

# Critical Discourse Analysis of "Criticism of the Representation of Islam in Western Media and the Role of Da'wah in Transformation" by Suud Sarim Karimullah

**Fathan Tibyan Rahman**

Ibnu Sina Research Institute, Bandung, Indonesia  
[fathanrahmantibyan@gmail.com](mailto:fathanrahmantibyan@gmail.com)

**Sajidin**

UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia  
[sajidin@uinsgd.ac.id](mailto:sajidin@uinsgd.ac.id)

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## Abstract:

This study critically analyzes Suud Sarim Karimullah's article, "Criticism of the Representation of Islam in Western Media and the Role of Da'wah in Transformation," using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model (text, discursive practice, social practice). It examines the article's discursive construction, legitimation strategies, and ideological tensions, including binary oppositions between "Western media" and "Islam," da'wah as dialogical "soft resistance," reverse essentialism, discursive hybridity, and the postcolonial intellectual's subject position. Through close reading of lexical choices, arguments, intertextuality, and social functions, the analysis reveals the text's sermonic-academic hybridity and its universalizing Islamic epistemology as a counter-hegemonic response. Findings urge da'wah practitioners to avoid reverse essentialism, embrace internal diversity in counter-narratives, and integrate critical reflexivity into media literacy education. This reflexive CDA application contributes to Islamic media studies and postcolonial discourse by illuminating paradoxes in counter-hegemonic knowledge production.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis; Counter-Discourse; Da'wah; discursive hybridity; Essentialism; postcolonial intellectual; representation of Islam; Western Media.

## INTRODUCTION

The portrayal of Islam in Western media constitutes a persistent and deeply entrenched intellectual and political conflict, extending far beyond simple questions of accuracy into the realm of symbolic power and cultural hegemony. For decades, a substantial body of scholarship has systematically documented a dominant media narrative that overwhelmingly links Islam with violence, terrorism, and civilizational backwardness, while neglecting its theological diversity and the lived experiences of its adherents (Ahmed & Matthes, 2022). This representational regime, firmly rooted in the Orientalist traditions analyzed by Edward Said (1978), does not merely reflect ignorance but actively produces a knowledge system where "Muslim" becomes a stable signifier for threat and dysfunction. In the contemporary digital landscape, these dynamics

have become more complex and intensified, with networked media and algorithmic curation accelerating the circulation of stereotypes and embedding them more deeply in the public consciousness (Maira, 2023). In response to this pervasive discourse, a vital and growing field of counter scholarship has emerged from Muslim and postcolonial academic spaces.

This body of work seeks to deconstruct biased frameworks, challenge the authority of Western media as the primary narrator of Islamic identity, and propose alternative paradigms for understanding (Onur, 2024). It is within this vigorous and consequential dialogue that Suud Sarim Karimullah's article, "Criticism of the Representation of Islam in Western Media and the Role of Da'wah in Transformation," situates itself. Engaging directly with this enduring debate, the article attempts to move from critique to prescriptive solution by championing the Islamic concept of da'wah, or inviting to the faith, as a transformative mechanism. However, while the article contributes to this important conversation, its own discursive construction, the very strategies it uses to build its argument and assert its legitimacy, remains unexamined. This presents a critical gap, as the power of such counter-narratives lies not only in their message but in their method.

Existing research on media and Islam largely follows two complementary trajectories. The first employs empirical content analysis to quantify and qualify bias, consistently demonstrating the disproportional association of Islam with conflict and the framing of Muslims as a homogeneous, problematic other (Baker et al., 2021). The second engages theoretical frameworks from postcolonial studies, critical race theory, and political economy to interpret these representations as instruments of power, contextualizing them within histories of imperialism and contemporary geopolitics (Grosfoguel, 2020). Karimullah's work explicitly bridges these approaches, drawing on empirical studies and on theoretical giants like Said. Yet, a significant research lacuna persists. While extensive energy is devoted to analyzing the distortions of mainstream media or advocating for Muslim produced alternatives, far less scholarly attention is paid to conducting a critical discourse analysis of these academic counter narratives themselves (Agha, 2024). How do these scholarly responses, in their legitimate effort to dismantle powerful misrepresentations, themselves employ discursive tactics that warrant scrutiny? What ideological underpinnings support their proposed remedies? Is there a risk that, in challenging one form of essentialism, they inadvertently enact another? As Abdulfattah (2023) cautions, the struggle against Orientalist discourse can sometimes produce a "reverse discourse" that simply inverts the binary without dismantling its foundational logic (Abdulfattah, 2023). This analysis seeks to address this precise gap by turning a reflexive, critical lens onto a text that is itself an exercise in critique.

Therefore, the central problem this article addresses is twofold and reflexively oriented. First, it investigates how Karimullah's text discursively constructs the relational dynamics between the three core entities in its title: "Western media," "Islam," and "da'wah." Second, and more critically, it examines how the text might simultaneously reproduce and negotiate the very discursive biases, such as homogenization and binary thinking, that it explicitly condemns in its object of study. These questions are paramount because they shift the focus from evaluating the article's factual conclusions to dissecting its rhetorical architecture. We analyze it not merely for *what* it argues, but for *how* it argues, recognizing that the form and strategy of its persuasion are constitutive of its meaning and social impact. This approach treats Karimullah's article not as a neutral vessel of truth, but as an active participant in a discursive contest, a site where language is mobilized to challenge existing power, claim authority, and promote a specific vision of moral and intellectual order.

