Clash of Civilization:
Indonesia, a Nation-State at the Crossroad

Alois Agus Nugroho

ABSTRACT: Rivalries, conflicts and clashes are real possibilities in our cultural pluralism. Yet, dialogue is also another possibility, albeit it may be hard to achieve. Combining Wittgenstein's and Ricoeur's perspectives, this essay will show that "language-games" plurality can be overcome by "the paradigm of translation". Translation as "linguistic hospitality" can become the phronetical answer to the paradigm of language pluralism. Historically speaking, the recognition of *Bahasa Indonesia* as a national language in the event of *Sumpah Pemuda* (The Pledge of Indonesian Youth) in October 28, 1928, is a case in point.

KEY WORDS: *cultural plurality, language-game, paradigm of translation*

ABSTRAK: *Persaingan, konflik dan perang adalah kemungkinan real dalam pluralisme budaya. Namun dialog adalah juga kemungkinan real, betapa pun dialog itu tidak mudah dicapai. Memadukan perspektif Wittgenstein dan perspektif Ricoeur, esei ini mau mengatakan bahwa perspektif pluralitas "language-game" itu dapat diatasi dengan paradigma penerjemahan. Tindak penerjemahan atau "keramahan linguistic" dapat merupakan jawaban bijaksana atas paradigma kemajemukan bahasa. Sebagai contoh dikemukakan di sini diakuinya Bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa nasional dalam Sumpah Pemuda, pada 28 Oktober 1928.*

KATA KUNCI: pluralisme budaya, "*language-game, paradigm of translation*".

1 INTRODUCTION

In the turn of the second millennium to the third millennium, or the twentieth century to the twenty first century, the attention of people all over the world is taken aback by Samuel Huntington's thesis of the clash of civilizations. (Huntington, 1996). Being intended as an analysis of the dynamics of global politics in the post cold-war era, Huntington's thesis maintains that the end of the cold-war does not mean the end of the dynamics of global politics. While ideologies constituted the main efficient cause of the dynamics of global politics during the cold-war era, the main efficient cause of the political dynamics of post cold-war era – or globalization era – will be cultures or clusters of cultures that Huntington calls "civilizations".

Even though not talking about any dialectics, let alone "clash", John Naisbitt's observation confirms the claim that the influence of cultures, or "tribalism", will ever stronger than ever, in the globalization era. That is precisely what he calls a "global paradox". (Naisbitt, 1994). Whereas economically the international market is becoming more and more integrated, people all over the world tend to proudly expose their own cultural identities. Market globalization does not only result in homogenization of consumer behavior, but also in its heterogenization as well, due to the self-expression of various cultures. Naisbitt most probably will take issue with Huntington in terms of the latter's notion of "clash of civilizations", but he surely will take Huntington's point of "Culture Matters" (Harrison & Huntington, 2000).

This paper is written by one who was also taken aback by the thesis of the clash of civilizations. Although it is admitted that conflicts and clashes are real possibilities in our interpersonal, intercultural and international relations, and even they are somewhat important in a certain situation, it should be admitted either that dialogue is another real possibility, hard as it may be. Moreover, as Thomas Hobbes has mentioned in the thirteenth chapter of his *Leviathan*, it will be very hard to talk about "civilization"

(such as "industry"), if the basic concept is "conflict" or "clash", such as in *bellum omnium contra omnes* (the war of every man against every man). (Hobbes, 2008/1651) The concept of "culture" or "civilization" itself should be associated with the assumption that the members of any culture or civilization are "cultivated" or "civilized" persons.

Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer are, among others, philosophers who maintain that such a dialogue and mutual understanding is highly possible. The willingness to learn from each other, the mutual trust on each other will promote the readiness to get into conversation and cooperation In turn, the mutual understanding among civilizations will results in good works which will be passed on to the next generations.

However, philosophical justification might be insufficient to support the real possibility of cultural dialogue. There should be historical evidences from where philosophical "flight" takes off and to where it will be landing – to borrow Whitehead's metaphor. In that case, this paper would proceed by highlighting some evidences of intercultural dialogue taking place in the history of Indonesia. Surely, there must be a lot of other evidences from all over the globe from where we can learn that intercultural dialogue is as important in the past as in the present and in the future.

