

## The Polemics of Interfaith Marriage and Patterns of Negotiation in Indonesian Films

Marta Widyawati<sup>1\*</sup>, Anindita Fikri Amalia<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Hamdan Mukafi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>123</sup>Indonesian Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Indonesia.

\* Corresponding Author, Email: martawidyawati@lecturer.undip.ac.id

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Harmonization;  
Indonesian films;  
Interfaith marriage;  
Negotiation;  
Religiosity.

#### Article history:

Received 2025-03-23  
Revised 2025-03-27  
Accepted 2025-04-05

### ABSTRACT

Indonesian cinema has often portrayed the theme of marriage between different religions occasionally. These problems frequently occur in society and trigger a complicated negotiation process between the individuals concerned. The difficulty of negotiation is because religion and marriage have significant consequences for the stability of family and community networks, so decision-making is based on many considerations. The prohibition of marriages of different religions raises questions regarding the compelling ways for couples of various faiths to deal with the inner and physical conflicts caused by these events. This research examines the negotiation patterns of different religious couples in Indonesian films (*Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1*, *Tanda Tanya*, and *Akhirat: A Love Story*). Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Gordon Allport's theory of religion are used in this study to examine the issue. The research can show how the three films offer a process of contemplation that ultimately leads the characters to make wise decisions and maintain broader harmonization.

### ABSTRAK

Perfilman Indonesia seringkali mengangkat tema pernikahan berbeda agama dari masa ke masa. Permasalahan tersebut pada faktanya memang sering terjadi di tengah masyarakat dan memicu rumitnya proses negosiasi antarindividu yang bersangkutan. Hal tersebut karena agama maupun pernikahan membawa konsekuensi besar terhadap kestabilan jaringan kekeluargaan maupun komunitas, sehingga pengambilan keputusan didasarkan pada banyak pertimbangan. Pelarangan pernikahan berbeda agama menimbulkan pertanyaan terkait cara yang efektif bagi pasangan berbeda agama dalam menyikapi konflik batin maupun fisik akibat peristiwa tersebut. Penelitian ini berupaya mengkaji pola-pola negosiasi berbagai pasangan berbeda agama yang dihadirkan dalam film-film Indonesia yakni film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1*, *Tanda Tanya*, dan *Akhirat: A Love Story*. Teori semiotika Roland Barthes dan teori

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*agama Gordon Allport digunakan dalam penelitian ini untuk mengkaji masalah tersebut. Penelitian ini pada akhirnya mampu menunjukkan cara-cara tiga film tersebut dalam menawarkan proses perenungan yang mampu mengantar tokoh untuk membuat keputusan yang bijak dan menjaga harmonisasi yang lebih luas.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Interfaith marriage is one of the most frequently raised issues in Indonesian cinema. It reflects that similar problems often occur in society, triggering a complicated and usually sentimental negotiation process. This phenomenon is inseparable from the condition of Indonesian culture, which embraces more than one religion, so conflict between them will always have the potential to occur. From 2005 to July 2023, 1,655 interfaith couples married in Indonesia (Nurfazila, 2024). Even so, this number is small compared to Indonesia's population of 284,438,800 in 2025, especially with the diversity of ethnicities and religious beliefs within that number. This comparison is due to the prohibition of interfaith marriages regulated by every religious organization, supported by interpretations of teachings, in Indonesia. In addition, society's views on interreligious marriage also tend to be negative. This is ironic when the happiness of individuals to fulfill their basic needs must clash with another fundamental thing, namely religion.

The social effects of the implementation of rules prohibiting interfaith marriages are enormous. This situation brings couples with different religious backgrounds to a complicated choice. The consequence is to convert or go abroad as an alternative to legalizing their marriage. In Indonesia, this phenomenon often results in divisions within families and communities and presents significant emotional and spiritual challenges for the couples concerned (Sirait, 2024). Research on YouTube influencers in Indonesia shows support for legal reforms that are more inclusive of religious diversity and individual rights in marriage (Falihin, 2024). This indicates that reactions to interfaith marriage have sought to fulfill both rights. However, it still leaves a dilemma regarding the priority scale in determining marriage. This research intends to provide a way of negotiating through a reflective understanding of dialogic and narrative decisions found in Indonesian films as the object of study.

