

The Meaning of Film with the Theme of Interfaith Marriage in Multicultural and Multi-Religious Indonesian Students

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ABSTRACT

Interfaith marriage is an increasingly heated issue in Indonesia, along with the increasingly massive practice carried out by couples of different religions, ranging from ordinary people to presidential staff, and causing pros and cons among the public. Most recently, a Christian man who wanted to marry his Muslim lover filed a lawsuit for review of the Marriage Law with the Constitutional Court, especially Article 2 paragraphs 1 and 2, and Article 8 letter f, which generally regulates the validity and prohibition of marriage. Interfaith marriage, which became a social issue, later became an interesting theme adopted by the scriptwriters and directors for the film. There are at least five film titles with the theme of interfaith marriages that have been displayed in Indonesian cinemas since 1999. Filmgoers who are predominantly teenagers and adults, of course, have different meanings for the narratives of the films they watch; this can be influenced by various aspects, especially cultural and religious backgrounds. The meaning of the film "Cinta Tapi Beda" will be given by a student audience that represents the dominant age of cinemagoers in Indonesia. This is qualitative research with a constructivist paradigm. The method of selecting the source uses *the criterion sampling* technique, where the criteria for the source have been determined in advance. The data collection method used in this study was through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guidelines. The data analysis method uses Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory by classifying meaning into dominant, negotiating, and oppositional. The results showed that one in four audiences was in a position of dominant hegemony, one was in a negotiating position, and the other two were in an opposition position.

Keywords: interfaith marriage, reception theory, Stuart hall's, the meaning of film.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Religion is one of the riches of the plurality that exists in Indonesian society. The Indonesian government has recognized six official religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and finally Confucianism (Maulid *et al.*, 2018). Of the six official Indonesian religions, data obtained at the end of 2021 states that Islam is the dominating religion, as many as 237.53 million people, equivalent to 86.9% of Indonesian citizens, are Muslims. A total of 20.45 million Indonesians are Christians, and around 8.42 million are Catholics. Meanwhile, Hindus are around 4.67 million, and Buddhists are 2.03 million. The adherents of Confucianism alone amount to 73,635 people and there are around 126,515 equivalents to 0.05% of the Indonesian population adhering to other beliefs (*Sebanyak 86,9% Penduduk Indonesia Beragama Islam*, n.d.).

Article 29 paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia states that Indonesian people are freed and protected by the state to embrace the religion they believe in. However, it cannot be denied that religious diversity in Indonesia has also caused various social implications, such as discrimination of religious minorities and riots between religious communities, cases that often occur in the dynamics of religious social life in Indonesia. In relation to social life, one of the phenomena arising from inter-religious interactions is inter-religious marriage. This is part of the social problem because, in general, it is not recommended by any religion; some even expressly prohibit it.

The prohibition of interfaith marriage in Indonesia is also implicitly contained in the regulations of Marriage Law No. 1/1974 (*UU Nomor 1 Tahun 1974*, n.d.). Article 1 of the Marriage Law states that every marriage must be based on God Almighty, which can be interpreted that as long as it is based on God, marriages of any religion can be recognized by the state. However, article 2 paragraph 1 explains more

specifically the matters relating to religion, where the paragraph reads” Marriage is valid if it is carried out according to the law of each religion and belief.” Although there is a legal prohibition, in fact it is not fully able to control the rampant interfaith marriages in Indonesia.

In recent years, the issue of interfaith marriage has increasingly become a topic of discussion. Interfaith marriage has become a popular theme in various public discussions and seminars, along with the massive discussion on tolerance, until it was finally adopted in the world of cinema as well as other social issues. The theme of religious marriage is a sensitive one in Indonesian cinema, so there are often pros and cons after its screening. Movies with this theme are considered controversial because they are considered to spread messages that violate religious orders.

Referring to the background explanation above, the problem to be studied in this research is how the meaning of religious marriage-themed films on Kampus Mengajar (teaching campus) batch 3 students who represent the age of the majority of Indonesian film viewers. This research will discuss the meaning of a movie with the theme of interfaith marriage, which was purposefully chosen among several movie titles with similar themes, namely *Cinta Tapi Beda* (love but different) (2012) by director Hanung Bramantyo. The purpose of this research is to find out the meaning of the movie from various perspectives according to the backgrounds of the students who are the sources, so that diverse data can be obtained and more points of view related to the theme of interfaith marriage can be captured. The urgency of this research is to explain the meaning of the film to several students who are sampling sources from the age group of the majority of film viewers in Indonesia and find out the extent to which the film’s message has an impact on each student.

