Article

Dialectic and Philosophy of Indonesian Islamic Liberalism (Study of the Thoughts of East Java Nahdlatul Ulama Figures)

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Abstract: Liberal Islam is a form of socio-religious deviation for its adherents. In the name of human rights in Islam excessively, the potential for liberal Islamic thinking is born. Meanwhile, human rights need to be upheld in order to create Islam that is open in thinking and solutions in solving problems for the sake of creating a harmonious life. This study aims to describe the results of research on the thoughts of the East Java Nahdlatul Ulama Figures on the dialectic of the emergence of liberal Islam in Indonesia based on the philosophical aspects and forms of thought in order to straighten the views of Indonesian Muslim figures who are considered liberal thinking based on their opinions of other religions. This research is based on a structural functional theoretical framework where each informant adjusts to his capacity in maintaining the balance of conflict. The approach in this study uses qualitative-analysis with a type of centralized interview research. The results show that the dialectic of liberal Islam is the power of human rights and ignores the creed oriented towards the advancement of legal products. While the liberal Islamic philosophy is a desire, differences in thinking methodology, excessive use of rationality.

Keywords: dialectics; philosophy; liberalism; Indonesian Islam

1. Introduction

There are two interesting phenomena regarding religious expression during the pandemic period to be exact in 2021. First, in January the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia Gus Yaqut Cholil Qoumas quoted several verses in the Gospel of Matthew 22. Verses 37-40 were quoted and presented at the activities of the Fellowship of Churches in Indonesia, that religion cannot be based on blind faith, but religion should have a goal of loving God and fellow human beings [1]. The statement conveyed by Gus Yaqut contains two statements, namely the view that considers the Minister of Religion (Minister of Religion) as a moderate and there is also an opportunity that views Gus Yaqut as a liberal figure because he cites scriptures other than the holy book of Islam as his religion.

Second, a unique phenomenon on February, Saturday, the 13th to be exact through the Youtube Hadits TV channel, an ustadz named Yayha Waloni through his lecture confessed to the collision of a dog so that it bounced and his legs limped on the border of Riau and Jambi, precisely in Kemuning District. He did so on the basis of the impurity of a dog [2]. The statement received responses from various parties, one of which was the @nathasatwanusantara account via Instagram that strongly criticized the lectures delivered through social media. The criticisms were made regarding the alleged motive to increase the popularity of the preacher. In addition, Nathasatwa Nusantara asked Yahya Waloni to learn from the story of ashabul kahfi about a dog going to heaven (Qitmir) and a prostitute for giving a dog to drink [3].

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Islam as a religion of rahmatan lil alamin teaches the values of love and compassion to all creatures created by Allah SWT, one of which is humans [4]. Love and care for humans regardless of religious, ethnic, and cultural background. Someone who practices these two values (love and compassion) will always live in an atmosphere of peace and serenity. As mentioned by KH. Hasyim Muzadi, a Muslim should show a spirit of peace with himself and fellow human beings. This condition of peace of mind is in line with the meaning of Islam, namely surrendering all soul, body, and mind to Allah SWT [5].

The presence of a democratic system in the midst of a pluralistic nation provides an opportunity for all citizens to express, share potential, explore ideas and uphold human rights protected by law [6]. However, it should be underlined that the state prohibits the presence of radical thought or what is known as fundamentalist. This thought is very dangerous because it has the potential to give birth to a conservative generation that has the potential to give birth to an attitude of terror [7]. Likewise, the opposite of radical thinking is liberal. The state strictly forbids these ideas or thoughts, especially Islam through the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) through the National Conference on July 29, 2005 regarding the prohibition of liberalism in Indonesia due to excessive use of will in understanding Islam [8].

There are a number of developed countries in the world who adhere to liberalism as a state ideology. There are 6 countries in the world that adhere to this understanding, including: America, Australia, Germany, England, France, and Japan [9]. These six countries are developed countries that cannot be separated from the principle of freedom to do various things, including innovation and creativity, even if it is against religion. Meanwhile, in the economic aspect, liberalism is also used to achieve various targets for the progress of the country. There are 10 countries using a free economic system in the world based on the results of the United States Heritage Foundation research institute. The three countries include: Hong Kong, Singapore, and Australia. The assessment is based on several indicators including legal regulations, regulatory efficiency, as well as bureaucracy and open markets [10].