The films selected in this study offer ideas related to religion and specifically mediate interfaith marriage. They are characterized by being entertainment-oriented yet interjecting values that can be more acceptable than verbal prohibitions from the parties concerned, especially on the issue of interfaith marriage, which is very sensitive for most people. In her research, Stephanie Mullins Sellers (2022) conceptualizes the role of film in bringing religious (Christian) messages to the audience. "Convincing non-believers makes sense, and the power of movies is one way to begin the believer's journey. Brain maps are formed when unbelievers see supernatural phenomena in movies, and scientific studies reveal episodic events in socio-emotional movies that are then used in real life (Beno, Silen, & Yanti, 2022). Since science and humans alike demonstrate the power of movies to build faith journeys, movies can be an excellent way to inspire belief in the supernatural world of Christianity (Sellers, 2022).

The history of Indonesian cinema shows a series of films that address the theme of interfaith marriage, albeit with different nuances and genres. The repetition of conflicts among these films

does not mean they convey the same message regarding attitudes toward interreligious marriage. Although adapted from Habiburrahman El Shirazy's best-selling novel four years earlier (2004), in 2008, at the time of its release, the movie *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* still attracted great attention and remained discussed in subsequent years. The theme centered on the feeling of love as part of an individual's basic needs faced with a religious dilemma created a significant emotional closeness for readers and viewers. The movie presents two religions meeting in a complicated romance.

Another complication can be seen in the movie *Tanda Tanya* (2011). Religious conflicts are presented with extremes at various levels of life, resulting in tragic effects. However, the subtle love story also deserves attention regarding how the characters make decisions in various religious relationships that involve many internal and external dimensions. The various religious relationships in this movie involve three different religions. This shows that *Tanda Tanya* tries to portray all the possibilities in Indonesian society as closely as possible while simultaneously offering how it should coexist. Although many studies have examined this movie and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1*, a study that compares the two from the way the characters make decisions related to interfaith marriage is yet to be found.

Furthermore, this research will juxtapose these two phenomenal films with *Akhirat: A Love Story* (2021). This romantic genre film also tells the love story of a couple of different religions but with a fantasy model. This fantasy model further shows the impossibility of unification until the formation of an imaginative world that allows them to unite. Even so, when the opportunity to unite comes, they are still bound by many things that make them go through a long dilemma to make the best decision.

The comparison of these three films is essential, given their position as representatives of each era. The decades-long span of the movie indicates that the issue of interfaith marriage has always been discussed and left questions. This research will contribute to reviewing the interrelationships, the motives of the problems, and the settlement patterns offered so that it can be a reference for Indonesian people to more easily position themselves before or after being involved in an interfaith relationship. Religion-related problems need to be resolved with the help of various means, including aesthetic works as products of individual creativity that contain expectations and expressions of personal experience. This research will examine the semiotic signs presented in the three films so that things that the audience has not fully read will become more apparent by utilizing objective theories and concepts.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study examines three Indonesian films with the theme of interfaith *love* relationships, namely the movie *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1* (2008), *Tanda Tanya* (2011), and *Akhirat: A Love Story* (2021). The reason for choosing these objects is not only based on the similarity of themes and the time of creation, which indicates the repetition and intensity of themes in Indonesia but also on the popularity of each film. The movie rating from the website [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) is a reference to review the movie's popularity and level of affection for the community. Hanung Bramantyo's *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1* which aired in 2008 (6.9 stars, with 3.6 million viewers), *Tanda Tanya* which was also directed by Hanung Bramantyo in 2011 (7 stars with an undisclosed number of viewers because the movie was banned from airing), and *Akhirat: A Love Story* that aired on Netflix in 2021 (6.1 stars, with 2.2 million viewers), as the object of research. The audience's interest in the three movies and the awarding of stars above 5 indicates a relationship of popularity and affection that people can receive after watching them.

Furthermore, this research was analyzed using qualitative research methods. The qualitative research method is a research method that utilizes the interpretation of data from the object of research (Ratna, 2015). The method, based on the object of study, uses a comparative analysis

technique that aims to compare the findings in the form of a description. The comparative analysis technique is used to compare the object of study to find the conflict that occurs so that the inner struggle that affects the pattern of resolution of the characters in the object of study can be known to solve problems related to interfaith marriage.

For instance, to find data comparisons based on the object of study, this research uses Barthes' semiotic theory to help find the motifs of harmonization of interfaith married life contained therein. Semiotic theory is a science that deals with signs. Semiotics views social phenomena as a system of signs that have meaning. Literary works, in this case movies, represent life and culture. Barthes is the successor of Saussure, who was interested in the complex way sentences are formed and how they determine meaning. However, Barthes was less interested in the fact that the same punishment could convey different meanings. Barthes' semiology emphasizes the interaction between the text and its users' personal and cultural experiences. This idea became known as the "order of signification," including denotation and connotation.

