

## Reification of religious figures in *azab* genre religious sinetron: An interpretative phenomenological analysis

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### Abstract

**Purpose** - To examine the phenomenon of reification in the presence of religious figures in Indonesian "azab" genre religious television series through the lens of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition.

**Method** - This study employs an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and collects data through in-depth interviews with six informants (religious figures/actors, TV producers, directors, scriptwriters) involved in the production of "azab" genre religious television series.

**Results** - This study indicates that individuals involved in the production of "azab" genre television series tend to neglect the antecedents of recognition—as per Honneth's concept of reification—such as the formation of identity and the role of media as a platform for da'wah. This neglect of recognition is influenced by interpersonal dynamics among workers and the market-driven pressures of the production environment.

**Implications** - This article offers a deeper understanding of the reality of the commodification of religion (Islam) and the perspectives of audiences who consume religious television, which is often positioned as a means of da'wah.

**Originality/Value** - Theoretically, this article offers a new perspective on the dynamics and representation of religion (Islam) in the media. Through this, it is possible to develop academic critical strategies towards media and stakeholders who have a responsibility to improve religious broadcasting on television.



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**Kata kunci:**

Genre azab, analisis fenomenologi interpretatif, reifikasi tokoh agama, sinetron religi.

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**Abstrak**

**Tujuan** - Mengkaji fenomena reifikasi dalam kehadiran tokoh agama pada sinetron religi genre "azab" di Indonesia melalui lensa teori pengakuan Axel Honneth.

**Metode** – Penelitian menggunakan metode Analisis Fenomenologi Interpretatif dan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam dengan enam informan (tokoh agama/pemain, produser TV, sutradara, penulis skenario) yang terlibat dalam produksi sinetron religi genre "azab."

**Hasil** – Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa individu yang terlibat dalam produksi serial televisi bergenre "azab" cenderung melupakan pengakuan anteseden—seturut konsep reifikasi Axel Honneth— terkait makna dan identitas diri, juga tentang aspek lain seperti media sebagai platform dakwah, serta peran tokoh agama di dalamnya. Kondisi melupakan pengakuan ini dipengaruhi dinamika interpersonal di antara pekerja dan tekanan lingkungan produksi yang digerakkan pasar.

**Implikasi** – Artikel ini menyuguhkan kedalaman realitas pemaknaan isu-isu agama (Islam) dari perspektif pelaku industri sinetron religi yang secara umum diklaim sebagai sarana dakwah untuk melengkapi perspektif yang relatif populer dalam kajian media dan agama seperti komodifikasi.

**Orisinalitas/ Nilai** – Artikel ini menampilkan cara pandang baru dalam melihat dinamika hubungan sekaligus representasi agama (Islam) di media. Melalui ini, dimungkinkan pengembangan strategi kritik akademik terhadap media dan stakeholder yang memiliki kaitan tanggungjawab dengan pentingnya memperbaiki siaran agama di televisi.

## Introduction

Religious television series in Indonesia are commonly identified with Islam. Religious themes are typically represented in the presence of religious figures, settings, and the use of specific Islamic terms and phrases. The most prominent religious topic in Indonesian television series since around 2004 is the concept of divine retribution (*azab*). This genre has become increasingly popular and diverse, with themes such as the sinner who is punished by God, the patient believer who succeeds, and the sinner who repents. These themes are often justified through various markings, such as titles, story sources, and the appearance of religious figures at the beginning and end of the series (Nazaruddin, 2008).

From an academic perspective, this phenomenon is often viewed in terms of the motives behind its production and reproduction on television. Various themes in religious television series, for example, are seen as a form of creativity in conveying religious messages (Nasriah et al., 2014). But also, in the end, it shows the success of television in making Islam a market religion (Sofjan & Hidajati, 2013); more than a form of commodification of religious values at all levels, from production, distribution, exhibition, to consumption (Syahputra, 2016; Yusuf, 2016; Thadi, 2020).

