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Oxford University Press. pp. 261.

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ISBN 9780197765159.

Reviewer: *Mohamed Fouz Mohamed Zacky*

Zouhir Gabsi (2024). *Muslim Perspectives on
Islamophobia: From Misconceptions to Reason*.
Palgrave Macmillan.
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Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ، اِ، اُ	a		آ، عَ، يَ	an
وْ	u		وُ	un
يَ	i		يِ	in
آ، اَ، اِ، عَ، يَ	ā		وِ	aw
وْ	ū		يِ	ay
يِ	ī		وُ	uww, ū (in final position)
			يِ	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>

Power of Knowledge vs. Self-Knowledge Production: The Protagonist's Journey towards Embracing Islam in Umm Zakiyyah's *If I Should Speak*

Nadira Brioua*

Rahmah Binti Ahmad H. Osman**

Abstract: Islamophobia has been a frequently used concept by non-Muslims who claim to be afraid of Muslims. Islam is misperceived and misunderstood as an oppressive religion; however, Islam's message and teachings have affected a significant number of non-Muslims all around the world. Consequently, many such people have converted to Islam, particularly women. This study addresses the story of Umm Zakiyyah's *If I Should Speak* (2000). The story is about a Christian black American, Tamika Douglass, who was influenced by the media and her parents in prejudging and perceiving Islam. However, she started to change her perceptions of Islam after she had comprehensively studied the religion and consequently embraced Islam. This study aims to first analyse some essential terms such as power and (self)-knowledge, and then explore the influence of the media on Tamika's attitudes towards Islam. It also investigates how Tamika has become a Muslim after being influenced by Islamic teachings. This research adopts a qualitative research method. It applies a descriptive-theoretical analysis to shape a new understanding and interpretation of the literary text. The study finds that the power of media affects non-Muslims' attitudes negatively, resulting in prejudice and misunderstanding of the faith. The study recommends that self-Islamic knowledge is a key for non-Muslims to understand Islam. Knowledge of the Qur'an in particular is of great benefit

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for a convert to be guided on the right path. Such a Qur'anic influence could be seen in Umm Zakiyyah's novel.

Keywords: Islam, media, prejudice, power of knowledge, self-knowledge

Abstrak: Islamophobia telah menjadi konsep yang sering digunakan oleh orang bukan Islam yang mengaku takut kepada Islam. Islam dilihat dan dipromosikan sebagai agama yang menindas; namun, mesej dan ajaran Islam telah mempengaruhi sebilangan besar orang bukan Islam di seluruh dunia. Akibatnya, sebilangan besar orang seperti ini telah memeluk Islam, terutamanya wanita. Kajian ini membincangkan kisah *If I Should Speak* karya Ummu Zakiyyah (2000). Kisah ini adalah tentang seorang Kristian kulit hitam Amerika, Tamika Douglass, yang dipengaruhi oleh media dan ibu bapanya dalam menilai dan memahami Islam. Bagaimanapun, dia mula mengubah persepsi dan kepercayaannya terhadap Islam selepas dia mempelajari Islam secara menyeluruh. Akibatnya, dia memeluk Islam. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis terlebih dahulu beberapa istilah penting seperti kuasa dan (diri)-pengetahuan, kedua meneroka pengaruh media terhadap sikap Tamika terhadap Islam, dan ketiga menyiasat bagaimana Tamika telah menjadi seorang Muslim selepas dipengaruhi oleh pengetahuan Islam. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan kaedah kajian kualitatif. Ia menggunakan analisis deskriptif-teoretikal untuk membentuk pemahaman dan tafsiran baharu teks sastera. Kajian mendapati kuasa media mempengaruhi sikap bukan Islam secara negatif, mengakibatkan prasangka dan salah faham Islam. Kajian itu menyarankan agar ilmu keislaman diri adalah kunci untuk orang bukan Islam memahami Islam. Ilmu al-Quran khususnya amat besar manfaatnya bagi seorang mualaf untuk mendapat petunjuk ke jalan yang benar. Pengaruh al-Quran sebegini dapat dilihat dalam kisah Ummu Zakiyyah.

Kata kunci: Islam, Media, Prejudis, kekuatan ilmu dan pengetahuan diri

Introduction

Umm Zakiyyah's novel, *If I Should Speak*, came out in 2000 and received the Distinguished Authors Award at the Muslim Girls Unity Conference. The novel has been taught at different schools and universities in several countries such as Howard University and Indiana University in the US and Prince Sultan University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The novel is divided into eleven parts, arranged in chronological order, and narrates the journey of its protagonist, Tamika Douglass. The protagonist, being a racist Christian, shows much hatred towards Muslims. This is

because of the negative coverage of the media which manipulated her misunderstanding and wrong attitudes towards Islam. After studying about Islam extensively from authentic sources, she came to believe in its tenets and subsequently espouse the religion.

