

Unity Concept from Islamic Perspective and the Reality of Unity in Malaysia

Sulaiman Md. Yassin and Dzuhailmi Dahalan*

Youth Social Health and Well-Being Laboratory

Institute for Social Science Studies,

University Putra Malaysia

43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 6-03-89471869 *Corresponding author e-mail: dzuhailmi@gmail.com

Abstract

Unity is a drive towards social stability of a country. Any society and the nation as a whole might be ruined, if the issue of unity cannot be solved intelligently and with wisdom. Unity as a concept has always been misunderstood among members of certain communities, therefore this issue not only persists in the context of a plural society, but also abide in a community of homogeneous religion or race. The dream for unity must be based on clear evidence and not merely hypothetical. The glory of Islam's past civilization clearly demonstrates the bond of brotherhood in a multicultural society that is sustained for such long periods of time. Such glory is a manifestation of the great messenger's determination, the Prophet Muhammad and his companions who advocated righteousness and forbid evil based on the guidance from God. The concept of brotherhood and harmony commanded by *Allah* is well understood by them. The question is whether that methodology is understood by today's society, specifically among Muslim leaders. Therefore, this paper briefly explores the concept of unity in Islam based on the guidance of Quran and *Hadith*, and the views of academics who debate this issue. The paper also initiates a brief discussion on some selected findings that relate to the situation of unity and national integration in Malaysia.

Keywords: Unity, Islamic perspective, Unity drivers, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Unity is the foundation of human solidarity¹. Unity comes from the word 'unit' which means compressed, compact, solid, dense, associated (mixed, joined) and into one, integrated, strong (tough, intact) and resilient (Dewan Dictionary, 2000). Conceptually, unity of an entity of society refers to the situation whereby ethnic groups, religious groups and people from different locations live in harmony. In a country's context, the bond of unity is usually triggered by a national identity. Nevertheless, the unity of humankind globally is not necessarily to the advantage of a national identity, race, ethnicity and region, respectively, but based on the principle of universal justice and harmony.

The search for unity is a global problem which is an impediment to the creation of a harmonious social atmosphere.

¹ All humankind since the creation until the Final Day

In current reality, social instability results in the destruction of property and loss of life. Nations and the world as a whole may result in the disintegration and destruction. Rapid modernization is creating changes in political, economic, and social competition that are often blamed as the root cause of social instability. However, this is not necessarily true in any case, the unity of an entity or small communities in the global context must be sustained for the purpose of universal norms of humanity.

1.2 Islam as the Cure

The concept of unity that is based on God's word is an effective guide to solve the problem of universal human conflict. Islam is a means of salvation from all calamities and disasters that haunt the human condition. Grace and love of *Allah* is the security that leads to peace as long as the holy laws are practiced by humankind as in *Allah's* commandment in the Quran which means:

"And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)." (Al-Anbiya: 107)

The prophetic mission is solely to provide guidance to humankind which had existed in ignorance and bewilderment. Prophet Muhammad was assigned to a community that was full of darkness. The ignorance of humankind at that time resulted in disunity of humankind even because of the smallest excuse which was not acceptable to any sensible mind. The morality of pagan Arabs at that time was so bad. They did not respect human rights and acted inhumanely. Female children were buried alive. They changed among spouses and they were willing to marry their own parents. The moral problem that occurred caused large empires like Rome and Persia not to consider invading the Arabs at that time because of fear of the moral infection that affects the Arabs. *Allah's* commandment which means:

"Indeed Allah conferred a great favor on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves, reciting unto them His Verses (the Qur'an) and purifying them (from sins by their following him), and instructing them (in) the Book (the Qu'ran) and Al-Hikmah (the wisdom and the Sunnah of the prophet (i.e. his legal ways, statements, acts of worship, etc), while before that they had been in manifest error." (Ali Imran: 164)

In such a relatively short period of 23 years, a community which was known as uncivilized before had evolved and was in its peak of glorious phase. By the end of 13th Hijrah, history has revealed a high human civilization. Disunity had been avoided by companions of the Prophet (May *Allah* bless them) whether on the issues of worship, *muamalah* (social affairs), *muasyarah* (the daily requirement) and caliph (rulers).

Has been produced by Abdul Razak from Qatadah r.a "Indeed Rasulullah s.a.w., Abu Bakar, Umar and Usman r.anhum at the beginning of caliphate era, they performed Qasar prayer two rak'ah in Mecca and Mina. Then Usman r.a performed as many as four rak'ah. Then when Ibnu Mas'ud was told on this matter, he has said: Inna Lillahi wa Inna Ilahi raji'un (from God We come and return in everything). Then he got up and prayed four rak'ah (without qasar). He was then asked: You have expressed Inna Lillahi wa Inna Ilahi raji'un, then performed four

rak'ah prayer? He answered: Conflict regarding the caliph is one default.” (Muhammad Yusuf, 2000)

Islam forbids the followers to do injustice, even against the hated enemy. Non-Muslim communities felt safe in the light of Islam's glory. They were not mistreated even before there was a group who outraged Prophet Muhammad and his companions. The most obvious example to illustrate this situation was during the opening of Mecca. The Prophet Muhammad and his companions entered Mecca with *Takbir* and *Tahmid* (words of majesty and praise to God) without doing any damage such as killing the weak (women, children, and the elderly). The prophet's companions were prohibited from creating any rivalry with those who previously had been hostile to Islam.

