

# **CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL CRITIQUE AS ETHICAL DISCOURSE IN INDONESIAN POPULAR RELIGIOUS LITERATURE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF HUSEIN JA'FAR AL-HADAR'S *TUHAN ADA DI HATIMU***

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Received: 17-10-2025 | Revised: 29-04-2026 | Accepted: 30-06-2026

## **ABSTRACT**

Religious intolerance and exclusivism remain challenges in Indonesia's plural society, particularly when religious practices tend to be confined to symbolism and formalism that do not adequately reflect ethical values. Previous studies have positioned religious literature as a medium for transmitting moral and inclusive values; however, most of them focus on normative and philosophical aspects and provide limited empirical explanation of how social critique is constructed and articulated within popular religious works. This gap is significant given the broad reach of popular literature in shaping public perceptions of religious practice. Addressing this gap, this study aims to analyze the forms of social critique in *Tuhan Ada di Hatimu* (God Resides in Your Heart) by Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar and examine their relevance to contemporary Indonesian religiosity. The study employs a qualitative library-based approach using content analysis to identify key themes of critique, including excessive conservatism, judgmental culture, and the politicization of religious symbols. The findings show that the work not only reflects socio-religious conditions but also constructs critique through a narrative that emphasizes self-reflection, empathy, and contextual understanding of religious teachings. These results indicate that popular religious literature can function as a medium for articulating social critique that bridges religious texts and social realities. Theoretically, this study contributes by demonstrating how content analysis can be used to uncover the construction

of social critique in popular religious narratives, while also expanding discussions on religious literature as a site for articulating social critique within contemporary religiosity.

**Keywords: Social Critique; Religiosity; Religious Inclusivism; Religious Literacy; Religious Ethics**

**ABSTRAK**

*Intoleransi dan eksklusivisme beragama tetap menjadi tantangan dalam masyarakat Indonesia yang plural, terutama ketika praktik keagamaan cenderung terjebak dalam simbolisme dan formalisme yang kurang mencerminkan nilai etis. Sejumlah studi sebelumnya telah menempatkan literatur keagamaan sebagai media transmisi nilai moral dan inklusivitas, namun sebagian besar berfokus pada aspek normatif dan filosofis, sehingga kurang memberikan penjelasan empiris mengenai bagaimana kritik sosial dikonstruksi dan diartikulasikan dalam karya religius populer. Hal ini menjadi signifikan karena literatur populer memiliki jangkauan luas dalam membentuk persepsi publik terhadap praktik keagamaan. Berdasarkan celah tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk-bentuk kritik sosial dalam buku Tuhan Ada di Hatimu karya Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar serta relevansinya terhadap dinamika keberagamaan Indonesia kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dengan metode analisis konten untuk mengidentifikasi tema-tema kritik seperti konservatisme berlebihan, budaya menghakimi, dan politisasi simbol agama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa karya ini tidak hanya merefleksikan kondisi sosial-keagamaan, tetapi juga mengonstruksi kritik melalui narasi yang menekankan refleksi diri, empati, dan pemahaman kontekstual terhadap ajaran agama. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa literatur keagamaan populer dapat berfungsi sebagai medium artikulasi kritik sosial yang menjembatani teks religius dengan realitas sosial. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan menunjukkan bagaimana analisis konten dapat digunakan untuk mengungkap konstruksi kritik sosial dalam narasi religius populer, serta memperluas kajian tentang literatur keagamaan sebagai arena artikulasi kritik sosial dalam konteks keberagamaan kontemporer.*

**Kata kunci: Kritik Sosial, Keberagamaan, Inklusivisme Beragama, Literasi Keagamaan; Etika Beragama**

## INTRODUCTION

Religious literature does not merely function as a medium for conveying teachings, but also serves as a space for critical reflection that responds to social issues and fosters inclusive religious interpretations. Zulaili et al. demonstrate that the Javanese manuscript *Alakirabi Wayuh Kaliyan Botên* contains a subtle critique of polygamy by highlighting the husband's inability to maintain emotional and material justice, while shifting the ethical focus from women's obedience to male moral responsibility.<sup>1</sup> Abror et al., through their study of the manuscript *al-Ibānah fī Tārīkh al-Sunnah*, reveal that the concept of *bid'ah* is understood in a more flexible and argumentative way, moving beyond rigid divisions between traditionalist and reformist perspectives.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Addzaky et al. show how the thought of Abdurrahman Wahid in the book *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita* emphasizes the importance of reinterpreting religious teachings to support pluralism, social justice, and the protection of minority groups.<sup>3</sup> Taken together, these works illustrate how religious literature continues to evolve as an ethical space that connects spiritual values with the demands of social justice in everyday life.

One compelling example from the contemporary era is the book *God Resides in Your Heart* by Husein Ja'far Al Hadar, which illustrates how religious literature continues to articulate social critique in a personal and reflective manner. The book gently yet firmly questions the tendency of individuals to monopolize God

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<sup>1</sup>In Nur Zulaili et al., "Ethical Critique of Polygamy in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Javanese Manuscript *Alakirabi Wayuh Kaliyan Botên*," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 23, no. 2 (December 31, 2025): 462–90, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v23i2.1345>.

<sup>2</sup>Muhamad Abror et al., "Reading *Al-Ibānah*: Habib Salim Bin Jindan's Eclectic Responses to Islamic Ritual Debates in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Indonesia," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 23, no. 2 (December 31, 2025): 806–41, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v23i2.1329>.

<sup>3</sup>Khoirul Umam Addzaky et al., "Contextualizing Liberation Theology in Indonesian Religious Literature through the Contributions of K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 23, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 142–78, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v23i1.1285>.

in order to justify power, exclusion, or discrimination, revealing how such claims can distort the ethical core of religion.<sup>4</sup> Through a warm, accessible, and inclusive narrative, it invites readers to rethink their understanding of faith beyond rigid boundaries and sectarian divisions. It emphasizes that religion, at its essence, should cultivate compassion, humility, and mutual respect rather than reinforce hierarchy or conflict. In doing so, the book advances a social critique that confronts the use of religion as a tool for domination and exclusion.

