

## **Religious Feudalism: Sacralisation, Fanaticism, Absolutism in Al-Azhar's Interpretation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Religious feudalism is a crucial issue because it has morphed into a mental pathology that has infiltrated modern religious authority, creating blind obedience that is often equated with divine obedience. This phenomenon shows that feudalism no longer survives only as an old political structure, but also as a religious culture that sanctifies human authority and weakens public reasoning. Previous studies tend to limit feudalism to an outdated political structure or identity conflict, thus failing to see the aspect of spiritual slavery that kills the critical reasoning of the people. To fill this gap, this study aims to reveal how Tafsir Al-Azhar deconstructs the sacralisation of manipulative authority and exposes the theological mechanisms that normalise submission to human power. To achieve this goal, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on Hamka's tafsir text, particularly on verses that highlight power relations, leadership, obedience, and social hierarchy. The study found that Hamka systematically dismantled the three pillars of feudalism: the sacralisation of cult figures, the blind fanaticism of taqlid, and the anti-critical arrogance of the religious elite. These findings confirm that domination now survives through the manipulation of emotional dogma rather than just physical coercion. Hamka's interpretation shows that true obedience must remain tied to tawhid, justice, knowledge, and moral accountability, not to the absolute authority of leaders or inherited traditions. The contribution of this research lies in offering a paradigm of "liberating monotheism" to restore people's freedom of thought from the shackles of individual cults. This research suggests the need for Islamic education reform based on critical literacy and democratisation of interpretation in order to prevent the reproduction of a slave mentality in the religious sphere.*

**Keywords:** *Feudalism, sacralisation, fanaticism, absolutism, Al-Azhar interpretation*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Feudalism in Indonesia has not completely disappeared but has transformed into neo-feudalism, hindering social democratisation and justice. This phenomenon arises through mechanisms of patronage and unquestioning loyalty that permeate social, political, and religious educational institutions. As a result, a pattern of relationships has been created that normalises the dominance of the elite and closes the space for criticism by subordinate groups. Rahmawati (2023) highlights that the persistence of feudal culture in agrarian politics perpetuates the elite's dominance over public resources.<sup>3</sup> Hamka (1982), in Tafsir Al-Azhar, also criticises the rulers' strategy of deliberately weakening the people through systematic indoctrination to maintain power. This shows that these practices

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<sup>3</sup> Dina Rahmawati, "Permasalahan Feodalisme Tanah Di Indonesia," *Court Review: Jurnal Penelitian Hukum* 3, no. 03 (2023): 1–6.

persist in the form of a highly hierarchical work culture and the fear of subordinates to correct their superiors. Therefore, a critical analysis of religious discourse is needed to uncover the roots of feudal culture that hinders social justice in Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

Academic literature on power relations and religion in Indonesia tends to be polarised into two main foci that have not been fully integrated into analyses of neofeudalism. The first stream is dominated by sociological studies that analyse feudalism as a phenomenon of pure political patronage without delving deeply into theological dimensions. Studies by Komaruddin & Pramuji (2023) and Rahmawati (2023) successfully map the transformation of feudalism into modern clientelism practices but fail to explore the archipelago's responses to this phenomenon. The second stream focuses on Hamka's political thought but often limits itself to the concept of general democracy, without specifying its critique of the culture of submission.<sup>5</sup> Yusoff and Abdullah have also examined Hamka's concept of leadership in Tafsir Al-Azhar through terms such as khalifah, imam and wali.<sup>7</sup> However, their study has not framed leadership as a critique of religious feudalism. Herdiawanto et al. (2023) and Abdul Rahim (2025) have discussed Hamka's idea of "Taqwa Democracy," but have not specifically applied it as a tool to dissect the feudal cultural structure.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the discourse of interpretation is often positioned only as a normative theological document, rather than as an active social manifesto against the hegemony of feudal structures. From this description, it appears that existing studies remain partial and lack integration of textual interpretation with social structural criticism, which requires an integrative approach to understand how Tafsir Al-Azhar operates as a counter-discourse to the sacralisation of authority and the residues of feudalism in Indonesian Muslim society.

This study aimed to fill a gap in Islamic studies by interpreting Hamka's social critique of the feudal mentality that often manipulates religious obedience. This reconstruction is crucial because modern feudalism operates through the control of reason, which kills Islamic egalitarianism, not just the control of land. Without sharp theological criticism, religious authority is vulnerable to abuse in order to perpetuate an unequal power hierarchy. This study specifically explores how Tafsir Al-Azhar exposes the practice of sacralising leaders who place humans in a semi-divine position. Recent research also shows that Tafsir Al-Azhar remains relevant for addressing socio-religious issues in Indonesia and Malaysia through Qur'anic values such as justice, moderation, peace, and moral accountability.<sup>9</sup> The analysis also focuses on forms of blind taqlid fanaticism and an absolute anti-critical attitude that closes the space for dialogue within the social structure. By identifying these indicators, this study dissects the theological mechanisms that legitimise oppression. This focus is relevant to Hamka's broader idea of

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<sup>4</sup> Buya Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Ujang Komarudin and Pitut Pramuji, "Between Clientelism and Patrimonialism: Local Politics of the Philippines and Indonesia," *JWP (Jurnal Wacana Politik)* 8, no. 1 (2023): 32–41.

<sup>6</sup> Rahmawati, "PERMASALAHAN FEODALISME TANAH DI INDONESIA."

<sup>7</sup> Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff and Abdul Hafiz Abdullah, "Pemimpin Menurut Pandangan HAMKA: Satu Tinjauan Dalam Tafsir Al-Azhar (Leadership According to HAMKA: A Review on Tafsir Al-Azhar)," *Jurnal al-Tamaddun* 8, no. 1 (2013): 1.

