

Negotiating cultural and religious identity through prophetic ethos: A critical discourse analysis of Kuntowijoyo's *Impian Amerika*

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ABSTRACT

In Indonesia, there are literary works deal with the issues of multiculturalism and religion, but those synthesize both in creative way are still rare. This study examines Kuntowijoyo's novel *Impian Amerika* as a case of what the author terms "prophetic multicultural literature", a literary form integrating multicultural values with a prophetic ethos grounded in humanization, liberation, and transcendence. Employing Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The study analyzes the novel across three dimensions: textual structure, social cognition, and social context. The findings reveal that: (1) *Impian Amerika* construct prophetic multiculturalism through the interplay of religious and cultural values rooted in a prophetic ethos; (2) multiculturalism identity in the novel is shaped by minority status, diasporic longing, and Indonesian nationalism; and (3) the novel advanced a moderate religious discourse that transitions from textual normativity to contextual and historical interpretation. Theoretically, this study contributed to the operationalization of prophetic multicultural literature as an analytical category within CDA, offering a frame for examining the intersection of religion, identity, and social justice in literary discourse.

I. INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is not merely an abstract ideal but a lived reality that continues to evolve amid modernity, shaped by subcultural, perspectival, and communal dynamics (Parekh, 2002; Kymlicka, 2015). In the context of Indonesia, one of the world's most culturally and religiously diverse nations, these dynamics carry significant implications for social cohesion (Zarbaliyev, 2017). When left unaddressed, multicultural tensions risk deepening societal polarization (Taufiq, 2017). Literature and language as social practice are key elements in the production

of discourse (Insani & Budiwati, 2021). It is within this landscape that multicultural literature emerges not only as artistic expression, but as a critical site for negotiating identity and social values.

Among Indonesian literary figures, Kuntowijoyo occupies a distinctive position as both a historian and cultural thinker who pioneered the concept of prophetic literature, a literary paradigm grounded in the Qur'anic principles of humanization, liberation, and transcendence (Qodir, 2015; Kuntowijoyo, 2019). His novel *Impian Amerika* offers a particularly compelling case for examining the intersection of multiculturalism and religious identity, set against the backdrop of the Indonesian diaspora experience in the United States. The contrasting multicultural context of the two countries, where American multiculturalism is largely shaped by immigration and ethnic marginalization, while Indonesian's emerges from historical and political processes requiring its own ideological framework (Taufiq, 2017), makes of this novel a rich site for critical analysis. Despite the significance of this work, studies specifically examining *Impian Amerika* through the lens of prophetic multicultural literature remain limited, warranting deeper scholarly attention.

Scholarly engagement with multicultural and religious literature has grown considerably, with studies examining identity construction, cultural representation, and the role of narrative in shaping social values (Musa, 2011; Arslane, 2020). These studies collectively demonstrate that literary analysis of multiculturalism and religion is neither static nor conclusive, findings vary significantly depending on cultural context, theoretical framework, and analytical approach. Of particular relevance is the integrative-interconnective approach proposed by Abdullah (2020), which bridges religious and cultural studies to reveal how literary works simultaneously carry multicultural and prophetic dimensions. However, existing research has yet to systematically apply this framework alongside Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how prophetic multicultural values are discursively constructed in Indonesian literary works, particularly in Kuntowijoyo's *Impian Amerika*. This gap underscores the need for a more theoretically grounded and methodologically rigorous analysis.

Central to this study is Kuntowijoyo's concept of prophetic literature, literary works that go beyond aesthetic expression to embody a spiritual and humanitarian mission (Kuntowijoyo, 2019). Rooted in the Qur'anic verse Ali 'Imran 3:110, this concept operates through three interconnection principles: humanization (*ya'muruna bi l-ma'ruf*), liberation (*yanhawna 'ani l-munkar*), and transcendence (*tu'minu billah*). Philosophically, Kuntowijoyo drew inspiration from Muhammad Iqbal's reflection on the Prophet's *Mi'raj*, which symbolizes a return to the world not for retreat, but for civilizational transformation and social justice (Iqbal, 2016; Kuntowijoyo, 2017b). In this sense, prophetic literature is not merely an act of worship, but a form of humanitarian commitment that actively engages with social reality (Qodir, 2015). When applied to the multicultural context of *Impian Amerika*, these principles provide a

powerful analytical lens for examining how culture and religious identity is constructed and negotiated in the novel.