Popular religious literature has increasingly become an important medium for conveying ethical values and responding to social issues in contemporary society, as reflected in several previous studies, yet these works also reveal notable limitations. Ulya in analyzing *Tuhan Maha Asyik*, shows that the novel promotes inclusivity and love-based religiosity as a response to exclusivist tendencies, but the study primarily focuses on philosophical interpretation without deeply examining how social critique is structurally articulated in the narrative.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Khoiriyah et al. through *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya*, highlight confusion in religious practices and emphasize values of faith, morality, and sharia, yet the analysis remains descriptive and normative, lacking critical engagement with broader social dynamics.<sup>6</sup> Palewai in studying *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, demonstrates how literature can serve as a medium of da'wah and interreligious understanding, but the focus is largely on message delivery rather

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<sup>4</sup>Muhammad Syafrizal and Hasyimsyah Nasution, "Konsep Tuhan Menurut Pemikiran Habib Husain Ja'far Al-Hadar Dalam Buku 'Tuhan Ada Di Hatimu,'" *Asian Journal of Islamic Studies and Da'wah* 1, no. 2 (November 20, 2023): 399–406, <https://doi.org/10.58578/ajisd.v1i2.2114>.

<sup>5</sup>Ulya Ulya, "Philosophical Messages In Tuhan Maha Asyik Novel For Religious Inclusivity," *Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* 9, no. 1 (June 19, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.20871/kpjipm.v9i1.271>.

<sup>6</sup>Tri Era Khoiriyah et al., "Internalization of Religiosity Values in the Novel 'Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya' by Rusdi Mathari," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Islamic and Muhammadiyah Studies (ICIMS 2023)*, 2024, 366–74, [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-102-9\\_34](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-102-9_34).

than critical reflection on power, exclusion, or inequality.<sup>7</sup> These studies confirm that religious books function as ethical guides, yet they tend to prioritize moral teaching over explicit social critique.

In a similar vein, Rahmalestari and Subekti examines *Tuhan Tidak Perlu Dibela* and *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita* by Abdurrahman Wahid, showing how humanistic thought can shape inclusive political ethics, although the study is largely theoretical and less attentive to narrative strategies in literary texts.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Salahuddin et al. in analyzing *99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa*, identifies multicultural values such as tolerance and mutual respect, yet the study is oriented toward pedagogical application rather than critical analysis of social tensions or contradictions.<sup>9</sup> Taken together, these studies demonstrate that while religious literature has been widely examined as a vehicle for moral, multicultural, and inclusive values, limited attention has been given to how contemporary religious books articulate social critique through direct, reflective, and accessible narratives. This gap is significant not only for Indonesian religious studies but also for broader international scholarship, as popular religious literature has increasingly become an influential medium for shaping public understandings of religion, ethics, and social coexistence across diverse Muslim societies. In this regard, *God Resides in Your Heart* by Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar provides an appropriate case for examining how contemporary religious narratives construct ethical critiques of religious exclusivism, symbolic religiosity, and social inequality through a humanistic and accessible narrative approach.

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<sup>7</sup>Muhammad Salman Palewai, "Messages of Da'wah for Non-Muslims in the Novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*," *Al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic and Contemporary Issues* 7, no. 1 (June 22, 2022): 757–66, <https://doi.org/10.53840/alirsyad.v7i1.233>.

<sup>8</sup>Widya Rahmalestari, Aswar, and Fiqi Restu Subekti, "Humanisme Sebagai Etika Politik: Relasi Negara Dan Agama Dalam Pemikiran Abdurrahman Wahid," *Takuana: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sains, Dan Humaniora* 4, no. 4 (March 4, 2026): 1942–52, <https://doi.org/10.56113/takuana.v4i4.305>.

<sup>9</sup>Amar Salahuddin et al., "The Multicultural Values in the Novel '99 Cahaya Di Langit Eropa' and Their Application in Literary Education," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 7, no. 1 (June 26, 2025): 776–90, <https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v7i1.7109>.

This article offers a specific novelty by positioning *God Resides in Your Heart* as a form of popular religious literature that functions not merely as moral guidance but as an active medium of social critique articulated through accessible and reflective narratives. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize doctrinal debates or descriptive moral values, this research demonstrates how Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar constructs ethical critique against religious exclusivism, symbolic religiosity, and formalistic expressions of faith through everyday narratives that are relatable to contemporary audiences. By highlighting the role of narrative style, linguistic accessibility, and humanistic framing, this study advances the understanding of popular religious literature as an ethical mechanism through which contemporary religious discourse challenges social fragmentation and promotes inclusive religiosity.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative library research design using a content analysis approach to examine *Tuhan Ada di Hatimu (God Resides in Your Heart)* by Husein Ja'far Al Hadar. This method was considered the most appropriate because the book is not a doctrinal text, but a reflective and narrative-based work that embeds social critique within everyday religious discourse. Content analysis enables the researcher to systematically identify both explicit and implicit meanings related to issues such as intolerance, symbolic religiosity, and identity-based polarization, which are central to this study.<sup>10</sup> Compared to other qualitative approaches, content analysis provides a structured framework to analyze recurring patterns of critique across the text while maintaining interpretive depth. Thus, this method aligns with the study's objective to uncover how social critique is constructed and communicated within popular religious literature in contemporary Indonesia.

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<sup>10</sup>John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage publications, 2016).

The unit of analysis in this study consists of analytically meaningful textual segments, including sentences, paragraphs, and concise narrative excerpts that articulate forms of social critique. These units were determined based on their relevance to the key issues identified in the introduction and findings, such as religious competition, judgmental attitudes, misuse of religious symbols, and resistance to modernity. The selection process followed a purposive strategy, ensuring that each unit directly reflects a form of critique articulated by the author. In total, the study analyzes nine main quotations that represent the core arguments of the book, as presented in the findings section. These quotations are treated as primary analytical units, allowing for focused and in-depth interpretation while preserving the broader narrative context in which they appear.<sup>11</sup>

The data collection process was conducted through intensive and repeated reading of the text to identify passages that explicitly or implicitly express social critique. This stage involved annotating relevant sections and cross-checking them to ensure consistency and completeness. The selected quotations were then compiled as the primary dataset. In addition to the primary text, secondary data were collected from scholarly articles, institutional reports, and media sources that discuss issues of religious intolerance, politicization of religion, and socio-religious dynamics in Indonesia between 2018 and 2025. These secondary sources function as contextual support, helping to relate the textual analysis to real social conditions. This combination of textual and contextual data strengthens the analytical depth of the study.

