

The Identity of Ba Alawi Women Islamic Communicators: Najwa Shihab and Halimah Alaydrus as models

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Abstract

Purpose - This research aims to uncover the identity of Ba Alawite women Islamic communicators, regarding their background of being closed (exclusive) while others are a small part of being inclusive. Also, to explain their transformation from exclusive to inclusive. This research is important to know the gender equality of Ba Alawy women.

Method - This research is qualitative with the type of literature review. Data is obtained from YouTube channels, journals, books, and related websites. The theory used is Mary Jane Collier's cultural identity theory.

Result - Ba Alawi women are closed because of communication with Tarim customs and traditions carried out since childhood, in this case, Halimah Alaydrus. At the same time, Najwa Shihab is an inclusive Ba Alawi woman whose identity has been influenced by openness since childhood in communicating with all traditions and thoughts.

Implication - This article is intended to provide encouragement and knowledge about the diversity of Ba Alawi women; the majority of them are exclusive, and a small number are inclusive. The climate in Indonesia and Hadramut is not the same. And Ba Alawi women need to take opportunities in the world of da'wah.

Originality/Value - This research is the first on female Islamic communication actors from among the ba alawy and their role in the world of da'wah, as well as their inclusive or inclusive life motives.



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Kata kunci:

Komunikasi Islam,
Najwa Shihab,
Halimah Alaydrus.

Abstrak

Tujuan - Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap identitas komunikator Islam perempuan Ba Alawite, mengenai latar belakang mereka yang tertutup (eksklusif) dan sebagian kecil yang inklusif. Selain itu, untuk menjelaskan transformasi mereka dari eksklusif menjadi inklusif. Penelitian ini penting untuk mengetahui kesetaraan gender perempuan Ba Alawy.

Metode - Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif dengan jenis tinjauan literatur. Data diperoleh dari kanal YouTube, jurnal, buku, dan situs web terkait. Teori yang digunakan adalah teori identitas budaya Mary Jane Collier.

Hasil - Perempuan Ba Alawi tertutup karena komunikasi dengan adat dan tradisi Tarim yang dilakukan sejak kecil, dalam hal ini Halimah Alaydrus. Sementara itu, Najwa Shihab merupakan perempuan Ba Alawi yang inklusif yang identitasnya dipengaruhi oleh keterbukaan sejak kecil dalam berkomunikasi dengan semua tradisi dan pemikiran.

Implikasi - Artikel ini dimaksudkan untuk memberikan dorongan dan pengetahuan tentang keberagaman perempuan Ba Alawi yang mayoritas bersifat eksklusif dan sebagian kecil bersifat inklusif. Iklim di Indonesia dan Hadramut tidak sama. Dan perempuan Ba Alawi perlu mengambil peluang dalam dunia dakwah.

Orisinalitas/Nilai - Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian pertama tentang pelaku komunikasi Islam perempuan dari kalangan ba alawy dan peran mereka dalam dunia dakwah, serta motif hidup mereka yang inklusif atau tidak.

Introduction

Ba alawi women are known as closed and exclusive women. This is inversely proportional to ba alawi men, who are seen as active in the public sphere, including in the field of da'wah. Not many ba Alawi women are engaged in da'wah and Islamic communication due to the doctrine of their home region of Hadramut, which adheres to the opinion of Shafi'i Fiqh, which requires women to be closed. Her in Indonesia, there are two famous and phenomenal ba alawi women figures, namely Najwa Shihab as a representative of inclusive ba alawi women and the second is Halimah Alaydrus as an exclusive da'iyah in terms of her appearance. These two women are important to be studied further regarding the background and motives that shape their identity from exclusive to inclusive.

The study of Ba Alawi women was conducted by Fatimah Husain in her inaugural speech as Professor at Sunan Kalijaga University, Jogjakarta. According to her, the emergence of Ba Alawi women preachers shows that there is a new religious authority displayed by Ba Alawi women in the public domain, especially with the existence of social media that allows them to convey their ideas (Husain, 2023; Mudhofi et al, 2023). This study confirms that Ba Alawi women have begun to play a role in the public sphere after previously only Ba Alawi men, known as Habib, were vocal in public da'wah.