<sup>8</sup> Heri Herdiawanto, Valina Singka Subekti, and Firman Noor, "Hamka's Thoughts on Taqwa Democracy," *Jurnal Penelitian Politik* 20, no. 2 (2023): 77–93.

<sup>9</sup> Harda Armayanto, Adib Fattah Sunoro, Achmad Reza Hutama Al Faruqi, Maria Ulfa, and Amir Sahidin, "Reviewing Religious Pluralism Through A Qur'anic Approach: The Relevance of Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah dan Pemikiran Islam* 27, no. 2 (2025): 345.

Islamic governance, which places leadership within the framework of justice, consultation, ethical responsibility, and public welfare rather than personal domination.<sup>10</sup> The results of this study are expected to provide an ethical foundation for transformative Islam in combating dehumanisation stemming from feudal culture.

This study argues that religious feudalism in Tafsir Al-Azhar is not merely a behavioural deviation but a structural mechanism that stifles public reason by sacralising power. In this system, human authority is equated with God, so criticism is deemed theological rebellion that must be silenced. As a result, the space for deliberation is replaced by the dogma of “power immunisation” that rejects any form of correction from the people. Data synthesis shows that an absolute anti-criticism attitude is often covered up by an emotional response of “stiffening the neck” when the ruler is reprimanded. Hamka assesses this physical reaction as evidence of a loss of the ability to argue and the dominance of feudal arrogance that relies on muscle. This phenomenon confirms that the obedience of the people today is not built on truth, but rather the result of manipulation, fear, and dulled common sense. Thus, discussions of Hamka’s social interpretation must go beyond mere moral advice and address the structural aspects that redefine the relationship between religion and power, freeing it from a manipulative feudal culture.

## METHODOLOGY

The main unit of analysis in this study is Buya Hamka’s Tafsir Al-Azhar, with a specific focus on verses discussing leadership, the ethics of power, and social relations. This unit was chosen because Tafsir Al-Azhar is not merely a theological document but a social manifesto that records the intellectual response of Muslims to the reality of feudalism in Indonesia. The academic reason is that analysing this text allows for a holistic understanding of Hamka’s genealogy of social criticism in dismantling oppressive cultural structures. The research process consisted of three stages. First, the corpus of tafsir was identified using thematic keywords relevant to power relations and social hierarchy. Second, data collection and categorisation were carried out based on three main indicators of religious feudalism: the sacralisation of figures, taqlid fanaticism, and an absolute anti-critical attitude. Third, the collected data were analysed interpretively to reconstruct Hamka’s theological arguments as a counter-discourse to the practice of dehumanisation in social structures.

This study uses a qualitative design with a library research approach and employs thematic content analysis. This approach was chosen because the object of study is interpretive texts that require intensive reading to uncover the meaning structure behind the narrative of leadership and power. The academic rationale is that content analysis enables researchers to systematically codify indicators of feudalism scattered across thousands of pages of interpretation, thereby allowing Hamka’s social criticism to be reconstructed objectively and quantitatively. The data analysis process consisted of three stages. First, repeated readings (close reading) of the Tafsir Al-Azhar corpus were conducted to inventory verses containing the theme of power. Second, the data were classified through a coding process based on three indicators: sacralisation, blind taqlid fanaticism, and an absolute anti-criticism attitude. Third, the findings were analysed

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<sup>10</sup> Adibah Abdul Rahim, “The Concept of Islamic Governance According to HAMKA’s Thought,” *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2025): 3.

thematically and descriptively to validate how Hamka used interpretation as an instrument of criticism against feudal culture.

The primary data source for this study is the complete text of Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar (30 volumes), published by Pustaka Panjimas, and secondary data in the form of sociological and historical literature on religious feudalism in Indonesia. The use of this tafsir text is crucial because it is an authentic document that fully records Hamka's intellectual response to the socio-political realities of his time, which cannot be replaced by biographical reviews alone. The academic reason for this is that the validity of Hamka's social criticism can only be tested through direct reading of the construction of the arguments and theological arguments he built in his masterpiece. The data collection process took place in three stages. First, an initial screening of the Tafsir Al-Azhar text was conducted using keywords related to the themes of power and obedience, namely: "leader," "obedient," "fair," "oppressive," "trustworthy," and "syura." Second, a list of candidate verses was compiled by selecting tafsir explanations that were substantive and had a socio-leadership dimension, rather than merely literal meanings. Third, the units of analysis were extracted from tafsir excerpts that contained at least one indicator of religious feudalism, which were then coded and grouped according to the analysis theme.

The data collection method is the systematic application of documentation and close reading techniques to primary and secondary texts. This method was chosen because it allows for the complete tracing of the genealogy of thought and facilitates the extraction of textual data scattered throughout the thick corpus of interpretations without disrupting the context. The academic rationale is that the use of structured documentation techniques ensures the authenticity of the data and minimises the researcher's subjective bias in reconstructing Hamka's social ideas. The data collection process was carried out in three stages. First, a scanning technique using thematic keywords was used to locate verses on power across the 30 juz of tafsir. Second, intensive reading was conducted to select exegetical narratives containing social criticism, separating them from purely theological or fiqh descriptions. Third, valid data were recorded and documented in a coding sheet using the three indicators of religious feudalism to facilitate subsequent classification and analysis.