As a country with a high degree of plurality, interfaith marriage is a phenomenon that has always existed in Indonesian society. Despite being a recurring phenomenon, it has yet to be fully accepted by society. Pros and cons related to interfaith marriage always appear every time this case becomes news, usually if it occurs among public figures and gets more attention from the public. As a social phenomenon, the use of interfaith marriage as a theme in a movie is a natural thing because movies can re-represent and construct social realities that occur in society. These two things can be seen in the way a movie delivers a picture of reality in various forms of meaningful symbols that contain aesthetic messages. A movie, which is a form of message consisting of various signs and symbols that form a system of meaning, can be interpreted differently by the audience according to their references and thinking abilities (Pertiwi *et al.*, 2020). Although films frequently address social realities, they do not always address those realities in their entirety, but instead include fantasies, as well as the abstract ideas of scriptwriters and directors (Risal & Nisa, 2021).

Through movies, a person is able to understand the message better because the information conveyed visually can be better understood, especially if it is uniquely packaged with an interesting storyline and enriched with sound effects. Therefore, it is not uncommon for movies to be considered propaganda tools because of their ability to influence the audience (Ghassani & Nugroho, 2019). Entering the digital era like today, the majority of people, especially teenagers, utilize digital media (including movies) as a means of learning and acquiring knowledge (Anisa & Winduwati, 2021). As one of the information media, movies have an essential element that can quickly provide a picture, negative or positive, of the daily behavior of adolescents. Even the problems they face and how to overcome them are influenced by the meaning of the movies they watch (Mirna Nur Alia, 2015). The content of a movie can reinforce the audience’s existing worldview, but it can also change it, depending on the audience’s personal ideals. When watching a movie, the audience constructs the meaning of reality in each scene with different ways of thinking, thus interpreting the movie’s message differently. Here, it can be understood that the difference in meaning between the meaning constructed by the director and the meaning produced by the audience is very likely to occur (Sari, 2015).

Several studies related to movie interpretation have been conducted, both published as journal articles and as final assignments. The meaning of the movie is divided into two different scopes according to the point of view and theory used by the researcher. First, the meaning given by the researcher himself to interpret the symbols contained in the film. This kind of interpretation uses semiotic theory. Second, the meaning given by the movie audience outside the researcher. Researchers use audience reception theory to explore in depth the meanings given by the audience, who are the sources in the study. In this study, the meaning that will be used is the second model, where researchers will determine several sources as viewers and interview them in depth to find out the meaning of the film based on the perspective of each individual.

In a thesis entitled “Interpretation of Films with the Theme of Interfaith Marriage in Chinese Teenage Audiences (Reception Analysis of Cin(T)A Film)” written by Win Dwitomo, the results of his research concluded that the meaning of Chinese teenagers regarding the issue of interfaith marriage in the film Cin(T)a is influenced by factors of frameworks of knowledge, media relations, and technical infrastructure. Muslim Chinese teenagers tend to reject movies that raise the issue of interfaith marriage, while Christian Chinese teenagers are more open to similar movie themes. This study found that the relationship between the factors that influence meaning does not work linearly, where the factors that influence meaning are not directly proportional to the results (Dwitomo, 2014).

Furthermore, an article entitled “The Meaning of Racism in Film (Reception Analysis of the Film Get

Out)” written by Adlina Ghassani and Chess Nugroho. The results of this study indicate that the meaning given by the four informants of the *Get Out* film audience produces different meanings from the seven scene analysis units studied, and that the position of the audience in their acceptance of racism in the *Get Out* film is dominated by the opposition position. There are also some informants who are in a dominant hegemonic position when interpreting each scene containing different racist material (Ghassani & Nugroho, 2019).

Another piece of research is in the form of an article entitled “The Meaning of Body Positivity in Imperfect Movies Among Teenagers in Jakarta.” The results of this study state that most of the informants who became research sources were in a negotiation position, namely, agreeing that the characterizations and stories conveyed in the *Imperfect* movie have body positivity values, but some of the scenes that appear in the film fall into exceptions. Body positivity is the accumulation of positive body image, self-confidence, and acceptance of body shape; it is an invitation to love oneself, especially for women who often lose self-confidence due to judging their bodies as not ideal (Anisa & Winduwati, 2021).

