



Legal Culture and the Dynamics of Religious Interaction in Ritual Practices among Interfaith Marriage

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Abstract: This study examines the legal culture dealing with the interaction of religious practices and rituals among interfaith couples in Purwokerto, Central Java, emphasizing the social and legal dynamics influencing family life. In Indonesian society, interfaith marriage presents a complex issue, intersecting between state legal regulations and religious doctrines. By using qualitative methods through in-depth interviews and analysis of legal documents, this research delves into how interfaith couples navigate their daily lives, compromise the religious differences, and adapt to the prevailing legal framework. Legal culture component in legal system, comprising values and attitudes that influence the operation of the law, this research argues that legal culture significantly influences the practices in not both social and and religious rituals, struggling the efforts to maintain household harmony. The issuance of Supreme Court Circular (SEMA) Number 2 of 2023 gave impact to the comprehensive legal interpretation and adaptation. This study demonstrates of understanding the interrelation of law, religion, and social practices within Indonesia's religious pluralism and its implications for the legal acknowledgment and spiritual lives of interfaith couples.

Keywords: Legal culture, Interfaith couples, Religious interaction, SEMA Number 2 of 2023

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji budaya hukum yang berkaitan dengan interaksi praktik dan ritual keagamaan di antara pasangan beda agama di Purwokerto, Jawa Tengah, dengan menekankan pada dinamika sosial dan hukum yang mempengaruhi kehidupan keluarga. Dalam masyarakat Indonesia, pernikahan beda agama merupakan isu yang kompleks, bersinggungan dengan peraturan hukum negara dan doktrin agama. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam dan analisis dokumen hukum, penelitian ini menggali bagaimana pasangan beda agama menjalani kehidupan sehari-hari, mengkompromikan perbedaan agama, dan beradaptasi dengan kerangka hukum yang berlaku. Komponen budaya hukum dalam sistem hukum, yang terdiri dari nilai-nilai dan sikap yang mempengaruhi bekerjanya hukum, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa budaya hukum secara signifikan mempengaruhi praktik-praktik baik dalam ritual sosial maupun ritual keagamaan, dalam upaya menjaga keharmonisan rumah tangga. Terbitnya Surat Edaran Mahkamah Agung (SEMA) Nomor 2 Tahun 2023 berdampak pada penafsiran dan adaptasi hukum yang komprehensif. Studi ini menunjukkan pemahaman tentang interelasi hukum, agama, dan praktik sosial dalam pluralisme agama di Indonesia serta implikasinya terhadap pengakuan hukum dan kehidupan spiritual pasangan beda agama.

Kata kunci: Budaya hukum, Pasangan beda agama, Interaksi agama, SEMA Nomor 2 Tahun 2023

Introduction

Legal culture extends beyond the formal rules codified within the legal system, encompassing the perceptions, values, norms, and beliefs that shape society's view of law and its role in regulating social life. It reflects how communities understand law's dual function as both a means of social control and a vehicle for justice. Law operates within a broader network of values and norms embraced by diverse communities; thus, legal culture is deeply intertwined with societal traditions, beliefs, and social practices, forming an essential component of daily life.¹

In Indonesia, the complexity of legal culture is heightened by the nation's religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. This pluralistic society encompasses groups that hold distinct perspectives on the law, shaped by their unique religious and cultural beliefs.² Religious values significantly impact public perceptions of the law, particularly on family matters, marriage, inheritance, and individual rights, with religious norms often serving as primary standards for judging the law's fairness. In this context, the application of law is inseparable from local values passed down through generations, and religious norms play a crucial role in guiding social conduct and interactions.³

The interplay between legal culture and religious norms manifests in numerous aspects of social life, including religious practices and traditions. In daily life, Indonesians frequently blend formal legal principles with religious values, fostering a dynamic relationship between state law and religious law. While this interaction occasionally leads to tension, it often promotes harmony within the pluralistic fabric of society. Thus, Indonesia's legal culture reflects not only the state's application of law but also how local communities adapt legal rules to align with their own norms, particularly in the context of religious diversity, which significantly shapes social interaction patterns across the nation.⁴

A noteworthy issue in the interaction between legal culture and religion is how interfaith couples engage in religious rituals. In Indonesia, including Purwokerto, interfaith couples frequently encounter unique challenges in navigating their spiritual lives. Religious rituals play a critical role in individual spirituality, serving as tangible expressions of personal beliefs. However, when individuals from differing religious backgrounds establish a shared household, their ritual practices often come into conflict with the formal legal system and prevailing religious norms, which typically delineate roles and rights based on individual religious affiliations.⁵

Indonesia's religious harmony index serves as a tool to assess the harmony levels among religious communities across various regions. In Purwokerto, this index is shaped by factors such as tolerance

¹ Bani Syarif Maula and Ilyya Muhsin, "Interfaith Marriage and the Religion-State Relationship: Debates between Human Rights Basis and Religious Precepts," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (May 2024): 791, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i2.19479>.

