

Characteristics of Moslem Intellectual, a Perspective of Communication Psychology

O. Hasbiansyah

ABSTRAK

Makna intelektual muslim tidak terpisahkan dari makna intelektual itu sendiri. Seseorang dikatakan sebagai intelektual bukan karena gelar akademik atau tingkat pendidikan yang dicapainya, tetapi dilihat apakah ia memiliki komitmen untuk membangun masyarakat ke arah yang lebih baik lewat gagasan dan aksi-aksi yang dikembangkannya. Seiring dengan pengertian ini, intelektual muslim adalah orang yang terikat dengan ajaran Islam, yang dengan kecerdasannya dan kearifannya, merasa terpancung untuk menerjemahkan ajaran Islam sebagai rahmat bagi manusia dan alam semesta. Dalam perspektif komunikasi, seorang intelektual muslim adalah orang yang terbuka sekaligus kritis. Kehadiran mereka di tengah umat sangat dibutuhkan sebagai mitra dialog agar umat tidak terjerembab pada fanatisme buta serta mampu menggali hikmat dari berbagai informasi dan perbedaan paham, lebih-lebih di tengah membludaknya arus informasi pada jaman sekarang ini

What is Intellectual All About

Intellectual is a term which is often associated with or used for scholarship and scientific terms. Students of the university are often said as intellectual persons of the future. Someone who has passed his high education degree are sometimes named as intellectual. Intellectual is also often used to call man who actively developed a kind of science.

As a matter of fact, intellectual is not the same as scholar and is not equal to scientist, either. An intellectual is more than both.

Scholar is someone who has just completed his study at university so that he/she begets an academic title, like Drs., Ir., S.Sos., S.P., S.H., M.Sc., M.A., etc. There are a great deal of them because every university produces scholars periodically. Scientist is a man or woman who steps himself or herself in science. He develops science whether by empirical observation or by his own analysis. Most of scientists reach high education level.

But among many scholars, there are only a few who become scientists—the real one. Many of them entered routine activities and became professionals. But to be a scientist didn't necessarily need any formal education at the university. Whoever can be a scientist even if they get their knowledge through an autodidactical way.

So, what is really the meaning of intellectual? James McGregor Burns defines intellectual as a devotee of ideas, knowledge, values. Intellectual people are a group of persons who involve themselves in social activities. They feel to be called to devote their knowledge and skill not only for themselves but for society as well. They live in social life.

At the XIX century, in France, the term intellectual was used to refer thinkers who lead anti-priest and anti-military movement, in order to protest the court of Dreyfuss in 1894. The term was also referred to critical thinkers of authority who held the power. This description doesn't mean that intellectual is always radical (Brym, 1993:2).

The most important characteristic of intellectual is that he works thoroughly in producing valued ideas.

Subagio Sastrowardoyo writes, "In English term, intellectual word is relied on a particular individual which has intelligence and refinement as results of cultural education. Someone may have an academic title and good expertness in his job field, but he is not an intellectual if he is not interested in cultural stimuli. In English society, it is unusual to cail a man who never pays attention to the development of his cultural nation as an intellectual. An intellectual tries to pursue his ideas, to develop knowledge, to struggle for his value." (Rakhat, 1986).

Opinion as written above is suggested by Sobary (1994). According to Sobary, intellectual has a social unrest. He always critically asking questions, strives—without despair—to get answers of any metaphysical problems or sociocultural ones at his social- environment. The true intellectual is an "independent person", a "free-man", who is not easy to be held spellbound by anything except the grandeur of values itself for the sake of intellectuals. There are so many people who have characteristics like that who had mentioned above. They could be lectures, journalists, researchers, NGO's activists, ulama, pastors, poets, etc.

The presence of intellectual in society is very important. Edward W. Said (1998:7) said, "... there was no important revolution in modern history without intellectual; in contrary, every movement of great contra-revolution always involved intellectual, too." In other words, intellectual has great role in social life. According to Julien Benda, Said cited, intellectual develops humankind's consciousness; he creates the social order of society.

In Islam, an intellectual has commitment of spreading Islamic teachings. Some people believed that Al Quran has its own special word to mention 'intellectual', that is, *ulul albab*—which means men with high capacity to understand, men with great wisdom. Based on that view, although not all people agree with the opinion, in this paper, Moslem intellectual simply will be as-

sociated with *ulul albab*.