2. THE PARADIGM OF LANGUAGE-GAME PLURALISM

The assumption of Samuel Huntington's concern on the possibility of the clash of civilizations goes along with Richard Rorty's thesis of incommensurability among civilizations, which is in turn based on Thomas Kuhn's account of the history of science and Wittgenstein's concept of "language game". As it is already well known to all students of philosophy, there is a reversal (German, *Kehre)* in Wittgenstein's thoughts that his *Philosophical Investigations* criticizes his own *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* in the assertion that "a picture held us captive". (Kenny, 2006). For *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, concepts refer to things in the world as propositions depict certain relation between those things. A proposition that is true is

a proposition that mirrors a certain part of objective reality. That is why the opening proposition of *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* asserts that the objective world is "all that is the case". (Wittgenstein, 2001/1921). The objective world consists of the totality of all which are mirrored by all true propositions.

However, his *Philosophical Investigations* shows a kind of linguistic turn in which Wittgenstein is awakened from the dream of a universal usage of language, that is, to picture reality. There are many functions of language other than that of propositional language. There are a lot of language-games other than, say, logics or scientific language-game, that is, language that represents reality (Wittgenstein, 2009/1953). Richard Rorty maintains even more that logics or philosophical language-game is by no means a privileged kind of language. Those who claim that logics is superior, or more accurate, than any other language-game, are practically captivated by the picture theory of language. Such a claim of superiority implies a neutral decision procedure by which to assess many kind of language-games and to rank them according to a certain standard. Yet, such a standard must be itself the part and parcel of a particular language-game (which contemporary French philosophers, notably Francois Lyotard, calls "narrative").

Wittgenstein' reversal is highly influential to contemporary philosophy in a way that Wittgenstein himself has probably never imagined. In Rorty's criticism of philosophy as "the mirror of nature", the concept of language-game becomes "conversation". In Kuhn's philosophy of science, it becomes "paradigm" between which there is "incommensurability". In Lyotard's criticism of science privilege, it becomes "narrative". In Alasdair McIntyre's ethics, it turns to be a question "Whose justice? Which rationality?" In short, the linguistic turn underscores the fact of pluralism among not only languages and games, but also among cultures, among ethical systems, among sciences and other branches of culture, among scientific paradigms themselves. And although the concept of incommensurability might not be coined by Wittgenstein himself, but is invented by Kuhn, and is

accentuated by Feyerabend and Rorty, the very concept has haunted the language-game model of pluralism ever since.

To be fair to Wittgenstein, the language-model of pluralism by no means necessarily leads to cultural or civilizational clash. Rorty himself even proposes the norm of "non-cruelty" as the expression of human "solidarity", albeit that it must be accompanied by "irony". (Rorty, 1989). The meaning of irony hereby is the awareness that "non-cruelty" and "solidarity" are not universal values, but the values of a particular society, even though those values are against whatever kind of oppression or domination. Rorty calls them the values of "liberalism", while Amartya Sen claims that the so-called "liberalism" is simply an American way to refer to what people from other parts of the world call "egalitarianism" (Sen, 2009).

It is Thomas Kuhn who slightly makes an association of the normalcy of paradigm with social power. To sustain the normalcy, there is a community of professors, there are textbooks, and scientific activities can simply be compared to "puzzle solving". If a freshman or even a young associate professor finds "recalcitrant data" in his or her research, he or she cannot blame the paradigm unless he or she is accused of being "a carpenter who blames his [or her] tools". Only professors, especially the strongest ones, can decide that it is indeed recalcitrant data that can develop into an "anomaly" for the hitherto reigning paradigm. (Kuhn, 2000). The relevance of power is more remarkable when the era of normalcy is ended due to the finding of anomalies. In such an "extraordinary science", there is a clash of paradigms and no neutral judge with neutral decision procedure can be found.

The thought that makes an association of knowledge and power is by no means a new phenomenon Kuhn brings about. Francis Bacon has indeed been well-known for the adage "Knowledge is power", long before Kuhn asserts the incommensurability of scientific pluralism. Michael Foucault in his turns maintains the primacy of power over knowledge (Foucault, 1980). The normalcy of a language-game is guaranteed by power. It implies

that intercultural communication must be one of dominant-oppressed, of power struggle, of clash.

