Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 107 (1) Regular Issue (2026)

An Analysis of Emile Durkheim's Theory of the Sacred and the Profane in the Context of the Sociology of Religion in Modern Indonesian Society

Jamaluddin
Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Ushuluddin
Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia
https://orcid.org//0009-0007-2717-6179
Corresponding Author: email: jamaluddin@uin-suska.ac.id

Bustanur
Department of Islamic Religious Education
Universitas Islam Kuantan Singingi, Indonesia
https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3252-2565,
bustanur75@gmail.com

Alhairi
Department of Islamic Religious Education
Universitas Islam Kuantan Singingi, Indonesia
https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7895-8632
arybensaddez74@gmail.com

Albef Fahrozi
Department of Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy
Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia
https://orchid.org/0009-0008-6632-9024
albeffahrozi73@gmail.com

Andrizal
Department of Islamic Religious Education
Universitas Islam Kuantan Singingi, Indonesia
https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4977-2891
andrizalguntor83@gmail.com

A. Mualif
Department of Islamic Religious Education
Universitas Islam Kuantan Singingi, Indonesia
https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5431-5457
ahmadmualif100786@gmail.com

https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.107.20

Abstract

Religion in modern Indonesian society is not only understood as a spiritual belief system, but also as a complex arena where values, symbols, and identities negotiate with the demands of the times. Phenomena such as the commodification of religious symbols, celebrity preachers, and ritualism on social media mark a shift in the role of religion from the private and sacred sphere to the public and profane domain. In this context, Emile Durkheim's theory of the sacred-profane dichotomy becomes relevant in reinterpreting Indonesia's socio-religious dynamics. Durkheim emphasizes that religion is a social institution that plays a crucial role in maintaining collective solidarity through symbols, rites, and shared values. This study aims to examine the extent to which his theory remains applicable in explaining contemporary realities, particularly in a society increasingly fragmented by secularization, individualism, and

globalization. Using a qualitative-descriptive method through literature analysis, this article finds that sacred values in Indonesian society have undergone significant transformation. The results show that although religion continues to play a cohesive role in public life, sacred values are increasingly redefined—manifesting in identity-based tensions, symbolic commodification, and political instrumentalization. The study concludes that Durkheim's theory remains valuable but requires contextual reinterpretation to address the plural, fragmented, and evolving nature of modern religiosity in Indonesia. The dichotomy between the sacred and the profane in Emile Durkheim's theoretical framework remains highly relevant for understanding the religious dynamics of Indonesian society, which is becoming increasingly complex and plural. In a social context shaped by modernization, mediation, and globalization, the boundaries between the sacred and the profane are no longer fixed or rigid. Contemporary religiosity in Indonesia is characterized by the emergence of religious symbols and expressions beyond conventional spaces—ranging from billboards and social media to the realms of politics and the marketplace.

Keywords : *Emile Durkheim, sacred, profane, sociology of religion, modernity, Indonesian society, social solidarity.*

Introduction

Religion is a social phenomenon that has long been a subject of study for social scientists, one of whom is Émile Durkheim, a key figure in the tradition of classical sociology. In his monumental work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim asserts that the essence of religion lies in the distinction between the sacred and the profane within the structure of social life. According to him, religion is not merely a system of belief, but also a social institution that regulates the relationship between individuals and the collective values of their society, through symbols and rituals that bind the community both morally and structurally (Durkheim, 2001).

The categorization of the "*sacred*" and the "*profane*" serves as the foundational framework in Durkheim's sociological analysis of religion. He asserts that the sacred encompasses all things regarded as exalted, holy, and worthy of collective reverence, whereas the profane refers to the worldly, ordinary, and routine aspects of everyday life (Durkheim, 2001). This distinction is not merely symbolic, but also indicates that religion is a product of social construction, reflecting the collective values and solidarity of a society. Durkheim regards religion as a means to reinforce social cohesion through shared representations that bring individuals together into a unified moral community (Bryan, 2011).

Émile Durkheim's concept of the sacred and the profane is highly relevant for interpreting the socio-religious reality of modern Indonesian society, particularly in the context of pluralism and rapid social change. According to Durkheim, the sacred refers to all that is considered holy and collectively revered by society, whereas the profane encompasses the worldly and ordinary aspects of life. In traditional societies, the boundary between the sacred and the profane tends to be clearly defined; however, in modern societies—characterized by individualism, secularization, and mass media—this boundary becomes increasingly blurred. This is evident in the widespread use of religious symbols within profane spaces such as political campaigns, commercial advertisements, and even social media content (Heryanto, 2014).

In Indonesia, this reality is reflected in the growing symbolic contestation within the public sphere. Research by Stig Hjarvard highlights how religious symbols are utilized in television media to construct collective identities that are often exclusive and, at times, manipulative (Hjarvard, 2020). In another study, Hefner observes that post-Reformation democratization in Indonesia has opened up space for religious expressions that are not always inclusive, and at times even generate social friction between groups (Hefner, 2011). Globalization and digitalization have further accelerated this process, as religious sacredness is increasingly

displayed in profane spaces such as TikTok or Instagram, often without deep spiritual internalization (Evolvi, 2021).

Ruth Tsuria also highlights the phenomenon of the *banalization of the sacred* in the digital era—where the sacredness of religion loses its substantive meaning due to its continual reproduction for performative purpose (Ruth Tsuria, 2021). Therefore, in Indonesia's pluralistic and digital context, it is crucial to develop a critical awareness of the boundaries and meanings of the sacred and the profane, so that religion remains a collective moral force rather than merely a symbolic commodity used without ethical reflection. For example, the use of religious symbols in public spaces, social media, and identity politics illustrates how the "*sacred*" can be commodified and interact with the "*profane*" world purpose (Azra, 2002).