² Edi Gunawan et al., "Interfaith Marriage of North Sulawesi Multicultural Community in Minority Fiqh Perspective," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 19, no. 2 (October 18, 2024): 384-412, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v19i2.8072>; Azhari Akmal Tarigan et al., "Islam and Christianity at Rumah Gadang: The Household Characteristics of Minangnese Interfaith Marriage," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 23, no. 1 (June 2024): 27, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v23i1.11926>.

³ Republik Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945* (Sekretariat Jenderal Mpr Ri, 2002).

⁴ Arbanur Rasyid et al., "Local Wisdom Recognition in Inter-Ethnic Religious Conflict Resolution in Indonesia from Islah Perspective," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 22, no. 1 (2023): 13-26.

⁵ A. Halil Thahir, "Towards the Multidimensional Ushul Al-Fiqh: A Study of the Integration of Science in the Fatwa of Majelis Ulama Indonesia," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (May 2024): 687, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i2.19686>; Asman Asman and Resali bin Muda, "Marriage Agreement Controversy in Indonesia-Malaysia Border Communities in Sambas Regency," *El-Mashlahah* 13, no. 1 (2023): 1-16.

levels, interfaith cooperation, and an understanding of pluralism.⁶ Generally, interfaith harmony in Purwokerto remains well-maintained due to effective communication among religious leaders, the community, and government officials. This harmony is further bolstered by diverse interfaith activities aimed at strengthening communal relationships and fostering spaces for constructive dialogue.⁷

The Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) in Purwokerto plays a vital role in sustaining and enhancing harmony among religious communities. FKUB serves as a platform for dialogue and consultation among government officials, religious leaders, and community members to proactively prevent conflicts rooted in religious differences.⁸ FKUB in Purwokerto regularly organizes interfaith dialogues, promotes the importance of tolerance, and mediates in resolving community conflicts. Its active role has effectively contributed to fostering an environment conducive to religious harmony within the region.

Alongside FKUB, the Gus Durian community in Purwokerto also plays a substantial role in promoting harmony among religious communities. Embracing the spirit of pluralism and tolerance advocated by Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid), this community actively engages in various social activities that include individuals from diverse religious backgrounds.⁹ The Purwokerto-bases-Gus Durian community frequently organizes cultural events, public discussions, and solidarity initiatives aimed at strengthening interfaith bonds, advocating for religious freedom, and fostering respect for diversity within society.

Purwokerto, as a region with high religious diversity, offers a distinctive view of the lives of interfaith couples. In this region, couples from different faiths face challenges not only within the framework of formal law but also in practicing their daily religious lives. Rituals, typically a personal or communal expression of faith, can become sources of tension as couples navigate between adhering to their own religious traditions and seeking compromises acceptable to both. In some instances, couples may find ways to integrate elements of both religions within certain rituals; however, in other cases, differences in ritual practices can lead to heightened tensions, particularly when religious laws and norms impose strict boundaries on interfaith practices.¹⁰

Religious rituals serve not only as spiritual expressions for individuals but also as reflections of identity and social recognition that are intricately linked to a broader system of norms, including legal culture. In Indonesia, where formal law often aligns with the teachings of the predominant religion,

⁶ Erawadi Erawadi and Fadlan Masykura Setiadi, "Exploring Religious Harmony Through Daliha Na Tolu: Local Wisdom in Peacebuilding in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 3 (September 30, 2024): 1379, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i3.1398>.

⁷ Deniansyah Damanik et al., "Religious Moderation By Organization Of Islamic Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah (Character, Identity, And Attitude)," *Islamadina : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 24, no. 2 (September 2023): 233, <https://doi.org/10.30595/islamadina.v24i2.17089>; Nurunnisa Nurunnisa et al., "Implications of Annulment of Marriage on the Distribution of Joint Assets According to the Compilation of Islamic Law and National Law," *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pemikiran* 23, no. 1 (July 4, 2023): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.18592/sjhp.v23i1.9523>. Identity, And Attitude

⁸ Imam Bahrodin et al., "The Strategy of Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) for Realizing A Religious Moderation in Sorong City," *International Journal of Religion* 5, no. 10 (June 2024): 817–28, <https://doi.org/10.61707/8fmcns25>.

⁹ Mursalat, "The Role of Alissa Wahid As A Women Fighter In Implementing Wasathiyah Islam In Indonesia," *Jurnal Dakwah* 23, no. 2 (September 2022): 77–97, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jd.23.2.22.5>; Nasrudin Nasrudin and Sudiro Sudiro, "Gusdurian Islamic Social Movement: Political Discourse, Resource Mobilization, and Framing," *International Journal of Social Science and Religion (IJSSR)* 3, no. 3 SE- (October 6, 2022): 251–76, <https://doi.org/10.53639/ijssr.v3i3.93>.