The same movie is also the subject of other research in the form of an article entitled “Body Shaming in Film (Reception Analysis of Imperfect Film).” The findings revealed that teenage victims of body shaming in the *Imperfect* film produced four meanings of body shaming in the negotiation position, namely: body shaming can happen to anyone, but in different proportions; perpetrators of body shaming are not only female, but also male; body shaming occurs frequently in the workplace, but not all jobs always prioritize appearance; and how to reduce body shaming is to accept and love yourself without trying to change it. Three other meanings of “body shaming” in the *Imperfect* movie that are in the dominant position are: “body shaming is not a joke,” “body shaming must enter the realm of education that is introduced to children from an early age, and body shaming can have an impact on unpleasant feelings” (Khotimah *et al.*, 2020).

Another article related to this research is entitled “Reception Analysis of Audience Interpretation of Family Conflict in the Film ‘Dua Garis Biru’ (two blue lines).” The results showed that the audience’s reception of the movie *Dua Garis Biru* in the first and second conflict scenes was dominated by a dominant-hegemonic position, which means that the message is interpreted ideally so that the audience can capture the message conveyed by the director. However, the third conflict scene is dominated by an oppositional position where the audience interprets the message by denying it and choosing alternative references to interpret the scene. This supports the argument that the audience does not always interpret a movie’s message in accordance with the director’s wishes (Pertiwi *et al.*, 2020).

From the five studies above, there are differences with the research that will be conducted by researchers, both from the film that is the object of research and from the sources who will interpret the film. As mentioned earlier, the movie that will be interpreted in this study is entitled “*Cinta Tapi Beda*” and the sources chosen purposefully are four Kampus Mengajar batch 3 students who have received lectures on tolerance.

II. METHODS

This study examines the results of the interpretation of the audience of the movie “*Cinta Tapi Beda*” which has the theme of interfaith marriage. The audience used as sources came from the student group. This research is considered significant to find out various aspects of students’ perspectives on the issue.

This study uses a qualitative research method with a reception analysis approach based on Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model that observes the fusion between media discourse and the discourse and culture of its audience (Hall, 2005). This research model requires researchers to understand the data source documents integrative and comprehensively.

In qualitative research, social data collection has the purpose of helping researchers interpret and understand several things: (1) Why people perform social actions; (2) How they build their lives and the meanings they attach to them; and (3) The social context of a social action. What matters is not the observable social action but the subjective meaning of the action (Sarantakos, 2013).

The data collection method for this qualitative research used in-depth interview techniques. an interview in the true sense of the word, which is to uncover the “inner views” of the interviewee (Chirban, 1996). In-depth interviews also use a form of questionnaire in the format of an interview guide. An interview guide is intended to obtain the required information through a structured list of questions; in other words, in-depth interviews conducted with interviewees are all planned, not random (Sarantakos, 2013).

The data analysis technique that will be used adapts the opinion of Milles & Huberman (1994), namely collecting data and then reducing it to present and conclude the processed data. So, the results of the interviews are not displayed in their entirety, but have gone through the data processing process according to the research needs.

III. SYNOPSIS FILM “CINTA TAPI BEDA”

The main character of this story is Cahyo, who works as a chef. He is a Muslim from Yogyakarta and lives in Jakarta. At the beginning of the story, he is told to have just been abandoned by Mitha, his girlfriend, who turned to another man. On one occasion, he gets acquainted with Diana, a Catholic girl from Padang who is studying dance education. Their introduction took place at a dance studio owned by Cahyo's aunt. Gradually, their relationship grew closer, and they decided to become lovers. Wanting to move to a more serious level, Cahyo then introduced Diana to his father. Cahyo's father expressly disapproved of their relationship for reasons of religious differences. Similarly, when Cahyo was introduced to Diana's mother, she expressed her disapproval and wanted Diana to marry a man who was also a Catholic.

In the helplessness of forgetting his lover, Cahyo tried to meet Diana's mother to say that he wanted to propose to Diana. At that time, Diana's mother was furious and did not allow Cahyo to approach Diana again. Diana's mother insisted that she would not approve of their relationship. Time passed, and it turned out that Cahyo and Diana were still unable to forget each other, so they secretly kept fighting for love. One day they went to the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) to ask about how people of different religions could get married. There they got an explanation. So that the marriage could be legalized, one of them had to convert. Diana and Cahyo did not agree to this rule because they had agreed to stick to their respective beliefs. At that time, they were increasingly worried about the fate of their relationship.

