

## FIVE LETTERS THAT “HURT”: THE MULTICULTURAL INDONESIA IN CURRENT FASTER CHANGE ERA

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### Abstract

Ideally, multiculturalism is good cultural integration model for Indonesia, the largest archipelago country in the world with a population of about 250 million, but realistically, today's world in which it exists has been hegemonized by power relations in political, economical and practical terms. The five letters—POWER—has disturbed and hurt its cultural integration creating social conflicts among some ethnics and/or religious groups in the country, especially in the fifteen years of decentralization and regional autonomy policy implementation. Action approaches, within which power is the central dominant, open up new challenges since it embodies power relations and contestation. Neoliberal capitalistic economy is recognized and preferred in the world by any measure while capital networking becomes more relevant and important in our present era as those who do not belong to any network will be in a disadvantaged position. This paper would elaborate that Indonesia has been coping with the socio-cultural impacts of the faster changes locally, nationally and globally. Its cultures respond differently to the changes and this increases new plurality of social life, but at the same time, unfortunately, its national or state laws have developed not as fast, and it is quite often they are left behind. Multiculturalism has hardly contested with global materialistic-capitalistic domination which is brought about by power hegemony.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, Multiculturalism, Culture Change, Paradox.

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### 1.Indonesia

While multiculturalism is an ideal goal to achieve cultural diversity integration, “diversity but unity”, a country must urge its people to take part in a process of negotiation and power sharing in order to create an authentic *unum* that has moral authority and legitimacy (Boutte, 1996). The process has to end with “*e pluribus unum*” meaning “out many, one” (Banks, 1996) –the term of which has long been used by Indonesians to symbolize their diversity but unity, that is, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Since the early twentieth century there had been political convention among Indonesian leaders that this country's natural heterogeneity—probably one of the most heterogeneous country in the world—was an unavoidable fact which had to be put as integrative force when they did extremely hard for an independent Indonesia, as a nation.

Indonesian diversity is its complexities. In his speech, (Bridge, 2012, p. 2)states :

It is impossible to have any depth understanding of Indonesia without understanding its complexities. The diversity of Indonesia almost defies description..... Even with that first-hand experience, the raw statistics on Indonesia remained mind-boggling : 17,508 islands—approximately 1000 permanently inhabited; 240 million people; 300 ethnic groups speaking 700 living languages; 5500 kilometers across—Jayapura is closer to Sydney than it is to Jakarta. While there are common bonds between these people making them all Indonesians, there are also very significant differences. While it is dangerous in the extreme to judge people by reference to cultural stereotypes, it pays to be aware of the differences between a Javanese and Batak or a Manadonese and a Balinese.

Mr Bridge's statements expressed some good things about Indonesia. He felt astonished that this gigantic country in terms of its extremely large variety of geographic and people conditions, the "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" has been well maintained up today. His astonishment is rational because it may be unimaginable that this big country should be managed by democratic bottom-up management instead of strong top-down government power which more reasonable for this intricate country's conditions.

Multiculturalism as a doctrine or policy should be translated into sets of systematic and consistent action to involve people of the society or nation. Different perspectives have been offered to make sense multiculturalism ideas into mind of the people of vast different cultures. Some are called politic of different approaches. What kind of politic of different approach may apply to Indonesia? It has to be different from one applying for American multicultural society because some hundred cultures making one Indonesia naturally belong to each rooted intrinsically in its own local-traditional culture—a quite comfortable habitus for centuries of its existence. We describe this distinctively for American migrants-based nation. Imagine some groups of people coming from different places to a new land and will live there together, it is most probably that they will negotiate things one to another in order to guarantee that all groups will live closely and share available resources. This will be possible in the same time because the groups realize that the land does not belong to them. However, for the Indonesian case, it is quite difficult to utilize the same analogy. The issue of culture regulation comes up into question; a "machine" regulating the different should be present there. Multicultural education, then, is seen as a practical dimension of multiculturalism.

