

**Article**

**The Manifestation of Ideal Norms and Real Norms among Muslims in  
Hamtramck**

Rifka Pratama\*

*English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang 50275, Indonesia*

**Abstract**

This research aims at explaining life of and religious norms conformed by Muslims in Hamtramck, a predominantly Muslim city in Wayne County of the U.S. state of Michigan. More specifically, through this paper the writer tries to explain and analyze the norms conformed by Muslims in Hamtramck from a socio-cultural perspective. Based on the data the writer sees the existence of two forms of norms conformed by Muslims in their daily life in Hamtramck. Later, these norms are called ideal norms and real norms. In this research, the data is collected by using library study method. The data on the portrait of Muslims' socio-cultural life in Hamtramck is obtained from newspaper articles and some video coverages. Furthermore, the data is processed and interpreted by using the theory that has been selected by the writer. The research suggests that the socio-cultural interaction of Muslims in Hamtramck is mostly based on the real norms while the ideal norms are conformed mostly in the context of religious rituals.

**Keywords:** Manifestation; Ideal Norms; Real Norms; Muslims; Hamtramck.

**1. Introduction**

Muslims are one of many immigrant groups in America, a country that is very plural in many aspects. As an immigrant group it is not easy for Muslims to adapt to new neighborhood in America. Sooner or later this minority group will find new things that to some extent will even shift the established values and norms they bring with. It sounds pessimistic. However, this does not mean that this religious group cannot exist or even merged into the American citizens. Hamtramck is one of the evidences. There lives Muslims as the majority group. Several world-class newspapers such as the Washington Post, the Guardian, and the Daily Mail have previously highlighted this fact. The Guardian's headline, for example, claimed Hamtramck to be listed as the first city in America to have the largest Muslims city council member<sup>1</sup>. Of the six members of the city council four are Muslims.

Muslims take part in various fields of life in Hamtramck. However, prejudice does exist. Some residents in Hamtramck city recently have a concern about the implementation of sharia law. This has been a sensitive issue in the city for a long time. Some right-wing media even refer to Hamtramck as "Shariaville"<sup>2</sup>. Muslim groups such as ISIS are often associated with Muslims in Hamtramck. This, in

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\* Corresponding author. +6285743304791.  
E-mail address: pratamarifka@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> This information is retrieved from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/nov/15/michigan-muslim-majority-city-council-hamtramck-detroit>

<sup>2</sup> Based on a report written by Liana Aghajanian. Further information can be retrieved from:

turn, brings insecurity to especially the non-Muslims citizens of the city. In series of interview Hamtramck's mayor, Karen Majewski, a Polish descent, dismissed the news by saying that people in Hamtramck could co-exist in difference. She insisted that the differences in ethnicity are not related to the problems she had been working on in her city.

The concerns of some community groups on the implementation of sharia law and the infiltration of radical groups in Hamtramck require Muslims to clarify. Not only do the Muslims make peace campaigns in the media, the clarifications would manifest in the existence and participation of Muslims in Hamtramck in various fields of life as well. From the sociological perspective, as Weber said, it is a form of social action, a term which is used to refer to anything people are conscious of doing because of other people (Tischler, 2011:103). From this perspective Muslims will prove their ability to live amid socio-cultural background differences in Hamtramck.

Prejudice against Muslims are various. Muslims support terrorism and are anti-American are the most common prejudice. However, it can be ignored by Hamtramck Muslims. The writer finds three things the Hamtramck Muslims have shown to counter the existing prejudice. These three things are respect to the country's constitution, the flexibility in social interaction, and the adaptation to American lifestyle including food and dress. For non-Muslim American these may be not difficult to do. In contrast, these are problematic for some Muslims. The values, norms, and culture brought by the immigrant Muslims will sometimes clash with American values, norms and culture.

It cannot be denied that there is a conflict between the norms that Muslims have conformed to and commonly conformed norms in America. To create harmony there must be a socio-cultural adaptation. In the process of the socio-cultural adaptation there will be things that can be compromised and cannot be compromised. This phenomenon will be further explained from a socio-cultural approach that specifically refers to the concept of ideal norms and real norms. As stated by Tischler, ideal norms refer to expectations of what people should do under perfect conditions while real norms are expressed with qualifications and allowances for differences in individuals (2011:56).

