Muslim Politics Review
Vol. 5 No. 1, 2026, 158-202
https://doi.org/10.56529/mpr.v5i1.572

Pluriversal Politics and Transnational Regional Localization: Alternative Developments in World Societies[1]

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Abstract

This article explores pluriversal politics as an alternative in contemporary politics and international relations which can help us understand contemporary Muslim societies and their challenges. The article explores the dynamics of transnational regional localization, where processes of localization, regionalization, and trans-nationalization meet in complex, creative, and emergent ways. Here, it examines the work of the Spirit of Bandung, the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), and Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), and calls for understanding emergent multi-alignment and multiplexity in our world, going beyond declining unipolarity and multipolarity. The article then discusses how contemporary world society calls for dialogues among religions, civilizations, cultures and civilizations to go beyond the contemporary logic and practice of domination and one-sided assertion.

Keywords: Pluriversal politics, transnational regional localization, Bandung, ASEAN, BRICS

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[1] I am grateful to Dr. Nia Deliana and participants during my presentation of this paper in UIII Foss Brown Bag seminar on Dec 10, 2025. I am grateful to Dr. Philips J. Vermonte, Dr. Ridwan Al-Makassary, Dr. A'an Suryana, Dr. Dadi Darmadi, Dr. Chaider S Bamalim, Syahrul Miladi Firmansyah, Rida, Sarah and Dini for their kindness and support during my fellowship. I am grateful to Dr. Ridwan Al-Makassary and the anonymous reviewer of this paper for their comments and suggestions.
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Introduction

This article examines the emerging relationship between middle powers in the contemporary world system and still hegemonic but declining world powers such as the United States. It is interested in new theoretical explorations of broader issues in politics, world system analysis, and international relations, which can help us understand contemporary Muslim societies both theoretically and empirically. This article delves into theoretical explorations of emerging alternative political processes both within states and societies as well as in the international system, referred to as pluriversal politics, which is different from the one-dimensional and ethnocentric Euro-American universalism of modern world systems, which Michel Rolph Trouillot calls North Atlantic Universalism.[3] Pluriversal politics, both within and across societies and states, reflects new movements of consciousness and political relations, such as new relationships between nature and politics reflecting the fragility of human life in the wake of climate collapse and relationships between state and society and state and self-going beyond the dominant centralizing frameworks of modern nation-state systems.[4]

This article explores pluriversal politics as an alternative in contemporary politics and international relations which can help us understand contemporary Muslim societies and their challenges. It then explores the dynamics of transnational regional localization, where processes of localization, regionalization, and trans-nationalization meet in complex, creative, and emergent ways. Here it explores the work of the Spirit of Bandung, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the BRICS grouping, which calls for understanding emergent multi-alignment and multiplexity in our world, going beyond declining unipolarity and multipolarity. It then discusses how contemporary world society calls for dialogues among religions, civilizations, cultures and

[3] Michel Rolph Trouillot 2003

[4] Escobar 2020; Kothari et al. 2019.

civilizations to go beyond the contemporary logic and practice of domination and one-sided assertion. It brings the vision and practices of inter-religious and trans-civilizational dialogues to the discourse of pluriversal politics, international relations, world system studies and the multi-dimensional visions and practices of Muslim politics in our contemporary world. It also argues how regional and world formations such as ASEAN and BRICS need to focus more on inter-religious and trans-civilizational dialogues. It then argues how both Muslim politics and world society studies need to go beyond one-sided assertions of many kinds and realize that we are all children of Mother Earth, or, in other words, achieve planetary realization.

Pluriversal politics is accompanied by new theoretical and practical movements of transnational actions and meditations. These go beyond the contemporary dominant models of globalization and the nationalistic upsurge against it. Transnational movements today take place in our local societies and states as well as in our regional contexts. Transnational regional localization, as it takes place in regional world contexts, such as Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa and in such formations as ASEAN, European Union (EU), BRICS, African Union (AU), reflects a new development in our contemporary world. Some of these groupings, such as ASEAN and BRICS, build upon aspirations and struggles of important world historical initiatives such as the Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian Relations held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955, which called for dignity and rights of previously colonized societies of Asia, Africa, and the world. Today Bandung at 70 calls for contemporary creative works in non-alignment, multi-alignment, and multiplex meta-diplomacy where diplomacy goes beyond conventional realistic interest imprisonment and reflects ethical and spiritual transformative will, cultivated by founding Bandung countries such as India and Indonesia.[5] It also calls for epistemic freedom

[5] See Bakrie 2025; Djumala 2025 & Mohanty 2025.

and responsibility, moving beyond dominant Euro-American epistemologies and politics.[6]

Contemporary World Societies and World Society Studies

World society refers to the entirety of world communication of which all societies of our present-day world are part and where none of the societies can lay exclusive claim that it is the sole world society. World society does not mean that it is society integrated at the level of the world normatively or structurally, but it has the possibility of world communication in a complex process of social and functional differentiation with accompanying complex processes of tensions, communications, conflict and emergent processes of integration. Politics in world societies are complex and, as evident today, takes multiple forms, such as democracy, authoritarianism, dictatorship, kingship, and hybrid forms, such as electoral democratic authoritarianism. Contemporary world societies are produced by complex socio-historical and socio-religious and socio-ideational forces but the dominant methodology of the study of world societies is still within the Enlightenment Black Box of Euro-American modernity which is based upon Judeo-Christian metaphysics and the so-called secular metaphysics of Kant.[7]

The dominant methodology and construction of world society does not embody multiple philosophies, ontologies, epistemologies, and civilizations of the world, such as Vedantic, Islamic, African, Buddhist, Indian, Chinese and Indonesian world views and traditions of world making and socio-political organization. World society is not a world state that challenges us to move beyond the statist production of society and culture in modernity, which resonates with many civilizations, as neither Islamic civilization nor Indic civilizations give primacy to state or uncritical support to state sovereignty challenging us to put state sovereignty in

[6] Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Tickner & Smith 2020.
[7] Habermas 2002

place by realizing the sovereignty of Creator and Creation—Divine and Nature. This calls for understanding self, society, and state not only from the dominant perspective of sovereignty but also non-sovereignty and shared sovereignty and what Fred Dallmayr calls sacred non-sovereignty.[8] For example, the sacred sovereignty of Nature and the Divine in many traditions calls on us to realize our non-sovereignty and not to be a prisoner of illusions of sovereign world power. This itself challenges us to rethink and transform the Euro-American construction and production of sovereign self, society, and state in our modern and contemporary world societies. It also challenges us to go beyond the state-centric conceptualization of societies and socio-centric conceptualization of individuals and to realize the state-shaping, soul-shaping, as well as no-self or Anatta and self-emptying flows in self, societies, cultures and states of the world.[9]

Contemporary world societies are products of complex processes of colonization but contemporary reflections on world society from the Euro-American shores do not always discuss the dynamics of colonization, which is at the heart of modern and contemporary world societies. The realist school of international relations is a product of multi-dimensional processes of colonial annihilation beginning with Columbus's annihilation of America, which is still wrongly termed as the 'discovery' of America. In the last two hundred years or so both American colonial annihilation of the Americas and the German colonial annihilation of African countries such as Namibia culminating in the Nazi colonization of Europe and the Holocaust have created an Atlantic realism, alongside other colonial forces such as Britain, Spain, Portugal, and France, where realism is not concerned only with balance of power but with world domination, unmindful of the discourse and consequences of annihilation that take place in this single-minded pursuit of domination.[10] Various scholars fail