Ba Alawi women, known as Hubabah or Sharifah in their home country of Tarim Hadramut, Yemen, are not active in public spaces; they tend to be closed and do not go out much. According to Buya Yahya, they are very awake and do not go out to crowded places (Al-Bahjah, 2005). The same thing was stated by Habib Abdul Qadir Ba'abud, one of Habib Umar's santri who lived for a long time in the city of Tarim, that women in Tarim leave their homes four times in a lifetime. Firstly, when they are still small until the age of ten, after that, they enter the house and are not allowed to go out in public. Secondly, when there is a very important need, such as the death of a relative, mother, or father, with the condition that it is after maghrib until Isha, because at that time, men are rarely outside, all are praying. Fourthly, when performing a marriage contract, they leave the house, and finally, when they die, they leave the house to be buried. This tradition is a source of pride for the people of Tarim because women are considered capable of maintaining themselves and their honor in addition to their firmness in carrying out religious teachings, more specifically, applying women's fiqh in the Shafi'i school of thought. In Indonesia, women from the Ba Alawi community follow this tradition because it is a custom inherited from their ancestors. Bani Alawi is nasally higher than the natives because they have a blood link to the Prophet Muhammad (Ismail, 2020).

Ba alawi women's closed lives follow the traditions or ideologies of their country of origin, Hadramut. But when they moved to Indonesia, they found new problems. The traditions in Indonesia that uphold freedom and multi-culturalism are not in accordance with the traditions of Ba Alawi women, so there are Ba Alawi female figures who break out of their traditions to become public communication actors, such as Najwa Shihab and Halimah Alaydrus with different styles. From this statement, it is interesting to examine the process of exclusion and inclusiveness of Ba Alawi women to illustrate that adjusting to Indonesian customs is the best and does not conflict with the madzhab of the majority of scholars so that the role of Ba Alawi women in the world of da'wah is no less beneficial than Ba Alawi men.

The first Habaib who migrated to Indonesia from Hadramut were only men; the women did not participate in the migration due to safety considerations and customs that did not allow women to migrate abroad (Latif et al., 2016). Hadarami men who migrated to Indonesia from among the Ba Alawi then mingled with the local community until they married local women. In this case, many of the Ba Alawi women known as Syariah are of Indigenous origin, but because they adhere to an endogamous system that reads only from male descent the glory of their lineage follows the male line called Habib (plural form of *habāib*).

The Ba Alawi Sharifahs living in Indonesia are at a crossroads between continuing the tradition of women inherited by their ancestors in Tarim by living a completely closed life from the public or following Indonesian culture, which requires them to socialize and open themselves like Indonesian customs. In this case, this research will portray two Ba Alawi women, Najwa Shihab, and Halimah Alaydrus, and how they assimilate their culture with the culture of Indonesian society to make themselves more useful in spreading the values of religious teachings.

This research is different from other research on Ba Alawi from the aspect of the object of research, namely Islamic communication actors from among Ba Alawi women, more specifically Najwa Shihab and Halimah Alaydrus. Furthermore, the novelty of this research in terms of the theory used is that it uses identity theory to reveal the exclusive and inclusive sides of Ba Alawi women and their adjustment to Indonesian traditions. It is important to provide knowledge that the role of Ba Alawi women in da'wah is quite strategic, just like Ba Alawi men. The strict doctrine of Hadramut scholars is less compatible with Indonesian traditions.

The problem of this research is why Ba Alawi women, when living in Indonesia, can survive with an exclusive life in their home country (Tarim, Yemen) and, on the other hand, open themselves to Indonesian culture as a new place so that they can move more widely in the field of da'wah. Therefore, researchers chose two Ba Alawi women, namely Najwa Shihab and Halimah Alaydrus, as models.

