

Liberal Islam - The Indonesian Experience

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Before elaborating on the liberal ideas of Indonesian Muslim, it is worth to note that the secularization and liberalization of Islam is not geographically confined to Indonesia. As will be proven, the sources of secular-liberal ideas are not independent of the hegemony of western secular-liberal worldview. Applying an alien worldview and epistemology, the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal) activists formulate secular-liberal ideas which deify Man and humanize God, equate religious truth with esoterism, deconstruct the Uthmanic Mushaf and the shariah. They promote a new paradigm shift to replace an existing one. Before delving further, it is worth to begin with the meaning of Liberal Islam.

1. The Meaning of Liberal Islam

The term Liberal Islam was first introduced in 1950's by Asaf Ali Asghar Fyzee (1899-1981), a jurist, professor of law and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Jammu and Kashmir as well as a former visiting professor at Cambridge University and U.C.L.A. He states:

We need not bother about nomenclature, but if some name has to be given to it, let us call it '*Liberal Islam*.'¹

Although Fyzee's pragmatic description of Liberal Islam is not based on a sound concept, Charles Kurzman popularizes it. He uses the term *Liberal* with caveats:

First, the authors in this collection do not necessarily self-identify as liberals. Second, the authors may not espouse all aspects of liberal ideology, even if they subscribe to some. Third, the term "liberal" has negative connotations in parts of the Islamic world, where it is associated with foreign domination, unfettered capitalism, hypocritical paeans to rights, and hostility to Islam. Fourth, the concept of "liberal Islam" should be viewed only as a heuristic device, not a hard-and-fast category. Fifth, I make no claims as to the "correctness" of liberal interpretations of Islam. I am not qualified to engage in such debates: I wish only to describe them.²

The description of Liberal Islam introduced by Kurzman is confusing and ambiguous. It has no clear boundaries. Hence Kurzman included Yusuf al-Qardawi and Muhammad Natsir as Liberal Muslim thinkers. On the contrary, the writings of Yusuf al-Qardawi and Muhammad Natsir should not be lumped with the concept of Liberal Islam which originates from sceptical minds. Yusuf al-Qardawi is a Muslim scholar who falsifies liberal thoughts in Islam while Muhammad Natsir is a distinguished figure who promotes the Shariah in the Indonesian Constitution.

Kurzman's strategy of loosely and vaguely categorizing Liberal Islam is rooted in post-modernistic approach. His strategy is analogous to Michel Foucault's who quotes a certain Chinese encyclopedia which divides animals into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.³

¹ Asaf. A.A.Fyzee, *The Reinterpretation of Islam*, in *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, ed. John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 193.

² Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Source Book*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 4.

³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: A Division of Random House, Inc. 1994), p. xv.

Similar to Foucault's ambiguous categorization of animals, Kurzman's description of Liberal Islam is absent of clarity. The result is a transposition and vagueness of meaning. Truth is construed falsehood and vice versa. Conviction becomes doubt and doubt becomes conviction. This is the reality of post-modernism strategy.

Kurzman's description of Liberal Islam in his foreword shows that he defies the existence of absolute truth. The Liberal Islam paradigm originates from relativistic epistemology. Thus, in its paradigm, there should be no monopoly of truth. All interpretation of revelations is relative, and therefore, Truth is relative. As a result, Islamic viewpoints agreed by the majority of Muslims must be continuously revised and constantly reviewed.

2. The Secular-Liberal Worldview

Having briefly described the meaning of Liberal Islam and precisely stipulated its relativistic epistemology, at this juncture it is worth to assess the secular-liberal ideas of Indonesian Muslim. In the Indonesian context, it is difficult to separate secular-liberal ideas from Nurcholish Madjid (d. 2005), who launched his concept in the discussion held among Muslim non-governmental organizations at Jakarta on June 2, 1970. During this discussion, Nurcholish introduced his views in an article titled "The Urgency of Islamic Thoughts Reformation and the Problems of the Ummah's Integration." (Keharusan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Umat). The concept was strengthened with his lecture titled "Some Thoughts on Religious Life in Indonesia." (Beberapa Renungan Tentang Kehidupan Keagamaan di Indonesia) at Taman Ismail Marzuki Jakarta on October 21, 1992.

Borrowing Harvey Cox's definition on secular, Nurcholish maintains that the word secular is derived from the Latin word *saeculum* which means this present age. *Saeculum* actually is one of the two Latin words denoting world. The other word is *mundus*. But while *saeculum* refers to time, *mundus* denotes space.⁴

After defining the word secular, Nurcholish holds that linguistically, the usage of the word secular is acceptable and hence, it is true to say that mankind is a worldly creation and that man lives in the material world before moving to the next eternal life. Thus, the word "wordly" is replaced by the word "secular" until it is said that man is a secular creation. It is realistically true as by definition. After justifying his usage of the term "secular," Nurcholish clarifies that the concept of the world as a lowly and despised place is against the teachings of Islam. Muslims should not have doubts in the worldly life and should never abandon the realities of the worldly life. Secularization is a worldly process.⁵

Defending the secular concept further, Nurcholish distinguishes between "secularization" and "secularism." He states that the distinction between "secularization" and "secularism" will be clearer if the analogy is drawn with the terms rationalization and rationalism. A Muslim should be rational but must not support rationalism. Rationalization is a method to correctly achieve the meaning and assessment of a problem. According to Nurcholish, analogically secularization without secularism is a worldly process devoid of worldly understanding which is not only possible but has happened and will happen in history. Secularization without secularism is limited and modified secularization. Limitation and correction originates from the belief in the hereafter and in the principles of divinity. Secularization is a must for every religious people especially Muslims.⁶

⁴ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan* (Bandung: Mizan, 1987), p. 216, hereinafter cited as *Keindonesiaan*, henceforth cited as *Islam Kemodernan*. Cf. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 16-17, henceforth abbreviated as *The Secular City*.

