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Hardiyanti, Hastanti Widy Nugroho

HETERONORMATIVITY: CONTENTIOUS SYMBOL OF BELONGING IN INDONESIA FROM THE PLURIVERSE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Unity has been touted as the cornerstone of Indonesian nationalism since its declaration in 1945. With the national motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, Indonesian unity holds a sacred and absolute status. However, in reality, unity sometimes becomes a national problem. This article revisits Indonesian unity by shedding light on its darker aspects, namely heteronormativity, and introduces how Indonesian unity can be supported by a new ontological alternative: pluriverse. The study provides a brief historical overview of the New Order era and the family ideology that shaped an adherence to heteronormative norms, and followed by exploration of the pluriverse as an ethical ontological foundation that can deepen the struggle for unity.
Keywords: Heteronormativity, pluriverse, Indonesia, New Order, gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is renowned for its celebration of diversity and unity, encapsulated in the national motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" (Unity in Diversity). This unity, achieved despite the nation's historical fragmentation into smaller kingdoms, sultanates, and chiefdoms, is attributed to two main narratives. The first is the pre-independence rhetoric of "*Sabang sampai Merauke*" championed by President Sukarno, and the second is the post-independence idealization of the Majapahit Empire promoted during President Suharto's New Order regime. These narratives mobilized the population against both real and perceived enemies, legitimizing the leadership of the chosen elites (Webster 2007; Wood 2005).

However, the emphasis on unity often overshadows diversity, forcing marginalized groups to compromise their unique aspirations and identities shaped by cultural or social upbringings. This can lead to the erasure of certain minorities' identity uniqueness, thus creating power imbalances and eventually an ambiguous stance on the increasingly homogenized society. This can be attributed to the New Order significant influence over Indonesia's cultural, societal, and political landscape through universalist approaches, which emphasized modernization and development. This included the implementation of Repelita[1] (Booth 1994; 1979; 1989), gender essentialism through women's organizations, and the promotion of heteronormativity, which reduced women to their reproductive roles (Brenner 1999; Suryakusuma 1996; Wijaya 2020). The prioritization of unity over diversity often resulted in the suppression of distinctive cultural identities and the marginalization of minority groups, imposing a homogenized national identity, which led to divergent forms of national imaginings (Nugroho 2020). Moreover, any form of societal abnormality often touted as sign of national destabilization attempt, often citing foreign actors (Cho, 2019).

Indonesia's symbol of embodiment takes form in a homogenous imagining, often being the prime example of Benedict Anderson's classic "imagined communities" (Anderson, 2006), of which, national symbols play a crucial role in creating a shared identity among people who may never meet but envision themselves as part of a larger community. However, is this concept still relevant today? The elevated importance placed on unity, especially in terms of national unity, runs the risk of becoming merely a floating signifier, potentially alienating individuals who feel compelled to embrace unity merely to avoid upsetting the status quo.

However, this notion of unity has become overestimated and imbued with excessive universalist pretension. Mahaswa and Kim (2023) argue that the ontological thesis of the pluriverse, which recognizes "many kinds of worlds," may actually deepen the pursuit of unity by giving serious consideration to the many worlds embodied by cultural diversity in Indonesia. This perspective also extends to the existence of gender and sexuality non-conforming subjects. By acknowledging the diverse expressions of gender and sexuality, the pluriverse concept serves as both an ontological and ethical foundation in the struggle for better advocacy for those marginalized due to their gender and sexual preferences. It challenges the dominant narrative and enriches our understanding of unity through the lens of cultural and identity diversity.

In the following discussion, our purpose is threefold. First, to build on the work of several prominent anthropologists who have conducted extensive eth-

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[1] "Repelita" stands for *Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun*, which translates to Five-Year Development Plan in English. During Indonesia's New Order era, *Repelita* aimed at guiding the country's economic policies and development strategies. These plans set specific goals for economic growth, industrialization, infrastructure development, and social welfare improvement under President Suharto's administration.

nographic studies on the history of gender nonconformity in Indonesia. Second, as the discussion unfold later, there exists contradictions between the rhetoric and the practices of the so-called pluralism and diversity that are the foundations of the edifice of the Indonesian nation. And third, introducing the pluriverse as not only ontological basis of this new perspective of understanding the complex dynamic of gender and sexuality in Indonesia past and present but also its ethical underpinning. Contingent to the discussion, an action based possible strategy to build pluriverse ethics to further firm its position in the contemporary ethical debate surrounding gender and sexuality nonconforming.

It should be noted that we frequently mention the phrase "gender and sexuality non-conforming subject positions" as an all-encompassing term in order to include an even more diverse spectrum of identities and expressions that do not necessarily fit within traditional binary notions of male and female, or whose gender expressions may not necessarily inform or give meaning to their sexuality. This term recognizes the fluidity and individuality of gender and sexual orientation, and it aims to respect and acknowledge the self-identification and experiences of each person.

2. THE MAKING OF NEW ORDER REGIME

In many respects, the substantial body of literature addressing the New Order and its strategic indoctrination to achieve its developmentalist goals aligns with the contextual approach required for discussing the regime. Examining certain regimes within their historical context reveals their distinctiveness. As highlighted by Cribb (2010), the Sukarno regime was a period of frenetic disruption, representing a departure from the continued influence of colonial powers in Indonesia (the Dutch East Indies being the precursor state of Indonesia).

