

Liberalism, Liberalization and Their Impacts of Muslim Education (Special Case of Indonesian Intellectuals)

Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi*

Institut Studi Islam Darussalam (ISID) Gontor Ponorogo

Email: hfzark@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

This paper is aimed at elucidating the liberalization of Muslim world and its impact on education. For that purpose the author traces at the outset the origin and the basic concept of liberalism, which is of postmodern Western worldview, including the concept of religious liberalism. The impact of liberalism in general is as wider as the meaning of liberalism in Western sense of the words. However, this paper confines only on the study of their impact on Muslim education with special emphasis on national education policy and on religious thought which in turn would affect curriculum development. Liberalization of religious thought appears, inter alia, through the introduction of the doctrine of relativity of truth, religious pluralism, gender equality and deconstruction of shari'ah and the likes. All those religious discourse conceptually hinder the development of curriculum and the teaching strategy of moral inculcation to the students.

Makalah ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji liberalisasi dunia Islam and dampaknya terhadap pendidikan. Untuk itu penulis melacak pertama-tama, asal usul dan konsep dasar liberalism, yang berasal dari worldview postmodern, termasuk konsep liberalisme keagamaan. Dampak dari liberalisme secara umum adalah seluas makna liberalisme dalam pengertian Barat. Namun, makalah ini hanya membatasi pada kajian tentang dampaknya terhadap pendidikan umat Islam, dengan penekanan pada kebijakan pendidikan nasional dan pada wacana keagamaan yang pada gilirannya dapat mempengaruhi pengembangan kurikulum. Liberalisasi pemikiran keagamaan muncul, di antaranya, melalui pengenalan pada doktrin relativitas kebenaran, pluralisme agama, kesetaraan gender, dekonstruksi syariah dan lain sebagainya. Semua wacana keagamaan ini secara konseptual menghambat pengembangan kurikulum dan juga strategi pengajaran dari penanaman akhlak kepada para peserta didik.

Keywords: *Liberalism, Liberalization, Religious discourses, Education, curriculum development*

* Program Pascasarjana ISID Gontor Ponorogo jl. Raya Siman Ponorogo
Telpon (0352) 488220.

Introduction

Liberalism is Western ideology that emerged along with the wave of modernism and postmodernism, and has influenced Western political, economic, social and even religious system of thought. During the process of modernization and Westernization of the worlds, such Western systems as politic, economic, education, social, culture were systematically introduced into Muslim worlds, including of which is religious system of thought. Now, Western religious thought is intensely intruding into Islamic religious discourses especially in theology and laws. In this case, fundamental change of Muslim education system, especially on its objectives and its approach towards the arrangement of curriculum is consequently inevitable. This paper traces the genealogy of liberalism and liberalization of the Muslim world, followed by its impact on Islamic thought and Muslim education policy as well as on curriculum and its output.

The term liberal and liberalism is of Western origin derived from Latin word *liber* that had undergone conceptual change from time to time. It initially means free, not slave or a condition when one is free from other ownership. However, from the denotation of free individual it developed into diverse denotations. Until the end of the eighteenth century the word *liberal* is signified only “worthy of a free man”, but later it was applied also to those qualities of intellect and of character, which were considered an ornament becoming those who occupied a higher social position on account of their wealth and education.

Therefore term was employed later on to refer to an educated middle class society in the West that had opened the gate for free thinking (Old Liberalism). In its further development the *liberal* got the meaning of intellectually independent, broad-minded, magnanimous, frank, open, and genial. Now, liberalism understood politically as an ideology that centered on individual interest, in which everybody has the same right to participate in the government, to be respected, to express his ideas and to act without religious and ideological restriction.¹ In social context, liberalism is interpreted as

¹ Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, v.s. liberalism.

social ethic that defends in general liberty and equality.² According to Alonzo L. Hamby, a Professor of History of Ohio University, liberalism is economic and political ideology that emphasized on freedom, equality and opportunity.³

The above definition suggests that liberal denotes mental condition of an individual in the society that pervades political, social, economic and religious thought of that individual. In fact, by the end of the eighteenth century, the word has been applied more and more to certain tendencies in the intellectual, religious, political, and economical life, which implied a partial or total emancipation of man from the super natural, moral, and Divine order. The origin of those tendencies is back to the principles of French Revolution (1789) which was considered as the Magna Charta of Liberalism. The most fundamental principle asserts an absolute and unrestrained freedom of thought, religion, conscience, creed, speech, press, and politics.

The necessary consequences of this are the abolition of the Divine right and of every kind of authority derived from God; the relegation of religion from the public life into the private domain of one's individual conscience; the absolute ignoring of Christianity and the Church as public, legal, and social institutions. On the other hand, is putting into practice the absolute autonomy of every man and citizen, along all lines of human activity, and the concentration of all public authority in one "sovereignty of the people". This implies the denial of all true authority; for authority necessarily presupposes a power outside and above man to bind him morally.

So, liberalism in social and political sense had evidently marginalizes religion or separate religion from social and political affairs in gradual manner. Religion has no place above social and political interest. When liberalism intrudes religious thought of Catholic and Protestant thinkers the church became subordinated under the interest

² Coady, C. A. J. *Distributive Justice, A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, editors Goodin, Robert E. and Pettit, Philip. Blackwell Publishing, 1995, 440.

³ Brinkley, Alan. *Liberalism and Its Discontents*. Harvard Univ. Pr., 1998; see also Gray, John. *The Two Faces of Liberalism*. New Pr., 2000; Kloppenberg, James T. *The Virtues of Liberalism*. Oxford, 1998.

of politic and humanism. In this situation the first problematic point was the concept of God. In fact, liberalism is coterminous with the worldview of postmodernism which is predominated by the doctrine of relativism.