The novel addresses some essential issues such as Islamophobia, racism, identity, religion and Islamic teachings, particularly the message of the Holy Qur'an. The author, who clarifies how the media plays an essential role in shaping one's cultural knowledge, narrates Tamika Douglass' initial prejudices and assumptions against Islam and Muslims. Umm Zakiyyah ends the story with Tamika's change of attitude toward Islam. She explains how Tamika became a Muslim after having searched Islam, reciting the Qur'an and befriending Muslims. The study shows that self-knowledge has played a fundamental role in helping Tamika benefit from the community's belief system (media and assumptions) by changing cultural knowledge into self-knowledge.

This study adopts a descriptive analytical approach to investigate the power of self-knowledge in changing the protagonist's prejudicial attitudes toward Islam who eventually converted to the faith. The writer explains how Tamika's attitudes changed after she started to search for knowledge from different sources, which gradually brought her to the path.

Having conceptualised the novel, the writer plotted the story in her mind in line with the desired goals. Such aims indicate the themes and the general issues that the novel deals with. Other objectives concerning the writer's inferred meanings should not be neglected since they imply Islamophobia, racism, media propaganda and cultural knowledge about Islam. Such inferred utterances and meanings extracted from the selected texts are the main focus of the present study. Thus, this research investigates the power of media in shaping and influencing the cultural knowledge of non-Muslim communities about Islam and Muslims, and demonstrates how individual self-knowledge of a Christian Black American, Tamika, changes her unfavourable views of Islam to glowing and affirmative ones.

The authors of this article have narrowed down their discursive focus in the piece to shed light only on the cultural knowledge of the mainstream American community concerning hijab, jihad and oppression of Muslim women.

Literature Review

There are some critical studies available on the novel. *Asiatic*, in its fifth volume (2011), published an article on *If I Should Speak*, authored by Raihanah M. M., Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Noraini Md Yusof. The title of this article is “The Road Not Taken: Shedding Xenophobia, Embracing the Other in Umm Zakiyyah’s *If I Should Speak*.” The study discussed the novel from a minority viewpoint. They explain the issues of stereotypes and prejudices based on Du Bois’ *Of Our Spiritual Strivings* as represented through the protagonist Tamika Douglass. Raihanah, Hashim and Yusof, having studied Tamika’s prejudicial attitudes towards Muslims generally, have emphasised that Tamika, as an African-American experiences a sense of ‘Othering’ after her white roommate is targeted by a racist incident. Due to her “identity,” Tamika has faced many multi-cultural and multi-religious issues. The authors were inspired by Robert Frost’s well-renowned poem, “The Road Not Taken” (1920). They explain that in “*If I Should Speak*,” Umm Zakiyyah picks up on both the road metaphor and the minority issue by problematising the minority experience through the creation of a compounded sense of being the other in race, religion and gender” (2011, p. 48). The authors argue that Umm Zakiyyah demonstrates some cases of xenophobia and war politics taking place within minority communities where there are misunderstandings and misrecognitions between individuals belonging to multi-religious societies. This study focuses on how others could embrace Islam and become religious after they are not influenced by media manipulation.

In her article, “Islamic Da’wah Through American Novel: A Study of Sociology of Literature in Umm Zakiyyah’s *If I Should Speak*,” Bondan Eko Suratno (2015) discusses the novel from a socio-religious perspective concerning Islamic *da’wah* [call for faith]. The novel pays special attention to how *da’wah* is addressed throughout the literature stated in the novel. The novel also addresses the topic of *jihād* that has been introduced by Umm Zakiyyah. According to Suratno, Umm Zakiyyah has firstly, introduced Islam in the novel, and secondly, explained how the West perceives Islam. Suratno’s study argues that non-Muslims’ prejudice against Islam has led to very serious problems, one of which is Western’s stereotyping of Islam based on their misperception of *jihād*. For this very reason, the present study claims that one’s self-knowledge and learning is a key for understanding the true teachings of Islam and

for correcting negative ideas about Islam. The article seeks to show that non-Muslims are capable of perceiving Islam positively. Thus, it refers to ‘the protagonist’s journey’ to emphasise the significant role of self-knowledge in putting an end to western’s prejudices against Islam.

