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Ideology, Authority, and Da'wah Communication: A Critical Discourse Study of MUI South Tangerang

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Abstract
This study addresses the question of how religious authorities manage *da'wah* communication amid a multicultural society, the rapid expansion of digital media, and the potential contestation of discourse that may trigger social tensions. It aims to analyze the *da'wah* communication practices of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) of South Tangerang City as an arena for the production of ideology and power relations within a multicultural society. Employing a qualitative approach within a critical paradigm, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis, and examined using discourse analysis and source triangulation. The analytical framework draws on Gill Branston and Roy Stafford's theory of ideology, which encompasses three main pillars: *Post-Marxism*, *Critical Pluralism*, and *Lived Culture*. The findings reveal three main points. *First*, from a post-Marxist perspective, the MUI's symbolic power operates through persuasive and decentralized mechanisms involving moral consensus, cultural traditions, digital media literacy, and the adoption of artificial intelligence. *Second*, through the lens of *Critical Pluralism*, the MUI regulates discursive contestation by containing *furu'iyah* issues, curbing the spread of radical ideologies, and monitoring vulnerable religious groups. *Third*, the values of moderation have been successfully internalized as an organic *lived culture* and *common sense* in the everyday practices of the community. The study concludes that the South Tangerang MUI's *da'wah* communication represents an articulation of cultural hegemony and symbolic power that adapts to changing circumstances in order to maintain social harmony within a pluralistic society.

Info Artikel
Kata Kunci:
MUI Tangsel; Ideologi dan kekuasaan; Critical Pluralism; Lived Culture; Komunikasi Dakwah.

Abstrak
Penelitian ini berangkat dari persoalan bagaimana otoritas keagamaan mengelola komunikasi dakwah di tengah masyarakat multikultural, pesatnya arus media digital, dan potensi kontestasi wacana yang rentan memicu gesekan sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis praktik komunikasi dakwah Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) Kota Tangerang Selatan sebagai arena produksi ideologi dan relasi kekuasaan di tengah masyarakat multikultural. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berparadigma kritis, pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi lapangan, dan analisis dokumen, yang diuji melalui analisis wacana serta triangulasi sumber. Kerangka analisis

berpijak pada teori ideologi Gill Branston dan Roy Stafford yang mencakup tiga pilar utama: *Post-Marxism*, *Critical Pluralism*, dan *Lived Culture*. Hasil penelitian mengungkap tiga temuan utama: *pertama*, secara *post-marxis*, kekuasaan simbolik MUI beroperasi persuasif dan terdesentralisasi melalui konsensus moral, tradisi kultural, serta literasi media digital dan adopsi kecerdasan buatan; *kedua*, dalam lensa *critical pluralism*, MUI meregulasi kontestasi wacana melalui peredaman isu *furu'iyah*, pembendungan paham radikal, dan pengawasan aliran rentan; *ketiga*, nilai moderasi berhasil terinternalisasi menjadi *lived culture* dan *common sense* organik dalam praksis keseharian warga. Disimpulkan bahwa komunikasi dakwah MUI Tangsel merupakan artikulasi hegemoni kultural dan kekuasaan simbolik yang adaptif dalam menjaga harmoni sosial masyarakat plural.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic organizations or institutions based on Islam have now made numerous efforts to convey their da'wah to the public. These efforts include the methods of *Bil Qalam* (recitation), *Bil Hal* (recitation), and *Bil Lisan* (recitation). Some da'is even combine these three methods into one approach (Syarifuddin et al., 2024). *Lisan* da'wah itself can take the form of lectures, sermons, advice, and so on. This da'wah method is carried out by preachers, whether during lectures at religious study groups, Friday sermons at mosques, or lectures at religious studies. *Bil-hal* da'wah is a method carried out by exemplifying real actions that lead to exemplary behavior. Meanwhile, *bil-qalam* da'wah is a da'wah method through written works by da'is who have the expertise to write for newspapers, magazines, books, and the internet (Amin, 2009). Therefore, it can be said that the preaching methods used by most individual preachers, as well as Islamic organizations collectively, still use a one-way preaching method or one that tends to make the audience passive.

The Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) is a religious organization that plays a crucial role in conveying Islamic messages, particularly to the public. The MUI's approach to Islamic communication tends to be conventional, which poses the challenge of whether this type of communication can effectively reach a broad audience (Subhan et al., 2023). In line with Gelner's statement, he views Islam as a social order that tends to operate without a balancing political institution or strong intermediary organization. In his view, the social structure in Muslim societies does not provide much space for individuals. Although this system is considered to function effectively, even without broad pluralism of thought, because religious authority and collective norms play a dominant role in regulating social life (Gelner, 1994).

Furthermore, the issue of authority, particularly religious authority, often becomes an arena of contestation for each religious group. As holders of religious authority, authoritarian actions are often demonstrated, such as judging other groups deemed to deviate from the religious understanding of those holding that authority (Prasetio & Bakri, 2023). In the view of the Indonesian Muslim community, the MUI's discourse and *fatwas* are authoritative. Therefore, the MUI holds a well-established position in Indonesian society. This is because the *fatwa*s and discourses produced by the MUI are sourced from scholars who understand the law. Functionally, what the MUI scholars produce aims to convey Islamic doctrine to society (Anugrah & Fadlullah, 2024).

To establish effective communication, preachers (*da'i*) need to adopt a participatory approach that actively engages audiences in the process of Islamic preaching (*da'wah*). This engagement may take various forms, including group discussions and activities oriented toward the common good. Such an approach can foster a shared sense of ownership of the messages conveyed through *da'wah*, in contrast to conventional methods that tend to be monological and dogmatic (Hanum & Baidawi, 2025). In addition, an interactive and phenomenological approach to *da'wah* can serve as an effective communication strategy. This approach emphasizes the dialogical delivery of religious teachings, in which preachers engage in direct, two-way communication with members of the congregation as the recipients of *da'wah*. Through this process, community members are encouraged to express their concerns and problems openly, allowing preachers to respond to their questions and provide relevant guidance (Abdullah, 2023).

As an institution representing the unity and consensus of Indonesian Muslim scholars, the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) plays a significant role in shaping and maintaining Islamic religious identity, as well as in upholding the moral values of Muslim communities in Indonesia (Tahir, 2019). As a religious authority, the MUI holds a significant position in Indonesian society and serves as a key institution in providing religious guidance and direction to Indonesian Muslims. Through its fatwas, the MUI offers guidance on various aspects of life, including cultural, economic, social, and political affairs (Amanah & Sikumbang, 2025).

Meanwhile, Islamic preaching in a pluralistic society should be guided by principles that promote peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. Both the messages conveyed and the methods employed in *da'wah* should emphasize compassion and harmony while avoiding discrimination against others. Adherents of different religions, as well as those who share the same faith, should be encouraged to coexist peacefully and harmoniously in a safe, stable, and conducive social environment (Nasor, 2018). A cultural approach to *da'wah* is also essential, as it emphasizes the engagement of Islamic teachings with the cultural contexts of society. In practice, *da'wah* must respond to the dynamics of human life and social change. Therefore, it needs to remain adaptive and dynamic to ensure that its approaches are aligned with the social and cultural conditions of the communities it seeks to reach (Bungo, 2014).

Scholarly studies on the contestation of religious discourse and authority can be broadly categorized into three main areas of focus. The first examines ideology and power in mass media, particularly documentary films (Afifah et al., 2024). The second explores the macro-historical relationship between religious institutions and state power during the New Order era through a structuralist perspective (Anugrah & Fadlullah, 2024). The third focuses on sociological and normative analyses of the MUI's religious authority and fatwas in maintaining interreligious harmony in Indonesia (Prasetio & Bakri, 2023). Although previous studies have examined ideology, authority, and the MUI as an institution, limited attention has been paid to how ideology and power operate directly through the da'wah communication practices of religious institutions at the local level. In particular, no previous study has specifically examined this issue through Gill Branston and Roy Stafford's theoretical framework of ideology and media, encompassing post-Marxism, critical pluralism, and lived culture. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how the da'wah communication practices of the MUI of South Tangerang City function as a site for the production of ideology and the negotiation of power relations in disseminating Islamic understandings within a pluralistic society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative methodology to understand the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) da'wah communication practices as an arena for ideological production and power relations in the dissemination of Islamic religious understanding in South Tangerang City. Qualitative research itself seeks to analyze social life by depicting the social world from the perspective of individuals, in this case, informants. Qualitative research also seeks to understand how individuals view and interpret the social world (Sudaryono, 2018).

