The Aesthetics of Islamic Literature: Lesson Learned from Forum Lingkar Pena

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Abstract

This study is to illustrate of the Islamic literature discourse. In the history of modern literature in Indonesia has always appeared Islamic works. But the presence of Islamic literature was deliberately rejected. Even the debate about the Islamic literary discourse occurred in several periods of Indonesian literature. The presence of the aesthetic discourse of Islamic literature between accepted and rejected. One party, assuming that Islamic literature is the same presence as others, for example Hindu literature also exists and is present in the Indonesian literary universe. While others say literature is a literature that does not need to be labeled.

[Kajian ini untuk menggambarkan pertarungan wacana estetika sastra islami oleh forum lingkar pena di dalam khazanah kesusastraan di Indonesia. Dalam sejarah sastra modern di Indonesia selalu bermuncul

karya-karya islami. Tetapi kehadiran sastra Islam itu sengaja ditolak. Bahkan perdebatan menyoal tentang wacana sastra islami terjadi dalam beberapa periode sastra Indonesia. Kehadiranya wacana estetika sastra islami antara diterima dan ditolak. Salah satu pihak, menganggap bahwa sastra islami adalah sama kehadirannya seperti yang lainnya, misalnya sastra Hindu juga ada dan hadir dalam jagat sastra Indonesia. Sedangkan pihak lain mengatakan sastra adalah sastra yang tak perlu di labeli.]

Keywords: discourse; Islamic literature; Forum Lingkar Pena

Introduction

Islamic literature in the world of Indonesian literature raises quite diverse terms. Some call it literary enlightenment (Danarto), prophetic literature (Kuntowijoyo), *sufi* literature (Abdul Hadi WM), *dhikr* literature (Taufiq Ismail), literature pertains to the inner world (M. Fudoli Zaini), transcendent literature (Sutardji Calzoum Bachri) and etc. However, in addition to Abdul Hadi WM no one identifies the mention with Islamic literature, eventhough it seems undeniable if it is associated with other interpretation of Islamic literature. Other typical Islamic literature in Indonesia realized on Islam, women and gender issues as has been many found in a numbers of publications²; Islamic popular culture in Indonesian Cinema.³

While the emergence of the Islamic literary discourse in the realm of Indonesian literature raises two contradicting poles. The first argument presented by Rianawati.⁴ In lined with it, A.A Navis argues that Islamic literature is something utopian for the moment. Edy A Effendi made the conclusion that Islamic literature was rejected because it did not manifest aesthetics in it⁵, and Chavchay Syaifullah was confused about the aesthetics of Islamic literature and questioned what

¹ Helvy Tiana Rosa, Sesenggam Gumam (Bandung: Syamil Cipta Mulia, 2003), 3.

² Diah Ariani Arimbi, Reading Contemporary Indonesian Muslim Women Writers: Representation, Identity and Religion of Muslim Women in Indonesian Fiction (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 240.

³ Alicia Izharuddin, *Gender and Islam in Indonesian Cinema* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1-186.

⁴ Riannawati, *Bahasa dan Sastra Kontekstual di Era Postliteracy* (Jakarta: UIN Jakarta Press, 2015), 234.

⁵ Effendi, Kurnia, *Anak Arloji* (Jakarta: PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2011).

is Islamic literature.⁶ Aguk Irawan MN wrote an article entitled Formulating the Concept of Islamic Literature which is from his writing is rejecting Islamic literature.⁷

The second argues that in every important period in the history of modern literature in Indonesia there are always emerging works of Islamic breathing that can be accounted for both the quality and elements of Islam. However, the presence of Islamic literature was deliberately rejected.⁸ According to Danarto, the movement "back to the roots of tradition". Similar movements are also reflected in other branches of art. Although the movement chose tradition as the primary source of inspiration for the creation of its work, it cannot be called the neo-traditionalist movement. One of the significant results of this movement is what commonly called "sufism literature".⁹

The debates over the Islamic literature existence have been occurred in several Indonesian literary periods. The acceptance of Islamic literature takes a long process. The presence has been nuanced with both acceptance and rejection. One side, assuming that Islamic literature is the same presence as others, i.e., the Hindus literature known to be exist and traditionally absorbed in the Indonesian literary tradition.¹⁰ While the others continue to reject it, a literature is just a literature, and it does not need any attributing elements.

