

MUBAHALAH AND SUMPAH POCONG IN INDONESIA: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MUHAMMADIYAH'S RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE WITHIN NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH'S FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Muhammadiyah's discourse on the practices of mubalah and sumpah pocong in Indonesia using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory. Unlike previous studies that separately discussed mubalah in the context of digital politics and sumpah pocong within local ethnographic settings, this research bridges both practices and positions Muhammadiyah as the primary subject of analysis. Based on primary data obtained from Muhammadiyah's official websites (Muhammadiyah.or.id and SuaraMuhammadiyah.or.id), the analysis focuses on three dimensions: the textual dimension (diction, sentence structure, and authoritative references), the discursive practice dimension (the production, dissemination, and consumption of discourse), and the social practice dimension (ideology, power relations, and social implications). The findings indicate that Muhammadiyah constructs mubalah as a sacred practice limited to doctrinal disputes with non-Muslims and used only as a last resort, while sumpah pocong is completely delegitimized as an act of bid'ah and khurafat because its procedure, which involves shrouding, is considered to undermine faith and lead to shirk. Underlying this discourse are three identified ideologies: textualism, puritanism, and modernism. The power relation between Muhammadiyah and the community is hierarchical through hegemonic mechanisms; however, the community responds through acceptance, negotiation, or resistance. This study contributes theoretically by enriching the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic law, and local traditions through the application of CDA. Methodologically, this study offers an integrative model combining adaptation theory, local customs, and CDA. Practically, this study provides recommendations for religious organizations in responding to local traditions in a dialogical and contextual manner.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Mubalah, Muhammadiyah, Norman Fairclough, Sumpah Pocong*

INTRODUCTION

In increasingly pluralistic religious societies, differences in interpreting sacred texts from the Qur'an and the Hadith occur more frequently. As explained by R. Michael Feener, Islamic law in Indonesia does not stand independently, but continually interacts with deeply rooted local traditions, thereby producing unique forms of adaptation (Feener, 2007).

Consistent with the observations of M. B. Hooker, fatwas and religious practices in Indonesia represent creative responses to the challenges of modernity and cultural diversity (Hooker, 2003). One issue emerging within this context is the resolution of theological conflicts among Muslims through the practice of *mubalah* (mutual imprecation). As a mechanism for resolving theological disputes, *mubalah* offers a unique and rarely utilized form of conflict resolution.

In Islam, *mubahalah* functions as a mechanism for resolving disputes between two parties. This practice is categorized as a solemn oath and is employed as a final recourse when all other methods have failed (Ibrahim, 2018). In practice, *mubahalah* involves invoking a curse upon the liar by asking God to inflict direct punishment upon the dishonest party. Moreover, the consequences of this curse are believed to extend to the spouses and children of those involved, serving as both a consequence and an affirmation of faith (Ibrahim, 2018).

Mubahalah is grounded in both the Qur'an and the Hadith, as reflected in the following sources:

فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ
أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ
نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَل لَعْنَتَ

اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ

“If anyone argues with you (Muhammad) regarding this (concerning ‘Isa) after you have received knowledge (revelation), then say (Muhammad) to them, Come, let us summon our children and your children, our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, then let us pray sincerely together and invoke the curse of Allah upon those who are lying (among us)” (QS. Ali ‘Imran:61).

...عَنْ حُدَيْفَةَ قَالَ: جَاءَ الْعَاقِبِيُّ وَالسَّيِّدِيُّ، صَاحِبَا نَجْرَانَ، إِلَى
رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يُرِيدَانِ أَنْ يُلَاعِنَاهُ، قَالَ: فَقَالَ
أَحَدُهُمَا لِصَاحِبِهِ: لَا تَفْعَلْ،

فَوَاللَّهِ لَئِنْ كَانَ نَبِيًّا فَلَا عَنَّا لَا نُفْلِحُ نَحْنُ وَلَا عَوْبَتْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِنَا...

.... “From Hudhaifah ibn Yaman, he said, al-Aqib and al-Sayyid, two leaders of Najran, came to meet the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, with the intention of engaging in *mubahalah* (mutual imprecation) with him. One of them said to his companion, ‘Do not do that. By Allah, if he is truly a prophet and we engage in *mubahalah* with him, then neither we nor our descendants after us will prosper” (Al-Bukhārī, 1993).

In response to these proofs, Ibn Hajar Al-‘Asqalānī said:

The Prophet Saw invited them to Islam and recited verses from the Qur’an, yet they rejected his invitation. Then He Saw said, “If you deny what I say, then allow me to swear an oath to you (i.e., perform

mubahalah).” This refers to the word of Allah SWT, “Say, come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women...”. Furthermore, in the narration of Yunus ibn Bakir in “al-Maghazi”, it is also stated that Sharbil ibn Abu Maryam said, “Wallāh, inkāna nabiyyan falā tal’anunā,” which means, “for the Sake of Allah, if he is truly a prophet, then do not curse us (Al-‘Asqalānī, 1970).

From the theological exposition above, it is evident that *mubahalah* in Islamic normative sources is understood as the highest-level mechanism for resolving theological disputes, the implementation of which involves solemn rituals and serious consequences.