This study was conducted in South Tangerang City, Banten, Indonesia, focusing primarily on the South Tangerang City branch of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI). This location was purposively selected because South Tangerang is part of the metropolitan area and is characterized by a high degree of social, cultural, and religious heterogeneity. These dynamics make the South Tangerang MUI an important local religious authority to examine in terms of how it responds to issues of pluralism and contributes to maintaining social harmony.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was employed to deliberately identify informants based on their structural positions, direct involvement, and in-depth knowledge of da'wah policy formulation, media management, and the implementation of religious activities within the South Tangerang MUI. The informants were selected according to the following criteria: *First,* Holding a key structural position within the organizational leadership of the South Tangerang MUI. *Second*, Being directly involved in planning, discourse production, the dissemination of da'wah messages, or the management of the MUI's official communication media. *Third*, Possessing an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of social and religious life in South Tangerang City. Based on these criteria, the selected key informants were: Ustadz Azharul Fuad as the Head of Information and Communication of MUI Tangsel, KH Aep Saepudin as a cleric and the Head of the MUI Muallaf Center, Mr. Muhtar Sadili as an Expert Staff responsible for the MUI Tangsel media.

Data collection is a crucial component of research, as the data obtained serve as the basis for supporting or rejecting the proposed hypotheses. This study draws on two types of data sources: primary data, obtained directly from the original sources, and secondary data, obtained indirectly through other sources (Sugiyono, 2014). Data were collected systematically using three techniques. *First*, in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format with key informants to explore their perspectives, ideological motivations, and the da'wah communication strategies they employed. *Second*, field observations were carried out through direct observation of da'wah activities organized by the South Tangerang MUI. *Third*, document analysis was conducted to collect secondary data from relevant materials, including articles and publications available on the South Tangerang MUI's official online platforms.

The discourse analysis in this study aims to understand how ideology and power are reflected in the da'wah communication carried out by the MUI Tangsel in spreading Islamic understanding in South Tangerang City. Discourse itself is a message that contains the reality that occurs using a system of signs as its primary tool and is also influenced by social structures through language (Fairclough, 2013). The analytical process was conducted through four main stages: Textual Analysis, which involved identifying and examining the microstructures of *da'wah* texts in interview transcripts and the media content of the South Tangerang MUI; Discursive Practice Analysis, which examined the

production, dissemination, and consumption of *da'wah* discourse by MUI officials, as well as how these messages were communicated to congregations; Socio-Cultural practice analysis, which connected *da'wah* discourse to the local arena of power, the context of social plurality in South Tangerang (*critical pluralism*), and the cultural practices and everyday norms of the community; and Ideological Synthesis, which formulated how the power relations and religious authority of the South Tangerang MUI are constructed, maintained, or negotiated through *da'wah* communication. To ensure data validity, this study employed a data verification technique called source triangulation. This source triangulation involved comparing the results of interviews, field observations, and documents.

Concepts related to ideology and discourse have become key concepts in media studies, particularly in Europe. In their book, The Media Student's Book, Gill Branston and Roy Stafford explain that 'ideology' is an important thing that then plays a role in showing the relationship between media and various forms of power, even though this relationship is still considered trivial and invisible. Discourse here can help us explore various areas about how an ideology is widely spread and persists in a region that then becomes an important part of every practice of everyday life, especially language, assumptions, how to position readers and users, both online and offline (Branston & Stafford, 2010).

