REINTEPRETATION OF ISLAM AND CIVIL SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT; CASE OF MAJELIS PEMBERDAYAAN MASYARAKAT MUHAMMADIYAH

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: This article aims to examine critically the roles of Muhammadiyah as one of the largest Islamic civil organizations in Indonesia in interpreting and praticing Islamic normative values, especially with regard to the empowerment of civil society after the fall of President Suharto's New Order political regime in 1998.

Methodology: This study applies qualitative approach and descriptive analysis that aims to critically describe the roles of Muhammdiyah through its department of Majelis Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (abbreviated as: MPM) in interpreting and practicing Islamic values in the relation of civil society empowerment in the post Soeharto's New Order regime era. Data is gathered from observation, interview with the MPM leaders, and document analysis. Other previous studies which are also included as the main sources of the study are conducted by Prijono (1996) and Harmsen (2008).

Main Findings and Novelty: The analysis produces some important findings: first, some of normative doctrines of Islam on the issue of society empowerment are reinterpreted. The resulted interpretation is different from classical interpretation and interpretive experiences in other Muslim world. The new interpretation focuses on Sūrah al-Māʿūn of the Qurʾan (and some other related verses) and uses such interpretation as a theological ground and spirit for implementing societal empowerment visions and works. Second, the empowerment roles of Muhammadiyah through the Council (i.e. MPM) affirms the theory of civil society in Indonesia, which becomes a strategic partner of the government, whose development program fails engender social welfare and prosperity.

Applications of this study: This study can be useful formany interdiscipliner area such civil society, civil empowerment, sociology, and Islamic Studies.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah, Islam, civil empowerment, Islamic Texts

INTRODUCTION: ISLAM, CIVIL SOCIETY, MUHAMMADIYAH, AND EMPOWERMENT

The distribution of prosperity and welfare is still an issue for most of the governments in the world, including the government of Indonesia after the regime change in 1998. Although Indonesian has transformed from an authoritarian government to a democratic one in a political context in that year, poverty is still a serious problem. The poverty rate is not significantly decreasing. In the discourse of sustainable development, if the success of development is among others measured by poverty alleviation and prosperity distribution, governments of Indonesia after the 1998 reformation were deemed unsuccessful. Development will succeed if the prosperity improves, indicated by the reduction of poverty rate, which does not happen as expected in Indonesia.

The inability of a country to ensure the wellbeing of their people has finally led to the establishment of many non-government organizations such as: charity organizations, religion-based civil society organizations, voluntary associations, humanitarian organizations, labor unions, and other forms of non-government institutions, which all of them is better known by the name of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). In this case, these NGOs support, strengthen, and complement the role of the government in empowering society. The concept of civil society proves its practical contribution. However, many studies reveal that this concept is usually born in the mid of conflict between the civil and the government, and more evolves in developed countries like Europe (Gellner: 1994; Hefner: 2000; Hashmi, 2002; Lapidus: 2002). In this case, civil society is associated with the non-governmental group of association and independent society which functions as a balancer and mediator between an authoritarian and corrupt government on one side with the powerless, poor, and coerced citizens on the other (Norton: 2005). Saad Eddin Ibrahim emphasizes that civil society is an effort to maximize the organized collective participation in public space which is formed between the individuals and the government(Norton: 2005). Therefore, this study aims to observe how far the religion-based civil society interprets Islamic values in the civil empowering activities in public space.

In Indonesia as the majority Muslim country, the existence and development of civil society has become an empirical proof that corresponds with the Islamic values. In its early development, it can be traced back to the pre-independency era where Islamic organization had been existed. One of them is Muhammadiyah, which was established in the year of 1912(Fauzia: 2016). Muhammadiyah has not only become an active agent of civil society but also has represented Islam as a social force that actively plays a crucial role in social changes and sustainable development. Since its establishment, Muhammadiyah has placed itself in the civil zone and avoids being involved political conflicts in order to achieve its objective and agenda smoothly, which is actualizing *baldatun ṭayyibatun wa rabbun ghafūr* (a good country blessed with a divine mercy), and to become a representative civil society organization that is able to embrace and harmonize the relation between Islam and