Finally, in “Postcolonialism, Islamophobia and Inserting Islamic Facts in African-American Fiction: Umm Zakiyyah’s *If I Should Speak*” (2021), Nadira Brioua highlights Umm Zakiyyah’s narrative about the truth of Islam in line with the original sources of Islam: Qur’an and the Sunnah. The article analyses how Umm Zakiyyah reconsidered the truth of Islam after having unequivocally understood the true meanings and goals of jihad, prophecy on women’s issues and rights and the reality of Jesus in Islam. It finds that Umm Zakiyyah narrates Islam and Muslims to counter the West’s negative views about Islam and emphasise the power of Muslims’ self-identity enhanced by self-knowledge and cultivation in line with the teachings of the Holy Qur’an and Hadith. Such knowledge led Tamika Douglass to convert to Islam.

Theoretical Accounts

Postcolonialism

The present study uses Postcolonial Theory as a framework emphasising the postcolonial concepts of power, knowledge and self-knowledge. These concepts are discussed and analysed from a postcolonial perspective in line with the narrative themes: media, prejudice and conversion. The influence of media has significantly contributed to the Westerners’ misperception and misunderstanding of Islam. This has resulted in creating prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. Nevertheless, one’s own perception could be changed if one reads the Islamic literature critically, as in the case of Tamika, the novel’s protagonist.

Postcolonialism is a movement against colonialism. This movement, which had different goals, is led by theorists, scholars, writers and novelists. The movement has addressed some essential issues such as slavery, racial and cultural discrimination, displacement, emigration, resistance, representation, difference and otherness, and gender. Postcolonialism could be defined as “a process of regaining control over colonised/independent people through sifting their cultures, identities and beliefs in order to get rid of the Western cultural invasion”

(Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 12). Robert J. C. Young (2003) explains that “postcolonialism offers you a way of seeing things differently, a language and a politics in which your interests come first, not last” (p. 2). Based on Young’s statement, we as Muslims belonging to the Global South should define ourselves differently from the Global North to maintain our sense of belonging and separate identity. Similarly, postcolonial literature often reflects the cultures, beliefs, languages, traditions and beliefs of the “Third/Muslim World.” It generally studies the effects of colonialism on societies and cultures. It means that postcolonialism shows cultural colonisation by the colonisers’ strategies in othering others and spreading their culture over the world.

Being powerful through knowledge and discourse, the West has spread its culture throughout the Third World. In this context, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1998) emphasise “... the system of knowledge and beliefs about the world within which acts of colonisation take place” (p. 42). They went on arguing that knowledge as a concept is generated by the understanding of “those who have power and control of what is known and the way it is known, and those who have such knowledge have power over those who do not” (p. 72).

In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said emphasised the relationship between power/hegemony and knowledge: “How does one know the “things that exist,” and to what extent are the “things that exist” constituted by the knower? This is left moot, as the new value-free apprehension of the Orient as something that exists is institutionalised in area-studies programs” (p. 300). Said paid attention to the Western knowledge production that “presents the Oriental as “fixed,” “stable,” “in need of investigation, in need even of knowledge about himself. No dialectic is either desired or allowed” (1978, p. 308). So, based on his view, there is a relationship between knowledge and formulation of the binary of the “West” and the “Rest”; the “Self” and the “Other”; the “Powerful” and the “Weak”; and the “non-Muslim Speaker” and the “Muslim Silent” who cannot speak, or in other words, who has been enforced to remain voiceless. In this context, “the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 89).

With regards to Islam, the strategy of “othering” explains the West’s thirst for control, imperialism and power by intellectually and culturally

invading the Muslim World. The creation of the *East* and the *West* as two separate entities is another strategy to create anti-bilateral relationship to dominate the East and to cover the Muslim World. Within this framework, Said highlights that the intellectual and cultural division between the West and the Muslim World is a mirage that was created by the West. He stresses that “knowledge and coverage of the Islamic World are defined in the United States by geopolitics and economic interests on – for the individual – an impossibly massive scale, aided and abetted by a structure of knowledge production that is almost as vast and unmanageable” (1978, p. 154).

In “Islam through Western Eyes,” Edward Said confirms that “the Westerners know nothing about Islamic civilisation, history, and culture. They ignore the great Muslim writers, intellectuals or musicians because Islam is portrayed to the Westerners only in the image that fits the West’s agenda as a new style of imperialism without colonies” (1980, p. 7). One of the West’s goals for intellectual production is to prove the negativity and uselessness of Muslims’ intellectual knowledge. The main aim of this is to create non-Muslims’ prejudicial stereotypes.