Ideology is often misunderstood by many people. A collection of ideas, even if they form a system, even if they are considered rigid, is not directly classified as 'ideological'. This is because these ideas cannot be shown to be related to conveying social power. Therefore, ideology must refer to an idea that explains the social world, then the idea is partial and selective, and then the ideas or values are related to power and distributed socially (Branston & Stafford, 2010).

Post-Marxism emerged after historical changes that influenced the power of classical Marxist theories. The birth of post-Marxism stemmed from the collapse of socialism in the Eastern Bloc countries in 1989, when these countries believed in and truly implemented the ideas of classical Marxism. This was reinforced by neoliberalism since the 1970s, which asserted that power no longer operates solely within the state, but also through market mechanisms, culture, and the media. Furthermore, the emergence of the powerful influence of postmodern thought, although this approach attempts to dismantle dominant ideologies, in practice, it actually constructs new ideologies by distancing itself from political involvement. Therefore, the presence of post-Marxism offers a critical position that does not reject the dominance of power, but expands it into the realm of culture and discourse, without eliminating its orientation to dominant real relations (Branston & Stafford, 2010).

These historical changes have led to key questions being posed, ultimately resulting in a post-Marxist approach. Post-Marxism does not completely reject political-economic analysis, but rather broadens the analysis to the fact that power relations are diffuse and not centralized in a single dominant ideological structure. In this understanding, the media is no longer understood as a tool of the ruling class, but rather as an arena where various interests and identities interact and compete. Branston and Stafford also emphasize that post-Marxism opens up space for the analysis of issues that were not within classical Marxism, such as identity politics, the representation of marginalized groups, and symbolic struggles in popular culture. Furthermore, the media also becomes an important arena for negotiations related to gender, race, religion, and the environment, which do not always refer solely to the logic of economic class (Branston & Stafford, 2010).

The pluralist model of media ownership is widely held to view media as being free from power relations, and to emphasize the diversity of forms and choices of media products that emerge. Within this framework, the dominance of certain media values or forms is assumed to occur solely because they are the most popular and successful in competing in the so-called 'free market of ideas'. For example, the dominance of American popular culture is often considered a 'universal' claim, rather than being linked to the global economic, political, and media forces that support it (Branston & Stafford, 2010).

In this case, Thompson stated that in the present day we are faced with a game that is related to several complex types of power, including economic power, political power, coercive or military power, symbolic power such as means of information and communication, including religion, schools, universities, and most importantly, the media (Thompson, 1995). This approach is commonly referred to as Critical Pluralism. They acknowledge the struggle between competing discourses, but emphasize that it is not a friendly or free-for-all arena. Some discourses are part of powerful institutions and have easy access to credibility, material resources, power, and publicity, while others are often marginalized (Branston & Stafford, 2010).

In media and cultural studies, Antonio Gramsci's term 'hegemony' is an important way to think about how a dominant value system can change. Similarly, the concept of lived culture, loosely related to the discourse approach, in this context brings us to attention to Gramsci's ideas. Gramsci argued that what is often referred to as 'common sense,' which is considered obvious and natural to many, is not actually simple wisdom, but rather a complex collection of traces of meaning. These traces can date back centuries, even hundreds of years, and are often contradictory. At the same time, common sense is never fixed, as it is constantly changing and competing with new beliefs and meanings. Gramsci then continued, stating that hegemony is a process that occurs in everyday life, not simply imposed or born from abstract ideas. The power of common sense lies in its connection with everyday practices, rituals, and material activities, and is influenced by the dominant ideas that are continually produced (Branston & Stafford, 2010).