[8] Fred Dallmayr 2005.
[9] See Ananta Giri 2012.
[10] Spectre 2022

to integrate historical colonialism and contemporary entrenched colonialism and colonization in their theorization of world society, including Albert, and even important thinkers and philosophers such as Karl-Otto Apel, Jurgen Habermas and Ulrich Beck, among others. Karl Otto-Apel and Jurgen Habermas created a border-crossing philosophy of Kantian pragmatism to overcome the horrors of Nazi and fascist destruction of democracy and the Weimer Republic of Germany. But this Kantian pragmatism, which can be a potential source of overcoming the pervasive hold of Atlantic realism, also does not acknowledge the reality of historical colonialism and entanglement of German idealism with colonial annihilation in Africa and Nazi occupied Europe and the world. Jurgen Habermas metaphorically spoke about the colonization of the life world by the system worlds of state and market, but has remained silent about historical colonialism as well as ongoing colonization of Palestine and the current genocide in Gaza. Uncritical Habermasian repetition of Israeli lines about 'heartless butchers' and Israel's right to defend itself forget the crucial distinction between right to self-defense and the right to genocide, which shows us the fault lines of current critical social theory in understanding present day world societies and its challenges of destruction and renewal.[11]

Can one write poetry after the Holocaust? Can one still speak about cosmopolitanism amidst heartless genocide in Gaza and murder of innocent civilians by terrorist forces of the world, including the Hamas murder of civilians on 7 October 2023, in Israel-Palestine? With all these challenges, a different kind of cosmopolitanism going beyond Eurocentric cosmopolitanism, where we are citizens of the world, to where we are children of Mother Earth, is the calling of our times.[12] Here Ulrich Beck quite rightly challenges us to realize the limits of what he calls methodological nationalism in our study of world societies. But the alternative lies not in simple methodological cosmopolitanism without

[11] See Ahmad 2025.
[12] See Giri 2018).

methodological cosmopolitanism being decolonized as well as overcoming the primacy of the epistemic in modernity and neglect of the ontological. To understand the multiplex realities, possibilities, and their colonial and post-colonial genealogies we need to overcome many of our conventional modes of thinking and being in our contemporary world, such as overcoming the colonial, color, caste, and gender blindness of much of our dominant modes in politics and international studies. We must also overcome the dualism between epistemology and ontology, fact and value and realize creative spirals of ontological epistemology of participation.

Dualism of fact and value or separation of fact and value is an aspect of modern positivism or what JPS Uberoi refers to as the positivist regime, which, beginning with turning a blind eye to the use of science and technology for destruction of life and earth including in the colonization of the world, ends with the dropping of the atom bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.[13] After the dropping of the first bomb, the second bomb was dropped mainly for scientific experimentation. Since then, this unholy alliance between science and politics continued through the dropping of many bombs in Vietnam and now in the bombing of Gaza and Palestine, Ukraine and Russia. World societies are today caught up in unimaginable spirals of violence which call for realizing the values of life or destruction of it intertwined with facts of existence, including our geo-political existence. It calls for overcoming the positivist separation between fact and value, subject and object and realizing many emerging and much-needed post-positivist turns, including linguistic, feminist and ecological, as articulated by R. Suandara Rajan in his *Beyond the Crises of European Sciences: Towards New Beginnings*.[14] Here JPS Uberoi[15] in his *The European Modernity: Truth, Science and Method*, also urges us to overcome dualisms of many kinds, such as the colonizer and the colonized

[13] JPS Uberoi 1978.
[14] R. Suandara Rajan 1998.
[15] JPS Uberoi 2002.

and move towards non-dual realizations drawing inspiration from Goethe and Gandhi as well as Fred Dallmayr[16] in his *Against the Apocalypses: Recovering Humanity's Wholeness*, who, along with Gandhi, urges us to learn from Herder. These post-positivist turns are an important starting point for rethinking and transforming our global human condition today. But these also need to be accompanied by onto-decolonial turns in our knowledge, politics and society as our world society is suffering from cognitive injustice and epistemicide.[17] We need to interrogate such regimes of knowledge domination and move towards epistemic freedom and responsibility. The task here is realizing the limits of both Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism of many kinds such as Indo centrism, Sino centrism, and Javano-centrism and move towards multi-dimensional processes of critique, creativity, transformations and mutual learning. This calls for creating awakening of new ideas building upon all traditions of our world societies. Our world society today is also going through many sided critiques of existing constellations of knowledge and power and creation of multiple knowledge commons which, building upon Gandhi, can be called a "Sarvodaya of Ideas".[18] The critique of North Atlantic universalism[19], Atlantic realism[20] and Eurocentric epistemologies and the need for realizing what Boaventura de Sousa Santos[21] calls epistemologies of the south must go beyond uncritical valorization and mechanical parroting of South-South dialogues. Our world society today needs many-track dialogues—South-North, North-East, South-West, and many directional dialogues and learning leading to not only *swaraj* (self-rule) of ideas but also *Sarvodaya* (progress of all) of ideas.[22]

[16] Fred Dallmayr 2015.
[17] De Sousa Santos 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018.
[18] Giri 2025b.
[19] Trouillot 2003.
[20] Spectre 2022.
[21] Boaventura de Sousa Santos 2014.
[22] Giri 2025b.

Along with the crisis of positivism, science, politics, state and society, our world society is also in the process of not only climate change but also climate collapse, challenging us to move beyond what Greta Thunberg calls politics as usual and science as usual. The Club of Rome, an important thinking nucleus of the world, had articulated in 1972 the need for realizing limits to growth. After fifty years, The Club of Rome calls for realizing our world society where our Earth is for all, and not only for a selected few, our still privileged and powerful 1%. The Club of Rome calls for realizing five 'turn arounds' in our world today: poverty turn around, the inequality turn around, the empowerment turn around (achieving gender equity), the food turn around (making the food system healthy for people and planet), and the energy turn around. These five turn arounds can be read together with 17 UN sustainable development goals, which also includes issues like gender justice, peace, and poverty transformation, among others. But these themes, and their pathways of realization, call for cross-cultural and trans-civilizational dialogues, for example, while in the dominant Euro-American world societies, poverty refers mainly to economic deprivation, in Indian, Chinese, Javanese, Islamic and Buddhist world civilizations and cultures, poverty refers to both moral and spiritual poverty and also the need for practicing what Buddha, Lord Jesus Christ, the Prophet Muhammad, St. Francis of Assisi, Gandhi, Mother Teressa and many saints and social and spiritual activists exemplify as voluntary poverty.[23]

World societies have been studied from the point of view of world system studies, such as that initiated by Immanuel Wallerstein. But, right from the beginning, sympathetic readers of world system theory have raised the issues of local initiatives and local responses in world system, such as, for example, historical anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz in his article, "The So-Called World System: Local Initiatives and Local Responses."[24] The predominant Marxist approach in world system studies

[23] Giri 2024.

