



# GLOBALIZATION'S TRAP BEHIND THE NARRATIVE OF A WORLD CLASS UNIVERSITY

## (Seeking the Form of a World-Class Education – Part 1)

### Introduction

Which Muslim student does not want to study at a world-class university? Which Muslim lecturer does not aspire to have an academic environment that is of world-class quality? Yes, the slogan 'World-Class University' or 'Research University' has been increasingly heard in the last decade. Every university anywhere in the world aspires eventually to be among the many world class universities.

But the condition of higher education in the Muslim world is very miserable. An article from the Pakistan MIT Technology Review (February 2016), entitled "***The Dark Age of the Muslim World***" exposed the fact that 1.6 billion Muslims in the world contribute very little to the world's knowledge. The global Muslim community - which forms the majority of the population of 57 countries and covers almost every country in the world - apparently only has three Nobel Prize winners in the history of this prestigious award. The number of universities from member countries of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) ranked only 500<sup>th</sup> in the world ranking or a little better than that.

Almost all universities in the Muslim world do not get a high ranking in different types of global university ranking systems. In the 2014-15 edition of the QS World University Rankings, there was no universities in the Islamic world which got into the world's top 100, and among the top 400 only 17 were in this ranking (11 were among the top 300 and 400). Similarly, the latest results of the 2016 *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* showed only 10 universities from the Muslim world ranked within the top 400 of the world (five of them among the top 300 and 400). As a result, the call to increase the ranking of universities in the Muslim world in order to become 'world class' universities is echoed repeatedly.

This paper will discuss this issue in two parts. The first part is trying to review what is behind the narrative of the World Class University (WCU) and the second part will discuss how the political vision of Islam formulates a world-class education under the umbrella of the Islamic Khilafah.

### The Trap of the Globalization Narrative

The arguments often raised about being a World Class University (WCU) are that universities can compete with world-class campuses and produce graduates that can compete with those from developed countries around the world. These arguments are given weight due to globalization's strong influence over various aspects of human life. Firstly, globalization in the field of economy is realized through the practice of the free market economy. Secondly, globalization in the field of culture is manifested in the form of the influx of foreign culture into the Islamic world. Thirdly, globalization of labor is a result of free market economic practices. And fourthly, globalization in the field of education occurs through the establishment of educational institutions throughout developing countries as well as inter-state scholarships.

Globalization has also made developing countries feel the need to bring the quality of their institutions in line with that of developed countries, adopting programmes like the Human Development Index (HDI), Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), and others. This is where the values of competition were sown and are now flourishing, especially when nourished by the inferiority felt by developing countries that lag behind. At

the elementary and secondary level of education, such concerns have also led to the idea of an International School Standard, in order to prepare students for competing internationally.<sup>1</sup>

However, Edi Subhan strongly criticized the education policy-makers in Indonesia that are pro WCU but have not been able to clearly convey the definitions and concepts of an international university, except through constant orientation to the concept of assessment and recognition in line with an international scale. It is therefore clear that the governments of the Islamic world are only parroting this concept without having a clear ideological basis, and are following this unoriginal narrative which is not necessarily in accordance with the country's identity.

Ideologically, the stream of internationalization of campuses also shows the vanity of this big narrative of globalization and modernity, where the 'modernity' claim espouses openness and tolerance, while on the other hand there is a massive effort to impose one cultural standard. Herbert Marcuse called it the phenomenon of a "One-Dimensional Man", which is the practice of leading the society into one uniform system i.e. the capitalist system, through education, media, etc.