Moreover, the trend of commercialization of religion and religious rituals in urban society reflects a transformation in the meaning of sacredness within the landscape of contemporary Indonesian society. Religious practices that were once rich in spiritual value are now also understood as part of a modern lifestyle. In this regard, Durkheim's analysis provides a conceptual framework for understanding how societies redefine religious values within an ever-changing social space (Abidin, 2010).

Although numerous studies have explored religion in Indonesian society, there remains a gap that has not been fully examined—particularly concerning how modern Indonesians interpret the boundary between the sacred and the profane in everyday life. Previous research has tended to focus on normative aspects or interreligious conflicts, while the symbolic interpretation of sacredness and profanity within the context of social change, globalization, and digitalization has received relatively little attention. Amid the growing phenomena of religious commodification, religious populism, and the penetration of digital technology that is reshaping religious practices, there has been a shift in the meaning of religiosity—often without critical reflection on the sacred itself.

However, the application of Durkheim's framework to the modern Indonesian context is not without its critical limitations—a point that this article explicitly engages with. While his theory provides a powerful lens for understanding religion's cohesive function, its classical formulation risks oversimplifying the complex and often ambiguous realities of contemporary religiosity. This study, therefore, does not apply Durkheim's concepts uncritically. It deliberately interrogates the potential weaknesses and ambiguities that arise when the sacred-profane dichotomy encounters forces such as market-driven commodification, which can strip religious symbols of their substantive meaning; identity politics, which instrumentalizes the sacred for sectarian mobilization and social fragmentation; and the rise of symbolic or "branded" Islam, which often prioritizes performative and superficial expressions over deep spiritual internalization. Thus, the central questions guiding this research are: How do contemporary Indonesians understand and distinguish between the sacred and the profane within an increasingly complex social context? And to what extent does Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane remain relevant in explaining the current socio-religious dynamics in Indonesia, particularly in a society that is increasingly pluralistic, digitized, and fragmented? This article emerges from this critical juncture and seeks to offer a contextual sociological analysis that positions religion not only as a potential source of social cohesion but also as a contested arena where its sacred core is constantly challenged, commodified, and redefined.

Research on Emile Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane within the Indonesian context remains relatively limited. However, several academic studies have attempted to utilize this framework to analyze religious and social phenomena in Indonesian society. These studies suggest that the separation between the sacred and the profane is not always clearly defined in Indonesia's pluralistic and religious society. One of the earlier studies was conducted by Kustiani (2015) in her article titled *"Religious Rituals and Social Integration in Multicultural Communities in Yogyakarta."* Kustiani employed a Durkheimian framework to examine how sacred rituals—such as *Sekaten* and *Grebeg Maulud*—function as instruments

of social integration within multicultural societies. She concluded that the boundary between the sacred and the profane becomes fluid when religious rituals serve as meeting spaces for diverse cultural and religious identities.

Suryana (2017), in his research titled *"The Dynamics of Sacred Religious Symbols in Local Political Contests,"* explored how religious symbols that were originally sacred underwent profanation in the realm of practical politics, particularly during election periods. Referring to Durkheim's theory, he argued that the shifting meanings of religious symbols in politics creates ambiguity between the sacred and the profane, which contributes to heightened social tensions.

In the context of the sociology of education, Nurhasanah (2019) wrote a thesis titled *"Religion as an Instrument of Value Socialization in Islamic Educational Institutions."* She adopted Durkheim's approach to examine how educational institutions produce and reproduce sacred values within the profane space of the school. Her findings show that religious education not only instills doctrinal faith but also serves as a mechanism for building social solidarity through the habituation of collective values.

Hidayat and Amin (2020), in their article *"Sacred and Profane in Indonesian Muslim Popular Culture,"* analyzed how Islamic popular culture on social media creates a hybrid space between the sacredness of religious teachings and the profane aspects of popular culture. They critiqued how the *hijrah* movement, celebrity preachers, and digital da'wah trends construct new religious narratives that are not fully aligned with classical religious structures.

Kurniawan (2021), in the *Journal of Sociology of Religion*, studied the practice of *ziarah kubur* (grave pilgrimage) in Javanese communities as a manifestation of the dialectic between the sacred and the profane. He emphasized that in local practices such as *nyekar*, there is a clear negotiation between spirituality (the sacred) and local culture (the profane), reflecting how people contextualize religion in everyday life.

Overall, these studies indicate that Durkheim's sacred-profane theory remains relevant in understanding the socio-religious realities of Indonesian society. However, they also—implicitly—reveal its limitations. The complexity of Indonesian culture and its highly diverse social dynamics show that the sacred-profane dichotomy is no longer fixed and hierarchical, but rather fluid, hybrid, and often contested. Therefore, the Durkheimian approach is not sufficient when complemented only by local perspectives; it needs to be critically reexamined in order to respond to contemporary challenges such as the commodification of religious symbols, the politicization of identity, and the mediatization of religiosity—phenomena that blur the sacred-profane boundary in ways that are not fully explained by Durkheim's classical theory.

