




Religious reality in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic

Chafit Ulya^{1*}, Sarwiji Suwandi¹, Nugraheni Eko Wardani¹,
Titi Setyoningsih¹, Ulfa Rizqi Putri², Else Liliani³

Abstract: During the COVID-19 pandemic, short story literary works emerged with the theme of the pandemic. The pandemic creates new problems at the level of the religious habits. This is a dilemma faced by the Indonesian people. This research aims to describe the reality of religion during the pandemic in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data source is nine short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic published in online media in the period 2020-2021. The technique used is note-taking, which involves the writer reading and recording the findings of religious realities in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this research show two aspects of religious reality in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely worship rituals and religious habits. The reality of religion in worship rituals in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic is to invite people to use religion to resolve the pandemic without worsening conditions. Meanwhile, the reality of religious diversity in religious habits shows the phenomenon of people still trying to realize religious habits during Eid by paying attention to the health protocols that apply amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, religious reality, religious habits, worship rituals



AFFILIATION

¹Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

²Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

³Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author:

✉ chafit@staff.uns.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2021, the community responded in various ways. One such response was the creation of literary works that explored the social phenomenon of the global outbreak (Dubey et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2020). For writers, the pandemic presented new themes to explore in their works. Literary pieces focused on the COVID-19 pandemic emerged on multiple media platforms, particularly online (Guo et al., 2020; Rajkumar, 2020; Xiong et al., 2020).

Literary works always have a close connection with social phenomena because literary works cannot be separated from the social lives of their authors (Vana, 2021; Peacocke, 2020). Therefore, studying literary works also means learning about the social life of society (Wicaksana, 2019), especially the social life of the author (Wellek & Warren, 1989). Literary writers have the power to turn current social phenomena into social realities in the works they create. This is because literary works are a reflection of people's social lives. From a sociological perspective, a writer's experiences and observations of social phenomena in their environment influence the creation of their literary work (Hermawan & Shandi, 2019).

Literary works are an image or reflection of the reality of a person's life. The social realities in the writer's life can be used as references in creating literary works. Literary works express reflections, descriptions, or reflections of people's lives (Syarifuddin & Zakiyah, 2022). A literary work provides a complex and dynamic picture of human life (Achساني, 2020). The picture of life is intended as a social reality. This reality is the source of the creation of literary works (Fatimah et al., 2021). The social reality depicted in a literary work consists of various aspects that occur in life, such as religion, education, economics, society, and culture (Soekanto, 2010).

The COVID-19 pandemic as a social phenomenon also contributes to a picture or reflection of social reality in people's lives. One element of social reality that is interesting to study in depth is the reality of religion. Therefore, this research focuses more on the religious realities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The fact of religion is fascinating to study because religion gave birth to two groups of people with different principles and views on facing and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic situation (Castillo et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has created new policies on religion that must be implemented in all countries, including Indonesia. As a country with a majority of Muslims, the Indonesian government, through the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), also issued regulation number 14 concerning the Organization of Worship in Situations of the COVID-19 outbreak, which regulates worship administration during the pandemic. These regulations, among other things, contain prohibitions on congregational worship, such as congregational prayers, Friday prayers, recitation or tabligh akbar, and the like. This regulation was, of course, made to prevent and reduce the transmission of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia. However, in reality, there is also a lot of conflict among Muslims regarding the issuance of this regulation.

The MUI fatwa has resulted in two groups of people with different attitudes. The first group represents most people who follow the fatwa to prevent and control the epidemic. However, some groups oppose the fatwa because of concerns related to stability in worship (Noor, 2020). This fact shows society's conflict regarding the reality of religion during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Religious issues during the pandemic have become widely discussed in the mass media, both in print and online. This happened because the COVID-19 pandemic created new problems at the level of the religious system. During the pandemic, there was a change in the way of worship from the habits that had previously been practiced (Jubba, 2021). The existence of government policies regarding activity restrictions creates changes to the system of religious worship. Places of worship, such as mosques, churches, temples, and monasteries, must restrict their congregation from worshipping together (Putra, 2019). Religious gatherings are known to contribute to the spread of COVID-19. Consequently, during the pandemic, religious holidays cannot be celebrated in the usual manner.

