

# AL-DA'IM

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## PENGANTAR EDITOR

Puji syukur ke hadirat Allah SWT atas limpahan rahmat-Nya sehingga Jurnal Manajemen Dakwah (Jurnal MD) Volume 3 Nomor 2 Tahun 2017 ini dapat diterbitkan. Sejak edisi sebelumnya Jurnal MD telah mengalami beberapa perubahan baik pada struktur tim editor, layout, serta kelengkapan tampilan dengan tujuan peningkatan kualitas jurnal. Pada edisi ini, Jurnal MD tersusun dari tujuh manuskrip hasil penelitian lapangan dan literer dari para penulis yang berasal dari beberapa perguruan tinggi baik dalam maupun luar negeri. Sebagai Jurnal yang mengkaji tentang manajemen dakwah (kombinasi ilmu dakwah dan manajemen), maka konten dari Jurnal MD edisi ini akan dimulai dari ilmu dakwah yang bersifat doktrinal.

Pada manuskrip yang pertama, Sawyer M. French dari The George Washington University mengemukakan bahwa dalam konteks budaya dan politik Amerika, dakwah yang terlalu vulgar akan menjadi kontraproduktif sehingga memerlukan analisis sosial budaya yang sesuai dan adaptif. Hal tersebut sesuai dengan hasil penelitian manuskrip kedua dari Cintami Fatmawati dari IAIN Pekalongan yang menjelaskan bahwa seorang pendakwah harus memiliki kepribadian yang baik dan gaya yang adaptif sehingga dapat memacu kesadaran mad'u untuk mencapai tujuan dakwah yang optimal. Setelah membahas dakwah yang bersifat doktrinal, maka selanjutnya jurnal ini beralih membahas dakwah yang lebih menekankan pada transformasi sosial umat.

Manuskrip ketiga karya Retnayu Prasetyanti dari STIA Lembaga Administrasi Negara Jakarta dan Dodi Faedlulloh dari Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Jakarta menjelaskan bahwa jabatan telah menjadi komoditas yang selalu diperebutkan oleh manusia meski esensinya adalah amanah untuk melayani rakyat atau umat. Oleh karena itu manajemen pelayanan publik harus didasarkan pada semangat ketulusan dan religiusitas. Dakwah transformatif tidak hanya pada tataran birokrasi, tapi juga mencakup di sektor ekonomi. Manuskrip keempat karya Netta Agusti dari IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang mengemukakan bahwa asuransi syariah (takaful) mampu menetralsisir pertentangan konsep yang ada pada asuransi konvensional dimana risiko ditanggung oleh seluruh peserta asuransi dan hal ini menjadi ciri khas asuransi syariah.

Dakwah transformatif di berbagai lini kehidupan tersebut tentu tidak akan berjalan mulus tanpa disertai sumber daya manusia yang berkualitas dan motivasi kerja yang tinggi. Hal tersebut senada dengan manuskrip kelima dalam jurnal ini karya Andhika Wahyudiono dari Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Banyuwangi yang menyatakan bahwa di Kecamatan Wongsorejo Banyuwangi, sumber daya manusia dan motivasi kerja berpengaruh signifikan terhadap dinamika kinerja baik secara parsial maupun simultan. Hal senada juga menjadi temuan utama manuskrip keenam karya Mukhamad Taufiq Setiawan dari Universitas Brawijaya Malang yang mengemukakan bahwa *tacit knowledge* dan *explicit knowledge* berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kinerja karyawan dan kebijakan dalam pemberian kompensasi di Hotel Zam Zam Kota Batu.

Kajian-kajian pada manuskrip pertama sampai keenam adalah suatu ikhtiar dalam upaya menganalisa problem-problem manajemen dakwah kontemporer. Salah satu tujuan akademisnya adalah sebagai landasan dalam pengembangan kurikulum manajemen dakwah. Sebagaimana manuskrip terakhir dalam jurnal ini yang ditulis oleh M. Rosyid Ridla, Bayu Mitra A. Kusuma, dan Munif Solikhan dari UIN Sunan Kalijaga yang mengemukakan bahwa untuk menghasilkan alumni yang berkompeten, salah satu strategi yang perlu dikedepankan adalah *mainstreaming* jurnal ilmiah karena saat ini menjadi poin yang sangat vital dalam menjaga kredibilitas institusi.

