

## The Transmission of Islamic Messages in Local Social Space Through Artistic Approach

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the use of an artistic approach in transmitting Islamic messages by Kyai Zen, a popular da'i (da'wah actor) in West Java in the last 50 years. The process of conveying Islamic values will always be in the local social sphere where the da'wah is conveyed. As a process, the transmission of Islamic messages, or da'wah, can be done through an artistic approach by considering the socio-cultural dimensions of the da'wah target. This kind of approach is considered relevant especially because da'wah is aimed at instilling values, and not just informing something about religious teachings. The method used in this research is phenomenology about the actor of the da'wah who uses art as his preaching approach. This research seeks to reveal and study things that are typical of the phenomenon, as well as in the socio-cultural context of what kind of process of communicating Islamic messages takes place. As an analysis tool, this study uses Melvin DeFleur's Simultaneous Transaction Model. The results show that the process of transmitting Islamic messages through an artistic approach can be described as something unique and distinctive. This research also proves that the artistic approach taken by Kyai Zen in conveying Islamic messages finds compatibility and can be accepted by the people of West Java, and appears to be politer to invite people, but still friendly to local socio-cultural conditions.

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penggunaan pendekatan seni dalam mentransmisikan pesan-pesan Islam oleh Kyai Zen, seorang da'i populer di Jawa Barat dalam 50 tahun terakhir. Proses penyampaian nilai-nilai Islam akan selalu berada pada ranah sosial lokal di mana dakwah itu disampaikan. Sebagai sebuah proses, transmisi pesan-pesan Islam, atau dakwah, dapat dilakukan melalui pendekatan seni dengan mempertimbangkan dimensi sosio-kultural sasaran da'wah. Pendekatan semacam ini dipandang relevan terutama karena dakwah bertujuan menanamkan nilai-nilai, dan bukan sekedar menginformasikan sesuatu ajaran. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah fenomenologi tentang seorang aktor dakwah yang menggunakan seni sebagai pendekatan dakwahnya. Penelitian ini berusaha mengungkap dan mempelajari hal-hal yang khas dari fenomena yang diteliti, serta dalam konteks sosio-kultural seperti apa proses mengkomunikasikan pesan-pesan Islam itu berlangsung. Sebagai alat analisis, penelitian ini menggunakan Model Transaksi Simultan dari Melvin DeFleur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa proses mentransmisikan pesan-pesan Islam melalui pendekatan seni dapat digambarkan sebagai sesuatu yang unik dan khas. Penelitian ini juga membuktikan bahwa pendekatan seni yang dilakukan Kyai Zen dalam menyampaikan pesan-pesan Islam menemukan kecocokan dan bisa diterima oleh masyarakat Jawa Barat, serta tampak lebih santun mengajak umat, tapi tetap bersahabat dengan kondisi sosio-kultural setempat.

**Keyword:** *transmisi, pesan islam, fenomenologi, seni, da'i*

## A. INTRODUCTION

The process of transmitting the message of Islam had never been done in the empty space in both socially and culturally. The practice of da'wah will always be in the local social space where the process of transmitting Islamic messages is carried out. The term social space refers to the notion of physical or non-physical space which is used as medium of social interaction formed by social actions, both individually and collectively. Meanwhile, the word "local" which follows refers to "West Java", both as an administrative region as well as a social and cultural area.

From a macro perspective, Islamic preaching often touches and struggles with the cultural movements among it (De Lamato, 2019). It is not surprising then that, at a certain stage, the struggle between Islam and culture can emerge the new guidance regarding the process of forming other life institutions, such as social, economic and political institutions. This is where da'wah can be seen as a dynamic process, or a force that lives in the local social sphere. Da'wah, in turn, serves as a driving force for the formation of social systems in a local scale.

This interdependence relationship between da'wah and social space shows, at

least, two important things. First, social reality can be used as a measuring tool for the success of da'wah and at the same time become a social mirror in formulating the da'wah agenda at the upcoming stages. Second, the da'wah movement itself can be a strategic choice in the community development process. This is among the reasons why da'wah plays an important role in the dynamics of local community life. As a social process, da'wah needs to be continuously developed and evaluated in accordance with its big goals and demands of the reality.

As a religion with universal characteristics, the presence of Islam in various cultural spheres, including the local Sundanese culture in West Java, cannot be considered as a simple assembly. Because, from this meeting, the sacred substance of the illahiyah was socialized. In subsequent developments, other ethnic groups living in Tatar West Java experienced a process of "delay". They, consciously or not, cannot free themselves from social demands to adapt strategically to Sundanese cultural patterns.

If so, it means that there is a commonality which can spark the interest to revive Islam in a cultural sphere. Practical values as reflected in clothing, mosque architecture, the illumination of

the Mushaf of the Quran, to the shape of a kebaya (Sundanese traditional clothes for female) or long dress with head scarf or men's clothes with a cap. In fact, there are practical traditions that merge into Islamic holidays in Sundanese culture. However, the grip of global culture has eroded it all. This culture, which is full of politeness and breathes Islam, has been pointed out by many experts as being almost extinct.