When Diana finished her dance exam, her mother introduced her to a Catholic man who was a doctor. The man's name was Oka. Doctor Oka is a friend of Diana's mother's church. Diana's mother intended to match her daughter with Doctor Oka, but Diana refused because she still loved Cahyo very much. As a result of Diana's refusal, her mother began to get sick. Diana finally returned to Padang and accepted her match with Doctor Oka. Diana tried hard to close her heart to Cahyo. Both Diana and Cahyo live a tough life with their respective life choices. Cahyo then considers Diana the same as Mitha, who left him for another man.

In Padang, Diana tried to love her future husband, and Oka also tried to help Diana forget her former lover. When Oka and Diana's wedding day arrived, Diana tried to contact Cahyo by phone to tell him about the wedding, but Cahyo did not respond. When the Catholic wedding vows were said, Diana was silent and unable to answer the priest's questions. Oka finally called off the wedding on the grounds that he did not want Diana to marry under duress and without love, so that later she would not be happy. Diana then fell on her mother's lap and apologized that she could not marry Oka and promised to be a filial daughter. Diana's mother was unable to do anything. In the end, Diana's mother gave her daughter the freedom to choose the path she wanted. On the other hand, when he learned that Diana was getting married, Cahyo then rushed to Padang. He asked for his mother's blessing, but the mother said that he should ask for his father's blessing as well. When Cahyo insisted on asking for his blessing, his father could not do anything else and gave Cahyo the freedom to choose his path. Cahyo also met Diana in Padang. It is not told what they did after the meeting. The movie ends at the meeting scene without explaining how this interfaith love story ends. The scriptwriter and director chose to let the audience imagine the ending of the story because everyone's interpretation is different.

IV. INTERPRETATION OF “FILM CINTA TAPI BEDA”

As mentioned in the background, the interviewees were selected purposefully with predetermined criteria. The interviewees in this study were four KM 3 (Teaching Campus batch 3) students who came from different ethnicities and religions. The four students are (1) C, female, a student of Udayana University Bali, Balinese, and Hindu; (2) T, female, a student of Udayana University Bali, Batak, and Protestant Christian; (3) R, male, a student of Jenderal Soedirman University Purwokerto, Javanese, and Muslim; and (4) J, male, a student of Pakuan University Bogor, Chinese, and Buddhist. The Teaching Campus is part of the MBKM (independent learning, independent campus) program, which aims to foster tolerance among students by sending them to locations outside of their respective regions and campuses to learn about culture and interact with the larger community (*Dorong Tumbuh Kembang Toleransi Mahasiswa Lewat Program Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka-Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi Kementerian Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia*, n.d.). To meet this goal, students involved in this program have received training or taken courses on diversity so that they are not easily suspicious when facing differences. Therefore, the different religions and cultural backgrounds of the four interviewees are considered to represent the audience's understanding of the meaning of the movie that is the object of research. This is considered important because the movie tells a love story between two people of different religions and cultures who encounter various obstacles to being able to continue their relationship to the level of marriage. The meaning that will be given by the four students can certainly vary, influenced by their different cultural and religious backgrounds. This difference in meaning will show the extent to which the movie's message can reach the audience.

The meaning of the film in this study, as described in the research method, will be carried out according to Stuart Hall's meaning reception theory, the essence of which is how the meaning encoded by the sender is received as something unique by the audience. The sender sends a message according to their perception, and the meaning of the message will interact with the audience through the decoding process. When receiving this message, the audience will be divided into three positions according to its acceptance of the message sent by the sender, namely: (1) The position of dominant hegemony, where the audience fully accepts the message conveyed by the media because the media conveys its message following the dominant culture. (2) A position of negotiation, where the audience accepts the message in general but will refuse to apply it if there are differences with the culture and values held. (3) Opposition position: in this position, the audience has perceptions and perspectives that are contrary to the sender's message, thus completely rejecting the message (Hall, 2005).

