

THE *DA'WAH* METHODS USED BY SELECTED
ISLAMIC ORGANISATIONS IN SELANGOR AND
KUALA LUMPUR COUNTERING ATHEISM

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to highlight two important points. Firstly, it intends to ascertain the ideological formulation of atheism and atheists. Precisely, this research aims to understand what atheism is and who is an atheist. The elaboration includes primary and secondary definitions of atheism and atheists as well as the alternative ideologies to atheism. A comprehensive discussion on the typologies, psychological and sociological conditions of an atheist are also included in the study. Next, the research examines the structure of the Islamic constitutional system, clarifying the position and the jurisdiction of the Islamic organisations in Malaysia. The three selected organisations are the *'Aqidah* Consultation Unit of *Mufti* of Federal Territories, the Advisory Service Unit of Selangor *Mufti* Department and the Modern *Daie* Society Malaysia. Secondly, the study seeks to analyse the *da'wah* methods used by the organisations in dealing with the cases of atheism. The study indicates that the *da'wah* methods used by the selected organisations are in accordance with the main principles highlighted by the Qur'an. The research also gathers response of the selected organisations in observing the phenomenon of atheism in Malaysia. This is a qualitative study in nature. It adopts textual analysis in gaining the works of literature related to the atheism and atheists. Meanwhile, data analysis was applied in doing a comparison on the *da'wah* modules used by the selected organisations. A series of interviews were also conducted to obtain the data and the responses from the officers in-charge at the organisations.

خلاصة البحث

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على نقطتين مهمتين. أولاً، التأكد من تطورات الأيديولوجية عن الإلحاد والملحد. وعلى وجه التحديد، يهدف هذا البحث إلى فهم ما هو الإلحاد ومن هو الملحد. ويشمل هذا الإعداد تعريفات أولية وثانوية للإلحاد والملحد فضلاً عن الأيديولوجيات البديلة عن الإلحاد. كما تتضمن الدراسة مناقشة شاملة حول الأنماط والظروف النفسية والاجتماعية للملحد. يتناول البحث بنية النظم الدستورية الإسلامية، ويبين السلطات والولايات التي يخولها الدستور لبعض المنظمات الإسلامية في ماليزيا. وكانت المنظمات الثلاث المختارة هي وحدة الاستشارة لشؤون العقيدة، التابعة للمفتي العام لدولة ماليزيا، ووحدة الخدمات الاستشارية التابعة لدائرة الإفتاء بولاية سلاڠور، ورابطة الدعوة الحديثة بماليزيا. ثانياً، تسعى الدراسة إلى تحليل أساليب الدعوة التي تستخدمها المنظمات في التعامل مع حالات الإلحاد. وتشير الدراسة إلى أن طرق الدعوة التي تستخدمها المنظمات المختارة تتفق مع المبادئ الرئيسية التي أبرزها القرآن الكريم. ويقيم هذا البحث الإستفسارات المتعلقة بالإلحاد في ماليزيا. استخدمت الدراسة الأسلوب النوعي. وتعتمد على التحليل النصي في الحصول على الأعمال الأدبية المتعلقة بالإلحاد والملحد. وفي الوقت نفسه، ويستخدم التحليل النصي في إجراء مقارنة حول وحدات الدعوة التي تستخدمها المنظمات المختارة. كما أجريت سلسلة من المقابلات للحصول على البيانات والردود من الضباط المسؤولين في المنظمات.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master in Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion.

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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*To the greatest treasure of my life,
Abdul Razak Hamid & Kartini Ahmad*

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TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

Table of the system of transliteration of Arabic words and names used in this study.

CONSONANT

ؤ = A ء = '	ر = R ز = Z س = s ش = sh ص = ṣ ض = ḍ ط = ṭ ظ = ṣ ع = '	ف = F ق = Q ك = K ل = L م = M ن = N هاء = H و = W ي = Y
ب = B ت = T ث = th ج = J ح = ḥ خ = Kh د = D ذ = dh	غ = Gh	

VOWALS

Short vowels: a = َ ; i = ِ ; u = ُ

Long vowels: ā = َ̄ ; ī = ِ̄ ; ū = ُ̄

Diphthongs: ay = َئِ ; aw = َؤِ

Double: uww (final: ū) = ُ̄ ; iy (final ī) = ِ̄

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Atheism is one of the external challenges to religions and their followers. According to some scholars, atheism could be traced back as early as the time of the ancient Greek philosophy wherein logical and critical thinking was highly practised and debated.¹ Although religion was there, people kept on asking “Is there any God?” This question was considered as the most basic metaphysical question in the study of the philosophy.²