The primary aim of this study is thus to subject Karimullah's article to a rigorous Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Informed by the dialectical approach of Norman Fairclough, CDA provides the essential toolkit for linking detailed textual analysis to broader social structures of power and ideology (Fairclough, 1992). Our objective is to delineate the article's key discursive strategies. This includes mapping its construction of in-groups and out-groups, its use of legitimisation devices such as strategic citation and moral appeal, and its framing of problems and solutions. We seek to uncover the ideological assumptions often embedded within these strategies, such as the presupposition of a monolithic "Western media" or the presentation of da'wah as an invariably benign and universally effective tool of cultural repair. Crucially, we aim to illuminate the internal tensions that structure the text: the tension between its deconstructive postcolonial critique and its potential reliance on reductive categories; the tension between its invocation of intercultural dialogue and its grounding in a particularistic theological framework; and the tension between its scholarly, analytical register and its underlying, prescriptive

imperative (Bhabha, 2022). These tensions are not failures but revealing fissures that expose the complex positionality of a postcolonial Muslim intellectual navigating Western academic norms while advocating for a faith-based epistemology.

The significance of this inquiry is multifaceted. Theoretically, it advances a more reflexive and sophisticated understanding of contemporary Islamic discourse in global academia. By applying CDA to a text that is itself a critique of dominant discourse, this study engages in a necessary meta critical exercise that enriches both discourse analytical methodology and the field of postcolonial religious studies. It responds to scholarly calls to subject "counter public" discourses to the same critical rigor applied to mainstream media, thereby avoiding romanticization and fostering greater analytical depth (Agha, 2024). Practically, the findings hold relevance for media practitioners, interfaith educators, and da'wah organizations. By critically examining the rhetorical formations and potential pitfalls within a prominent corrective narrative, this analysis can inform more nuanced, self aware, and effective communication strategies aimed at bridging cultural divides rather than inadvertently reinforcing them (Stoner, 2019). Contextually, the study is vitally important in an era marked by resurgent identity politics, global Islamophobia, and information polarization. Understanding how scholarly counter discourses are constructed, and the complexities they embody, is essential for comprehending the intellectual and communicative challenges of fostering genuine understanding in a fractured public sphere.

To fulfill these objectives, this article is structured according to the IMRaD framework. Following this introduction, the Methods section will elaborate on the application of Fairclough's three dimensional model of CDA, detailing how we analyze the text, its discursive practices, and its embeddedness in social practice, using Karimullah's article as our primary data. The subsequent integrated Results and Discussion section will present our findings through thematic analysis, exploring the construction of discursive binaries, the mechanics of legitimation and their inherent contradictions, the ideological framing of da'wah as a counter discourse, and the hybrid nature of the text's academic and normative voices. The Conclusion will synthesize the core argument, underscore the broader implications of our analysis for scholarship and practice, and suggest directions for future research that continue to critically unpack the intertwined dynamics of media representation and discursive resistance.

## METHOD

To interrogate the intricate discursive architecture of Karimullah's article, this study adopts a qualitative research design anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is distinguished by its explicit political and ideological commitment to uncovering the often-opaque connections between language use, social power, and ideological reproduction (van Dijk, 2015). It operates on the fundamental premise that discourse is not a neutral medium but a form of social practice that both shapes and is shaped by societal structures. This approach is particularly apt for the present analysis, as it allows us to move beyond a surface-level summary of Karimullah's arguments and instead critically examine how the text itself functions as an agent within the very power dynamics it describes—namely, the struggle over the legitimate representation of Islam.

The primary data for this investigation is the full text of Suud Sarim Karimullah's scholarly article, "Criticism of the Representation of Islam in Western Media and the Role of Da'wah in Transformation." This text is treated not merely as a container of ideas but as the central discursive event to be dissected. As a published academic work that synthesizes critique with religiously-informed prescription, it serves as an ideal site for analyzing how counter-hegemonic knowledge is linguistically produced and legitimized within hybrid scholarly spaces (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). All textual elements—from its title and abstract to its theoretical framework, argumentative flow, and concluding remarks—are considered constitutive data for analysis.

Guided by Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, the analysis is conducted across three interconnected levels. First, at the level of textual analysis, the micro-features of the language are scrutinized. This involves a close reading of lexical choices—such as the recurrent use of "Western media" as a collective actor versus the portrayal of Islam as a "peaceful faith"—to map the construction of in-groups and out-groups. The argument structure is examined to trace how propositions are linked to build a coherent narrative. Special attention is paid to the use of modality, particularly deontic modals like "should," "must," and "can," which reveal the author's prescriptive stance and moral injunctions (Fairclough, 2013).

Furthermore, the overall tone, oscillating between analytical detachment and defensive advocacy, is assessed for its rhetorical effect.