Indonesia is a country that has a society with a high level of religiosity. This is proven by the first principle of Pancasila, which reads, “Belief in One Almighty God.” These precepts prove that every citizen must prioritize God in their life behavior. Indonesian society has a structured worship pattern. Community customs related to religion include celebrating religious holidays, which are celebrated grandly. Routine obligatory worship is also carried out in places of worship, such as by Muslims who pray five times a day in mosques and Christians who perform Saturday and Sunday church services. Besides, people are used to routine activities with religious nuances, such as charity activities involving many people. However, the pandemic has changed the religious system that has been formed in society so far. The government implemented new policies that limited religious rituals in society.

In principle, the changes that occur do not change the substance of worship, which is explicitly outlined in religious teachings (Jubba, 2021). However, people’s communal worship habits were forced to change to personal ones. The worship system, which usually involves public places of worship, must also change. Worship rituals in places of worship must be limited to reduce the number of COVID-19 victims. In addition, charity activities must be temporarily suspended. Even the funeral process for COVID-19 victims cannot be carried out optimally according to their respective religions. This causes people to need help accepting new policies. Some Indonesians have the perspective that religion can be a way to mitigate the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, religion has two dual functions that are contradictory to each other (Regus, 2022). The first function is that religion can potentially reduce or even stop a pandemic (Barmania & Reiss, 2021; Fardin, 2020). The second opposite function is that religion can be a medium for the spread of COVID-19 (Ahmed & Memish, 2020; Ebrahim et al., 2020). The pattern of worship that is a dilemma for the community includes the *safety* system when praying in congregation at the mosque, which initially had to be close together and then changed to being distanced. Also, congregational Friday prayers at mosques, which are mandatory for male Muslims in certain areas that are COVID-19 red zones, must be changed to regular noon prayers, which are held at their respective homes. Christians also experienced a change in the worship system, which initially had Saturday and Sunday services held in the church, which had to be changed to online services.

Every religion has flexible policies in its worship system to deal with pandemic problems like this. However, people are experiencing a dilemma because they are used to the pattern of worship as explained above. The dynamics of policy changes in the religious system cause dilemmas for society. This dilemma causes differences in worship systems for each community group. There are community groups that comply with health protocols by adhering to the policies that have been implemented. Groups of people violate policies by continuing to worship as before the pandemic.

The religious phenomenon during the pandemic prompted the writer to write a short story on the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several short stories with a pandemic theme present a reflection of the religious reality that occurred during the pandemic. The nine short stories raise the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic while providing an overview of the religious realities that happened during the pandemic.

These nine short stories illustrate the reality of religion during the pandemic. The author attempts to reveal the phenomenon of religious system dilemmas that occur in society. Therefore, research regarding the reality of religion during the pandemic is interesting. Many short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic provide valuable lessons about the importance of obeying government regulations regarding religious rituals. Forms of conflict in religious ceremonies and rituals are shown in the story but are dominated by those who agree with social restriction policies. This proves that literary works and concise stories can act as a funnel for socializing government policies, especially in dealing with disaster situations. For this reason, studying religious realities in short stories with a pandemic theme is essential.

Aside from the significance of this research, research that focuses on the reality of religion in short stories during the pandemic has never been carried out before. Research on short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic has been carried out, but only with a study of social reality. Research on social reality in short stories during the pandemic includes research on social reality during the pandemic in the short stories *Atai Balak and Plan for Idul Fitri* (Krismawati, 2021) and social reality in the short story collection *Surai Pandemic* (Maharani, 2022). Other research on short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic tries to relate short stories set in the COVID-19 pandemic as educational material for global diversity (Sufanti et al., 2022). Correspondingly, there is also research on efforts to make the COVID-19 pandemic a theme raised in students' short stories through the learning process (Antari, 2023; Suwandi et al., 2021).

Based on the description above, this research aims to describe and explain the religious reality found in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this research will contribute to efforts to strengthen theories about social reality in literary works, especially religious social reality. Meanwhile, this research will be a reference for further studies examining literary works with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

This research is included in the qualitative descriptive type because it bases the conclusion on the data analysis carried out by the theory used (Sutopo, 2006). Meanwhile, the approach used to analyze religious reality is the literary sociology approach (Wellek & Warren, 1989) combined with the sociology of religion (Arifin et al., 1996). Literary sociology examines literature as a reflection of society's life and vice versa (Rahayu et al., 2022; Wu-

landari et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the sociology of religion is applied to look at religious rituals and procedures that occur in society (Arifin et al., 1996).