Da'wah practices that are friendly to local culture are directed at preserving and developing regional culture as well as maintaining regional identity and cultural values amid the increasingly rapid flow of information and the negative influence of global culture. Cultural integrity and regional noble values must be preserved and developed to provide a foundation for the life of the community. Because, the values contained in regional culture are very influential in strengthening and refining the social life of the community.

On the other hand, with the existence of socio-cultural transformation due to the current swift of globalization, human with less commendable attitudes and behaviors creates major anxiety. The negative impact of the negative sides of globalization - which are more quickly digested by society - causes changes in lifestyle such as consumptive, pragmatic, materialistic and

instantaneous cultures. Meanwhile, the spirit of togetherness, tolerance, mutual cooperation, tolerance, hard work and independence slowly fades away from people's lives.

Rising and developing a lifestyle that is rooted in the noble values of Islam and local wisdom is a necessity to build a solid social order as an effort to reaffirm the identity of the people of West Java. Admittedly, the people of West Java have cultural treasures and local wisdom which can be a solid foundation of values in building social life among the increasingly rapid flow of information and the negative influence of global culture.

Facts about the waning of local cultural values of the people of West Java are getting stronger to the fore. On the one hand, there has been a very devastating cultural erosion where society is increasingly vulnerable to the adverse effects of globalization, which has many negative effects. Meanwhile, at the same time, people are increasingly alienated from their own cultural roots. The waning of local cultural values is considered to be able to affect the cultural character of the community, which in turn will make the people of West Java lose their own identity and identity as people of West Java.

At this point, the presence of da'i with insight into local culture in building society in the future is really needed. The character formation of society takes place in a continuous life process. The practice of da'wah which is based on the noble values of local culture is a necessity to build a strong social order as an effort to reaffirm identity as people of West Java. The people of West Java are known to have local cultural treasures that can become a solid foundation of values in building social life in the middle of rapid increasing of information and the negative influence of global culture.

West Java itself can actually become a pilot area in the country as the friendliest area by re-grounding the wisdom of its local culture. All of this is to show the continuity of culture and local values in the midst of the increasingly swift currents of global culture. Because globalization is a necessity, what might be done is how to guard society so that it remains grounded in its own cultural roots by taking the positive side of global culture.

Based on the explanation above, it is necessary to strengthen the understanding and to internalize the local cultural values through Islamic da'wah practices with the presence of da'i who understand and practice the values of local cultural

wisdom. Each da'wah performer transmits local cultural values, such as slogans, district and city motto, includes local cultural wisdom values in each da'wah message so that the content of local cultural values is not separated from the practice of the Islamic da'wah.

However, in their practice, there are still many preachers who convey da'wah material in a uniform way to all circles. The new term is like 'cassette culture', which is to convey the same da'wah material anywhere and to anyone regardless of the socio-cultural conditions of mad'u, the target community for da'wah. If the work system is continued without a development, the purpose of preaching will be difficult to optimally achieved.

One of the popular da'i in West Java who in the last 50 years has consistently transmitted Islamic values within the frame of local wisdom is Kyai Zen. The interesting thing about this relatively rare da'i is the artistic approach he uses in preaching activities. In general, he is known to carry out many da'wah activities with an artistic approach. Either through songs, qiroat, and poetry containing Islamic messages. As a da'i, he also mastered a number of musical instruments that he used when preaching, such as the guitar, including the Arabic guitar, lute,

harmonica and piano. This research further analyzes the use of the artistic approach in transmitting Islamic messages in the local social space by Kyai Zen. Specifically, this research seeks to uncover and study the specific phenomenon related to the study, as well as in the socio-cultural context of what kind of process of transmitting Islamic messages takes place.

## B. THEORETICAL STUDY

In the context of da'wah as a medium for conveying Islamic messages, it is understood as a form of cross-cultural communication (Basith, 2016; Dwiningrum, 2014). Da'wah basically contains the idea of civilization (taqwîm al-hadhârah) namely the conscious and systemic efforts carried out by believers so that humans as da'wah partners (mad'û) can transform into superior humans and societies with a high level of culture and civility, khaira ummah (QS. Ali Imran [3]: 110). As a civilization, preaching must uphold democratization, human rights, gender justice, and the preservation of nature and the environment (flora and fauna), and be free from violent biases, coercion and intimidation, in accordance with Islamic doctrine itself which states firmly, " Lâ ikrâha fî al-dîn ", there is no compulsion in religion (Surah al-Baqarah

[2]: 256). Normatively, according to Ismail Ilyas (2017) da'wah must be carried out with full civility (QS. an-Nahl [16]: 125) and based on the interests of mad'û, not da'i (QS. Ibrahim [14]: 4).

