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Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics of Alterity and Its Relevance to Gender Equality in Patriarchal Indonesian Culture

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ABSTRACT

Patriarchal culture in Indonesia continues to produce unequal gender relations and places women in subordinate positions across various areas of social life. This article aims to examine Emmanuel Levinas's philosophical concept of alterity and to explore its relevance for efforts to promote gender equality within the context of patriarchal culture in Indonesia. Levinas's philosophy of alterity asserts that ethical relations are grounded in an unconditional responsibility toward the "Other," understood as the recognition of the dignity and uniqueness of every individual who must not be reduced to an object of domination. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a literature review method, drawing on an analysis of Levinas's major works as well as scholarly literature on gender and patriarchy in Indonesia. The data were analyzed interpretively to identify the conceptual relevance between the ethics of alterity and the struggle for gender equality. The findings indicate that the concept of ethical responsibility toward the Other provides a strong normative foundation for rejecting subordination, discrimination, and gender-based violence. Levinas's thought thus offers a reflective framework that encourages the recognition of women as autonomous and dignified ethical subjects, thereby contributing to the development of more just, equal, and humane social relations in Indonesian society.

Keywords: Philosophy; Emmanuel Levinas; Gender; Women; Patriarchal

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1. Introduction

For a long time, even up to the present day, the influence of the philosophy of totality, which is characterized by placing the “ego” as the central point in interpreting truth, has been used as the starting point for various aspects of human life. In a frame of mind like this, humanity is no longer a priority. Human existence, which should also be determined by its relationship with “others in their otherness,” is narrowed down within the totality of my consciousness. I am the primary one, not anyone else. The “Other” is secondary and only enters into a relationship with me as long as it supports my existence, as long as it functions and is useful in its relationship with me. Others exist because I exist. I am the main one, not him. I can even kill others if I want. I can even bully others if I feel it is necessary. I place myself first.

In the history of the development of philosophy, there was a figure who, through his ideas, sought to reconstruct a new way of thinking to replace the old mode of thought that prioritized the self. The figure who introduced the “philosophy of alterity” was Emmanuel Levinas. Emmanuel Levinas was born in Kaunas, Lithuania, into a Jewish family in 1906. Since childhood, he had been acquainted with the Holy Bible as well as with works of literature and philosophy. Classical literary works helped him to discover the meaning of life and also served as an introduction to philosophy. Therefore, an understanding of his philosophical ideas can never be separated from this background. In his youth, he witnessed the upheavals surrounding the Russian Revolution in Ukraine^[1].

In 1923, he studied philosophy at the University of Strasbourg, and in 1928–1929, he continued his studies at Freiburg. There, he became acquainted with various philosophical works and, at the age of eighteen, studied philosophy under the guidance of four professors. In 1961, he published his doctoral thesis entitled *Totalité et Infini*, and, thanks to this thesis, he was appointed professor of philosophy at the University of Poitiers. He was later appointed to the University of Paris-Nanterre in 1967 and subsequently held the position of professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1973, where he served until his retirement in 1976^[2].

The direction of his ethical-philosophical thinking was influenced by several stages of his life. First, his reading of the Hebrew Scriptures and the works of Russian classical writers provided an important introduction to his philosophi-

cal studies. Second, his period of study and intellectual engagement with several great philosophers, such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, as well as with prominent French philosophers such as Gabriel Marcel and Jean-Paul Sartre, significantly shaped his thought. Third, his experience of war and the atmosphere of totalitarianism also had a profound influence on his philosophical orientation.

Between 1940 and 1945, he was captured by German soldiers, while at the same time his entire family was “swallowed up” by the power of the Nazis. Before his death in 1995, he served as a professor at Paris-Nanterre (1967) and later, in 1973, at the University of Paris IV. He produced a number of important books, including *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974).

Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy of alterity emphasizes that others are no longer secondary but must be placed in the first position as honorable beings, which demands my responsibility to protect them. If we reflect on it, Levinas’s philosophical rationale regarding the relationship between the self and others has relevance for our lives today, especially in relation to discrimination against women, who are often considered weak^[3].

