multiculturalism to Indonesia were raised in the interviews above. The first is related to the nature and origin of multiculturalism, which is seen as a notion that emerged in the individualist West to deal with migrants and their cultures. The informants argue that while Indonesia is ethnically diverse, it is not a migrant society. Furthermore, its communal character means multiculturalism is not applicable to Indonesia. The second point they raise is that local notions of diversity, including the state ideology of *Pancasila* and the national motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, have been sufficient to accommodate differences and protect the rights of different religions and cultural groups to coexist in harmony.

In relation to the question of the suitability of multiculturalism to the context of Indonesia, it is important to realise that although the discourse and policy of multiculturalism originated in the West, they are by no means exclusive to the West. Neither is multiculturalism a set formula that can be transposed to any society in a wholesale fashion. Stuart Hall (2000, p. 210) reminds us that “just as there are different multi-cultural societies, there are very different multiculturalisms”. In other words, multiculturalism is not a set of cast-in-stone doctrines; rather, it is a process, which is “always contextual to particular places and cultural experiences” (Nye, 2007, p. 116). Non-Western societies “have their own history of pluralist challenge and their own need to devise meaningful formulas for its resolution” (Hefner, 2001, p. 3). Hence, contextuality needs to be recognised in any discussion of multiculturalism beyond the West. The more useful question to ask is whether Indonesia has the three “pre-conditions for multiculturalism” identified by Kymlicka (2005): an immigrant demography, rights consciousness and democracy. How are minority/majority and indigenous/non-indigenous categorised in Indonesia?

The demography of Indonesia, though different from that of migrant societies in countries such as the US, Australia and Singapore, is no less diverse. While immigration from other countries is less common in Indonesia, transmigration policies, particularly under the New Order, have resulted in diverse communities. The aspirations of these new settlers to express their identities contemporaneously as they established themselves as socially,
economically and ecologically viable communities were not addressed by the state, as it was only interested in promulgating a homogenous national culture (Hoey, 2003). With burgeoning democracy and rights consciousness, Indonesia needs to configure a framework of multiculturalism that suits its needs and demographic contexts. This new framework must also take into account what Goh and Holden (2009) termed "postcolonial multiculturalism", or the need to challenge the racial and class structures put in place by the colonialists.

Furthermore, multiculturalism is a “global discourse” (Kymlicka, 2005), which has appealed in Asia as nation-states search for ways to accommodate an increasingly diverse and complex population amidst globalising forces of migration and democratisation. Such an effort is evident in the serious scholarly discussions of multiculturalism in India (Mallick, 2013), East Asia (Nagy, 2014; Kim, 2014), Japan (Graburn, Ertle, & Tierney, 2008), Korea (Watson, 2010) and Southeast Asia (Hefner, 2001; Goh & Holden, 2009), including Indonesia (Raïhani, 2014; Budiman, 2014). The application of the “global” multiculturalism framework to Indonesia is not meant to privilege the Western discourse but rather to understand “the cultural and sociological circumstances that make different responses to the problem of pluralism and citizenship likely” (Hefner, 2001, p. 4).

To launch the conceptualisation of multiculturalism in Indonesia, this article suggests three considerations:

1. Multiculturalism must maintain a balance between unity and diversity. Ien Ang (2010) argues that the idea of a unified multicultural nation – united in diversity – is an inherently ambiguous and paradoxical concept, and that the tension between unity and diversity can never be resolved. Nye (2007), however, argues that multiculturalism is not the opposite of nationalism because as a policy, multiculturalism concerns issues and processes that are embedded in national identity construction and development.

2. Multiculturalism must allow space to acknowledge cultural boundary-crossing and hybridity. Instead of being a cosmetic display of a selection of monocultural individuals, being multicultural is about the acknowledgment of the existence of a matrix of different cultural influences within each individual. Moreover, this understanding of multiculturalism at the “micro” level of the individual can also be translated to the “macro”-societal level, especially in the state’s accommodation of not only the existence of different ethnic groups but also the diversity within each ethnic group (Hoon, 2006).