Pada penyajian tujuh manuskrip tersebut, redaksi menyadari bahwa masih terdapat berbagai ketidaksempurnaan ataupun kesalahan, sehingga saran dan kritik yang membangun sangat diharapkan untuk perbaikan dan penyempurnaan jurnal ini ke depannya. Akhirnya redaksi mengucapkan banyak terima kasih atas sumbangan hasil penelitian dari semua pihak yang turut berpartisipasi dalam penerbitan edisi ini. Redaksi juga mengapresiasi kepercayaan yang telah diberikan kepada Jurnal MD sebagai media publikasi ilmiah yang didedikasikan untuk pengembangan profesionalisme keilmuan manajemen dakwah. Selamat membaca.

Yogyakarta, Desember 2017

Atas Nama Tim Redaksi

Bayu Mitra A. Kusuma

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# REFLECTIONS ON AN AMERICAN'S JOURNEY TO ISLAM: A SOCIO CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF DA'WAH METHODOLOGY\*

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## Abstract

*Da'wah among non-Muslims as a practice necessitates the development of cross-cultural understanding. Attempts to draw non-Muslims towards Islam will be largely fruitless without taking into account strategic concerns regarding the dominant rhetorical and interpersonal traits of the unique cultures in which they live. In this paper, I present a narrative on my personal journey to Islam and discuss the implications it holds for da'wah strategies among non-Muslims in an American context, while acknowledging the vast diversity within this sphere. I make an analytical distinction between values particular to Islam, like the ṣhalāt prayers and the ḥajj pilgrimage, and universal values, like kindness and social justice. Based on my experience, I argue that an emphasis on Islam's universal values will create far more appeal among non-Muslims, as their existing value systems place no importance on rituals such as ṣhalāt. In the American cultural and political context, I insist that overt da'wah will be counter-productive and drive non-Muslims away, whereas da'wah given by good example will - although less effective in the short term - be more fruitful overall. The best da'is are those who live out and pursue the social ideals of Islam, regardless of whether or not they even intend to conduct da'wah. While the specific conclusions which provided in this paper in an American context, I argue that da'wah in any unique cultural context requires socio cultural analysis in order to maximize da'wah efficiency.*

**Keywords:** American's Journey, Socio Cultural, Da'wah Methodology

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\* The previous version of this manuscript was presented in the International Da'wah Conference (iDACON) 2017 "Da'wah in 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Bridging Diversity, Enriching Humanity" which co-organized by Faculty of Da'wah and Communication UIN Sunan Kalijaga, American Institute for Indonesian Studies, Globethics.net, and CSEAS Kyoto University, (Yogyakarta, October 4, 2017).

## Abstrak

*Praktik dakwah di kalangan non-Muslim mengharuskan adanya pemahaman lintas budaya. Upaya untuk menarik non-Muslim terhadap Islam sebagian besar akan membuahkan hasil tanpa mempertimbangkan masalah strategis mengenai sifat retorik dan interpersonal yang dominan dari budaya unik tempat mereka tinggal. Tulisan ini menyajikan sebuah narasi dalam perjalanan pribadi saya ke Islam dan membahas implikasinya untuk strategi dakwah di kalangan non-Muslim dalam konteks masyarakat Amerika yang beragam. Saya membuat perbedaan analitis antara nilai-nilai khusus dalam Islam seperti doa shalat dan ziarah haji dan nilai universal seperti kebaikan dan keadilan sosial. Berdasarkan pengalaman saya, saya berpendapat bahwa penekanan pada nilai-nilai universal Islam akan menciptakan daya tarik yang jauh lebih tinggi. Dalam konteks budaya dan politik Amerika, saya menekankan bahwa dakwah yang terlalu vulgar akan menjadi kontraproduktif dan menjauhkan non-Muslim, sedangkan dakwah yang diberikan oleh contoh yang baik - meski kurang efektif dalam jangka pendek - akan menjadi lebih baik secara keseluruhan. Para da'i terbaik adalah mereka yang hidup dan mengejar cita-cita sosial Islam, terlepas dari apakah mereka berniat melakukan dakwah atau tidak. Kesimpulan spesifik yang diberikan dalam kajian ini menawarkan wawasan tentang dakwah dalam konteks Amerika yang unik dan memerlukan analisis sosial budaya untuk memaksimalkan efisiensi dakwah.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Perjalanan Seorang Amerika, Sosial Budaya, Metodologi Dakwah*

