Article

Voluntary Diaspora and Missionary Purposes: Mapping Indonesian Muslim Diaspora in Western Countries

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Abstract

This paper aims to show a new characteristic of diaspora. While previous literature discusses the issue of diaspora mostly in terms of victim subject and is associated with the marginalized individual and forced refugees, this article finds a new category which we call a voluntary diaspora. This term refers to a group of diaspora society who actively organize their members to maintain a social bond and identity. This finding was sufficiently generated by conducting literature research, especially on recent works of the diaspora of Indonesian Muslims in Western countries. The finding then contributes to the theoretical explanation of diaspora which is dominated by the notion that views diaspora as a victim phenomenon, as discussed in previous literature.

Key Words

Victim diaspora, voluntary diaspora, Indonesian Muslims, social identity, globalization, migration, missionary

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Introduction

Diaspora is a global phenomenon that increasingly plays an important role in the advancement of globalization. In the context of the Muslim diaspora, its role is pivotal since it determines not only the current interaction between Muslim communities and citizens in the West but also influences the relationship between the governments of the Muslim countries and the Western countries.

This article clarifies the notions of diaspora, Muslim diaspora and Indonesian Muslims overseas. The analysis is unfolded in three sections. The first section explores diaspora as a conceptual framework. It clarifies the genealogy of the diaspora and its characteristics. The second section focuses on diaspora in the wake of globalisation and migration. It discusses how migrations give an influence on diaspora and *vice versa*. The discussion is closed with the contextualization of the Muslim diaspora in Western society.

The scholarship of diaspora has developed to a great extent in the past few decades. There has been a significant shift from a highly particular sort of diaspora to one that is characterized by multi-disciplinary studies. In his early work, Cohen (1996), for example, initially discusses the issue of diaspora as a fact of victims resulting from unexpected situations such as war, poverty, and overpopulation. He analyses that such experience of victim diasporas has caused various complex issues for social identity in the modern state and the notion of nation-state and this also has been astonishing in the economy, education, arts, sport and other aspect of life. In other words, some diaspora have changed their status from victim to challenger. Responding to this change, later Cohen (2008) classifies diaspora into four categories: first, notions of diaspora which roots in the classical Jewish tradition; second, victim diasporas that relate to Africans and Armenians diaspora; third, labour and imperial diasporas that refer to diaspora where Indians and the British were indentured; and fourth, trade and business diasporas that refer to diaspora from Chinese and Lebanese.

Similarly, Dufoix (2015) proposes two types of diasporas. The first type of diaspora is a centred, essentially political version of diaspora. This mostly relies on the Jewish case, characterized by either migration or exile, nostalgia, the perpetuation of original traditions, customs and languages, and a dream of returning to the homeland. The second version relies on the black/African case. This can be traced from the mid-1970s (the evolution of British cultural studies) towards greater attention to identity issues. This type of diaspora is characterized by several identity issues related to a

situation where the member of any kind of group spread across many areas. Some identity issues are being a minority group, becoming a migrant or a transnational community and a statistical group of expatriates.

Based on the literature review on diaspora in general above, we mapped the patterns of the Muslim diaspora as well as the Indonesian Muslim diaspora. This study of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora contributes to adding one characteristic of diaspora, that is a voluntary diaspora, to previous literature which dominates the articulation of diaspora with the forced and marginalized population (Cohen 2002, 2008, 2017), which Cohen characterizes this as victim diaspora (Cohen 1996). This article emphasizes that one of the most important features of the voluntary diaspora is the missionary endeavours of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora in the West. The structure of this article is as follows: First*,* the genealogy of diaspora and its characteristics; second, diaspora in the wake of globalization and migration; third, global diaspora and Muslim communities in the Western context; and finally*,* Indonesian Muslim diaspora in Western countries.