Liberalism and Postmodernism

In fact, the notion of liberalism is imbedded in the doctrine of postmodernism. It began when the idea of modernism started to be questioned by philosophical movement that was skeptic towards the principle that reality has structure comprehensible by human being. This is on the one hand implies the denial of absolutism and a serious attack to one of the most important branch of philosophy, metaphysics, on the other. The product of postmodern mind is the rise of existentialism, and analytical philosophy, two dominant trends that had replaced metaphysical system. This, according to Silverman, was the closing of metaphysical thought which co-incident with the end of modern era.⁴ This new system of thought that has no metaphysical view anymore had brought about the marginalization and the denigration of religious doctrine, which is mostly based on metaphysics. The turning point that marked the shift from metaphysical method of thinking to analytical one could be referred to the idea of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Nietzsche (1844-1900) on religion.⁵

Nietzsche who is regarded as one of the earliest postmodern thinkers, was known with his doctrine of *dissolution of value* which implied the abolition of men tendencies of relying on authority and the reduction of highest value that every religion deem it as absolute.⁶ This doctrine was also known as nihilism. In his work *Will to Power*, Nietzsche described nihilism as a situation where men revolve from the center towards X point, where the highest value devaluates by itself.⁷ Heidegger (1889-1976) in

⁴ Hugh J. Silverman, "The Philosophy of Postmodernism", in Hugh J. Silverman (ed) *Postmodernism-Philosophy and the Art*, London, Routledge, 1990, 5.

⁵ For further discussion on this matter see Nancy Love, *Marx, Nietzsche, and Modernity*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, especially Chapter I, 1-7 and Chapter IV, 113-134.

⁶ Geovani Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, Trans with introduction by Jon R. Snyder, Cambridge, Polity Press & Blackwell Publisher, 1988, 167.

⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will To Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann dan R.J. Hollingdale, edited oleh Walter Kaufmann, New York, Vintage Books, 1968, 8-9.

the same tone defines nihilism as a process that finally there is nothing left.⁸ The two thinkers have the same *mindset* and inclination. In the eye of Nietzsche in the process of nihilism contain the devaluation of the highest value that brought about the doctrine of the death of god, while according to Heidegger nihilism is the abolition of *Being* in such a way that reappear in the form of value.

Here reality is no more understood as a structure where the Creator is placed in the top of hierarchy and regarded as absolute. In short, both Nietzsche and Heidegger propose an idea that man have no value structure and value has no meaning, and consequently any notion cannot be based on something metaphysical, religious or something divine. However, says Snyder, nihilism is not merely the abolition of value, but the change of the notion of truth in it from something divine or religious into human opinion and belief.⁹ It is because in the highest value achieved by metaphysics truth is deemed as God, while the fact is nothing more than subjective value that might be wrong as other human opinion. So, according to Nietzsche there is no truth and falsehood, for they are wrong belief or delusory that cannot be trusted. Therefore, if one denies the falsehood he must also deny the truth in other words *to do away with one is to do away with other too*).¹⁰ Based on this doctrine Nietzsche define metaphysic pejoratively as science that deal with fundamental falsehood of human being, as if all are fundamental truth.¹¹ This postmodern belief is serious attack towards all religions and belief as the foundation of morality.

The doctrine of nihilism related closely to hermeneutic, because, according to Nietzsche, all differences between truth and falsehood, rational and irrational must be placed beyond the domain of language and its embedded concepts. Differences are only the product of will to power (will to rule) or the will to interpret in the human self. This

⁸ Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 19.

⁹ *Ibid*, xi.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Twilight of the Idol*, (Pent.) R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 41. In *Will To Power*, he asserts that "Truth is the kind of error", see Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will To Power*, 493.

¹¹ Jon R.Snyder, in Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, xii.

indicates that everything in the human experiences in this world is nothing more than interpretation; and everything in this world is always interpreted according to “the subjective value in ourselves.” In addition, since man has tendency to interpret, the postmodernist believes that human interpretation is only a world of different interpretation. This is the point where nihilism related closely with philosophy of interpretation, namely hermeneutic.¹²

In short, nihilism and philosophy of difference marked the development of post-modern thought that in turn became the foundation to disavow the transcendental truth. In connection with hermeneutic, the atmosphere of postmodern thought can be depicted through Gellner’s formulation in the following statement that:

everything is text, that the basic material of text, societies and almost anything is meaning, that meaning are there to be decoded or ‘deconstructed’, that the notion of objective reality is suspect.¹³

Gellner’s formulation is appropriate, for in the discourses of postmodern thinkers this world is regarded as meaning and even everything is meaning and meaning is everything and hermeneutic is its “prophet”. Consequently, interpretation of reality is more important than the objective reality. It is because in the worldview of postmodern the objective truth had been replaced by hermeneutic truth,¹⁴ and in the hermeneutical truth the subjectivities of truth seeker, reader or audience are highly respected. In this state of mind says Ernest Gellner postmodernism clearly supports relativism. The truth, for the postmodernist is elusive, subjective and internal, therefore it cannot admit single, exclusive, objective, external and transcendental truth.¹⁵ In short, postmodern philosophy dissolve the highest value, denying God as the reference of every values. The values which are relative have the same status and universal in nature. Therefore any form of value can be exchanged with one another.

¹² *Ibid*, xiii.

¹³ Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Routledge, London-New York, 1993, 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 35

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 24

The problem with postmodernism is that if everything is reduced into relative value and subject to unlimited interpretation, then there will be no values that could have priority over the others. In consequence, everyone will be involved in the activities of interpretation on every aspect of being endlessly. In addition, religion cannot claim to have more authority on dealing the source of values formulated by philosophers. Now, religion is understood as similar to human perception and has no absolute value, in other words religion is not different from philosophy in traditional sense.

In conclusion, it is true that the doctrine of liberalism is imbedded in the worldview of postmodernism that started out from the denial of absolute truth, metaphysics and dissolution of value or nihilism. This fundamental doctrine had resulted in the belief of subjectivity and relativity of truth, which in turn emerge in the form of the doctrine of social and theological pluralism, gender equality, humanism and the like.

