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Hisanori Kato
hisanorikato@hotmail.com

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***Philanthropic Aspects of Islam:
The Case of the Fundamentalist Movement in Indonesia***

Hisanori Kato

Despite common theological roots and centuries-long interaction, Islam's relationship to the West has often been marked by mutual ignorance, stereotyping, contempt, and conflict.¹

Introduction

The contemporary image of Islam in the West seems to have risen to a new level of negativity; numerous terrorist acts have been executed, and mutual distrust between the West and Islamic world is at a peak since the 9/11 attacks.² At the beginning of the twenty first century, a politician from the U.S. reported that there existed “a large group of citizens” that regard Islam to be a potential threat to the U.S, a Christian nation.³ More recently, in January 2015, a group of Muslim militants attacked a publisher, *Charlie Hebdo*, in Paris, which published a magazine featuring a caricature of Prophet Muhammad. Dozens of tourists have been also victimized when several Muslim militants attacked Tunisia’s National Museum in March 2015. It is said that these terrorist acts are linked with Muslim militant groups such as *al-Qaeda* and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria known as ISIS.⁴ The former was a perpetrator of the September 11 attacks in the U.S., and the latter is one of the most feared militant Muslim groups in the contemporary world.

The existence of ISIS has been recognised by the international community since the former’s declaration of the establishment of a caliphate in June 2014. Using Internet technology, ISIS has adopted a sophisticated media strategy, which has often involved broadcasting, in an extremely inhumane fashion, the execution of hostages through a popular user-generated video site such as YouTube.

These acts surely have contributed to the building of a negative image of Islam in the West, while encouraging people who criticize and spread stereotypical images of Islam. One of the most recognizable, if not popular, of these Western anti-Islam campaigners is a Dutch politician, Geert Wilders; he states that “Islam is the cause of terror and misery.”⁵ It might

¹ J.L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, New York, 1995, p.25.

² For example, an Islamic militant group founded by Osama bin Ladin called al-Qaeda carried out simultaneous terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington D.C. in September, 2001, destroying the twin buildings of the World Trade Center with more than three thousand casualties.

³ P. Findley, *Silent No More: Confronting America's False Images of Islam*, Maryland, 2001, pp.65-66.

⁴ Al Jazeera online news 14 January, 2015 and 19 March 2015:

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/al-qaeda-yemen-charlie-hebdo-paris-attacks-201511410323361511.html?hc_location=ufi and <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/3/19/several-arrests-made-in-tunisia-museum-attack.html>

⁵ Geert Wilders Weblog available at <http://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php/94-english/1910-geert-wilders-in-parliamentary-debate-with-dutch-prime-minister-we-see-a-cowardly-cuddling-of-islam>

be true that Islam and fundamentalism in general are seen as a “threat to global security.”⁶ Wilders was once charged with inciting hatred and discrimination for his comments against Islam but he was acquitted in June of 2011; the judge said that “they were (his comments) acceptable within the context of public debate.”⁷ In focusing his attention on the immigration policy of the Dutch government, and in urging it to ban further Muslim immigrants, he seems to have failed to distinguish between terrorists and other Muslims who appreciate humanity and peace.

In fact, there has been indignation about, and disagreement with, ISIS from different Islamic communities in the world. These include the reactions from the most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia. The Indonesian Council of *Ulama* or *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) issued a statement regarding ISIS in August of 2014 in which ISIS is described as “radical.” In criticising ISIS by saying that “it devastates innocent people and the holy places of Islam,” MUI has made clear their rejection of the militant group.⁸

However, in spite of the efforts of some Muslims to exhibit an Islamic appreciation of humanity, we still find a strong belief within non-Islamic communities worldwide that Islam is an uncivilized religion without any philanthropic nature. This can be the cause of distrust between Muslims and non-Muslims, as exemplified by statements made by Geert Wilders. Is this Western perspective on Islam justifiable? Can we refer to the activities of some Indonesian Muslims in order to shine a light on Islamic nature that may otherwise be unnoticed in the West?