The Genealogy of Diaspora and Its Characteristics

The genealogy of diaspora has a strong relationship with the phenomenon of Jewish society. At least, in the last two thousand years, a large volume of historical records demonstrated that the term "diaspora" was strongly linked with the prototypical Jewish experience of 'exile' (Baumann 2000, 2016; Safran 2005; Cheyette 1996; Ray 1016). The term "diaspora" was found for the first time in the evolved Greek translation of 'the *Septuagint'* (third/second century BCE) undertaken by the Jews to describe Jewish communities that then spread all over the Eastern Mediterranean. Genealogically, it refers to "their capacity to preserve the 'law' outside 'the Holly Land', to live a life according to the command of Torah despite assimilative pressures from the host society" (Baumann 2016). It was associated with the experiences of marginalized individuals and a group of forced refugees who were separated from and longed for returning to their place of origin (Cheyette 1996). Applying postmodern theory, the phenomena of Jewish diaspora within Western metaphysics was considered as the signifier of ineffable alterity. They show all kinds of heterodoxy, otherness and nonconformity as Lyotard described that Christians expect Jews to convert, and monarchs, republics, and Nazis demand them for these acts: expel, assimilate, exterminate respectively (Cheyette 1996).

Outside the Jews' case, the Christian generation in the first century CE adopted the term diaspora and adjusted it into their eschatological meanings

to refer to 'the Dispersed Christians' who travel to circulate the message of God. Yet, Christian writers abandon 'diaspora' in the second century CE, limiting its use to the Jewish dispersion as an exemplary curse for their sins. In the first centuries of the Christian era, the 'diaspora' is confined to the Eastern Roman Empire and later the Byzantine Empire (Dufoix 2015). With the replacement of Greek with Latin within the Western Roman a millennium later, after the sixteenth-century reformation and the emerging Christian schools, the diaspora was associated with the Protestants living in Catholic territory and *vice versa* (Dufoix 2015). In the wake of the inner state migrations of the nineteenth century, the term diaspora then was used for the confessional minorities.

During the second half of the twentieth century, it was not only Jewish experiences that appeared in academic as well as media debate on 'exile' but also included a large number of Tibetans, Cubans and Armenians (Baumann 2016). The latter portrayed the Armenians' long-distance commerce and trade that emerged following the early expulsions of Armenians by a Byzantine emperor in the sixth century AD. However, Cohen (2008) contended that it was approximately 1.75 million Armenians were expelled in the late nineteenth century and their forced displacement during 1915–1916 allegedly carried out by Turks which eventually forced many Armenians to escape for France and the USA. Cohen also paid attention to the two third of the Arab population of Palestine which was initially scattered around neighbouring Arab countries and then the Middle East at the creation of the Israeli state in 1948 which also demonstrated the notion of exile, dispersal, alienation and denial experienced by diaspora.

Since the 1960s, following the scholarship debate on the comparison between the enslavement of Sub-Sahara Africans and the exile of the classical Jews, the term 'diaspora' has been associated with a group of a national, cultural and religious people who live in a foreign land (Cohen 2008). Literature on the African diaspora during these periods was specifically concerned with the misfortune of ten million Africans who were forcibly transshipped across the Atlantic for mass slavery and coerced plantation labour in the Americas. Yet still, the account of the Indian Ocean African slave trade to Asia and the Middle East involving as many as four million was under-researched. It was during these periods that the study of African diaspora also highlights post-colonial African emigration caused by civil war, famine, economic failure and political instability (Cohen 2008).

Up to this point in time, diaspora literature was drawn upon major cases that described the process of victimization which over time invoked 'social cohesion' among particular groups and drove them away from the

surrounding context in their countries of settlement and created their own separated life. There were two major characteristics for defining diaspora, *i.e*. “the traumatic dispersal from an original homeland and the salience of the homeland in the collective memory of a forcibly dispersed group” (Cohen 2008). Hence, Cohen labelled this type of diaspora as the victim diaspora (Cohen 1996).

In the post-1990s although the Jewish experiences continue to influence the study of diaspora, the term was expanded widely to include groups that might experience ‘analogous circumstances’ caused by difficulties they encountered at home or limited acceptance from the society of the hosting countries. In this context, Safran’s article in the opening issue of the new journal, *Diaspora,* had a significant influence on developing sub-categories of diaspora in the literature (Safran 2005). Cohen himself, for example, argued that the nineteenth-century system of indentured labour abroad involving many Indians, Japanese and Chinese was to be included under the increasingly broader categories of diaspora for they maintained the compelling element of their history of the original homeland. At this point, it is important to note that ‘the homeland’ was still central in defining major characteristics of diaspora as Safran observed:

> Members of a diaspora retained a collective memory of ‘their original homeland’; they idealized their ‘ancestral home’, were committed to the restoration of ‘the original homeland and continued in various ways to ‘relate to that homeland’ (as cited in Cohen 2017: 4).

