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ABSTRACT

This paper, intended as lecture material for university students or as background material for teachers of social studies and world history, assumes that students already have some knowledge about the origins, practices, and beliefs of Islam, but that they have no prior background about Indonesia or its history. The paper describes the diversity and the history of Indonesia, including its experience with Dutch colonialism, Japanese occupation, and the struggle for independence. It compares the administrations of Presidents Sukarno and Suharto. The document provides a brief survey of economic development and education in Indonesia, focusing on Islam, and Indonesia's commitment to religious pluralism and toleration. Finally, the paper discusses the role of women in Indonesia. Learning objectives and discussion questions are included. The paper outlines nine objectives and eight discussion questions. Contains 33 references. (JAG)

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Unity in Diversity:
History and Religion in Indonesia

Bruce William Jones

Abstract

This paper describes the diversity of Indonesia and the history of Indonesia, including its experience with Dutch colonialism, the Japanese occupation and the struggle for independence. It compares the administrations of Presidents Sukarno and Suharto. It provides a brief survey of economic development and of education in Indonesia. It describes unique features of religion in Indonesia, especially Islam, and Indonesia's commitment to religious pluralism and toleration. Finally, the paper discusses the role of women in Indonesia. Bibliography, learning objectives and discussion questions are included.

Background

This paper is intended as lecture material for university students. It may be used as background information for teachers of social studies and world history. It assumes that students already have some knowledge about the origins, practices and beliefs of Islam, but that they have no prior background about Indonesia or its history.

Students should be provided with maps of Indonesia.

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Objectives

1. Students will be able to name the major colonial power that ruled Indonesia and be able to describe the kinds of government that existed prior to colonialism.
2. Students will be able to describe the steps that led to independence in Indonesia.
3. Students will be able to name the two men who have been presidents of Indonesia and be able to describe the differences in their administrations.
4. Students will be able to answer questions about the economy of Indonesia, its growth and its main products.
5. Students will be able to name the major religious groups in Indonesia.
6. Students will be able to describe ways in which religion in Indonesia has made compromises with indigenous practices.
7. Students will be able to give examples of religious toleration in Indonesia.
8. Students will be able to explain the meaning of the motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, "unity in diversity."
9. Students will be able to describe ways in which Indonesian women do and do not have equality with men.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain in your own words the meaning of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. To what extent does the motto apply to the U.S. in your opinion?
2. What is necessary in order for a country to be truly multi-cultural?
3. What is necessary in order for a country to have genuine religious tolerance?
4. Do you think most Muslims would consider Indonesian Islam to be true Islam?
5. What is "a religion," what the founder(s) taught or what its present followers do and believe?
6. How much democracy is possible in a country like Indonesia? How much is desirable?
7. Some people in both Indonesia and the U.S. distrust political parties; words like "partisan" and "political" have negative overtones in both countries. Can democracy work when people distrust the political process?
8. In your opinion, how important is it for a country to have a strong leader? What are the advantages and disadvantages of depending on strong leadership?

Unity in Diversity:
History and Religion in Indonesia

Bruce William Jones¹

This paper is intended to help Americans become more familiar with Indonesia. It describes the diversity of Indonesia with emphasis on its history and unique religious traditions, especially Islam. It includes a brief survey of economic development and of education in Indonesia and a discussion of the role of women.

Indonesia's population is the fourth largest in the world, and yet many Americans could not find it on a map. As a nation, we pay less attention to Indonesia, and we invest far fewer resources in Indonesia, compared to places like Japan or Korea or Israel or Egypt.

Indonesia is varied enough and complex enough that almost any generalization about it is false. It straddles the equator and contains lush tropical rainforests, but it also has mountains covered year-round by snow.

Stone Age culture survives on some islands, and accusations of head-hunting were made as late as 1985 (Zach, pp. 176,

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219-223). At the same time, Jakarta is a modern city of more than 9 million people, with traffic jams and smog comparable to conditions in Los Angeles or Mexico City.

The Indonesian language reflects the diversity of its history in the same way the English language does. It has loan words from Indian languages and from Arabic, Portuguese and Dutch.