In a sense, the New Order regime can be characterized as cosmopolitan yet nationalist simultaneously. It embraces Western concepts like Weberian rationality and hierarchical bureaucracy to a certain extent, while also adopting Rostowian modernization theories to drive development. However, it remains closely aligned with traditional and conservative values that gained prominence during Indonesia's struggle for independence. This process of rediscovery will be explored further in the following discussion. Such a stance can be viewed as reactionary in its perception of power (Pye, 1985, 90). This blend of Western and Eastern elements gave the New Order a unique position in the discourse of nationalism, making Indonesian nationalism distinct. This nationalism is neither purely ethnonationalist nor purely civic. Instead, the mix of modernization and diverse cultural and societal conditions led the state apparatuses to "create" unity through engineered ideology, tradition, or institutions (Gunn, 1979; Morfit, 1981). Yet, its conservative stance towards "abnormality" seems to align with colonial attitudes, reinforcing Saskia Wieringa's (2009, 206) claim

that “tradition” was perceived (and constructed) as the site of “moral decay” during colonial times. This prompted the need for reconfiguration—a project aimed at redefining and reinterpreting tradition during the New Order through its ideology and institutions, as we shall explore later.

Drawing from Cribb’s (2010) observation regarding the similarities between the New Order and Colonial Dutch regimes, one can highlight their shared focus on managing diversity. In the colonial era, there was a recognition of the need to allow indigenous populations some degree of autonomy in governing their affairs, resulting in the establishment of indirect rule and the implementation of segregation measures. This segregation went beyond physical separation, extending to the application of different laws for various ethnic or racial groups as a strategy for managing diversity (Raben, 2020). Conversely, the New Order regime promoted unity as the approach to managing diversity. This aligns with Benedict Anderson’s (Anderson, 2006) concept of an “Imagined Community,” suggesting that a modern nation must possess tangible symbols or commonalities to foster a sense of belonging. This was evident in the indoctrination of state ideology, which became mandatory for civil servants. Pancasila, serving as Indonesia’s official ideology, encapsulated the nation’s aspirations and character by embracing diversity, thereby promoting solidarity without the need for compartmentalization. As indoctrination of ideology played a pivotal role in nation-building, Indonesia, like other postcolonial nations, embarked on a journey to rediscover its identity. While Pancasila ideology predated the New Order regime, the government felt it necessary to demystify Pancasila, leading to the implementation of the P4 program to ensure a universal understanding of it (Morfit, 1981).

In addition to ideology, another intangible aspect crucial to state-building was the cultivation of a shared identity and shared reality. This involved shaping the narrative of history, with the regime and its supporters benefiting the most from the dissemination of a particular version of history (Ashton, Brahmantyo, Keaney, 2012; Wood, 2005). During the 1960s, Indonesia initiated efforts to decolonize historiography. While the New Order regime was in power, the prevailing narrative emphasized the military’s triumph over communism, which profoundly influenced Indonesia’s political trajectory. This resulted in the outlaw of communism since 1966.

This reinterpretation of history reflects Indonesia’s alignment with the Cold War geopolitical landscape of the time. A key element of the national security doctrine was the concept of vigilance (*kewaspadaan*) against the “latent danger” of communism, as promoted by Lemhannas.[2] Lemhannas emphasized internal stability as a prerequisite for national security and development, aiming to instill public trust in the government’s efforts to maintain domestic order following the failed coup, amid external uncertainties and political polarization

[2] *Lembaga Ketahanan Nasional* (National Resilience Institute).

(Honna, 1999). Therefore, it is pertinent to further examine the enduring vigilance towards what Wieringa and Katjasungkana (2019) describe as "imagined evil," which provides context for understanding the developmentalism and gender ideology that followed.

The locus of realpolitik that centered the military was rooted in the complexities and ambiguities of governance, as per Weberian tradition. At that time, the regime's interests—defined here as those of the governing elite who wielded violence as a means of control—effectively excluded the broader "nation," despite relying on it as their legitimate expression of political identity (Krishnamurthy, 1977; Sebastian, 2006, 27–28). While the developmentalist agenda did benefit the larger public by improving Indonesia's economy and raising living standards (Wie, 2002), it disproportionately advantaged the regime. This was due to the power imbalance normalized and "naturalized" by the national security doctrine. Here, consensus reached its limitation: it became a consensus among the elite at the expense of people's freedom and societal control, seen as the proper strategy for the public good. However, this consensus only existed under specific conditions and, when prolonged, it discouraged public participation and healthy democratic practices, such dynamic where the current state of Indonesia is today.

With the military playing a dominant role in the public sphere alongside bureaucrats and technocrats, the "superstructure" level—borrowing the Marxist term—led to the creation of a society that normalized values typical of military institutions: order, discipline, efficiency, hierarchy, and rationality, in stark contrast to the more passionate governance of the previous regime. It is ironic that the national personification is portrayed as a goddess, a mother. In a tangible sense, the abundant natural resources and fertile soil of the archipelago make it fitting for Indonesia to be personified as a Mother. However, this maternal association extends beyond nurturing and nourishment, suggesting a need to be "tamed" by a patriarchal culture laden with moral discipline and cumbersome mechanisms. The military further defined the 'national feminine' through institutionalized practices, as exemplified by the dissemination of popular songs, the celebration of national war heroines, and the institutionalization of feminine roles within the military (Sunindyo, 1998).

Where can we locate the inspiration for this seemingly innocent family metaphor? Within the framework of the New Order regime in Indonesia, family ideology intertwined with patriarchal structures to significantly influence the roles and perceptions of women. Central to this ideology was the concept of "*kodrat*," which prescribed traditional gender roles and duties within the national development narrative. This entrenched patriarchal framework not only shaped familial dynamics but also institutionalized heteronormativity as a cornerstone of nation-building. This section explores how these ideological constructs and norms profoundly impacted societal perceptions and policies concerning gender and family during the New Order era in Indonesia.