## INTRODUCTION

On many Sunday afternoons during my final year of college, I would walk down the streets of Washington D.C. with a few dozen of my fellow students from George Washington University giving away bags of sandwiches and personal hygiene products to people who needed them. The university's Muslim Student Association (MSA) organized this monthly activity, in which students would gather on a Sunday morning to make sandwiches and assemble bags, later in the afternoon handing them out, mostly to homeless people who spent time in a nearby park. I participated regularly, though at the time I was not a Muslim. Not only did I enjoy being around the people in the MSA, but it was also a great (but small)



way to exercise social responsibility. I now look back on these Sundays as a formative experience in my own journey to Islam.

But I did not fall in love with Islam just because a few Muslims gave out some sandwiches. Indeed, most religious groups give out some sandwiches occasionally. Throughout my years at college, however, I saw in my Muslim friends an incredible tendency towards kindness as well as an intense passion for social justice. I was drawn towards Islam because I saw people living out its teachings all around me, inspiring me to be more like them. I found a community that was not only based on a religious identity, but that strove to realize the ideals of that religion as well. Although I took multiple Islamic studies classes in college, I would not be a Muslim today if it were not for the many incredible Muslims I met along the way. Although many of these Muslims may not have had any intention to draw me towards Islam, my experiences with them - just like the experiences of all converts to Islam - hold important implications for how Muslims might effectively draw others to the faith.

In the Qur'an, God instructs Muslims, "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best" (16:125). From the Arabic for the imperative "invite" (*ad'u*) used here derives the noun *da'wah*, meaning invitation, call, or proselytization. This verse clearly instructs Muslims to invite others to the way of God, but it offers three requirements: it must be done "with wisdom, with good instruction, and in a way that is best".<sup>1</sup> Here, the Qur'an emphasizes that not just any form of *da'wah* is acceptable, and it seems that much consideration is necessary in order to ensure that these three requirements are fulfilled. As the Qur'an does not explicitly specify how *da'wah* is done with wisdom or good instruction, I see this as a case where strategic reasoning must be utilized, keeping in mind the values presented within the Qur'an as a whole. In this paper, I will offer strategic advice to *da'wah* practitioners about how to meet these

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<sup>1</sup> Classical interpretations of the requirements in this verse vary. Al-labari insists that "wisdom" means using the scriptures of other people's faiths as the basis for calling to Islam, while al-Razi prefers the use of demonstrative rational proofs. See the discussion of verse 16:125 in Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, (New York: Harpercollins Publisher, 2015).

requirements in an American setting as a result both fulfilling the demands of the Qur'an and making effective da'wah.

The most basic factor in determining da'wah strategy is whether or not the audience is Muslim. Calling Muslims to practice their faith is quite a different endeavor from calling non-Muslims to enter it. Keep in mind that Islam strongly encourages its people to create peace, not only among themselves but also among all human.<sup>2</sup> So that's why this paper focuses specifically on the dynamics of da'wah towards non-Muslims and the factors involved in a non-Muslim entering Islam, specifically in an American context. This paper does not offer a scholarly study of da'wah in America. It is instead mostly the result of contemplation on my own journey to Islam as an American and on the roles of American Muslims in that long process. In preparing this paper, I asked fellow American Muslims about their opinions and experiences, but I did not conduct anything resembling academic fieldwork, research, or interviews. I am unaware of any Muslim-funded sociocultural research on effective proselytism in Western and other non-majority Muslim contexts, but I imagine something of the sort would be valuable to those working in or passionate about da'wah activity. I am personally neither involved in nor particularly passionate about da'wah nor the prospect of non-Muslims converting to Islam. I do not write this paper as a practitioner of da'wah, but rather as product of it. My own experiences did not involve anyone actively encouraging or asking me to embrace Islam, but my particular path to the faith still offers valuable insight about how to conduct a more effective form of da'wah in an American context.