Religious Liberalism

Since liberalism pervades not only social and political field but also religious or theological domain, specific discourse and movement on religious liberalism prevailed in the West since long time ago. Nicholas F Gier has traced the liberal thought of American founding fathers, which might have been originated from European leaders. The salient feature of religious liberalism in the thought of American founding fathers such as Thomas Paine, Washington, Jefferson, Franklin and John Adams has been formulated in four characteristics, they are: The *first* they believe in God, but not necessarily the God of orthodox Christianity. *Second* they hold strict separation between Christian doctrine and Christian ethics. It is not mere affirmation of dogma that makes a person religious; rather, it is a person's ethical and moral conduct. They also rejected some or all of the following doctrines: the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, the virgin birth, the Bible as the literal word of God, predestination, Hell, Satan, and *creatio ex nihilo*. *Third*, they affirm the separation of church and state. *Fourth* they believe in religious liberty and tolerance. Therefore, in United States peoples of all faiths, including those who profess no religious belief, can live in

peace and mutual benefit. Full religious liberty means not only freedom of religion, but freedom from religion. James Madison summed up this ideal in this apt motto: "Conscience is the most sacred of all property."¹⁶

In the West liberalism is contrasted with conservative stance. The latter tend to establish institution, tradition and values, without which social chaos could take place. The conservative is also accused of denigrating human being on the ground that it believes that the good come only from God. Conservatives also tends to regard human being as static, looking human being only from two axes: God or satanic warrior. On the other hand, liberalism confidently believes that men are perfect and capable of determining their own life without individual or institutional interference. This is the reason why liberal thinkers emphasize on individual right, against power and authority. The influence of modern and postmodern Western worldview is manifest, for some of them concede that man is the measure of everything. So liberalism in all its senses is dominant trend that is now prevailing in the West. Francis Fukuyama in his *The End of History, and the Last Man* propose his thesis that :

... the principle of liberty and equality underlying the modern liberal state had been discovered and implemented in the most advance countries, and that there were no alternative principles or forms of social and political organization that were superior to liberalism. Liberal societies were, in other words,would therefore bring the historical dialectic to a close.¹⁷

This implies that the principle of freedom and equality, which are the basis of modern liberal state, have been discovered and implemented in the developing countries and almost no alternative organization system that is superior than liberalism. In other words, liberalism is the final and the most ideal fashion of social and political system, and even religious thought in the West.

¹⁶ *National Gazette*, March 29, 1792, as quoted by Nicholas F. Gier, *Religious Liberalism and The Founding Fathers*, in *Two Centuries of Philosophy in America*, Peter Caws, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1980), 22-45.

¹⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*, Avon Book, New York, 1992, 64.

Now, if the idea of liberalism which is imbedded in the worldview of postmodernism contrasted with Islamic worldview the congruencies would appear. The truth in the worldview of Islam, for example, is derived from the revelation, prophet tradition, reason, experience and intuition. Those sources are not separated from one another, and therefore it has different approach from the West on the problem of truth, reason, freedom, equality, authority and the like. These differences were acknowledged by Fukuyama when he placed Islam *vis a vis* liberalism and communism, and believes that Islam has its own moral value and political as well as its social doctrine. Since Islam contains universal values, it has been a serious challenge to liberal democracy and conversely Western liberal thought also a grave challenge of Muslim society. He states:

Indeed, the Islamic world would seem more vulnerable to liberal ideas in the long run than the reverse, since such liberalism has attracted numerous and powerful Muslim adherent over the past century and a half. Part of the reason for current, fundamentalist revival is the strength of the perceived threat from liberal, Western values to traditional Islamic societies.¹⁸

In a sense Fukuyama is true, but his assumption is limited only to political and social system. In fact, there are other aspects of Western liberal and postmodernist thought that have been adopted uncritically by Muslim intellectuals who are grouped as liberal Islam.

Liberalization

Before we discuss the impact of liberalism on Islamic education, it is imperative that we delineate first the mode of the spread of liberalism in the Muslim worlds. After the tragedy of 9/11 the spread of liberalism or the program of liberalization became more rigorously and systematically implemented, but since it is Western program against the so called "fundamentalist Islam", the term liberal has been soften by the term moderate. In other words the term moderate has been

¹⁸ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*, Avon Book, New York, 1992, 45-46.

hijacked by Western denotation that conceptually nothing else than liberalism. Angel Rabasa (et al) in his *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* defines moderate Muslims as those who share the key dimensions of democratic culture.

These include support for democracy and internationally recognized human rights (including gender equality and freedom of worship), respect for diversity, acceptance of nonsectarian sources of law, and opposition to terrorism and other illegitimate forms of violence.¹⁹ The definition seems to be acceptable in general, but detailed explanation of those dimensions of democratic cultures becomes controversial. More practical measure of building moderate or liberal attitude in the Muslims mind is to be found in other work of Rand Corporation, i.e. Cheryl Bernad's *Civil Democratic Islam, Partners, Resources and Strategies*. In this work she exposes some strategies and tactics of liberating Muslim mind to avoid the growth of fundamentalism. The first and the most important strategy of liberalization is to support modernist (liberal) by developing their vision about Islam in a way that is superior to traditionalist group; to give the liberal thinkers a freedom to spread their ideas; to educate and promote to become public figures to represent the face of contemporary Islam.

Two steps that should be taken to implement this strategy are 1) breaking the fundamentalists and traditionalists' monopoly of defining, explaining and interpreting Islam 2) supporting modernists intellectual to write textbooks and develop curriculum. Practically Cheryl proposed to US security council to support modernist and secularist Muslim in the following ways: i) giving financial support for publishing and distributing their works ii) encouraging them to write for the masses and young generation iii) introducing the idea of liberal thinkers into the curriculum of Islamic education iv) supporting them in spreading their idea on some fundamental issues as in the interpretation of religious text in order to challenge the standpoint of fundamentalists and traditionalists.²⁰

¹⁹ Angel Rabasa (et al), *Building Moderate Muslim Networks*, Rand Corporation, Center for Middle East Public Policy, Santa Monica, 2007, xi, see note no 1; 66.