Multicultural literature, broadly understood as literature that reflects interactions among diverse cultures, ethnicities, religions, and traditions (Alamsyah et al., 2023), has been examined extensively in the Indonesian context. Akhmad Taufiq's (2017) seminal work on Indonesian multicultural literature traces identity construction and state discursive practice across a century of novels, highlighting the ethnic and religious dimensions of Indonesian identity as represented in literary works. Taufiq's analysis affirms that multiculturalism is a dynamic social fact, with identity discourse continuously evolving in response to shifting political and cultural forces. Building on this foundation, the present study moves beyond descriptive identity mapping to critically examine how prophetic values are discursively embedded in *Impian Amerika*, contributing a new analytical dimension to the study of multicultural literature in Indonesia.

Literature serves as a vital window into the cultural and social identity of a society, portraying lived experiences and embedding values within narrative structures (Ratna, 2011; Kamelia, et al. 2023; Hidayat, 2022). Religious identity, in particular, is not merely reflected through characters' beliefs but is actively constructed through the values and discourses woven into literary narratives (Somae, 2021). A useful distinction exists between Islamic literature, grounded in religious texts, and Islamic-themed literature, informed by Islamic values more broadly (Azhari et al., 2022). Studies on religious identity in Indonesian literature have consistently found that religious values function as a protective force against negative cultural influences, while the interaction between religion and culture generates new and hybrid identity formations (Hakim, 2010; Rahaya, 2021; Rahaya et al., 2020). These findings are particularly relevant to *Impian Amerika*, where the diasporic experience of Indonesian Muslim characters navigating American society provides a rich context for examining how religious and cultural identities are maintained, negotiated, and transformed through literary discourse.

Multicultural literature can be examined through a range of theoretical lenses, and the choice of framework significantly shapes the analytical outcomes. This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach (Abdullah, 2020) combined with Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, enabling a simultaneous examination of both the prophetic and multicultural dimensions embedded in *Impian Amerika*. While previous studies, including Taufiq (2007) on identity construction in Indonesian novels, Rahaya (2021) on religious values in literary works, and Rahaya et al. (2007) on the interplay between culture and religion, have made valuable contributions, none has specifically applied this combined framework to Kuntowijoyo's novel. This study therefore positions itself at the intersection of prophetic literary theory and critical

discourse studies, offering a methodologically innovative approach to the analysis of culture and religious identity in Indonesian multicultural literature.

The urgency of this study is furthered underscored by the persistent challenges of religious and cultural insurance in Indonesia, which continue to fuel societal polarization, particularly in politically charged moments (Purwaningrum & Harmoko, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires a dialogical, integrative, and interconnected engagement between culture and religion (Abdullah, 2024). Multicultural literature, in this regard, serves not only as a medium for promoting tolerance and sustaining national identity, but also as a vehicle for anchoring humanitarian values within a transcendental framework (Muna & Lestari, 2023). Literature broadly plays a role in preserving cultural identity amid social change (Aminudin et al., 2024). Kuntowijoyo's *Impian Amerika*, with its prophetic ethos, exemplifies how literature can bridge the social and transcendental, offering a model for how multicultural values can be grounded in religious conviction without compromising openness and inclusivity. A critical examination of this novel is therefore timely and socially relevant.

Despite the growing body of research on multicultural and religious literature, critical studies that integrate prophetic literary theory with discourse analysis remain scarce, particularly in the context of Indonesian novels (Aula & Ichwan, 2022). Many existing works tend to engage with surface-level thematic analysis rather than critically examining how cultural and religious values are discursively constructed and negotiated within literary texts. This study addresses that gap by critically examining Kuntowijoyo's *Impian Amerika* as a case of prophetic multicultural literature, employing Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis across three analytical dimensions: textual structure, social cognition, and social context. In doing so, it seeks to illuminate how prophetic multicultural values are embedded, negotiated, and communicated through literary discourse, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the intersection between religion, culture, and identity in Indonesian literature. This study is guided by the following central question: How are prophetic multicultural elements represented in Kuntowijoyo's *Impian Amerika*?

II. METHOD

This study adopts Teun A. van Dijk's paradigm of critical discourse analysis to analyze the ideas and narratives of multiculturalism in the novel. Critical discourse studies are problem-oriented, multidisciplinary, and critically engage with discourse (Dijk, 2015). Five key features of critical discourse analysis include: (1) a commitment to promoting equality and social justice, (2) attention to how discourse produces or reproduces social dominance, (3) constructing narratives of justice within the framework of equality, (4) ethical assessment and critical examination of norms that may serve ideological or vested interests, and (5) close collaboration with marginalized or dominated groups (Haryatmoko, 2017).