Research Methods

The problem of this research is why Ba Alawi women when living in Indonesia can survive with an exclusive life-like in their home country (Tarim, Yemen) and on the other hand, open themselves to Indonesian culture as a new place so that they can move more widely in the field of da'wah, therefore researchers chose two Ba Alawi women, namely Najwa Shihab and Halimah Alaydrus as models. This research is qualitative research and uses library research (literature study). Researchers collected primary data related to this theme from books, journals, and videos of Halimah Alaydrus and Najwa Shihab from social media. The theory used in analyzing the data is Mary Jane Collier's cultural identity communication theory (Collier, 2009), which is used to examine the identity of Islamic communication actors, in this case, two Ba Alawi women, namely Najwa Shihab and Halimah Alaydrus. Social identity communication theory asserts that a person's identity is defined through negotiations between the self and the culture or outside the self that influences it (other).

Results and Discussion

Halimah Alaydrus

Halimah Alaydrus is a Sharifah who is the 39th descendant of the Messenger of Allah from the Ba Alawi clan (Husain, 2005). She was born in Indamayu on 2 April 1979 to a mother named Nur binti Muhdar Assegaf and a father named Usman Alaydrus. Since childhood, Halimah loved to read; she bought magazines at the shop near her father's kiosk, and she aspired to become a writer; although none of her family were academics, her father was a lover of knowledge (Alaydrus, 2022).

JID | 19

Halimah's formal education was only taken up at an elementary school, after which she chose to study at an Islamic boarding school. In 1991, she entered Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah Bangil Pasuruan for four years. Then, in 1996, he moved to Pondok Pesantren Attauhidiyah Tegal Central Java for six months to focus on studying Tauhid Science. Then, he moved to Al-Anwar Islamic Boarding School for 2 years (1996-1998) to study Fiqh (Alaydrus, 2022). Then, in 1998, she left for Tarim, Yemen, to continue her education at Dār Al-Zahro, which was the first female boarding school in Tarim. Halimah Alaydrus was the third generation student at the boarding school and the first student from Indonesia and even Asia (Alaydrus, 2022). After returning from Tarim in 2002, when she was 22 years old, Halimah Alaydrus was matched with Habib Ahmad al-Haddar by Habib Umar bin Hafiz (Setiawan, 2020).

Tradition, Lineage, and Religion

It has already been mentioned that women in Tarim are very private; they are out of the house until the age of 10, and after that, they are considered pubescent; they must close themselves inside the house and wear the veil, not going out except for important activities. When their daughters reach puberty, mothers in Tarim hold an official ceremony attended by many guests to signify their daughters entering puberty and officially wearing the veil so that it is instilled in the child that veiling is something noble. Uniquely in the event, married women are separated from unmarried women (girls), because in Tarim custom married women are considered a disgrace to see the face of an unmarried girl, let alone seen by a man, so when a married woman enters the girl's room, they quickly take the veil and the married woman is considered rude because she came to the girl's area without permission (Ropi'i, 2021; Mudhofi & Karim, 2024).

According to Buya Yahya's experience, as explained on his YouTube channel, Tarim women rarely go out of the house, and if they are forced to go out and feel behind a man who is also walking, then they move to the edge of the road and stop letting men precede them, this is because they do not want their bodies to be seen from behind, in order to protect themselves from the views of men. Sheikh Taha Rayyan, a scholar from al-Azhar, claimed that he lived in Tarim for two years and never saw a woman's face.

The exclusive tradition of women in the city of Tarim cannot be separated from the school of Jurisprudence that they adhere to, more specifically, the concept of aurat and *kafā'ah* in marriage in the Shafi'i school of Jurisprudence. The concept of aurat - as applied by Tarim women - within Shafi'i Jurisprudence is still a matter of debate, rather than outside Shafi'i Jurisprudence.

Meanwhile, the concept of *kafā'ah* in lineage, wealth, and beauty has the potential to lead to inferiority of social status, in contrast to *kafā'ah* in religion, so the scholars of jurisprudence are also not unanimous on this issue.

JID | 20 A woman's '*awrah* outside of prayer and in the presence of non-mahram men (*ajānib*) is all of her body, while during prayer it is all of her body except her face and two palms (Al-Nawawī, 2005). However, Habib Masyhur bin Hafiz, a prominent scholar of Tarim who is an expert in Shafi'i Jurisprudence, said that the opinion of Imam Nawawi (muktamad) regarding the aurat of women in the presence of non-mahram men is that all of her body including the face and palms, so women are obliged to cover their faces because according to him the face is a place that is prone to fitnah. According to Habib Al-Masyhur, although the Shafi'i scholars say that a woman's '*awrah* in prayer and in front of non-mahram men is all of her body except her face and hands, they must still be covered because of the fear of causing fitnah.