The phenomenon of gender discrimination clearly shows that women are often regarded as inferior in social life or as unequal to men, particularly within patriarchal cultures. Therefore, the study of gender functions as an instrument of criticism and social analysis that can help us detect asymmetries in power relations and reveal the darker side of gender bias in contemporary human rights discourse.

Gender is generally understood as a cultural interpretation of the sexual body. Based on this interpretation, individuals, through their gender identities and roles, occupy specific positions within a social order. Gender thus serves as an analytical instrument for understanding social networks, which are reflected in various cultural expressions (such as language and symbolic systems) and social structures (such as law), and are closely related to social hierarchies and asymmetries of power^[4].

Gender analysis shows that the sexual division of labor within the household and society contributes to the economic invisibility of women’s work. Based on gender identity, women are often assigned responsibility for childcare and household management, while productive activities outside the home are generally considered the responsibility of men.

In this context, gender studies can sharpen awareness of problematic issues in discourses surrounding identity, sexuality, the body, violence, economics, and politics.

Through gender studies, we can understand what is truly unique to women and what is socially constructed. For example, giving birth to children is biologically unique to women. Other activities, such as child-rearing or house-keeping, are socially constructed. Gender studies thus help us distinguish between what is natural and what is socially constructed.

Previous research has found that strong patriarchal structures make it difficult for women to participate in public spaces and to express experiences of injustice that are unique to them. Patriarchal structures also create stages in the formation and construction of laws that tend to oppress women. Therefore, oppression occurs not only in the practical application of the law but also in its formulation^[5].

A study shows that patriarchal culture creates inequality in the social order, gender roles and relations, and the understanding of power relations at both macro and micro levels^[6]. This inequality is reflected, among other things, in marital decision-making, where women's opinions are often overlooked and decisions tend to be determined by their spouses. After marriage, women are often expected to leave their family homes and follow their husbands.

Other studies demonstrate the power relations between feminism and patriarchy in the context of contemporary Indonesian media, both conventional and digital, highlighting how social, cultural, and ideological dynamics shape the construction of women's images. These studies indicate that feminist representation in the media remains limited and often stigmatized. Feminist issues also tend to emerge only during symbolic moments, such as International Women's Day^[7]. Furthermore, public policies frequently fail to comprehensively address women's vulnerability to sexual violence^[8].

Human rights instruments built upon a patriarchal cultural foundation primarily address the experiences of injustice faced by men and often fail to accommodate the unique suffering experienced by women. The root of this problem lies in formal egalitarianism that ignores the aspect of differentiation or difference.

Although numerous studies have examined Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of alterity and a growing body of research has explored issues of gender inequality in patriarchal

societies, the relationship between these two themes has received limited scholarly attention. Existing studies have largely focused on Levinas's fundamental ideas in relation to ethics, phenomenology, or political philosophy. Conversely, research on gender discrimination has generally been analyzed from sociological, feminist, or legal perspectives. This article seeks to address this gap by connecting Levinas's philosophical concept of ethical responsibility with a critical analysis of gender inequality and discrimination against women within the context of patriarchal culture in Indonesia. In this regard, the article also offers a reinterpretation of Levinas's concept of "the Other" by understanding women as a vulnerable and marginalized group that is often positioned as "second-class" within patriarchal cultural structures.

Accordingly, this article contributes to the theoretical discourse by extending Levinas's philosophy of alterity into the field of gender studies, particularly in relation to patriarchal cultural structures. Furthermore, it provides practical implications for scholars, educators, and social practitioners by proposing an ethical framework grounded in responsibility toward the Other as a critical perspective for addressing gender inequality within patriarchal societies.