ISIS and Indonesian Muslims

The statement made by MUI indicates that, in the main, Islam in Indonesia officially stands against ISIS. *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, also vehemently rejects the actions of ISIS. Said Aqil Siradj, the chairperson of NU, articulated such a sentiment. In his opinion: “...What is carried out by ISIS is apostasy of Allah, and it does not reflect the spirit of *al-Quran*. Violence is by no means justified in the teachings of Islam.”⁹

The view is echoed by a respected Indonesian Islamic scholar, Ali Musthofa Yaqub, who states that “ISIS does not appear from the (true) Islamic community. Rather it comes from the non-Islamic community that intends to destroy Islam.”¹⁰

⁶ B. Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Fundamentalism since 1945*, New York, 2005, p. 9.

⁷ BBC Online News, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13883331>

⁸ Press Release *Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, available at: <http://mui.or.id/mui/homepage/berita/berita-singkat/press-release-pernyataan-sikap-fu-mui-tentang-isis.html>

The chairperson of MUI also stated that there was no need for issuing an official religious ruling or fatwa to ban ISIS as it was too obvious that the course taken by ISIS was against Islamic teachings.

⁹ R. Muhammad, *ISIS*, Jakarta, 2014, p. 148. The original text is written in Bahasa Indonesia, and the author of the paper translated it into English.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.144.

ISIS is rejected in Indonesia not only by so-called ‘moderate’ Muslims such as Said Aqil Siradj but also by those more conservative Muslims who are ‘fundamentalists.’ For example, Ismail Yusanto, who is one of the executives of a *syariah* (*shariah*)-focused organisation Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, shares the view of moderate Muslims in Indonesia. Although Hizbut Tahrir seeks to establish a caliphate system, it rejects the so-called caliphate established by ISIS. Yusanto has maintained that al-Baghdadi, the apparent leader of ISIS, is not a legitimate caliph, and that ISIS will do harm rather than good to Islam as a whole.¹¹

In addition to the rejection of ISIS by Islamic organizations and influential Muslim scholars in Indonesia, the Indonesian government itself has banned support or endorsement for ISIS by its citizens since August of 2014.¹² The popularity of ISIS in Indonesia remains low, and the vast majority of Muslims in the country disagree with the course of action taken by ISIS.

However, there are about three hundred and fifty Indonesian citizens who have joined ISIS between 2013 and 2015.¹³ More appalling news for both the government and the Islamic community in Indonesia has been the call for support of ISIS made by one of the most popular hard-line Muslim preachers, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, currently serving a fifteen-year prison term for his alleged involvement in terrorist activities in August of 2014.

Core members of his organization, *Jama’ah Ansharut Tauhid* (JAT), however, have refused to follow the instruction given by their leader in prison. Therefore, they left JAT to establish a new organisation called *Jama’ah Ansharusy Syari’ah* (JAS) in August of 2014. The founders of JAS include a long-term friend and close aide of Ba’asyir, Mochammad Achwan; Haris Amir Falah; and a son of Ba’asyir, Abdul Rohim. These individuals have been regarded as ‘terrorist’ type hard-liners and thus dangerous. In fact, Abdul Rohim was listed in “*al-Qaida* Sanctions Lists” of United Nations Security Council in July 2011, notwithstanding his repeated denials of his involvement in terrorist activities.

According to Abdul Rohim, ISIS is too “extreme,” and its interpretation and implementation of *syariah* incorrect. Thus, he argues, ISIS is not accordance with the teachings of Islam. He cites one of the verses from *al-Quran* (2-256) that “There shall be no compulsion in religion.”¹⁴ He maintains that his father has had very limited access to the information on ISIS in prison and has been influenced by other terrorist inmates.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Haris Amir Falah the former aide, says that he, together with fellow JAT members including Abdul Rohim, tried to persuade Ba’asyir to return to the right path of Islam for five months before August of 2014, but in vain.

