

[RELIGIOUS EXPLOITATION THROUGH PRACTICAL ACTIONS IN THE NOVEL *EMPAYAR: HIKAYAT PUTERA TANPA NAMA*]

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Abstract

Religious exploitation is a phenomenon that frequently occurs in society, where religion is used as a tool to achieve personal goals or specific interests. This study aims to analyze the issue of religious exploitation in the novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* by Teme Abdullah, based on Abdul Karim Zaidan's Theory of Da'wah Methods outlined in the book *Usūl al-Da'wah*, using a qualitative approach. The study examines how the antagonist, Pahlawan 1636, manipulates practical actions such as abuse of power and selective implementation of laws to fulfill personal agendas, including justifying oppression and injustice under the guise of religion. It also connects the narrative of the novel with three da'wah methods proposed by Abdul Karim Zaidan: Eliminating *Syubhat* (Eliminating Misconceptions), Education and Teaching (*Tarbiyyah* and *Ta'lim*), and Encouragement and Warning (*Targhib* and *Tarhib*), emphasizing the need for da'wah approaches based on wisdom and truth. The findings reveal that religious exploitation through practical actions not only contradicts the principles of da'wah but also creates confusion and disrupts societal harmony, highlighting the importance of understanding and applying proper da'wah principles and methods in the field of da'wah.

Keywords: Religious exploitation; actions; da'wah; literary analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Religion often becomes a subject of contention when it is misused or exploited for personal or political gain. This phenomenon can be viewed as a form of deviation that contradicts the true purpose of religion, which is meant to serve as a guide to life and a blessing for humanity. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, in his book *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (1989), emphasizes that religious exploitation is a betrayal of the sacred teachings of religion. This view is supported by Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani (2015), who highlights religious exploitation in the Malaysian context as a threat to societal unity.

In the realm of literature, the use of religion as a central theme has garnered considerable attention. One contemporary work addressing this issue is the novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* by Teme Abdullah. Through its intricate storytelling, the novel depicts conflicts involving religious exploitation, manipulation of religious authority, and the misuse of knowledge for personal gain. As a young author, Teme Abdullah skillfully raises these issues in a manner that sparks discussions among readers, particularly within the Muslim community.

This study aims to analyze how religious exploitation through practical actions is deeply portrayed through the characterization in the novel. It employs the theory of da'wah methods introduced by Abdul Karim Zaidan in *Usūl al-Da'wah*, such as Eliminating *Syubhat* (Eliminating Misconceptions), Education and Teaching (*Tarbiyyah* and *Ta'lim*), and Encouragement and Warning (*Targhib* and *Tarhib*), which emphasize the importance of a da'wah approach grounded in authentic sources, wisdom, and respectful methodology. The da'wah principles

outlined by Abdul Karim Zaidan serve as a framework to assess whether the religious elements highlighted in the work align with effective da'wah approaches.

This study also aims to address the gap in previous research, which has predominantly focused on religious exploitation in classical literary works, such as studies on *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* by Braginsky (1993) and *Hikayat Hang Tuah* by Sweeney (1987). To date, no in-depth study has been conducted on the novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* by Teme Abdullah. Therefore, this research not only contributes to the development of contemporary literary studies but also broadens discussions on the role of literature in addressing issues of religious exploitation in modern society. The analysis will focus on the rhetoric and speeches of the antagonist, reflecting today's social realities, and concludes that addressing religious misuse requires profound knowledge and awareness of da'wah principles.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach through library research, which includes thematic analysis to identify the main themes within the novel's narrative, comparative analysis to evaluate the application of Abdul Karim Zaidan's da'wah principles by the main characters, and critical analysis to derive relevant and meaningful findings. This approach enables an in-depth examination of the selected literary work, specifically the novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* by Teme Abdullah. The primary focus of the study is to understand the issue of religious exploitation as depicted through the narrative and characters in the novel. Additionally, the study evaluates the use of da'wah methods by the main characters based on Abdul Karim Zaidan's Theory of Da'wah Methods, as elaborated in the book *Usūl al-Da'wah*. This analysis not only offers a new perspective on the literary text but also connects it to significant Islamic da'wah theories.