For this reason, Safran’s list of diaspora included Cubans and Mexicans in the USA, Pakistanis in Britain, Maghrebis in France, Turks in Germany, Poles, blacks in North America and Corsicans in Marseilles and any groups of ‘expatriate minority community’. They share several of the following features:

- They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from an original ‘centre’ to two or more foreign regions;
- They retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland including its location, history and achievements;
- They believe they are not – and perhaps can never be – fully accepted in their host societies and so remain partly separate;
- Their ancestral home is idealized and it is thought that, when conditions are favourable, either they or their descendants should return;

- They believe all members of the diaspora should be committed to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland and its safety and prosperity; and
- They continue in various ways to relate to that homeland and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are in an important way defined by the existence of such a relationship (as cited in Cohen 2002: 5).

Cohen then revised the aforementioned features of diaspora developed by Safran as he added the process of dispersal from the homeland which is accompanied by a single traumatic event due to bad memory of injustices that eventually provide social cohesion for the group. In addition, Cohen also proposed an important point of the *ex post facto* construction of an 'imagined homeland' to allow groups such as Kurds or Sikhs to be included as a diaspora (Cohen 2002:5).

Based on these features, further sub-categorizations of the diaspora were introduced to include *labour, trade* and *imperial* diaspora. The first category refers to those people who were recruited for their labour in the foreign land. This category fits the Indian indentured migrants who work for tropical plantations. The second category could be applied to the Chinese merchants who are scattered outside the Chinese mainland, hence a 'trade diaspora'. The last category is for the groups that were brought to foreign land as imperial or colonial settlers (Cohen 2002:7).

Another important characteristic of Diaspora is also related to what Cohen called "the positive virtues of retaining a diasporic identity" in which competition and the demands for advances are strongly embedded for survival. This is evident in the number of Nobel prizes won by the Western Jewish diaspora (Cohen 2002:7). However, this point should be cautiously analyzed, particularly to identify factors that lead to advances instead of focusing on extraordinary achievement gained by particular groups of diaspora.

Global Diaspora and Muslim Communities in the Western Context

The study of diaspora hardly avoids the twin process of globalization and migration and its interconnection with the complex notion of diaspora (Knott and Mcloughlin 2010). In this context, the study of migration and diaspora are interwoven (Toyibah et al. 2022). The association of Islam with the terrorist activities following the 9/11 attacks has increased Islamophobia among Western citizens. This has affected the lives of many Muslim Immigrants who have settled in Europe and North America.

Against this background, the Muslim diaspora has recently become a focus of concern and discussion among government and other public bodies, including academic circles.

Toyibah et al. (2022) show that the most recent global estimate for the number of international migrants is 244 million in 2015 or about 3.3 per cent of the world population (Global Migration Trends Fact Sheet 2015). According to IOMs World Migration Report 2015, the majority of those migrants live in the top 20 largest cities globally (International Organization for Migration 2015). The report also found that in many of these cities, migrants make up at least one-third of the total population. In Toronto, Canada for instance, 50 per cent of its population is Canada's foreign-born.

