

Islam and Capitalism: American Comparative Literature Study Toward Achdiat Karta Mihardja's *Atheis* Novel

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Abstract— This article aimed to find out the relation between Islam and capitalism, and Islam with science and technology based on American comparative literature studies on Achdiat Karta Mihardja's *Atheist* novel. The study was a qualitative that relied on verbal data in the form of ideas, opinions, and perceptions on Islam and capitalism obtained through a critical overview on the novel. The writer finds out that Although capitalism was criticized by many parties, both from secular circles and some Islamic circles, for Mihardja the ideal Islam was the one which was folded with capitalism as economic rationality, one of the dimensions of modernity. At the least, capitalism in the sense of multiplying profits as a goal is through three ideas: instrumental ratios, scientific ratios, and legal ratios. For him, the ideal Islam is rational Islam, including rationality in economic activities, not Islam that only concerns with spiritual life and life after death alone, as in the Islamic belief of the *Tarekat*, a Sufistic organization in Islam. However, capitalism which he carries out in the novel does not seem to be capitalism which allows economic injustice to occur, but capitalism with its elements of socialism (economic justice) in the macro and micro level.

Keywords—Reconstruction of Islam, Capitalism, Comparative Literature, Achdiat Karta Mihardja, *Atheis* Novel

I. INTRODUCTION

As a modern economic system that is now valid in various parts of the world, capitalism is a controversial issue not only in the Islamic world, but also in the World in general. In certain circles, capitalism is honoured as something good and positive, but on the contrary, capitalism is hated and reviled. Capitalism is considered by the latter circles as a bad economic system.

Among the experts who glorify capitalism as good and positive are Gwatney, Lawson, and Block (1996). In their study, there is a link between economic freedom as the core idea of capitalism and prosperity. In this study, it was found that the greater the level of freedom of a country, the higher the standard of living of its people. Cox's study [1] even found that because of economic freedom, universal wealth reached even the lowest levels of the people. They deny the criticism of capitalism which states that under free markets (capitalism), the rich are getting richer and the poor are increasingly misleading. In contrast,

according to them, the poor, under the free market (capitalism), are also getting richer. In his study, Stanley Lebergot [2] said that homes in the United States in 1900 usually did not have central heating, electricity, refrigerators and flushes, or even plumbing. Now, said Lebergot [3], even poor people benefit from these kinds of goods. In fact, Michael Cox's study shows that capitalism has made the real price of various necessities of life such as home and electricity significantly decrease throughout the 20th century. He, like Andrew Carnegie, believes that capitalism transforms luxury goods that only a handful of people have become a necessity of the general public [4, pp: 29-32]. Besides being able to provide material needs and the comfort of life and give birth to economic dynamics, capitalism has even brought feudalism to democratization and emancipation [5].

However, it is certainly different for its critics, especially Karl Marx and his followers. For Marx, the economic system of capitalism is dominative which will generate alienation, not only for the oppressed (proletarian) class but also for the oppressive (bourgeois) class. In the economic system of capitalism, Marx asserted, natural freedom for the bourgeoisie that was humiliated was false. Their freedom has been taken away by "capital power" or the ability to accumulate capital, if they do not want to go bankrupt in the intense competition. Meanwhile, in the economic system of capitalism, the proletariat is even more sad. They will be alienated from themselves, because they have become the objects of others (bourgeois class); alienated from the family (species) as human beings who are free to create; estranged from production which he does not control; even alienated from fellow proletarians because of competition for employment [6].

The most recent economist criticizing capitalism is Thomas Piketty, the writer of *About Capital in The Twenty-First Century* [7]. According to him, capitalism as an economic system that controls the world has made economic inequality in the modern world until World War II. From World War II to the end of the decade of the 1970s, the economy of capitalism was characterized by equality. This is the era when capitalism has a human face. The rapid variety of social security occurred between 1954-1975. However, the neo-liberal storm since the 1980s buried the human face of capitalism. This new form of

capitalism has exploded the level of economic inequality back in the world like the 19th century and before. Sharp inequality ensued. Wealth in the world is not only concentrated in the hands of the richest reaching 10,10 percent of the population, but 1 and 0.1, even 0.01 and the richest 0.001 percent as reported in *Harian Kompas* [8].

Of course in the Islamic world, capitalism is also the object of criticism, even considered as a system that is not in accordance with Islam. In Indonesia, for example, the most eager to reject capitalism include *Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI), one of Islamic political fundamentalists. In December 2008, the HTI mass staged an act of rejecting capitalism and democracy and encouraging the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate, an Islamic theocratic multinational political system that prevailed in the classical period. They are calling for capitalism to be abandoned and democracy to be watched out. Capitalism for them does not provide welfare at all. Capitalism and democracy are tools to exploit the people. The jargon they offered was "*Khilafah* Yes, Capitalism and Democracy No"[9].