¹¹ Interview with the author, Jakarta, 3rd January 2015.

¹² Jakarta Post, 5 August 2014.

¹³ Jakarta Post, 15 January 2015

¹⁴ Interview with the author, Solo, 9th March 2015.

¹⁵ Interview with the author, Solo, 9th March 2015.

He also reports that more than ninety percent of former JAT members have transferred to JAS, and *umat* Islam (the Islamic community) in Indonesia still has a conscience and it maintains the righteousness of Islam.

Like Abdul Rohim, Falah finds ISIS to indulge in extreme violence, and it is therefore against the core teachings of Islam.¹⁶ He cites several verses from *al-Quran* to show that Islam gives no encouragement to the militant way of life.

God does not forbid you to be kind and equitable to those who have neither made war on your religion nor drive you from your homes. God loves the equitable. (6-8)

Give generously for the cause of God and do not with your own hands cast yourselves into destruction. Be charitable; God loves the charitable. (2-195)

Islam's Fundamental Teachings

The term “fundamentalism” may connote negativity or fanaticism or violence. We have to be careful with a semantic, definitional pitfall in relation to fundamentalism. G. Haar reminds us that popular (or journalistic) use of “fundamentalism” might lead us to a misunderstanding of the truth.¹⁷ Muslim fundamentalists merely emphasise the importance of original religious scriptures and have developed a strong determination to perform their religious duties without failure, while militant Muslims or terrorists have no hesitation to employ violent means in achieving their political and religious purposes.¹⁸ As fundamentalists never accept compromising religious doctrine, they may be regarded as dogmatically conservative and rigid. In this sense, both Abdul Rohim and Falah are true Muslim fundamentalists.

For Abdul Rohim, Islam never teaches the taking of someone's life without justification, and he cites one of the historical records of deeds and statements of Prophet Muhammad known as *Hadith*. When Prophet Muhammad lived in Medina, he was by no means willing to slay ‘hypocrites’ indiscriminately.¹⁹

Abdul Rohim also emphasises the importance of coexistence with non-Muslims. During a public lecture held at one of the mosques in Jakarta, Rohim stated his view that Muslims can accept non-Muslim as wedding guests, even though Muslims themselves are not

¹⁶ Interview with the author, Jakarta, 3 March 2015.

¹⁷ G.T. Haar, “Religious Fundamentalism and Social Change”, in G.T. Haar and J. J Busuttill(eds.), *The Freedom to do God's Will*, New York, 2003, p.23.

¹⁸ H. Kato, “Social demand and the “Clash of Ijtihad”: A Constructionist Approach”, in *The Clash of Ijtihad* (H. Kato, ed.) Delhi, 2011, p. xvi.

¹⁹ Interview with the author, Solo, 9th March 2015. The story is that one of the hypocrites implied that he was more powerful than the Prophet Muhammad. The son of the hypocrite reported it to Muhammad and was ready to slay his father. However, the Prophet did not instruct execution of the hypocrite. See, S. S. al-Mubarakfuri, *Ar-Rahiq al-Makhtum*, Darussalam, 2001, pp. 487-489.

supposed to attend the weddings of non-Muslims.²⁰ He also states that forgiveness is appreciated and encouraged in Islam, citing one of the verses in *al-Quran* in support:²¹

Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors. Slay them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. Idolatry is more grievous than bloodshed. But do not fight them within the precincts of the holy Mosque unless they attack you there; if they attack you put them to the sword. Thus shall the unbelievers be rewarded: but if they mend their ways, know that God is forgiving and merciful. (2-190~192)

With regard to punishment in Islam, Abdul Rohim insists that strict and correct implementation of *syariah* Islam is essential. He demands that there should be four witnesses to establish wrong-doing, and the punishment should take place in the community where the crime took place. Other than these circumstances, any punishment implemented under the name of Islam, according to Abdul Rohim, is invalid, suggesting that the public execution of ISIS shown by YouTube is improper.²²

Falah also explains that Islam never devalues human life. In Islam, it is prohibited to take someone's life without any tenable reasons.²³ He refers to one of the verses in *al-Quran*.