This research uses Allport's psychology of religion to interpret Barthes' semiological signs related to the characters' destiny in the object of study. As in the psychology of religion, Allport (1966) says religion is directed at the motivation and orientation of individuals who adhere to a belief. Furthermore, the concept of religiousness is divided into intrinsic and extrinsic-oriented religiousness. Intrinsic diversity is influenced by commitment to beliefs, while extrinsic diversity refers to individual behavior using religion as a form of power through group participation.

Therefore, this study uses Hanung Bramantyo's film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1*, which aired in 2008, *Tanda Tanya*, which was also directed by Hanung Bramantyo in 2011, and the film *Akhirat: A Love Story*, which aired on Netflix in 2021 using the note-taking technique in the data collection method. The systematic data collection in this study begins with watching the movie that is the object of research more than three times, then proceeds to collect scenes that contain symbols of the significance of interfaith marriage. After the symbols are found, the next step is to analyze them through Barthes' semiology, which focuses on connotation and denotation to help find their polemics. Then, the polemics that arise are drawn in aspects of Allport's psychology of religion to see the patterns of negotiation carried out by the characters and find a resolution to the polemics that occur.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

Marriage is a lifelong binding activity between two individuals and is legally, religiously, and socio-culturally recognized. Instead of uniting two individuals for life, the bond of marriage is not that superficial. Marriage does not only bind two individuals who are the same in religion or socio-culture; marriage must also be based on love, emotion, and commitment, which will lead to the same principles and goals. Marriage, which is one of the meaningful steps that is an act of worship to perfect religion, is sometimes constrained by the rules of religion. This problem can be seen in the movies *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1* (2008) and *Tanda Tanya* (2011), as well as *Akhirat: A Love Story* (2021).

The three films that are the object of this study have marriage conflicts conveyed explicitly through the actions and personalities of the characters. In this case, the marriage conflicts do not only refer to events after the characters in the object of study get married. However, it also appears in the steep path faced by these characters to be able to get married. Lazuardi and Viktorahadi (2024) said that religious values are often integrated with the institution of marriage. The marriage conflicts, inner struggles, and forms of negotiation that appear in the object of study are embodied as follows.

#### 3.1.1. Comparison of Conflicts in Interfaith Marriages (Relationships between characters and considerations)

##### 3.1.1.1. The Conflict of Interfaith Marriage in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1*

Concerning Interfaith Marriage in the movie *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1*, it appears in the love story of Maria and Fahri. Maria and Fahri have feelings of love and wanting to have each other. However, their different beliefs must hinder their story, as it is known that Fahri, a student from Indonesia, is Muslim. At the same time, Maria is a Coptic Christian with a different faith background. Furthermore, the conflict in the movie *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1* is seen when Maria and Fahri are talking on the Nile River when they question the meaning of love.

**Figure 1.** 00.19.15 | Maria and Fahri on the Niil River



The dialogue “Bukan dari langit Maria, tapi dari hati, sangat dekat” (“Not from the sky Maria, but from the heart, very close”) and supported by Fahri's gaze at Maria, which is shady and deep, is a sign that he sincerely loves Maria and vice versa. In the twinkle of their eyes and gaze, there is a feeling of wanting to have and love. However, Maria and Fahri's different faith backgrounds become a barrier. As a Muslim who obeys the teachings of his religion, Fahri always practices this in his daily life. His obedience to religion is a sign that is shown explicitly through the marker in his dialog when he is too long with a shady and deep gaze at Maria. The signifier is expressed through the sentence of *istigfar* uttered when he realized his actions could lead him to negativity, as it is known that in Islam, looking at a non-mahram woman with a gaze that is too deep can refer to adultery.

Based on these two conflicts, there are considerations made by the characters in dealing with them. It appears that Fahri cut off his gaze from Maria and said *istigfar*. The action taken by Fahri is an intrinsic religious orientation, according to Allport (1966), namely a comprehensive commitment to the religious beliefs he adheres to and their impact on everyday life. It is characterized by the utterance of the sentence *istigfar* spoken by Fahri in a quite surprised tone. The words indicate that he has unconsciously looked at Maria with such a deep and longing gaze. Therefore, the sentence of *istigfar* uttered spontaneously using a relatively high tone of speech is a sign that Fahri is begging God for forgiveness for the actions he has unconsciously taken.