Family Ideology

The New Order regime's spiritual dimension is best described through its ideology of family, which is universally accepted in the private realm and through the organicist view that equates the "State" with the "Family" (Bourchier, 2015). This ideology was reinforced by a complex interplay of external political influences, especially the Cold War, and domestic demands for economic development. These demands were met through militaristic modernization and bureaucratization (Simpson, 2008, 2009), which served to rationalize the regime's oppressive and repressive nature.

Before initiating a discussion on family ideology, it is essential to first distinguish between "ideology" and "family" and understand their intersection. When combined, these concepts emerge as the driver of the state's political will, characterized by paternalism and patronage within Indonesian civil society.

The concept of ideology can be interpreted in either a pejorative or ameliorative sense. Marxist thinkers often express a pejorative view, seeing ideology as a cognitive instrument; to disseminate illusions, distortions, and mystifications (Eagleton, 1991, 3). Conversely, there is another view that emphasizes ideology's role as a dominant force. This perspective highlights its ability to legitimize beliefs and values through processes of naturalization and universalization, thereby marginalizing rival thoughts and alternative social realities (Eagleton, 1991, 5). From the ameliorative perspective, ideology emerges as an imaginary solution to reconcile social conflicts. Both pejorative and ameliorative aspects of ideology must be considered when examining social phenomena that have lasting and transgenerational effects.

The family institution is assumed to be a primordial and stable entity due to its association with the primal desire for refuge and protection. The definition of family often centers on anthropological sense of "kinship," implying that family are related by blood. This definition has universal significance but needs further diversification through specific contexts. In Indonesia, this particular context involves religion and culture. And in this case, the dominant culture is Javanese, as it represents the majority ethnic group. Consequently, when "Javanese" culture is enforced by the means of ideology, rival ideas must be then marginalized, a process known as "Othering." As the result, New Order regime is often dubbed as "Javacentric" albeit standing behind the thinly veiled ideas of unity through diversity (Nugroho, 2020; Pemberton, 1994; Reid, 2010).

In Javanese culture, the nuclear family is considered a stable feature of the social structure. The family functions not only as a structure but also as a source of stability and continuity in society and community, fulfilling economic, social, and psychological needs, and serving as a medium for socialization and the maintenance of normative continuity (Geertz, 1961). To sustain this continuity, which contributes to national stability, reproductive capability is essential. Following Yuval-Davis (1996; 1993; 1997; 2003), for example, emphasizes incor-

porating private matters like reproduction into the broader concept of maintaining the survival of the nation. Consequently, reproduction becomes politicized and intertwined with state ideology (Dwyer, 2000; Katjasungkana, Wieringa, 2003; Meyer, 2000). When the family is defined primarily as kinship based on blood relations, heteronormativity—the partnership between men and women—automatically becomes accentuated, and thus reinforcing traditional gender roles and framing heterosexual relationships as the ideal context for reproduction.

While the concept of "Indonesia" as a nation-state is a product of modern history, the idea of the Java itself is much older. The historical significance of Java in Indonesia is undeniable, with Javanese dominance dating back to the Majapahit Empire, which sought to "unite" the archipelago yet ironically through conquest (Nugroho, 2020, 44; Wood, 2005). Majapahit is thus seen as a proto-representation of the spirit of unity. Using Pierre Nora's (1989) term "*lieu de mémoire*," Majapahit and Java serve as containers of memory, with remembering them seen as an effort to restore past glory.

Therefore, the qualities of unity and stability, which are core characteristics of Javanese and Majapahit civilization, need to be incorporated into the concept of modern Indonesian unity. Since these qualities are closely related to the concept of family, the national character of Indonesia should adopt the character of the family. Bridging the differences in family and kinship concepts within Indonesia requires political efforts to manage and reduce competition.

The formidable presence of family based on dominant view in such multicultural and multireligious settings is not only limited to attributing the concept of family based on anthropological sense. In political sense, it gives broader understanding of family that goes beyond the confine of kinship and adds another characterization of what a family is; defined along the lines of traditional masculinity based on the romanticization of organicist thoughts.

Organicist thought found a romanticized rendition among Indonesian nationalists during the early development of nationalism. Inspired by European organicist ideas, which align with the Japanese model of a family state, this ideology emphasizes hierarchy to ensure order, harmony, and organic growth and development, as if the nation were a living body. In this national family, everyone has a place and role, and all are expected to contribute to national development. The president is viewed as the Father, who knows what is best for his "children," the citizens. This reflects a paternalistic tendency (Bourchier, 2015).

Following Louis Althusser (1971), the perpetuation of this dominant capitalist ideology is facilitated through the so-called State Apparatuses, the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) that works alongside the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). ISA is more subtle and persuasive, aiming to achieve similar objectives as RSA by reinforcing the state ideology through institutions such as the educational system, media, and family institutions. This further suggests that the

regime sought to lead the state with order and harmony and by means of repression and violence to enforce laws and suppress dissent.

It is hard to neglect the inextricable link between capitalism and family institution, that is, reproduction being the bridge between capitalism and family (Wolf, 2009). The traditional family unit is often centered on the nuclear family norm, where the father worked as the breadwinner and the mother stayed home to care for the children and manage family affairs. This arrangement was embraced organization such as Dharma Wanita[3] and its counterpart, the PKK.[4] As key components of the ISA in the New Order, they illustrate how deeply the capitalist structure influenced the organization of the family and labor division in the public sphere. The so-called double burden highlights the detrimental effects of the strict division of gender roles within capitalism, particularly for working-class women who struggled between unpaid household work and paid employment. And it has become a permanent condition resulting from the socialization of elitist values that emerged during the New Order regime's developmentalism.