### **Globo-Capitalist Industry VS Islamic World Deindustrialization**

The level of higher education is at a pinnacle that has the closest relationship with the industrial world. Therefore, the productivity of research always receives stimulation from industrial needs that require high innovation. Thus, it makes sense that universities in the Islamic world find it difficult to penetrate the world's top 100 rankings since almost all Muslim countries have been experiencing de-industrialization on a large scale, while the West has been through its phase of industrialization over 150 years ago. **Whereas one of the requirements for a state to be able to master science and technology, is if it is capable of conducting research leading to the solving of problems faced by the state, as well as being capable of forming an industrial system to apply the research results.**

On the other hand, the WCU stream over the last decade has actually perpetuated de-industrialization in the Islamic world by directing internal research to only serve the needs of the globo-capitalist industry, not the national industries in their own country. This condition has been worsened by the poor political vision of the rulers of the Muslim lands. For example, the Arab countries have never developed a manufacturing industry although within the oil sector, due to the pretension of Western oil companies that want to control crude oil refining.

The logic of capitalism is strongly contained in many indicators of WCU. It can be seen from THE indicators, for example, such as research income from industry (per academic staff, 2.5 percent), public research income/total research income (0.75 percent), research income (scaled) (5.25 percent). Here, a campus is like a corporation that seeks to reap profit from intellectual activities, especially research, for the global industrial world – it will strangle the state authority if necessary. Moreover, the judgement basis of Webometric on the web visibility of a campus is based on the view of a "**new global market**" regarding academic information; the web is considered very important as a means of campus internationalization.

This is in line with the trend towards commodifying higher education pioneered by the WTO - World Trade Organization - by setting education up as a tertiary sector industry through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which regulates the trade liberalization of 12 service sectors, such as health care, information and communications technology, accounting services, higher education and lifetime education, and other services.<sup>ii</sup> The umbrella agreement of GATS/WTO which was ratified in 1995 in Marrakech, has made education a commodity, and of more concern, the government has followed into this agreement of its own volition, without considering local ability or the educational principles in our constitution.<sup>iii</sup>

Because of the WTO's pressure for the ratification of GATS, the Indonesian government issued Presidential Decree No. 111/2007 about the List of Closed and Opened

Business Fields with Requirements in the Investment Sector. Prof. Sofian Effendi deeply regrets the release of this regulation because it has input education as one of the opened business fields to foreign investment, even with a maximum of 49 percent equity participation. This is the first trap, which is foreign power hegemony in the educational system in the Islamic world.

From the aspect of independence, it is clearly visible that the regimes of the Islamic world have a high level of dependency and a lack of original vision to advance the education of their own civilization. When the governments of the Islamic world strive for their universities to be world-class universities by fulfilling the requirements - either via the ratings of THE, QS, Webometric, SJTU, or others, it means that the education system in the Islamic world has been practically subjugated under the dictation of the publishing companies, research institutions, and foreign campuses. It is very clear now that WCU is just a cheap globalization narrative that simply tries to deceive the Islamic world and subjugate our education system.

### **Co-opting of Superior Human Resources of the Ummah**

When a state no longer has control over the direction of its research and education system, and also does not have an independent national industrial system, this is when the state will lose control of its own human resources. There are many stories of Muslim countries that have lost the ability to stop the *Braindrain* to the developed countries. In the last 50 years, a large number of Muslim intellectuals have migrated from the Muslim world to the industrialized countries. One study estimated that the numbers are nearly 500,000. This number is from the Arab world, which covers one third of the entire professional diaspora. It is similar with Indonesia. Say the best sons and daughters of Indonesia: Khoirul Anwar, who was born in Kediri, East Java. He now works at the Nara Institute of Science and Technology, Japan. He is an expert in the field of telecommunications and the owner of 4G patents in telecommunications systems based Orthogonal Frequency Division Multiplexing (OFDM). Andriwo Rusydi (33 years old) and Nelson Tansu - both are experts in nanotechnology. Currently, Andriwo is a lecturer at National University of Singapore, while Nelson Tansu is a lecturer at Lehigh University, United States (US).

Such co-opting of the best human resources of the Muslim Ummah eventually became so easy due to the absence of a political vision in the countries of the Islamic world in the mastery of science and technology. Moreover, if education has been determined to be an opened business field for foreign capital, then the coopting of human resources by foreigners is very easy to do by westernizing the hearts and minds of young Muslims, promising a future for their research, as well as 'selling' the secular ideology and the values that seem identical with progress and prosperity.