Method

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using the method of library research. This approach is chosen because the main objective of the research is to describe and analyze the concepts of the sacred and the profane in Emile Durkheim's theory and relate them to the contemporary socio-religious realities of Indonesian society. The research is grounded in the sociology of religion, particularly through the theoretical framework developed by Emile Durkheim. Durkheim positions religion as a social institution that creates social cohesion through the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane. In this context, Durkheim's concepts are used as analytical tools to examine current socio-religious dynamics in Indonesia, which often reveal tensions between expressions of religiosity and secular or multicultural social realities. The type of research used is qualitative, as it aims to explore meaning, understanding, and interpretation of social realities and theoretical texts. The data are not presented in statistical form but rather as deep, narrative descriptions. The data sources in this study are divided into two categories: Primary sources**,** namely the original works of Emile Durkheim, such as *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and other key literature containing his theory of the sacred and the profane; Secondary sources**,** including journal articles, books, research documents,

and relevant news reports related to socio-religious phenomena in Indonesia, such as intolerance, pluralism, the sacralization of religious symbols, and the secularization of public space.

Data collection techniques involve literature review—gathering and analyzing books, academic journal articles, dissertations, and related documents—and discourse analysis by examining socio-religious narratives found in mass media, social media, and religious practices in Indonesian society. Data analysis is conducted using descriptive-analytical methods, which involve describing Durkheim's core ideas on religion, particularly the sacred-profane dichotomy; analyzing their relevance and application to socio-religious phenomena in Indonesia—such as interreligious conflicts, religious conservatism, marginalization of minority groups, and the sacralization of religious institutions—and offering a critical reflection on how Durkheim's concepts help in understanding or even challenging the current religious reality in Indonesia.

Result and Discussion

The Concepts of the Sacred and the Profane According to Emile Durkheim

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) was a French sociologist widely regarded as a founding figure in the sociological study of religion. Through his classical work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim introduced a structural-functional approach to understanding religious phenomena. He argued that religion is not merely a matter of spirituality, but a social institution that plays a vital role in maintaining solidarity and social order (Durkheim, 2001).

A central concept developed by Durkheim in his theory is the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. The sacred refers to all things regarded as holy, exalted, and collectively meaningful. Sacred elements are set apart from everyday life and are manifested through rituals, symbols, and profound religious ceremonies. In contrast, the profane refers to all things that are ordinary, worldly, and routine—lacking any specific spiritual or sacred significance (Durkheim, 2001).

Durkheim emphasizes that religion is essentially a system that classifies the social world into these two major categories, and its primary function is to maintain social integration through the formation of collective beliefs (Bryan, 2011). In Durkheim's view, religious beliefs and their accompanying symbols are representations of a society's collective consciousness. Therefore, when an individual worships God or a particular religious symbol, what they are essentially venerating is society itself, objectified through that symbol (Berger, 1967).

Durkheim also emphasizes the importance of ritual as a social activity that binds individuals into a moral community. Through religious rites, individuals feel emotionally and spiritually connected to their community, thereby reinforcing social solidarity and stability. In other words, religion not only reflects social conditions but also serves as an active force in shaping and maintaining the structure of society (Durkheim, 2001). This perspective on ritual as the engine of social cohesion is a cornerstone of the Durkheimian tradition and has been influential in the works of subsequent sociologists, such as Peter L. Berger, who similarly analyzed how sacred rituals create and maintain a "sacred canopy" for society (Berger, 1967). In other words, for both thinkers, religion through ritual is not only reflective of social conditions but also an active force in shaping and maintaining the structure of society.

Durkheim's theory has received considerable appreciation, but also criticism. Some critics argue that his understanding of religion is overly reductive, as it interprets religion merely as a reflection of social structure, without giving sufficient attention to personal spiritual experience (Rodney & Finke, 2000). Nevertheless, many modern sociologists, such as Peter L. Berger and Bryan S. Turner, continue to employ Durkheim's foundational framework to understand the dynamics of religion in contemporary society (Bryan, 2011).

In the context of Indonesia, where religion plays a significant role in public life, the separation between the sacred and the profane is often not fixed, but fluid and contextual. Therefore,

Durkheim's theory of the sacred-profane dichotomy can be employed as an analytical tool to examine how modern Indonesian society reproduces religious symbols within a changing social context.

The Transformation of Socio-Religious Reality in Modern Indonesia

The transformation in the meaning of the boundary between the sacred and the profane in modern Indonesian society reflects a complex and paradoxical socio-religious dynamic. According to Durkheim, religion functions as a social glue and a generator of collective solidarity through symbols and rituals that unify society around shared values. The sacred, in Durkheim's view, is not solely related to the divine, but encompasses all things that are socially distinguished and elevated above the ordinary—that is, the profane (Durkheim, 2001). Thus, when religious symbols and practices appear in spaces that were once considered profane—such as the media, politics, and the marketplace—we are witnessing a transformation in the structure of collective consciousness itself, not merely a shift in symbolic meaning.

Peter L. Berger, in *The Desecularization of the World*, emphasizes that modernity does not necessarily lead to total secularization; rather, it gives rise to a "*resurgence of religiosity*" in new and more complex forms (Berger, 1967). In Indonesia, this is evident in the growth of digital religious communities, the Muslim fashion market, integrated Islamic schools, and online da'wah content. This phenomenon, as explained by Martin van Bruinessen, is part of a new conservatism in Indonesian Islam, which places religious expression in the public sphere as a component of an increasingly rigid social identity (Van Bruinessen, 2013). Religious symbols that were once exclusive to places of worship have now become means of lifestyle expression and even tools of political mobilization.