## **DA'WAH AND THE CHALLENGE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE**

In order to give da'wah effectively, strategic rhetorical considerations are vital. This requires intimate knowledge of a society

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<sup>2</sup> M. Amin Abdullah, "Visi Dakwah di Era Milenium Baru: Fresh Ijtihad Memperjumpakan Ulum al-Din dan Sains Modern dalam Keilmuan Dakwah dan Komunikasi", in Ahmad Izudin and Bayu Mitra A. Kusuma (Eds.), *Dakwah Milenial: Dari Kajian Doktrinal Menuju Transformasi Sosial*, (Yogyakarta: Samudra Biru and PSDT FDK UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2017), pp. 24-25.

and its culture. To draw a person towards Islam, a preacher benefits greatly from an understanding of what they find appealing and persuasive. This obviously differs at the level of the individual, but the predominance of particular value systems and rhetorical forms significantly affects how and why people's opinions might change in a given society. This is because the world is diverse, contains no color, but complex. In addition to the various and stratified, the color is also almost infinite, can be processed and mixed with other colors to form a new color.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in symbols and how to make a rhetoric. What symbols and knowledge systems have normative and rhetorical power? A given argument will be more convincing among followers of the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) if a quotation from Hasyim Asyari (NU's founder) is included rather than from a figure like Ahmad Dahlan, who founded rival organization Muhammadiyah. What are the cultural norms regarding argument, insistence, and request? Indonesians are far more accustomed to giving advice to those other than family and close friends, sometimes even considering it a flattering demonstration of concern for the person being advised. Americans, on the other hand, would find this presumptuous and rude. People have different values, epistemologies, and interpersonal customs, so it would be foolish to try to persuade all people with the same strategy.

A classical example of deftly navigating local culture to spread Islam is found the legend of the Javanese Muslim saint Sunan Kalijaga. In popular Javanese stories, Kalijaga used traditional Javanese cultural art forms in order to convey the message of Islam to the Hindu-Buddhist society in Java. He is said to have incorporated Islamic messages into the dialogue of *wayang* (shadow puppet) plays, teaching the society about the new faith in a language that they understood. Kalijaga is famed for presenting Islam in a way that was acceptable to the Javanese by not breaking any cultural taboos and presenting Islam as a belief system that could in fact be Javanese. As the story goes, because this method of da'wah demonstrated such a deep understanding of and engagement

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<sup>3</sup> Al Makin, *Keragaman dan Perbedaan: Budaya dan Agama dalam Lintas Sejarah Manusia*, (Yogyakarta: Suka Press and Al-Jami'ah Research Center, 2016), p. 5.

with Javanese culture, Sunan Kalijaga was among the most effective of the early preachers who participated in the Islamization of Java. I argue that modern da'wah practitioners have much to learn from this story, and that cultural knowledge and engagement is a key to effective da'wah.

I see da'wah as one of the fields of Islamic practice that would benefit most by taking into consideration the tools of modern social sciences, especially ethnography. In order to more effectively navigate unique cultural and political settings in the pursuit of da'wah, an academic study of these settings should be utilized. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions that integrate secular sciences - like most of Indonesia's Islamic universities and institutes - have a unique ability to produce preachers who have not only an in-depth knowledge of Islamic teachings, but also the rhetorical, psychological, cultural, sociological, and political capacities necessary to spread them effectively. Below, I offer an account of my own journey to Islam, an ethnographic analysis of American rhetorical culture, and an explanation of the effects of Islamophobia on Muslim public relations in the United States. In each case, the paper explores the implications these factors hold for da'wah in non-Muslim majority settings like America.