### **Criticism from Islam**

**The first factor in the fundamental failure** of the Capitalist ideology is because it has made knowledge a commodity. The result is a growing pragmatism in education. This is reflected in the purpose of education, which has put the material aspect higher than the purpose of developing knowledge and improving personal quality. If we consider carefully, consciously or not, education carried out at the primary level clearly exhibits an orientation towards pragmatic subject, and it is even clearer in higher education. In fact, many major universities shamelessly claim themselves to be entrepreneurial universities.

Islam strongly condemns this, because in Islam the position of knowledge is very noble. Making education or knowledge a commodity is the same as humiliating the knowledge. Imam al-Ghazali had warned us in straightforward language in the introduction of his book "*Bidayat al-Hidayah*". He said, "If in your quest for knowledge, your aim is rivalry, boasting, surpassing those who are equal to you in age and merit, attraction of others' attention to you, and amassing the vanities of this world, then you are in reality trying to ruin your own religious nature and destroy yourself, to sell your [happiness of the] Hereafter for [happiness

of] this life...". (*Fa-anta saa'in ilaa hadmi diinika wa ihlaaki nafsika, wa bay'i aakhiratika bi dunyaaka*).

For Imam al-Ghazali, knowledge was something very precious, and therefore it was too cheap for knowledge to be aimed towards worldly things. Knowledge should be for worshipping Allah (swt) and seeking His blessings. Whoever seeks knowledge with such noble intentions, the Messenger of Allah (saw) said,

«مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَطْلُبُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَلَكَ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ. وَإِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَتَتَّعِجُ أَجْنَحَتَهَا لَطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ رَضًا بِهِ. وَإِنَّهُ يَسْتَعْفِرُ لَطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ حَتَّى الْخُوتِ فِي الْبَحْرِ. وَفُضِّلَ الْعَالِمُ عَلَى الْعَابِدِ كَفُضِّلَ الْقَمَرُ عَلَى سَائِرِ النُّجُومِ لَيْلَةَ الْبَدْرِ. وَإِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ. إِنَّ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ لَمْ يُورَثُوا دِينَارًا وَلَا دِرْهَمًا، وَلَكِنْ وَرَثُوا الْعِلْمَ. فَمَنْ أَخَذَ مِنْهُ أَخَذَ بِحَظِّ وَارٍ»

**“One who proceeds on a path in the pursuit of knowledge, God makes him proceed therewith on a path to the Garden (Paradise). And, verily, the angels spread their wings for the seekers of knowledge out of delight. Verily, every creature of the heaven and the earth asks forgiveness for the seeker of knowledge, even the fish in the sea. The merit of the ‘alim (the learned) over the ‘abid (the devout) is like the merit of the moon over the stars on a full-moon night. The learned are the heirs of the prophets, for the prophets did not leave behind a legacy of wealth but that of knowledge. So whoever partakes of it derives a plenteous benefit.”**

**The second factor of fundamental error** in Capitalism is the hands-off attitude of the state in managing its educational institutions, developing knowledge, and building a strong industrial system. A state, in the Islamic view, has a central role in establishing the relationship between the education system, the direction of national research and industrial needs. This role is built within the framework of the state as the servant of the people. It is because the state leadership is obliged to take care of the people in its care. The Prophet (saw) compared a leader to a shepherd (*ra'in*). In a hadith, Rasulullah said: «إِنَّمَا الْإِمَامُ جُنَّةٌ يُقَاتَلُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِ وَيَنْتَقَى بِهِ» **“An Imam is a shepherd and he is responsible for those in his care.”** (Narrated by Bukhari and Ahmad, from Abdullah ibn Umar r.a.).