That was why We laid it down for the Israelites that whoever killed a human being, except as punishment for murder or other villainy in the land, shall be deemed as though he had killed all mankind; and whoever saved a human life shall be deemed as though he had saved all mankind. (5-32)

Another verse also expresses the necessity of a fair treatment of humans.

Alms shall be only for the poor and the destitute, for those that are engaged in the management of alms and those whose hearts are sympathetic to the Faith, for the freeing of slaves and debtors, for the advancement of God's cause, and for the traveller in need. That is a duty enjoined by God. God is all-knowing and wise. (9-60)

Falah also added that it is crucially important for every Muslim to value other people's existence; accepting a foreign non-Muslim such as the author of this paper is a gesture to prove this principle. He cites a verse from *al-Quran*.

...Do not allow your hatred for those who would debar you from the Holy Mosque to lead you into sin. Help one another in what is good and pious, not in what is wicked and sinful. Have fear of God; God is stern in retribution. (5-2)

²⁰ At Masjid al-Muhajirin, Grogol, 8th March 2015.

²¹ Interview with the author, Solo, 9th March 2015.

²² Interview with the author, Solo, 9th March 2015

²³ Interview with the author, Lubuk Bulus, 3rd March, 2015.

Obviously, original teachings in Islam doctrinally tell its followers to appreciate fellow humans, and they emphasise the importance of helping others. In this regard, all Muslims are supposed to be benevolent in any given society. In contrast to the stereotypical image perceived by Westerners, it is possible to see philanthropic aspects to Islam. It would be far from the minds of Indonesian fundamentalists to disparage humanity. This very tendency differentiates them, though fundamentalists, from terrorists.

We also should not forget the fact that several Islamic fundamentalist groups in Indonesia swiftly offered their assistance to the victims of the Great Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami that hit the northern province of Aceh in 2004. For example, *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI), or The Islam Defenders Front, though they are known for their radical and militant handling of social issues, contributed much to putting life in Aceh back in order. Soon after the disaster, dozens of FPI members were dispatched to the affected area, and they were engaged in difficult and abhorrent tasks, such as collecting corpses and retrieving the dead from the rubble.²⁴

This suggests that Indonesian Islam as a religion is socially attentive and seeks to bring about compassion in society.

Muslim Fundamentalists and Humanitarian Activities

Generally speaking, the philanthropic aspect of Islam is little heeded in the modern world, while a militant feature of Islam draws much more attention in media.

In Indonesia, large Muslim organizations, which are usually regarded as moderate, have sponsored countless social activities. For example, *Muhammadiyah*, the second largest Muslim organization in the country, is always ready to provide the victims of natural disasters with financial support through its sub-organization called *Lembaga Zakat Muhammadiyah*.²⁵ Another mass Islamic organisation called *Nahdlatul Ulama* also offers health programs to local residents in the one of the provinces together with the Ministry of Health.²⁶ Thus it is that Indonesian fundamentalist Muslims, who are rather rigid and conservative with Islamic doctrine, also seem to be highly attentive to their duty to carry out humanitarian activities.

²⁴ Jakarta Post, 18 January, 2005. The article is available at:
<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2005/01/18/fpi-wins-praise-collecting-dead.html>

²⁵ Muhammadiyah official website at:
<http://www.muhammadiyah.or.id/id/news-2941-detail-lazismu-zakat-fitrah-untuk-korban-bencana.html>

²⁶ Nahdlatul Ulama official website available at:
http://www.nu.or.id/a_public-m,dinamic-s,detail-ids,2-id,59403-lang,id-c,daerah-t,LKNU+Gelar+Sosialisasi+TB+HIV+di+NTB-.php

The members of the newly established fundamentalist organisation, JAS, noted above, are concerned about the course of Islam even though their former leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir has become a militant. Both Abdul Rohim and Falah, the founding members and influential leaders of the organization, are apprehensive of the prospect of physical confrontation between fundamentalists who are pro-ISIS and those who are anti-ISIS.

