

Majority versus Minority

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Abstract— Majority versus minority in this article refers to a number of adherents of a religion. Majority means religion that has high adherents in number and minority means religion that has low adherents in number. Majority versus minority is a way of thinking that put majority to the central of a society, while minority becomes marginalized. Majority has special rights through which they get many benefits not only from the state but also from society. Moreover, majority tends to take control over others. In Indonesia, Islam considers themselves to be the majority, while many other religions become minority. As the majority, Islam acquires privilege position in the government system. Besides, being minority, indigenous religions are treated in very different ways, compared with the way in which big religions such as Islam, Protestant and Catholic, Hindu, Buddha, and Kong Hu Chu, are treated. These are some indications of injustice in society because people are treated differently due to their religion.

Keywords— majority, minority, discrimination, inequality

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country in where many religions existed. The existence of many religions has been supported by Indonesian constitution, especially the article 29. According to this article, Indonesia State guarantees all its entire citizen to live and to express their religion freely. Precisely, this article guarantees all Indonesian citizen to live their religion. However, in practice, there are many injustices experiencing by minorities in society. Some minorities are facing discrimination and violence. While writing this article, in Sunday, May 20th, 2018, there was news in Metro TV, a TV channel in Indonesia, about violence faced by Ahmadiyah in East Lombok. Six houses were destroyed. 24 Ahmadiyah adherents were forced to leave their houses.[1] This violence describes how Ahmadiyah, as Indonesian citizen, get more bad experiences. The same bad experience was seen also in 2017, in West Java, especially at Kuningan region, in the Manislor village.[2] It was (maybe still is) difficult for 1600 Ahmadiyah adherents in the Manislor village to get their ID card due to their faith. The same difficulty to get an Indonesian ID card is also faced by some indigenous religious people such as Sunda Wiwitan followers in the West Java and Nuaulu in Seram Island in the Moluccas. In addition, majority Christian who is mainstream Christian in the Moluccas, in some cases, committed also violence to other Christian minority.

II. METHODOLOGY

Based on those cases, the attempt of this article is to analyze determinant factors that have made relation between

majority and minority is shaped in the frame of opposition to one another. Therefore, the method that will be used by the writer is field and library researches.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Literature Review on the notion of majority-minority

Majority and Minority are two terms which are used to identify a number of a group in society. Therefore, in this article, the writer will use these terms to point to a number of a religious group in society. Generally, majority refers to religion that has high adherents in number and minority refers to religion that has low adherents in number.

In an article entitled ‘The rules of quantity and quality’, Cesare Mirabeli explores the meaning of majority and minority. According to him, “The terms ‘Majority’ and ‘Minority’ designate two distinct and complementary groups which form parts of a whole. A reciprocal relationship exists between a majority and a minority: the majority cannot exist without the presence of a numerically inferior minority; likewise, a minority does not exist if there is not a majority which is numerically superior to it.”[3] It seems that he understands majority and minority as two existing groups in a society which each group has its own specific identify and uniqueness. The specific identity is an inner part of the group, so it gives certain value, emotion, and understanding to the group itself. So, the specific identity and uniqueness of each group is not opposite and threat to other. Because of the uniqueness, each group needs another group to be its complement. Therefore, Mirabeli said that majority exists because minority exists vice versa. One relates and connects to another and together they perform society. Therefore, majority and minority are equal.

However, Nesrin Ucarlar sees majority and minority in a different perspective. Ucarlar says “These binary oppositions reflect the modernist epistemology, which acknowledges the human tendency to think in terms of opposition and hierarchy, that is, to construct binary and hierarchical oppositions such as reason vs. passion, mind vs. body, inside vs. outside, self vs. other, subject vs. object, etc.”[4] In this notion, Ucarlar argues that majority and minority is a way of thinking of opposition and hierarchy. This is the modernist epistemology which tends to think in opposition and hierarchy. Hierarchy is an expression of willingness to dominate and to control over other; while, opposition reflects notion of seeing two things which one is less worth than the other; one is a threat for the existence of the other. Therefore, the two try to exclude, even to destroy each other. In this point, Ucarlar talks about the real fact of majority and minority in society. Majority tends to dominate and to take

