

Islam, Muslims and the West in globalisation era: A reflection on 'the Danish cartoon' case

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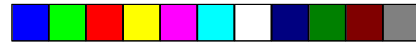
ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membincangkan maksud globalisasi serta pengaruhnya terhadap hubungan di antara 'Islam' dan 'Barat'. Meskipun globalisasi sukar didefinisikan secara tuntas, namun kehadirannya tidak dapat dielakkan dalam kehidupan masa kini. Artikel ini mengambil maksud globalisasi sebagaimana dikemukakan oleh Lister (2006) dan Appadurai (1990). Seterusnya artikel ini mengupas pengaruh globalisasi dalam hubungan Islam dan Barat dengan mengambil contoh kes kontroversi kartun nabi Muhammad s.a.w yang disiarkan akhbar Denmark, Jyllands-Postens, pada 30 September 2005.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is a buzz word of the 21st century. The definite meaning of the term and the understanding of the concept is still highly debated. It could mean differently to different people. As Wong (2004:3) exemplifies in the case of Malaysia - 'there is a broad consensus that globalisation is not a uniform concept. For some, it is the presence of foreign multinationals, brands and lifestyles; for others it is the Internet, Astro (satellite television), the ties of the Malays and its greater Islamic *ummah* (the family of Muslims), the rising significance of international non-governmental organisations and Malaysia's exposure and vulnerability to global flows and vectors to capital and labour, amongst other possible developments. Clearly, globalisation has far-reaching effects and is embedded in Malaysians' daily lives'.

Wong's observation is very true indeed. Though the definition and concept of globalisation remains fuzzy, the effects could be felt at various sectors in different forms. The opponents of the concept argue that the phenomenon had been happening before and there is nothing particularly new in globalisation, it's just another way to express 'internationalisation'. On the other hand, the proponents of globalisation put the emphasis on the extent and speed of changes that are taking place in today's world as a sign that globalisation is a new phenomenon. I am for the latter opinion. Globalisation catches the attention of

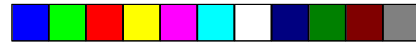


scholars, policy makers, political leaders, business and corporations, and also people at large because of the changes that it brings about in relatively short period of time. This nature of rapid change poses great challenges to all that are involved either directly or indirectly - in other words, it challenges each and every one of us.

Thus it is the aim of this paper to discuss the challenges of globalisation, with reference to the Muslim *ummah* and how they could contribute effectively in this globalise world. This is particularly crucial in contemporary period of tension between Islam and the West due to the events of September 11, the London bombing, the Iraq war, the Danish cartoon, and the Iran nuclear power. The images portrayed by the Western media and the responses by the Muslim world has to be dealt with careful thinking and reflecting - nothing could be easily accepted as totally right or totally wrong in today's world of massive movement of information and ideas within and across borders. To complicate matters, the West is not a homogenous entity and so does the Muslim world. Thus who speaks for the West? And how about the Muslim - whose voice represents the Muslim world? Does this dichotomy of Muslims and the West serves as the best way to discuss our world today? These are some of the questions that I attempt to explore in this article, with focus on the controversial case of Prophet Muhammad's s.a.w. cartoons that were published in the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*.

THE MEANING OF GLOBALISATION

As a point of departure, it would be useful to highlight some opinion in defining and understanding globalisation. Lister (2006:33-37) asserts that globalisation connotes a wealth of meaning and could be understood by isolating five distinct functions that it brings about. The first function of globalisation is to describe the condition of the world that is qualitatively changing into a more integrated world. The second function is to name the Post-Cold War era in which the systems of walls and divisions are being challenged and replaced by the system of integration which signifies globalisation. The third function is to provide a new paradigm for study by raising new questions about economic, social and cultural integration. The fourth function of globalisation is to make personal statement about change which some thinks as 'uncontrolled and confusing' especially with regard to the loss of the old national, gender, ethnic or professional identities. The final function of globalisation is to be used as political tool due to its powerful and influential notion that successfully grasps the attention of politicians and serve to justify their ideas and policies.