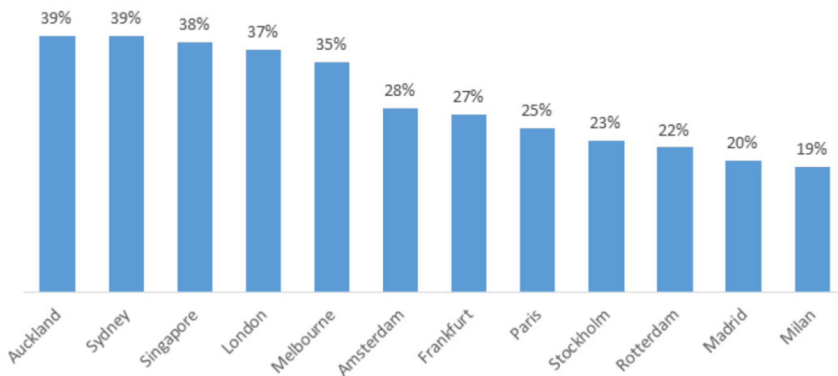

Table 1. Foreign-Born Population in Major Cities

Source: International Organization for Migration 2015

Data from Global Migration Trends Fact Sheet 2015 also revealed statistics on different reasons that made those 224 million people international migrants. In most cases, those individuals fell under the category of forced migration. The end of 2015 recorded the greatest level of forced displacement as 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. This number includes 21.3 million refugees, 40.8 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and 3.2 million asylum-seekers (Global Migration Trends Fact Sheet 2015).

Instead of the movement of people in terms of forced migration or becoming victim diaspora, the diaspora of Indonesian Muslims shows a different trend that can contribute to the recent study of this issue. In the following section, we provide an analysis that the trend of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora seems to be voluntary diaspora.

Indonesian Muslim Diaspora and the Missions of Preserving Islamic Identity and Spreading Islam

The diaspora of Indonesian Muslims has been discussed by several scholars. They see Indonesian Muslims as active communities in organising their members and maintaining their social identity. For example, Mujab (2017; 2019) and Sujadi (2006; 2010; 2013; 2017) look at the development of Islamic organizations in the Netherlands by studying the case of PPME (*Persatuan Pemuda Muslim di Eropa*/the Young Muslim Association in Europe). Those authors focus on describing the contribution of organisations in shaping Indonesian Muslim identity in Europe. Other authors explore the role of the typically Indonesian Islamic organization of Nahdlatul Ulama in the Netherlands (Pribadi 2022) and the role of the *Persatuan Pelajar Indonesia* (PPI; Indonesian Student Association) in Germany (Hasyim 2014). These works portray the way the Indonesian Muslim diaspora in Europe voluntarily maintains the social bond and identity of their community (Fachri and Gusnelly 2019; Mudzakir 2020; Wardana 2015).

Hence, the type of Indonesian Muslim diaspora in Western countries is not similar to Cohen's criteria and classification (Cohen 2006; 1996) except Muslim diaspora in the Netherlands, where some relate to the history of Dutch colonialization in Indonesia. Fachri and Gusnelly (2019) mention that historically, since the end of World War II Muslims have been in North-Western Europe. Those who migrated between 1945 and 1965 were the ex-colonials who arrived in their colonizing country, the Netherlands. They were from Indonesia (16,000) and Javanese-Surinam (34,000). Others are students or workers who seek a better opportunity to live. However, they experience similar problems in the Muslim diaspora. For example, it has been argued that Indonesian Muslims in Australia are very vulnerable to experiencing being a minority in religion and identity (Fakhruroji 2019) and being discriminated against Islamophobia (Safei et al. 2022; Briskman 2015; Akbarzadeh 2016).

Problems facing the Indonesian Muslim diaspora have motivated Indonesian Islamic organizations to introduce Indonesian Islam in Western countries even though intolerance cases have been raised and some scholars consider Indonesian Islam is not as promising as it was. The pessimistic views are triggered by the decreasing Indonesian democracy (Aspinall et al, 2020; Fossati et al. 2020; Mietzner and Muhtadi 2019), indicated by the flourishing inequality (Muhtadi and Warburton 2020; Mietzner and Muhtadi 2020), the increasing of conservatism/populism (Bruinessen 2021; Jubba et al. 2021; Pribadi 2021; Zuhdi 2018), and Islamism (Azca et

al. 2019; Arifianto 2020). However, some are still confident in the power of moderate Islam as the origin of Indonesian Islam (Subchi et al. 2022) and the fact of raising Islamism is not the mainstream of Indonesian Islam (Dzuhayatin 2020; Sakai and Fauzia 2014). "Intolerant Islam" currently may be more popular than it was, but the core of Indonesian Islam is moderate and tolerant indicated by moderate practices and interpretation and its compatibility with democracy, and human rights principles (Azra 2004, 2006; Daniels 2009; Feener 2007; Ricklefs 2012; Woodward 1989). The power of Indonesian Islam promoted by Nahdlatul Ulama with the *Islam Nusantara* (Arifianto 2016; Aminuddin 2020; Schmidt 2021) and Muhammadiyah with progressive Islam or *Islam Berkemajuan* (Ali 2015; Qodir et al. 2020; Nashir et al. 2019) can go globally and influence Muslim in the West and other regions.