Hearing that Fahri was married to Aisha, Maria felt pressure. On the one hand, she wanted Fahri ultimately. However, she realized that she would not be able to unite with Fahri when their differences stretched. It can be seen in Maria's writings in her diary. These writings are a signifier of the signifier related to Maria's desire to be with Fahri forever and love in the family ark. The deterioration of Maria's health caused her mother to exile Maria to her hometown. The action taken by Maria's mother is a form of personal extrinsic orientation to protect her child from becoming more protracted in her sadness. However, fate seems to be playing with Maria and Fahri. Maria was reunited with Fahri, who was slandered for raping someone and needed Maria's confession as a key witness. This action is a turning point in their relationship. The marriage between Fahri and

Maria is a sign that their love story is sacred and difficult to separate even though a large wall separates it because they love each other and fill the space in the soul.

### 3.1.1.2. The Conflict of Interfaith Marriage in the movie *Tanda Tanya*

The concept of interfaith marriage also appears in the movie *Tanda Tanya*. The idea can be seen in the love story of Menuk and Ping Hen. Menuk, a Muslimah, works as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant owned by Ping Hen's family, who is a Confucian. Both of them had feelings of love in the past. However, their different beliefs prevented them from uniting. Their separation creates a sense of resentment in Ping Hen's heart, as shown in the following scene.

At 00:06:20, Ping Hen peers through the cracks upstairs to ensure Menuk has come to the restaurant and hurriedly leaves it. The scene is a sign that in Ping Hen's mind, Menuk has not entirely given up on marrying Soleh, a Muslim man whom Menuk has chosen as her husband. Ping Hen's temperamental behavior and harsh dialogues are signs that he is still unable to accept the fate that separates his story with Menuk, plus the high probability of meeting Menuk if he stays in the restaurant will add to the annoyance that settles in his mind.

Furthermore, the feelings of annoyance and resentment towards the differences that stretch in Ping Hen's mind appear in the footage at minute 56:28, which is supported by Ping Hen's dialogue with Soleh, "Heran aku kenapa Menuk lebih milih kamu" ("I wonder why Menuk prefers you"). It is supported by minute 57:29 when Ping Hen is being counseled by his parents for his actions. In the scene, there is a dialog: "Menuk lebih milih nikah sama soleh hanya karena dia taat beragama, taat! Taat tok! Bayangin mi, bayangin! Picik to itu, goblok" ("Menuk prefers to marry Soleh just because he is religious, religious! he is just obdience to religion! Imagine,, imagine that! short sighted, right, stupid)". The two excerpts of the scene are a sign that Ping Hen is trying to hate everything related to Menuk. He wants to forget Menuk and her story. He tried to blame fate and Menuk's choice, but instead of choosing him, he chose Soleh, a man who had no wealth and only capitalized on his religious observance.

Ping Hen's deep love for Menuk experienced a turning point when Menuk personally met Ping Hen, as shown in the following scene.

**Figure 2.** Minute 1:12:00 | When Ping Hen and Menuk meet before tarawih



At minute 1:12:00, the scene above shows Menuk confronting Ping Hen about her feelings. In the scene, Menuk speaks in a dialog: "Saya tau dulu kita pernah punya cerita yang mungkin menurut Mas Hendra itu ngga enak, tapi buat saya itu anugerah karena Tuhan ngajarin arti cinta dalam agama yang berbeda." ("I know we used to have a story that might not be good for Mas Hendra, but for me, it was a gift because God taught me the meaning of love in different religions"). The dialogue spoken by Menuk is a sign that means Ping Hen must try to forget and let go of everything that happened to them

in the past, related to the beautiful story they once had, the feelings of love and love they once had let them become memories in their respective minds. The dialogue also explicitly means that their love story is a gift God gave, even though, in the end, they cannot unite in a sacred bond, namely the bond of marriage.

Furthermore, at the end of Ping Hen and Menuk's romantic conflict, Ping Hen forgives Menuk and their love story. It is shown in the scene when Ping Hen threw away all his beautiful memories with Menuk in the river and made his choice to convert to Islam. Ping Hen's action is a sign that Ping Hen has tried to start a new life without grudges and let go of the memories of his romance with Menuk. However, even though Ping Hen converted to Islam as Menuk did, Ping Hen and Menuk's love story continues on its path. Menuk lost her husband, who died to save the church, which at that time was carrying out Christmas services. On the other hand, Ping Hen reopened a Chinese restaurant inherited from his parents, using halal food.

