

MULTICULTURALISM IN LIBERAL AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES: A PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: It is used to discuss multiculturalism comes from liberal philosophy since the latest improvement of the multiculturalism ideas occur in liberalism society like American and European. To understand the meaning of multiculturalism, however, culture is viewed as a dynamic process of human adaptation toward their historical journey as the way to defend their life through a sympathetic involvement in understanding and responding the world. The connection of multiculturalism to liberalism ideas shows that multiculturalism is a further improvement of political philosophy of liberalism, or it may be also inferred that multiculturalism is an antithesis toward liberal political theory itself. However, the ideas of multiculturalism also develop in Islamic tradition. The basic multiculturalism concept in Islam can be traced in daily life of plural society during the Medina government under the Prophet Muhammad SAW (peace be upon him)'s authority and furthermore continued by the next generation. The distinctions of multiculturalism concepts between liberal and Islamic perspectives can be an interesting topic to discuss as an effort to enrich multiculturalism understanding that now becomes a real challenging idea in this globalization era.

KEY WORDS: multiculturalism, tolerance, equality, cultural diversity, and liberalism and Islamic perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

In online *Encyclopedia of Wikipedia* (as available at: www.en.wikipedia.org/2005,20/5/2009), multiculturalism is considered as a public policy which is used to manage plurality in multiethnic society, and it emphasizes to the importance of mutual respect and tolerance toward the differences between members in community. This meaning of multiculturalism refers to the policy made by a country. It can be

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said as official multiculturalism. In addition, multiculturalism also has normative meaning. It refers to a principle or norm in society.

There is an expert defines multiculturalism as a way of thinking that demands the willingness to receive another group and its values without questioning about cultural diversity, social stratification, gender and also religion (Al-Muchtar, 2004:6). This concept is in harmony with the idea viewing multiculturalism as an ideology that recognizes human and cultural diversity and equality (Suparlan, 2002). In addition, multiculturalism is viewed as a principle that requires us to receive diversity, equality, open to change and being able to recognize our self in relation to the “alienation” of someone else. This principle must be referenced for taking any action in society (Watson, 2000:110). Furthermore, C.W. Watson states that to understand the meaning of multiculturalism, culture is viewed as a dynamic process of human adaptation toward their historical journey as the way to defense their life through a sympathetic involvement in understanding and responding the world (Watson, 2000).

Also, based on this view, the United Nations on Development Programme (UNDP) reveals that basic principle in multiculturalism is “cultural liberty” (cited by Favell & Moodod, 2003). For some reason this view is based on: (1) cultural liberty is the urgent aspect in human independency which constitutes a central capability for a man/women to live and to choose any opportunity he/she faces; (2) a long this time, the discussion about culture has lack of attention to cultural liberty, rather it focuses on cultural conservatism; and (3) cultural liberty is not only beneficial in cultural context but also connected to the failure and success of the political, social and economics development in any society. Therefore, avoiding cultural liberty is taking to the destruction and deterioration of human life.

Recently, a lot of attentions and reviews about multiculturalism emerge in many discourses since the plurality is an unavoidable reality in our life. Consequently, plurality must be accepted and protected in order to keep it exists as a way of life. Unfortunately, many discussions of multiculturalism focus on political aspects. Alternatively, this writing tries to review multiculturalism in philosophical domain.

THE PURPOSE OF WRITING

The purpose of this writing is to discuss philosophical basics of multiculturalism in two perspectives: Liberalism and Islam. The writer realizes that this short article will not be able to represent a deeper and wider philosophical review. However, it is aimed at starting an alternative discourse about multiculturalism. In addition, it also tries to give a different description about multiculturalism which developed in non-Western culture. This writing is a part of a dissertation about “A Framework of Multicultural Education in Indonesia Based on an Analysis of Local Conflict” (2006).¹ Discussion

¹So this essay, one again, is based on my research of Ph.D. Dissertation, “Kerangka Konseptual Pendidikan Multikultural Berdasarkan Analisis Konflik di Indonesia”, Bandung: Program Studi Pendidikan IPS, Pascasarjana UPI (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia), 2006.

and literature review in this essay will encompass on multiculturalism in liberalism perspective and multiculturalism in Islamic perspective.