Next is the concept of *kafā'ah* (compatibility) in marriage in the Shafi'i school of thought, especially in the issue of nasab. Shafi'i scholars agree that *kafā'ah* in marriage is measured in four ways, namely religion, lineage, wealth, and beauty. The four criteria of *kafā'ah* are not a valid condition of marriage, but the woman and her guardian have full authority to cancel the *kafā'ah*, because *kafā'ah* is the right of both (Al-Malibari, 2018). However, many Ba Alawi female guardians require *kafā'ah* for their daughters, so Ba Alawi sharifahs are constrained by the *kafā'ah* nasab system.

Kafā'ah nasab in the tradition of the Ba Alawi Hadramut family stems from the sanctity of their descendants from the line of Fatimah bint Muhammad PBUH, because although Islam adheres to the patrilineal system, there is an exception in the case of the Fatimah bint Muhammad line because there are texts of the Qur'an and Hadith that privilege the descendants of Fatimah still connected to the Prophet so that the Sharifah cannot be said to be kufu' commensurate with other than Sayid (descendants of the Prophet) (Subchi, 2020).

The height of the Ba Alawi Hadrami lineage forms a hierarchy of social status in society. So that there is a first and second, even third-class society. This social stratum has been formed since the Dutch era and even before when the Dutch classified three classes of society in Indonesia, namely first Europeans, second foreign easterners (Chinese, Arabs, Indians), and then natives (Saefullah, 2004). This classification is the psychology of Indonesian society accustomed to occupying the lowest class so that in the case of Habib's degree of Hadrami descent in various regions, he is still positioned as a special person, although there are movements that dare to criticize them because they are considered to be the best group and tend to make natives under them.

Najwa Shihab

The daughter of Prof Quraish Shihab was born in Makassar on 16 September 1977 (Tempo's Team, 2019). She is the second of five children, and her mother is Fatmawati Assegaf, whose name can be guessed from the Assegaf clan whose ancestors came from Tarim Hadramut. Despite being descendants of Ba Alawi Hadramut, Najwa Shihab's family is not usually called Sharifah or Habib like other Hadrami families; they consider it not so important. This shows the egalitarian attitude and openness of Najwa's family.

The woman who is familiarly called "Nana" took her primary school education at Madrasah Ibtida'iyah Nurul Hidayah (1984-1990), then continued to Al-Ikhlâs Jeruk Purut Junior High School in South Jakarta in 1993. She went to Senior High School at SMA Negeri 6 Jakarta; then Nana had the opportunity to study in America through the American Field Service (AFS) Programme at the age of 16. After America, Najwa continued her studies at the University of Indonesia (UI) in the field of law through the Interest and Talent Search (PMDK) selection path in the year (1996-2000); in 2008, Najwa received a scholarship offer to Australia, she continued at the University of Melbourne Law School taking Media Law (Septiasmara, D., & Marianti, 2023). Najwa's profession is in accordance with her scientific background; she became a well-known journalist and presenter in various media and national television.

Najwa Shihab does not expose her family life on social media, but it is known that Najwa's husband is a Sayid, although their marriage was not arranged like the Ba Alawi family custom, through their personal introduction while studying at the University of Indonesia (UI), they did not date for a long time and then decided to get married. The inclusiveness of Najwa's life on this issue does not eliminate the tradition of Ba Alawi women as a whole; Najwa is still married to Sayid but on a consensual basis through her own choice. Marrying not long ago was also done by his father, Quraish Shihab; he married Mrs Fatmawati Assegaf (Nur, 2012) after two meetings and then married at the age of Fatmawati's 20th, both of whom were from the Ba Alawi family (Quraish Shihab, 2015). Marrying this immediately is done to keep both of them from committing adultery.