The related debate of Islamic Literature resulted in the emergence of the ethical and literary aesthetic standards of the two opposite poles, the literary work with the Islamic nuance is thus deemed

⁶ Chavchay Syaifullah (November 23, 2003). Republika.

⁷ Aguk Irawan MN, "Menulis Untuk Apa Saja; Belajar dari Aguk Irawan," accessed July 23rd, 2018, https://pwnujatim.or.id/menulis-untuk-apa-saja-belajar-dari-aguk-irawan/

⁸ Abdul Hadi W. M., *Kembali ke Akar Kembali ke Sumber. Esai-esai Sastra Profetik dan Sufistik* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1999), 51.

⁹ Ibid, 21.

Rahul Mishra, "Mosaics of Cultures: Investigating the Role of Cultural Linkages in India-Indonesia Relations," accessed June 21st, 2018, https://idsa.in/system/files/IB_IndiaIndonesia.pdf

¹¹ J.M. van der Kroef, "The Hinduization of Indonesia Reconsidered. *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 11, no.1 (1951): 17-30. doi: 10.2307/2048901

to be inferior, even considered unliterary, typically regards as a written sermon text. Islamic literature is considered popular literature, it is classified only as the embodiment of semagnedta entertainment. Highlevel literature is created by observing ethical and aesthetic value standards based on their respective predictions contrary to the values of Islamic Literature. In his anthology of essays and literary criticism noted that literature is literary, there is no need to trigger for divisions.

This article will not be deliberately intended to discuss the essence and meanings of Islamic literature. It rather provides discussion from the writers' opinions, since the debates over the Islamic literature shall become easily understandable, although in reality the presence remains in debate. This article elaborates the debating aspects regarding the emergence and motivation underlying the Islamic literature, in addition to the evolution in current trend of Indonesian literature. This article further seeks implication on validity of the understanding the typical literature that essentially addresses theologically and socially, because indeed the understanding of Islamic literature is not limited to literature which only proclaims the "heavenly realm" emerged from a Muslim humanist by merely use the Islamic idioms, not limited to its birth from a region where the population is Muslim in great number, but more than just that.

Methods

This is a qualitative research characteristically engages the author's centered interpretation. Interpretation will be supported by Michel Foucault's theoretical framework of knowledge and power. This study places Foucault's discourse as it underlying approach. Foucault views discourse analysis as an analysis of statements, contribute to establishing a discourse. The significance of the analysis characterized by a view that a discourse is constitutive, as a contributor to production, transformation and reproduction of the representation of existing powers. In addition, Foucaultfurther argues that the social subject producing the statement in which the subject is outside and discourse

¹² Mugijatna, "Representasi Pertarungan Ideologi dalam Sastra," (Pidato Pengukuhan Guru Besar, Kamis, 25 Mei 2016), 51.

stands independently. 13 The subjects are only the source of the statement, this concludes that discourse is independent. Statements represented in manuscripts on Islamic literature and FLP on each data are deliberately collected for analysis. The analysis is undertaken through interpreting the existing statements. One of them is through words selection to represent the Islamic literature and FLP. Discourse analysis uses thematic concepts where the collected discourse is categorized on the basis of the main concept and the theory used. There are two concepts used, namely Islamic literature and FLP. The theory in this study belongs to Michel Foucault about knowledge and power. In regard of discourse, Foucault seems to be more interested in seeing the reality as a systematic practice which can be shaped and controlled by certain people. Reference and the meaning of discourse in social life is potentially established by the man who reflect relative will to enforce. In many aspects of human life, discourse in general is never neutral and came into existence from natural assumptions. Discourse is deliberately established and conditioned by institutions that are more dominant over the dominated aspects. According to Foucault, discourse is political comodity, a phenomenon of exclusion, limitation, prohibition.¹⁴

Basically the data both primary and secondary obtained through library data collection, which is undetaken through heuristic stages, critical source, and interpretation.¹⁵ The heuristic stage is to collect resources according to the theme of this study. The method used to collect data through archive search and other documents. The next stage, source criticism through selection, as well as external and internal criticism which is oriented at obtaining source of legitimacy. The next stage, having criticised the interpretation the data source on the Islamic literature discourse and FLP.

