

Critical Discourse Analysis of Norman Fairclough: Representation of Religious Life in the Novel *Aku Wong Kafir* by Tulus Setiyadi

Alifia Maharani¹, Sri Harti Widyastuti²

^{1,2}Yogyakarta State University

ABSTRACT: This study explores the representation of Javanese religiosity in Tulus Setiyadi's *Aku Wong Kafir* (I Am an Infidel) through Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. The analysis focuses on how discourse reflects the complexity of religious identity, faith conflicts, and tolerance among followers of different belief systems. The protagonist, Pak Nguditomo, embodies the indigenous belief system *Penghayat Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* (The Believer of Faith in the Almighty God). His journey reveals the intersection of faith, culture, and social structure in Javanese society.

Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model—textual, discursive, and social analysis—this research shows that language serves as a medium for negotiating religious meanings. Instances of intolerance, such as the “kafir” (labeling of unbelief) and social exclusion, are contextualized not as condemnation but as constructive criticism. By integrating Pancasila values—unity, humanity, and justice—the novel becomes a reflection of Indonesia's pluralist ideals and a call for *moderasi beragama* (religious moderation). The findings demonstrate that literature functions as a moral and cultural mirror that reinforces tolerance, empathy, and harmony among believers. Thus, Setiyadi's work is both a critique of religious hypocrisy and an affirmation of the spiritual diversity that defines Indonesian identity.

KEYWORDS: critical discourse analysis, religious life, representation, novel, Norman Fairclough

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion and culture have always shaped the worldview and moral foundation of Javanese society. In Indonesia's multicultural context, religious identity often intersects with tradition, ideology, and social hierarchy. Literature, as a mirror of culture, reflects how these intersections are experienced and contested. Through literary discourse, writers can critique, reinterpret, and reaffirm spiritual and moral values within their communities.

Tulus Setiyadi's *Aku Wong Kafir* (I Am an Infidel) presents an intricate portrayal of faith and tolerance in Javanese society. The novel centers on Pak Nguditomo, an adherent of the indigenous belief system *Penghayat Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* (The Believer of Faith in the Almighty God). His spiritual journey exposes the tension between religious orthodoxy and local spirituality. The word “kafir,” used repeatedly in the text, symbolizes social exclusion, but Setiyadi uses it not to provoke intolerance—rather, to illuminate the moral fragility that emerges when religion becomes a tool for division instead of compassion.

From the perspective of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the novel provides a rich terrain to explore how language constructs, challenges, and reproduces power in religious life. Fairclough (1995) posits that discourse is both socially shaped and socially shaping—it is a medium where ideology, identity, and power converge. In *Aku Wong Kafir*, the author uses linguistic strategies to question moral authority, expose hypocrisy, and promote reflection on the true essence of belief.

Previous studies on Javanese religiosity (e.g., Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Mulder, 2001) emphasize harmony and self-control as core ethical principles. However, Setiyadi's narrative challenges these ideals by exposing their fragility in the face of fanaticism. This duality—between harmony and hypocrisy—becomes central to understanding the dynamics of religious tolerance and conflict in the novel.

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining discourse analysis, literary interpretation, and cultural reflection. By grounding the analysis in the values of Pancasila, particularly *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in One God) and *Kemanusiaan yang Adil dan Beradab* (Just and Civilized Humanity), this research contributes to Indonesia's ongoing discourse on

Critical Discourse Analysis of Norman Fairclough: Representation of Religious Life in the Novel *Aku Wong Kafir* by Tulus Setiyadi

religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*). It demonstrates that literature can serve as a form of moral education—encouraging empathy, tolerance, and unity in diversity (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*).

METHOD

This study is qualitative research, specifically descriptive using Critical Discourse Analysis. This method focuses on linguistic aspects and their contexts. Moeliong (2014:6) states that the purpose of qualitative research is to understand events experienced by research subjects—such as behavior, motivation, actions, perceptions—holistically, using natural contexts and naturalistic methods. This method is used to describe and analyze the content of the novel, especially aspects related to culture.