Thus, JAS focuses on peaceful missionary work called *dakwah* through discussion, seminar and *al-Quran* studies. Simultaneously, JAS members as 'fundamentalists' intend to achieve what has been taught through *al-Quran*, which includes Muslims being philanthropic to fellow humans. They in fact have launched humanitarian assistance programs in Indonesia, although these are less significant than those managed by *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama*.

Activities of Me-Dan

In order to conduct humanitarian aid programmes, some fundamentalists established an independent body in January of 2014 called *Medis dan Aksi Kemanusiaan*, which is better known as Me-Dan.

Although at the time of its establishment Me-Dan consisted of members of JAT, most of the constituents of Me-Dan have now shifted to JAS. Me-Dan has seven chapters across Indonesia, located in Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, East Java, West Nusa Tenggara and East Nusa Tenggara.²⁷ Me-Dan has five major missions: (1) providing medical and humanitarian assistance to those who are in need; (2) bringing financial support to those who are in need; (3) encouraging cooperation among volunteer workers in humanitarian activities; (4) organizing volunteer workers; (5) and undertaking humanitarian activities as *dakwah* along with (members') families.²⁸

Based on these missions, they routinely organise training sessions for volunteers and offer practical and technical support to victims of natural disasters. For example, in April of 2014, they held a two-day training program for fifty volunteer workers in Cibubur, one of the vicinities of Jakarta. The participants received special training for first-aid, including technical methods of rescue operations, plus general information on disaster support activities.

In November of 2014, Me-Dan organized a similar program in Bekasi in the outskirts of Jakarta in order to bring about public awareness of sanitation and the prevention of epidemic diseases.²⁹ Me-Dan is a non-profit organization, and their source of income is donations and fees for participation in programs.³⁰

²⁷ Djuanda, interview with the author, Glogol 4th March, 2015

²⁸ Me-Dan official website, available at: <http://me-dan.com/?p=27>

²⁹ Dr Dito, interview with the author, Glogol, 8th March 2015

³⁰ Djuanda, interview with the author, Tangerang 4th March 2015

Djuanda, a coordinator of Me-Dan in Jakarta and an active member of JAS, finds the truth of Islam to lie in humanitarian activities. He believes that all Muslims have to help one another. However, he also emphasises that their activities reach non-Muslims. He explains that, Muslims have to help not only Muslims but also non-Muslims. All people are the same. We do not look at religion when trying to help people. We do not choose people...people who should be helped or not.³¹

This thirty-seven-year-old school administrator is always sensitive to whether his behaviour and ideas are in accord with Islamic teachings. While the implementation of *syariah* Islam, for him, is the positive development of society, he also believes that the true followers of Islam appreciate humanity, and thus providing humanitarian support to the needy is an obligation for Muslims.³² Djuanda is also one of those who moved from JAT to JAS out of disagreement with the course taken by ISIS.

Me-Dan has taken part in actual humanitarian assistance on the occasion of natural disaster. When huge floods endangered the residents of the Semeru and Pasing areas in Jakarta in February of 2015, some members of Me-Dan swiftly organized a rescue team and reached the affected areas. Anto, who was the leader of the team, recalls that he packed food, water, medicine and candles and brought them to the victims, together with five other Me-Dan members on the day of the floods. Anto's comprehension of Islam has much in common with other fundamentalist Muslims of Indonesia -- that it is a correct way for every Muslim to be mindful of others.

These fundamentalists never exclude non-Muslims from the list of the needy to be served. Anto explains that,

I did it for all the people. I helped anyone regardless of their religion in the time of the floods. I did not ask their religious affiliation when I handed food to them.³³

With regard to humanitarian assistance during natural disasters, people often take part in it simply because of their non-religious, humane conscience. That is often the case in Japan. For example, Japanese religious convictions played little role in humanitarian relief activities at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011. However, Islam, which is often regarded as exclusive and even 'dangerous' in the Western society, has functioned positively in Indonesia in the same manner as humanitarianism elsewhere.