Results

¹³ Michel Foucault, The Archeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

¹⁴ Colin Gordon, *Power Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 245.

¹⁵ Dudung Abdurrahman, *Metode Penelitian Sejarah* (Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu, 1999), 92.

The discourse on Islamic Literature

The unit of Islamic literary discourse concept consists of two elements, namely discourse and Islamic literature. First, discourse is the domain of language ,however, the emergence is also due to the directly related social practice and everyday life. As a language area, discourse is defined as "... a certain way of speaking, writing and thinking". Discourse is a specific way of using language. Nevertheless, discourse is not only a way of speaking, but more importantly, is the things directly related certain ways of using language, and the social relations behind the practice. As a manifestation of practice, discourse deals with history and time. More importanly, discourse deals with language in a particular time, age and place.¹⁶

For Foucault discourse unifies language and practice and refers to the production of knowledge through language providing meanings to material objects and social practices. Although the material objects and social practices existed outside the language, they are given meaning or 'displayed' by language and then constructed discursively. Discourse constructs, defines and produces the object of knowledge in ways that make sense while excluding other forms of reasoning as unreasonable ways.

Foucault simply asserts that no power is exercised without a set of goals and objectives.¹⁸ Foucault does not at all give us a way to escape from that power. The reason is, since the power goes through the process of normalization, then no longer people who take power, therefore no party should be blamed. Under such normal conditions, is there a way to fight? In such skeptical view, Foucault gave an example of the life of a patient in a hospital cell or inmate in a prison cell who is unable to resist because of the control of the authority of the holder of power, such as a hospital doctor and prison warden in their strict circumstances. In this sense, what exactly is the point of the idea that Foucault wants to convey? This is where we will come to the power of

Yasraf Amir Piliang, Semiotika dan Hipersemiotika (Bandung: Matahari, 2012), 103.

¹⁷ Chris Baker, *Cultural Studies*. *Teori & Praktik* (Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2015), 83.

 $^{^{18}}$ Iswandi Syahputra, "Post Media Literacy: Menyaksikan Kuasa Media Bersama Michael Foucault", $Aspikom\ 1,$ no.1 (2010): 7.

discourse through language as a machine of meaning. According to Foucault, discourse has the ability to create human knowledge.

According to Foucault, discourse is a means of generating knowledge, along with the social practices that accompany it, the form of subjectivity which is the product of it, the power relations that lie behind such knowledge and social practice, and the interrelationship between all aspects. Meanwhile, according to Fitriana discourse is a way of generating knowledge, along with the social practices that accompany it, the form of subjectivity formed from it, the power relations which lie behind such knowledge and social practice, as well as the interrelationships among all these aspects. Foucault has addressed such concept in his *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1976) that it embodies the rigid explanation of the unity of discourse, discursive formations, clumsiness, exteriority, accumulation, and archaeological descriptions. By using such concepts as "cracks, thresholds, boundaries, series and transformations superseding previous concepts of "tradition and influence".²¹

What Fitriana has emphasized isunderlying the use of discourse theory in exposing the phenomenon of Islamic literary discourse. More specifically its application to the object of this study is the relationship of knowledge and power establishes out of the Islamic literature discourse which gave birth to Islamic literary discourse.

In this study, the application of the theory developed by Foucault is more inclined to the discourse of knowledge and power relations. Through knowledge of power can be obtained. Second, Islamic literature, *literature* in the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia²² is defined as: 1) the language (both words and style) used in the books

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Pengetahuan dan Metode: Karya-karya Penting Michael Foucault* (Yogyakarta & Bandung: Jalasutra, 2002), 9.

²⁰ Adytia Fitriana, *Karakteristik Novel-Novel Metropop Gramedia* (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia, 2010), 25.

