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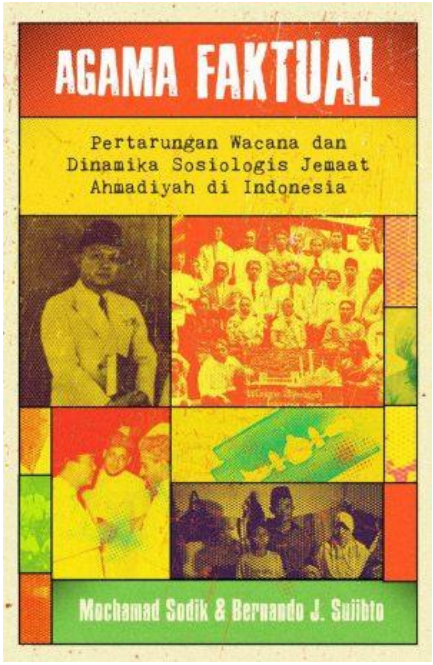
BOOK REVIEW

Agama Faktual: Pertarungan Wacana dan Dinamika Sosiologis Jemaat Ahmadiyah di Indonesia: A Review Essay

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Extract

State involvement in facilitating freedom of religion and belief (FoRB) has created a safe and conflict-free space for society, especially religious communities. However, state supremacy is also effective in constructing a single religious narrative, creating a dualism between the strong and the weak, or the majority and the minority. This power system enables the state to play a hegemonic role through normalisation and marginalisation, including in relation to FoRB. This debate is explored in this book, set against the social and theological backdrop of the Ahmadiyah community in Indonesia. Mochamad Sodik and Bernando J. Sujibto explore how state supremacy has made the Ahmadiyah a marginalized minority group through a single narrative. Based on sociological analysis, this book adopts a chronological framework to highlight the shift in discourse from contestation to theological discrimination, which has implications for intolerant actions and violence against the Ahmadiyah.This book carefully analyses the issue of Ahmadiyah as a minority and target of intimidation and violence, which did not occur naturally, but involved a structured and solid dominant power. The book's urgency is evident in its success in shifting the issue of Ahmadiyah, which initially focused on theological judgment, toward a sociological conversation. Additionally, the use of accommodative social theory, supported by extensive data analysis, underscores the primary publication's significance.



Author	:	**Mochamad Sodik & Bernando J. Sujibto**
Year	:	**2025**
Publisher	:	**Cantrik Pustaka**
Language	:	**Indonesia**
ISBN	:	**978-623-139-083-7**

Background

Since the Ahmadiyya movement first emerged in Indonesia in 1924, its presence has always been overshadowed by opposition. Attention to the ban on the Ahmadiyya movement reached a peak alongside the surge in conservatism following the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998 (Bruinessen 2014). In the early years of the Reformation, books exposing the heresies of the Ahmadiyya began to appear, such as *Ahmadiyah: Kepercayaan-kepercayaan dan Pengalaman-Pengalaman (2002), Ahmadiyah dan Pembajakan Al-Qur'an (2004), Ahmadiyah Menodai Isalm: Kumpulan Fakta dan Data (2007), Jejak Hitam Sang Pendusta dan Pengkhianat Agama: Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyani & Fakta Penghinaan Ahmadiyah terhadap Agama (2010)* and other books. Subsequently, the ideological contestation escalated into an anarchist movement that targeted the Ahmadiyya with acts of intimidation and even physical violence. This level of anarchy culminated in the tragedy of February 6, 2011, which claimed the lives of three Ahmadis in Cikeusik, Tangerang, Banten. A total of 12 defendants were sentenced, with no mention of their affiliation with a specific group (Tirto 2021). At the same time, the government has shown a passive response to various issues concerning the Ahmadiyya.

Sympathy for Ahmadiyah has emerged from various quarters, including academics. However, studies on this topic have been dominated by descriptive accounts of the various acts of violence they have experienced. In the last decade, studies have begun to shift toward the spiritual experiences and daily lives of Ahmadis as a social phenomenon. This focus is explored in greater depth in the book *Agama Faktual: Pertarungan Wacana dan Dinamika Sosiologis Jemaat Ahmadiyah di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta 2025) by Mochamad Sodik & Bernando J. Sujibto. Specifically, this book presents an analysis that places religion within the space of discourse contestation. It also emphasizes that the persecution

experienced by Ahmadis must be understood as an implication that indirectly intersects with the broader social space.

This book is an academic work based on rigorous sociological analysis. However, after completing each page, readers will realize the important conclusion that not everything can be understood normatively, especially regarding the teachings of Ahmadiyah. The easy-to-understand writing style and systematic presentation of information make it easy for readers to understand the main points of this book. The background of Mochamad Sodik as an activist who also serves as a sociology lecturer and Vice Rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, and Bernando J. Sujibto as a teacher in the same field of study, demonstrates a deep empathy in presenting a work that offers a more balanced alternative understanding of Ahmadiyah.