Meanwhile, looking into the origin and development of atheism in the Malaysian context, Muhammad Rashidi Wahab in his book *Ateisme: Satu Penelitian Awal*³ explains that the development of atheism in Malaysia had started long before the most known period. It is traced back during the early nineteenth century when the modern ideologies of Marxism and Communism were introduced in Malaysia.⁴ The adaptation of the ideologies was manifest through the establishment of *Parti Komunis Malaya* (Communist Malaya Party) in year 1930.⁵ The influence of the ideology was then propagated through Malay literatures which were produced by Malay writers such

¹Center for Inquiry Organization, “What Is Atheism”, accessed February 9, 2019, <https://centerforinquiry.org/definitions/what-is-Atheism/>.

²Draper, Paul, "Atheism and Agnosticism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), accessed July 12, 2019 <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/Atheism-agnosticism/>.

³Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, *Ateisme: Satu Penelitian Awal* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2018), 27.

⁴Muhammad Rashidi Wahab...

⁵Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah, *Pemikiran Islam di Malaysia: Sejarah dan Aliran* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1997), 145.

as Nordin Omar,⁶ and Kassim Ahmad.⁷ These are the writers believed to be among the pioneers who were responsible for the spreading of those atheistic dogmas.⁸

Being associated with atheism and atheists is considered taboo and peculiar in Malaysian society, where culture and custom are highly influenced by religion. The fact that Malaysians have pledged under the oath of “*Rukun Negara*”(National Principles) that states “Belief in God” as the first principle for Malaysians as drafted in the constitution of Malaysia has put all the groups that support atheism under a difficult position of being the outlaws.⁹

However, there was one uproar atheists case reported back in 2017, where a non-profit atheists organisation, Atheists Republic had to bring controversy to the Malaysian media when they posted a photo of a meetup with the fellow members of atheists. There were about 20 people consisted of mostly youths who casually smiled and toasted a cup capturing their moments on the meeting.¹⁰ The religious authority of Malaysia had responded to the issue by stating that an investigation needed to be conducted to identify atheist’s movement among the Muslims. They also added that educational exposures and seminars were usually conducted by the religious authorities in handling this type of cases.¹¹

⁶One of the Malay poet that mentioning about atheism in his poetry during the year 1961. He also believed to even claimed himself as God. Refer to: Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah, *Pemikiran Islam di Malaysia: Sejarah dan Aliran* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press,1997), 147.

⁷In 1960, the poet of Kassim Ahmad entitled “*Sidang Riu*” became controversial not only to the Malay’s literature arena but to all community during that time. The content of the poet was believed to had deviate from the aqidah of Islam. Refer to: Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah, *Pemikiran Islam di Malaysia: Sejarah dan Aliran* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press,1997), 148.

⁸Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, 28.

⁹Lim Teck Ghee, “Godlessness: False or real threat,” *The Sun Daily Online*, April 7, 2019, accessed August 17, 2019, <https://www.thesundaily.my/opinion/godlessness-false-or-real-threat-DC765207>.

¹⁰Justin Higginbottom, “Intolerance Rising: Atheists at Risk in Malaysia,” *The Diplomat*, August 22, 2017, accessed August 17, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/intolerance-rising-Atheists-at-risk-in-malaysia/>.

¹¹Amin Ridzuan Ishak, “Siasat Gerakan Ateis dalam Kalangan Orang Islam,” *Berita Harian Online*, August 6, 2017, accessed August 17, 2019, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2017/08/309408/siasat-gerakan-ateis-dalam-kalangan-orang-islam>.

The story had gained immense responses from the media and the public. Many reports have been filed regarding the later response from the former Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Dr Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki regarding the matter. He concluded that atheism is against the main principle of the *Rukun Negara* and the spreading of such ideology is dangerous for both the Muslims and the non-Muslims community in Malaysia.¹² As a response, various articles and news were written concerning the issues like *The Diplomat Online*,¹³ *The Star Online*,¹⁴ *Astro Awani Online*,¹⁵ and *Portal Islam dan Melayu*.¹⁶ Against this background of the spread of atheism in Malaysia, there is a need to study the methods of *da'wah* which are used by several Islamic organisations to counter atheism.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Due to the emergence of atheism and atheistic organisations, there is a need to identify the ideology of atheism that has grown drastically within this couple of years that makes it as one of the religious crises existed in Malaysia. As stated by the news from *Berita Harian Online*,¹⁷ religious authorities seemed to be aware of the problems back in 2017 but the extent of remedy and control being done to address the issue are yet to be known.¹⁸ A comprehensive study is constructed to look through the effectiveness of the

¹²Loshana K Shagar, "Atheism Is Unconstitutional: Says Deputy Minister," *The Star Online*, Nov 23, 2017, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/11/23/Atheism-is-unconstitutional-says-deputy-minister/>.