²¹ Michael Faucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

²² Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, Departemen Pendidikan Nasional Edisi ke-3. Balai. Pustaka (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2002), 1001-1002.

(not colloquially), 2) literature, 3) Hindu's scriptures, books of science, 4) books, literatures, *primbon* (manifesting prophecy, count of numbers, etc., 5) writing; alphabet. In case we are to use the formulated term susastra thus we can understand that the prefix su sas a soul that will perform in literature. Su is beauty or aesthetics or further interpreted as typically excellent words and advice, while literature is a letter, alphabet or that recite the aforementioned su. In a simple sense, we can understand that literature has two main elements, namely the first literature as the soul and the content (spirit) in ideas forms, author's ideas, substantially based on philosophical and religious values, and the second as the universe or container from the soul and the content (ruh) literature realized in themes, story characters either as the main character or side, story line, setting, scene, and the expressions used by the story performers. To these days, there is still a polemic about Islamic literature. Thus, writers agree on the naming of Islamic literature, arguing that it has an Islamic value, or Islamic literature.²³

In many ways, the reality of such Islamic literature as exemplified in the Qur'an stories, the stories of Prophet P.B.U.H, biography and expressing thoughts in literary works form. Discourse in a literary work is not an independent entity, the presence is intertwined with other events of many texts or everyday life which in additon to that, produces Islamic literary discourse. The interrelationship of Islamic literary discourse in literary works and discourses beyond literary works establishes a formation in which its presence influences the formation of certain subjects in certain times as well.

Literary works are not just a narrative, poetic, or dramatic poles that gives beauty to its readers. Moreover, in Foucauldian's perspective, literary works can be positioned as written documents involved in the historical process in which a discourse formation is constructed. Through techniques and strategies of narativization, puitisation, and dramatization in written statement forms, a writer constructs a discourse connected with other discourses in society. Similarly, Islamic literature is constructed and produced by the authors.

²³ Mulyono, "Apresiasi Sastra Islami di Indonesia," *Jurnal Lingua* Vol. 3, No. 2, (2008): 26-27.

The rise of Sexual Literature

The rise of sexual literature in the 2000s was co-authored by several female authors. carrying the flag of liberation of the sexual ideology. Some works determine sexuality as a must which should be exist. Without any presence of sexuality within a work, some of the female writers deemed themselves to losing power. However, there are also those who make sexuality a lifestyle and a demand which must be present in any literary work.

The sexual literature spearheaded by several female authors carrying the flag of liberation of the ideology of sexuality. I.e., Dinar Rahayu in her work Ode untuk Leopold Von Sacher Masoch (2002). Is a work that puts forward a strange theme and nuanced with sexuality, namely sadomasochism. Sadomasochism is derived from the Sacher-Masoch, a legend who once enjoyed sexual relationships by harming his sexual partners. Nova Rivanti Yusuf comes with a novel entittled Mahadewa Mahadewi (2003) The novel is divided into three parts of the story: "Sinner", "Healing Process", and "Return to Innocence". Describes a phenomenon of neurotic and psychotic disorders experienced by a professor of mathematics from Princeton University named John Forbes Nash who was diagnosed with schizophrenia as was narrated in Silvia Nazr's novel, "Beautiful Mind" (1998), Nova Ryanti Yusuf's novel is also thrilling for sexual vulgarly literary discourse. Stefani Hid in her literary work Bukan Saya, tapi Mereka yang Gila! (2004) a popular novel among several other novels in this article. This novel presents the story of heterosexual love with the age difference far adrift. The firstly famous Djenar Maesa Ayu in her work of a short stories Mereka Bilang, Saya Monyet! (2003), Nayla (2005) and Jangan Main-Main (dengan kelaminmu) (2004) also carries sexuality themes, sexual harassment, homosexual or lesbian relationships, and adultery. Saman which was published less than a month from Suharto's resignation contains a lawsuit against authoritarian rule, and religious demythology. The lawsuit against sex taboo in the novel is not just a porn story, as well as the presentation of the infidelity of the characters

in the Bible, not merely the demythology of religion, but is a representation of freedom ideology won by liberalism.²⁴

Operation and Mechanism of Islamic Literature Discourse

A number of the concepts to be explained are: (1) Knowledge Geneology (2) Exclusion (3) Discourse Restrictions (4) Discipline (5) Knowledge and Power (5) Power and Interest.