Indonesia stands at the crossroads between two continents, Asia and Australia, and two oceans, the Indian and the Pacific. It is made up of over 17,000 islands (Indonesia 1994, p. 9) that stretch out over more than 3,000 miles. There are some 300 different ethnic groups, and some 500-600 languages and dialects.² Even those statements are a little misleading; most of those islands are very small and uninhabited, and a common language, Bahasa Indonesia, is widely spoken and taught in all the schools. Actually, most people live on Java or Sumatra. Java is not the largest island, but it is the most crowded. Java contains approximately 2/3 of the population, and the Javanese are the largest single ethnic group.

So much diversity provides a challenge to Indonesia, and the national motto reflects this: Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, "unity

²There is no agreement on these statistics. Even tabulations of the number of islands vary widely, and to distinguish a language from a dialect is a difficult value judgement. The Indonesian Center for Language Development puts the number at "over 400 languages and dialects," Soebadio, p. 10. For an extended discussion of language and its effect on national integration, see Drake, pp. 37, 61-64.

in diversity."³ To me, the motto is both a hope and a reality. Americans should be able to understand that; our motto is E pluribus unum, "one out of many," and we -- like Indonesia -- are still struggling to make it a reality. As a hope, Indonesia's motto represents its determination to stay together as a single republic in spite of its cultural differences. As a reality, the motto reflects a long history of toleration in Indonesia. Peoples living side by side for centuries have come to accept the fact that each group has its own adat, tradition. When Indonesia became independent after World War II, the new country was careful to respect those differences.⁴ As we shall see, below, toleration of religious differences is an important part of Indonesia's commitment to pluralism.

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History

Indonesia was inhabited early in the prehistoric period. The so-called Java Man is one of our oldest known relatives, homo erectus, ca. 500,000 years ago (Soemardjan, pp. 7-9). Immigrants from India arrived almost 2,000 years ago, bringing Hinduism,

³The motto can be traced to an old Javanese manuscript, perhaps from the 11th century. It means, literally, "[although] divided, it is one." See Soebadio, pp. 12, 13.

⁴There are exceptions to these generalizations. At times in the past, the Chinese minority in Indonesia was not favorably accepted. Also, independent Indonesia has not been tolerant of rebel groups who wanted to secede from the republic or of Islamic movements that wanted to establish an Islamic state. International human rights organizations have complained about Indonesia's treatment of ethnic minorities in East Timor and elsewhere. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe these exceptions in detail.

Buddhism and the Sanskrit language (Surkatty et al., p. 206; Seekins, pp. 5-11).

By the eighth century, there were large Buddhist and Hindu kingdoms on the main islands, where the king enjoyed an almost religious veneration. Some of them built huge temple complexes at Borobudur (Buddhist) and Prambanan (Hindu) in central Java. The Majapahit kingdom (1293-1527) was the most widespread, and several of the smaller kings recognized the Majapahit king as their overlord (Abdullah, 1994). That period has left a rich legacy of culture and sophistication, especially in Java.

Indonesia has been in touch with the rest of the world at least from the time of the ancient Greek geographers who wrote about it. From as early as the 5th century, Indonesia was engaged in long-distance trade with Arab, Indian and Chinese merchants. Marco Polo and the Arab traveller, ibn Battuta, both visited Sumatra (Abdullah, 1994; Seekins, p. 12). The Mongols invaded Indonesia under Kublai Khan, but they were driven back (Indonesia 1994, p. 32). When Christopher Columbus sailed west to find "the Indies," it was probably Indonesia, not India, that he had in mind.

Indian merchants brought Islam with them in the 13th century. Some of the kings converted to the new religion and began to call themselves sultans (Indonesia 1994, p. 33). However, none of them was able to extend his control over the whole of Indonesia. The divisions among them allowed European powers to penetrate Indonesia, first the Portuguese and then the

Dutch. The indigenous states survived, but they had to acknowledge the European monopoly over trade.