BACKGROUND OF THE NOVEL *EMPAYAR: HIKAYAT PUTERA TANPA NAMA* BY TEME ABDULLAH

The novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* was published in 2018, marking another milestone in the works of Teme Abdullah, renowned for his captivating and creative storytelling style. This work is the author's fifth novel and serves as the first installment in the *Empayar* series. As of 2024, the series includes two additional sequels: *Empayar 2: Hikayat Mukjizat Daripada Iblis* (2019) and *Empayar 3: Hikayat Saka Keturunan Raja* (2022).



FIGURE 1 *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama*

Source: <https://www.imanshoppe.com/collections/teme-abdullah> [30 October 2024]

The novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* by Teme Abdullah, spanning 340 pages, has been printed 24 times since its first publication in April 2018, demonstrating a warm reception from readers. Set in a post-apocalyptic world under the Empire of the Aradhanapura Sultanate, the novel portrays the life of trainees at the Madrasah Taming Sari, a place where future leaders are trained, identified by numbers instead of names. The narrative focuses on the character of Trainee 8492, who faces moral and religious conflicts involving Pahlawan 1636, a manipulator of religion.

With themes of morality, religion, and humanity, Teme Abdullah adopts a critical approach and intellectual debates between characters to reflect the challenges of religious principles in real-life situations. Through his relaxed yet meaningful writing style, Teme Abdullah successfully conveys the message that religion should never be used as a tool for personal gain, especially when it tarnishes the purity of the concept of da'wah, which must be carried out with sincerity and truth.

RELIGIOUS EXPLOITATION

Exploitation, according to the *Kamus Dewan Bahasa Edisi Keempat* (DBP, 2005), refers to the act of taking advantage of someone unfairly for personal gain. In the context of religion, exploitation refers to the use of religion or religious elements for personal benefit. Within the framework of philosophy and sociological thought, Ibn Khaldun, a prominent Islamic scholar renowned for his contributions to sociolinguistics and the philosophy of language, associates the concept of exploitation with injustice, oppression, and abuse of power. Among the concepts he highlights is the term *zulm* (injustice), which refers to actions that violate principles of justice and balance within society (al-Atas, 2006). In his renowned work *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun offers profound insights into how exploitation can manifest across various dimensions of human life, including religious, economic, and social aspects (Al-Atas, 2006). The central focus of this discussion is on religious exploitation, where injustice often hides behind the manipulation of religious values for personal or group interests. Anwar (2017) states that such actions aim to acquire power, influence, or wealth through the manipulation of religious elements. Examples include the misuse of religion in politics or deceptive fundraising, turning religion from a moral guide into a tool for personal gain (Setiyani & Wiwik, 2018).

Religious exploitation manifests in three main forms: speech and rhetoric, actions, and symbols. First, exploitation through speech involves the use of manipulative language in advertisements or politics. For instance, slogans like "If we do not act, our country will be destroyed" aim to create fear to influence support. Second, exploitative actions involve direct acts, such as the misrepresentation of religious practices in horror films, which can undermine religious values (Farhannur et al., 2024). Third, exploitation through symbols involves the use of religious symbols in marketing, often distorting their original meaning and degrading religious values for commercial gain. These three forms demonstrate how religion can be manipulated unjustly, highlighting the need for public awareness to prevent such exploitation.

Religious exploitation spans various key areas of life, such as economics, politics, and society, where religion is manipulated to achieve the personal interests of individuals or groups. In economics, this includes activities like pyramid schemes disguised under religious terms, non-transparent fundraising, and the abuse of the concept of waqf (endowment) for personal profit, among others (Anon, 2024). In politics, religion is often manipulated to gain support through misleading narratives, hate sentiments, or the involvement of religious figures to legitimize political agendas (Ariyandi & Batubara, 2014). Socially, religious leaders sometimes use their positions to manipulate followers with ideologies that go beyond traditional moral values, as discussed by Mahoney (2008) in his study of Michael Burleigh's work on Political Religion.

Overall, such exploitation tarnishes the values of religion, which should serve as a moral guide and promote societal well-being. Therefore, understanding the approach of da'wah theory can help the community distinguish between true da'wah methods and those that exploit religion for personal gain. True da'wah aims to spread goodness and justice, whereas religious exploitation often tarnishes these principles for certain interests. By understanding da'wah theory, society can identify elements of religious manipulation and reject actions that undermine the integrity of religion.