²⁰ Cheryl Benard , *Civil Democratic Islam, Partners, Resources and Strategies*, RAND, National Security Research Division, the RAND Corporation, 2003, 53.

The medium of implementing the strategies and steps is nothing else than education. Their target to change the fundamentalist and traditionalist Muslims, to borrow Rabasa's term, with the modern or liberal one is by preparing next Muslim generation through education. Therefore, to promote democratic culture as well as modern and moderate attitude of the Muslims, they encouraged education institution in developing civic education, human right, intercommunity reconciliation, gender equality, and inter-faith dialogue, including the training for religious leaders, studies on gender issues and strengthening the pluralist and tolerant Islamic media.²¹ So the program of liberalization is to promote civil society in the Muslim world, but civil society in Western sense is a society that support the ideas of democracy, human right, gender equality and pluralism either in social or theological sense in term of Western values and ideology.

Its Impact on Islamic Thought

Since education is pivotal medium of transformation of any idea from generation to generation, which in turn will bring about change in society, the first and the most immediate influence of liberalization is on Islamic thought or on the way the Muslims think about and interpret Islam as well as socio-religious realities. As the matter of fact, in recent decade especially after 9/11, the mode of Muslims thought that inclined to liberalism became controversial discourses among academicians in the Muslim worlds. Among the contemporary Muslim intellectuals the name of Mohammad Arkoun (deconstructionist), Hasan Hanafi (*socialist*), Farid Esack (*pluralist*), Mohammad Syahrur (*deconstructionist*), Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (*Hermeneutician*), Aminah Wadud (*feminist*), Fatimah Mernissi (*feminist*), Abdullahi Ahmad al-Naim (secularist/liberal) and the likes are known as the adopter of liberal thought in the Muslim world. The following are ideas that are adopted by those Muslim liberal thinkers.

1) The Relativity of Truth

As an impact of current postmodern discourses and liberalism, where metaphysics was not used anymore, the old notion of Protogoras

²¹ Lihat <http://www.asiafoundation.org/Locations/indonesia.html>

that man is the measure of all things and Nietzsche doctrine of nihilism emerges in the new fashion. The new doctrine is relativity of truth implying that there is no value better than other which consequently indicates that no religion can claim to have absolute truth. Religion is understood as equal to human perception which is relative and more or less equal to philosophy. From the perspective of epistemology relativism holds that truth depends relatively on the subject who has his own historical, cultural, social, linguistic and psychological background.²²

This idea of relativism now become an important vehicle for supporting liberalism especially in marginalizing theology, in promoting equality and pluralism. The liberal thinker would usually says that “truth belongs to everybody”; that “human thought is relative and only God is absolute”, that “we do not know the absolute truth” and finally when it is brought into religious discourses it appear in a statement that “religion is absolute and religious thought is relative”. Clear statement of a person who is trapped by the logic of relativism can be discerned in the following:

Interpretation of religion (Islam) is not single. Therefore, an attempt to equalize and to unite (religious interpretation) into one umbrella (of interpretation) is contra-productive. Religion, in turn becomes very relative when it is implemented in the practice of daily social life.

In this domain, what is imperative to be held as our conviction is that we can not know absolute truth. We only know the truth insofar as we believe it to be legitimate. This implies that truth we that we are now understanding is nothing else than partial truth.²³

The above statement is sweeping statement, or blind generalization. It is not clear what he means by interpretation, whether it is on fundamental issues (*usul*) such as theology, or issues regarding branches that are opened for further *ijtihad* (innovation). In addition, if we do not know absolute truth as it is in God knowledge that is very

²² Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1996, s.v. *relativism*

²³ Khairul Muqtafa, dalam Sururan (ed), *Nilai-nilai Pluralisme dalam Islam*, Jakarta Fatayat NU & Ford Foundation, 2005), 58.

human and ordinary because human being can never have knowledge similar to that of God. If we are regarded as knowing only partial truth, it could be dangerous for our belief in religion, for this would imply that we do not know absolutely the truth of our religion or in other words the religion we believe is only true because of our perception and not because of the truth in itself. For Muslim doubting the truth of Islam as it is revealed by Allah through Prophet Muhammad is equal to denial of the prophecy and even denying that the Prophet knows the absolute truth. In fact, the Muslims believe that the truth in human mind is from God (*alhaqq min rabbika*), implying that the absolute truth has been revealed by Allah to human being and according to human capacity to know.

Another implication of this doctrine is dualistic understanding of religion. It was because of this doctrine that religion is divided into religion as it is revealed and religion as it is understood, or religion and religious thought. The former is absolute, whereas the latter is relative. Consequently, the interpretation of Muslims scholars (ulama) in the past and in the present either in legal or theological issues are relative and cannot be referred to as an authoritative in their respective fields, and hence the liberal are mostly against *fatwa*. Abdullahi Ahmad al-Naim, one of the liberal thinkers, during the launching of his book in Jakarta asserted that Ulama such as al-Qaradhawi, Sayyid Qutb, al-Buthy, and others are misguided (*zall*) and misleading (*muzill*).

2) Religious Pluralism

The aspect of relativism is now associated in the idea of pluralism. It is because pluralism, etymologically has at least two meanings, *first* is tolerance towards diversity or diversity of worldview that can not be reconciled and no one can be deemed more fundamental than others, *second* is a doctrine of post-structuralism that usually associated with relativism and general suspicion of the concept of truth.²⁴ The first meaning of pluralism, i.e. tolerance, is acceptable and no problem for all religion, but the second meaning is really problematic. It is because the second meaning contains the idea of relativism that usually admits

²⁴ Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, 290

the slogan that *no view is true, or that all view are equally true*.²⁵ In religious pluralism it could be modified into a slogan that *no religion is absolutely true or all religions are equally true*.