[24] Sidney W. Mintz 1977.

over the course of time has become plural including new approaches to system thinking where the system includes grace and creativity of the actors. Sociologist Alberto Martinelli's exploration of trajectories of development from the world system to world societies need contemporary creative participation where we understand plural and pluriversal structuration, constitution and dynamics of our world societies.[25] The critique of world society here, thus, is not only one of critique of political economy as creatively articulated by scholars and emancipatory visionaries from Marx to Piketty, but also moral economy, moral sociology, and spiritual ecology in which movements of critique, creativity and transformations from many spiritual, religious and political traditions play an important role.[26]

Our world societies today have geopolitical dimensions which are struggling with questions over world domination. Geopolitical power dynamics have changed over the last fifty years. Today, we see the decline of American geopolitical domination and the rise of multiple power centers of the world. Different scholars give this different names—Jan Nederveen Pieterse[27] terms it as multipolar globalization while Amitava Acharya challenges us to realize the difference between multipolarity and multiplexity and understand our contemporary world as a multiplex world.[28] The rise of the multiplex world is accompanied by the decline of American power, rise of China, rise of BRICS, and revitalization of regional formations such as ASEAN. Here what Amitava Acharya writes deserves our careful consideration:

[25] Alberto Martinelli 2007.
[26] Giri 2023.
[27] Jan Nederveen Pieterse 2018.
[28] Acharya 2025a; Acharya 2025b.

> The term multipolarity, a Eurocentric notion, is also quite out of date now. It described a world of great powers and referred mainly to the number of actors and the distribution of power among them. It said much less about the substance and quality of their interactions. If one takes the latter into account, the dominant feature of today's world and Asia is not multipolarity, but multiplexity. Multiplexity, or the idea of a Multiplex World, differs from a multipolar system in significant ways. Whereas as the traditional conception of multipolarity assumed the primacy of the great power, actors (or agents) in a multiplex world are not just great powers or only states (Western and non-Western). Multiplexity recognizes the importance of international institutions, non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, and transnational networks (good and bad). A multiplex order is marked by complex global and regional linkages including not just trade but also finance and transnational production networks, which were scarce in pre-World War European economic interdependence. Moreover, interdependence today is not only economic in nature but also covers many other issue areas, such as the environment, disease, human rights, and social media. A multiplex order has multiple layers of governance, including global, inter-regional, regional, domestic, and sub-state. Regionalism is a key part of this but regionalism today is open and overlapping, a far cry from 19th century imperial blocs that fuelled great competition and war, and which are unlikely to reappear. A multiplex world is a decentered world. While power hierarchies remain, the overall architecture of a multiplex world is non-hegemonic. The world is unlikely to see global hegemons like Britain and the United States again. China is not going to be one [..] At the same time, a multiplex world is not a "G-Zero' world, but one that encourages pluralistic and shared leadership at both global and regional levels.

Acharya also tells us: "ASEAN's prospects should be judged not in terms of old-fashioned, outdated notions of multipolarity, but in the light

of these unfolding changes towards a multiplex world, which also affect the Asia-Pacific region."[29]

But this multiplex world also has a reflective dimension in which there is move towards collective learning across borders what Heikki Patomaki calls hetero-reflexivity.[30] Hetero-reflexivity points to the need for going beyond the familiar power games and practice new ways of thinking and collaborative organization at the planetary scale to come to terms with challenges such as climate collapse.

Thus, our world societies have geopolitical dimensions, but they also have other inter-linked dimensions such as civilizational and spiritual dimensions. Civilizations of modernity, in their many different ways—nation-state based rationality, one-sided rationality without cultivating the intuitive and mystical, valorisation of violence and an extractive logic—are undergoing foundational crises today and our world societies are facing civilizational transitions today.

Our world societies today have two contradictory tendencies, among others—much more pluralization at the level of our existence of our life and sometimes one-sided violent absolutism in the dominant political and ideological structuration of our world. Understanding world societies requires us to understand these inter-linked dynamics. Here Hamid Dabashi urges us to realize that Muslims everywhere are part of plural societies and their politics and spirituality need to include concern for suffering—our common human suffering—of both the Muslims and the non-Muslims in our intertwined world societies today.[31] This calls for geopolitics of political, spiritual and social pluralization involving both actions and meditation. Dabashi also highlights the cross-cultural dimension of our world societies today in our difficult place between

[29] Acharya 2025a: 121-122.
[30] Heikki Patomaki 2017.
[31] Hamid Dabashi 2008.

geopolitics of empire and colonization and liberation theodicy of resistance and new co-creation. As Dabashi writes:

> The only liberation movement against the terror of a globalizing empire that will be meaningful and mobilizing will have to be cross-cultural and global – precisely in the same way that the empire it must oppose and the capital it must curtail are global. That liberation movement will have to account for the existence and accommodate the inclusion of the non-Islamic – and as a result not a liberation theology but a liberation theodicy – that at once recognizes and celebrates diversity. Theodicy in this sense is not accounting for the existence of any ''evil'' in the world, but the presence of diversity, alterity, shades and shadows of truth, variations that collectively make the world wonder at its own marvel. Theodicy of liberation liberates Islam itself, before anything else, from the dogged dogmatism of its nomocentric juridicalism having brutally suppressed its own logocentric and homocentric domains in Islamic philosophy and mysticism. At the heart of Islamic political culture is a paradox – it is only in power when it is not in power, and it loses legitimacy when it is in power. The only way that this innate paradox at the heart of Islam can be put to work for a permanent good is for Islam no longer to be triumphalist but tolerant, aware of its own polyfocality, and in that awareness and tolerance not just to resist the abuse of power but also the temptation of power. The massive globalization of Islam by Muslim labor migrations throughout the world now provides for the former, its liberation theodicy for the latter.[32]

Dabashi is pointing to fundamental issues of power and its limits. which highlight the limits of conventional dominance in our geopolitical construction of world history as well as our contemporary world societies.

[32] Dabashi 2008: 21-22.

Similarly, Arnold Joseph Toynbee also points to the limits of the idolatry of power in societies, histories, religions and civilizations and the need to acknowledge our suffering—our common suffering—and live meaningfully with Mankind and Mother Earth.[33] From contemporary Indonesia, Ahmad Syafii Maarif writes in his *Islam, Humanity and the Indonesian Identity*:

> "[..] we must humble ourselves and not pound our chests in pride. We must realize that Islam is facing a serious corrosion of its practice. And we have not even begun to speak of Islam in the realm of politics, where the picture is even more dismal. Islam now increasingly a doctrine justifying flawed an immoral political behaviour. In contemporary Indonesian history, examples of moral misconduct and deviance are easy enough to find. Statements of support by several Muslim groups for the corrupt and repressive authoritarian regime some years back are only one example. The situation is becoming ever grave due to the religious arguments made in approving these statements [..] One can find similar doings not only here in Nusantara, but in all Muslim countries. Islam has been made into a commodity of power politics on a global scale."[34]

In this complex and difficult state of power, religion and histories, which affect all religions of our contemporary world societies, such as religious justification of abuse of power and authoritarianism not just in Islam, Dabashi cultivates an interlinked alternative pathway of Muslim politics and world liberation which needs to be woven into our world society studies:

[33] Arnold Joseph Toynbee 1956.
[34] Maarif 2018.