As issued by Ibnu Asakir from Umar Bin Al-Khattab r.a indeed he had said “In Mecca's opening day and rasulullah s.a.w. in anticipated to be there, Rasulallah s.a.w. had sent an envoy to Safwan Bin Umaiyah, Abu Sufyan Bin Harb and Al-Harith Bin Hashim.” Umar r.a had said “Indeed Allah s.w.t reinforced the position (the religion) of those (all three people that are called by Rasulallah s.a.w.) to be known by them what has been committed by them that Rasulallah s.a.w. decreed that “My assurance with you is as was mentioned by Yusuf a.s when he said to his kinship: Nothing reproach on you on this day, Allah s.w.t forgives you and indeed He is the Most Merciful from those who are merciful.” Umar r.a said: “I also became deeply embarrassed to Rasulallah s.a.w. with a heart that did not really like if my recommendation like the one that I have given in Badar War (where those captured should be beheaded), and indeed Rasulallah s.a.w. had decreed that to them with what has been forgiven by Prophet Yusuf a.s to his kinship).” (Muhammad Yusuf, 1998)

Islamic justice requires its followers not to take other people's rights. Betrayal of human rights, even to other religions is a sin and contrary to the teachings of Islam as in *Allah's* commandment which means:

“O you who believer! Stand out firmly for Allah and be just witnesses and let not enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just that is nearer to piety, and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Well-Acquainted with what you do.” (Al-Maidah: 8)

Islamic justice is reflected through the firmness shown by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions who obeyed every commandment from *Allah* throughout their lives. The Prophet Muhammad taught his companions to respect the rights of others even those of different religions and faiths. The devotion of Prophet's companions in obeying the commandment from *Allah* are clearly shown in their life histories.

Has been produced by Ibnu Asakir from Abdullah Bin Abu Hadrad Al-Aslami r.a that he owed a Jewish man four dirhams and was unable to repay. The Jewish man said “Ya Muhammad! He (Abdullah) still owed me four dirhams and has not able to pay.” Rasulallah s.a.w. then told me “Pay what has been delayed by him.” Abdullah then replied “For Him who represents you with the truthful religion, I am unable to settle the debt, ya Rasulallah, I Have told him (the Jewish man) that you would send me to Khaibar and I hope I will get a little loot, thus when I return later, I will pay the debt” Rasulallah s.a.w. then said for the third time “Actualize his rights.” It is Rasulallah s.a.w.'s practice, when he said for the third time, he will not change the decision made by him. Hence, Abdullah Bin Abu Hadrad Al-Aslami r.a went out towards the market. At that time he was turbaned and blanketed with a piece of

cloth. Then he removed the blanket and sold it. A buyer had purchased the piece of cloth with four dirhams. An old woman passed him and asked: "What has occurred to you dear friend of Rasulallah?" He (Abdullah) tell relayed happened. Then, the old woman said:" take this cloth (the old woman gave the cloth to Abdullah)." (Muhammad Yusuf, 2000)

Islam is a complete and perfect religion. *Allah* Himself has declared the perfection of Islam. Through Islamic perfection, *Allah* has furnished his blessing and mercy towards all humankind as in *Allah's* commandment which means:

"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (Al-Maidah: 3)

Making life hereafter as the ultimate end and priority have caused Prophet Muhammad and Islamic caliphs after him to uphold the completeness of the laws and rules from *Allah*. This determination is founded on a conviction that Islam is the only way towards humankind's salvation. Many centuries have seen the Islamic empire sheltering under it various religions, races and tribes successfully consolidated in a harmonious and peaceful environment based on guidance from the Most Wise, *Allah*.

2. The Fundamental Principles of Unity from Islamic Perspective

Islam is a religion that demands the unity of humankind. Since the human being is the greatest creation, certainly *Allah* do not want to see humans destruct and destroy themselves as in *Allah's* commandment which means:

"And indeed We have honored the Children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with At-Taiyibat (lawful good things), and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with marked preference." (Al-Isra: 70)

The creation of Hell in no way reflects the desire of *Allah* to fill it with humans, but as a purpose to caution those who are disobedient. Therefore, Heaven is created as a blissful tidings to humans who are devoted to *Allah*. The proof of mercy and love of *Allah* towards humankind has been manifested by the deputation of 124,000 Prophets to the world to lead humans toward the pursuit of happiness in life and hereafter. Therefore, there is no other way for humans to quest for happiness except by obeying the guidance from Prophets deputed as in *Allah's* commandment which means:

"O Prophet (Muhammad), Verily, We have sent you as witness and a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner. And as one who invites to Allah (Islamic Monotheism), i.e. to worship none but Allah (Alone) by His Leave, and as lamp spreading light (through your instructions from the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the legal ways of the prophet))." (Al-Ahzab: 45-46)

Based on the clear statement on the intention of deputation of the Prophet especially the last of all the Prophets

(Muhammad), hence several fundamental principles of unity from Islamic perspective concisely in the writer's humble opinion is as stated below. The main clauses of Medina Charter² are used as reference in the presentation of these fundamental principles of unity.

2.1 Faith and piety

The unification of humankind based on faith and piety is the fundamental aspect in Islamic perspective. Whether in the context of relationship among Muslims or relationship with Non-Muslims, religious principle should not be disregard. *Allah's* forgiveness should surpass everything. Conduct of vices on the ground to achieve unity of mankind is totally unacceptable. It is similar to make peace with the devil and his followers (Muhammad Ihtisamul, 2001) thus inviting the wrath of *Allah*.

From Ibnu Abbas r.huma narrated that Rasulallah s.a.w. used to say that: "Anyone who delights humans by inciting Allah's wrath, and so angers Allah towards him and Allah would make people whom had been delighted with Allah's wrath to become angry towards him. And those who delight Allah and thus make humans angry with it, then Allah would make him delightful and Allah will also delight those who were angry towards him because he delights Allah. Until Allah will improve his personality in the eyes of those who are angry with him and improve his words and others' views of him." (Tabrani dan Majma uz Zawaid)

Therefore, relationships among humankind in good deeds which is an effort to shaping cohesion and unity need to consider the question whether *Allah* is pleased or not with the action? Inevitably, it must be in line with the perfection of *Iman*.