⁵ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Kemodernan*, pp. 216-218.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

To justify the concept of secularization from Islamic teachings, Nurcholish maintains that the *kalimah shahadah* which contains a negation of belief in deities and an affirmation of belief in the true God is a process of secularization. Islam's uncompromising tawhidic teachings totally eliminate animism. This means with tawhid, an animist undergoes a big secularization process. Strengthening his argument further, Nurcholish differentiates between the "earthly days" (hari dunia) and "divine days" (hari akhirat). In divine days, laws which govern the relationship amongst men do not apply and the relationship is between man and God. On the other hand, in the worldly days which we are experiencing now, the laws of after life do not apply. The present life is governed by the positive laws. In addition, Nurcholish argues that the phrase *Bismillah* (In the Name of God) shows that man is God's vicegerent on earth. *Al-Rahman* signifies God's Compassion (according to worldly standards) while *al-Rahim* shows His Mercy (according to the norms of after life). The practice of religious/spiritual values are not results of rational activities and inversely, worldly problems cannot be solved by spiritual methods. Both have different scopes even though there is a close relationship between belief and knowledge.⁷

As a matter of fact, Nurcholish is influenced by Harvey Cox's idea on secularization. For Harvey Cox secularization is a legitimate consequence of the Christian faith. He urges the Christians to support and nourish it.⁸ He differentiates between secularism and secularization. For him secularization as a liberating development, implies a historical process, in which society and culture are delivered from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical world views.⁹ He affirms that the disenchantment of nature, the desacralization of politics and the deconsecrating of values are based on the biblical teachings.¹⁰

Currently, the secularization concept is becoming an important programme for the liberalization of Islamic thought. A Liberal Islam Network (JIL) activist, Dr. Denny JA states:

It is time that the Liberal Islam community in Indonesia spread its own legitimate theology substantially and methodologically i.e. Liberal Islam Theology. It is a religious philosophy which is based on its own Islamic texts and traditions which lends credence to liberal culture. In politics, the theology becomes a Secular State Theology (TNS) which is a religious philosophy with sources from Islamic texts and traditions, parallel or confirming to the needs for a secular and democratic state.¹¹

It is a pity that the concept of secularization which originated in the Westernized Christian is accepted and regarded as universal. Rightly, Muslim thinkers should be critical towards the views of secularization which had emerged due to the traumatic experience of the dominant Church in the medieval ages. Muslims don not have such a traumatic experience, and therefore, it is wrong to infuse the concept of secularization into Muslim society which has its own worldview.¹²

⁷ Ibid., pp. 222-223.

⁸ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, p. 15.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 15-18.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 19-32.

¹¹ Denny JA, *Sebuah Teologi Negara Modern*, in *Wajah Liberal Islam*, ed. Luthfi Assyaukanie (Jakarta: JIL, TUK, 2002), pp. 232-233. See further my dialogue with Liberal Islam activists about secularization in my book *Christian and Orientalists Influences on Liberal Islam. An Interactive dialogue with activists of the Liberal Islam Network (Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis Terhadap Islam Liberal: Dialog Interaktif dengan Aktivis Jaringan Islam Liberal)* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2003), pp. 3-58, hereinafter cited as *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis*.

¹² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas for example, has criticized the secular ideas in 1973. See his work *A Message for Muslims (Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin)* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001), pp. 196-209. Although published in 2001, this *Risalah* was compiled since 1973. Cf. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), pp. 38-49.

3. Approving All Religions

Liberal Islam Network (JIL) activists challenge that Islam is the only true religion. The JIL coordinator Ulil Abshar-Abdalla remarks:

All religions are equal. All lead to the Truth. Thus, Islam is not the only true religion.¹³

Similarly, Budhy Munawar Rachman, the manager of Islamic Studies Programme in the Paramadina Foundation rejects the exclusivity of Islamic truth and accepts the pluralistic theology. He is convinced in the opinion of scholars such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John Harwood Hicks, Paul Knitter, John B. Cobb Jr., Raimundo Panikkar, Frithjof Schuon, and others. Budhy for example quotes the opinion of Paul Knitter who said that *"All religions are relative - that is, limited, partial, incomplete, one way of looking at something. To hold that any religion is intrinsically better than another is felt to be somehow wrong, offensive, narrow minded..."*; *"Deep down, all religions are the same - different paths leading to the same goal."*; *"Other religions are equally valid ways to the same truth"* (John Hicks); *"Other religions speak of different but equally valid truths"* (John B. Cobb Jr.); *"Each religion expresses an important part of the truth."* (Raimundo Panikkar).¹⁴

Sharing the same view, Sukidi, a doctorate candidate at Harvard University holds *".....all religions are basically true, only the path towards truth differ."* He embraced Islam on sociological reasons, not because Islam is (to him) the correct religion but because Islam provides the same path towards God. Therefore, Islam is similar to other religions in paving the way towards God. On this premise, the process of seeking the truth propagated by various religious traditions is appreciated.¹⁵

The ideas of Indonesian Muslim liberal thinkers can be easily traced to the thoughts of Western scholars such as Rene Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John Hick and others. Frithjof Schuon, a transcendentalist emphasized that all religions call to truth and goodness. Therefore, on the esoteric level, all religions are the same. Even though dogmas, rules, morals and rituals differ between religions, deep down all religions share a common ground. For Frithjof Schuon this is the Perennial Religion (*Religio Perennis*).¹⁶