Through the theoretical approaches of Post-Marxism, Critical Pluralism, and Lived Culture, Branston and Stafford offer a more dynamic and contextual framework for ideological analysis. This allows us to understand how the relationship between media, ideology, and power is interconnected. Post-Marxism broadens the analysis by viewing power as a distributed relationship, not only within dominant economic structures but also through language, culture, and media representation. Critical Pluralism also complements this perspective by emphasizing the diversity of discourses in the media. Meanwhile, Lived Culture explains how ideology and hegemony operate not only at the level of formal discourse but also through practices, customs, and common sense in everyday life. By combining these three theories, it is hoped that a relationship between ideology and power will emerge in the arena of struggles for meaning, where this relationship is generated through discourse, cultural practices, and social experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Authority and Da'wah Communication Pattern

The Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) is a sovereign organization established by the government during the New Order era on June 28, 1975. The institution's formation was based on a conference of ulama in Jakarta organized by the Center for Islamic Propagation. From this conference emerged the idea of establishing a council for ulama in Indonesia to promote Muslim

unity in all social activities. The government's involvement in the formation of this institution gave the MUI legitimacy as the holder of religious (Islamic) authority in Indonesia. Besides government support, the MUI's strong position is also bolstered by its socio-political standing within society (Prasetio & Bakri, 2023). In its implementation, the South Tangerang City MUI has responsibilities to both the institution and the community. For example, the MUI is accountable for its activities and the issuance of *fatwa*s. This confirms that the MUI's role as the holder of religious (Islamic) authority cannot be interfered with by any party (Fuad, 2025).

As an institution with the authority to convey religious messages, particularly Islam, good communication is essential in every message delivered to the public. This is because Islamic communication (Da'wah) emphasizes the preacher (*balagh*) delivering messages that encourage good deeds, forbid evil, and inspire change of heart, rooted in sincerity and ethical considerations (Bakti, 2000). Currently, the South Tangerang MUI focuses on more up-to-date news and messaging, such as news related to Palestine. Furthermore, the South Tangerang MUI focuses on preaching through religious studies, such as delivering material on the yellow book (*Kitab Kuning*), a regular program. The preachers are selected from within the MUI, including qualified clerics (*Kiayi*) and religious teachers (*Ustadz*) who are competent in their fields. The more relaxed and structured presentation makes the congregation feel more comfortable and enjoy the religious studies conducted by the South Tangerang MUI (Fuad, 2025).



Figure 1. *Study of the Yellow Book* by the Tangsel MUI

In the da'wah communication conducted by the MUI Tangsel through their routine program of *Kajian Kitab Kuning*, the message conveyed emphasized the importance of building a strong moral and faith foundation in South Tangerang City. Deputy Mayor Pilar Saga Ihsan further emphasized that Tangsel's development focuses not only on the physical aspects but also on the spiritual. A foundation of faith and piety is the direction of civilization's development in South Tangerang City (https://muitangsel.or.id, 2025). The delivery of religious teachings through the *Kajian Kitab Kuning* is conducted in an open and communicative manner without compromising the depth of scholarly content. This approach enables the sessions to reach participants from diverse organizational backgrounds, as well as members of the general public. Furthermore, support from the South Tangerang City Government for strengthening moral and religious values reinforces the institutional

legitimacy of the MUI in promoting Islamic teachings as a foundation for the development of the city's civilization.

Media Management, Digital Literacy, and the Development of Young Da'wah Cadres

In the digital communication domain, the Information and Communication Commission (Infokom) of the South Tangerang MUI disseminates da'wah messages by integrating local mass media channels with social media platforms. The commission's organizational structure, strengthened by media practitioners and professional journalists, enables the MUI's religious narratives to reach wider audiences through both print media and online news portals across Banten (Sadili, 2025). To reach older members of the congregation, the South Tangerang MUI also makes strategic use of *WhatsApp* groups, including *Tokoh Muslim Tangsel* and *Ittihadul Mubalighin*. These groups have proven effective in mobilizing and bringing together hundreds of participants for its religious activities (Fuad, 2025).