The spread of religious pluralism is one of the agenda of liberalization, not only to Islamic religious thought but also other religion. Religious pluralism is theological innovation and the final form of liberal thinkers in religions. These groups of liberal thinkers in many religions do not claim anymore that their religions are perfect and absolute. They believe that all religion are equally true and valid. There are at least two different schools as the theoretical basis for this religious pluralism, *first* transcendent unity of religions and *second* global theology. The first is the resistance position against globalization, while the second supports it.

When this idea was adopted by liberal Muslim thinkers, it appears not only in the first sense of pluralism, i.e. tolerance, but the second meaning namely relativism. Relativism brought about pluralism and equality, meaning that the Muslim liberal adherents emulate the Western liberal thought that attempts to equalize everything, especially religion. The following is the statement of one of the Muslim liberal adherent:

...all religions, therefore, are true, with different variations, depth levels and qualities in internalizing that religiosity. All religions are in one and the same big family: that is the family of the lover of path of truth that has no end.²⁶

The statement clearly tries to equalize something that is not equal, practically or conceptually. To state that all religions are true is sweeping statement that requires further verification, especially on the standard of truth to justify all religions. Logically, one who declares that all religions are true, he must have no religion or someone who is beyond religion.

Another impact pluralism is the dissolution of Islamic value and religious doctrine into postmodern discourses and globalization. They modified for example the concept of *ahlul kitab* (People of the Book)

²⁵ Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary*, see "Pluralism".

²⁶ Ulil Absar Abdallah, *Kompas* (18/11/2001)

to justify the doctrine of equality of religions. Using the approach of Western social science Mohammad Arkoun, for example proposes to review the orthodox position on Islam including to deconstruct the meaning of *ahlul kitab* without referring to historical and standard methodological method of interpretation. This is not only Westernized minded but conceptually against authority in Islam.

The objective that the liberal want to achieve is to abolish exclusive attitude of religious adherent, especially Muslims. They hope that the doctrine could force down Muslims fanaticism, truth claim, and ready to accept the truth of other religions. According to John Hick, the inventor of the doctrine of global theology, one of the doctrine of religious pluralism is that other religions are equally valid ways to the same truth.²⁷ In Indonesia, this idea is one of the most important program of liberalization of Islamic thought. It is not understood in the sense of tolerance, but in the second sense, i.e. relativism. In attempt to oppose exclusive attitude the pluralist introduces inclusivism or "inclusive theology". In fact, the doctrine of religious pluralism is not only incompatible with Islamic doctrine, but also all other religions, especially Christianity. Kenneth R Samples clearly asserts that:

The twentieth century has brought forth unparalleled challenges to the historic Christian faith. During this century, Christianity's relevance and ultimate validity have been questioned as never before. This assault on the central truth claims of Christianity has come from two distinct fronts: atheistic secular humanism and the growing climate of religious pluralism.²⁸

So religious pluralism that questions the truth of religions came from Western secular humanism and liberal or postmodern thought and therefore it is challenge for all religions.

3) Feminism and Gender Equality

Gender and equality is one of postmodern doctrine that could be the result of Nietzsche's doctrine of nihilism but it has undergone

²⁷ For further detail of the discussion of religious Pluralism see ISLAMIA, vol. 3, September-November, 2004.

²⁸ Kenneth R. Samples, "The Challenge of Religious Pluralism", in *The Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1990, 39.

further development from feminists movement as well as socialist concept of society. Gender according Wilson, is the basis to determine the distinction between men and women in collective cultural and social life, because of which they become men and women.²⁹ Gender movement does not question the different identity between men and women from biological or sexual anatomy, but to study social, cultural, psychological aspect and other non-biological aspects.³⁰ The basic principle of this idea is that the differences between man and women is of social construction and thus can be changed through the changing of social construct. Therefore, the liberal program in this field is promoting the absolute equality of men and women in the social life of the Muslims.

If the gist of the feminism and gender equality is to empower the role of women in society to be able to participate in the development of the country, it could be acceptable in Islam. However, the Muslim feminists emulate the Western concept in so uncritical way that almost every aspect of Western concept of gender equality is adopted and justified by exploiting the religious text. One of the supporter of radical feminism in Indonesia declares that

According to me, what is forbidden in the sacred text is more about sexual act, rather than sexual orientation. Why? Because becoming heterosexual, homosexual (gay and lesbian) and bisexual are natural, something "given" or in term of Islamic jurisprudence is called *sunnatullah*. ...while the sexual act is human construction...if homosexuality and lesbianism could really guarantee the achievement of the basic aim (of sexual activity) that sexual relationship could be acceptable.³¹

This statement is pure copy of the idea of radical feminism, which is well known with its challenge to have equal right of not only social but also sexual affairs. It means sexual satisfaction of women

²⁹ H.T.Wilson, *Sex and Gender, Making Cultural Sense of Civilization*, Leiden, New York, E.J.Brill, 1989, 2.

³⁰ Lindsey, *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 2.