The problem with such a thesis is that "translation" is, theoretically at least, impossible. We cannot translate from one paradigm to another one, we cannot describe one game in the language of another game, we cannot translate one language into another language. The thesis of incommensurability is paralyzing because – in Paul Ricoeur's terms – "the diversity of languages expresses a radical heterogeneity; and hence translation is theoretically impossible". (Ricoeur, 2006).

3. FROM COMMENSURABILITY TO TRANSLATABILITY

It is by no means a necessity for the linguistic turn to develop into clash of civilizations. Language-game model of pluralism does not willy-nilly lead to civilizational clash, in which civilizations fight for being the yardstick or the standard of being "civilized". There are at least two reasons. Firstly, as the thesis of incommensurability comes up initially in the context of Kuhn's account of the history of science, it might not be correct to apply the concept to the context of intercultural communication, as Rorty does. Secondly, the problem of commensurability is a problem of science-model pluralism, and not that of language-model pluralism. For the latter, the problem should be referred to as that of translatability.

We are surely able to translate the problem of commensurability into the context of translation. Languages will be commensurate should there be a standard language, with which any particular language can be assessed as to its "distance" or deviation from the standard language. This standard language might be either an original language, or a universal language (Ricoeur, 2006). Original language provides a common historical basis for all particular languages, while universal language is a common logical basis for them.

In fact, translation is possible despite the diversity of languages. Moreover, the very act of translation needs neither original language nor

14

universal language. From time immemorial, there have been traders, envoys, espionages, wanderers, and the likes, who learned to speak in languages other than their mother tongues, then doing what is now called "translation".

What is the motivation of those who translate from a foreign language into their own languages, or vice versa? It might be practical interests, such as trading. Yet, translation essentially express human desire to get into conversation with those coming from foreign-language-speaking countries. This basically expresses human intentionality towards inter-subjective relation. According to Aristotle, man is not only a *zoon logon echon*, but also *zoon politikon*. However, the concept of *zoon politikon* should be no longer limited to social intermingle within the wall of "polis" or nation border. From time immemorial, men sometimes had to visit a country other than their own "polis". Both these foreign visitors and the local inhabitants had to find a way to communicate to each other, particularly if it was something to do with arts and artists, traders (not accompanied by military forces), religion (not accompanied by geopolitical interests), or cultural interests in the widest sense of the word. Translation was needed in such an encounter.

To paraphrase, the act of translation satisfies both the urge of practical interests as well as the desire to communicate with foreigners or foreign texts. Ricoeur calls the second desire as "linguistic hospitality", namely, an intentionality to verbally intermingle with other human being who speaks other language. Such an intentionality gives man a strength to overcome the existing linguistic barrier. Rorty is apparently correct in claiming that conversation is a keyword for the description of human life. He goes even further as maintaining that we tend to have a special feeling toward certain animals, pet animals in particular, due to their mouths that gives impression that the animals can take part in a conversation with us (Rorty, 1980).

By translating and by getting into a conversation with foreigners in a foreign language, not only do the translators and the interlocutors satisfy

their nature of social beings which is not limited by any linguistic barrier, they also have a new opportunity to enrich and to widen their horizons. For example, there is only one Indonesian word for both "wine" and "grape" (because they are not essential part of Indonesian way of life or form of life; for the majority of Indonesian people, "wine" is even a forbidden drink due to their religious belief). Conversely, there are two Indonesian words for "we", namely, "*kami*" (I and several other people, but not you) and "*kita*" (I and several other people, including you). This awareness will come to the fore whenever one translates a text from English into Indonesian or the other way around. The act of translation enables the translator to grasp the richness of the source language as well as the target language. It can widen his or her horizon.

In Hans-Georg Gadamer's jargon, the translators can improve their sensitivity to the "alterity" of a foreign language and horizon, without losing or giving up their own. There is no need to resort to a neutral framework (Gadamer, :269). The translators can simply start from their own languages with all the context wherein the languages are meaningfully found. Yet, it should go along with a kind of humility by which the translators respect the alterity of the foreign languages. They need to be humble in acknowledging that there are foreign elements they cannot force to fit into the categories of their own languages.