The heteronormative norms ingrained in the family ideology long accepted by Indonesian society are gradually losing credulity. Heteronormativity can be considered a byproduct of modernity, rather than an inherent aspect of Indonesian culture. This implies that heteronormativity is context-specific knowledge and should not be appropriated as a political element of unity that supposedly always existed in Indonesia (Wieringa, 2009).

The romanticization of a glorious past, as presented in Indonesia's official history, ignores the complex dimensions of pre-colonial society, where gender and sexuality were fluid and ritualistic, lacking stable identities. Scholars question whether there is continuity from these liminal spaces. Various perspectives argue that past cultural precedents do not necessarily validate or legitimize inclusive movements within the framework of human rights (Boellstorff, 2005, p. 35). On the other hand, perspectives such as offered by Wieringa (2024) stress the importance of appreciating deeper understandings of gender and sexuality, which deserve recognition in contemporary Indonesia due to their unique and historical significance.

In reality, however, the opposite is occurring. Nostalgia for the past tends to be selective and politically constructed. Wieringa calls this phenomenon post-colonial amnesia (Wieringa, Sívori, 2013), which contributes to the rise of hate crimes against those considered "abnormal" (Wieringa, 2009). This post-colonial amnesia underscores the urgent need for a new perspective that re-examines the concept of unity based on meaningful experiences of pluralism. It

[3] Dharma Wanita, established in 1974 during the New Order regime in Indonesia, was the state organization for the wives of Indonesian civil servants and include female civil servants as well. Dharma Pertiwi was its counterpart within the Indonesian military.

[4] PKK stands for *Pemberdayaan dan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (Empowerment and Family Welfare).

is crucial to seriously consider important findings that shape Indonesian national identity.

Post-colonial Amnesia: A Component of the Universalist Outlook

But what is post-colonial amnesia in this context and what role does it play in the nation-building agenda of the New Order? To answer this, we turn to Saskia Wieringa's extensive ethnographic research on gender subjectivities and struggles against heteronormativity in post-colonial nations. Wieringa (Wieringa, 2009) suggested that selected memories were exploited to frame non-heteronormativity as something of a "Western" origin, and therefore incongruent to the Eastern value not especially when Indonesia was right in the middle of state building project, hence the image of the West being the locus of "pervasive desire." In postcolonial regime, especially in the Indonesian context of nation-building, "tradition" is a room reconfiguration—towards heteronormative "normalcy" (Wieringa, 2009).

And since we situate the New Order regime as emerging from this postcolonial trend during the Cold War, it is pertinent to consider how the politics at that time shaped this understanding of heteronormative "normalcy." In her examination of gender construction during the New Order, Wieringa (Wieringa, 2003) discovered a systematic erasure of the memory of groups considered non-conforming to the regime's gender ideals. Additionally, progressive individuals advocating for gender equity and equality were demonized due to their affiliation with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), attributed to the regime's Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) played crucial roles in enforcing a masculine public sphere and promoting heteronormativity (Wieringa, 2002; 2003).

Postcolonial amnesia serves as a powerful tool of imperial power during the peak of global colonialism and imperialism (Wieringa, 2009; Wieringa, Sívori, 2013). This selective amnesia, especially regarding issues of gender and sexuality, manipulates public perception by erasing the history of same-sex practices and gender diversity among Indonesia's indigenous and customary populations (Wieringa, 2010). It also fuels sexual moral panics (Wieringa, 2009). This sort of amnesia is a transnational phenomenon, part of a global discourse aimed at nation-building, promoting an image of "Asian" (and in some documented cases in Africa as well) (Cheney, 2012; Currier, 2010) identity devoid of sexual or gender diversity to align with capitalist ideals. Despite ethnographic evidence disproving these claims, postcolonial states continue to normalize exclusion and violence to shape society's understanding of gender and sexuality in line with a universalist regime.

Wieringa's work highlights the problematic nature of universalist pretension in Indonesia that attempt to influence public morality through homogenous and

linear imaginings, while appropriating pluralism only when it is politically expedient. This is illustrated by Costa's (2020) exploration of "*keberagaman*" (diversity) during the developmentalist era, which disguises expansionist projects as aesthetic appreciation of diversity.

This form of universalism, deeply embedded in the national psyche, neglects inherent diversity and pluralism, especially regarding gender and sexuality. The prevailing universal understanding, molded by coercion, repression, and indoctrination, is viewed as morally superior for sustaining developmentalist regimes. In contrast to this theoretical approach, and aligning with Mahaswa and Kim (2023), who employ the pluriverse as an ontological basis, we seek to enhance it from an ethical perspective. And in that regard, the pluriverse gives ample opportunity to explore different sorts of worldviews that produce knowledge and understanding as well as point of entry for understanding the motivation for and implications of the vision of "many words" invoked by the scholarly endeavors in finding legitimation to defend gender and sexuality as liminal spaces, which will be useful under the rubric of human rights agenda.