The Dutch were involved in Java for 350 years, often through treaties with local rulers. Primarily they were exploiters of the economy, first through the United East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) and later by the Dutch government. Initially, the spice trade attracted them. Then, they planted coffee and tea and sugar plantations and later rubber. Large parts of Java and Sumatra were turned into plantations, owned by the Dutch but worked by Indonesians, as forced labor (Suleiman et al., pp. 37-40). Peasant opposition to Dutch rule was often inspired by Muslim religious leaders (Lapidus, pp. 757-766).

The nationalist movement broadened its base in the 20th century, and in 1928 students came together in the All-Indonesian Youth Congress to ask for a united, independent country with a single language. Many leaders of this movement were imprisoned, including a young engineer named Sukarno, who would become the first president of Indonesia twenty years later. Muslim organizations continued to play a significant role in the struggle for independence, sometimes in competition with the emerging Communist party (Suleiman et al., pp. 44-46; Lapidus, pp. 766-768).

In 1942, the Japanese conquered Indonesia, displacing the Dutch. Japan needed Indonesia's oil and rubber for its war effort. At first, some Indonesians welcomed the Japanese as

liberators, but their rule soon proved to be harsh. Nevertheless, it contributed to Indonesia's nationalist movement. The Japanese demonstrated that Asians did not need to be ruled by Europeans. They released Sukarno and other nationalist leaders from prison, and gave them positions of authority. Also, they trained an Indonesian army, with Indonesian officers, which became the nucleus of the force that later fought the Dutch for independence (cf. Seekins, pp. 38-42; Drake, pp. 36-42 and Soemardjan, pp. 141-147).

Sukarno proclaimed the independence of Indonesia right after the Japanese surrender in 1945, and he became the first president. However, the Dutch tried to regain control, with help from the British army. After much fighting, the Dutch recognized Indonesia's independence in 1949. The U.S. has not always supported independence movements, e. g. in Vietnam, but we did support Indonesia's desire for independence. We cut off Marshall Plan aid to the Dutch for a time, because they were using the money to fight against Indonesia (Suleiman et al., pp. 46-47).

In the first years of independence, there were competing political parties, including the Communist Party, but conflict between the parties created instability. In addition to Sukarno's National Party and the Communist Party, there were religious parties that wanted to establish an Islamic state. Also, some of the tribes in the outer islands did not want to be part of a united Indonesia.

In the context of these conflicts, in 1957 President Sukarno proclaimed what he called Guided Democracy, giving more power to the president. It was to be a government by consensus, with himself at the head. Decision-making by consensus is an old and honored tradition in Indonesia, but Guided Democracy often seemed autocratic -- more guided and less democracy. Sukarno continued to cooperate with Communists, both in Indonesia and in China, and that earned him opposition both from the west and from within his own country, especially from the army.

In 1965, there was a coup d'état against Sukarno, which was put down by the army, led by Gen. Suharto. The details about the coup and who was responsible for it are the subject of disagreement. The most common explanation is that it was an uprising by the Communist Party (e. g. Indonesia 1994, p. 44; cf. Seekins, pp. 54-57). One American has written that Gen. Suharto was really behind it, even as he was blaming the Communists. Another explanation gives the C.I.A. credit for it, at least for its financing if not the planning.

In any case, putting down the coup led to a bloodbath against Communists. Some estimates go as high as one million deaths (Naipaul, pp. 299, 381). Others were imprisoned. Nine of the leaders were imprisoned for 20 years and then executed in 1985, and four more in 1990 (Pluvier, p. 342).

Sukarno continued briefly as nominal president, but Suharto exercised more and more actual authority. Then, in 1967, Suharto was named president, and Sukarno was put under house arrest

until he died in 1970. Suharto proclaimed a New Order to replace Sukarno's Guided Democracy, and established a system of parliamentary elections every five years (Indonesia 1994, p. 45), though, by American standards, the government remained authoritarian.

Indonesia has a multi-party system, but the president is the dominant center of power. The government has merged several of the parties together to reduce conflict, and the president may dissolve any party that he considers a threat to the state. The Golkar or "Union of Functional Groups," is theoretically not a political party, but it participates in elections and always wins more votes than any other party. It enjoys government support and includes government employees and members of the armed forces, all of whom have a stake in maintaining the existing system (cf. Soemardjan, pp. 88-93, 98-100).