3. Multiculturalism needs to include religion. This point will be discussed further below.

The second issue raised in the interview excerpts above concerns the sufficiency of existing local ideologies. As the philosophical foundation (Weltanschauung) of Indonesia, there is no doubt that Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika are meritorious notions that represent the inclusiveness and diversity of Indonesia. Both ideologies, however, are far from reflecting the social reality of Indonesia. The end of the New Order has seen Pancasila demystified and de-ideologised. With the raft of new ideas that come with the flow of globalisation and information to other societies – such as the rise of Islamism in the Middle East with the Arab Spring – Pancasila has now become one of the options in the ideological marketplace of democracy. Reformasi has apparently given Indonesians democratic freedom, but this very space has also allowed room for the hard-line, radical and exclusive religious groups to grow. The result is rising religious intolerance and inter-religious violence.
Religious intolerance has been on the rise in Indonesia (Rogers, 2012). In an article published in *The New York Times* entitled “No Model for Muslim Democracy”, Andreas Harsono argues,

While Indonesia has made great strides in consolidating a stable, democratic government after five decades of authoritarian rule, the country is by no means a bastion of tolerance. The rights of religious and ethnic minorities are routinely trampled. While Indonesia’s Constitution protects freedom of religion, regulations against blasphemy and proselytizing are routinely used to prosecute atheists, Bahais, Christians, Shiites, Sufis and members of the Ahmadiyya faith… By 2010, Indonesia had over 150 religiously motivated regulations restricting minorities’ rights (Harsono, 2012).

It should be unimaginable for minorities to envisage living in this most populous Muslim state without the shelter of the religiously-neutral values set out in *Pancasila* and the Constitution, but it is also apparent that the principles laid out in the national ideology and the Constitution have not been observed or honoured by the state itself.

This is not to say that *Pancasila* has lost its relevance in Indonesia. In fact, responding to the growing radicalism in Indonesia, interfaith activists, religious leaders and academics are now calling for the Indonesian state and society to “reclaim”, “revive” and “return to” *Pancasila* (see Susanto, 2009; Adam, 2011; Magnis-Suseno, 2011; Syofyan, 2011). There are also proposals in the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR) to revive the *Pancasila* ideology through the arts, culture and education, in ways that differ from the New Order days. These efforts signify the hope that the re-actualisation of *Pancasila* can ultimately reunite the people, restoring the value of tolerance and upholding respect for differences in Indonesia’s multicultural society. I argue that multiculturalist governance is essential to manage the diversity of Indonesia. More specifically, this mode of multiculturalism, which I term “religious multiculturalism”, has to take religion seriously, and at the same time, incorporate and complement existing local ideologies – in particular, *Pancasila* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

“Religious multiculturalism”, as used in this article, is primarily concerned with the inadequacy of the current mode of multiculturalism in accommodating religious minorities. While the notion of multiculturalism deals primarily with culture, pluralism is primarily focused on religion. However, pluralism is contentious within the religious sphere due to its perceived association with liberalism, secularism and relativism. With such baggage, and also with a lack of formal structure and governance, the religious multiculturalism advocated in this article requires both the state and religions to play an active role in promoting tolerance and harmonious coexistence.

Religious multiculturalism focuses on governance (Fleras, 2009) and requires the dynamic involvement of the state to protect its religious population, especially religious minorities (Modood, 2007). Scholars have increasingly agreed that some form of state management of multiculturalism is necessary for the policy to work. For instance, Nye argues that “The management and governance of multiculturalism is necessary, to ensure that there is a widespread and effective respect for diversity, whilst at the same time there is an element of cohesion and shared identity – a common ground upon which the society and nation works as more than a collection of diversities” (2007, p. 118). Unfortunately, democratisation and decentralisation in Indonesia have not led to a universal, creative and inclusive public policy for its diverse cultures and religions (Jones, 2012). In fact, Indonesia has struggled to contain factionalism and communal and religious violence since the latter years of President Suharto’s authoritarian regime and the abrupt opening of the public sphere
in the aftermath of his downfall. Moreover, the state has been silent amidst an increasing climate of religious intolerance and alarming examples of violence against minorities (International Crisis Group, 2010). So far, various official declarations of respect and appreciation for cultural diversity remain empty rhetoric, which has led to the public discourse of an “absent state” (negara absen).