³¹ Musdah Mulia, *Islam Agama Rahmat Bagi Alam Semesta*, as quoted by *Majalah Tabligh, Muhammadiyah*, Mei 2008.

should not only depend on men, but also on their fellow women. This lesbian tendency was also supported by others who support homo sexual. In an article published at one of Islamic higher education in Indonesia a student wrote a practical guidance to socialize homosexual:

...what should be developed are (1) to organize the homosexual people to unite and grapple their right (2) to inform the society that homosexuality is normal and according to *fitrah* (3) to criticize and reinterpret the story of Luth and the concept of marriage that is not in favor of homosexual practitioners. (4) to propose the modification of Marital Law No.I/1974 that limited the meaning of marriage only to men and women.there is no strong reason for anyone with any argument to forbid the marriage of homosexual men or lesbian women.³²

What is ridiculous here is that the “abnormal” sexual act is regarded as religiously legal, but on the other hand the polygamy that religiously justified is illegal. In the *Counter Draft of the Compilation of Islamic Law* (Kounter Draft Kompilasi Hukum Islam) the Muslim feminists proposed to the Ministry of Religious Affairs the following laws: a) polygamy is *haram* b) inter-religious marriage Muslim women with non Muslim men or the contrary is legal c) marriage could be held without *wali*, it can be done by the couple candidate d) the right to divorce is not the monopoly of men, but also women and the *iddah* for men is 130 days e) the portion of inheritance for boys and girl should be the same.³³

The basis of the above statements is nothing else than emulating Western liberal thought on gender equality and feminism. Comprehensive study of gender equality and feminism would reveal that this idea is incompatible with Islam. If equality is applied to Muslim social life, women would be encouraged to leave the home and participate in all aspect of social activities. This in turn would cause

³² Ahmad Khairul Umam et al, *Indahnya Kawin Sesama Jenis, Demokratisasi dan Perlindungan Hak-hak Kaum Homoseksual*, Compilation of article in Journal of Justisia, IAIN Walisongo Semarang.

³³ *Counter Legal Draft* Kompilasi Hukum Islam, compiled by headed by Prof. Dr. Musdah Mulia, Research and Development Ministry of Religious Affairs Republic of Indonesia, the proposal was then banned by Maftuh Basuni the Ministry of Religious Affairs Republic of Indonesia in 2007.

the women to neglect their responsibility of educating their children and of becoming the household. If it is applied to family life, the husband would be no longer the leader of the family, since both husband and wife have absolutely the same rights and responsibilities.

4) Deconstructing *Syariah*

One of the liberal way to emulate the humanistic doctrine of the West is by denying or deconstructing the Islamic law. Here religious texts is interpreted in different ways. This is exactly the implementation of Cheryl Bernard proposal that to liberalize Muslim is to a) destruct the fundamentalist and the traditionalist monopoly in defining, explaining and intepreting Islam, and b) to challenge the inaccuracy of their opinion on interpreting Islam. One of the strategy of changing the interpretation is by a) emphasizing *ijtihad* contextually b) emphasizing the commitement on rationality and reform c) developing the idea of social and religous pluralism.³⁴

There are many ways to make *ijtihad* contextual. *First* they place the Qur'an as historical response towards social condition at that time. The reason is that the Qur'an is not revealed in void, it was influenced by cultural condition at the time it was revealed. Nas Hamid Abu Zayd asserted that the Qur'an is the product of Arab culture. Apparently it is justifiable, but its logical consequence would soon appear that the Qur'an is not universal anymore, its acceptability is limited only to the Arab people, while the fact is the contrary. If it is revealed based on Arab culture, it can hardly be understood from present situation.

In fact, behind their claim that the Qur'an was influenced by Arab culture is their intention to bring the intepretation into the present context. In the case of legal inference (*istinbat al-ahkam*) for example, the liberal thinkers change the legal philosophy : *al-Ibrah bi 'umum al-lafz, la bi khusus al-sabab* (the command is based on general words and not on the specific reason) into the contrary and became *al-Ibrah bi bi khusus al-sabab la umum al-lafz* (the command is based on the specific reason and not on the general words). What is meant by *sabab* (reason) here is context. So obligation and prohibition in Islam,

³⁴ Greg Barton, *Gagasan Islam Liberal di Indonesia*, (translation) 1999: xxi

according to the liberal should be understood in connection with the time when it was revealed. The prohibition of drinking khamr, eating pork, gambling, adultery, according to them are not fixed law and could change along with the changing of culture, geographical and social situation, while the fact according to Muslim scholars on legal sciences those prohibitions are fixed law (*muhkamāt*). Therefore, the liberal also deny the scholars' decision which determined the differences between the fixed verses (*muḥkamāt*) and the ambiguous verse (*mutasyābihāt*)

In addition, the liberal thinkers also posits that legal decision should be based on human welfare (*maslahah*). It sounds justifiable, for it is also the opinion of majority of the Muslim scholars. However, when we examine their further argument, it reveal that they hold that *maslahah* is more important than *shariah*. It is because the objective of *shariah* is to achieve human welfare (*maslahah*). However, when the liberal thinkers argue that every *maslahah* must contain *shariah*, they clearly want to justify that what is good according human mind even from Western culture and worldview should be also good according to *shariah*. So the standard is not *shariah* anymore, but human mind or wider sense humanism.

Their argument to deny legal decisions that had been taken by Muslim scholars in the past is historical approach. They hold that the thought of Muslim scholars in the past were bound by space and time. This is equal to the argument of relativism. So, looking at the legal decisions in this way, the liberal will reject their legal decision or regard them as irrelevant for present era. The problem is not whether we have to take or not the legal decisions in the past, but it is more about the denial of authority of Muslim scholars. Most of scholars of the present era admit that not all legal decision in the past are acceptable in the present, but otherwise not all legal decision in the past should be rejected. All knowledge is based on the achievement or innovation in the past, but why the liberal spirit to negate Islamic knowledge in the past is so intense.