However, in the sense of capitalism as a multiplication of profits, or a multiplication of production using technology ratios (industrialization), the Islamic state seems sad that is different from countries in Northern Europe for example. The economic level of Muslim countries in general is still low. This assumption can be seen from the proportion of Muslim communities in IDB (Islamic Development Bank) member countries living below the poverty line. It is range in 2000-2001 from 3.8% (in Malaysia) to 66.4% (in Sierra Leone). This measure of poverty is based on the measurement used by the World Bank, namely people who are in the poor category are people who earn under US \$ 1.25. Only ten Muslim countries with less than 2% poverty (Malaysia, Kazastan, Jordan, Albania, Azerbaijan, Iran, Maldives, Syria, Kyrgyz Republic and Egypt). The economic level of Muslim countries can also be seen from GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of IDB member countries. The GDP of these countries does have an increase of US \$ 1 trillion (1990) to US \$ 2.4 trillion (2009). However, this amount is only 6.1% of total World GDP, although there are 8 countries with high GDP levels. Among them are Turkey (YS \$ 357.5 billion) and Indonesia (US \$ 258.5 billion) [1, p: 181-183] [10].

Therefore, this article will discuss the relation between Islam and capitalism, also with science and technology, based on American comparative literature studies on Mihardja's Atheist novel, the novel in the end 1940s [11]. This article will seek to answer: (1) is *Atheis* novel a critique of the authors about patterns of Islam which are not in line with capitalism and science (technology)? And what kind of Islamic reconstruction offered by them? (2). Is Islamic criticism that contained in the novel in line with the academic literature in Islamic studies?

II. METHODS

To obtain the data and comprehensive analysis of the topic of discussion, the conceptual framework of this research combines the theory of literature and sociological studies, particularly sociology of modernity and religion and theory of American schools on comparative literature enriched by the

theory of and the literary theory of social realism and Islamic literature.

The data collection method used in this research is a qualitative method. The meaning of this research method is more qualitative looking at the accuracy of the data which is not on the number (quantity) of it, but the depth and the whole so that the complex human reality, in contrast to the reality of nature, is not viewed simply consisting of sheer numbers. In this way, the research made two novels mentioned above as the main object of study. According realist literary theory, a novel text considered comparable to scientific texts. The text were quoted according to the novel focus of discussion, and confirmed by contemporary Islamic textbook that discusses the same thing, newspapers, magazines or other printed media. The findings of two novels were confirmed by the results of in-depth interviews to the figures related to the topic of discussion, both as actors and experts [12] [13].

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Criticism and Reconstruction of Islam in Atheis Novels

Based on the *Atheis* novel, apparently *Atheis* novel by Mihardja is a critique of the authors on Islamic patterns who were not answering the demands of modernity, especially capitalism as one of measurements of modernity, as well as a reconstruction of Islam that they think is ideal. The novel is a kind of Islamic literature that criticizes social reality of Muslims who do not conform with the values of Islam which is ideal, as the categorization of Islamic literature. The novel is viewing that the ideal of Islam is not a religion that is not in conformity or even reject modernity as a mindset and a contemporary phenomenon, especially capitalism. It sees Islam as a religion of the present and to-here's, although as a religion born in the pre-modern, old elements must exist, at the very least, in the major issues (*ushul/principle*). As a religion, which is valid until the end of time, Islam must *shalih likulli zaman wa makan* (in accordance with all of space and time). Therefore, contextualization, reinterpretation, dissemination of new ideas, and institutionalization becomes imperative. Without it, Islam can be a pre-modern society past, even abandoned by its people.

At least, Islam in sociological term is as the Muslim community. This is because it's viewed from the sociology of literature, especially the theory of Hippoyte Taine (1766-1817), the *Atheis* novel which was studied is literary work influenced by race (what the author inherited in body and soul as a Muslim), moment (socio-political situation of his time, especially when confronted with modernity), and environments (natural conditions, climate, and social). The novel that was examined seemed to express the appreciation of authors most in the upper course of his life as a society and nation, at the time and place he lived, especially when meeting and interacting with Western modernity, what he thought, felt, or hoped. The novel borrows Predric Jameson language, which contains social, historical, and political resonances and buried beneath of the plot is a surface of the text that should be explored. Seen in this light, the novel is a critique on the sociology of Muslim community of Indonesia in dealing with modernity, especially capitalism, as well as reconstruction of Islam (at least sociological Islam), where the

public/Muslims (sociological Islam), ideally in line with modernity especially capitalism as one of dimensions/measurements of modernity, although it should be with criticism, not a total acceptance, without reserve [14] [15] [16].