> [..] Islam now resumes its historic life within the bosom of its millions of inhabitants scattered around the globe at the most sacrosanct moments of their pieties, with Muslim masses' lives and livelihood at the mercy of a vastly changed world not completely at home with itself. What we are witnessing in much of the Muslim world today, as indeed in much of the world at large, is the rightful struggle of ordinary people for their pride of place, for social equanimity, economic justice, political participation, a legitimate and assertive place in the global redistribution of power. Muslim or non-Muslim, the world is at its normative and epistemic thither – waiting to deliver itself to a renewed significance, where its wars and its peaces will once again mean something [..].[35]

In this context, world society studies need to cultivate critical plural traditions of struggles, aspirations, societies, and histories going beyond what Farish Noor calls "presentism of IR studies."[36] World society studies interrogate the conventional methodology of IR studies as well as global studies by interrogating its Eurocentric and colonial constitution and contemporary predominant determination. It challenges us to go beyond ethnocentric comparative methods, that can be called a spectre of comparison, to new methods, epistemologies and ontologies of comparative historical engagement. To go beyond "presentism of IR studies", which is part of the broader problematique of narcissism of the present or temporal narcissism, we need to move across different time conditions in humble and open ways, practicing multi-valent politics and spirituality of multi-temporal hermeneutics, where, in our present day geopolitical condition of still childish struggle over world domination, we learn from difficult experiences of the past, where ancestors learnt to work together and live together. Noor's view on contemporary Southeast Asia has resonance beyond the region:

[35] Dabashi 2008: 215.
[36] Farish Noor 2023.

> To attempt to remember the era of Pan-Asian globalization would entail the need to *re-member*, or to put back together, the broken body of a Pan-Asian world that was divided as a result of colonial encounters. It means having to recognize the fact that, long before there existed such a thing as the nominal construct called 'South East Asia," there was a more fluid and porous region that was in constant interaction with other parts of Asia, when the Indian Ocean was not seen as a barrier that divided South and Southeast Asia but rather as a corridor that connected two parts of the world.[37]

Furthermore:

> If in the past, the politics that dotted the once vibrant and complex landscape of Asia could deal with crisis and change without necessarily adopting the zero-sum logic of "winners take all," then perhaps we can learn from Asian ancestors, who lived in pre-Westphalian era before national identities became fixed and exclusive, before the prerogative and the needs of the singular state became paramount".[38]

The 1955 Bandung Afro Asian Conference was an attempt to think of alternatives to colonial domination. Leaders of the Conference worked with the framework of the nation state, though both in case of Soekarno and Nehru it was animated by pluralistic, humanist and spiritual nationalism going beyond nationalism as one-sided domination. Soekarno did not reproduce the conventional geopolitics of domination, despite some historical temptation later, but geopolitics of co-existence—

[37] Noor 2023: 152.
[38] Noor 2023: 159.

what Hasto Kristiyanto calls "progressive geopolitical co-existence."[39] This geopolitics embodies what Dutch philosopher and historian Frank R. Ankersmit calls "aesthetic politics,"[40] where we try our best to artistically represent the aspirations and struggles of our people, rather than what David Harvey calls an "aesthetics of empowerment"[41], where for Harvey, Nazi Germany engaged in sado-masochistic aesthetics and politics of annihilation, torture and destruction. Here, what Kristiyanto writes about the aesthetic dimension of Soekarno's geopolitics deserves our careful consideration:

> Soekarno's criticism of Western Geopolitics was also conveyed through art. Soekarno loved works of art as a manifestation of Indonesian cultural philosophy that upholds the relationship between humans and nature [..]. Soekarno's taste in art was also closely related to the liberation of the oppressed. Soekarno's love for *wayang* was not only related to entertainment but also inspired him in his duties and obligations as a leader. His views were contrary to Western geopolitical thought, which was influenced by a perspective that prioritized reason and materialism.[42]

Soekarno's geopolitics of co-existence combined the artistic and ecological, which have important lessons for our world societies today. According to Soekarno, humans who can be friends with nature are heroes. This view is inseparable from his mother's teachings about *Trihita Karana*, which states that humans will be happy if they are able to maintain balance with the Creator, their fellow humans, and with the entire universe and all within it. This is also a criticism of how Western geopolitics treats natural resources in an exploitative manner. For the sake of imperialists,

[39] Hasto Kristiyanto 2023.
[40] Frank R. Ankersmit 1996.
[41] David Harvey 1989.
[42] Kristiyanto 2023: 50, 60.

colonialists, and capitalists, natural resources are exploited relentlessly. With this view, it is clear why ecology is important to Soekarno in his geopolitical structure. Soekarno said: Natural resources must be managed by the nation's children.[43] Indonesia's forests, as one of the lungs of the world, must not be exploited by the capitalists.

But how are Indonesia's children carrying forward this form of ecological aesthetic geopolitics articulated by Soekarno? The contemporary geopolitical leaders of Indonesia now continue an extractive logic with scant attention to Nature, and people who live in different eco-systems of Indonesia. In his important contribution to the World Indonesianists Congress, "Reviving Bandung Spiriti: Boosting South-South Cooperation toward a More Prosperous and Stable World Order," Stein Ofu Kristiansen from University of Adger, Norway argued that the present-day political regime of Indonesia is pursuing coal-based extractive energy model because of the influence of the coal mafia, rather than utilizing much less expensive and sustainable modes of energy arrangement and energy transition. At the same time, at the normative level, there are profound further elaborations of Soekarno's geopolitics in the works of Connie Rahakundinin Barkrie's project of "birth of conscious nation" and Dharmansjah Djumala's (2025) project of "Envisioning Metadiplomacy in a Divided World."[44] In the first chapter of her book, *From the Dream of Civilization to the Birth of Conscious Nation*, entitled "The Perfect Nation and the Conscious Civilization," Bakrie writes:

> The Perfect Nation is not a misty utopia floating in the sky of imagination, but a sacred inner roadmap—etched from the deeper layers of human awareness—guiding us toward the dawn of a luminous soulful civilization.

[43] Kristiyanto 2023: 60.
[44] Dharmansjah Djumala 2025.