Second, the analysis moves to the dimension of discursive practice. Here, the focus shifts to how the text is produced, consumed, and disseminated within specific social contexts. This involves analyzing the intertextual strategies Karimullah employs: how and why certain academic references (e.g., Said's Orientalism, empirical media studies) are marshaled to lend authority and credibility to his claims (van Leeuwen, 2007). We investigate the positioning of the text within broader discursive formations, notably postcolonial criticism and contemporary Islamic revivalist thought. This level asks: How does the author establish his epistemic authority? What discursive traditions does he align with or distance himself from?

Finally, the analysis situates the text within the broader arena of social practice. This macro-level inquiry interprets the text's social function and ideological effects. It explores how the article operates as a form of symbolic resistance against what it frames as Western media hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). It evaluates the text's role in contesting narrative authority and its attempt to redefine the power relations inherent in who gets to represent Islam. This involves considering the potential of the text to reinforce a particular Islamic identity, advocate for da'wah as a socio-discursive project, and intervene in real-world debates about multiculturalism and religious dialogue (Forchtner, 2016). By integrating these three levels, this methodology provides a comprehensive lens to unravel not only what Karimullah's article says but, more critically, how it works as a discursive instrument of critique, legitimacy-building, and ideological positioning within a contested field of knowledge.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Construction of Binaries and Power Relations

A foundational and recurring discursive strategy in Karimullah's article is the construction of a rigid, homogenizing binary between two central entities: "Western media" and "Islam." This opposition is not merely descriptive but performative, actively shaping the epistemological battlefield upon which the argument unfolds. Through consistent lexical choices, "Western media" is framed as a largely monolithic actor, characterized by secular bias, persistent prejudice, and a hegemonic drive. This construct operates as a unified source of distortion, often devoid of internal diversity or countervailing voices within Western journalistic fields (Ben Hadj Salem, 2025). In stark contrast, "Islam" is lexically fashioned as a coherent, essentially peaceful, and theologically unified entity that exists prior to and apart from its flawed media representations. This discursive move, what Abdulfattah (2023) terms the "reverse discourse" strategy, simplifies a profoundly complex transnational and intercultural dynamic into a clear moral and epistemic dichotomy: a powerful, distorting producer versus a passive, misrepresented truth (Abdulfattah, 2023).

Critical Discourse Analysis views such binary constructions as primary instruments for establishing and naturalizing power relations (van Dijk, 2021). In this framework, Karimullah's text initially reproduces the very power dynamic it seeks to critique. The "Western media" is positioned as the dominant subject, the active agent that controls the means of representation and the production of global meaning. "Islam" and Muslims, conversely, are positioned as the object, the spoken-for, defined by external narratives beyond their control. This mirrors what Said (1978) identified as the core of Orientalist practice, where the power to define is centralized with the Occident. Karimullah's article provides a contemporary academic iteration of this dynamic, explicitly stating that media holds the symbolic power to "represent," while Muslims are relegated to the position of the represented (Said's, 1978). This initial framing effectively sets the stage for a narrative of victimization and epistemic injustice, which is a potent rhetorical foundation for subsequent calls to action (Baker & McEnery, 2021).

However, the article's core intervention lies in its attempt to disrupt and reverse this imposed power relation. This is where the third term, "da'wah," is strategically introduced as a catalytic agent. Da'wah is not simply added to the binary; it is constructed as the means to dismantle it. The text proposes da'wah as an active, collective subject capable of reclaiming narrative agency. It is framed as a transformative discursive practice that can shift Muslims from passive objects to active subjects of their own representation. In CDA terms, this is a move to contest hegemony through what Fairclough (2013) describes as the creation of a "counter-hegemonic discourse." By advocating for da'wah, Karimullah attempts to symbolically transfer the power of narration from the institutional apparatus of Western media

to the agency of the Muslim community, now equipped with a theologically-grounded communicative mandate (Fairclough, 2013).

Yet, this powerful rhetorical strategy is fraught with internal tension and ideological consequences. The persuasive clarity gained by the "West versus Islam" binary comes at the cost of analytical nuance, engaging in a form of strategic essentialism that risks scholarly critique. As Agha (2024) argues, the homogenization of "Western media" inadvertently replicates the reductionism it condemns, ignoring the significant presence of critical, alternative, and even sympathetic voices within Western journalism and academia (Agha, 2024). It flattens the complex political economies and varied editorial lines of outlets from the BBC and Al Jazeera English to Fox News and The Guardian into a single, distorting entity. Similarly, the construction of a singular, "peaceful" Islam as the authentic counterpoint silences the vast internal pluralism, theological debates, and divergent political projects within global Muslim communities (Grosfoguel, 2020). This discursive move, while perhaps effective for moral persuasion, can be seen as an exercise in what Karim (2021) calls "polished representation," which seeks to replace a negative stereotype with an idealized one, yet still within a monolithic frame (Karim & Hidayat, 2021).