Apart from the way of those liberal thinkers in deconstructing the *shariah*, some other liberal adherent do not rely on religious law or even deny the existence of religious law. The following statement is the proof:

The problem of humanity, can not be solved merely by referring to divine law (once more I do not believe in divine law; we only believe in universal divine values), but it has to refer to laws or sunnah that have been set by Allah Himself in every field. Political field has its own law, economic field also has its own law, social field has its own law and the likes.³⁵

The statement is clearly influenced by Western rationalism and humanism that human being is the standard of every law and not divine law. The foregoing statement was supported by other liberal thinkers as follows:

Muslim can be feel very close to Allah without praying (*shalat*), because he can do it through meditation or other rituals that are usually carried out through spritual meditation. Hence, religious experiences are almost independence of formal religious norm. ... in turn, religius tenets and concepts such as sacred text, prophet, angel, and others are not so important anymore, because the most important one is the way how someone can enjoy spirituality and transcend himself through his unlimited belief.³⁶

The foregoing statement indicated not only the denial of Islamic law, but also the pillars of religion which are regarded as no more important and not needed. It exactly emulates the liberal thought in the early postmodern era in the West.

Its Impact on Muslim Education

The foregoing explication of liberalism and liberalization of Muslim thought implies that it could bring grave impact on Muslim education system. Therefore it is imperative that we shall delineate, in the following section, its impact on Muslim education policy as well as curriculum and its output.

1) On Education Policy

In fact, liberalism or neo-liberalism is spread to all over the world along with globalization. Globalization could imply global awareness of social, political and cultural perspective. This awareness can be summarized into three ways of thinking: *first*, society of the world are increasingly

³⁵ Ulil Absar Abdallah, *Kompas* (18/11/2001)

³⁶ Luthfi Asyaukani, *Kompas*, 39/2005)

interconnected. *Second*, global perspective enables us to see that many human problems are confronted in a restricted area more serious globally. *Third*, thinking in global way is an excellent way to learn more about ourselves.³⁷

The adoption of neo-liberalism with free-market economic policies leads consequently to deregulation of education and has impacted many systems even in Europe, North and South America, and Asia including New Zealand and Australia.³⁸ Many of these nations have restructured their system of public education in an attempt to acquire relative autonomy and to assume responsibility as individual institution. As a result of deregulation and liberalization, the trends of individual institution are more competitive and accountable by creating an overall market mechanism within education system.³⁹ The issuance of education loan by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank support this trend.

The impact on education is pervasive, but the most important one is on higher education. It is because higher education system has become one of the national imperative for international competitiveness. Knowledge –based economy brought by globalization forces continuing to proceed in an unprecedented way. The internets have made knowledge more accessible and transparent, while in many developing countries the need of higher education have increased the demanded of the state or private sector to establish new universities. In some cases, globalization and liberalism have brought about new trend that transform public universities from public entity into private commodities.

³⁷ Macionis, J.J. and K.Plummer, *Sociology a Global Introduction*, London: Prentice Hall, Europe, 1998

³⁸ Olssen, M., "The Restructuring of Tertiary Education in New Zealand: Governmentality, neo-Liberalism, Democracy", *McGill Journal of Education* (Montreal), 2002, 37 (1) ; see also Dale, R., "Constructing a Long Spoon for comparative education: Charting the Career fro the New Zealand Model" *Comparative Education*, 37 (4) 493-501

³⁹ Giroux, H.A., *Neo-Liberalism, Corporate Culture, and the Promise of Higher Education: The University as Democratic Public Sphere*, *Harvard Educational Review*, 72 (4)

It was because of liberalism and materialism that education in almost all over the world becomes major industry. Education is not only a place where the inculcation of knowledge and behavior changing process is carried out, but also organization and social institution, working in harmony with open system approach that having many social, psychological, political and economic function and objectives.⁴⁰ Education is also linked with pragmatic values in the society which are dominated by economic growth orientation.

One of the most popular effects of neo liberal globalization on education especially on higher education in the Muslim world is the privatization in education and educational policy. In most Islamic countries higher education system is state monopoly and subordinate to Ministry of Education in matter of governance, planning, organization, teaching and research. Privatization in the sense of neo-liberal policies implies private ownership of property, pursuit of personal profit, free competition, consumer sovereignty and job market orientation.

Privatization in education would automatically minimize state financial burden on the national budget. This will also abandon the responsibility of government from creating social welfare society or state. Moreover, privatizaion in education would cause inequality of chance in getting the best education for the people. Students from the socio-economically lower class cannot get the best education system freely. The quality of private school can be generally considered better than public schools. Consequently, the student of the upper class society can be said to be educated in better condition and quality. This in turn, would cause social and political problem in society.

Another important negative effect of privatization or globalization in education is that privatization has hindered social mobility function of education, meaning that a person from a lower class can hardly develop into upper class. It is because the expenditure for attending private universities is more costly than state universities. It began to become difficult for the student from the lower class to have the opportunity to attend private

⁴⁰ Owens, R.G. "Organizational Behavior in Education, Boston: Pearson Education 2004; see also Popenoe, D. *Sociology*, New Jersey: Prientice Hall, 1991, 428

universities. Thus, the liberal policy in education has affected negatively the educational right of lower class family. However, the situation in the case of Indonesia higher education is little bit different. The number of private universities is higher than state universities,⁴¹ but so far no significant different in term of expenditure. In this case the private education give support to the mobilization of people of lower class, whereas at the same time the people of middle and upper class family generally have the chance of keeping going their education in higher education.

In addition in order to meet the new global challenge, universities are mandated to respond by restructuring their management, funding scheme, the objective of education, the content of curriculum and methodology of knowledge inculcation. As regard to curriculum there are tendencies of higher education to orient their curriculum to international requirement. In fact, the trends of universities and higher education in the Muslim world have been shaped in accordance with new world regulation by governing them as a commercial perceptiveness.⁴² It is in turn could lead the Muslim education to global job market orientation or towards "knowledge based economy". However, such kind of educational objective and orientation would jeopardize national as well as Islamic goal of education. The objective of Islamic education which is to produce a perfect human being who believe in God and master useful knowledge for the welfare of the nation could be marginalized by new objectives of economic pursuit.