In this context, audience acceptance, measured by ratings and share, has provided legitimacy for producers to continue producing and reproducing these programs, even though they are often considered harmful to faith/ *aqidah* (Hermawan, 2009), distort religious values (Yusriah, 2013), are merely commercial projects that imitate successful films or series (Rakhmani, 2014); present an irrational view of Islam (Mujiburrahman, 2015), exploit Islamic symbols (Yasir, 2015), and are often misinterpreted by the audience as a reflection of reality (Fitrianingrum & Suwanto, 2020). In general, these studies depict the practice of commodifying religion in Indonesian television through religious television series. It shows that the production of religious television series begins and ends with the sole purpose of generating profit, where religious symbols are constructed and adapted to commercial interests. Alternatively, the representation of religion in the media is merely the result of the economic motivations of industry players.

This research reveals that the phenomenon of religious television series can be seen as a reflection of personal perspectives and industry dynamics. It also suggests that the concept of religion is not merely a cognitive construct but is deeply ingrained in the beliefs and practices of the production team.

The assumption underlying this research is that the motivation behind the economic success of religious television series can be traced to a systematic process that limits the definition of what constitutes an intrinsically religious media product. For instance, the popularity of religious television series can be attributed to factors beyond mere religious keywords. Rather, it is the combination of key elements such as the attractiveness of these series, the support of the television industry, and the value assigned to them by the market. For example, a study in 2019 in Indonesia showed that the value of religious television series, particularly those related to "azab" (divine retribution), is significantly higher compared to other television programs (Selamun et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the production of such series, between 2004-2007, saw hundreds of episodes of standalone series like *Rahasia Ilahi* (TPI) garner high ratings, even in reruns (R. Suwardi, personal communication, 2022). During the same period, similar programs such as *Astaghfirullah*, *Kuasa Ilahi* (SCTV); *Istighfar*,

*Hidayah* (Trans TV); *Pintu Hidayah, Hikmah* (RCTI); *Misteri Ilahi, Titipan Ilahi* (Indosiar); *Azab Dunia, Sakaratul Maut* (ANTV); and *Azab Ilahi* (Lativi) were also popular. There were more than 40 standalone series categorized as mystical-religious during this period, distributed across seven television stations. Rating metrics showed that religious series were popular and often ranked among the top ten highest-rated programs, such as *Rahasia Ilahi* (ranked first in 2005), *Takdir Ilahi* (ranked third in 2005), and *Pintu Hidayah* ranked second in 2006 (Nazaruddin, 2008).

After its trend relatively declined, around 2018, a similar phenomenon emerged with broader discussion due to the influence of social media, when television aired *Zholim* (MNCTV) and *Azab* (Indosiar). These anthology series were produced as many as 194 titles by October 2018 (*kumparanNEWS*, 2018) with details: 131 titles of *Azab* FTV (Indosiar) since its premiere on July 1, 2018, and 63 titles of the *Zholim* series (MNCTV) since August 13, 2018. This number is based on the uploads of the two television stations on YouTube and vidio.com. These two series were publicly discussed starting from the selection of titles such as "Pasangan Pengoplos BBM Mati Terbakar Bensin" (Couple of Fuel Adulterators Died Burned by Gasoline), "Jenazahnya Tertimpa Tiang Listrik" Their Corpse Was Hit by an Electric Pole), and "Liang Lahatnya Tersambar Petir Berkali-kali" (Their Corpse Was Hit by an Electric Pole); or "Perebut Suami Orang Mati Dengan Perut Membengkak Disengat Ribuan Tawon" (Husband Snatcher Died With a Swollen Stomach Stung by Thousands of Bees), "Keranda Jenazahnya Terkena Badai dan Terjebur ke Adukan Semen" (Her Coffin Was Hit by a Storm and Plunged into Cement Mixture); and various others. Later, this soap opera genre still received wide attention from viewers, marked by the appearance of its name in television award events (Hawari, 2018); and in 2023 it was included in the curation list of the Indonesian Film Censorship Awards from the Film Censorship Institute/FFI (Riandi, 2023).