B. Islam and Capitalism

Based on the explanation of the novel's synopsis above and also the novel's plot in its entirety, the issue discussed in the *Atheis* novel is the issue of capitalism. At least, to Islam in the Islamic sense of sociology and for capitalism in the sense of multiplication profits, as understood by Lucian W. Pye and Werner Sombart, who inherent in, it also alluded to the industry as an instrumental ratio to multiplication the advantage, as stated by Ross Poole. Islam and the Muslim community were ideal, according to Achdiat, Islam and the Muslim community are in line with capitalism in the sense above, though of course with the record [5].

That assumption can be seen from that Mihardja in his novel understands Islam is in line with capitalist, though with a note, at least, in the form of rational and effective bureaucracy, that the governments run who are trained and based on rational procedures and regulations, as admitted by Weber and P. Selinow. Rational and effective bureaucracy become comparable to capitalism as an attempt to organize work and production in a rational way, and also an effort to understand and master nature through reason [17]. What is meant by the rational methods, according to Max Weber (1864-1920), as Ross Poole calls it, are internal, juridical, and scientific ratios. In modern capitalism (bureaucracy), to increase productivity (performance of bureaucracy), then, in addition to manage of employment and economic enterprises, it must also be assisted by machinery and other technologies. Through technology such as electricity and machinery, the products obtained can far multiply rather than through human hands. That way, the product price is more likely to be accessible to most people. In addition, in the perspective of the juridical ratio, economic (bureaucratic) rationalism also means that economic assets must be legally accountable. Legal evidence and legal practitioner services in the modern economic system of capitalism (bureaucracy) become very important. The goal is to secure economic assets, so that it cannot disappear. Meanwhile, in the perspective of scientific ratios, to improve the performance of the bureaucracy (management), especially marketing, and also products, independent scientific research is promoted. The scientific ratio in capitalism (bureaucracy) also means the importance of promoting education needed by the capitalist industry (bureaucracy) and also the training of employees to increase productivity. For Weber, capitalism (modern bureaucracy) is not a mode of production, but the result of a process of rationalization [18] [19].

This modern capitalism (bureaucracy) can be evidenced by the plot that after completing his high school, Hasan worked at the municipal water department, effective bureaucracy belonging to the Dutch East Indies colonial government, in Bandung. While working in this water department Hasan met Rusli, an old friend at the school when he was in Garut, and also Kartini who later became his wife. During this period, Hasan could still be considered a representation of Islamic

congregations, because he had been not contaminated by Rusli and Anwar who were Marxist and Atheist. The work had been done until the end of his life when he was already an atheist, though later repented.

Capitalism as economic rationalism can also be seen from the plot and main theme of the novel, although not directly related to capitalism. The plot and main theme of the novel are the abandonment of the irrational traditional religious pattern of the *Tarekat* --the Sufi order in Islam-- by Hasan, who then moved to atheism, but at the end of the novel returned to religion before his death after being long advised by I character. However, the religion he later recognized through the I character was a religion with a rational typology and which emphasized the life of the world at this time, not merely in the past, which was more in line with modernity.

In the novel, it is told that when Hasan failed to marry the first woman he loved, he later became a member of the *Tarekat*, following the belief of his parents. Hasan's parents were very happy, because Hasan had fulfilled the religious ideals embraced by his father and mother. Thanksgiving was held, among others by reading the biography of the great Sufi Abdul Qadir Jailani through Sundanese song (*pupuh*). Based on the pattern of the *Tarekat*, Hasan had taken mystical behavior by bathing forty times from the time of *Isha* prayer until dawn, the event that made him later suffer from TB disease. This *Tarekat*-style heavy action can be done, because Hasan's main concern was life in the afterlife, and religion must encompass life. Religion was not to be questioned, but to be carried out sincerely, without having to be questioned [20].