The Geneology of Knowledge

The concept of knowledge genealogy developed by Michel Foucault is related to the origin of a discourse with power. A discourse has its origins that relate to the truth production, thus it in turn to be an archeology, the archaeological knowledge on the origins of power being the "genealogy of knowledge". This is the concept developed by Foucault (1969), which later developed into one of the methodologies in the works of cultural studies.²⁵ ²⁶ Thus, genealogy is a theoretization puts forward by Michel Foucault, and is used to dismantle Islamic literary discourse. Genealogy may be articulated in the meaning of a discourse or archeology, thus the underlying Foucault's method lays on the understanding of power relations in archeology. Next to the archeology, it sought its origin called the geneology of knowledge, which is stored in discourse and is believed to be the true knowledge of society permanently called episteme in the Foucauldian concept (1969).

Exclusion

Describing the operation of exclusion functions. According to Foucault²⁷, first of all, the analysis is directed to how the separation between two things takes place in the texts under study or the operation of the prohibition system through language related to Islamic literature.

²⁴ Representasi Pertarungan Ideologi, 50

²⁵ Nanang Martono, "Dominasi Kekuasaan Dalam Pendidikan: Tesis Bourdieu dan Foucault tentang Pendidikan," *Jurnal Interaksi* Vol. 8 No.1 (2014): 36, http://www.academia.edu/36497466/DOMINASI_KEKUASAAN_DALAM_PENDIDIKAN_Tesis_Bourdieu_dan_Foucault_tentang_Pendidikan (accessed: Novem ber 24, 2018)

²⁶ Novella Parchiano, "Sejarah Pengetahuan Michel Foucault," in *Epistemologi Kiri*, Listiyono Santoso and Abd. Qodir Saleh (ed.) (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2015), 163.

²⁷ The Archeology of Knowledge....., 70

Two discourses in Indonesian literature that continue to be separated between Islamic and literary literature without the Islamic label.

Discourse Restrictions

Foucault establishes a mutual interrelationship between power and knowledge. For that reasons, knowledge becomes inseparable from the regime of power. Knowledge is formed within the spirit of power and it forms the development, improvement and proliferation of new techniques of power. The limitation and rejection of Islamic literature is a lot of vigorous and nuanced with ideological interests. This is as emphasized by Riannawati. A.A Navis says that Islamic literature is something utopian for the moment. Edy A Effendi concludes that the Islamic literature has always rejected due to the absence of aesthetics values (Media Indonesia, July 3rd, 2005), and Chavchay Syaifullah was confused about the aesthetics of Islamic literature and questioned what is Islamic literature (Media Indonesia, July 10, 2005). Aguk Irawan MN (Republika, November 23, 2003) wrote an article entitled Formulating the Concept of Islamic Literature which is from his writings is rejecting the Islamic literature.

Disciplining

Analysis on the influence of discourse with specific claims-medical, psychiatric, and sociological discourse, for example-to the set of actions and decisive discourses established by a punishment system.²⁹ The starting point and basic material of this analysis focuses on the psychiatric expertise study and its role in the penal system. In literature analysis, of course this method may be classified inclined towards easy and difficult. If it, however, returns to the fact that any discourse will affect the subject, then, we can see the discourse of discursive subjects in the narrative characters in the story. Both the

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282 I

²⁸ Riannawati, *Bahasa dan Sastra Kontekstual di Era Postliteracy* (Jakarta: UIN Jakarta Press, 2015), 234.

²⁹ Bahasa dan Sastra Kontekstual, 71.

main character and the supporting characters will certainly be in a series of stories that formulate certain discourses.