The coding process was carried out through an iterative qualitative procedure. The first stage involved open coding, where each unit of analysis was examined line by line to identify initial meanings without predetermined categories. Codes such as “religious competition,” “intellectual immaturity,” “symbolic religiosity,” “cultural stagnation,” and “identity polarization” emerged during this stage. The second stage involved axial coding, where related codes were grouped into broader thematic

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<sup>11</sup>Matthew B Miles and A Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Sage Publications, 1994).

clusters. This process allowed the researcher to identify patterns and relationships among different forms of critique. Coding was conducted manually to ensure close engagement with the text, and revisions were made continuously to refine conceptual clarity throughout the analysis.

From the coding process, initial categories were developed and later refined into final analytical categories that align with the findings of this study. The initial categories included themes such as intolerance, symbolic formalism, cultural rigidity, and moral judgment. These were then synthesized into four main categories: (1) critique of religious competition and exclusivism, (2) critique of judgmental and anti-critical attitudes, (3) critique of symbolic and formalistic religiosity, and (4) critique of cultural stagnation in responding to modernity. These final categories reflect the dominant patterns of social critique identified in the book and are consistent with the thematic structure presented in the discussion section. This categorization ensures that the analysis remains focused and directly connected to the research objectives.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applies several qualitative validation strategies. Credibility is maintained through prolonged engagement with the text and repeated readings to ensure accurate interpretation of meanings. Dependability is ensured by clearly documenting each stage of the research process, including data selection, coding, and categorization, allowing the study to be traceable and transparent. Confirmability is achieved by grounding all interpretations in direct quotations from the text, minimizing subjective bias. Transferability is supported by providing detailed descriptions of both the analytical process and the socio-religious context of Indonesia, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other settings. These strategies collectively enhance the rigor and reliability of the study.

This study exclusively employed publicly available textual materials, with *Tuhan Ada di Hatimu* by Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar serving as the primary source of analysis. As the research does not involve human participants, personal data, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures, formal ethical approval and informed

consent were not required. Throughout the research process, the analysis was conducted with respect for academic integrity by accurately citing all primary and secondary sources and ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in the textual evidence. These ethical considerations help ensure the transparency, credibility, and scholarly responsibility of the research.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Religious Social Critique of Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar in the Book *Tuhan Ada di Hatimu***

The book *Tuhan Ada di Hatimu* by Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar is a reflective work that blends Islamic spirituality with sharp and contextual socio-religious analysis.<sup>12</sup> Through a narrative style that is at times satirical, Husein Ja'far addresses various social problems within the religious life of Indonesian Muslims, which often tends to be formalistic, rigid, and sectarian. He does not merely call for a return to the essential values of Islam such as compassion, etiquette, and wisdom, but also critiques numerous deviations in religious practices that have long been normalized. The social critique in this book is not destructive but rather serves as a form of collective self-reflection so that Muslims may improve the image of their religiosity within a plural society. These critiques are deeply tied to the cultural context of Indonesia, where religion is often used as an exclusive identity marker, a political tool, or even a justification for actions that contradict the teachings of Islam itself. In the nine passages below, Husein Ja'far articulates his critique with clarity, each of which will be analyzed to uncover the depth of its message for the religious and social reality of Indonesian Islam.

Throughout the book, Husein Ja'far conveys his social critique in a clear and relatable way. Although these critiques

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<sup>12</sup>Dea Kurnia, Wanti Nur Aprilian, and M Nurul Ikhsan Saleh, "Analisis Nilai-Nilai Ketauhidan Dalam Buku *Tuhan Ada Di Hatimu* Karya Habib Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar Dan Relevansinya Terhadap Pendidikan Agama Islam," *At-Thullab : Jurnal Mahasiswa Studi Islam* 5, no. 3 (October 2023): 1365–78, <https://doi.org/10.20885/tullab.vol5.iss3.art4>.

appear in different parts of the text, they reflect several recurring patterns in contemporary religious life. To make these patterns easier to understand, they are grouped into a few main themes. The following sections present these themes as the key findings of this study.

### **Religious Exclusivism and Identity Competition**

Religious exclusivism in contemporary society often appears through the tendency to treat faith as a field of competition rather than a space of reflection. In many cases, religiosity is not only understood as belief, but also as an identity that must be compared and validated.<sup>13</sup> This orientation shifts the meaning of religion from ethical practice toward symbolic rivalry among believers.

This tendency is reflected in the way Husein Ja'far Al Hadar explains that belief, especially in matters beyond rational proof, is deeply personal and should not become a ground for competition:

*“The truth aspect of every religion, especially in what is irrational, is subjective. It is accepted because we believe in our hearts in what God has conveyed through His prophet. Therefore, in this matter, we are not only forbidden to impose but also not commanded to compete.”<sup>14</sup>*

Through this explanation, the text shows how religion is often shifted into a contest of correctness, where individuals seek to prove superiority rather than deepen ethical awareness. In such conditions, religiosity becomes closely tied to recognition and comparison, rather than inner conviction.

A similar pattern appears in the way religious identity is constructed in everyday life, where differences are continuously

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<sup>13</sup>Ângela Leite, Bruno Nobre, and Paulo Dias, “Religious Identity, Religious Practice, and Religious Beliefs across Countries and World Regions,” *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 45, no. 2 (July 25, 2023): 107–32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00846724221150024>.

<sup>14</sup>Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar, *Tuhan Ada Di Hatimu: Tak Di Ka 'bah, Di Vatikan, Atau Di Tembok Ratapan* (Noura Books, 2022), 64.

emphasized and used as boundaries between individuals. This tendency is illustrated when Husein Ja'far describes how people repeatedly classify others based on religious labels:

*“As Muslims, we often orient ourselves toward division. We delight in searching for differences to use as provocations and conflicts. Among fellow Indonesians, we ask, ‘Are you Muslim or not?’ If one is Muslim, we continue to ask, ‘Are you Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah or not?’ If yes, we go further, ‘Which Islamic organization are you from?’ And we keep asking until we find a difference, then use that difference as a reason to quarrel, argue, and be hostile. Our lives thus become fragmented.”<sup>15</sup>*

The passage reveals how the search for difference gradually turns into a source of tension and separation. Instead of building understanding, identity becomes a tool for comparison and conflict, shaping a fragmented pattern of social interaction.

