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The Meaning of the Film " *Air Mata Mualaf* " Analysis of Relevance to Riau Malay Cultural Values : A Semiotic Study

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Abstract

The film Air Mata Mualaf is a work of religious drama that depicts the spiritual process of a woman in achieving her life beliefs. This research is intended to analyze the meaning contained in the film and its relationship to Riau Malay cultural values. The approach applied includes descriptive qualitative, using semiotics and content analysis. Research findings reveal that this film includes religious values, steadfastness of faith, patience, and respect for family, which is in line with the Riau Malay principle "adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah". The film plays a relevant role as an educational tool to understand the integration of culture and religion in the lives of Malay people.

Keywords: Meaning of Film, Riau Malay Culture, Religious Values, Semiotics

INTRODUCTION

Film is defined as a series of moving images that form a narrative story. Film functions as a means of entertainment, a means of conveying information, and a medium for expressing and representing the realities of everyday life. Sometimes, film becomes a manifestation of individual expression or an outlet for emotions, while also reflecting aspects of life often overlooked by society. As an element of mass communication, film has a significant impact on the public. Thus, film is considered an ideal medium for conveying the ideas, thoughts, and views of its creators (Yuni & Bandjar, 2024). The evolution of the film industry, both in terms of production and consumption, has positioned film as a powerful instrument of audiovisual communication. As a form of creative communication, film integrates various elements such as

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plot, dialogue, conflict, characters, and so on, presented through a sequence of verbal and nonverbal scenes. In addition, film serves various purposes, such as providing entertainment, education, and disseminating information to the wider public (Wahyuningsih, 2019).

As a form of mass communication media, film plays a crucial role in conveying moral, social, and cultural messages to the public. Through narratives, visual elements, and dialogue between characters, films can reproduce the realities of life while shaping the audience's perspective on specific values. According to (Iskandar, 2019), film is not limited to entertainment but also serves as an educational tool and a potential social reflection for disseminating cultural values widely throughout society. Along with the rapid progress of the Indonesian film industry, film producers are increasingly encouraged to produce high-quality works. These works serve as a medium for disseminating religious messages to the public through light and enjoyable narratives. These narratives typically relate to daily routines while adhering to Islamic teachings. Film is seen as an efficient channel for interaction with audiences; furthermore, film is recognized as an effective means of da'wah (Islamic outreach) due to its ability to present diverse stories in a short time, supported by audiovisual characters involving images and sounds. When watching a film, the audience feels as if they are in a space and time that reproduces life, even to the point of influencing their emotions (Margina, 2021).

In the realm of religious films in Indonesia, *Air Mata Mualaf t*emerged as a production that explores the theme of spiritual transformation and the search for the essence of life by a character. This film tells the story of Anggie's inner struggle that culminates in peace through acceptance of Islamic teachings. The narrative not only emphasizes the dimension of faith, but also family tensions, social coercion, and the evolution of personal identity that are commonly faced by converts to Islam (Syafriani, 2025; Kristiana, 2025). Furthermore, the interpretation of meaning in this film is inseparable from the underlying cultural background. Among Malay communities, especially in Riau, the foundation of life values is strongly attached to the principle of "adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah." This principle illustrates the inseparable link between customary traditions and religion in Malay communal existence. (Tenas Effendy, 2018) emphasizes that Malay culture prioritizes religiosity, politeness, and social balance as the main foundations of social interaction.

Analyzing the meaning of a film is essential for understanding the representation and interpretation of messages by audiences. Semiotic methods are often used to uncover symbolic layers in films, including dialogue, body language, and plot development. (Alex Sobur, 2020) explains that a semiotic approach facilitates researchers in decoding signs.media as a reflection of specific values, ideologies, and social conditions. Referring to the description above, this study

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aims to unravel the meaning contained in the film Air Mata Mualaf and evaluate its relationship with the cultural values of Riau Malays. This research is anticipated to contribute to the advancement of literary and cultural studies, particularly in conceptualizing the interaction between film media and local wisdom as elements of Malay community identity.

Barthes developed the study of semiotics by emphasizing two layers of meaning: denotation, which refers to literal interpretation, and connotation, which involves cultural and ideological dimensions. He viewed signs as the primary instrument in the formation of myths among cultural communities (Barthes, 2018).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on in-depth understanding and interpretation of the meanings contained in the film. This approach was chosen based on the nature of the study object: dialogue, scene sequences, and symbols, which preclude quantitative measurement. (Sugiyono, 2020) states that qualitative methods are intended to explore phenomena naturally, prioritizing interpretation of meaning over generalization. Data sources include both primary and secondary data.