Figure 2. Ulama *Cadre Education Event (PKU)* MUI Tangsel

Meanwhile, in response to the challenges posed by social media communication and emerging artificial intelligence (AI) trends, the South Tangerang MUI has designed specialized training programs on AI-assisted da'wah content creation for younger generations. This initiative is integrated into the *Pelatihan Kader Ulama* (PKU), with the aim of developing young preachers who can respond effectively to contemporary developments and produce constructive, positive content for digital platforms (Fuad, 2025). Ustadz Azharul Fuad further explained that da'wah is currently undergoing a paradigm shift, extending beyond the *mimbar*. Social media has become a fertile space for disseminating Islamic messages. This development presents a significant challenge: ensuring that da'wah continues to convey messages of peace and moderation amid the proliferation of increasingly provocative online content. To address this challenge, he emphasized the need for strategic measures to strengthen digital da'wah. First, developing strong digital literacy as a fundamental foundation. Second, prioritizing *wasatiyyah* (moderate) communication by conveying Islamic messages that promote moderation, peace, and inclusivity. Third, improving content quality through sound literacy practices to prevent the dissemination of misleading narratives (https://muitangsel.or.id, 2025).

Local Pluralism Dynamics and the Monitoring of Religious Beliefs

In the context of South Tangerang's pluralistic society, a preacher must understand at least several things: First, they must be aware of the heterogeneity of the community they are preaching to. Second, they must not convey messages of hatred. Third, they must be persuasive and not coercive. Fourth, they must avoid thoughts or attitudes that denigrate other religions. Fifth, they must be able to defuse any differences and avoid extreme religious attitudes (Nasor, 2018). Pluralism and multiculturalism essentially produce benefits by providing minority cultures with freedom from the domination of the majority culture, and avoiding cultural uniformity that leads to exploitation and imperialism by the dominant group. This can strengthen small identities and subcultures that are often hindered and ignored, so they can grow and develop independently without having to follow the rules and norms of the majority culture (Bakti, 2013).

A phenomenon occurring in South Tangerang is that Muslims themselves come from different religious backgrounds and organizations. However, in the Muslim community in particular, there is no longer any friction of a *furu'iyah* nature or religious issues related to derivative laws that are not fundamental. While such issues may be a major issue in other regions, in South Tangerang, they have been resolved. The Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) itself avoids discussing matters that could lead to friction among Muslims. Understanding of religious tolerance in South Tangerang is considered very high, not only towards fellow Muslims but also towards non-Muslims. This is inseparable from the role of religious institutions such as the MUI and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, through their advisors, who narrate how this religious moderation is socialized to the people of South Tangerang (Fuad, 2025).

The socio-religious dynamics in South Tangerang represent an integration of various social instruments within the community. The creation of high tolerance in a pluralistic society is not solely determined by a single dominant actor. The presence of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI), as the religious authority responsible for conveying appropriate Islamic preaching, provides a strong foundation for the people of South Tangerang to adhere to. Furthermore, the high level of religious intelligence in South Tangerang City supports the humanitarian side, fostering mutual tolerance among Muslims and non-Muslims in their daily lives.



Figure 3. *Building Faith and Faith for Converts*

In addition to maintaining interreligious harmony, the South Tangerang MUI plays a strategic role in safeguarding Islamic faith (*hifẓ al-din*) and providing guidance to converts to Islam through its dedicated *Muallaf Center*. The unit's active engagement in the field was directly observed by the researcher during fieldwork at the South Tangerang MUI Secretariat. The researcher witnessed an actual encounter in which KH. Aep Saepudin, Head of the Muallaf Center, received a woman who had decided to embrace Islam. The spiritual guidance session, followed by her declaration of the two testimonies of faith (*shahada*), took place in a solemn and supportive atmosphere in the presence of the MUI officials. This field observation confirms that the Muallaf Center functions not merely as a formal administrative unit but also as a responsive and inclusive space for da'wah interaction, providing guidance throughout the process of religious conversion. Following the declaration of the *shahada*, the South Tangerang MUI provides ongoing religious guidance through a structured program comprising three stages of instruction in Islamic creed (*aqidah*) and worship (*ibadah*). It also facilitates economic empowerment programs for converts in collaboration with the National Amil Zakat Agency (BAZNAS) of South Tangerang City (Observation field, 21 November 2025).