> Such a nation is not built merely upon ambition and power, but arises from the harmony of a people's inner being, where every system—education, defense, economy, environment, and leadership is rooted in deep self-awareness and spiritual love for the homeland that transcends mere territory.
>
> In the Perfect Nation, the ancient Sundanese principle of Tri Tangtu di Bauman from the Kingdom of Pajajaran comes alive: Wisea, the wise and compassionate ruler, Prebu, the spiritual guardian and bearer of sacred knowledge; and Rama, the people—the farmers, the caretakers of the land and of life itself. These three forces do not stand apart; they interweave like sky, earth, and breath—one body, one spirit.
>
> This nation also breathes through the Balinese wisdom of *Tri Hita Karana* where harmony between humanity and the Divine (Parahyanngan), between humans and fellow beings ((Pawongan), and between humans and nature (Palemahan) forms the sacred architecture of society. It is a cosmic symphony binding all governance, development, and civilization within the sacred rhythm of universal goodwill.
>
> And when strength must be summoned, the Javanese adage Sura Dira Jayaningrat Lebur Denning Pangastuti becomes its moral compass: true strength is not found in cruelty or domination, but in courage tempered by love, in firmness softened by compassion. It is in the grace to forgive, and in the wisdom that protects, that every tyranny and violence dissolve without a trace.[45]

Bakrie's above articulations, with many important realities, aspirations and wisdom pathways, challenge us to go beyond one-sided preoccupation of geopolitics with domination and resistance and cultivate many pathways of geo-spirituality. Soekarno and Bakrie's cultivation of pathways of *Tri Hita Karana* from Javanese traditions can be read together

[45] Bakrie 2025: 3-4.

with the perspective, reality and transformational push of Triguna where reality has three dimensions—*Sattva* (Truth), *Rajas* (Power), and *Tamas* (darkness). Realism in international relations theory has mainly focused on the work of processes of *Tamas* (darkness) and *Rajas* (power / domination) in our international system and world orders. But along with these forces of *Tamas* (darkness) and *Rajas* (power/domination) is also the work of Sattwa in complex socio-historical and soul spheric onto-epistemic ways. For a fuller understanding of our world societies today, we need to bring visions and realities such as *Tri Hita Karana* and *Triguna* together in cross-fertilizing ways. This also helps us to put conventional realism in international relations theory in its place, calling us to also move in the direction of what Karuna Matenna (2022) calls another realism[46], where, as in the case of Gandhi, realism, and normative struggles dance together in manifold ways. The brutal manifestation of real politique in our contemporary world, the naked dance of war, aggression and genocide today is a pointer to the dark realism or tamasic realism of which we all are part but with and beyond such realism there are also forces of normative struggles for a different reality of beauty, dignity and dialogues. Such realism is not just naïve realism or reproductive realism but also an aspirational realism or transformational relational realism which builds upon creative application of Roy Bhaskar's critical realism and spiritual realism to international relations theory by Heikki Patomaki.[47]

It is here that Dharmanshjah Djumala's articulation of metadiplomacy, expanding on Soekarnro's project of building the world anew, is important:

[46] Karuna Matenna 2022.
[47] Patomaki 2000; also, Kurki 2020.

> The term metadiplomacy is not widely established in International Relations (IR), yet it can be understood through analogy with "metapoiltics"—political action that concerns the values, narratives, and philosophical underpinnings of politics itself. By extension, metadiplomacy refers to a form of diplomacy that operates beyond the negotiation of immediate interests, engaging instead with the moral and normative foundations of international conduct. [..]
>
> Metadiplomacy can be placed in conversation with constructivism, which holds that international relations are socially constructed through ideas, norms and identities [..] Yet it goes further by prioritizing moral universals over merely acknowledging that norms matter. [48]

The Emergence of Pluriversal Politics

World societies today reflect varieties of political formation—democratic, authoritarian, among others. In these complex fields of domination and resistance, we see the emergence of vision and movements of pluriversal politics across the world today. Based upon his studies of alternative development in South America, Arturo Escobar invites us to understand the vision and dynamics of pluriversal politics today, which has important implications for rethinking and transforming our world society and for understanding Muslim politics in our contemporary world.[49]

Pluriversal politics calls for transformation of politics, self, society, state, and the world with and beyond the colonizing one-dimensional universalism of Euro-American modernity as well as ethnocentric universalism from other parts of the world. Pluriversal politics calls for creating a pluriverse in place of monological worlds of various kinds that

[48] Djumala 2025: 164-165.
[49] Arturo Escobar 2020.

annihilate. It emerges from new political, social, cultural, and spiritual movements from all over the world, as manifested in movements such as the World Social Forum. It calls for and embodies new movements in practice and thinking. As Escobar tells us:

> The Recommunalization of social life, as a counter to the dominant individualizing imperative and as the foundation for human action from the perspective of the interdependence of everything that exists. The relocalization of activities, in the domains of economy, food, health, energy, transportation, education, building, and so forth, to resist the delocalizing tendencies of capitalist globalization, strengthen local and regional economies, and foster convivial modes of living. The strengthening of collective local autonomies and direct forms of democracy, as a means to lessen the dependence on norms established by experts and the state; critically revalorize local knowledges and values; and promote horizontal political strategies based on people's self-organization, potentially linking up with other similar transformative experiments and autonomous movements elsewhere.[50]

For Escobar, pluriversal politics also calls for us to follow three broad theoretical and political movements. First, "the simultaneous depatriarchalization and decolonization of societies, as a way to move decidedly toward nonpatriarchal, nonracist, and postcapitalist social practices and organizations" Second, "the liberation of Mother Earth, as an ethical-political principle to create novel forms of existence as living beings and to rethink the relations between humans and nonhumans in mutually enhancing manners." Third, "the flourishing of the pluriverse, to weave multiple paths toward a world of many worlds, countering the

[50] Escobar 2020: 30.

power of the current model of a single globalized world and the capitalist hydra [..].” [51]

Pluriversal politics is ontological politics which urges us to realize the quality of our being, inter-being, interrelationship and becoming. It is a politics of radical relationality which also has a spiritual dimension of service, care and responsibility.[52] Escobar’s political ontology is not the political ontology of Martin Heidegger, of which anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu offers a critique of its logic of mastery and silence on killing and othering of the other, as happened during Hitler’s reign.[53] Escobar invites us to understand the distinction between strong relationality and weak relationality. For Escobar, in weak relationality, as in dominant forms of modern politics, “entities are first assumed to be ontologically separate; then they are reunited through some sort of connection, such as a “network,” but even when this is done, it is clear that the entities, now found to be related, pre-exist the connection”.[54] Weak relationality “stem from ontologies that are deeply embedded in the negation of the full humanity of multiple others and the nonhuman”.[55] In strong relationality, “nothing pre-exists the relations that constitute it; in other words, reality is relational through and through” and it stems from “nondualist ontologies and their corresponding pluriversal forms of politics”.[56] Strong relationality in pluriversal politics embodies not only non-dualist ontology but also “weak ontology” as cultivated by Giani Vattimo.[57] Vattimo makes a distinction between “weak ontology” and the “strong ontology.” Strong ontology as in Heidegger’s early phase is one of mastery while weak ontology is one of vulnerability and mutual care and responsibility. Escobar’s strong relationality and political ontology embody weak

[51] Escobar 2020: 30.
[52] See Dallmayr 2015.
[53] Bourdieu 1991.
[54] Escobar 2020: xiv.
[55] Ibid xiv.
[56] Ibid xiv.
[57] Giani Vattimo 1999.

ontology as well as weak naturalism, as discussed by Habermas, where we work with Nature but are not determined by it.[58] Weak naturalism embodies our creativity, courage as well as immanent transcendence. In the face of the current ecological holocaust, we need to cultivate a different political ontology of weak ontology, weak naturalism and strong relationality which would help us go beyond the current challenges of the climate and social collapse and embody responsibility. As Escobar writes:

> Political ontology refers in the first instance to the practices involved in creating a particular world or ontology; it also provides a space for studying the relationships between worlds, including the conflicts that result when different ontologies or worlds strive to preserve their existence in their interactions with other worlds, under asymmetric conditions of power. Political ontology exists in the space between critical currents in the academy and the ongoing struggles to defend territories and worlds. It reveals the ontological dimension of accumulation through dispossession that is taking place in many parts of the world under extractivist development models, especially in large scale mining, biofuel production, and the appropriation of land linked to commercial agriculture. It lets us see why environmental conflicts are often at the same time ontological conflicts, that is, conflicts over contrasting ways of existing and making worlds. Finally, political ontology seeks to highlight and promote the pluriverse while resisting the tendency to represent the world as if it were only one. It records the rise and political mobilization of relationality as a space for struggle and life force. It bears witness to the urge to rebel among many communities faced with the ravages caused by a world that has arrogated to itself the right to be "the world."[59]

[58] Habermas 2003.
[59] Escobar 2020: 25.

