

THE CONCEPT OF FRONTIER IN AMERICA IN THE MODERN ERA

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Abstract:

The objective of this paper is to uncover the concept of frontier in the United States in the modern era. This study used American Studies method, namely the combination of literary, historical and sociological methods. History and sociology were used in the study because they complemented the existing sources in the literature. The data were mainly taken from James Fenimore Copper's novels, namely, *The Leather-Stocking Tales* for the frontiersmen's characters in the eighteenth century. The novels were used in the research as starting points to describe the concept of frontier, and then the development of it could be described in the modern era. Other data were taken from film, magazines, newspapers and historical and sociological articles. Based on the study, frontier can be in the religious area, political area and others. The existence of female leader in *sholat* in Islam in America when male people are available in the same mosque belongs to the frontier. According to the mainstream in Islam, no woman becomes a leader in *sholat* when man is also available in the same place. Then, Trump's policy to prohibit Moslem's immigrants from certain countries is basically contradictory with the idea of the country of immigrants for America. This policy can be understood when people think of the idea of frontier. In social area, the idea of LGBT shows the soul of frontiersmen. Things that are beyond mainstream can be categorized as frontier and the people who agree with the idea can be called as frontiersmen even though they do not live in the real savagery.

Keywords: *The Concept of Frontier, Frontiersman, America, Modern Era.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Frontier is still an interesting topic to discuss. It refers not only a physical area but also a concept that still exists in the modern era. Relating to area, it is believed that people in America can no longer find out an area that belongs to no one nowadays. Any land has been occupied and becomes housing, industrial area, and others. According to Turner frontier is "the meeting point between savagery and civilization." [1] Savagery is an idea that says that people living in a given area do not have civilization so that they are barbarous, cruel, etc. People who live in such area are mostly Indians, while white people live in the civilized area.

Frontier that I would like to discuss is a concept. It means that it exists in the human beings' mind. Frontier can be in the religious area, political area and others. What people do and think that is beyond common thought will be discussed.

Frontiersmen are those who live in such areas in which common people think that such people are beyond them. In terms of idea, these people refer to those who are contradictory with the mainstream idea. For example, the existence

of female leader in *sholat* in Islam in America when male people are available in the same mosque. According to the mainstream in Islam, no woman becomes a leader in *sholat* when man is also available in the same place. This opinion is supported by Qur'an and Hadiths as well as well-known 'ulama.

Other examples can be found in political and social areas. Trump's policy to prohibit Moslem's immigrants from certain countries is basically contradictory with the idea of the country of immigrants for America. This policy can be understood when people think of the idea of frontier. In social area, the idea of LGBT shows the soul of frontiersmen since those who belong to LGBT crash the mainstream of marriage.

Things that are beyond mainstream can be categorized as frontier and the people who agree with the idea can be called as frontiersmen even though they do not live in the real savagery.

2. Frontier

American culture cannot be separated from frontier. Frontier is defined as "the border between two countries; the part of the country which borders on unexplored region." [2] In

American culture, frontier is also defined as “forest land to the west of the settled communities.”[3] People who comes to the forest have to prepare what they need so that they can survive and adapt. For this reason, only those who know well how to live in the forest will succeed. These people are the frontiersmen who have the characteristics to live in the frontier. They were usually unmarried and did not have homes. They got their food by hunting or trapping. Some of the frontiersmen were married and built their own cabin to live with their own family, but they tended to be freemen because they were not tied to their home.

People coming to the New World had a strong will to have better life. They voluntarily went through the danger and misery leaving their own country crossing oceans and deserts as well as borders. All of them had different motives when they came to America, but they had similarities in terms of their aspiration for the future. They wanted to pursue happiness in their lives.

2.1 The characters of Frontier life

Frontier life differed from life of the established settlement because “life on the frontier was crude and hazardous.”[4] Their crudeness could be seen in the cabin where they had to live and characters which they had to behave. Before they built their cabin, they “built a stockade as protection against Indian raids before clearing the land.”[4] Their crudeness could also be seen on their attitude and behavior, as illustrated by Dwight in the following:

His manners are rough. He wears, it may be, a long beard. He has a great quantity of bear or deer skins wrought into his household establishment, his furniture, and dress. He carries a knife, or a dirk in his bosom, and when in the woods has a rifle on his back, and a pack of dogs at his heels.

.... With this single exception, I have found the backwoodsmen to be such as I have described, a hardy, adventurous, hospitable, rough, but sincere and upright race of people. [5]

Shaped by the dangerous environment, frontiersmen did not care about the social status in the society. Their relationship was not based on superiority on the age, but merely based on the skill and capability to overcome any dangerous things on the frontier.