The power relation thus constructed is not merely one of domination versus resistance, but a triadic structure where da'wah becomes the key to unlocking a new equilibrium. The implicit power logic shifts from a dyad of "oppressor and oppressed" to a more dynamic triad: a hegemonic force (Western media), a subjugated but authentic identity (Islam), and a liberatory mechanism (da'wah). This framework is deeply ideological. It grants da'wah a unique, almost messianic role as the sole legitimate pathway to accurate self-representation and global understanding. It positions Islamic epistemic and theological foundations, accessed through da'wah, as the necessary corrective to secular Western epistemology, which is framed as inherently prone to bias and misunderstanding (Fouz Mohamed Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024). This creates a closed discursive loop where the solution is pre-ordained by the very terms of the problem's construction, potentially foreclosing other forms of critique or collaboration that do not originate from this specific faith-based premise. The analysis reveals that in its earnest effort to combat one form of power, the text meticulously constructs an alternative architecture of discursive authority centered on a particular vision of Islamic agency (Anwar, 2024).

### Legitimation Strategies and Internal Tension

Karimullah's argumentative authority is meticulously constructed through a calculated use of intertextuality, a key discursive practice where one text incorporates and responds to others (Fairclough, 2013). The primary legitimation strategy employed is the invocation of esteemed Western academic canons, most notably Edward Said's seminal work on Orientalism, alongside other empirical media studies from Western scholars. This is a potent rhetorical maneuver. By citing Said (1978) and others, Karimullah performs a critical form of discursive jujitsu, leveraging the intellectual tools and authoritative voices of the West to critique the West's own representational practices (Said's, 1978). As van Leeuwen (2021) explains, such "authorization" through expert reference is a fundamental process for establishing epistemic credibility (van Leeuwen, 2021). It demonstrates scholarly engagement and positions the author within a recognized, and respected, critical tradition. This strategy effectively builds a bridge of legitimacy for a Muslim academic voice, allowing it to communicate across cultural and epistemic boundaries by speaking a familiar, academically sanctioned language (Ramadan, 2025). It suggests, persuasively, that even the West's own finest critical minds corroborate the thesis of systemic media bias, thereby insulating the argument from charges of partisan grievance.

Simultaneously, the article's tone is carefully modulated to project a posture of diplomacy, balance, and reasoned appeal. There is a conspicuous emphasis on universal values like "tolerance," "mutual understanding," and "education," and a framing of da'wah that prioritizes its dialogical and pedagogical dimensions over any confrontational or proselytizing connotations. This tonal diplomacy, as Aslam (2020) observes in analyses of post 9/11 Muslim writings, is a strategic adaptation often employed to counter perceptions of antagonism and to align with liberal discursive norms of civil dialogue (Aslam, 2020). The text seems consciously crafted to assuage potential Western readers while affirming for Muslim readers a vision of Islam that is confident, rational, and peaceable (Wetenschappelijke & Zayd, 2006). This dual address creates a rhythm of cautious persuasion, where the critique is consistently tempered with affirmations of shared humanistic goals.

However, a critical discourse analysis reveals that these very strategies of legitimation generate profound internal tensions, exposing a central paradox within the text. The most conspicuous contradiction lies in the treatment of essentialism. While the article's entire premise is a critique of the essentializing, homogenizing portrayals of Islam in Western media, it inadvertently engages in a parallel act of essentialization by consistently referencing "Western media" as a monolithic, singular entity. This replicates what Abdulfattah (2023) identifies as the trap of "reverse discourse," where the critic, in rejecting a dominant stereotype, inadvertently accepts and inverts its foundational binary logic (Abdulfattah, 2023). The complex, multi-vocal, and often internally contested landscape of Western media institutions from public service broadcasters to tabloid press and digital platforms is collapsed into a unified agent of distortion (Gatrell et al., 2022). Thus, the text critiques a mode of thought it simultaneously enacts, demonstrating how difficult it is to escape the gravitational pull of the discursive categories one opposes.

Furthermore, the defensive undercurrent within the diplomatic tone reveals a deeper anxiety about moral credibility and the text's hybrid purpose. The repetitive insistence on Islam's peaceful nature and the corrective role of "education" functions not only as description but as a performative act of reassurance. This defensiveness signals the text's dual, and at times conflicting, function: it is both an academic analysis and an *apologia*, a scholarly defense of the faith's image. As Agha (2024) notes, this is a common feature of minority counter discourses operating within majoritarian academic spheres; the burden of proof and the need to preempt misinterpretation shape the rhetoric, embedding a layer of advocacy within the analysis (Agha, 2024). The tone, therefore, becomes a site of struggle, manifesting what Bourdieu (1991) would call the "habitus" of a writer navigating a field where his religious identity community is the object of contentious debate (Bourdieu, 1991).

This tension permeates the use of sources. The strategic citation of Western critics like Said serves to "borrow" legitimacy, but it also creates an implicit hierarchy of credibility where validation from Western academia remains paramount. It inadvertently reinforces the very epistemic authority it seeks to challenge. The text does not primarily ground its core solution, *da'wah*, in citations from classical Islamic scholars of communication or contemporary Muslim theologians, but rather justifies its transformative potential through a framework of intercultural dialogue and media correction that is legible to a secular academic audience (Sultan, 2023). This results in a discursive hybridity where Islamic theological concepts are translated and validated through the secular logic of communication studies and postcolonial theory (Mamalipurath, 2024). The internal tension lies in whether *da'wah* is presented as a unique theological imperative or as a universalist tool for intercultural harmony; the text often ambiguously straddles both, leading to a potential dilution of its specific religious meaning in the pursuit of cross cultural legitimacy.