CONCEPT OF DA'WAH

Da'wah, etymologically, means to invite or call (Pimay, 2006:2), while terminologically, it refers to explanation and communication, encompassing the development and formation of individuals, families, and communities (Sayid Muhammad Nuh, 2011:4), as well as raising awareness for positive change (M. Quraish Shihab, Munir Amin, 2009). Da'wah aims to help society accept the teachings of Islam with the goal of promoting good and avoiding evil for the welfare of both this world and the Hereafter (Samsul Munir Amin, 2009:6; Safrodin, 2008:32). Meanwhile, da'wah methods, or *al-Manhaj al-Da'wah* in Arabic, refer to clear approaches for achieving the objectives of da'wah. These involve methods such as speech, writing, and practical actions tailored to the context of the audience. Based on Surah an-Nahl, verse 125, da'wah methods are divided into *Hikmah* (wisdom), *Mau'idzah Hasanah* (good advice), and *Mujadalah* (gentle dialogue) to ensure the religious message is conveyed effectively and ethically (Amin, 2009:13).

Abdul Karim Zaidan's Theory of Da'wah Methods in *Usūl al-Da'wah*

The main components of Abdul Karim Zaidan's da'wah methods in the book *Usūl al-Da'wah* consist of four parts, namely, based on Sources of *Uslūb al-Da'wah*, Eliminating *Syubhat* (Eliminating Misconceptions), *Tarbiyyah* and *Ta'lim*, as well as *Tarhib* and *Tarhib*. However, this writing will focus on only three parts: Eliminating *Syubhat* (Eliminating Misconceptions), Education and Teaching (*Tarbiyyah and Ta'lim*), and Encouragement and Warning (*Tarhib and Tarhib*) (Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

The approach of Eliminating *Syubhat* (Eliminating Misconceptions) introduced by Abdul Karim Zaidan aims to address any misconceptions raised against the da'wah or the *da'i* (preacher) itself, such as accusations or slanders labeling them as heretical, foolish, or mad. Misconceptions can also be linked to da'wah through allegations of introducing something new, challenging the recipients of da'wah by instilling hatred towards it, and manipulating deviant ideologies for personal gain (Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

The *Tarhib* and *Tarhib* approach introduced by Abdul Karim Zaidan emphasizes the balance between offering encouragement and providing warnings in da'wah efforts. *Tarhib* (encouragement) refers to religious messages aimed at motivating the recipient to accept da'wah and adhere to the truth, based on the desire to attract the hearts of the audience with promises of goodness and rewards. On the other hand, *Tarhib* (warning) refers to religious messages that instill fear of consequences if the truth is not accepted or if one does not remain steadfast after accepting it. Forms of *Tarhib* and *Tarhib* include reminding others of the goodness they have received as a sign of gratitude to Allah, while *Tarhib* warns of the punishment in this world and the Hereafter if one denies Allah's blessings by committing sins and immoral actions (Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

The fourth da'wah method proposed by Abdul Karim Zaidan is *Tarbiyyah* and *Ta'lim*. This method focuses on education and character development, as well as knowledge acquisition for individuals or groups targeted by the da'wah (*mad'u*). *Tarbiyyah* refers to the process of education aimed at shaping an individual's character and morals. In the context of da'wah, *tarbiyyah* involves several key elements such as spiritual upbringing, continuous learning, and a systematic approach (Abdul Karim Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

Spiritual upbringing is a key element in the *tarbiyyah* process, aimed at strengthening an individual's faith and belief in the teachings of Islam. Through imparting deep spiritual values, individuals are guided to draw closer to Allah SWT and understand their role as servants and vicegerents on earth. This upbringing is not limited to ritual worship but also encompasses the application of Islamic ethical values and morals in daily life (Abdul Karim Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

The process of continuous learning in *tarbiyyah* emphasizes the concept of education as a lifelong journey. It is not limited to formal educational sessions in institutions but also involves individual efforts to continue seeking religious knowledge and self-improvement. With the spirit of continuous learning, individuals are encouraged to explore various dimensions of Islamic teachings, enrich their understanding, and use it as guidance in facing the challenges of life.

To ensure the effectiveness of *tarbiyyah*, a systematic approach is crucial, as emphasized by Abdul Karim Zaidan. He stresses the need to recognize the "illnesses" that exist within the *mad'u* (individuals being preached to) before providing appropriate solutions (Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020). This approach ensures that the *tarbiyyah* process is not generic but tailored to the needs and backgrounds of the individuals, resulting in effective and lasting changes.