Therefore, it is the obligation of the State to provide a high quality education system with adequate facilities and sufficient salary for everyone who works in this system, by providing subsidies to make fees affordable for the people. Therefore, Islam strictly prohibits the hands-off state, let alone allowing foreign capital to invest in our education.

## **Restoring the Golden Age of Islam**

In this 21st century, the majority of the top 100 or 500 world ranked universities are located in the developed countries like the United States, Europe, Japan, or Australia. Another small portion are found in Singapore, China, Korea, India, or Malaysia.

## **What if this ranking was performed a thousand years ago?**

Then there is no doubt that the top universities in the world were located in Gundishapur, Baghdad, Kufa, Isfahan, Cordoba, Alexandria, Cairo, Damascus, and several other large cities of Islam. The universities outside the Islamic State were at most only in Constantinople that was still the capital of Byzantium Rome; or in Kaifeng, the capital of China at that time; or in Nalanda, India. Apart from those, and including Western Europe, there were no other universities a thousand years ago. Let alone in the United States, of which the continent was newly discovered in 1492. <sup>iv</sup>

Imagine a country that had a 95% illiteracy rate! Terrible. But that was Europe in the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century CE. Even the Emperor Karl of Aachen, in his old age was said to still be trying to learn that "difficult and rare skill"! In monasteries, there were few pastors who were able to read. This was the gap between the East and the West. For the Christian holy book, only a pastor who had access could read and understand the scriptures. This is the very condition, known as the Dark Ages of Europe (the Dark Middle Ages) to many historians, which

triggered the scientific revolution in the Renaissance (Enlightenment) era. During the same period, millions of children in rural and urban areas of the Khilafah State were sitting on the carpet and spelling out the letters of the Quran, writing, and memorizing the letters, and starting to learn the basics of Arabic grammar (*nahwu and sarf*). The desire to be a good Muslim was the beginning of all this learning, because every Muslim should be able to read the Quran.

Indeed for a long time, Western civilization had made knowledge a privilege for only a certain community. Not much different from its past, the modern Western civilization has made knowledge, particularly in higher education, only able to be enjoyed by certain community. Meanwhile, Islam has a unique way of appreciating knowledge. Islam respects knowledge, not by giving it a "price tag" like Capitalism does, but Islam glorifies knowledge as the twin brother of faith, for the noble goal of forming the human personality that has noble integrity. As a result, there is no privilege for the Muslim Ummah in seeking knowledge, because everyone has the same obligation in the quest of knowledge. The difference is only in their piety.

The Islamic ideology has a clear and comprehensive concept of a system that covers all areas of life, and it is to be applied perfectly under the shade of the righteous Khilafah upon the method of the Prophethood. The Islamic ideology governs the correct management of natural resources to make the wealth of the State abundant, so that it can create prosperity for the entire society, as well as not causing damage. With this abundant wealth, the state will provide funding for various research projects as well as provide the best facilities, and show high respect to intellectuals, thus the intellectuals are motivated to generate their best work. And finally the problems of the nation can be solved and its independence can be realized. Therefore, if we return to the term "world-class-university", as a matter of course, we do not have to chime with the standard defined by the West. Islam of course has its own standard, such as what the quality of human created by a university should be, and the criteria for a world class university. This is what is referred to by the Ulama that say, **"The Western communities can become advanced because they abandon their religion, while Muslims will only become advanced if they study their religion."**

*To be continued in Part 2*

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<sup>i</sup> Edi Subhan, Mempertanyakan Orientasi World Class University, Darmaningtyas Institut of Education and Globalization Studies (Digest), Jakarta

<sup>ii</sup> Sofyan Effendi, *Menghadapi Liberalisasi Perguruan Tinggi*, Harian Seputar Indonesia, 12-13 Maret 2007

<sup>iii</sup> Edy Suandi Hamid, *Komodifikasi Pendidikan*, Republika, 22 Agustus, 2007

<sup>iv</sup> Fahmi Amhar, artikel *Universitas Kelas Dunia*, Media Umat, Edisi 41 Agustus 2010