In the Indonesian local context, there is an oath-taking practice that bears similarities to *mubahalah* and carries comparable legal and spiritual consequences, namely *sumpah pocong*. Its purpose is similar to that of *mubahalah*, to invoke a curse from God so that the party who is lying may be punished, even with death (Anisa, 2024; Elis, 2025). Unlike *mubahalah*, however, *sumpah pocong* requires the involved parties to be wrapped in a burial shroud (*kafan*) (Kusairi, 2022).

Clifford Geertz, in his work *The Religion of Java*, describes the tradition of *sumpah pocong* in Java as part of a syncretic blend of local traditions, animistic beliefs, and elements of Islam and Hindu-Buddhist traditions. This practice is rooted in the belief in supernatural powers and involves wrapping the person taking the oath in a burial shroud as a symbol of death to prove truthfulness or honesty in a dispute. The oath is viewed as a means of directly invoking divine retribution, as well as a mechanism for maintaining social harmony and upholding justice in accordance with prevailing local norms (Geertz, 1960).

In Indonesia, both of these oath-taking practices have been carried out, either in the form of *mubahalah* itself or in the form of *sumpah pocong*. One notable

example of the practice of *mubahalalah* in Indonesia involved Gus Nur and Bambang Tri regarding allegations of the falsification of President Joko Widodo's diploma, which was circulated publicly in 2022, as shown in Figure 1 (Gus Nur Official 13, 2022).

Figure 1. *Mubahalalah* between Gus Nur and Bambang Tri regarding Joko Widodo's diploma



Source: YouTube (Gus Nur Official 13, 2022)

Meanwhile, a case involving the practice of *sumpah pocong* occurred between 2023 and 2024 in relation to Saka Tatal, who was accused in the murder case of Vina Cirebon, an incident that attracted widespread public attention. Saka Tatal (23), who was accused of murdering Vina, performed a *mubahalalah*-type ritual in the form of *sumpah pocong* to seek justice and clear his name, as shown in Figure 2 (SINDOnews, 2024).

Figure 2. The execution of *sumpah pocong* by Saka Tatal



Source: YouTube (SINDOnews, 2024)

The cases above demonstrate how the concept of sharia has undergone a process of acculturation when adapted into social practices in Indonesia. This

phenomenon is closely related to the diverse character of Indonesian society, in which such practices are often associated with efforts to restore interpersonal relationships damaged by conflict (Tahir, 2018). The acculturation process between Islamic sharia and local traditions in Indonesia reflects the acceptance and adaptation of religion to cultures that are deeply rooted in society (Arifin & Hambali, 2016).

In response to these cases, this research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically Norman Fairclough's model, as the primary analytical framework. This approach was selected because of its ability to integrate micro-level linguistic text analysis with broader macro-level social contexts (Fairclough, 1989, 1995).

Fairclough divides discourse analysis into three dimensions: the textual dimension, the discursive practice dimension, and the social practice dimension (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). Through this framework, the study examines how Muhammadiyah, as a religious authority, constructs discourse surrounding *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong*.

The urgency of this research is significant for at least three reasons. First, from the perspective of social phenomena, the practices of *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong* are neither obsolete nor merely theoretical issues. Over the last decade, a number of related cases have emerged in the public sphere and gained widespread attention on social media.

This condition reflects the argument of Jürgen Habermas, as cited by Gunawan, regarding the reconstruction of Critical Theory. Habermas argues that Critical Theory should no longer be grounded in a monological paradigm of labor, as such a paradigm is inadequate for addressing the realities of pluralistic societies. Instead, Critical Theory should be based on a communicative paradigm

(Gunawan & Bangun, 2020; Habermas, 1987).

From both methodological and practical perspectives, the normative-textual approach that has dominated studies on *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong* is insufficient to capture the complexity of the relationship between texts, authority, and social practices. A more critical approach, such as Fairclough's CDA, is therefore necessary to deconstruct the ideology, power relations, and construction of meaning underlying Muhammadiyah's fatwas and official statements.

Without this research, discussions surrounding *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong* will continue to revolve solely around normative questions of whether these practices are *halal* or *haram*, without critically examining how religious authorities construct meaning and how society responds to such constructions.

Therefore, the research questions formulated in this study are: (1) How does Muhammadiyah construct the meaning of *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong* in its official documents? (2) How does Muhammadiyah position itself regarding the practices of *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong*? (3) What ideologies underlie Muhammadiyah's position, and what power relations are formed between Muhammadiyah, as the producer of fatwas, and the public, as the consumers of those fatwas?

This study addresses these questions using Fairclough's CDA framework with three main objectives: (1) examining the construction of the meanings of *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong* in Muhammadiyah's official discourse through textual and discursive practice analysis; (2) analyzing Muhammadiyah's position regarding the practices of *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong*; and (3) uncovering the ideologies underlying Muhammadiyah's position and the power relations formed between

Muhammadiyah and the public through analysis of the social practice dimension.