The data source is the novel *Aku Wong Kafir* by Tulus Setiyadi, published in 2019 by CV Pustaka Ilalang (ISBN available). Data consist of words, phrases, and sentences in the novel that contain representations of religious life. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling: the researcher selects portions of words, phrases and sentences deemed representative for analysis. For data collection the method used is document analysis.

RESULTS

The analysis of *Aku Wong Kafir* reveals several important patterns in the representation of religious life and social dynamics within Javanese society. The term *kafir* is recurrently used in the text, not merely as a theological condemnation but to denote social exclusion, as seen in the marginalization of Pak Nguditomo by community members who uphold orthodox beliefs. This demonstrates how language reflects and reinforces social boundaries.

Textual analysis also shows a negotiation of religious identity, where the protagonist's internal reflections on faith and morality highlight the dynamic interplay between personal belief and societal expectations. Furthermore, the novel embeds local Javanese ethical concepts such as *tepa slira* (empathy), *eling lan waspada* (mindfulness), and *rukun* (harmony), which emerge through narrative passages where characters navigate moral dilemmas, emphasizing cultural wisdom in moderating social behavior. Narrative strategies, including rhetorical devices and dialogic exchanges, enhance moral reflection and allow readers to witness conflicting viewpoints, thereby fostering understanding of pluralism and tolerance.

Importantly, these narrative instances not only illustrate instances of social exclusion but also demonstrate the novel's constructive critique of intolerance. By contextualizing these behaviors within cultural and moral frameworks, Setiyadi emphasizes the importance of empathy, mutual respect, and moral accountability. In this way, the text aligns with the principles of Pancasila, particularly the ideals of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in One God), *Kemanusiaan yang Adil dan Beradab* (Just and Civilized Humanity), and the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Through this lens, the novel becomes a medium for promoting interfaith understanding and religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*), reflecting both moral reflection and cultural continuity in Javanese society.

Overall, the findings indicate that language in *Aku Wong Kafir* functions as a medium to explore religious identity, social exclusion, and cultural ethics, illustrating how literature mirrors societal norms while encouraging critical reflection in line with national ethical and pluralist values.

DISCUSSION

This study attempts to reveal how Javanese religiosity is represented in *Aku Wong Kafir*. The novel portrays Pak Nguditomo as adhering to the indigenous inner-tradition stream (*kebatinan*), currently recognized as *Penghayat Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa*. This is illustrated in the text:

“kanggo ngandelake kakuwatan batin dheweke melu salah siji paguyuban aliran kebatinan sing saiki diarani Penghayat Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa. Ora dheweke wae, nanging ana sadulure lan saperangan warga sing uga nyawiji Tunggal paguyuban.”

(“To strengthen his inner power, he joined one of the spiritual communities of the inner-tradition stream, which is now called Penghayat Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa [The Believers of Faith in the Almighty God]. Not only him, but also his relatives and several villagers joined this association.”)

This excerpt shows Pak Nguditomo's religious life and the community of followers practicing the inner-tradition. The narrative demonstrates how personal belief and communal support intersect to shape religious experience.

Pak Nguditomo's teaching to his daughter, Sumirah, emphasizes moral conduct, humility, and social responsibility:

“Sum, iki piwulangan budi pakarti. Ora ana sing keru lan ora ana sing keminter. Kabeh sinau bareng lan kudu bisa ngetrapake ing bebrayan...”

Critical Discourse Analysis of Norman Fairclough: Representation of Religious Life in the Novel *Aku Wong Kafir* by Tulus Setiyadi

("Sum, this is a lesson in moral conduct. No one is left behind and no one is more clever than another. Everyone studies together and must be able to apply it in society...")

Here, the text highlights that religiosity is not only a matter of ritual observance but also of ethical action, empathy (*tepa slira*), and mindfulness (*eling lan waspada*). Such principles reflect cultural wisdom in moderating social behavior.

The novel also depicts instances of intolerance, as seen in Sumirah being labeled as *kafir* by some villagers:

"... Sumirah niku bocah ora nate gelem solat, dielingake malah nyepelekake... Bocah kafir senengane gawe pitnah wae. Minggata wae saka omahku. Ora kanggonan wong kafir, tiwas gawe rereged."

("...Sumirah is a child who never wants to perform prayer... 'That infidel child loves to make slander. Get out from my house. No place for infidels here; they make filth.'")