In high school, I knew the few Muslims at my school, but I understood very little about the religion itself. I come from a liberal family background and I would often watch world news on Al Jazeera, so I was enthusiastically anti-Islamophobic, but not necessarily pro-Islam. I have always been passionate about progressive social causes, and I found the spread of Islamophobia to be morally appalling. But in college I began to learn more about Islam itself. I entered George Washington University wanting to study Middle Eastern politics, fascinated by the story of the Arab Spring and by its political and social aftermath. Because of the prominence of Islamic movements in Arab politics, I eventually also became interested in the social study of Islam on its own terms, outside the confines of Middle Eastern politics.

My coursework in Islamic studies shaped the way I came to both understand and idealize Islam. Although I originally approached my studies from a detached, academic perspective, many of the Islamic scholars I encountered in these classes articulated visions of Islam that

I found beautiful and liberating. The first course I took in Islamic studies was “Women in Islam” taught by Kelly Pemberton. She is the one who first introduced to the works of feminist Islamic scholars like Amina Wadud, who criticized not only patriarchal interpretations of Islam but also exclusively secularist and Western elaborations of feminism.<sup>4</sup> I admired Islamic feminism not only as a corrective against a patriarchal orthodoxy, but I also found it to offer unique and valuable contributions to the wider feminist movement. As a committed feminist, if I had never encountered such progressive scholarship challenging dominant notions of gender hierarchy within Islam, I would never have considered embracing the religion.

I also took a wide variety of courses in Islamic thought, taught by Sayyid Hossein Nasr and Mohammed Faghfoory. Nasr, a pioneering scholar of Islamic philosophy, truly opened my eyes to the breadth and beauty of the Islamic intellectual tradition. My most important takeaway from his classes was not knowledge - as most went far over the head of a beginner like me - but humility and an appreciation for the incredible degree of diversity within Islamic thought. Studying the vastly different works of thinkers like Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Taymiyya showed me how divergent - even incompatible - positions could all be held within Islam. But Nasr’s own contributions to Islamic thought were also formative in my acceptance of Islam. His teachings on the Perennial Philosophy not only provide a basis for pluralism within Islam, but they also empower the individual Muslim to seek and appreciate truth in all of the ways that God has created and revealed it, even in those places traditionally considered to be outside the realm of Islamic scripture. As someone who, because of my family background, has an immense spiritual reverence for both Jesus Christ and the Bhagavad Gita, I could never have been drawn to an Islam that saw their followers as nothing but *kafir* (disbelievers).

Overall, I took more undergraduate classes with Mohammed Faghfoory than with any other individual professor. One of the most

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<sup>4</sup> See Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

impactful was his survey on Islamic political thought, for which I wrote a final paper on the Islamic socialism of ‘Ali Shari‘ati. Here, I was captivated by a reading of Islam that not only rejected economic injustice, but also positioned Islam itself as an agent of liberation. In contrast to common interpretations of Islam as facilitating private accumulation of wealth, Shari‘ati offered a radical vision of Islam as forwarding social equality.<sup>5</sup> As someone who despairs at high levels of economic inequality and subjugation in today’s world, I could not have accepted an Islam that protects private capital at the cost of human suffering.

## UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR VALUES IN ISLAM

These stories might beg the question for born Muslims: why should one’s acceptance of Islam be conditional to lesser ideologies like feminism, pluralism, and socialism. For those socialized into Islam from birth, faith is something of a primary condition, but those born outside Islam must first be convinced. While I have heard stories of people who immediately wanted to enter Islam simply after hearing the beauty of an *adhān*, all of the Muslim converts that I have ever met have had rational reasons for embracing the faith. As for me, I was convinced both by core theological teachings of Islam like *tawhīd* and by these ideological interpretations of how Islam’s social values should be realized in the world. I consider Islamic ideas such as justice, equality, and love to be universal values, as their truth is evident to non-Muslims as well. By appealing to and living out these universal values, Muslims can be said to be making da’wah, as they may come to be seen as virtuous people worthy of emulation.