From Abu Umamah r.a. narrated that Rasulallah s.a.w. decreed that: "Anyone who love someone because of Allah and hate because Allah, give because of Allah and attract grant also because of Allah, so indeed he has perfected the faith." (Abu Daud)

2.2 Obey leaders/rulers

The unity of humankind also includes the cohesion between leader/ruler and the citizens/followers. However, obedience towards a leader is not as absolute as towards *Allah* and Prophets. There is no such thing as obeying a leader in matters that raises *Allah's* and Prophet's wrath. *Allah's* commandment which means:

"O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority (and) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination." (An-Nisa': 59)

Obedience towards leaders in the context of governance of a country is vital to ensure a harmonious relationship

² Document, code or written agreement on authority and ruler responsibility in Medina

within the community. Conflicts happen if the people who are being led disobey decisions/orders from their leader towards good things.

As derived by At-Tarmizi from Abu Daud, whereas the utterance from Abu Daud, from Al- 'Irbaash Bin Sasriyah r.a. said that "One day we prayed with Rasulullah s.a.w., then Rasulullah s.a.w. gave advice that shed tears because of its greatness and beauty, every heart became nervous. Then one of us asked: Ya Rasulullah, as if this advice is last advice and what possibly that you trust to us?" Rasulullah s.a.w. decreed that "I will commend to you to fear Allah, listen and obey your leader even he is a Habsyi slave, because whoever who live after my time will see a lot of conflicts, thus you must keep hold on to my sunnah, sunnah Khulafaur Rasyidin which bear guidance, hold on to it, bite it with your teeth. Stay away from creating new laws, because creating new laws is bid'ah and every bid'ah is astray." (Muhammad Yusuf, 2011)

Thus, as long as the leaders' orders do not conflict with Islamic policy, give benefits to others, give protection to Islam and its followers and do not bring any loss to Islam, the leaders' order must be respected and obeyed. Therefore, pledges of allegiance in *makruf* (good deeds) have been shown a lot in the lives of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

Ibnu Syahin narrated from his grandfather Ibrahim Bin Muntasyir, he said: "When Allah decreed baiat sentences in Surah Al-Fatihah then prophet s.a.w. and his companions made an oath to be obedient to Allah and the truth. As such when Khalifah Abu Bakar r.a. and Khalifah Umar r.a., they also swore to be obedient to Allah and towards leaders as long as the leaders are obeying Allah. This kind of oath has also been practiced by Caliphs after that." (Muhammad Yusuf, 2011)

2.3 Respect and respecting the rights of others

Conflicts among humankind happen because of misunderstanding of several people on the responsibilities to perform the rights of humankind. Recognition of human rights in the presence of Islam in the context of human relationships (*hablum mina annas*) aimed to preserve the harmony within the community. Indeed anyone has one's right, however Islam teaches each of its followers to try to attend to others' rights without demanding his/her own rights.

"Worship Allah and join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, Al-Masakin (the poor), the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion to your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and those (slaves) whom your right hand possess. Verily, Allah does not like such as proud and boastful." (An-Nisa': 36)

It is hard to unite humankind if human rights are disregarded. Respecting others' rights is a trust that cannot be betrayed. Since the betrayal of the rights of others can bring conflicts within humankind, thus it creates huge problems to those who infringe it.

From Abu Hurairah r.a narrates that Rasulullah s.a.w decreed: "Do you know which persons are destitute? The companions r.anhum said "To us, the persons who are destitute/bankrupt are persons who have no money and life's necessities. "Prophet s.a.w replied:" Among my followers, persons that are destitute are persons who come in doomsday with prayer, fast, zakat, and other accepted practices, but he had done bad deeds to others, slander others, take other persons' property, shed blood without the rights, hit other people, thus all these vices will be redeemed from the good deeds proportionally to the vices/sins rate, then taken from the good deeds (and given to those oppressed). And if the good deeds are finished, while the evils/sins have not yet been redeemed, thus would also be taken from oppressed person their sins, and burdened to him, then he will be thrown into hellfire. (Muslim)

2.4 Fairness

Principle of fairness is prioritized in Islamic perspective. Being fair means giving deductive justification and being impartial to any party when deciding something (Dewan Dictionary, 2000). Fairness generally relates to knowledge and ability to place something or somebody in a right place and justified, truth that nullify the wrong, offence, method or limitation, spiritual benefit over loss and truth over falsehood (Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, 1992). *Allah's* commandment which means:

"O you who believe, stand you firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be he rich or poor, Allah is a Better Protector to both (than you). So follow not the lust (of your hearts), let you may avoid justice, and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do." (An-Nisa': 135)

Fairness is to be upheld in the context of the relationship between Muslim community and non-Muslim community. Non-Muslim community is free to practice their value system with the respect towards sensitivity of Muslim community. Clause 16 dan 25 of Medina Charter emphasized these:

"That indeed Jewish who loyal to us, have the right to get aid and protection. They cannot be reduced of their authority and cannot be separated from social interaction" (Clause 16)

"That Jewish and Bani Auf are one people with Muslim: they are free with their own religion and Muslim with own religion as persons who allied with them and also themselves, except those who are cruel and commit sin so the case will not befall except towards himself and his own family." (Clause 25)

Justice in Islam evolved across limitations of origin, rank and race whereby there is no difference between any sentence passed on to a sultan or king and common people, no difference between superior and subordinated (Mohd Asri, 2011).

Has been produced by Al-Bukhari from Urwah, "Indeed a woman had stolen in Prophet s.a.w. time during Mecca's

Opening. Then the tribe had met Usamah Bin Zaid r.a. to get the intercession for their daughter's forgiveness. Urwah said: "When Usamah met Rasulullah s.a.w. and told the Prophet on the request of those tribe, Rasulullah s.a.w. face turned reddish and he said: Are you arguing Allah's punishment (to change and to take it lightly?)" Usamah then said: "Forgive me ya Rasulullah." In the evening, Rasulullah s.a.w. rose lecturing in front of the public. He praised Allah s.w.t as usual and decreed: "Amma ba'du! Indeed the earlier tribe is destructed when a person among them steal and they are not punished. But when persons who lowly among them steal, they punish them. For He who holds soul of Muhammad in His hand! If Fatimah Binti Muhammad steal, definitely I am going to cut her hand." (Muhammad Yusuf, 2000)

2.5 Maintaining ties of kinship and brotherhood³

Breaking the ties of kinship is a huge sin. The sin will prevent a person to go to heaven, unless the person had already been punished or his/her sin had been forgiven (Muhammad Saad, 2004).