Najwa Syihab's family, especially her father's, is noted as an academic and upholds science. Unlike other habaib who are hadromycentric in all aspects, Najwa's father's family is more neutral. Quraish Shihab prefers Egypt as a place to seek knowledge (Rizki et al, 2020), not to Tarim, which, of course, the scientific climate in Egypt is more inclusive, dynamic, and moderate so that it shapes the way Quraish educates his children. The open attitude of Najwa's family created a new atmosphere in the Hadrami family, which then broke out of the exclusionary shell of the doctrine and customs of the Ba Alawi Hadramut family.

Gender equality in Najwa Shihab's family is also respected within its boundaries. When Najwa asked Quraish Shihab whether it is permissible for women to have a higher education, he replied that it is permissible, even when working and becoming a leader. This statement shows that women are allowed to appear in the public sphere, either working or becoming leaders. This thinking opens the horizons of some Ba Alawi women to pursue higher education on various campuses so that they interact with many people with different backgrounds, which can then open new insights so that Ba Alawi women are more open. This is what Michael Hecht means by identity discussion, that a person by knowing the outside world will give a reaction to the environment he knows (others), and then he will look for a new identity as a result of these interactions (Hecht, M. L., Warren, J., Jung, J., & Krieger, J, 2005; Riyadi & Karim, 2023).

Furthermore, Najwa's openness goes far from the tradition of Ba Alawi women; in general, deciding not to wear the hijab course the decision is also the effect of her interaction with the environment in which she lives and is reinforced by Quraish as a Professor who is an expert in the field of Tafsir who argues that hijab is not mandatory for women, which is mandatory to wear respectable clothes. Quraish interprets the verse of Surah al-Nur: 31 about the verse of women's

aurat which recites "*illā mā dzahara minhā*" (except what is visible from women) with hands, face and head (hair). Quraish also quoted the opinion of Ibn Ashur, who said, "We believe that the customs of one people cannot be imposed on another people in the name of religion, nor can they be imposed on that person (Quraish Shihab, 2004)." In fact, Quraysh only gives the views of different scholars about the hijab; he does not clearly state that the hijab is not obligatory. He says that the consideration is not only about whether or not the headscarf is obligatory but more about behavior and manners (Quraish Shihab, 2017).

Communication between "Self" and "Other" Sharifah Ba Alawi: Halimah Alaydrus and Najwa Shihab

The doctrine of Shafi'i Jurisprudence on the aura of a woman's entire body when in the presence of non-mahram men is not used by the majority of Indonesian scholars because, in the literature of the well-known Shafi'i books, the face and palms are not accurate. The opinion of the scholars of Tarim can only be applied in their region, where life is very simple, and the public sphere is dominated by men. In Indonesia, this opinion is not appropriate because women compete to spread benefits in the social sphere, communicate with others, and receive the same education as men.

Ba Alawi women's scholarly communication is limited to their mazhab, and chooses an opinion that is muktamad but not in accordance with today's times, namely that all women's bodies are aurat as mentioned above. This opinion, although muktamad, is difficult to apply today, especially in Indonesia, because the face is an identity and the hands as a tool for transactions that are needed every day, therefore the opinion of the shafi'iyah scholars who say the face and hands are not aurat, and even the feet in the da'if opinion are also not aurat in the presence of non-mahram men (Al-Baghawī, 1997). This is the better view to take if one wants to adhere to the Shafi'i school of thought because it does not trouble people in their daily activities. In the Maliki madhhab, a woman's aurat in the presence of a non-mahram man is all of her body apart from the hands and face (al-Ṣāwī, 2007), and in the Hanafi madhhab, the face, hands and feet are not aurat (al-Rāzī, 2010). The only madhhab that resembles the Shafi'i madhhab is the Hanbali madhhab, which states that all of a woman's body is aurat in the presence of a non-mahram man (Abdul Muhsin Abbad, 1425 H.).

The location of Tarim Yemen with Saudi Arabia, which is the centre of the Hanbali school of thought, is also a factor in the similarity of opinions adopted by Hadarmut residents about aurat, cultural communication between the two regions allows for mutual influence, although different schools of thought but one concept about women's aurat. The interaction of Tarim scholars with other madhhabs is also not much done; the books read are limited to the Shafi'i madhhab, so they do not accept the views of other scholars because they have become customs and doctrines. This attitude changes the identity of Ba Alawi women in Tarim a lot; they remain in their traditions because they limit communication with others who share the same mazhab and beliefs.