Literature Review

In conducting the literature review, the researchers identified at least four previous studies that discuss related issues. The first study is by Maya and Sarbini (2023), which reveals that al-Zuhaili's thoughts on *mubahalalah* can be applied in contemporary contexts, particularly in responding to the phenomenon of *mubahalalah* claims circulating on social media during political contests such as the 2024 Indonesian general election (Maya et al., 2023).

One notable contribution of this study lies in its attempt to bridge classical theological concepts with contemporary political dynamics. However, the study remains limited to *mubahalalah* claims made by individuals on social media and does not examine how religious organizations perceive this practice, nor does it connect *mubahalalah* with the practice of *sumpah pocong*. The difference between the present study and previous research is that this study not only examines *mubahalalah* within the context of digital politics but also relates it to the practice of *sumpah pocong* as a form of local transformation, while positioning Muhammadiyah as the primary subject of analysis.

The second study is Harahap's thesis (2020), which argues that *mubahalalah* is a solemn oath involving both families and is intended exclusively for matters of creed rather than worldly affairs or ordinary social conflicts (Harahap, 2020). A major strength of this study lies in its success in clarifying the normative boundaries of *mubahalalah*. However, its normative-textual approach limits its ability to explain how *mubahalalah* may be transformed or adapted into practices such as *sumpah pocong*. The distinction of the present research lies in its broader analytical scope, which extends beyond the normative aspects

of *mubahalalah* to investigate how it is interpreted within the context of *sumpah pocong*.

Third, the study by Ahmad (2021) on oath-taking practices among the Serawai tribe explains that oaths are performed when dialogue has reached an impasse and are used as a means of invoking God's curse upon the party who is lying (Ahmad, 2021). This study is particularly valuable because it vividly portrays the social function of oath-taking within society and successfully documents actual practices in the field.

However, Ahmad's study only adopts the community's perspective (an emic viewpoint) and fails to address how formal religious authorities, such as Muhammadiyah, evaluate these oath-taking practices. Furthermore, the study does not employ a discourse analysis framework capable of revealing the power relations underlying the practice of oath-taking.

The fourth study is by Mukarromah (2021), which employs Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach to demonstrate that *sumpah pocong* in Polagan Village, Sampang, is not merely an ancestral ritual, but also the result of negotiation between Islamic values and local culture (Mukarromah, 2021). An important contribution of this study lies in its ability to demonstrate that local practices are dynamic and negotiable. However, although Mukarromah successfully highlights the negotiable nature of *sumpah pocong*, her study does not analyze how religious organizations such as Muhammadiyah construct discourse and position themselves regarding this practice.

From the four studies above, it is evident that research on *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong* has largely developed separately. Studies on *mubahalalah* by Maya and Sarbini, as well as Harahap, focus primarily on its misuse in the digital sphere and its normative boundaries. Meanwhile, studies on *sumpah pocong* by

Ahmad and Mukarromah emphasize negotiations with local culture from the perspective of the community. To date, no study has comprehensively connected these two practices, particularly by positioning Muhammadiyah as the primary subject of analysis.

This research seeks to bridge these three gaps simultaneously and offers significant novelty by: (1) connecting the previously separate studies of *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong*; (2) incorporating Muhammadiyah's perspective as a religious authority; and (3) applying Fairclough's CDA as an analytical framework capable of uncovering the ideologies, power relations, and constructions of meaning underlying the relationship between religious authority and local traditions in Indonesia.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the question of how religious practices are adopted and adapted into local ritual forms. This assumption arises from the issue of whether such adaptations function as a means of reinforcing theological truth or, conversely, as a challenge to it.

As illustrated in the study of local wisdom values in Luwu by Nasriandi et al. (2023), certain religious practices may undergo transformation when encountering local traditions. Examples include the provision of halal food in non-Muslim traditional ceremonies and modifications to marriage customs that adapt to local traditions while still maintaining sharia principles (Nasriandi et al., 2023).

In this study, the framework is applied to understand Muhammadiyah, as an Islamic organization and religious authority, and its position regarding the sharia practice of *mubahalalah* within local contexts such as *sumpah pocong*. This conceptual framework offers novelty through four aspects: a dialogical-negotiative approach, an expansion of

intertextuality, a balanced application of Fairclough's CDA across its three dimensions, and the inclusion of public discourse as an integral part of the analysis.

Norman Fairclough's CDA is an interdisciplinary approach used to study language, text, and communication. This theory posits that language is not merely a tool of communication, but also a form of social action that contributes to the formation, maintenance, and transformation of power structures and ideologies within society (Fairclough, 1989, 1995).

The central premise of this theory is that discourse constitutes a social practice. Fairclough argues that the relationship between discourse and social structure is not one-directional; rather, the two mutually influence one another. In addition, the theory addresses issues of power and ideology by seeking to deconstruct how power is constructed, reinforced, and maintained through discourse. Consequently, CDA does not merely describe linguistic structures, but also seeks to uncover hidden ideologies and social inequalities embedded within discourse (Fairclough, 1989, 1995).

In applying his theory, Fairclough proposes three dimensions of analysis: the textual dimension, the discursive practice dimension, and the social practice dimension (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). These three dimensions are employed in this study to understand Muhammadiyah's position as a religious authority in responding to the phenomena of *mubalah* and the *sumpah pocong* ritual.