The analysis method used is content analysis with a thematic-interpretive approach. This method was chosen because of its ability to dissect the structure of meaning in the interpretive text in depth, not only at the linguistic level but also at the contextual and ideological dimensions that underlie the interpretation. The academic reason for this is that this technique allows researchers to reconstruct Hamka's scattered thoughts into a coherent argument against religious feudalism, thereby clearly mapping the intertextual patterns between verses and social reality. The content analysis process consisted of three systematic stages. First, data reduction involved selecting and coding segments of the interpretive text relevant to indicators of religious feudalism to separate the core data from the supporting narrative. Second, the data display stage was carried out by compiling coded quotations into a thematic categorisation matrix, such as sacralisation, blind taqlid fanaticism, and an absolute anti-criticism attitude, to see Hamka's argumentation pattern. Third, the conclusion-drawing stage involved interpreting the data synthetically to address the problem formulation: how Tafsir Al-Azhar deconstructs the theological legitimacy of feudalism.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Criticism of The Sacredness of Religious Authority

In Tafsir Al-Azhar, evidence of religious feudalism is evident through indicators of sacralisation. Hamka criticises the tendency to idolise religious leaders/authorities to the point that they become difficult to criticise, while also noting the symbolic validation of power. (Explanation) Hamka’s criticism of the idolisation of authority shows how religious discourse can be used to legitimise domination and close off avenues for correction. (Elaboration) The following is Hamka’s statement, which not only explains but also touches upon and criticises the practice of sacralising religious authority.

Table 1. Forms of religious sacralisation in al-Azhar’s interpretation

No	Quoted Verse	Interpretation	Coding
1	<p>اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَابَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ يَوْمَ مَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا لَّا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ سُبْحٰنَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ٣١</p> <p>(At-Taubah 9: 31)</p>	<p>“The symptoms of idolising teachers, both during their lifetime and after their death... excessive worship of revered teachers, and after the teacher dies, their grave also begins to be revered, that is, idolised.”</p>	<p>Deifying teachers</p>
		<p>The hierarchical structure of religion (for example, in the Catholic Church) places the figure at the top as the “Holy Father”. It suggests that rejecting his decisions is understood as leaving the religious community.</p>	<p>Sacred</p> <p>Idolized</p> <p>Positioning top-tier figures</p>
2	<p>وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَا تَصِفُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ أَلْكَذِبَ هَذَا حَلَالٌ وَهَذَا حَرَامٌ لِّتَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ أَلْكَذِبَ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ أَلْكَذِبَ لَا يُفْلِحُونَ ١١٦</p> <p>An-Nahl 16:116</p>	<p>“They make up their own rules... inventing things in the name of God.”</p>	<p>Attributing human laws to God</p>
		<p>“But the polytheists of Mecca added several more animals that they themselves had declared unlawful ... And they made up various other prohibitions.”</p>	<p>Human-made halal-haram absolutism</p>

<p>3</p>	<p>وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ  أَتَذَرُ مُوسَى وَقَوْمَهُ لِيُفْسِدُوا  فِي الْأَرْضِ وَيَذَرَكَ  وَأَهْلَكَ ؕ قَالَ سَنُقَاتِلُ  أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَنَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّا  فَآفِقُهُمْ فَهَرُونَ ۝ ١٢٧</p> <p>Al-A'raf 7:127</p>	<p>According to their beliefs, Pharaoh himself was a descendant of the Sun God, sent to rule the earth...</p>	<p>Considering leaders to possess divine attributes/be incarnations of gods</p>
		<p>"...Similar to the Japanese belief in the sun, which they call Amaterasu Omikami, and sent her son Tenno down to earth to build the Japanese archipelago."</p>	<p>Using religious myths/gods to legitimize political positions</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ  أَهْلَهَا شِيْعًا يَسْتَضِعُّ  طَائِفَةً مِّنْهُمْ يُدَبِّحُ  بِأَبْنَاءِهِمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ  إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ۝ ٤</p> <p>Al- Qashas 28: 4</p>	<p>"So because important people elevated and exalted him... to the point of considering him a god, he felt that he was indeed an almighty god."</p>	<p>Considering humans as God</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَلِكُ تُوْنِي  الْمَلِكُ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِغُ الْمَلِكُ  مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ  وَتُوْذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِبِيْدِكَ الْحَيْرِ  إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ۝ ٢٦</p> <p>Al-Imran 3:26</p>	<p>How many Christian kings included in their titles that they were defenders of the Christian religion? Moreover, some Islamic caliphs only felt their power was secure when their names were mentioned in Friday sermons.</p>	<p>Using religious symbols as a tool to consolidate political power</p>
		<p>"The mighty Al-Mu'tashim, who had captured Imam Hanbali and imprisoned him for 30 months... was forced by various threats and insults."</p>	<p>Using violence/imprisonment to force establishment</p>

Source: Analysis of Buya Hamka's interpretation

Table 1 shows 11 forms of religious sacralisation in Hamka's interpretation. Table 1, point 1, shows that there are four forms of religious sacralisation. The phenomenon of

“deifying teachers” elevates religious figures from simple respect to a status understood as “holy,” as evidenced by the development of excessive worship. Teachers are not only viewed as special when they are alive, but the practice of deifying teachers also extends to sanctifying their graves, as if they were idols. Further data shows that after the teacher’s death, their grave also began to be revered to the point of being idolised. Second, the religious hierarchical structure (for example, in the Catholic Church) places the top figure, the “Holy Father,” and makes rejecting his decisions tantamount to leaving the religious community. Thus, the cult of the individual and hierarchical authority is considered a fatal form of doctrinal deviation.

The second point shows two forms of sacralisation. Namely, considering leaders to have divine attributes/beings sent by God, attributing human rules to Allah, and making halal absolute. This occurs because authority, in which subjective human rules are forcibly elevated to the level of revelation, is involved. Hamka highlights this behaviour as a great deception because the right to determine what is halal and haram is actually the absolute prerogative of God. The proof is in the behaviour of people who “make their own rules” but label them “in the name of God” for legitimacy. Specifically, the interpretation gives the example of the polytheists who “added several livestock animals that they themselves had forbidden” without any basis in argument. This act of “making up” prohibitions is clear evidence of the process of sanctifying artificial halal and haram rules. Thus, the practice of sanctifying human regulations is strongly rejected because it is essentially a form of deception that equates human thinking with God’s law.