The method of *ta'lim* is a formal teaching process that plays an important role in the context of Islamic da'wah. It is structured to convey religious knowledge in a systematic and in-depth manner. The purpose of this process is to guide the *mad'u* (individuals being preached to) to understand the teachings of Islam more comprehensively through an approach that is both knowledge-oriented and practical. Abdul Karim Zaidan emphasizes the importance of *ta'lim* as a key element in da'wah to ensure the continuity of delivering the true values of Islam (Abdul Karim Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

One of the main features of *ta'lim* is the emphasis on teaching religious knowledge. It involves disciplines such as fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), aqidah (Islamic creed), and tasawuf (Islamic mysticism), which are essential for understanding the teachings of Islam. By studying fiqh, the *mad'u* are taught the laws and regulations of Islam, while aqidah helps them strengthen their faith and belief in Allah SWT. In addition, tasawuf emphasizes the purification of the soul and spiritual practices to draw closer to Allah. Through this approach, the *mad'u* is provided with holistic guidance to apply Islam in every aspect of their life (Abdul Karim Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

Furthermore, the interactive method plays a significant role in *ta'lim*. Interaction between the educator (*da'i*) and the learners (*mad'u*) through discussions, Q&A sessions, and dialogues enhances understanding of the knowledge being taught. This method is not one-way; it encourages active participation from the *mad'u*, enabling them to ask questions, share views, and clarify doubts. This approach helps ensure that the knowledge conveyed is understood and applied more effectively (Abdul Karim Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

The final feature of *ta'lim* is the emphasis on practical application. The knowledge learned is not just theoretical but also applied in daily life to bring about tangible changes in the behavior and practices of the *mad'u*. For example, lessons on prayer are not only taught in terms of its pillars and conditions but are also applied practically by training the *mad'u* to perform it consistently. Through this approach, *ta'lim* serves as a tool for transformation, not only enhancing knowledge but also improving the morals and practices of the individual (Abdul Karim Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

DISCUSSION

ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS EXPLOITATION THROUGH PRACTICAL ACTIONS

The analysis will focus on the forms of religious exploitation through practical actions by the antagonist character, Pahlawan 1636, in Teme Abdullah's novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama*. The religious exploitation activities of Pahlawan 1636 are strongly opposed by the protagonist, Trainee 8492, who is also the mysterious 'Prince Without a Name'. The da'wah methods between these two characters are analyzed using the da'wah theory outlined by Abdul Karim Zaidan in his book *Usūl al-Da'wah*.

Throughout the history of civilization, religion has often been exploited as a manipulative tool to justify actions hidden behind a facade of piety. This exploitation is not merely rhetorical but is translated through subtle actions that obscure the true intentions behind the religious guise. Exploitation through practical actions refers to the act of taking advantage of religious beliefs, norms, or teachings to achieve specific goals, often carried out with hidden motives (Ibrahim, 2000). In this context, religious elements are used as tools to manipulate individuals or societies for personal or group interests.

This phenomenon is evident in the character of Pahlawan 1636 in the novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama*, where his actions reflect the use of religion as a tool of domination to consolidate power and achieve personal gain. There are two prominent forms of religious exploitation through actions in Pahlawan 1636's conduct: 1) Imposing prison sentences on several students of Madrasah Taming Sari in the name of religion; and 2) Deceiving his followers with titles, ranks, and lineage.

Behind religious teachings that emphasize love and tolerance, the act of imposing prison sentences on individuals who are engaged illustrates how misinterpretation can lead to oppression and injustice. In the novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* by Teme Abdullah, this situation is portrayed by the author as follows:

Setelah mengambil nafas, penuntut itu pun menerangkan situasi yang sebenar, "Pahlawan 1636... Dia telah memenjarakan lima orang pelatih sekali gus." "Lima orang? Kerana apa? Masalah sahshiah?" tanya Pelatih 8492. "Tidak..., mereka semua dipenjarakan kerana telah bertunang. Pahlawan 1636 mengatakan perkara itu menyemarakkan lagi perasaan cinta sebelum nikah. Mereka semua dituduh telah melakukan perkara haram," jawabnya. Pelatih 6480 mengurut dahinya sambil menggeleng-geleng. Kemudian tangannya dicekakkan ke pinggang. "Nampaknya, dia masih belum sedar. Masih lagi kasar. Aku sangkakan, akulah pelatih terakhir yang akan dipenjarakan atas alasan tidak munasabah ini," kata Pelatih 6480.