In addition to the three-dimensional model described above, this theory also adopts Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which explains how power is maintained without coercion by naturalizing the perspectives of dominant groups. Furthermore, the theory incorporates the concept of ideology as a system of beliefs embedded within language that shapes perceptions of reality.

Finally, it employs the concept of intertextuality, which emphasizes that a text does not stand alone, but exists in relation to other texts and social contexts (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Gramsci, 1971).

In this study, intertextuality is not limited to the relationship between fatwa texts and classical religious texts but also extends to the relationship between fatwa texts and the social realities of community practices. This framework emphasizes that interpretations of religious practices within local cultural contexts cannot be separated from the processes of production and reproduction of religious discourse carried out by Islamic institutions such as Muhammadiyah.

Furthermore, this research aims not merely to determine whether the practices of *mubalah* and *sumpah pocong* are considered *bid'ah*, but also to examine the constructions of meaning, power, and ideology underlying Muhammadiyah's interpretation of these practices. This interpretation has broader implications for social change among Muslim communities in Indonesia, particularly those that strongly uphold local customs and traditions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a library research approach. A qualitative design was selected because the study aims to explore and interpret the meanings, theological arguments, and discursive constructions embedded in Muhammadiyah's understanding of *mubalah* and the practice of *sumpah pocong*.

This research differs from conventional qualitative studies because it systematically and operationally applies Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). While library research functions as the primary source of data collection, CDA is employed as the analytical tool to deconstruct the power

relations, ideologies, and constructions of meaning underlying Muhammadiyah's discourse.

The novelty of this study lies in its application of CDA to Muhammadiyah fatwas, an approach that has not been extensively undertaken in previous studies. In particular, this research emphasizes the dimension of discursive practice, including the production, dissemination, and consumption of fatwas, aspects that are often overlooked in CDA studies in Indonesia, which tend to focus primarily on textual analysis.

The analytical procedure in this study is divided into five stages. The first stage involves collecting official Muhammadiyah documents and publications discussing *sumpah pocong*, *mubalahah*, or similar local practices. The selection criteria require that the documents explicitly address the topics of *sumpah pocong* or *mubalahah*, be issued by official Muhammadiyah authorities such as Muhammadiyah.or.id, and reflect variations in temporal and geographical contexts.

The second stage consists of textual analysis using Fairclough's CDA through close reading, with particular attention to linguistic aspects such as diction and sentence structure. At this stage, the researchers examine whether the language used is declarative, imperative, or interrogative in nature. In addition, the analysis identifies metaphors, analogies, or other figurative expressions employed in the discourse.

The third stage involves analysis of the discursive practice dimension by examining how Muhammadiyah produces, disseminates, consumes, and legitimizes meanings related to *mubalahah* and *sumpah pocong* through institutional and public discourse. This stage includes tracing Muhammadiyah's statements concerning the contexts in which the fatwas were issued and the channels through which they were disseminated.

The fourth stage involves CDA analysis of the social practice dimension by exploring the broader ideological and social contexts that influence Muhammadiyah's interpretation, as well as the discourse's impact on social relations and religious authority. This stage is followed by an examination of power relations, in which the researchers analyze how Muhammadiyah's discourse on *sumpah pocong* operates within broader dynamics of power.

The fifth stage involves synthesizing the findings from the three dimensions in order to address the research questions. This synthesis is conducted by connecting findings from the textual dimension (how language is used), the discursive practice dimension (how discourse is produced and disseminated), and the social practice dimension (why the discourse emerged and what impacts it produces).

From these five stages, conclusions are drawn regarding how Muhammadiyah constructs the practice of *sumpah pocong*: whether it is completely rejected, conditionally accepted, or negotiated. Furthermore, the study examines whether such rejection is based solely on theological considerations or is also influenced by socio-political factors. In addition, the study conducts an ideological critique by revealing how Muhammadiyah's discourse potentially marginalizes deeply rooted local religious practices and reproduces the dominance of particular religious interpretations.

DISCUSSION

The Construction of Meaning of *Mubalahah* and *Sumpah Pocong* in Muhammadiyah's Official Discourse

Analysis of the Textual Dimension: Diction and Sentence Structure

Based on the research findings, the Muhammadiyah fatwa published on the Muhammadiyah.or.id website in 2022

demonstrates that the organization employs a particular set of diction in constructing the meaning of *mubahalalah*. In one official statement, it is stated:

“Mubahalalah is a grave oath, as both parties are prepared to accept the curse of Allah. Such an oath is taken to uphold the convictions of each disputing party after efforts to resolve the conflict have been exhausted and neither side is willing to concede, as both believe they are in the right; they then swear, asking Allah SWT to send down His curse upon whoever persists in their erroneous position” (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022b)

Analysis of the quotation above reveals three important points. First, the phrase “a grave oath” (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022a) constructs *mubahalalah* as a practice with a high theological status, distinct from ordinary oaths in everyday life. The word “grave” here carries not only a psychological meaning, implying a heavy emotional burden, but also a theological meaning, referring to serious consequences in the sight of Allah. Through this diction, Muhammadiyah indirectly warns that *mubahalalah* is not an instrument that can be used carelessly.