Bryan Turner (2007) takes a critical view of the politics of recognition that celebrates diversity at the cost of equality and justice. He (2007, p. 261) argues that the tension between “transnational identities of neo-fundamentalist religions (Christian, Muslim, Jewish but also Hindu and Buddhist) and the state-based identities of national citizenship” must be resolved by the creation of a “common legal and political framework, namely citizenship”. Hence, Parker and Hoon (2013) argue for “religious citizenship” in Indonesia, which calls for an explicitly pro-active government that intervenes on the side of minorities, to protect their constitutional right of freedom of religion. Citizenship is more than a legal status or administrative category; it includes political practice, as well as a mode of participation in public life (Stokes, 2008). Membership of and participation in religious non-governmental organisations and religious institutions could be considered acts of “religious citizenship” (Parker & Hoon, 2013; Modood, 2010).

Two important principles can be adapted from Kymlicka’s (1995) work on multicultural citizenship: (1) the state must be seen to belong equally to all citizens, and (2) individuals must be able to access state institutions, and participate fully and equally as citizens in political life, without having to deny their religious identity. The state is the key player in the imposition of a moral order through the rule of law so that equal rights can be enjoyed by all citizens, but the role of the state in enforcing peace and stability should not come at the cost of human rights, as was often the case during the Suharto regime. Hence, the state needs to exercise “reasonable pluralism” so that tolerance for difference can be encouraged and coercive political power is not used to impose conformity on non-believers (Rawls, in Wenar, 2012; McKinnon & Castiglione, 2009).

While the function of the state is quintessential to the implementation of institutionalised multiculturalism (Werbner, 2012), this role can be paradoxical: on one hand, the state can prevent hostility and violence by maintaining religious and racial harmony; on the other hand, state multiculturalism often reinforces racial and religious boundaries in the bid to maintain harmony, by preventing organic interaction and hybridity between groups from occurring. In Indonesia, the paradox of multicultural governance has been manifest when the Ministry of Religion, established in order to regulate religious affairs, has, on many occasions, circumscribed religious freedom; and, on the other hand, when the police have failed to maintain law and order in the face of communal violence, and the legal system has failed to provide justice to victims of religious violence (see Crouch, 2009). The key is to strike a balance between state involvement in ensuring the protection of minority rights and tolerance of difference in the public sphere, while at the same time allowing space for civic participation and cross-cultural fertilisation to take place organically among the citizenry.

**Conclusion**

This article has attempted to elucidate the convoluted concepts of multiculturalism, pluralism and religion, and the ways they intertwine and intersect, which are often messy, conflated and complex. It has presented a case for the “global discourse” of multiculturalism to be seriously considered as a policy practice in Indonesia. By acknowledging the conspicuous
silence on religion in the theories of multiculturalism, which have conventionally privileged race, culture and ethnicity, the article proposes “religious multiculturalism” as a conceptual alternative to “religious pluralism”. Religious multiculturalism promotes the idea of an active state that protects religious minorities and incorporates the inclusive *Pancasila* national ideology in its framework. This concept can avoid the baggage and stigma that the notion of “religious pluralism” connotes, and yet push the boundaries of existing theories of multiculturalism to include religious identities and religious minorities. While the substantive content of how religious multiculturalism can be institutionalised is beyond the scope of the current discussion, it can be expected that religious multiculturalism can be promoted through education and interfaith activities, where the engagement, understanding, encounter and dialogue proposed in Diana Eck’s Pluralism Project can be best implemented.

**Notes**

1. Connolly has also rejected the conflation of pluralism with relativism. He argues that it is necessary to set limits to pluralism and tolerance “because it is impossible to house every possible mode of diversity in the same regime at the same time” (2005, p. 43).
3. This can be seen in the case of multiculturalism in Singapore, which Chua (2003) describes as “an instrument of social control”.

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