¹³Justin Higginbottom.

¹⁴Loshana K Shagar.

¹⁵Dania Zainuddin, "Atheisme Perlu Dicegah - Dr Shamrahayu," *Astro Awani*, Nov 24, 2017, <http://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/Atheisme-perlu-dicegah-dr-shamrahayu-161170>.

¹⁶Imran Harith Bin Azmy, "Isu Ateis: Jangan kerana taksub, kita diperbodohkan," *Portal Islam dan Melayu*, Dec 2, 2017, <https://www.ismaweb.net/2017/12/02/isu-ateis-jangan-kerana-taksub-kita-diperbodohkan/>.

¹⁷Amin Ridzuan...

¹⁸The problem is that the methods and measures adapted by Islamic organisations in Malaysia are not clearly known to Malaysian. Hence, there is a need to investigate and analyse both the phenomenon of atheism and methods adapted by Islamic organisations to counter Atheism in Malaysia.

da'wah methods in modules created and applied by the selected three Islamic organisations in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur in dealing with atheism. This has been done through analysing the cases, reports, academic journals and books related to atheism and atheists as well as an in-depth interview with related individuals and authorities.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is atheism and who is an atheist?
2. What is the general structure of the Islamic organisations in Malaysia and how does it work?
3. What are the relevant *da'wah* methods from the modules used by selected Islamic organisations in dealing with atheists in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To understand atheism and atheists.
2. To explore the general structure of the Islamic organisations in Malaysia and the way it works.
3. To identify the existing *da'wah* methods and their relevance from the modules used by selected Islamic organisations in dealing with atheists in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As far as the topic is concerned, there is a study being conducted on the basic tenets of atheism and atheists but there is insufficient and outdated research conducted on it.¹⁹ This research, therefore, will help in identifying and signifying the origin and development of atheism and atheists. The response of the Islamic organisations towards atheists and atheism cases in the states of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur would also be included. This study is significant because it highlights the *da'wah* methods from the modules used by Islamic organisations in dealing with atheism in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. The result of this study may contribute to improve and revise the modules and techniques used in dealing with atheism. This research, therefore, analyses all possible definitions and interpretations used in defining the word atheism and atheists. This study also examines the structure of the Islamic organisations in Malaysia who have held responsibility in countering the ideology of atheism and atheists.

1.6 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

As stated in the significance of this research, this study focuses mainly on identifying the methods used in dealing with atheism and atheists. In collecting the data on atheism and its module, this study focusing on the states of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur which have among the highest cases of atheism in Malaysia. That was the data as stated by the Department of Statistics Malaysia back in the year 2010.²⁰ The three selected organisations are the Selangor State Islamic Religious Council (MAIS), the Federal Territories Islamic Religious Council (MAIWP), and the Modern *Daie* Society

¹⁹Muhammad Rashidi Wahab.

²⁰Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, 22.

Malaysia.²¹ Besides, the limitation of the places of research is highly influenced by time and financial constraints.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research technique including textual analysis and series of interviews. This research highlights the definitions of atheism and atheists as well as its ideological formation. The data is gathered from a series of interviews with religious authorities and personal individuals from the selected Islamic organisations. This research stresses on how the Islamic organisations counter atheism through the *da'wah* methods in modules used in dealing with atheists in Malaysia.

1.7.1 Textual Analysis

The sources of references and materials used in this study are directly connected with the library resources like books, journal articles, theses, and newspapers. The study of all the definitions of atheism and atheists, the origins and the developments of the ideology were gathered from the library research.