Ultimately, these legitimation strategies and their inherent contradictions illuminate the precarious positionality of the postcolonial Muslim intellectual. The author must simultaneously critique a powerful discourse, speak truth to that power using tools it recognizes, defend a stigmatized identity, and propose a faith based solution in a secular academic idiom. The diplomatic tone and citational politics are not mere stylistic choices but essential survival and persuasion tactics in this contested field (Elyamany et al., 2025). However, the CDA reveals that this necessary performance comes at a cost. It risks reproducing the reductive categories it opposes and exposes a latent anxiety that shapes the argument's progression. The text becomes a living artifact of the very struggle it describes: the struggle for a voice that is heard as simultaneously credible, critical, and authentically Islamic, without being relegated to the margins of either partisan apology or incomprehensible particularism (Elyamany et al., 2025). This analysis shows that the quest for legitimacy in a hegemonic discursive field can subtly constrain and contort the counter narrative, embedding within it the fingerprints of the power it seeks to unsettle.

### Da'wah as Counter-Discourse and Ideology

Central to Karimullah's transformative project is the strategic reframing of *da'wah*, a term traditionally associated with religious invitation or proselytization, into a sophisticated mechanism of discursive correction and cultural mediation. Within the article's textual architecture, *da'wah* is meticulously reconstructed not as a confrontational theological imperative but as an educational, dialogical, and inherently peaceful practice. It is envisioned as a form of "soft resistance" (Bayat, 2017) that operates within the symbolic and communicative realms, aiming to dismantle biased representations through

knowledge production, empathetic engagement, and the strategic use of media technology. This reframing is a pivotal discursive move. It seeks to reclaim the moral high ground by aligning Islamic practice with universally laudable values of education, dialogue, and peacebuilding, thereby directly countering the violent and regressive stereotypes attributed to Islam in mainstream media narratives (Aslam, 2020). In Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) terms, this represents the construction of a potent counter-discourse, an alternative framework of meaning designed to challenge and displace a dominant, hegemonic narrative (Fairclough, 2013). Da'wah, in this formulation, becomes the vehicle for a "symbolic re-narration," empowering Muslims to transition from being objects of discourse to active subjects and authors of their own identity (van Dijk, 2021).

This promotion of da'wah as a primarily cultural and educational project serves a crucial legitimating function. It positions Islamic response within a modern, rational, and cosmopolitan framework that is palatable and persuasive to both Western academic audiences and global civil society. By emphasizing dialogue over monologue and education over conversion, the text attempts to sidestep common anxieties about religious expansionism, presenting da'wah instead as a contributor to mutual understanding and global ethics (Ghazali & Kamal, 2023). This reflects a broader trend in contemporary Muslim thought, identified by scholars like Mandaville (2021), where religious concepts are translated into the language of liberal modernity to navigate secular public spheres (Mandaville, 2021). The article thus engages in a form of "discursive adaptation," packaging a theological concept in the wrapper of intercultural communication theory to enhance its acceptability and perceived utility in addressing a shared social problem (misunderstanding and prejudice).

However, a critical excavation beneath this surface framing reveals a substantive and consequential ideological layer. While presented as a neutral, dialogical tool for universal benefit, da'wah in Karimullah's text is fundamentally anchored in a specific Islamic epistemology. Its ultimate objective, though softly stated, remains the transmission and affirmation of a particular religious truth. The knowledge it seeks to disseminate is not neutral information but a revelatory worldview that posits Islam as the corrective lens through which humanity and its representations should be viewed. This creates a profound, yet often unacknowledged, tension at the heart of the argument. The text advocates for open dialogue and mutual understanding, principles that presuppose epistemological pluralism and the possibility of reciprocal transformation (Grosfoguel, 2020). Yet, it simultaneously grounds its core solution in a framework of doctrinal certainty that inherently views Islamic revelation as the ultimate truth. As Agha (2024) points out in similar analyses, this results in a "dialogical monologue," where the form is open and inviting, but the underlying epistemic structure anticipates a specific corrective outcome: the alignment of understanding with Islamic principles (Agha, 2024). This tension between the rhetoric of open-ended dialogue and the reality of a truth-claim-driven mission remains largely unresolved in the text, presenting a paradox where the proposed medium of communication subtly contradicts its professed spirit of open exchange.