The third piece of data in the table reveals two forms of sacralisation of power. These are: viewing leaders as having divine attributes/being incarnations of gods, and using religious myths/gods to sanctify political positions, thereby portraying political leaders as having divine origins for the sake of legitimacy. The interpretation notes the example of Pharaoh, who was claimed to be “a descendant of the Sun God sent to rule the earth.” A similar narrative is found in Japanese tradition, which holds that the Sun Goddess “Amaterasu Omikami” sent her son, the Tenno, down to earth. This evidence confirms the finding that rulers deliberately “used religious myths” to sanctify their political positions. This theological strategy was employed to confer absolute immunity, so that all orders from the ruler were treated as equivalent to God’s commands and could not be questioned. In addition, religious myths were manipulated to lead people to believe that the leader’s political position was a sacred destiny that could not be challenged. In conclusion, the claim of “divine descent” status was merely a political tool to perpetuate authoritarian power under the guise of sanctity.

The fourth point reveals one form of sacralisation, namely, viewing humans as gods. Hamka assesses this phenomenon as a dangerous two-way interaction in which the elite surrounding the ruler actively inflate the leader’s ego. As a result, humanity’s boundaries blur, and the leader no longer sees himself as a human being but as the owner of absolute power. The interpretation explains that this process begins when “important people elevate and exalt” a figure beyond reasonable proportions. This escalation of respect continues “until he is considered a god” by his own followers. Ultimately, because he is constantly worshipped, the figure loses touch with reality and “feels that he is indeed an almighty god.” Thus, this sacralisation is a product of social engineering that causes humans to forget themselves to the point of daring to usurp the rights of divinity.

The fifth finding describes two forms of sacralisation: using religious symbols as a tool to strengthen political power and using violence/imprisonment to enforce compliance, where symbols of piety and instruments of violence are used simultaneously to secure the throne. Rulers used religious attributes as a shield of legitimacy, so that the public would see their power as a sacred, legitimate mandate. However, physical violence was also used when religious doctrine was not strong enough to silence criticism of their policies. Interpretations note that kings used the title of defender of religion, and sultans felt secure if “their names were mentioned in Friday sermons.” The repressive side can be seen in the actions of Al-Mu’tashim, who “arrested Imam Hanbali and imprisoned him for 30 months” due to differences in opinion. He was proven to have imposed his political stance with “various threats and insults” against the cleric. Thus, religion was exploited as a cosmetic image-building tool as well as a repressive tool to perpetuate authoritarian power.

Table 1 summarises Hamka’s criticism in Tafsir Al-Azhar of the sacralisation of authority that triggers religious feudalism, through five points of deviation. This phenomenon arises because human limitations are deliberately obscured to equate political power with divine will. Hamka assesses this shift as a fatal distortion of faith in which rational respect is manipulated into absolute submission for worldly interests. This can be seen in the cult of teachers and the fabrication of human laws that are unilaterally claimed to be God’s sharia for the sake of false legitimacy. Furthermore, the text highlights the politicisation of myths by leaders who claim to be “descendants of gods,” triggering psychological delusions of absolute power. This strategy is perfected by combining symbols of piety and instruments of physical violence to silence criticism of the regime. Finally, these findings confirm Hamka’s rejection of the absolutism of humans who turn religion into a mere mask for authoritarian tyranny.

### **Blind Taqlid Fanaticism**

The reading of Tafsir Al-Azhar suggests the presence of religious feudalism through indicators of fanaticism/blind taqlid, namely, obedience without critical consideration. Hamka highlights this attitude because it makes the opinions of authorities seem absolute and difficult to correct. Hamka’s criticism of fanaticism and blind taqlid shows how religion can be used as legitimisation, closing the space for ijihad, and perpetuating domination through disproportionate obedience. The following is Hamka’s statement, which not only explains but also touches on and criticises the practice of fanaticism/blind taqlid.

Table 2. Forms of Blind Taqlid Fanaticism in al-Azhar's Interpretation

<b>No</b>	<b>Quoted Verse</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Coding</b>
<b>1</b>	<p>بَلْ قَالُوا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِم مُّهُتَدُونَ ٢٢</p> <p>Al-Zukhruf 22</p>	<p>“That is how they found it, that is the trail they left behind, and of course, that is what we followed.</p>	<p>Following in the footsteps of our ancestors without knowledge</p>

<p>2</p>	<p>إِذْ جَعَلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْحَمِيَّةَ          حَمِيَّةَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ فَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَى          رَسُولِهِ وَعَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَلْزَمَهُمْ كَلِمَةَ          التَّقْوَى وَكَانُوا أَحَقَّ بِهَا وَأَهْلَهَا          وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا ٢٦</p> <p>Al- Fath 26</p>	<p>“My people are always right, and our enemies are always wrong... Only we, my people, are right.”</p>	<p>Feeling that only your own group is right</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى          وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ          أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ          خَبِيرٌ ١٣</p> <p>Al-Hujurat 13</p>	<p>“...half human... preserving the lineage; a daughter of the Syarifah clan cannot marry a man who is not a Sayid...”</p>	<p>Prohibiting marriages between different lineages (Syarifah–not Sayid)</p>
		<p>“...wants to say that he is superior... because of his ancestry, that he is royalty, while others are slaves.”</p>	<p>Creating a hierarchy of descent (royal nations–slave nations)</p>
		<p>“...if you meet someone who is said to be a descendant of Sayid... even if he is wicked, a drunkard... he is the one who must be accepted as the mate of Syarifah.”</p>	<p>Prioritising lineage over religion and morals</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَاكُمْ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ          سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يُدَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ          وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ ۗ وَفِي ذَلِكُمْ          بَلَاءٌ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ ٤٩</p> <p>Al-Baqarah 2: 49</p>	<p>“As soon as they reached the height of their glory, which led to arrogance, feeling superior to other nations, they were reminded of how they lived under oppression...”</p>	<p>Feelings of superiority or feeling holier/superior to other groups</p>