Not only has the liberal policy in education marginalized the objectives of national and Islamic education, but also open free market in which Western universities are given opportunities to offer various services of education to the Muslim worlds. World Trade Organization (WTO) had identified four modes of educational service offered by foreign universities to the Muslim worlds: they are 1) *Cross-broder-supply*, this is a mode where foreign universities offer lectures via internet and on-line degree program, 2) *Consumption abroad*, is a form of most

⁴¹ According to data from Directorate of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, the total number of state university in Indonesia are 123 universities, whereas the number of private universities is more than 200 universities.

⁴² Hooker, M., " The Transformation of Higher Education" in D.Oblinger & S.C.Rush (eds) *The Learning Revolution*, Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, 1997

dominant service in higher education, where the students are offered to attend university education abroad. 3) commercial presence, or the presence of foreign universities by making partnership, subsidiary, twinning arrangement with local universities 4) *presence of natural persons*, this is a form educational services where foreign lecturers become a teaching staff in national universities. These four modes of liberalization in higher education are designed to enhance the free trade service. These four modes of education service are supported by WTO by forcing its member to accept those four modes foreign service of education.⁴³

2) On Curriculum and output

Now, we discuss the impact of those religious thought on curriculum and output of Muslim education institution. The liberal curriculum that is now applied in education institution is Gender-based curriculum and multiculturalism, inherent in which the deconstruction of shari'ah.

Regarding the application of the doctrine of gender equality in the curriculum of education one can vividly discern its problem in five points. The *first* problem is that if we adopt theory of gender equality there could be no different of vocational education between girls and boys, while the society still maintains this distinction. *Second*, there are theories of gender equality, which of those theories should be taught and applied in the curriculum. *Third*, in the case when the gender equality contradicts Islamic teaching, which one should be given favor. *Fourth*, from theological perspectives, gender equality could extend to question why Islam tends to be dominated by men: on the inheritance; on the number of witness, on biological difference of men and women and so on. *Fifth*, since most of feminist schools of thought

⁴³ Until now there were six countries requested Indonesia to give them opportunity to open education service. Those countries are Australia, United State of America, Japan, China, Korea and New Zealand. The service-sectors that they intend to open in Indonesia are higher education, live-long education, vocational as well as professional educations. China even offered Chinese Medical Education. Obviously, it is not of humanitarian motives that drove the six countries to build education system in Indonesia. It is in fact, profit oriented project. See Sofian Effendi, Prof. Dr. "Indonesia Menghadapi Liberalisasi Pendidikan Tinggi", *Harian Sindo*, edisi 10 Maret 2007.

have no clear concept of family institution, there could be difficulties in teaching the student some social values. Those problems are thought of by teachers as well as students.

The next liberal thought that began to be applied in education is pluralism that is commonly named "multiculturalism". This idea has two faces, first is tolerance and second is relativism of truth. Relativism apparently is associated with sophists who deny the reality and truth. If this method of thinking is spread over the Muslim education it would produce the graduates who are not confident their life or graduate who cannot trust anybody. In addition, to separate religion from religious thought would not only denigrate the thought of religious scholars but also the religion itself, for it become something that cannot be understood by human mind or even confusing. Moreover, if the Muslims, in general, and the teachers in particular, do not know the truth of Islam, or believe that the truth of Islam is not absolute, then all Islamic subjects taught to the students are subject to further question and could not convince the student. Islamic education would be only a place to impart knowledge and not morality, which is contradictory to the concept of *'ilm* in Islam.

The impact on Muslim education could be in two ways: *first*, to admit other religion as having the same truth as Islam would weaken the Muslims belief and conviction on their religion. *Second*, to admit the equality of the truth of religions would lead to the rejection of the very teaching of the Qur'an or at least it would confuse the students since it accepts one verse and reject the others. *Third*, if all religions are true all religion should consequently be taught in the schools in different ways and different truth. The problem will soon become apparent when the students have to practice the moral teaching of all religions. In this predicament students will be reluctant to obey the injunction of one religion and choose other religion which he consider easier. The real impact of this idea on university students nowadays is their belief that "truth is relative and therefore nobody has the right of truth claim.

Finally, the strategy of liberalization is to modify, to change or to deconstruct Shariah or Islamic law. There are aspects in Islamic law that could be modified or changed according to social situation usually

called changeable (*mutaghayyirat*), but there are also aspects that cannot be change whatsoever and commonly known as permanent (*thawabit*). However, for the interest of liberalization those division is deconstructed and resulted in uncertainty of law. If these deconstructive methods of understanding Islamic law is applied to the curriculum of Islamic education institution teaching Islam as the way of life become problematic. *First* there are problems in constructing curriculum of shari'ah, which legal school should be taught to the student. *Second*, student could hardly practice Islamic law due to legal uncertainty.

Conclusion

The explication of liberalism above is only in cursory manner, it actually has large subject that requires detailed examination of each concept. It become complicated when liberalism is adopted by Muslim intellectual uncritically and resulted in the intrusion of Western worldview. Conceptually, this adoption touched the foundation of Islamic theology, Islamic law and in turn would lead to fundamental change of Muslim education. The most important impact is on inculcating the teaching of Islam which was influenced by relativist point of view, deconstructive method of deriving legal decision and on the absolute equality of men and women that is incompatible with Islamic law (shariah). In facing all these impact of liberal policy in education, the Muslim world should neither categorically reject nor blindly accept the policies along with their educational consequences.

There are proposed measures to face liberalism in education. *First*, the Muslims on the one hand should take benefit of those foreign education systems for the improvement of Muslim education system by assimilating such aspects as their managements, their teacher training and research methodology and the likes. *Second*, Muslim society should be involved in carrying out the services of higher educational which are in fact the responsibility of government, local government and society. *Third*, Islamic state and private universities should participate in taking national educational policy. *Fourth*, the national universities in general should improve their qualities in order to excel the foreign education system. However, to face the impact of liberalism on Islamic thought, Muslims should refer back to scholar

authority in various fields of Islamic studies, and come with alternative curriculum better than that which was offered by liberal activists. []

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