Based on this background, the important issues examined in this article are as follows: first, what is meant by the philosophy of alterity, or the philosophy of "the Other," in the thought of Emmanuel Levinas? Second, what is the relevance of Levinas's thought for efforts toward gender equality? From this formulation of the problem, the aim of this article is to understand and critically analyze Levinas's thinking about "the Other." This concept becomes the basis for philosophical reflection in examining the relevance of Levinas's thought on the Other in relation to efforts toward gender equality within patriarchal culture.

2. Materials and Methods

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a literature review method. Data were collected through a review of national and international journal articles as well as several academic books^[9]. The literature search was conducted using keywords such as "philosophy," "Emmanuel Levinas," "gender," "women," and "patriarchy." The search process was facilitated using the Publish or Perish software. The selected literature was limited to journal

articles and academic books published within the last ten years and relevant to the research topic.

The initial search yielded 80 publications. After screening the titles and abstracts, 35 sources were identified as relevant. A full-text review was subsequently conducted to assess the suitability of the content with respect to the focus of the study. Through this process, 25 sources were selected for further analysis.

Based on the selected literature, the study first examines Emmanuel Levinas's philosophical concept of alterity. It then relates this concept to the importance of respecting women as an effort to promote gender equality within a patriarchal culture. In this study, patriarchal culture is understood within the context of Indonesian society.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Alterity Philosophy: About “The Other”

3.1.1. Who Is the “Other”?

In the Greek language, “the other” is referred to as *heteros* (one of two) and *allos* (one among many others). Through a path called *via negativa* (negation), Emmanuel Levinas describes “the other in his otherness” as “that which is not me.” The other is that which is not me: *Il est que moi, je ne suis pas*.

To understand “the other,” I cannot begin from myself, because starting from myself means beginning from the world of my own understanding and perception. A better way to understand “the other” is to begin from his world, namely from his otherness. His world is his otherness. However, the other is an infinite reality that I cannot fully grasp with my mind. The other is infinite indeed, a given reality coming from a foreign world, a world that I have never known^[10].

Emmanuel Levinas appears as a philosopher who challenges the authority of the philosophy of totality, which, according to him, forgets “the other in his otherness.” In the philosophy of totality, “the other” is absorbed into one's own identity and reduced to the consciousness of the “I” alone. In this perspective, “the other” is translated into “the same”^[11]. Starting from his criticism of the philosophy of totality, Levinas then develops a new ethical perspective that prioritizes “the other in his otherness.” He subsequently refers to ethics as the first philosophy^[12].

Who is “the other in his otherness” according to Emmanuel Levinas? Through a path called *via negativa*, Levinas refers to “the other in his otherness” as “that which is not me.” The other is what is not me. Levinas expresses this with the phrase *Il est que moi, je ne suis pas*: the other is that which is not me. To understand “the other,” I cannot begin from myself, because starting from myself means beginning from the world of my own understanding and perception. A good way to understand “the other” is to begin from his world, namely from his otherness. His world is his otherness. However, the other is an infinite reality that I cannot fully reach with my mind. The other is infinite; it is even a given reality that comes from a strange world, a world that I have never known. It comes from above or from beyond^[13].

For Levinas, the otherness of what is not me is not merely an external object outside human consciousness but is understood as a radical otherness that is transcendent, namely that which goes beyond what is ontological and is infinite. Therefore, we may ask: what or who is the other, in reality? To answer this question, Levinas uses the third-person pronoun “He” to refer to the other. In this sense, the other is not something but someone who is heteronomous, personal, and not included in collective categories such as “we,” “us,” “they,” or “you.” The other is He who is radically other.

If this is the case, how do we understand the other? In a concrete and real sense, “He who is other” appears in a particular way. Levinas calls this appearance the “face.” The face is understood metaphysically and contains a transcendent dimension. In its transcendence, the face reveals something living. This manifestation of the face is called an epiphany. The face that is revealed is an innocent, naked face, without any protective covering and clearly portrayed in total poverty. The personification of this epiphany of the face appears in figures such as the poor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the naked^[14]. Thus, the other is not only the Infinite One but is also encountered concretely in others, especially the poor and the abandoned.