<p>5</p>	<p>وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَنْبَغُ مَا آَلَفْنَا عَلَيْهِ ؕ آَبَاءَنَا ؕ أَوْلُو كَانِ          ؕ آَبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ          ١٧٠</p>	<p>“Children and grandchildren who blindly cling to the wrong ancestral traditions... stubbornly defend outdated customs... even though their minds no longer function properly.”</p>	<p>Obey orders</p>
<p>Al-Baqarah 2: 170</p>		<p>6</p>	<p>without thinking deeply</p>
<p>Yusuf 12: 40</p>		<p>مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ ؕ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءٌ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآَبَاؤُكُمْ مِمَّا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنْهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ ؕ إِنْ أَحْكَمْتُمْ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ ؕ أَمْرٌ إِلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ؕ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ٤٠</p>	<p>“You inherited those things from your ancestors, and without thinking twice, you joined in and worshipped them too.”</p>

Source: Analysis of Buya Hamka's interpretation

The findings in Table 2 show that there are nine forms of fanaticism and blind imitation as indicators of religious feudalism. Table 2, point 1, shows one form of blind imitation, which is characterised by following ancestors without knowledge. This attitude arises because the standard of truth is no longer measured by revelation or common sense, but solely by past heritage. The interpretation quotes the ancients, who said, “That is how they found it, that is the path they left behind, so that is what we follow.” This narrative shows a pattern of following in the footsteps of ancestors without clear knowledge, using that as the only guideline for life. Hamka considers this mentality dangerous because it creates rigid thinking, leading people to reject renewal simply to maintain the prestige of their ancestors. Thus, blind imitation is a form of intellectual slavery that closes the door to guidance and perpetuates ignorance.

Table 2, point 2, shows one form of fanaticism, namely, the feeling that only oneself is right. Hamka highlights how truth is monopolised unilaterally by one's own group. Tafsir captures this character through the inner expression of fanatics who believe that “my people are always right and my enemies are always wrong” in all situations. This mentality arises from hamiyah jahiliyah, or blind fanaticism, that kills objectivity, so that group sentiment is prioritised over the value of justice. As a result, adherents of this ideology are trapped in a moral delusion that views all actions of their group as sacred while outsiders are automatically wrong. In conclusion, this claim to a monopoly on truth is an indicator of religious feudalism that fuels social division and rejects open dialogue based on knowledge.

The third finding in Table 2 shows four forms of hereditary fanaticism. This practice shows symptoms of extreme fanaticism because it prohibits intermarriage between Syarifah and non-Sayid and creates a rigid hierarchy between the royal family and the slave class. This reflects an attitude of *asabiyyah*, which exaggerates tribal pride to the point of prioritising lineage over fundamental religious and moral values. This symptom can be seen in “preserving lineage; a daughter of the Syarifah nation cannot marry a man who is not a Sayid,” which is clear evidence of rigid social boundaries. This is evidenced by the desire to declare oneself superior because of lineage, “that he is of royal descent, while others are slaves.” As a result, “if you meet someone who is called a Sayid descendant, even if he is a sinner, a drunkard, he must be accepted as a spouse” for the sake of tribal affairs that give rise to *jahiliyyah* asymmetry, as the Germans said when Hitler rose to power: “Deutschland über alles!” Thus, this exclusivity of lineage has created a social caste system that glorifies genealogy over morality, so that, in practice, it no longer reflects the essence of religious teachings but has become destructive group fanaticism.

Point 4 in Table 2 identifies one form of fanaticism/blind imitation: collective narcissism, namely feelings of superiority or a sense of holier-than-ness toward other groups. This attitude is a form of ego-imitation, as unfounded feelings of superiority replace objective standards of truth. Hamka considers this mentality dangerous because it creates an illusion of glory that justifies the oppression of groups considered inferior. Hamka describes, “As soon as they reach the peak of glory that causes arrogance, feeling that they are special compared to other nations, they are reminded of how they live in oppression.” As a result, they are trapped in group fanaticism, feeling that they are superior to other nations and rejecting equality. Ironically, this arrogance makes them forget their history, even though they need to be reminded that they lived under oppression before their glory days. In conclusion, this fanaticism of grandeur is psychological feudalism that blinds people’s hearts to historical truth and social reality.

Table 2, point 5, highlights one form of blind fanaticism (*taqlid*). Namely, blind conformity, which is absolute submission to ancestral traditions that override the truth of revelation. Hamka describes this mentality as “Grandchildren who blindly cling to the false traditions of their ancestors... stubbornly defending outdated customs... even though their minds are no longer functioning properly.” This has become a form of religious feudalism because it demands unconditional obedience to the past, regardless of its validity. Common sense is suppressed in order to maintain emotional loyalty to tradition, so that renewal is seen as a threat to group identity. Thus, this blind adherence to tradition is an intellectual shackle that perpetuates ignorance and hinders freedom of thought among the people.

Point 6 is a form of inherited fanaticism, where one does not think deeply and simply accepts beliefs from ancestors without filtering them through common sense. Hamka considers this attitude to be blind imitation, worshipping based solely on old habits rather than on true understanding. “You inherited these things from your ancestors, and without thinking twice, you follow them and worship them.” An emotional attachment to their ancestors makes them lazy to think, so that the fatal mistakes of the past are repeated without correction. He regrets how they accept these doctrines without critically considering their truth. Thus, fanaticism towards tradition is dangerous because it kills critical thinking and traps people in false worship.

