

# Reversing Islamophobia Perspective through Tolerance Principles in Islam

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**Abstrak**-Islam telah hadir di benua Eropa berabad lampau melalui gerbang ilmu pengetahuan. Keterlibatan ilmuwan-ilmuwan muslim dalam proses transisi dan transformasi pengetahuan Islam dilakukan dalam bentuk penerjemahan pustaka dan pendidikan yang diberikan kepada orang-orang Eropa. Perkembangan peradaban Eropa sejak lahirnya *renaissance* dan *aufklarung* hingga saat ini tentunya tidak dapat menafikkan peranan Islam sebagai sumber awal ilmu pengetahuan bangsa Eropa. Namun hubungan harmonis Eropa-Islam mengalami degradasi karena beragam faktor penyebab, baik internal maupun eksternal. Pandangan bangsa Eropa kepada Islam turun hingga tingkatan terendah, bahkan kemudian lahir paham Islamophobia-ketakutan terhadap agama Islam yang menyebar secara massif di antara penduduk Eropa non-muslim. Menguatnya paham tersebut membuat umat Islam yang minoritas, semakin mendapat perlakuan yang non-adil dan melukai perasaan umat muslim. Sejatinya, Islamophobia dapat dikurangi bahkan dihilangkan apabila penduduk Eropa non-muslim mau menggali dan memahami ajaran Islam yang penuh kasih sayang dan perdamaian. Salah satu pokok ajaran tersebut adalah toleransi yang sarat dengan nilai penghargaan dan penghormatan kepada sesama manusia, sebagai perlambang bahwa Islam adalah agama yang diturunkan bagi seluruh alam (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*).

**Kata kunci:** Islam di Eropa, Islamophobia, toleransi

**Abstract**-Islam has been existed in European countries since couple centuries ago through science-based approach. The involvement of Moslem scientists, in the era of Islamic sciences transition and transformation process, were done in term of translating literature and education given to Europeans. The role of Islam towards development of European civilization since *renaissance* and *aufklarung* era until present days could not be neglected. Yet, the harmony between European and Islamic countries relationship was fluctuated; it because of various causes, both internal and external factors. The perspective of European communities towards Islam decreased until its lowest level; even Islamophobia perspective appeared massively in among non-Moslem European societies. The perspective caused Moslems, the minority in European societies, got injustice and it caused them irritated psychologically. Ideally, Islamophobia could be decreased or even omitted if European societies were willing to explore and understand the teachings of Islam which are full of compassion and peace. One of the teachings' core was the tolerance, which was full of appreciation and respect toward human being. It was a symbol that Islam is a religion for the universe (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*).

**Keywords:** Islam in Europe, Islamophobia, tolerance

## 1. Introduction

Europe, known as the blue continent, consists of various races and cultural background. The European natives, referred to Caucasians whom their physical appearances are tall with blonde hair, are Europe's dominant population. However, during the last centuries, Europeans began to stain with immigrants whom later on becoming the integral part of European nations. One of those immigrants' group was Moslems. In the beginning, Moslems were a minority, but they currently have a significant increase in number and play a fairly important role in the history of European civilization.

The sources of western high civilization (Europe) are the science and knowledge and the rational thinking method. Among the penetration route of Islamic civilization was Spain-Islam. When Islam experienced triumph in Spain, Europeans came to learn and translate the scientific works of Moslem scientists since the 12th century (Poeradisatra, 1986). When returning to their homeland, they established a centre for the study of sciences or universities based on the knowledge gained when they studied in Spain.

The process of transferring this knowledge had helped the commencement of *renaissance*, reformation, and rationalism in Europe. At that time, Europe was in the dark ages because of the church's pressure to science. The collapse of the Second Umayyah Caliphate in Spain had made the Moslems scientists, who understood the Greek and Romans' teachings, spreading and sharing their science and knowledge all over Europe. As the result, *renaissance* happened, which was begin in Italy and then spread to other European countries (Suryanegara, 1999). Poeradisatra (1986) mentioned that *renaissance* and *aufklarung* initially occurred from Greek heritages excavation by Moslems. Then, through the translation, the commentaries, the interpretation, and some additions written by Moslems philosophers and scholars, Europeans finally understood those heritages.

