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SULTAN AGUNG

Bismillah membangun generasi khaira ummah

**Optimilasi Pemanfaatan Jembatan Penyeberangan Jalan Raya
Kaligawe Semarang**
Mochamad Rosul

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Abdul Choliq Dahlan

Islamic World In The West's Perspektive
Falasifatul Falah dan Dwi Wahyuningsih

R.A. Kartini as a Symbol of Contemporary Indonesia Woman
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Pujiati

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ISLAMIC WORLD IN THE WEST'S PERSPECTIVE

Article Review

*Falasifatul Falah & Dwi Wahyuningsih**

INTRODUCTION

The debate about Muslim women's veil or "hijab" in western feminists' discourse has been heating up. In white feminists' view, hijab, as the Muslim women's code of dress, is often believed to be a symbol of women's oppression in the Islamic world (Torstrick, 2003, p.160). One occurrence, which has caught the world's attention after the triumph of the Iranian revolution lead by Ayatullah Rohullah Khomeini, was the controversial rule to force all women in Iran to wear the hijab (Brooks, 1995, p.18). This was followed by other rules, which were thought to be sorts of women's repression, such as the ban on female judges since a woman being an adjudicator was believed to be against Islamic law (Ebadi, 2004).

This issue of Muslim women has attracted the attention of Geraldine Brooks, a white Wall Street Journal reporter, who was born in Australia and has lived and worked in the Middle East for more than six years (Lumetta, 1996, p.70). She has tried to find what she called "the hidden world of Islamic women" (Brooks, 1995, p.12) and portrayed the phenomena in her article "Behind the holy veil" (in The Australian Magazine, February 25-26, 1995, pp.12-23). This was then published as a book with title *Nine Parts of Desire* (Lumetta, 1995, p.70).

In this essay, I analyse how are the Muslim communities as non-Western people represented in Brooks' writing? How are their lives described? What assumption about the relationship between the West and the Rest detected in this representation? And what is the effect of this representation, particularly in terms of development?

ISLAMIC WORLD IN THE WEST'S PERSPECTIVES

The West, as dominant societies, believes that their own ideas about other societies are true, thus they judge the 'Rest' by their own perspectives (Strawson, 1997, p.31). In that way, they use their objectives and values to assess the non-Western communities' records and ways of life. Even Western feminists, who argue against women's subordination, instinctively see non-Western women to be subordinated under the Western ones (Ong, 1998, p.80). By illustrating non-Western women as "identical, interchangeable, and more exploited" than Western women, white feminists are accepting their own "cultural superiority" as true (Ong, 1998, p.85) There is such an idea in the West that

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people in the Muslim world will never be released from tyranny and under-developed circumstances unless the West gives a hand, or in other words: intervention (Strawson, 1997, p.31).

Western people hardly ever engage with Islam in a serious dialogue or a "measure of understanding" (Lumetta, 1996, p.70). Islam is typically simply stereotyped, particularly by the Western media, as a "conservative, dominant, rigid, and oppressive" religion (Matthews, 2001). The common picture in Western societies is that Islam coerces women (Boyd, 1997, p.58). How 'barbaric' Islam treats women in Western people's images can be shown from Brooks' narrative that she wore a heavy black chador, rather than an easy scarf, in order to "escape the 80-lash penalty with which Iran threatened women, even foreigners, who flouted the Islamic dress code" (Brooks, 1995, p.18).

The topic of "hijab" is raised not only as a religious issue, but also a political one (Brooks, 1995, p.21). According to anthropologist Dr. Fadwa El Guindi, veiling as a political action started in Egypt, when, in about the year 1970, "women university students suddenly started to wear the veil" (in Boyd, 1997). This was recognized as the beginning of the Islamic movement in this North-African country. For the next two decades this movement had been growing and got stronger all over the Middle East (Boyd, 1997, p.58). In Iran, people were persuaded to believe that the traditional black cloak was a "trench against Western values" (Brooks, 1995, p.22). It is interesting to note how the dress code was perceived by opposite sides. On one hand, the hijab was considered by the West as a symbol of under-development and women's oppression. On the other hand, it was exactly used by the 'Rest' as a symbol of opposition to demonstrate their hostility towards the West's arrogance.

Brooks has tried to illustrate the religious historical background of the hijab wear by telling the story about the prophet Mohammed and his bride Zaenab, who was the former wife of Mohammed's adopted son (Brooks, 1995, p.18-19). She obviously has worked hard in looking for the authentic explanation. However, the author should be careful since there are many versions of the histories and the religious teaching's interpretations, particularly in Islam (Umar, 1999, p.287). The controversies and misunderstandings about the Islamic world by non-Muslim societies can often emerge from inaccurate information. Therefore it is still risky to accept Brooks' story as the only explanation.