## **2.Cultural Diversity: Culture and Biology Ambiguity**

Efforts to segregate too much culture and biology as many have endeavored is not so successful when this concept is situated on the domain of interaction, one of the requirements of multiculturalism. The similar critics to the others who attempt to insulate biology in its idiosyncratic position to differ from culture that all the way is at all mind concerns, no such thing like its relation to biology which has been accused authoritarian oriented structural-functionalism. Top-down, too much state control and regulation, human objectification*etc*, are some amongst the issues of the accusation. In fact, cultural diversity is increasingly employed and defined in the same way as biology or biodiversity in the time that the latter refers to biological and ecological variations, habitats and ecosystem. One attempts to explicitly imply diversity through this lens conceived as "a situation that includes representation of multiple (ideally) all groups within a prescribed environment, such as university or a workplace (Dietz, 2007, p. 8)". These words most commonly directs to distinction between cultural groups. Cultural differences have to be respected and accepted by acknowledging that no superiority between and within cultures exists.

Intrinsically, it is challenging to shift from biological to cultural diversity concepts, not only due to the matters of its physical characteristics to those idealistic mind but also the issues of objective to subjective typological judgment in academic exercises, unless we accept—at least to some extent—the integration (again) of those two embodied-dimensions of human-being, physical and cultural. Deliberation on the two dimensions is to minimize the distinction into accepting back the structure-function—in systemic way—into current acceptable analysis for cultural diversity. The discourse on diversity not only "tends to include a descriptive dimension—how cultures, groups and societies are diversely structured and how they encounter with heterogeneity—but also a strongly prescriptive dimension—that states how cultures, groups, and societies should interact within themselves and among each other (Dietz, 2007, p. 9)". This kind of new integration provides space of dynamic productive relation between cultural and social matters, the ideal of culture which basically in abstract mind and social connoting

action, controlling, and ordering in which biological is traditionally articulated and embodied within it. Suppose that theoretically-traditionally social and biological sides are more dialogic-embedded than both to cultural side, then social, actuality, action, and interaction are related concepts to which cultural diversity will intensively interplay when we are going to prescribe the latter into responsible development in our forum concern.

However, it could factually be undeniable if we still maintain our cultural forum title “cultural diversity for our sustainable planet”. When the problematic of cultural diversity is solved, we will be facing another conceptual dilemma, that is sustainable and/or responsible development. The concept of development is one that invites another ambiguity. It has conventionally been conceived by our neighbor, the economists. Development traditionally placed the economy as the first priority, so that cultural diversity in its relation with it, intentionally or unintentionally, is highly affected by the economic terms. Culture then is shifting again as utility to support the economic process. To put the word “development” in our discussion is inevitably encouraging us to enter the space of holistic perspective dealing with other sides of human life such as politics, belief system, technology, and, certainly, the economy. The implication of this perspective is our retraction from the first standing position to put culture as central to all matters. By way of explanation we may unintentionally be economizing culture; that is, we prescribe culture for the sake of the economy. An ecosystem perspective is brought upon the economic and cultural sides together when we put the word development, or more precisely “responsible development.” Why “responsible”? It is because we are highly aware of the existing inequality which mostly economic predominant in its connotation. The economy structures the world, and surely the culture.

### **3. Multiculturalism as Responsible Development**

Cultural diversity is a truism ever since no such naturally social and cultural homogeneity. If there is any indeed it is an objective construct of the cultural theorists, and the level of theoretical authority to divide and label things. Homogeneity or homogeneous culture is metaphoric rather than one in empirically observable sense. On the other side, heterogeneity is not metaphoric, yet real and empiric. In constructive anthropological sense, heterogeneity is reality on the field, not on paper. Cultural diversity is a heterogeneity issue but these two concepts—take aside their analogies—have left problematic space that remain unsolved. It is an interaction issue that has not taken into account that otherwise multiculturalism is one passable solution for bounded and bounded-less query.