Me-Dan is also committed to a larger scale of humanitarian aid, as in East Java when the Mt. Kelud erupted in February of 2014. This natural disaster caused much damage in the small village of Satak in Kediri. Maman and fifty other members of JAS and Me-Dan carried out humanitarian assistance in the affected areas for two days. They collected three

³¹ Interview with the author, Tangerang, 4th March 2015.

³² Interview with the author, Tangerang, 4th March 2015.

³³ Anto, interview with the author, Glogol 8th March 2015.

million rupiahs from their communities and brought it to the victims whose houses were damaged by the eruption. In addition, they laboured to remove ashes which had accumulated on the roofs and in the gardens of the houses and on the roads all over the village.

Humanitarian Activities and Islamic Justification

The population of the village of Satak stands at about one thousand and five hundred, and Muslims constitute a majority group while sixty Catholics form a minority. In fact, the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims seems to be harmonious, as a popularly elected *kepala desa* (village head) is a Catholic. According to the *kepala desa*, in the time of the disaster in 2014, the villagers offered each other mutual aid because they shared the feeling of being “*orang di sini*” (people of this place).³⁴ This attitude is also echoed with the ideas of Maman, a leader of volunteer group of Me-Dan. He recalled the feelings that he had before he launched aid activities.

It (the feeling that I have to help others) came from my heart. It was intuition. I just wanted to help people. Islam encourages one to do so. Religion was not important (when I was engaged in humanitarian assistance). I just wanted to help people. This society is just like a human body. If the left hand is not working, the right hand should help. The situation was just like that.³⁵

Maman also tells one of the stories about Islamic history or *shirah*, which Muslims often cite as a norm for their behaviour in addition to *al-Quran* and *hadith*.³⁶ It was during the time of the second caliph Umar bin Hutto that the governor in Egypt planned to construct a mosque in the land of Jewish people and to do so, he wanted to destroy the house of these non-Muslims. Since the residents refused to leave the premises, the case was brought to Umar. The caliph justifiably examined the dispute and decided that there was no need for the Jews to abandon their land.³⁷

The implication of this story is that Islam by no means denies the dignity of non-Muslims. Although Islam in the eyes of Muslims is superior to any other religion, it does not necessarily devalue the humanity of non-Muslims. One might sarcastically see the activities of Maman as a mere gesture to make non-Muslims believe that Muslims are ‘good people.’ However, the motivation of this thirty-year old member of a fundamentalist group seems to be based on the core teaching of Islam that non-Muslims are also supposed to be treated fairly.

³⁴ Sujarno, interview with the author, Satak, 10th March 2015.

³⁵ Interview with the author, Satak, 10th March 2015.

³⁶ Interview with the author, Satak, 10th March 2015.

³⁷ Available at:

<https://nenyok.wordpress.com/2008/06/06/umar-bin-khattab-dan-lelaki-yahudi-tua/>

Muslim volunteer workers who are engaged in humanitarian assistance activities and training can be regarded as ‘kind’ and ‘good’ people in a secular sense. Yet the motivation of these Muslims seems to originate genuinely in the teachings of their religion. In other words, as they view it, it is their obligation to be philanthropic to fellow humans in the same manner as they struggle for the implementation of *syariah* Islam.

Provided that one follows a true path of Islam, the dignity of humans should be appreciated, they believe. It is therefore understandable that the members of JAS and Me-Dan vehemently criticize the course of ISIS. Needless to say, so-called ‘moderate’ Muslims who have little intention to put *syariah* Islam as the foundation of the national legal system are also philanthropic towards the victims of natural disasters and are severely critical of ISIS. However, fundamentalists Muslims believe that these ‘moderate’ Muslims are inconsistent with the teachings of Islam, and thus their campaign on ‘good Islam’ is not persuasive to these fundamentalists.