Referring to the assumption that the continued production of religious sinetron (soap operas) of the "Azab" genre is also driven by certain beliefs considered to be sourced from religion and not merely the practice of seeking profit, this study will examine the above phenomenon using Axel Honneth's concept of reification, known as the theory of recognition (Honneth et al., 2008). Previously, reification was introduced by Georg Lukács (1976) in *History & Class Consciousness* (1971) when he reinterpreted Karl Marx's concept of alienation and showed that relations between subjects had taken on the character of a "thing," so that there is "phantom objectivity" for social actors (Fuchs, 2021). Lukács stated that in Marx, alienation or estrangement of humans from themselves and their surroundings stems from the change in the essence of human relations, which are replaced by something that can always be calculated in terms of profit and loss. This is where reification is seen as a process when the elite class separates humans and society from their essence (Fuchs, 2016).

In short, reification can be understood as a situation where everything that actually has an abstract essence is then objectified or seen merely as an objective-rational entity. Objects that are not essentially material, such as the human soul, consciousness, abilities, social relations, and even, for example, one's experience of their own history, as well as nature and the environment, are simplified as objects or things (Kavoulakos, 2019). In its spirit, the concept of reification seeks to explain, describe, and critique various forms and processes of dehumanization in modern capitalist society (Vandenberghe, 2015).

Axel Honneth offers an interpretation and development of the concept of reification that allows it to be used in a wider scope, not only in the context of economic exchange as implied by Lukács. Through the theory of recognition, Honneth formulates reification as a situation of lack of existential connection between the self and others. By first describing the philosophical thoughts on humans and human relations from Heidegger,

Dewey, to developmental psychology thinkers such as George Herbert Mead, Honneth illustrates that reification is a form of attitude that forgets recognition (Honneth et al., 2008). Thus, the "objectification" of abstract things in Lukács' definition is a situation of forgetting recognition in Honneth's sense.

Honneth's Recognition refers to the assumption that humans, as psychological beings, strive to build and maintain their self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem; and suffer if these are disregarded or forgotten. Basing his formulation on Hegel and George Herbert Mead, Honneth divides recognition into three forms: love, equality, and achievement. For Hegel, the recognition of the need for love is provided within the family, the recognition of human autonomy in civil society and the legal system, and the recognition of individual particularity by the state and in ethical life and processes of solidarity.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Mead shows three important forms of recognition: love, legal rights, and solidarity. These approaches are reformulated by Honneth by stating that the emotional support provided by family and friends, cognitive respect through legal rights, and social esteem from solid value communities are the three modes of recognition in society (Herzog, 2020; Honneth et al., 2008).

**Table 1. Honneth's Theory of Recognition**

Mode of Recognition	Emotional Support	Cognitive Respect	Social Esteem
Dimension of personality	Needs and emotions	Moral responsibility	Traits and abilities
Forms of recognition	Primary relationships (love, friendship) For example, freedom from economic restrictions	Legal relation (rights)	Community of value (solidarity) Individualization, equalization
Developmental potential	Basic self-confidence	Generalization, deformalization	Self-esteem
Practical relation-to-self	Abuse and rape	Self-respect	Denigration, insult
Forms of disrespect	Physical integrity	Denial of rights, exclusion	"Honor," dignity
Threatened component of personality		Social integrity	

Source: (Herzog, 2020)

As illustrated in the table above, Honneth's theory of recognition encompasses the broad aspects of human needs for self-recognition, which inevitably arise in relationships with others. Love is the primary level of recognition that can be found in relationships with family, friends, partners, and others. From this, all physical and emotional needs such as security, confidence in the future, and self-esteem are fulfilled and become the foundation for relationships created beyond that.

The second level of recognition is moral respect. It is at the moral and legal level that individuals become aware of their rights and are respected by others in society. As with the expectation of justice, self-respect, dignity, and morality are developed through this process. The third level is recognition in relation to solidarity, loyalty, and appreciation. This need can be fulfilled when a

person feels their abilities and contributions to society are acknowledged and valued (Andersson & Punzi, 2024; Herzog, 2020).

From this perspective, reification, in Honneth's view, occurs when recognition of oneself, of others, and of the environment has been forgotten due to various reasons or situations.