Suharto came to power because he was a general, and the armed forces have remained a dominant force in the country's government and economy. Indonesians speak of the dwifungsi, the "dual function" of the military -- defense and also civil rule -- (Indonesia 1994, p. 233; Haseman, pp. 290-297, 311), although today many argue that the influence of the armed forces is declining.

Suharto is now in his seventies, and many people inside and outside the country are speculating about what will happen when he dies or steps down. Both Sukarno and Suharto have been strong leaders, overshadowing everyone else. They made the office of

the president more important than parliament, and there have been ten times as many presidential decrees as laws passed since independence (Brauchli, p. A8). Many Indonesians are hoping for another strong leader who can hold the country together and keep it moving forward.

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Economy

When Sukarno was president of Indonesia, he was more interested in nation-building and in foreign policy than in internal economic development (Wie, Adil). Sukarno aspired to world leadership, and in fact he was one of the main figures in the non-aligned movement. He, more than anyone else, was responsible for bringing together the heads of government of Asian and African countries in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. He did not want the Third World to be sucked up into the Cold War. Sukarno, like others, wanted to overcome the legacy of colonialism. At one point, he even refused foreign aid from the U.S. in order not to become dependent on the west. In retrospect, some Indonesians are critical that he neglected domestic affairs for the sake of foreign policy. In those years, domestic production fell, and inflation reached 600% (Adil, Wie).

When Suharto became president in 1967, he changed the national priorities, putting more emphasis on economic development. He strengthened ties to the U.S., and he sought foreign investment. He strengthened the economy, so that it became one of the fastest growing in the world, currently 7% per

year (Hobohm, p. 350; Brauchli, p. 1). He expanded the infrastructure, and he increased agricultural production. Suharto was from a farm family himself, and he understood how important agriculture is to a country (Manuwoto, Wie). Indonesia became one of the leaders of the Green Revolution, which increased agricultural production in many parts of the world. The country went from being a rice importer to a rice exporter. Average annual incomes doubled in a decade, and today half of all homes have electricity, compared to only 6% when Suharto became president (Brauchli, p. 1).

Indonesia has also been more successful than many Third World countries in reducing the birth rate, in both rural and urban areas, and that reduction has helped to improve the standard of living (Williams, pp. 48-50; cf. pp. 99-118). Some Muslim leaders oppose family planning, but they appear to have had little impact.

Unfortunately, the gap between rich and poor is widening in Indonesia. The standard of living for the wealthy is increasing at a faster rate than for the poor, especially in the cities (Sumarwoto). While there is a wealthy upper class, Indonesia has been more successful, in my opinion, than some other developing nations in raising the standard of living of its poorest citizens. According to UN figures, the percentage of people in abject poverty dropped from 60% in the early 1970's to approximately 20% in 1990 (Wie). That is a tremendous accomplishment in just a quarter century.

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Education

Education has not had as high a priority in Indonesia as in some other third-world countries, and in part that is a legacy from colonialism. The Dutch gave less importance to education in their empire than did the British, for example. When Indonesia proclaimed its independence, there were only 300 university graduates in the country (Wie), mostly trained in the Netherlands. There was no university, except for the Institute of Technology in Bandung (Purwanto). Only a million pupils were in school, out of a population of 77 million, so a whole educational system had to be created (Pekerti). By contrast, when India became independent, it already had a well-educated civil service and university-trained teachers, physicians and lawyers.

This lack of education slowed industrial development, but fortunately education is becoming more widespread. The literacy rate in 1990 was 84% (Raharjo, p. 1). Indonesia recently raised the number of years of compulsory schooling to nine, that is, completion of junior high school, and the numbers going on to high school and university have been steadily climbing. There are 45 large public universities and institutes of higher education and over 1200 private ones (Guhardja). Approximately 9% of the young people in the 19-24 age group are enrolled in higher education. In the 1992-93 academic year, there were 7,500

students in doctoral and other post-graduate studies (Indonesia 1994, p. 203).