Therefore, multiculturalism should undeniably be put into central discussion and debates when cultural diversity implies some cultures exist nearby, side by side, interact each other in at least potentially-increasingly intensive today and future. Multiculturalism only exists in multicultural society which—is a rather cyclical statement—denotes one in which there are several cultures living together. As Parekh, (1997) suggests that the term multiculturalism has three components: firstly, it has something to do with culture; secondly, it points to a plurality of cultures; and, thirdly, it refers to a specific manner to responding to that plurality. Although it is still debatable for its unsatisfactory use as a definition, if it is simplified, culture is simply as knowledge, common language, shared history, shared set of believe, moral values, and sense of shared geographical origin— “all of which taken together define a sense of belonging to specific group (Watson, 2000, p. 27)”.

“Diversity originates discourse of culturality”, a statement that we start with in this discussion. It comes from “the societies self-defined as ‘countries of immigration’ located mostly in North America and Oceania (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 31)”. Multiculturality endorses the need to build a medium of communication, a symbolic-vehicle, bridging across and through the existing cultural differences. The migrants from other regions or countries brought with them different

ideas, beliefs, values, and traditions would have to live closely with each other for a long time, living on the same land, shading under the same sky, and earning benefits from the same resources. The idea of living together on the new land, “the New World” for American cultural history context, for instance, got different realms of reasoning why American multiculturalism is mostly considered much more successful. The case is probably different when we use Indonesian’s which has been established through various narratives bounded in local histories, even though this country is recognized as well managed in maintaining its unity for about seventy years. However, need to notice that the successful maintenance mostly due to a non-democratic cultural way. For more than a half of a century Indonesia—during twenty years of Old Order and thirty five years of New Order—was managed by authoritarianism thought of power. There was almost no such multiculturalism as we have conventionally conceived earning space in managing this country during the time.

One of the crucial differences that Indonesian creates from American experience is each culture composing Indonesian cultural diversity had rooted and embodied within its local history; therefore, cultural claims on behalf of communal or societal rights which has been developing in Indonesia in the last decade are stronger than those happening in the history of American establishment. Many authors have put more emphasis on the cases of the indigenous Indians in America. In Indonesia, politic of lands or territories have increased quite significantly in the current reformation era. It is indicated unofficially by various kinds of disputes and conflicts in many regions of this country, and officially manifested by the formation of some double-fold numbers of *kabupaten* dan provinces. As a comparison, for instance, the number of *kabupaten* in Indonesia during New Order era is 247 (BPS 1995) and 597 (KPU 2015), and the number of provinces has increased from 27 (then, 26 in 1999 because of the freedom of Timor Timur Province which then became a new State, Timor Leste) to 35 provinces (2016) which will further increase in years ahead. Informally, and also formally, discourses on proposal ideas from some other provinces to divide each one of their own into two or more provincial administrations. My observation signifies that there are four main reasons for this increasing intention: (1) socioeconomic discrepancies amongst and throughout regions (read: provinces) in the countries. The same is for the districts (read : kabupaten) in the regions. Some are very rich, and some are poor; (2) the inefficiency of regional managements should be reduced by dividing a region into some manageable smaller areas which then called *provinsi* or *kabupaten pemekaran* ; (3) rich resources of a region tends to encourage the motives of it to be autonomous rather than one that is not rich; (4) some regions had been heightening the awareness of cultural history background such as ethnic origins. Religious factor—although of its the same important—is only secondary to encourage self-divisional region as ethnic-factor is predominant.

Multiculturalism is a view of cultural diversity as valuable and worth maintaining. “The multicultural view encourages the practice of cultural ethnic traditions (Kottak, 2011, p. 143)”. Multiculturalism is unavoidably multiculturalism, but it is not always the reverse. Multiculturalism need extra-efforts to be multiculturalism. “The suffix ‘ism’ signifies a normative doctrine or an ‘ideology’ hopefully working in the peoples minds in their daily life (Watson, 2000, p. 47)”. It is the ‘ism’ that “makes our task much harder than one instead as we will not be evitable to proceeding from extrinsic factual sense—plurality or multiculturalism—to intrinsic realm of people mind –pluralism or multiculturalism (Watson, 2000, p. 49)”. Multiculturalism is factual realm that be processed into “culture vocabulary in people mind (Parekh, 2001, p. 98)” which “we believe very much likely in multiculturalism process in education (Gibson, 1984, p. 107)”. It is still being debated whether culturality really could turn into culturalism in practical sense, although education offers to communicate this two domains intensively.