An Indonesian who is translating English into Indonesian, or vice versa, will be struck by the difficulty in translating the third-person pronouns "he" and "she" into Indonesian. The distinction of third-person pronouns into male and female simply does not exist in Indonesian language. Neither is there a distinction in Indonesian language between "brother" and "sister". It seems that gender distinction is not so relevant for Indonesian culture. A more relevant category in referring to sibling relation is seniority which cannot be found in the language-game of English. Indonesian "*kakak*" means both English "elder brother" and "elder sister", whereas "*adik*" means both "younger sister" and "younger

brother". In Indonesian, we should use the first-person pronoun "*saya*" whenever we are talking to a more senior person, while we can simply use "*aku*" whenever communicating with closed friends and those more junior with us. In the act of translation, translators can find the richness of both the source language and the target language. While appreciating the category of gender in the English language, the Indonesian translator can still retain the category of seniority of their own language. In such a way, the translators can widen their horizons.

If that is the case, that the translators can widen their horizons in the very act of translation, then one can justifiably claim that translation can make the translators more cultivated and more civilized by widening the horizon of theirs. This surely holds also for those who dare to learn to speak a foreign language, since learning a foreign language also consists in overcoming a linguistic barrier. The reward of this effort is personal and intellectual growth along with the widening of their horizons. This is not yet taking into account other benefit of translation, particularly its enabling people to access the richness of other languages.

No less important is that translation can become a model of intercultural communication within the paradigm of language-game pluralism. The very act of translation shows that intercultural effort to reach mutual understanding and mutual cooperation is possible and feasible within the paradigm of language-game pluralism. "Linguistic hospitality", Ricoeur says, "is the model for other forms of hospitality that [is] akin to it" (Ricoeur, 2006). Translation is a linguistic activity which can provide a model for dialogue and cooperation in a cultural and civilizational pluralism.

4. THE LEGACY OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN INDONESIA

It was Denys Lombard, a French researcher, who characterized In-donesia as a nation at the *Carrefour* (Crossroad). Indonesian forefathers

themselves used to call their country *Nuswantara* (*antara* means in-between, *nusa* means islands). Indonesia used to be and still is a collection of islands, big and small, between two oceans (namely, Indian ocean and Pacific Ocean), two continents (Asia and Australia), two great Asian civilizations (those of China and India). In his masterpiece, *La carrefour javanais*, Lombard describes how was the interaction of three clusters of cultures at the cultural cross road. The three clusters are, firstly, that of concentric kingdoms (of Majapahit, Pajang, Surakarta and Yogyakarta, which inherited many elements of Hinduism and Buddhism) and, secondly, that of "Asian network" (meaning Islam and Chinese, which initially walked hand in hand, but later was departed and becoming rival to each other, particularly in business); the last cluster is Western, particularly European (Lombard, 1990).

The interaction of the three clusters was not in all cases good. Clash of civilizations was, and still is, a possible result of a cultural interaction, even though it might be the result of miscommunication and misunderstanding rather than that of communication and mutual understanding, as Gadamer's and Ricoeur's thoughts imply. Moreover, cases of miscommunication and misunderstanding have frequently been involving a very small fragment of culture (terrorists bombing in Bali in the name of Islam, for instance) and being condemned by the moderate mainstream. At any rate, cultural conflict is not the whole story of cultural interaction. In Indonesian history, cultural dialogues are also remarkable, in so far as history is not interpreted as a series of war which each own *casus belli*.

The influences and the result of the dialogue and cooperation of Indian civilizations (Hinduism and Buddhism), Chinese, Moslem, and last but not least Western cultures can be found almost all over the country. Hindu and Buddhist temple (and even the mixed architectures of both) can be found in Central Java. A well-known tower at Kudus mosque had been built in Hindunese architecture. A catholic church in Yogyakarta, as well as in Madiun (Puhsarang) had been built with Hindu flavor. In the

city of Semarang, we can find the tomb of admiral Cheng Ho, a Chinese who propagated Islam in Java.

But the most remarkable legacy is *Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian language) as a flash of civilization, which the elites of Indonesian youth proclaimed on October, 28, 1928, some two decades before Indonesian independence from the Dutch colonization. *Bahasa Indonesia* is rooted in *Melayu pasar* language, that is, Malay language (as it is spoken in East Sumatra and Malaysia alike) that was in the past used in trading (*pasar* literally means "market"). In trading, people from the previously mentioned three clusters had to communicate each other and the *Melayu pasar* played the role of *lingua franca*. Javanese elites had no objection to the usage of *Melayu pasar*, although demographically they were, and still are, the majority of Indonesian people. As a matter of fact, the Javanese language is highly complicated, consisting of no less than three levels. Using Javanese language as a national language would be a nightmare for Indonesian coming from other local languages (there are more than seven hundred local languages). At that time, the *Melayu pasar* was not only spoken by native Indonesians, but also by other Asian and Westerners who were dealing with common Indonesian. In the process of its becoming *Bahasa Indonesia*, the vocabulary of *Melayu pasar* had been enriched by the words coming from Javanese, Indian (Sanskrit), Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese, Dutch (hardly found in Malaysian Malay) and recently it takes also English words (notably American English).