Second, the declarative sentence structure employed in the statement lacks qualifying phrases such as “according to some opinions” or “it is permissible,” indicating a claim to authoritative truth. The sentence “*Mubahalalah* is a grave oath” (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022b) is presented as a definitive formulation rather than as one interpretation among many. This strengthens Muhammadiyah’s authority as an institution entitled to define religious concepts and practices.

Third, references to the consequences of “Allah’s curse and His damnation” (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022b) are repeatedly emphasized within a single short paragraph. This repetition functions as a deterrent effect. Muhammadiyah not only defines *mubahalalah* but also highlights the spiritual risks faced by anyone who employs it irresponsibly. Therefore, the discourse is not merely neutral and

informative, but also persuasive and normative in character.

In a separate interview, Yunahar Ilyas, Chairman of the Central Executive Board of Muhammadiyah, reiterated the contextual limitations of *mubahalalah*. He stated:

“Mubahalalah is for when we are in a dialogue with non-Muslims, after all arguments have been presented. Only if they refuse to accept it, then mubahalalah is considered. There is no such thing as mubahalalah regarding interpretations. Discussion is sufficient for that. It is absurd for people to invoke mubahalalah for every little thing. Between fellow Muslims, discussion is the way” (Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021).

Analysis of this statement reveals two important points. First, the phrase “there is no such thing” (Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021) reflects a firm and direct style of spoken language rather than formal academic language. This diction constructs the use of *mubahalalah* outside the context of Muslim–non-Muslim dialogue as something improper or even absurd. Second, the statement “Between fellow Muslims, discussion is the way” (Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021) explicitly excludes internal disputes among Muslims from the scope of *mubahalalah*, including disputes related to practical politics or differences in religious interpretation.

After constructing the meaning of *mubahalalah* as a solemn oath limited to matters of creed, Muhammadiyah then projected the same logic in assessing the practice of *sumpah pocong*. Interestingly, in its official statements, Muhammadiyah did not immediately reject the substance of *sumpah pocong* outright. Instead, it explicitly distinguished between the content of the oath and the procedures of its execution. In a detailed explanation published on its official website, Muhammadiyah stated:

“Actually, simply wearing a shroud while taking an oath is not prohibited; however, wearing a shroud carries a philosophical or psychological significance, particularly among the Javanese, which is the fear of retribution. Thus, what is feared is not the content of the oath, but the meaning of the

object used to swear it. If it is accepted, it signifies an erosion of faith, because people are not fearing Allah, but fearing something else. In Islamic teachings, such practices are not permitted so that individuals do not fall into the act of shirik" (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022a).

The analysis of the quotation above highlights three important points. First, Muhammadiyah consciously distinguishes between the substance of the oath (its content) and its ritual form (its procedure). Muhammadiyah acknowledges that the content of *sumpah pocong*, which includes invoking the phrase "for the sake of Allah" and expressing "readiness to accept a curse" (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022a), does not substantively conflict with Islamic principles of oath-taking. This acknowledgment is analytically significant because it demonstrates that Muhammadiyah does not reject the practice merely on the basis of prejudice, but through a structured process of theological reasoning.

Second, Muhammadiyah employs strong theological language to describe the dangers of the *sumpah pocong* ritual. The phrases "erosion of faith" and the threat of "fall[ing] into the act of *shirik*" (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022a) function as theological labels carrying severe consequences within Islamic discourse. The word "erosion" is analytically noteworthy because it implies a gradual and often unconscious process. In this context, Muhammadiyah views *sumpah pocong* as slowly damaging a person's *tawhid* without the individual necessarily realizing it, because the fear experienced is no longer directed solely toward God but has become associated with the corpse shroud used in the ritual.

Third, the sentence structure employed is declarative and imperative in character. Muhammadiyah does not merely state that the practice "should be avoided" or that it "could potentially lead to *shirk*." Instead, it explicitly declares that "in Islamic teachings, such practices are not permitted" (Muhammadiyah.or.id,

2022a). The use of this firm declarative structure reflects a claim to authoritative truth with little room for negotiation. Muhammadiyah does not open space for alternative interpretations regarding the philosophical meaning of the burial shroud; rather, it immediately closes such possibilities through a definitive legal judgment.

Muhammadiyah further reinforces its legal determination through rigorous theological categorization. In one of its official statements, Muhammadiyah declares that "*sumpah pocong* is unknown in pure Islamic teachings. This practice contains elements of *bid'ah* and *khurafat* because it places faith in something other than Allah" (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022a).

Analysis of this statement demonstrates that Muhammadiyah employs theological labels such as *bid'ah* and *khurafat*, which in Islamic discourse carry the consequence of symbolic exclusion from legitimate religious practice. The term "unknown" constructs *sumpah pocong* as an external or foreign practice lacking genealogical roots within Islamic tradition. By referring to "pure Islamic teachings," Muhammadiyah simultaneously implies the existence of an "impure" form of Islam, thereby constructing a dichotomy between puritan Islam, represented by Muhammadiyah, and syncretic Islam, represented by communities that maintain local traditions.