Liberalism in religion as an understanding is dangerous because it leads its followers to a free way of thinking about a text [11], especially in Islamic teachings that produces liberalistic interpretations as pointed out by Ma'ruf Amin [12]. Liberalism uses the hermeneutic method in interpreting texts without *takwil* [13]. This is what is able to undermine the model of religious moderation in Indonesia in line with the Pancasila philosophy as the nation's ideology. Indonesia actually has not adhered to radical or liberal understanding since independence. The plurality of the nation by adhering to the Pancasila democracy is enshrined within the boundaries of unity and integrity without deviating from the religion followed [11].

Indonesian Survey Circle (LSI) led by Deny JA in 2017 conducted a survey in 34 provinces through face-to-face with multi-stage random sampling with 1200 respondents and a margin of error of 2.9%. The results of the survey showed that 74% of respondents are consistent with the Pancasila ideology, while 8.7% want an Islamic state, 2.3% want liberal democracy, and the remaining 15.09% did not answer [14]. Meanwhile, based on the survey results from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2013, 75% are consistent with the ideology of Pancasila, and the remaining 20-25% of respondents want another ideology with a total of 30,000 respondents spread throughout Indonesia [15]. It is one thing that is recommended in order to reveal the philosophy and indicators of liberal thinking in the perspective of the East Java NU figures.

2. Discussion

2.1. Dialectic and Narrative of Indonesian Islamic Liberalism

The study of liberalism has always been a hot topic for discussion in the world, especially in terms of religion. The emergence of liberalism is a response to modernization and a process of civilization development towards perfection [16]. Liberalism is in the form of

ideology and is not a standard word that refers to the form of an object that can be accepted by everyone [17]. While ideology greatly influences human movements and attitudes in living life. Ideology is inseparable from the dialectical process of the human mind in the context of modernization, so that sometimes it is beneficial and can also be detrimental.

The design of Islamic teachings has similarities with the ideological philosophy of Pancasila. The principles in it regulate human relations with God for all citizens of the country to embrace religion according to their respective beliefs (hablumminallah), human relations with humans (hablumminannas), and human relations with nature (hablumminal'alam) [18]. Pancasila is the basic principle of the state which is the result of a compromise between Muslim and nationalist groups for the establishment of a religious state [19]. It is normal that the state ideology contains the value of moderation (middle thinking) as indicated in the motto of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (different but still one). This is the difference between the ideology of the Indonesian state and the ideologies of other countries. Indonesia does not use right (radical) or left (liberal) ideology.

Radicalism is clearly oriented towards changing the state system in the form of Islam as a philosophy in various aspects, both political, social, and economic [20]. This has the potential to trigger the growth of horizontal conflicts, including bloodshed among religious adherents. In contrast to liberalism, even though it is not as dangerous as radicalism, it still needs to be watched out for. Although in essence it does not try to change the basic foundation of the state, liberalism needs to be watched out for because it destroys the basic value order of the state. So it is not surprising that the MUI banned the ideology of liberalism through the MUI fatwa in 2005. The fatwa was issued as a form of MUI *muraqabah* against ideologies that began to emerge in Indonesia.

It is necessary to be wary of the emergence or development of liberalism, although it cannot be said to be a dangerous thing like the PKI issue for people who think it is dangerous. Awareness of liberalism is carried out on the basis of concerns over the thought of growing wild because of the aspect of rationality that is developed [21]. So the presence of liberalism in Islam in Indonesia needs to be vigilant so that it does not have a negative influence on the best students and sons of the Indonesian nation so that it does not give rise to a fatwa on sharia law that is beyond human reasoning as something that is actually prohibited to be halal.

A wary attitude towards Islamic liberalism in Indonesia actually needs to be watched out for so that someone pays attention to *muru'ah*, namely returning to good personality or character because as a Muslim who has an attitude of *tawazun*, of course, he also pays attention if something that harms other people is not vigilant it will develop. A different reason is that the presence of liberalism certainly disturbs the harmony of people's lives in the nation and state. Why is that, few Indonesians have never been felt when they were present in the midst of society with statements they did not know before. This is certainly a concern of the community, especially those who are under the auspices of *jam'iyah an-nahdliyyah*. Therefore, before conducting a more in-depth discussion, it is necessary to study the definition of liberalism.