Julian Millie (2019), researcher from Monash University, Australia, sees the activities of propaganda as a variety of public communication, but do not assume that the propaganda messages should faithfully follow the norms that apply nationally. For Millie (2019), da'wah is communication oriented towards Indonesians in a certain context, namely the context created in the routine of Islamic worship and learning. He, therefore, cannot be separated from its own local social space where the da'wah is undertaken,

The practice of Islamic da'wah in calling for the way of Allah, in Millie's view (2017), can change the way of thinking about Islamic communication. In Islamic societies in West Java in particular, broadcasting Islam, or sermons, is not devoted to mosques and Friday prayers alone. The da'is are needed for all types of events that exist in the midst of Islamic society, from wedding ceremonies, to tabligh which is performed for companies and other large organizations.

In the practice of preaching in the midst of society, the preachers use several

jokes, stories and impersonations in their expositions to explore the emotion of audience (mustami'), which often provoke a reaction and criticism by accusing them of ignoring the intelligence of the listener (Milie, 2013). The da'i in Indonesia, in many cases, in their da'wah activities synergize with the media, both local, regional and national, and have even shifted from mainstream oral media to written media (Safei, 2020). It's just that, according to Millie (2012), academic studies have shown a uniformity of cultural references and their religious messages in the middle of relatively heterogeneous mustami'.

Conceptually, preaching that is rooted in local culture is not only called very closely, but cannot be separated. Therefore, the cultural values that have been adhered to by the people of West Java called Sundanese culture which acts the main culture and as a culture in areas with various and distinctive characteristics, can be actualized in the process of da'wah in various forms. This is what is called culture-friendly preaching. Da'wah with a qualified perspective and cultural understanding.

The blindness of a da'i to the cultural background of the da'wah is often a strategic weakness that causes the

effectiveness, if not failure, of his preaching. Knowledge of the conditions and sociological situations of the da'wah is an important standard for the success of the da'wah. Without this, it is not surprising that the story spreads that a certain preacher faced strong resistance from his audience because he was ignorant to the socio- anthropological background of his mad'u.

In this context, traditional values, customs, language, environment, and the level of economic welfare are socio-cultural factors that should be controlled by every preacher. Understanding of these sociological factors will determine the quality of effective communication built by the da'i, both on the plain ittishâl syakhshî (interpersonal communication), ittishâl jamâ'î (group communication), and ittishâl i'lâmî (symbolic communication).

Thus, the mastery of the sociological background of the da'wah field is a sine qua none for every da'wah movement. Therefore, this description of the sociological map of West Java is a kind of social-setting for the da'wah field of West Java. It is then used as a kind of road guide sign or a supporting step for preachers to preach effectively and efficiently in West Java Region.

A da'wah activity will achieve its target if it takes place in accordance with the conditions and situations of the community which are the object of preaching. The absence of adequate knowledge of the conditions and situations of the da'wah object (mad'u) will be the first reason for the failure of a da'wah. The preacher will be trapped into an activity that is isolated and not connected with the conditions and situations of the target community for preaching (mad'u).

What is meant by community condition is the internal condition in that society. Meanwhile, what is meant by the community situation is the state of the factors that affect the internal condition of the community. On this basis, it is very important for preachers to know the sociological map of the dakwah community that they want to enter. The introduction of the da'wah field (the kind of feasibility study) will be a very decisive first step in designing a plan for the da'wah material to be conveyed.

The people of West Java are known to have pro-social behavior with the philosophy of *silih asih, silih asah, silih asuh* which literally means loving one another, giving knowledge and caring for one another among fellow citizens. The description of the sociological map above

is intended to prevent da'I from being culturally illiterate. Cultural illiteracy will put the preacher in an inappropriate position before he starts doing da'wah. Incorrect starting position will result in inaccuracies in subsequent steps. Therefore, an understanding of the socio-anthropological map, such as knowledge of local values and wisdoms adopted by a community, will be a very useful provision to enter their sociological and psychological spaces.

Furthermore, it is important to know the insight and understanding of the sociological map of the da'wah community to become provisions for preachers in preparing the next da'wah plan; that is, what material should be conveyed, and what material should be avoided. This will be useful in making da'wah as a constructive activity for the community, and not a destructive activity. It would be an 'accident of proselytizing' when a preacher delivers inappropriate material to a group of people. Instead of enlightenment, it creates tension.

In the life style of the people of West Java, the internalizing of Islamic values has become a distinctive feature. So that since the earliest historical development experiences, the people of West Java have always placed religious (Islamic) values in

a very central position in large-scale development, particularly in the human resource development sector. Philosophy of Sundanese life Sundanese is reflected in the expression: *silih asih, silih asah, silih asuh* that was actually a principle of life colored by the spirit of the Islamic teachings. According to Asep S. Muhtadi (1997), the contact between interfaith cultures, the conditions of the culture that was passed, and the situation of local traditions, especially in the people of West Java, gave birth to the Islamic style of the Sundanese society that has developed until now.

Theoretically, this study uses the Simultaneous Transaction Model theory from Melvin DeFleur (1993). Within this theoretical framework, the process of preaching as practiced by Kyai Zen can be described as an attempt to convey messages which are generally influenced by at least three dominant factors. Namely, physical environmental factors (physical surroundings); the living space where the da'wah takes place by emphasizing the "what" and "how" aspects of the teaching messages are exchanged, sociocultural situations; the da'wah process is an integral part of the social situation in which a certain cultural meaning is contained, as well as the identity of every actor involved

in the process of preaching, and the factors of social relationships, namely that the status of the relationship between da'wah actors is very influential, both on the content of the message itself as well as the process of how the messages were conveyed.