From this perspective, Muhammadiyah positions itself as a religious authority possessing the legitimacy to interpret sacred texts and evaluate local practices. Consequently, *sumpah pocong*, which lacks explicit grounding in the Qur'an and Hadith, is automatically delegitimized regardless of whether certain aspects of its substance may align with broader Islamic teachings.

Analysis of the Dimension of Discursive Practice: The Production and Dissemination of Mubalah and Sumpah Pocong

The production of Muhammadiyah's official discourse on religious issues, including *mubalah* and *sumpah pocong*, falls under the authority of the Tarjih and Tajdid Council, as reflected in the statement: "therefore, the Tarjih Council is of the opinion that *sumpah pocong* should not be performed" (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022a). This council serves as a central body within Muhammadiyah's organizational structure that is specifically responsible for issuing legal rulings and renewing religious understanding.

One notable aspect of Muhammadiyah's discourse production concerning *mubalah* and *sumpah pocong* is its format. Based on document analysis, discussions of these two issues are not presented in the form of specific or standalone fatwas. No special meeting of the Tarjih and Tajdid Council dedicated exclusively to these issues was identified, nor was any official *Muktamar* decree with a specific number and date concerning *mubalah* or *sumpah pocong* found.

Instead, the discourse production process is primarily contained within articles published on Muhammadiyah's official websites (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022a, 2022b). The responses presented on these platforms involved formulation teams from the Tarjih and Tajdid Council, consisting of Muhammadiyah scholars and intellectuals with expertise in *tafsir*, *Hadith*, *fiqh*, and *usul fiqh*. This collective and documented process provides legitimacy to the resulting discourse. Consequently, the statements produced are not merely personal opinions of individual council members, but rather products of collective *ijtihad* representing the organization's official position.

Within the context of CDA analysis, this finding is significant because

it demonstrates that Muhammadiyah's discourse is institutional rather than individualistic, carrying the collective authority of the organization's structure. This aligns with Fairclough's central assumption in CDA that discourse and social structures are dialectically related: discourse is produced in response to social realities, while simultaneously shaping those realities in return (Fairclough, 1989, 1995).

The dissemination of Muhammadiyah's discourse on *mubalah* and *sumpah pocong* occurs primarily through the websites Muhammadiyah.or.id and SuaraMuhammadiyah.or.id. These digital channels are highly strategic because they offer global reach, real-time accessibility, interactivity, and searchable content that enables users to easily access topics such as *mubalah* and *sumpah pocong*. This mode of dissemination reflects Muhammadiyah's adaptation to the digital era and broadens the reach of its discourse, particularly among younger Muslim audiences who are more familiar with internet-based media than printed religious texts.

In relation to the textual dimension, this dissemination strategy also implies that the meanings of *mubalah* and *sumpah pocong* may be interpreted differently by various audiences. In the case of *sumpah pocong*, dissemination through digital and social media can sometimes produce unintended effects. Although Muhammadiyah's rejection of the practice is widely circulated, the ritual itself continues to gain viral attention because many members of the public are more attracted to the sensationalism of the ritual than to the theological substance of the fatwa.

Muhammadiyah's Position in Responding to the Practices of *Mubalah* and *Sumpah Pocong*

A clear distinction between *mubalah* and *sumpah pocong* can be

observed in the way Muhammadiyah explicitly differentiates the two practices, despite the tendency of the general public to equate them. *Mubahalalah* is recognized as a practice with a strong normative foundation in the Qur'an (QS Ali 'Imran: 61) and Hadith. In contrast, *sumpah pocong* is categorized as a local tradition without explicit textual grounding, although it coincidentally shares a similar function as a solemn oath involving the consequences of divine curse (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022a).

Muhammadiyah considers *mubahalalah* to be a normative practice whose application must be strictly limited. Its position toward *mubahalalah* can therefore be described as accommodative-normative yet restrictive. Muhammadiyah imposes these restrictions through four layers of argumentation.

First, *mubahalalah* is intended solely for theological disputes rather than worldly matters or practical political conflicts. Second, *mubahalalah* is considered relevant only in dialogues with non-Muslims who reject the truth of Islam after all arguments have been presented, and not for disputes among fellow Muslims. Third, *mubahalalah* is viewed as a final resort after dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims has reached a complete deadlock. Fourth, although Muhammadiyah acknowledges the normative legitimacy of *mubahalalah*, it nevertheless recommends avoiding the practice because of its "terrifying" consequences (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2022b; Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021).

In contrast, Muhammadiyah's position regarding *sumpah pocong* is delegitimizing and exclusionary. Unlike *mubahalalah*, which is recognized albeit with strict limitations, *sumpah pocong* is rejected entirely. However, this rejection does not necessarily target the substance of the oath itself, since Muhammadiyah acknowledges that invoking the phrase "for the sake of Allah" and expressing a willingness to accept

divine curses are not substantively contrary to Islamic teachings. Rather, Muhammadiyah criticizes the ritual procedure because it carries philosophical implications that may erode faith and potentially lead to *shirk*.