From Jubair Bin Mut'im narrated that he listened to prophet s.a.w decreed that "Person who break a kinship bond, are not going to be in heaven." (Bukhari)

Connecting the ties of kinship even though with the parties who intended to break the ties is something that is commanded by Islam. This is because, the meaning of kinship ties itself is to bond between two ties which are already broken.

From Abdullah Bin Amr narrated that Prophet s.a.w decreed that "And the person who patch up an existing relationship is not silaturahmi. But the silaturahmi is one who connects kinship that had been severed and conjoined again." (Bukhari)

The basic of kinship requires a person to have to embrace a noble character. In Islam, a person is perceived as not yet fulfilling his/her faith if the person does not preserve the ties of kinship and relationship.

From Abu Hurairah narrated that Rasulullah s.a.w. decreed that "Whoever who is faithful to Allah and Final Day, should he ennoble the guest and faithful to Allah and the Final Day, should he establish silaturahmi (do well to relatives) and those who are faithful to Allah and the Last Day, should he be nice or quiet. (Bukhari)

The commandment stated that the ties of kinship should be claimed even with relatives who are non-Muslim. An individual has to show good virtue, as such with parents even though they are not Muslim.

From Asthma Binti Abu Bakar said: "During Rasulullah s.a.w. time, my mother is still in infidel state (had travelled from Mecca to Medina) to meet me. I asked Prophet s.a.w., "My mother came to meet me, can I affiliate with her?" He then answered: "Yes you can affiliate with your mother." (Bukhari)

³ Bond of kinship/brotherhood (Dewan Dictionary, 2000).

Taking care of the ties of kinship that are already broken is the main basis to reform the unity among humankind. In any context, even with enormous quantity, unity is not guaranteed if the ties of kinship are broken. Therefore, there are other assurances which are specifically related to maintaining the ties of kinship among humankind.

From Alla' Bin Khorijah narrates that Prophet s.a.w. decreed that. "Learn the nasab knowledge (pedigree) because with that you can bond with your kinship." (Tabrani)

2.6 Syura⁴

Musyawwarah (discussion) is an important method to decide on matters pertaining to humankind's benefits. However, discussion will only give an impact if the implementation is done correctly. The manner of its implementation must be based on the Prophet Muhammad *sunnah* and *Rashidun* Caliphate guidance received from *Allah*. There is no such term as lobbying before meetings. Similarly, there is no such term as detraction after a meeting. The success of a meeting is when every member of the meeting accepts the result as a consensus even though sometimes it is conflicting with the suggestion and opinion of several members of the meeting. There were many examples in Prophet's companion lives which used meetings as tools to make a decision.

Are issued by Ibnu Sa'ad Bin Al-Qasim indeed Abu Bakar As-Siddiq r.a. when he has matters which need to be discussed, he will call Fiqh expert and representatives from companions Muhajirin⁵ and Ansar⁶. He called Umar, Usman, Ali, Abdul Rahman Bin Auf, Mu'az Bin Jabal, Ubai Bin Ka'ab and Zaid Bin Thabit r.anhum. All of them proclaimed decisions during their caliphate tenure. He (Abu Bakar As-Siddiq) had inquired of fatwa that were requested by the public. So Abu Bakar had committed as such. Then, when Caliph's post was held by Umar r.a, he also gathered the companions and asked fatwa from them. He had asked fatwa from Usman, Ubai Bin Ka'ab and Zaid. (Muhammad Yusuf, 2000)

As a conclusion, the concise discussion on the fundamental principle of unity according to Islamic perspective can help solve the unity issue within our community. The principles mentioned are related to each other. In the writers' view, the principles discussed are fundamental items which will be the basis to be connected with various fields of human livelihood (economy, social and politics) in order to achieve unity. Doubtlessly, the principle mentioned for each aspect of human life needs more extensive research by the subject matter experts. From writers' understanding, every item stated requires deep reflection and observation from each individual as the conflict, disunification, disagreements and hatred are the manifestations of individuals' bad attitudes such as envy, jealousy, prejudice, and resentment. Therefore, there is no other way than for the individual to understand and observe the fundamental principles presented.

3. Malaysia: Brief Senario of Current Unity

⁴ Method to discuss something or achieve a decision (Dewan Dictionary, 2000).

⁵ Group that migrate from Mecca to Medina.

⁶ Medina citizens who help Prophet Muhammad and his companion.

3.1 Demographic

Malaysia is a country in the Malay Archipelago cluster that has people with various ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The 2010 Census by Malaysia Department of Statistics shows that the number of Malaysian population is around 28.3 million people. This figure consists of 91.8 percent citizens and remainder 8.2 percent are non-citizens. Malaysian citizens consist of *Bumiputera*⁷ (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indian (7.3%) and others (0.7%).

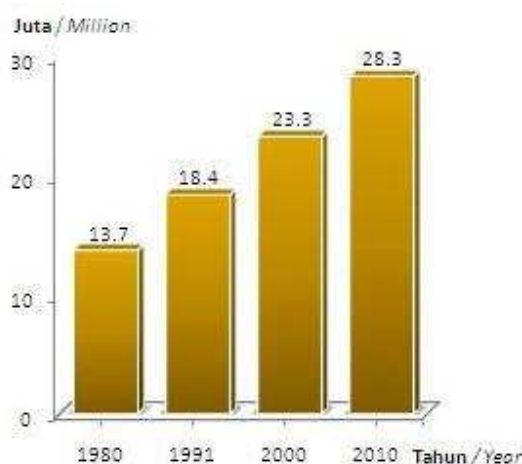


Figure 1: Number of Population in Malaysia 1980-2010

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia

The citizenship percentage shows that Malays is the main ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia (63.1%), while Kadazan/Dusun and Iban are the highest percentage of citizens in Sabah and Sarawak. Meanwhile, religious composition in Malaysia shows Islam has the highest number of followers with 63.3 percent. The other religions in Malaysia are Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%) and Hinduism (6.3%). The Malaysian population density in 2010 is 86 persons for every sq kilometer. Population density gives different pictures on distribution of population. For example, although Selangor state records the highest population, however in terms of population density, this state occupies the fifth position from population density perspective with 674 people per sq kilometer. Other states in Malaysia that record high densities are Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur (6,891 persons⁸), Pulau Pinang (1,490 persons) dan Federal Territory of Putrajaya (1,478 persons).