This research produces data in written form obtained from data sources (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The data source in this research is a document of nine short stories that were selected based on a purposive sampling technique. The analysis technique used in this research combines content analysis techniques with interactive analysis techniques. Content analysis techniques are used to conclude the text in the context of its use (Krippendorff, 2004). Meanwhile, interactive analysis techniques are carried out by following four analysis stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Theoretically, triangulation techniques were used to obtain data with a reliable level of validity. This research further produced findings that short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic depict the reality of religion in society during a pandemic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This effort to analyze religious reality cannot be separated from the sociological theory of religion, which is part of social reality (Soehadha, 2021). Theoretically, religious reality is divided into two concepts: reality with a theological pattern and reality with a sociohistorical (cultural) pattern (Arifin et al., 1996). Theological reality leads to the rituality of worship, while sociohistorical reality leads to religious habits. This research uses these two modes of reality to discuss religious realities in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The system that regulates worship, the order of faith or belief in God, and the rules of interaction between humans and their environment is called religion. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the lives of religious communities. This influence changes society's perspective on the implementation of worship. Indonesian people are accustomed to carrying out worship in places of worship. The government has also designated religious holidays as holidays so that people of a religion can worship solemnly. However, the pandemic has provided a different perspective on implementing worship. Due to the pandemic, restrictions must be imposed on implementing group worship in places of worship.

The religious reality that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic is depicted in the short story. The religious reality found in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic is divided into two types: religious reality in worship rituals and religious reality in religious habits. The table below provides an overview of the research findings from the nine short stories studied.

Table 1. Short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic

No	Short Story Title	The Author	Data on Religious Reality in Worship Rituals	Data on Religious Reality on Religious Habits
1	Wabah	Risda Nur Widia	5	
2	Telur Ayam Sebelum Fajar	Edy Hermawan	1	
3	Menembus Pandemi	Ibedy Stiawan Z. S.		3
4	Masjid Kecil di Dekat Rumah	Sinta Yudisia	2	
5	Lebaran Tinggal Dua Hari Lagi	Komala Sutha		2
6	Mudik Singkat	Latifah Nurul Fauziah		2
7	Kehidupanku Setelah Adanya Virus Covid-19	Dinbel Pertiwi		1
8	Bukber di Masa Pandemi	Mumtaaz Qadhifa		1
9	Ramadhan Bersama Covid-19	Diaz Tavel S.		2
Total			8	11

Religious Reality in Worship Rituals

The religious reality during the pandemic illustrates the dilemma among the community in carrying out worship rituals. Eight data points were found regarding this worship ritual. Seven of the eight data points show the community's strong desire and encouragement to carry out congregational prayers at the mosque. In comparison, one piece of data shows a solution to the dilemma experienced by the community. An illustration of the reality of religion in worship rituals can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Description of Religious Reality in Worship Rituals

No	Data	Description of Religious Reality in Worship Rituals
1	Data 1	Prohibition of congregational prayers in mosques
2	Data 2	Prohibition of congregational prayers in mosques
3	Data 3	Places of worship are quite
4	Data 4	Complaints about the silence of the mosque
5	Data 5	Many places of worship are becoming increasingly quiet
6	Data 6	No one wants to make the call to prayer (Adzan)
7	Data 7	The routine of the call to prayer at the mosque is not coordinated
8	Data 8	Depend your fate on Allah

Religious Reality in Religious Habits

The reality of religious customs is demonstrated by two events experienced by Indonesian Muslims, namely the Ramadan fast and the Eid al-Fitr

holiday. These two events have distinctive religious routines and habits, including Eid traditions (going home, Eid clothes, ketupat, and so on) and Ramadan fasting traditions (breaking together, sharing takjil, tarawih, and so on). These two religious habits are the reality in the short story based on the COVID-19 pandemic. From the analysis results, 11 data points show the reality of religious diversity in religious habits, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Description of Religious Reality in Religious Habits