Seen from these patterns, the book portrays religiosity as something that is often pulled toward competition and division, even though it is rooted in personal belief. What emerges is not only a critique of exclusivism, but also an invitation to return to a more reflective and ethical understanding of religion that is less concerned with superiority and more grounded in shared values.

### **Judgmental Culture and Anti-Critical Attitudes**

Another important form of social critique found in the book concerns the tendency toward judgmental attitudes and resistance to criticism within religious life. In many cases, religiosity is expressed through the habit of evaluating others rather than reflecting on oneself.<sup>16</sup> This orientation creates a defensive mindset, where differing views are quickly perceived as threats instead of opportunities for learning. As a result, religious

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<sup>15</sup>Al-Hadar, 125.

<sup>16</sup>Jesse Smith, “Linking Religious Upbringing to Young Adult Moral Formation,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 62, no. 3 (September 4, 2023): 481–99, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12835>.

discourse becomes closed and less responsive to intellectual engagement.

This condition is closely related to how criticism is received in religious contexts. Instead of encouraging inquiry, criticism is often treated as an offense that must be rejected. This tendency is described when Husein Ja'far emphasizes the importance of responding to criticism with knowledge rather than emotion:

*“When hearing such criticism, our Islamic instinct should move us toward researching Islam to answer it, rather than taking offense. Even an objective non-Muslim scholar would feel compelled to respond to it. Because we know that good people exist in every religion, and they cannot bear to see tendentious subjectivity directed at any faith.”*<sup>17</sup>

Through this statement, the text highlights that criticism should function as a stimulus for intellectual growth. However, the dominant reaction often shows the opposite, where emotional responses replace critical engagement. This reflects a lack of readiness to engage with differing perspectives in a constructive manner.

In addition to resistance to criticism, the book also reveals a strong tendency toward moral judgment. Religious expression is frequently accompanied by the desire to assess and label others, especially in terms of belief and practice. This condition creates a hierarchy of religiosity, where individuals position themselves as morally superior. This tendency is sharply illustrated in Husein Ja'far's critique:

*“Instead of working like the Prophet, who sought to bring everyone into paradise, we act like devils, whose job description is to cast people into hell.”*<sup>18</sup>

This statement points to a shift in orientation, where religiosity is no longer centered on guidance and compassion, but

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<sup>17</sup>Al-Hadar, *Tuhan Ada Di Hatimu: Tak Di Ka 'bah, Di Vatikan, Atau Di Tembok Ratapan*, 75.

<sup>18</sup>Al-Hadar, 126.

on condemnation. The act of judging others becomes more dominant than efforts to nurture goodness.

The pattern of judgment is further reinforced by collective practices that normalize labeling and exclusion. In many cases, time and energy are devoted to identifying who is right and who is wrong, rather than improving one's own understanding or behavior.<sup>19</sup> This condition is reflected when Husein Ja'far notes: "*Some of us spend night and day devising schemes to declare others misguided, unbelieving, or heretical.*"<sup>20</sup> The passage shows how judgment becomes a continuous activity that shapes social interaction. Instead of fostering dialogue, it creates distance and tension among individuals and groups.

Alongside this, the book also highlights a contradiction between strong religious conviction and weak intellectual engagement. Many individuals believe in the perfection of their religion, yet are reluctant to explore or respond to critical perspectives in a meaningful way. This paradox is expressed in the following statement:

*"We believe Islam is a perfect teaching, and therefore we are convinced that all orientalist critiques have their answers."*<sup>21</sup>

Here, the text reveals that certainty is often not accompanied by effort. Confidence in belief exists, but it is not followed by intellectual responsibility to understand and articulate it.

Taken together, these patterns show that judgmental attitudes and anti-critical tendencies are closely intertwined. The refusal to engage with criticism, combined with the habit of judging others, creates a form of religiosity that is rigid and closed.

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<sup>19</sup>Dmitriy Oparin, "Spiritual Authority and Religious Introspection among Muslim Migrants in Western Siberia," *Problems of Post-Communism* 67, no. 4–5 (September 2, 2020): 362–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2019.1616566>.

<sup>20</sup>Al-Hadar, *Tuhan Ada Di Hatimu: Tak Di Ka 'bah, Di Vatikan, Atau Di Tembok Ratapan*, 126.

<sup>21</sup>Al-Hadar, 75.

Rather than encouraging reflection, it limits the possibility of dialogue and growth.

Through these observations, the book presents a form of critique that invites a shift toward a more open, reflective, and intellectually engaged religious attitude. Instead of positioning oneself as a judge, religiosity is directed toward understanding, learning, and improving one's own perspective in relation to others.

### **Ethical Problems in Religious Practice**

The book also draws attention to the gap between religious practice and public ethics in everyday life. Religiosity is often expressed through visible rituals and symbolic actions, yet their social impact is not always taken into consideration.<sup>22</sup> This condition shows how religious expression can appear devout on the surface while overlooking the comfort and well-being of others. As a result, the ethical dimension of religion tends to be overshadowed by its formal and performative aspects.

This concern becomes clearer when Husein Ja'far highlights the use of mosque loudspeakers as an example of how religious practices can affect the surrounding community. He explains:

*“Islam teaches, through the Prophet’s hadith, that a Muslim is one who does not disturb others with his tongue or his hand. A mosque’s loudspeaker is like our tongue, the tongue of Muslims. Therefore, it should not emit sounds or volumes that disturb others. Islam also teaches us always to speak gently, especially when delivering da’wah or reciting the Qur’an, prayers, qasidah, and so on.”*<sup>23</sup>

Through this explanation, the text reframes a common religious practice as an ethical issue rather than merely a ritual

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<sup>22</sup>Harvey Whitehouse, “Rethinking Ritual: How Rituals Made Our World and How They Could Save It,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 30, no. 1 (March 11, 2024): 115–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.14048>.

<sup>23</sup>Al-Hadar, *Tuhan Ada Di Hatimu: Tak Di Ka ‘bah, Di Vatikan, Atau Di Tembok Ratapan*, 116.

activity. The analogy between the loudspeaker and the human tongue emphasizes that every form of expression carries responsibility. What is often considered normal or routine is shown to have broader social implications when not guided by sensitivity.