We can compare these universal values to conceptions of virtue that are specific to Islam, like *ṣhalāt* (ritual prayer) and *ḥajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). All Muslims agree on the necessity of these practices, the virtues of which are clearly elaborated by divine command. But for non-Muslims, there is no inherently evident value in the recitation of incomprehensible Arabic or in a journey to a particular city in Saudi Arabia. Compared to Islam’s universal values, these particulars have far

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<sup>5</sup> The work by Shari‘ati that most influenced me was Habib Shirazi’s translation of his *Red Shi‘ism* (Michigan: Free Islamic Literatures, 1980), in which he articulates a laboratory interpretation of Islam in opposition to a stagnant, despotic version.

less power to attract non-Muslims to the faith. But my studies were only part of the reason I came to be a Muslim; another crucial factor was my interactions with Muslims friends. Many of these Muslims inspired me by striving to live out the values of their faith. Again, as a non-Muslim, I did not care whether or not they offered prayer regularly, but I was moved by their overall kindness and high levels of concern for human wellbeing and social justice. Many of the Muslims I knew were did not only give to charity in order to help those in need, but they were also social activists working to eliminate unjust systems that contribute to human suffering. Most importantly, these American Muslims did not care only about the causes of other Muslims; many were certainly passionate about issues like Islamophobia in America and about the occupation of Palestine, but they served and fought for oppressed and marginalized non-Muslims as well. I saw many of my Muslim friends mobilize against poverty, racism, and global warming. In Surah al-Baqarah, God commands us to “race towards goodness” (*fastabiqū'l-khayrāt*), implying that this effort should be the orientation of the community (or the “direction in which it turns,” *wajhātun huwa muwallibā*). As I got to know the Muslim community at my university and in America at large, I could often see this ideal in their actions.

While I embraced Islam partly because of my Muslim friends, many Muslims in Indonesia are surprised to hear that not a single one of them ever pushed me to convert. In my travels, I had met a few Muslims abroad who aggressively told me that I should come to Islam if I did not want to face hellfire, but this was never an appealing invitation. Just like non-Muslims have no reason to place value on *shalāt*, I had no reason to believe in God’s judgment since I was not yet a Muslim. Such forms of da’wah that may be effective among Muslims - who already recognize the importance of worshipping and the power of God - have no persuasive influence among non-Muslims. Rather, what I see as most necessary is for Muslims to become living examples of the good that Islam demands. When discussing this topic previously in Indonesia, I have called this “*dakwah keteladanan*,” which might translate as “da’wah by good example”. This kind of da’wah that leads by example is especially important in an American cultural context.

## AMERICAN RHETORICAL AND PERSUASIVE CULTURE

In Surah Al ‘Imran, God proclaims, “And by the mercy of Allah you dealt with them gently. If you were harsh and hard hearted, they would have fled from around you” (3:159). In his commentary on this verse, al-Rāzī writes: God has been so good to us! We were idolaters, and if the Messenger of God had come with this entire religion all at once, and with the Qur’an all at once, the responsibilities would have weighed heavily upon us, and we would not have entered Islam. Rather, he called us to a single word, and when we accepted it and tasted the sweetness of faith, we accepted what came after it, word upon word, in a gentle way, until the religion was completed and the law was perfected.<sup>6</sup>

This reminder is useful to keep in mind when dealing with anyone. Gentle persuasion that does not push people too far will generally be far more effective in changing the opinions of others than forceful attempts to gain their submission. As Americans say, “you get more bees with honey”. But what is considered gentle and forceful vary in different cultural settings. To deal gently with someone, we must understand the social norms and manners of their society. Here, I offer an ethnographic analysis of American manners and rhetorical culture as I know them and address their implications for the world of da’wah. My depiction is shaped significantly by my background and experiences, mainly in middle-class, relatively liberal communities. Cultural realities certainly vary further by region, class, and social grouping, but I hope that this general description can illuminate basic trends in American culture at large.