Perspective of Quran

According to Al Quran, besides the meaning as has mentioned above, Moslem intellectual has some particular characteristics as follows:

1. He surrenders to perform the teachings of Allah.
"And take a provision (with you) for the journey. But the best of provisions is right conduct (takwa). So fear Allah, o ye *ulul albab*." (QS 2:197).
"... then please do 'takwa' to Allah, o *ulul albab* so that you'll get the luck." (QS 5:179).
"Allah has prepared for them a severe punishment (in the hereafter). Therefore fear Allah, o ye *ulul albab*." (QS 65:10).
"Is one who worship devoutly during the hours of the night prostrating himself or standing (in adoration), who takes heed of the hereafter, and who places in his hope in the Mercy of his Lord-(like one who does not)? Say: 'Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?' It is those who are *ulul albab* that receive admonition." (QS 39:9).
2. He can classify which, the right thing and which the wrong ones and then he chooses the right one.
"Not equal are things that are bad and things that are good, even though the abundance of the bad may dazzle thee. So fear Allah, o ye *ulul albab*, that (so) ye may prosper." (QS 5:100).
3. He interested in science or knowledge.
"Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of day and night, there are indeed the signs for *ulul albab*." (QS 3:190).
"And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe in it, the whole of it is from our Lord,' and none will grasp the admonition except *ulul albab*." (QS 3:7).
4. He has high commitment of teaching his knowledge improving the circumstance of society.

“Here is a Message for mankind: that they may take warning there from, and may know that He is One Allah: let *ulul albab* take heed.” (QS 14:52).

- “Is then one who doth know that that which hath been revealed unto thee from thy Lord is the Truth, like one is blind? It is those are *ulul albab* that receive admonition; those who fulfill the Covenant of Allah and fail not in their plighted word; those who join together those thing which Allah hath commended to be joined, hold their Lord in awe, and fear the terrible reckoning; those who patiently persevere, seeking for countenance of their Lord; establish regular prayers; spend out of (the gifts) We have bestowed for their sustenance, secretly and openly, and turn off Evil with good: for such there is the final attainment of the (Eternal) Home.” (QS. 13:19-22).
5. He consider all opinions from other, yet he keeps his critical attitude toward every matters. “Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best of it: those are ones who Allah has guided, and those are *ulul albab*.” (QS 39:18).

Perspective of Communication Psychology

Communication and psychology have closed relationship upon each other. Both of them describe and explain human being behaviour implicitly and explicitly. Communication science learns transmission of messages between two or more persons mediately or immediately. Psychology, according to George A. Miller, is a science that attempts to describe, predict, and control mental and behavioral events.

According to what I have explained before, communication psychology, as branch of psychology, approaches events of human life as communication process' concerned with mental or attitude and the behavior of individual. Communication psychology explains such events not only as transmission process of message, but also as description of their attitudes toward each other

and toward information sources they share.

In this paper, communication psychology is used as perspective to analyze characteristics of Moslem intellectual in its simple description.

Characteristics of Moslem Intellectual:

Perspective of Communication Psychology

We have mentioned five characteristics of Moslem intellectual according to some verses of Al Quran. We will not describe all in this paper. We will just clarify the characteristic which conforms to communication psychology perspective. One of the characteristics which is concerned with the communication psychology perspective is the characteristic that says: a Moslem intellectual can consider all opinion wherever they come from, but he must keep his critical attitude. Al Quran says: “Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best of it: those are ones who Allah has guided, and those are *ulul albab*.” (QS 39:18). He didn't have necessarily agree or disagree to any opinion. Opinion came to him will be “tested” by a “valid” logic or proper proposition based on Al Quran and Hadits directly or indirectly. He can think of something without prejudice. He is open-minded enough to consider all information objectively. The opposite of open-mindedness is closed-mindedness or dogmatism. Whoever who has closed-mindedness is not suitable to be called as Moslem intellectuals.

There is proof that open-mindedness man is psychologically more successful in making friendship, building a harmony relationship, growing mutual understanding than those who is born closed-mindedness. And talking about open-mindedness, dogmatism lies on the contrary.

Milton Rokeach who wrote a book entitled *Open and Closed Mind*, defines dogmatism as “(a) relatively closed cognitive organization of beliefs and disbeliefs about reality, (b) organized around a central set of beliefs about absolute authority, in turn (c) provides a frame work for patterns of intolerance towards others” (Rakhmat, 1985:171).

