

Rethinking Multiculturalism in an Era of Blurred Cultural Boundaries

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Abstract

This paper departs from the phenomenon of the dominance of patriarchal families in the large Batak family community which finally extinguishes the instinct of a mother to her child. Mother feels fine not to meet and not give affection or get affection from her child. The reason is absolute: her extended family doesn't want her, because the child does a different will from what the extended family expects. The exclusion or exile of those who are different has long been studied in the topic of multiculturalism. However, research on multiculturalism so far is still focused on how to facilitate cultural diversity or community groups. That is why there is a research gap showing that multiculturalism is becoming less relevant in capturing reality; because in group dynamics, individuals in one cultural group are not necessarily facilitated. It is the dominant individual who forms the identity of the group; so, there is a neglect of other individuals in the group. This paper aims to fill this research gap. Using Emmanuel Levinas' ideas from Totality and Infinity, this research proposes a thesis that, given the difficulty of defining cultural boundaries in an age of interconnectedness, multiculturalism actually goes beyond recognition of cultural or group differences within community groups.

Keywords

exclusion; individual; group; multiculturalism



I. Introduction

Mother is a single parent who raises Togar, her only child. They were abandoned by Father, who had not returned since Mother was pregnant. Mother and Togar lived together in the village until Togar graduated from undergraduate college. Togar then migrated to Malang, Jogja, Jakarta, and Bali to try his luck. As a single parent, his mother was helped a lot by her extended family, and even lived a few years of Togar's childhood with his extended family. Mother became a woman who was very concerned about his grandparents, but also very controlled; because she is seen as indecisive. There are many implied hopes for Togar, a child who is also loved in such a way in the family because his life story is seen as less than ideal growing up without a father.

Such conditions make Mother and Togar only willing to take action if they get approval or support from their extended family. But being away from his origin and having little experience studying philosophy made Togar a slightly different person. Togar begins to realize that some life decisions must be made even if they are not in accordance with the will of the group; at the same time realizing that past decisions, even group domination of individual decision-making can hinder individual progress. Learning from several philosophical discussions, Togar found that the group's decisions were not always absolutely correct. The emancipation of individuals in groups becomes important to achieve the common good. But it is not uncommon in the Batak culture that requires people like Togar and his mother to submit to whatever will or suggestion from the

extended family with the status of *hula-hula* in Batak custom—regardless of whether the will is good or bad; because all *hula-hula* decisions must be purely good decisions.

Togar's disapproval of such domination, as well as Togar's concern over the condition of his mother, who is often also treated unfairly by his extended family; such as being seen as poor and helpless and then being used as an example of failure, being ignored, and not being seen as necessary to be heard, made Togar start trying to emancipate himself. He hopes that one day he can take his mother out of his extended family and live with him. Togar made various decisions that did not get the approval of his extended family either secretly or openly. Choosing a partner who is not from the same ethnic group, leaving a career designed by the family since childhood, trying other jobs that are not considered ideal (because they are not civil servants), and getting married in church without traditional events. The inability of the extended family to access or put pressure on Togar was eventually transferred to Mother. Mother became a person who had to bear the curse, anger, and all the accusations that should have been leveled at Togar, who at that time chose to isolate himself from his extended family.

Mother is in a tight position. In the first few years, Mother used to call frequently and her maternal instincts were active to make sure Togar was okay. After two years, Mother has become a very different person. She no longer had any desire to interact with Togar. Even when his grandparents met him and finally agreed with the decisions he made after he shared his background on his decision-making, his mother was still in the same position to avoid or condemn him.

Indeed, he only communicated the background of his decision-making in the past to his grandparents. He does not have access to communicate with other extended family such as his mother, uncle, and aunt. In hope that the grandparents could facilitate, even in their old age, grandparents are no longer listened to by the extended family. Grandma's message to Mother when she was in the hospital before she died was that mother should stay at Togar's house. Take care and love Togar as a child, because Togar really loves his Mother. This suggestion was ignored by Mother and Mother preferred to stay with her brother in Bekasi during her visit to grandmother. Togar, who witnessed the conversation beside the grandmother's bed, could only remain silent. Grandma, who is referred to as *Opung*, as *Opung* is also referred to as a grandfather or grandmother, looked into Mother's eyes and Togar's eyes. Grandma's message through her eyes seemed to speak: *"Be patient, Togar. Opung loves you... Keep loving your Mamak. She is currently like that, really stubborn, don't know why. She's so stupid right now."*