On this basis, Muhammadiyah categorizes *sumpah pocong* as *bid'ah* and *khurafat*, two theological labels that symbolically exclude the practice from the legitimate sphere of Islam. By referring to "pure Islamic teachings," Muhammadiyah simultaneously constructs a dichotomy between puritan Islam, represented by Muhammadiyah itself, and syncretic Islam, represented by communities that preserve local traditions.

Analysis of the Social Practice Dimension: Ideology, Power Relations, Community Responses, and the Social Implications of Muhammadiyah's Discourse

The Ideologies Underlying Muhammadiyah's Discourse

Based on the previous textual and discursive analyses, at least three ideologies underlying Muhammadiyah's discourse on *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong* can be identified. In Fairclough's CDA, ideology is understood as a system of beliefs embedded in language that shapes perceptions of reality (Fairclough, 1989, 1995).

First is the ideology of textualism. Muhammadiyah recognizes only religious practices explicitly supported by the Qur'an and Sunnah. This position is reflected in its acceptance of *mubahalalah* and rejection of *sumpah pocong* due to its lack of textual basis. This stance aligns with the Muhammadiyah *Manhaj Tarjih dan Tajdid*, which emphasizes a "direct return to the Qur'an and Sunnah" as well as "caution in accepting local traditions that lack textual support" (Nasir, 2010).

Second is the ideology of puritanism (Sandiah, 2023).

Muhammadiyah not only rejects practices lacking textual legitimacy but also frames them as threats to Islamic creed. Expressions such as “erosion of faith,” “falling into acts of *shirik*,” “*bid‘ah*,” and “*khurafat*” function as theological labels that symbolically exclude *sumpah pocong* from legitimate Islamic practice.

Third is the ideology of Islamic modernism. As emphasized by Haedar Nashir, *this tajdid does not mean bringing renewal into religion but rather returning it in accordance with the Qur’an and Sunnah, using analogies (qiyas) that do not contradict both, and advancing the nation’s thinking capacity in both technology and general knowledge*” (Nasir, 2010; Nasir et al., 2019).

Muhammadiyah’s discourse on *mubalahah* and *sumpah pocong* reflects a modernist Islamic project that distinguishes itself from what it considers “traditional Islam,” often viewed as syncretic, irrational, and overly imitative. Its emphasis on rationality, prioritization of dialogue over *mubalahah*, rejection of rituals considered excessive such as *sumpah pocong*, and textual interpretation of religion are characteristic of Islamic modernism. This perspective assumes that Islam can be separated from local cultural elements and restored to its original textual sources.

Power Relations between Muhammadiyah and Society

For Fairclough, power dynamics are central to discourse analysis because language is never neutral; it functions to maintain or transform social power structures (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Rumaf et al., 2025). He argues that discourse is a social practice that not only represents reality but also shapes and is shaped by power relations (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). By positioning itself as the primary authority in answering religious questions, Muhammadiyah reproduces hierarchical power relations through discourse.

From the sociology of knowledge perspective, this relationship reflects what Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe as the “social construction of reality,” in which religious institutions possess the authority to define reality for the broader public. As discussed by Nigel Parton, this authority is not natural, but continuously produced through institutional legitimation (Parton, 2008).

Muhammadiyah also exercises hegemony without explicit coercion. Rather than forcing society to abandon *sumpah pocong* through violence or legal sanctions, Muhammadiyah employs symbolic power through language and discourse. This reflects what Fairclough and Antonio Gramsci describe as intellectual and moral leadership (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Gramsci, 1971).

By using labels such as “*bid‘ah*,” “*khurafat*,” and “*shirk*,” Muhammadiyah portrays *sumpah pocong* as un-Islamic, outdated, and potentially harmful to faith. The goal is to encourage society to abandon the practice voluntarily through moral persuasion and fear of theological consequences rather than coercion. This reflects a Gramscian mechanism of hegemony, in which power operates through consent rather than force (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Gramsci, 1971).

Muhammadiyah also asserts singular interpretative authority. By referring directly to the Qur’an and Hadith while rejecting *urf* that conflicts with them, Muhammadiyah positions itself as the legitimate authority entitled to determine which practices are “Islamic” and which are “non-Islamic.” This claim is not only theological, but also socio-political in nature (Lorinda, 2022; Nasir, 2010; Nasir et al., 2019).

Response, Negotiation, and Community Resistance

Although Muhammadiyah possesses strong religious authority, society is not entirely passive in accepting its discourse. Fairclough’s CDA

emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between text, discourse production, and social conditions (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). Based on observations of existing cases, at least three patterns of community response can be identified.

First is the pattern of acceptance. Some groups, particularly Muhammadiyah members and educated communities exposed to religious discourse through books and websites, tend to accept the fatwa rejecting *sumpah pocong*. As a result, they abandon the practice and shift to other forms of dispute resolution, such as mediation, litigation, or conventional oath-taking without the *pocong* ritual.

Second is the pattern of negotiation. Groups that do not fully abandon *sumpah pocong* often modify the ritual to reduce elements considered problematic by Muhammadiyah. For example, they may continue performing the oath with a burial shroud but avoid publicizing it on social media, or they may retain the solemn oath formula while omitting specific ritual elements.