⁷ Origin races in Malaysia such as Malay, Dayak, Iban, Kadazan and others.

⁸ To each sq km

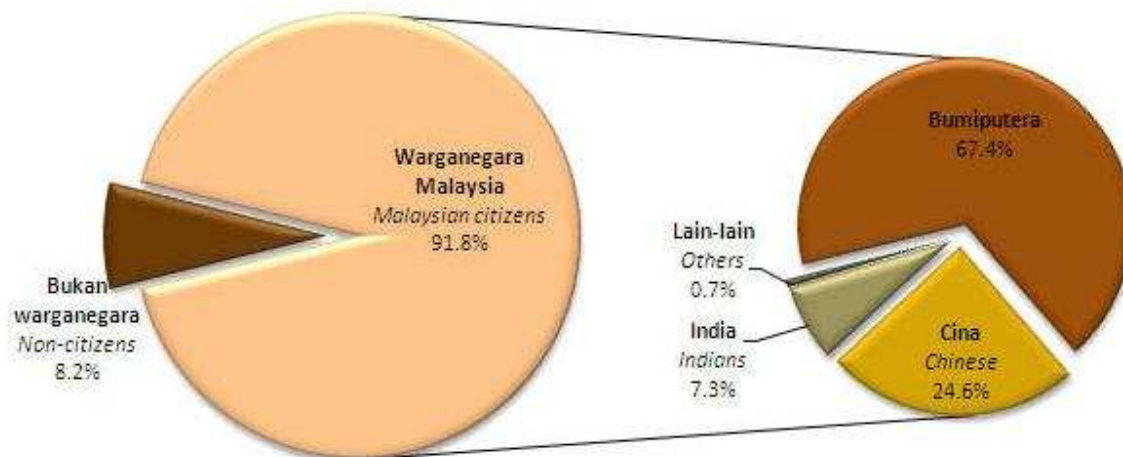


Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of Malaysia's Population According to Ethnic Group in Malaysia 2010

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia

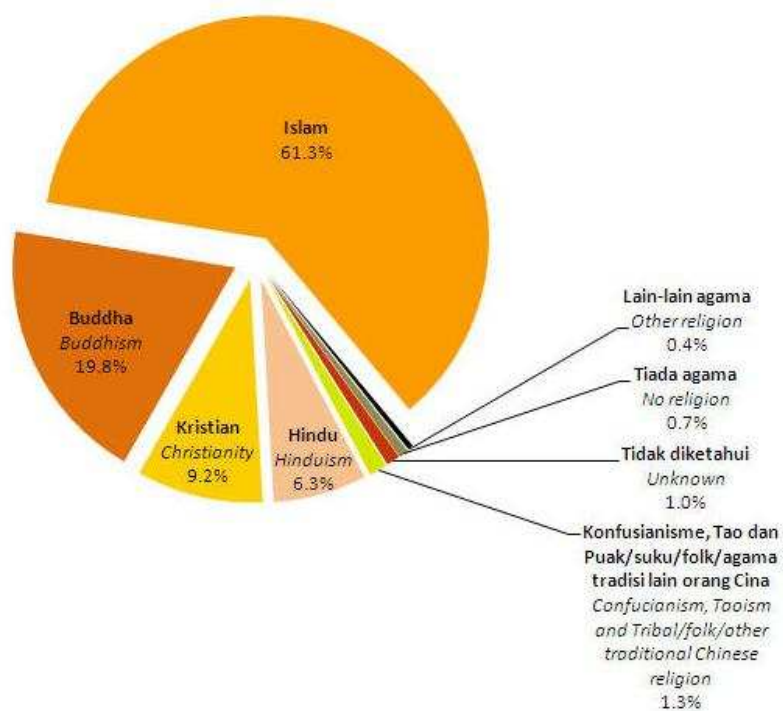


Figure 3: Distribution of Religion Composition according to Malaysia's population 2010

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia

3.2 Commitment towards Unity

The Malaysian government has indeed shown a high commitment towards developing a harmonious country and strong unity with integrated bonding among races and regions from our independence till today. National unity in Malaysian context refers to a situation whereby citizens from various ethnic, religious and regions live harmoniously as a united nation with full commitment to national identity based on the Federal Constitution and National Principles⁹.

Till now, the government has planned and emphasized several prominent policies in socioeconomics that lead to cultivation of unity and national integrity such as National Education Policies, National Development Policies, National Aspiration Policy, and National Social Policy. All these policies are based on 'National Principles' which is a national ideology to minimize political and social disturbance that could harm and threaten the unity of different races in Malaysia.

During the current administration, The Honorable Prime Minister Dato' Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak had inaugurated the 1Malaysia Concept that is an idea to nurture unity among multi-racial Malaysians based on several significant values that should become the practice of every Malaysian. To drive the new government administration to achieve this 1Malaysia concept, the slogan: "People First, Performance Now" has been made as a philosophy that underlie all approaches of national development activities.

The formation of all policies, concepts and principles by various administrations in Malaysia till today shows the highest commitment of government to make unity as national agenda. Government actions in not compromising with issues of social security and stability without neglecting the democratic principles are clearly shown. The objective of all the efforts done is to ignite the awareness of multi-racial society in Malaysia on the importance of nourishing and retaining national unity.