(Teme Abdullah 2018: 305)

This excerpt tells the story of a trainee who arrives, breathless, at Trainee 6480's room after running from the first-year trainee dormitory to inform Trainee 8492 about Pahlawan 1636's action of imprisoning five trainees for being engaged. Pahlawan 1636, who had performed the marriage contract with Trainee 2335 a week earlier, still believes that engagement intensifies feelings of love before marriage and holds onto his self-made fatwa, declaring the practice to be forbidden. Trainee 6480 expresses disbelief and surprise at his action, especially since he had just been released from prison for the same reason. Trainee 6480 feels that the imprisonment is baseless, and Pahlawan 1636 continues to display harshness and is unrepentant in his propagation of his beliefs.

The analysis of Pahlawan 1636's proselytizing practices in the novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* refers to Abdul Karim Zaidan's third and fourth methods of da'wah, namely *Tarbiyyah* and *Ta'lim* (Education and Teaching) and *Targhib* and *Tarhib* (Instilling Hope and Caution). These methods highlight how Pahlawan 1636's manipulation of religion deviates significantly from the authentic principles of Islamic propagation.

In the context of Pahlawan 1636's *Tarbiyyah*, several conflicting aspects warrant attention, including the neglect of justice in imparting teachings. His act of imprisoning the trainees for their engagement reflects a disregard for the principles of justice in Islam.

Pahlawan 1636's use of religion as a tool to justify his repressive actions stems purely from his intent to uphold his fabricated fatwa. This prohibition against engagement was devised after Pahlawan 1636 himself married without any prior engagement, solely to claim a woman he desired who was previously engaged to his friend. This contradicts the fundamental purpose of *Tarbiyyah*, which aims to educate individuals to comprehend and practice Islamic teachings in a fair and truthful manner. It should not be misused to fulfill personal ambitions.

In authentic *Tarbiyyah*, the value of justice should serve as the foundation for decision-making, as elaborated by Nurhakim in his study *Pandangan Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas Tentang Pendidikan Dan Relevansinya Dengan Teori Pendidikan Kontemporer* (The Perspective of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on Education and Its Relevance to Contemporary Educational Theory):

But more importantly, education must lead to changes in attitude and behavior. This indicates that the main purpose of seeking knowledge is to instill values of goodness or justice, and the correct attitudes and behaviors must also be derived from true knowledge.

(Nurhakim, 2022: 140)

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphasizes that the knowledge taught or learned should instill values of goodness and justice in attitudes and behavior, enabling individuals to act based on true knowledge. In the context of Pahlawan 1636, it is evident that the *Tarbiyyah* imparted is not aimed at fostering these values but rather at justifying his manipulation of religion. Thus, his actions fail to provide any spiritual nurturing to the punished trainees and do not align with the systematic approach suggested by Abdul Karim Zaidan for effective da'wah.

When examining *Ta'lim* (education and teaching) within the context of Pahlawan 1636, several aspects are contradictory to its authentic principles. One such contradiction lies in the absence of foundational knowledge in his teaching. Pahlawan 1636's act of imprisoning trainees for their engagement demonstrates that his teachings are not grounded in valid Sharia knowledge. Furthermore, his actions, justified through fatwas and religious rhetoric delivered poetically and persuasively, are based on sources cited recklessly and without a solid foundation.

According to Mansor's journal article *Retorik Pemerian dalam Ceramah Agama* (Descriptive Rhetoric in Religious Lectures), *Ta'lim* should impart genuine and profound knowledge about Islamic teachings, not merely rhetoric (Mansor, 2018). This means that education in Islam should not focus solely on delivering attractive phrases, slogans, or poetic expressions without providing accurate and deep understanding of religious teachings.