There are many theoretical and empirical references that discuss the practice of da'wah through the approach of art and local wisdom. Some of the studies include: *The People's Religion: The Sermons of AF Ghazali* (Millie, 2008), *Implementation of Islamic Da'wah through Islamic Music Arts* (Lesmana et al., 2015), *Da'wah, Art and Technology* (Ahmad, 2013), *Contemporary Da'wah Approach through Art* (Halim and Sahad, 2020), *Da'wah Strategies for Facing Modern Society Through an Arts Approach* (Fikri, 2019), *Islamic Art as a Media of Da'wah* (Nasution, 2017), *Art as a Media for Moral Development* (Satriya, 2019), *Islamic Da'wah Strategies in the Development of Art and Civilization* (Yahya, 2019), *Transformation of Values Arts in Da'wah* (Papatungan, 2016).

Some of the studies mentioned earlier focus on the main topics of the approach of art and local wisdom in da'wah while still considering the socio-cultural situation of the target community of da'wah. The basic

assumption is that da'wah should be adapted to the socio-cultural conditions of the society, and one of the efficient approaches that can be used in dealing with modern society is the artistic approach in its various forms. Art is an expression of the spirit and human culture that contains and expresses harmony, human dignity and accuracy that fascinates the human mind. It was born from the innermost human being in the form of feeling and imagination which is expressed through the skill of a beautiful talent. Such encouragement is a gift from Allah.

However, art as part of culture is an expression of the feeling of the people, so that it becomes a true expression of people's lives. Thus, the presence of religion in the midst of society always moves and grows through cultural institutions which initiate cultures that are characterized by religion, or cultural symbols that are used to express religious values.

Basically, Islam enlivens a sense of beauty and art, under condition conditions; if the art brings improvement and does not damage or destroy. In the heyday of its civilization, Islam has brought a variety of arts to life which is different from other products of civilization, such as calligraphy, decoration, and carving arts,

which are usually found in mosques, buildings, swords, vessels. silver, wood, ceramics, and so on.

Departing from this openness of the socio-cultural values in one place and the "holy message" of da'wah meets the common ground, without significant friction and collision. The attention and the da'wah movement from these two sides has actually made Islam able to carve gold ink throughout the history of human civilization and spread in various parts of the continent, the worldwide and Indonesia.

### C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a phenomenological method of a da'wah actor who uses art and local wisdom as his da'wah approach. This research seeks to uncover and study a phenomenon and its unique context experienced by individuals up to the level of belief. The individual referred to the one and only Kyai Zen himself as a da'wah actor.

Phenomenological research seeks to reduce personal experiences into a common meaning or universal essence (essentializing) of a phenomenon. Of course, this experience is an individual experience. Researchers collect stories from a group of individuals to look for

similar meanings. Thus, oral stories about life experiences become a form of primary data that must be collected. To obtain this data, of course, the informants need to be open to reveal what they experienced. Phenomenological data in the form of descriptive narratives are collected from stories of individuals who have experienced a phenomenon. And, the main data in this study were obtained through a series of in-depth interviews with the main subjects of this study, namely Kyai Zen himself, and other sources who were considered to have adequate closeness and knowledge about the figure and his da'wah work.

## **D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Artistic Approach in Da'wah**

In the span of more than five decades, Kyai Zen, born in Sukabumi in 1953, has emerged as a preacher who is very popular among the people of West Java. Before retiring and becoming Chancellor at the Sukabumi Islamic Institute, Kyai Zen was a lecturer at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. His straightforward, intelligent and pithy style in preaching will not be easily forgotten by people. The artistic blood that flowed freely in his body gave him a distinctive color in terms of spreading the teachings.

His very long history of wandering as a preacher, since the late 70s until now, has given him invaluable life lessons. He had received all the bitterness of being a preacher. Like a little Khidir, Kyai Zen wandered around to wander to meet those who had been waiting for him at the top of the mountains, beyond the estuary, between the lakes, or in the city. But, what made Kyai Zen so immersed in the world of da'wah that had raised him? What motive is behind his choice of life as a preacher? what Socio-cultural situation background that he has in all preach he has?

According to Kyai Zen, becoming a preacher is a life choice that can be called strategic. If we as preachers who are in college, then we will bring the big name of the college where we are. For example, when a Miftah Faridl appears as a great missionary from ITB, it will immediately carry ITB's name from a religious perspective. If ITB was without Miftah Faridl, then ITB would remain ITB, there would be no religious touch, even though there were religious teachers there. However, when Miftah Faridl appeared as a preacher delivering religious messages, people also recognized ITB as an institution that is thick with religious values. Unisba was also great because he

was an EZ Muttaqien, who was none other than a great da'i in this West Java region. He is a warrior, intellectual as well as a great da'i. UPI Bandung is known for its religious nuances and touch because there is a great preacher there, he is Muslim Nurdin. Meanwhile, Uninus did not resonate because there were no preachers who came from this campus. According to Kyai Zen, the campus of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung will also be bigger and even bigger if this campus is supported by large preachers with brilliant minds. Related to this, the UIN campus is actually strong because of the services of preachers such as KH Abdul Hamid, KH Jujun Junaedi, and, of course, Zen himself, who almost every day wanders everywhere to preach (interview).