¹⁰ M Sofwan Jauhari and Abdul Ghoni, "The Level of People's Obedience to MUI Fatwas (COVID-19, Bank Interest, and Interfaith Marriage)," *AHKAM : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 20, no. 2 (December 2020), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v20i2.18685>.

interfaith couples frequently encounter regulations that constrain their freedom of movement. The conflicts arising from these ritual practices extend beyond interpersonal relationships; they also pertain to how legal and social norms respond to the realities of religious diversity. While rituals fundamentally express personal identity and beliefs, they can also become arenas for both cooperation and confrontation between the legal culture of the state and religious values, highlighting the broader social dynamics present in a multicultural society such as Purwokerto.¹¹

Interfaith couples in Indonesia, including those in Purwokerto, frequently encounter dilemmas in managing their households, particularly concerning legal regulations and the teachings of their respective religions. The formal laws governing marriage in Indonesia are primarily based on religious affiliation, complicating the legal status of interfaith marriages. In this context, these couples must work around state regulations that are often restrictive, particularly regarding the recognition of their unions, while also adhering to their religious doctrines, which frequently impose stringent rules on interfaith relationships. This negotiation encompasses not only legal considerations but also the social norms and expectations imposed by both the religious community and the broader society.¹²

Indonesia's marriage law, which mandates religious conformity in marital unions, presents distinct challenges for interfaith couples. Indonesia employs a religion-based legal system for civil matters, such as marriage, couples from differing faiths must seek solutions that are often complicated, whether by choosing one partner's religion or opting to marry abroad for official recognition. This situation adds complexity to the lives of interfaith couples, as they must navigate not only personal matters of faith but also a legal framework that frequently lacks provisions for diversity in marriage. In Purwokerto, as in many other regions of Indonesia, these challenges are particularly pronounced, especially in the context of strong social and religious norms that continue to exert significant influence.¹³

In addition to legal challenges, the practice of rituals in the daily lives of interfaith couples must also be adapted to various social pressures and religious expectations. Religious rituals, which ideally serve as a space for individual spiritual expression, often become arenas for negotiation between the necessity of adhering to the norms of each religion and the requirement to comply with state law. On one hand, couples may feel compelled by religious norms that advocate for exclusivity in ritual practices; on the other hand, they must consider the social ramifications of performing these rituals in a society where the majority adheres to a single religion. This trend adds an added layer of complexity, as each decision regarding rituals and religious activities not only pertains to their personal lives but also affects their social relationships within the broader community.¹⁴

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how legal culture and the dynamics of religious interaction shape and influence the ritual practices of interfaith couples in Purwokerto. In a

¹¹ Asy'ari Asy'ari and Triansyah Fisa, "Interfaith Marriage in Perspectives of Classical and Modern Scholars," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, November 2022, 287–300, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v16i2.6772>.

¹² Iwan Setiawan et al., "Reforming Marriage Law in Indonesia: A Critical Examination of Islamic Law on the Ban of Interfaith Marriages," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, July 2024, 179–98, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v18i2.11134>.

¹³ Nor Salam et al., "Interfaith Marriage from the Perspective of Rationality: Theocentrism in Islamic Law and Anthropocentrism in Human Rights Law," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah*; Vol 16, No 1 (2024) DO - 10.18860/j-Fsh.V16i1.23989, June 30, 2024.

¹⁴ Rosdiana Rosdiana, Ummu Hanah Yusuf Saumin, and Masayu Mashita Maisarah, "Legitimacy on Inter-Faith Marriages: An Analysis of the Role of Religious Councils on the Legal Policy in Indonesia," *AHKAM : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 19, no. 1 (July 2019), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v19i1.11710>.

multicultural society, these couples encounter complex challenges in navigating their religious lives. This includes adapting to existing formal legal frameworks, particularly those governing interfaith marriage, as well as managing the differences in religious teachings upheld by each partner. Religious rituals, which are believed as a fundamental teaching, are influenced not only by spiritual values but also by the tensions between state law and religious teachings. Consequently, interfaith couples often find it necessary to negotiate their ritual practices to ensure alignment with both applicable legal and social norms.¹⁵

By conducting an in-depth analysis of how interfaith couples respond to legal regulations and religious norms in their daily lives, this study aims to offer new perspectives on the interplay and mutual influence of law, religion, and culture within a pluralistic society.¹⁶ This study will examine not only how interfaith couples manage conflicts or challenges stemming from the incompatibility between legal and religious regulations but also how they seek compromises that enable them to continue practicing their faith within a broader context. Consequently, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of legal culture in accommodating religious diversity, while also shedding light on the social dynamics that arise within the ritual practices of interfaith couples in Purwokerto.¹⁷

The study employed qualitative field research utilizing a socio-anthropological approach. By integrating the disciplines of social science and anthropology, this research aims to understand the nature and purpose of marriage, focusing on the processes of formation, development, and change, as well as the beliefs and convictions that differentiate the ways of life within interfaith couples' families. An anthropological perspective facilitates an understanding of how cultural values and traditions shape religious views and practices among interfaith couples in Purwokerto City, Central Java.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Purwokerto City

Purwokerto serves as the de jure center of the Banyumas Regency government and is situated in Central Java. To the north, it is bordered by Mount Slamet, Tegal Regency, and Pemalang Regency; to the south, it borders Cilacap Regency; to the west, it adjoins Cilacap and Brebes Regencies; and to the east, it shares borders with Purbalingga, Kebumen, and Banjarnegara Regencies. Often referred to as an educational city, a tourist destination, a culinary hub, and even a transit city, Purwokerto is also known as a retirement city due to the significant number of retired state officials who have chosen to settle here for its comfort and tranquility.¹⁸

As the capital of Banyumas Regency, Purwokerto boasts a diverse population, predominantly composed of Muslims. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) indicates a steady increase in

¹⁵ Firdha Annisa, "Ritual Unggahan Pada Komunitas Adat Bokokeling (Studi Kasus Pada Komunitas Adat Bonokeling Di Kabupaten Banyumas Menggunakan Teori Liminalitas Victor Turner)," *SOSIALITAS: Jurnal Ilmiah Pend. Sos Ant* 8, no. 1 (2019).

