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An Analysis Of Malay Feminism In The Character Of Maria In The Film *"Jangan Panggil Mama Kafir"*

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the struggle of interfaith women through a feminist perspective on the character of Maria in the film *Jangan Panggil Mama Kafir*. The main focus of the study is to deconstruct the patriarchal culture represented in the film, especially through binary oppositions such as male/female, majority/minority, and "believer/infidel" which place women in a subordinate position, the form of oppression experienced by the character of Maria as an interfaith woman and the representation of Maria's feminist struggle in facing social and religious stigma. The method used is descriptive qualitative research with data collection techniques in the form of audiovisual observation and documentation studies. Data analysis was carried out using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach associated with feminist theory, as well as a deconstruction approach to dismantle and reverse the dominant hierarchy of meaning about the form of oppression experienced by the character of Maria as an interfaith woman and how the representation of Maria's feminist struggle in facing social and religious stigma. The results of the study show that the character of Maria represents a form of feminist struggle that is non-confrontational, namely through identity negotiation, mental resilience, and the practice of compassion.

Keywords: Feminism, infidel stigma, child custody, women's resilience, interfaith women, Malay culture

INTRODUCTION

The film *Jangan Panggil Mama Kafir* tells the story of the obstacles faced by a woman (Maria) in maintaining her autonomy and domestic role when faced with discriminatory public moral standards. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), feminism is a women's movement that demands complete equality between men and women. Tong (in Surahman) defines feminism as a women's movement that demands equal rights with men. Starting in the

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1890s, based on the idea of men and women being equal, as well as the struggle for women's rights. Today, feminism means empowering women's rights based on the equality of both.

The film " *Jangan Panggil Mama Kafir* " presents a complex depiction of interfaith women through the character of Maria. Maria is depicted experiencing an identity struggle that is not only personal, but also social and cultural. She faces religious stigma, family pressure, and cultural norms that construct how women should behave. In the narrative, Maria's struggle is not simply interpreted as an individual conflict, but as a form of resistance against structures of domination that limit women's freedom of movement.

Relevant previous research supports this study. Luluk Ulhasanah (2021) shows that films reflect social changes that shape cultural realities, including the increasing emphasis on gender issues in narratives and character representation (Ulhasanah, 2021). Graeme Turner (in Diani, 2017) rejects the notion of films as mere reflections of society; for Turner, the meaning of films as representations of societal reality differs from films as mere reflections of reality, because films shape and re-present reality based on cultural codes, conventions, and ideologies (Turner in Diani, 2017, p. 45). Furthermore, Alison M. Jaggar (1983) explains that gender inequality cannot be separated from power relations that operate through social institutions, including religion and culture, where women are often placed in subordinate positions and deprived of the opportunity to speak their truth (Jaggar, 1983, p. 112). Effendy's (2004) study of Riau Malay culture is also relevant, which emphasizes the principle of "adat berndikan syarak, syarak berdendikan Kitabullah", showing the close connection between Islamic values and religiosity, politeness, tolerance and social harmony, even though it experiences dynamics over time (Effendy, 2004; Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

In 2025, this religious film appeared, presenting a non-Muslim woman who experienced injustice like Maria (played by Michelle Ziudith) as “inspiring people,” centering on the clash between a mother’s human rights and the pressure of rigid socio-religious structures, as well as the dignity of a mother whose rights were taken away in the name of difference. “The character of Maria has a strong relevance to the lives of today’s women who are often caught between customary rules and personal choices.” (Meaning: Maria’s story is very connected and represents the feelings of today’s women). In Malay culture, the relevance of Maria’s struggle touches the reality of life in diverse communities such as the Riau Islands, Kalimantan, or Sumatra. This film asks: “If custom tells us to respect our mothers, does that respect disappear just because the mother is of a different religion?” The polite tongue of Malay society can turn sharp with the term “Kafir” when faced with differences.

This study is relevant for the modern Malay community who are learning to maintain their Malay identity while living in harmony in religious diversity, where the figure of the mother has a high position (the proverb "Heaven is at the mother's feet"). This research aims to examine the forms of oppression experienced by Maria's character as an interfaith woman and the representation of Maria's feminist struggle in facing social and religious stigma, with a focus on intersectional feminism which looks at the intersection of class, gender, race and religion in

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Malay culture. Researchers are interested in taking the title Analysis of Malay Feminism on the Character Maria in the Film Jangan Panggil Mama Kafir.