Mechanism of Religion and Diversity in Islam

The rationality of human beings has been enormously valued in modern Western society. A famous statement made by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal in the seventeenth century is as follows: “Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed.”³⁸ Thus, ‘modern men’ are supposed to -- and are able to -- utilize their faculties to bring about virtue in society. This sort of trust in human nature is dominant in modern society, and it could lead us to have a blind belief in science, while the role of religion is less heeded, if not completely rejected. Nietzsche’s idea that God is dead³⁹ might foster secularism in the modern world.

Nonetheless, religion is still a major element in contemporary society. Many believe that it was the tenets of Islam that mobilized millions of people to bring about social change during the ‘Arab Spring’ beginning in 2010.⁴⁰ Popular Buddhist organizations in Japan claim millions of members.⁴¹

At the same time, it is also true that religion might be seen as the cause of conflict in the modern world. Terrorism, discrimination, and wars are typical examples of outcomes that could originate in religion. Does this mean, then, that religion is inherently unfavourable to humanity? Should we fail to comprehend religion correctly, I think, some would answer

³⁸ B. Pascal, *Pensees*, London, 1995, p.66.

³⁹ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, New York, 2006, p.81.

⁴⁰ For example, H. Dabashi explains that “what is being retrieved here is a cosmopolitan worldliness to which Islam is integral but not definitive. See, H. Dabashi, *The Arab Spring*, New York, 2012, p.250,

⁴¹ For example, Soka gakkai, which is a lay Buddhist organisation, claims two million and sixty thousand memberships while another mass Buddhist organisation Risshyo Koseikai states that one million and twenty-six thousand households have joined the organization. <http://www.sokanet.jp/info/gaiyo.html>: <http://www.kosei-kai.or.jp/010gaiyo/>

to the question above positively, and thus the role of religion would be diminished in the world which retains an indiscriminate trust in science.

It is important to consider both the doctrine of religion and the behaviour of religiosity.⁴² The former tends to deal with the theological aspects of religion, while the latter with social aspects of it. Religiosity is affected by such various elements as individual interpretations of dogmas; the political, historical and economic situations of various societies, and even the psychology of the followers. In that sense, religion is one sort of social organism. Development of religiosity can be a deciding factor in the formation of religion. Therefore, the outlook of Islam as a religion could be dangerous and violent despite the fact that Islam still appreciates universal aspects of humanity.

This can be applied to cases such as the conflict between the majority Buddhists and minority Muslims in Burma today.⁴³ It does not necessarily mean that the doctrine of Buddhism teaches violence and discrimination against the minority population. Rather, social circumstances contribute to the development of religiosity that affected the formation of organized religion, Buddhism in this case. This theory also explains the role of Japanese *Shinto* during the World War II. *Shinto* functioned as an ideology to justify Japanese imperialism although the nature of *Shinto* has little to do with aggression. It is now clear that the attributes of Islam, which include a philanthropic nature, can be distorted by terrorists who impact on its religiosity. To this must be added a long-standing Eurocentrism in history, further strengthening the negative image of Islam.

The fact remains that the standard teachings of Islam cannot be officially disputed; there is no absolute religious authority such as the Pope in the case of Catholicism. Although there are several schools of thought in Islam, they are merely able to present interpretations of the teachings. Diversity has led to internal conflicts, even noxious ones, that have taken place in Islamic history. The birth of *Shia* is a typical example of this, and even the fourth caliph Ali was assassinated by a group of fellow Muslims called *Kharijites*.⁴⁴ It suggests that one of the components within the organized religion of Islam is that theological aspects are often disputed by individual followers. Terrorist acts are the conspicuous result of this mechanism.

Fundamentalists in JAS and Me-Dan seem to have rejected unconventional interpretations of scriptural teachings but remained true to only orthodox written texts. In this sense, that they are true literalists. They never allow theological metamorphosis as such but accept only original teachings which have been passed on since the revelations in Mecca given to Prophet Muhammad.