JID | 334 **Table 2. The Three Forms of Axel Honneth's Reification**

Form of Reification	Description
Self-Reification	Every human has an antecedent recognition of themselves. It arises from the need for love, solidarity, and happiness in a social context. It also concerns concepts, identity, and meaning related to self-worth. For one reason or another, this recognition is forgotten.
Reification of Others	The state of forgetting recognition of someone or other people is usually a consequence of the condition of forgetting self-recognition. The meaning of the relationship with someone or other people no longer refers to its true meaning.
Reification of the Environment	The state of forgetting the essence of relationships with other relevant things that may be directly or indirectly related to the subject. This could be nature, other people, animals, concepts, thoughts, etc.

*Summary and interpretation of the researcher from Honneth, 2008*

Based on this understanding, recent studies utilizing Honneth's theory of recognition generally examine phenomena related to the recognition or loss of recognition concerning love, respect, and self-esteem within a fairly broad scope. For example, regarding the importance of recognition and respect in the practice of caring for migrants (Andersson & Punzi, 2024); the ambivalence of recognition towards transgender groups in socio-political contexts (Wong, 2024), to issues surrounding self-esteem and recognition related to employment and education (Corbin & Flenady, 2024; Hancock, 2024; Mao & Xue, 2022; O'Neill, 2023; Oshodi, 2023; Välimäki & Husu, 2023). This theory is used to examine issues surrounding corporations and stakeholders in the context of corporate social responsibility or CSR (Trittin-Ulbrich, 2023); the relationship between poverty and recognition (Schweiger, 2024); discrimination experienced by asylum seekers (Oshodi, 2023); the phenomenon of academic dishonesty in higher education during the COVID-19 period (Roe, 2022), to issues related to mediatization and social change (Hemming Pedersen, 2022). Honneth's perspective also touches on areas such as ecology (Arcos et al., 2024), the concept of freedom (Stensen, 2023), and also religion, namely issues concerning the emancipatory movement of the local church in the Philippines (Basas, 2024).

These studies generally demonstrate phenomena related to humans, self-identity, and their psychological needs within a broad relational context, and in Indonesia, specifically, have not been developed to interpret the phenomena of subjective experiences within media and religious relations. Therefore, this study will use Honneth's theory of recognition to analyze the interpretations of the figures behind the production of religious sinetron (soap operas) of the "Azab" genre, particularly regarding the involvement of religious figures or ustadz in the production. The researcher will also utilize the concepts of recognition developed by Heikki Ikäheimo (Kahlos et al., 2019) in recent research related to recognition and religion to identify the main points of the findings.

## Research Methods

This research is developed through a phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to capture and interpret the meanings of the subjects behind the scenes of religious sinetron related to media production practices and the concept of religious sinetron. In its most basic form, phenomenology is a study of essences, or the lived experience of a person in their world before it is categorized or theorized. After Husserl conceptualized phenomenology as a way to understand the context and meaning of the lived experience of a person or group of people, this theory was expanded to become a qualitative research methodology in various fields (Moustakas, 2009, Sarantakos, 2013, Zahavi, 2021). Interviews and data analysis of 6 (six) figures behind the religious sinetron are based on the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method (Smith & Pietkiewicz, 2014, Van Manen, 2014, Alase, 2017, Kahija, 2017). Data were obtained through interviews with subjects who have different roles, namely television producers, directors, scriptwriters, and religious figures who have been involved in it. They are "united" by the same kind of experience: working behind the production of *azab* (punishment) genre religious sinetron at a certain time.