Film is a literary work in the form of audiovisual communication that moves a story, combining narrative and cinematic elements through cinematography, acting, directing, and screenwriting techniques. Its genres include action, animation, documentary, comedy, drama, horror, and fiction. The messages in films influence the audience in terms of knowledge, feelings, emotions, and conatives, and reflect society's views on gender roles and the struggle for women's equality. This film, written by Ustadz Lukman Hakim Abbas, is a popular inspirational narrative on social media in the Muslim community, presenting gender ideology from the perspective of Muslim women with formal and informal criticism. The involvement of women in this film is described as figures defined by society only by the label "Kafir", considered a threat to the purity of the family's faith. From the perspective of religious feminism, Maria's struggle is critical piety: she remains religious, rejecting societal interpretations that rob her of her rights as a mother and human being because of religious differences.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study applies a descriptive qualitative approach that emphasizes the representation of intersectional feminism in the character of Maria in the film " *Jangan Panggil Mama Kafi*r." The choice of qualitative method is based on its ability to comprehensively explore and interpret the social phenomena depicted in the film. As stated by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln in Satori and Komariah (2011:23), qualitative research involves observation in the natural environment to interpret events through appropriate techniques. This approach is used to analyze the representation of Maria as a female character facing social, religious, and cultural pressures that shape the experience of intersectional feminism in the film.

The research data includes primary and secondary data. The primary data is the film "Don't Call Mama an Infidel" directed by Ustadz Lukman Hakim Abbas, with the role of Maria played by Michelle Ziudith. Secondary data are sourced from literature related to feminism and Malay culture, including the definition of feminism based on the KBBI (Big Indonesian Dictionary), Tong's feminist ideas in Surahman, Alison M. Jaggar's feminist theory (1983), and Malay cultural values according to Tenas Effendy (2004). Data collection was carried out through repeated observations of the film five times for a deeper understanding of the plot, characterization, and conflict. In addition, the researcher compiled dialogue transcripts and documented screen captures of crucial scenes, especially those depicting the "infidel" stigma against Maria and her response to resistance as a mother.

The data analysis adopted the thematic analysis model developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). The initial step involved an in-depth understanding of the data through film re-screenings and examination of dialogue transcripts. The next step involved identifying key themes, such as gender-based and religious oppression reflected in Maria's labeling as an "infidel," along with the manifestation of resistance through Maria's independence and steadfastness as a mother. The data were then interpreted by connecting the film's

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representation of intersectional feminism to the values of Malay feminism by Effendy (2004), Jaggar's feminist theory (1983), and Turner's notion of representation in Diani (2017). In this way, this study reveals the significance of women's representation in the film as a reflection of the interaction between gender, religion, and Malay culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Film Profile Don't Call Mama an Infidel



In the film Don't Call Mama an Infidel, Film Kreator is directed by Dyan Sunu Prastowo with a script by Archie Hekagery and Lina Nurmalina, starring Michelle Ziudith as Maria, Giorgino Abraham as Fafat, Humaira Jahra as Laila, and Elma Theana as the mother-in-law, telling the story of the struggle of interfaith love between Maria and Fafat which ends in a conflict over child custody after Fafat's death, adapted from a true story about a mother's emotional journey facing differences in beliefs and the mother's main (non-Muslim) family experiencing identity conflict when they want to convert to Islam. According to Effendy, in Malay culture, religious identity is not automatically inherited from the family, but is fought over through "labels" from groups such as family or society—for example, the term "infidel" or "convert" becomes a tool of power to control people. This clashes with the mother's personal choice, which was born from a long inner struggle from depression to finding the meaning of life, where social pressure tries to limit her freedom.

An Analysis of Malay Feminism in the Character of Maria in the Film " *Jangan Panggil Mama Kafir* "

The analysis of the representation of Malay feminism through the character of Maria in the film is divided into three main points based on the dialogue and context provided, namely:

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Labels and Identity Authority, Rejection of Oppressive Domestication, Resilience in Facing Persecution.

Identity Labels and Authority

No	Dialog	Duration
1.	*"I may not be a Muslim, but I am also a mother, I know how to educate my child."* The dialogue above shows Maria's simple but strong resistance to the religious label used by Fafat's family to fight for custody of her child; she admits she is not Muslim but emphasizes that the role of a mother is more important than other people's rules. Maria also spoke about labels that cause differences of opinion, rejection, or tension in family relationships. Analysis:In Malay culture, according to Effendy, Maria's dialogue, "I may not be Muslim, but I am also a mother. I know how to educate my child," directly challenges the authority of labels and identities. Fafat's family uses the label "non-Muslim" as a tool of power to define and control the child's identity (must be educated in a Muslim way). Maria seizes this authority by emphasizing her identity as a mother—not religion—as the more legitimate authority to regulate her child's education, demonstrating that in Malay culture, labels are not automatically assigned but contested, and personal initiative can challenge group domination.	(00:53:20)
2.	*"I hope that you will not only see me from a religious perspective, but also see me from a mother's perspective."* From the dialogue above, Maria challenges the label and authority of her identity by rejecting her in-laws' view that only judges her through the label "non-Muslim" to control child custody. Maria shifts the focus to her identity as a competent mother, seizes authority from religious labels, and demands recognition of her natural right to her child's education. Analysis: In Malay culture, Maria's dialogue—"I hope you don't just see me from a religious perspective but also see me from a mother's perspective"—counters the way her in-	(1:45:27):