3.3 The Reality

Unity among community members is a concept that is abstract and elusive because it is so sensitive to changes of value transformation, environment norm and priorities (Mohamad Zaini, 2005). To prevent racial conflict, each individual has to tolerate different cultures, religions, beliefs, and ethnic differences (Wendy Yee, 2008). This situation which is indeed sensitive to environment norm need rational thinking in the community whenever they encounter certain issues. Championing emotions that neglect general unity principle is something critical other than hastening the demise of unity.

In Malaysia even though national leaders have a high aspiration towards strong unity within the community with the existence of policies, concepts, and programmes to achieve this noble attention, nevertheless, the reality which is that the unity atmosphere becomes hard to illustrate. Various ethnic groups living together need issues or conflicts to be

⁹ National Unity Advisory Panel Meetings (PANEL), February 1992.

managed wisely. In certain situations, unity in Malaysia really depends much on how certain issues and racial conflicts are managed effectively in community.

Malaysia had experienced a 'unity conflict' on 13 May 1969 which resulted in lost of lives and properties. Ezhar (2009) stated that even though the 1969 tragedy had jeopardized the harmony of multi-racial society in Malaysia once, Malaysia then moving forward encountered racial challenges, and restored the prosperity of the nation through political base and stable economy. Although, it is not extreme to mention that the reality of multi-racial unity in Malaysia does not completely exist, however, it is generally known that Malaysian society continue to survive and develop without any huge conflict that can spark chaos such as what is happening in West Asia (Dzuhailmi, et al., 2011).

Currently, there are many perceptions and perceived patterns if the question of unity in Malaysia being discussed at different any age levels. Shamsul Amri (2005) mentioned that the unity issues in Malaysia are still in control and perceived as in stable tension condition. According to him, this phenomenon means that even though at the surface level, the unity of community in Malaysia is at good level and exists everywhere, and in reality is hard to be clarified.

Former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad had shown his concerns regarding racial polarization, specifically within the young generation, whereby according to him, the young generation in Malaysia is still not united in the real sense (Lee, 2004). In a similar context, research which had been conducted by Sabah Development Institute in 1994, identified that there are still issues of unity and national integration that need to be overcome in Malaysia. This research identified that historical facts pertaining to formation of Malaysia have not yet been strengthened within young generation. It is the writers' observation through mass media reports and particularly blogs that identified there are still many statements that indicate prejudice within certain ethnic groups in Malaysia such as perception that other ethnic group's unification as a threat to their ethnic group. The tragedy of conflicts between races in Kampung Medan in 2001, the riot of Hindaf group in Kuala Lumpur in 2008, and the incidence of Cow Head Incident by a group of residents in Section 23 Shah Alam because of the protest against construction of Hindu temple in 2009 are examples of racial conflicts that have preoccupied the thinking and lifestyle of communities of various races in Malaysia. According to Mansor Mohd Noor (2005), racial conflict which happened on 13 May 1969, incident of Kampung Rawa 1977 and incident of Kampung Medan 2001 are the effect and cause of instability of development and governance, instability between races and regions, urban poverty and isolation of citizens from government's services. Therefore, in the writers' view, connotation will exist whether in positive or negative perception by international community on ability of Malaysia—to manage communities of different races.

If viewed from different perspectives, the disunity in similar ethnic groups in Malaysia is still happening. Most of us know that Malays as *Bumiputera* in Malaysia are not in consensus because of the influence from two Malay political parties (UMNO¹⁰ and PAS¹¹) which have different ideologies. The honorable Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal the

¹⁰ United Malay National Organization

¹¹ Islamic Party of Malaysia

Minister of Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage Malaysia then had stated that if the strong unity exist with Malay and Islamic strength, it will become an example to the other races in Malaysia (Berita Harian, 23 July 2008). In other words, unity of Malays is perceived as the basis of unity of other races in Malaysia. Concerns on unity and brotherhood of Malays had initiated an idea to hold a discourse between UMNO-PAS in middle of 2008.

A similar situation has happened among other ethnic groups in Malaysia. During the opening ceremony of the Sixth Seminar on Unity among Tamil Society 2009, the Deputy Minister of the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk T. Murugiah suggested that any registration of associations or organizations based on castes have to be eliminated to avoid any disunity among the Indian community. He also mentioned that unity can only be strengthened if the caste system has been addressed first (Malaysiakini, 26 September 2009). Therefore, the disunity situation within ethnic groups and within Malaysia is perceived as challenges towards national mission to make unity a reality.

3.4 The Issues Arising

According to Abdul Latif (2005), celebrating the varieties should not be confused with encouraging the differences. Referring to him, we may be different physically, we shall be different physically, but should not be different in choices, knowledge, preferences and cooperation in the national integration activities. Celebrating variety has to be in fundamental manifestation, and doesn't mean that every difference has to be celebrated (Abdul latif, 2005). The writers also agree with this statement and also query on whether on certain extreme differences, we still need to approve and accept opinion that can provoke sensitivity of certain religions and ethnical cultures such as insult on sanctity of place of worship and to question the purpose of religious activities and other cultures. Although it is undeniable that many aspects of changes have happened in unity concept in Malaysia, there are still pessimistic opinions of many on Malaysia's ability to manage ethnic variety even though the country had become independent for more than half a decade. Furthermore, there are still those in communities who are ignorant and are not sensitive to the changes in ethnic relationship in Malaysia. Thus, the additional questions arise:

1. Is unity difficult to achieve even though Malaysia has become independent for 54 years?
2. Is it true that current situation make it difficult to find the point of contact that could enhance unity in various ethnic groups in Malaysia?
3. Is it true that there are several groups in the community that are still confused when encountering conflict in various ethnic groups?
4. Has the Malaysian independence history that celebrates the variety of ethnicity failed to be fully internalized by the community?