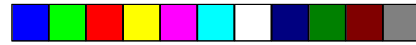


In developing the argument of this paper, I shall employ the five functions of globalisation suggested by Lister together with the five 'scapes' of Appadurai (1990:220-230). The 'scapes' refer to five dimensions of cultural flow that could be explored in the complex current global cultural economy. The five landscapes are the ethnoscape, technoscape, finanscape, mediascape and ideoscape. The ethnoscape refers to the landscape of people who constitute the shifting world in which we live - tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, etc. It relates to the realities of having to move (in the case of immigrants searching for better economic gain and refugees who fled the countries of war), and also the fantasies of wanting to move (as for the tourists and the professional expatriates working in the ICT companies). Technoscape refers to the mechanical and informational moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries - modern transportation systems, internet, printing and media technology, and satellite television serves as examples for this 'scape'. The third 'scape', finanscape, refers to the global flows of money often driven by interconnected currency market, stock exchanges and commodity market. The next 'scape', mediascape, refers to the global distribution of media images that appear on computer screens, newspapers, television, and radio. Finally, the ideoscape which refers to the related images, ideas and political ideologies such as the meaning of 'freedom', 'welfare', 'rights', and 'sovereignty'.

Having discussed the five 'scapes', we shall now proceed to examine each of it. I shall relate the discussion to the case of the Danish cartoon as an example of an event that occurred in one part of the world but caught the attention of the entire globe. The cartoon that appeared in the mediascape affected all the other 'scapes' - it spreads like wildfire due to the advance current technology of information and communication (ICT) (technoscape); the whole Muslim *ummah* shows their concern (ethnoscape); it prompted the discussion on ideas of 'clash of civilisation' and 'dialogue of civilisation' (ideoscape); and finally affects the finanscape through the boycotts and banning of Danish products in the Muslim world. The whole situation serve as an experience and there are lessons to be learnt by the Muslims (as well as the West) regarding the challenges of globalisation and ways of coping with it. Before going further I shall briefly summarise the happenings in the Danish cartoon case and the debates that surrounds it.

THE DANISH CARTOON AND THE MEDIASCAPE

The cartoons that depicted Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. were printed by *Jyllands-Posten* on 30th September 2005, with a text saying that:



'The modern, secular society is rejected by some Muslims. They demand a special position, insisting on special consideration of their own religious feelings. It is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech, where we must be ready to put up with insults, mockery and ridicule. It is certainly not always attractive and nice to look at, and it does not mean that religious feelings should be made fun of at any price, but that is minor importance in the present context. [...] we are on our way to a slippery slope where no-one can tell how the self-censorship will end. That is why *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* has invited members of the Danish editorial cartoonists union to draw Muhammad as they see him. [...]' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_cartoons).

The cartoon publication initially got little attention by the general public and Muslim community of Denmark except for the complaint to the Denmark Prime Minister. The cartoons gained greater attention in 2006 when various newspapers especially in the continental Europe start reprinting it. Some newspapers in the Muslim countries took the same action such as the Jordanian weekly newspaper, *al-Shihan* dan Malaysian *Sarawak Tribune*. In both cases, the editors were fired for charges of insulting the religion. Other than the reprinting of the cartoons, the issue caught headlines due to the responses by the Muslim community all over the world. The responses ranges from statements of protest, boycotts of all Danish goods, call for more understanding between Islam and the West, and also riots and protesters attacking the Denmark and Norwegian embassies. What interest me most are the responses that were highlighted by the media - I still remember watching the BBC showing time and again the violent protesters attacking the embassies and only brief footage of the Indonesian politician giving a statement in a 'civilised' manner. This to me shows some bias and selectivity in the media in portraying the overall picture of the issue. On the other hand, responses from the Muslims that chooses violence as their means to express respect and love for the Prophet s.a.w. is to me rather immature. This kind of responses will only open the door to further biases and confirming the negative images of Muslims in the eyes of some Westerners. We shall discuss this further with regards to ideoscape and the debates on 'clash of civilisation' and 'dialogue of civilisation'. Before that we shall look into the ethnoscape and relate it to concept of the Muslim *ummah*.

ETHNOSCAPE AND THE MUSLIM *UMMAH*

Ethnoscape refers to the people and the movement of these people, in this respect, the Muslims. The Middle East is normally known as the centre for Muslim world, but nearly half of the total population of Muslims are actually located in South East Asia i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei among others. Other than that, the Muslims in Europe and North America are growing in numbers and political influence.