democracy. In recent development, especially after the fall of New Order regime in 1998, the government tends to allow more spaces for civil society to grow(Hilman Latief: 2013; Fauzia: 2016). In this case, Muhammadiyah sees the government as a partner in terms of empowerment, just as it sees the other partners in the scope of civil society. Besides, there are many other Indonesian-Islamic civil society organizations that also conduct civil empowerment programs, like Nahdlatul Ulama, Persatuan Islam and Al-Irsyad. Even though all of them share similar scopes of empowerment, they have different characteristics, particularly in choosing and interpreting Islamic texts that are used as theological grounds for their activities.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The spirit of civil empowerment is identical with Islam as a religion where, according Bassam Tibi (1999), is one of the factors that can determine the development and at once motivate its adherents to do changes in many aspects in their life. Religion gives its followers a meaning of life. Religious contents shape reality and and at the same time are formed by reality. Islamic values in the sacred texts (al-Qur'an and Ḥadīth) have guided the followers to do and think positively in life, including in the light of economic activities. If an economically poor Muslim comprehends the value of Islam, it can actually be a spiritual and logical power that encourages and helps him out of the situation.

Viewing deeper into Islamic texts, the word of empowerment is, according to some scholars, represented by the Arabic word "tamkīn" and "istiqwā" where semantically-philosophically means "to enable or strengthen" someone to own authority and power (ḥissī-emotional and māddī-material) in order to succeed in life (Majma' al-Lughah al-Arabiyah: 2004) . The word of "tamkīn" and its derivation are repeated 18 times in the Qur'an and have several meanings: a) a power given by God in Sūrah al-Kahfī 84; b) favors and livelihood in Sūrah al-Anʿām 6; c) ability and victory over something in Sūrah al-Anfāl 71; d) stay stable and strong in one place in Sūrah al-Mursalāt 21 (Zamrud: 2010; Sanrego: 2016). Prophet Muhammad PBUH is said to practice the idea of economic empowerment in one of this long hadith:

Anas bin Malik said, there was a friend from Anṣār coming to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to ask a favor, then the dialogue happened between them: (the Prophet Muhammad/P): "Is there something you own in your house?" (The friend of the Prophet/F): "Yes, Oo Prophet, an old saddle cloth. Part of them is what we wear, the other one is for sitting, and the other one is for drinking." Then P said, "Go, catch them all and bring them here." The Anṣār man came back to his house to gather his last things and gave them to the Prophet who then gathered the crowd and auctioned the saddle cloth. (P): "Who wants to buy this thing?" "I take it for one dirham," said someone. (P): "Who dares to pay more?" The Prophet repeated his offer three times. Then, "I take it for two Dirhams," said another one. Then the Prophet gave him the saddle. The Prophet then gave the money to the Anṣār man and said: "Go buy food for your family with half of this amount, and buy an axe with the rest of it. After that, come back here." The Anṣār man soon went to fulfill the Prophet's order and came back with a new axe. The Prophet greeted him and reached for his hands while giving him a piece of wood, and said: "Go and cut the woods, and sell them. Do not go see me before 15 days!". The Anṣār man went to the hills to cut the wood and sold them. After 15 days, he came to the Prophet with 10 dirhams in his hands. From his money, some of them he used to buy clothes, some of them to buy foods, and the rest he saved as the next capital. The Prophet said: "This is better for you than begging for foods—it will make you ugly in the Judgment Day. O really, begging is forbidden—except in three situations; extreme starvation, heavy debt, and burdening fine payment." (Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidzi in Abi Ulfah: 2008)

The word "tamkīn" and other derivations in the Qur'an emphasize that empowering poor man, both individuals and society, does not only focus on material side but also spiritual side of a human's life as well as representing the dimension of Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah (the higher purposes of religion) referring to five essentials, namely: the preservation of religion, soul, mind, property, and offspring. Furthermore, Islamic normative empowering values in the primary and secondary texts have provided a set of epistemic cycle, from the foundations (i.e. a concept of ownership and freedom in Islam), methods, active subjects, target-objects, to material sources of empowerment (the concept of ṣadaqah, infāq, zakāh, waqf, and hibah).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic normative values on society empowerment within those sacred texts stated above have been used and applied in Muslims societies for centuries and have been interpreted to resolve many problems in life, including the distribution of welfare. Previous studies (A. Clark: 2004; Deneulin and Bano: 2009; Atia: 2013) on society empowerment in Islamic world proved that Islamic sacred texts have become a driving factor in many empowering activities among the individuals and Muslim societies.