Grandma tells Togar that she wants to stay with Togar only at the end of her life. She wanted Togar to immediately take her from the hospital to Togar's house, so that she would die at Togar's house alone; or wherever Togar took her. Grandma says: *"I am your mother. Your mother doesn't want to take care of you, I take care of you Togar. Bring Opung now to your house, so that I can live with you. If Opung dies, you just bury me next to your Opung Doli's grave."* *Opung Doli* is a nickname referring to a grandfather. In the context of this story is the Mother's biological father. Togar then responded that Togar also wanted to do it that way, because if she was with Togar, there were many things that Togar could do freely to help with Opung's sickness at that time. But to do it alone is challenging. The extended family was like a big wall that couldn't possibly allow that to happen for any reason. Grandma took a deep breath and realized how harshly the extended family treated Togar. She caressed Togar's head and hugged, kissed, and said: *"Be patient, Amang, they are all mean to you. Let it be their business with God."* *Amang* is a nickname for men. Can be given from the old to the young, can be from the young to the old.

Relieved by all the wonderful encounters with his grandmother, Togar came home calmly and tried to invite his mother to come over to his house. *"While Mamak is in Jakarta, please stop by your son's house, Mak. If you really feel like you have a child. From what I know, a mother's heart cannot be lied to. Mothers always want to be close to their children. Maybe Mamak is dominated by Mamak's extended family. As short as my knowledge is, a mother's heart can definitely break through any obstacles. I hope that Mamak can get through it well. This is my address, Mak. If you want to be picked up, just let me know, Mak, I will pick you up later. Or Jogi can also do it for you,"* said Togar's message via WhatsApp to his mother. Unexpectedly, the mother replied, *"I will come and get ready to go there later."* This meeting was practically the first meeting in ten years of never being close. This meeting was brief, not more than two hours, but it was memorable for Togar. Togar asked her mother to stay at home, she didn't want to and preferred to sleep at her brother's house who was also her *hula-hula* in Bekasi.

In Togar's mind, why to respect *the hula-hula* and the demands of the extended family, a mother has the heart to turn off her feeling as a mother; even though the customs demands the *hula-hula* to love the *boru* (in this case Togar and his mother) were not fulfilled? Violence so deep that it penetrates the bone marrow of Mother, that sadly is no longer recognized as violence; but something that just happens. Mother asked Togar to visit his uncle, whose nickname was normally referred to as *Tulang*—Mother's brother—in his house in Bekasi and apologize for the decision that Togar had made. Then he quickly responded, he immediately went to Bekasi with his wife and children and then apologized and asked for approval. *"Tulang, I came here with my wife and children. We want to come to apologize for past decisions that I made without asking for your approval... This is my family. This is Yaya Lim, A Chinese boru, this is Timot, and Iyem is currently studying in London. I hope that in the future our relationship will improve because we used to live together in Opung's house when I was little. You were very nice to me when I was little. We used to always eat at the same table, we played together, and my life back then was very beautiful."* said Togar in front of his mother and his uncle's family. Mother and the others looked then at uncle. While waiting for a good response, the family got an unexpected response. Uncle replied: *"I don't care about you. I do not."* My family and I then looked at Mother. Not long after, we said goodbye to all the family who was there at that time. Before leaving the house, I said to my mother: *"Mak, you heard directly earlier. Tulang doesn't really care about my family. We feel sorry for you, Mak, if you don't care about us either. We're good people, mak... There's nothing wrong with us. Take care of us, Mak, and you also need to think about where you will be later when you are old... It's better to just stay with us."* Mother replied: *"Forgive your Tulang, Mamak can't do anything anyway. It's the extended family, Mamak alone here can't fight so many of them."* This phenomenon then raises the question: ***in a portrait of society like this, how is it possible for a multicultural society to grow? To what extent can women's emancipation occur in such a society?***