In the case of the Danish cartoon, it first strikes the attention of the Muslim minority in Denmark. There are approximately 150,000 Muslims in Denmark, with those of Turkish heritage being the largest group at 36,000 (<http://euro-islam.info/pages/denmark.html>). Other Muslims trace their origins from Yugoslavia, Turkey, Morocco and Pakistan. And they all came in to Denmark for various reasons - working as foreign labours, seeking political asylum and also family reunions. In 1970's, the economy of Denmark went slow and causes many cases of unemployment. Social welfare is taken as a problem, burdening the taxpayers. The targets of criticism are the Muslims since they are those who fall under the low income level. Ethnic, religion and cultural otherness become important issues. The Muslims are being criticised as marginalising themselves by sticking only to their own cultures and do not adapt to the Danish norms and values. This kind of criticism is not only for the Danish Muslims, but rather widespread to other Muslims living as minority in Western secular countries.

This criticism is certainly not without basis. Thus there are Muslim scholars who call for the integration of the Muslim minority in the Western countries to the larger communities. Tibi (2001:xiv) suggested the concept of Euro-Islam. He maintains that 'Islam with a growing community of more than 15 million Muslim migrants has increasingly become part of Europe. The othering of this Muslim segment of Europe's population would only contribute to the politicisation of Islam and to the rise of fundamentalism among the migrants in the European diaspora of Islam. I argue for integration as opposed to the building of communitarian ghettos'. Another scholar who holds similar opinion is Tariq Ramadan. He argues that the rapidly increasing numbers of Muslims in the West should cease viewing themselves as minorities and implications of such categories. Rather they should take part as citizens with all due rights and responsibilities. The Muslims should live an Islamic life that enriches the societies that they are part of and avoid any physical or intellectual ghettoisation, and thus the need for a change in attitude by re-reading and re-interpreting the core Islamic sources (al-Rashid 2005:6-10). The opinions forwarded by both scholars are certainly very true and to me it poses a challenge for Muslims of today especially to those who are living in the Western secular countries. There is no other choice but to adapt to the Western way of living while holding fast to the

teachings of Islam. This might be difficult at times but most of the time it is manageable and many Muslims had proved that it is workable. I would argue that the concept of *ummah* should be the basis for the contemporary Muslims in order to expand and adapt to the various different cultures and background.

The concept of *ummah* originated during the time of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. at the time of migration of Muslims from Makkah to Madinah in the seventh century of the Common Era. The group formed a close-knitted group, known as the *ummatul Muslimin* or the *ummah*. In time, membership of the *ummah* replaced the tribal loyalty and also the supreme significance of an individual in a society. However, the *ummah* did not abolish the tribal identity. The changes are just in the hierarchy of an individual identity in society - the Muslim *ummah* takes the supremacy position in identifying oneself (al-Ahsan 1992:3). To me, this concept of *ummah* which acknowledge the tribal identity and at the same time unite all Muslims under the *shari'ah* is very relevant to the situation of the 21st century. It is crucial that these Muslims maintain the religious identity and at the same time function as good citizen in the country in which they are living or visiting.

Relating the question of Muslim *ummah* to the Danish cartoon, I would argue that it could be looked into both as an opportunity and a challenge for Muslims. Opportunity, because it reflects that the contemporary Muslims treat the religion seriously and respect the Prophet s.a.w. as he is supposed to be. This unity of respect and concern about the religion could be felt for the whole Muslim *ummah* as reflected in the responses by Muslims from the UK, Syria, Jordan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Niger and other parts of the world - that makes the right spirit to strengthen the *ummah*. On the other hand, the challenge comes on the portrayal of the images of Muslims that are violent and intolerant in accepting differing views from others. Therefore I think the Muslims should learn to respond towards provocation and criticism in a more civilised and learned manner. Anger is certainly not the best way in dealing with this kind of situation. After all, the Prophet s.a.w. thought Muslims to learn to manage anger and always be patient when being tested. But this does not mean that the Muslims should just keep quiet and be manipulated by others. To me, in times of challenges as this, the Muslims should hold fast to the Islamic teachings and better equipped with the skills to counter-debate the issue. Responses of some Muslims who wrote their views and explain the stand of Islam towards blasphemy and respect of religion is the best way to reflect the attitude and behaviour of the 21st century Muslims. This is to be nurtured, and we still have a long way to go.