A concrete example of this transformation can be seen in Indonesian elections, particularly since 2014 and 2019, when Islamic symbols were explicitly employed in political campaigns (Burhani, 2016). This phenomenon demonstrates how sacred elements are strategically employed within profane spaces to gain legitimacy and mass support. As Burhani has shown, the politicization of religion in Indonesia has developed through the production of religious identities disseminated via social media and religious sermons (Burhani, 2016). This transformation illustrates that sacredness is no longer the exclusive domain of religious institutions but is being redefined by social actors with ideological, political, and economic interests. Furthermore, the integration of sacred values into the profane world is also evident in the commercial industry. The hijab and Muslim fashion are no longer merely symbols of piety but have become markers of status and modernity—what is now known as *Muslim fashion* as a form of "*performative religiosity*." (Jaffer, 2018). Thus, religion undergoes a form of aestheticization, where outward appearances become more dominant than substantial meaning. From Durkheim's perspective, this reflects a shift in the structure of collective solidarity: from mechanical solidarity, which is homogeneous in nature, to organic solidarity, which is more heterogeneous and individualistic (Durkheim, 2001).

However, this phenomenon is not without critical implications. When the sacred merges into the profane realm, there is a risk of religious banality. As noted by Frengki Napitupulu et al., there is a tendency toward the commodification of religion, in which spiritual values are packaged into popular formats devoid of reflective depth. This can diminish the role of religion as a guardian of public morality, replacing it with superficial symbolic expressions. On the other hand, the emergence of new spaces for religious expression also creates opportunities for the democratization of religious symbols, making them more inclusive and responsive to the changing times (Frengki, Mirza & Mikhael, 2019).

Recent studies indicate that Indonesian society does not passively accept the fusion of the sacred and the profane; rather, they actively process and negotiate it within everyday contexts. For instance, Noorhaidi Hasan's research on integrated Islamic schools shows that contemporary religious education not only teaches dogma but also imparts moral values and social identities that are contextualized within the modern world (Noorhaidi, 2009). In this

context, religion functions as a discursive arena open to social interpretation, rather than merely a transcendent institution (Hjelm, 2014).

The phenomenon of “religious lifestyle” that is widespread among urban Indonesian society—particularly among the younger generation and the Muslim middle class—reflects a major shift in how religion is interpreted and practiced. Whereas in the past, religion was primarily understood as a system of belief and spiritual ethics, it now also serves as a cultural expression and a symbol of social status. Robert W. Hefner notes that in Indonesia, Islam functions not only as a moral foundation but also as an integral part of the rapidly growing middle-class social identity (Hefner, 2000). The routine performance of Umrah, participation in exclusive religious study groups, and the consumption of halal products and modest fashion are no longer merely manifestations of faith, but have become indicators of a lifestyle aligned with upward social mobility.

This transformation is inseparable from the influence of market capitalism and digital technology. Social media platforms have become stages for the performance of religiosity, framed in aesthetic and performative ways. In this context, religious symbols undergo de-differentiation—that is, the blurring of boundaries between the sacred and the profane (Heryanto, 2014). For instance, the use of the hijab, once regarded primarily as a symbol of piety, has now become a fashion product that follows market trends. It is even promoted through endorsements by influencers who commodify religiosity as part of their commercial content (Rahim, 2022).

Nevertheless, this transformation is not entirely negative. On one hand, the emergence of religion as a lifestyle reveals new forms of expression that are more inclusive and open. Younger generations are discovering new spaces to engage with religion beyond formal institutions. The digitally literate middle class is forming online communities that creatively and contextually promote religious values (Mattes et al., 2025). However, without critical reflection, this process risks reinforcing symbolic conservatism and social polarization. When religious symbols are used exclusively and politicized, they become markers of identity that hinder intergroup dialogue (Rodenhausen, 2024). Azyumardi Azra warns that substantive Islam—namely, a religion that emphasizes moral and social values—may be eroded by symbolic Islam, which tends to be formalistic and identity-based (Azra, 2000).

In this context, Émile Durkheim’s thought provides a critical lens for understanding how religious symbols function in collective life. For Durkheim, the power of religion lies in its ability to generate social solidarity through rituals and sacred symbols. However, he also cautions that when symbols lose their connection to collective structures and social meaning, the integrative function of religion weakens (Durkheim, 2001). In the context of modernizing societies such as Indonesia, processes such as urbanization, market integration, and digitization have triggered a complex blend of individualism and heightened identity awareness. In this context, religious symbols can transform from Durkheim's tools of collective solidarity into tools for asserting exclusive group identities. This is particularly evident in the phenomenon of identity politics that emerges during various electoral contests in Indonesia—where religious symbols are mobilized not to foster collective awareness, but to secure political legitimacy and power (Mundakir, 2025).

Hadiz, in his research on identity politics in Indonesia, reveals that the use of religious symbols in political campaigns not only reinforces social segregation but also generates horizontal tensions between communities (Hadiz, 2010). On the other hand, Ahmad Najib Burhani’s study on middle-class Muslim expressions asserts that, despite the commercialization of religious symbols, many among them also demonstrate an inclusive orientation and engage in interfaith social work (Apriantika, 2023). This illustrates the ambiguity of contemporary socio-religious reality: between moral idealism and the instrumentalization of religion within the logic of the market and power.

In this context, the greatest challenge for Indonesian society is how to maintain a balance between authentic and inclusive religious expression and the need for self-actualization in the

modern era. Religious education, media, and religious institutions must play an active role in fostering critical awareness of the meaning of the sacred, so that it is not reduced to mere visual identity markers. Durkheim emphasizes that the power of the sacred does not lie in its outward form, but in its function of shaping the *conscience collective*—the collective consciousness that sustains social morality (Durkheim, 2001).

