

## ISLAMIC SOCIETY AND THE CHALLENGE OF GLOBALIZATION\*

Taufik Abdullah\*\*

### IKHTISAR

*Masyarakat Islam dewasa ini berada dalam era globalisasi. Karena itu mereka menghadapi berbagai tantangan: seperti mobilitas penduduk, keterbukaan terhadap pengaruh luar, perkembangan akan pengetahuan dan teknologi. Dalam rangka menghadapi hal-hal tersebut maka masyarakat di negara-negara Islam hendaklah berpartisipasi dalam perkembangan dunia dan juga harus memiliki strategi sosial dan ekonomi yang mantap dan terencana.*

The not entirely explicable series of event that finally reach their climax with the virtual destruction of the Iron Wall are perhaps some of the historical mysteries of the 20th century -- the century that is aptly called by Hobsbawm as the "age of extreme". If the end of the Second World War opened up the gate of decolonization process, the end of the Cold War has practically become a driving force that hastens the processes of various types of transformation. How

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\*\* The writer is research professor (Ahli Peneliti Utama) at the Center for Social and Cultural Studies, Indonesia Intitute of Sciences (PMB-LIPI).

come at this particular juncture of history the world is experienced such massive transformation? The whole processes have challenged our sense of history and our vision of the future.

It is only understandable if now we can observe the appearances of several studies and treatises that try to explain the meaning of the tremendous events that are taking place and their impacts of the future. It is also not hard to understand that some of these studies and treatises incite controversies that have practically cut across national boundaries. What theory can we take as the guideline? Should it be Fukuyama's theory, that rejects Marx and returns to Hegel as the intellectual guide? The end of the Cold War for Fukuyama means nothing less than "the end of history". The conflict between the East and the West has ended and the process toward the formation of one world begins. That is the time when the whole world would finally succumb to the persuasion of Western liberal democracy. Indeed Fukuyama believes in the bright future of mankind, but who can be so easily swayed by his too obvious cultural arrogance? Or, perhaps, after reflecting on the two successive world wars and the innumerable armed conflicts, we better look at Huntington, who cannot foresee the world without conflict. The dissolution of the Soviet Union could mean the end of ideology as the basis conflict, its place is to be taken by "civilization". And, he sees the possible conflict between the "Islamic civilization" -- which "has bloody borders" and has no "core state", that can manage its internal affairs -- and the Western civilization. His obvious anti-Islam aside, by the end of the book Huntington has practically shifted the concept of civilization to nothing less than the grouping of powers. Or, perhaps we better settle for the less daring prediction of Ohmae, who visualizes the future as the world undivided by nation states. But how can people who well remember the history of national struggle to simply accept the legitimacy of the borderless states? The future, the uncharted territory, is after all not only an objective possibility but a subjective and normative state as well.

We are, perhaps, in a much safer ground if instead of imagining the structure of future -- and allowing ourselves to be trapped by our own predilection -- we just observe the present trends and the divergent scenario of the future, that are being written by the great and minor

powers. In a word we better observe the trends and processes that have been widely called the "globalization". Never in human history there are so many competing nation-states and international organizations strive together to create a common new world, which is economically more open and interdependent and politically more cooperative. The formation of several interlocking regional economic groupings, which among others aim at economic liberation, is certainly the most obvious step toward the process of economic globalization. Whatever the agenda of the various international and regional economic cooperations might be and whatever time-tables they might have set for themselves one thing is clear a globalized world would eventually come into being. This is the world that would open up every possibilities, but this also the world that is also full of challenges. Demographic mobility would increase tremendously. The time when people migrate to avoid political persecution could be terminated but the attraction of economic opportunities would be intensified. The skilled manpower would travel to wherever economic opportunities are opening up. The ability of the national governments to protect domestic industries would be curtailed by international agreements. Science and technology and human resources would practically determine market orientations. In the event power itself might be lodged some where in transnational capitals which tend to create new worlds.

How should the Islamic countries face these challenges? Whatever one might say about the rapid development of some Islamic countries in the last two or three decades, these countries are still weak in both technology and human resources. One can simply imagine that some Islamic countries might find themselves in a better position, due to some extent to their participation in the fast rapidly developed economic region, while some others might fall behind. The globalization process is in more than one way a test to the notion of Islamic brotherhood. If the I.O.C. is simply too big to be effective and too bogged down by pressing political problems, what mechanism is there that can mitigate the possible economic discrepancies? It is to face the challenges of the globalized world that eight Islamic countries (Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Egypt) established the Developing Eight (June 15, 1997), which aims at strengthening



cooperation in industry, trade, communication, banking and finance, eradication of poverty, science and technology, environment, health, and culture and sports. It is also along this line of reasoning that Malaysia has taken the initiative of establishing International Malay Networking, which among other things aims at developing economic networks among Malay private entrepreneurs. It goes without saying that every Islamic countries with different degrees of intensity have also made their preparations to face the almost unavoidable process of economic globalization.