Figure 4. The Shari'a *Pledge Process*

The connection to "experienced culture" brings us back to Gramsci's notion of "common sense." Gramsci emphasized that hegemony is a process that is experienced rather than simply imposed or inherent in an idea (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Dianto et al., 2021). The power of common sense derives from its connection to everyday cultural practices, rituals, activities, and dominant ideas (Dianto et al., 2021). If we examine the religious cultural practices in South Tangerang, they are fairly uniform; there are no worship practices that lead to heresy. However, the challenge remains how to build enthusiasm and encourage improvement in worship itself. Radical religious ideas, for example, exist in South Tangerang only impulsively, not rooted in a serious community. The conflicts that occur in the community also do not originate from permanent residents of South Tangerang; these individuals are merely transitory and do not stem from genuine societal conflict (Sadili, 2025).

Returning to the MUI, one of its authorities is of course to preserve the purity of Islamic faith, one way of doing this is by issuing *fatwas*. The MUI's decisions are culturally binding for those who require them. When the public requests a *fatwa*, the MUI must respond to that request. Although, in Islamic teachings, *fatwas* only have legal force for those who raise the question (Hasyim, 2011). In general, the prevailing culture in society, particularly regarding religious matters, is relatively conducive, although there are some minor variations that require attention. Examples of this include

the LDII (Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institution) preaching in South Tangerang, which is under the supervision of the MUI clause. Furthermore, GAFATAR, a sect that, according to an MUI *fatwa*, teaches religious beliefs and understandings that are disturbing to the Muslim community. Furthermore, the *Ahmadiyah* movement is still considered by the MUI to have engaged in intolerant behavior. There are also sects from other religious teachings that disturb Muslims by distributing pamphlets, brochures, and so on. Although ultimately there is strong resistance from the community because the culture formed by the community is already at a strong and solid stage (Saepudin, 2025). If we look closely, the culture that exists in South Tangerang City provides a barrier or barrier against teachings that are inappropriate or not born from the actual conditions of society. This goes back to Gramsci's common sense idea that cultural practices are derived from everyday activities, rituals, and ideas that exist within a society, not from teachings or schools of thought that are not dominant in a society.

The Dialectics of Ideology, Critical Pluralism, and Lived Culture

The da'wah communication practices of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) of South Tangerang City reveal a complex dialectic between the reproduction of ideology, the management of discursive contestation, and the formation of religious culture within an urban society. Within the theoretical framework of Gill Branston and Roy Stafford, the relationship between media, ideology, and power is no longer understood in terms of a singular form of domination or rigid structural imposition. Instead, it is examined through the simultaneous interplay of three critical dimensions: *Post-Marxism*, *Critical Pluralism*, and *Lived Culture*.

First, from the perspective of Post-Marxism, power and ideology operate subtly and diffusely through the moral legitimacy and symbolic authority held by the South Tangerang City Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI). The MUI's power is not exercised through instruments of physical coercion, but rather through the public's voluntary acceptance of the fatwas, *tausiyah*, and religious discourses it produces. When critically examined in dialogue with previous literature, this finding extends the study by Afifah et al. (2024), which investigates ideology and power relations in documentary films. While Afifah et al. (2024) highlight how audiovisual media frame legal reality through narrative symbols, the present study demonstrates that official religious institutions such as the MUI transform their *da'wah* into narratives of "normative truth" that enjoy a high degree of public trust. In a similar vein, this finding further develops the studies by Marini et al. (2023) on political media propaganda strategies and Dianto et al. (2021) on oppositional discourse. Unlike political media, which relies on electoral power, the South Tangerang MUI articulates its symbolic power through moral consensus. Furthermore, whereas Anugrah and Fadlullah (2024) situate the MUI during the New Order era within Louis Althusser's macro-structural framework, the present study indicates that, in the post-Reformasi era at the local level, the MUI's power relations operate in a more fluid and adaptive manner and are oriented toward public service.