## **2. Methods**

In this research, the data are obtained from online and offline sources presented as newspaper articles, journals, books, and digital media such as photos and videos. Thus, this is a library research. The data obtained are largely qualitative in nature. The data is then processed and interpreted by using qualitative methods in which the writer seeks compatibility between the data and the theory that has been selected. The data and theories are analyzed by using the socio-cultural approach. First, the writer explains the Islamic norms conformed by Muslims in Hamtramck. After that, the writer analyzes if there is a difference between the daily practice and Islamic norms among Muslims Hamtramck. At last, the writer categorizes whether the norms include ideal norms (conforming to the established teachings) or real norms (adapting to circumstances).

## **3. Results**

The results of this research suggest that the ideal norms and real norms both exist in the life of Muslims in Hamtramck. Next, the writer will show the findings in the two sub chapters below.

### **3.1 The Manifestation of Ideal Norms**

Ideal norms are clearly seen in some aspects of life among the Muslims of Hamtramck. The writer's findings are:

- The wearing of *Burqa* among some Muslim women
- The availability of halal food outlets
- Islamic prayer call (Adhan)

These findings can be categorized by the writer as norms related to ritual and worship.

### **3.2 The Manifestation of Real Norms**

Real norms are also reflected in some aspects of life of the Hamtramck Muslims. These real norms are seen in the following practices:

- Acceptance of the local political system
- The wearing of jeans by Muslims from Bangladesh
- Acceptance of American values such as American Dream and Free Exercise

The manifestation of real norms among Muslims Hamtramck is more related to the social aspects.

## **4. Discussion**

Excessive ethnocentrism can bring a plural society into conflict. People judge about other cultures according to the customs and values of their own. That is a form of ethnocentrism (Tischler, 2011:53). In the context of Muslim life in Hamtramck the term majority is currently attached to Muslim groups. Meanwhile, minority groups refer to non-Muslim groups, for example, Catholic groups. Despite the majority, the Muslim groups in Hamtramck seems to know that ethnocentrism will not be the solution to the existing prejudices. On the contrary, with the dialectic and adaptation process Muslims are able to adapt to the norms and cultures that have existed longer in Hamtramck.

The Muslim adaptation to Hamtramck's values, norms and cultures manifests in various forms<sup>3</sup>. By using the concept of material culture and nonmaterial culture it can be divided into two. Material culture deals with cultural products that are material. Meanwhile, nonmaterial is a cultural product of ideas, ways of thinking, and ideas (Tischler, 2011:54-55). Among the material adjustments is the acceptability of American food products under the terms of halal and the wearing of jeans. Nonmaterial culture

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<sup>3</sup> Based on an interview done by Religion and Ethics Newsweekly. The interview video can be seen by visiting the URL below: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2016/02/05/february-5-2016-muslims-of-hamtramck-michigan/28948/>

adaptation is reflected in the life motivation driven by the spirit of the American Dream.

From the socio-cultural perspective, social interaction is influenced by norms. Social scientists use the word norm to refer to the rules of conduct agreed upon and executed together in a cultural group to limit acceptable behavior or not (Tischler, 2011:104). Muslims, for example, in the ideal circumstances will live their lives according to the norms set forth by their religious leaders. These norms are inspired by the sacred sources of religion both presented as scriptural texts and the advice given by the religious leaders. In practice, not all of these norms can be ideally manifested.

The process of adjustment to the new neighborhood is called adaptation. It is defined as the process by which human beings adjust to changes in their environment. Muslim immigrants in Hamtramck, of course, finds different values and cultural practices in the new environment. These differences are not big problems for Muslims. In practice, as the research suggested, there are some adjustments in their norms, in this case Islamic norms, and the norms conformed by the local communities.

The process of adjustment of the Islamic norms to the Western norms or specifically the Hamtramck non-Muslim society's is what can be seen as a socio-cultural phenomenon. To borrow Tischler's terminology, under the condition Hamtramck society has been practicing two types of norms namely ideal norms and real norms. The manifestation of ideal norms are found in rituals of worship while the real norms are seen more in the mundane aspects, which Muslims call *muamalat*<sup>4</sup>.

Among the conformities with ideal norms of the Hamtramck Muslims found by the writer are the wearing of Burqa, the availability of halal food outlets, and Islamic call prayer in public places. The wearing of Burqa in non-Muslim majority countries often causes controversy, as what happened in France, for example. Different from what happened in France, the wearing of *Burqa* is difficult to ban in America. The first amendment of US' constitution guarantees the free exercise. Thus, it very clearly prohibits the state intervention in the religious affairs. In this case, *the Burqa* is not just about clothing. For some Muslim women it is a religious symbol. On the streets of the city of Hamtramck it is not uncommon to find Muslim women wearing *Burqa*. Nevertheless, not every Muslim in Hamtramck wears Burqa. Some of them wear *hijabs* without face covering. Still, this can be categorized as ideal norms conformity.