Furthermore, the article's ideological construction of da'wah as a panacea tends to gloss over significant internal diversity within Muslim communities, a form of discursive erasure that weakens its analytical power. Da'wah is presented as a unified, benevolent practice, emanating from a coherent "Islam." This overlooks the intense debates, varied methodologies, and competing political projects that characterize da'wah movements globally, from state-sponsored programs to grassroots digital activism and transnational networks with divergent agendas (Pall, 2022). The text does not engage with critical questions about who gets to define and practice this "corrective" da'wah, which interpretations of Islam are promoted, and which Muslim voices (e.g., progressive, feminist, or secular-leaning) might be marginalized in the process. By presenting a homogenized version of both the problem (a singular Western media) and the solution (a singular, peaceful da'wah), the article inadvertently perpetuates what Abdulfattah (2023) calls a "polished counter-essentialism," which fails to account for the polyvocality and internal power dynamics within the Muslim world itself (Abdulfattah, 2023).

Similarly, the proposed application of da'wah often underestimates the structural complexity and political economy of Western media contexts. The solution is heavily focused on the production of "correct" content and ethical communication, presupposing a media landscape where truth, once packaged benevolently and disseminated skillfully, can win in a fair marketplace of ideas. This perspective underestimates the role of algorithmic curation, entrenched commercial interests, sensationalist news cycles, and deeply rooted ideological filters that shape media ecosystems (Noble, 2018). The text's

framework operates with a somewhat idealized Habermasian model of public discourse, where better arguments prevail through rational communication, while paying insufficient attention to the material and structural barriers that sustain representational hegemony. A more robust CDA would necessitate linking discursive strategy to a critique of these political-economic structures, asking not just how to produce a counter-narrative, but how to challenge the very platforms and economic models that amplify certain narratives over others (Fuchs, 2021).

In conclusion, the presentation of da'wah in Karimullah's article is a compelling and strategically astute piece of discursive engineering. It successfully repositions a religious concept as a key to solving a modern problem of representation, thereby reclaiming agency and moral authority (Bhatt, 2023). However, a critical analysis exposes its function as a carrier of a specific ideology, one that navigates the modern world by translating theological imperatives into the language of liberal dialogue while retaining its foundational truth claims (Hanafi, 2025). The tensions between its universalist aspirations and particularistic foundations, alongside its homogenizing tendencies, reveal the complexities and constraints of forging a counter-hegemonic discourse from within a positioned religious identity. The text, therefore, stands as a telling case study of how counter-discourses, even in their most refined and diplomatic forms, must be critically examined for the ideological architectures they build and the complexities they may inadvertently conceal in their quest for legitimacy and transformative power.

### Discursive Hybridity and the Author's Subject Position

A defining and pervasive feature of Karimullah's text, revealed through close linguistic analysis, is its fundamental discursive hybridity. This manifests most conspicuously in the sustained use of prescriptive modality, where verbs like "should," "must," "ought to," and "can" dominate the prose, particularly in sections outlining the role and methods of da'wah. For instance, the text frequently asserts that da'wah "should" be educational, that it "must" employ modern technology, and that Muslims "ought to" engage in dialogue. This consistent modalization operates as a key linguistic resource for constructing obligation and necessity (Fairclough, 2013). While such language can signal analytical recommendation in academic writing, its density and normative force in this context cross into a moral and instructive register. This is compounded by a concluding framework that seamlessly blends scholarly summary with a clarion call for tolerance, understanding, and ethical action (Rendón & Cantú, 2023). The final passages do not merely synthesize findings; they exhort the reader toward a specific moral and behavioral stance, advocating for a world rectified through the application of the article's core principles.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, this linguistic pattern signifies more than a stylistic choice; it marks the text as a hybrid genre. It meticulously upholds the formal conventions of an academic article—abstract, literature review, citation, theoretical framework—yet its communicative function often aligns more closely with that of a sermon (*khutbah*) or a moral advisory. It is academic in form but sermonic in function, a duality that Fairclough (2013) identifies as a site where different social practices and their associated power dynamics intersect and compete (Fairclough, 2013). The text becomes a vessel for what van Leeuwen (2021) terms "moral authorization," where the legitimacy of an argument is derived not solely from empirical evidence or logical coherence, but from an appeal to a system of values and duties (van Leeuwen, 2021). This hybridity is not a flaw but a strategic and revealing discursive formation, directly reflective of the author's complex subject position.

Karimullah's subject position is that of a postcolonial intellectual operating within a specific set of constraints and commitments. He is, first, a scholar situated within Western or Western-influenced academic structures, a domain governed by norms of objectivity, critical distance, and secular rationality. To be heard and deemed credible within this sphere, he must adeptly employ its language, methodologies, and citational practices. Simultaneously, he writes as a committed Muslim, explicitly defending a faith community that is the object of the representational violence he critiques (Thobani, 2017). This positionality, what Spivak might call that of the "native informant" turned critical theorist, generates an inherent tension. The author is caught between the institutional imperative to analyze and the communal imperative to advocate, between the detachment required by one audience and the solidarity demanded by another. This in-betweenness is precisely what produces the hybrid discourse: the academic form satisfies the criteria of the university, while the prescriptive, moralizing tone satisfies the imperative of defense and mission (*da'wah*).