3.1.2. “The Other” as Exterior and Heteronomous

Others are also characterized as being both exterior and heteronomous. The other as exterior cannot only be understood as a reality that I encounter outside my awareness but also, and especially, as a transcendent reality that lies beyond the world of my awareness, a reality that does not enter the

context of my understanding. The other as heteronomous refers to aspects of radical and absolute otherness^[15].

The other, with personal, exterior, heteronomous, and transcendental characteristics, is the other as infinite. Because it is infinite, it cannot be fully understood. The other is a mystery that is too great for my consciousness. The other is also not the “other me” (*alter ego*). The only thing I must do is accept his presence and allow him to speak about himself^[16]. The relationship between the self and the other shows an asymmetrical structure; the other is placed in a greater and more universal position. Thus, my relationship with the other is an asymmetrical relationship.

3.1.3. Facial Epiphany

Others are present in the epiphany of the face. In the epiphany of the face, there is the presence of “the absent One.” What was previously absent makes its presence known. The face here is understood in a metaphysical sense, as the way in which others present themselves. In this metaphysical sense, the face is a moment of the presence of the other, with all its otherness, that goes beyond the diversity of sensory characteristics. The face is the revelation of the other as transcendent. The face manifests infinity, the infinite^[17].

The appearance of the face of the “other” speaks its own language, a language that is not merely an empty form without meaning. It is the most direct language, the language of the face. The face proclaims nakedness (*la nudité*), a nakedness that reveals the figure of poverty. This figure expresses helplessness, a weakness that simultaneously contains within itself an ethical invitation^[18].

The others who appear as faces are manifested as widows, orphans, and strangers. Because of their presence, I am required to take responsibility; I am called to assist and protect them. Their presence disturbs me, and I must take responsibility for it. The main point here is my responsibility for their disturbing presence, not their responsibility for my presence. Therefore, whether they are responsible toward me is not my concern. Their presence, which demands my responsibility, must be placed first in my consciousness. The presence of the other as a face invites me to let go of my egoism and turn toward the other.

3.1.4. Substitution Liability

In terms of responsibility, I cannot replace others. Instead, I must be ready to bear the burdens of other people.

His responsibility becomes my responsibility. This is the responsibility of substitution. Obsession with responsibility is a movement toward the position of someone else. Such a movement has the consequence that “I leave my world.” Movements of this kind lead me to profound consequences, namely loss—the loss of attachment to my own world. I lose everything, including myself. Such a loss would mean death. Substitutive responsibility implies death.

Death here is always associated with other people. My death is an ethical death^[19]. According to Emmanuel Levinas, asymmetrical relationships and responsibility for others constitute the essential, primary, and fundamental structure of my subjectivity. Subjectivity must be understood in terms of “for others,” not “for oneself.” In this sense, subjectivity attains its true meaning. My subjectivity is therefore understood in an ethical light^[20].

The philosophy of the other refers to the relationship “I—the Other” rather than “I—Thou.” The relation “I—the Other” refers to all others; therefore, all others must be addressed as brothers. What emerges here is a universal brotherhood that transcends culture, lineage, and language. Such brotherhood is based on something fundamental, namely “universal humanity.” According to Emmanuel Levinas, the relation between the I and the Other cannot be reduced to abstract cognitive terms, to intellectual synthesis, or to subject–object relations. Rather, it describes an involvement between singularities whose defining characteristic is absolute alterity^[21].

The presence of other people demands responsibility on my part. Once I am physically “close” to another person, I am responsible for him, and I cannot escape that responsibility. I feel as if I am being held hostage by him. This responsibility binds me long before I can decide whether to accept it or not. Therefore, primordial responsibility must be distinguished from responsibility in the everyday sense. In primordial responsibility there is total passivity, meaning that before any attitude or action I can take, I am already a hostage. In taking responsibility as a hostage, I take the place of the other (substitution). However, this substitution does not mean that I am alienated from myself; rather, through it I become truly myself. Because I am aware that I am under responsibility, I become aware that I am myself.