1.7.2 Interview

The researcher conducts a series of interviews with the officers in-charge at the government agencies and one representative from the non-government agency. Most of the interviews were conducted directly at the offices respectively. However, a few continual discussions were also made through online platforms of WhatsApp messenger. A voice recorder was used during the whole interview sessions within the

²¹A non-government organisation which is focusing on conducting practical exercises and seminars related to modules for atheists and apostates as well as street *da'wah*.

permission of the interviewees. The complete recorded interview sessions were then transcribed by the researcher. The content of the interviews was analysed based on the *da'wah* modules and the responses from the organisations towards the ideology. (Please refer to Appendix 1).

1.7.3 Module Analysis

The researcher analyses the *da'wah* methods and its relevance from the modules for atheists prepared by three selected Islamic organizations. The three Islamic organisations are the Selangor Islamic Religious Council (MAIS), the Federal Territories Islamic Religious Council (MAIWP), and Modern *Da'ie* Society Malaysia (MD). The two main criteria in the selection of the Islamic organisations are the organisations must have either specific application of *da'wah* modules for atheism or having a direct contact with atheists through cases and records.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

The sources for this research are limited where there are just a few numbers of readings on atheism that could be found in Malaysia. The major finding for the literature is highly contributed from findings on the definitions of atheism and atheists. There is one writing on the origin and development of atheism in Malaysia but as for the ideological formation of the atheism, there is insufficient research that has yet been made concerning it. A general survey of atheism, besides, has been conducted from various other fields whereas as far as the religious approach is concerned, there is still no cases that could be found.

From the collective readings on the definitions of atheism and atheists, it can be summarised that there are two versions used by most dictionaries and encyclopaedias

in defining atheism. The first version indicates that the term “atheism” derived from Greek word which gives the actual meaning of the denial of theism, but the term becomes broader as time goes by thus bringing to the denial of God.²² *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*²³ is also having the same point by adding that the word came in the sixteenth century as “*atheos*” which means godlessness.

Meanwhile, the second version explained in *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of World Religions*, atheism as opposed to the theism in expressing their “non-belief in God” with certainty without any doubt as in agnosticism.²⁴ The disbelief of God also brings a doctrinaire rejection of any beliefs, doubtful to any religious claims and no certainty to religious truth.²⁵ The general disbelief to any forms of metaphysical beings, divine beings, spiritual or supernatural beings is also what indicates in a religion called atheism.²⁶

The definitions above show that there is a diverse way of interpreting atheism. The first version claims that atheism means the denial of God where an atheist chooses to deny the “existence” of God while the second version from encyclopaedia claims that atheism means not to have any “believe” in God. This research, therefore, intends to analyse the similarities as well as the differences that could be found in defining the words “atheism” and “atheists.”

Next, this research also looks through the characteristics of atheism. Based on the library research, there are a few journal articles as well as theses that could help in

²²Taliaferro, Charles and Elsa J. Marty, *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 22.

²³Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, Vol.1, Koninklijke Brill NV, (The Netherlands, 2007), 149 – 150.

²⁴Doniger, Wendy, *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of World Religions*, (Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 1999), 87 – 88.

²⁵Hinnells, John R. (ed.), “Atheism”, *A New Dictionary of Religions*, (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publisher Oxford, 1995), 55.

²⁶Nielsen, Kai E., “Atheism”, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (June 7,2019), Encyclopædia Britannica Incorporated, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Atheism>

elaborating the point. Catherine L. Caldwell-Harris in her study denotes that there are three characteristics from the cognitive or personality traits of an atheist. Those three characteristics are low sociality and individualism, logical thinking versus intuition, and instant problem-solving versus concern over transcendence.²⁷ This psychological study shows that an atheist usually has high social status as many of the atheistss came from intellectual and well-off people, tend to be more individualistic rather than socializing and an atheist has always been seen by their dependence on logical reasoning and scientific knowledge.²⁸ Furthermore, other fields like social science classified atheism into two prior points that are, ideology and identity. The key point to having an “ideology” in atheism simply denotes the absence of belief to any universal spirits while atheistic identity reflects self-proclaims as an “atheist”.²⁹

Lubna Saeed and Cali Elise Greksa have come out with two responses of the society and atheists, using quite similar references and hypothesis on conducting their study from the sociological perspectives. Cali quoted from Campbell³⁰ that even at the earliest time, people found it hard to face an atheist during the Victorian Era, where people stigmatized atheists as demoralized, unfriendly, and corrupted soul.³¹ Lubna also mentions the same point that the common perspective that the Western society has towards an atheist is a slur and it makes it hard for an atheist to vocally profess himself as an atheist and being bold in public but rather chooses to call himself as agnostic and irreligious. They also claim that there are many categories and classifications that could be seen in exploring atheism in philosophy, like the one mentioned by George H. Smith

²⁷Caldwell-Harris, Catherine L., “Understanding Atheism/Non-Belief as an Expected Individual-Differences Variable,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, Vol.2 No.1 February 2012, 4-47, 9.