Intellectual production has spread through various means, including social media. In this context, Thomas Sealy (2017) states that “If we accept that media coverage is an important source of cultural knowledge production, then even this broad framing of Muslim converts is likely to have a strong impact on how they are perceived in society more widely” (p. 4). Said also speaks about the role of media in his book, *Covering Islam* (1981). He considers media as a tool of power to take over the Muslim World and to defame the image of Islam. Media, which portrays Islam as a religion of ‘terrorism,’ associates Islam with violence and fundamentalism. Such a fabrication is used as a ‘pretext’ to declare the “War on Terror.” As such, Said wrote that, “He [Grunebaum] has no difficulty presuming that Islam is a unitary phenomenon, unlike any other religion or civilisation, and thereafter he shows it to be antihuman, incapable of development, self-knowledge, or objectivity, as well as uncreative, unscientific, and authoritarian” (1978, p. 296). Indeed, the Western media overtly promotes the policy of ‘othering’ Islam. Akbar S Ahmad (1992) emphasises “nothing in history has threatened Muslims like the Western media” (p. 223). In *Is Objective Reporting on Islam Possible? Contextualising the Demon*, Syed Farid Alatas (2005) explores the relation between Islam and power. According to

Alatas, Islamic civilisation succeeded earlier in extending its power, control and influence like the Ottoman Empire, but today, the West is the dominant civilisation in both economic and cultural spheres. The threat of hostility towards Islam is deeply rooted in the West based on experiences of past encounters.

Likewise, in *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror* (2009), Hamid Dabashi emphasises that Orientalists' knowledge about Islam and Muslims reflects their hegemonic desire, and that the colonised (Muslims in general) should resist this Western hegemony. Edward Said states that Dabashi associates the mode of oriental knowledge with the production of colonialism. Dabashi (2009) adds that "the origin and function of this mode of knowledge are compatible with the imperial imaginary they serve, for the problem of knowledge production in an age of empire will have to begin with the political provenance of that empire, the U.S. empire, and the postmodern predicament of its illusion of sovereignty, legitimacy, and authority."

Muslim Writers, Novelists and Islam

To elaborate the truth of Islam, some astonishing Muslim writers use knowledge as a weapon to refute the West's perceptions and misunderstanding and perceive Islam as a powerful system with an impact on power relations. They enhance the acceptance of the "other" by representing the rest's cultures in terms of alterity/otherness and represent Islam differently from the way the Western media or writers do. For example, Malak quotes a statement by an early South Asian feminist writer, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "Our religion is based on Love and Truth. It is our religious duty to love one another and to be absolutely truthful" (2005, p. 30). Hossain, here, wants to show the peaceful and true Islam which calls for a sense of love, acceptance and tolerance between all people for correcting the misunderstanding and stereotypes that show Islam as a violent religion.

Muslim writers and novelists have formed an intellectual writing style that has enriched contemporary critical thinking. Among these writers, we find: Ahmed Ali's landmark work *Twilight in Delhi* and is now an established literary tradition, a recognised and respected one at that, popularly and academically. One could point out several prominent works: in 1981, Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* received the Booker Prize; in 1994, M.G. Vassanji's novel *The Book of*

Secrets received the prestigious Giller Award in Canada; and in 1995, Bangladeshi-Australian Adib Khan's novel *Seasonal Adjustments* received the Commonwealth First Novel Prize, with the awarding committee praising it for "provid[ing] a Muslim voice to Australia's multicultural literature" (Chimo 40). Moreover, both Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* were shortlisted for the Booker in 1994 and 1999, respectively. Amin Malak (2005) states that: "These writers have taken up a daunting linguistic, aesthetic, and intellectual challenge and have given voice, with varying degrees of clarity and commitment, to the erstwhile unrepresented, underrepresented, or misrepresented Muslims." (p. 12). They proposed some methods to understand and interpret the text (particularly the literary one) in different ways. As for fiction, many Muslim writers have addressed the issue of post-colonial Muslim identity. For instance, Umm Zakiyyah, in her novel, contributes successfully to Islamic postcolonialism. She uses the counter-narratives by narrating the change of Islam and Muslims' issues in order to refute and criticise the colonial discourse that usually misrepresents Islam and Muslims from an Islamic perspective. One of these controversial issues that the writer attempts to defend is 'hijab,' which not as the West claims as a kind of oppression, reflects the identity of a Muslim woman.

Umm Zakiyyah's *If I Should Speak*

In "*If I Should Speak*," Umm Zakiyyah addresses different topics related to Muslims, the most important of which are Islamophobia and misunderstanding of Islam. She portrays the media as an evil means used to convey false information and unconstructive knowledge and demonstrates the process of knowledge transformation that the convert protagonist had experienced. She demonstrates how cognitive reconciliation led Tamika Douglass, one of the characters, to search for truth, change her negative attitudes and prejudices towards Islam and eventually become a convinced Muslim.

In *If I Should Speak*, Umm Zakiyyah reports how Muslims are subjected to prejudices and stereotypes promoted and incited by the media in America. She demonstrates how non-Muslim characters show prejudicial attitudes toward their Muslim counterparts, which is a result of media influence. Tamika's experience of having prejudicial attitudes against Islam reflects how Western media prejudices Islam and Muslims.