3.1.5. I Am the Defendant

Others appear in the form of widows, orphans, and foreigners. Here another form of nakedness is revealed. In this

nakedness, the other continues to disturb me with her cry: “You cannot kill me; you must give me a lift.” Because of this cry, the other disturbs me and brings a claim against me. I become the defendant. The power of the face lies precisely in its nakedness. Her nakedness carries a message of peace rather than violence. Her nakedness is her suffering.

By bringing this claim against me, however, she does not reduce my freedom; instead, the possibility remains open for kindness on my part, arising from my own freedom and initiative to respond. In this claim, I am required to open my heart to her. Here I appear as “the defendant.” I am the defendant because the other person is present in her nakedness.

The other person does not attack me with his views because he is not my enemy. Instead, he invites me to enter into a peaceful relationship. Peace is not the result of defeat on one side and victory on the other. Peace is not negativity. Peace is my peace and his peace. I do not lose, and he does not win, and vice versa. Peace is not defeated by weapons, nor is it produced by victory. Rather, peace arises from a relationship with the “other,” who comes with the power of “the Completely Other,” “the Most High”^[22].

3.1.6. Responsibility and Answering

In traditional ethics, there are three elements that participate in the process of responsibility. First, something has been said or done, and there is someone who is responsible for it. According to Emmanuel Levinas, what is done can be called work (practice), while what is said remains at the level of words (theory). Second, we are responsible for the existence of others, because others are subjects just as we are also subjects. Third, responsibility in the traditional sense is related to answering. However, this relationship is rather limited. A person is responsible to others because he is willing to respond to them^[21]. A response in the form of an answer is a reply to the call of others.

These three processes of responsibility are referred to as self-responsibility, which represents the highest vision of responsibility. Self-responsibility means a form of responsibility that does not arise merely from words and actions themselves but from the offering of oneself. This means that the answer does not primarily refer to something that “has been” said or done, but rather to what “must” be said and done.

According to Emmanuel Levinas, the process of responsibility for others in traditional ethics (self-responsibility) is

different from the process of answering. Levinas explains this distinction by differentiating between the terms “*dativus*” and “*nominativus*.” The term *dativus* means that I answer someone else, but “after” I give the answer, I no longer have a relationship with that person^[19]. In contrast, *nominativus* means that someone gives an answer “for” another person. In this case, the person is automatically and directly related to the subject.

3.2. Examining the Relevance of Levinas’s Thought for Efforts toward Gender Equality in Patriarchal Culture

In philosophical reflection on human existence, it is often stated that the self and others have a reciprocal relationship. On the one hand, the “I,” or my subjectivity, is determined by the “Other.” Therefore, I accept my existence as a gift from others and receive it with a humble and grateful heart. On the other hand, the “Other” is also determined by the “I.” A reciprocal relationship such as this emphasizes that the “I” and the “Other” are both subjects who must respect one another.

The self and others give meaning to each other and sustain one another. Their correlation is co-creative. The self and other subjects or substances are centers that exist as “autonomy-in-correlation,” or conversely as “correlation-in-autonomy.” More firmly and radically stated, the self and others are “identical-in-distinction” as well as “distinct-in-identity.” The relationship between the self and others is therefore understood as a reciprocal relationship. This is a general concept that is widely accepted today as a way of describing how the self relates to others.

Unfortunately, in practical life, the tendency to emphasize the “self” above “others” is often stronger, so that individuals tend to dominate the lives of others. Within such a conceptual framework, Emmanuel Levinas appears as a philosopher who attempts to re-elevate the existence of the “Other in his otherness” as a subject equal to the “I.” Therefore, according to Levinas, my relationship with others must be an asymmetrical relationship.