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, however, argues that the transcendent unity of religions is not found at the esoteric level because each religion has exclusive or differing concepts of God. The notion about transcendent unity of religions may be experiences of certain individuals about religions. Yet, those experiences are not religion itself because they cannot be spread to all men but only to an elite few. Therefore, such transcendent unity cannot be deemed "religion," only religious experience. Thus, the unity of religions at the esoteric level is beyond the religious experience of the masses. Islam is not for an elite people but for all mankind.¹⁷

Thus, *religions other than Islam are false*. The fault found within religions other than Islam can be identified not only through the Qur'an but from their "sacred" texts as well.¹⁸

¹³ Majalah Gatra December, 2002.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁵ <http://islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&id=846>

¹⁶ Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1984).

¹⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas has criticized the idea of the transcendent unity of religions. See further *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995); Cf. Adnin Armas, "Gagasan Frithjof Schuon tentang Titik Temu Agama-Agama," *ISLAMIA* 3 (2004), pp. 9-28.

¹⁸ Judaeo-Christian scholars found many fundamental problems with respect to the history of the Bible. the works of Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament; Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, 2nd edition); *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1971) and *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford

4. The Desecration of the Uthmanic Mushaf

Liberal Islam activists criticize the Uthmanic Mushaf as well. Taufik Adnan Amal, a lecturer of the Quranic Sciences at Institut Agama Islam Negeri Alauddin at Ujung Padang, for example, writes an article titled *Edisi Kritis Al-Quran (A Critical Edition of the Quran)*. In that article, he states:

The explanation in the paragraph below attempts to reveal briefly the process of strengthening text and the recitation of the Quran, emphasizing that the process still leaves fundamental problem whether in the textual orthography or the choice of its recitation which we have inherited in the current printed form. Thus, this article also proposes ways to solve the problem through a critical edition of the Quran.¹⁹

Luthfi Assyaukanie, the editor of the book *Faces of Liberal Islam in Indonesia (Wajah Liberal Islam di Indonesia)* and the Liberal Islam mailing list moderator falsifies the history of Quranic text. He remarks:

Majority of Muslims believe that the Quran from the first page to the last are words of Allah revealed to Muhammad verbatim, by words (*lafdhan*) or the meaning (*ma'nan*). The majority of Muslims are convinced that the Quran they see and read today is the same as the Quran during the time of the prophet more than fourteen centuries ago. Such formulation and theological dream (*al-khayal al-dini*) was created by the scholars as part of Islamic doctrinal formulation. The realities and history of the Quranic compilation is indeed full of delicate nuances and not free of debate, resistance, intrigue and enrichment.²⁰

Denouncing the contents of the Uthmanic Mushaf, Luthfi argues:

Ibnu Mas'ud was not the only person who did not include *al-Fatihah* as part of the Quran. Ali is another Companion of the Prophet who considered this "important" surah as not part of the Quran besides excluding the surahs 13, 34, 66 and 96. This sparked a debate among the ulama on whether *al-Fatihah* is part of the Quran or only an introduction and in essence is not part of the holy book. Abu Bakar al-Asamm (d. 313 AH) is another great ulama who with a few others supported the argument that *al-Fatihah* was only a "liturgic verse" to begin Quranic recitation. It was a popular tradition among the Mediterranean society in early Islam. A hadith supports this fact: "Who so ever do not begin his actions with the recitation of *Alhamdulillah* (in another hadith *Bismillah*), his deeds becomes meaningless."²¹

University Press, 1987). Cf. Robert R. Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Cf. Edgard Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). Cf. the Quran, Al-Maidah (5: 13); Al-Baqarah (2: 75); Al-Nisa (4: 46); and al-Maidah (5: 41).

¹⁹ Taufik Adnan Amal states: "Uraian dalam paragraph-paragraf berikut mencoba mengungkapkan secara ringkas proses pemantapan teks dan bacaan Alqur'an, sembari menegaskan bahwa proses tersebut masih meninggalkan sejumlah masalah mendasar, baik dalam ortografi teks maupun pemilihan bacaanya, yang kita warisi dalam mushaf tercetak dewasa ini. Karena itu, tulisan ini juga akan menggagas bagaimana menyelesaikan permasalahan itu lewat suatu upaya penyuntingan edisi kritis al-Quran." See his work further "*Edisi Kritis Alquran*," in *Wajah Liberal Islam Indonesia*, ed. Luthfi Assyaukanie (Jakarta: JIL, Utan Kayu, 2002), pp. 78-101, henceforth abbreviated as *Edisi Kritis Alquran*.

²⁰ Luthfi Assyaukanie states: "Sebagian besar kaum Muslim meyakini bahwa al-Quran dari halaman pertama hingga terakhir merupakan kata-kata Allah yang diturunkan kepada Nabi Muhammad secara *verbatim*, baik kata-katanya (*lafdhan*) maupun maknanya (*ma'nan*). Kaum Muslim juga meyakini bahwa al-Quran yang mereka lihat dan baca hari ini adalah persis seperti yang ada pada masa Nabi lebih dari seribu empat ratus tahun silam. Keyakinan semacam itu sesungguhnya lebih merupakan formulasi dan angan-angan teologis (*al-khayal al-dini*) yang dibuat oleh para ulama sebagai bagian dari formalisasi doktrin-doktrin Islam. Hakikat dan sejarah penulisan al-Quran sendiri sesungguhnya penuh dengan berbagai nuansa yang *delicate* (rumit), dan tidak sunyi dari perdebatan, pertentangan, intrik dan rekayasa." <http://www.islamlib.com/id/page.php?page=article&id=447>