A. *The Position of Dominant Hegemony*

From the results of interviews with the four informants who became the audience in this study, related to the meaning of interfaith marriage depicted in the movie *Cinta Tapi Beda*, one of the informants, J, was in the position of dominant hegemony. where he has no problem with interfaith marriage. According to him, to the best of his knowledge as a non-fanatical Buddhist, Buddhism does not prohibit interfaith marriage nor does it require its adherents to have a Buddhist marriage. He admits that this view is based on his Buddhist teachings, according to which if there is a Buddhist who wants to marry a non-Buddhist partner, he is welcome to do so under the rules of his partner's religion. However, he also underlined that because interfaith marriage is still a polemic in Indonesia, couples who want to carry out interfaith marriages must really understand all the consequences, and if they are not able to bear all these consequences, it would be better not to continue and end it. The interviewee also agreed with the sender's message in the form of criticism of the Indonesian government, namely that there are no special rules or laws related to interfaith marriage, so there is no forum that can accommodate cases like this and let them go.

B. *The Position of Negotiation*

The resource person in this position is C, who is a Hindu. According to her, as far as she knows, in her religion there is no prohibition against interfaith marriage, so she can accept the message contained in the movie. However, in her culture, marriage is very dependent on the family and the traditions they hold. Although the message of interfaith marriage can be well accepted, there are certain things that cannot be accepted by the informant, namely the change in attitude of the parents depicted in the movie. According to her, if rejecting interfaith marriage is a principle, parents should not be easily swayed just because they do not want to see their children sad. The change in parents' attitudes depicted in the movie, both from the male and female sides, is considered something that is difficult to happen in reality. Similar to informant J, informant C also criticized the government for the absence of special rules for couples of different religions who want to legalize their marriage.

C. *The Position of Opposition*

The other two interviewees, T and R, were in an oppositional position, where they could not accept the message conveyed by the sender through the movie medium because it did not match the ideals, they believed in. Interviewee T, who is a Protestant Christian, acknowledged that interfaith marriage is prohibited and not recognized in her religion. This is because some of her religious rules require the presence of both parents, such as at a child's baptism ceremony. Interfaith marriages, in his opinion, will only make it difficult for children born from these marriages in the future. She also believes that no parent would approve of an interfaith marriage, as most parents would assume that such a marriage model would end up in vain and would not find a middle ground, especially for couples who still want to maintain their respective beliefs as depicted in the movie. It is difficult for parents to give their blessing because it is feared that one of the couples will leave their religion to convert to their partner's religion, which will certainly hurt the parents' feelings.

Interviewee R, who is a Muslim, believes that the movie *Cinta Tapi Beda* is difficult to accept by the public because it raises themes that are still considered sensitive. He also admitted that in his religion, interfaith marriage is not known or recognized. According to him, interfaith marriages are not in accordance with the norms that exist in Indonesian society and are also not in accordance with the laws and regulations that apply in Indonesia. As far as he knows, interfaith marriage is considered illegal in Indonesia, especially since there are no regulations that accommodate this practice. Couples who enter into an interfaith marriage will find social pressure so high that they personally feel certain that they will not choose to do so. Not only do interfaith couples face societal rejection, but they are also not recognized by Indonesian marriage law.

From the results of in-depth interviews conducted by researchers with the informants, it was found that the message of interfaith marriage interpreted by the sender and sent through the medium of the movie *Cinta Tapi Beda* was not fully accepted by the informants. Only one of the four informants can accept this message as a whole, and this is because it does not conflict with the dominant culture that he holds. The

acceptance of the sender's message by the interviewees is closely related to their religion. It can be determined that, despite claiming not to be religious fanatics, the informants still considered accepting or rejecting the meaning of the sender's message according to their respective religious perspectives. In the case of the negotiation position, the informants accept the message of interfaith marriage well because it does not contradict the religion they profess, but there are other things tucked away in the message that are not in accordance with the culture and values they believe in. So, there is negotiation in accepting the sender's message because it is not in accordance with his culture. Meanwhile, in the case of opposition, two informants have principles that contradict the sender's message. Both of them recognize that in their religions, interfaith marriage is not allowed. Both also feel that interfaith marriage will complicate the lives of couples who do it in the future, because they are dealing with not only opposing families but also society in general and state law.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted by researchers through in-depth interviews with four informants about the meaning of interfaith marriage in the movie *Cinta Tapi Beda*, the position of the informants as viewers and audiences is divided into three different categories. One of the four informants is in the dominant hegemony position, one is in the negotiation position, and the last two are in the opposition position. The four speakers interpreted the message sent by the sender through the movie medium in accordance with their religion. This proves that religion is still an important consideration for students when making decisions related to marriage and the future.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest among the authors conducting research for this article. The research proceeded in accordance with the facts and data obtained from the sources, and the sources were also not forced or directed to answer the researcher's questions.

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