4. The Study of Drivers Dimensions towards Unity in Malaysia

Unity is a dynamic process because it is influenced by environment norms. Community unity level needs to be continuously measured so that new unity dimensions could be developed (Sulaiman et al., 2011) thus enabling to sustain momentum of unity. Several current unity dimensions have been identified by Sulaiman et al., (2011) based on selective analysis on several issues and challenges within the unity context in Malaysia which are fairness

of policies, rights as citizen, social fairness, social construct, patriotism, potential acceptance and social environment. Sulaiman et al., (2011) found that any unity element that touches policy fairness issues, rights as citizens, social fairness, social constructs, patriotism, potential of acceptance and social environment have to be emphasized by all parties in multi-racial community to guarantee the sustainability of racial unity in Malaysia. The same research also found that the Malaysian community admitted that prejudice/stereotype dimension is an element that can lead to disunity in multi-racial community if it is over-practiced, however, simultaneously, this element still overshadow the thought and action of multi-racial community in Malaysia on particular aspects. There are four contributing dimensions (Sulaiman et al., 2011) that influence unity practice significantly which are fairness of policy, patriotism, prejudice and social environment (all p-value for regression coefficient of <0.05). Four drivers of unity contributed practices of Malaysia community up to 38.1 percent. The match of unity model to the data is good as shown by massive p-value (close fit) which is 0.131. This result is supported by GFI values (Good Fit Index) = 0.986 and dan CFI (Comparison – Fit Index) = 0.991 approaching 1.00, and error value RMSEA (Square Root Approximation Error) = 0.064 (less than 0.08). A list of unity contributing dimensions affecting the unity practice of Malaysian community shows that social environment dimension affect the highest contribution of 0.279, followed by social fairness domain (0.219), patriotism (0.165) and prejudice (0.144). The results of the analysis show that there is significant collerational relationship among several unity contributing dimensions in influencing unity practices of Malaysian community. This means that there are dimensions there are not influencing unity practices directly, but has a strong relationship with other dimensions such as rights as citizen, potential of acceptance, social construct and others.

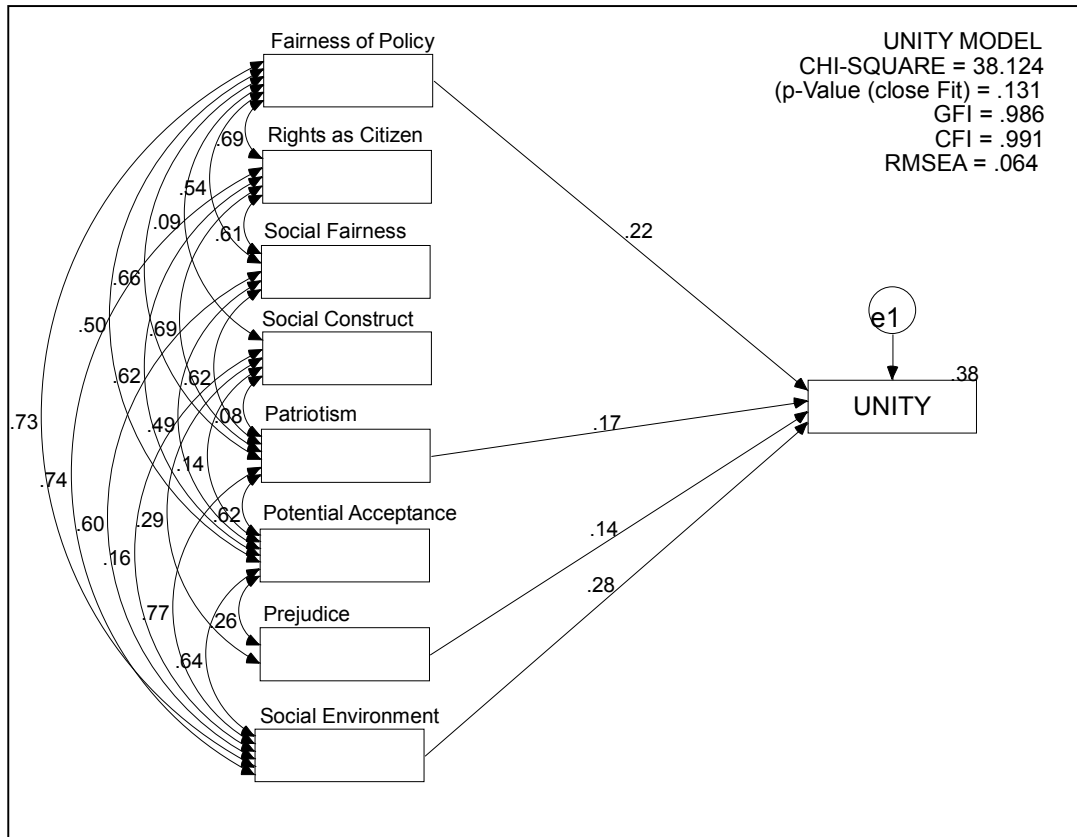


Figure 4: Model Analysis of Unity Drivers for Malaysian Society
 Source: Sulaiman et al., (2011). *Drivers Dimensions towards Unity in Malaysia*

4.1 Chances of the Penetration of the Islamic Unity Concept

Malaysia is a de-facto¹² secular country which recognizes Islam as an official religion (wikipedia, the free encyclopedia¹³). The secular identity that inseminates Malaysia is associated with British colonization that occurred before independence. Even though Islam is the official religion that is governed by The Federal Constitution,¹⁴ however, the enforcement of Islamic Law has not yet been adopted completely because of the political restraint that further lead to debates other than the lack of conducive situation that become main crux of the matter (Mohd Asri, 2011). However, the hope to enhance the racial unity in Malaysia for the future is not superficial. Even to this day, any crisis incident that happened in Malaysia is forgotten and rejected by most Malaysians. The maturity of thinking is clearly seen within the community. Malaysian society is clearly resilient and has learnt from past disunity misery.

In the Malaysian situation which is led by a Muslim leader, discussion of the unity's fundamental principle from

¹² Latin expression which means "in the fact is" and "in the practice".

¹³ Islam in Malaysia. Online: http://ms.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_di_Malaysia

¹⁴ Malaysia Supreme Law Document that shaped based on The Federation of Malaya 1948 and Malaysian Constitution year 1957.