This perspective highlights that religiosity should be closely connected to empathy and awareness of social context. Religious practices do not occur in isolation, but within shared spaces where different individuals coexist. When ethical consideration is absent, even well-intentioned actions may create discomfort or tension. In this way, the book presents religiosity not only as devotion, but as a form of ethical engagement that requires balance between personal faith and social responsibility.

### **Cultural Stagnation and Response to Modernity**

A significant form of social critique also emerges in relation to how religious communities respond to modernity and cultural change. In many situations, engagement with contemporary culture is dominated by a prohibitive attitude, where new forms of expression are quickly judged and rejected.<sup>24</sup> This creates a distance between religious values and the realities of modern life, especially in areas such as music, film, and digital media. As a result, religion often appears rigid and less responsive to changing social contexts. This tendency becomes clear when Husein Ja'far questions the habit of rejecting cultural expressions without offering constructive alternatives. He states:

*“Why choose to forbid music simply because some use it for immorality? Why not fight it by creating music oriented toward goodness and benefit? Even if banned, music will still be used by irresponsible people for immorality and vanity. If we don't use it, they will. If we leave it, they will*

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<sup>24</sup>Željka Tonković, Sven Marčelić, and Krešimir Krolo, “Between Engagement and Disengagement in Contemporary Global Culture. Types of Cultural Consumers among Youth in Adriatic Croatia,” *Cultural Trends* 31, no. 5 (October 20, 2022): 490–510, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2021.2018912>.

*dominate with music oriented toward the forbidden. Jreng  
... jreng ... jreng!*"<sup>25</sup>

Through this statement, it becomes evident that prohibition alone does not resolve moral concerns. Instead, it often creates a cultural void that is filled by less constructive influences. The text highlights the importance of active participation in shaping cultural spaces, rather than withdrawing from them. This pattern is further illustrated through a comparison that reveals contrasting responses to modernity. Husein Ja'far notes:

*"Ironically, while some Muslims in Indonesia are busy banning cinemas, in Saudi Arabia they are actually building them."*<sup>26</sup>

This comparison shows that resistance to modern culture is not always consistent or grounded in clear principles. In some cases, it reflects uncritical attitudes or inherited assumptions rather than thoughtful engagement. Such conditions contribute to a form of stagnation, where religious expression becomes disconnected from contemporary realities.

The critique also points to the risks of leaving cultural spaces unengaged. When religious communities avoid participation, they lose the opportunity to influence values within those spaces. This absence allows other forces to dominate cultural production, which may not align with ethical or moral considerations. As a result, religion becomes less visible in shaping everyday cultural experiences.

At the same time, the text suggests a different orientation that emphasizes creativity and contextual awareness. Cultural forms are not seen as inherently problematic, but as spaces that can be filled with meaningful and positive content. This perspective encourages a more dynamic engagement, where religion interacts with modern life in ways that remain relevant and accessible.

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<sup>25</sup>Al-Hadar, *Tuhan Ada Di Hatimu: Tak Di Ka 'bah, Di Vatikan, Atau Di Tembok Rataan*, 147.

<sup>26</sup>Al-Hadar, 165.

Through these patterns, religiosity appears not only as a matter of preserving values, but also as an active effort to respond to change. Instead of remaining reactive, it is directed toward participation and contribution. In this way, the critique points toward a more adaptive and creative understanding of religion in the face of modern cultural developments.

## DISCUSSION

The social criticism expressed by Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar in *Tuhan Ada di Hatimu* reflects a moral unease with religious practices that have increasingly drifted away from ethical and humanitarian values. This criticism is not only relevant but also mirrors the religious-social conditions in Indonesia between 2018 and 2025. In a deeply religious society such as Indonesia, religious practice often becomes trapped in formalism and symbolism yet lacks empathy and tolerance.<sup>27</sup> Husein Ja'far does not reject the spirit of religiosity itself but reminds us that religion should serve as a path of liberation, not a tool of restriction. His criticism is directed at the habits of being judgmental, competing in matters of faith, and politicizing religious symbols, which have become increasingly prevalent in our society in recent years.

One of the most urgent problems criticized by Husein Ja'far is intolerance among Muslims themselves. Over the past decade, several acts of persecution have been committed against certain religious study groups deemed deviant, ranging from the disbandment of study sessions, the expulsion of congregants from mosques due to differing traditions, to the destruction of places of worship.<sup>28</sup> A recent case of intolerance involved the demolition of

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<sup>27</sup>Cut Shabrina Dzati Amani and Lulu Almaknun, "Harmony in Commerce: Tolerance Communication Practices in the Chinatown District of Kelenteng Street, Bandung," *Theosinesis: Journal of Integrative Understanding and Ethical Praxis* 2, no. 1 (2026): 29–38, <https://doi.org/10.20625/theosyn.v2i1.092>.

<sup>28</sup>Paul Marshall, "The Ambiguities of Religious Freedom in Indonesia," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 85–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2018.1433588>; I Nyoman Budiana, "Legitimacy of the Dissolution of Beliefs by Community Organizations," *International Journal of Research in Community Services* 3, no. 1 (January

a house of worship mistaken for a church, This shows that some believers are too quick to claim an exclusive monopoly on truth. Husein Ja'far's criticism that believers are more concerned with judging who goes to hell than with who can be saved reflects a culture of religiosity that emphasizes exclusivity over compassion. He urges that differences should not be grounds for division but should instead be bridged through dialogue and mutual understanding.

The phenomenon of intolerance criticized by Husein Ja'far is not an isolated case, but rather part of a broader pattern that has been widely identified in studies on religious life in Indonesia. Suntana and Tresnawaty, in their research involving 1,300 students across 13 state Islamic universities in Indonesia, found that although there is a general acceptance of religious diversity, intolerant attitudes still emerge in concrete issues such as the establishment of places of worship and the religious practices of other groups.<sup>29</sup> Similar findings are presented by Azizi et al., whose socio-literature study in the Indonesian context shows that acts of violence and intolerance are often driven by narrow religious interpretations and a failure to internalize humanitarian values in religious practice.<sup>30</sup> However, Wahyono et al., in their study of intolerance dynamics in Southeast Asia, argue that social,

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2022): 35–45, <https://doi.org/10.46336/ijrcs.v3i1.182>; Andi Muhammad Irawan and Zifirdaus Adnan, "The Ahmadiyya, Blasphemy and Religious Freedom: The Institutional Discourse Analysis of Religious Discrimination in Indonesia," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 1 (September 27, 2021): 79–102, <https://doi.org/10.1515/mwjhr-2020-0034>; Jajang A Rohmana, "Uga Sundanese Ahmadiyya: Locality Of Mahdiism in West Java," *Al-A'raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Filsafat* 17, no. 2 (December 23, 2020): 227–58, <https://doi.org/10.22515/ajpif.v17i2.2750>.