⁴² See, H. Kato, "Social demand and the "Clash of Ijtihad": A Constructionist Approach", in *The Clash of Ijtihad* (H. Kato ed.) Delhi, 2011.

⁴³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18395788>

⁴⁴ B. Milton-Edwards, op. cit., pp.13-14.

Conclusion

Some might believe that Western civilization and Islamic civilization share little common ground, as famous posited in Huntington's theory.⁴⁵ F. Quinn also points out that some French scholars have long had an unbalanced view of the relationship between Christianity and Islam. He describes the ideas of Renan, a French scholar,

On a superior-inferior scale, Christianity was the leading religion, the product of the higher Aryan race. Islam, of contrasting lower Semitic origin, inhibited progress, represented an "iron circle" around the heads of believers, and kept them from understanding modern science or philosophy.⁴⁶

A Eurocentric mindset is instrumental in creating a negative image of Islam as disregarding humanity and orientated towards violence. We can never justify terrorism such as that which targeted *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, and the perpetrators should be brought to justice. Demonstrators who voiced the support for *Charlie Hebdo* emphasised the importance of the freedom of speech and expression, and their implication was that Muslims have no respect towards these basic human rights. The freedoms of speech and expression are basic and essential rights for every human. That is undeniable truth that every member of society should respect, including Muslims. However, it is also vital for all members of society, both Muslims and non-Muslims, to be mutually attentive to respective cultures and traditions.

JAS is a fundamentalist group in Indonesia whose members also join Me-Dan yet who have issued a religious ruling or *fatwa* that people who insult the Prophet Muhammad should be subjected to capital punishment.⁴⁷ One might think that JAS and Me-Dan members are no different with other militant Muslims. However, we should also know that this *fatwa* is based on the teachings of Islam (as they see it) that no one should ever insult Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. It is their faith and tradition that all Muslims should follow. These are clearly stated in *al-Quran*.

The hypocrites are afraid lest a Chapter be revealed to them, telling them what is in their hearts. Say: 'Scoff if you will; God will surely bring to light what you are dreading.' If you question them, they will say; 'We were only jesting and making merry.' Say: 'Would you mock at God His revelations, and His apostle? Make no

⁴⁵ See, S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, 1996.

⁴⁶ F. Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies: The Image of Islam in Western Thought*, New York, 2008, p.99.

⁴⁷ JAS declared it on their official website on 15th January 2015.

<http://www.ansharusyariah.com/read/release/460/press-release-terkait-fatwa-mati-untuk-penghina-nabi/>

excuses. You have bartered away your faith for unbelief. If We forgive some of you, We will punish others, for they are guilty men.' (9:64-65)

Those who speak ill of God and His apostle shall be cursed by God in this life and in the life to come. He has prepared for them a shameful punishment. (33:57)

It is understandable that non-Muslims in the West perceive Islam rather negatively because of historical events such as Crusades and numerous numbers of terrorist acts perpetrated by so-called Muslim militants more recently. Moreover, Islam as a religion is a social organism that can be shaped by individual behaviours of followers. That means that there are some Muslims who interpret the essential teachings of Islam so as to become involved in inhumane terrorist acts. In order to narrow the widely divided Islamic and Western societies in the world today, it is crucially important to understand the mechanism of organized religion and notice that Islam in fact embraces philanthropy as do other civilizations.

The activities of the Indonesian organization Me-Dan, as reported in this study, suggest that Islamic civilization shares much common ground with other civilizations, at least in relation to mutual help in the time of natural disasters.

Their humanitarian activities can be carried out as an element of their 'religiosity,' and this can be shared with non-Muslims, while the other segment of organized religion, that dealing with theological dogma, is a steadfast tenet which they believe can be never compromised with non-Muslims.

Therefore, the key to bringing about a more peaceful world is to promote cooperation and communication between Muslims and non-Muslims within the framework of 'religiosity.' It seems to me that decent Muslims would have no hesitation to follow that path.

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