Table 2 summarises Hamka's view that fanaticism and blind imitation are the main pillars of religious feudalism that stifle critical thinking. This phenomenon arises because objective standards of truth are replaced by emotional sentiments towards ancestral heritage and group ego alone. Hamka considers this attitude fatal because religion becomes a rigid dogma that demands absolute obedience without a foundation of true knowledge. The proof is in the culture of "following along," where people stubbornly defend "using heirlooms" even though this contradicts common sense. Furthermore, the text highlights the fanaticism of lineage that creates artificial social castes and arrogant sectarian claims that "my people are always right." This mentality is exacerbated by the illusion of material superiority, which makes a group feel holier and leads it to reject the principle of human equality. Finally, these findings confirm that fanaticism and blind imitation are intellectual shackles that turn religion into a tool for perpetuating ignorance and division.

### Authority in Absolute Truth

Tafsir Al-Azhar presents an indicator of absolute attitudes when authority is treated as the final truth. Hamka criticises this style because it is considered to close off avenues for social correction. This is because absolute attitudes stifle deliberation/ijtihad and make it easy to label other views as wrong. The following is Hamka's statement that touches on and criticises these absolute attitudes.

Table 3. Absolutism in Al-Azhar's interpretation

No	Quoted Verse	Interpretation	Coding
1	<p>أَتَّخِذُوا أَحْبَابَهُمْ وَرُهَيْبَتَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا ۚ لَّا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ سُبْحٰنَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ٣١</p> <p>(At-Taubah 31)</p>	<p>"The only rules that must be obeyed are their rules, even though it is understood that these rules are very far from the teachings of the holy book," and "In an era of absolute power as God's power... it is very terrifying."</p>	Absolute power
2	<p>إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضِعُّ طَائِفَةً مِنْهُمْ يُدَّبِحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ٤</p> <p>Al-Qashas 28:4</p>	<p>"Therefore, he did as he pleased, and no one could argue with him. If he said black, it was black. If he said white, it was white."</p>	The sole truth of the ruler, criticism is totally prohibited.
		<p>"Anyone arrogant is considered disobedient, and death is his challenge."</p>	Resisting the authorities is considered a crime.

<p>3</p>	<p>فِيمَا رَحِمَهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ لَئِن لَّمْ يَكُنِ اللَّهُ أَفْوَاجًا لَقَدْ ضَلَّتْ سُبُلُكُم مِّنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ فَاصْبِرُوا لِحُكْمِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ          فَظًا غَلِيظًا لِّلْقَلْبِ لَأَنفَضُوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ ١٥٩          Al-Imran 3: 159</p>	<p>“Blaming Mu’awiyah, who froze the Islamic Shura for his own interests to establish a dynasty of Umayyah descendants.”</p>	<p>Silencing deliberation for the sake of absolute power.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ مَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَإِلَىٰ الرَّسُولِ قَالُوا حَسْبُنَا مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا ءَأُولُو سَكَانٍ ءَأَبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ ١٠٤          Al-Maidah 5: 104</p>	<p>“But if they are reprimanded, they get angry and tense up.</p>	<p>Respond to rebukes with anger, not arguments.</p>

Source: Analysis of Buya Hamka's interpretation

Table 3 identifies 4 forms of religious feudalism characterised by an absolute anti-critical attitude. Point 1 has 1 form of absolute attitude, namely, when power is determined absolutely by the ruler. Hamka highlights this deviation because people are forced to submit to human rules that must be obeyed. Hamka describes “The rules that must be obeyed are only their rules, even though it is understood that these rules are very far from the line of the holy book,” and “In the era of absolute power as God’s power... very scary.” In this system, every attempt at correction is considered a major sin of rebellion that must be silenced with threats. Hamka describes the fear of the people with the phrase “very scary,” because it is considered to oppose absolute power, as God’s power. In conclusion, the cult of absolute, anti-critical attitudes is the essence of feudalism, which kills reason to perpetuate power.

Point 2 shows two forms of anti-criticism as the face of religious feudal tyranny, namely, the single truth belonging to the ruler and the denial of the ruler being considered a crime. This shapes the ruler’s will into an absolute law that cannot be challenged, as well as the existence of threats. The interpretation describes that “because of this, he does as he pleases, no one can argue, he says black, it is black, he says white, it is white.” Hamka criticises this system because it positions the leader as the sole arbiter of truth, thereby closing the space for dialogue to the arrogance of power. There is also the threat that “Whoever marries is considered disobedient and faces death.” This creates public fear that is difficult to avoid. In conclusion, this anti-critical attitude creates a regime of terror that kills freedom of thought in order to perpetuate totalitarian domination.

The third point reveals a form of absolute anti-criticism. Namely, the silencing of the consultative mechanism (Shura) in order to secure absolute power. Hamka explains, “Blame Mu’awiyah for freezing the Islamic Shura for his own interests in order to establish the Umayyad dynasty.” Hamka views the elimination of this space for discussion as a feudal strategy to close the door to correction, thereby preventing the ruler’s personal ambitions from being challenged. The ultimate orientation is the feudal ambition to pass the throne along by bloodline, not by competence, and to position the ruler as the sole authority beyond debate, turning leadership of the people into a family inheritance. In conclusion, the death of deliberation is clear evidence of an anti-criticism attitude that transformed the caliphate system into a repressive dynastic kingdom.

The last point in Table 3 shows that there is one form of absolute anti-criticism: responding to reprimands with anger rather than argument. Hamka believes that this reactive attitude arises from an intellectual inability to defend fragile beliefs, so that emotions become the last line of defence. Hamka emphasises, “But when reprimanded, they get angry and tense up...” Instead of reflecting on the truth of the reprimand, they feel that their pride has been hurt, turning scientific discussion into an unhealthy ego battle. The physical reaction of “tensing up” shows that they have closed the door to common sense and rely more on muscle or verbal violence. The answers they give are not logical arguments, but purely emotional outbursts. Thus, anger at criticism is a sign of the death of reason and clear evidence of anti-criticism feudal arrogance, the result of ignorance.