<sup>29</sup>Ija Suntana and Betty Tresnawaty, "The Tough Slog of a Moderate Religious State: Highly Educated Muslims and the Problem of Intolerance in Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (November 10, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7933>.

<sup>30</sup>Alfian Qodri Azizi, Muhammad Faiq, and Thiyas Tono Taufiq, "Building The Foundation Of Religious Tolerance And Countering Radicalism Ideology In Indonesia.," *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 15, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 191, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2021.152-03>.

economic, and political factors are often the primary drivers of conflict, which are then framed as religious issues.<sup>31</sup> In this context, Husein Ja'far's critique should not be seen merely as a reiteration of previous findings, but rather as a form of social critique that expands the discourse by emphasizing the ethical dimension—that the root problem of intolerance lies not only in social or political structures, but also in the failure of individuals to understand faith as a lived practice of compassion, empathy, and humanity.

Religious symbols are often used as instruments of justification to support political and economic interests. In several cases, terms referring to Islamic teachings have been used as marketing strategies to attract consumers, as seen in the case of “ruqyah salt” products, even though the business practices behind them do not reflect Islamic values.<sup>32</sup> In politics, the use of religious symbols is also visible in gestures and campaign narratives, especially during the 2019 and 2024 elections. The use of caps, veils, or Qur'anic verses in political debates does not always reflect religious integrity, but more often serves as an image-building instrument.<sup>33</sup> Husein Ja'far criticizes such practices,

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<sup>31</sup>Zubaidi Wahyono, Alizaman D. Gamon, and Maulana Akbar Shah, “Religious Tolerance in Southeast Asia: Issues and Challenges,” *AL-ITQAN: Journal of Islamic Sciences And Comparative Studies* 9, no. 2 (December 29, 2024): 24–53, <https://doi.org/10.31436/alitqan.v9i2.297>.

<sup>32</sup>John Mayberry, “‘Islamic Medicine’: A True Discipline for the 21st Century or Quackery?,” *Medico-Legal Journal* 90, no. 1 (March 14, 2022): 32–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00258172211059919>.

<sup>33</sup>Rizky Widian, Putu Agung Nara Indra Prima Satya, and Sylvia Yazid, “Religion in Indonesia's Elections: An Implementation of a Populist Strategy?,” *Politics and Religion* 16, no. 2 (June 11, 2023): 351–73, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048321000195>; Nobertus Jegalus, “Identity Politics and Religious Recognition in Indonesian Democracy: A Post-Secular Perspective,” *Muharrrik: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Sosial* 7, no. 2 (October 2024): 419–31, <https://doi.org/10.37680/muharrrik.v7i2.7086>; Muhammad Hilali Basya and Hamka Hamka, “Cultural Capital, Islamism, and Political Distrust in Indonesia General Election: An Ethnicity-Based Community Engaged in Islamic Defenders Front (FPI),” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 13, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 253–77, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v13i2.253-277>.

emphasizing that religion should not only be displayed visually but should be embodied in ethical and responsible social conduct. His critique of symbolism is crucial in distinguishing authentic religiosity from artificial displays of piety.

The commodification of religion criticized by Husein Ja'far confirms the findings of previous studies. Makiah et al., in their study on halal certification practices within Indonesia's Muslim consumer industry, show that the concept of halal often transforms into a profit-oriented economic instrument, where its sacred value becomes intertwined with market logic.<sup>34</sup> This finding is reinforced by Lestari et al., who analyzed the Instagram content of the Safi Indonesia brand and found that religious symbols are deliberately constructed within digital marketing strategies to shape the perceptions of urban Muslim consumers and boost sales.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Aryasatya, in a study of halal-labeled television advertisements in Indonesia, demonstrates that Islamic symbols are used as symbolic capital to build identity and attract market attention through mass media.<sup>36</sup> However, in contrast to these studies, the findings of this article more specifically illustrate how such commodification manifests in concrete practices, such as the "ruqyah salt" product, which exploits religious legitimacy without reflecting its ethical values, as well as in electoral political practices (2019 and 2024) where religious symbols are used as tools of image-building. Therefore, this study not only confirms the existence of religious commodification but also emphasizes that the core problem lies in the use of religious symbols detached

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<sup>34</sup>Zulpa Makiah et al., "A Convergence In A Religion Commodification And An Expression Of Piety In Halal Certification," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 20, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 153, <https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v20i2.7113>.

<sup>35</sup>Rizqiani Dian Lestari, Ayu Sulistya Putri Sugeng, and Fajar Harits, "Commodification Of Religion's Value On Instagram Content-Study Case: Safi Indonesia," *Jurnal Indonesia Sosial Teknologi* 4, no. 10 (October 25, 2023): 1869–78, <https://doi.org/10.59141/jist.v4i10.772>.

<sup>36</sup>Agustian Bhaskoro Abimana Aryasatya, "Komodifikasi Agama Melalui Iklan Televisi (Studi Kasus Iklan Televisi Berlabel Halal).," *Jurnal Pustaka Ilmiah* 4, no. 1 (August 14, 2019): 515, <https://doi.org/10.20961/jpi.v4i1.33802>.

from moral responsibility and the humanitarian values that should accompany them.

Religious identity-based political polarization has also become a serious phenomenon in recent years.<sup>37</sup> Political campaigns that highlight the dichotomy of “us the faithful” versus “them the liberals or infidels” have created deep divisions in society.<sup>38</sup> The effects are evident not only in elections but also in daily social life, within religious communities, on social media, and even within families. Through his criticism, Husein Ja‘far reminds us that religion should not be used as a tool to bring down political opponents or justify hatred. Mature religiosity should foster ethics in politics rather than reinforce identity-based divides.<sup>39</sup> In the context of Indonesia’s pluralism, this criticism serves as a warning that religion should not be used as a tool of polarization but instead as a bridge of unity across groups.