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	laws use religious labels (“not Muslim”) to control her grandchildren’s identity and custody; Maria asks to be seen as an ordinary mother who has the right to educate her children, not just about religion—this shows the struggle to seize personal identity from the pressure of the extended family, as is common in Malay tradition.	

Rejection of Oppressive Domestication:

Effendy critiques Malay domestication as a patriarchal and customary norm that oppresses women through expectations of conformity (e.g., giving up child custody for the sake of family harmony). This resistance emerges as a form of subaltern rebellion, a form of individual women's initiative to reject restrictive domestic roles, reclaiming agency through legal and emotional resistance, in response to socio-cultural pressures that use religion as a tool of gender control.

No	Dialog	Duration
1.	*"But Papat's mother still makes me an infidel."* FromThis dialogue is about Maria complaining about her mother-in-law (Umi Papat) who continues to label her an "infidel" despite her struggles. Maria is also frustrated that her mother-in-law hasn't changed, continuing to use the term "infidel" (non-Muslim) to belittle and reject her as Ibu Papat. This label is a tool that the in-laws always use to control the custody of their grandchildren, ignoring Maria's role as a mother. Analysis: In the context of Malay culture (Effendy's family), Maria's sentence "But Papat's umi is still an infidel" - combines an attitude of respect ("umi") with annoyance ("gue", "still"). The term "kafir" is used by housewives to control the grandchildren's identity through religious labels, which are invoked by Mary's rights as a mother—a typical feature of power struggles in Malay families.	(52:18:10)
2.	*"Why would I give custody of my child to someone else? I'm a mother."*	(01:07:30)

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	This dialogue demonstrates a subtle rebellion against oppressive domestication. Maria also expresses a mother's refusal to hand over custody of her child to someone else. Her simple yet powerful phrases: "Why should I?" (Ngapaian ya), "Saya kasih hak asuhan anak saya ke orang lain" (I hand over my child to someone else), and "Saya ibu" (I am her mother). These are not mere questions, but firm rejections of the social pressures that force mothers to sacrifice their natural roles. Analysis: In Malay culture, the family is the primary foundation of society. The mother is seen as the irreplaceable "biological mother," as expressed in the Malay proverb: "Ibu dua tak ada pengganti" (there is no substitute for two mothers). Maria's expressions such as "What are you doing?", "I gave custody of my child to someone else," and "I am a mother" are subtle forms of rebellion that align with these values but reject the pressures of modern domestication. This dialogue reflects the authentic voice of a Malay mother—simple, firm, and full of wisdom. She reminds us: "Children are a mother's property, not anyone else's." This analysis demonstrates that Malay culture is not rigid, but rather flexible in upholding women's human rights.	
3.	*"Then we'll meet in court, sir."* This is a threat or firm statement to resolve a problem legally in court, rather than through other means. It is usually uttered when negotiations fail or there is a conflict. From dialoguePolite but challenging (the term "Sir" maintains politeness, but is confrontational in content). Analysis: In Malay culture, the dialogue “Then we will meet in court, sir” reflects the tension between the highly respected customs of deliberation and patience, where conflicts should be resolved amicably to preserve shame and social harmony—and the modern assertive approach that ignores proverbs such as “let the child die, don’t die the custom”; the polite address “Pak” maintains the refined Malay language, but the threat of court is considered a humiliating last resort, signaling the failure	(01:08:49)