However, the text also shows responses of tolerance and empathy, particularly from Kyai Subud:

"Nur, kowe kuwi wis dakanggep putuku dhewe... Sumirah ngono pancen saka kaluwarga penghayat kepercayaan. Dadi wajar menawa ora sholat..."

("Nur, I already consider you my own grandchild... Sumirah indeed comes from a family of Penghayat Kepercayaan, so it is natural she does not pray...")

These passages illustrate a balance between intolerance and constructive critique. By including empathetic responses and moral reasoning, the novel emphasizes reflection, understanding, and moderation (*moderasi beragama*), consistent with Pancasila values, especially *Kemanusiaan yang Adil dan Beradab* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

Furthermore, public ridicule and social stigma are presented not to reinforce intolerance, but to critique hypocrisy and social misuse of religion:

"Ngertenana, jebul Sumirah kuwi wong kafir... Dosa lan najis Pak, ngingu wong sing ora seiman kuwi."

("Understand, it turns out Sumirah is an infidel... it is sinful and filthy, Sir, to keep people who do not share our faith.")

The author uses these narrative moments to challenge readers to critically reflect on social exclusion, emphasizing that true religiosity encompasses ethical behavior, empathy, and mutual respect across belief systems.

In conclusion, *Aku Wong Kafir* portrays religiosity as a dynamic interplay between personal faith, communal norms, and moral reasoning. Instances of intolerance are contextualized and critiqued, while the narrative affirms interfaith understanding and ethical conduct. By embedding Javanese spiritual values and national ideals of Pancasila, Setiyadi's novel encourages a balanced, constructive view of religious life and promotes a culture of tolerance and moderation in Indonesian society.

CONCLUSION

In light of the findings, it can be concluded that Tulus Setiyadi's *Aku Wong Kafir* provides a nuanced portrayal of Javanese religiosity, emphasizing both moral reflection and social engagement. The novel illustrates that religious identity is dynamic and communal, grounded in ethical principles such as humility, gratitude, and empathy. Instances of intolerance, including labeling and social exclusion, are presented not as endorsements but as critiques of societal hypocrisy and misuses of faith.

Interactions between characters of differing beliefs demonstrate interfaith tolerance and moderation, reflecting broader Indonesian values of Pancasila and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. By highlighting these ethical and spiritual dimensions, the novel encourages readers to reflect on the moral responsibilities of religious practice and the importance of pluralism in a multicultural society.

Thus, *Aku Wong Kafir* functions as both a literary work and a moral lens, revealing how language, belief, and social norms intersect, and promoting religious moderation, empathy, and harmony within Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape.

works reflect life. Authors write influenced by their experiences and environments; therefore, literature becomes a mirror of real life. Besides providing entertainment, literature also teaches. Therefore, analyzing novels is necessary.

Aku Wong Kafir is a novel with a strong religious theme. Although there are topics outside religiosity, most of the narrative centers on religion and belief. This study found many representations of religious life in the novel: the decline of faith, the depiction of society using religion as a veil, attitudes of interreligious tolerance, attitudes of intolerance, and the strength of personal faith. These representations can provide lessons for readers.

REFERENCES

- 1) Ervania et al. (2022). *Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis: Representation of Religious Life in the Short Story "Mbah Sidiq"* by A. Mustofa Bisri. *Sosmaniora*, 1(2), 256–264.
- 2) Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2nd ed.). London: Pearson Education Limited.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Norman Fairclough: Representation of Religious Life in the Novel *Aku Wong Kafir* by Tulus Setiyadi

- 3) Jorgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J. (2017). *Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Belajar.
- 4) Moleong, Lexy. (2014). *Qualitative Research Methodology*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- 5) Supriyantini. (2019). *Educational and Moral Values in the Novel "Dendam Si Yatim-Piatu" by Sintha Rosse*. Jurnal Pujangga, 5(1), 47–75.
- 6) Setiyadi, Tulus. (2019). *Aku Wong Kafir*. Lamongan: CV Pustaka Ilalang.
- 7) Syarif, Ulil Amri. (2012). *Character Education Based on the Qur'an*. Jakarta: Rajawali Pers.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.