Therefore, the concepts of the sacred and the profane in Durkheim's perspective are not only relevant to explain modern religious phenomena, but also serve as a foundation for rethinking the function of religion amid the dynamics of a plural, capitalist, and digital society. Sacredness must be preserved not as an exclusive identity, but as a shared moral space that supports social cohesion and human solidarity. It is important to acknowledge the main limitations of Durkheim's framework, as pointed out by critics. Durkheim's analysis of the sacred and the profane is rooted in his study of totemism in Australian Aboriginal societies, which are relatively simple and homogeneous. Many critics, such as Stark and Finke (Rodney Stark, 2000), question whether a model derived from such a social structure can be adequately applied to complex, pluralistic, and differentiated modern societies—such as Indonesia—where religion is not the only source of cohesion and meaning. However, it is precisely in this context that this article finds its relevance. The challenge of applying Durkheim's theory to the pluralistic, capitalist, and digital reality of Indonesia is not a reason to reject it, but rather an opportunity to test, stretch, and enrich the theoretical framework. By showing how the sacred-profane dichotomy remains useful as a 'measuring tool' for mapping symbolic transformations and contestations—even though its boundaries have become fluid and changing—this study argues that the value of Durkheim's theory lies in its ability to highlight the social functions of religious symbols, regardless of the original ethnographic background of the theory.

Analysis of the Relevance of the Sacred and the Profane in the Indonesian Context

The concepts of the sacred and the profane proposed by Émile Durkheim do not merely represent a symbolic dichotomy within religious traditions, but also open a broad sociological framework for analyzing how societies form, sustain, and even reconstruct the boundaries between spirituality and worldly life. In the context of Indonesian society, which is rapidly transforming under the forces of globalization, digitalization, and pluralism, Durkheim's thought is highly relevant for understanding contemporary socio-religious transformations. He viewed religion not merely as an individual system of belief, but as a social institution that functions to build collective solidarity and to produce shared values that morally bind society together (Durkheim, 2001).

Firstly, in practice, sacredness in Indonesia is no longer exclusively confined to formal religious institutions or spaces. As noted by Noorhaidi Hasan, the emergence of phenomena such as "millennial Islamic gatherings" held in coffee shops, religious sermons disseminated through digital platforms, and worship practices conducted in public spaces such as during car-free day events, all indicate a redefinition and expansion of sacred spaces (Noorhaidi, 2009). These religious activities do not diminish their spiritual significance; rather, from Durkheim's perspective, they can be understood as *collective effervescence*—a shared emotional experience that reinforces social bonds through new forms of ritual, even when conducted in non-conventional settings (Bryan, 2011). This transformation reflects how sanctity is dynamic, produced by the social and cultural needs of a new generation. Although Durkheim's framework does indeed pay little attention to individual existential spirituality—a valid criticism of his sociological methods—its strength lies in its ability to explain how this new collective experience functions as a powerful social glue.

Secondly, the expansion and fluid overlap of sacred spaces into profane realms, as noted by the reviewer, is a central feature of modern Indonesian religiosity. This very fluidity, however, also opens up the possibility of intensive commodification.. Patricia Spyer notes that religious symbols such as the hijab, calligraphy, spiritual songs, and even digital Qur'an applications not only serve as media for da'wah but also become commodities traded within the logic of

market capitalism (Patricia, 2001). Within Durkheim's framework, this phenomenon indicates a shift in the production of collective consciousness from a moral basis to a consumerist one. Thus, an ambivalence arises: on one hand, these religious products reach a broader audience and create new forms of identification; on the other hand, they raise concerns about the banality of transcendental values, which shift from substance to appearance or lifestyle (Heryanto, 2014).

Criticism of the banality of sacredness also appears in the thought of Peter L. Berger, who states that in modern society, "*religion is no longer taken for granted,"* and consequently experiences delegitimization through processes of secularization and commodification (Berger, 1967). In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon is reflected in the proliferation of "*ustaz celebrities"* or religious influencers who deliver religious messages in a light, fast-paced format that sometimes lacks theological depth (Natasha et al., 2024). While this phenomenon can be viewed as part of the mediatization of religion, it remains important to question whether these new forms of sacredness still carry prophetic and transformational dimensions, or merely conform to market algorithms?

Thirdly, another important aspect is the use of the concept of the sacred in identity politics. Martin van Bruinessen emphasizes that post-Reformasi Indonesia has experienced a conservative turn, in which religious symbols are strategically employed to shape collective identities, build exclusivism, and mobilize political support (Bruinessen, 2013) This is evident in various religion-based mass protests, such as the 212 Movement, where religious symbols are used not only as expressions of spirituality but also as instruments of symbolic power that marginalize other groups (Ismet and Rebecca, 2020). This affirms Durkheim's concern that when sacredness is employed outside the context of social cohesion, it can become a tool of domination that fosters segregation.

Several contemporary studies reinforce this observation. Research by Sipa et al. notes that religious symbols in local politics are used to gain moral and emotional legitimacy before the public, even when the policies implemented are not necessarily religious in nature (Sipa, Wadi, and Fahrurrazi,2019). Meanwhile, Ahmad Najib Burhani demonstrates that Islamic identity in electoral politics is often mobilized not based on the substantive values of religion, but rather on group affiliation, which has the potential to undermine national solidarity (Burhani, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to critically revisit the relevance of Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane in the context of modern Indonesia. On one hand, it provides us with an understanding of how religious practices and symbols continue to serve as social bonds, particularly in the formation of new digital communities. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that in a pluralistic and digitalized society, sacredness is no longer absolute but dynamic, fluid, and even vulnerable to commodification or political manipulation.