This unresolved tension between scholarly objectivity and passionate advocacy is not a peripheral issue but mirrors the core dilemma the article itself engages with: the struggle for authentic self-representation within and against a dominant discursive system. Just as the article argues Muslims are forced to negotiate their identity within frameworks not of their own making, Karimullah's own text negotiates its argument within the academic framework, a powerful discursive system with its own rules of legitimacy. The text's hybridity thus becomes a performance of the very conflict it describes. It demonstrates the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of producing a "pure" critique that is not already shaped by the structures it critiques or the loyalties it upholds. As Agha (2024) notes in his work on reflexive turns in Muslim media studies, this ambivalence is endemic to counter-hegemonic scholarship from marginalized positions, where the scholar is always also a stakeholder (Agha, 2024). The "voice" of the analysis can never be fully disembodied; it carries the inflections of the identity under examination.

The prescriptive modality ("should," "must") further exposes this subject position by revealing the author's assumed role. The use of these deontic modals positions the writer not merely as an analyst diagnosing a problem, but as a moral guide or a community elder prescribing a cure (Sadegh-Zadeh, 2015). It implies a posture of authority derived from both academic expertise and a privileged understanding of the correct Islamic response. This linguistic move constructs an ideal reader—likely a Muslim intellectual or practitioner—who is called to action, and a Western reader who is presented with a blueprint for correction. However, this very prescriptivism can undermine the text's critical edge when directed inward. The article largely refrains from applying the same critical lens to the concept of *da'wah* or the Muslim community that it applies to Western media (Mellor, 2017). There is little exploration of how prescriptive discourses *within* Muslim communities about correct representation might also be exclusionary or power-laden. The "should" and "must" are directed almost exclusively outward, toward rectifying external perception and behavior, thereby protecting the proposed solution from the deconstructive force applied to the problem. This protective stance is a classic feature of apologetic discourse, even of a highly sophisticated kind.

Ultimately, the discursive hybridity of Karimullah's article is its most telling characteristic. It stands as a textual embodiment of the postcolonial condition in the realm of knowledge production. The text cannot escape being a product of the Western academy it critiques, nor can it abandon its commitment to the faith it seeks to defend. The oscillation between analytical and prescriptive registers, the blend of empirical citation and moral exhortation, is the linguistic symptom of this condition. This does not invalidate the article's arguments; rather, it deepens our understanding of them. It shows that the battle over the representation of Islam is not fought only in newspapers or on television screens, but in the very syntax and genre conventions of the scholarly texts that critique those media. The tension between objectivity and advocacy remains provocatively unresolved because it is constitutive of the author's position and, by extension, of the broader political and epistemic struggle the article documents. The text, therefore, is more than an analysis; it is a performative artifact that, in its own structure and style, re-enacts the complex negotiations of identity, authority, and resistance in a postcolonial, media-saturated world (Ali, 2016).

The critical discourse analysis of Karimullah's article reveals multiple layers of discursive strategies, internal contradictions, and complex subject positions. To systematically synthesize the key findings, the following table outlines the core insights across four principal analytical dimensions: binary constructions, strategies of legitimation, the positioning of *da'wah* as ideology, and discursive hybridity. Each dimension does not merely identify textual features, but also exposes the ideological implications and internal tensions that define the article as a contested discursive practice rather than a neutral academic account (Nisa'u & Karsidi, 2025).

Tabel 1 Critical Discourse Analysis of Karimullah's Article: Findings and Implications

Analytical Aspect	Key Findings in the Text	Discursive & Ideological Implications	Exposed Tensions / Contradictions
<b>Binary Construction &amp; Power Relations</b>	Constructs a homogeneous opposition between "Western Media" (monolithic, biased, secular) and "Islam"	1. Reduces a complex representational field into a morally clear narrative. 2. Reproduces an Orientalist logic (subject	Tension between critique and the reproduction of essentialism. While criticizing Western homogenization, the text

	(coherent, peaceful, misrepresented). Da'wah is introduced as an agent capable of reversing this power relation.	vs. object of representation) that the article initially seeks to critique. 3. Establishes a triadic framework: hegemon (media) – authentic subject (Islam) – emancipatory mechanism (da'wah).	performs a counter-homogenization of both "Western media" and "Islam."
<b>Legitimation Strategies &amp; Intertextuality</b>	Employs Western academic authorities (e.g., Edward Said) to critique Western media representations. Adopts a diplomatic tone emphasizing tolerance, dialogue, and education.	1. Builds cross-cultural credibility by forging counter-hegemony through hegemonic epistemic tools. 2. Reflects the performative condition of postcolonial intellectuals who must speak within recognized regimes of knowledge. 3. The defensive tone reveals the text's dual function as both academic analysis and apologetic discourse.	Tension between epistemic authority and identity advocacy. Reliance on Western theoretical canons risks reinforcing the epistemic hierarchy it seeks to challenge, while the apologetic tone limits deeper internal critique.
<b>Da'wah as Counter-Discourse &amp; Ideology</b>	Reframes da'wah from proselytization into cultural mediation, "soft resistance," and a dialogical-pedagogical instrument.	1. Reclaims moral authority by offering solutions aligned with universal values (dialogue, education). 2. Functions as a vehicle for a particular ideology presented as universally applicable. 3. Marginalizes internal diversity within Muslim communities and overlooks the political economy of Western media.	Tension between claims of universal dialogue and doctrinal certainty. A form of "dialogical monologue" emerges: the format is open, yet the epistemic foundation presupposes Islam as the final corrective truth.
<b>Discursive Hybridity &amp; Subject Positioning</b>	Dominance of prescriptive modality ("should," "must") and a hybrid conclusion combining academic synthesis with moral exhortation.	1. Demonstrates genre hybridity: academic form coupled with pedagogical and sermonic functions. 2. Reflects the author's position as a postcolonial intellectual navigating Western academic expectations and commitment to a faith-based community. 3. The performativity of the text mirrors the representational dilemma it seeks to analyze.	An unresolved tension between scientific objectivity and advocacy. Rather than a flaw, this tension reflects the author's structural position and constitutes the core of the discursive struggle itself.