This negotiation pattern shows that society possesses agency in adapting fatwas to local realities rather than simply accepting or rejecting them in absolute terms. This finding supports the argument that Islamic moderation in Indonesia emerges from historically and culturally embedded legal dynamics (Mashadi, 2017).

Third is the pattern of resistance. The Saka Tatal case (2023–2024) demonstrates that *sumpah pocong* continues to be practiced despite the widespread circulation of Muhammadiyah's fatwa rejecting it. This resistance may occur because Muhammadiyah fatwas are not legally binding for non-members, many communities place greater trust in deeply rooted local traditions than in organizational rulings, and in desperate situations *sumpah pocong* is viewed as a more accessible solution than lengthy and costly legal processes.

These diverse responses reinforce Fairclough's assumption that discourse is not only produced from above but also negotiated from below. Society is not merely a passive consumer of discourse; communities also possess the capacity to accept, negotiate, or reject fatwas that do not align with their social realities (Fairclough, 1989, 1995).

The Social Impact of Muhammadiyah's Religious Discourse

As explained by James B. Hoesterey, religious figures in Indonesia build legitimacy not only through religious knowledge, but also through communication strategies that utilize mass and digital media to shape public opinion (Hoesterey, 2022). In this context, Muhammadiyah's discourse on *mubalahah* and *sumpah pocong* produces at least three social impacts at both the micro (individual) and macro (social structure) levels.

From Fairclough's perspective, Muhammadiyah's discourse on *sumpah pocong* does not merely reflect social reality but actively shapes and transforms it. As Fairclough argues, "linguistic usage both reflects and helps create social institutions," meaning that language not only represents social institutions, but also contributes to constructing them (Fairclough, 1989, 1995).

However, following Fairclough's dialectical principle, discourse is not produced solely from above, but is also negotiated from below. In practice, communities demonstrate agency by not always passively accepting fatwas. Fairclough emphasizes that discourse is a form of social practice that not only reproduces, but also transforms knowledge, identity, social relations, and power structures (Fairclough, 1989, 1995).

The resulting impacts can therefore be divided into three categories. First is the impact on religious practices within society. Among Muhammadiyah members, the fatwa appears relatively

effective, as many abandon *sumpah pocong*. However, among communities outside Muhammadiyah, particularly in regions with strong local traditions, its impact remains limited because the public is often more attracted to the ritual's sensational aspects than to the fatwa itself.

Second is the impact on social cohesion. Discourse that stigmatizes local practices as “*bid'ah*” and “*khurafat*” may create polarization between modernist and traditionalist groups. The dichotomy between “pure Islam” and “impure Islam” can transform differences in religious practice into broader identity divisions, potentially weakening social cohesion within Indonesia's plural Muslim society. Nevertheless, this polarization does not appear explicitly; rather, it remains a latent potential that may intensify if such discourse continues to be reinforced (Bachtiar et al., 2024).

Third is the impact on Muhammadiyah's own religious authority. On the one hand, Muhammadiyah's firm stance strengthens its image as a defender of Islamic purity and a consistent religious authority. As argued by Pierre Bourdieu, religious authority is built through the accumulation of symbolic capital gained from consistency in defending core religious principles (Bourdieu, 1991).

On the other hand, Muhammadiyah's inability to stop the practice of *sumpah pocong* may indicate the limits of its authority within the digital public sphere. This aligns with the view of M. Amin Abdullah, a member of Muhammadiyah's Central Executive expert council, who argues that the overwhelming flow of information contributes to the fragmentation of religious authority (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2025).

He further explains that when a fatwa is ignored, especially when the prohibited practice instead becomes viral, the credibility of the religious authority itself may weaken. This reflects a broader dilemma faced by religious authorities in

the social media era, where the speed of information circulation often exceeds the speed of institutional responses and the reach of fatwas (Muhammadiyah.or.id, 2025).

CLOSING

As the culmination of this study, the findings show that Muhammadiyah clearly distinguishes between *mubahalalah* and *sumpah pocong*. *Mubahalalah* is recognized as a normative practice limited to doctrinal disputes with non-Muslims, whereas *sumpah pocong* is delegitimized as *bid'ah* and *khurafat* because its ritual procedures are considered to erode faith and lead to *shirk*. Underlying this discourse are three main ideologies: textualism, puritanism, and modernism. The resulting power relations are hierarchical; however, society does not remain passive, as communities may accept, negotiate, or reject the fatwa.

As a critical and neutral study, this research does not seek to side with any particular group, but rather to open space for a more equitable dialogue. The study argues that no group can claim absolute truth, that the scope of *mubahalalah* requires further reconsideration, and that local traditions should be understood fairly within their sociological contexts. In this regard, discursive justice means providing equal opportunities for all perspectives to be heard and critically considered.

This study has several limitations. It relies solely on document analysis without direct interviews with the authors of the fatwas and focuses exclusively on Muhammadiyah without comparison to other Islamic organizations. Future research is therefore recommended to conduct comparative studies involving organizations such as NU, PERSIS, and LDII, as well as ethnographic research in regions with strong oath-taking traditions. Further studies could also examine the dynamics of fatwas in the social media era.

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