Etymologically, the word liberal has its origin in Latin, namely free, which means free. In addition, liberal can also be called not restricted, non-restricted or free in opinion (independent in opinion) [22]. Meanwhile, in terms of liberalism in the encyclopaedia dictionary, it is interpreted as an idea born on a socio-political basis that focuses on freedom, equality and human rights in an effort to realize progress [23]. These three words are the key for every citizen who adheres to liberalism. Identically, liberalism implies freedom without being colonized.

The provisional conclusion on the definition of liberalism is that it is oriented towards the creation of social progress through the expansion of the area of individual freedom in the functioning of the mind. Based on the philosophical point of view, in fact every human being is a liberal creature through the freedom to think and act according to his will without being regulated or directed, let alone demanded by others, including God who created

him. Every human being has the authority to determine his attitude and actions in dealing with various problems. Thus liberalism can be understood as an understanding that educates people to think optimistically and confidently [24].

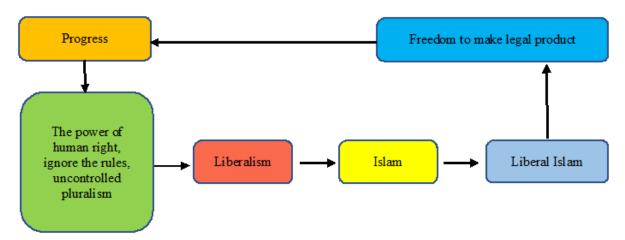


Figure 1. Logical frame work of dialectics and narrative of Indonesian Islamic Liberalism.

Meanwhile, based on the views of East Javanese ulama' and academics, it can be concluded that terminological liberalism is an understanding that uses rationality freely on the basis of the power of human rights and equality for the realization of progress. Liberalism certainly has principles related to the nature of liberalism. As stated by Leonard Binder that the principle of liberalism as an ideology that has developed in Europe includes 1) individual freedom, 2) social contract, 3) society as a free market, 4) believes in the realization of socio-cultural and political plurality of society [25]. Different opinions also describe the principle of liberalism which only consists of two things, namely freedom and responsibility. Without these two things, the liberal social order will not be realized [26]. The following is a logical framework for dialectics and narratives of Indonesian Islamic Liberalism:

2.2. Philosophy of Indonesian Islamic Liberalism

Islam has nothing to do with liberalism, given the different meanings it has. This can be seen based on the basis used by Islam that a religion is sharia, while liberalism uses the basis of human rights. The meaning of Islam is obedience or submission, while the origin of the word liberal is liberty which means free [27]. The two words have opposite meanings which cannot be put together, including becoming a unified whole with meanings according to the needs of the Indonesian people.

In relation to the NU ulama, the difference in the *amaliah* aspect is that the NU clerics encourage their followers to adhere to *madzhab*, while liberals do not. In addition, Islam actually uses moderate (middle) thinking methods, while liberals teach free thinking methods. The free-thinking method is irrelevant to the ideology of the Indonesian state because it will hit the concept of unity and integrity as regulated in Islam related to *ukhuwah islamiyah*, *ukhuwah basyariyah* and *ukhuwah wathaniyah* [27].

Basically, Indonesia is a multicultural country, moderate Islam has strong relevance to the conceptual framework of the state, both ideology and constitution. As regulated in the 1945 Constitution paragraph 29 article 2, it is explained that essentially the state guarantees the freedom to embrace religion according to each belief [29]. But what needs to be underlined is that the freedom in question must be balanced with the harmony of fellow nations. This means that every religious adherent does not harm each other by always adhering to the principle of harmony in order to maintain state assets within the frame of harmonization and peace without hindering or forcing religion [28].

Nahdlatul Ulama' (NU) has a big role in maintaining harmony based on the value of Indonesian unity in the third principle of Pancasila. The concept of brotherhood (*ukhuwah*) in NU through *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah* consists of *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, *ukhuwah Basyariyah*, and *ukhuwah Wathaniyah* [29]. The three concepts of brotherhood teach the brotherhood of fellow human beings, countrymen, and religions [30]. Aswaja as the basis for NU's thinking is not just doing a study, especially what is done textually not contextually by directing its followers to fight like war stories. Aswaja NU is not like that, there are aspects of deliberation, and *amaliyah* such as the practice of religious pluralism and commitment to maintaining state sovereignty [31], and of course avoiding the practice of religious liberalization.