control over minority, while minority is marginalized and tends to keep silence. Supporting this argument, Ucarlar quoted Derrida and Hall ideas, so s/he wrote: “As Derrida highlights, in a traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. In this respect, the movement of deconstruction tries to reveal the relation of power between the poles of oppositions in order to reverse the hierarchy. The relation between the poles, however, is not limited to the power of one over the other, but it also refers to difference that serves the construction of meaning in a dialogue with the other. As a result, the other is fundamental to the constitution of the self, to us as subjects.” By quoting Derrida and Hall, Ucarlar tries to reconcile majority and minority as two social existences that have reciprocal relationship. Majority has its meaning when it goes together with minority; minority has its meaning when it goes together with majority. Thus, minority exists not to serve the majority and be only a complementary. In contrast, minority and majority are there to give meaning, to criticize, to share life and to support each other. Thus, to act in opposition and hierarchy principally denies the essence meaning of majority and minority. This is the main reason when Mirabeli argued that “If the identity of each one, that is, the difference which distinguishes them and the relationship which unites them, is lessened, then their being distinct part of a whole is also lessened. In this case the ‘whole’ loses the characteristic of being a unity of the many parts of which it is made up”.

Numbering group of people in a society reflects recognition of society and state about the specific identity, uniqueness and character of its members. By knowing their identity, uniqueness and character, society and state serve and protect their need. “In the social sphere this is true for complex communities, in which the state ensures cohabitation and favors the integration of different social groups by uniting them under one roof, respecting them and guaranteeing the identity of each one. All social groups living together in the same state, no matter their numerical status, have a common interest in a reciprocal guarantee of freedom, which assures their own identity and peaceful cohabitation with others”. The important notion, here, is that the state must develop equality as the basic principle for serving all group of people in the society. Unfortunately, there is temptation for society and state to stand beside a certain group.

B. Taking Control Over Other

At the conceptual level, as it has been described in the literature review, majority and minority should complement to each other. They have to complement each other through equal relations. However, in fact, majority tends to act as rule maker and control over minority. The tendency to control over other is an expression of behavior disorder because it depicts appetite of human to destroy lives of others. This is contradicted to all religious perspectives in understanding the life of human beings. Religiously, each person has his/her own authority and freedom to run his/her life. Recognition of authority and freedom of human beings is the fundamental acknowledgment of human dignity. Quoting John Rawls, a contemporary philosopher, Iqbal Hasanuddin wrote “Through his Theory of Justice, Rawls sees the respect and protection of the right to Freedom of Religion and Belief, as a manifestation of respect and protection of human dignity as a rational, free and equal moral person.”[5] Therefore, each person must be respected and protected to express his/her belief. In this perspective, religions play important rule to protect human dignity by teaching its adherents to respect and embrace other who are different to them.

Ironically, in the frame of reference of majority versus minority, religion becomes a very strong determinant factor to exclude, deny, and even to destroy other. Besides Ahmadiyah and indigenous religion cases, sometime, mainstream Christians exclude also the presence of other Christian minority in some places in the Moluccas. The groups of people who committed violence to other groups, showed “emotional violence, or sometime people call it as anger violence, which has aim to hurt. In such cases, destroying is the goal, and all instrument values of these people are only in psychological level”. [6]

Tendency to take control over other is a human behavior which is naturally part of the life of all human beings. There are two contributed factors that encourage people take control over other. They are vanity and fear. In order to understand how vanity and fear play role to shape majority tendency to take control over other, it is better to know the meaning of these two words.

According to Oxford Dictionary, vanity means “too much pride in your own appearance, abilities, or achievement.”[7] Pride in the sense of appreciation to appearance, ability and achievement that a person conducted and get is a very important aspect that must be developed. By appreciation, a person will develop positive thought towards his/her personal behavior and activities in social relations. This is a good way to grow as a good person who has positive thought and insight in connecting his/her life to other people. Therefore, appreciation must be given because the person has performed and managed his/her life to support the life of all people in the society. Thus, pride connects a person with his/her responsibility to other in the society. Pride not makes the person to exclude other. However, too much pride has negative implication. Too much pride motivates a person to look more at him/her than other. It is vanity.

Vanity drives person to pride himself/herself, at the same time, looks down other people. Precisely, s/he cannot pride himself/herself without looking down to other. In other word, only by looking down other, s/he becomes pride himself/herself. Vanity is a human weakness which brings a person to look down at the other. Vanity makes people becomes arrogance. Majority who takes control over minority acts as vanity people. Vanity encourages people to see and give meaning to oneself and at the same time to deny other. Badly, other is seen less worthy. Vanity people have mentality to see themselves worthy only when other is seen less. Thus, vanity people will try to find many ways to make minority feel insecure and depend on the majority. Person with vanity will exclude other in all aspects of life. Looking at the meaning of vanity which points more to an individual pride, however, the writer applies the meaning to social pride especially to understand how majority see themselves before minority. The argument is that majority tends to act as superior and minority becomes inferior.