No	Data	Description of Religious Reality in Religious Habits
1	Data 9	New clothes for Eid
2	Data 10	New clothes for Eid
3	Data 11	New clothes for Eid
4	Data 12	THR for Eid needs
5	Data 13	Working overtime for Eid needs
6	Data 14	Advisory prohibiting going home
7	Data 15	Cannot go home because of social restrictions
8	Data 16	Eid virtually
9	Data 17	Non-fasting routines: fasting together, tarawih, etc.
10	Data 18	Non-fasting routines: fasting together, takjil, etc.
11	Data 19	Virtual fast-breaking

Discussion

The religious reality during the pandemic is the community's dilemma in carrying out worship rituals. The government has imposed restrictions on implementing worship at places of worship. People must familiarize themselves with this advice and choose to worship at home. However, many still have not entirely accepted the appeal of worshipping at home. Carrying out worship in places of worship has become a habit for Indonesians.

(Data 1) ... Mother forbade me to go to the Kubah Hijau. I have to stay at home.

(Data 2) "But I want to pray there. At Kubah Hijau"
 "Do you want to die?" Mom gets angry."

Data (1) and (2) are excerpts from a short story, "Masjid Kecil di Dekat Rumah." This short story tells about the character Nur, who has difficulty carrying out worship at home. His mother prohibited him from praying in the mosque because the house was too small for him to pray. People who frequently visit places of worship should consider practicing their worship at home. Society makes holy and sacred places so that worship carried out in places of worship becomes an obligatory activity for religious people. However, during the pandemic, places of worship suddenly became one of the places whose activities were limited. Religious people are advised not to carry out worship rituals in places of worship in order to reduce the rate of

victims of the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to soar.

(Data 4) “Wow, if it continues like this, there might not be any people come to pray,” said a congregation member at the mosque. “Even though in everyday life, the mosque is empty. When will we be able to prosper the mosque?”

(Data 6) “I do not want to die stupidly because I got this disease for the call to prayer (Adzan)”.

(Data 7) In the end, no one organized a mosque. The regular call to prayer five times a day no longer resounds. The mosque in the village was left to become a run-down place, neglected for more than three weeks.

Data (3–7) are excerpts from the short story “Wabah.” The short story tells the story of a city hit by a plague that causes death. The government prohibits residents from carrying out rituals outside the home. This causes the mosque to become increasingly quiet. No residents dared to go to the mosque or call the prayer (Adzan). “Wabah” also represents the religious reality during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data (6) shows people’s concerns about carrying out prayers at the mosque. People’s anxiety, which is contrary to this data, is shown by data (4). The village head figure is worried that his residents will not be able to prosper in the mosque if the mosque is left neglected.

(Data 8) If you are afraid of the plague, you will stay away from the plague. If you fear God, you will approach Him and be confident in facing the epidemic you fear. However, most importantly, you must know how to trust your God and how to deal with this terrible plague.

Data (8) is an excerpt from a short story, “Telur Ayam Sebelum Fajar.” This short story excerpt shows the answer to society’s dilemma in carrying out worship by implementing new policies during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from that, the quote explains two functions of religion during the pandemic. It is hoped that society will use religion to resolve the pandemic without worsening conditions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government implemented the PPKM policy (Implementation of Restrictions on Community Activities). People are advised not to carry out rituals outside the home. As a result, the pandemic caused many people to lose their jobs. Job loss impacts many areas of society. One of the economic impacts related to religious realities is that some people cannot buy clothes for Eid.

(Data 9) He is now worried about whether his family will eat or whether his children will be able to wear new clothes for Eid.

Data (9) are excerpts from a short story entitled “Menembus Pandemi.” The short story tells about Santo’s anxiety and how he has difficulty earn-

ing money from his job as a daily laborer. He has to pay various mandatory bills and buy his son new clothes for the Eid holiday, which is getting closer. The story about the anxiety of a character who has not bought Eid clothes is also shown in the short story below.

(Data 11) Eid is just a week away. Marhan complained for a long time. His five children have yet to be bought Eid clothes. Especially the eldest and second, every time he comes home, he often asks questions. When my father went to the market, he asked me to shop for clothes while telling me that his peers, school friends and playmates had all been bought clothes by their parents.