To understand open-mindedness, we have

to understand its contrary first: dogmatism. Dogmatism means;

1. To evaluate a message based on personal motives. He doesn't want to consider opinion that does not conform to his beliefs. Dogmatic people will accept an opinion only if it is in accordance with his belief or support his desire, his need for power, his need for developing his-self. He doesn't wish to pay attention on logic or proposition concerned with the message. In short words, his personal motives become a strongly influential in evaluating a message.
2. Simply thinking. He thinks anything just in "black and white" range. He thinks everything without nuance. Reality is always divided into dichotomical parts: right and wrong, pro and contra, and the likes. He claims that his opinion is the rightest one. Whoever disagrees with him is wrong. Each opinion that is suitable with his opinion is considering right. It is impossible that the opinion disaccordance with his beliefs was considering right. In short, he is intolerant to any different opinion. Al Quran insinuates the man like this as someone who has ears but are not used to hear.
3. Source oriented. The most important thing for the dogmatic person is the person who speaks, not what is spoken. His mind is only focused on the source where information comes from.
4. Due to the source oriented, dogmatic people only seeks information from his own source group only. Such kind of person will accept information only if it comes from the source which he usually uses. He will refuse to use other sources. In other words, he avoids to consider information coming from other. For instance, a member of Persatuan Islam (Persis—an Islamic organization exists in Indonesia) just believes information from books written by a member of Persis. But he is not interested in reading a book written by Nadhlatul Ulama (NU—another Islamic organization based on East Java) people, and so on.
5. Defends and cares for his belief system. Dogmatic person believes that his beliefs are the absolute one. According to him, all of his beliefs are always right. He never improves, let alone changes his beliefs. His certainties are not allowed to be questioned or doubted. He won't tolerate any beliefs or information that disconform his beliefs.
6. Incapable of letting inconsistency in his belief system. Dogmatic person always denies contradiction. He refuses all information that is not in accordance with his belief system. Inconsistent information with his belief will be refused, distorted, or ignored immediately. He can not bear to face differences of opinion condition.

Dogmatism is not conform to characteristic of Moslem intellectual. Moslem intellectual is a person who has open-mindedness, that is:

Firstly, he evaluates messages objectively. He uses logic and good common-sense. His reason is used to consider a message he deals with. Al Quran says, "O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin ..." (QS 49: 12).

Secondly, he can accepted opinion, information, or event not only be divided into right and wrong, pro and contra, and the likes. He considers them alternatively. Reality of the truth has nuance that can't just be categorized into binary opposition such as "black and white".

Thirdly, he is content oriented. He doesn't just pay attention to someone who speaks, he especially orients to what someone speaks. He is capable of accepting information wherever it comes from, regardless of the source, even from his enemy, as long as good enough for his mind.

Fourthly, he seeks information from many sources. He isn't only bound to the source of his group. He is able to adopt messages that came from every sources, as long as they can be tested by logic or an appropriate proposition.

Fifthly, he can improve and change his opinion or his beliefs. He realizes that his belief is not absolutely true. But it doesn't mean that his belief is false. The only absolutely truth is God: Al-

lah. Open-minded people are brave enough to state that his belief is true, moreover, he can improve it if he gets better information. However, he is aware of contextual meaning. It means that whatever he believes at that time is only based on information or knowledge as far as he knows at that time. There is so much information and knowledge either from books or other sources which are not known yet by him.

Sixthly, he can tolerate information which is inconsistent with his belief system. He can bear to face inconsistent information that opposes to his belief. He will seek the basis of thought of each opinion. Then, he will decide the rightfulness or the wrongfulness of that opinion.

It is proper that Moslem intellectual has a steady belief that all thoughts and ideas, regardless of its familiarity for his environment, ought to have a way to be expressed as far as they are intended to broaden understanding of Islam and enrich the alternative thoughts and ideas. The various opinions of Islam thoughts existed in society should not be viewed as a bad condition. The Prophet said, "The difference of opinion is the mercy." So, the difference of opinion is natural, not a betrayal. Differences of opinion will lead to the truth. Mao Zedong ever said, "Let a thousand flowers grow, let a thousand thoughts compete" (Mohamad, 1990). The difference of opinion requests to use our mind so that we can consider all the opinion.

Moslem intellectual is willing to hear humanity ideas in wide spectrum as possible, he chooses which one of them that contains a truth according to objective standards. For him, the truth is the dynamic thing which has to be pursued continuously, instead of the static thing that is considered as the Final result of effort. O. W. Holmes said, "The ultimate good desired is better reached by free trades in ideas that the best of truth is the power of thought to get itself accepted competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safety can be carried out" (Madjid, 1987:209).