Sound and well-thought social and economic strategies would certainly be needed to cope with the problems that come out as the results of economic liberation and the increase rate of geographical mobility. Globalization, however, also brings with it growing demands for democratization and human rights. These two demands are perhaps the strongest forces that aim at bringing the world into a more or less homogenous system. In the event cultural arguments about the greatness of diversities might no longer be adequate. The differences in democratic system can be argued but the failure to promote the creation of a healthy and workable civil society could be reason enough to be isolated from international community. Since these growing demands can only be solved by introducing structural rearrangement and to some extent also ideological reorientation, one may ask whether the present Muslim nation-states are well equipped to adjust themselves to such historical necessities?

This question, however, is related to the problems raised by the second set of challenges -- pluralism and homogenization of culture. This set of challenges address itself right to Islamic religious consciousness. At its extreme pluralism may not only lead to relativism but also to secularization, when transcendental concerns cease to be the guiding principles in the system of action. The globalized world may also mean the continuing hegemony of Western mass media. With this hegemony the West would be able penetrate deeply into the isolated parts of the Muslim world. It would be able to disseminate news and popular knowledge about anything that might weaken the sense of Islamic brotherhood. The hegemony of Western mass media -- through its movies, TV shows, music, etc, -- would also hasten the process of

the homogenization of pop culture on the one hand, and cultural hybridization, on the other. If the homogenization of pop culture may eventually negate whatever boundaries there are between ethically proper and improper style of life, then, the hybridization of culture is the state in which, as one observer put it, "forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices". While potentially a threat to the integration of local communities these potential cultural challenges could re-integrate individuals to a world wide community. The warm community life would be lost while a new of community of strangers would emerge. How would the Muslims react to these possible eventualities?

The least creative response to these divergent types of challenges is certainly to make complete adjustment with these changes. Let these changes mold a new way life. But ,how Islam can survive without the support of the warm community life ? Man can be only an entity in himself only in his direct relation to His Creator -- hence one may call Islamic society as anti- structure, one is only responsible to his Creator. But the moment he looks around to his fellow creatures, man is obliged to be part of the community. The destruction of the community life, when social pluralism has turned into excessive philosophical relativism, is tantamount to the abandonment of the sanctity of Islamic community.

The second possibility is, of course, to fight against these new trends. This option would certainly confirm Huntington's judgment that Islam has "bloody borders" and fulfill the prophesy of Western scholars, and most significantly, mass media and politicians, that the conflict between the West and Islam is unavoidable. In time when Islam is still in a disadvantage this option would certainly turn the whole world against Islam. "Fundamentalism" would ,and it has become now, simply be equated with nothing less than terrorism.

Withdrawal is perhaps another obvious possibility. Returning to Islamic spirituality and to the serene life of hermitage and abandoning the unavoidable imposition of the strange and threatening structural necessities and cultural changes can be an attractive solution. If history can be taken as a guide the survival or even revival capacity of returning to Islamic spirituality in time of trouble is enormous.

Returning to Islamic spirituality can never be simply discounted as an act of despair. It is a way to find solace from an hostile environment. But, then, globalization is an unprecedented event in the history of mankind. History does not teach us how to behave in the uncharted territory of to-morrow, it can only show the trends that can be taken as nothing more than the signposts. Therefore one can say that withdrawal to Islamic spirituality is far from adequate. Not only are the force and the scope of the penetration of globalization can be far reaching, the present stage of Islamic community is also in dire need of more creative and proactive actions. Poverty and backwardness are still very much two of the most obvious features of the Muslim communities all over the world.

If recent historical development can be taken as a sign then the most creative response to these possible structural and cultural challenges is not other than to continue the cultivation of the spirit of Islamic *tajdid*, reform. While emphasizing *tauhidic* ethics, with its stress on justice, knowledge, *ihsan*, tolerance, and continuing to purify religion from unlawful *bid'ah*, the strive to hasten the formation of just and prosperous civil society should also be carried out. In spite of the fact that there are still so many disappointments and there are also so many "ups and downs" that may one wonder about the future trends, recent history of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia, however, shows that this is the only way that promises the bright future. There are indeed so many structural rearrangement that have to be made and there are also phases of cultural adjustments that have to be made, but as it stands now, this option can still be seen as the only way that would make the Muslims face the future with confidence.

Then, we can pray may God bless the people who strive on His right path.