Data (11) are excerpts from a short story entitled “Lebaran Tinggal Dua Hari Lagi.” This short story tells the story of Marhan, who is waiting for his salary and THR (money) to pay zakat fitrah and buy Eid clothes for his five children. However, the salary he received had to be cut. He also did not receive THR money due to the pandemic, which made the shop empty of buyers.

Muslims in Indonesia have a habit of wearing new clothes on Eid. This culture has been created from generation to generation until it becomes routine and even tends to become inevitable. Islam teaches its followers to wear the best clothes on Eid. However, most Muslims in Indonesia choose to buy new clothes as their best clothes to wear on holidays. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people had difficulty buying new clothes. This is because many people have lost their jobs or their income has decreased.

(Data 13) Santo then followed this suggestion. He started to dare to leave the house. Not forgetting to wear a mask, he visited his friends. He also often hangs out with his colleagues in the newspaper media. He knows many journalists. Of course, John, a writer and journalist, was invited.

Data (13) shows the last quote from the short story “Menembus Pandemi.” The main character, Santo, leaves the house looking for activities to increase his income. This was done so that he could meet his daily needs and buy his son new clothes for the holidays. People who experience a dilemma because they cannot buy new clothes for the holidays then create a new phenomenon.

Indonesian people have habits related to religion. Muslims have a habit of wearing new clothes on Eid. This culture has been created from generation to generation until it becomes natural and even tends to become inevitable (Zamzami, 2020). However, due to the pandemic, some people find it difficult to buy new clothes. This was caused by many people losing their jobs or reducing their income during the COVID-19 pandemic (Indayani & Hartono, 2020).

People who experience a dilemma because they cannot buy new clothes for the holidays then create a new phenomenon. Research conducted by Halensiana and Pramonojati (2019) shows that lower-middle-class people are emerging and forcing their circumstances to fulfill the sense of prestige

caused by the hyperreality of consumerist culture when approaching Eid. In this case, the character Santo in the short story “Menembus Pandemic” not only tries to fulfill the consumerist culture of buying new clothes but also tries to fulfill his daily needs.

A religious habit that people often carry out is the Eid homecoming tradition. Eid homecoming is a culture of returning home, especially for Muslims ahead of Eid al-Fitr. Homecoming is a tradition passed down from generation to generation that completes the month of Ramadan. However, during the pandemic, the government prohibited people from going home. The government’s policy is to stop operating public transportation and carry out road patrols to prevent travelers from using private transportation.

(Data 14) On the other hand, the impact of the coronavirus has caused the government to urge people not to return to their hometowns temporarily to prevent the coronavirus from spreading to their relatives

(Data 16) However, for this celebration, my father decided not to go home even though the COVID-19 virus was starting to subside until we did Zoom to celebrate Eid with relatives in the opposite city.

Data (14–16) are excerpts from the short stories “Mudik Singkat” and “Kehidupanku Setelah Adanya Virus Covid-19,” which tell the story of my character’s life during the Covid-19 pandemic. The main character in the short story cannot go home due to government policy, which prohibits people from going home. The religious reality of other religious habits is the anxiety of people who want to go home and meet their families, but the government prohibits homecoming activities. The result of the ban on going home is that many people feel disappointed because they cannot meet their families and are trapped in overseas cities.

People’s disappointment increases when other religious habits, such as breakfasting together, cannot be carried out. Breakfasting together is one of the community’s social gathering activities during Ramadan. Iftar is carried out by a group of people who break their fast at sunset together in one place. Not only Muslims but people of other religions attended the breaking fast event. This happens because fasting together is usually carried out for various purposes, such as reunions, activities to introduce members of specific organizations, friendship activities, etc.

(Data 17) At that time, it also coincided with the month of Ramadan, which usually the month of Ramadan is filled with the recitation of the Quran, numbers (breakfasting together), and tarawih together. However, that is not the case now due to the virus that has hit.

Breakfasting together, a culture passed down from generation to generation in Indonesia, had to be stopped during the pandemic. The government prohibits fasting together because this activity can be a means of spreading

the COVID-19 virus. As a result of the prohibition on fasting together, some people feel disappointed and sad because they cannot meet their friends. However, this disappointment can be overcome with the existence of virtual space technology.