Primary data comes from films *Air Mata Mualaf*, including conversations, narrative plots, and scenes containing specific values. Secondary data was drawn from literature, academic journals, and articles related to film studies, semiotics, and Riau Malay culture as a theoretical basis. Data collection was carried out through documentation and literature studies, namely by reiterative film screenings, recording crucial dialogues, and identifying scenes containing symbolism. Data analysis relied on semiotics and content analysis.

Semiotics refers to Roland Barthes' framework, which distinguishes between denotative and connotative meaning, while content analysis serves to classify and interpret messages in a structured manner. To ensure data validity, source triangulation was applied through comparisons between film data and literature references, accompanied by rereading to produce accurate and coherent interpretations.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Film Tears of Converts



Figure 1. *Air Mata Mualaf* Poster

"Tears" Mualaf" (released November 27, 2025) is a religious drama film directed by Indra Gunawan. tells the story of Anggie (Acha Septriasa), an Indonesian woman studying in Australia. Her life changes when she becomes a victim of violence at the hands of her boyfriend, Ethan (Matt Williams), in Sydney. After hitting rock bottom and feeling unable to cope any longer, Anggie finally decides to leave Ethan and her past behind.

Drunk and injured, she falls in front of a mosque and is rescued by Fatimah (Hana Saraswati), a young woman who is also the mosque's caretaker. Fatimah's kindness and the recitation of the Quran she hears from her slowly touch Anggie's heart. From there, a desire to learn about Islam grows within her, leading Anggie on a meaningful spiritual journey.

Anggie's decision to embrace Islam marked the beginning of a new chapter in her life, filled with challenges, rejection, and trials, especially from family and friends who found it difficult to accept the change. But despite all the obstacles, she found peace, courage, and a new meaning for love, family, and forgiveness. But he must face rejection from his family and those around him. His journey is filled with pain, determination, and hope for change. This film is steeped in spirituality, self-acceptance, loving family, and forgiveness, relevant to all ages.

Semiotic Analysis of Rolland Barthes' Model of Relevance to Riau Malay Cultural Values

1. Value of Piety

Film *Air Mata Mualaf* presents Anggie's spiritual journey as the main narrative focus. The transition from dep ression to the search for meaning in life indicates that faith is not created

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spontaneously, but through a complex mental process. The director emphasizes that belief is not something inherited genealogically, but rather the result of an individual's own initiative. Religious values are a dominant element in this film. The main character is depicted experiencing inner turmoil before deciding to convert to Islam. This conflict demonstrates that religion is not merely a personal belief, but also relates to social and cultural relationships in society (Effendy, 2018).

Dialogue 1

Minute 10:57



Denotation:The dialogue directly demonstrates that Anggie's desire to convert is based on personal desire, without pressure from others. Hearing the call to prayer and Quranic recitation, something she'd never heard before, made her feel calmer.

Connotation:This dialogue implies that guidance is understood as a call from the pure heart. In Riau Malay culture, inner peace is often associated with a person's closeness to God. This statement also emphasizes that the decision to convert to Islam is a form of search for spiritual identity.

Analysis :Semiotic analysis reveals that the term "tenang" serves as a representation of spirituality and self-acceptance. This finding aligns with Sobur's (2020) view that signs in films often reflect affective experiences and ideological values within society. The representation of religious values in the Riau Malay community is reflected in the respect shown by other figures for the decision, despite emotional conflict within the family. This phenomenon indicates that Malay culture prioritizes Islamic principles and social tolerance.

2. Values of Independence and Self-Confidence

The values of independence and self-confidence in Riau Malay culture are reflected in a person's ability to take responsibility for themselves, make decisions boldly, and be confident in their abilities without abandoning traditional and religious norms. Malay society teaches that

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individuals must be able to stand on their own two feet, work hard, and not be completely dependent on others. This sense of independence in Malay culture is evident in the habit of educating children to face life with responsibility and perseverance (Effendy, 2018).

Dialogue 2

Minute 17:18



Denotation:Dialogue Anggie conveys directly to her parents that she wants to change religion or beliefs.

Connotation:This dialogue conveys the meaning of courage, openness, and self-confidence in making major life decisions. The characters not only convey information but also demonstrate an effort to be honest with themselves and their families about their religious choices. Furthermore, this dialogue reflects emotional conflict, as the decision has the potential to create differences of opinion, rejection, or tension in family relationships.

Analysis :This dialogue's connection to Riau Malay culture is reflected in the harmony between individual autonomy and respect for parents; although the character exhibits independence in determining the direction of life, he still communicates this choice openly to his family as a form of ethical obligation and respect for family ties. Thus, this dialogue illustrates that independence and self-confidence in Malay tradition must be in harmony with politeness and social norms.