A. MULTICULTURALISM IN LIBERALISM PERSPECTIVE

Choosing the two perspectives is not aim at dichotomizing the world to the West and the East. It is only to say that multiculturalism is also developed in other culture beside Western countries.

In liberalism point of view, there are two main ideas about multiculturalism conservative and critical view. Actually, besides these points of view, there is a group of liberalism who rejects the concept of multiculturalism, and sees it as threat for their liberal tradition. However, this contrastive view will not be part of this discussion.

One of the critical perspective shows in Charles Taylor's idea. In this concept, multiculturalism is developed based on idea of "politic recognition" (in Watson, 2000:2). This idea claims that multiculturalism does not only create the meaning of diversity but also recognizes it as a consequence of collective commitment toward the importance and acknowledgement of all cultures and its equality in any society. In critical view, multiculturalism means a fight in political context through open discussion and being independent to know and respect each other which has different identity.

Meanwhile, Mursyid Ali explains that politics of recognition is a psychological dimension of a plural society without considering ethnic, race, nationalities and religions varieties. Everybody needs to be seen as a human and a member of his community, and recognized as a citizen who has political rights and has the same positions with others (Ali, 2003). Therefore, in critical point of view, the existence of cultural community is measured from diversity that emerges in political arena.

Different from critical view is conservative view which reflects in Will Kymlicka's idea. According this view, multiculturalism comes from an opinion that culture is a fundamental basic for multicultural community (Kymlicka, 2002:13-49). Then, an ideal political system is providing the equal opportunity for each group to express their identity and aspiration. Related to this idea, it needs a specific policy to accommodate national and ethnic diversity. It is at least showing in three ways: (1) Right over government itself; (2) Polyethnic right that constitutes positive efforts to decrease discrimination and prejudice; and (3) Specific representative rights in parliament.

Conservative view sees culture as a "ready-made" product to create multicultural community. Differ from critical one that multiculturalism is a dynamic process toward multicultural society. Both of this views, critical and conservative, has been reviewed by many scholars. But in this writing will be focused on philosophical background behind these ideas.

The connection of multiculturalism to liberalism ideas shows that multiculturalism is a further improvement of political philosophy of liberalism, or it may be also inferred that multiculturalism is an antithesis toward liberal political

theory itself. This philosophical idea can be traced from John Locke's and John Rawls' ideas. Both of them are experts in liberal philosophy.

John Locke (1632-1704) was a well-known as liberalism philosopher who implicitly admit multiculturalism showing in his writing, "An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of the Civil Government", published in 1663 (edited by John Somarville & Ronald Santonie, p.169-204). Specifically, John Locke did not mention his ideas by multiculturalism or something like that, but implicitly reflected in his concept about supreme right and individual freedom owned by everybody. In government practice, it can be seen in the protection of state toward the rights, while in social practice it is manifested in relationship among individual – especially in the use of property – which is underlined by legal policy. This concept contains tolerance, mutual respects and equality that all are under fair legal regulation. Therefore neither prejudice appears among citizen nor conflict between them.

In addition, John Rawls informed his multiculturalism idea in the "justice" principle as a solving problem in liberal community that has various backgrounds and beliefs. Explicitly, John Rawls poured his idea in his writing titled "Justice as Fairness" (1958) and "The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus" (1989). Both were republished in a book, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, edited by Robert Goodin & Philip Pettit (1997). John Rawls said that justice has no connection with the dominant group to justify their opinion or business; neither based on a specific doctrine. In contrast, it is supported by a consensus (overlapping consensus) that become specific political domain. According to John Rawls, the idea of justice will be a meeting point for all groups that has various beliefs, moral doctrine and philosophy of life in society (Rawls, 1997a:185).

Multiculturalism view also reflects in Jean Jacques Rousseau (1663) and Immanuel Kant ideas (cited by Tilaar, 2004:80). It is represented by the famous concepts about "freedom and autonomy". Both of them imply that human life will carry on well if people mutually respect their own rights. In short, the essential of multiculturalism is a kind life that has been carried out by people in the way of tolerance, mutual respect, obedience toward law and collective consensus about justice.