(Data 19) “Yu, why don’t you invite your friends to have a virtual breakfast together? That is it; just breaking fasting together via video call with your friends. If you break the fast together outside, you’ll have been walking for about an hour or half an hour before breaking the fast, and when you get to your destination, you’ll be chatting like that, right? “Well, if this is a substitute, you and your friends can read the Koran while waiting to break the fast.”

Data (19) is an excerpt from a short story entitled “Bukber di Masa Pandemi,” which tells the story of Ayu when she could not break the fast with her friends. The similarity between these two data is the solution given by the writer of a short story with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic to stay in touch even online in a virtual space. Technological developments answer the disappointment of people who cannot go home or have breakfast together.

Based on the data that has been explained, the characters in the short story complain about not being able to go home to meet their families. Homecoming is a religious tradition. Research conducted by Arribathi and Aini (2018) regarding homecoming from a cultural and religious perspective explains that homecoming combines religious teachings with the traditions of Indonesian society. The tradition of going home has been deeply rooted in Indonesia as an activity to return home ahead of Eid al-Fitr. Meanwhile, from a religious perspective, going home is related to various characteristics and dimensions of human life because going home is not only defined as the activity of returning home. People stay in touch with relatives and follow the Sungkeman tradition of apologizing for their mistakes. Even when returning home, some people also carry out the tradition of pilgrimage.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the government to take firm steps to prohibit homecoming and fasting together. People complain about the ban on going home because Ramadan is a moment to meet their families after working abroad for a year. Iftar together is also a moment to stay in touch with their old friends. However, as a result of the pandemic, people cannot go home or have breakfast together during the month of Ramadan.

However, the author wants to convey that gatherings with family and friends cannot only be done in person. Virtual space can be an alternative for continuing friendships in each other’s places without leaving the house. The government imposed a ban on going home and breaking fast together, which has had a positive impact. Based on research conducted by Haidar and Nurwati (2021) regarding the impact of the COVID-19 homecoming ban policy on homecoming culture in Indonesia, it is clear that it has had a positive impact. The prohibition policy was visible within two to three weeks and shows that society is disciplined in implementing this policy.

Ultimately, this step is a positive step that can end the spread of COVID-19.

The author intends to educate readers that the prohibitions implemented by the government are actually for good purposes. The government wants to end the COVID-19 pandemic immediately, so it has decided to impose activity restrictions, meaning people must stay home. The existence of short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic, apart from explaining the religious realities that occurred during the pandemic, also functions as a way for writers to help tackle the spread of COVID-19 by presenting educational stories. The author contributes to re-emphasizing solutions so that people's disappointment subsides due to the ban on going home and fasting together.

This research aims to describe the religious reality during the COVID-19 pandemic in short stories with a pandemic theme. The research results show two aspects of religious reality in pandemic-themed short stories: religious reality in worship rituals and religious reality in religious habits. The religious reality found in the five short stories above points to the Islamic religion. In this context, the two religious realities in this pandemic-themed short story correspond to two types of worship in Islam: *mahdhah* worship and *ghairu mahdhah* worship. The Prophet Muhammad explained these two types of worship. In a hadith qudsi, "Allah says, My servant cannot draw closer to Me with something that I love more than what I have required (*mahdhah* worship); if My servant continues to draw closer to Me with good deeds (*Ghairu Mahdhah* worship), then I love him" (HR Bukhari 6021).

Mahdhah worship is worship that has provisions from the propositions in the Quran and Hadith (Filasofa, 2021). The religious reality of worship rituals is an example of *mahdhah* worship affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as Friday prayers, five daily prayers in mosques, and recitation activities (Zulfa, 2015). Meanwhile, the *ghairu mahdhah* worship is a worship that has no provisions but is permitted to be done as long as it is based on the intention to seek Allah's approval (Filasofa, 2021). In this case, the reality of religious customs becomes an example of *ghairu mahdhah* worship. Thus, the religious reality during the pandemic impacted *mahdhah* worship, namely the rituality of worship, and *ghairu mahdhah* worship, namely religious habits.

The reality of religion in the short story described in the research results is very much in line with the depiction of people's lives during the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the religious system was associated with two opposing religious dimensions. The first dimension is that religion has potential rules to stop the pandemic (Barmania & Reiss, 2021; Fardin, 2020). However, in the second dimension, religion can also be a medium for spreading COVID-19 (Ahmed & Memish, 2020; Ebrahim et al., 2020). In this case, the second dimension is the point of concern and debate among society, and this is also what the writers raise in their short stories.