Moreover, there is a lack of interactive methods in Pahlawan 1636's approach to teaching. This is evident in the dialogue that takes place in Trainee 6480's room, where Pahlawan 1636 does not create any space for interaction or questioning between himself and the trainees imprisoned for their engagement. In contrast, effective *Ta'lim* requires active interaction between the *da'i* (preacher) and *mad'u* (audience) to clarify misunderstandings about religious admonitions. This principle is supported by Hariyanto in his journal article *Relasi Kredibilitas Da'i dan Kebutuhan Mad'u dalam Mencapai Tujuan Dakwah* (The Relationship Between the Credibility of Preachers and the Needs of Audiences in Achieving Da'wah Goals), which states:

In reality, there are often things that contemporary da'i forget. First, da'i who are too focused on delivering da'wah content forget the duration set by the organizers. Second, a lack of interaction or communication, failing to provide space for dialogue, such as holding question-and-answer sessions. Providing space for dialogue will increase the interest of the mad'u in receiving da'wah messages. Moreover, questions from mad'u to da'i will present a great opportunity (potential) to meet the needs or expectations of the mad'u.

(Hariyanto, 2018: 63)

According to Hariyanto, contemporary *da'i* often make several critical mistakes in their da'wah practices. Among these, a common flaw is their excessive focus on delivering material, neglecting to engage in meaningful communication and failing to provide sufficient space for interaction, such as question-and-answer sessions. This leaves unanswered questions lingering in the minds of the *mad'u*, resulting in a lack of deep understanding. Conversely, providing room for dialogue can enhance the *mad'u*'s interest in receiving da'wah messages, and their questions can serve as opportunities for the *da'i* to address their needs and expectations effectively.

Using Abdul Karim Zaidan's third method, *Tarhib* and *Tarhib*, the analysis of Pahlawan 1636's da'wah practices highlights how he violates key principles of this approach. *Tarhib* and *Tarhib* aim to attract the *mad'u* to internalize and understand religious messages through the elements of hope and warning (Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020).

Tarhib focuses on providing motivation and instilling joy in the *mad'u* through Islamic teachings conveyed in a harmonious and open-hearted manner (Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020). In Pahlawan 1636's case, several issues stand out. His act of imprisoning trainees for being engaged contradicts the joy typically associated with the engagement period. In Islam, engagement is a phase for individuals to become acquainted with their prospective spouses under the guidelines set by the religion. According to Abdul Karim Zaidan in *Kitab al-Mufasssol Fi Ahkam al-Mar'ah Wa al-Baiti al-Muslim Fi al-Syariah al-Islamiah* (Detailed Rules on Women and Muslim Households in Islamic Law) (Volume 6: 58), engagement is permissible (*mubah*) and should be encouraged as a positive practice. Zaidan elaborates that engagement allows men and women to select the best life partners based on religion, morality, family background, and other factors (Zaidan, 1997).

However, Pahlawan 1636 vehemently opposes this practice, misinterpreting it as inherently harmful, as if Islam does not provide facilitations for its followers regarding marriage. He overlooks the value of engagement as a period to build understanding and trust between potential spouses. As a leader, he should emphasize the positive aspects of engagement and marriage rather than propagate baseless fatwas that contradict Islamic teachings.

Simultaneously, as a leader, Pahlawan 1636 should motivate his trainees to adhere to religious values in a constructive manner rather than relying on coercion or fear. Mohamed Hamdan, Fareza, and A'dawiyah (2017), in their journal article *Pendekatan Motivasi dalam Dakwah Remaja* (Motivational Approaches in Youth Da'wah), emphasize that motivating the *mad'u* to uphold religious values should prioritize positive reinforcement rather than coercion or intimidation. This approach encourages self-driven transformation and fosters a stronger commitment to faith.

The spirit injected through a motivational approach to changing behavior will affect the body to act more diligently or improve self-change. Motivation becomes a driving force that can influence a person to take action.

(Mohamed Hamdan et al., 2017: 79)

Furthermore, in the context of the *Tarhib* method, the act of imprisoning trainees based on unfounded reasoning reflects a warning given without adhering to the principles of justice. In the framework of proper da'wah, warnings must be supported by clear and valid Sharia evidence. Unsubstantiated warnings not only risk leading to injustice but also undermine public trust in the Islamic legal system and ethical values within society. This point is emphasized in the book *Maqasid Syariah dan Pemikiran Pengurusan Islam* by Asmadi Mohamed Naim, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

The implementation of a practice contrary to Islamic Shari'ah under the guise of fulfilling the ultimate goals of Shari'ah is rejected. On the contrary, implementing the practice according to the methods prescribed by Islamic Shari'ah is the true objective.