In her writing, Brooks condemns Islam and Muslim people (in Lumetta, 1996, p.70). For instance, she criticizes some rules applied in the Muslim communities' places as being hypocritical (Brooks, 1995, p.23). On the other hand, she does, to a certain extent, apologies for Islam by dismissing the repressive aspects in some Muslim societies (in Lumetta, 1996, p.70).

Brooks described that she had visited Khomeini's family's house and interviewed the female family members, including Khomeini's wife, just after the death of this charismatic Iranian revolution leader. Through her investigation, Brooks herself finally found that the person whom she called "the stony faced Ayatollah" was not as tyrannous as she imagined before. His wife and other

female family members testified that this man, who was known as a dictator who had forced people in his country to follow Islamic law strictly, was a gentle husband, a democratic father and a lovely grandfather. Ayatollah Khomeini never practiced polygamy, which is often associated by Western society as a Muslim custom (Brooks, 1995, p.12 and 16). Brooks implies that her previous Western-perspective image about Khomeini, and other aspects of the Islamic world, could be wrong.

In my opinion, Brooks, like people from the West mostly do, sees Iranians and Middle-East communities as representations of the Islamic world. Here the system of representations worked. The mental representation in their heads makes all concepts about Islam are always associated with Middle East (Hall, 1997, p.17). For some extent, these misrepresentations might fall into distorted understanding which is confused between Islam as religious values and the Middle East' culture.

STEREOTYPING IN PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW

Stereotyping refers to the process of activating and using a stereotype. Social Psychology's original thinking about stereotypes construed them as faulty, inflexible and inaccurate. Stereotypes are signs of aberrant and abhorrent thinking, a kind of thinking to be remedied by full consideration of individual being perceived (Augoustinos and Walker (1995, p. 223).

Crano & Messe noted that there are several interest features in giving negative opinions about social aggregates (Crano & Messe, 1982). First, traits, characteristics, and qualities become associated with the specific identifying cue (or cues) that define membership in the aggregate. These traits are called stereotypes. Hamilton and Sherman, also Stangor and Lange explain about a stereotype as a mental representation of a social group and its members (Hamilton and Sherman, 1994; Stangor and Lange, 1994, in Augoustinos and Walker, 1995, pp. 208-209). For example, in this case, is the way Brooks sees Islam and "hijab" for Moslem women. The second important aspect of prejudicial opinions about aggregates is that they rarely permit exception. Thus, people who hold such an opinion typically assume that all members of the aggregate possess the stereotyped trait. In her article, Brooks gives her opinion as a Western who holds a part of their opinion by judging Islam as a "conservative, dominant, rigid, and oppressive" religion (Matthews, 2001). She and other Western have had stereotyped Islam, because they, as "outsiders", had not known totally understand Islam and assume that all Moslems are homogenous: not modern, unchangeable, and oppressive. The third interesting feature of opinion of aggregates concerns their operation in the impression formation process. Western gives the biased opinion, called prejudice, as negative evaluation to Islam.

Stereotypes that given to Islam has their social consequences. Furthermore Augoustinos and Walker note that stereotypes derive their form

and content from social context surrounding the individual, and their operation leads to social injustice. Lippmann explains that the systems of stereotypes may be the core of our personal tradition, the defences of our position in society. No wonder, then, that any disturbance of the stereotypes seems like an attack upon the foundations of the universe. Allport's notion of stereotypes as an excessive and inaccurate generalization was gradually extended into an almost completely cognitive notion (in Augoustinos and Walker, 1995, pp. 208-211).

CONCLUSION

Brooks' hard work in improving the Western's view about the Islamic world should be appreciated. Her writing demonstrates more respectful concern about Islam overall, rather than many other Western journalists did. She was successful in avoiding "Western judgments", though, she could not stay away from using her "Western perspective" (Lumetta, 1996, p.70).

Therefore, Brooks and other authors need to be more careful in writing about other societies in which they are outsiders, since both misrepresentation and misinterpretation can emerge. We need to consider that the societies of the world are dynamic and identify the contents of restrictions in Islam. As Aihwa Ong (1988) stated, "We begin a dialogue when we recognized other forms of gender-and culture-based subjectivities, and accept that others often choose to conduct their lives separate from our particular vision of the future" (Ong, 1988, p.90).

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