The following is a brief description of the demographics of the participants:

**Table 3. Participant Demographics**

Name/ Age	Profession	Education	Experience
MQM (55)	Preacher/ Islamic Boarding School Leader/ Actor	Bachelor's/S1	Played since 2004, among others in soap operas: <i>Rahasia Illahi (TPI), Rahmat Illahi (TPI), Takdir Illahi (TPI), Allah Maha Besar (TPI), Dzolim (MNCTV)</i> dll
IS (60)	Screenwriter, Journalist	Bachelor's/S1	Screenwriter of religious soap operas since 2005, including: <i>Rahasia Ilahi, Takdir Ilahi, dll</i>
SWN (48)	Screenwriter, Director, Lecturer	Bachelor's/S1	Screenwriters include: FTV <i>Hantu Ronggeng, Azab Istri Zalim, Fitnah Membawa Azab, Anak Pelacur Jadi Guru Ngaji, Sedekah Membawa Berkah, dll</i>
AK (47)	Director	Bachelor's/S1	Works, among others: <i>Kolor Ijo, Rahasia Ilahi (TPI/ MNCTV), Azab (Serial Lepas), Serial Asmara 2 Dunia , Doaku (Indosiar)</i>
HB (53)	Director	Bachelor's/S1	Assistant Director 1997-2004); Director, 2005 - present. Worked on a freelance series <i>Rahasia Ilahi (TPI), Serial Lepas Legenda</i> . Film: <i>Diaspora, Surga Menanti, Surga Pun Ikut Menangis, dll</i>
RSI (60)	Producer	Bachelor's/S1	Produce TV soap operas at TPI: Sinetron TV Misteri (PT. Virgo Film); and various other production houses. TV producer when <i>Allah Maha Besar, Rumah Allah; Rahmat Ilahi, Takdir Ilahi, Rahasia Ilahi</i> are aired.

## Results and Discussion

Through the principles of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method, data analysis yielded two superordinate themes (or super-themes) and several sub-themes. The two superordinate themes are *Awareness of Competence and Motives for Involvement* and *Meaning of Involvement of Religious Figures in Religious FTV (television film)*.

**Table 4. Superordinate Theme and Generated Subtheme**

Superordinate Theme	Subtheme
JID   336 Awareness of Competence and Motives for Involvement	- Religious Competence
	- Production Competence
	- Motives for Involvement in Production
	- Perceptions about the Benefits of Religious Sinetron
Meaning of Involvement of Religious Figures in Religious FTV	- Role of Religious Figures in Production
	- Dynamics of Relationships between Religious Figures and the Production Team
	- Meaning of the Presence of Religious Figures in Production

*Awareness of Competence and Motivation for Involvement*

**Competence in the Religious Field.** The participants in this study assess that the competence of religious figures has high urgency in production because they will ultimately become a reference in story creation, even in daily practices for workers during production. Therefore, the production team chooses figures who are known to have competence in the religious field and are active in the world of da'wah (Islamic propagation), such as leading study groups, giving lectures regularly, or managing Islamic boarding school education.

**Competence in the Field of Production.** The participants revealed that in the field of production, they generally have long experience involved in the production of sinetron (soap operas) with horror-mystical themes. These themes are also generally displayed within a religious framework and become the embryo for the birth of religious sinetron.

**Motives for Involvement in Sinetron.** The participants in this study, especially religious figures, explained that their motivation for being involved in production goes beyond pragmatic reasons—as a job—but also the desire to be involved in spreading goodness, or da'wah.

**Perception of the Benefits of Religious Sinetron.** The participants interpret that religious sinetron must be based on source stories from religious references. Even though it will eventually develop as fiction, the source of reference that mentions or relates to religion must truly be accountable. Only in this way will religious sinetron have benefits for its viewers.

*The Meaning of Religious Figure Involvement in Religious Sinetron Production*

**The Role of Religious Figures in Production.** The participants explained that these figures are not only important in front of the camera, but also as a place to ask questions or consult about story ideas to the visualization of certain scenes to ensure they are in accordance with religious teachings. One of the participants in this study is the founder and manager of an Islamic boarding school who has been involved on the recommendation of other Islamic scholars since the production of *Rahasia Ilahi* (2004), namely KH Arifin Ilham (deceased). Other well-known figures in society are involved in production, such as KH Musthofa Yakub (deceased) and Hj. Luthfiah Sungkar.