In the view of Kyai Zen, other institutions will also develop more quickly if they have reliable and popular preachers. Even political parties also rely a lot on preachers when they are recruiting public votes before the election. On that basis, Kyai Zen then draws an important conclusion, that the world of tabligh is a very strategic medium to socialize all kinds of things to a wide audience. Especially if we look at our society which has just arrived at the listening stage. Maybe one day the preachers will no longer be sold if

people have moved to a reading-culture. However, the fact is, until now, our society has not moved from listening-culture (interview).

If we think pragmatically, people can listen to religious lectures while still working, relaxing in the family, or in a state of what was just. Whether from cassettes, radio, or loudspeakers in mosque towers. What is clear is that through the medium of tabligh, all ideas can be offered to various regions and levels of society widely and openly. The problem is packaging of the da'wah. The benefit of tabligh is how to change the face of society. It can be called as the kind of social transformation through tabligh. Although, of course, the new tabligh process is just one part of the transformational process. There are other advanced processes, such as attadbir, attahkim, attatbiq, and so on.

Philosophically, according to Kyai Zen, the world of tabligh is a very strategic world as an arena to market ideas to various levels of society. Epistemologically, the world of tabligh will develop if it is supported and studied more deeply, so that it will give birth to disciplines and experiences that are systematized so that new sciences (interviews) will be born.

Theologically speaking, da'wah is an activity that is under the auspices of the pleasure of Allah. Surah Fushilat verse 33, is a very basic theological foundation that shows how the world of preaching (in this case tabligh) is a very noble work. Sociologically, tabligh is a social need that must be served. On this side, a preacher can be seen as a social worker. This tabligh world also later brought Kyai Zen to meet many segments of society: Governors, TNI (Indonesian Military) Commander in Chief, Military Commander, Mayors, Regents, Sub-district heads, village learders, with many other layers of society, such as the police, large companies, down to the bottom (Safei, 2020).

In every time he appears on stage, Kyai Zen always realizes that he is just a lecturer and bureaucrat who is sometimes asked by the public to give lectures. Therefore, Kyai Zen does not feel strange with what he does. Even though it is known by many levels of society, Kyai Zen still appears normal and mediocre. And most importantly, he never came out of his own socio-cultural roots as a Sundanese. Entering the first half of the third millennium, it can be seen how all modes of activity of the human child are undergoing a very revolutionary transformation. This happens in various

areas of life, especially in the world of entertainment, except in the da'wah sector.

In this latter area of life, very few attempts at methodological transformation have been made. Da'wah efforts, especially tablig, still mostly use old formulas which tend to be rigid, standardized, frozen, and muted. Meanwhile, at the same time, the methodological transformation in the world of entertainment, for example, is taking place so dynamically and creatively, that it really attracts people's attention. Meanwhile, the tabligh world still dwells on the old pattern which seems to never move. In fact, it is demanded a new touch in accordance with the pace of the new era.

On that basis, Kyai Zen then came up with the idea of modifying the tabligh 's expression patterns, which had been containing monologue lectures into a new form that was more attractive, creative and supermotivative. Came then a new innovation from the Kyai Zen in delivering the preach called "Mustaqim", an abbreviation of the Musik (music), Tablig (tabligh or preach), Qiraat (qiraat), Indah (beautiful) and Menentramkan (reassure).

This is characteristics of Kyai Zen. When Kyai Zen delivering the any material, he always combine those things. Thus, Mustaqim is not seen partially, nor necessarily as a whole. Hence, Kyai Zen

always creates spontaneous songs or poems to support the material he delivers. For this purpose, it is not uncommon Kyai Zen was put on the guitar, violin, organ, or stringed instruments as a means to help to convey the preach.

Thus, the tabligh in this new innovation contains various elements at once; music, lectures, and qiraat, in which dialogue and interactive quizzes can also take place. The desired final result is the delivery of da'wah messages to the community through the concoction of various elements. Isn't music also entitled to go to heaven?

As a modification to a new culture of being able to perform, Mustaqim has now begun to be socialized to the wider community. Together with his art group, Kyai Zen actively socializes his innovation to the community. The results were very encouraging: the public welcomed him with enthusiasm. This shows how the element of creativity in worship, *ghair mahdhah*, has a very important role. It seems that it has become a widely accepted social reality that music does have an important spiritual meaning not only for music itself, but also in relation to poetry, as Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi shows so perfectly.