Tamika's feedback on Islam is expressed in Umm Zakiyyah's words: "She did not know much about Muslims aside from what the media portrayed of angry Black nationalists, religious fundamentalist men, and oppressed women" (p. 37). Muslims in America are a "secondary minority group;" therefore, Tamika knew little about them for they "were not a significant part of her life" (p. 123), and for all she knows is that Muslims will go to Hell (Ibid).

Having moved to the campus, Tamika met her new Muslim roommates, Aminah Ali and Durrah Gonzalez. Knowing that her roommates are Muslims, "her heart sank at the news, feeling a sense of xenophobia and anxiety about living with them even with knowing little of them, but "enough to know she didn't want one as a roommate," Aminah Ali, the religious one (p.5). Tamika's reaction can be explained in line with Thomas Sealy's view: "Muslims are likely to feature in abuse and prejudice and [bad] "news" (2017, p. 1). The narrator says, "She had heard a lot about Muslims and how strict they were, and she was not sure she would get along with Aminah at all, religion major or not" (p. 30).

Despite Tamika being a religious person using Islam as her research topic, she initially did not want to befriend Aminah who was very knowledgeable about Islam. In fact, Tamika has heard a lot about Muslims and "how strict [about religious practices] they were" (p. 30). She is not the type of person who often exaggerates her knowledge of others she does not know. She is different with her Muslim roommates for she has only known of Muslims from the media portraying them as "angry Black nationalists," "religious fundamentalist men" and "oppressed women" (p. 37). Tamika's attitudes can be defined as "'parallel barriers of prejudice' that involve 'a desire of many Western Europeans to hold Muslims at a distance'" (Stoica, 2013, p. 24).

Tamika views Aminah as 'strict and oppressed.' strict for being devoted believer and oppressed for daily wearing of hijab. Misrepresentation of hijab develops Tamika's wrong perceptions that led to her to stereotype Islam and Muslims. Tamika considers hijab as a means of oppression practiced by Muslim men over Muslim women. Tamika's stereotypical attitudes here can be explained within Karin van Nieuwkerk's view: "Lack of knowledge of Muslim women's home-

grown historical and contemporary feminisms reinforces stereotyping of Islam by others as well as self-stereotyping practices” (2006, p. 199).

However, Tamika’s attitude towards Aminah gradually begins to change. Tamika cries involuntarily while she listens to Aminah’s reciting the Qur’an and begins to understand her spiritual strength, finding “herself empathising with whatever Aminah was feeling at that moment, sensing tears forming in her own eyes” (p. 35). Tamika sees why prayer is important to Aminah and Dee when she hears Aminah recites “strange words” from a “green book” [the Qur’an] and becomes more curious to understand the meaning of those strange but powerful words. In fact Islamic prayer raised a million questions in Tamika’s mind.

In addition to Aminah’s different view of perceiving Islam, Dr. Sanders, the religious professor, encourages Tamika to study Islam. He told her “I started reading about other religions, and it really opened my eyes. It made me realise there was something else out there. As a teenager, I never knew that others even had any real beliefs. I had thought of the people of the world as belonging to either one of two groups” (p. 38). His words helped her to end religious prejudice. Tamika believes that God creates people differently with different religions, beliefs, races, as well as roots, and sends different messengers to guide them to the truth but does not know that Islam is God’s religion with a message of peace to all people.

Tamika reconsiders her perceptions and attitudes about Islam due to her parents’ unanswered questions concerning Christianity. She blindly followed her parents’ Christianity as God’s true religion, which they believe is right, while all others are wrong (p. 73). According to Althusser (1984), “ideology is not just a case of the powerful imposing their ideas on the weak: subjects are ‘born into’ ideology, they find subjectivity within the expectations of their parents and their society, and they endorse it because it provides a sense of identity and security through structures such as language, social codes and conventions” (p. 37). When Tamika asks her best friend, Makisha, her parents and the preacher for her evidence, they reply, “We are only here to believe” (p. 71). Makisha’s belief reflects the words of Daniela Stoica, “In addition, since the power to act in specific ways, to claim resources, to exert control or to be the object of control depends on the dominant types of

knowledge available in a specific society, knowledge and power emerge in interconnected forms” (p. 118).

Tamika’s burning desire for the truth encouraged her to write down her first ‘paper’ on Islam and told Dr. Sanders: “I guess I’ll just do it on Islam” (p. 36). It was ‘curiosity’ that led Tamika to read about Islam as she believes that all of what she knows about Islam and Muslims “is nothing like Aminah appeared” (p. 37). She wanted to learn about Islam and started to recite the Qur’an. She further engage in a discussion with Aminah about some topics related to Islamic teachings, about what Islam is and how to become a Muslim, and read about different matters such as hijab, jihad, prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and women’s issues.

