

FEMININE DIMENSION IN ISLAM AND THE ERA OF MASCULINIZATION TOWARD NATURE

Mohammad Hasan Basri

Pondok Pesantren An-Nuqoyah Guluk –Guluk Madura

Telp: 081388148364

Abstract

The development process which is running in several countries tends to ignore the aspect of natural balance. It leads to undesirable impact toward natural -ecosystem sustainability process and human beings' life. In Vandana Shiva language, this recent development process is "masculinization" process toward nature. Nature which is symbolized as mother earth is exploited destructively causing natural destruction and ecological crisis. In this paper, writer tries to find the root of problem form eco-feminism perspective through several theories on human and nature relationship related to feminism concept in Islam. There are two main reasons for recent exploitative and destructive development towards nature. First, human beings act as single authoritarian and single entity. Second, in Islamic theological perspective, recent development model is masculine -based and it ignores feminine aspects in Islam that it applies rigid and dominating approaches.

Proses pembangunan yang berlangsung di berbagai negara saat ini cenderung mengabaikan aspek keseimbangan alam. Hal tersebut berdampak tidak saja berakibat buruk terhadap proses keberlangsungan ekosistem alam, akan tetapi juga mengancam terhadap keberlangsungan hidup manusia. Dalam bahasa Vandana Shiva, proses pembangunan saat ini ada proses "maskulinisasi" terhadap alam. Alam yang disimbolkan sebagai "mother earth" kemudian dieksploitasi secara destruktif sehingga menimbulkan kerusakan alam dan krisis ekologi. Dalam tulisan ini, penulis mencoba mencari akar persoalan tersebut dari perspektif eco-feminism melalui beberapa teori tentang hubungan manusia dan alam dikaitkan dengan dimensi feminitas dalam Islam. Ada dua hal penting yang mendasari mengapa saat ini pembangunan cenderung eksploitatif dan

destruktif terhadap alam. Pertama, manusia merasa sebagai penguasa alam dan melihat dirinya sebagai entitas tunggal. Kedua, dalam perspektif teologis Islam, model pembangunan selama ini masih bersifat “maskulin” dan tidak memperdulikan aspek-aspek feminin dalam Islam, sehingga pendekatan yang digunakan masih bersifat rigid dan mendominasi.

Keywords: *Feminine dimension, natural balance, development process*

Preface

As an initial point, I would like to present what we can learn from India about the notion of “*masculinization*” on nature (Shiva, 2005). During the era of struggle against English colonialism, for Indian People, “Mother India” became a symbol of struggle and inspiration against colonization. However, during the 1947-1980’s, when “development” was oriented as the main policy of the nation-state, the metaphor tended vanished from the discourse of national development. The state then acted as what Shiva names *parents patriae*; pretentiously, the state’s policies done in the sake of people’s welfare of protecting economical assets, and natural sources, the state dominated people’s life. Later on, the domination of the state gradually decreased since the power of transnational companies (TNCs) began to intervene and dominate the national economy. Liberalization policy with requirements from the IMF and a general appointment on tariff (GATT) defined by Word Bank, were carried and simultaneously TNCs promises the notion of a “free market”. The meaning of “Mother India” then, was not venerated as the source of power in the sake of people’s welfare anymore, yet as the source of interests and conflicts. “Mother India” as the symbol of freedom, inspiring the spirit of liberation during the early half of the 20th century, was replaced by the process of “masculinization” toward the country. This issue will be discussed deliberately by the writer in the following section.

Masculine Development and India

Masculine development such as India’s experience is actually similar with what has been happening in this country; since “*developmentalism*” initiated by New Order regime, Indonesia has become “a golden field” for TNCs to exploit natural resources. More than three decades, the authoritarian

regime and oppressive governance disoriented the governmental policies of development into monopolies way and destructed the autonomic civilian potentials. The result of development only benefited a few conglomerations and the empire of global capitalists. The big influence was, when the monetary crisis reached the third worlds countries, Indonesia couldn't recover until today because of the twist of loans and the power of the empire of global capitalists IMF and World Bank (Petras, James and Henry Veltmeyer, 2001).

In this situation, Indonesia faces challenges not only to free itself from twisted debt but also to pay the expensive cost to cure fundamental "acute diseases" such as uneducated people (the height of unemployment rate), corruption, and natural destructions; more than half of the whole forest in this country is already destroyed. Natural disasters like floods and landslides are daily disasters; the volume of water year by year has decreased (Based on WALHI's record), and so on. The hitherto era of autonomy and the strengthening ideas of empowering civil societies, actually gives many contingencies for regional stakeholders to rearrange and manage autonomous policies to raise the rate of people's welfare on one hand, and on the other hand to sustain natural potentials and ecosystem.

Thus, this paper attempts to trace the theories on the relationship between humans and nature, and the feminine dimensions in Islam as an epistemological framework to construct an eco-feminist perspective (Islamic perspective), and as a consideration to balance "masculine development" and "feminine development".