## 2. Da'wah in Local Social Space

Kyai Zen is one of the few preachers who can be accepted by all circles. The methodology of Kyai Zen lectures is always inseparable from four things. Namely aspects of doctrine, illustration, recreation and information. According to Zainal, these four things must be integral in each of his lectures. These four elements are then reflected in the form of art in preaching while still considering the socio-cultural dimensions of the place where da'wah is carried out.

However, the way Kyai Zen performs will be very much determined by the conditions of the tabligh field (*mubalagh alaihi*) he is facing. Even though the society and the bureaucracy, basically, have shared common characteristic. The only difference is in the technique of the approach. In terms of da'wah material, Kyai Zen conveyed a lot of everyday social problems that exist in society. But, of course, intellectual and spiritual consumption is never overlooked. Even doctrinal aspects, including the issue of tauhid which is the heart of religious teachings, according to Kyai Zainal, still have to have a social effect. Without giving any social effect, that is called sterile monotheism.

Illustration is one of the most prominent aspects of Kyai Zainal's lectures. For him, the illustrations presented in his lectures were not only illustrative in nature, but also piled up the aspects of doctrine, aspects of information, and aspects of recreation at the same time. According to Kyai Zainal, through this illustration, people are stimulated to understand for themselves where the aspects of the doctrine, the aspects of information and the aspects of entertainment are at the same time. Thus, according to Kyai Zainal, all illustrations must be an integral part of the lecture material. No illustration is forced solely for fun.

In order to strengthen the message he wanted to convey, illustration is indeed important. On this basis also, to attract interest and impart a strong message, illustrations are often wrapped in what is then called an artistic approach, whether in the form of music, qiroat, songs, poetry, rhymes, or wawacan (Sundanese poetry). To unify everything, Kyai Zen then packaged it in one form of artistic approach called *Mustaqim* (Music, Tabligh, Qiroat, Beauty and Reassuring). If we take a look at the history, actually the efforts to convey Islamic teachings through the media of art have a relatively old.

Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Bonang, for example, are two of the many prominent figures who spread Islam who have used music as a medium for preaching.

Music and poetry are not 'Gods' that are worshiped, focused and prioritized, but are powerful vehicles for processing life independence, divining enjoyment, social justice, total intimacy, peace, unity and intimacy. Kyai Zen really loves music, just as he really loves God and life. So if the Kyai Zen uses music and poetry only as a means of communication, it is a denial of his love and responsibility towards beauty.

The emergence of cultural modification and pattern revealed in the study, as shown by Kyai Zen with his *Mustaqim*, may regarded as musical representation of Islamic religious nuances. Thus, in fact Muslims must also have their own cultural choice, their own choice of art, and their own choice of music, which not only offers beauty and intimacy, but also the salvation of the world and the hereafter. In such a context, it can be seen how the artistic approach used by Kyai Zen in his preaching activities looks unique and beautiful.

That is exactly what *Mustaqim* is trying to achieve. Isn't it true that music can function to appease the mind from the burdens of humanity (*basyariyat*), and

entertain human nature. Islam maintains the greatness of music and all its aspects that can calm the minds of all people. Through the tradition of reciting recitations and religious chants associated with the Messenger of Allah, such as the tradition of singing *debaan* or *marhabanan*, as well as a series of holy prayers, Islam has made music a ladder to reach the Divine Presence.

Thus, it is true when Nasr (1987) said that the human self itself is God's music. And Islam, as an integral culture, inevitably recognizes this fact and makes it possible for those who meet certain qualifications to listen to music from the harp of their own existence plucked by the Fingers of God.

The sharpness of Kyai Zen's observations in exposing the social illnesses that he presents in the language of *da'wah* does not actually reduce the dimension of art which is actually the property of every individual. It is not something artificial if in his religious lectures, Kyai Zen, always includes elements of art which function not only as a refreshment for the atmosphere but also a cover for the substance of the teachings which for some people still taste bitter. The transmission of teachings like this was what since the first time Islam entered the

archipelago, the guardians, Muslim traders and other propagators of Islam were introduced to it.

For Kyai Zainal, a cultural approach to *da'wah* like this is considered relevant, especially because it is aimed at instilling values, and not just informing something about teachings. The word "change" which is attached to the purpose of preaching shows a comprehensive process, covering all aspects of life, starting from changes in cognition, attitudes and behavior. Therefore, the process of preaching takes place continuously (on-going process), penetrating times and circumstances. *Da'wah* become a "native" wherever and whenever. So that its presence cannot be measured normatively as a form that is taken for granted. Through a process of adaptation as well as meaningful dialogues with conditions, *da'wah* efforts have always been historical in the cultural plains of a society.