Awareness in academic studies that the issue of multiculturalism needs to be approached by paying attention to issues that are unique to what each region has developed. For example, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *We Should all be Feminist* shows how the peculiarity of the issue of feminism in African society (TED, 2019). She shows that the issue of feminism in Africa is different from what is used as the basis for feminism studies in Europe or America (TED, 2019). Chimamanda's existential experience in this case is a significant contribution to the development of the theory of multiculturalism. The idea is still in the same corridor that multiculturalism is important and relevant for society. But on the other hand, multiculturalism is also seen as less relevant to be applied. German

Chancellor Angela Merkel stated emphatically for example that multiculturalism is a false dream (Johansson, 2022). The statement published in the *Washington Post* on December 14, 2015, even shows Merkel's serious plans to reduce the number of immigrants in Germany (Johansson, 2022). This conclusion was deemed necessary after the failed attempts to assimilate immigrant groups with a German national identity; because immigrant groups instead form their groups (Johansson, 2022). Kukathas (1993) stated differently. Multiculturalism for Kukathas has failed to facilitate individuals in groups; because what is recognized as a group in multiculturalism is a group dominated by only a few individuals; and multiculturalism is thus inadequate to serve as a basis for appreciating differences in society (Kukathas, 1993). If the state also supports multiculturalism, then the state has directly ignored individuals who are not dominant in the group (Kukathas, 1993). But whether ignoring multiculturalism as the basis for recognizing diversity will facilitate individual differences as a whole, Kukathas (2003) cannot answer it (Kukathas, 2003). Thus, this research gap will be filled in this paper.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Multiculturalism in Batak Society: There and Nothing

There is no academic study that shows how the Batak community views multiculturalism. As is typical for several ethnic groups in Indonesia, customary values are not inherited in the form of academic studies or writings; but through speech or oral inheritance. This oral information is passed down from generation to generation through various cultural events and family talks. It contains information about genealogies, interactions between clans, agreements and relationships between clans, as well as interactions between classes in adat. This information is used as the basis of life, the basis for how to interact in customs and daily life in the village (Vergouwen, 1964).

Batak society inherently already has multiculturalism, in the sense that the Batak society itself is not homogeneous (Roolvink, 1977). It also includes tribes including the Toba Batak, Karo Batak, Simalungun, and Mandailing Batak (Vergouwen, 1964). The phenomenon studied above occurs in the Toba Batak, but each Batak tribe has similarities in how the relationships or interactions between clans within each tribe are carried out; how clan differences are addressed in social life (Vergouwen, 1964). Attitudes toward diversity can be easily observed in how people interact at traditional events. The order of the traditional ceremonies and the whole arrangement must show respect for each element in society which is also different (Vergouwen, 1964).

On a macro level, the interaction between each other in the Batak community refers to the principle of *daliha na tolu* (three life advice) (Vergouwen, 1964). **The first advice** is *respect for mar hula-hula* (respect for the uncle's family) (Vergouwen, 1964). In this principle, what is referred to as an uncle's family is any man who has the same surname as his biological mother, and also who has the same surname as his wife (Vergouwen, 1964). The attitude of respect in question is that whatever the wife's family or the mother's family wants must be a top priority to be fulfilled rather than personal wishes (Vergouwen, 1964). In traditional ceremonies, the mother's family and the wife's family are treated like kings. The food given to the wife's family and mother's family is meat, as a symbol of strength and self-sacrifice (Vergouwen, 1964). If the mother's family and the wife's family are referred to as *hula-hula*, then the family who calls *them hula-hula* is the *boru* party. For example, the mother's surname is Siregar and the wife's name is Sinaga; then the *hula-hula* is Siregar and Sinaga. If the surname is Aritonang, then Siregar and Sinaga are considered *boru* (Vergouwen, 1964).

The second piece of advice is *elek mar boru* which refers to how the *hula-hula* party should behave towards *boru*. Borrowing the example above regarding the interaction of the Aritonang clan with Siregar and Sinaga, the second piece of advice discusses how Siregar and Sinaga should treat Aritonang. *Elek mar boru* (meaning: gentle and persuading to the *boru*) is the essence of the actions taken by *hula-hula* to *boru* (Vergouwen, 1964). Practically, it can be analogized that *elek mar boru* is like how a father treats his daughter. Whatever his daughter asks for, he needs to give it; and his love is poured out in full on her (Vergouwen, 1964). Here it is clear that the action of *hula-hula* to *boru* is based on affection, while the action of *boru* to *hula-hula* is based on respect.