²⁸Catherine.

²⁹Saeed, Lubna., “Socio-Political Thoughts and Impact of atheism on Contemporary Western Society”, *Context and Reflection: Philosophy of the World and Human Being* 2018, Vol. 7, Is. 3A, 88.

³⁰Campbell, Colin., *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

³¹Greksa, Cali Elise, “The atheists Experience: A Sociological Approach to Atheists Identity in College Students”, (PhD diss., Boulder Department of Sociology, University of Colorado, 2015), 10.

who classified atheism into two sections, implicit and explicit atheism.³² George H. Smith³³ also suggested that some stages could be constructed in tracking an atheist's identity development.³⁴

The study on the general phenomenon of atheism is also important for this research as the global phenomenon is a direct and general indicator to the development of atheism in the world. The Pew Research Organisation 2016, for example, showed that there is a significant rise in Americans who identify themselves as atheists looking through the data from 2007 to 2014 by 3.1%, and about 4% increase in agnostic as compared to 2.4% in 2007.³⁵ Also, the latest Pew Research Center 2018 survey in asking people on what is their current religion to 41 out of 106 countries across the world shows that most of the young adults consider themselves as not religiously affiliated.³⁶

Meanwhile, in the Malaysian context, a survey conducted by the Department of Statistics Malaysia in the year 2010, there are about 0.7% out of about 28 million people in Malaysia that claimed to have no religion. Among the highest, no religion percentage are the states of Pahang and Sarawak with 2.6%, followed by Perak and Negeri Sembilan with 0.9% and 0.8%. Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan were next with 0.4% and 0.5% respectively.³⁷

³²Implicit Atheism: may not believe in God but they are not rejecting the Theism or supernatural things as a whole.

Explicit Atheism: does reject all theistic beliefs in general.

³³Smith G.H., *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Los Angeles: Nash, 1974).

³⁴Saeed.

³⁵Lipka, Michael, "10 Facts about Atheists," *The Pew Research Center*, June 1, 2016, accessed March 10, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/10-facts-about-Atheists/>.

³⁶Pew Research Centre. "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World," *The Pew Research Centre*, June 13, 2018, accessed February 9, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/>.

³⁷Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, 27.

These were the results of 9 years ago and as of 2019, the number might have risen drastically as we went through more advanced and civilized world of technology.³⁸ Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate and explore the current spreading of atheism in Malaysia specifically in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur as the central capital of the peninsular. Muhammad Rashidi Wahab in his book *Ateisme: Satu Penelitian Awal* explains that the development of atheism in Malaysia can be traced back during the early nineteenth century where the colonialism of the West succeeded in injecting the ideologies of Marxism and Communism thus influenced the political and literary development of the people.³⁹

There are various examples of *da'wah* methods through the development of modules and executions made by Islamic organisations. Among the modules and approaches are PERKIM's *da'wah* to the Chinese ethnic of Malaysia,⁴⁰ *Da'wah's* development module for *mūallaf* (converted Muslim) in Sarawak,⁴¹ and IIS approach in fostering the inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia.⁴² However, there is just one module that proposes a *da'wah* to atheists had been identified. In the module, the author synthesizes that the module is not just to atheists but also deists, and agnostics as all of them are inter-related to one another. The module stresses on defining the groups, then describing the belief in God, the *fitrah* (natural inclination), a common characterization of the groups and simple steps to *da'wah* to them. It also highlights its rejection towards

³⁸Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, 27.

³⁹Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, 27.

⁴⁰Nur Hieadayah Abdul Rahim, Idris Zakaria, "PERKIM Propagation to Chinese Ethnic in Malaysia," *Islamiyyat: International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 36(1) 2014: 63 – 70.

⁴¹'*Penerangan Islam (Pra Pengislaman)*', *Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak*, n.d., 1–36.

⁴²Aemy Elyani Mat Zain, Idris Zakaria, Jaffary Awang, "Islamic Information & Services Foundation's (IIS) Approach in Fostering Inter-Religious Dialogue in Malaysia," *Islamiyyat: International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 37(1) 2015: 76 – 85.