For the word of fear, in Oxford Dictionary, the meaning of fear is “the bad feeling that you have, you are in danger, when something bad might happen.” Fear in this sense is an expression of human feeling to response to his/her unsafe circumstances. But, when someone does not able to control his/her fear, s/he will take extreme act to protect him/her which will end up by committing violence. Many cases committed by majority reflect that majority is afraid toward minority. Majority fear because they see minority as threat. Majority is not ready to face another reality which will criticize their faith or value. In another word, majority does not want to live in vulnerable circumstances which might contribute to develop a good dynamic society.

The meaning of these two words, vanity and fear, point to two contradicted different notions, but they influence each other. On one side, vanity describes superior feeling of someone to see other as inferior. On the other hand, fear describes inability of someone to face things around. The impact of fear is a person tends to have negative insight in meeting other. Therefore, s/he tries to protect him/her in an extreme way, even to destroy everything which according to him/her is threat. Feeling insecure is nutrition to develop suspicion which makes a person to lose his/her critical mind. Consequently, s/he takes action to control over other in order to make sure that s/he is in a safety zone. Getting into the safety zone, s/he becomes vanity person.

Vanity and fear make a person to be self-oriented. They also put themselves in the central. At the central, they have to control everything. They decide standards for all. The cases in East Lombok, West Java and the Moluccas depict this majority vanity. Six houses were destroyed. 24 Ahmadiyah adherents were forced to leave their houses. The adherents of Ahmadiyah did not only lose their houses and land, but also their live.

Putting down a person or a group as if the group of people is less worth than one own group is a way to insult and to humiliate people. Insulting and humiliating people makes people lose their confident to participate actively in society. This situation is not an ideal situation for pluralistic society. A pluralistic society will grow to be a real democratic society when all groups of people can participate in a freedom atmosphere in where all are equal. Equality becomes the basic value to deny discrimination, marginalization and exploitation. Therefore, the tendency to take control over other must be transformed by all religions. All religions have critical function to criticize human behavior, including criticizing religion itself.[8] Religions should transform self-mind oriented in order to develop willingness to share life with other, and to strength awareness to respect differences. Looking at religion as an important source of human values is postmodern insight. “There is now a postmodern consciousness which has notion that religious spirituality is the only hope, whether for a positive social change or for the preservation of truly important values.”[9] All people are now living in a postmodern world.

C. Majority Rule and Minority Rights

Cases in the West Java and Ceram Island describe the majority rule. As Indonesian citizen, the adherents of Sunda Wiwitan and Nuaulu have rights to get their ID and it is an obligatory for Indonesia Civil Office to serve all Indonesians by providing the ID card they need. In fact, it is difficult for Sunda Wiwitan and Nuaulu to get their ID because of their faith or religion. Having no Indonesian ID card, adherents of Sunda Wiwitan and Nuaulu will face many problems. They will have limited or even no access to have health care, education, and job.

These two cases above reflect a kind of public service which is full of manipulation, intimidation and discrimination. The Indonesian Civil officers manipulate Indonesian regulation which provides same requirements for all Indonesian citizens to apply for an ID card. There is no rejection for indigenous religion to have an ID card. But the officers, specifically, people who serve the public, manipulate the regulation. They create unwritten stipulation which must be obeyed by adherents of indigenous religion. The unwritten stipulation is that the followers of indigenous religion must choose one of the six big officially recognized religions, namely: Islam, Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, Buddha and Kong Fu Chu, when they fill out the form of ID application. They are not allowed to write Sunda Wiwitan or Nualu as their religion. Facing this intimidation, the adherents of Sunda Wiwitan and Nualu decide not to choose one of these religions. They knew that having Indonesian ID card is a must, but they cannot disclaim their religion. By rejecting this unwritten stipulation, they declare that they cannot let other to manipulate their religion. Here, we see unfair public service to Indonesian citizens due to their belief. There is inequality in the society because adherents of indigenous religion are treated differently. “If the term of citizenship is deemed meaningful, the term should be applied equally to all members of society based on the same basis, not on the basis of beliefs held by particular groups who are different from others.”[10]