For Muslims, food is not only related to the fulfillment of nutritional needs. Moreover, Islamic norms require a very strict standard. In Islamic tradition this standardization is called *halal*. Therefore, under ideal circumstances Muslims, for example, will not eat pork or drink alcohol. This is what can be found in Hamtramck where *halal* food outlets are widely available on the streets. Not always, these *halal* outlets are traditional dishes from the countries of origin of the Muslim groups in Hamtramck. There are a lot of fast food outlets that combine foods such as pizza, burgers, french fries with *halal* labels.

As a mandatory ritual, the practice of *shalah* has a special place for Muslims. This often becomes a convergence for many differences within Muslim communities. One of the rituals performed before the prayer is the call to prayer, a call containing sacred sentences and a solemn prayer. Often the call to prayer is loud. Most Muslims use loudspeakers in reciting the call to prayer so that Muslims within reach can hear and then immediately perform the prayers. In Switzerland, the practice of adzan using loudspeakers is prohibited by local law. In addition to being considered disturbing, the ban on call to

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<sup>4</sup> It deals with commercial and civil matters. Islamic law divides legal action into two namely worship and *muamalat*. In *muamalat*, there is enough room to compromise legislation to facilitate human interaction based on the principle of justice.

prayer is also related to sentiments and suspicions against Muslims. In America, the reason for the ban is more on the issue of order. Speakers are considered annoying and polluting. In Hamtramck, if we search on youtube, adzan is recited through loudspeakers. Regardless of the controversy, the adhan is still being sung by Muslims in Hamtramck with loudspeakers.

Ideal norms-based activities mostly relate to ritual aspects of worship. This is natural. Since most religions make devotional piety an important determinant of the salvation of the world-the life of an adherent. Unlike the ideal norm, the real norm is more visible in worldly activities. This apparent norm is seen from Muslim acceptance of the American political system, the wearing of typical American clothing products, and some American philosophy of life.

The Hamtramck Muslims acceptance of the American political system is both reasonable and smart. Given that in a democracy legal products are often the result of the political process then it becomes reasonable. It is said to be smart because Muslims are able to see opportunities, this may sound negative, to sit in power so that their rights can be fully assured. To some extent, the participation of Muslims in politics is suspected as a form of "Islamization". On many occasions this suspicion is dismissed by the mayor of Hamtramck, who is a non-Muslim<sup>5</sup>.

American popular culture in many ways is also accepted by Hamtramck Muslims. The wearing of jeans and t-shirts is a small example. Not only as a characteristic, the clothing has also been filled with conditions covering *the aurat*<sup>6</sup> where this is the practice of Islamic ideal norms. Of course, the wearing of jeans and shirts is not necessarily free of the so-called Islamic norms. Still, there is an adjustment. For example, the shirts worn do not contain vulgar words or for jeans it has to be trousers.

American dream becomes one among the philosophy existing in the American society believed by the Muslim immigrants in Hamtramck. This philosophy does not have fundamental contradiction with the basic norms of Islam. Material necessities in many forms are things that a Muslim cannot escape from. Only, there are some adjustments. For example, *the American Dream* that is free of spiritual values has to have a spiritual value when practiced by a Muslim. It goes without saying that one of the reasons of why the immigrants come to America is to achieve economic prosperity. This is a representation of the American Dream. At the same time it is the spirit of Muslims to develop a strong economy so that they can practice the religion at its best.

## **5. Conclusions**

The Hamtramck Muslims are majority citizens. As an immigrant group, Muslims are still subject to prejudice especially with regard to the issue of terrorism. However, Muslims can still exist even in politics. In Hamtramck this group has a strong position. At the same time, this shows that there are adjustments between Islamic norms and the local norms. The adaptation of Muslims to local norms does not completely eliminate their original norms. Ritual of worship are still based on the so-called ideal norms. While worldly activities allow for compromise or are based on the real norms.

## **References**

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<sup>5</sup> An interview with the incumbent Hamtramck Mayor, Karen Majewski. Retrieved from: <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/wayne/2017/11/05/hamtramck-race-mayor-heats-up/785108001/>

<sup>6</sup> According to Islamic teaching the word refers to intimate parts of the human body that must be covered by clothing

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## **Appendix**

Photos with captions to support the findings of the research can be seen in:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3336823/Inside-Hamtramck-America-s-Muslim-majority-city-call-prayer-echoes-streets-Syrian-refugees-welcomed-defiance-governor.html>.