As a *da'wah* actor or *da'i*, Kyai Zen has packed teachings in the language of his time. Borrowing the Simultaneous Transaction Model from Melvin DeFleur (1993), such a *da'wah* process can be described as an attempt to convey messages that are generally influenced by at least three dominant factors. First, physical environmental factors (physical

surroundings), namely the living space where the da'wah takes place by emphasizing the "what" and "how" aspects of the teaching messages are exchanged. Basically, Da'wah can be done anywhere. But to reach the maximum target, in practice, da'wah will always consider the physical atmosphere in which the da'wah is carried out. Second, the factors of socio-cultural situations (sociocultural situations), it means that the da'wah process is an integral part of the social situation which contains certain cultural meanings as well as the identity of every actor involved in the da'wah process. Cultural considerations in the implementation of da'wah like this have actually been shown by the Prophet himself when facing cultural diversity which became the identity of the dakwah community. Because the term "ability of reason" used by the Prophet in his words, *khatibu al-naas 'ala qadri' uqulihim*, implies the need to consider the cultural factors of a society which is the main target of preaching. Because the ability of one's intellect is closely related to the local cultural environment. Third, the factor of social relationships, in this point of view, the status of the relationship between da'wah actors is very influential, both on the content of the message itself and on the

process of how the messages are conveyed. Social relations that take place in society are tied to the status and function played by each individual. As a large group that involves individual interaction, social relations will provide their own way for the formation of a community with its exclusive characteristics. This is where da'wah can be seen as a social engineering facility by giving a more dominant feel of religiosity.

The construction of da'wah as described above can actually be traced back to the time of the Prophet. Da'wah carried out by the Prophet SAW with his friends illustrates the process of culturalization of teachings into the plains of people's lives in his day. Almost all hadiths or sunnahs that are tied to Muhammad's prophetic identity always have strong cultural support with the local community. In fact, in its history, this process attachment not only shows the existence of functional relationships between da'wah and the permanent culture that becomes the identity of the community, but also with temporary and local situations. For example, the Prophet always chose the right situation to convey a message. Even if analyzed in terms of the substance of the observations and the narrative process, the entire hadith of the

Prophet can describe the cultural structure of the local community. Likewise, the ethics of life which are based on the traditions of the Prophet almost entirely illustrate this fact.

Therefore, the process of community formation carried out by the Prophet, especially in Medina, took place through a cultural approach by always taking into account the socio-cultural background of the local community. The messages of the Prophet that were revealed to his followers were the result of meaningful dialogues with the cultural reality that surrounded him. Thus, the Prophet's hadiths are basically a product of the conceptualization of inductively formulated social facts so as to be able to provide concrete answers to problems faced by society at that time.

Since Prophetic age, da'wah activities have always been carried out by considering aspects of local culture, especially to copy the da'wah path he is taking. Da'wah is always dealing with socio-cultural realities that have developed long before the birth of Islam. Because when Islam was born in the barren land of Arabia at the beginning of the 7th century, Arab society at that time already had a very high civilization. So that as the religion of Rahmatan li al-'alamin, Islam is present in nuances that are still to be

considered. It is not only a teaching that offers a new system of universal life, but also a teaching that still provides opportunities for the growth of the local cultural system of the people it faces.

By the time Islam was born, Arab society had shown very high cultural achievements. Since thousands of years BC, in Egypt human civilization has grown and developed as can be seen in its historical heritage which is still preserved until now. Even if we trace the traces of the prophets who were sent by God since thousands of years before the arrival of Islam, they have succeeded in bringing their people to a very high level of culture. It is not surprising that the Ka'bah building in the era before Muhammad has been used as a storage center for valuable literary works. So when the Quran was introduced to the Arab community, they did not easily accept it. The history of Islam by Umar bin Khattab, for example, illustrates the high appreciation of the Arab community in the literary world.

History records how the struggle of the Prophet's da'wah had to deal with cultural challenges that had been solidly indigenized. In fact, many of the teachings he brought were intended to reform and straighten the values that have become his daily role models. The Prophet had to

introduce new teachings on the one hand; and on the other hand the Prophet also found it difficult to avoid the fact that was deeply rooted in the life system of the people he faced. This is where the dilemma of the da'wah field is, so that the Quran itself directly provides guidance on how da'wah should be carried out.

The Quran shows a number of da'wah approaches in order to be able to become indigenous in their own homeland. The Quran also reminds its followers to preach in accordance with the cultural capacities of the people they face. If the Messenger of Allah ever indicated that the preaching must be carried out by considering the size of the mind which belongs to the people, then preaching also means having to look intelligently at the character of the local culture in which the da'wah is carried out.

Therefore, in carrying out the treatise teachings, Prophet never obtrude anything else, although there is no guarantee that an overarching theological propaganda coup movement. Rasulullah always opens space for a more open cultural dialogue so that there is a fair process in building a new value system in the midst of an established life system. Because in such a social context, da'wah is not a figure who completely eradicates the old order of life, but a form that carries out a process of

selecting the values of life which are considered relevant to the will of teachings.

That is why, when Islam entered the archipelago around the 13th century, preaching took place through the channels most likely to make cultural compromises. Because the archipelago at that time was not an area without culture, but a place for civilized communities. There were a very old society, so that automatically it has become a figure which full of traditions and values that previously colored life.