¹⁶ Danu Aris Setiyanto, Sekar Ayu Aryani, and Sri Wahyuni, "ICRP Jakarta and Interfaith Marriage Assistance in Indonesia: Civil Rights, Legal Interpretation, and Advocacy for Interfaith Couples," *Journal of Islamic Law* 5, no. 2 (2024): 170–95, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v5i2.2796>.

¹⁷ Ahmad Rajafi, Arif Sugitanata, and Vinna Lusiana, "The 'Double-Faced' Legal Expression: Dynamics and Legal Loopholes in Interfaith Marriages in Indonesia," *Journal of Islamic Law* 5, no. 1 SE-Articles (February 29, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v5i1.2153>.

¹⁸ Yusfira Anisa Rahma, S T Wisnu Setiawan, and M Arch, "Perancangan Pusat Pemerintahan Kota Purwokerto" (Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, 2019).

population density in this region, accompanied by a substantial proportion of individuals in the productive age group.¹⁹

In terms of education, the Purwokerto community demonstrates a significant awareness of the importance of education, which can impact perspectives on family law issues, including marriage and inheritance. However, the level of legal literacy, particularly regarding Islamic family law as outlined in the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI), remains varied. Many individuals do not fully comprehend the provisions of the KHI, leading to legal problems that frequently arise of marriage and inheritance.

As one of the educational hubs in Central Java, Purwokerto has fostered a considerable student population, attracting not only individuals from Central Java but also those from outside the region, including other islands and even international students. The Chinese ethnic minority plays a significant role in the city's trade sector, contributing to the social dynamics of Purwokerto. This demographic diversity has a considerable impact on the religious landscape of the city. Additionally, the disproportionate distribution of religious affiliations influences the pluralistic nature of Purwokerto. The percentages of various religious groups are as follows: Islam 87.98%, Christianity 10.73%, with Protestantism at 6.13%, Catholicism at 4.60%, Hinduism at 0.70%, Buddhism at 0.51%, and others at 0.07%.

According to data from the local Religious Affairs Office (KUA), the marriage rate in Purwokerto remains relatively stable each year, with the majority of couples adhering to Islamic law. However, various challenges in the realm of marriage persist, particularly concerning several phenomena. Regarding child marriage, Law No. 16 of 2019, which amends Law No. 1 of 1974, establishes a minimum marriage age of 19 years for both women and men; nonetheless, instances of early marriage continue to occur in Purwokerto. Economic, social, and educational factors are the primary contributors to this phenomenon.²⁰

Interfaith marriage, though prohibited by Islamic law and the Indonesian Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI), continues to occur in Indonesia, albeit in relatively small numbers. Data from the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP) indicates that from 2005 to July 2023, there were 1,645 interfaith marriages in the country.²¹ Those marriages cannot currently be legalized in Indonesia, as Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage mandates that marriages must align with each party's religious teachings. Additionally, the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) only records marriages for Muslims, as stipulated by the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 517/2001 and the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 20/2019. Interfaith marriages conducted by court order are registered with the civil registry office. These cases frequently lead to legal and social dilemmas, touching on public interpretations of religious teachings, individual rights, and state legal provisions. Furthermore, Purwokerto's divorce rate reveals concerning trends, with common causes cited as economic issues, incompatibility, and domestic violence (KDRT). This underscores the need for improved family law literacy and counseling resources for married couples in Purwokerto.

Although the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) serves as an official reference in religious courts, public comprehension of its provisions remains limited. Many married couples are unaware of their

¹⁹ BPS Kabupaten Banyumas, "Jumlah Penduduk Menurut Jenis Kelamin (Jiwa), 2016-2018," 2018.

²⁰ BPS Kabupaten Banyumas, "Jumlah Kasus Dan Penanganan Kasus Kekerasan Terhadap Anak Menurut Kecamatan Di Kabupaten Banyumas," Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Banyumas, 2022.

²¹ Friski Riana, "Makin Sulit Menikah Beda Agama" (2023).

rights and obligations under the KHI, particularly in areas related to divorce, maintenance, and child custody. As social dynamics and societal expectations grow increasingly complex, there is a pressing need for reform and adaptation of the KHI to enhance its relevance to contemporary conditions. This includes strengthening regulations to protect the rights of women and children within marriage.

The social and legal landscape in Purwokerto embodies the diverse dynamics and challenges involved in applying Islamic family law. The occurrence of interfaith marriages highlights the need to enhance legal literacy within the community. While the application of the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) as a foundation for Islamic family law is essential, it must be supported by sufficient public understanding and an adaptive approach to evolving social conditions.