Education seems to be promising ideally. In long terms, the American case reveals quite a lesson that education had worked well to change those two potential antagonistic sides into a working multiculturalism in the nation life –it took about two centuries, to establish this *ism* along with the building of American rule of laws, for every citizen, from local to national (Gibson, 1984; Watson, 2000)—but, especially nowadays, diversity era the process seems quite far from the same. Like a pendulum swinging to the right, it comes at time to start swinging to the left. It means that multiculturalism will be ready for predominant integrative force which is actually top to down policy terms—the unpopular, undemocratic so to speak today. An example of the Indonesian case, there has been a spread concerned among ordinary people that the increasing intensity of motives amongst political elites and practitioners to divide regions along with the higher tension of potential disputes and conflicts at least in some regions in this country will break up this Republic (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia) in the near future. One of the main concern sources is that the national rule of laws has not been working properly ever since.

Another debatable question to date is what kind of process and through which ways that multiculturalism as expected normative doctrines come into existence? Far from simple phrase is that the process has to go through political pathways in order to be formal policies (Saifuddin, 2004)—in this sense, education policies—which we call as part of responsible development. Responsible means that policy apparatus takes action and risks to formulate and implement multicultural program—in education, for instance—for the sake of national prosperity and integration. Ideally, the unity of the Indonesian nation is the end of these intricate multiculturalism issues. “Multiculturalism is cultural movement (Huat, 2002, p. 3)” because it is intrinsically manifestation of unsatisfied condition of contemporary global multicultural world. “It is an empirically social reality that can be transformed into an ideology in which the historicity of an empirical reality is suppressed and the ‘reality’ itself read as ‘nature’ (Huat, 2002, p. 5).

Multiculturalism as cultural movement is practically political. It has to do with policy of different levels, from local to national, and with fast growing possibility of local-global intercommunication . The latter developing phenomena has made Parekh’s five models— isolationist, accommodative, autonomist, critical or interactive, and cosmopolitan multiculturalisms—have to be left skeptical because none will be able to satisfactorily respond to the fast-dynamic global-local process—*glocalization*—today and in the future (Robertson, 1995).

However, the main issue is not merely a culture eligibility to be put into one model or another yet, it is quandary if one has to be engaged by a culture that made it naturally put into the kind. Indonesia is a suitable instance for this model exercise. The current major and intense changes of our world have made these models more limited. Therefore, an alternative new model is required.

#### **4. Five Letters (Power) that “Hurt” : A Lesson from Indonesia**

This part is a lesson from Indonesia. Most authors of multiculturalism seem to agree that a multicultural society is seemingly stable, cohesive, and at ease with itself—it achieves a multiculturalism successful—if meets such following condition : (1) A consensually grounded structure of authority; (2) a collectively acceptable set of constitutional rights; (3) a just and impartial state; (4) a multiculturalism constituted common culture and multicultural education; and (5) a plural and inclusive view of national identity (Parekh, 2001).

Suppose we follow these conditions, it would be obvious that a multicultural society is (still) conceived as bounded one due to such key concepts that should be in it as “consensus, acceptable, impartial, common, and inclusive”. These words look homogenizing intra cultural variations which are inevitably exist in a complex society.