### 3.1.1.3. The Conflict of Interfaith Marriage in the Movie *Akhirat: A Love Story*

The *Akhirat: A Love Story* movie depicts Mentari, a Muslim girl, in a love story with Timur, a Catholic youth who was her schoolmate. Their love story experiences upheaval when their parents, Mentari's and Timur's, disapprove of their relationship. It is based on their different beliefs and lifestyles. It is shown in the following scene.

**Figure 3.** Minute 20:30 | When Mrs. Mentari advises about the future of marriage



The 20:32 minute scene is a signifier when Mentari asks her parents for permission to introduce Timur to her family and approve of their relationship. However, her mother's actions, which seem to match one outfit with another, signify that they disapprove of their daughter's relationship with her lover. It is indicated by the dialogue, "nggak semua hal di dunia ini, cocok sama kamu" ("Not everything in this world suits you") and "mulai sekarang kamu harus belajar memilih mana yang cocok sama kamu mana yang enggak" ("From now on you have to learn to choose what suits you and what doesn't,") that Mentari's mother said to her. The dialogue seems to tell Mentari that she does not deserve to be with Timur, given their different backgrounds and beliefs.

**Figure 4.** Minute 00:23:29 | When Timur's mom is not interested in Mentari



Likewise, Timur's parents, as found in the scene minutes 23:29 - 24:05, the change in expression shown by Timur's parents is indirectly a sign that his relationship with his girlfriend is not approved. It is based on the differences between the two, which are very contradictory, both in their belief background and lifestyle. It is supported by the dialog revealed by Mama Timur at minute 24:16: "Tim, menurut Mama kamu sudah cukup dewasa untuk menentukan masa depan kamu" ("Tim, Mama thinks you are old enough to decide your future") The sentence indicates that Timur's parents disapprove of their relationship because of their differences.

Furthermore, Timur and Mentari's conflicted romance is not necessarily opposed by their parents but also by the universe. It can be seen in minute 36:36. The scene depicts that the gates to the afterlife between Timur and Mentari are different. It is a sign that until the final resting place, they will not be able to be together because of the various beliefs they believe in.

However, Timur and Mentari's love story had a wonderful time. They married in Pancarona House, where spirits who still wanted to live in the world lived. In Pancarona's house, they got married and experienced life together without caring about the differences that stretched. It is a sign that their love story can end happily as Mentari and Timur desired, although not in the real world. However, behind their happiness is an inner conflict experienced by Mentari, who often disappears from Timur's sight. Mentari's disappearance occurred because her parents brought her personal belongings to her hospital room. It signifies that Mentari's parents want their child back in their arms. Living together in the real world and realizing all her dreams.

Furthermore, the scene depicting Mentari's sudden disappearance and her confession that it was her wish is a sign that Mentari doesn't want to leave the world to be with Timur, in Pancarona House, or their subconscious. She wants to be with her family, live life as it should be, and complete her unrealized dreams. Mentari's actions consciously hurt Timur, who desperately wanted them to be together. It can be seen in Timur's expression of disbelief when Mentari says her wish. The expression shown by Timur refers to his disappointment with Mentari's choice and selfishness in determining an ending. Timur's willingness to give Mentari a chance to live is a sign that he still loves Mentari sincerely until the end of his life.

The actions taken by Mentari and Timur based on Allport's psychology of religion are an extrinsic orientation. The extrinsic orientation that appears from their actions is a form of escape from the universe's rules that do not allow them to be together in a family ark. It is also supported by the participation of the residents of Pancarona House, who allow Timur and Mentari to marry without any binding rules based on their beliefs or regulations in the real world.

### 3.2. Discussion

The three films that are the object of this research indicate an inner struggle, especially in responding to religious differences in marriage. The movie *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1*, set in Egypt and the Nile River, brings together Fahri and Maria, two humans entrusted with love by the intermediary of Surah

Maryam in the Holy Qur'an. Similarly, *Tanda Tanya* brings together illustrations of religious differences and love through Menuk and Ping Hen in a Chinese-owned restaurant in Semarang City. The portrait of religious differences and the attempt to reconcile with love is also present in the movie *Akhirat: A Love Story* through Mentari and Timur, who are driven by youth and dreams of being together. Furthermore, the inner struggles and negotiation patterns that lead to the resolution of the story of different religious marriages experienced by the characters will be embodied in the following subsections.