Pluriversal politics calls for a new relationship between Nature and Humanity, and works for social and political transformations, which would help us come to terms with the challenges of climate change and imminent collapse. In the pluriverse, "people –relearn what it means to be a humble part of 'nature,' leaving behind narrow anthropocentric notions of progress based on economic growth".[60] As Haraway links multi-species living to the alter-globalization movement, Escobar et al. link strivings for plurivesrality to the alter-globalization movement: "[..] the alter-globalization movements 'propose pluriversality as a shared project based on the multiplicity of 'ways of worlding'".[61]

Understanding Dynamics of Contemporary World Societies: Transnational Regional Localization

Pluriversal politics is emerging in the context of the crisis of globalization and nationalist reaction. Nationalist reactions such as Trump's Make America Great Again (MAGA) reflect the need for creative localization—building local industries and local and regional networks of production and consumption. In order to realize a new relationship between middle powers and contemporary world societies and systems, we need to understand the dynamics of transnational regional localization. BRICS is an example of this, of which India, Brazil, China, Russia, and South Africa are founding members and Indonesia is a recent member. With challenges, BRICS is striving for multi-polarity, even though it is overshadowed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent war. Long before BRICS, ASEAN was established in 1967 and through the turbulence of history and societies it has moved on with co-operation among the member states of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. For Amitava Acharya, "Yet, if the traditional perspectives are correct, ASEAN

[60] Kothari et al. 2019: xxiii.
[61] Kothari et al. 2019: xxiv.

would have been doomed from its birth in 1967, as many Westerners and some Asian analysts had indeed predicted then and keep predicting. ASEAN is an anomaly in the universe of great power politics. Not only has it survived, but it has contributed significantly to conflict reduction and management in Southeast Asia and has served as the main anchor of regional co-operation involving all the major powers of Asia and indeed the world. As a result, Southeast Asia is the only region in known history where the strong live in the world of the weak, and the weak lead the strong. ASEAN's record has been a mixed one, but its existence, survival and purpose turn traditional realism on its head."[62]

ASEAN is not just a replica of European Union (EU) as, for Acharya, it does not have the entrenched colonizing thrust of the dominant members of EU. ASEAN faces challenges, the foremost of which is the "lack of attachment and empathy among the people of Southeast Asia to the regional idea".[63] ASEAN does not have robust people to people and civil society co-operation and collaboration, as many of the ASEAN countries suppress civil societies and critical citizen voices within their own national borders. ASEAN also faces an ecological crisis: "Among non-traditional security challenges in Southeast Asia, ecological security deserves serious consideration. Southeast Asia could be one of the worst affected regions in terms of environmental disasters brought on by deforestation and climate change."[64] BRICS, of which Indonesia is a member, also faces an ecological crisis as part of worldwide ecological crisis.

ASEAN is confronting geopolitical rivalry in its neighbourhood and waters, for example, between China and the USA. But some scholars also propose opening regionalism as a way of being and moving forward here, as, for example, proposed by Da Wei in his Asia Foundation consultative note, "China-ASEAN-US Relations: The Need to Reactivate Open

[62] Acharya 2025a: 120.
[63] Acharya 2025a: 61.
[64] Acharya 2025a: 154.

Regionalism."[65] For Wei, "Open regionalism means that China, the United States, and ASEAN countries are part of the same shared region, rather than two opposing regions. [..] Open regionalism is built on the reality of a 'multi-centric' Asia-Pacific, a region where multiple forces co-exist and interact. The future of the Asia-Pacific must be created collectively by the countries in the region ..".[66] There is also a need to nurture this open regionalism with an alternative history of Southeast Asia, ASEAN and the world where maritime networks created worlds of exchange and circulation of people and ideas, without the dominance of the nation-state system. As Amitav Acharya tells us:

> But Southeast Asia's geopolitical future can also be framed around an alternate history where there is no center. This is an alternative to the strategic notion of the Indo-Pacific. It comes from the pre-colonial Indian ocean network before the rise of Europe, and transatlantic trade. It brought together East Asia and the Indian Ocean, including China and India, but without being dominated by either. It was a non-hegemonic way of managing commerce and security. Using this as a model, Asia could further its economic linkages, multilateral institutions and ideological tolerance, all of which are the key drivers of peace and stability.[67]

Heritage and the Living Spirit of Bandung

In order to realize the possibilities of open regionalism with and beyond great power rivalry, we need to build on the movement and spirit of Bandung. The 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung was an important part of the anti-colonial and post-colonial struggle of humanity. A Bandung at 70 Conference was organized in Indonesia from 28 October

[65] Da Wei 2024.
[66] Wei 2024:23.
[67] Amitav Acharya 2025a: 175.

to 1 November 2025, with the leadership of important intellectuals such as Darwis Khudori from Indonesia, who is now teaching in Paris, and Manoranjan Mohanty from India. Mohanty had taken part in the 60-year anniversary of Bandung held in Indonesia in 2015, and he tells us how it has inspired new global conversations on autonomy, freedom, and emancipation, bringing ideas of *Swaraj* (self-rule) from India and *Ubuntu* (shared humanity) from Africa together. Mohanty also played an important role in the Bandung at 70 Conference, in which I had taken part and had presented a paper on the challenges of Bandung and epistemic freedom and emancipation on the part of Asia and the world.[68] At the 60 year anniversary event, Mohanty had pleaded for global self-rule in politics and epistemology embodying dialogues between *Swaraj* from Indic traditions and *Ubuntu* from African traditions. Mohanty also drew our attention to the need for Asian, African and Latin American cross-fertilization of current and historical liberation struggles. Mohanty authored an article, "Bandung's New Global Agenda," following his participation in the Bandung at 60 Conference in Jakarta, saying:

> The Bandung Spirit Conference not only alerted everyone on some unfinished tasks of liberation such as Palestine, but equally stressed on the need to struggle against all forms of domination and hegemony. Hence the idea of "Global Swaraj"—self-rule or self-realisation at every level—resonated throughout the conference. This notion of "self" treated others also as "self," by striving to transform the relationship of domination into one of freedom and equality. Thus, the notion of mutuality of existence or Ubuntu ("I am because you are" in the Zulu language) always went along with Swaraj, encompassing not only the human species but entire nature. It was pointed out that the newly announced Sustainable Development Goals for 2015–30 could not be substantively realised unless people and nations at the ground level took responsibility and exercised freedom to achieve them.