In this regard, Pribadi (2022), for example, investigates how the *Perwakilan Cabang Istimewa* (PCI; special branch) of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Germany extends its networks, seeks influence, competes and also compromises with other Indonesian Islamic organizations, campaigns Indonesian Islam, and exercises its religious agency. NU promotes moderate Islam overseas to make its voices heard within the Islamic communities and broader public in the host country and maintain socio-religious connections with the home country. This strengthens previous research on the role of religious study *(pengajian),* the role of other Indonesian Islamic organizations, and some media to keep Indonesian Muslims maintaining their religion and identity (Muttaqin et al. 2016; Setianto 2015). Interestingly, future studies on Indonesian Muslims in the diaspora and the efforts to promote tolerant and pluralistic Indonesian Islam will be developed simultaneously.

In addition to the role of organization, the voluntary diaspora can be identified as the activity of a missionary. Here, diaspora is seen as a form of Islamic missionary (*dakwah*) by which Muslim preachers go overseas for their agenda in spreading Islamic teachings. Yet, their orientation is still strengthening internal groups within Islamic communities who originate from Indonesia. The reason why there is missionary activity amid the diaspora movement can be traced from the perspective of both preachers and the community. In the view of a preacher, the number of Islamic scholars who are taking the role of recognised *ulama* or *ustadz* overseas has a small figure compared to the mushrooming of those who live in Indonesia. This drives some preachers to have a call to go abroad to enhance Islamic knowledge and guide Islamic practices for their counterparts who live as diaspora Muslims. Ashabul Kahfi, one of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora

communities in Sydney, for example, was founded under this missionary agenda and its leading Islamic teachers have become permanent residents there (Nasir 2019). This phenomenon of the missionary is also one of the key findings of the recent works of Toyibah et al. (2020) and Toyibah et al. (2017) who underline that there is a strong relationship between diaspora and the Islamic missionary.

The diaspora of recognised Islamic *ulama* from Indonesia can also be explained from the perspective of the community. This can use the data collected from Indonesian Muslims in Australia, especially in Sydney, which shows the range of Indonesian Muslim diaspora communities who identify themselves as *kelompok pengajian* (Islamic study groups) (Muttaqin et al. 2016). A recent work that listed 34 *kelompok pengajian* says that individual Muslims from Indonesia prefer to identify themselves as Indonesian Muslims who live in Australia rather than Australian Muslims (Muttaqin et al. 2016:178). The study provides the possible reason for this, namely the unwillingness of the community to integrate themselves into a larger number of Australian Muslims who came from other countries, such as Lebanon, Pakistan, and Turkey (Muttaqin et al. 2016). Instead of integration, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora in Sydney has enjoyed their *kelompok pengajian*-based communities which are formed due to their salient backgrounds, such as ethnicity or even ideological preferences. Based on this sense of belonging, those communities are very welcome to those who visit Australia intending to do the Islamic missionary agenda and liven their *kelompok pengajian*. These some Muslim scholars sometime turn eventually to be Australian residents and are becoming part of the diaspora.

Conclusion

The article has shown that the majority of Muslim diaspora from Islamic countries is a migratory population heading to Western countries due to war and expulsion from their countries (55%), but the Indonesian Muslim diaspora is a more voluntary one. Nevertheless, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora faces the same problems of being marginalized in Western countries as most diaspora from other Islamic countries.

Handling the social gap with the larger population, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora manages themselves by becoming actors of voluntary organizations. These institutions have an orientation to facilitate the social needs of diaspora communities such as maintaining their social bond, collective memory, social identity, and spiritual needs.

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