

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVE, CRITICAL, AND TENTATIVE SELF

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Abstract

Culture, which manifests in religion, tradition, custom, thought, perspective, language, lifestyle and many other human creations, is not one. There are many cultures that come in front of oneself massively, especially in this information and global era. Their presence makes every person asks: does a self only accepts one culture and then refuses other cultures? Should oneself accept any cultures by neglecting him/herself? How if oneself has an identity but receives any cultures?

Some individual prefers to adhere to one culture, and refuse other cultures. Directly or indirectly, he/she says: "There are no others, except me". In other hands, some people negates him/herself and affirms others. He/she says: "I am nothing. The only existence is others. There is no specific cultural identity. Every culture is an imagined bundle of several cultures".

In this paper, I go out from those contradictory positions. I affirm the existence of an inclusive, critical and tentative self, which opens toward any cultures, but always criticizes anything before (and after) internalizes it in its changeable identity. This self is the self that will be retained by arguments in this paper, as a compatible self for encountering multicultural phenomenon in this era.

Key Words

Self, Other, Culture, Identity, Multiculturalism, Inclusive-Critical-Tentative Self.

Introduction

Many cultures come in front of any selves massively, especially in this information era. Cultures present as religions, traditions, customs, thoughts, perspectives, languages, and several human creations. To show up, cultures use many mediums, from oral, textual, actions, habits, until electronics. The manifestation of cultures put every self to take a position in many positions. Does a self only accepts one culture and then refuses other cultures? Should

oneself accept any cultures by neglecting him/herself? How if oneself has an identity but receives any cultures?

In the presence of those multicultural problems, some individual prefers to hold one culture. He/she loves only one ethnic, one religion, one school of thought, and one identity. He makes a distinct border between me and others. The self is the self. The other is the other. The self and the other are different. Sometimes, this boundary brings a self to hate others.

In other hands, other individual takes an opposite position. He/she does not admit a specific identity. He/she says that there is no identity as such. Any "identity" is an imagination upshot. An identity is a bundle of differences which imagined as one. The core of identity is differences. Facing the multicultural phenomenon, then, there is no position for self except to accept others without determining one certain identity.

But there are other people who accept any cultures and still has an identity. He/she has an inclusive, critical and tentative identity. This identity allows him/her to appreciate even take useful elements from many cultures. Yet he/she does not takes anything without criticism. His/her critique is not only delivered to other cultures but also toward him/herself, because, as a rational being, he/she naturally thinks of everything; and he/she aware his/her tentative identity which always in changing.

This last self is the self that will be defended by arguments in this paper. I assume it as the self which compatible to solve the problem of the relationship between self and multicultural phenomenon in this era.

However, I will discuss, firstly, two contradictory positions. I mean (1) the position that establishes personal identity (self) by rejecting different cultures (others), and (2) the position that receives any cultures (others) by denying personal identity (self).

There are no others except me

Textualist religionists are one of many people who takes the first position. Their narcissistic and disparage to others based on their reading of religious text textually.

They read their holy book textually. The mentioned thing in the book is understood as it is, without any further interpretation and consideration of the context of the text. This understanding, according to them, is the right understanding of the text, until they assume that there is no difference between the text and the understanding of it. As long as they assume religious text as the divine thing, they, explicitly or implicitly, deem their reading as divine as the text. Then, they reject any critique toward their reading; and put the critique of their reading as the critique of the text itself.

They find their religious text mentions obviously that their religion is the complete religion which recommended by God. Thus, they textually interpret that other religions are defective and prohibited by God. Their holy book said that they are the best community. Hence, they conclude that other communities are nasty.

We can see from their interpretation how they do not see the religious text from wide and deep perspective. They neglect the phenomenon that many religions have a mission to be followed by the human race. To be chosen, a religion takes a position as the worthy thing. It introduces to its (candidate) followers that they will never get a loss, but a profit, to chose it. Every religion (and its followers), then, proud of itself. Its religious text, thus, claims that the religion is the best religion and its believers are the best humans.¹

Actually, this claim is an ordinary claim. It is natural to love our own belief and group. But, it will be a problem if our love to ourselves make us hate others. Unfortunately, this problem occurs in those textual religionists. They glorify their culture (i.e. their religion, law, custom, lifestyle, belief, norms, and value) and at the same time they insult, even hostile to other cultures.²