KH. As'ad Said Ali as one of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board also gave his opinion regarding the definition of liberalism, namely the practice of exalting individual power. Liberal way of thinking by exploding ideas through optimizing rationality in order to give birth to new and original thoughts with the aim of developing science and technology [32]. The practice of liberalism in Western countries often displays unlimited freedom. KH. As'ad Said Ali views the existence of various legal products in NU with non-individual characteristics. Some examples of the *fardlu kifayah* law for people of adult Muslim to do things where the law is obligatory to become invalid if one of them does it [33].

The dialectic of Islamic thought was also emphasized by the Chair of the East Java PWNU, KH. Marzuki Mustamar, that Islam that pays attention to cultural aspects in Indonesia is moderate Islam or Nusantara Islam as voiced by NU [34]. Unlike the case with liberal Islam, it is Islam that upholds human rights by ignoring the rules of the Islamic religion. In addition, liberal Islam is a style of thinking that is not in the middle line which is certainly contrary to the basic principles of *Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah* [34].

Meanwhile, the view of Tebuireng's educator, the former chairman of RMI East Java, emphasized that liberal Islam is an understanding of Islamic teachings oriented to the use of excessive rationality on the basis of human rights. If it is associated with examples of LGBT, homosexual, and transgender people, it is certainly non-humanist which is inversely proportional to the definition of Human Rights which tends to lead to the meaning of the word humanistic [21]. In the discussion of Human Rights, there are two basic principles that guide human rights, namely equality and anti-discrimination [35]. This has been stipulated in articles 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The 1945 state law after the amendment cannot be used as a protector of human rights if it is contrary to Pancasila and the moral values of society.

The philosophy of the emergence of liberal Islamic discourse is the need for human desires in the context of human rights. Various reasons were put forward, including new issues and problems that contradicted ideology and the constitution on the pretext of humanity. Whereas such behavior is clearly against the basics of humanity, where humans should be respected, protected, and get the opportunity to maximize their potential, but because they use a liberal way of thinking, their self-esteem disappears. For example, in the pros and cons of LGBT and homosexuals in 2017, certain groups hope that there will be legal protection under the pretext of humanity [36].

The view of the Chairman of the Aswaja Center on LGBT and homosexual discourses is a form of liberalization of the thoughts of a group of people under the pretext of humanity in order to get protection instead of justifying LGBT [27]. And the *ulama'* Aswaja clearly did not allow it, let alone justify entering the liberal realm. Medical science has explained that there is a sexual disorder for someone who has same-sex relationships and this condition has entered the realm of psychological illness. As emphasized by Neuro psychologist from Al Azhar in a forum organized by the ministry of women's empowerment and child protection, that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) are mental illnesses, not biological or congenital [37], but there are other factors such as aspects of social and economic.

Second, differences in thinking methodology. Liberal Islam uses hermeneutic interpretation by interpreting meaning based on linguistic aspects. Second, they also interpret

the text by using *bil ra'yu* interpretation, which means maximizing the mind in translating the text. *Third*, liberalism also uses interpretation of *bil ma'tsur*, meaning interpreting texts with a textual approach based on the verses of the Qur'an and Hadith, so that the linguistic aspect is more dominant. Liberal Islamic thinkers use this methodology to pave the way for progress and move progressively, and only with a liberal understanding of Islam are Muslims able to rise from setbacks as explained by Dawam Raharjo [38].

Third, the philosophy of the emergence of liberal Islam is the excessive use of rationality. Thinking rationally does not mean arbitrarily using the mind to free fall and ultimately lead to the abyss of error. The human mind is used to think not loose and not tight or rather in the middle to be rational [36]. Thinking rationally means thinking in a healthy manner based on logic and reason that can be accepted by every human being. If it is contrary to the concept of logical thinking (logic and systematic) and rational, then make it liberal.

Some examples of liberal thinking that are oriented to misguidance are considered to be insulting to Muslims, one of the characters is Lia Eden. There are 10 ideas that are considered controversial, including: 1) the presence of Jibril in him, 2) reincarnation for humans who have died and will be reborn as a baby, 3) the resurrection of Prophet Isa as, Prophet Muhammad and Imam Mahdi, 4) the apocalypse and disaster nature, 5) heaven on earth and hell, 6) the work of God Eden and the *Salamullah* people, 7) the permissibility of interfaith marriage and blasphemy against Muslims, 8) praying in two languages, 9) refutation and threats against the MUI, 10) and it is permissible to eat pork [39].