### 3.2.1. Inner Struggle in Making the Decision to Marry a Different Religion

#### 3.2.1.1. Inner Struggle in Decision-Making in the Movie *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* 1

Fahri's meeting with Maria while in Egypt is inevitable, which can be interpreted as a sign of the growth of romance. Until, in the process, it marks a mutually bound event to make them a reflection of the sincerity of feelings of love. Maria, a Coptic Christian, has feelings for Fahri, a pious student from Indonesia, and his depth of understanding of Islam, which shows the beginning of an inner struggle.

As shown in the image above (figure 1), Maria delivers a dialog: "Aku juga suka Nil, kalau nggak ada Sungai Nil, nggak akan ada Mesir, nggak akan ada kehidupan." ("I also like the Nile; if there is no Nile, there would be no Egypt, and there would be no life"). Maria's dialogue marks two things: hope and awareness. When she says she also likes the Nile, she agrees with Fahri's previous statement about the Nile. It shows her desire to accompany whatever Fahri says; togetherness also leads to marriage. However, she also comes to a realization when she does not immediately say that she wants to be Fahri's bride. The cropped setting of the image is also a sign of a realization of Surah Maryam, about the woman who gave birth to Isa a.s. in solitude.

The illustration shows that the world represented by the movie shows an inner struggle faced by lovers of different religions. Differences in religious beliefs prevent the union of love in marriage. However, as a symbolic representation of Coptic Christianity, Maria loves someone in her heart and does not force Fahri (a symbolic representation of Islam) to pair up with her. It is especially illustrated when Fahri and Aisyah decide to get married, a union that Maria recognizes as the beginning of the gathering of longing. However, Maria did not demand Fahri to feel her longing. She chose to be wise by sticking to her beliefs even though the feeling of love had to put her in a downward condition. This condition will later become a turning point for another process of inner struggle.

Maria was one of the crucial witnesses who freed Fahri from prison, forcing her already weak self to free the man she loved. At this moment, Fahri asks Aisyah for permission to tell the story next to the hospital bed where Maria is being treated. At that time, Fahri said, "...Atau keranjangmu yang suka jatuh ke tanah karena terlalu berat membawa buku yang mau kau pinjam. Bangun Maria." ("...Or your basket that likes to fall to the ground because it is too heavy to carry the book you want to borrow. Wake up, Maria"). The narrative expression conveyed by Fahri was delivered in a soft tone, which became a sign of the subtlety of Fahri's attitude, which was widely captured as a sign of affection by Maria until this process reached Maria's declaration to convert to Islam and marry Fahri. This polygamy initially becomes a problem in the love triangle of Maria, Fahri, and Aisyah.

Seeing that, the focus that needs to be shown is the marriage process after Maria's first inner struggle as an individual. Maria's decision to convert also reflects the process of interfaith marriage, when love becomes an option to continue life. However, this condition presents another inner struggle, especially when it comes to the polygamy procedure, which is initially shown as unwillingness and doubt through Fahri's various expressions. Although polygamy eventually occurs, Aisyah also processes herself through inner struggles with her inner unacceptability. It becomes a cross-section of how the decision to end one's inner struggle with a polygamous marriage can present another inner battle. When the conflict peaks, Aisyah experiences a catharsis to accept polygamy - a sign of sincerity, after the sign of her inner journey is done by staying away from home and returning home. This

condition is similar to the statement by Allport (1965), where an individual can come to a position overwhelmed by his nothingness. The concept of nothingness is related to two things, namely helplessness and resignation. When this condition occurs, an individual comes to a religious value that is not only concerned with personal understanding. A man's agreement to have one wife becomes void when his first wife reaches this state of nothingness - and there is an acceptance of a new fate after an inner struggle.

### 3.2.1.2. Inner struggle in decision-making in the movie *Tanda Tanya*

**Figure 5.** 00.24.22 | Menuk and sadness before marriage



The inner struggle to negotiate the condition of meeting religious differences in the context of marriage is also shown in the movie *Tanda Tanya*, especially in this case, which focuses on the characters Menuk and Ping Hen. Menuk and Ping Hen are illustrated in the film as two characters of different religions who love each other, a Confucian and a Muslimah. Of course, this event is often seen in the development of love in society occasionally.

However, as captured in the snippet, there is a dialogue delivered by Ibu Menuk, "Pernikahan itu ibarat naik perahu, yang satu mendayung, yang satu mengemudikannya. Kalian harus bisa gantian." ("Marriage is like riding a boat, one rowing, one steering. You have to be able to take turns"). The dialog leads to the concept that marriage should be on the same boat, with the same rowing goal. As a signifier, the ship is a form of media used to sail the ocean, which signifies faith. This difference in faith, as a signifier, points to the difference in the construction of the oars used to coast through life. It leads to the marker of different life goals, different ways of worship, and how to deal with all the various life processes. This statement then makes Menuk struggle with choosing between love and religious belief.