At the same time, I do not want to give the impression that all the educational problems are solved. Teachers in Indonesia have very low salaries. The better students refuse to become teachers, at least in the primary and secondary grades. The Ministry of Education is currently revising the curriculum to replace rote memorization with more creative teaching methods, but such changes will take time. At the university level, the curriculum tends to reflect western ideas more than Indonesian ideas (Purwanto). It often promotes the official ideology without being critical or self-reflective. Sometimes the faculty know more about Europe and North America than they know about Indonesia.

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Religion

Like the United States, Indonesia does not have a single religious tradition that unifies all its citizens. In the past, Islam has been a unifying force in Indonesia, but it has also created tensions with the non-Muslim minorities. In both countries, there is disagreement about the extent to which religion should be a unifying factor.

The people of Indonesia are roughly 85% Muslim, 10% Christian and 2% Hindu, with smatterings of Buddhism and traditional tribal religions. There are more Muslims in Indonesia than in any other country in the world, although

discussions about Islam often focus on the Middle East and ignore Indonesia.

Hinduism has influenced Indonesian culture much more than the relatively small proportion of Hindus today would suggest. The island of Bali is the only place in the world outside of India and Nepal with a Hindu majority, and there are more shrines per capita in Bali than in India. Moreover, Hinduism's influence is not restricted to Bali. The national symbol of Indonesia is the Garuda, the legendary bird which carried the Hindu god Vishnu. Hindu mythology is part of the folk tradition of Java, and the popular puppet plays, based on Hindu stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are enjoyed by many Christians and Muslims, who regard them as part of their heritage. Ganesh, the Hindu god of strength and wisdom, is the emblem of the prestigious Institute of Technology in Bandung, though Hindu students there are a tiny minority.

Indonesian Islam, like Islam in Africa, is more likely to make compromises with traditional customs than would be the case in Iran or the Arab world. I think a similar claim could be made about Indonesian Hinduism and Indonesian Christianity; they are less strict than their counterparts elsewhere. Indonesians, especially Javanese, are known to be tolerant, and they are reluctant to condemn someone else's practices. Ideas from one group can rub off on another. Pre-Hindu magic and animism, such as the selamatan ritual to ward off evil spirits, may be

practiced by members of several religious communities.⁵ Some have argued that religious dogma is potentially divisive in Indonesia, whereas the traditional customs tend to unite people from differing religious groups (Drake, p. 67).

Islam came first to Sumatra and gradually spread to Java. It was brought by Indian traders from Gujerat. The ruling classes were converted first, and gradually Islam spread among most of the population. Muslims controlled much of the world trade at that time, and conversion to Islam allowed the Indonesian rulers to have a share in it (Suleiman et al., p. 26).

Even today, Aceh in northern Sumatra tends to be more strict in its observance of Islam. Elsewhere, there is a mixture of orthodox observance by some, syncretism by some and indifference by yet others. Indonesians distinguish the santri who practice a stricter Islam and the abangan whose Islam is combined with their ancestral adat, tradition (Drake, pp. 66-71; cf. Geertz, pp. 65-70).

Some Indonesians speak of "statistical Muslims," who are Muslim in name only. A similar term is "identity-card Muslims." Everyone must declare some religion on his or her identity card,⁶

⁵Some interesting examples of the way one religious tradition has influenced another are given by Kathy MacKinnon, William Collins, Dewi Anwar and Eric Oey in the "Insight Guide," Indonesia, ed. Eric Oey, pp. 78-85. This book, designed for travellers, is also useful for teachers.

⁶Because of past opposition to Communism and its association with atheism, it is unacceptable for an Indonesian to be an atheist. One must be identified as a Muslim, Hindu, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist or practitioner of one of the indigenous traditions.

and some people call themselves Muslims by default, even though they do not know the prayers or observe Muslim practices.

On the island of Lombok, people speak of "three-time Muslims," Islam waktu tiga. Some say that the phrase refers to nominal Muslims who pray only on three occasions, at the noon prayers on Friday, at the end of the Ramadan fast and on the birthday of the prophet. Others explain the term as a combination of three religions: Hinduism, Islam and the traditional ancestral religion (Zach, p. 134).