The social dynamics and interactions in Purwokerto have contributed to the occurrence of interfaith marriages. These unions in Purwokerto include partnerships between Muslims and Christians, Muslims and Catholics, Muslims and Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, and Muslims and Confucians.²² The Governor of Central Java has described Purwokerto as a highly pluralistic city, noting the remarkable unity and harmony among interfaith communities within Central Java, particularly in Banyumas Regency.²³

Talcott Parsons' Theory in Interfaith Marriages

Interfaith marriages, both prior to and following the issuance of Supreme Court Circular (SEMA) Number 2 of 2023, continue to be practiced. This study focuses on interfaith couples who share a household while adhering to different religious beliefs. Religious and traditional differences within these households can alter the household system, often leading to family disputes.²⁴ Society is seen as a system in which all social structures integrate into a unified whole. Each structure serves distinct functions, yet they are interrelated, creating consensus and social order. Furthermore, all societal components adapt to changes occurring within and outside the community.²⁵ To analyze the household dynamics of interfaith couples, this study applies the Structural Functionalism theory using Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework (Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration, and Latency).

In this concept, adaptation refers to the system's ability to adjust to situations based on its needs, enabling it to address external situational demands in line with environmental requirements. Differences in beliefs within a household can indeed alter the system's structure, affecting both status and roles within the family. To sustain the household system's continuity, adaptation becomes essential. Adaptations within these interfaith couples include the following:

a. Communication

Communication poses a significant challenge in Muslim-Buddhist marriages. Differences in expressions and expectations within such couples frequently arise, at times nearly leading to divorces.²⁶ Consistent improvements in communication help upholding family unity, as effective

²² MP, interview (Purwokerto, 2024).

²³ Heru Guntoro, "Toleransi Umat Beragama Di Banyumas Tuai Pujian" (2024).

²⁴ Mochammad Rizky Eka Aditya et al., "The Problem of Interfaith Marriage in Indonesia: A Juridical-Normative Approach," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 6, no. 2 (December 2023): 456, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ujhk.v6i2.20059>.

²⁵ Talcott Parsons, *Talcott Parsons on Institutions and Social Evolution: Selected Writings* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

²⁶ CC, interview (Purwokerto, 2024).

communication facilitates problem-solving within the household.²⁷ For example, differences emerge in daily practices around food, in which Muslims in Purwokerto require a wife to serve her husband in any circumstance, contrasting with Buddhist views, which lack prescriptive expectations on a wife's service. Additionally, during marital rituals or religious observances, the Muslim husband may be unwilling to participate in certain ceremonies. However, through respectful communication, the Buddhist wife accommodates these differences, though she initially needed to compromise for the sake of harmony. This communication dynamic contrasts with that of Muslim-Christian couples, where communication often appears more collaborative. Muslim-Christian couples typically resolve the issues together, with avoiding disputes over it.²⁸

b. Respect and Understand

Interfaith couples, whether Muslim-Christian, Muslim-Catholic, Muslim-Confucian, Muslim-Buddhist, or Muslim-Hindu, demonstrate respect for one another's beliefs in distinct ways. For instance, Muslim-Christian couples may choose to accompany their partners to church, even accompanying their spouses respectfully while they were performing religious rituals.²⁹

Muslim-Buddhist couples, by contrast, show high respect to their partners as they do not prohibit their partners from worshiping, even though they may refrain from accompanying them during religious observance.

Awareness of existing differences influences the family system's dynamics, fostering respect and understanding between partners. Despite the different teachings within their respective faiths, interfaith couples strive to appreciate each other's beliefs. For instance, Islamic teachings designate men as leaders or protectors within the family, positioning the husband as the guide for his wife and children. However, this role may not fully operate in matters of religion due to differing beliefs, applying primarily to decisions regarding the religious affiliation of the wife and children.

Each household may have unique objectives, yet all households inherently aim to achieve specific goals. For interfaith couples, the decision to marry marks the start of their pursuit of shared goals, shaped by underlying needs. According to Abraham Maslow's theory of needs, individuals hold autonomy over their personal development, balancing a drive for growth with the option to resist it. This drive is fueled by the fulfillment of essential needs. Maslow identified a hierarchy of needs, often illustrated as a pyramid, to convey that fundamental needs drive individuals. These needs include physiological necessities, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.³⁰ This theory is applied in this study to analyze the needs of interfaith couples within their family dynamics, encompassing the following areas:

The first category is physiological needs. For interfaith families, as with any family, these needs form a fundamental basis that must be fulfilled. If these needs are unmet, the structure within the life of interfaith couples cannot function effectively. This is because physiological needs are essential to

²⁷ Dwi Suratno and Ermi Suhasti Syafei, "Hak Dan Kewajiban Suami Istri Pada Keluarga TKI Di Desa Tresnojono, Kebumen, Jawa Tengah: Antara Yuridis Dan Realita," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 8, no. 1 (September 2015): 75–86, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2015.08106>.

²⁸ IK, *interview* (Purwokerto, 2024).