In his study on Muslim civil society in Jordan, Egbert-Harmsen found at least two motives that affect many Islamic civil organizations in conducting empowerment, they are: a) religious motive, based on the sacred texts—the Qur'an and Ḥadīth For example, there are verses about humanity, such as zakāh (translated as: zakat) and ṣadaqahfī sabīlillāh (charity in the path and for the sake of Allah). The ḥadīth texts are just the same. There is are ḥadīths suggesting helping others due to brotherhood-sisterhood and humanity reasons, others suggesting helping poor people vnd orphans, and others also suggesting being kind in the neighborhood, no matter who they are; b) sociological motive, such as social solidarity motives. Among other interesting findings is that empowerment is performed to measure the quality of ideology, religiosity, and human morality (Harmsen: 2008). The civil society experience in Jordan has shown that religious motive still becomes the main factor that encourages Jordanian Muslims to do empowerment through the distribution of

philanthrophic and humanitarian funds. These are distributed to several sectors like education, health, and economic-financial sectors. Religion, in this case, has been an undeniable factor in human life, including economic activities, which seem to affirm Max Weber's thesis and study on religious puritans like Calvinist in the *Protestant Ethics and The Spirit of Capitalism*.

METHODOLOGY

This study applies qualitative approach and descriptive analysis that aims to critically describe the roles of Muhammdiyah through its department of Majelis Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (abbreviated as: MPM) in interpreting and practicing Islamic values in the relation of civil society empowerment in the post Soeharto's New Order regime era. Data is gathered from observation, interview with the MPM leaders, and document analysis. Other previous studies which are also included as the main sources of the study are conducted by Prijono (1996) and Harmsen (2008).

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

In 2010, a decade after its establishment, Muhammadiyah generates a new identity by carrying on "three pillars of al-Māʿūn" concept, which focuses on three main agendas and actors: a) disaster management by Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center (MDMC); b) zakat management by Lembaga Amil Zakat Infak Sedekah Muhammadiyah (Lazismu); and c) civil society empowerment by Majelis Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (MPM).

MPM was established in the 2000 Muhammadiyah conference in Jakarta with the name of *Lembaga Buruh Tani dan Nelayan* (Fishermen and Peasants Institute) as a conclusive evidence of the application of Muhammadiyah's theological vision of Sūrah al-Māʿūn. One of the causing factors that led to this establishment is that, after the 1998 reformation, theological concept on freedom and transformative Islam were widely raised in Indonesian public spaces. In response, Muhammadiyah institutionalized and structured the activity of society empowerment by establishing such body (*Lembaga Buruh Tani dan Nelayan* and then became MPM). Meanwhile, al-Māʿūn, the 197th Sūrah in the Qur'an, contains normative values on defending *mustaḍʿafīn*—a poor, powerless, and marginalized groups of people in a country. The text of Sūrah al-Māʿūn can be seen below:

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدُعُّ الْيَتِيمَ وَلَا يَحُضُّ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ فَوَيْلٌ لِّلْمُصَلِّينَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَن صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاؤُونَ وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ

Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense? For that is the one who drives away the orphan. And does not encourage the feeding of the poor. So woe to those who pray. [But] who are heedless of their prayer -Those who make show [of their deeds]. And withhold [simple] assistance.

As for MPM, Sūrah al-Māʿūn has become a driving power and motivating spirit in ensuring the availability of *halal* (permissible) and *ṭayyib* (good-hygienic) foods for the people just as stated in the third Qur'anic verse. The theological values in Sūrah al-Māʿūn have affected the vision of MPM in improving competitiveness and position, as well as increasing society empowerment through a mission of *Penolong Kesengsaraan Oemem* (PKO, The Aid Provider for the Public Suffering) and through a movement called "al-Māʿūn prosperous and civilized society." As for its mission, MPM aims to uphold social religiosity and faith as spiritual power in empowerment activity as well as to actualize social transformation that includes life changes in individuals, families, and wider society.