The analysis is organized around van Dijk's three analytical dimensions. First, textual structure examines the linguistic and narrative strategies in the novel, including lexical choices and narrative framing that construct multicultural and religious identities. Second, social cognition investigates the ideological representations embedded in the text, focusing on how the author's prophetic worldview shapes the portrayal of cultural and religious identity. Third, social context situates the novel within its broader social cultural conditions, examining how the diasporic experience of Indonesian Muslims in the United States informs the construction of multicultural values. These three dimensions enable systematic and layered analysis of how prophetic multicultural literature operates as both a literary and ideological discourse.

This study employed a qualitative method within the paradigm of critical discourse studies. The method and paradigm were used to uncover the aspects and ideas of multicultural prophetic literature amid cultural and religious identities in the novel *Impian Amerika* by Kuntowijoyo. A critical examination was carried out using a descriptive-analytical method by first describing the cultural and religious identities in the novel, then analyzing them critically and methodologically by presenting the aspects and ideas of multicultural prophetic literature. The primary data for this research consisted of the novel *Impian Amerika*, while the secondary data comprised previous relevant studies and scholarly works.

The methodological steps of this study were as follows: First, determining the research subject as the source of primary data, namely the novel *Impian Amerika* by Kuntowijoyo. Second, identifying the research object, which in this case referred to the cultural and religious identities portrayed in the novel and their connection to multicultural literature and the prophetic ethos. Third, conducting an inventory, categorization, and interpretation related to the key elements in the critical analysis of cultural and religious identities. Fourth, undertaking a thorough, careful, and critical study of multicultural literature concerning cultural and religious identities using a descriptive method. Fifth, conducting a critical evaluation, drawing conclusions, and formulating new understandings as answers to the research questions, presented systematically and comprehensively in relation to multicultural prophetic literature and the issues of cultural and religious identity (Mustaqim, 2016).

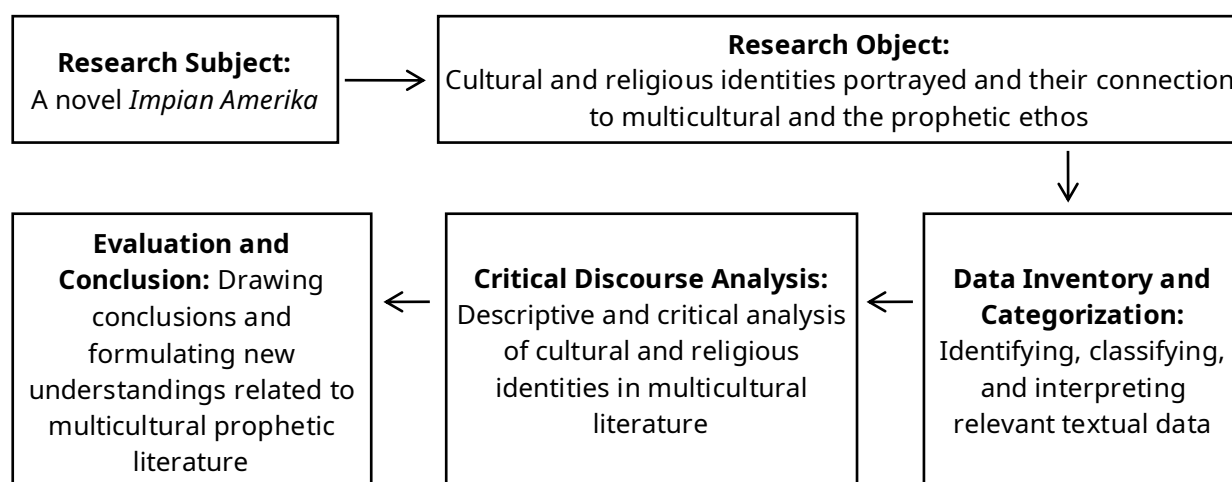


Figure 1. Methodological steps

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Multicultural Literature

The study of multicultural literature is closely related to the national dimension, encompassing a nation's ideology, national identity, and state institutions (Taufiq, 2017). Meanwhile, prophetic literature concerns the dimensions of humanity and faith. This study aimed to weave diversity into a bond of tolerance, characterized by mutual support, exchange of ideas, and acceptance without negating others, all grounded in faith. Critical discourse on issues of nationality, equality, human rights, and social harmony could be effectively conveyed through literary works, particularly novels.