I shall emphasis that the challenge for Muslims of the 21st century is to strengthen the unity of the *ummah* no matter where they are, whether in Muslim majority countries or places where the Muslims are small in number. The *ummah* could make connections into a trans-national network that functions across

borders of nation-states. Establishment of institutions and other forms of groups could be useful in developing on the commons that Muslims have. This is in line with Asad's suggestion for the Muslims in secular Europe to find institutional representations as a minority in a democratic state that consist only of minorities (Asad 2003:178). He argued that this is particularly crucial in the Western world where Muslims is not represented due to the historical facts that construct the present Europe which looks at Islam as 'the other'. The concept of *ummah* allows Muslims from different origins and parts of the world to relate to each other - it allows for diversity and provides a common ground for unity. Even if we are away from our own country, we still have the *ummah* to provide us with the brotherly or sisterly comfort that were left home. This spirit of unity is certainly good to be fostered.

IDEOSCAPE - CLASH OF CIVILISATION OR DIALOGUE OF CIVILISATION?

Having discussed about the Muslim *ummah*, we shall now move on to the relation between the Muslims and the others, particularly, the West. There had always been encounters and interaction between Islam and the West since historical period. There were great achievements by both Islamic and Western civilisations, though the golden era of each might differ with some overlaps at certain period. Robinson (2005:78) argued that this could happen due to the existence of power in the Muslims and the West at that time - religion and power goes hand in hand. The present 21st century certainly posed a totally different picture - the power relation is only one sided, heading towards the West. Though there are pictures of successful Muslim nations, the common image of Islam and Muslim represents the symbol of 'injustice and oppression' and also of 'violence and intolerance'. These images pose bad portrayal of the Muslims and certainly needs to be rectified; thus another big challenge for the Muslim *ummah*.

The idea of Islam and the West being at two opposing ends had been shaped by a long history. For the contemporary debate, the thesis of Huntington (1993) regarding the clash of civilisations plays an important role in contributing to the notion of Islam as 'the other' to the West perspectives. Huntington argued that after the era of Cold War, the crucial distinctions between people are cultural and not economical or ideological. He claimed that the world politics had been reconfigured along cultural lines. Conflict will happen along the fault-lines. Unfortunately, the fault-lines and the hot spots are those represented by the Muslim nations. Another argument also looked into the tension between Islam and the West as a post Cold War event. The political restructuring and the power relation pattern in the new era makes the West goes looking for a new

'enemy' and Islam (and Muslims) seems to be the target. I am not in the position to comment on the truth of such claims. What I am concerned about is the effects of such claims in bringing hatred and tensions between the West and Islam, and manifested in actions from both parties. The groups of authorities who came up with these ideas and working on it seemed to be seen as speaking for both parties. The question is that are they the true representation of what the Muslims and the West think and feel about each other? To me, it certainly does not tell the whole truth. And this needs to be dealt with carefully.

The Danish cartoon could be seen as a manifestation of the differing ideas and opinions between Islam and the West. Looking from Huntington's point, it could be regarded as an example of cultural tension. The cartoon was published as a way of upholding the rights for freedom of speech in the secular Denmark media. Freedom of speech is crucial in portraying the Western democracy and modernity, thus anything that goes against it is treated as anti-democracy and backward looking. On the other hand, for Muslims the depiction of the great Prophet s.a.w. or any form of insults for the religion is strictly forbidden - this portrays respect for the religion. In this perspective, we could say that both parties are arguing for the characters of 'democracy and modernity' that are 'the rights for freedom and respect'. The problem lies in different understanding and interpretation of 'respect and freedom' between the two parties. This difference should provide for an opportunity for discussion between Islam and the West, but unfortunately in the Danish cartoon case, this had been the reason for dispute.

I am of the opinion that the dispute between Islam and the West should be tackled by both sides and the idea of dialogue of civilisations should be promoted. I very much agree to the idea forwarded by Ahmed (2005:115-116) that calls for understanding the way today's world was formed and developing on the common problems that faces contemporary humankind to be the start for a dialogue. To make this happen, it certainly needs the concerted effort from both sides, as he further elaborates:

'Muslims face an internal challenge. Reducing a sophisticated civilisation to simple rituals encourages simple answers: reaching for guns and explosives, for instance. For Muslims to confront the world with poise and confidence is to rediscover and begin to repair the mainsprings of Islamic civilisation. They need to rebuild an idea of Islam that includes justice, integrity, tolerance, and the quest for knowledge - the classic Islamic civilisation - not just the insistence on the rituals; not just the five pillars of Islam, but the entire building. The West must not pressure on Muslim governments to 'get their act together', to ensure justice and

provide clean administration. It must send serious signals to the ordinary Muslim people that it does not consider Islam as the enemy. Serious and urgent rethinking is required by the scholars, policy planners and policy makers in the corridors of power - not only in Washington, London, Moscow, and Paris, but in Cairo, Kabul, and Tehran'.