The Emergence of FLP as the Aesthetic Resistance against the Islamic Literature

The arising phenomenon of sexual literature and the difficulties of Islamic literature demanding the market, FLP then took the role, he tried to offer the discourse of Islamic literature to stem 'sexual literature'. According to Helvy, Islamic literature will never describe the physical relationship, the beauty of female's body or how 'beautiful' immoral, vulgar in the name of any art or literary genre. In addition it should not bring us to *tasyabuh bil kuffar*, let alone the level of polytheism. This community was established in the 2000s, they were born from educated Muslims, namely from the campus environment. The FLP literary community then tries to resist the domination of secular literature and the quality of literature. FLP literary community was founded by Helvy Tiana Rosa, Maimon Herawati, Asma Nadia, and others. The presence of an Islamic-style FLP is considered to be a contender for the existence of 'secular literature' this, as well as a refreshing counterweight. In the sexual literature and the difficulties of the existence of 'secular literature' this, as well as a refreshing counterweight.

Forum Lingkar Pena (FLP) is an Islamic-based authorship organization, engaged in all fields related to writers' authorship and empowerment. FLP was established on February 22, 1997 in Jakarta, initiated by Helvi Tiana Rosa, Asma Nadia, and Muthmainnah. FLP has a vision and mission. Their vision is to build Indonesia who love to read and write and build a network of qualified writers in Indonesia. FLP agreed to make writing as one of the people's enlightenment process. In addition to their mission, first to become a forum of writers and prospective writers, second, to improve the members' writing quality and productivity as a meaningful contribution to society; third, to build an objective and responsible image of the press. Fourth, to improve the culture of reading and writing, especially for young Indonesians; fifth, to become an organization directing new writers from various regions throughout Indonesia. By the institutional principle or motto, *Worship*,

³¹ Segenggam Gumam, 47.

³⁰ Helvy Tiana Rosa, *Segenggam Gumam* (Bandung: Syamil Cipta Mulia, 2003), 6.

Work, Meaning. In a relatively short time, Forum Lingkar Pena (FLP) extends its branches in almost 30 provinces and in abroad, there has been more than 5000 members, nearly 70% of the members are women. Of these, 500 of them are actively writing in various mass media. They are trying to build another 4500 FLP members to become writers as well. For twelve years since its foundation, the author's organization has published more than 500 books consisting mostly of serious literary works, juvenile fiction, and children's stories. No institution is sponsoring FLP.

Conclusion

The presence of an Islamic-oriented FLP is considered to be a contender for the existence of 'sexual literature', which up to the present has been used as entertaining literature. FLP is on the contrary to any literature that incline toward vulgarity or sexually exposed writings for what have been adapted by sastrawati Ayu and Djenar. The work of the two literatures breaks through the fence of Indonesian women's pronunciation culture which is faint during their own sexuality, both in the literary and societal realms. The theme and style of writing of Ayu and Djenar's works induces sensation and controversy, and is enhanced by its gender status as an Indonesian woman. FLP takes its own role, its existence attempts to offer a discourse about "Islamic literature" to stem 'the Sastra Wangi', this is as emphasized by the community founder. The work of Islamic Literature will never describe the physical relationship, the beauty of a female body or how 'beautiful' the immorality, vulgarity in the name of any art or literary genre. Additionally, it does not bring us to tasyabuh bil kuffar 'associate with infidelity', let alone the level of polytheism. Islamic literature will be born out of individuals who have a strong Islamic ruhiyah 'soul' and wide Islamic insight. Judgment whether the work can be literally called Islamic literature or not is not only seen on the work alone, but also from the author's personal sides, the making process to the impacts on society. Islamic literature for the author is a devotion which must be accounted for the people and God. Literature in the life of a Muslim or Muslim writer is part of his devotional worship.

It cannot be mapped in isolation. In its application, all themes, techniques and styles of storytelling may be raised in Islamic literary works. In fact, it is a mistake when a work is not processed and presented creatively to incarnate the khutbah. Aesthetic factors certainly are insparable. This means that a work may necessarily be deemed about Islam simply because it takes the setting in a pesantren 'Islamic cottage', exploring Islamic scholars or figures, and performing religious rituals or Sufism elements. The idea of Islamic literature is more than just a slogan or a symbol. The author, life, Islam and his work incarnate into single unity.

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