Jan Romein in Kusdiana (2013) said that Islam's contributions to the world civilization were not small. When the Second *Umayyah* Caliphate was in power, there were many Moslem scientists whose work and thoughts were phenomenal and very beneficial to the community. For example, Husein ibnu Abdullah ibnu Sina, known by Europeans as Avicenna. He wrote a book entitled *al-Qanun fi al-Thibb* which was widely used and gave a strong influence in medical field either in Islamic countries or European countries until the 16th century. Furthermore, there was ibnu Rusyd or Averroes (1126-1198) who pioneered the science of body tissue. He did many research and found knowledge about blood vessels system and smallpox. He was also the first man who discovered the characteristic that a person who had ever had a disease would be immune from the same disease. His book entitled *al-Kulliyat fi'th Thibb* belonged to the most complete medical book in its era.

Moslem scientists also became the pioneers in nature science. It was proven by the large numbers of recently used words which derived from Arabic language (i.e., *zenith*, *nadir*, and *azimuth* which was known in astrology). In history field, there was the well-known Ibnu Khaldun from Africa who lived in the 14th century. He wrote a 500 pages introduction namely *Kita al-I'bar* which explained the principles he used in researching history. History science according to his principles was objective-scientific either in the observation, collection, or test of the facts in its inter-relation and its conclusion with inductive logic (Poeradisatra, 1986). Moreover, there were many other Moslem scientists who contributed through their knowledge and work in enriching the science and knowledge for the mankind.

The long history of science and knowledge involving Moslems scientists has made Islam inseparable from the development of Europe civilization. The experienced advancement could not be separated from Islam's role when it existed in Europe. There was an Islamic civilization's transmission and transformation through the education and interpretation given by Moslem scientists to Europeans (Kusdiana, 2013). However, the conflict between Moslems and Europeans began with the land dispute of the Holy Land Jerusalem. The war was between Moslems warriors against crusaders. The crusade eventually worsen the relation between Europe-Islam and degraded the perspective of most Europeans toward Islam and Moslems.

The arrival of Moslem immigrants after the Second World War to European countries also raised another problem. This was due to the difficulty felt by Moslems to integrate with Europeans' culture and values (Kusuma et. al., 2014). Moreover, the tragedy of WTC bombing in 11 September 2001 in New York and the call for war against terrorism has made Moslem's community becoming the part of important issue to always be talked about. Moslem's community is viewed as the cause of all problems and stereotyped as the accused (Moordiningsih, 2004).

On the other hand, the radical Islam group such as Al Qaeda, which committed series bombings in several cities and countries sometimes ago, has worsen the image of Islam in Europeans view. Furthermore, the sporadic movements of radical Islam who often spread terrors in Europe such as the

suicide bombing in London and Spain, the murder of Theo Van Gogh by a Moslem in Netherlands, and the emerge of Islamic State (IS) eventually leading to the reluctance and fear of Europeans toward Islam. Even in certain stages, the fear of Islam and Moslems has created 'Islamophobia' which spreads from America, Australia, to the Europe.

The widespread of Islamophobia in Europe raises social problems. This condition urged more and immediate attention from each country. The discrimination received by Moslems is a negative excess emerged from the misunderstanding or unwillingness to understand Islam further. Some events and policies in some Europe countries show that Islamophobia has deeply rooted in the society. The forms of Islamophobia in Europe are such as the prohibition of hijab for Moslem in a workplace and public places in France- meanwhile, hijab is an obligation for every female Moslem. Furthermore, the other discrimination is the discrimination of Moslems' prayer (including the establishment of mosques) as well as the strict examination in every land, sea, and air transportation immigration toward Moslems or those who come from predominantly Moslem countries. Even the violence such as assault, vandalism, destruction of personal property, etc. mostly occur recently. This certainly hurts Moslems' feeling since they are actually a part of Europeans.