After becoming an atheist due to Hasan hanging out with Rusli and Anwar, he was given a new religious perspective by the I character. The new religious perspective was a religious perspective that emphasized rationality, though it was not extreme rationality that rejected the religion totally. For Achdiat, irrational religious pattern will be marginalized; it will even die, abandoned by its adherents, because the religion will survive in modern life is the rational religious teaching. This can be seen from Hasan's change to atheism and also the plot of the death of his father as the members of the *Tarekat*. The new religious perspective that Hasan recognized through the I character was also a religious pattern (Islam) which emphasized the afterlife and spirituality were not ideal Islamic patterns. The ideal is the pattern of Islam that is more concerned with the life of the world, even though it does not forget the afterlife. For I character when advising Hasan, the duty of the most important human duty is to live here and now. Life at this time is the most important issue and it is more important than death. The matter of hell is a matter beyond human power. People who put aside life here and now, such as political, economic and cultural issues, are people who betray the obligations that God has imposed on him. This plot shows that capitalism as economic rationality (the multiplication of profits to obtain material happiness [economy/world] (in order to meet physical needs) is not a problem for Mihardja, even though he still cared about the spiritual side[20].

In addition to the plot and idea, capitalism as economic rationalism can also be seen from: first, Kartini's rational

attitude, who later became Hasan's wife. Initially Kartini was told in the novel as a woman who was treated unfairly. He was previously forcibly married by his mother to a wealthy Arab, but old merchant man, where Kartini became his fourth wife. She chose to live as a modern woman, who felt entitled to enjoy public life, by not being an ordinary woman who was turned away. Her dress style was very modern, and she was used to smoking. Kartini was also good at playing modern musical instruments as a product of capitalism, especially a piano that when her tapering fingers played the piano, Rusli lived and enjoyed the music, like a devout Muslim who is living reading *ta'awwudz* when worshipping [20]. Piano - although not directly related to the instrumental ratio for generating economic benefits - can act as an instrument to stabilize and encourage the soul, with the quality of work to gain economic benefits to be maintained. Indirectly, Mihardja shows that for him, the instrumental ratio for obtaining multiplication is something fundamental that is needed by humans.

Second, Anwar's attitude rejected feudalism as an irrational attitude that is not in line with capitalism which requires equality, where everyone is valued based on his achievements such as the ability to multiply economic gains (performance), not because of his offspring. This principle is often called the principle of meritocracy. In the novel, at least it is seen from the plot that Anwar, who is the son of a regent, has different views and attitudes with his father. He condemned his father's actions which were sheltered by people, because his father, although the regent, said Anwar, could raise his own umbrella. Umbrella is a light item. For him, there was no difference between the regent and ordinary people, and there was also no difference between the regent's son and the ordinary people's children [20].

The matter of legal ratios can be seen from the plot of Hasan's marriage to Kartini formally. At a minimum, in the sense that it is legally valid in Islamic law (*fiqh*) and a party (*walimah*) was held which proclaimed himself to marry with Kartini. The plot that showed this was also when Kartini - along with Rusli who was considered her brother - picked up Hasan's body at the Japanese military centre in Bandung, because she considered herself as still Hasan's legal wife, despite having separated her bed. She could not stop her to cry. While, the scientific ratios in the novel can be seen from the plot of Hasan who took modern Dutch education which taught modern Western empirical science and its civilization, not traditional Islamic education, from elementary to middle school. He also became part of the indigenous elite who were drawn into the European axis according to his political association Snouck Hurgronje, where the knowledge he obtained became his provision for working in the Bandung City water service.

Finally, the Atheist novel also emphasizes the importance of instrumental ratios which are part of the main ideas of capitalism. Through figures Rusli, Mihardja in the novel found the emphasis in modern life is a science and technology. With them, people can create new creations to facilitate human life, such as televisions, airplanes, electricity, cars, and others. In fact, in the language of Rusli sounds atheist, science is not even impossible to check and find out the properly nature of their lives, and more than that, it may be able to revive the dead, as

God. Parta character the novel even called it literally "the technology is our God" [20].

However, on this issue that there is a note from figure I, an ideal character in the novel that corrects the view of Rusli et. Al. who lived without any balance. For I figure, science and technology has its limits that does not make a man atheist. Religion must guide the souls and consciences of men who develop and use technology. Through the figure I, as if Mihardja wanted to say as Einstein: "science without religion is blind, and religion without science is lame" [21]

In this case, Mihardja is compared with Huston Smith who refused triumphalism of science or scientism, which is a Freud's view that science is a material fact, not an illusion, and the view that the methods of sciences are empirically assessed is as the most reliable method. Because science is based on empiricism, then that is considered only the real material. What happens afterwards is the removal of God. Scientists also further become an atheist, and the conflict between science and religion until now is inevitable [22] [23].

In the novel *Atheis*, according to the title, there were indeed characters of Rusli and Anwar, Communist activists that rejected capitalist. As described above, Rusli did not hesitate to evict beggars. For him, helping the poor only slowed the descent of capitalism, the enemy and movement of Rusli. Rusli considered that helping the poor as the act of holding-restraining and deepening their hatred against the domination capitalist (the owners of capital) [21].