American culture differs from Indonesian culture in important ways concerning the interpersonal norms surrounding persuasion. Overall, individualism makes Americans more reserved and less likely to attempt to impose their opinions on others. While the communal nature of Indonesian culture emphasizes the importance of group coherence and conformity, Americans are far less concerned by deviation in opinion or practice among their peers. In Indonesia, it is typical - especially for people who are older or in a superior social role - to offer unsolicited

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<sup>6</sup> As cited in the discussion of verse 3:159 in Nasr et al, *The Study Quran*.



advice to others. Indonesians also tend to hold far greater respect for and deference to authority figures, making them more receptive to such advice. For Americans, however, offering spontaneous advice to others comes across as presumptuous and rude. If an American adult wants to hear someone else's opinion about their choices, they will ask for it; and if they do not ask for it, most likely they will not appreciate hearing it. Advice giving is, however, more acceptable in certain American sub-cultures than in others, especially where, like in Indonesia, communality is more important than individuality. In rural areas or in the American South, for example, people have a reputation for "minding other people's business" more than those who live in cities or their suburbs, who consequently "mind their own business".

Americans largely are disdain those who seek to impose their opinions or lifestyles on others. Anyone who wants to influence or convince others of a certain cause or belief runs the risk of being labeled "preachy". Religious zealots who preach about their beliefs to others are seen as having little tact and breaking the cultural rule of "minding their own business". This is especially true in matters of religious belief, where not everyone shares the same beliefs, but it is important even in cases where someone is reminded of something they already believe or value; even if I were to advise a friend to study for an exam that they wanted to pass, I would still likely come across as preachy. Americans often respond to unsolicited advice by sarcastically calling that person "Mom", as one's parents are generally seen as among the few people with the right to give such advice.

So given the sensitivity around advice giving, how do Americans change each other's minds? Overall, there are in fact less opportunities for Americans to influence the opinions and actions of their peers than there is for Indonesians to do so. In the urban and suburban American communities with which I am familiar, the most powerful way to influence others is through setting an appealing example and by speaking as little as possible about one's principles or virtues. In my experiences, Muslim friends never requested that I convert to Islam. In fact, I would have most likely been put off if they had been so presumptuous to do so. Instead, I was drawn in by the good examples they set as kind, caring,

and passionate people.

A useful example for those interested in da'wah in an American setting might be the case of vegetarianism. In America, vegetarians (people who abstain from eating meat) have a reputation for being too forceful about their beliefs, seeming to idiomatically “shove it down your throat”. They often come across as arrogant and proud of themselves, showing little tact and respect for the autonomy of others. As a vegetarian of myself, I have always resented this stereotype and striven to disprove it. I never talk about my vegetarianism without being asked, and I have never sought to make others feel guilty about their choice to eat meat. If others ask me about my diet out of sincere curiosity, however, I am happy to talk to them about my beliefs. Throughout my life, many of my friends and acquaintances have adopted vegetarian diets after feeling comfortable enough to talk openly with me about it. On the other hand, I have never met a lifelong vegetarian who was converted directly by aggressive propaganda.

In America, religious proselytizers are viewed as similar to vegetarians, in that they attempt to force their beliefs on others. This makes overt proselytization somewhat ineffective in an American context. In my estimation, there is more potential to draw in potential new Muslims by simply setting a good example and piquing their curiosity about Islam. Once someone is interested in learning more about Islam, they will seek out someone who they can trust to answer their questions without pressuring them to convert. Someone may be inspired by kind and passionate Muslims, but they will likely be driven away again if those Muslims are also forceful about their faith. Americans will be unlikely to feel comfortable around someone if they seem to have intentions to convert them. As a result, most Americans will not be convinced of a new idea immediately, and likewise rarely will anyone embrace Islam quickly. For Muslims interested in da'wah, this means they must exercise great patience and focus on making themselves into good examples as well. In fact, as is the case with vegetarians, those who are most effective at drawing others to the faith are usually not those who overtly attempt to spread it, but those whose priorities lie in realizing the social values taught by Islam.

## DA'WAH AND PUBLIC RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

The cultural factors described above largely result in the American Muslim community demonstrating a relatively limited initiative to overtly spread the faith, and a far greater focus on social work, activism, and charity. But culture is not the only reason that overt da'wah is limited in America. As with all aspects of Muslim life in America, this is significantly affected by the spread of Islamophobia. One narrative used by Islamophobes is that Muslims are seeking to take over and Islamize America. Multiple state congresses have proposed anti-*shari'a* legislation, hoping to stem the imagined tide of Islamists seeking to submit the United States government to a caliphate.<sup>7</sup> Because of these fears, any overt attempts at proselytization have become even more stigmatized; efforts to spread the faith run the risk of being seen by some as part of a larger plot to Islamize the country.