²¹ Luthfi Assyaukanie states: "Ibnu Mas'ud bukanlah seorang diri yang tidak menyertakan al-Fatihah sebagai bagian dari al-Quran. Sahabat lain yang menganggap surah "penting" itu bukan bagian dari al-Quran adalah Ali bin Abi Talib yang juga tidak memasukkan surah 13, 34, 66, dan 96. Hal ini memancing perdebatan di

Luthfi's idea merely imitates Arthur Jeffery (d. 1959), who had ambitions of critically editing the Uthmanic Mushaf.²² According to Jeffery, *al-Fatihah* is not part of the Quran. In his view, *al-Fatihah* is a supplication which is required before recitation of the Quran as is common in other holy books. Jeffery states: "*It is possible, of course, that as a prayer it was constructed by the Prophet himself, but its use and its position in our present Quran are due to the compilers, who place it there, perhaps on the fly-leaf of the standard Codex.*"²³ Strengthening his argument, Jeffery argues that his opinion is not only shared by Western scholars but also by Muslim such as Abu Bakr al-Asamm, as mentioned by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi.²⁴

It is indeed wrong for Jeffery to implicate Fakhr al-Din al-Razi to justify his stand because Fakhr al-Din al-Razi himself accepts *al-Fatihah* as part of the Quran and in fact mentions *al-Asas* as another name of the surah. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi regards *al-Fatihah* as the first surah of the Quran (*annaha awwal surah min al-Quran*)²⁵ and rejects the view which says that Abdullah bin Mas'ud denied the *al-Fatihah* as part of the Quran.²⁶

Besides, *al-Fatihah* is the surah most frequently recited as an integral part of each rakaat of the solat. In the acts of solat with loud recitation, *al-Fatihah* is recited 6 times a day and 8 times a day on every Friday. Thus, al-Baqillani concluded that Ibn Mas'ud never denied *al-Fatihah* and the *al-mu'awwidhatain* surahs as part of the Quran and probably it was others who hijacked the good name of Abdullah bin Mas'ud.²⁷

Luthfi Assyaukanie also states:

In fact, according to Ibn Nadim (d. 380 AH) the author of *Al-Fihrist*, the Mushaf of Ibn Mas'ud did not include surahs 113 and 114.²⁸

Even though Ibn Nadim stated that the surahs *al-Nas* and *al-Falaq* are not in the Mushaf of Ibn Mas'ud, it does not necessarily mean that Ibn Mas'ud deemed them not part of the Quran. This is because the students of Ibn Mas'ud like 'Alqama, al-Aswad, Masruq, al-Sulami, Abu Wa'il, al-Shaibani, al-Hamadani and Zirr narrated the Quran in entirety from Ibn Mas'ud a total of 114 surahs. Only one student 'Asim, narrated differently.²⁹

Besides that, if indeed the surahs *al-Nas* and *al-Falaq* are not parts of the Quran, there would be many narrations supporting the fact. Yet there is none. Thus, the Mushaf of Ibn Mas'ud cannot be used as a yardstick to reject the authenticity of the Uthmanic Mushaf.

Another liberal activist who denounces the Uthmanic Mushaf is Ahmad Baso, the director of Desantara Foundation. According to him, the Uthmanic Mushaf is a Quraish construction of the Quran which ignores other mushafs. Uthman, for example, ignored the Mushaf of Ibn Mas'ud which included the phrase "*Inna al-dina 'inda Allah al-hanifiyyah*"

kalangan para ulama apakah al-Fatihah merupakan bagian dari al-Quran atau ia hanya merupakan "kata pengantar" saja yang esensinya bukanlah bagian dari kitab suci. Salah seorang ulama besar yang menganggap al-Fatihah bukan sebagai bagian dari al-Quran adalah Abu Bakr al-Asamm (w. 313 H). Dia dan ulama lainnya yang mendukung pandangan ini berargumen bahwa al-Fatihah hanyalah "ungkapan liturgis" untuk memulai bacaan al-Quran. Ini merupakan tradisi populer masyarakat Mediterania pada masa awal-awal Islam. Sebuah hadis Nabi mendukung fakta ini: "Siapa saja yang tidak memulai sesuatu dengan bacaan *alhamdulillah* [dalam hadis lain *bismillah*] maka pekerjaannya menjadi sia-sia." <http://www.islamlib.com/id/page.php?page=article&id=447>.

²² Arthur Jeffery, "Progress in the Study of the Quran Text," *The Muslim World* 25 (1935), pp. 4-5.

²³ See Arthur Jeffery, "A Variant Text of the Fatiha," *The Moslem World* 29 (1939), p. 158.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, 11 Vol. (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabiyy, Third edition 1999), 1:158.

²⁶ Ibid., 1: 190.

²⁷ Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text, from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), pp. 199-00, henceforth cited as *The History of the Qur'anic Text*.

²⁸ <http://www.islamlib.com/id/page.php?page=article&id=447>.

²⁹ Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text*, pp. 200-01.

and not “*al-Islam*.” Uthman rejected this version in his mushaf because Ibn Mas‘ud did not represent the powers of the Quraish. Ibn Mas‘ud comes from the marginal tribe of Hudzail. What needs to be known is that the power of Uthman is the representation of the Quraish power hegemony which controlled every cultural and religious product in the early history of Islam. Hence, which mushaf represented the words of God, the Uthmanic or the Ibn Mas‘ud’s mushaf? ³⁰

Ahmad Baso was wrong when he said that Ibn Mas‘ud was deliberately omitted from the Quran compilation team due to his being a non-Quraish. The real reason was because Ibn Mas‘ud was in Kufah when the codification team was formed. Uthman was, on the other hand in Madinah and desperate to form the team.³¹ Race was never an issue in the codification of the Quran because Zaid bin Thabit, the leader of the team is not a Quraish.