The novel *Impian Amerika* (The American Dream or The American Myth) served as Kuntowijoyo's narrative to depict freedom, economic mobility, social mobility, and cultural mobility (Kuntowijoyo, 2017a). The themes explored in this work included employment, family, and cultural shock (Rahaya, 2021). The novel is a collection of short stories initially serialized in *Harian Republika* starting in 1996 and later published as a book by Benteng Budaya in 1998.

The multicultural aspects of the novel were evident in its discussion of cultural diversity, which also incorporated the ethos of prophecy. Examining the data through van Dijk's three analytical dimensions, we identify how this prophetic multicultural discourse is constructed at multiple levels. At the level of textual structure, the novel employs narrative framing and dialogic strategies that position characters across culture, ethnic, and religious boundaries. At the level of social cognition, Kuntowijoyo's prophetic worldview shapes the ideological representation of multicultural encounters: the intermarriage between Mustofa, an Indonesian Muslim, and Liza, an American of Jewish descent (p. 14), for instance is not merely a romantic narrative but a discursive enactment of transcendence, where faith becomes the

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unifying principle across difference. At the level of social context, these encounters are situated within the broader condition of the Indonesian diaspora in the United States, a context marked by minority status, cultural negotiation, and the challenge of maintaining identity amid a dominant cultural majority.

Table 1. Multicultural aspects of *Impian Amerika* by Kuntowijoyo

Page	Text	Context
14	"I am from Kuningan, Cirebon, a true Sundanese. Liza is of Jewish descent, a Lutheran by religion, though she never goes to church. Her father is from the Bronx, her mother from Texas, and her father works in Willimantic."	The complex differences in faith and nationality do not become an obstacle for Mustofa, an Indonesian Muslim, and Liza, an American of Jewish descent, to love one another. They marry according to Islamic rites after Liza recites the shahada. Despite experiencing cultural shock, they manage to adapt to each other's cultures. This reflects the transcendental aspect that runs alongside humanization and liberation.
26	"It was at work that he met Vanesa, a Filipino-American woman, and they fell in love. When people remind him about nationalism, 'It's a pity if she doesn't end up with an Indonesian'. Lukito has a quick answer: 'Love transcends national borders.'"	Lukito, an Indonesian in America, falls in love with Vanesa, a Filipino woman living in America. Their love binds them beyond their different national and cultural backgrounds. The humanization aspect breaks through the barriers of primordialism.
28	"Lukito's family also frequently attend national and religious events. On such occasions, Vanesa wears a kebaya, making her indistinguishable from Indonesian women. Those who are fond of them will call them 'Kama-Ratih'."	Vanesa's adaptation to her husband Lukito's Indonesian culture is shown by her wearing the traditional kebaya during national and religious events. The word " <i>kama</i> ", the God of Love in Indian mythology, who symbolizes love, has even been absorbed into the <i>Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)</i> , Indonesia's official dictionary (2025). This reflects prophetic values through the sensitivity of the humanistic side in religious and national ceremonies.
36	"His experience in Saudi Arabia turns out to be very helpful. He can speak English and Urdu, thanks to his interactions with Indians in Saudi. His English with Black people is fairly good, and he speaks Urdu fluently with Indians and Pakistanis."	Tengku Syakir, an Acehnese preacher in New York, advances his career because of his multilingual abilities, speaking Arabic, English, Urdu, and, of course, Indonesian. He gains these skills through extensive interaction, broad insights, and the straightforward manner typical of Acehnese people. His capacity to connect across nations and languages embodies a universal humanistic outlook.

These data samples affirmed that *Impian Amerika* embodied multicultural prophetic literature. It could also be stated that Kuntowijoyo, as a cultural figure and literary author, used literature as a medium to highlight Indonesia's multicultural issues and its interactions with other global cultures. The prophetic ethos became the hallmark through which he conveyed multicultural values, that is the integration of the spirit of humanization, liberation, and transcendence.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity in literary works, especially novels, is an essential element that cannot be overlooked. Literature itself reflects societal events, each shaped by distinct cultural and social identities. Within the issue of multiculturalism, cross-cultural encounters lead to the evolution and transformation of cultures through processes such as assimilation, acculturation, and integration (Poerwanto, 1999). Cultural shock becomes a common phenomenon experienced by almost everyone engaged in cross-cultural contact. Amidst their existing cultural identities, individuals have to learn new cultural skills, adapt to new environments, manage stress, adjust to different cultural norms, and establish relationships with new people (Ward et al., 2020). As a result, responses to culture shock often involve resistance and negotiation.