Menuk is already married to Sholeh. However, this did not prevent Menuk from being nice to Ping Hen. After Menuk married Sholeh, Ping Hen was more often temperamental because of her disappointment with Menuk, who chose Soleh. This condition shows that Ping Hen is also in an inner struggle because of his intense love for Menuk. As shown in the picture, Ping Hen has a crumpled face, and Menuk is at peace. At that moment, Menuk said, "Saya minta Mas jangan lampiasin amarah Mas Hendra ke orang tua Mas atau ke suami saya. Assalamualaikum." ("I ask you not to take your anger out on your parents or my husband. Assalamualaikum"). Pulled straight to the *Assalamualaikum* sentence, Menuk was in a state of focus on the value of her religiosity. Allport (1965) said that the depth of religion an individual achieves can lead to a focus previously on mingled motives and desires. *Assalamualaikum* means prayer for salvation so that someone who finds the phrase will continue to find himself far from disaster. The phrase is also an option to respond to the process of interfaith marriage. Both are examples of humans who do not need to force the unity of love. A couple who, although not united in marriage, can still find themselves in a healthy friendship.

Even though inner struggles still occur, gentle communication and not returning fire with fire keep them in balanced states.

### 3.2.1.3. Inner Struggle in Decision-Making in the Movie *Akhirat: A Love Story*

**Figure 5.** 01.08.25 | Mentari and Timur before marriage



The portrait cut from the movie *Akhirat: A Love Story* has an inner struggle that no less represents the conditions of married life in Indonesia. Mentari is Muslim, while Timur is Christian. Both admit to being in love with each other, but their parents don't give their blessing because of their different beliefs. Eventually, they had an accident and were in a coma. At that time, their spirits wandered and met various other spirits who chose not to go to the afterlife.

Allport (1965) explains that the island of individual consciousness draws its composition and support. In this movie, the absence of support from their respective parents presents a similar inner struggle between Timur and Mentari. Both are still looking for a way to unite but are constantly confronted by the sincerity of the parents waiting in the hospital. Finally, when Timur reaches the island of individual consciousness - when he gives up his life, even though he is not with Mentari in the afterlife, he can still see Mentari resolving her inner conflict, ending her parents' grief, and continuing her dream.

It shows that the inner struggle associated with interfaith marriage can be resolved by accepting not to be together, as happened to Ping Hen and Menuk. However, the process of overcoming inner struggles through death is also an irony. A couple finally accepts not being together when, physically, one has ended their existence. Regardless, Mentari shows another catharsis by still visiting Timur's grave, even though she has no space to say her prayers. It also shows the path of wisdom that Mentari is trying to decide: to remain a human being who honors the history of his love, even though it doesn't have to be through marriage.

### 3.2.2. Resolution of Interfaith Marriage: Patterns of Negotiation

The three films present resolutions that vary depending on the individual's level of religious belief. Nonetheless, all three films present characters confronting romance with intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. Allport (1960)(Gordon W. Allport, 1960) conceptualized the motivations underlying religiosity in terms of the differentiation between intrinsic (I) and extrinsic (E) religiosity and defined its dimensions as follows: Extrinsic religion is a self-interested, utilitarian and self-protective form of religious outlook, which provides comfort and salvation to adherents at the expense of outside groups. Intrinsic religion marks a life that has internalized the creeds of the faith thoroughly and unconditionally, including the commandment to love one's neighbor. A person with this type is more intent on serving his religion than making it serve him.

The inner conflicts present in different religious marriages in the film are caused by differences in the characters' internalization of their religion. Some characters prioritize their feelings of love (ego) and try to negotiate religious and family rules prohibiting marriages of different faiths. Some other characters with strong religious principles try to put aside their feelings of love and desire to unite in marriage. According to Allport, religiosity takes on intrinsic value in intrinsically oriented individuals, while in extrinsically oriented individuals, religiosity performs an instrumental function. Allport & Ross (1967) further noted motivational differences between the two types of religion. They characterize intrinsic religion by stating that people with [intrinsic religious] orientation find their primary motive in religion. No matter how strong, other needs are considered less important and, as far as possible, are harmonized with religious beliefs and rules. Having embraced a belief, the individual strives to internalize and follow it thoroughly. It is in this sense that he practices his religion.