The qiraah from the Mushaf of Ibn Mas‘ud omitted by the codification team is not necessarily part of the Quran. A qiraah has to meet a few criteria agreed by the ulama. The Uthmanic Mushaf was distributed to many cities accompanied by the qurra. They taught qiraah based on relevant authorities. This determined whether the text is the Quran or not, not based on illegal and unconfirmed manuscripts.³²

Since Ibn Mas‘ud's attitude towards the Uthmanic Mushaf is frequently used to undermine the authenticity of the Uthmanic Mushaf, it is necessary to examine Ibn Mas‘ud's true attitude towards it. When Uthman sent a standard mushaf to Kufah and ordered all other versions burnt, Ibn Mas‘ud refused to relinquish his mushaf. He objected because the standard mushaf was given priority although it was arranged by Zaid bin Thabit who was far younger and when Ibn Mas‘ud embraced Islam, Zaid was still a kuffar. Nevertheless, Ibn Mas‘ud reconsidered and accepted the views of Uthman and the other Companions of the Prophet SAW. Ibn Mas‘ud regretted and was ashamed of his earlier stand.³³

Critics of the Quran also ignore the fact that Uthman standardized the Quranic text in efforts to prevent the fate which befell the “holy” books of the Jews and the Christians.³⁴ Standardisation was necessary and therefore the companions readily accepted Uthman’s decision for standardization. According to Mus‘ab ibn Sa‘ad, none of the Muhajirin, Ansar or learned persons opposed Uthman’s decision (*adrakat al-nas hina fa‘ala ‘Uthman ma fa‘ala, fama raitu ahadan ankara dhalika, ya‘ni min al-muhajirin wa al-ansar wa ahl al-‘ilm*).³⁵ In accord with Mus‘ab ibn Sa‘ad, Ali r.a. said when Uthman burnt other mushafs: “If Uthman did not do it, I would have done so” (*law lam yasna’hu ‘Uthman lasana’tuhu*).³⁶ Ali also said, “If I were in power, I would have done the same as Uthman with regard to the mushafs.”³⁷ Thabit ibn ‘Imarah al-Hanafī said “I heard Ghanim ibn Qis al-Mazni said: If Uthman did not compile the mushaf men would start reciting poetry” (*law lam yaktub ‘Utsman al-mushaf, latafiqa al-nas yaqra’una al-shi‘r*)³⁸ Abu Majlaz said “If

³⁰ See my book further, *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis*, p. 85.

³¹ Quoted from Ahmad ‘Ali Imam, *Variant Readings*, p. 29.

³² Ibid.

³³ *Kitab al-Mabani*, edited by Jeffery in 1954 mentioned Ibn Mas‘ud regretted and agreed to accept the ‘Uthmanic Mushaf. See *Muqaddimatani fi ‘Ulum al-Quran wa Huma Muqaddimah Kitab al-Mabani wa Muqaddimah Ibn ‘Atiyyah*, ed. Arthur Jeffery (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanji, 1954), p. 95, hereinafter cited as *Kitab al-Mabani*; Cf. Abu Bakr ‘Abdullah bin Abi Daud Sulayman Ibn al-Ash’ath al-Sijistani, *Kitab al-Masahif*, ed. Muhibbuddin ‘Abd Subhan Wa‘iz, 2 jilid (Beirut: Dar al-Basha’ir al-Islamiyyah, 2nd edition, 2002), 1: 193-195, hereinafter cited as *Kitab al-Masahif*.

³⁴ Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, eds. Abd Aziz ibn Abdullah ibn Baz and Muhammad Fuad al-Baqi 14 Vols (Cairo: Dar al-Hadits, 1998), 9: 20-21.

³⁵ Abu‘Ubayd al-Qasim bin Sallam, *Fada’il al-Quran*, ed. Wahbi Sulayman Ghawaji (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1991), 194; 157, hereinafter cited as *Fada’il al-Quran*. Cf Ibn Abi Daud Sulayman Ibn al-Ash’ath al-Sijistani, *Kitab al-Masahif*, I: 178.

³⁶ Ibn Abi Da‘ud al-Sijistani, *Kitab al-Masahif*, 1:177.

³⁷ Abu ‘Ubayd, *Fada’il al-Quran*, p. 157.

³⁸ For detailed information, see Ibn Abi Daud al-Sijistani, *Kitab al-Masahif*, 1: 178.

Uthman did not compile the Quran, men will recite poetry.” (*law la anna ‘Uthman kataba al-Quran laulfiyat al-nas yaqra’una al-shi’r*).³⁹ For this reason, Arthur Jeffery’s view that the burning of “rival codices” and the canonization of the Uthmanic Mushaf is politically motivated⁴⁰ can not be justified.

