

Gray Identity in Popular Da'wah: Obscuring the Path of Islamic Revival

"He urinated on the Zam-zam well to become famous"

(Arabic proverb)

The openness of social media has provided a wide opportunity for everyone to be popular. Even today the mantra is "popular is money". Looking for as many subscribers or followers as possible has finally become a dream of most of the millennials. In today's information age, pop culture plays a major role in shaping image culture and taste culture through visually appealing and intoxicating stimuli.

Gray Power

In the last decade, there has been a new power of social media influencers (such as celebgram and YouTubers) who represent gray communities and the 'vulnerable' being proxy driven by capitalist forces. Although this is not a new phenomenon, the gray moral force is increasingly existing with the current digitalization.

Since the end of the Cold War era, this power has been deliberately raised along with the globalization of Capitalism to 'tame' old moral values in countries that are their target market. Especially when the United States is advancing in the world of international business, it is increasingly important for America to have Western moral values accepted globally. As Ayn Rand said: "The cult of moral grayness is a revolt against moral values." So, gray moral is actually a rebellion against moral values themselves.

In its development which continues to metamorphose, the strength of the US economic industry has succeeded in creating popular culture through music and films since the mid-20th century; to expand in Asia and continue its relay by Korea with its K-Pop wave. As more and more film and art deliberately dissociate from the contrast of black vs white moral areas, they gradually become more and more shades of gray. The blurring of these values aims to make them acceptable to the global market.

Popularity eventually became the new moral standard which generated by the secular culture industry. Pop Culture really emphasizes the quantity of mass acceptance of one 'image' and 'taste' compared to quality and morality. Advertisings, which offer a visual style, play a major role in influencing the market and graying power in modern society. This encourages the exploitation of art and creativity in some circles such as artists and creators who poor in ideological direction, with their slogan creativity without limits.

Hijrah Community in Popular Culture

The problem is that this popular culture does not only affect ordinary people, but also affects Muslim communities who already have more awareness to change (*hijrah*) or what is known in Indonesia as the '*hijrah* community'. The encounter between calls for Islamic da'wah and popular culture trends has generated Islamic populism among the Muslim youth.

This makes the *hijrah* activists not immune from the popularity syndrome, which also means they are not immune from graying attitudes. The success standard of da'wah is ultimately measured by popularity and the number follower da'wah content, NOT by the quality and originality of the Islamic teaching itself and its methodology that is in accordance with the legacy of the Prophet. As a result, the da'wah was carried away due to popularity syndrome that hit da'wah activists, Muslim scholars and pious people. Many da'wah activists plunge into the world of the creative and arts industries and become swept up in gray wave. Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi, Rahimahullah, said; "*The last thing that fades from the hearts of righteous people: love of power and love of existence (popularity)*". The cases of those who have just *hijrah* and popular instantly are lesson learned for us. Instead of instilling the influence of da'wah, what happened actually strengthened the gray attitude which is in line with the principle of Religious Moderation - the Western agenda for weakening and obscuring Islamic identity.

A report by Wunderman Thompson Intelligence, in collaboration with Malaysia's Muslim Intel Lab, entitled "The New Muslim Consumer" concludes that among the 250 million Muslims in Southeast Asia today "the generation of Muslims are living very different lives from their parents, formed by two great forces: the revival of faith (religiosity) and the spread of Western-style consumerism."

This report shows that Islam has become a popular way of life among young Southeast Asian Muslims, although it is limited to superficial and individual choices. Their religiosity does not prevent them from being consumptive of Western or Korean entertainment products. Like the phenomenon of Hijrah K-Poppers which is hit by ambiguity where on the one hand they are required to be pious Muslims, but they also still want to consume Korean entertainment. It is this ambiguity that is prone to turning into a gray attitude, which makes easier for them to be 'colonized as a market' by the Capitalists to become eternal consumers of secular lifestyle products.

On the other hand, the tendency of popular culture is to dilute the Islamic message so that it can be accepted by the general public. For example, if we stop by a bookstore, it will be easy to find a line of books with the word "hijrah" displayed on the best-selling shelf. In contrast to religious books which are generally formal, popular hijrah books have pop designs with illustrations like teenage love books or comics, as well as casual language styles. Likewise on social media, when we type the hashtag #hijrah on Instagram, 70 million posts appear talking about the topic of hijrah, with an attractive graphic design and light articulation.

The meeting between two currents i.e., the popular culture and Islamic da'wah among the Muslim youth, certainly are not always negative, because this phenomenon actually represents ideas upheaval (*siro'ul fikr*) between two cultures. Therefore, to deal with this, we need more qualified da'wa carriers who are ideologically mature and sensitive to value upheavals and identities. So that it is not Islam that is actually colored and carried away, but Islamic ideology that colors and brings huge changes to the society.

The qualifications of da'wah activists who are able to navigate Islamic da'wah in popular culture are those who have strong censorship in contrasting differences between secular and Islamic values, without lack of creativity in using tools and creative ways in popular styles. Plus, da'wah activists must always remember that the standard of success is not from a popular figure or from the mass acceptance of da'wah, but all depends on the Shariah standard and the main purpose itself which needs to distinguishes between *haq* and *batil*. Da'wah activists must live the path of real change with the method outlined by Islam, they must also avoid obscurity and ambiguity, and stay away from gray attitudes in da'wah, as the message of Rasulullah (saw): **«إِنَّ الْحَلَالَ بَيْنَ وَإِنَّ الْحَرَامَ بَيْنَ وَبَيْنَهُمَا أُمُورٌ مُشْتَبِهَاتٌ لَا يَعْلَمُهُنَّ كَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ، فَمَنْ»** **«Indeed, what is lawful (halal) is clear, what is unlawful (haram) is clear. And between the two there are things that are doubtful – things that are ambiguous (shubhat) – which most people don't know about. So, whoever avoids shubhat, it means he has released his religion and honor. And whoever falls into shubhat matters, then he falls into a matter that is forbidden by Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala...»** (Bukhari Muslim)

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