Emmanuel Levinas continues to appear as a philosopher whose ideas still resonate today. In recent times, it can be said that the world is experiencing a humanitarian crisis. People no longer prioritize respect for noble human values. The wars occurring in many parts of the world are concrete

evidence of the erosion of values that should be protected, upheld, and respected.

Solving problems through violence increasingly appears to be considered legitimate, to the point that common sense is often disregarded. Such a global situation indicates that understanding the value of my relationship with “the other in his otherness,” who in fact stands in an equal relationship with me, is no longer regarded as a priority. It would therefore not be inaccurate to say that what Levinas once feared, namely the tendency of totalizing philosophies that prioritize the “ego” while ignoring “the other in his otherness” has re-emerged in the contemporary world. As a result, the ethical meaning of human relationships has gradually been lost.

The ethical and asymmetrical relationship between the self and others must first be manifested concretely in my relationship with others in the present moment. This means that when I encounter other people, I must first demonstrate respect and appreciation toward them. The ideal of peace that every human being longs for can only be realized if my relationship with others here and now is first properly established^[23]. If I am able to respect others beginning with my own awareness of being “challenged” by the appearance of the other’s nakedness then it is possible that my relationship with the other will ultimately become a relationship of love. In such a relationship, there will be no room for anarchy or tyranny.

Emmanuel Levinas also reveals that my consciousness has long been influenced by a tendency toward egocentrism. The presence of another person as a face invites me to let go of my egoism and turn toward the other. This is a difficult task because, as Levinas himself states, it implies a kind of “death.” I must leave my own world and my comfort in order to enter into an ethical relationship with others. In other words, I must be willing to yield first. I must always be ready to take the position of the one who appears to lose. However, this “defeat” is not the result of losing my freedom; rather, it occurs because I freely choose to prioritize the other.

In social life, it can be observed that there is a relationship between a patriarchal social order that discriminates against women and human rights instruments that adopt the liberal concept of separating the private and public spheres. This separation makes it more difficult to identify women’s unequal treatment as an experience of injustice. Because

such injustice cannot easily be identified, it often fails to receive protection under existing human rights instruments. One possible solution is to develop methods for deprivatizing women’s experiences of injustice and for expanding the scope of human rights protections^[5].

The reduction of women to quasi-natural gender functions is one of the root causes of discrimination against women and violations of their human rights. Acts of gender discrimination demonstrate that people often fail to recognize and respect others in their differences. Gender discrimination can only be overcome if gender analysis is able to connect the structure of gender relations with the cultural context and other forms of social organization. Therefore, every form of culturalist argumentation or cultural essentialism that rejects women’s human rights in the name of culture and tradition must be critically questioned^[24]. Cultural essentialism holds the view that culture is a closed substance or monad that remains static. Although the accidental aspects of culture may change, the “soul” (*Seele*) of a culture is believed to remain the same. However, such a conception of culture is problematic. Human culture is in fact a dynamic process and is always open to influences from outside.

This understanding of culture as dynamic opens opportunities for dialogue among different civilizations in order to build a peaceful global order^[5]. More fundamentally, this argument is supported by anthropological evidence showing that the emphasis on collective aspects such as kinship ties and respect for elders in many Asian cultures was also experienced by agrarian European societies during the Middle Ages. The Industrial Revolution brought significant changes, including the rise of individualism with a stronger emphasis on freedom and personal rights^[25]. Similar transformations have affected and will continue to affect human cultures throughout the present century.

The dynamic concept of culture allows for critical reflection on culture and tradition. Culture, tradition, and religion must be open to criticism when they are used as the basis for legitimizing violence and oppression against certain groups, including women^[26]. The demand to respect traditions and cultural uniqueness must not become an excuse to undermine individual freedom to act in accordance with traditions, culture, and systems of belief based on independent personal decisions and judgments.

Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophical concept of alterity

emphasizes that every person must be respected and given equal recognition. Those around us especially the poor, those considered weak, minorities, and women are not objects to be dominated but subjects who deserve equal respect. They must be treated with dignity because they reflect the presence of the “Other” who calls us into an ethical relationship. Only within such a paradigm of thought can human rights, including women’s rights, be meaningfully defended and promoted^[27].