The religious polarization criticized by Husein Ja‘far indicates that religious practice has shifted from its ethical function into a tool of social division and political mobilization. This finding both confirms and extends previous studies on the relationship between religion and political polarization. For instance, research by Sembiring et al., conducted during the 2018 North Sumatra regional head election, found that the politicization

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<sup>37</sup>Muhammad Fajar Noor Khamdani and Muhammad Royhan, “From Exclusivism to Tolerance: Religious Moderation and the Prevention of Religious Blasphemy in Indonesia,” *Mishkat: Journal of Theology and Civilization* 1, no. 1 (2026): 1–15, <https://perfidiajournal.com/index.php/mishkat/article/view/1>.

<sup>38</sup>Wahyudi Akmaliah and Ibnu Nadzir, “The ‘Elective Affinity’ of Islamic Populism, Mobilization and Social Media: A Case Study of Indonesian Politic Identity Within the Three Elections,” *Studia Islamika* 31, no. 1 (April 30, 2024): 31–61, <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v31i1.36305>; Agus Danugroho, “Defects of Democracy: The Continuity of Identity Politics in Post-Reform Regional Elections,” *Jurnal Sosiologi Dialektika* 19, no. 1 (July 30, 2024): 89–101, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jsd.v19i1.2024.89-101>.

<sup>39</sup>Balya Haikal Hizbullah Al- Kautsar and Fatimah Azzahro, “Politicizing the Sacred: Conflict and Power in Contemporary Qur’anic Interpretation,” *SYMPHONIA: Journal of Theory and Research Output* 1, no. 2 (2026): 12–27, <https://darulilmijournal.com/index.php/symphonia/article/view/142>.

of religious issues by political elites and religious leaders directly triggered polarization of hatred and intensified conflict among supporters.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Hayat and Nurhakki, in their study of political labeling discourse on Indonesian social media, show how terms such as “kadrun” and “cebong” function as identity-based propaganda that deepens polarization in the public sphere.<sup>41</sup> However, unlike these studies, which primarily emphasize political and communicative dimensions, this analysis extends the discussion by demonstrating that such polarization is rooted in the degradation of the ethical dimension of religiosity. Yet, Husein Ja'far's critique also challenges this reductionist view by emphasizing that religion should not be confined to an ideological instrument, but rather restored to its practical function as a source of public ethics—one that can reduce conflict, strengthen social cohesion, and foster more inclusive political relations in a plural society such as Indonesia.

The dominance of formalism in religious practice is another key concern for Husein Ja'far. In Indonesia, religious symbols such as shari'a-compliant clothing, public calls for communal prayer, or the label of “hijrah” are often highlighted more than daily attitudes that embody love, empathy, and justice.<sup>42</sup> His phenomenon is evident in many institutions schools, bureaucracy, and media—that place greater value on outward appearances than on deep ethical values. Such conditions turn religiosity into ceremonial displays that fail to touch the roots of humanity.

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<sup>40</sup>Walid Musthafa Sembiring et al., “The Politicization of Religion and Polarization of Hate in the 2018 North Sumatra Regional Head Election Indonesia,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 3 (June 2023): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.328>.

<sup>41</sup>Nahrul Hayat and Nurhakki Nurhakki, “Religion Identity And Political Polarization: How Does Labeling Make It Worst?,” *Palita: Journal of Social Religion Research* 7, no. 1 (April 10, 2022): 51–66, <https://doi.org/10.24256/pal.v7i1.2715>.

<sup>42</sup>Putri Rahmah Nur Hakim et al., “Negotiating Religious Identity In Digital Communication Discourse: A Study Of Acehnese Hijab Tiktokers,” *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, no. 2 (December 22, 2025): 323, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v9i2.25583>.

Husein Ja'far's criticism emphasizes that religion is not only about rules and prohibitions but also about social sensitivity and moral responsibility. He calls on believers not only to focus on ritual piety but also to uphold social integrity, which lies at the heart of Islamic teachings.

The level of religiosity criticized by Husein Ja'far extends the findings of various studies on religiosity in Indonesia. Research by Subchi et al., conducted on 578 students at State Islamic Higher Education institutions in Indonesia, found that religiosity does contribute to religious moderation, but does not automatically guarantee the development of tolerant attitudes when it is not accompanied by a strong ethical dimension.<sup>43</sup> This finding is reinforced by Mujani through a national survey of Muslim communities in Indonesia, which shows that certain forms of religiosity may in fact correlate with increasing intolerance in social and political life.<sup>44</sup> However, a study by Ismanto et al. involving 1,920 Islamic primary school students in Indonesia demonstrates that religiosity, when nurtured comprehensively, can foster altruism, social concern, and moral responsibility.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Husein Ja'far's critique not only reinforces previous empirical findings but also corrects the direction of religious practice by emphasizing the importance of integrating ritual dimensions with ethical values as the core of religious life.

Criticism of cultural backwardness in facing modernity is also highly contextual. Amid technological advancements and social change, some Muslims remain reactive toward popular culture. Debates over the permissibility of digital platforms, music, or even the use of AI in religious preaching are examples

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<sup>43</sup>Imam Subchi et al., "Religious Moderation in Indonesian Muslims," *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022): 451, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050451>.

<sup>44</sup>Saiful Mujani, "Explaining Religio-Political Tolerance Among Muslims: Evidence from Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 26, no. 2 (August 13, 2019): 319–51, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v26i2.11237>.

<sup>45</sup>Hadi Ismanto et al., "Religiosity and Attitudes: A Study of Indonesian Islamic Primary School Students," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 16, no. 3 (July 30, 2024): 3289–99, <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i3.5564>.

of this lack of adaptation.<sup>46</sup> In fact, these cultural spaces could be filled with progressive Islamic values. Husein Ja'far encourages Muslims to actively participate in shaping civilization, not merely criticizing or avoiding it. In Indonesia, this delay is evident in the lack of creative, substantive, and youth-relevant religious content. Preaching often remains confined to one-way lectures rather than transformative, participatory dialogue. This criticism highlights the importance of building an Islam that is not left behind but instead stands at the forefront of change.