[68] Giri 2025a.

> The new agenda now tied up Asia and Africa with Latin America and produced an ASAFLA (Asia–Africa–Latin America) framework on global futures. This framework was not confined to this ASAFLA region alone. This new discourse and pedagogy of liberation existed in all parts of the world, including in the US and in Europe, where too forces of peace, equality and justice uphold the Bandung vision. Conversely, among the elites in ASAFLA many were wedded to the hegemonic agenda of capitalist globalisation with its multiple inequalities and environmental unsustainability. Some of the Latin American countries had shown signs of hope for pursuing the Bandung vision of a peaceful, equitable and sustainable world. To the making of that process, people from all parts of the world had the capacity to contribute as indeed they all possessed a common yet differentiated civilisational heritage.[69]

The Middle East Council on Global Affairs had organized a symposium on "70 Years After Bandung" on 20 April 2025, in which what was conveyed by some of the scholars present deserves our consideration. Cemil Aydin of University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill said: "Bandung represented a major shift: formerly colonized societies collectively asserting their rights and demanding an alternative world order free from empire and racial hierarchy." [70]Furthermore, "Bandung attempted solidarity-driven emancipation, moving beyond appeals to imperial mercy towards self-organized power. It remains deeply relevant: it highlighted that colonized peoples forced global powers to address justice and equality, not out of goodwill but due to persistent resistance."[71]

[69] Mohanty 2016: 27; also see Lee 2023; Acharya & Tan 2008; Utama 2025.
[70] Cemil Aydin 2025.
[71] Ibid.

Challenges of Inter-Religious and Trans-Civilizational Dialogues

Contemporary world societies and regional formations such as ASEAN and BRICS are not only confronted with the challenges of colonialism and ecological crises but also of dialogues: inter-religious, cross-cultural and trans-civilizational. But scholars such as Amitav Acharya do not touch on this. For example, ASEAN countries have many conflicts around religions within and across national borders, at the same time as there are also some efforts at dialogue among religions in countries such as Indonesia. But ASEAN itself has no inter-religious dialogue initiative like the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.

After the 11 September terror attack in 2001, President Muhammad Khatami of Iran made dialogue among civilizations a key theme in world discourse and he and Iran played an important role in UN declaring 2001 as a year of dialogue among civilizations. Khatami had studied political philosophy and Aristotle. He taught at Tarboat Modannes University in Iran. Following the earlier work of noted Iranian philosopher Dariush Shayagen, Khatami introduced the theme of "Dialogue Among Civilizations" into the UN discourse. He held a famous interview with Christina Armapour, in which he emphasized the reality and need of dialogue among civilizations, such as between American civilization and Iranian civilization. With deep philosophical and historical sensitivity, Khatami told us in this interview how the foundation of American civilization lies in the Plymouth Rock planted by the pilgrims, which is a symbol combining religion with liberty. This is also, for him, the core of aspiration of Iranian civilization, which is a confluence of Persian and Islamic civilization.

Khatami founded the Foundation for Dialogue Among Civilizations in 2007, the European headquarters for which is located in Geneva. It collaborates with similar initiatives, such as The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, The Washington National Cathedral, Foundation Culture of Peace and Club de Madrid. All these partnering organizations are

committed to peace and dialogue. For example, the Foundation Culture of Peace was founded by Frederico Mayor, the former Secretary General of UNESCO. Mayor began as a scientist but became a politician and statesman and he is also a poet. The poetic spirit of Mayor dances with the philosophical spirit of Khatami and together, along with partner organizations, they strive to create more streams and spaces for dialogue in this fragile world. It should be noted that when the Alliance of Civilizations began as an initiative of the UN in 2005, Kofi Annan appointed President Khatami as a member of this grouping. In 2009, he shared the Global Dialogue Prize with his philosopher co-pilgrim Dariush Shayegan from Iran. While his Foundation for Dialogue Among Civilizations works at an international level, the Baran Foundation established by Khatami works in Iran on domestic issues of well-being and dialogue.

ASEAN also can learn from the work of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. The idea for an Alliance of Civilizations was first put forth in a speech to the 59th session of the United Nations General Assembly given on 21 September 2004, in New York by the former Prime Minister of Spain, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Just half a year prior, on 11 March, a terrorist attack had taken the lives of 192 people in Madrid. Zapatero reminded those gathered how the men and women from Spain "took to the streets and squares of the cities," expressing "our rejection and disgust, our unanimous contempt for terrorist brutality." He also expressed sympathy for, and solidarity with, not only those in the United States who suffered great loss during the 9/11 terrorist attack, but also all those in other locations globally including, Jakarta, Bali, Casablanca, Riyadh and Beslan, who had been afflicted by terrorism throughout recent years: "Here in New York I would like to convey the Spanish people's heart felt solidarity with this great American nation. We fully understand the terrible pain that in these past years has been inflicted. We know all about enduring kidnappings, bombings and cold-blooded killings. We are well acquainted with the meaning of the word compassion."

Although the Alliance focuses on the relationship between Western and Muslim societies, its overall approach to establishing peace and harmony is considered useful for bridging diverse kinds of cultural divides. Its list of general policy recommendations are firmly in line with its guiding principles, and consist of: a renewed commitment to multilateralism; a full and consistent respect for international law and human rights; coordinated migration policies consistent with human rights standards; combating poverty and economic inequities; protection of the freedom of worship; exercising responsible leadership; the central importance of civil society activism; and establishing partnerships to advance an Alliance of Civilizations.

ASEAN and BRICS can also learn from work on inter-religious dialogues already underway in countries such as Indonesia and cultivate these at the regional, trans-regional and planetary level. In his doctoral theses, *Religious Pluralism in Indonesia: Muslim-Christian Discourse*, submitted at University of Hamburg in 2007, Fuad (2007) discusses the background of state and society in Indonesia, especially the ideology of Pancasila, and several dialogue initiatives by both Christians and Muslims. Through Pancasila, the Indonesian state strives to create inter-religious harmony. The council of Indonesian Ulama plays a significant role in managing inter-religious relations in Indonesia. At the same time, other initiatives in inter-religious dialogues have emerged, such as INTERFIDEI (Institute for Inter-Faith Dialogue in Indonesia). This was created in 1992 by leading Indonesian Protestant thinker Th Sumartana. Since 1998, INTERFIDEI's local conflict resolution workshops have "both an inter-faith and inter-ethnic perspective."

Fuad discusses the thoughts and works of several Islamic thinkers and leaders in Indonesia, who have worked on dialogue between Muslims and Christians. He begins with the work of Nurcholis Madjid. Majid urges all concerned to realize that Prophet Abraham or Ibrahim surrendered himself to God, but was not committed to a certain form of "organized

religion".[72] Majid tells Muslims to realize that Prophet Muhammad had developed the Medina Charter so that Muslims and non-Muslims would be united within a band of civility.