Unlike Arabia at the time of Muhammad, Indonesia already had a sophisticated culture before the coming of Islam. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz says, "In Indonesia Islam did not construct a civilization, it appropriated one" (p. 11). Islam had to adapt to what was already there. Also, many of the first Muslim preachers in Indonesia were sufi mystics, who were willing to accept existing practices, just as sufi preachers had previously done in India, so there is a long tradition of cultural openness among Indonesian Muslims.

There is a strong Muslim revival movement in neighboring Malaysia, but there are fewer signs of that in Indonesia.⁷

⁷Some Indonesians scorn the revival movement by calling it "the Malaysian disease," but others have great respect for it (Naipaul, pp. 302, 361-376). In Malaysia, Islam has been identified with the national consciousness of indigenous Malays and opposition to Chinese and other non-Malay elements of the population.

Indonesian opposition to Muslim revivalism is very old. A group of West Sumatrans made a pilgrimage to Mecca around 1800, after the city had been conquered by Wahhab and his zealous followers. Influenced by Wahhabism, three of the pilgrims
(continued...)

However, some groups in Indonesia would like to transform the country into an Islamic state with Muslim law. In the past, some of these groups engaged in guerilla warfare against the government (Lapidus, pp. 768-776), but most Indonesian Muslims reject such a concept, and the government is firmly opposed to it. Also, there are large geographical areas in Indonesia where the majority of people are Hindu or Christian (Drake, p. 71), so the creation of an Islamic state would undoubtedly increase the desire for separation. Some of these regions account for much of the country's wealth -- from tourists, timber and mining -- and Indonesia would not want to lose them.

Throughout the twentieth century, there has been a conflict among the Muslims of the world about the proper relationship between religion and government. On one side would be Kemal Ataturk, who secularized modern Turkey and adopted a western legal system. The late Shah of Iran was very near that end of the spectrum. At the other end of the spectrum are the Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran after the expulsion of the Shah. Iran became an Islamic republic, and any law passed by parliament could be vetoed if the religious leaders decided it was against the Quran. Traditional Islam expects that all of society and its laws should

7 (...continued)

returned in 1803 with a desire to reform Islam. They began to win support, which put them in conflict with the easy-going ways of the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra. Fighting broke out, called the Padri Wars, and local leaders invited the Dutch to rule in order to control the revivalists. It took the Dutch seventeen years, to 1838, to conquer them (Anwar; Abdullah, 1972, pp. 199-206).

be subject to God and his revelation. The state should be a Muslim state. Saudi Arabia represents another attempt to put that ideal into practice, and its flag contains the Muslim creed, "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

Americans have a long tradition of separation of church and state, so the idea that government should be secular and separate is widely accepted. Many Muslims, including those in Iran and Saudi Arabia, reject that concept.

Indonesia represents another option; it is neither secular nor Islamic. Religious toleration is built into the Indonesian constitution. Indonesians are very proud of their Panca Sila, five principles, the first of which is belief in one God.⁶ Thus, Indonesia is not a secular country, but is religious in such a way that all groups have equal rights. The country is religious without being Islamic. That first sila, belief in God, is a kind of balance between alternatives. On the one hand, it is a rejection of secularism; on the other, it is a rejection of an Islamic state. Christians, Hindus and other recognized minorities enjoy religious freedom.⁷

⁶Hindus are not ordinarily considered to be monotheists, because they worship many gods. Some Buddhists are non-theists. Such exceptions seem to fit easily within the Indonesian idea of Panca Sila. (Cf. Soemardjan, pp. 59-60). Notice that the Panca Sila omit any reference to Islam or to Muslim symbols.

⁷The rights of new religious movements is not as clear-cut, nor is the right of conversion from one religion to another. Some Mormons, for example, have been expelled from the country, because of their efforts to convert others. Muslims resent evangelistic efforts by Christians, and occasionally violence may break out between religious groups, but the government tries to
(continued...)

The public schools have classes in religion, but each religious group determines the curriculum for its own children. There is a cabinet Minister of Religious Affairs, to oversee and coordinate the recognized religions. The government sponsors an annual Quran recitation contest, and in the past it has distributed scriptures for Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists (Indonesia 1994, p. 194). Many Americans would be reluctant to have such a ministry in our country, for fear that government might exercise too much control over religion, but most Indonesians seem quite comfortable with the idea. The motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, "unity in diversity," reinforces the commitment both to cultural pluralism and religious tolerance.