In the context of a patriarchal culture that structurally places men in a dominant position and is deeply rooted in sociocultural norms in many societies, the ethical framework developed by Emmanuel Levinas can be seen as a source of inspiration for expanding the discourse on gender equality. Levinas’s ethics, which consistently prioritizes the Other, calls for an existential respect that does not reduce the identity and autonomy of marginalized groups, including women in patriarchal cultures. Such an ethical perspective can challenge systemic patterns of domination and discrimination and encourage social practices that are more responsive to the demands for equality^[28].

Patriarchal culture in Indonesia refers to a social system that places men at the center of authority within the family, society, and the broader social structure. In this system, men are often perceived as heads of households, primary decision-makers, and representatives of family honor, while women are more commonly associated with domestic roles such as managing the household and caring for children. Although Indonesia constitutionally guarantees equal rights for men and women, in practice the legacy of patriarchal culture continues to strongly influence mindsets, power relations, and the division of gender roles in many regions^[29].

In the context of gender issues, patriarchy contributes to unequal access to education, employment, and leadership opportunities. Stereotypes portraying women as emotional, weak, and less rational than men often underlie restrictions on women’s participation in the public sphere. For example, in the workplace, women continue to face wage disparities and barriers to promotion, particularly for strategic positions that are often perceived as requiring “male assertiveness.” Furthermore, in politics, women’s representation has increased; however, they are still frequently regarded as merely fulfilling quota requirements rather than being recognized as leaders with equal competence.

Practical manifestations of patriarchal culture in everyday life can be observed in various social practices. First, in many families, important decisions such as purchasing assets, determining children’s education, or relocating the household are more often made by the father as the head of the family. Second, in the division of domestic labor, women, even when working full-time, still bear the primary responsibility for household tasks. Third, in some local cultures, inheritance rights or land ownership are prioritized for sons rather than daughters. Fourth, victims of domestic violence often experience social pressure to “maintain family harmony,” illustrating how patriarchal structures continue to perpetuate unequal power relations^[6].

However, social change has begun to emerge alongside increasing gender awareness, expanded access to women’s education, and advocacy movements promoting equality. Many women in Indonesia now hold prominent positions in academia, business, government, and community organizations. Younger generations are also beginning to challenge traditional divisions of roles and to advocate for more equal relationships within families. This transformation demonstrates that culture is not static but can be critically examined and reformed in accordance with the values of justice and human dignity.

Thus, patriarchal culture in Indonesia has a tangible impact on the dynamics of gender issues, both in the private and public spheres. Efforts to build equality do not mean erasing cultural identities; rather, they involve reinterpreting traditional values so that they align with the principles of justice, respect for human dignity, and the human rights of every individual regardless of gender^[30]. Critical awareness, inclusive education, and collective community commitment are essential for reducing the inequalities inherited from patriarchal systems and for creating more equitable gender relations in Indonesia.

4. Conclusions

Emmanuel Levinas emphasized that the Other becomes present in the appearance of the face, particularly in the faces of those who are deprived and suffering. This appearance represents another form of nakedness whose presence both disturbs and challenges me. In this encounter, I stand as the one who is called into question—the defendant.

The power of the face lies precisely in its nakedness, which conveys a message of peace rather than violence. Such nakedness calls me to an ethical responsibility to open my heart to the other.

The philosophy of alterity therefore remains a valuable insight that continues to speak to contemporary situations, especially in efforts toward gender equality. Levinas reawakens our awareness that others suffer, and that the weak call for sensitivity and ethical responsibility on our part. The presence of vulnerable people and minorities around us demands a moral response from us.

In this process, Levinas reminds us once again that ethics must occupy the primary place in our relationships with others. His ethical philosophy suggests that any practice within patriarchal culture can only be justified insofar as it respects the dignity and moral responsibility of women.

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