Religious patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic present new worship strategies that emphasize that religion provides freedom for its adher-

ents to carry out worship even in emergencies (Najoan, 2022). The worship regulations implemented in a religion can be adjusted flexibly to deal with the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic so that religious people can continue their worship without worsening the situation (Silfiah, 2020). This is in line with the fatwa of the ulama, which says, “La dharar wa la dhirar,” which means worship must not be dangerous to oneself or endanger others. Concerning this worship ritual, the writers invite readers to obey government regulations by limiting congregational worship in places of worship.

In the Islamic context, this belief is strengthened by the Qoran verse in Surah At-Taghabun verse 19, which means, “So fear Allah according to your ability, listen and obey, and make a good living for yourself. And whoever is kept from his stinginess, then they are the lucky ones.” This verse explains that Allah relieves His servants to worship according to their abilities, including in the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Warnings about the dangers of carrying out congregational prayers in mosques, as found in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic, align with research on the management of congregational worship. On the basis of protecting human lives during the pandemic situation, congregational prayers can be carried out by heeding applicable regulations, such as obeying health protocols, maintaining physical distance, and even eliminating congregational prayers when in the red zone (Hadana & Irwan-syah, 2021). The procedures for congregational prayers have also been regulated through MUI Fatwa No. 14 of 2020 concerning organizing worship services in situations of the COVID-19 outbreak. However, this fatwa is still debated among the public (Noor, 2020). So, when the short story with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic questions the implementation of congregational prayers in mosques, this reflects the social reality found in society.

The religious reality related to worship rituals in this research was only found in mosques’ rituality of congregational prayers. At the level of *mahdhah* worship, Friday prayers and congregational prayers are indeed the most debated acts of worship in society (Hasibuan & Yusram, 2020). This also happens only in certain circles, namely, people with high religious devotion. Therefore, the reality of religion in worship rituals was only found in three of the nine short stories analyzed. Meanwhile, at the *ghairu mahdhah* worship level, the community’s debate appears to be more widespread. This is proven by discovering religious habits in six of the nine short stories studied. Uniquely, the reality of religious customs is grouped around a critical event in Islam, namely the commemoration of the Eid al-Fitr holiday and its series.

Eid al-Fitr, or Eid, has a special position for Muslims in Indonesia. Muslims use this holiday moment to stay in touch, do *halalbihalal*, enjoy togetherness, and express joy. There is a homecoming tradition that has kinship, primordial, existential, and transformative values (Fuad, 2011). In the Eid tradition, there are also the meanings of cultural friendship, social friendship,

formal friendship, and even political friendship (Yanti, 2019). Beautiful gathering moments with the closest people cannot be held in a pandemic. This is what causes problems in society. Indonesian society, known as a communal society, is closely related to ceremonial activities that create large crowds, making it difficult to adapt to social distancing rules (Nastain & Rochwidowati, 2020). As a result, there was inner and social upheaval in society.

The reality of religion in this short story presents two social conflicts between religious communities. First, there is a debate between two groups of religious believers: those who support the policy of limiting worship rituals in places of worship and those who reject this policy on the grounds of obedience to religious commands. Second is the community's dilemma in dealing with Eid traditions under social restrictions. However, short stories provide common ground and the best solution for society, which is to use religion to resolve the pandemic without worsening conditions. In this way, these short stories have become a channel for educating the public about the importance of heeding government recommendations to overcome the spread of COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

The reality of religion in short stories with the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic shows two symptoms, such as the reality of religion in rituals of worship and religion in religious habits. The reality of religion in worship rituals is to invite people to use religion to resolve the pandemic without worsening conditions. Meanwhile, the reality of religious diversity in religious habits shows the phenomenon of people still trying to realize religious habits during Eid by paying attention to the health protocols that apply amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The existence of short stories can be used as an educational medium for the public, especially in responding to differences in religious views in an epidemic situation. This research supports previous research regarding the role of religion during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is hoped that the results obtained from this research can be followed up with literary works with other pandemic themes to obtain a more comprehensive representation of religious reality during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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