The fear of Islam is actually can be reduced, even can be omitted if the true teachings of Islam are clearly seen. The command to behave gently to other human, the suggestion to think positively, the ban to do cruel action are the teachings' examples which represent Islam as the religion of compassion for the universe (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*). Moreover, the teachings for giving tolerance for human being either for Moslems or non Moslems can be one of the keys against Islamophobia perspective.

## **2. Research Method**

This research was a literature research using library research method either by reading, researching, comprehending books, magazines, or other literature that is relevant with the research problem, in order to obtain data (Suryabrata, 1999).

## **3. Result and Discussion**

### **3. 1. Islamophobia Perspective**

In 1995, a group of racial or ethnic-relation experts in the UK began to establish a special commission to study and analyse Islamophobia. The commission researching Moslems and Islamophobia in Britain reported that Islam was perceived as a threat, both globally or particularly in Britain. Islam was assumed as the substitute for Nazi or communist viewed having a picture of invasion and infiltration. This was referred to the fear and hatred toward Islam and continued to the fear as well as the hatred toward Moslems. This fear and hatred are happening in some western countries and culture. In this last twenty years, the resentment is more revealed, more extreme, and more dangerous (Runnymede Trust in Moordiningsih, 2004).

The term Islamophobia arises because there is a new phenomenon that needs a name. Anti-Moslems prejudice develops quickly in some of this recent years so that it needs a new word to identify. The use of new term Islamophobia will not lead a conflict. However, it is likely to play a role in the effort to correct perception and build a better relationship (Young European Muslims in Moordiningsih, 2004).

Abdel-Hady in Moordiningsih (2004) stated that Islamophobia cannot be separated from the problem of prejudice against Moslems and those who are perceived as Moslems. Anti Moslems prejudice is based on a claim that Islam is an inferior religion and a threat for the dominant values in the community. Trust Runnymede (Anti-Semitism commission) from the UK said that the definition of Islamophobia is widely accepted by the people as the legal definition (i.e. a short way refers to fear and hatred toward Islam, and therefore that fear and hatred are addressed to all Moslems) (Amghar et.al. in Fiqriarifah, 2013).

The preconception toward Moslems are divided into closed and open preconception (Moordiningsih, 2004). It is the closed preconception that is likely to allow Islamophobia as shown in table 1.

Table 1. The summary of different views about Islam

Main differences	Closed preconception toward Islam	Open preconception toward Islam
Monolithic/Diverse	Islam is viewed as one monolithic bloc, static, and unresponsive to new realities.	Islam is viewed as a part of a diversity and progressive, having internal differences, different ideas, and development.
Separate/Interacting	Islam is viewed as a separate part from the other; a. not having any contributions or universal values to other cultures, b. not influenced by Islam, c. not influencing Islam.	Islam is viewed having interconnectivity with other beliefs and cultures; a. having certain values and influence that can be transmitted, b. influenced by Islam, c. enriching Islam.
Inferior/Different	Islam is considered inferior toward the western – barbaric (cruel), irrational, primitive, and sexist.	Islam is considered as specifically different and well worthy to be respected.
Enemy/Partner	Islam is considered as ruthlessness, aggressive, threatening, supporting terrorism, and clash with civilization.	Islam is considered as a potential partner to do cooperation and to solve the existing problems.
Manipulative/Sincere	Islam is viewed as a political ideology used for political and military importance.	Islam is viewed as a sincere religious belief, practiced earnestly and sincerely by its adherents.
Criticism of West rejected/considered	The criticism toward Islam from the western is rejected.	The criticism toward Islam from the western is being considered and discussed.
Discrimination defended/criticised	Hostility toward Islam is used to justify the discriminative behaviour and alienate the Moslems from the community.	Debate and dissent toward Islam do not reduce the effort to fight against discrimination and isolation.
Islamophobia seen as natural/problematic	Hostility against Moslems is accepted as something natural and normal.	A critical view toward Islam form inside