²⁹ MP, *interview* (Purwokerto, 2024).

³⁰ Hanter Manik et al., "Teori Filsafat Humanistik Dalam Pembelajaran Matematika," *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (2022): 348–55.

every individual; thus, they must be adequately addressed before marriage. These needs encompass water, rest, shelter, sexual satisfaction, and relief from physical discomfort.

The second category is the need for security. Interfaith couples fulfill this need by fostering mutual respect and understanding. Couples feel secure when they are afforded time and space to continue practicing their respective faiths. As long as their religious practices remain undisturbed, they experience a sense of safety in navigating married life as partners of different faiths.

The third is the need for affection and belonging. Among interfaith couples, affection manifests in their ability to raise children who may follow differing beliefs, which demonstrates the sustained presence of mutual affection within these couples in Purwokerto. Their sense of belonging to each other, despite religious differences, unites them in a shared goal—to raise their children for a brighter future.³¹

In addition to the three previously mentioned levels of needs, interfaith couples also seek to fulfill their self-esteem needs. These couples often experience feelings of shame when separated from their partners. Opting to marry someone from a different faith represents a challenge to uphold their self-esteem. The fear of losing self-esteem arises from the prospect of separation, as it would imply that they have made a commitment to marry but have been unable to adhere to that choice.³²

Moreover, the need for self-actualization is also present. Interfaith couples achieve their self-actualization needs by successfully addressing the four aforementioned needs. This actualization manifests in their ability to live freely and pursue their beliefs and desires. For instance, Muslims are free to worship and engage with individuals of varying backgrounds, and the same applies to their partners. This collaborative spirit can even extend to their family life, allowing them to realize their potential together.

The term “integration” originates from the English words “integrate” and “integration,” which have been adapted into Indonesian to signify the processes of uniting, merging, or forming a cohesive whole.³³ Interfaith couples in Purwokerto have successfully achieved integration through their efforts to adapt in pursuit of their goals. Despite not fully meeting all their needs, they continue to strive for stability within their household, keeping in mind the rationale behind their decision to marry someone with different faith.³⁴

It is essential for interfaith couples to preserve the established patterns within their families. Not only should these patterns be maintained, but they must also be continuously improved as a means of achieving a shared vision or mission. Without the presence of latency, interfaith couples may struggle to sustain the rituals associated with their respective religions. A notable example of latency among interfaith couples in Purwokerto is their commitment to respecting one another and understanding each partner’s activities, despite occasional challenges stemming from both external pressures and internal dynamics within the family.

³¹ CC, *interview* (Purwokerto, 2024).

³² CC, *interview*.

³³ John M Echols and Hassan Shadily, “An English-Indonesian Dictionary (Kamus Inggris Indonesia),” *Jakarta: PT Gramedia, Cet 26* (2005).

³⁴ CC, *interview*.

Symbolic Interactionism in the Context of Religion and Rituals among Interfaith Couples

The symbolic interactionism approach provides a valuable analytical framework for examining the dynamics of religion and rituals among interfaith couples in Purwokerto City.³⁵ This theory highlights the significance of social interaction and the meanings developed within interpersonal relationships. In the context of interfaith marriages, couples frequently engage in a process of negotiation and meaning-making concerning the religious practices and rituals they observe, with religious symbols occupying a pivotal role in their daily lives.

Interfaith couples in Purwokerto encounter challenges in harmonizing their religious practices. In their daily lives, they often incorporate symbols from both religions to forge a shared identity. For instance, during religious holidays, they may choose to honor each other's traditions or develop new rituals that blend elements from both faiths. This process involves symbolic interaction, as couples communicate and comprehend each other's interpretations of the rituals they engage in, thereby creating unique meanings within the context of their relationship.

Moreover, the symbolic interactionist perspective illustrates that interfaith couples in Purwokerto not only adapt to their individual religious norms but also cultivate a social space that facilitates the sharing of experiences and the development of harmonious relationships. Through interactions with family members and the surrounding community, these couples often receive legitimacy and support for their chosen practices. In this context, religious symbols serve as instruments for fostering stronger and more profound connections and for reinforcing their commitment to one another, despite their differing religious backgrounds. Thus, the symbolic interactionist perspective not only elucidates how interfaith couples navigate their daily lives but also offers insight into how they forge a shared identity within the framework of religious pluralism in Purwokerto.

Utilizing the theory of symbolic interactionism, the rituals conducted by interfaith couples in Purwokerto can be articulated as follows: the interaction between the mind and the self is perceived as the significance attributed to the self by the mind. This process elucidates the transition from basic human interaction through movement to symbolic interaction, where meaning can be articulated with greater specificity.³⁶ The mind encompasses the entirety of actions undertaken by the individual towards themselves or others.³⁷ The self serves as the fundamental entity for all interactions, as it encompasses a multitude of interpretations. When the self remains consistent, it generates a stable pattern, which is then reflected in observable behaviors. Cooley defines the self as the representation of others that exist within "our imagination of him" brought to life.³⁸

The religious rituals undertaken by each interfaith couple are influenced by interactions and reflections that stem from established habits. This process necessitates negotiation between the minds and selves of each partner before determining whether to accompany their spouse during worship or to continue practicing their faith independently, without their partner's presence.