Islamic perspective as mentioned in the initial part of the article should be internalized especially in the search for the contributing dimension of unity (Sulaiman et al., 2011) which is documented scientifically. As the earlier suggested, these principles should be integrated within the variety of life fields (economy, political and social). In the context of unity contributing dimensions (Sulaiman et al., 2011), critique about its implementation in every constituent dimension surely needs the support and opinion from the subject matter experts.

5. Conclusion

The process of rapid modernization always create changes in political, economic, and social vistas that give impact to the change of thinking and lifestyle among various ethnic groups in Malaysia. Other than positive changes, unconsciously and without systematic guidance, the rapid changes also lead to unhealthy competition, collision of cultures and religions and also create apparent rifts in multi-ethnic society of Malaysia. All the issues that are highlighted in this article especially in the reality of current unity concept in Malaysia justifies the need to adapt the unity principles from Islamic perspective in every unity contributing dimension discussed. Malaysia has a strong base to implement it. Emphasis of the country's leaders during the celebration of Prophet Muhammad Birth with the theme "*1Malaysia, 1Ummah*" on 15 February 2011 opens the opportunity for related parties in the community to sit together and intellectually discuss the issues of the unity that are especially important for national unity in Malaysia.

References

- Abdul Latif, S. (2005). National Integration Issues. Proceedings of National Unity and Integration Seminar, Malaysia, Putrajaya, pp. 13-23.
- Adian, H. (2010). Medina Charter and Religious Tolerance. Seminar paper themed: Implementation of Prophet Rasulullah Moral on Family Life, Community, Ethnic and Nation. Gedung Sasana Amal Bakti, Religious Ministry for Republic of Indonesia.
- Berita Harian. (2008). Unity of Malays Binds Community. 23 Julai 2008, Malaysian newspaper.
- Dewan Dictionary. (2000). Dewan Dictionary: 3rd Edition. Malaysia, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Dzuhailmi, D., Nobaya, A., Md. Salleh, H., Mariah, M., Jamilah, O. & Nor Azliza Wanis, A. (2011). Challenges of 1Malaysia and Reality of Youth Involvement in Unity Campaign in Television. In: Youth: Heir of 1Malaysia, Eds.: (Haslinda Abdullah, Sarjit S. Gill, Ismi Arif Ismail, Turiman Suandi, Nobaya Ahmad & Dzuhailmi Dahalan). University Putra Malaysia Press.
- Ensiklopedia Muslim. Medina Charter. Access online: <http://ensiklopediamuslim.blogspot.com/2011/08/piagam-madinah.html>. Date accessed: 28 September 2011.
- Ezhar, T. (2009). Contribution of Inter-ethnic Contact on Inter-ethnic Attitudes of Malay and Chinese-Malaysian University Students in Malaysia. European Journal of Social Sciences, 8(1), 51-61.
- Lee, K.H. (2004). Differing Perspective on Integration and Nation Building in Malaysia. In: Ethnic Relations and Nation Building in Southeast Asia: The Case of Ethnic Chinese. Singapore: ISEAS Publication.
- Mahmud, Y. (1957). Al-Quran Translation. P.T. Hidakarya Agung, Jakarta, Indonesia.
- Mansor, M.N. (2005). Transformation of Ethnic Relation in Malaysia, Proceeding of Seminar on Unity and National Integration, Malaysia, Putrajaya, pp. 98-119.

- Malaysiakini. (2009). Eliminate the Caste-Based Association. 26 September 2009, Malaysian online newspaper.
- Mohammad Zaini, A.B. (2005). Measurement of Unity Level among Ethnic: A Case Study in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. Proceeding for Unity and National Integration Seminar, Malaysia, Putrajaya, pp. 120-136.
- Mohd Asri, Z.A. (2011). Hudud (Islamic Crime Law): Conducive with Cooperation from Federal Government, 26-29 September 2011, Harakah, Malaysian online newspaper.
- Muhammad Ihtishamul, H. (2001). Deterioration of Muslim and the Solution. Translator: Abdul Aziz Abdul Hamid. Malaysia, Al-Izzath Sri Petaling Emporium.
- Muhammad Saad (2004). Muntakhab Ahadith. Translator: Abu Abil Hassan Ibn Musa and Muhammad Sanadi Abu Bakar. Malaysia, Klang Book Centre Press.
- Muhammad Yusuf Al-Kandahlawi. (1998). The Life History of The Companions. Volume 4, Translator: Abul Khairy Al-Latifi. Malaysia, Darul Nu'man Press.
- Muhammad Yusuf Al-Kandahlawi (2000). The Life History of The Companions. Volume 2, Translator: Abul Khairy Al-Latifi. Malaysia, Darul Nu'man Press.
- Muhammad Yusuf Al-Kandahlawi (2011). The Life History of Prophet Rasulullah s.a.w. Companions. Volume 1, Translator: Asiah Din. Malaysia, Klang Books Centre Press.
- Shamsul Amri, B. (2005). The Construction and Management of Pluralism: Sharing the Malaysian Experience. International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) Journal, 2(1), pp. 5-6.
- Statistics Department of Malaysia. (2011). Census of Population and Housing of Malaysia 2010. Official Website for Statistics Department of Malaysia.
- Sulaiman, M.Y., Azimi, H., Ismi Arif, I., Nobaya, A., Haslinda, A., Fazilah, I, Wendy Yee, M.T. & Dzuhailmi, D. (2011). Drivers Dimension towards Unity for Malaysian Society. Consultative report, Malaysia (Unpublished)
- Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. (1992). Aim and Objective of Islamic Education. Translator: Samsudin Jaapar. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.
- Wendy Yee, M.T. (2008). Development of Youth Competency as the Predictor of Tolerance among Undergraduates. PhD Thesis (Unpublished), Universiti Putra Malaysia.

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:**

<http://www.iiste.org/Journals/>

The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a fast manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