The synthesis of the data in Table 3 confirms that an absolute anti-criticism stance is a fundamental pillar of religious feudalism, transforming leadership into theological tyranny. Hamka analyses that this phenomenon stifles public reasoning because human authority is sacralised as equal to God (absolute power/rule), so that any form of correction is considered a sin of rebellion that must be destroyed. This is structurally evident through the freezing of the Shura in order to perpetuate the family dynasty and the application of authoritarian “black is black” laws that silence opposition with the threat of death. Psychologically, this feudal character is evident in the inability to argue, which is covered up with an emotional response of “stiffening the neck” when reprimanded. This condition ultimately gives rise to a society that is forcibly submissive, where obedience to authority figures is considered safer than the truth itself. Thus, this immunisation of power is a systematic way of silencing the common sense of the people to ensure the elite’s position remains unshakable. This contextual reading is supported by Mujahidin, Itmam, and Rofiq, who show that Hamka interprets the Moses narrative rationally and critically, turning the story of Pharaoh into a moral lesson against arrogance, domination, and oppressive power.<sup>11</sup>

## DISCUSSION

### Discussing the Interpretation of Al-Azhar

These findings show that religious feudalism in Tafsir Al-Azhar is formed from three main indicators: sacralisation, fanaticism/blind taqlid, and an absolute anti-critical attitude. Hamka assesses that these three elements work systematically to transform religion into a tool of hegemony, where humans are positioned as equal to God. As a result, critical reasoning is stifled because the faithful are forced to submit to sanctified religious figures who cannot be corrected. This aligns with the findings of Shomad et al. (2024), who state that Hamka rejects the authoritarianism of religious figures to preserve the purity of tawhid from individual cults.<sup>12</sup> Further support comes from Hamka (2020) research, which confirms that Hamka’s criticism of taqlid aims to free the faithful from

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<sup>11</sup> Anwar Mujahidin, Muhammad Shohibul Itmam, and Ahmad Choirul Rofiq, “The Dynamic of Contextualization in Indonesian Qur’anic Tafsirs: A Comparative Study of Tafsir Al-Azhar and Tafsir Al-Mishbāh on The Story of The Prophet Moses,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur’an dan Hadis* 25, no. 2 (2024): 241.

<sup>12</sup> Bukhori Abdul Shomad, Anwar Mujahidin, and Ahmad Choirul Rofiq, “Implications of Hamka’s Thoughts in Tafsir Al-Azhar on the Standpoint of Islamic Social Organization in Preventing Authoritarianism in Indonesia,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v14i1.91-116>.

the shackles of irrational traditions that hinder progress.<sup>13</sup> Without such rational control, religion is vulnerable to manipulation into a legitimisation of absolute power that demands total and unconditional obedience. In conclusion, religious feudalism is not merely an ethical deviation but a systematic structure of oppression that perpetuates structural ignorance.

In this context, this finding reflects Hamka's criticism of the paternalistic culture that remains deeply rooted in the social structure of Indonesian Muslim society, especially in Islamic boarding schools and mass organisations. This phenomenon persists because the line between ethical respect and absolute obedience is often blurred by local feudal culture, which forbids criticism of leaders. As a result, religious relations in mass organisations or Islamic boarding schools are often trapped in a "patron-client" pattern that stifles reasoning in order to maintain false harmony. This aligns with Rush (2016), who describes Hamka's narrative as a "cultural attack" on the rigidity of traditional authorities and clerics who often demand absolute obedience.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Federspiel (2001) asserts that Hamka's efforts to democratise interpretation aimed to dismantle the religious elite's monopoly on truth, the "Kaum Tua" (Old Guard), who were feudal and closed to reform. This criticism implicitly attacks the post-colonial political mentality of "Bapakisme" (fatherism), which treats leaders as sacred figures who cannot be corrected.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Hamka's criticism of feudalism serves as a cultural deconstruction, transforming people from a mentality of servitude into an intellectually independent, egalitarian society.

Theoretically, the findings of this study validate Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, in which feudal domination is maintained through the engineering of consent rather than solely through physical coercion (Osman, 2025).<sup>16</sup> This is evident in the indicators of sacralisation and fanaticism that instil the doctrine that absolute obedience to religious leaders is "common sense," so that people feel guilty for thinking critically. These findings align with Lears' (1985) interpretation of Gramsci, who argues that hegemony is successful when their subordinates internalise the ideology of the rulers.<sup>17</sup> In a theological context, this phenomenon is reinforced by Abou El Fadl (2001) as authoritarianism, namely the practice of hijacking God's authority to silence criticism, exactly as found in the anti-critical attitude in this interpretation.<sup>18</sup> Hamka shows that religious feudalism works by transforming religion from a path to liberation into a tool for legitimising the elite class's power. In conclusion, religious feudalism is a sophisticated form of hegemony that imprisons people's reasoning through the manipulation of symbols of sanctity.

Philosophically, this study reveals that Hamka's criticism of religious feudalism is a manifestation of Liberation Theology aimed at restoring the dignity of human reason

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<sup>13</sup> Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

<sup>14</sup> J.R Rush, *Hamka's Great Story: A Master Writer's Vision of Islam for Modern Indonesia* (United States: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Howard M. Federspiel, *Islam and Ideology in the Emerging Indonesian State: The Persatuan Islam (Persis), 1923 to 1957* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Sonny Osman, "Taking Consent for Granted: A Case for Rethinking Hegemony," *Thesis Eleven* 187, no. 1 (2025): 116–127.

<sup>17</sup> T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 567–593.