³⁵ Y Sonafist and Henny Yuningsih, "Islamic Law, the State, and Human Rights: The Contestation of Interfaith Marriage Discourse on Social Media in Indonesia," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 22, no. 2 (December 2023): 381, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v22i2.10934>.

³⁶ George Herbert Mead, "Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist.," 1934.

³⁷ Mead.

³⁸ Charles Horton. Cooley, "The Looking-Glass Self," *The Production of Reality: Essays and Readings on Social Interaction*, 1902, 126–28.

The interaction between the self and society represents the process of socialization through which individuals engage with one another, allowing one person to exert influence over others. This interaction posits that individuals and social groups are shaped by cultural and social processes, with social structures emerging from these interactions. Strong argues that the context of the group remains integral, highlighting the presence of signs and symbols that facilitate social interaction. Consequently, the relationship between the individual self and society fosters the development of specific meanings associated with particular phenomena, thereby establishing meanings that guide the practices of individuals involved.³⁹

The environment can be categorized into two distinct types: the physical environment and the contextual environment.⁴⁰ The application of Herbert Mead's symbolic interaction theory to interfaith wedding rituals in Purwokerto illustrates how the individuals involved in the marriage engage with one another and ascribe meaning to the symbols within the context of the union. Mead's theory underscores the significance of symbols in the processes of socialization and human interaction. In the context of interfaith marriages in Purwokerto, individuals from diverse religious backgrounds interact and interpret the symbols present in their wedding ceremonies. These symbols encompass traditional attire, the arrangement of the wedding venue, the structure of the ceremony, and the prayers that are performed.

In the interfaith wedding rituals in Purwokerto, individuals engage with one another through language and symbolic expressions. The couple communicates to understand and interpret the significance of these symbols. For instance, the traditional attire worn by each party may hold distinct symbolic meanings within their respective religions. However, through interaction and dialogue, they endeavor to establish a shared understanding of these symbols' meanings.

The application of Mead's theory is further evident in the formation of social identity within interfaith marriages in Purwokerto. Through interaction and mutual influence, these individuals shape their social identities and establish a shared understanding. This process involves negotiating and adapting religious symbols to foster agreement and harmony between both parties. Additionally, Mead's symbolic interaction theory highlights the significance of personal interpretation of symbols within interfaith marriages. Each individual brings unique meanings and interpretations to these symbols, influenced by their cultural background, religion, and personal experiences. The interaction and dialogue that occur between them enable the development of a shared understanding and mutual respect for their differences.

In summary, the application of Herbert Mead's symbolic interaction theory within interfaith marriage rituals in Purwokerto highlights the significance of interaction, communication, and mutual understanding in fostering harmony and unity among those involved. This theoretical perspective sees individuals as active participants in interpreting symbols and shaping social identities. Within the context of interfaith marriages in Purwokerto, this approach helps in comprehending and respecting religious differences while building strong, enduring connections between both parties.

³⁹ Cooley.

⁴⁰ Ronald W. Smith and Valerie Bugni, "Symbolic Interaction Theory and Architecture," *Symbolic Interaction* 29, no. 2 (April 2006): 123–55, <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2006.29.2.123>.

The Legal Culture in Religious Interactions and Life Rituals of Interfaith Couples in Purwokerto

Legal culture holds significant influence in shaping social interactions, particularly within the context of marriage. In Indonesia, a nation marked by its rich religious diversity, interfaith marriage presents a unique and complex set of challenges. This study examines the role of legal culture in influencing religious interactions and ritual practices among interfaith couples in Purwokerto, with an emphasis on understanding the challenges and opportunities these couples encounter as they strive to maintain household harmony despite differing beliefs.⁴¹

Purwokerto, a city in Central Java Province, Indonesia, is characterized by its religious diversity. While the majority of its population is Muslim, it is also home to Christian, Hindu, and other religious communities. Within this context, interfaith interactions are common, fostering a pluralistic social environment. However, these religious differences can also lead to tensions, particularly when individuals from varied religious backgrounds choose to marry, thereby presenting substantial legal and social challenges for interfaith couples.⁴²

The positive law governing marriage in Indonesia, as outlined in Law Number 1 of 1974, mandates that a marriage is valid only if it is conducted in accordance with the religion of each party. This provision effectively restricts interfaith marriages, reinforced further by Islamic law, which explicitly prohibits interfaith unions, particularly when a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man. In this legal context, interfaith couples in Purwokerto frequently encounter difficulties in registering their marriages, which can, in turn, affect their legal status as husband and wife.

Interfaith couples in Purwokerto frequently encounter substantial challenges within the prevailing legal culture. For instance, many couples attempt to register their marriages with the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) or the Population and Civil Registration Office, only to be met with rejection due to inconsistencies in religious regulations. In response to these barriers, some couples pursue alternatives, such as marrying abroad or temporarily changing the religious status of one party. This illustrates how the existing legal culture can constrain individual choices in pursuing marital life.⁴³

In daily life, interfaith couples frequently devise innovative approaches to practice their respective religious beliefs. For instance, they may incorporate elements from both faiths to establish new rituals that blend values from each tradition. Often, these rituals evolve into symbols of convergence between two distinct cultures, creating new meanings within the context of their relationship. This process underscores not only the legal dimensions but also the significant social and emotional aspects essential to the couple.