Extrinsic religion is characterized as people with [extrinsic religious] orientation tend to use their orientation for their purposes. Extrinsic values are always instrumental and benefit-oriented. People with this orientation may find religion valuable, as it provides security and comfort, hospitality and distraction, and status and self-justification. Adhered beliefs are lightly held or selectively shaped to fit more overriding needs. In theological terms, extrinsic types turn to God without turning away from self. Thus, the extrinsic religious orientation of religion is practiced to be seen by people, admired by people, or to obtain certain positions and offices. Religion becomes a tool for interests outside of religion. Meanwhile, intrinsic religious orientation shows that spiritual beliefs become a personal part, merge with personality, and dissolve in conversations and acts of worship solely to fulfill the thirst for knowledge of the Almighty.

Romantic relationships involving religious differences always place individuals in this kind of polarization. An attempt at negotiation is often made to move one individual towards the other's religion. However, this is usually uncomfortable and unsettling for both individuals. After all, religious and more prominent group (family or community) attachments and their emotional attachments are not easily disentangled. How characters respond to intermarriage is linked to morality and the preservation of broader stability. Interfaith marriages are often associated with the consequences of disharmonious relationships with close family members who disapprove of interfaith marriages and the displacement of family members.

The patterns of negotiation that emerge in the three films used as the object of study are the first is the effort to force marriage by ignoring religion, the second is the effort to give up separation to maintain their faith, the third is the occurrence of marriage for the sake of greater love and wisdom. However, all three patterns involve complex emotional struggles that are difficult to navigate. The process ultimately leads individuals to question their faith to the point of evaluating the extent to which religion is essential in their lives. With a series of long dilemma processes and complicated negotiations, these three films ultimately make the characters realize that, intrinsically, religion is the most appropriate decision in addressing different religious marriages. Interests outside of spiritual teachings and beliefs are finally put aside and let go for inner and emotional comfort and the harmonization of a broader life together.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The attempt to tie the feelings of love of a couple towards marriage can be challenged by religious beliefs. The three films analyzed in this study show that marriage efforts in religious differences can present diverse conflicts for each family. Therefore, negotiations are born that lead each character to reconcile with their respective beliefs. Although different religious marriages cause significant reactions from the various parties involved, in the end, individuals place religious beliefs as a priority. The realization to put aside feelings of love towards a potential partner

(individual) arises because there are more essential things that should be defended (Godhead) and greater harmony that needs to be maintained, namely the family. These films suggest that individuals in different religious relationships can look more and evaluate themselves to reach a high level of religiosity (intrinsic). Ultimately, this study can show how films contribute to increasing Indonesian society's awareness of the layers of faith that can contribute to the level of wisdom in decision-making related to religious conflicts.

This research ultimately contributes to film and religious studies in Indonesia. This research not only shows the representation of interfaith marriage but also the inner complexity of individuals in dealing with issues of religious differences. This research provides an in-depth understanding and critical evaluation of Indonesian society when facing interfaith love relationships. The various negotiation patterns in this film are a form of offering and input for the community to review their religious ways to minimize dilemmas when facing similar problems. This research can be further developed by comparing many Indonesian films to obtain more comprehensive results.

This research limits its analysis to understanding the desirability and outcomes of marriages initiated by religious differences. In this case, the meaning of this is obtained by understanding the narrative and semiotic signs illustrated by Hanung Bramantyo's films *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 1*, which aired in 2008, *Tanda Tanya*, also directed by Hanung Bramantyo in 2011, and *Akhirat: A Love Story* which aired on Netflix in 2021. The three films bring together characters of different religions who wish to unite their romantic relationship in a formal realm, marriage. However, differences present polemics, which are referred to as inner struggles. All these processes gave birth to negotiations to resolve the differences and create harmony between each belief. The findings are reflected in the concrete life in Indonesia's plural societies.

**Acknowledgments:** All three researchers contributed ideas of plurality in various literary works and audio-visual art shown in digital spaces. Finally, considering the popularity of the movies and the romantic state of marriage, the three researchers selected the movies with the titles written above.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors have no conflicts of interest in preparing this study.

**Author contributions:** At every research stage, various contributions can be made. Anindita Fikri Amalia, in this case, becomes a theoretical benchmark for processing the analysis of the scientific article written. Marta Widyawati processes the distinctions and motives found in the data to see the harmony of religious differences aired by the research objects. Meanwhile, Muhammad Hamdan Mukafi provides an analytical projection to see the reflective opportunities of this research towards the condition of Indonesian society.

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