(Asmadi Mohamed Naim, 2003: 5)

By using threats as a means to control the behavior of the *mad'u*, Pahlawan 1636 creates an atmosphere of fear. This contradicts the principles of da'wah, which should prioritize justice and compassion. Such repressive actions risk alienating the *mad'u* from religious teachings. When warnings are issued without a foundation of justice and compassion—such as imposing prison sentences without discretion—they can lead to feelings of disillusionment and distrust in religious institutions.

According to Wawarah Saipudin et al. (2021) in their study titled bertajuk '*Membina Kredibiliti Pendakwah Selebriti: Panduan Berdakwah Melalui Media Sosial*' (Building the Credibility of Celebrity Preachers: Guidelines for Preaching Through social media) several important aspects need to be emphasized by preachers. They highlight that preachers must uphold strong principles and strive to maintain their credibility through five key aspects. First, preachers must safeguard their credibility and integrity by ensuring that the information they convey is accurate and grounded in authentic Islamic teachings. Second, they should use their influence to spread positive and constructive messages while avoiding the dissemination of information that could provoke controversy or misunderstandings. Third, preachers should adhere to ethical preaching practices, including respecting the views of others and refraining from imposing their opinions on others. Fourth, the platforms used for preaching must be utilized wisely by ensuring that the content shared is beneficial and does not offend any party. Fifth, celebrity preachers should continuously enhance their religious knowledge to provide accurate advice and guidance to their followers (Wawarah et al., 2021).

Additionally, a field study by Nuzila Fitria, Anuar Rasyid, and Zulkarnain (2021) revealed findings indicating that the credibility of preachers and exposure to preaching through appropriate platforms significantly influence the level of religiosity among adolescents. Based on data analysis, these two factors contribute 32% to adolescent religiosity, with a significant value of 0.00 and a correlation coefficient of 0.569. This demonstrates that efforts to enhance the religiosity of adolescents or the Muslim community as a whole must consider both the credibility of preachers and the use of appropriate means of preaching to effectively achieve more impactful results.

Overall, the context of da'wah implementation by Pahlawan 1636 in the novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* illustrates how religion can be exploited not only to serve personal interests but also to maintain power. Referring to Abdul Karim Zaidan's methods of da'wah, it is evident that Pahlawan 1636's actions contradict the principles of *Tarbiyyah* and *Ta'lim*, which emphasize spiritual and moral education, as well as *Targhib* and *Tarhib*, which advocate spreading knowledge and promoting good practices through well-founded and fair motivation and warnings. It is essential for preachers to practice religion ethically and compassionately, without misusing it to justify oppression. Instead, religion should serve as a guide to cultivating noble character and upholding social justice to foster a harmonious and respectful society.

Another form of religious exploitation through actions by Pahlawan 1636 is his manipulation of loyal followers using titles, ranks, and lineage. This is highlighted by the author as follows:

Jadi..., Pahlawan 1636 merupakan Putera Aradhana Sastra yang hilang itu?" tanya Pelatih 8492 dengan tenang. Ura-ura ini memang pernah dia dengar. Namun tidak diambil serius. "AKU MEMBERITAHU KAU SEBAGAI AMARAN! JANGAN SESEKALI MELAWAN SEORANG PUTERA! JIKA AKU TAHU RAHSIA INI BOCOR, ENKKAU YANG PERTAMA AKU CARI!" Itulah kata-kata terakhir sepuluh orang a-kaf tersebut sebelum meninggalkan Pelatih 8492 keseorangan. Apabila para a-kaf itu sudah tidak kelihatan, Pelatih 8492 menjatuhkan dirinya melutut di atas tanah, kepenatan. Dia menggeleng-geleng. Patutlah para pengikut tegar Pahlawan 1636 sangat-sangat setia kepadanya. Hanya kerana Pahlawan 1636 mengaku dia seorang anak gahara, dia boleh melakukan apa sahaja sesuka hatinya.

(Teme Abdullah 2018: 279)

In this excerpt, Pahlawan 1636's right-hand man, a-Kaf, attempts to threaten Trainee 8492 not to overstep boundaries in reprimanding Pahlawan 1636. The context of religious exploitation by Pahlawan 1636 can be seen through his manipulation of loyal followers using the title "Prince of Aradhana Sastra," claiming to be the son of Sultan Aradhanapura. Trainee 8492 is deeply disappointed by how Pahlawan 1636 deceives his followers solely to intimidate and control them. The title "Prince of Aradhan Sastra" rightfully belongs to Trainee 8492, who has been disguising himself as an ordinary trainee at Madrasah Taming Sari without his father, Sultan Aradhanapura, knowing.