Keypoint

The main argument of this book is that discrimination against the Ahmadiyya in Indonesia is the result of symbolic violence against religious minorities. This violence takes the form of hegemonic discourse and regulations, although it also results in physical violence against them. For Bourdieu, social praxis implies a singular narrative shaped by the process of normalising a particular discourse while simultaneously marginalising other discourses through binding regulations. In the context of a religious society, hegemony becomes even stronger because it is supported by religious authorities capable of producing normative laws (right/wrong and good/bad) (Rey 2014). In Indonesia, this understanding is relevant because religion holds a significant place and plays a key role. Furthermore, the majority of the population is Muslim. Nevertheless, the Ahmadiyya community faces opposition due to its differing views from the Muslim majority regarding the existence of the final prophet. In fact, Islamic organizations such as FPI, MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah, and DDI

have at times called for the dissolution of the Ahmadiyya (Detik News 2011). The teachings of the Ahmadiyya are discussed extensively in the first chapter of this book, alongside topics on the history and social movements of the Ahmadiyya in Indonesia. The author also emphasises that only the Qadiani Ahmadiyya believes Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a prophet after Muhammad, not the Lahore Ahmadiyya (p. 94)). Generally, discussions of prophethood within the Ahmadiyya movement tend to be overly generalized and overlook this distinction. On that basis, the author presents a discussion of the "Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia" (JAI) as a specific representation of the Qadiani Ahmadiyya (p. 89).

Over time, the dynamics surrounding the Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia have shifted from a contest of ideas to theological discrimination. This shift was marked by the issuance of regulations by the MUI regarding "*fatwa*" declaring the Ahmadiyya to be heretical (1980 and 2005) and by the government regarding the prohibition of public activities related to the Ahmadiyya in the Joint Ministerial Decree (SKB 3 Menteri) (2008). As a nation that recognizes freedom of religion and belief, the state has instead used its legal apparatus to intimidate the Ahmadiyya community rather than accommodating diversity as mandated by the constitution (Bagir 2019). In the second chapter, this book examines these regulations as the state's efforts to establish hegemony over religious communities. From Foucault's perspective, such practices are a key indicator of structural power (Foucault 2009). Functionally, the MUI fatwa serves to confer normative status rather than providing a legal basis for judgment. However, the author explains that the fatwa received both qualitative and quantitative support, which can easily be understood as the initial phase leading to the issuance of the Joint Ministerial Decree (SKB 3 Menteri) (p. 114).

In chapter three, the author argues that the MUI fatwa and the Joint Ministerial Decree (SKB 3 Menteri) are no longer public policies but rather political propaganda in the realm of religion. Drawing on Lyotard's perspective, the author views these regulations as an attempt to construct a metanarrative that is dominant, absolute, and deterministic (Lyotard 2005). Narratives of heresy and restrictions on Ahmadiyya activities have ultimately gained social legitimacy, sparking acts of violence. Although violence has lost momentum since the 2011 incident in Tangerang (Tirto 2021), the dissolution of the 2024 Jalsah Salanah in Kuningan (Tempo 2024), and the dissolution of the Ahmadiyya youth camp in 2026 in Karanganyar (Kompas 2026), demonstrate that the influence of these regulations remains strong. The state's role has become increasingly evident as armed forces have been involved in these incidents. In chapter **four**, this book argues that this series of events is no longer a matter of religion. Borrowing Durkheim's terminology, the author asserts that this shift in the arena of contestation has transformed religion from something sacred—transcendental and normative—into something secular and profane (Durkheim 2008). Ultimately, the space for interpretation—as a manifestation of diversity—does not apply in the public sphere, even in countries that recognize freedom of religion and belief.

Contextualization and Critical Evaluation

Recently, the narrative of freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia has been challenged by a new concept called "*moderasi agama*", which was introduced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in 2019. While granting citizens the right to practice their respective beliefs, the government fbelieves it must set boundaries so religious activities do not disrupt the stability of society at large. However, this concept is inherently contradictory because, through this approach, the government assumes an authoritative role in determining what is

moderate and what is not. Consequently, government's effortsto standardise religion stifle the narrative of freedom of religion—particularly through the extremely broad concept of "religious interpretation" (Bagir 2022). It is not difficult to see that this measure merely strengthens the state's power to regulate society's private affairs. The government's inability to resolve issues concerning freedom of religion and belief indicates that there is still much work to be done.

Such phenomena at the intersection of religion and the state warrant critical examination. In the Indonesian context, the Ahmadiyya issue is only a small part of the various social dynamics at play in society. The critical steps taken by Mochamad Sodik and Bernando J. Sujibto should be viewed as a practical part of academic work aimed at holding power in check so that it does not become an authoritarian structure that views society as merely a political object. At the very least, the significance of this publication is evident for two reasons. First, Mochamad Sodik and Bernando J. Sujibto play a role in shifting the discourse on the Ahmadiyah from normative judgment toward sociological conversation. On the one hand, this book boldly challenges socio-religious inequalities in Indonesia; on the other hand, it offers a balanced analysis of the Ahmadiyah amid the proliferation of books advocating theological rejection of them. Second, this book presents an accommodative application of social theory. The use of CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis), supported by a Foucauldian poststructuralist framework, provides a comprehensive analysis well-suited for social scientists seeking to understand the practical application of social methodologies.