The third piece of advice is *manat mar dongan tubu* (maintain good relations with friends of the same clan). The clan relationship in this case is based on the desire to always get along, have good relationships, and always be close to friends of the same clan. This can be seen in how clan mates always support each other, stay in touch with each other, and don't hesitate to each other—because there is equality. Friends of the same clan are expected to always help each other in distress and protect each other (Vergouwen, 1964).

In various traditional rituals, this always seems dominant. All parties are appreciated, and clan differences are celebrated as a family fortune. In one family you can imagine how many *hula-hula* parties and how many *boru* and *dongan tubu* parties. No wonder even for it being away from its origin, Batak people always try to get acquainted with each other in order to find out how the linkages or relationships between their clans. Such knowledge is expected to enable them to position themselves to other parties (Bartlett, 1934). Batak with any clan, when they get to know each other, they will *eventually* be connected to each other; because after traced, the clan will be connected as well.

It seems clear that the diversity that exists within the Batak tribe is based on the pretext of *na tolu* which, if implemented, makes the relationship between people within the Batak tribe very beautiful. One individual at the same time can act as *the hula-hula* for which he gets the highest respect; at the same time he can also be a *boru* who gets affection; and can become *dongan tubu* who gets close friendships (Bartlett, 1934). Looking back at the example of interaction between clans above, Aritonang will be the *boru* for Siregar and Sinaga; but he will be *hula-hula* and *dongan tubu* for the Aritonang family. There is a fair distribution of human positions in custom, and there is respect for differences in clans and extended families. This is the customary idea of the Batak community about multiculturalism, in which women (*boru*) are also treated with honor; not what it looks like daily.

The problem now is the implementation of the *daliha na tolu*. In the observed phenomenon, it was found that mothers with *boru status* did not get enough love from their *hula-hula*. This is indicated by how *the hula-hula* treats Togar and extinguishes the mother's instinct to be with her child. However, this cannot be demanded by a mother who chooses to just let it happen, as long as she does not violate her calling as a *boru* to always respect the *hula-hula*. So that any treatment of the *hula-hula* on her will be accepted with respect, even though she knows that the actions of the *hula-hula* do not reflect affection for the *boru*. There is no customary court that can give a decision on whether the *hula-hula* act is wrong and must be changed; there are also no traditional advocates who can fight for the mother's right to get the love of her *hula-hula*. What is there is only a social response, in this case, her brothers and sisters, all of whom have the same tone to yield to the *hula-hula* and respect *the hula-hula* whatever happens. If *hula* does what is not appropriate, let it be her business with God.

There is a point in this view, that under any circumstances, moral responsibility must be carried out. However, on the other hand, there is a risk of arrogance on the part of the *hula-hula* that may occur. There is an omission of unfair treatment, and indigenous peoples who should be able to be a catalyst for justice are less successful because they do not focus on efforts to maintain a balance of treatment. However, if the *boru* responds to the injustice committed by *the hula* by not carrying out their responsibilities as *boru*, society will view them as guilty. The community's alignment is clearly in *the hula-hula*. In this trap the mother is held captive, unable to do anything, so that even her maternal instincts can die. She also had the gut to sacrifice her elderly time which was supposed to be with her only child, to be uncertain. Because her extended family doesn't care about her life, doesn't even have the capability to guarantee her elderly time; because they all have their own families to take care of. Mother seemed to be lulled by empty messages that her extended family lured.

Departing from such a phenomenon, it is understandable that the idea of multiculturalism based on the *daliha na tolu* is ideal for facilitating various positions in custom, but at the same time, it becomes non-existent when implemented blindly. There is a potential for arrogance which in the end encourages the birth of violence and unfamiliarity with differences. The fatal impact is rooted in society, which perhaps unintentionally gives rise to the dominant class in the Batak group, namely the *hula-hula*. Whatever the word *hula-hula* is seen as a command of God. So the role of *boru* and other elements or individuals in the family is not represented at all in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* which frames Indonesia. The result is clear in the phenomenon: some are exiled (or under some kind of embargo), ostracized and their extended family is strictly prohibited from interacting with them, either by means of threats, curses or subtle suggestions with holy verses but they are very tendentious.