Society empowerment conducted by MPM, following its main organization—Muhammadiyah, is massively run and organized since the scope of practice is quite wide around Indonesia. MPM is spread in Indonesia starting with the head central leadership of Muhammadiyah and is followed by sub-regions as much as 33 areas (provincial level), and 417 of sub-regions (regency level). In its operational governance, MPM builds partnership with the government and Muhammadiyah University unions. In other words, MPM, using Muhammadiyah's wide business networks, is still considering the government as its partner in the effort to strengthen human resources (being empowerment agents) and to develop programs. Other business networks within Muhammadiyah organization also play an important role in fundraising and its empowernment programs, especially done by Lazismu. Furthermore, the empowerment agenda run by MPM in many scopes (education, economy, politics, etc) employs the approach of what is so called "the ecology of human development and its environments." In this approach, a social intervention should reach all levels (macro, memo, and micro) of relation between individuals and their environments.

Various empowerment programs which are derived from Sūrah al-Māʿūn can be classified into three sectors and approaches: first, informal sectors such as for street vendors, pedicab drivers, and others. They need an intense accompaniment and supervision. Second, migrant workers and labors, which also need an empowerment and accompaniment programs. Third, people with disabilities. Programs like capacity building, accessible facilities, career coaching, and job opportunity are essential for them.

In addition, the empowerment program should also ensure food sovereignty and provide legal and moral advocacy for the public in the case of unjust public regulations. In the effort to ensure food sovereignty, it is formulated into several programs: developing integrated farming; establishing education and training centers (PUSDIKLAT) for integrated farming; developing business model for products of agriculture, husbandry, and fishery; and improving society's capacity in marketing the products. Meanwhile, citizen advocacy of public regulations is done through , among other things, a

critical involvement and advocacy in the formulation and allocation of State Budget (i.e. APBN) and Regional Budget (i.e. APBD).

In seven years since 2010, MPM has implemented programs to empower society, in which reaches 60 programs in total(based on MPM annually Reports). In informal sectors, the implemented programs are: material briefing of good services and English language education for pedicab drivers and material briefing of healthy snacks for street vendors. Micro-funding is also given to the pedicab drivers in Malioboro, Yogyakarta. As for the labors and migrant workers, there are entrepreneurship training and accompaniment-supervision programs until novel publishing programs initiated by Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. As for the people with disabilities, the programs are establishing and at once accompanying the community of deaf people to learn the Qur'an and sign language, initiating training of banking and establishing banks for people with disabilities. As for the farmers and fishermen, there are training of cultivation capacity improvement and forming fishermen's meeting as a facility to discuss problems and express complains about protection of fishermen's life. Other advocacies are also shown by assisting people with disabilities to simultaneously watch over the legislation and the implication of regional regulations relating to the people with disabilities.

Concerning society empowerment conducted by MPM, it strongly affirmed the previous theory regarding religion's role in the development of a society. If observed deeper, Islam contains a set of practical values (ontology, epistemology, and axiology) relating to the development where two main aspects of human life, according to Islamic perspective, is involved, namely: material and spiritual aspects. Besides, religion has at least four functions in life, namely education, social control, loyalty in brotherhood, and tranformation (Puspito: 1983).

Through MPM, Islam becomes a spirit of freedom to take roles in the development agendas. The spirit is based on the Sūrah al-Māʿūn which ideologically becomes theological foundation of Muhammadiyah'e establishment in 1912. At that time, the founder of Muhammadiyah, KH. Ahmad Dahlan, who was inspired by Sūrah al-Māʿūn emphasized the importance of the integration of faith and action. He saw social action as an implication of individual's faith. In its early establishment, during pre-independence until the end of New Order era, the theological spirit of al-Māʿūn is practically interpreted in the forms of empowerment activities in education (by building schools and universities), health (by enacting clinics and hospitals), and social sector (by establishing houses for orphanages and the poor).