It is indeed very interesting to learn that the decision to adopt *Melayu pasar* and to name it *Bahasa Indonesia* was taken in the second Youth Congress in which representatives of Indonesian ethnic cultures were present, such as *Jong Java* (Javanese youth), *Jong Celebes* (Sulawesi Youth), *Jong Soematranen Bond* (The association of Sumatranese Youth), *Jong Bataks Bond* (the association of Bataknese Youth), *Jong Islamieten Bond* (the association of Moslem Youth), *Jong Ambon* (the association of Ambonese Youth), *Pemoeda Kaoem Betawi* (Betawinese Youth). The opening session of

the Congress itself took place in the office of *Katholieke Jongenlingen Bond* (the association of Catholic Youth) in Jakarta. This second Indonesian Youth Congress is usually depicted as one of political preparations for Indonesian independence. In fact, it is more than a political event, it is moreover an event of intercultural dialogue. The flash of civilizations came up when the Indonesian youth from various "comprehensive doctrines" or cultural backgrounds chose a national language that was widely accessible and more egalitarian in character. Since then, *Bahasa Indonesia* has constituted the most important part of what Rawls calls "public reason" (Rawls, 1993). Since then, formal public and political discourse should be conducted in *Bahasa Indonesia*.

5.   CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the era of the so-called globalization, the integration of the global economy is said to be not the end of history, in so far as history means geopolitical dynamics. The main efficient cause of the geopolitical dynamics of the post cold-war era will be cultures or clusters of cultures that Huntington calls "civilizations". Admittedly, conflicts and clashes are real possibilities in our interpersonal, intercultural and international relations, and even they are somewhat important in a certain situation, yet it should be admitted either that dialogue is another real possibility, albeit it may be very hard to achieve.

Philosophically speaking, the assumption of Samuel Huntington's emphasis on the possibility of the clash of civilizations goes along with Richard Rorty's thesis of "incommensurability" among cultures, which is in turn based on Thomas Kuhn's account of the history of science and Wittgenstein's concept of "language game". However, in the paradigm which regards each culture as a "language game" and the actual diversity of cultures as a plurality of language-games, the problem might be that of translatability rather than that of commensurability.

Moreover, translation can become a model of intercultural commu-

nication within the paradigm of language-game pluralism. Linguistic hospitality can be the model for cultural or civilizational hospitality. Hermeneutically speaking, the interlocutors of intercultural communication can widen their cultural horizons as well. As cases in point, there are historical sites and historical buildings in Indonesia which can be regarded as legacies of inter-civilizations dialogue. Furthermore, the "birth" of *Bahasa Indonesia* can even be regarded as a flash of civilization, as far as the pledge of Indonesian Youth (*Sumpah Pemuda*) of October, 28, 1928, is not simply taken into account as a political event in the preparation of Indonesian independence, but also viewed as an intercultural communication alike.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Foucault, Michel. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York: Pantheon Books.

Gadamer, Hans Georg. (2004). *Truth and Method*, New York: Crossroad.

Harrison, Lawrence E. & Huntington, Samuel P. (2000). *Culture Matters. How Values Shape Human Progress*, New York: Basic Books.

Hobbes, Thomas. (2008/1651). *Leviathan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Huntington, Samuel P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kenny, Anthony. (2006). *Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Kuhn, Thomas S. (2000) (4). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lombard, Denys. (1990). *Le carrefour javanais*, Paris: EHESS.

Naisbitt, John. (1994). *Global Paradox*, New York: Avon Books.

Rawls, John. (1993). *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Ricoeur, Paul. (2006). *Reflections on the Just*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Rorty, Richard. (1980). *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Rorty, Richard. (1989). *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sen, Amartya. (2009). *The Idea of Justice*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (2001/1921). *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, New York: Routledge.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (2009/1953). *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Wiley & Blackwell.