Particularly talking about tolerance, it needs further explanation because there are some basic differences about meaning tolerance in Islamic concepts as it will be elaborated later. The meaning of "tolerance" here is referred to Jurgen Habermas ideas as stated in his interview with Giionnava Borradori (2005). Tolerance is about keeping "respective love" or "generosity" from majority group to the minority one by allowing a contradictory norm under condition that is not beyond the limit of tolerance (Borradori, 2005:61). In this context, tolerance is conducted under a specific and limited condition. It is different from the Islamic ideas about tolerance as will be in the next discussion.

B. MULTICULTURALISM IN ISLAM

The idea of multiculturalism in Islam has been applied as a way of life since the age of the prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him)

in Medina. All the ideas of multiculturalism are developed based on Al-Qur'an (holly book of Islam) so that make real difference between liberal multiculturalism and Islamic multiculturalism.

The word of "multiculturalism" is never mentioned at that time. However, multicultural values show clearly in the way of how Islamic authority treats its citizen and it also shows in the relationship among citizens. The practice of multiculturalism firstly can be observed in "legal formal document" called *Piagam Madinah* (Medina Charter). This document encompasses two main parts. One of them talks about an agreement between the Prophet Muhammad SAW (peace be upon him) as an authority with non-Moslem citizens (Madina Jews) who live under Islamic government. Another part relates to commitment, right and the duty of Muslim, *Muhajirin* or Mecca immigrants, and *Anshar* or Madina Moslem (Al-Umary, 1991:102). The agreement between the Prophet of Muhammad SAW (peace be upon him) and the Jews is also applied for *nasharoh* (Christian) and other religions those are under Islamic authority.

Furthermore, Abdul Hamid Siddiqi explains that this agreement contains three resolutions among *Muhajirin* (Mecca immigrants), *Anshar* (Madina Moslem), and Medina Jews. An accurate investigation of the text shows that the agreement is not only a reconciliation among races but also agreement that merges narrow chauvinism loyalty into a higher structure (nation and country). Besides that, this agreement is a historical proof created by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (peace be upon him) about fifteen centuries ago which guarantees the freedom of thinking, worshipping and protects human life and their properties (Siddiqi, 2001).

Piagam Madinah (Medina Charter) gave an example principle that showed reciprocal relationship among any groups based on justice and humanism. Moreover, it was said that the Medina Charter was made up the first constitution in the world which emphasized on reciprocal relationship between Muslims and Jews enclosed with the acknowledgement of right and the duty of each member of the community (Emerick, 2002:131). Furthermore, Yahiya Emerick stated that this charter has created a collective identity as a citizen in a country. It is as a model, made based on understanding that people who come from different group basically have the same purpose that can be equally unified in a multicultural community within mutually beneficial (Emerick, 2002).

Throughout this Charter, the Prophet Muhammad SAW (peace be upon him) gave a real model to build multicultural community that applied justice principle, equality, tolerance and inclusive that developed from non-Western tradition. The basic principle of life in Medina society was relied on the frame of vertical relation believing in Allah as stated in the document of Medina Charter. It suggests that every argumentation is returned to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad SAW (peace be upon him). This principle is based on Al-Qur'an (*surah Annisaa, ayah 59*).

The vertical principle (*tawheed*) is developed into two horizontal relationships in open community that its membership encompasses all of society components that respect each other, and hold high the duty and right. In Islamic government, plural community is called *ummah*.

Anis Malik Toha, in his book entitled *Tren Pluralisme Agama: Tinjauan Kritis* (2005), explains that the concept of *ummah* has a central position in the discussion of Islamic pluralism. This concept includes rights and the duty of all community members enclose their existence, independency, affectivity and stability. In the concept of *ummah*, the members of society (Muslim and non-Muslim) live autonomously, worship independently according to their own beliefs. Both of Muslim and non-Muslim live together and tolerance each other in the community. They also have the same positions, right and duty before the law. There is no discrimination, the principle of equality is based on standard of *tawheed* morality (Aly, 1996:84).