Kuntowijoyo's depiction of culture shock in the novel posed a challenge to national cultural identity, a logical consequence of cross-cultural encounters. Yet through his work, Kuntowijoyo emphasized the importance of recognizing one's rights as a global citizen living within a particular nation, including equality and protection in practicing one's beliefs and cultures. At the level of textual structure, these rights are articulated through dialogue and proverbs that construct a discourse of cultural pride alongside openness to difference. Through the character Soleman from Madura, for example, Kuntowijoyo portrayed both social equality and its challenges. At the level of social cognition, we identify how Kuntowijoyo's prophetic worldview, shapes the ideological representation of cultural identity in the data presented in Table 2. At the level of social context, we find that local cultural identity tended to strengthen as characters found themselves minorities among the majority. This reinforced not only Indonesian nationalism, but also a deep longing for the homeland.

Through expressions in dialogue and proverbs, Kuntowijoyo highlighted pride in national cultural identity while remaining open to other cultures. Beyond rights, he also addressed themes of freedom, justice, and tolerance. Through the character Soleman from Madura, for example, Kuntowijoyo portrayed both social equality and its challenges.

Table 2. Cultural identity aspects in *Impian Amerika*

Page	Text	Context
1	"He always proudly refers to himself as 'Madura,' even though every Indonesian in New York knows he was born in Surabaya."	Soleman, a man of Madurese descent born in Surabaya, consistently identifies himself as Madurese wherever he goes. His pride in his ethnic identity grows even stronger while living in New York City, America.
2	"Women need men, and men need women.' It seems that even in New York, Soleman remains untouched by feminism."	Soleman firmly upholds his cultural identity, particularly regarding family values. For him, the idea of "freedom" does not extend to remaining single in the name of equality and career. Differences in perspectives on gender equality are not an issue, as long as both sides recognize the importance of maintaining mutual honor and acknowledging that men and women need each other. This illustrates the humanistic aspect (humanization).
122	"We find that Tio's family is very friendly, perhaps because they were born and raised in Semarang. Tio calls the meeting a moment of ' <i>kangen-kangenan</i> ' (expressing longing and reconnecting) and ' <i>ngumpulake balung pisah</i> ,' (gathering separated bones, meaning a family reunion) and he speaks Javanese fluently."	Tio's family, Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent living in America, continues to embody their Javanese cultural roots. Their friendliness and fluent use of the Javanese language reflect a strong attachment to their heritage, demonstrating the characteristically warm and welcoming Eastern humanism and a deep pride in their cultural identity.
123	"People must love their own culture. It's the only thing that distinguishes us from Americans, Japanese, or Chinese,' said Tio."	Every summer, Tio sends his son, Lie, to Indonesia to learn traditional dance, either in Bali or Yogyakarta. This strong pride in their national cultural identity makes Tio's family seem even "more Javanese" than native Javanese themselves.

In the novel, local cultural identity tended to strengthen as characters found themselves minorities among the majority. This reinforced not only Indonesian nationalism but also a longing for their homeland. Kuntowijoyo criticized the phenomenon of dehumanization resulting from globalization, manifesting in human objectification, aggression, and spiritual alienation, particularly evident in Western societies such as the United States (Kuntowijoyo, 2019). The value of humanity (humanization) in Kuntowijoyo's prophetic concept served as a foundational thought integrated with cultural identity.

Religious Identity

Religious identity in *Impian Amerika* appeared in the beliefs held by the characters and the values embedded in the narrative. Because it carried Islamic values, the novel was more accurately categorized as Islamic-themed literature, rather than Islamic literature in the doctrinal or symbolic sense. The values promoted a positive and transcendental approach to life. Sociologically, the interaction between religion and diverse cultures in literature could represent a pluralistic and tolerant view of Islam.

Readers of literature possess the freedom to interpret texts; however, their critical depth and ideological stance greatly influenced their interpretations, particularly concerning religious identity. This also applied to interpreting religious identity as reflected in the first principle of *Pancasila*, Belief in the One and Only God. Among conservative and Islamist groups, this principle was often interpreted as a mandate for implementing Islamic law in Indonesia (Ichwan & Slama, 2022).