Being the first authentic source of Islam, Tamika starts learning and understanding the Qur’an. Karin van Nieuwkerk (2006) writes “Since apprehending Islam as a rational religion was important to the women to continue their search for knowledge, which typically began with reading the Qur’an as the ultimate authority” (p. 205). Having understood the exegesis of the Qur’an, Tamika comes to the truth that Jesus is not God’s son but like other messengers sent by God to guide people to His path. Eventually, Tamika believes that Muhammad (PBUH) was the last and final messenger sent to the whole world regardless of their races, cultures, beliefs and traditions. Umm Zakiyyah writes “we have only to apply what has been taught to us by Allah through our Prophet. The West has to learn to accept that there is only One God, even for Christians. Civilisation is only in the state of *ubudiyyah* (servitude) to Allah; this is the same for everybody” (p. 142). Furthermore, Tamika recognises the essence of Islam and the meaning of becoming a Muslim.

Having had regular dialogues with Aminah, Tamika has remarkably some pivotal Islamic issues. This dialogue is commented on by Sylvie Avakian’s statement that “It assumes the signification of the relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘Other’” (2015, p. 83). Some of Tamika’s misrepresentations due to the media’s influence are clarified by Aminah and she now understands Islam as a whole (its teachings and practices). She learned about Aminah’s perception of hijab, jihad and that Islam respects and protects women rights in general and particularly in respect with marriage, inheritance and freedom of participation and speech within the scope of Sharia. To seek the truth of Islam, Aminah’s help made her understand the Muslim society from inside. Tamika’s experience

fits Duncan Black Macdonald's method of "understanding the other from within." This helped Tamika to remove all suspicions about Islam and Muslims, and answer all the questions reasonably, rationally and convincingly. In this context, Daniela Stoica stated that "the acquisition of new knowledge perspectives and cognitive reconciliation are also reflected in the researchers' discourses that describe the Islamic message as 'logical' and 'simple,' and acknowledge the monotheistic dimension of Islam by contrasting it with their previous religious affiliation" (p. 112).

It is noteworthy to mention that Umm Zakiyyah draws attention to Tamika's prejudgment of jihad as a concept affiliated with terrorism and violence. Previously, and because of the media manipulation of facts, Tamika believed that jihad was a term denoting "terrorism which is done in the name of God" (p. 110) and that jihad and terrorism are interchangeable terms. Such a belief is obvious in Tamika's statement that "I could understand obeying a man and covering her body, but she did not support terrorism, even if done in the name of God" (p. 110). Md. Mahmudul Hasan explains how media manipulates and distorts some Islamic concepts and states "[jihad] is one of the most significant [instances] of linguistic colonialism" (2014, p. 9). Having done her research, Tamika now believes that jihad should not be affiliated with terrorism; it is a means of self-defense when Muslims are oppressed and persecuted (Marranci, 2006).

In her journey of writing a paper on Islam, she decided to visit a mosque as a place of worship and her unawareness of 'others' (Muslim) is apparent in her statement that "as if I were in another country." Her experience and trial of knowing others could be expressed in Gabriele Marranci's words "knowledge comes from different sources, social and non-social, which in any case are external to the organism. The human being needs to receive information from the environment" (2006, p. 17). Shocked with a surprise, at the mosque, Tamika watches Muslims passionately talking and smiling to one another. "Some women stopped to shake her hand, hug her, and say, "'As-salaamu-alaikum'" (p. 126). Umm Zakiyyah reports that Tamika has experienced estrangement and describes her feeling with this statement: "she felt awkward, out of place with each embrace, unfamiliar with such friendly contact between strangers" (p. 126). Despite such an 'estrangement,' Tamika admires the spirit of sisterhood between Muslim women and the vigorous

bond of unity which is described in the way “they stood shoulder-to-shoulder, foot-to-foot” (p. 126). She hardly believes how these people with different ages and belonging to different races and nationalities gather in one place to worship One God. Umm Zakiyyah states that “She [Tamika] was inspired by the sermon, even as she admired the prayers’ unity” (p. 128). Tanya Gulevich lay emphasis on such a sense of peace at a mosque, stating that “Muslim architects designed magnificent mosques evoking the peace and transcendence of God and inspiring worshippers to humility and reverence” (2004, p. 90).