Based on affirm and strong *tawheed* principle, everybody considers another as brother and sister like a family (*ukhuwah*). In the frame of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), Islam leads a Muslim to give priority and honor his/her brother (neighbor) even though he/she is not a Muslim. This merit attitude is praised in al-Qur'an as a noble *akhlaq* (behavior) which ones gives his/her brother main priority for help although he/she also needs a help (Q.S.59:9). A Motivation to do this high conduct also is also stated in many *Hadiths* of Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him). In this context, tolerance takes place as basic concepts of Islamic multiculturalism.

Islam considers diversity as moral view in two levels: the first one is relied on an appreciation of reason. Al-Qur'an determines the urgency of intelligence for human. Being a Muslim is a matter of choice to live and to take responsibilities as a Muslim. "There is no force in a faith" likewise, being a good man or a bad one is urged by the reason. The second basis of Islamic moral view is the acceptance of Islamic values in accordance with level of understanding of an individual or community. It implies that there is a social dialectic making Islamic view or ethic improved and applied by the people (Mas'ud, 2001:145).

Based on the discussions above, it proves that the meaning of concept of Islamic multiculturalism absolutely be different from the one in liberal point of view. The difference can be seen in the way of how it sees and treats human.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Although this discussion is very limited, there are some principles or ideas about multiculturalism can be inferred from both. These ideas are worth considering understanding multiculturalism and developing its discourse so that the people get some references about multiculturalism. Essentially, multiculturalism takes the same and urgent position in both of points of view (liberalism and Islam). Because, they see that diversity or complexity is an inevitable condition, and it should be managed carefully in order that togetherness will be beneficial for all.

Liberalism relies the idea of multiculturalism on individualism idea that requires appreciation, tolerance and rule of law so that everybody will get justice and protection. The starting point of this idea is the legal aspect and the willingness of everyone to respect others as an individual who are equal in terms of the right

and duty. Based on this principle, there is no explicitly sue of loyalty from individual to any authority, except it only insist on that everybody should build tolerance and mutual respect under legal acknowledgement from the authority. In this context, individual needs collective consensus to what extent the limit of tolerance can be carried on, and equipped by the regulation so that the human rights will be protected.

Different from liberalism idea, multiculturalism in Islam is applied under a clear agreement among different groups. The agreement constitutes a collective convention about the rights and duties that should be accomplished by the member of community. Besides that, members of community free to control and undertake the system in the intra-community relationship without disturbing by another group (out group), even if by the state. This convention does not only concern about rights and duties, but also about a loyalty of citizen toward their country. Everybody has the same duty to protect the unity and existence of his country.

In Islamic point of view, all of the rights and duties are applied in the frame of *tawheed* encompassing a faith toward the authority of Allah Al-Mighty as a creator, and *ukhuwah* that considers someone else as a relative whom firstly to be served. The meaning of tolerance here is unconditional and only based on the beliefs and obedience to Allah Al-Mighty.

The similarity between liberal and Islamic concepts about multiculturalism can be seen in the acknowledgement of diversity that needs of systematic management to give benefit for everyone. In contrast, the basic concept underlining the multiculturalism itself in both of liberal and Islamic is obviously opposite. Liberalism emphasizes on individuals and their rights. Meanwhile, Islamic concept is more focus on community and its rights. In liberalism, diversity is understood in terms of individual base rather than community context. Meanwhile in Islamic view, the diversity is related to the individual as a member of community as well its culture.

Another distinction between liberalism and Islamic dealing with togetherness in political domain. Liberalism gives attention on this matter by emphasizing on the regulation and conventions among individuals in order to protect individual rights. Meanwhile in Islamic view, the commitment for the unity and integrity of the country is a shape of togetherness from any different groups.

The distinctive of basic concept between both of views above, gives the people a deep insight to apply the concept of multiculturalism to manage the human life that is getting complex and diverse. Any different society in any place needs different concepts of multiculturalism to apply. For example, a community with different culture and religion is recognized as religious community, like Indonesia, is probably more compatible to apply multiculturalism that orient to community based instead of individual one.

The application of multiculturalism in community life needs a deeper review. Along this time, the discussion about multiculturalism tends to be in practical domain that refers to recent examples in the whole word. However, there are only few dialogues dealing with philosophical aspect of multiculturalism. It is hoped that this writing would be one of starting point to improve the discourse about multiculturalism, and make it applied based on clearly philosophical reason.

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