Facing this unfair public service, groups of indigenous religion adherents do not fighting back to reclaim their rights. It is a common attitude of many minority groups in Indonesia. They tend to keep silence because they know that as minorities, they cannot change majority behavior of intimidating minority. However, keeping silence has two consequences. On one hand, keeping silence will not make conflict in the society. Thus, even though it is a false or fake harmony, the society runs in harmony. This principle shall be noted as an expression of minority rights to protect society from getting into a depth and width problems. On the other hand, keeping silence will nurture this injustice in society, so it will grow rapidly and spread widely. One cannot deny the fact that adherents of indigenous religion are facing discrimination not only in West Java but also in other places.

Decision not to fight back is a positive way because it prevents revenge from minority. However, it does not contribute to change or transform injustice in the society. As integral part of the society, minority has responsibility to heal the society by criticizing people who do injustice. Keeping silence in facing injustice is another expression of committing injustice to oneself. It is difficult for person who cannot fight for his/her rights to participate in a society to work for justice. Letting the state to work alone is not helpful because all must participate. However, the state should do its job and responsibility to bring crime to court. The state has responsibility to play role to give back minority rights. As for the cases in West Java and Ceram Island, Indonesian authority must control the public service at every level. So, unfair practices can early be recognized and fixed according to Indonesian regulation. For the case in East Lombok and the Moluccas, Indonesian police must condemn violence done by majority who act against Indonesian law.

Besides, the election process of Jakarta Governor in 2017 showed how majority rule drawn and transformed mind set of majority to vote. Religious sentiment grew very fast and strong. Demonstrations spread out in Jakarta. Many issues were rose to influence voter not to vote Ahok. Majority did not want him to be the Governor of Jakarta. Ahok was a representative of minority in two circumstances. He is not only Christian minority. He is also a Chinese. He has double minority label. This case reflects that minority quality cannot survive in the midst of majority when religion becomes defining factor to vote for a new public leader. Olaf Schumann reminds this when he wrote: "If all components of society, namely all individuals, including minority religion, participate thoroughly in social life, then they should be considered as full citizens of a society, and this presumption should not be modified in such a way that religion is a major consideration."

Even though minority has qualification to be a public leader, the majority cannot accept a minority power and leadership. It seems that there are problems in majority notion about leadership in public sphere. In public sphere, religion should not be a stipulation to be elected. A candidate must fulfil leadership qualifications. In public sphere, religion plays its role to teach its followers to have good leadership characters. So, how a religion has its function in the life of its followers will be examined in the public sphere. At this perspective, religion must contribute to develop a good and

stable society, in where all groups of people are equal. Therefore, a good Moslem leader is a leader who fights against injustice, manipulation, marginalization, exploitation which are experiencing by all groups of people in the society. The same principle goes also to a good Hindu, Buddha and Christian leaders. A leader is not a good Christian leader if s/he runs her/his administration by preferring to stand only beside Christians.

In the front of majority rule, minority are bad people. There is no worth and good things in their life. This is a manifestation of superior feeling which actually reflects unconfident attitude. It is an unconfident attitude as accumulation of vanity and fear. Superior feeling is a psychological problem because there is no religious reason to look down other people. At this perspective, one can argue that people who live in a society in where relation between majority and minority is shaped in opposition are psychologically, socially and religiously sick. Therefore, all people have responsibility to heal the condition by developing notion of equality and giving back minority rights.

As an integral part of society, it is their rights to be protected by other groups. However, majority has made a strict clear boarder to exclude minority. Majority tends to close their eyes to see, their ear to hear and their feeling to feel. There is no solidarity in the society. "The basic principle of solidarity is recognition to every human being. We are convinced that every human is precious: either from religion, whether from tribe, social standing and any class, also in any physical condition." [11] Solidarity, empathy and equality are absence in the society in where relation between majority and minority has been shaped in the form of opposition and hierarchy.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Human tendency to life in the form of binary or opposition has shaped majority versus minority relations. Living in this way is not a religious notion; it is a merely psychological problem. Therefore, in order to heal this condition, both majority and minority must work together. Firstly, to acknowledge that there is something wrong in the society that must be transformed. Secondly, to decide to transform their points of view or frame of thinking about how majority and minority must relate one another. By working together, majority and minority fights against discrimination, intimidation, and marginalization in order to establish a society in where all are equal.

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