***The Dynamics of the Relationship between Religious Figures and the Production Team.*** The participants revealed that the role of the ustadz (Islamic scholar) as a religious consultant is not formalized in the form of a contract agreement. They are only contracted to appear in front of the camera, both as actors and as "openers" and "closers" of scenes. However, informally they are given space to provide corrections, reprimand, or request producers and directors to make changes when there are things that are considered incorrect.

***The Meaning of the Presence of Religious Figures in Production.*** As consultants, religious figures are not only asked for advice or opinions related to stories or scenes that are considered to need assessment from their perspective. They also become "teachers" or places to ask questions for directors, actors, and crew during filming activities about religious matters in daily life. In production practice, corrections from religious figures are usually related to scenes that are considered inhumane, or related to fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) issues such as how to handle a corpse from bathing to burial.

The summary of the interview results above is the meaning or interpretation of the experiences of the participants which we then define as recognition issues in the relationship between workers behind the scenes of religious sinetron of the "Azab" genre, as well as in relations with production policymakers in general. Therefore, from here we formulate recognition issues related to competence, motivation for involvement, and perceptions of religious sinetron. The following points are formulated as a summary relating to the recognition issues of religious figures, as well as the role and meaning of their presence in the production of religious sinetron of the "Azab" genre.

#### *Da'wah and the Recognition of Religious Figures in Production*

The three dimensions of Honneth's recognition, namely love, respect, and appreciation, according to Ikäheimo, have succeeded in becoming important concepts for understanding the complexity of the phenomenon of recognition and are useful for understanding various contexts. To understand this complexity, Ikäheimo formulated two forms of recognition, namely vertical and horizontal. Vertical recognition involves a hierarchy, where someone recognizes something higher, such as norms, institutions, or even God. The subject in this recognition is hierarchical, being in a lower position. Meanwhile, horizontal recognition refers to relations between individuals who are equal. This recognition is more reciprocal and mutually respectful. Horizontal recognition is also divided into two, namely recognition that is based (mediated) on certain norms or rights (for example, recognition of human rights) and pure intersubjective recognition which is more personal and direct, without the mediation of norms (Kahlos et al., 2019).

Issues of recognition related to competence, motives for involvement, and perceptions of religious sinetron, and issues of recognition of religious figures, as well as the role and meaning of their presence in the production of religious sinetron of the "Azab" genre can be interpreted through these variations of recognition. Vertically, workers in the religious sinetron industry are in a clear hierarchy: the program producer occupies the highest position in production and below that are the director, then the screenwriter and the actors. But in the television industry hierarchy, the producer is still not the highest. Vertical recognition here is reflected in how lower-level workers value the authority and decisions of those higher than them. Meanwhile, horizontally, interactions involve

fellow workers such as between actors, camera crew, and other production staff where they recognize each other's expertise and contributions in the production process.

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These recognitions show the dynamic conditions in the relations between the figures behind the production of the "Azab" genre sinetron. The religious figure here is one or several *ustaz* who are involved by the sinetron industry players to be consultants (although not formally referred to as such), openers and closers of stories, to become actors with roles as themselves: a *ustadz*. In the production of *Rahasia Ilahi*, for example, the idea of presenting a *ustadz* or religious figure in such roles came from the producer and was welcomed by the television station. Then figures such as Arifin Ilham, KH Musthofa Yakub, Ustaz Wahfiudin, Luthfiah Sungkar, and several other names were involved. Sometimes these religious figures are recognized for their authority as "guides", but overall and in the long time that production is carried out, it is based on the authority of the producer or the hierarchy above them.

In the participants' descriptions, there are three roles and meanings of the presence of religious figures or *ustaz*. First, as a controller of the content to be displayed. Sometimes, this role is played from the beginning of production and is anticipatory, generally revolving around the concept of scenes and dialogue to be produced or that are already underway. Meanwhile, discussions at the level of ideas are complete when religious figures accept the offer to be involved. Second, religious figures are a place to ask questions about religious matters in general, not only in the context of production. Third, religious figures or *ustaz* are present as "security" as well as convincing the audience—whose number, capacity, and possible responses cannot be predicted. Their presence is a legitimator of the "validity" of the religious message displayed.