As self-educator and knowledge-seeker, Tamika has become very close to the ‘truth’ about Islam and Muslims. This has made her reconsider ‘others’ as well as her attitude and perception. She previously considered Muslim women oppressed for they wear hijab, and weak because they are dependent on men, and now being aware of her false prejudgment and stereotyping of Islam, she changed her approaches. Stuart Hall (1983) states that “the true knowledge without masking always leads to the recognition of the real” (p. 128). Such a change took place right away after Tamika mingled with Muslims especially Aminah whose personality she is very much amazed by, and she would never thought of her being outspoken and strong-minded. Umm Zakiyyah writes that “Aminah’s appearance gave the impression that she was quiet and soft spoken” (p. 113). Tamika is very surprised, as well, that Aminah is such a pleasant woman with a sense of humour. When Tamika watches and listens to a “white woman and a Cuban woman sitting in a room with their families, reminiscing on their lives, their lives before Islam” (p. 131), she could not believe what she has witnessed since she thought of a Muslim woman to be ‘oppressed’ and ‘persecuted’ by man. She is even shocked to see Muslim women speaking, laughing, wearing beautiful clothes and ‘having fun.’ She was equally shocked by Aminah’s mother, Sarah, with “white skin,” “fair hair” and “green eyes” and could not believe that Sarah is the one whom she had seen wearing all black outside. Tamika now understands that Muslim women wearing hijab are not oppressed, that, they wear hijab to emphasise on their identity as Muslims who should be pious and modest. She blamed herself for misconceiving and misjudging Muslim women and now reconsidered her attitudes against Muslim women as “average women” and “regular people,” realising that “They were not oppressed. They were not even introverts. Rather, they were opinionated, strong women,

who loved who they were and what they had chosen. No one had forced them into anything. No one had asked them to cover, told them they had to. They had simply done it, because God wanted them to.” (p131)

Tamika’s experience reflects Elizabeth Warnock Fernea’s recognition of how the West unfairly misrepresents and portrays Muslim women’s lives in Islam. She argues that “and so I set out, and over two years of traveling, discovered that the realities of Muslim women’s lives today have far surpassed the discourse about those lives with which we have been presented in the West” (1998, p. ix). Tamika has reconsidered her views and attitudes and “her stereotypes were swept away like dust after a brisk wind, removing all doubts from her mind as to what she should do” (p.132). Eventually, she has recognised that she has been unaware and ignorant about ‘others/Muslims.’ Previously, Tamika as a black woman had suffered from ‘ prejudices’ from her white ex-roommate, Jennifer. Now, she considers herself as a racist Christian labelling Muslims as “others.” Ultimately, she has learned that “other religions could be attacked at the base, but no one, even the most scholarly of ‘Islam’s enemies,’ had been able to attack the foundation of the religion, the pure worship of God” (p. 28). Her prejudices against Muslims are very similar to Jennifer’s who mistreated her due to her different skin color. “She now understood what it meant to be racist like Jennifer, a White person who had carelessly flung a filthy, racist word at her, tearing at her heart? No. But it was possible; definitely possible that she had viewed Muslims the way Jennifer had viewed her.”

Having learned about the ‘true Islam,’ Tamika has realised that she was a racist herself. She even starts to reconsider her religion and search for the truth of who Jesus is. Besides, she has questioned other beliefs that she has inherited from her family without knowledge. Daniela Stoica points out that “Once individuals discover Islamic knowledge, they reconsider their core assumptions concerning the nature of reality, truth, and knowledge, as well as their representations of the world and their role inside it. While they evolve as believers, they change their perspectives on religious knowledge and faith” (p. 109). She realised that she knows nothing about Christianity.

Consequently, Tamika starts first doubting her Christian beliefs, and second finding answers to her questions. She studied Christianity and shared her doubts with her friend, Makisha, who advises her to

believe in what her parents taught her and to not listen to her Muslims roommate(s) who try to convince her that 'Christianity' is controversial and telling her: "just remember that we ain't here to question God, we're just here to believe" (p. 43). Her words "just to believe" do not make sense to Tamika who has become more suspicious of Christianity. In this regard, Aminah emphasises that "people don't actually submit because of various reasons, like pride, fear, or weakness, or because they don't want to be ostracised by their family or friends, and so on. But for many others, they just want to hold on to the religion of their parents" (p. 59). In fact, Tamika has realised that her parents are influenced by the media in conceiving, Islam which has led them to have different stereotypes against Muslims; and that Makisha's parents influence made her blindly and unquestionably believe in 'Christianity.'

Tamika's ignorance can be further elaborated in Miller's words (1990) that "The peasant's destiny will be revealed to [her] by the leader [parents], in a relation of active to 'passive,' literate to 'illiterate,' progress to tradition, knowledge to 'ignorance'" (p. 44). Tamika has become more and more doubtful because of the discrepancies between the Pastor's answers and what she used to hear from her mother.