Most striking of all is the reality that even houses of worship are not spared from violence in the name of religion. One case that drew significant attention was the rejection of a church construction in Cilegon, which received support from local officials despite the fact that the project had met administrative requirements.<sup>47</sup> Although this case targeted a different faith community, the tolerance of such actions in the name of the majority highlights the weakness of religious ethics.<sup>48</sup> While

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<sup>46</sup>Christos Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education: Ethical, Pedagogical, and Theological Perspectives," *Religions* 16, no. 5 (April 28, 2025): 563, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050563>; Asna Istya Marwantika and Kazeem Oluwaseun Dauda, "Da'wah in the Algorithmic Era: Investigating Bias and Validity of Islamic Artificial Intelligence Applications," *MUHARRIK: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Sosial* 8, no. 2 (September 1, 2025): 01–19, <https://doi.org/10.37680/muharrik.v8i2.7730>; Engkos Kosasih, Mohammad Rindu Fajar Islamy, and Rizzaldy Satria Wiwaha, "Artificial Intelligence in the Era of Society 5.0: Compromising Technological Innovation Through TheWasathiyah Approach within the Framework of Islamic Law," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 9, no. 2 (September 20, 2024): 551–72, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v9i2.9596>.

<sup>47</sup>Imam Rozikin et al., "Narrative Politics And The Limits Of Religious Governance In Decentralized Indonesia: The Case Of Hkbp Maranatha In Cilegon, Indonesia," *Penamas* 38, no. 1 (July 10, 2025): 393–408, <https://doi.org/10.31330/penamas.v38i1.830>.

<sup>48</sup>Eka Fitriyana Sari, Muhammad Zuhaf Hafiizh, and Khoirul Mazid, "The Strategic Role of Religious Moderation in Mitigating Conflict and Religious Blasphemy in Indonesia," *Theosynthesis: Journal of Integrative Understanding and Ethical Praxis* 1, no. 1 SE-Articles (2025): 25–35, <https://doi.org/10.20625/theosyn.v1i1.011>.

Husein Ja'far does not explicitly address this issue in his book, his criticism of arrogance in religiosity is highly relevant. He reminds us that faith should not oppress but should guarantee freedom and safety for all, including in matters of worship.

Habib Husein Ja'far's critique of arrogance in religiosity and the loss of ethical dimensions in religious practice aligns with empirical findings on the rise of intolerance in Indonesia. Research conducted by Hakim et al. across 38 regencies and municipalities in East Java shows that strong religious conviction does not necessarily correlate with tolerance; in many cases, it is instead associated with exclusivism and rejection of minority groups.<sup>49</sup> This confirms that religiosity without ethical grounding can lead to discriminatory attitudes, as reflected in cases of rejecting houses of worship. Furthermore, a study by Lolong and Timomor, which focuses on legal analysis and the practice of freedom of worship in Indonesia, finds that violations of religious freedom are still influenced by political factors, social inequality, and low acceptance of diversity.<sup>50</sup> These findings are reinforced by Sahide et al. through a qualitative study on the role of local elites in Indonesia, showing that the politicization of religious issues in local power contests often strengthens intolerant values, especially when elites support majority pressures.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Habib Husein Ja'far's critique not only confirms previous studies but also extends them by demonstrating how this crisis of religious

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<sup>49</sup>Muhammad Lukman Hakim, Indah Dwi Qurbani, and Abdul Wahid, "A Paradox between Religious Conviction and Recognizing the Freedom of Others on Measuring Religious (in) Tolerance Index in East Java, Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (December 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2191443>.

<sup>50</sup>Wenly Ronald Jefferson Lolong and Adensi Timomor, "Moral Conflict: Balancing Human Rights and Worship Regulation in Indonesia," *Jurnal Moral Kemasyarakatan* 10, no. 1 (June 1, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.21067/jmk.v10i1.11705>.

<sup>51</sup>Ahmad Sahide, Muhammad Azhar, and Sidik Jatmika, "The Role of Local Elite in the Transformation of Intolerant Values in Indonesia," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 9, no. 12 (December 11, 2022): 210, <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v9i12.4138>.

ethics is concretely manifested in social practices and local policy dynamics in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that *Tuhan Ada di Hatimu* by Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar functions not merely as a popular religious text, but as a form of social critique that directly responds to contemporary challenges of religiosity in Indonesia. This study answers the main research problem by showing that Husein Ja'far's critique systematically targets four key issues: excessive conservatism, internal exclusivism among Muslims, the dominance of symbolic religiosity over ethical substance, and the intensification of identity-based polarization. Rather than rejecting religiosity itself, his work reorients it toward ethical and humanitarian values, emphasizing that faith should operate as a source of compassion, reflection, and social responsibility. In this sense, the book articulates a model of religiosity that is both self-critical and transformative, offering an alternative to rigid, formalistic, and exclusionary religious expressions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to contemporary religious studies by positioning popular religious literature as a legitimate medium of social critique that constructs ethical responses to religious exclusivism, symbolic religiosity, and social fragmentation. By combining content analysis with a socio-religious perspective, this research demonstrates how accessible narratives function as mechanisms for articulating critical religious ideas through everyday language and humanistic storytelling, thereby extending previous studies that primarily emphasize doctrinal debates or normative values. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening ethical religiosity—grounded in empathy, public ethics, and intercommunal solidarity—to address intolerance and polarization in contemporary Indonesian society. Accordingly, religious discourse in the public sphere should move beyond symbolic representation toward substantive ethical engagement.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single text, which limits the generalizability of its

findings across different authors, genres, or forms of religious expression. Second, the qualitative and interpretive nature of the analysis leaves room for subjectivity, particularly in the process of coding and thematic interpretation. Third, the study does not incorporate empirical data on audience reception, making it difficult to assess how Husein Ja'far's social critique is understood, accepted, or contested by different segments of society.

Based on these limitations, future research should expand the scope by examining a wider range of popular religious works, including digital platforms such as podcasts, social media, and video content, which increasingly shape contemporary religious discourse. Further studies could adopt sociological or ethnographic approaches to explore how such critiques are received and practiced in everyday life. Comparative analyses between religious figures or movements with similar inclusive approaches would also enrich the understanding of evolving patterns of religiosity in the digital era. Finally, integrating social critique in religion with broader issues such as gender equality, environmental ethics, and minority rights would provide a more comprehensive framework for developing a socially engaged and contextually relevant religiosity in Indonesia.

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