The process of Islamization carried out by the guardians also took place through the most easily accepted cultural approaches. Local traditions are met with teaching values as long as the process through which they are passed does not interfere with the principles of the creed which are the main principles of Islamic teachings. So that it is with da'wah approaches like this that Islam can enter the life spaces of the people of the archipelago, and in a not too long time Islam has become the religion adhered to by the majority of the people of the archipelago.

With regard to this kind of da'wah process, history shows that there is a meeting between teachings and culture in various forms. The inclusion of religious

values in the Wayang Golek culture in Sundanese, for example, or at the Sekatenan ceremony at the centers of power of the kings of that era, provided positive inspiration for the process of adapting Islam in the context of local culture. It is as if this fact is the most likely choice so that Islam as a "new" religion can easily be accepted. Because the presence of other faiths who have established into indigenous religions before Islam came, it is a fact that the same could not be denied.

Islam then became a cultural partner who jointly faced the people of the archipelago and brought them to new agreed patterns of life. Cultural transformation takes place through acculturation channels between Islam and local culture. The teaching values which are the main content of Islam have become the new colors of Nusantara (Indonesia) culture. Likewise, on the contrary, the form of the old culture is united in cultural ties so as to provide an solution for efforts to expedite the da'wah process. Until now, the product of acculturation is still seen as the cultural clothing of the Indonesian society, especially those of the Sundanese.

For the Sundanese people, the presence of Islamic preaching is not something that is seen as extruders. This is

because the Sundanese people with their philosophy that emphasizes on a harmonious value system have provided a very large space for religiosity for the growth of monotheistic beliefs which are the substance of Islamic teachings. Sundanese culture is a form that is not easily separated from the spirit of Islamic teachings, so it is easy for this "new" religion to become the indigenous religion of the Sundanese people. Even more extreme, there is a view which states that "Sunda mah geus Islami samemeh Islam datang" (Sundanese has embrace Islam even before Islam came to Indonesia). So, from this viewpoint, there is an assumption which states that "Aneh lamun urang Sunda asli teu ngagem agama Islam" (it is strange when Sundanese no embrace Islam).

The problem is, are these Sundanese cultural approaches still the dominant color of the da'wah movement in West Java? Many people are concerned about the presence of a number of preachers who are unable to convey Islamic teachings in Sunda Land using Sundanese. Didn't the Prophet himself ever reminded us through one of his words: "Convey the preaching of Islam using the language of its people". Because da'wah must be able to integrate into the cultural bloodstream of its people.

If this is not the case, then da'wah is nothing more than a spectacle that does not have any social impact on the listeners.

Therefore, the Prophet's words above essentially indicate that a da'wah activity should be carried out within the cultural flow of the community which is its main target. When the Prophet appealed to the Arab community, the call was carried out in the context of the Arab culture. Likewise, preaching to the Sundanese people, of course, must also be conveyed in the cultural space of the Sundanese people, so that a meaningful dialogue process occurs between the messages conveyed by the preachers and the cultural clothing of the people they face.

This is where Kyai Zen finds his preaching habitat which is "artful" and "delayed" but still "nyakola (educated)" so that it is easily accepted by rural and urban communities. Kyai Zen also seems to enjoy the profession of preaching, while offering da'wah patterns that are more polite to invite people, but still friendly with the local culture.

In the perspective of da'wah science, the interesting elements from the da'wah approach taken by Kyai Zen is the choice of the way of preaching that is based on local culture. Therefore, the cultural values that have been adhered to by the people of

West Java, namely Sundanese culture as the main culture and as culture in areas with various characteristics, can be actualized in the da'wah practices carried out by Kyai Zen. This is perhaps what is called culture-friendly preaching. Da'wah with a qualified perspective and understanding the local culture (Muhtadi, 1997).

The transmission of teachings like this was what since the first time Islam entered the archipelago, the guardians, Muslim traders and other propagators of Islam were introduced to it. This is where Kyai Zen finds his preaching habitat which is "artful" and "nyunda (based on Sudanese culture)" but still "nyakola (educated)" so that it is easily accepted by both rural and urban communities. Kyai Zen also seems to enjoy the preaching profession, while offering da'wah patterns that are more polite to invite people, but still friendly with the local socio-cultural situation where the transmission of Islamic messages is carried out.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The process of transmitting Islamic messages through the approach of art and local wisdom, especially in the form of Sundanese songs and poems, can be described as something unique and rare.

For more than 50 years working in the world of da'wah, Kyai Zen shows his consistency with his chosen approach to art and local wisdom in conveying Islamic messages to the community. The methodology of Kyai Zen lectures is always inseparable from four things, namely aspects of doctrine, illustration, recreation and information. These four things are integral in each of his lectures. These four things are then reflected in the form of art in preaching while still considering the socio-cultural dimensions of the place where da'wah is carried out.

In a sociological context, this research also proves that the approach of art and local wisdom that Kyai Zen takes in conveying Islamic messages finds compatibility and can be accepted by the people of West Java, and feels more polite to invite people, but still friendly to local socio-cultural conditions. In his preaching activities, Kyai Zen always includes elements of art which function not only as a refreshment for the atmosphere but also a cover for the substance of the teachings which for some people still taste bitter.

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