Abdurrahman Wahid was a pioneer of inter-religious dialogue in Indonesia. Wahid, known as Gus Dur, developed *pesantren*, schools of education working in Indonesia which are like madrasas, as places of inter-religious dialogues. In 1991, Wahid, together with leading figures from different religious backgrounds, set up a forum called *Forum Demokrasi*. Wahid was the President of the Republic of Indonesia from 1991 to 2001 and as President he continued his efforts at inter-religious dialogues and co-existence. A dialogue between Wahid and Daisaku Ikeda was published as *The Wisdom of Tolerance: A Philosophy of Generosity and Peace*.[73] Wahid also founded the Wahid Institute and, in his book, he tells Ikeda that, through the activities of the Wahid Institute, "we are working to promote the harmonious co-existence of different religions and win broader acceptance of cultural diversity". Wahid says that originally Sharia was conceived of as a Way rather than a law. He also urges us to realize that laws against blasphemy and apostasy were formulated in a political context and should be abandoned. Speaking of the Indonesian context, he says that "if [prohibitions on apostasy] become law, so then we would have to execute 25 million of Indonesians who have changed their religion."

Banawiratma is a Christian theologian who emphasizes the "significance of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council as the basic foundation for the opening of Catholic attitudes in relation with other religions" (Baniwiratma bid: 172). He finds it necessary to "develop another level of dialogue, which he calls 'contextual analysis and reflection" (ibid: 176). He elaborates this practice of dialogue:

[72] Fuad 2007: 129.
[73] Wahid & Ikeda 2015.

> This level of inter-religious dialogue takes place in small groups who know each other, in daily life where men and women of different faiths experience together a common situation, with ups and downs, anxieties and hopes, and thus common concerns emerge. They are concerned about the need for clean water, healthy housing, adequate education, fields of work etc (ibid).

Expressing solidarity with Muslims, Baniwiratma says: "We, Christians, address the same God as Abba, the motherly Father of Jesus and our motherly Father." It may be noted that Baniwiratma presents God as Motherly Father, which already embodies a deep realization of not only God as Mother but also Father as Mother. Baniwiratma says that the meeting point between Christians and Muslims is the Word of God and not the book of God, such as scriptures. While for Christians, Jesus is the Word of God, for Muslims it is the Qur'an. So, for Baniwiratma, the comparison between Christians and Muslims is not between Jesus and Muhammad but between Jesus and the Qur'an.

Franz Magnis-Suseno is originally from Germany and settled in Indonesia. He is a respected Catholic theologian and public intellectual of Indonesia. He emphasizes natural law as the foundation for dialogue. He also emphasizes ethics as a foundation of inter-religious interaction and dialogue. Like other Christian theologians, Magnis-Suseno also emphasizes the significance of the state ideology of Pancasila in dealing with the plurality of Indonesian society.[74]

The Institute for Social Research, Democracy and Social Justice (locally known as Percik) is a research Institute and voluntary organization working on local democracy and dialogue in Indonesia. It was founded by Dr. Pradjarto in 1996. Pradjarto did his doctoral work in Anthropology from Free University, Amsterdam. He had studied the work of *pesantren* and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) for his doctoral work. His study of NU and close

[74] Franz Magnis Suseno 194.

association with Gus Dur had made him interested in both democracy and dialogue.

The inter-religious dialogues cultivated by former President Wahid in Indonesia have a well-established pedigree in Islamic and other world religious, philosophical and spiritual traditions. Here we can relate to initiatives of Mughal Emperor Akbar and Prince Dara Shikoh who translated the Upanishads into Persian. Dara Shikoh was influenced by Sufism and the Upanishadic teaching Sufism has a long living practice of inter-religious dialogue. It also resonates with the initiatives of President Muhammad Khatami of Iran, who played a key role in creating the Alliance Among Civilizations in the United Nations in the wake of the 11 September attack and the subsequent wave of Islamophobia and the pervading discourse of clash of civilizations.[75] It also invites us to understand the multiple pathways of dialogues that work in world history and not only trajectories of conquest and domination. China undertook the Belt and Road Initiative, building on its earlier Silk Road, but in this Belt and Road Initiative, China continued a path of domination. We need to understand other networks of travel, such as maritime networks, which had a different logic of communication in the pre-colonial era, and the paths of travel of religious and spiritual teachers, such as Buddhist Bhikkhus and the Sufi saints. William Darlymple's recent book, *The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World*, describes paths of travel and co-learning undertaken by the Buddhist seekers from India and China like Kumarajiva and Hsuan Tsang, which is helpful here.[76]

We have the aforementioned initiatives in dialogues in histories and societies which can help our contemporary world societies, as well as transnational regional local societies to come to terms with the challenges of dialogues today, which call for not only structural initiatives but also

[75] Haynes 2018.
[76] William Darlymple 2024.

"heart-to-heart dialogues".[77] ASEAN members, such as Thailand and Myanmar, suffer from inter-religious conflicts around Buddhism and Islam, as the Philippines does between Islam and Christianity. Powerful members in BRICS such as China and India are not creating a condition of dignity, respect and equal citizenship for their Muslim minority members with, and beyond, their boastful official rhetoric. Similarly, Brazil needs to hold dialogue with her indigenous people, cultures and civilizations, which the present Brazilian government under the leadership of President Lula has begun.

Along with inter-religious and cross-cultural dialogues within countries, ASEAN and BRICS need to conduct dialogues across national and civilizational borders. The Chinese Government has established Confucian Institutes in many countries around the world. But these Institutes are mainly to teach Chinese language and they are not places of dialogue between Chinese culture and their many entangled cultures and civilizations. In this context, the Chinese Government can take the leadership to make its Confucian Institutes centers of open and non-censored dialogues to resonate with the spirit of ecological civilization mentioned in the Chinese Constitution. In this context, Boaventura de Sousa Santos discusses the need for China to cultivate Confucius Plus and not just nationalistic Confucianism, where there is dialogue between Confucianism and other cultures, religions and civilizations among the BRICS countries and around the world.[78] Similarly, India should cultivate *Vedanta* Plus as South Africa *Ubuntu* Plus where Confucianism, *Vedanta* and *Ubuntu* dance with each other as along with Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and other religions and philosophies around the world.

[77] See Tarip 2025.

[78] Boaventura de Sousa Santos 2025.

Conclusion: Contemporary World Societies and the Calling of Planetary Realization

Our contemporary world societies and our transnational regional local societies are confronted with the challenges of planetary realizations, where within and beyond our many borders of nation-states, cultures, religions, civilizations, and anthropocentric dominance and vulnerability, we realize that we are children of Mother Earth. Pluriversal politics, new transformative initiatives in Muslim politics, where politics is for the liberation of Muslims and non-Muslims alike suffering from injustice and idolatry of power and capital, and transnational regional localization, can help us in realizing this. Dialogues among religions, cultures and civilizations both within and across states and societies play an important role here. This article has explored the challenges of decolonization and pluriversalization in contemporary world society studies. It has also discussed dynamics of trans-national regional localization and the vision and dynamics of ASEAN and BRICS. It has also discussed the living legacy and spirit of Bandung and how it can help us rethink and transform our contemporary world order. With discussion of these inter-related processes and associated visions and struggles for practical realizations, this article calls on us to continue our *sadhana* and struggle for planetary realization, through which all of us realize our responsibility as children of Mother Earth going beyond centrism and domination of many kinds—anthropocentricism, colonialism, nation-state centrism, and ethnocentrism.

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