Theories on Human-Environmental Relation

Since the Renaissance period up to the modern era, dichotomy outlooks have influenced people's worldview, especially how human being perceives nature. The modern dichotomy between nature and society has been often taken for granted; *"The systematic fragmenting of the medieval world and the "othering" of nature entailed first took shape in the Renaissance period, during which the whole western attitude to the environment, knowledge and learning was transformed."* (Pálsson, 1996)

Related to the metaphoric term as the main discussion of this paper, one example that has affected modern perception toward nature is rooted in Medieval thought. Bordo expounds that "the Cartesian anxiety of

estrangement and uncertainty of the separation from the mother-world of the Middle Ages and the nursing earth was compensated for by the rational ego, the obsession with objectivity, and a “masculine” theory of natural knowledge; “She [nature] becomes “it”, and “it” can be understood and controlled. Not through “sympathy... but by virtue of *objectivity* of the “it”; nature as the otherness. “

However, in recent decades, to argue this strict dichotomy perspective, to separate human and environment/nature and society, has created a lively critical discussion among scholars from many fields of study particularly in the light of postmodernism; to see the existence not in a binary-opposed way.

To see the development of theories on the relationship between humanity and the environment, I will present what Pálsson conceptualizes historically, how the people have perceived and dealt with nature from early modern times-hitherto. To see the relationship between human and nature, Pálsson divides into three paradigms; *orientalism*, *paternalism*, and *communalism*. Environmental orientalism suggests a negative reciprocity in human-environmental relations. The vocabulary of orientalism is typically one of domestication, frontier, and expansion, of exploring, conquering, and exploiting the environment; for diverse purpose of production, consumption, sport, and display. In this orientalism context, scientists present themselves as analyst of the material world, unaffected by ethical considerations (Pálsson, 1996).

Whereas paternalism implies a balanced reciprocity, presupposing human responsibility; it implies human mastery and a distinction between layman and experts. This involves privileging scientific expertise, an inversion in the relative power of experts and laypersons. It is trapped in objectivist, western discourse on science and the other, animal rights activists often make a fundamental distinction between them (indigenous producers) and ‘us’ (euro-Americans). In the case of both environmental orientalism and paternalism, humans are masters toward nature.

To reject the radical separation of nature and society, subject and object, and modernist assumptions of othering, certainty and monologue, adding the dimension of continuity and discontinuity, Pálsson formulates the third paradigm i.e. communalism. This paradigm suggests generalized

reciprocity in human-environmental relations, invoking the notions of contingency, participation, and dialogue. The need to develop an ecological theory along such line, a theory that fully integrates from nature, and conversely that nature cannot be separated from humans. These three paradigms can be schematized in the following figure:

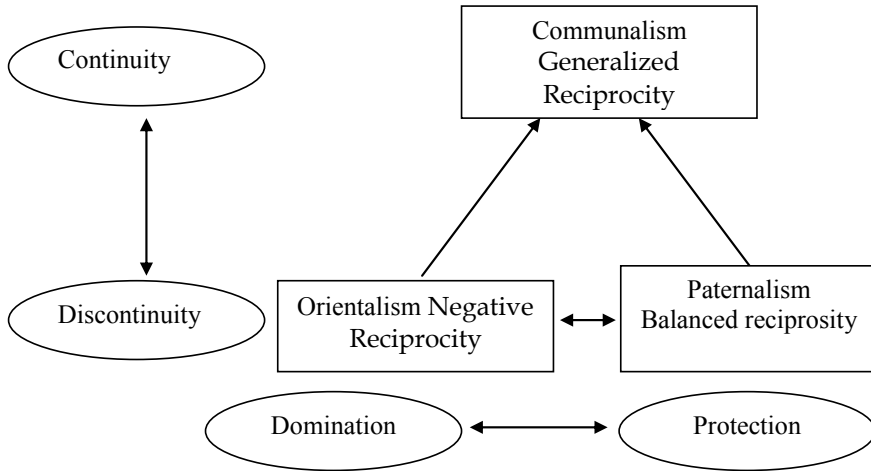


Figure 5: human beings and nature relationship paradigm

Islam, Eco-feminism, and Environmental Crisis

The number of religious notions on human beings and nature relationship are necessarily abundant in scriptural and prophetic tenets describing the way to treat nature. In Islam, as Nasr (1996) admitted, Islamic teachings concerning natural order and the environment are rooted in the Koran, the Sunna, and the Sufi’s Tradition (Said, Abdul Aziz and Nathan C. Funk, 2001). However, why has environmental crisis and natural destruction pervasively overwhelmed the Islamic World (third world countries).

It must be asked why, if the traditional teachings of Islam concerning the natural order are still alive, they are not more evident invoices from the Islamic world, nor more effective in the practical realm in averting ecological disasters? And why is it that the environmental crisis is no less acute in the Islamic world than in other parts of the globe? Let us first of all turn to the voices from the Islamic world which the west has heard during the past century and a half and still hears, and through which it interprets the Islamic view

concerning the natural environment (Said, Abdul Aziz and Nathan C. Funk, 2001).