Implicitly, they are "in harmony with" Jean Paul Sartre's notion. In his play script, *No Exit (Huis Clos)*, Sartre, the French philosopher, wrote: "Hell is other people (L'enfer, c'est les autres)".³ This statement expressed by Inez, a character in that play, who enters hell with Garcia and Estelle. In the hell, they do not see any torture which imagined by religious myths. But they feel an uncomfortable feeling because Inez is a cruel lesbian woman who loves Estelle, but Estelle is a conceited beautiful high-class woman who loves Garcia. Because of Inez hates Garcia (a man), Garcia does not accept Estelle's love. Consequently, Estelle does not loves Inez, but hates her. In this complicated situation, Inez said: "Hell is other people".

If hell is a sign for an annoying attribute, then it is valid to say that some other people looked like hell. But it should be remembered that the quality of that proposition is particular affirmative (some X is Y). It is not a universal affirmative proposition (all X is Y). If we converse the particular affirmative proposition to be the universal affirmative proposition, we are not just logically make an invalid conversion, but also may produce bad perspective and bad action toward others.

To say that all other people are hell is to place oneself abhor other people, and only love him/herself. Self-glorifying that produces insulting and hostility to others is a bad position because it places oneself in a war against others. It could be felt that war makes

¹ Alquran said, "kullu *hizbin* bi mâ *ladaihim fârihûn* (every party happy to their belongings)" (QS. Al-Mu'minûn: 53).

² In the case of Muslim textualists, their insulting, even hostility to others based upon their literal interpretation of religious texts, such as the saying of Muhammad (hadith) : "*umirtu 'an uqâtîla an-nâsa hattâ yasyhadû an lâ ilâha illâ allâh wa anna muhammadan rasûlullâh wa yuqîmû ash-shalâta ya yu'thû az-zakâta* (I was commanded to attack human beings until they witness that there is no god except Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah; they perform prayer and give tithe)" (HR. al-Bukhari and Muslim). Muslim textualists neglect the context of this hadith., i.e. war condition. Then, it is very contextual, and cannot be positioned as universal tenet, since Alquran, the highest Islamic reference said: "*lâ ikrâha fî ad-dîn* (there is no compulsion in religion)" (QS. Al-Baqarah: 256) and "*fa man syâa fal yu'min wa man syâa fal yakfur* (whosoever wills, let him believe, and whosoever wills, let him disbelieve)" (QS. Al-Kahfi: 29).

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and three other Plays*, trans. S. Gilbert and I. Abel (New York: Vintage International, 1989), p. 45.

oneself inconvenient, unhappy, anger and fear. Life without peace is unworthy life. Base on that reasons, I refuse the position of establishing personal identity (self) by rejecting different cultures (others).

But the problem still exists. Is this refutation pushing me accepting others totally, and denying the self? Does the rejection of the statement that "there is no other except me" transforms oneself to receive the expression that "I am nothing, only others"?

I am Nothing, Only Others

If we read the contemporary Europe philosophy, we will find some philosophers who criticize self and admire others. Some of them are Alexandre Kojève, Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Emmanuel Levinas, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattary and Jacques Derrida. Although they have their own argumentations, they have an almost same proposition that specific self-identity is nothing. The only exist is others. Consequently, please allow me, in this short paper, to elaborate only one of them, i.e. Emmanuel Levinas.

Emmanuel Levinas is the twentieth-century Europe philosopher who changes the direction of philosophy from epistemology to ethics, and from self to other. He said that the first philosophy is not metaphysics—as mentioned by Islamic philosophers—and not epistemology—as mentioned by modern Europe philosophers. The first philosophy, according to Levinas, is ethics.⁴

His ethics is the Ethics of Other. This ethics is the responsibility ethics to others. It is derived from the experience of the encounter with the Other, which is irreducible by self. "The Other precisely reveals himself in his alterity", he said.⁵ Therefore, the Other is not the object of self. The Other must not be harmed, instead, it should be welcomed.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas does not only recommends us to welcome and take care others, but he even describes subjectivity as hospitality to others. He wrote, "subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as a hospitality".⁶ Subject/self always opens to others, either he opens himself or not. Subject/self-consists variety of others, which enter to himself or entered by himself to himself, either he aware of it or not. For this reason, subject/self, according to Levinas, does not only welcomes others. Self is a hostage for others. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas wrote: "But it is I, I and no one else, who am a hostage for the others".⁷

I see the strength and the weakness in this Levinas's idea. His idea on subjectivity as welcoming Other and hostage for Other, in one hand, shows self-kindness to others. It is very useful for social life. It conditions us to live in peace with one another. It encourages

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Justifications de l'ethique* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Universite de Bruxelles), 1984, pp. 41 - 51

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans., Alphonso Lingis, (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), p. 150

⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 27.

⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: or Beyond Essence*, trans., Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 116.

everyone to open himself in front of any cultures. With the openness to others, self can study and improve him/herself.

Nevertheless, this notion, in another hand, sets in the absence of identity. Circumstantially, it stimulates self to import everything from outside. It makes self-unprotected, may be dominated, and always confuses to encounter anything. For this reason, I do not agree with Levinas.

Inclusive Self-Identity

I think the self needs an identity, i.e. a specific attribute. Without identity, the self cannot be identified. Without identification, the self is vague, between being and nothing, for himself and for others.

In fact, the self exists and has a specific sign, like a fingerprint which unique to each individual. The self should not merely exist. It must have a mission for himself and for others, i.e. to contribute, because self is being for himself and being for others.

If a self is vague for himself and for others, a self will be confused and confusing. If self is in that condition, then self cannot contribute to him/herself, moreover to others. Without contribution, the existence of self is meaningless. Since the existence of self should be meaningful, and his meaningful depends on his contribution, then the self should contribute. To contribute, the self, firstly, should be clear for him/herself, and, secondly, should be clear for others, because who does not has anything cannot give anything.⁸ To be clear, the self needs an identity.

The needed identity is not the closed identity. The closed identity imprisoned self in a seemingly comfortable zone but actually stifling. The closed identity shuts the possibilities of self to develop, consequently, harms self.

The needed self-identity is an open identity, an inclusive identity. When closed identity installs a self as inanimate object, inclusive identity assigns a self as an organism. In inclusive identity, self can evolve, repairing the bad and increasing the good. Self still has an identity, but his/her identity is inclusive.

The good example of inclusive self is Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi. He is a Muslim mystic philosopher from Andalusia (Spain) who live at 1165-1240 AD. He wrote many books and articles, of which the very famous are *Futûhât al-Makkiyyah*, *Fushûsh al-Hikam*, and *Tarjumân al-Asywâq*.⁹

⁸ It is Arabian aphorism "*fâqidu syai' lâ yu'thî* (who does not has anything, cannot gives anything)".

⁹ To read his biography, see Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât al-Makkiyyah*, ed., Ahmad Syamsuddin (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 1999), p. 3-13.

In *Tarjumân al-Asywâq*, Ibn ‘Arabi wrote Arabic mystic poetry. Its well-known stanzas, which commented by Ibn ‘Arab himself in *Dzakhâir al-A’lâq Syarh Tarjumân al-Asywâq*, said:

Laqad shâra qalbî qâbilan kulla shûrah / fa mar’â li ghizlân wa dîrun li ruhbân

Wa baitun li autsân wa ka’batu thâif / wa alwâhu taurât wa mushhafu qur’ân

*Adînu bi dîni al-hub annâ tawajahat / rakâibuhû fa ad-dînu dînî wa îmânî.*¹⁰

Literally, it means:

My heart accepts every form / it is a pasture for gazelles, an abbey for monks

A home for idols, Kaaba for circuitous / a tablet of Torah and Alquran

I adhere religion of love that aimed / by my knees. The religion is my religion and my faith.

Ibn ‘Arabi defines heart (*qalb*) as a changeable thing in human being, for *qalb* derived from Arabic term: *qallaba-yuqallibu-qalban* which means changing.¹¹ As a changeable thing, the heart can change its quality depending on its conditions and its inputs. It can receive and become anything. It can be a dwelling place of love which analogized by mystics as a deer's pasture (*ma’â li ghizlân*) and religion's residence which symbolized as monk's abbey (*dîrun li ruhbân*). It can accept honored things which mentioned as idols (*autsân*), and receive holy books, like Torah and Quran. His hearth, literally, can receive love, polytheism, Christianity, Jewish, and Islam.¹² With changeable heart which accepts any forms, Ibn ‘Arabi is very inclusive.