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The Role of Women

There is also diversity in the role of women in Indonesia. I think most observers would say that the status of women in southeast Asia is higher than in the Middle East, for example, and that is certainly true in Indonesia. Parents seem to welcome the birth of a girl as much as the birth of a boy (Williams, p. 47).

The constitution guarantees equality between men and women, although men continue to earn higher incomes than women (Raharjo, p. 3) and women work longer hours than men (Williams, pp. 33,

⌘ (...continued)
discourage publicity about such events (Aznam) in order not to inflame passions or interfere with its policy of toleration and Panca Sila.

43-47). Over 30% of women work outside the home, and the number is increasing rapidly (Megawangi, p. 4). There are more men than women in higher education, especially in science, and most of the physicians are male, but over half of the law students are female. There are more female novelists and short-story writers than male (Damono).

In the past at least two queens ruled the Majapahit kingdom (Raharjo, p. 2), and one of the Aceh sultans in northern Sumatra was a woman (Megawangi, p. 4). More recently, several women were prominent in the struggle for independence. Over 10% of the present members of parliament are women.

Traditional Muslim law allows a man to have four wives. In Indonesia, each religious community is free to follow its own customs, but multiple marriage is very rare in practice, less than 2%. Since 1974, a man has not been allowed to take a second wife unless the first wife gives her consent in writing, and government employees must get the permission of their supervisors (Megawangi, p. 8).

At least one of the indigenous ethnic groups is a matrilineal society, the Minangkabau of West Sumatra. It is, in fact, the largest matrilineal society in the world (Agoes). The traditional society there tended to be very egalitarian, with equal rights for men and women, but family property passed from the mother to her daughters (Anwar; cf. Soemardjan, pp. 43, 68-70). The husband was never considered a member of his wife's

clan, so he was always something of an outsider. Typically, a man would be buried with his mother's clan, not his wife's clan.

Women owned the traditional house (rumah gedang, great house), where the extended family lived. Rather, the women and small children lived there. The men and the older boys lived in very simple dormitories or slept in the religious schools. The husband might be invited to spend the night with his wife, but it was clearly her house (Anwar).

The system of matrilineal inheritance is in conflict with the inheritance laws from the Quran, which specify that sons should inherit twice as much as daughters. The Minangkabau solve the conflict with a typically Indonesian compromise: Traditional property is inherited by the traditional rules; land, rice fields, traditional houses go to the daughters only. Acquired property, i. e., capital, money from wages, houses in the city, is distributed according to the requirements of Islam (Anwar; cf. Abdullah, 1972, pp. 190-192).

The status of women in Indonesia, like so much in the country, has many different facets. I suggested earlier that any generalization about Indonesia risks being false; the role of women in Indonesia is another example of Indonesia's complexity.

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When Indonesia became independent, it was able to survive as a single, unified country because of its willingness to tolerate diversity. After independence, Indonesia was able to become strong economically and to extend the benefits of education to

more and more of its citizens. Nevertheless, diversity remains as a challenge for Indonesia's future.

Because of its long history of exposure to other cultures -- Indian, Chinese, Muslim, European -- Indonesians came to understand that diversity is a fact of life. In most cases, its rulers did not attempt to impose a language or a religion or an alien tradition on people. Different ethnic groups learned to live together in peace; Indonesians proved that it is better to accept differences than to fight over them.

Indonesia has managed to maintain its unity into the nineties, the decade that saw the breakup of multi-cultural, multi-language states in Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union. In many ways, Indonesia is an inspiration to other countries, including the United States, which are struggling to balance diversity with unity.

The ability of Indonesians to live together in harmony in the future will depend, in part, on religion. The idea of an Islamic state, governed by religious law, is a strong part of Muslim history, and it is possible that the desire for such a state will become stronger in the future. However, any movement in that direction in Indonesia would strain the relationship with Chinese, Hindu and Christian minorities. Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, "unity in diversity," will continue to be both a reality and a challenge in Indonesia for the foreseeable future.

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