<sup>18</sup> Khaled Abou El-Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, Oneworld Publications, 2001.

in the face of dogma. This is fundamental because religious feudalism hijacks the concept of obedience, shifting absolute loyalty from God to servitude to human authority. Hamka teaches that blind obedience to the clergy is not piety, but a form of social idolatry that dulls the intellectual potential of the people. This argument is reinforced by Jamarudin, May, and Pudín, who show that Hamka views human beings as moral agents endowed with reason, freedom, and responsibility to distinguish between truth and falsehood.<sup>19</sup> This understanding aligns with the latest study by Kasmuri et. al (2023), which frames Hamka's thinking as the basis for the "Religion of Reason," which rejects dogmatism in pursuit of civilisation's progress.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Rosowulan (2015) emphasises that Hamka's vision of religious humanism aims to restore the people's independence, which has been paralysed by a paternalistic culture that forbids questioning.<sup>21</sup> This means that anti-criticism and blind imitation are not merely ethical issues, but major obstacles to the advancement of Islamic civilisation. In conclusion, this study conveys the wisdom that anti-feudal Islam is an absolute prerequisite for the creation of an egalitarian and progressive civil society.

This study provides a new perspective by shifting the focus from the causes of conflict to its serious impact on people's mentality. Until now, experts have spent more time looking for the causes of religious tensions, such as political issues or group identity. In fact, what is often overlooked is the impact on people's minds when religious leaders become too powerful. In comparison, Burhani's (2020) study delves deeper into the sociological roots of hatred and closed-mindedness.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Sebastian and Arifianto's (2020) research focuses on how the politicisation of identity is the main trigger of intergroup strife. Unlike them, this paper proves that the greatest danger is not merely physical conflict, but the creation of mental slavery that permanently destroys the common sense of the people.<sup>23</sup> Thus, this research complements the shortcomings of previous studies by emphasising that religious feudalism poses a real threat to our critical thinking skills.

This study recommends a total overhaul of religious education and mass organisation cadre training to eliminate feudal culture. This is urgently needed because the culture of "as long as the boss is happy" and the cult of personality are still rampant, stifling people's courage to think critically. Specifically, the curriculum should teach critical literacy, enabling people to distinguish between God's holy revelations and human opinions that may be wrong. In addition, a deliberative system must be strictly implemented in organisations to prevent the emergence of anti-criticism "little kings." Finally, it is necessary to instil the awareness that respecting religious scholars does not mean mindlessly obeying everything they say; thus, in order to produce a generation of Muslims who are polite and independent-minded, not just followers who can only obey.

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<sup>19</sup> Ade Jamarudin, Asmal May, and Ofa Ch. Pudín, "The Prospect of Human in the Exegetical Work: A Study of Buya Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar," *Ulumuna* 23, no. 1 (2019): 42-43.

<sup>20</sup> Kasmuri Kasmuri, Riki Candra, Abdul Ghofur, and Syamruddin Nasution, "Menimbang Akal dalam Falsafah Hidup Buya Hamka," *Nusantara: Journal for Southeast Asian Islamic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>21</sup> Titis Rosowulan, "Aspek-Aspek Humanis Pemikiran Keagamaan Hamka," *HIKMATUNA: Journal for Integrative Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>22</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, *Heresy and Politics: How Indonesian Islam Deals with Extremism, Pluralism, and Populism* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Leonard C. Sebastian, Syafiq Hasyim, and Alexander R. Arifianto, eds., *Rising Islamic Conservatism in Indonesia: Islamic Groups and Identity Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The Al-Azhar interpretation positions feudalism not merely as a political structure inherited from the past, but as a mental pathology that has infiltrated modern religious authority. This occurs because religion is often instrumentalised to create “power immunisation,” which demands blind obedience akin to obedience to God. As a result, the relationship between the elite and the people shifts from a basis of knowledge to emotional manipulation for the sake of blind obedience. Data analysis proves that Hamka systematically dismantled the pillar of “sacralisation of figures,” which transformed ethical respect into a dangerous cult of personality. Then there was a pattern of “taqlid fanaticism” that was deliberately maintained to stifle the critical faculties of the people so that they would be unable to question oppressive policies. This finding is reinforced by the identification of an “absolutely anti-critical attitude” among religious elites, who respond to every rebuke with emotional anger rather than rational arguments. The epistemological wisdom gained is that Tafsir Al-Azhar offers a vital paradigm of liberationist monotheism to restore the community’s freedom of thought from the shackles of spiritual slavery.

This study makes a significant contribution by revising the understanding of feudalism in Indonesia, no longer merely as an outdated political structure but as an active theology of power. This finding is of high urgency because it reveals that feudalism has evolved from a physical royal system into a psychological mechanism that hides behind the sanctity of religious doctrine. Without understanding this transformation, democratisation efforts in the Islamic world will continue to reach a dead end, because the root cause lies not in the external political system but in the mentality of patronage considered noble. Empirically, it has long been detected that the danger of a “cult of personality” that paralyses the critical faculties of the people is worse than physical colonialism. This study also shows that the greatest threat is not inter-group identity conflicts, but the death of reason due to internal indoctrination. The research data shows a systematic pattern in which religious arguments are manipulated to create a culture of “as long as the father is happy” that rejects rational correction. Thus, this study fills a gap in the literature by offering a liberation-theology perspective to deconstruct the sacralisation of manipulative authority and to liberate the reasoning of the faithful.

The main limitation of this study lies in its textual analysis, which does not empirically examine audience reception in the field. This calls for further study to measure the extent to which Hamka’s social criticism effectively changes people’s behaviour. This is because interpretive texts risk becoming static documents if they are not contextualised with current social psychology. Future research should examine the resilience of patronage within society, especially as the emergence of new authorities in the current digital era tends to reinforce fanaticism among followers. This phenomenon shows that even middle-class Islamic activism is often still trapped in the figure of leadership, rather than in the independence of ideas. Therefore, interdisciplinary studies are needed to develop a cadre curriculum proven capable of breaking this chain of blind imitation. Thus, further studies must shift from text analysis to the formulation of applicable liberation pedagogy.

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