3. The concept of frontier in america in modern era

3.1 A brief account of westward movement

When the Europeans came to America at the first time and they settled along the Atlantic coast, their settlement became a frontier since the area lied on the boundary between their home and an unknown area. Their migration from Europe, especially from England caused by bad treatment experience, generated a new group of society that was still mostly tied with European life. Because of this, the Atlantic coast “was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense.”[6] Migration from Europe kept taking place so that “at the opening of the eighteenth century the New England population had reached the Massachusetts-Vermont line.”[7] In the second half of the eighteenth century, they kept going to the west so that “in the period of the Revolution the frontier crossed the Alleghanies into Kentucky and Tennessee, and the upper waters of the Ohio were settled.”[8] As a result, “by 1800, the Mississippi and Ohio valleys were becoming a great frontier region.”[9] The discovery of gold in California and Oregon made them motivated to keep moving to the West. The movement physically came to an end when they had got to the Pacific coast where they could not cross the ocean.

In the Pacific coast, their expansive power did not actually come to an end. They wanted to go beyond the Pacific Ocean to look for new regions so that they could build new settlements. It can be traced in the following poem by Walt Whitman:

Passage to India!

Lo, soul! seest thou not God’s purpose from the first?

The earth to be spann’d, connected by net-work,
The people to become brothers and sisters,
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,

The oceans to be cross’d, the distant brought near,
The lands to be welded together. [10]

Hawaii was the next destination to become their settlement and became one of states in the US. It did not stop in Hawaii because the West was still their expectation even though the US had become a big country which had wide area. For the sake of country’s safety, the US needed a good and strong protection so that the US built military bases in Philippines, namely Clark Air Base and Naval Base in Subic Bay. It was, then, followed by building Bien Hoa Air Base in Vietnam. West Asia, namely Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and others, became the next the US military bases. The last, in Europe, some countries also became

US military bases so that the west movement based on territory had been over after they came back the Atlantic coast in the US.

3.2 Frontier in modern era

Frontier as territory has been over since there is no land's occupation. The idea of frontier is actually still available in American mind in line with the development of idea and technology. Frontier's idea can be in the religious, political, social, and economical areas as well as other life aspects.

Frontier idea in modern era refers to idea that is beyond the common idea available in the society. The common idea is thing that is accepted and considered correct by the society. The frontiersmen think that any ideas can be doubted in terms of their truth and they believe in their own value to judge whether the idea is suitable for them or not.

3.2.1 Frontier in Religious Area

In Islam, the existence of woman's leader in prayer is not accepted. According to Islamic teachings, prayer's leader must be an adult male. He has to fulfill some requirements in order to become prayer's leader. In hadith, there are 5 requirements that a man can become a prayer's leader, namely his perfection of reading Al Qur'an and the amount of memorizing Al Qur'an, his knowledge of hadith, time of Hijrah, time to convert to Islam, and age.

According to frontiersmen, such an understanding of prayer's leader limits their thought. Again, God creates human beings equal so that any human being, including female, has the same right to become a prayer's leader, as Rabi'a Keeble thinks about. Moreover, the separation of prayer's place between male and female makes her unable to see the prayer's leader and it makes her frustrated. For this reason, she argues that there is inequality between male and female and she decides to build her own mosque named Qalbu Maryam Mosque. She becomes the prayer's leader and she carries out the prayers in the same place for male and female.

Her educational background and experience make her ask the dogma about the role of woman in Islam. Equality between man and woman is her main concern in modern era. The situation and condition in modern era are quite different from the old era where woman had to be protected by man. In old era, woman had to be at home taking care of family while man worked.

In modern era, woman can be powerful because of her mastery on knowledge and

science. She becomes independent so that she can determine what she will do without being worried about her strength. The strength does not refer to physical strength only, but it also refers to non-physical strength. It can be the mastery of knowledge, the mastery of science, the position in her job and society.

Having such understanding on the role of woman in religious area is an out-of-the box thought which is uncommon in the society. This is the main point of frontier life where people live beyond the rule. What they think and do is merely based on the value that they believe although it contradicts the value that, in general, the society believe.

Figure 1 Rabi'a Keeble [11]



Another female prayer's leader is Mary Teasley or Aminah Wadood. As a professor in Religion and Philosophy, she always talks about gender equality in Islam, cross cultural understanding, and human rights. Her educational background in Arabic and Islamic Studies supports her idea to become a prayer's leader. She becomes the leader of Friday prayers where male and female worshippers are behind her in the same place.

Figure 2 Aminah Wadood [12]



Her background as a professor of Islamic Studies and her belief in equality between man and

woman make her powerful to become a prayer's leader. Inequality between man and woman in worshipping happens because of the patriarchal system in which the interpreters in Islam are mostly dominated by man. For this reason, she believes that there is no difference between man and woman to become a prayer's leader.

3.2.1 Frontier in Political Area

European people came to America to get freedom from any burden of life. There were a lot of reasons why they moved to America even though they understood that living in a new country was very hard. America is still attractive for people around the world until now. Many people come to America for the sake of having a good future. People from different countries and cultures want to live in America, and it makes the recent government issue the policy or the regulation to limit immigrants.

The regulation is issued to protect America's interest and security from terrorism issues. Immigrants from some countries in Middle East Asia and Africa are banned to enter the United States. Islamic phobia after terrorist's attack on September 9, 2001 makes the US government selective and careful to receive immigrants from Islamic countries. President Donald Trump, along with two Republican senators, explains regulations that will impose new restrictions on legal immigrants. The regulation requires an immigration system based on job qualifications and skills rather than family relationship. [13]

Figure 3 Border Wall [14]



The regulation or the policy issued by the US government actually contradicts the human rights in which people are created equal and the pursuit of happiness. As a result, a family who becomes immigrant cannot live together because of the regulation.