Understanding religious identity in this novel required adopting Kuntowijoyo's prophetic paradigm, which included humanization (*amar ma'ruf*), liberation (*nahi munkar*), and transcendence (*tu'minuna billah*). At the level of social cognition, we find that this framework shapes how Islamic values are ideologically represented as interconnected and grounded in reality rather than isolated abstractions (Kuntowijoyo, 2018). Kuntowijoyo himself viewed his literary works as a form of worship, or "literary worship," reflecting both his religious values and his engagement with reality (Kuntowijoyo, 2019).

Expressions of Islamic values appeared throughout the novel's dialogue and storyline, emerging through cross-cultural, cross-national, and interfaith encounters. At the level of textual structure, we identify how these values are discursively constructed through specific lexical choices and narrative framings. At the level of social context, we observe that the ideal religious identity portrayed in the novel leaned toward moderation, emphasizing balance, excellence, goodness, and the middle way.

While the novel does not explicitly address LGBT issues, reflecting the social taboos of its era, Kuntowijoyo's theocentric humanist framework nonetheless offers a productive lens for engaging with contemporary question of identity, rights, and religious ethics that extend beyond the novel's immediate historical context. They are now seen as part of the multicultural development of modern societies through subcultural patterns or the emergence of distinct cultures within established ones (Parekh, 2002).

*Negotiating cultural and religious identity through prophetic ethos: ...*Table 3. Religious identity aspects in *Impian Amerika*

Page	Text	Context
9	"Father says that all people are the same. There are no honorable or dishonorable people. There are only those who believe and those who do not."	The narrative places egalitarianism and social ethics in the right moment. Although all human beings are equal and honor in God's eyes depends on piety, this does not mean neglecting the importance of social relations and appropriate moral conduct. Here, the value of transcendence (faith) guides the principle of human equality and dignity.
12	"Religion is right; one lie must be covered by another. I do not want to carry double sins."	This highlights the importance of honesty, even when it is painful and even when there are tempting short-term pleasures ahead. One lie inevitably leads to another. The value of transcendence directs towards liberation values, so that people free themselves from accumulating sins by avoiding lies.
15	"I will not sin by violating God's rules."	An offer to "sleep" with a non-marital partner is rejected. Awareness of religious and cultural identity becomes a strong foundation for thinking and acting. The value of transcendence serves as guidance so that every thought and action does not lead to wrongdoing.
183	"We all feel like defendants. The religious study gathering becomes very quiet, not because of attentiveness but out of fear. We feel relieved once that 'trial' is over."	A regular Islamic study gathering for Indonesians in New York is once lively and enthusiastic, thanks to a preacher skilled at integrating textual and contextual Islamic knowledge, making religion feel alive. However, after the preacher is replaced by someone with a rigid and judgmental style, the gathering becomes deserted. The atmosphere of family warmth disappears. This shows the importance of humanization, liberation, and transcendence being implemented as an inseparable unity.

The ideal religious identity portrayed in the novel leaned toward moderation, emphasizing balance, excellence, goodness, and the middle way (Nashir, 2019). Kuntowijoyo shifted religious discourse from text to context, from normative to historical, through the articulation of life values such as piety, obedience, tolerance, peace, equality, justice, honesty, open-mindedness, mutual understanding, and non-coercion. Although transcendence was prominent in discussions of religious identity, it was always linked to principles of humanization and liberation.

IV. CONCLUSION

The novel *Impian Amerika* by Kuntowijoyo represents a form of prophetic multicultural literature that reflects the interaction between cultural and religious values based on a prophetic ethos. We find that the strengthening of cultural identity in the novel arises from minority status, longing for the homeland, and Indonesian nationality, serving as the author's critique of dehumanization amid modernization and westernization. The novel further idealizes a moderate and religious identity, narrating religious discourse by moving from text to context and from the normative to the historical, expressed through life values such as tolerance, justice, honesty, and non-coercion.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the operationalization of prophetic multicultural literature as an analytical category within van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, demonstrating that its three dimensions, textual structure, social cognition, and social context, provide a systematic lens for examining how prophetic values are discursively constructed in literary texts. We acknowledge, however, that the focus on a single literary work constitutes a limitation. Future research would benefit from extending the analysis to a broader corpus of Kuntowijoyo's works or to comparative studies across other Muslim, including reader-response perspectives to enrich interpretive depth.

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