3. HOW TO AVOID EXTREMITIES?

As proponents of pluriverse have frequently argued, such concept is inherently radical in its aims and methods to achieve some form of relationality. This relationality is understood as a dialog that acknowledges the complexities of geopolitical locations and colonial differences to challenge the totalizing claims and political-epistemic violence of modernity (Quijano, 2007; Walsh Mignolo, 2018). To promote social justice in modern politics and influence public sentiment, it is not necessary to completely reject Western knowledge and perspectives, as they are integral to the pluriverse project (Mignolo, 2011). To broaden and deepen our understanding of gender and sexuality within the theoretical framework of the pluriverse, it is essential to revisit seminal works on these topics, particularly in the context of Indonesia.

While the West focuses on achieving lasting social justice for individuals identifying outside heteronormativity or those with same-sex desires within heteronormative roles, the Global South experiences a different trajectory. In contemporary Global South contexts, increasing amounts of knowledge about gender and sexuality are being uncovered through literary narratives and extensive ethnographic research, revealing even more intriguing discourses. The definition of gender is being expanded and enriched, seen not only as performative (Butler, 1999; 2009) but also as occupying a liminal space (Wieringa, 2024; Wieringa, Blackwood, 2007). This perspective supports the view of gender not as a stable and immutable identity, but as a fluid state. Indigenous "ritualized transgenderism," exemplified by the *Bissu* highlights this fluidity (Andaya, 2018; Davies, 2003; 2018).

The pluriverse perspective on gender and sexuality certainly can depart from the theoretical underpinning offered by Wieringa, that is, designating gender and sexuality as not only precarious but also liminal space. Describing this liminality is quite a daunting task considering that there is a belief about the so-called "always already" heteronormative, looming large as the backdrop of Indonesian society which prompt a moral panic should there ever be challenges against it (Wieringa, 2022).

Translating gender and sexuality non-conforming subjectivities prevalent in Asian context into Western terms risks reinforcing Eurocentric epistemic patterns (Sinnott, 2010). As already pointed out by Stevenson (1995), Western personhood, characterized by its intact and individualistic nature, struggles to relate to Asian personhood, which is divisible, relational, and highly situational. As Asians, specifically from the Southeast Asian cultural sphere, this perspective validates our own multiplicities: our "performances" in private and public spheres, the gender roles and expectations assigned to us, and the linguistic judgments we must navigate in specific situations and with particular interlocutors. Despite the pervasive influence of Eurocentrism through colonialism, Asian personhood continues to condition individuals to navigate society and community appropriately.

Sinnott's (2010) work, along with that of Blackwood and Wieringa (2007), taken together evidence that historical precedents reveal the fluidity of gender expression. However, these expressions struggle to gain a foothold in global gender discourse, risking being interpreted through a Western lens instead. While these precedents do not necessarily validate contemporary experiences of gender non-conforming individuals and their sexual expressions or desires, they demonstrate that gender and sexuality are not unitary constructs, especially in Asian context. The implications of such understanding in contemporary developments could expedite civil rights for sexual minorities, yet also place individuals who identify with ethnic groups that historically practiced ritualized gender and sexuality non-conforming behaviors in precarious positions. These historical precedents in Indonesian history might be difficult to accept, as they challenge the theory of the Indonesian archipelago being inherently heteronormative. This perspective suggests that contemporary forms of gender and sexuality non-conforming behaviors are not imported or learned but are intrinsic to the region's historical and cultural context, thus challenging the notion that they destabilize national integrity and religious identity.

A defensive attitude may arise to protect straightist rhetoric through street protests, online hate campaigns, and the dissemination of poorly informed facts (Boellstorff, 2016; Dalek et al., 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2016). These efforts are often exploited to create a divisive narrative, framing the "LGBT" community as part of a global "proxy war" orchestrated by the West to undermine Indonesia's sovereignty (Editorial Republika, 2016). This situation echoes the "red scare" moral panic of the past, with the LGBT community now cast as

the actors spreading fear in the 21st century (Wieringa, 2022). This framing can be used opportunistically as a political tool to rally the masses, presenting a more convincing polemical stance on unity. This phenomenon reflects broader trends in knowledge production, particularly in the Global South, as discussed through Syed Farid Alatas' (2003) academic dependency theory.

Academic dependency mirrors the economic relationships between nations, where developed nations are seen as expanding their influence over underdeveloped ones. This dynamic creates a parallel between economic and academic development, built upon foundations of expansionism, tutelage, dependency, and Eurocentrism (Alatas, 2003; 2022). In this context, the social sciences in certain countries are shaped by the development and growth of social sciences in other, more dominant countries. The constraint of academic dependency, just as its economic counterpart did, is that it limits chance for a subaltern theorization or perspective contribution to global development of human understanding. A condition of dependency consequently reduces science as a means to an end, not the end itself. Academic dependency hampers this project of "theorizing from the South" since it correlates deeply with postcolonial amnesia that aims to rehabilitate the image of "tradition." The technocratic interest that exploited Western epistemic methodology, much aligned with the nation-building agenda during the New Order, tends to superficially value quantitative measures of progress over qualitative assessments of indigenous (in the sense that it is unique to Indonesia) way of knowing, being, and understanding.

On the one hand, while "fully" decolonizing by rejecting Western perspectives entirely is impractical, a balanced strategy is essential and that involves adopting useful aspects of Western science while integrating traditional knowledge (Alatas, 2000). Alatas' pragmatic approach aligns with pluriversal political and epistemic aspirations, advocating for a form of selective assimilation, thus, understanding a progress not merely just advancement in linear form as understood by classic Enlightenment thinkers but also perpetual construct of knowledge.