The introduction of action approaches opens up new possibilities. The end of twentieth century and current early twenty first century are hypothetically regarded by many social scientists as the beginning of our world cultural change process with fast higher intensity. Many information and technology innovations have come up in year nevermore in decade time and they have transformed many faces of people life globally in modes ever imagined before. People stratification which conceived distinctive by social theorists in the last centuries no longer effective to read people because those who live in a cosmopolitan city or in a village deep behind the mountain may communicate each other without significant barriers. Globalization—now, some call glocalization (Robertson, 1995)—could be the best paraphrased by Anthony Giddens’s “runaway world” (1997), “the world is running in hurry, causing us who live in it just not having adequate time to think over what’s being happened (Saifuddin, 2016, p. 5)”. The result is people might respond to the external “cultural raid” as fast as possible, as logically as possible, according to their way. “Imagine that our world inhabited by a wide variety of people and their cultures variously respond to the accelerate changing culture, then resulted in the new plurality of social and cultural life. This is the new order in which we currently live in (Saifuddin, 2016, p. 6)”.

This is a postmodern turn. One key—at least one of the keys—of the new world order is relations. Human being seems do not have sufficient time to think thorough; contemplating over their existence as structural and/or symbolism approaches had strongly proposed for about two or more decades ago. People over the world seem to be moving toward more practical purposes, they rapidly grasp daily and routine need fulfillment—especially for the economic matters—and some set aside their idealistic-ideology for the sake of survival. Capitalism economy—now, changes its name to neo-liberal economy—is again recognized as the queen of human progress and development in any measure, and the implication is the emergence of new world structure. The main issue is and will be who control and are controlled by the world liberal economy. Actual, however, is more meaningful than ideal; action is considerably more worthwhile than words. It could be said that action approaches are preferable and acceptable among the social scientists today. Actor, agent, and agency are some of the becoming more familiar concepts interplay. They are pre-supposedly able to explain the high social dynamic, very urban in its sense, and that promise social problem solution. Distinction of social and cultural level of analysis which Geertz, (1973) once strongly proposed for the sake of theoretical adequacy is no longer paid for much attention because it is merely more considered as philosophical matters, not to seek urgent demanding practical socioeconomic problem solution (Saifuddin, 2016).

Power is the concept embodied within action approaches. It works as central orientation along social relation, interaction, and implies contestation. Although democracy and human right issues are two concepts that are conceived as culturally embodied deep inside human mind, becoming the intrinsic power of humanity they are not as easy as expected in realistic domains. Actor, agent and agency may go through along different pathways—practical ways. Rapid changes turn this easier. It is obvious that world changes—under the terms of globalization and/or glocalization—have created “new order” based on the actors who gain and evoke power. There are many resources of power—for example, knowledge, technology, and economy—in which culture may be utilized as vehicle of materialistic interests instead of guiding principles like norms and values as well-known in the past.

Referring to power relation perspective, a new world order is basically “moving order”, because power is always something to do, not something to own. Moving order means that relationships of culture, economy, politics, religion, and other domains of human life are always dynamic and often conflict contextually, but conversely they are also interlinked and integrated through new politics of culture, new interpretation of their current cultural condition, in order to survive in the world we live in. Many scholars agree that globalization or glocalization may create conflicts

and resistance as consequences of cultural diversity, however, at the same time it may also create integration. Conflicts and resistance due to different interpretations of changing environments for practical and pragmatic bases.

“Culture has been shifted its position from central to periphery, from guidance principle for action to the vehicle to achieve practical goals—this is the politic of culture instead of culture of politics as traditionally conceived (Saifuddin, 2010, p. 27)”. Power relation and action perspectives bring about shifting to more political concerns rather than cultural. So, what happened with culture? It has turned to be defined as something more ambiguous and ambivalent and fluid and less distinctive. Logically, multiculturalism turns to be evolving (or revolving?) to a secondary position of its importance as a new cultural integration which had been intensively promoted until 1990s. It has been working well in America, Canada, and some European countries but not it is not really the case for other countries like Indonesia.

To sum up this discussion, Indonesian national formation history, is very different from the American’s or Canadian’s. Local-ethnic consciousness of Indonesian is (still) strong, and even getting stronger—at least in some regions —these days. Multiculturalism is itself an ideal model which has to be supported, legitimized and committed through the national laws, the process of which has not been working well in Indonesia yet. In this uncertain national law enforcement condition—which conflicts and resistance are increasingly vulnerable—multiculturalism is and will be in disadvantaged position.



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