I chose to quote the whole paragraph of Ahmed's elaboration since it reflects clearly the important things that should be considered in the relationship between Islam and the West. I certainly agree to his view of rebuilding the holistic idea of Islam based in the classic Islamic civilisation that had proven a success. This could certainly materialize again provided that the *ummah* strives for it. I would also add that the *Qur'an* and *sunnah* should be the basis of this rebuilding, and that probably also needs reinterpretation (as suggested by Ramadan, I mentioned it earlier in the discussion). Then again, I hold that the reinterpretation should be guided with skills and the right intention so as not to go astray from the actual truth of Islamic teachings.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this paper, I shall summarise our discussion by highlighting the main points that I argued for. We started of by discussing the meaning and concept of globalisation. Though it is still a debateable concept, the effects of globalisation could hardly be resisted by the 21st century global citizen. I also described the functions of globalisation as forwarded by Lister and the five dimensions of cultural flow as expressed by Appadurai in his five 'scapes'. I further employ these 'scapes' in looking into the challenges facing Muslims of the 21st century. In so doing, I chose the case of the Danish cartoon to illustrate the complex interaction between the five 'scapes'. One thing that is worth emphasising is the extent and speed of changes that is happening in this globalise world - the case of Danish cartoon would have not been widespread if it happens 100 years ago. Thus the 21st century has the characters and forces to make things happen faster and more extensive - this I argued is a salient feature of globalisation.

In order to cope with the fast moving nature of a globalise world, the Muslims shall have to face up many challenges. In this paper I pointed out three of them. The first challenge is to rectify the bad images of Islam and Muslim in the eyes of the world. This is very crucial and I would not put the blame solely on the West for featuring such biased portrayal. I would rather approach this from the Muslim side - there are reasons and evidences that provide those

negative images of Muslims. The violent responses of the protesters of the Danish cartoons serve as an example. These immature responses towards differences will only show the Muslims weaknesses - violent, angry, intolerant, etc. Thus I would say that the 21st century Muslims should develop behaviours and characters of civilised and forward looking people. This could be materialised by going back to the teachings of the *Qur'an* and *sunnah* and understand the *shari'ah* in its holistic manner and not confined it just to the ritual aspects of Islam.

The second challenge is to integrate and adapt to the contemporary way of life without letting go the identity of a good Muslim. Relating to the cartoon case, this apparently is the reason for the marginalisation of the Muslims in Denmark. The same goes for Muslims in other Western countries. Thus I would emphasis again on the need to take up the challenge of integrating as also echoed by our renowned Muslim scholars such as Tibi, Ramadan and Asad. After all, Islamic teachings celebrate plurality and diversity. The 21st century Muslims should strive to be a good citizen for the states in which they are being part of and also at the same time uphold the identity of a Muslim.

The third challenge is to gain power that was once a feature of Islamic civilisation. In contemporary context, I would see power in a wide perspective ranging from political power to personal power and knowledge power. It is crucial for Muslims in the 21st century to master the skills and knowledge that runs the world today. To be an effective global player is to know the rules of the game. As such, Muslims would be at the same level playing field with others and in better position to voice their opinion and could not be manipulated easily. In my view, the concept of the Muslim *ummah* serves as a ready template to be built on in order to achieve a united and powerful 21st century Muslims.

In essence it all lies in the hands of the Muslims to take up the challenges and respond to it in a positive manner. We should accept the reality that the world today is not shaped by the Muslims. But that does not mean that the Muslims could not live in such world. Islam preaches flexibility and moderation as a way of life. Thus it is the role of Muslims to adapt to the situation and at the same time strive to bring about the glory that we had before. This could be seen as the bigger *jihad* that faces the Muslims today and if managed properly would certainly be rewarded by God.

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