This perspective shows that Indonesia has yet to build conducive state of ethical understanding within the framework of the pluriverse in terms of development considering how much influence Western development models affect what has been traditionally considered "taboo" topics in Indonesian academia realm such as those surrounding gender and sexuality non-conforming. As the technocratic elite perpetuate this dependency on ideas from Western social science, especially those that deem integral to the development, subdisciplines like gender and sexual nonconformity suffer from devaluation and certainly loss of significance within social sciences. As Indonesian scholars often highlight nonconforming subject positions negatively, it does influence public morality to be singular and homogenous—rooted in religious values and presumed to be universally applicable.

This positions the state as an ambiguous and avoidant actor regarding its moral responsibility to accommodate socially vulnerable and politically marginalized groups. The state, with its extensive societal and political influence, selectively incorporates elements of liberalism that align with so-called Asian values, which are considered a contrast to Western liberalism.

Therefore, if the state aims to persist in its development goals, it should simultaneously work towards fairer accommodations for gender and sexuality nonconforming individuals, based on the following assumptions: 1) the multiplicity of life forms, and 2) the vulnerability of moral judgments and epistemic stances, which implies that they are neither unassailable nor infallible (Fitzgerald, 2022).

4. TOWARDS PLURIVERSAL ETHICS: SOME ALTERNATIVES

In addressing the pervasive and harmful moral superiority in a world where diversity and plurality are often reduced to mere floating signifiers, it seems commonsensical to broaden our conceptualization of ethics. This expansion should go beyond specific contexts and avoid the pitfalls of extremism.

Reflecting on the cultural and political conflicts discussed earlier, we align with proponents of care ethics in recognizing that the default values entrenched in public morality and policies. First, it would instigate a radical paradigm shift in reconciling the "dark present," seriously politicizing the issue and potentially leading to rectification, provided sobriety prevails. Second, pluriversal ethics, heavily influenced by the ethics of care, could redefine Indonesian nationalism, traditionally based on concepts of an imagined community and the invention of tradition, which are often entrenched in masculinist and heteronormative doctrines.

Moral cosmopolitanism emerges as the dominant approach in the ethical discourse of pluriverse. As acknowledged by Fitzgerald (2022, 57), neglecting cosmopolitan values in moral understanding means failing to recognize the current global political reality, where distances shrink and information spreads rapidly through advanced internet technology. Fundamentally, there is a moral claim inherent in cosmopolitanism itself. As we know, cosmopolitanism asserts principles of inclusivity, universality, and transcending cultural, religious, and other boundaries. However, when confronted with pluriverse, the universal principles of cosmopolitanism encounter their limits, even as cosmopolitanism itself assumes a superior status compared to other options.

In this section, several alternative options are proposed to strengthen ethical claims that not only support heteronormativity as "contentious," but also argue that heteronormativity is a symbol no longer credible when being co-opted with claims of Indonesian unity. An ethical foundation rooted in the pluriverse framework provides a cautious alternative in navigating its relational, contextualized, and evaluative nature when faced with specific cases.

5. EXPLORING DIFFERENT ETHICAL ORIENTATION

Although Fitzgerald's discourse ethics does not offer conclusive solutions, it is considered the most appropriate in the pluriverse context due to its dialogical nuances. This is driven by a desire to evade the pitfalls of metaphysical assumptions often inherent in ethical studies. The pluriversal ethics that will underpin discussions on gender and sexuality advocacy (issues deemed taboo not only in Indonesia but also regarded as "final" or definitive) must incorporate certain assumptions when attempting to understand the dynamic and historically situated complexities of gender and sexuality. These assumptions include acknowledging the attribute of incommensurability in these two aspects, indicating that there are limitations in knowledge where each individual may have varying depths of understanding. Furthermore, the attribute of relationality recognizes the need to understand shared material existence. Therefore, Fitzgerald (2022, p. 59) proposes a different ethical orientation derived from various ethical claim domains, such as moral cosmopolitanism or other variants of postmodern ethics.

Moral cosmopolitanism

Before delving into the moral dimensions of cosmopolitanism, it is helpful to revisit its definition. Kantian cosmopolitanism is the most renowned in Western philosophy. In *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, Immanuel Kant (1991) defines cosmopolitanism as "the matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop." Essentially, Kant's cosmopolitanism aims to create a global environment where every individual can fully develop their human capacities. Kant further explains this by stating that "the greatest problem for the human species, the solution to which nature compels him to seek, is that of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally."

Understanding Kant's cosmopolitanism involves two main points. First, one must understand the components involved in creating a cosmopolitan legal framework. This includes defining what is meant by universal justice, establishing a global civil society, and recognizing the moral value of human capacities. Second, it is necessary to synthesize these principles with Kant's assertion that nature compels us to implement universal justice and that all humans possess inherent capacities that should be fully developed. In this context, Kantian cosmopolitanism can be seen through two lenses: one focusing on a naturalistic teleology and the other on the formal principles required to establish universal justice and cosmopolitan law.

The pluriverse, as an alternative ethical approach, helps in understanding gender and sexual inequalities beyond a heteronormative perspective. Onora O'Neill (2004), for instance, presents a view of moral cosmopolitanism that merges Kant's idea of universal rational autonomy, considered the default for

every human, with the realities of human finitude and vulnerability. This perspective acknowledges that humans are agents with limited capacities who interact with other similarly limited beings. The limitations of universal principles become evident when principles of violence or coercion fail to provide comprehensive benefits, resulting instead in moderate and often biased outcomes (O'Neill, 2004, 138).