Likewise with Anwar, as described in the novel, that while he was on the way to the village, Anwar stole citrus to taste the result of farmers. For him, taking citrus farmers was not an act of theft, but the action of trial (consuming) capitalism. Anwar behaved like that because the oranges were already sold to middlemen as an arm of the Chinese as a capitalist. He hated the Chinese capitalists. In the viewpoint of Anwar, Islam was viewed as a bad religion, because Islam was a religion of bourgeois allowed the free trade and free competition. As a party activist equals to Rusli, Anwar dreamt Indonesia without colonization and capitalist domination, whereby, talented people like him that gifted art could develop his talent to become a professional. However, in the novel *Atheis*, Rusli and Anwar characters are not portrayed as the ideal figures. The ideal figure that the novel illustrated is the character of I. Character I looked at Hasan and his friends (Rusli and Anwar) were perverted and he was able to influence their back on the truth. At the very least, the truth in this version of the figures I am, as already be revealed in the sub of Islam and secularism [20].

Therefore, the rejection of capitalism approved by Rusli in figures I was the refusal on the side of exploitative capitalism, in terms of dominance, not capitalism as a whole. Moreover, Rusli himself did not reject the whole of capitalism. There was a side of capitalism that was also approved and enjoyed by Rusli as the communist party elite. Capitalism as a lifestyle such as modern music and entertainment institution that was Rusli enjoyed. As described above, that in Rusli's house there are some modern musical instruments such as piano and frequently played songs with modern music, and all of them were a product

of capitalism. In fact, at the moment that he had to pray Maghrib, Rusli and Kartini went to watch Western movies in theaters where those West films were the products of capitalism. For him, when the music community and government products proletariat in the name of social justice had not been created, the music production of the bourgeois/capitalist was not a problem to be enjoyed.

The interpretation of the novel *Atheis* related to capitalism represented the figures I as mentioned can be confirmed in the final novel of Mihardja, Khalifatullah Manifesto. In almost the end of the novel, it was clear that world leaders, including economists like Adam Smith capitalism visited Abah place Arifin, human. This Abah figures was proclaimed as manifesto. He provided the world capitalist leaders with an envelope containing a story. The core of the story is the importance of capitalism which is filled by religious spiritualism, for a balance between individualism/economic freedom and religious values. In this case, it appears that Mihardja did not refuse capitalism in general, but only refused the disappearance of humanism in capitalism which was not in line with the ethics or religion [21] [11].

So, the model of capitalism that Mihardja agreed on the *Atheist* novel was a model of mixed capitalism, namely capitalism in which there were elements of socialism. This type of capitalism is often called the welfare state economic system, as is currently the case in Western European or North American countries. The elements of capitalism in the economy of mixed capitalism are: recognition of the government's active role in distributing wealth through subsidies, something that is most fundamental in socialism (communism) adopted by Rusli; high wages received by workers, at least, there is a minimum standard of salary (in Indonesia known as Regional Minimum Wages); the existence of labor social security; the need for health insurance for workers; channeling their aspirations and elites through trade unions, so that they no longer need to carry out a revolution; and there is a progressive income tax (tax according to the amount of income and also value added tax, and other taxes) which the state uses for the benefit of the poor [24].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the elaboration above, the novel is the results of the writer's criticisms himself. The writer does not only criticize capitalism, but also toward the Islamic pattern which does not match with the capitalism. At least, Islam in sociological terms w is generally understood and performed by the Muslim society in Indonesia, particularly, Muslim society Bandung in 1940s. Based on the criticisms on the novel, it's also consisting of the Islamic reconstructions from Mihardja which is considered as ideal.

For Mihardja based on the study of *Atheist* novels he wrote, the ideal Islam was the one which was folded with capitalism as economic rationality, as one of the dimensions of modernity. At the least, capitalism in the sense of multiplying profits as a goal through three ideas: instrumental ratios, scientific ratios, and legal ratios. For him, the ideal Islam is rational Islam, including rationality in economic activities. Islam that attaches importance to life today and material welfare, and not Islam that only

concerns with spiritual life and life after death alone, as in the Islamic belief of the *Tarekat*, a Sufistic organization in Islam, although life after death and spirituality must not be forgotten. Islam that does not have such a rational character will experience a process of marginalization and even die, abandoned by its adherents as experienced by Hasan who was atheist and also his father who died. However, capitalism which he carries out in the novel does not seem to be capitalism which allows economic injustice to occur, but capitalism with its elements of socialism (economic justice) in the macro and micro level.

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