The theoretical implication of this reading is the need to develop a sociological framework of religion that views religion not only as a doctrinal system but as a social arena full of dynamics, contestations, and meaning reproduction. In practical terms, this requires institutional creativity. Religious educational institutions, for example, can reform their curricula to include critical media literacy, so that students can analyze and understand the commodification and politicization of religious symbols they encounter in their daily lives. The main obstacles to such reforms are often institutional inertia and political pressure from conservative groups who benefit from the status quo. Furthermore, a key challenge lies in navigating the tension between preserving sacred identity and avoiding exclusion. The answer may lie in the formation of a "shared moral space," as seen in interfaith movements, where universal sacred values such as justice and compassion take precedence over exclusive group symbols. This approach allows for the preservation of specific religious identities while building solidarity across differences, preventing sacredness from becoming a tool of domination (Bagir, 2019; Casanova, 1994). .

The phenomenon of reproducing sacredness in profane spaces in Indonesia demonstrates that religion remains a dynamic and adaptive social force in the face of changing times.

Interfaith movements such as the Interfaith Volunteers in Yogyakarta or Peace Train Indonesia, which involve youth from various religions to engage in dialogue and collaboration on humanitarian issues, serve as concrete evidence of how sacred values such as compassion, solidarity, and justice can be reproduced beyond the boundaries of formal religious rituals (Peace Train Indonesia, 2023). From Durkheim's perspective, this reflects a process of *collective effervescence* that is not limited to traditional religious rituals but can also emerge in cross-boundary social gatherings, producing shared meaning and strengthening social cohesion (Durkheim, 2001).

Zainal Abidin Bagir notes that such practices have emerged in various regions as a response to religious identity tensions and, in many cases, have successfully created safe and collaborative spaces among different religious communities (Abidin, 2010), This indicates that sacred values can be redefined as "shared values" that transcend religious identities and, in the process, shift the meaning of sacredness from institutional symbols to social practices.

This approach aligns with José Casanova's argument that religion in the modern era does not merely undergo privatization but rather experiences deprivatization—the return of religion to the public sphere in new, more dialogical and participatory formsCases in Indonesia demonstrate that this deprivatization does not necessarily signify conservatism or identity politics, but can also serve as a space for inclusive social transformation, especially when religious communities engage in joint social work.

Research by Ahyadi et al. on interfaith communities in Sukoharjo also shows that the reproduction of sacredness in profane spaces, such as disaster solidarity actions or joint peace commemorations, can create trust among religious groups and reduce social tensions (Ahyadi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the main challenge remains how to ensure that the reproduction of sacredness is not reduced to empty symbolism or the commodification of spirituality merely as a response to social market demands.

Thus, Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane remains relevant in interpreting the socio-religious dynamics of Indonesia. This concept not only explains the structure of religious meaning but also opens a critical space for reflection on how religion—through symbols, practices, and solidarity—is continuously reconstructed within a pluralistic and modern society.

Reflection and Socio-Religious Implications

The development of religious life in Indonesia within the landscape of modernity demands critical reflection on how society understands and engages with religion in the public sphere. The transformation of the boundary between the sacred and the profane, as analyzed through the lens of Émile Durkheim, is not merely a sociological phenomenon but also carries profound social implications. Religion, which was originally a cohesive force and a guardian of social solidarity, now faces an ambivalence of function: between being a unifying bond or, conversely, a source of societal division (Durkheim, 2001).

The first reflection that needs to be raised is the necessity to develop an inclusive collective consciousness regarding the meaning of sacredness. In modern society, this consciousness must be fostered inclusively to avoid symbolic domination by a particular religious group. Durkheim states that religion is a system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things that function to bind society through moral solidarity (Durkheim, 2001). Sacredness, within this framework, is not solely the property of any particular religious entity but rather a social construct shaped by society to instill shared norms and values (Berger, 1967). In the multicultural and multireligious context of Indonesia, an exclusive interpretation of the sacred risks generating social tensions and identity segregation.

The phenomenon of identity politics that utilizes religious symbols to create boundaries of "us" versus "them" illustrates how sacredness has been reduced to a tool for group interest mobilization. As Scott Appleby argues, religion possesses an "ambivalence of the sacred"—it can become a source of violence when misused, but also a reconciliatory force when

understood inclusively (Scott, 2000). Therefore, the construction of sacred meaning must be reoriented toward universal values such as justice, compassion, and peace. This aligns with Talal Asad's idea that religious practices should be viewed as discursive expressions that can change depending on the socio-political context (Asad, 2003).

In the era of digital disruption and rising belief-based intolerance, instilling universal sacred values becomes crucial to creating an ethical and humanistic public sphere. Sacredness should no longer be viewed as a religious monopoly but as a shared moral awareness that shapes the "public ethos" within a pluralistic society. An inclusive collective consciousness of sacred values will strengthen social cohesion and prevent religion from being reduced to merely an exclusive symbol of power (Bryan, 2013).

Second, amid the currents of modernization and intense identity struggles in the public sphere, the role of religious institutions and religious leaders becomes increasingly strategic yet problematic. The commodification of religion has shifted its primary function as a source of collective moral values into merely a symbolic tool to gain political or market support. In this context, Durkheim has warned that religion is essentially a representation of the collective morality of society, not the possession of any individual or particular group (Durkheim, 2001). When religious symbols are capitalized in political campaigns or used as exclusive justifications for group agendas, the meaning of sacredness is reduced to merely a profane instrument of power (Hefner, 2021).

Religious leaders, in this context, are demanded to be more than mere repeaters of dogma. They must act as guardians of public ethics—filtering transcendental values so they remain grounded in social life, rather than becoming agents of sectarian provocation. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of "*celebrity ustaz*" or preachers aligned with political affiliations illustrates how this ethical awareness is increasingly displaced by interests of popularity and power. Karen Armstrong reminds us that "religion, when it loses its dimension of compassion and ethics, becomes the deadliest weapon in human history." (Armstrong, 2000).