Umm Zakiyyah reconsiders Tamika's situation, stating that "Tamika concluded that she had believed in Christianity only because it was all she had been taught. And if that was a sufficient reason to 'just believe,' then how could Tamika believe her religion was right and others wrong, given that everyone was taught something, and, for many, it was not Christianity? So should they too 'just believe' because it had been taught to them by their parents and community? It made no sense. Certainly, there had to be more to truth than 'just believing without questioning'" (p. 73). This indicates the fact that knowledge plays an essential role in transforming one's prejudicial attitudes and false perceptions, and is a key for one to understand the truth and embrace Islam. Daniela Stoica states that "Islamic knowledge as actively embodied via devotional activities that contribute to the growth of Islamic subjectivities or the (re)activation of these women's real Islamic selves and simple religion based on a single truth. This is made up of Islamic truth and its monotheistic message" (p. 126).

Tamika's self-awareness has become stronger for her "feeling shamefully bare, stripped of her beliefs of herself" (p. 95). Tamika

has been wondering why the Bible has gone into a constant process of change since it is God's own words; while, the Holy Qur'an has never been altered or changed preserving its 'original source of truth, revelation and knowledge.' Karin van Nieuwkerk states that "Islam is a natural, social, and complete way of life. It is a rational, scientific and logical religion, and this makes it the most convincing religion as compared to the other monotheistic options" (2006, p. 107).

The end of the novel reveals that Tamika has become a Muslim and her conversion can be read in Yazbeck Haddad's words: "acceptance of Islam as an individual journey from confusion to peace, from conflict to resolution, from drift to coherence, from emptiness to fulfillment" (2006, p. 42). When presenting her paper, Tamika shows up in hijab and announces her conversion to Islam. She calls her teachers and fellow classmates to re-consider and understand Islam from its original sources 'the Holy Qur'an and Hadith' saying "As we can see, Islam, the fastest growing religion in the world, is a holistic religion, its teachings affecting every aspect of the Muslim's life. Its roots reach back as far as Adam, and given its followers' strict adherence to its original teachings, it holds an authenticity that no other religion can rightfully claim. History shows that other religions have changed tremendously, their teachings having been adapted and compromised over time. And although, as we saw earlier, some heretical groups of Muslims seek to adapt the religion, Islam is the only religion that remains in its orthodox form. The teachings of Islam are profound and its message convincing, which is why I chose the religion for myself" (p. 192)

Overall, Tamika's overview of Islam can be summed up in three words: original, authentic and convincing. She recognised that she was ignorant and that she judged Islam without 'true knowledge.' However, she converted to Islam after having realised the truth. In this regard, Anthony C. Alessandrini states that "it was not only about asking the other to recognise his fault, for him to ask for forgiveness, to pay a compensation, but also for oneself about finding another access to recognition, which was through knowledge" (p. 270).

Having been closed to Muslims and studied Islam from its original sources, Tamika has realised that her being Islamophobic is unjustifiable. Umm Zakiyyah stresses that the Western media can be extremely hostile and prejudicial towards Muslims. In addition, Umm Zakiyyah refers

to Tamika's conversion to Islam by emphasising that non-Muslims' prejudicial attitudes toward Islam could change if they come to know about Islam from the 'original sources.' i.e. the Holy Qur'an and Hadith, as well as an unbiased media. To understand 'history-based fact,' Umm Zakiyyah emphasises the importance of religion-based dialogues. In sum, one's self-knowledge is a powerful tool to find the truth.

Tamika's interaction and mingling with Aminah in particular and Muslims in general, has led her to reconsider her prejudgments and stereotypes. In reference to Tamika's experience of giving up prejudicing and stereotyping Muslims, Umm Zakiyyah emphasises that self-knowledge and constructive dialogue are very important for "Westerns" to seek the truth, which helps them to co-exist with Muslims. In this regard, Tariq Ramadan emphasises that "dialogue is an act of conviction, of listening, of self-awareness, of self-knowledge, and the heart: together, these qualities constitute wisdom" (2004, p. 204).

Conclusion

In *If I Should Speak*, through the journey of Tamika from prejudging Islam to embracing it, Umm Zakiyyah reflects the power of knowledge that makes Tamika change her negative stereotypical prejudgments towards Islam and Muslims. Tamika's journey of being a Christian to eventually embrace Islam emphasises the role of self-knowledge in seeking the 'truth.' In other words, 'Westerners' should give up believing in what the media says about Islam, rather, they should be self-educators. They should rely on self-knowledge and cultivation, and refer to the original sources of Islam: the Holy Qur'an and Hadith.

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(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

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The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

Ḥadīth

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(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

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