Criticism towards the Uthmanic Mushaf continues. The Uthmanic Mushaf was said to undergo standardization due to restriction of choice by Ibn Mujahid (245-324 AH/859-936). Taufik Adnan Amal blamed Ibn Mujahid’s limitation on multiple readings. According to Taufik Adnan, orthodox Islam agreed on the seven qiraah as authentic text because of Ibn Mujahid, who had political backing from the viziers of Abbasid, Ibn Muqla (d. 940) and Ibn Isa (d. 946). For Taufik Adnan, orthodox Islam had systematically eliminated views which threatens the integrity of the Quran such as the recitations by Ibn Shannabudh (d. 328 AH/939) and Ibn Miqsam (d. 362 AH).⁴¹

Actually, Taufik Adnan merely repeated Arthur Jeffery’s view that the various readings were eventually curbed due to political pressures. Jeffery condemned Sultan Ibn Muqla and Sultan Ibn Isa because of their restriction on variant readings as proposed by Ibn Mujahid. According to Jeffery, these rulers acted on Ibn Mujahid’s instigation where else in the early days of Islam, the qiraah were varied and flourished in the rival codices.⁴² Jeffery maintained that Ibn Shannabudh and Ibn Miqsam opposed the limitation of variant readings. In the end, however, they were quelled and forced to repent because their qiraah differed from the qiraah of the Uthmanic Mushaf.⁴³

Jeffery’s critique to Ibn Mujahid’s action of limiting multiple readings is inaccurate. Qiraah does not mean freely reading the Quran. Acceptable qiraah is not from choice but from the commands of the Prophet saw. The main condition is that qiraah must have a chain of transmitters that goes back to the Prophet saw. It must follow the qiraah determined and taught by the Prophet saw to his Companions.⁴⁴

Al-‘Abbas ibn Muhammad bin Hatim al-Duri said that Abu Yahya al-Himmani told us: Narrated from al-A‘mash from Habib from ‘Abdurrahman al-Sulami from Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud: “Follow and do not innovate. It is enough for you.” (*Ittabi‘u wa la tabtadi‘u faqad kufii-tum*). Hudhaifah said “Observe piety O reciters of the Quran and follow the ways of those before you. By Allah, if you are truly firm you will be saved from being astray and if you are not firm and are swayed to the left or to the right you will be truly astray.” (*Ittaqu ya ma‘ashara al-Qurra’, wa khudhu tariq man kana qablakum fa wallah lain istaqamtum laqad subiqtum sabqan ba’iidan, walain taraktumuhum yaminan wa shimalan laqad dalaltum dalalan ba’idan*). ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib r.a. said “Verily the Prophet SAW commanded you to recite the Quran as you are taught (*Inna Rasulallah sallallah ‘alayhi wa sallam ya’murukum an taqrau’ al-Quran kama ‘ullimtum*).” Abu ‘Amru bin al-‘Ala said “If not for him (the Prophet SAW), I will not recite each word as I do.” (*Law la annahu laysa li an aqra’a illa bima qad quri’a bihi laqaraqtu harf kadha kadha wa harf kadha kadha*).” The uncle of ‘Abdul Rahman said “I asked ‘Amru bin al-‘Ala about multiple renditions (*barakna ‘alayh wa tarakna ‘alayh*) and he said “It could only be known by directly hearing from the previous masters.” Zayd bin Thabit said “The qiraah is a sunnah. Thus recite as you are taught.” (*al-Qira’ah sunnah, faqra’uhu kama tajidunahu*). Muhammad bin al-Munkadir said “The qiraah is a sunnah which is obtained

³⁹ Ibid., 1: 179.

⁴⁰ Arthur Jeffery, *Materials*, pp. 7-8.

⁴¹ Taufik Adnan Amal, “Edisi Kritis al-Quran,” pp. 85, 90-91.

⁴² Arthur Jeffery, *Scripture*, p. 99.

⁴³ Arthur Jeffery, *Materials*, pp. 8-9. See Jeffery’s detailed criticisms against Ibn Mujahid in my book *Metodologi Bibel dalam Studi Al-Qur’an: Kajian Kritis (Biblical Methodology in Qur’anic Studies: a Critical Analysis)* (Jakarta; Gema Insani Press, 2005), pp. 116-19, henceforth cited as *Metodologi Bibel*.

⁴⁴ Ibn Mujahid mentioned the chains of transmission clearly. See Ahmad bin Musa bin Mujahid, *Kitab al-Sab’ah fi al-Qira’at*, ed. Shawqi Dif (Cairo: Dar al-Ma’arif, 3rd edition), pp. 46-52, hereinafter cited as *Kitab al-Sab’ah*.

from the previous generations.” (*al-Qira’ah sunnah ya’khudhuha al-akhar ‘an al-awwal*). ‘Amir al-Sha’bi said “The qiraah is a sunnah so recite as those before you recited.” (*al-Qira’ah sunnah, faqra’u kama qara’a awwalukum*). ‘Urwah bin al-Zubayr said “Indeed the recitation of the Quran is part of the sunnah, so recite in the way that you have been taught by the Prophet saw.” (*Innama qira’at al-Quran sunnah min al-sunan, faqra’u kama ‘ullimtumuh*).⁴⁵

Besides that, other Muslim scholars supported Ibn Mujahid’s attitude towards Ibn Shannabudh and Ibn Miqsam. If the renditions of Ibn Shannabudh and Ibn Miqsam were allowed, it would create confusion. Ibn Mujahid rejected their qiraah because Ibn Shannabudh ignored the orthography of the Uthmanic Mushaf and Ibn Miqsam disregarded the chain of transmitters. Every qiraah has its rules. Without fulfilling those conditions, the qiraah is deemed wrong and can never be accepted.⁴⁶

Based on the above observations, it is clear that the Liberal Islam activists in Indonesia who criticized the Quran were merely parroting the orientalist, who are influenced by the Judaeo-Christian theological studies of the Bible. In studying the Bible, the Judaeo-Christian theologians found many fundamental problems and concluded that the bible should be revised. They considered biblical criticism as positive and applied it to the Quran.