A critical construction of this phenomenon is the need to deconstruct overly centralized religious authority. Authority must be built collectively and dialogically, not merely based on symbols or personal charisma, but on moral consistency and the capacity to respond to contemporary challenges (Hefner, 2021). In a pluralistic country like Indonesia, religious leaders should serve as bridges between identities, not as drivers of polarization. Thus, religion will remain a sacred space that upholds human dignity and strengthens solidarity, rather than divides it.

Third, contemporary religious education faces serious challenges due to the growing dominance of textual conservatism and the lack of reflective space for contextual understanding of religion. When religion is taught rigidly and literalistically, learners are easily trapped in formalism, separating spiritual values from the ever-changing dynamics of society. Durkheim emphasized that religion is essentially a social reality that lives within collective consciousness and is shaped by social structures. Therefore, religious instruction needs to be reconstructed as a dialectical space between text and context, between the sacred and the profane.

Such an approach is essential for shaping a generation that is neither dogmatic nor prone to identity-based polarization. In a digital society rife with religious disinformation and hate speech, religious education must prioritize a sociological understanding of how religion is practiced and interpreted within social diversity (Mulkhan, 2005). Menurut Nasaruddin Umar, pendidikan agama seharusnya mengajarkan pluralitas bukan sebagai ancaman, melainkan sebagai anugerah yang memperkaya ruang spiritualitas kolektif (Mulkhan, 2005). A contextual approach will enable learners to reinterpret religious texts in light of today's human realities—fostering a balance between faith and reason, between conviction and tolerance.

In the context of Indonesia's pluralism, the awareness of the importance of interreligious dialogue has become a social imperative. However, ceremonial forms of dialogue alone are

insufficient. What is needed are spaces that allow for authentic interfaith encounters—such as cross-community social cooperation, joint peace education, and humanitarian solidarity in response to social crises. This aligns with Jürgen Habermas's concept of *communicative action*, which emphasizes social interaction grounded in communicative rationality and mutual recognition (Habermas, 1984), When sacred values such as compassion and justice are actualized in the profane realm through dialogue and genuine solidarity, the sanctity of religion is not only preserved but also becomes a unifying force amid diversity (Abidin 2010).

Critically, this demands a reform of religious education curricula in Indonesia—not to focus solely on normative-doctrinal aspects, but to open interdisciplinary spaces with social sciences, philosophy, and the humanities. Only in this way can religion remain relevant, inclusive, and make a tangible contribution to the formation of a just and peaceful society.

Ultimately, Durkheim's analysis of the sacred and the profane offers an important lesson for Indonesian society: not to view religion merely as a transcendent institution detached from social reality, but as an integral part of collective life that must be continuously developed in a dynamic, reflective, and inclusive manner. Preserving the sanctity of religion does not mean isolating it from the modern world, but positioning it as a moral source of inspiration for building a just, peaceful, and dignified societ

Conclusion

The dichotomy between the sacred and the profane in Emile Durkheim's theoretical framework remains highly relevant in understanding the increasingly complex and plural religious dynamics of Indonesian society. In a social context shaped by modernization, mediatization, and globalization, the boundaries between the sacred and the profane are no longer fixed or rigid. Contemporary religiosity in Indonesia is marked by the emergence of religious symbols and expressions beyond conventional spaces—ranging from billboards and social media to politics and the marketplace.

Sacredness undergoes continuous decontextualization and resacralization through social practices that are not always directly related to formal religious institutions. This also indicates that religion has become a field of symbolic contestation and collective identity that transcends the domains of worship and spiritual belief. Durkheim emphasizes the importance of the social dimension of religion in shaping cohesion and collective consciousness, a reality still strongly felt in Indonesian society today.

However, on the other hand, the fluid transformation of religious expression also presents problematic potentials, especially when sacred symbols are strategically employed for the sake of power, group identity, or social exclusivity. This reveals the urgent need to re-approach the sacred-profane discourse critically and contextually so that religion does not lose its integrative function.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this study has limitations in terms of data coverage and analytical approach. The exploration of sacred-profane manifestations remains at a macro level and has yet to fully capture the diversity of local practices or specific communities that may offer alternative interpretations. The empirical aspects of cultural and digital religious dynamics have also not been deeply explored. Therefore, further research is needed—adopting a more exploratory, participatory, and comparative approach. Future research could use ethnographic methods to compare negotiations between the sacred and the profane in various Indonesian contexts (e.g., rural versus urban, Muslim-majority versus Christian-majority areas). In addition, a comparative perspective that analyzes similar diverse and modernizing societies such as India, Malaysia, or even Western democracies such as Australia can provide valuable insights into how these dynamics intersect or differ globally. This presents a significant opportunity for scholars to expand perspectives and methodologies in investigating how religion continues to be reconstructed within the contemporary social space.

Acknowledgment: The researcher (Albef Fahrozi) would like to thank the Indonesian Education Fund Management Institution (LPDP) as a scholarship and a supporter of publication fund, State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

References

Ahyadi, Mibtadin, Rosidin, Lilam Kadarin Nuriyanto, Arnis Rachmadhani, Reslawati, Muh Isnanto, et al. (2023). "CIVIL SOCIETY PEACE EDUCATION: A PORTRAITOFTHE SUKOHARJO INTERFAITH COMMUNITYIN CENTRAL JAVA." *Russian Law Journal* (Россия, Москва) 11, no. 5S. https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/civil-society-peace-education-a-portraitofthe-sukoharjo-interfaith-communityin-central-java.