3. Values of Resilience and Honesty

Honesty (jujur or ikhlas) is the foundation of Riau Malay ethics, where one is expected to tell the truth, keep promises, and avoid deceit. This is closely related to the teachings of*custom is based on syarak, syarak is based on the Book of Allah*, where honesty is the main requirement in muamalah (worldly affairs) (Effendy, 2018).

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Dialogue 3

Minute 18:09



Denotation:Anggie's dialogue conveys her feelings and opinions directly because she feels she is an adult and has the right to determine her own life choices.

Connotation:This dialogue conveys the meaning of freedom, independence, and the struggle for personal rights. The characters not only speak of literal choices but also demonstrate a desire to break free from pressure, rules, or interference from others in their decisions. This dialogue represents an individual's courage in upholding their identity and beliefs.

Analysis :This dialogue demonstrates significant connections to Riau Malay culture, particularly regarding the principles of deliberation, politeness, and the recognition of individual rights. Riau Malay culture teaches individuals to express their ideas using polite and respectful language, especially towards relatives or senior figures. The phrase "mengukarkan apa yang aku merasa" reflects the desire for a transparent exchange of views, consistent with the Malay tradition of deliberation.

4. The Priority Value of Demanding Knowledge

The principle of the superiority of seeking knowledge is reflected in the trajectory of the main character, who intensively studies Islamic teachings before declaring his conversion. This film illustrates how knowledge serves as a means of reaching the true essence, building faith, and strengthening an individual's spiritual identity. In Riau Malay culture, knowledge is valued as an essential existential compass because it is linked to morality, religiosity, and human dignity (Effendy, 2018).

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Dialogue 4

Minute 28:43



Denotation:Dialogue Anggie wants to know more in-depth information about Islam and possibly ask for advice or guidance from a Ustadz.

Connotation:The dialogue conveys the essence of spiritual exploration, the aspiration to explore religious doctrine, and the pursuit of inner peace. This statement transcends conventional curiosity and represents the dynamics of self-identity discovery and the need for guidance in navigating existential challenges. Furthermore, the dialogue reflects the characters' receptiveness to religious principles and their desire to gain deeper insights into faith and existence.

Analysis :This dialogue aligns with the principles of Riau Malay culture that prioritize the pursuit of knowledge, particularly religious knowledge; in Malay society, knowledge is considered an existential compass that shapes morality, wisdom, and individual maturity, as seen in the motivation of figures to deepen their understanding of Islam in order to achieve a more optimal understanding of life. The attitude of “wanting to consult” also represents Malay customs that glorify the role of teachers, scholars, or figures of superior knowledge, where Riau Malay culture encourages consultation with experts in order to avoid wrong decisions, thus emphasizing the value of humility and the recognition that knowledge is achieved through learning and mentoring.

5.Value of Respect for Parents

Riau Malay culture highly values respect for elders as part of social etiquette. In the film, family conflict arises due to differences in the main character's beliefs with his family.The film's central conflict centers on the family's resistance to Anggie's choice to embrace Islam. This

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situation illustrates how decisions about faith often clash with family norms and traditional heritage.(Effendy, 2018).

Dialogue 5

Minute 29:05





Denotation:Anggie's dialogue means that a child must still remember and respect his mother even though he has made his own life choices, even though he has received rejection from his family.

Connotation:The character demonstrates respect for his parents by considering their permission, but on the other hand, he also feels uneasy about his limited freedom to make life choices. This dialogue can also be interpreted as a search for a middle ground between obedience to family and an individual's right to determine their own future.

Analysis :This dialogue can also be interpreted as a manifestation of personal identity conflict. In the Riau Malay cultural setting which adheres to the axiom of adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah, normative determination of life still requires consideration of religious and customary values. This dialogue character appears to want to affirm his own rights, but

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through a non-confrontational communication pattern, thereby maintaining the polite nature typical of Malay society.

6. The Value of Patience

The value of patience embodied in this dialogue is evident in the character's ability to calmly accept the situation even when facing difficulties or disappointment. The character doesn't show anger or despair, but instead tries to understand that every problem has a lesson to be learned. This attitude reflects inner patience in facing life's trials (Effendy, 2018).

Dialogue 6

Minute 1:41:00



Denotation:Anggie's dialogue tries to find a lesson or good side from the events she experienced.

Connotation:This dialogue conveys the meaning of fortitude, sincerity, and maturity in facing problems. The character doesn't simply accept the situation passively, but instead strives to understand that every trial has meaning and a life lesson. This line also reflects a religious and optimistic attitude, namely the belief that difficulties can bring goodness or positive change to a person.