Source: Authors' discursive analysis, 2025.

Table 1 clearly maps how Karimullah's article operates as a site of complex discursive struggle. Each deployed strategy—from binary simplification to the reframing of *da'wah* and the use of hybrid language—functions not merely to describe reality, but to actively construct positions of truth, authority, and resistance. The identified tensions, particularly between deconstruction and the reproduction of essentialism, as well as between claims of universalism and doctrinal particularity, lie at the heart of this analysis.

Rather than undermining Karimullah's argument, these tensions render the article an honest and representative document of postcolonial intellectual dilemmas. The article ultimately transcends its thematic focus on representational struggle; through its form, strategies, and contradictions, it performatively embodies that very struggle. Accordingly, this study affirms that counter-hegemonic discursive practices must be accompanied by sustained critical reflexivity toward the epistemic tools and positionalities they mobilize, lest they become re-entangled within the same power logics they seek to contest.

## CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken a critical discourse analysis of Suud Sarim Karimullah's article, "Criticism of the Representation of Islam in Western Media and the Role of Da'wah in Transformation." In doing so, it has answered its core research questions by demonstrating how the text is not a transparent medium of analysis but an active site of discursive struggle. The analysis reveals that Karimullah's article constructs a homogenizing binary between a monolithic "Western media" and an essentialized, peaceful "Islam." This binary, while critiquing Orientalist power dynamics, initially reproduces them by positioning media as the active subject of representation and Islam as its passive object. The article's central intervention is the introduction of *da'wah* as a third term—a transformative mechanism of "soft resistance" designed to reclaim narrative agency and reverse this power relation. However, this persuasive strategy is laden with internal tensions. The text's reliance on Western academic references to legitimize its critique creates a paradox where it borrows epistemic authority from the very structure it challenges. Furthermore, the reframing of *da'wah* as a dialogical and educational tool, though strategically astute, conceals an ideological layer where a particular Islamic epistemology is presented as a universal corrective. Ultimately, the article exhibits a profound discursive hybridity, merging academic form with a prescriptive, almost sermonic function, a reflection of the author's precarious position as a postcolonial intellectual navigating the demands of Western academia and the imperative of defending a stigmatized religious identity.

The theoretical implications of this analysis are significant. First, it provides a model for applying Critical Discourse Analysis in a meta-critical, reflexive mode, treating counter-hegemonic texts not as sacred canons but as objects of scrutiny that are equally embedded in power relations. Second, it advances postcolonial and Islamic media studies by moving beyond the analysis of mainstream media bias to critically interrogate the discursive formations of the resistance itself. It validates and elaborates on concepts like "reverse discourse" of Abdulfattah and "polished representation" of Karim, demonstrating their textual mechanics. Finally, it contributes to understanding the sociology of knowledge in hybrid scholarly spaces, revealing how religiously-committed intellectuals translate theological concepts into secular academic idioms to gain legitimacy and effect change. In terms of practical implications, this study offers crucial insights for practitioners of *da'wah*, intercultural dialogue, and media activism. It cautions against the seductive simplicity of binary constructions, which, while rhetorically powerful, can perpetuate the very polarization they aim to overcome. For Islamic organizations engaged in public communication, the findings highlight the importance of embracing internal diversity and avoiding monolithic self-representations that mirror the stereotypes they contest. For educators and journalists, it underscores the need for reflexivity regarding their own discursive positioning and the structural, not merely ideational, barriers to equitable representation in a complex media ecosystem.

This research is not without its limitations. As a qualitative, single-text analysis, its findings are interpretative and contextual, rather than generalizable. The focus on one article, while allowing for depth, cannot account for the full spectrum of discursive strategies within the broader field of postcolonial Islamic scholarship. Furthermore, the analysis is inherently shaped by the researchers' own interpretive frameworks and positionalities within the academic field. Therefore, suggestions for future research are manifold. First, a

comparative CDA of multiple counter-narrative texts from different geo-cultural Muslim contexts (e.g., the Arab world, Southeast Asia, the West) would illuminate varying strategies of legitimation and resistance. Second, research could productively shift from textual analysis to the reception of such discourses, investigating how they are interpreted and mobilized by different Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. Finally, linking discursive analysis to the political economy of knowledge production—examining the publishing platforms, funding structures, and academic networks that enable or constrain such voices—would provide a more materialist understanding of the conditions for postcolonial intellectual critique.

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