ISLAMIC DA'WAH THROUGH AMERICAN NOVEL (A STUDY OF SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE ON UMM ZAKIYYAH'S *IF I SHOULD SPEAK*)

Bondan Eko Suratno[2]

ABSTRAK

Tujuan tulisan ini, yang berasal dari sebagian kecil penelitian tesis penulis, adalah untuk mengungkap dan menjelaskan strategi dakwah Islam dalam novel If I Should Speak karya Umm Zakiyyah. Dalam If I Should Speak, aspek keagamaan mendominasi isi cerita sekaligus menjadi tema besar novel ini. Aspek keagamaan merupakan bagian dalam pembahasan sosiologi sastra. Kajian sosiologi sastra terhadap If I Should Speak menitikberatkan pada pengungkapan aspek dokumenter beserta fungsinya di tengah prasangka publik Amerika terhadap Islam. Pada konteks tulisan ini, strategi dakwah yang terungkap adalah tanggapan mengenai isu jihad yang menjadi pangkal berkembangnya stereotip terhadap Islam. Hal ini dilakukan untuk meluruskan pandangan negatif terhadap Islam.

***Kata kunci**: aspek sosial, novel, stereotip Islam, sosiologi sastra, dakwah Islam*

1. Background

Representation of the West view on Islam can be seen in the academician work and national survey conducted in America. A professor of the science of government from Harvard University, Samuel P. Huntington, in an article says:

> Civilization identity will be increasingly important in the future, and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization. The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another. (Huntington, 1993:25)

Considering this he then explains one of his reasons, "First, differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic. Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion." (Huntington, 1993:25). When he talks about relation between the West and Islam, he says "Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1, 300 years." (Huntington, 1993:31). In the military aspect, for example, the West and some Islamic countries have been competing for well-developed weapons. As stated further, "This centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline. It could become more virulent." (Huntington, 1993:31-32). He ultimately concludes "On both sides the interaction between Islam and the West is seen as a clash of civilizations." (Huntington, 1993:32). With this conclusion, he reasserts his hypothesis that "a central focus of

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conflict for the immediate future will be between the West and several Islamic-Confucian states." (Huntington, 1993:47).

A survey, as quoted by Jack G. Shaheen, professor emeritus from Southern Illinois University, can also be another way to see the West view on Islam as follows.

Consider the National Conference's 1994 Survey on Inter-Group relations. Pollster Louis Harris conducted in-depth interviews with nearly 3,000 people; Asians, Blacks, Latinos, and Whites were asked about negative stereotypes. 42 percent agreed with the statement that "Muslims belong to a religion that condones or support terrorism." 47 percent concurred with the assertion that Muslims "are anti-Western and anti-American;" and 62 percent agreed with the declaration that Muslims "segregate and suppress women." (Shaheen, 1997:2-3)

Concerning this view, general definition for judgment about people or something which is often not true called as stereotype. A.S. Hornby defines "Stereotype is a fixed idea, image, etc that many people have of particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality." (Hornby, 1995:1169). While in the dictionary of sociology "A stereotype is an exaggerated and usually prejudiced view of a group of people that is based on little or no evidence and is resistant to modification by evidence." (Bruce and Yearley, 2006:289).

A bomb attack in Oklahoma can help us to understand what stereotype of Islam is,

When a powerful bomb destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, news organizations were quick to identify Middle Easterners as suspects and reported that the FBI was specifically looking for two men with dark hair and beards. Within hours, Arab and Muslim Americans became the targets of physical and verbal assaults. As it turned out, an American with European ancestors, Timothy McVeigh, committed what was said at the time to be the most deadly terrorist deed on American soil. (Nacos and Torres-Reyna, 2002:1)

This tragic incident reflects that stereotype of Islam has been internalized by most American. Right after the bombing, suspicion falls on Muslim. They think that Muslim must be the suspect in the bombing to interrogate even before it is finally revealed.

2. Review of Literature
2.1. Islamic Da'wah

Based on the explanations above, Islamic da'wah urgently needs to be done mainly in America. Jum'ah Amin Abdul 'Aziz says da'wah has several meanings such as to call, to ask, to assert, to preserve, every effort to call people into a religion (2003:24-25). Therefore, in the context of this paper Islamic da'wah means to call/inform American of Islam, to assert/preserve Islam from any stereotype, and to call on the people to embrace Islam.

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah Subhanahu wa ta'ala commands 'Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good (Islam), enjoining *Al-Ma'ruf* (i.e. Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do) and forbidding *Al-Munkar* (polytheism and disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden). And it is they who are the successful.' (Al-'Imran:104). It is the primary guide for every Muslim to do da'wah. In a hadits, as narrated by Nisa'i, Rasulullah Muhammad Salallahu alaihi wassalam says 'From Abu Sayeed Khudri r.a. Rasulullah Saw said, "Who observes

Munkar [evildoings] and he stops it by force, he is excused [from accountability] and if he could not remove it by force but used his tongue against it, he is exempted and if he cannot condemned it by tongue, but abhors it in his heart, he may also be exempted and that is the weakest position of Iman". [Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb: Nisa'i]. This hadits reasserts the primary guide of da'wah as stated in the Holy Qur'an surah Al-'Imran 104. In accordance, every Muslim in this case American Muslim is asked to do da'wah.