Yet his inclusivity does not makes him losing identity. Ibn Arabi will not become like Abu Yazid Al-Bustami, a Muslim mystics who asked "is there Abu Yazid?" and then he answered, "Abu Yazid searches Abu Yazid, but he does not find him".¹³

Ibn Arabi still has an identity and aware of himself. His identity is the adherent of love religion (*ad-dîn al-hub*).¹⁴ He loves wisdom from wherever it comes.¹⁵ He loves any beings in this universe with all of its diversities. As a lover, Ibn Arabi has a specific identity. His self-identity is clear. But its clearness and specificity do not make his identity closed. His identity still opens to others elements and always loves others. Therefore, it could be said that Ibn Arabi has an inclusive self-identity.

¹⁰ Muhyiddin ibn ‘Arabi, *Dzakhâir al-A’lâq Syarh Tarjumân al-Asywâq*, ed., Khalil Imran al-Manshur, (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2000), p. 35-36.

¹¹ There is Islamic invocation that says “*yâ muqalliba al-qulûb tsabbit qalbî ‘alâ dînîk* (O, Modifier of heart! Ordain my heart on Your religion)”.

¹² Ibn ‘Arabi, *Dzakhâir al-A’lâq Syarh Tarjumân al-Asywâq*, p. 36.

¹³ Jamaluddin ibn Al-Jauzi, *Al-Mudhisy*, (Cairo: Dar Ibn al-Jauzi, 2010), p. 181.

¹⁴ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Dzakhâir al-A’lâq Syarh Tarjumân al-Asywâq*, p. 36.

¹⁵ Muhammad, the Islamic prophet said, “*Al-hikmah dhâlah al-mu’min haitsumâ wajadahâ fa huwa alhaqqu bihâ* (wisdom is believer's missing belonging, wherever he find it, he is entitled to get it)” (H.R. Tirmidzi).

Inclusive, Critical and Tentative Self

Even though, inclusive self-identity is not enough. The self does not merely need identity and openness to others. It needs criticism to itself and to others.

Criticism filters anything which entering or has been entered into self. It will throw the false, the bad and the ugly. At the same time, it will prefer the truth, the good and the beauty. Without criticism, hospitality to others can cause harm to self. Without criticism, self's identity is unhygienic. We possibly invest a bad identity to ourselves, then we need a filter namely criticism to clean up the badness that possibly exists in ourselves. In other words, inclusive self-identity must be equipped with critical power, until resulted what I call as inclusive and critical self-identity.

With this identity, we have to aware that our identity is tentative. The self still able to change and progress. It accepts others critically, and then internalize the true, the good, and the beauty of the self which always introspect to be better and better. There can be said that inclusive and critical self-identity is tentative. It is inclusive, critical and tentative self.

However, this self identity faces the main problem of this paper: how inclusive, critical and negative self encounters multicultural phenomenon?

Encountering Cultural Diversity

Etymologically, 'culture' is term derived from Latin 'cultura', which means cultivation or improvement. It, first of all, is the cultivation of individual. Marcus Tullius Cicero, a Roman philosopher who first introduced the term, calls the culture as "cultura animi philosophia est (the improvement of mental philosophy)". It occurs in the self who develops through the formation of certain mental abilities, intellectual properties, and moral virtues. By purification of life and intellectual enterprise, the self gains culture from him/herself.¹⁶

In addition, Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, names the improvement of individuality as *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment). In the first paragraph of "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?", Kant explains Enlightenment as follow: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause to use it not lack understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding!".¹⁷

¹⁶ Dimitar Stankov, "The Moral Culture of Person" in *Morality and Public Life in a Time of Change*, ed. Vassil Prodanov and A Sen Dadidov, (Washington D.C.: Paideia Publisher & CRVP, 1994), p. 96. For more information about Cicero's ideas concerning culture and self, read Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations, also Treatises on the Nature of the Gods, and on the Commonwealth*, trans., C.D. Yonge, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1888).

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in Lawrence E. Cahoon, ed., *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, (Cambridge/Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1996), p. 51.

According to Kant, self-improvement will occur if self is mature. To be mature is to be independent. To be independent is to depend only on self, especially in thinking and taking a decision. Whenever self is mature and independent, self will go progress. He will cultivate goodly. By this cultivation, the self is enlightened.