In line with Nasr's great pity, I would like to recall feminine dimensions in Islam as a reflective notion to re-envision our sensibility of the ecological crisis especially from esoterical aspect (Sufis/sapiential dimensions). There are two theological categories for attributes of God. The first is *Jalal* (majestic); qualities of God emphasize the *tanzih* (oncomparability), *adl* (justice), *ghadab* (wrath), and *'izza* (inaccessibility/distance) of God. Whereas the *jamal* (beautiful), qualities invoke a more personal relation of *lutf* (Gentleness), *rahmah* (Mercy), *fadl* (bounty), *maghfira* (forgiveness), and *muhabbat* (love) with God (Schimmel, 2003 and Sharify, 2001).

In Murata's terms, the former attributes are "Yang names" since they place stress upon greatness, power, control, and masculinity, and the last attributes are "Yin names" for they place stress on submitting to the wishes of others, softness, acceptance, and receptivity (Murata, 1992). The contrast between these two approaches to reality is reflected throughout Islamic thought and society. Those who emphasize God's remoteness and distinction tend to dwell on the world of multiplicity and difference. They stress the discreet reality of individuals, the difference between the Creator and the creature, the distinction between things, the reality of these distinctions (masculine dimensions).

by contrast to that notion, those who emphasize God's similarity, nearness, and witness (*ma'iyya*) from the Koranic verse, "He is with you wherever you are" (57:4) prefer to dwell on the establishment of unity and interrelationship (feminine dimensions). Unfortunately, the *jamal* hand of God (feminine dimensions) has been overlooked and underdeveloped within the Islamic world's modern epistemological and ideological frameworks. The two theological perspectives have been particularly imbalanced in the domain of politics and governance, and in prevailing conceptions of power (conceived as power *over* rather than power *with*).

Therefore, there is a dire need to "re-cognize" the Feminine aspect or notion within Islamic precepts and to conceive of ways to implement the feminine attributes within society to avoid unguided and undesirable nature management. It is considered as one of major factors to dialogue

with nature in fulfilling human needs. Islam as a source of notion also put this into consideration in its development of thought. The development of Islamic thought in the Muslim world has been dominated by the so-called fundamentalism and or revivalism (tend to be masculine), and the survey of the recent revivalist works shows that the concern for nature and the related ecological issues has never been a top priority (Nasr, 2003).

Conclusion

From the aforementioned discussion, I will summarize the ideas as forward discussion. Epistemologically, the cognition and direction of modern science today still tends to separate, dichotomize, and divide existences. For instance, to see the natural phenomena, human beings are placed in the top position. It means that humans can treat anything whatever and however they want regardless of the reciprocal effects for all entities. Beyond human entities are seen as “the others”. This outlook will entail to exploit, to conquer, and to expand (*orientalist* and *paternalistic*, in the term of Pálsson, and *masculine* in the term of Shiva). Another example, epistemological and ideological frameworks in Islamic thought is more developed in the masculine track. This brings political and governmental outlooks to be rigid, dominated, and “othering”, or in the term of Murata, Islamic thoughts are still developing *masculine* epistemological frameworks, regardless feminine dimensions in Islam.

By considering Pálsson’s communalism theory and feminine dimensions in Islam, the need to construct a holistic, integrated, and balanced paradigm is very urgent. Thus, every element such governments, scholars, NGO activists especially feminists (to deal with *eco-feminist* perspectives) have a great chance and responsibility to envision and take the roles in sustaining ecosystems and natural resources in this only home of earth.

REFERENCES

- Afrasiabi, Kaveh L. 2003. “*Toward an Islamic Ecotheology*” in Richard C. Foltz, at. all, *Islam and Ecology: Bestowed Trust, Massachusetts* :Publications of the Center for the Study of World Redligion, Harvard Divinity School.

- Murata, Sachiko. 1992. *The Tao Of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Realtuinship in Islamic thought*. NewYork: State University of New York Press.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. 1992. "Islam and Environmental Crisis" in Steven C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder, *Spirit and Nature*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. 2003. "Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis" in Richard C. Foltz, at.all, *Islam and Ecology: Bestowed Trust*, Massachusetts :Publications of the Center for the Study of World Redligion, Harvard Divinity School.
- Pálsson, Gísli. 1996. "Human-Environmental Relations" in Philippe Descola and Gísli Pálsson *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspective*, New York: Routledge.
- Petras, James and Henry Veltmeyer. 2001. *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century* (Transl. Agung Prihantoro, Imperalisme Abad 21), Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana.
- Said, Abdul Aziz and Nathan C. Funk. 2001. "Peace in the Sufi Tradition: An Ecology of the Spirit", in *Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam: Precept and Practice*. New York: University Press of America.
- Schimmel, Annimarie. 2003. *My Soul Is A Woman*, New York: Continuum.
- Sharify, Meena-Funk. 2001. "Peace and the Feminine in Islam" in *Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam: Percepts and Practice*, New York: University Press of America.
- Shiva, Vandana. 2005. *Ecofeminism* (Transl. Kelik Ismunanto & Lilik, Perspektif Gerakan Perempuan dan Lingkungan). Yogyakarta: IRE Press.