However, there are several aspects of this book that warrant evaluation. There are at least two major limitations: the strength of the findings or analysis and the data sources. The book's central thesis is that the Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia faces structural discrimination

through fatwas, laws, and public discourse as a theologically controversial religious minority. Referring to previous studies, this topic is similar to the research by (Alnizar 2019), (Irawan and Adnan 2021), and (Putri 2023), which focused on the disparity between the state's stance and that of religious minorities. Previously, Najib Burhani has conducted extensive research on the Ahmadiyya, including how the production of narratives labeling them as heretical has intensified persecution against them (Burhani 2014b, 2014a, 2021). Consequently, this book does not demonstrate significant novelty.

The similarities between the findings in this book and those studies give the impression of repetition. Furthermore, in the fourth section of this book, the author once again presents a theoretical framework on structural power that lacks significance. Meanwhile, the third part has already identified discriminatory discourse in fatwas and government regulations as forms of institutional intervention against religion—a personal sphere that is free and protected by the constitution. Readers seem to be invited to revisit theoretical procedures rather than to strengthen the analysis of factors contributing to discrimination against the Ahmadiyya. The first part constitutes an important contribution of this book because it provides a broad, chronological overview of the Ahmadiyya. However, this chronological overview—which takes up nearly half the book—fails to find analytical significance in the subsequent sections. Consequently, it gives readers the impression of being apologetic and appears insufficiently substantial as an introduction to the research findings.

The data sources for this study tend to view the issue in general terms and pay little attention to subjective experiences, which are often overlooked in studies on the Ahmadiyya. In some studies, subjective experiences and ethnographic approaches have been key to generating alternative perspectives. For example, Soedirgo's findings indicate that nationwide religious politicization and discrimination do not necessarily

impact the living conditions of the Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia. Soedirgo found that the Ahmadiyya in Tasikmalaya faced difficulties in advocating for their rights because political actors relied on the support of their political opponents. Conversely, the Ahmadiyya in Bandung received state protection and had their rights upheld because the diversity of preferences regarding Ahmadiyya issues led the city government to take a middle ground (Soedirgo 2018). From this, it can be understood that the Ahmadiyya's clientelist networks helped them secure a better living space.

These two limitations indicate that this book still has areas for exploration that have not been adequately identified. On the one hand, an insufficient literature review will fail to identify research gaps. On the other hand, a research focus that remains too general will fail to yield specific findings—which are the fundamental purpose of conducting research. In studies of minority groups, these groups are often positioned as passive objects. Consequently, the findings tend to be uniform, such as violence, discrimination, and stigmatization. However, positioning them as active subjects can yield different findings, such as peacebuilding, philanthropy, social movements, or resilience strategies. For example, Hassan's study on the efforts of the Ahmadiyya diaspora in Finland to transmit their teachings through the Jalsah Salanah event via speeches, lectures, and poetry (Hassan 2025), or Hanson's study on how the Ahmadiyya community in Ghana has become an actor in educational development and social services (Hanson 2009).

Conclusion

This book invites readers to understand another side of the Ahmadiyya. Each section of the chapters is intended to provide a balanced public understanding of the Ahmadiyya, moving beyond the stigmas and

one-sided narratives that have previously been prevalent. The history, development, and contributions of the Ahmadiyya—as well as the figure of its founder and its teachings, which are often perceived as controversial—are presented in an informative manner so that the public does not limit its understanding to theological perspectives alone but grasps the movement in its entirety as a social phenomenon. The findings in this book indicate that repression against the Ahmadiyya stems from three arguments: structural power, discursive power, and structural hegemony. These three foundations are interconnected and have implications for the current situation of the Ahmadiyya in Indonesia. More broadly, this kind of critical analysis is important, given the increasingly complex socio-religious conditions in Indonesia over the past decade.

However, a critical evaluation of this book reveals two major limitations: first, in terms of findings or analysis. Discrimination against the Ahmadiyya in Indonesia—triggered by the state's structural power through fatwas and formal regulations—has been examined in previous studies. The chronological description of the Ahmadiyya, which takes up nearly half the book, does little to establish the analytical significance of the subsequent sections. Second, the data sources have not adequately explored the subjective experiences of the Ahmadiyya, which is precisely a gap in previous research. A recommended approach would be to shift the focus from treating the Ahmadiyya as a passive object of study to an active subject. This would allow for a deeper exploration of their empirical experiences—particularly regarding social and spiritual resilience—and yield different findings.

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