O'Neill (2004, 147) also addresses how abstract notions of justice can be gender-biased. Moral subjects are positioned differently within power systems based on their gender. In various contexts, gender definitions, manifested within a binary system (male-female), constrain individuals differently, translating their moral capacities and autonomy in distinct ways. By recognizing and emphasizing human vulnerability, O'Neill aims to capture the dynamics and impacts of different positions within power systems. This approach seeks to refine cosmopolitanism to be more practical by considering the political and ethical consequences of these differences.

Given the dynamic of cosmopolitanism, it can be perceived as a viable ethical alternative within the framework of the pluriverse whose orientation give more emphasis towards addressing sensitive and contentious issues like gender and sexuality. This viewpoint aims to unify all global citizens into a cohesive moral community that prioritizes the development of rationality and individual autonomy, underscoring the relational aspects crucial for achieving mutual understanding. The concept of global citizenship advocated by cosmopolitanism introduces a novel aspiration: fostering relationality that transcends particularities and borders, out of solidarity being at the margin of heteronormative society. Integrating deontological moral understanding within cosmopolitanism strives to foster a sense of "belonging" that transcends national boundaries and embraces a supranational citizenship status.

While relationality holds significant value as a global ethical approach within the pluriverse framework, it's crucial to recognize its limitations. Relationality grapples with the pervasive influence of universalist perspectives, which are deeply ingrained. The pluriverse, in its avoidance of oversimplification, necessitates a nuanced exploration of relationality itself. In the following section, where we discuss relationality as the guiding principle for ethical orientation within the pluriverse framework, we delve into its challenges. These include not only addressing oversimplified views of gender and sexuality that marginalize nonconforming individuals but also asserting relationality's struggle for equitable recognition amidst other structures imposed by coloniality/modernity, such as developmental paradigms. As previously discussed, developmental discourse during the New Order often perpetuated oppression and disenfranchisement, particularly affecting those on the margins of societies shaped by gendered and heteronormative norms.

Relationality against Abstract Principles: On Strength and Weakness of the Pluriverse

While absolute universalist abstraction is practically inescapable and evident in emerging scholarly contributions on the contentious nature of colonial order entrenched in everyday life, achieving a hermeneutical equilibrium is possible if we start rethinking our default analytical framework. This framework is often inspired by a unitary mode of thinking and the violences of modernity. While some suggest conservative to moderate changes, others like Escobar (2018) argue for a radical shift towards a relational pluriverse design. This shift involves adopting a relational pluriverse design, which means radically rethinking our ontology and rejecting the modernist dualities based on Cartesian mind-body separation (Escobar, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2022; Mignolo, 2013).

This radical redesign not only empowers activism related to environmental issues, climate change, and sustainability but also elevates other struggles, such as decolonization. According to Chen (2010) and Lee (2023), decolonization often resembles internalized colonialism due to Cold War politics and post-colonial tendencies that replicate imperialist imaginaries and neocolonial structures, thereby showing less commitment to emancipation in the Asian decolonial context. Mignolo (2011, 10) shares this dissatisfaction, describing decoloniality as "a relentless analytic effort to understand and overcome the logic of coloniality that lies beneath the rhetoric of modernity and the structure of management and control that arose from the transformation of the economy in the Atlantic."

During the second half of the 20th century, the global Cold War, dominated by the Soviet Union and the United States, significantly impacted the politics and culture of East and Southeast Asia. Democratic values and the desire to liberate nations from communism were often used to justify development projects. In Indonesia, however, democracy was considered far-fetched, even to the point of premature since the nation was seen as still in its "infancy." Nevertheless, the development in postcolonial nations was observed by the New Order regime, which then being appropriated as a necessary step to achieve national security, provided that it followed the Western model to gain welfare led by technocrats as its designers (Honna, 1999; MacDougall, 1976). This "design," borrowing from Escobar's term, resulted in what would become integral to Indonesian developmentalism during the regime; the Repelita implemented within political repression and ideological rigidity (Booth, 1979; 1989; 1994; 2003; 2016).

As postcolonial nations developed, their understanding of gender and sexuality had to align with the heteronormative norms of Western public life. Historically, same-sex desire and gender non-conforming identities were integral to the social fabric of pre-colonial life. However, as noted earlier in this article, such ideas were not accepted because they represented divergent ways of being, un-

derstanding, and knowing. This is particularly problematic given that Christianity, the primary religion introduced by European colonizers, is monotheistic. Consequently, the logic of existence had to conform to a singularity, relegating the diverse realities of pre-colonial societies to insignificance.

Recognizing that "reality" has various dimensions is crucial. Politics is arguably the primary "reality" designer for most people living in modern nation-states with their own nationalist imaginaries. Political actors, particularly those behind the structure of the state, such as the government, have the power to not only design but also institutionalize theories and the resulting designs. We must acknowledge this cold truth: our collective abstractions, such as heteronormativity and straightism, which are part of the nationalist imaginary and nationalist project born from masculine desire and power structures, are the result of unanimously decided moral imperatives.

Mignolo offers a visionary solution: planetary communal "orders" based on pluriversality as a universal project. This approach seeks to dismantle the Colonial Matrix of Power, which perpetuates global inequality through dominance in knowledge, governance, and economy (Mignolo, 2011; 2023). While appealing, implementing such a paradigm shift faces formidable challenges in Asia and the Global South, including entrenched cultural values and bureaucratic inertia (Freeman, 1996; Mauzy, 1997; Peerenboom, 2000; Robison, 1996; Sheridan, 1999).