When analyzing the excerpt that depicts religious exploitation by Pahlawan 1636, one of Abdul Karim Zaidan's relevant da'wah methods is Eliminating *Syubhat* (Eliminating Misconceptions). This method emphasizes that a *da'i* (preacher) should avoid any doubts or misconceptions or suspicions about themselves or the teachings of religion, such as avoiding any slanders or accusations that could undermine the trust in the preacher and Islam (Zaidan, 1992; Surizkika Aldi, 2022; Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali, 2020). In this excerpt, Pahlawan 1636 uses the title "Prince of Aradhana Sastra" to deceive and control his followers. By claiming a high status, he hides his wrongful actions and influences his followers to blindly obey his commands. This contradicts the principles that a *da'i* should uphold in delivering da'wah.

According to Sopian Ilyas in his master's thesis '*Usaha Dakwah Muhammad Arsyad Thalib Lubis Terhadap Golongan Bukan Islam Suku Batak di Medan, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia*', a *da'i* should set an example for society by demonstrating noble character and honesty as core values. Any form of deception or exploitation, including misleading identities to gain influence, is unethical and can undermine the trust of the community in the religion and the individual. A *da'i* must adhere to honesty and integrity in every interaction, building positive relationships without deception. Emphasizing good character in da'wah not only protects the preacher's reputation but also ensures that Islamic teachings are delivered correctly and effectively, encouraging the community to trust and practice Islamic values more deeply (Sopian Ilyas, 2015).

Based on the field study by Zulkefli Aini (2019), titled '*Strategi Komunikasi Pemujukan Pendakwah Dalam Penyampaian Mesej Islam Kepada Masyarakat Orang Asli di Selangor*' (The Persuasive Communication Strategies of Preachers in Delivering Islamic Messages to the Indigenous Communities in Selangor) one key finding is that the honesty of preachers plays a crucial role in preaching to the community, as it serves as a foundation for building credibility and trust. The study demonstrates that preachers who are honest in delivering Islamic messages, possess deep knowledge, have clear objectives, exhibit strong spiritual practices, and display commendable character are more capable of influencing the acceptance and appreciation of Islamic teachings by the community as a whole. This honesty helps to avoid negative perceptions and enhances public confidence in preachers, making their preaching more effective and well-received.

According to Risal Qori (2024), honesty is a fundamental element in preaching that significantly impacts the effectiveness of the message and the community's trust in Islamic teachings. The study emphasizes that honesty is not only reflected in the accurate delivery of facts but also in the consistency between the preacher's words and actions. Honest preachers strengthen the integrity of their message, build audience trust, and ensure that the content delivered is free from manipulation or falsehood, which is particularly critical in the current digital era. Honesty is also linked to the preacher's commitment to conveying messages that are relevant and guiding, making it a vital tool in fostering strong relationships between preachers and their audiences.

In a nutshell, the religious exploitation depicted by Pahlawan 1636 in this excerpt shows the misuse of titles and positions to deceive and control his followers. These actions not only contradict the principles of da'wah, which demand honesty and transparency but also damage the community's trust in religion. By understanding Abdul Karim Zaidan's second da'wah method, it is important for society to be cautious in assessing religious leaders and understand that true da'wah must be based on noble character and integrity. An honest *da'i* will always prioritize honesty in their actions, not using titles, ranks, and lineage for personal gain or power.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study concludes that the religious exploitation by the character Pahlawan 1636 in the novel *Empayar: Hikayat Putera Tanpa Nama* not only tarnishes the sanctity of Islamic teachings but also illustrates how religion can be manipulated for personal gain. Through the analysis of Abdul Karim Zaidan's Theory of Da'wah Methods, it was found that the religious deviations by the antagonist character in this novel contradict the da'wah principles outlined by Abdul Karim Zaidan, such as Eliminating *Syubhat* (Eliminating Misconceptions), *Tarbiyyah and Ta'lim* (Education and Teaching), and *Tarhib and Tarhib* (Encouragement and Warning). These methods prioritize an approach to da'wah that is based on sound principles, respectful conduct and wisdom.

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