The Biblical text, however, is different from the Quran because the former is the word of man whereas the Quran is God’s word. Allah said in the Quran meaning: “And if he (Muhammad saw) had forged a false saying concerning Us (Allah) We surely would have seized him by his right hand (or with power and might), And then We certainly would have cut off his life artery (aorta).”⁴⁷ Allah also said meaning “Nor does he speak of his own desire. It is only a Revelation revealed.”⁴⁸ Allah also said meaning “Falsehood cannot come to it from before it or behind it, (it is) sent down by the All-Wise, Worthy of all Praise.”⁴⁹

Rejecting the truth of the Quran, the orientalist neglect the faith factor in the study of the Quran whereas the knowledge of the Quran and the sunnah is tied to faith. Abu Hurayrah, Ibn ‘Abbas, Zayd bin Aslam, Ibn Sirin, al-Hasan al-Basri, al-Dahhak and Ibrahim al-Nakha’i said: “Verily this knowledge is religion. Therefore beware who you take it from.” (*inna hadha al-‘ilm din fanzuru ‘amman takhudhuna dinakum*).⁵⁰

Besides this, al-Tabari (d. 310 AH/923) stressed that “the main criteria for a person interpreting the Quran is true faith and commitment to the sunnah. A person with faulty belief is not fit to propagate not only religious matters but also worldly matters.” (*min shartihi sihhat al-i’tiqad, wa luzum sunnat al-din, fainna man kana magmusan ‘alayhi fi dinihi, la yu’taamana ‘ala al-dunya, fa kaifa ‘ala al-din!*).⁵¹ On a similar tone as al-Tabari, Al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH/1505) said that “Arrogance, inclination to innovation, weak faith, easily enticed, excessive love for worldly pleasures and continuous sinning becomes a veil against receiving Allah’s knowledge.”⁵²

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 46-52.

⁴⁶ See my criticism against Arthur Jeffery on the multiple readings of Ibn Miqsam and Ibn Shannabudh in *Metodologi Bibel*, pp. 116-26.

⁴⁷ Surah al-Haqqah (69: 44-46).

⁴⁸ Surah al-Najm (53: 3-4).

⁴⁹ See also other verses in the Quran such as Surah Fussilat (41: 42); al-Shu‘ara’ (26: 192); al-Sajdah (32: 2); al-Zumar (39: 1); al-Mu‘min (40: 2); Fussilat (41: 2); al-Jathiyah (45: 2); al-Ahqaf (46: 20) al-Waqi‘ah (56: 80); al-Haqqah (69: 43).

⁵⁰ Imam Abu Hatim Muhammad ibn Hibban, *Kitab al-Majruhin min al-Muhaddithin wa al-Dhu’afa wa al-Matrukin*, ed. Mahmud Ibrahim Zayed (Halb/Aleppo: Dar al-Wahy, 1396 H), 1: 21-23.

⁵¹ Quoted from Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *al-Itqan fi ‘ulum al-Quran* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabiyy, 2003), p. 854.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 854-55.

5. Challenging the Shariah

The Shariah (Islamic law) is also not free from the criticism of the Liberal Islam activists. Luthfi Assyaukanie states:

I personally consider that there is no such thing as the Islamic law. The Islamic law is a creation of the later generations who had excessive ideals towards Islam (in aspects such as the Islamic state, Islamic economics, Islamic mathematics, etc).⁵³

He also states:

The hajj is a paganistic practice, the zakat is a revised Roman tradition, the prayers is the legacy of David (in the Judaic tradition) which has been modified, and in the economic system the prophet agrees with all the economic practices of the Romans who at that time dominated almost all the administration and politics. Exception is the usury (but even Romans will loathe if usury actually means any transaction which causes others to lose).⁵⁴

The orientalist had maintained that the Judaeo-Christian and foreign culture influenced the Islamic law. Abraham Geiger (d. 1874), for example, who was an intellectual, rabbi and proponent of Liberal Judaism in 1833 wrote in German *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (What did Muhammad Borrow from Judaism?). Geiger concluded that rules, laws, morals, stories, and matters related to faith in the Quran are also influenced by Judaism. After Geiger, the Judaeo-Christian scholars like Theodore Nöldeke (1836-1930), Siegmund Fraenkel (1885-1925), Hartwig Hirschfeld (1854-1934), Israel Schapiro (1882-1957), Arent Jan Wensinck, Joseph Horowitz, Charles Cutley Torrey (1863-1956), Wright, Louis Cheikho, Friedrich Schwally, Wilhelm Rudolph, Tor Andrae (1885-1947), Richard Bell (1876-1953), Alphonso Mingana (1881-1937), K. Ahren and others propagated the Judaeo-Christian influences on Islam.

W. St. Clair-Tisdall, an English missionary to Isfahan, concluded that Islam was not revealed from the heavens but from various religions and cultures. According to Tisdall, Islamic concepts regarding God, the hajj, kissing the Black Stone, respecting the Kaabah, are all legacy of the days of ignorance. The five daily prayers has its origins in the Sabian tradition. The stories about Abraham, Solomon, Queen Sheba, Harut and Marut, Cain and Abel are from Judaism. The story about the cave-dwellers and Mary originates from Christianity. Not forgetting, from Hindu writings and ancient Zoroastrian are the Flight and Ascension (*al-isra' wa al-mi'raj*) and the bridge (*sirat*) in the hereafter.⁵⁵

Generalization is not correct. Despite the similarities with Judaeo-Christian, Islam ushered a new teaching. Islam corrected and islamized erroneous teachings from the days of ignorance, Judaism and Christianity.