Analysis :The dialogue on the attitude of "taking wisdom" reflects the Malay view of life which is close to Islamic values, namely believing that every trial has its own purpose and goodness. This dialogue is also relevant to the Riau Malay principle of adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah. The value of "wisdom" in this statement shows the existence of religious awareness that human life is under God's provisions. Therefore, the characters not only see problems as suffering, but also as a means of learning and self-maturation, which is one of the important moral values in Malay culture.

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7. Values of Good Manners

The principle of Malay politeness is a central pillar of Malay culture, including the Riau Malay variant. This politeness is manifested through speech patterns, behavior, dress, and respect for others, especially those of the older generation. Malay society instills the value of using polite language, free from rudeness, and filled with respect to foster harmonious social relations (Effendy, 2018).

Dialogue 7

Minute 1:44:10



Denotation:Dialogue Anggie tries to apologize to her mother for what happened.

Connotation:This dialogue conveys feelings of guilt and emotional responsibility. The character feels she is the cause of the family's problems and suffering, prompting a desire to apologize. Furthermore, this dialogue reflects the affection and closeness of the child's relationship with her mother, as the apology is delivered in a gentle and respectful tone.

Analysis :This dialogue is closely related to Riau Malay culture because it represents the principles of politeness, respect for parents, and ethical obligations within the family. In Malay culture, asking for forgiveness from parents is an ethical expression that indicates awareness of the offense. The choice of the word "forgive" reflects humility and respect for the mother, a central figure revered within the Malay family structure.

8. Value of Unity and Unity

The values of unity and oneness in Riau Malay culture are reflected in attitudes of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and maintaining harmonious relationships among people. Malay society believes that life will run smoothly if every individual helps, respects, and maintains unity within the family and community. This principle teaches that brotherhood, peace, and togetherness are part of moral and religious values that must be maintained. In the

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Malay perspective, unity is not merely living together, but also the effort to create a harmonious, mutually supportive, and familial life (Effendy, 2018).

Dialogue 8

Minute 1:44:44



Denotation:The Supporting Character Dialogue invites others to forget the problems or events that have occurred and start a relationship or life again from the beginning.

Connotation:The dialogue conveys the essence of reconciliation, aspiration, and intention to restore relational bonds. This statement goes beyond a literal interpretation of eliminating problems, but rather signifies an effort to erase tensions, emotional wounds, or past mistakes to foster a more harmonious relationship. This dialogue reflects a posture of mutual forgiveness, cohesion, and a positive outlook on future prospects.

Analysis :This dialogue embodies the principle of tolerance and forgiveness held in high regard in the Riau Malay tradition. The Malay community believes that disputes are best resolved through constructive dialogue and an open mind to maintain the integrity of family relationships. The phrase "start again from scratch" indicates a commitment to restoring conditions and reconstructing harmonious bonds without harboring resentment.

The eight dialogues in the film *"Air Mata Mualaf"* This demonstrates the close relationship between religious values and Riau Malay culture. Denotative meaning is revealed through direct dialogue between characters, while connotative meaning emerges through cultural symbols such as family, tears, patience, deliberation, and religion.

According to Roland Barthes, connotation is related to cultural values and ideologies that exist within a society (Barthes, 1977). In this film, Malay cultural values are represented through polite language, respect for family, and the community's closeness to Islamic teachings. Thus,

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this film serves as a medium for representing Riau Malay culture as well as conveying moral and spiritual messages.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the film *Air Mata Mualaf*, it can be summarized that this production contains various dimensions of deep meaning, especially related to religiosity, steadfastness of attitude, tolerance, and resilience in facing existential trials. The trajectory of Anggie's character reflects a gradual spiritual evolution, through psychic dynamics, social tensions, and an intense exploration of the essence of life. This work emphasizes that the enlightenment of faith stems from an individual's intrinsic awareness, not external intervention.

Furthermore, the family conflicts depicted reveal tensions between traditional norms, affective bonds, and personal commitment to faith. This phenomenon indicatesthat differences often arise from fear of loss and uncertainty, not simply from hostility. Within this framework, the film effectively presents the principle of tolerance and the crucial importance of emotional dialogue in family dynamics.

The results of this study recommend that future researchers expand the study with alternative methods, such as an audience reception approach or critical discourse analysis, so that film interpretation is not limited to text analysis, but also includes the perspective of the audience as the recipient of the message. For film industry players, it is recommended to continue producing works that go beyond mere entertainment functions, by integrating moral, cultural, and religious values, so that films play a potential educational tool for the public. For educators, the film Air Mata Mualaf can be used as contextually relevant teaching material, especially to internalize character values such as tolerance, fortitude, and faith in students.

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