2.2.   Da'wah through Literature

An alternative media for da'wah is through literary works, for instance novel. Alan Swingewood explains to us the function of novel,

> Thus the novel, as the major literary genre of industrial society, can be seen as a faithful attempt to re-create the social world of man's relation with his family, with politics, with the State; it delineates too his roles within the family and other institutions, the conflicts and tensions between groups and social classes. (Laurenson and Swingewood, 1972:12)

Based on the context of this paper, Islamic da'wah constructed in the novel can be the media to introduce Islam. He then tells us "We learn both of the nature of society and the ways individuals experienced it, through the fictional characters who see and record 'not only the reality around them, but their hopes, wishes, dreams and fantasies…' (Laurenson and Swingewood, 1972:16). Islamic da'wah can be well-constructed within the characters in the novel and their interaction to respond the reality.

This paper making use of the first approach suggested by Swingewood in *The Sociology of Literature*, "At the present time it is possible to characterize two broad approaches to sociology of literature. The most popular perspective adopts the documentary aspect of literature, arguing that it provides a mirror to the age." (Laurenson and Swingewood, 1972:13). This paper focuses on the problems and situation faced by the characters in the novel and its relation to social context.

3. Discussion
Islamic Da'wah through *If I Should Speak* (called as *IISS*)

In the very beginning of this paper, the writer has explained the condition related to the view of the West on Islam. In fact, public opinion of Islam helps to build the negative issue. It asks the Muslim to implement da'wah.

One of noted characteristics of American is their open-mindedness. In practical level, opinion which is delivered confidently will usually be accepted. It is often, however, preceded by sequence of question and answer or debate. The same strategy used in *IISS* to tell readers of Islamic da'wah. The values of Islamic da'wah are constructed in the dialogue of Tamika Douglass, Aminah Ali and Durrah 'Dee' Gonzalez. Tamika represents American non-Muslim, while Aminah and Durrah represent American Muslim.

American public often misuses the word *jihad* to justify Muslim as the suspect of terrorism. They think Islam teaches its followers to do holy war towards people with different religions. After being investigated, the writer finds out that *jihad* issue becomes the starting point of further stereotypes towards Islam. *Jihad* is usually used to describe terrorism. Islam is then seen as a religion of violence. *IISS* corrects this view by explaining to readers about the concept and purpose of *jihad* in Islam.

American view of *jihad* as portrayed in *IISS* can be summed up as follow; they disagree with *jihad* since they claim that it is similar to terrorism done in the name of God, Islam is considered as a dangerous religion for a belief that *jihad* is a holy war, *jihad* allows every Muslim to attack innocent people, therefore *jihad* harms the world peace (2000:113-114).

Responding to the stated view, *IISS* starts with the definition of *jihad. Jihad* means struggle, in certain condition, in battlefield. The meaning of struggle is the same with what the US Army is doing when defending their beloved country (2000:113-114). With the definition and comparison given, *jihad* physically means struggle to defend someone's soul against the oppressor to get their right.

Meanwhile, the concept of *jihad* in Islam is explained in the following dialogue.

> "Well," Aminah replied, "in Islam, it's similar to that. Just like America does not tolerate oppression in the world and at times goes to help those who are oppressed, Muslims are not allowed to permit people to be oppressed. And when the oppression occurs, Muslims must defend and help the oppressed. These are the two types of jihad, the first being when Muslims fight to help people who are being oppressed, like America does at times, and the second being when Muslims defend themselves from attack." (p. 114)

This quotation explains that *jihad* in Islam is taught to protect the peace from anything harmful to this. When there is intolerable oppression Islam commands its followers to help the oppressed, but when Muslim is oppressed they must defend themselves against the oppressor. It is the true meaning of physical *jihad* in Islam. In other words, Islam never teaches any form of *jihad* out of the context of what has already been taught.

In the context of human relation, Islam forbids its follower to harm other people including terrorism.

> "Harming the innocent is not something taken lightly in our religion." She continued, "Terrorism is not allowed in Islam whatsoever, and whoever does take part in it, no matter what religion they claim to be a part of, is risking punishment in the Hereafter for that grave sin." (p. 114)

Human will be responsible in the Hereafter for whatever he or she does in the world. Committing terror is considered a sin that will be punished by God. Even it includes the prohibition to harm as much as tree in the battlefield (2000:114).

Related to the peace of the world, *jihad* is taught to preserve it. People will live peacefully when their life is free from oppression. But, when there is oppression people must defend themselves to gain their rights as truly human. For that reason *jihad* is taught.

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