2.2 Ideas: From Kymlicka, Habermas to Giddens

The issue of exclusion of individuals and groups has been comprehensive in Kymlicka's study in *Multiculture Citizen* (Kymlicka, 1995). Kymlicka is a Canadian philosopher who in his daily experience interacts with various ethnic groups. As it is known that Canada is one of the countries with high multiculturalism, where there are multi-ethnics, multi-nationals and poly-ethnics (Kymlicka, 1995). In such a country for Kymlicka, harmony and state welfare can only be achieved with the concept of multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 2013).

For Kymlicka, multiculturalism is an attitude to appreciating and celebrating differences in a multiethnic society (Kymlicka, 1995). The award covers differences in tradition, food and music (Kymlicka, 1995). In his research, Kymlicka found that in Canada, there are big problems including unemployment, economic problems, and minimal English language skills in minority groups (Kymlicka, 2013). He views that all of this must be tackled in the name of human rights, civil rights to freedom and democracy (Kymlicka, 2013). Citing the results of research by Irene Bloemraad, Kymlicka shows that the treatment of immigrants from Vietnam and Portugal in Boston and Canada studied by Bloemraad can tell many things (Kymlicka, 2013). Immigrants' education is much better in Canada than in Boston; so that it can help the country's economic growth (Kymlicka, 2013). This is found by Kymlicka who is encouraged by Canada's fair treatment of immigrants and their native citizens to obtain jobs, a decent living, and access to various shared facilities (Kymlicka, 2013). This is what drives Canada to grow rapidly (Kymlicka, 2013).

Kymlicka views that multiculturalism has not only succeeded in suppressing inter-ethnic conflicts but more than that it can produce national welfare (Kymlicka, 2013). Kymlicka does not deny that the dominance of the majority group can still be felt strongly in the determination of national holidays, for example, or in the preparation of the national education curriculum (Kymlicka, 1995). However, Kymlicka sees that as far as it is not detrimental to the existence of minority groups, there is no significant problem (Kymlicka, 1995). However, on the other hand, Kymlicka also realized that facilitating minority groups were also sometimes risky (Kymlicka, 1995). Usually, after being facilitated, minority groups have a higher *demand*, there is even an impression of imposing their will (Kymlicka, 1995). This idea certainly shows that German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that multiculturalism has failed Germany is not new and does not contrast with Kymlicka's views (Johansson, 2022; Kymlicka, 1995). The solution that Kymlicka offers is intercultural dialogue as proposed by Habermas (Kymlicka, 1995). In such a dialogue, Kymlicka views that cultural rights will not lead to *win-lose*, but *win-win*; violence between groups is not possible and individual freedom is guaranteed in carrying out their culture (Kymlicka, 1995).

Kymlicka's thinking seems very optimistic about the capabilities of individuals in his group. Taking into account the phenomena observed in this study, it was found that the individual represented by the mother could not be equal to others. Mother positions herself as inferior, and her group views her as such; so she does not have the right to voice her opinion or do something that is not in accordance with the wishes of her group. In this case, some inequalities do not allow for discourse as proposed by Habermas (Chakraborty, 2019)

Communication is the process of delivering messages by someone to other people to tell, change attitudes, opinions or behavior either directly orally or indirectly through the media (Hasbullah, et al: 2018). Habermas in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Misgeld et al., 1981) show how the role of communication in society can resolve conflicts. Borrowing Kymlicka's thought that intercultural dialogue needs to be carried out within Habermas's framework, discourse is the solution (Misgeld et al., 1981). The basic assumption is that all in the discussion are on an equal footing (Papastephanou, 1996). However, in the context of Batak culture, this equality is almost impossible to achieve. Therefore, the thinking of Kymlicka and Habermas needs to be developed to be able to explain phenomena, as Popper shows the urgency of developing scientific theories to explain phenomena (Gorton, 2006; Popper, 2002). However, the mother does not have the freedom to express her affection for her child's family; and her instincts were extinguished at the will and pressure of her extended family. Where is individual freedom in the structure? This is not fully captured by Kymlicka, Habermas, and Kukathas.