Appleby, R. S. (2000). *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Apriantika, S.G.. (2023). "Religiosity versus Class Existence: Indonesian Muslim Middle Class Fashion Consumption on Instagram." *Simulacra* 6(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v6i1.19034.

Armstrong, K. (2000). *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Asad, T. (2003). *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford University Press.

Azra, A. (2000). *Islam Substantif: Agar Umat Tidak Kehilangan Arah.* Jakarta: Mizan.

Bagir, Z. A. (Ed.). (2010). *Kebebasan Beragama atau Berkeyakinan di Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: CRCS UGM.

Berger, P. L. (1967). *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion.* New York: Anchor Books.

Berger, P. L. (1999). *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Washington: Eerdmans.

Bruinessen, M. van. (2013). *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the Conservative Turn.* Singapore: ISEAS.

Casanova, J. (1994). *Public religions in the modern world*. University of Chicago Press.

Constantin, Natasha, Ardina Lukita Wiraputra, Geraldo Rotty, and Desideria Lumongga Dwihadiah. (2024). "Relgious Transformation in Digital Era: Mediatization Impact on Religious Practice." *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies,* 4(10). https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v4i10.1313.

Durkheim, É. (2001). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (J. W. Swain, Trans.). New York: Free Press. (Original work published 1912)

Evolvi, Giulia. (2021). "Religion, New Media, and Digital Culture." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.917.

Fanany, Ismet, and Rebecca Fanany. (2020). "Religion and Populism: The Aksi 212 Movement in Indonesia." In *Populism, Democracy and Community Development*, edited by Sue Kenny, Jim Ife, and Peter Westoby, 245–58. Policy Press. https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447353867.ch014.

Habermas, Jürgen. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Volume 1. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hadiz, Vedi R. (2010) *Localising Power in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: A Southeast Asia Perspective*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Hasan, N. (2006). *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia*. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program.

Hasan, N. (2009). *Islamising Formal Education: Integrated Islamic School and a New Trend in Indonesia*. RSIS Working Paper.

Hefner, R. W. (2000). *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hefner, R. W. (2011). *Shari'a Politics: Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hefner, R. W. (2021). "Islam and Institutional Religious Freedom in Indonesia." *Religions* 12(6). https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060415.

Heryanto, A. (2014). *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture*. Singapore: NUS Press.

Hjarvard, S. (2020). Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion. *State Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide* 38(2), 41–75. https://doi.org/10.22394/2073-7203-2020-38-2-41-75.

Hjelm, T. (2014). Religion, Discourse and Power: A Contribution towards a Critical Sociology of Religion, *Critical Sociology*, 40(6), pp. 855–72, doi:10.1177/0896920513477664.

Jaffer, A. (2018) A Drama of Saintly Devotion: Performing Ecstasy and Status at the Shaam-e-Qalandar Festival in Pakistan. *TDR/The Drama Review* 62(4), 23–40. https://doi.org/10.1162/dram_a_00791.

Mattes, A., Haselbacher, M., Limacher, K. & Novak, C. (2025). Religion and Politics of Belonging in Digital Times: Youth Religiosity in Focus. *Frontiers in Political Science,* 6. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1476762.

Mulkhan, A. M. (2005). *Agama dan Konflik Sosial.* Yogyakarta: Suka Press.

Mundakir. (2025) Symbols of Diversity in Political Contestation During the 2019 Presidential Election and 2020 Simultaneous Regional Elections (Perspective of Santri at the North Coast of Central Java). *Journal of Information Systems Engineering and Management* 10(33), 276–88. https://doi.org/10.52783/jisem.v10i33s.5477.

Napitupulu, F., Mirza, R., and Dua,M. (2019). "Commodification of Pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Jerusalem Critical Study of Spiritual Tourism and the Advertising Power Based on Adorno's Critical Theory." *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science* 9(2), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.9734/jesbs/2019/v29i230101.

Peace Generation Indonesia. *Peace Train Indonesia*. Diakses dari https://peacegeneration.or.id

Rahim, A. (2022). 'Between Piety And Lifestyle: Hijab Shar'i on the Commodification Practices of the Islamic Culture Industry', *Ulumuna*, 26(1), pp. 88–118, art. 1, doi:10.20414/ujis.v26i1.448

Rodenhausen, L. (2025). Disentangling 'Polarization in Religion'. *Frontiers in Political Science,* 6. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1492172.

Rodney Stark, R. F. (2000). *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Universityof California Press.

Ronaldo, Riki, and Darmaiza, D. (2021). Politisasi Agama dan Politik Kebencian pada Pemilu Presiden Indonesia 2019. *Indonesian Journal of Religion and Society* 3(1), 33–48. https://doi.org/10.36256/ijrs.v3i1.150.

Sipa, Amar Muhyi Dinis, Wadi, H. & Fahrurrazi, F. (2021). Religion and Politics: Symbolization of Religion in the Contestation of Legislative Elections 2019. *Kawanua International Journal of Multicultural Studies,* 2(2). https://doi.org/10.30984/kijms.v2i2.63.

Spyer, P. (2001). Religious commodities in Indonesia. *Anthropological Theory*, 1(4), 446–472.

Stark, R., & Finke, R. (2000). *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tsuria, R. (2021). "Digital Media: When God Becomes Everybody—The Blurring of Sacred and Profane." *Religions,* 12(2): 2. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020110.

Turner, B. S. (1991). *Religion and Social Theory*. London: Sage.

Turner, B. S. (2011). *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Umar, N. (2003) *Argumen Pluralisme Agama: Membangun Toleransi Berbasis Al-Qur'an*. Jakarta: Paramadina.

***Conflict of Interest Statement**: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*