To protect the country, President Donald Trump builds border wall with Mexico so that the immigrants cannot freely enter the US. For the

sake of protecting the country, President Donald Trump refers to what the frontiersmen did when they had to protect themselves from Indian's attack. Safety was so important that the frontiersmen neglected other aspects of life. What President Donald Trump does describes the concept of frontier in the modern era. The threat of Indian's attack is unavailable in the modern era, but the fear of attack still emerges in the form of immigrants.

3.2.3 Frontier in Economic Area

To protect the economic country, President Donald Trump issues the trade protectionism and individual and corporate tax reform. According to Hornby, protectionism is defined as "the principle or practice of protecting a country's own industries." [15] The government needs it when industries in the country cannot compete against industries from other countries. The products of competitor countries are usually cheaper than those of the country so that the government needs to intervene. If it uses free trade, the products will not be sold out. Consequently, the factories dismiss their employees and finally many people will be unemployed.

Unemployment will eventually threat state security and the government will be unstable. This condition is not expected by all governments at any countries. Riot and demonstration demanding job must happen around the country. By doing trade protectionism, the government tries to minimize state's instability.

Then, individual and corporate tax reform is issued to make sure justice and independence to fund state financing. Especially for corporates, tax reform gives them freedom to compete their products so that they can export their products. By doing this, the government protects the country even though criticism and threat emerge. Believing in one's own strength and independence is in line with the concept of frontier life.

This concept was firmly held by the immigrants when they came to America in the seventeenth century so that they managed in living in the new country. The strength and independence were really embedded in their children so that they could survive to live in such a hard condition.

3.2.4 Frontier in Social Area

God creates male and female to develop a good family so that the family will have offspring to continue human being's civilization. A good

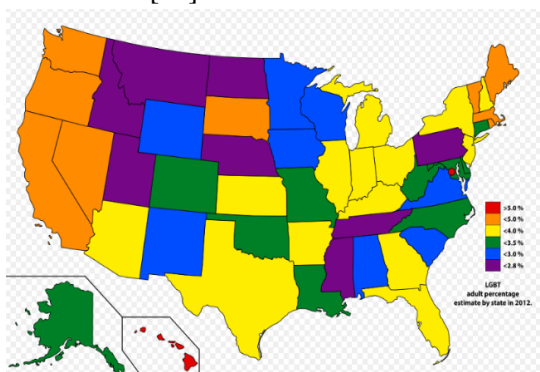
family derives from a legal marriage between a male and female. Also, basic education for children is learned in the family. Normal family, then, consists of husband and wife with their children.

In line with the development of technology and idea, marriage institution between male and female is no longer considered as, for some people, sacred institution. They think that marriage institution is no longer considered as the institution to continue human being's civilization. Moreover, marriage institution is no longer needed since they can have a special relationship with whom they like.

In America, LGBT emerged as a social movement at first. Their existence was neglected and most people hated them. Their existence fostered sympathy when there was a mass shooting to the popular gay dance club Pulse in Orlando on June 12, 2016. Social movements, organizing around the acceptance and rights of persons who might today identify as LGBT or queer, began as responses to centuries of persecution by church, state and medical authorities. [16]

The phenomenon of LGBT bursts out in line with the freedom of thought among a group of people who have queer opinion. According to them, male – male or female – female relationship is the shape of freedom of choice that God has given to them without considering God's prohibition in any holy books in all religion. Besides, they believe that they can change what God has created and destined on them. If they do not like to become males or females, they can change their destiny by technology. Such a thought is firstly beyond the legal, but eventually becomes legal recently in some states in the US.

Figure 4 LGBT Adult Percentage Estimate by State in 2012 [17]



Conclusion

The concept of frontier in America in modern era is different from that of frontier when the first immigrants came to America. Frontier in modern era does not refer to the uncivilized region where the savages live. It mostly refers to thought which is beyond the civilized or established thought.

Islam has founded the rules which have been established since Prophet Muhammad spread his teachings. The role of male and female in the society has been clear, including in the worshipping. Male becomes the prayer's leader while female becomes the follower in the prayer. The idea of female to become a prayer's leader is thing which is beyond the established rule. For the sake of individual freedom of thought, female prayer's leader becomes a movement which is followed by some groups of society around the world.

The limitation and the ban of immigrants contradicts human rights since America is actually the country of immigrants. Immigrants have dream to get their good future in their lives and they cannot make it come true in their own countries. Being immigrants is not their choice. For the sake of state security, it is done by the government.

Protectionism is the choice to protect the country from other countries' attack, the same as the first immigrants who had to protect themselves from Indian's attack. State security is more important to achieve than other interests.

For the sake of individual freedom, LGBT grows and develops in America even though such an idea contradicts the established religions. This movement has spread out the world although it threatens human being civilization in terms of the sustainability of human being's descendants.

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