The problem can then be viewed from the perspective of Anthony Giddens' structuration theory. In *The Constitution of Society* (1984), Giddens points out that the explanation of the theory of structuralism and functionalism as two major theories to explain the relationship between individuals and groups is inadequate (Anthony Giddens, 2006). Because for Giddens, both of them are extreme in explaining reality, which shows that human life is in tension between them (Anthony Giddens, 1984). Agents and structures for Giddens interact in a duality of structures (Skocpol & Giddens, 1987). In this concept, agents can have to act that is not by the will of the structure (Skocpol & Giddens, 1987). Thus, even if her extended family forbids her from interacting with Togar, she can still choose to interact with Togar. But Giddens bases his theoretical assumptions on the individual's ability to choose to act freely. However, in reality, not all individuals have that capability. Not all community groups also have the capability to accept differences in

individual actions from what their groups want, as has happened in the west. Therefore, the context of the typical Batak problem which is put forward as a phenomenon under study is still not fully explained by structuration theory.

III. Research Method

After discovering the theoretical limitations of Kymlicka, Kukathas, Habermas, and Giddens, it is necessary to develop a theoretical framework that can explain how a multicultural society can be formed in the context of such a social society; and the extent to which women's emancipation (in this case represented by mothers) can be realized in such a society. The preparation of the thesis as an answer to this research question was carried out using an existential-phenomenological approach to Emmanuel Levinas' writing entitled *Totality and Infinity*. This text was chosen because it is considered the most capable of showing how enmity between different groups can be liquidated by realizing the human side of others (Cooper, 2012).

The text of *Totality and Infinity* will be dissected with several key questions, including 1) what does the text speak to me today? 2) which community practices criticism, comparison, and confirmation? 3) which part of the text speaks to me? Why? 4) What are the calls for change or action? 5) What kind of custom or practice is the text trying to break? how do I deal with it? 6) was there a gap between the practice of the time and the present context? 7) ideological critique of my interpretation. These seven questions serve as directions to find the relevance of Levinas' text in developing a new thesis that is better able to explain reality in phenomena.

IV. Results and Discussion

Levinas' text in *Totality and Infinity* is a reference that delivers the *face-to-face concept* as a way to encourage morality to grow well (Levinas, 1979). This text discusses an important message for today's humans, where conflicts between groups and between individuals are triggered by mutual suspicion and discrimination. For Levinas, fragmentation in society occurs because humans are less able to see other humans as humans who are the same as themselves (Levinas, 1979). The realization that other human groups are the same as oneself who also have human features makes humans ultimately able to become human liaisons with one another (Levinas, 1979).

Community practices such as lectures or movements that discredit other community groups are something that is criticized in this text. This fragmentation often leads to prolonged conflicts, such as conflicts between religions and conflicts that spread to conflicts in the virtual world (Arung Triantoro, 2019). In his text, Levinas points out that after all, human beings are bound in a world that is interconnected and should love each other, as follows (Levinas, 1979) :

"However, our being in-the-world also entails the enjoyment of natural elements and love of life " (TI: 110–115).

"We live from 'good soup', water, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc.... These are not objects of representations. We live from them" (TI: 110).

"Labor as the creation of a store of goods thanks to which the other can be welcomed" (TI: 157–161, 205).

Therefore, Levinas considers it necessary for humans to view others as part of themselves (Levinas, 1979) as stated in the following text:

"To think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object. But to think what the lineament of an object does not have is in reality to do more or better than think." (TI: 49)

"The acuity of the problem [of universalization] lies in the necessity of maintaining the I in the transcendence [of the face-to-face] with which it hitherto seemed incompatible [given its self-interests]." (TI: 276)

For Levinas, seeing others as part of oneself and knowing oneself by understanding the humanity of others is an absolute necessity to overcome conflicts and divisions (Levinas, 1979) as written in the following text:

"The very status of the human implies fraternity and the idea of the human race. Fraternity is radically opposed to the conception of a humanity united by resemblance, a multiplicity of diverse families arisen from the stones cast behind by Deucalion, and which, across the struggle of egoisms, results in a human city." (TI: 214)

The texts above speak to this case because there is a strong conception in the extended family that Togar is another person *who* must be avoided because of his disobedience and incompatibility with the expectations of the extended family. The existence of Togar under any conditions is seen as not needing attention like other people. But when this was done, it turned out that at the same time there was neglect of oneself, who was also the Togar's family.