Source: Abdel-Hady in Moordiningsih (2004)

### 3. 2. Tolerance Principles In Islam

Islamophobia causing factor is historically complex. However, it actually can be prevented if non Moslem Europeans want to try to explore as well as understand the teachings of Islam further. Islam is not a religion that teaches violence. Referring to its word's origin, etymologically the word Islam derived from Arabic language that has some meanings (Romli, 2008). The first meaning is *aslama* which means

surrender. The surrender means that someone who asserts into Islam will surrender to Allah, to be ready and obey all His commands as well as to avoid His prohibitions. Islam also derived from the word *salima* which means survivor, i.e., someone who believes in Islam will survive both in the world and in the hereafter. The other origin of the word Islam is *sallama* which means saving others. When someone stated to convert to Islam, he/she saves his/her life and also has to save the others' life. The last word's origin is *salam* which means secure, peace, tranquil. A prosperous life will only be achieved if Moslems understand and implement *aslama* and *sallama*.

Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* always keep peace and compassion among all creatures created by Allah. Islam forbids the Moslems to destroy and spread enmity among His creatures. Islam suggests the Moslems to appreciate others. The religion concept that protect all nature is meant that Islam did not come to remove all the existing religions. There is no compulsion to convert to Islam since Islam offers dialogue and tolerance in the form of mutual respect.

Tolerance derives from Latin word '*tolerar*' which means restraint, be patient, respect for others' opinion, be open and tolerant toward people of different opinion or religion (Nuh, 1993). *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (1996) explains that tolerance is having an attitude or behaviour for (appreciating, letting, permitting) the establishment (ideas, views, beliefs, habits, and behaviours) which are different or contradict with their own mind. Tolerance is an open attitude in facing differences. Tolerance contains the behaviour of appreciating and respecting the existence of each person. In the tolerant life, the life balance becomes a priority. The diversity is not placed as a threat, but an opportunity to synergize positively (Yasir, 2014).

Meanwhile, in Arabic language, tolerance is known as *tasamuh* which means generosity, mutual allowance, and mutual ease (Tatapangarsa, 1980). Yasir (2014) stated that tolerance leads to open-minded and tolerant to diversity, either in races, colour, languages, customs, culture, and religion. These are the nature and *sunatullah* from God. The rationale for this thought is QS. Al Hujurat verse 13 which means 'O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.' Generally, *tasamuh* concept means affection (*ar-rahmah*), justice (*al-'adalah*), safety (*al-salaam*), and belief (*al-Tauhid*). Each concept is bound one another and cannot be broken down, so it becomes one thing with its own characteristic. That concept become the basis for Moslems to do *muamalah* (in the context of *hablum minan nas*) which is supported by religious conviction (in the context of *hablum minallah*).

Prophet Muhammad has given the direct exemplary in giving religious tolerance, i.e., through Medina Charter. In this charter, it is confirmed that there should be religious tolerance, i.e., the attitude of giving mutual respect among the existing religions, protecting and not hurting each member who bound in the Medina Charter. The Medina Charter is another phenomenal example from the practice of Islamic tolerance which strongly refuse the intolerant accusation posed by Islam's enemies. The Medina Charter affirms the equal function and position as well as the equal rights and obligation among Moslems and non Moslems in Medina (Yasir, 2014). The holy book of Islam, the Qur'an, stated in QS Al-Mumtahanah: 8 which means 'Allah does not forbid you respecting those who have not made war against you on account of (your) religion, and have not driven you forth from the homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly; surely Allah loves the doers of justice. Based on that surah, it can be clearly seen that there is a prohibition for being cruel (*dzalim*), but for being good and fair toward non Moslems as long as they do not fight against Islam.