Halimah Alaydrus' communication with others from the beginning within the scope of Hadrami culture; she studied at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Waddakwah Bangil Pasuruan in 1991, from the year of her birth she was 12 when at DALWA Bangil (Alaydrus, 2024). He communicated with others at the DALWA boarding school, which is a Haramut school, for five years. The founder of Darullughah Waddakwah Pasuruan was a Sayid from Ba Alawi, Habib

Hasan Baharun (1934-1999). And now it is continued by his sons, who are all Habaib. Female santri at Pondok DALWA are required to wear a veil, as is the custom of the Hadramut Syarifahs (Inayah & Susanti, 2019); from here, Halimah Alaydrus' contact with Hadramut-style religious doctrine has started since childhood.

Furthermore, the knowledge and tradition of syarifah who adheres to the Shafi'i school of thought by wearing the veil obtained from Pondok DALWA was further strengthened when Halimah Alaydrus continued her non-formal education to Hadramut, studying directly with Habib Umar bin Hafiz, and studying at the Daruz Zahra Islamic Boarding School in Tarim in 1988 (Setiawan, 2020). There, the figure of Halimah communicated with the scientific tradition, customs, and traditions of Ba Alawi in its direct center, Tarim Hadramut.

Rahma Sarita, a Ba Alawi female YouTuber from farm Aljufri, discusses the tradition of not marrying a nonsayid on her YouTube channel. As a Sharifah, she had failed in a household with a sayid because there was no compatibility but was forced, so the household only lasted two years. Rahma's discussion began with the fact that the Arabs like to boast about groups; at that time, Quraysh was the honored tribe and the highest caste; according to Rahma Islam did not come to strengthen it, even on the contrary to eliminate the caste system, because the measure of glory in the Qur'an is only through piety (Q.S Al-Hujarat {49}: 26). According to Rahma, the Prophet's daughters did not all marry Quraysh men, such as Uthman bin Affan, and even Zainab married Zaid bin Haritash, a former slave.

In Rahma's experience, many of the sharifahs were forced not to marry because they could not find a sayid or mate who was compatible because, according to her, the supply of sayids was small, and they also had the freedom to marry any woman, even outside the sharifahs. Actually, the four madhabs are not of one opinion on the issue of *kafā'ah*, especially in the Malikiyah madhhab. In the Maliki school of thought, the *kafā'ah* that counts is religion and *al-hāl* (Al-Zarqānī, 2002). Furthermore, Rahma dismissed the fact that the sharifah's child was not considered because she did not marry a sayid, because according to her, the mother's lineage is also important. This is in accordance with the opinion of PBNM chairman Yahya Cholil Tsaquf that the Prophetic Nutfah (prophetic sperm) which is possible to descend to many people must be respected, so there is no reason not to respect people because there is a possibility that there is prophetic *nutfah* (*nutfah al-nabawiyah*) in that person, even though they are not sayid.

This article is intended to provide encouragement and knowledge about the diversity of Ba Alawi women; the majority of them are exclusive, and a small number are inclusive. The climate in Indonesia and Hadramut is not the same. Ba Alawi women need to take opportunities in the world of da'wah, as Najwa Shihab and Halimah Alaydrus have done. The da'wah of Ba Alawi women is important because they have the recognition of their religious and social status as the grandchildren of the Prophet, so it is easy to be accepted.

Conclusion

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this research. *First*, the motive of Ba Alawi women (sharifah) is exclusive because the communication space with others is still in their own lingkungan, as happened in Tarim. Halimah Alaydrus' communication with others is mostly done through books, scholars, and Tarim traditions. *Second*, she has to interact with people in her

homeland whose culture and traditions are far different from Tarim, so she opens up her identity by appearing in public areas but still maintaining Tarimese ideology and doctrines such as the veil. Thirdly, Najwa Shihab's inclusiveness is obtained from communicating with unlimited others, from all circles and various kinds of thoughts so that the self can determine the best way in her life and criticize the customs of the ancestors that are not suitable if applied in Indonesia.

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