Through this text, Levinas gives a new invitation for a moment to look at each other's faces and openly acknowledge each other's limitations. So that there is a new awareness that those who are considered *other* so far are also humans who are the same as yourself. The practice of isolation that had been carried out so far was well dismantled by Levinas, where the extreme impact was shown: a serious and protracted war between German troops and French troops.

Although Levinas' text in *Totality and Infinity* has a different context from today's, the text can still be considered. The context of the era at the time of writing *Totality and Infinity* was when the war between Germany and France occurred (Cooper, 2012). At that time, all German citizens were indoctrinated from childhood to regard people other than Germans as non-humans; which reinforces the view that the German race is the best race on earth (Levinas, 1979). In the current era, cultural convergence occurs (Georgi, 2021; Hay & Coudry, 2011), media has connected humans globally (Skinner, 2018), and communication through digital media has influenced humans very quickly (Harari, 2015). Culture can no longer be considered singular. Mr. A may be part of the X tribe, but at the same time, he is also a global citizen with B, C, D, E, and F cultures and infinite combinations of cultures. So it is not easy to call the identical A as tribe X. The culture becomes very fluid. An Indonesian citizen may have a western culture after reading various books from western writers; while he is also a resident of the East Javanese tribe who interacts with his wife's Chinese tribe. However, this gap still leaves an abstract concept that is more timeless, namely how to treat different people; that is, by looking at his face and realizing that he is the same as us as humans. Appreciating it is the same as respecting yourself because we are all connected in a network that develops and needs each other (Lévinas & Poller, 2003).

My interpretation of the existential phenomenology in Levinas' text may be biased. My subjectivity that what really needs to change is myself and my extended family is one of the criticisms of my interpretation. Perhaps, it is precisely the steps to paying attention to faces and understanding other people are things that I do myself. I am also interested in this text because it seems to support that the exile given to me is injustice; without thinking that their impartiality towards me is precise because of other antecedents such as my step

of shutting down, not wanting to connect, and not wanting to open up. So what needs to be done is to make sure both parties take the opportunity to meet face to face and understand each other that they are limited human beings.

Through criticism, a new thesis was born to complement the multiculturalism thought of Kymlicka, Kukathas, Giddens, and Habermas. I think that multiculturalism in the digital era is understood to facilitate individual differences in society. The role of the state is not only to ensure that group conflicts do not occur because of differences, but also to the impact of individual differences. This is because, in the digital era, culture has become very fluid. It makes individuals in any group, even though they have similarities, the values they hold are very diverse. In the portrait of a typical Batak society as stated in the phenomenon studied, the solution in this thesis is considered relevant. The emancipation of women can occur in society is also seen as only possible if and only if there is an interaction between faces that men and women are both human beings. The patriarchal structure is only a structure and should not affect human attitudes across genders.

V. Conclusion

The phenomenon of the death of a mother's instinct to be with her child has been studied using the theoretical perspective of Kymlicka, Habermas, Giddens, and Kukathas. Its limitations in capturing phenomena that occur in the Batak culture have been approached with the existential-phenomenological method of Emmanuel Levinas' text *Totality and Infinity*. It was found that in the digital era, the text of *Totality and Infinity* has relevance for criticizing the current situation in society. Seeing other people's faces enables humans to have the awareness that other people are also limited reflections of themselves. The thesis proposed after conducting the analysis is that in the digital era, culture can no longer be interpreted as part of a group; but as an individual. Multiculturalism must facilitate not the only group or cultural differences, but also individual differences in society.

This study has limitations that need to be continued in future research. Testing the theory using other contexts from other ethnic groups or cultures in Indonesia needs to be used as a basis to find a formula for the realization of a multicultural society and respect for women in various parts of Indonesia. These findings will be the basis for realizing Indonesia; *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is a society with inherently multi-culture.

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