Once again, one of the important characteristics of Moslem intellectual is open-mindedness. The following implication of open-mindedness

is nontraditionalism and nonsectarianism. Traditionalism in this paper is meant as an attitude of being bound to the past tradition, while sectarianism is defined as an attitude of being only bound to their own group's opinion. For a traditionalist, things came from the past always have to be preserved. The past traditions (like culture, norms, values, beliefs, etc.) are viewed as the truth which can't be changed or improved. His thought and soul is clogged by the past. For a sectarianist, everything is true if it comes from his group or conforms with his group's beliefs system. A sectarianist doesn't want to accept opinion from other groups.

So, nontraditionalism is the opposite of what has been said in Quran: "Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers" (QS 2:170); and the opposite of nonsectarianism is like what is described by Quran as "Each party rejoicing in that which is with itself" (QS 30:32). Surely there is no group allowed to monopolize the truth.

Let's pay attention to the following verses: "... So, announce the Good News to my Servants; those who listen to the Word, and follow the best of it: those are ones who Allah has guided, and those are *ulul albab*. (QS 39:17-18). These verses had been proven right in Islamic History. History research showed that the Moslems were open and inclusive, they were willing to learn from everywhere and anyone at all. Due to this fact, Islamic civilization became the first civilization to internationalize science and knowledge. The Moslems had absorbed and combined sciences from many sources that existed in all earth's surface. The Prophet Muhammad once was seen asked the Moslems to seek knowledge, "Look for knowledge though it is in China." As we know, at that time China was not Moslem, but the followers of The Prophet were allowed and encouraged to discover knowledge at such an unknown and strange land. All bin Abi Thalib ever said, "Take the wisdom wherever you discover, though it comes from the mouth of a munafik (hypocrite)." So, don't only pay heed to the "container" where the wisdom comes from.

It could be said that Islam had embraced many ideas as soon as the Moslems met with the

centers of the world civilization. But, historically, the assimilation of various cultural ideas on large scale happened after the translation of many books. Islamic civilization reached its peak after the publication of many ideas in manuscripts and the development of them were carried out. In other words, the movement of translation had stimulated the resurgence of Islamic intellectual. Therefore, it couldn't be rejected that Islam had contributed to the civilization value for humanity.

Epilogue

This era is often said as The Information Age. There are so much information spreading over the world through various media. Marwah Dawud Ibrahim said that technology development through the satellite transmission unifies human beings as in one world. We live as if in a glass-house, so we can peep at and to be peeped by others. We can't avoid the influence of information dissemination. It is another serious matter which is faced by the Moslems besides the difference of opinion among themselves.

So, what is the suitable attitudes of Moslem to deal with matters like this?

As we have explained above, the Moslem—especially Moslem intellectual—are obliged to learn anything from everywhere and every possible sources. All and simultaneously, he has to be critical to evaluate it. He has to be open-minded. Besides, he has to give up the traditionalism and sectarianism. This condition is needed in order to spread the understanding of Islam, to develop tolerance toward differences of opinion, to build science, and to avoid stagnant condition. **M**

Wallahu a'lamu bishshawab.

References

- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. 1990. *The Holy Qur-an, English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*. Al Madinah Al Munawarah: King Fahd Holy Qur-an Printing Complex.
- Baqi, Muhammad Fuad Abdul. wy. *Al Mu'jam Al Favras*.
- Brym, Robert. 1993. *Intelektual dan Politik*. Translated by Nugraha Kacasungkana. Jakarta: Grafiti.
- Departemen Agama. 1990. *Al Quran dan Terjemahannya*. Jakarta: Bumiarestu.
- Madjid, Nurchalish. *Islam Keindonesiaan dan Kemodernan*. Bandung: Mizan.
- Mohamad, Goenawan. 1990. *Catatan Pinggir 3*. Jakarta: Grafiti Pers.
- Rakhmat, Jalaluddin. 1986. *Islam Alternatif*. Bandung: Mizan.
- _____. 1987. *Psikologi Komunikasi*. Bandung: Remadja Karya.
- Said, Edward W. 1998. *Peran Intelektual*. Translated by Rin Hindryati and P. Hasudungan Sirait. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor.
- Sobary, Mohamad. 1994. *Moralitas Kaum Pinggiran*. Bandung: Mizan.
- Syihab, Qurasy. 1986. "Mengikis Fanatisme dan Mengembangkan Toleransi," in *Islam Sebuah Dilema*. Bandung: Mizan.
- Tempo*, No. 25, XXII, Agust 22, 1992.