Another Muslim Liberal activist, Mun'im A. Sirry, the author of the *History of Islamic Fiqh: An Introduction (Sejarah Fikih Islam: Sebuah Pengantar)* and the editor of *Cross Religious Fiqh (Fikih Lintas Agama)* remarks:

There is no Islamic law. Firstly, the prophet saw did not classify laws the way we know it such as compulsory, prohibited, etc. Secondly, understanding of law itself is paradoxical when linked with Islam. I take as an example the verse which means "There is no compulsion in religion". Third, Islamic law is preceded by the assumption that man or society needs to be confined to act Islamically. The question is, who has the authority to determine? The

⁵³ See further *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis*, p.33.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ W.St. Clair-Tisdall, "The Sources of Islam," in *The Origins of the Koran*, ed. Ibn Warraq (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), pp. 227-292.

conservatives are inclined to say that only the opinion of the ulama is authoritative.⁵⁶

The meaning of the shariah has also been given new nuances by Dr Siti Musdah Mulia. Together with the team and contributors to the Religious Department Gender Management, they blamed the methodology of the authoritative scholars and proposed new methodology as follows: First, formulating and revitalizing the marginal jurisprudence methodology which has not been included in many books on the origins of Islamic jurisprudence such as "*al-'Ibrah bi khusus al-sabab la bi 'umum al-lafaz; takhsis bi al-'aql wa takhsis bi al-'urf, al-amr idza dzaqa ittasa'a*". Second, should the first method not suffice to resolve human problems the next step is to unravel and revise the foundation of the old origins of Islamic jurisprudence: 1) Change the paradigm from theocentrism to anthropocentrism; from elitism to populism (2) Move from *eisegese* to *exegese*. With *exegese*, the mufassir exerts maximum effort to replace the text as 'object' and himself as subject in a balanced dialectic. (3) Justifying or revitalizing the shariah. The shariah should be positioned as a means (*wasilah, hajiyyat*) to achieve Islamic principles such as equality, justice, public interest and upholding the human rights. Therefore *solat, zakat, fasting, and hajj* are means and not the necessary aims (*ghayat, daruriyat*).⁵⁷ (4) Public interest welfare is always taken into consideration in any works of interpretation. (5) Change thinking from deductive to inductive (*local wisdom, al-'Urf*). This is where it is important for the *kiyai* (religious scholar) to adopt the local wisdom. (*al-'urf*).⁵⁸

Using the new methodology described above, the Religious Department Gender Management formulated several alternative principles of Islamic jurisprudence methodology such as "*al-ibrah bi al-maqasid la bi al-alfaz, jawaz naskh al-nusus bi al-maslahah and tanqih al-nusus bi al-aql al-mujtama*." ⁵⁹ The team formulates that the vision and foundation of Islamic law are pluralism (*ta'adudiah*), nationalism (*muwatanah*), upholding human rights (*al-maslahat*)⁶⁰, democracy, public interest (*al-maslahat*) and gender equality (*al-musawah al-jinsiyyah*).⁶¹

Having applied the new methodology, the Religious Department Gender Management in 2004 formulated the new Islamic law: A woman can marry off herself without a waliy because the waliy is not condition of a marriage. The dowry must not only be given by the prospective husband but also by the prospective wife or by both. Marriage between different religions is allowed;⁶² polygamy is prohibited; contract marriage is allowed; 'iddah (waiting period) is also applicable to man, the inheritance of sons and daughters are equal in the ratio 1:1 or 2:2 and inheritance from people of different religions are allowed, and other material differences.'⁶³

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁷ *Pembaharuan Hukum Islam: Counter Legal Draft Kompilasi Hukum Islam* (The Reformation of Islamic Law: Counter Legal Draft Compilation of Islamic Law (Jakarta: Departemen Agama RI, 2004), henceforth cited as *Pembaharuan Hukum Islam*.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁶⁰ In the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in section 16 part 1 states "adult men and women regardless of race, nationality, religion has the right to marry and contribute to the family. They have the equal rights in matters concerning marriage and after dissolution of marriage."

⁶¹ *Pembaharuan Hukum Islam*, pp. 25-30.

⁶² Surah al-Baqarah (2: 221) and Surah al-Mumtahanah (60: 10); See the hadith narrated by *al-Bukhari* (no. 5287): *idza aslamat al-nasraniyyah qabl zawjiha bisa'ah harumat 'alayh* (When a Christian woman embraces Islam before her husband, she becomes unlawful to him); and Muslim scholars unanimously prohibit such a marriage.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 32-74.

Conclusion

Unduly influenced by the West, the Liberal Islam Network activists have become disseminators of secularization and liberalization of Islam. Instead of Islamizing the West, they are westernizing Islam. As a result, they deny Islam and affirm "Islams". Their secular-liberal ideas are rooted in their *interpretation* of Islam, guided by the Western worldview and epistemology.

To counter the infusion of the Western worldview and epistemology in the minds of Muslims,⁶⁴ authoritative Muslim scholars should strive to study and understand Western civilization. Foreign elements in every branch of the religious, rational, intellectual and philosophical sciences, originated from Western intellectual tradition, should be isolated and Islamic elements and key concepts should be infused in those branches of sciences.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas identifies the infusion of alien concepts into the minds of Muslims as Deislamization. See his work further *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1999, first published 1980), p. 45, hereinafter cited as *The Concept of Education in Islam*. Cf. Wan Mohd Nor Wand Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), p. 310.

⁶⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, pp. 41-45.