Some of the basic teachings of tolerance in Islam put a Moslem on the obligation for appreciating and respecting the human beings, either for Moslems or non Moslems. The basic of those teachings consists of;

1. Islam teaches for helping anyone, either the poor or the sick;
2. the teachings for being good at neighbours even though they are non Moslems;
3. interacting with others in a good way and should not be *dzalim* toward the family and relatives even though they are non Moslems;

4. the strict prohibition for murdering non Moslems unless they fight against the Moslems;
5. conducting the reliable judicial system as well as being fair in law toward non Moslems (Bahraen, 2014).

When looking backward, the history of Islam is the history of tolerance. The rapid Islamic development into the outer regions of Arabia showed that Islam can be accepted as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. The Islam's expansions to Syria, Egypt, Spain, Persia, Asia, and all over the world were done in a peaceful way. It should be admitted that the expansion of Islamic territories often lead to war, indeed. However, those wars were done only as a defence that Islam was not being defeated. The war was not the way to urge belief to the non Moslems, but it tend to be political excess which was a logical consequence of an occupation (Nababan, 2009).

In war, Islam has given an unequivocal rules to be obeyed by Moslems. Those rules reflected the high teachings of Islam which highly appreciate and respect others. Those war rules included the prohibition to fight against women, children, and elderly. When the enemy had waved the white flag, the sign of discontinuing the battle, the Moslem warriors were prohibited to fight against them and they have to protect the surrender-enemies' life and belongings. Furthermore, public facilities such as hospital, schools, worship places, and houses were prohibited to be destroyed or burned down. Living environment and natural resources were also prohibited to be destroyed, for example cutting branches and palm tree. These prohibitions also meant that there was a protection of human rights. Islam forbids unbeneficial destruction such as poisoning water sources, destroying people's fields, blocking food supplies which later on would affect the civil residence who did not join the war (Shodiq, 2014). Those rules showed that the teachings of Islam always keep a tolerance even in a war.

However, tolerance as the teachings of Islam, which highly supports the harmony in society, has restrictions set by Allah. The tolerance in Islam does not mean blurring the boundary belief nor exchanging belief among the adherents, but it should always look at the strict restriction in which it limited only on the relation among human being or only in the *muamalah* field. Allah has set up the restrictions that should be obligate by Moslems in QS. Al Kafirun; 'O disbelievers! I worship not that which you worship; nor worship you that which I worship; and I shall not worship that which you worship; nor will you worship that which I worship; unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.

Furthermore, Allah says in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 256 which means 'There shall be no compulsion in (acceptance of) the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelievers in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.' Ibnu Katsir translated that surah into; Do not force anyone to convert to Islam. Islam is a clear religion in term of its teachings and the proof of its truth, so it does not need to force anyone to convert to Islam. Whoever has Allah given guidance, they will convert to Islam, and vice versa, whoever has Allah closed their sight and hearing, will not be proper to convert to Islam (Yasir, 2014). This is the essence of tolerance taught in Islam, which opens an opportunity to interact with the non Moslems in a good way by still holding on each belief and without worrying of a force to pray to God they do not believe at.

#### 4. Conclusion

Islamophobia which is taking root among non Moslems Europeans actually begins from a prejudice and misconception toward Islam. Islam is imaged as a violence-teaching religion that its development has to be suppressed. However, that perspective is completely wrong since the true teachings of Islam is full of affection and peace. The tolerance taught in Islam become the representation of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* which give high appreciation and respect to mankind. Furthermore, Islam requires the Moslems to always be tolerant, either to other Moslems or non Moslems. However, Allah establishes the obligation for being tolerant just in the matter of *muamalah*, i.e., the things relate to the relation with human being. When it is related to *aqidah* and *tauhid*, there is an obvious rules for Moslems for not mixing or converting their belief. Vice versa, there is no compulsion for non Moslems to pray to Allah, unless for those who has given guidance by Allah.

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