Second, from the perspective of Critical Pluralism, communication and media are understood as arenas of contestation in which religious discourses compete with one another. Institutions with authority and resources, and have greater access to determining which discourses become dominant and which are restricted. The South Tangerang MUI actively manages potential religious conflicts within the heterogeneous society of South Tangerang by establishing discursive boundaries. This is reflected in its decision to avoid *furu'iyah* issues, restrict the spread of radical ideologies, and implement monitoring provisions for vulnerable groups. A critical reflection on these findings connects with the study by Prasetio and Bakri (2023) on the MUI's exercise of religious authority in

maintaining interreligious harmony. However, whereas Prasetio and Bakri (2023) approach the MUI's role from a functional-normative perspective, viewing it primarily as an agent of social balance, the present study reveals that the maintenance of harmony is pursued through strategies of discursive control legitimized by the institution's symbolic capital.

Third, the successful reproduction of ideology and management of pluralism ultimately become embedded in society's *lived culture* through the formation of religious *common sense* in everyday life. Field findings confirm that the *lived culture* of religion in South Tangerang has been firmly established through the various programs implemented by the MUI. This characteristic of *lived culture* reinforces the analysis by Assegaf et al. (2023) of the concept of *Islam Wasathiyah* (moderate Islam) as a theological bulwark against the threats of extremism and liberalism. The present study further elaborates on Assegaf et al.'s findings by demonstrating that *wasathiyah* in South Tangerang has become part of residents' cultural practices, enabling them to reject radical ideologies organically. Furthermore, whereas Amanah and Sikumbang (2025), in their study of the MUI in Medan City, found that public participation in *da'wah* programs tended to be hierarchical and formal-administrative, *da'wah* communication at the South Tangerang MUI relies on participatory cultural networks. Finally, in line with Widoyo et al. (2023) research on religious moderation in digital *da'wah* ethics, the integration of tolerance and proper media communication etiquette into the South Tangerang MUI's practices constitutes a key factor in fostering a harmonious, tolerant, and ethical urban society.

CONCLUSION.

This study confirms that the MUI Tangsel's da'wah communication is an ideological practice and power relations that play an important role in shaping the understanding of Islamic teachings in society, especially among the people of Tangsel City. Through the framework of the Theory of Ideologies and Power, it can be seen that da'wah communication such as the study of *kitab kuning*, religious study groups, *fatwa* delivery, and *tausiyah* by religious leaders are not only the dissemination of Islamic religious values, but also a form of power production that works through religious institutions in a pluralistic society and has a culture that lives in society.

Critically, these findings demonstrate the MUI's success in maintaining harmony in a pluralistic environment, rooted in its ability to communicate Islamic propagation, integrating Islamic values with the lived culture of the community. This communication, through religious study groups (*Majelis Taklim*), the study of Islamic texts (*Kitab Kuning*), media coverage, and *fatwas*, serves as an ideological construct that strengthens the MUI's position as the highest religious authority. However, this dominant authority can also pose challenges regarding the extent of more participatory dialogue within non-dominant groups.

In conclusion, the Tangsel MUI's da'wah communication is a manifestation of symbolic power that operates through discourse within the cultural practices of society. Through a framework of critical pluralism, the MUI serves not only as a transmitter of religious messages but also as a shaper of community identity, fostering a relevant and functional understanding of Islam in a multicultural society. Ultimately, effective da'wah communication depends on the extent to which the MUI maintains its institutional independence and understands the social dynamics within society.

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BHS: as the lead author, was primarily responsible for developing the manuscript, structuring the discussion, organizing the arguments, and preparing the final written work. MIQ: Supervision, critical review, and provision of feedback on the manuscript. N: Supervision, critical review, and provision of feedback on the manuscript. MH: Supervision, critical review, and provision of feedback on the manuscript.

AI USAGE STATEMENT

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in a limited capacity to assist with language refinement, stylistic editing, and translation. AI tools were not used to formulate the study's substantive arguments, theoretical framework, research findings, or conclusions. The intellectual content, analytical interpretations, and scholarly claims presented in this manuscript remain the responsibility of the authors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research and publication of this article.

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