In the mid 1990s, Amien Rais—general leader of Muhammadiyah during 1990-1995 periods—introduced the concept of "social *tawḥīd*" (the understanding of the oneness of Gis should be reflected in social actions) to enrich and widen the interpretation of Sūrah al-Māʿūn. In Arabic, al-Māʿūn means "significant assistance" or "helpful practices" which, in its classic interpretation, aims at the weak ones that are explicitly stated in the -Māʿūn verses, namely orphans and poor people, through zakat (Ibn Katsir: 2004) . When the Sūrah representing Muhammadiyah's ideology is practically interpreted by the actors, leaders, administrators, and members of Muhammadiyah, the interpretation becomes wider. First, in the early period (post New Order era), MPM, led by Moeslim Abdurrahman, practically applied the Sūrah to help weak parties in several sectors like marginalized farmers, labors, and fishermen.

Second, in the next MPM generation, the interpretation of Sūrah al-Māʿūn was more developed by Said Tuhuleley—head of MPM for two periods (2005-2010 and 2010-2015)—who actively translated the spirit of Sūrah al-Māʿūn into many ideas and idioms, like social orphans, corruptors are liars, jihad for food sovereignty, and social infidels. According to Tuhuleley, infidelity does not only happen in individual level but also in organizations, even in a country, where, whether intentionally or not, those actors have weakened others (Prihantoro: 2016). In this regard, there is a good statement from Bachtiar Dwi Kurniawan, secretary general of MPM, representing the MPM vision:

"No matter a nation does exist or not, no matter the government has changed many times, empowerment activities must be continued. It is a task and also a holy commandment from God—as stated in many verses in the Qur'an—that is related to social justice reinforcement, reflected by those marginalized people or mustaḍʿafīn.*"*

The statement above shows that empowerment done by MPM aims not to surpass or compete with the government but more of a task and obligation from Allah.

Besides Sūrah al-Māʿūn, the second MPM generation also applies many chosen texts taken from the Qur'an and hadith as their justification for the empowerment, for example: Sūrah an-Nisā' 9, Sūrah al-Balad 13-16, Sūrah ar-Raʿd 11, Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt 69, and a hadith narrated by Imam Muslim about how a Muslim should be physically and mentally strong(based on interview with MPM leaders, 2017). Sūrah an-Nisā', verse number 9, contains a spirit of empowerment in families as a micro-civil society institution to cultivate physically-mentally strong offspring or generation. Sūrah al-Balad, verse number 13-16, tells Muslims to do empowerment for marginalized groups and explicitly states the duty of empowerment as a steep hill to climb (*wa maa adraaka ma al-ʿaqabah*). Sūrah ar-Raʿd, verse number 11, tells about human free will to start and to end a change. In this light, Bachtiar Dwi Kurniawan states:

"The core of empowerment agenda is actually strengthening the main power which is laid within the society itself. This main power will determine the fate of the society. In this case, MPM places itself as a facilitator of change—not an actor of change."

Sura al-ʿAnkabut, verse number 69, conveys philosophical ideas of empowerment that involves hard effort to do changes in individual levels. The change is actually possible under God's guidance and is informed by God Himself. Meanwhile, a common ḥadīth that is usually delivered by the MPM agents in the empowerment activities says: *"A strong faithful man is more loved by Allah compared to the weak faithful one."(Muslim in Abi Ulfah: 2008)*

The reinterpretation formulated and done by leaders, members, and key actors of MPM on the above Islamic texts plays an important role in the success of empowerment program. The MPM's successful implementation of the empowerment program is deemed representing the success of Muhammadiyah as one of the largest Islamic civil society organizations in Indonesia in the aftermath of the fall of New Order regime.

CONCLUSIONS

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that: first, Muhammadiyah through MPM has done the reinterpretation Islamic texts in light of empowerment goals. This interpretation is different from classical interpretations and from interpretive practices in other Islamic world since the interpretation, which focused on Sūrah al-Māʿūn and other related supporting texts, involved and generated social, empowering, and advocacy activities in practical levels. The reinterpretation utilizes Islamic texts and teachings as the main theological grounds for empowerment activities. Second, the role of society empowerment conducted by Muhammadiyah through MPM affirms the theory of civil society in Indonesia in the post New Order era, in which Muhammadiyah along with other civil society organizations in Indonesia build a partnership with the government and complement its role in society empowerment programs since the government alone is unable to alleviate poverty, improve social welfare, and spread prosperity around the country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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