The surrounding community plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of interfaith couples' lives. Support from family and friends can, in some cases, aid couples in navigating daily life. However, they may also encounter stigma and rejection from society, particularly if religious traditions are perceived as disregarded. Thus, interactions with the social environment significantly influence how couples manage their religious differences, ultimately affecting the harmony within their households.

⁴¹ Tarigan et al., "Islam and Christianity at Rumah Gadang: The Household Characteristics of Minangnese Interfaith Marriage."

⁴² Ikhwan Budiman, "Keluarga Sakinah Pada Pasangan Beda Agama Perspektif Hukum Islam Studi Kasus Di Kecamatan Bacukiki Barat Di Parepare" (IAIN Parepare, 2024).

⁴³ Safrudin Aziz, "Tradisi Pernikahan Adat Jawa Keraton Membentuk Keluarga Sakinah," *IBDA: Jurnal Kajian Islam Dan Budaya* 15, no. 1 (2017): 22–41.

The Supreme Court Circular (SEMA) Number 2 of 2023 introduces new guidelines for courts concerning the processing of interfaith marriage permits, aiming to clarify the legal standing of these couples. However, this SEMA simultaneously includes a prohibition against courts approving applications for the registration of interfaith marriages. Consequently, discrepancies remain between the established legal norms (*ius constitutum*) and the social realities experienced by interfaith couples concerning the legality of their unions.

Interfaith couples in Purwokerto frequently cultivate a distinctive shared identity that reflects their experiences within a pluralistic environment. These couples endeavor to integrate religious symbols into their daily lives to formulate new social meanings. For instance, during the celebration of a religious holiday, they may opt to conduct a ritual that merges traditions from both faiths. This approach fosters a sense of mutual respect and tolerance between the partners, which is vital for sustaining harmony in their relationship.⁴⁴

The results of this study offer significant implications for the advancement of legal policy in Indonesia. Given the rising number of interfaith couples, it is essential for policymakers to explore methods to integrate these marriages within the current legal framework. This may involve amending the marriage law to enhance inclusivity and creating programs that promote interfaith tolerance and understanding within society.

The legal culture surrounding the interaction of religion and rituals among interfaith couples in Purwokerto illustrates the intricate relationship between law, religion, and society. Despite the numerous challenges they encounter, interfaith couples continue to seek ways to establish a harmonious existence. By acknowledging the prevailing social dynamics and adapting legal practices, it is anticipated that a more inclusive environment will emerge for interfaith couples to navigate family life within the framework of religious pluralism in Indonesia. The findings of this study underscore the significance of understanding this interaction as a fundamental aspect of social life in Purwokerto, providing valuable insights for future research on the interplay between religion and law in a pluralistic society.

Arina, serving as a judge at the Religious Court, asserts that the state, through the Supreme Court (MA), remains steadfast in upholding the Pancasila ideology, particularly its first principle, which emphasizes belief in God Almighty. She contends that interfaith marriages cannot proceed unless one partner adopts the religion of the other. The Supreme Court's ruling must serve as a guiding principle, and any deviation from it typically results in reversal at the appellate or cassation level. In contrast, Usman, the Executive Director of Amnesty International Indonesia, argues that SEMA Number 2 of 2023 should either be revoked or revised, as it contradicts human rights norms and restricts individual liberties. Furthermore, he believes that this SEMA conflicts with Law Number 23 of 2006 concerning Population Administration.

Conclusion

This study underscores the intricacies of legal culture in highlighting the interplay between religion and the lives of interfaith couples in Purwokerto, encompassing legal, social, and spiritual

⁴⁴ Muhammad Iqbal Juliansyahzen, "Dialektika Hukum Islam Dan Hukum Adat Pada Perkawinan Lelarian Di Lampung Timur," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 12, no. 1 (June 2019): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2019.12101>.

dimensions. In Indonesia, interfaith marriage is not merely a legal matter; it is also shaped by the social dynamics and religious norms that present significant challenges for the couples in their daily lives. The issuance of SEMA Number 2 of 2023 has established a clearer legal framework regarding the prohibition of courts from approving applications for the registration of interfaith marriages. This policy has sparked a spectrum of discourses within society. Supporters of the policy contend that this legal decision issued by Supreme Court the Law of Marriage No. 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage and the Decision of the Constitutional Court. Conversely, those who challenged this argument perceived the such legal standing is seen as a form of discrimination among citizens as commonly protected by the law of human rights principles and the Population Administration Law. This study by looking at special case in Purwokerto show that despite SEMA can not be seen exclusively a social legal foundation for people life. Rather, the living law experienced at Purwokerto reaffirms the need of accommodating religious pluralism, particularly in the context of marriage life, in order to foster an more inclusive legal framework that preserve the protection of human rights.

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