Kant's notion of enlightened self is in harmony with Cicero's idea of cultivated self. Both *Cultura Animi* and *Aufklärung* are a culture which process inside self. Its source comes from itself. It improves self to a new condition than before.

Regardless, culture is not merely the improvement of self, but also a sign of a society. Adolf Bastian, one of German anthropologist, defines culture as *Völkergedanken* (folk ideas), which influences the individual mind. Every individual, according to him, comes into being, either theoretically or practically, by referring to *Völkergedanken*. But folk ideas does not present by itself. Bastian argued that *Völkergedanken* is the local interpretation of *Elementargedanken* (elementary ideas), which is human race's worldview. *Elementargedanken* is a shared identity of the human being which manifested at any time and any place by *Völkergedanken*.¹⁸

While Cicero and Kant define culture as the improvement of an individual by him/herself, Bastian defines culture as society ideas which determine self's mode of being. him/herself. In my opinion, both ideas concerning culture are not contradictory. We may synthesize them by saying that culture is an individual identity in one hand and social identity in another hand. As an individual identity, culture is the result of individual efforts in establishing itself. As a social identity, culture is a unique thing that owned by a community, which is identified and identifying individuals.

Either as individual identity or as social identity, culture has many faces, such as lifestyles, thoughts, perspectives, traditions, customs, norms, religions, and so on. There are many cultures in this world which encounter every individual.

It is possible to close a self from diverse cultures. With such position, the self might feel sufficient with him/herself. But it also makes self-has a rigid and poor knowledge and experience. This short life is too dear to be lived with that kind of attitude and condition.

Opening self toward plentiful cultures might also be done. With such decision, a wealth of experience and knowledge are gained. Life felt colorful. Yet without a filter and clear identity, the self will oscillate and not safe at all.

Consequently, self-disclosure on any cultures needs to be fortified with a filter, namely criticism that can change its identity. By such position, the self-has inclusive, critical, and tentative identity. The self is inclusive and also critical to any cultures. It regards any

¹⁸ See: Manuela Fischer, Peter Bolz, Susan Kamel, eds., *Adolf Bastian and His Universal Archive of Humanity: The Origins of German Anthropology*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 2007; Klaus-Peter Köpping, *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind: The Foundations of Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, Verlag: LIT, 2005.

cultures that are internalized into the self as a tentative culture, which can be criticized and modified.

Conclusion: Objections and Answers

People who take the position of establishing personal self-identity and choosing one culture by rejecting different cultures and others possibly question the openness to others which support self to be others. They may ask: who is the self? Does the self still exist if it accepts and becomes others?

Herewith my answer. The self, which I propose, is inclusive, critical and tentative self. It is a self-identity. It still differs from the others: who become exclusive, stagnant, and too self-sufficient, in one hand, and who become too open to others until losing a specific identity, in another hand.

The last mentioned may criticize the existence of identity in such self. People, who take the position of hospitality to any cultures and others by denying the personal identity of self, may ask: is there any specific identity? Is there any certain subject or the only exist is others?

To those who took the last position, I say: Identity of self is not totally absent. Although you reject any identity you still have an identity, i.e. rejecting identity. If you accept any others, you still have an identity, namely accepting identity. Whatever you state your position, you still have an identity. Having identity is not negative. It is positive as long as it still can be developed, as inclusive, critical, and tentative identity which mentioned before.

The self which inclusive, critical and tentative is the self who can correlate with multicultural phenomenon goodly. With his openness to others, self can interact and study from others and from many cultures. He can be a rich self culturally in this global era which flooded by diverse cultures. With his criticism, his openness to others has a filter. He will not be too easy to accept something as his identity before he considers it in depth. With his tentative identity, he is not only critical to others but also to himself. He considers himself could be corrected. Therefore he will not easily feel complacency, and always go forward in fixing and developing himself.

Through openness, criticism, and tentative identity, the self can make a contribution for him/herself and for others. Minimally, he/she reduces the number of people who are too exclusive and too inclusive in this world. He/she also could be an example of the person who can interact friendly with other people and other cultures, but still be critical of him/herself and others, for the sake of goodness for him/herself and others. Since the inclusive, critical, and tentative self is the being for him/herself and for others, so he/she should contribute the better for him/herself and for others as good as possible, as far as he can. []