This is certainly different from some NU personnel who are considered to carry liberal thoughts, even though in reality these personals have returned to the actual path. The real path is on the moderate (middle) line [27]. Even though he was on the left, he did not reach the stage of reconstructing the sources of Islamic law. Except for those who have reconstructed the law, such as justifying LGBT or homosexuals, this is true liberalism.

The author is of the view that Ulil Abshar Abdallah does not use excessive rationality in religion. Most people think that Gus Ulil is a liberal or plural Islamic figure from traditional circles. Their argument for such an opinion is based on several writings or opinions of Gus Ulil which are interpreted textually, not contextually in a broad sense. In fact, if we want to understand his opinion broadly and deeply, the thinking style used is oriented towards inclusive Islamic thought patterns. The definition of inclusive Islam is defined by the meaning of open Islam (open religion), meaning the recognition of the truth value in other teachings for the benefit of the people [40].

Acknowledging the truth value of other teachings is not justifying their teachings as justifying their own *aqidah*. If that happens, then they are classified as liberals. Therefore, it is very different from liberal Islam. The concept of inclusive Islam tries to understand the followers of Islam to make Islam a religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. Islam that embraces as a religion that helps all mankind. The ICIS Forum was initiated by KH. Hasyim Muzadi as an Islamic campaigner for *rahmatan lil 'alamin* with the aim of becoming a liaison media between Islam and the West. The aim is none other than to reduce tensions in global conflicts, including removing accusations of Islam as a religion that breeds terrorism [41].

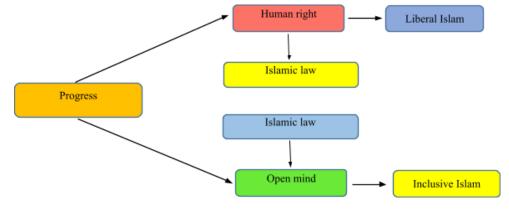


Figure 2. Logical framework difference between liberal Islam and inclusive Islam.

Islam as a religion has a universal meaning, where the meaning is addressed to adherents and non-adherents [42]. The universality of Islam as a religion proves that Islam is a religion that respects pluralism with the value of *tasamuh* (tolerance) in the Qur'an *Surah al-Kafirun*: 8, providing education for Muslims to respect each other's differences in beliefs. Allah created creatures on this earth with various groups in order to know each other as in the *Surah al Hujarat*: 13. Meanwhile in the *Surah al-Maidah*: 48 it is explained that if Allah wants to create only one people, it is very easy to happen, but not because of Allah wants to test his creatures by being competitive in goodness. This is where the universality of Islam is a religion of peace for all groups.

The universality of Islam as a religion is certainly very relevant to the current conditions, where Indonesia is faced with radicalism. A great power that wants to replace the state ideology of Pancasila with the ideology of an Islamic state. This is what makes the hearts of the "kaum sarungan" to touch on thoughts that are relevant to contemporary problems faced by Muslims in general. Inclusive Islam can also be categorized as a form of moderate Islamic thought. The reason is based on an open ideology, but that does not mean allowing other religions to mix with Islamic law. Therefore liberal Islam and inclusive Islam are very different. The difference lies in the basic foundation used between freedom on the basis of human rights and openness on the basis of Islamic law.

3. Conclusion

Liberalism as an ideology that can influence people's thinking to make a movement is contradictory to the identity and constitution of Indonesia. Liberalism is the basis of Western countries in advancing ideas and concepts of various concepts to become a developed country, ignoring the concept of religion in managing the country on the basis of human rights. The impact on social justice in society is that the lower class has the potential to be discriminated against by the elite with unlimited freedom and authority. Likewise in Islam that liberalism in Islam is contrary to the concept of *ahlussunnah wal jamaah*. Excessive use of rationality on the basis of human rights makes a person arbitrarily in religion according to his wishes and desires, not on the basis of religious rules made by the creator of Allah SWT. Unlike the case with the concept of inclusive Islam which is more accepted in Indonesia by placing sharia above reason with limits on its use without being excessive. So that there is a proportionality in the use of reason against the Sharia to produce inclusive (open) Islamic thought and do not interpret everything textually but contextually.

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