Another result of Islamophobia, however, is a widespread interest in public relations among Muslims in order to promote a better image for Islam in the eyes of the public. Because of the prominence of racist stereotypes about Muslims in popular American discourse, Muslims often seek to be living proof of their inaccuracy. This offers increased incentives to practice the teachings already offered by Islam, such as giving to charity, fighting for the oppressed and pursuing justice. Muslims in America are likely to be involved in charity and activism campaigns beyond simply those that affect other Muslims, partly because these help demonstrate to the American public that Islam teaches kindness and generosity rather than violence and extremism.

Coalition building is also an important tool and consideration for American Muslim community leaders and activists. If Muslims can forge support networks that cross into other non-Muslim communities, they will have greater strength in fighting Islamophobia. In order to build coalitions across diverse subsets of American society, Muslims need to also pursue the welfare of other marginalized and oppressed groups in

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<sup>7</sup> See Patrick Strickland, "US Anti-Islamic Bills Create 'Environment of Fear'", *Al-Jazeera English*, (January 31, 2016).

America and around the world. When American Muslims come to the aid of victims of anti-Semitism, they forge relationships and gain allies within another minority community. This is valuable not only instrumentally as a tool to increase the strength of the Muslim community, but also because God commands it. In Surah al-Nisa, God asks “And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed...” (4:75). Indeed, there may be divine wisdom behind the fact that solidarity with the oppressed both fights particular cases of injustice and helps build coalitions among marginalized communities more broadly.

I believe that it is important to differentiate here between good public relations and apologism. Most Muslims agree that there are certain lines that should not be crossed for the sake of good public relations or coalition building. Some Muslims (myself is not included) see outreach efforts by some Muslims, like support for the right same-sex marriage, to constitute abandoning Islamic values just to appease the public. I personally am opposed to the brand of “moderate Islam”, as it seems to necessitate ignoring the faith’s many radical teachings about justice and equality and instead require submission to a capitalist and imperialist American status quo. Just like in any Muslim community, there are open debates about what Islam allows and commands. But beyond these certain issues, there are universal issues on which common ground can be found not only among Muslims, but in the public at large. Utilizing charity and activism for the purpose of public relations is not apologist in the face of Islamophobia, nor does it lessen the value of charity qua charity or activism qua activism. Rather, multiple good ends may be achieved by emphasizing of values already enjoined by Islam that are also appreciated by others.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Most importantly, take seriously and practice diligently the universal values of Islamic teachings (along with particulars like *chalât*, of course). Give selflessly to charity. Enjoin goodness and prevent the bad through social activism, especially in matters of justice and human welfare. Follow the *sunnah* of the Prophet by devoting yourself to the welfare of others

as a mercy to the worlds. When Muslims live out the virtues laid out by Islam, non-Muslims may take notice as I did and take interest in joining such a virtuous and passionate community. *Second*, do not limit your sympathy, charity, and advocacy only to causes involving fellow Muslims. The Prophet showed us that justice, peace, and welfare are not only the rights of Muslims, but of all humanity. In addition, this will strategically both help to promote Islam beyond Muslim communities and build networks of solidarity with other communities. *Third*, take the time to learn about the cultural practices of a specific community before attempting to convert them. Cultural norms surrounding rhetoric, debate, and persuasion vary significantly from place to place, and what is persuasive in a certain setting may be offensive in another. Learn from Sunan Kalijaga by gaining the skills to rhetorically navigate a particular culture in an effort to promote a universal religion. *Fourth*, in particular in an American context, you must realize that overt and explicit proselytization will most likely be counter-productive. Refrain from ever urging others or insisting that they learn about or convert to Islam. This will not be well received by those who have no prior knowledge of Islam and it will turn away those who may already be interested. As for alternative methods that are more effective, as explained in first tip, you must be an example of the goodness that Islam promotes and let your actions speak for themselves. This takes far longer than verbal da'wah, but it is, in my estimation, far more effective.

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