Planetary communal orders resemble the postdevelopment project that aspires towards a reality that prioritizing the cultivation of interconnectedness, inclusivity, and context sensitivity in order to allowing multiple epistemologies and ontologies to coexist on equal footing. However, candidly speaking, achieving this vision in Asia and the global south appears challenging. It is hindered by deeply ingrained Asian values, considered "universal" among Asians, in sense that since Eastern philosophical thoughts have influenced and informed socio-political and cultural conducts of particularly communities in East and Southeast Asian regions. Additionally, envisioned structural adjustments face obstacles such as political rigidity and rampant corruption exacerbated by problematic decentralization (Hofman, Kaiser, Schulze, 2009; Saputra Setiawan, 2021; Siburian, 2024). Nonetheless, emphasizing inclusivity is a logical step towards sustainability. As argued by Andrijevic et al. (2020), addressing inequality can significantly enhance adaptive capacity and resilience in confronting various crises.

The issue is akin to disputes over selecting development strategies to respond to specific crises. Here, we agree with Kiely (1999) with some reservations regarding his analysis of postdevelopment rhetoric, which often discounts materialist discourse and oversimplifies complex issues, despite postdevelopment's own inconsistency in some regards when it touches upon historical reflection. Connecting this issue to the speculation about whether contemporary Indonesian society is unwilling or unable to accept alternative historical narra-

tives of gender and sexuality—different from those approved or commonly accepted by scholars—the community appears more unwilling than unable in this regard. Accepting these narratives could allow critique of harmful practices like the male circumcision ritual called "*sifon*" among the West Timor ethnic groups (Eko, Putranto, Veronika, 2023; Lake, 2009; Tumina, Yona, Waluyo, 2021). This ritual is often upheld as local wisdom but may pose health risks to the community if not performed with proper medical oversight, contrasting with safer Western practices.

Proponents of harmful practices or local traditions may defend their continuation by emphasizing diversity and the right to plural existence, often leveraging the logic of "part of tradition" to justify the ethical basis of these practices. This raises concerns about the pluriverse concept overall. However, if we were to assess what constitutes "good" in a utilitarian sense, proponents of the pluriverse could come together to discuss overlooked harmful practices. In this context, one ought to return to Fitzgerald (2022, 215) regarding the pluriverse's ability to navigate moral dilemmas across different cultural contexts is crucial. It highlights the recognition of contingency but acknowledges the challenge of providing practical guidance for real ethical challenges. Each situation requires a nuanced approach that considers the perspectives and values emerging from these diverse worlds, rather than imposing a singular, external ethical framework. It is also assumed that each world is actively unfolding and co-constituting individuals and communities, thereby creating space to restructure power relations and enable the thriving of multiple worlds—whether they are cultural, social, or ideological.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As previously discussed, the reinforcement of heteronormativity by certain aspects of the New Order ideology, particularly through the family institution, has led to heteronormativity being seen as synonymous with the unity and sovereignty of the Indonesian nation, rooted in the existence of the family. Indonesian citizenship status, determined by adherence to heteronormative norms, marginalizes individuals who do not conform to these norms. This categorization labels individuals who identify with non-conforming gender and sexual subjectivities as "contentious," as the stigma of being "abnormal" attached to them can be misinterpreted as foreign agents seeking to destabilize Indonesian nationalism.

The politicization of gender and sexuality in Indonesia also tends to marginalize and restrict scholarly exploration of Indonesia's rich historical tapestry. Several renowned anthropologists previously mentioned have pointed out that the politicization of gender and sexuality in Indonesia stems from a project of "reconfiguring" tradition during the New Order era. This project aimed to reha-

bilitate the image of the past, which was seen as incompatible with the religious, traditional, and morally conservative values of Indonesian society. However, this reconfiguration has led to collective amnesia and has not expanded scholarly discourse on gender and sexuality in Indonesia but rather confined it within heteronormative constraints. Past development initiatives perpetuated the marginalization of non-conforming individuals, pushing them to the fringes of heteronormative society.

To challenge the prevailing narrative and symbols of absolute heteronormativity in Indonesia, it is crucial to reorient ethical perspectives within the pluriverse framework. The pluriverse perspective acknowledges that all things are evaluated as unique and emphasizes nuanced understanding, avoiding oversimplification and the assertion of universal or relativist truths. A sensible approach involves embracing relationality. Within this context, the advocated ethical orientation for effective advocacy efforts is moral cosmopolitanism.

While the reorientation of ethical stances may not wield immediate structural changes to the status quo, it represents a promising form of resistance. The pluriverse could potentially emerge as a new ethical symbol of justice, fairness, and resilience, offering hope to those constrained by cultural and religious landscapes. Moving forward, further studies should delve deeper into the intersections of the pluriverse with gender and sexuality nonconformity. Engaging in thought experiments that incorporate diverse cases, localities, and synthesis of ideas will be crucial to advancing the intellectual discourse of the pluriverse. By expanding these horizons, we can foster a more inclusive understanding and pave the way for meaningful societal transformation.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS —

Hardiyanti, known professionally as Dyl Basri — studied English Literature (2012–2016) and Philosophy (2018–2021) at Universitas Gadjah Mada. Based in North Kalimantan, Indonesia, Basri is an independent writer and translator whose work centers on

Indonesian nationalism, exploring its intersections with gender, culture, and religion within the framework of Indonesian national identity.

Email: hardi@tutanota.de

Hastanti Widy Nugroho — PhD, an associate professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, Universitas Gadjah Mada, where she currently serves as the Vice Dean for Finance, Assets, and Human Resources at the Faculty of Philosophy. Dr. Nugroho's research interests encompass ethics and its intersections with multiculturalism, feminism, communication, and gender studies.

Email: hastanti_widy@ugm.ac.id