From the experiences of the workers behind the production of "azab" genre religious sinetron, we can see how power dynamics, religious values, and individual identities interact in shaping complex and diverse work experiences. Religious figures place self-recognition of values as the main thing. Their motive for involvement is to spread religious values and warn people about the consequences of sin. When involved, they feel their authority as preachers is recognized. However, religious figures also tend to ignore self-recognition when compromising on many things, for example, when considering dramatization and efforts to exaggerate stories as normal things that do not interfere with da'wah goals.

In addition to creative recognition which is related to the awareness of playing an independent role, television producers, directors, and scriptwriters also convey their recognition which is related to social and moral responsibility. Therefore, they interpret the presence of religious figures as very crucial in production. But recognition of competence, motives for involvement, perceptions of the meaning of religious sinetron, and the meaning of the presence of religious figures is never truly fixed. This happens at least because they are almost always under pressure that comes from vertical (hierarchical) relations, time pressure, and financial pressure.

**Table 5. Reification of Religious Figures in the Production of "Azab" Genre Religious**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Self-Reification</b>	<b>Reification of Others</b>	<b>Reification of The Environment</b>
Religious Figure/Ustadz	Forgetting or at least distorting recognition as a preacher whose line of responsibility is directly to God and society.	Authority as a religious figure is blurred in hierarchical work relations.	Making audience surveys a measure of quality and truth.
Television Producer	Forgetting the desire to be a worker with social and moral responsibilities.	Distorting the true role of religious figures by letting them "act" as "production safety instruments."	Ignoring critical and corrective voices from outside or parts of society.
Director	Loss of creative authority and independence in determining technical quality, aesthetic achievement, and religious story references.	The opinion of religious figures can be ignored when business analysis shows different results.	
Scriptwriter			

The identity of a preacher, in the view of religious figures, is recognition obtained from struggles with learning experiences and preaching practices, as well as education. This socio-religious role is generally based on a direct interpretation of God's commands through the scriptures and the teachings of the Prophet. Scholars and writers in this field briefly describe da'wah (Islamic propagation) as the Islamic concept of how goodness is conveyed to the public so that social change occurs (Ahmad, 1986; Anshari, 1991; Arifin, 1977). Several of these examples show more or less the same formulation regarding da'wah in Islam, the practices means, and methods that must be used. Meanwhile, the media is ultimately more than just a value-free mass communication tool, but rather an institution with its values, and has a mission that may conflict with da'wah itself. The content of da'wah includes all aspects of life from an Islamic perspective and is sourced from verses of the Quran, hadiths of the Prophet, opinions of the companions, opinions of scholars, results of scientific research, exemplary stories and experiences, news and events, literary works and works of art (Aziz, 2004; Ismail & Hotman, 2013; Munir & Ilaihi, 2015; Suparta & Hefni, 2015). Other explanations regarding media and religion (da'wah) show us how complex this term is, especially in the modern world.

The presence of religious figures in the production of religious sinetron (soap operas) is based on the desire to spread da'wah through media. However, this involvement is then defined not solely and primarily in that context. Religious figures allow self-recognition as preachers to become blurred over time and the dynamics of production. They see themselves as part of art workers in an industry that has a different work logic from their activities in da'wah outside of media. When the director dramatizes the story by displaying a reality that is not even written in the script, for example, religious figures interpret it as normal. This compromise is based on the belief that a greater benefit can be achieved in that way, namely making religious messages reach a wider audience. This is because dramatization is the closest opportunity to increase audience attention.

Within themselves, television producers, directors, and scriptwriters possess an awareness of offering television products that have educational value or contain meaning and enlightenment for the public. They also have the intention of presenting alternative shows, and even possibly replacing the dominant sinetron (soap opera) shows that were previously considered to only present fiction with dangerous content for the morals of adolescents and children. The disclosure of the meanings

and goals of this involvement—beyond work demands—in any case illustrates the consistent primordial cognition that exists before production begins, as well as after production experiences have passed. This perception is easily recalled every time a question about motives or intentions is conveyed during the interview. Of course, we can see this as recognition, in the form of a definition that exists in self-awareness when faced with a certain role in the face of work.

The participants stated that their vision of moral responsibility and efforts to present educational broadcasts were given space when the idea for religious sinetron began. At least there was a conversation that reflected a balance between creative freedom and the intention to produce valuable products. The parties tended to agree to produce shows that would balance the themes of romance on television, infotainment, and children's sinetron which are often considered by public critics to not reflect educational values. But when market demand for "Azab" genre religious sinetron increased, education, story morals, technical quality, and aesthetic achievement were no longer important discussions.

The phenomenon of reification in the interactions of the figures behind the scenes of "Azab" genre religious sinetron is part of the issue of the relationship between media and religion. Theoretically, views on media and religion have developed into at least three influential main approaches, namely functionalist: assessing media only as an instrument for religion; essentialist: seeing both media and religion as having their own independent cultural and historical identities; and interactive: namely, when religion and media interact and even cannot be separated. This last view states that religion is not only limited to events that occur in the sacred realm but is part of the culture. Religion plays a role in giving meaning to human life (Hoover, 2008; Hoover & Lundby, 1997; Hosseini, 2008).

When interpreting competence, involvement in production, and the benefits of sinetron (soap operas) as a medium for da'wah (Islamic propagation), the participants show a mediatization-convergence relationship context. But unstably, they also show a perception that tends towards a functionalist view, seeing media as a neutral and value-free tool. That sinetron, or television in general, is just a neutral tool. This view remains consistent despite the debate—which is not quiet—about the presence of sinetron as a medium for da'wah because several opinions state that sinetron is better avoided because it has many disadvantages (Mas, 2007).

Finally, in this last paragraph, we state that Axel Honneth's concept of reification helps us understand the complexity of the problems behind and within religious representation in media. If commodification can lead us to human struggles in economic aspects and exchange, reification digs deeper into the social and psychological processes that may occur when religion is transformed into an object of consumption. In other words, the concept of recognition does not only concern economic aspects, but also social, cultural, and psychological aspects. This point of view also recommends stakeholders, especially broadcast supervisors and religious figures, to further develop critical thinking in understanding media content related to religion. This research can also be valuable input for policymakers, media practitioners, and the wider community to create a healthier and more dignified media ecosystem.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the figures behind the scenes of the "Azab" genre religious sinetron (soap opera) are involved in work relationships that tend to influence the meaning of the presence of religious figures in production. In the context of vertical recognition, religious figures disregard their own recognition as preachers who are hierarchically directly responsible to God and society. Involvement in the production of religious sinetron appears as recognition of this role, but is actually a way to compromise the values of responsibility as a preacher with the demands born from the logic and hierarchical relations of commercial work. Meanwhile, for program producers, directors, and scriptwriters, the involvement of religious figures which should strengthen the recognition of the vision of moral responsibility within each of them related to educational broadcasts, actually becomes something whose value is no longer recognized by themselves. This happens as the demands of profit-oriented production increase.

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This study offers an enrichment of perspectives in viewing the issue of media and religion. Axel Honneth's concept of reification allows us to understand the process when social aspects, including religion, are transformed into objects that can be manipulated and traded. This process results in the loss of intersubjective dimensions and intrinsic values inherent in religion. The concept of commodification leads us to understand religious representation in media. However, it is not enough to explain the complexity of the social and psychological processes involved in the reification of religion. Its limitations include the fact that Honneth's theory of reification is rooted in the tradition of critical philosophy, is quite complex and abstract so that applying it to concrete phenomena such as the production of religious sinetron is a challenge in itself. The operationalization of the concept of "forgetting" in Honneth's reification is very prone to researcher bias because of its subjective nature and is difficult to measure empirically. We also acknowledge that the use of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method is highly dependent on the researcher's interpretation. Although based on empirical data, the possibility of subjective bias in analyzing and interpreting data, especially those related to abstract concepts such as reification, is unavoidable. By considering these limitations, future researchers can design more comprehensive, critical, and contextual studies. Combining Honneth's theory with other theoretical frameworks, such as media political economy or cultural studies, also deserves consideration.

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