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	of negotiations and a shift towards urban individualism, although it remains effective as a passive-aggressive warning without losing face.	
4.	*"No, there's something troublesome, Ma'am, if it's for the children."* The dialogue "No, there are some hassles, Ma'am, if you have children" in simple language means "No, Ma'am. It will be a hassle if you have children", which expresses the refusal to have children because of the worry of the hassle in household life; the domestication aspect is seen in the word "repot" which has been absorbed from Malay and has become an everyday term for practical burdens such as taking care of babies, expenses, or family time, reflecting the modern value of the nuclear family where domestic comfort is prioritized over the tradition of "many children, many fortunes", with a firm, polite tone typical of the conversation of a realistic and pragmatic urban couple. Analysis: In Malay culture, the dialogue "No, there are troubles, Ma'am, if you have children" (meaning: "No, Ma'am, it's a hassle to have children") contradicts the old value of "many children, much fortune" and the extended family tradition of mutual cooperation and preserving the lineage. The word "repot" reflects modern, urban-style practical reasoning—often criticized by elders as impatient or arrogant for ignoring the adage "children and grandchildren are wealth." However, the polite address "Ma'am" maintains Malay etiquette, demonstrating the clash between the harmony of traditional families and the comfort of today's individualistic households.	(1:25:38)
5.	*"Sorry, maybe you have never prepared food with your mother, sir, so I think it is natural for you to respond like this."* The line, "Sorry, maybe you never prepared food with your mother, sir, so I think it's natural for you to respond this way," contains a subtle domestication of oppression, namely a way of oppressing women through household norms that bind women to the role of cooking and taking	(1:34:05)

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	care of the kitchen. This line insults adult men as “spoiled” or “less masculine” because it is assumed that they have never participated in domestic tasks considered typical of mothers or women, so their response is considered “stupid” or “natural” due to their lack of experience. The polite tone with “sorry” disguises the sarcasm, making it difficult to refute, but it actually reinforces the patriarchal stereotype: the household is the domain of women, oppressing both genders while maintaining the dominant norm. Analysis:In the Malay view, the dialogue "Sorry, perhaps you have never prepared food with your mother, sir, so I think it is natural for you to respond like this" is a subtle insinuation that violates good manners and respect for elders ("Pak"). He seemed polite with "sorry", but actually insulted the man's dignity by accusing him of never cooking with his mother, a typical domestic task for women in Malay tradition, where men are more concerned with matters outside the home. This reinforces gender stereotypes such as the saying "mother takes care of the kitchen", so this insinuation is domestically oppressive while breaking friendships, contrary to the Malay value of abstaining from backbiting or hurt feelings, such as the "sweet mouth, sour heart" philosophy.	

Resilience in the Face of Persecution:

Effendy defines resilience as the Malay adaptive capacity—the mental and spiritual ability of individuals to survive persecution (social, emotional, or legal) through internal transformation. It is not passive, but a dynamic process of inner turmoil leading to identity affirmation, where persecution (such as custody battles) triggers resilience as a form of creative resistance, generating new meanings of life beyond traditional authority.

No	Dialog	Duration
1	*“What does this mean?” (Dialogue between Maria and the Lawyer).* In the dialogue "What does this mean?" between Maria (a victim of persecution) and her lawyer, Maria's resilience is clearly visible when she dares to ask questions despite being confused by complicated	(01:10:45)

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	legal documents, shows courage in seeking help, managing fear, building social support, and adapting to learning step by step rather than passively giving up like many victims of persecution, but proactively facing pressure to stay strong and move forward. Analysis:In the dialogue "What does this mean?" Maria asked the lawyer even though she was confused about legal documents, from the perspective of Malay culture (such as endeavor, patience, and asking for advice), her resilience was strong because she dared to make an effort (seek help, not be silent), was patient to overcome fear (slowly learn even though it was difficult), and built gotong royong (collaboration as per Malay custom) instead of giving up passively, but moving forward in the face of persecution, becoming an example of a strong Malay woman who is humble and tries.	
2.	*"No, Pap, I don't want to change religions for the sake of victory, even if I have to convert to Islam, it must come from my heart."* In the dialogue “No Pap, I don’t want to change religion for the sake of victory, even if I have to convert to Islam, it must come from my heart,” the speaker’s resilience is very strong because he refuses forced compromise on religion despite facing severe persecution for the sake of legal “victory,” choosing to hold onto the principle of faith from his own heart. This shows the courage to firmly hold onto his self-worth, not wavering from external pressure, and recovering mentally authentically, making him stand firm despite the risk of losing. Analysis: In the dialogue “No Pap, I don’t want to change religion for the sake of victory, even if I have to convert to Islam, it must be from my heart,” from the perspective of Malay Culture (such as sincerity, piety, and upholding customs), the speaker’s resilience is very strong because he refuses to change religion forcibly for the sake of winning the law, chooses sincere faith from this heart, shows sincerity	(01:11:49)

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	and acceptance of Allah (not following worldly pressure), is firm in his faith (fights the slander of persecution like the Malay teaching “keep your faith even though you are poor”), and is patient and principled (risks of losing but the soul is calm), becoming a strong and authentic Malay role model even though it is difficult.	
3.	*"From the moment Laila wakes up, to school, until she goes back to sleep, I take care of her personally. I prepare food, clothes, and medicine for her illness. Everything that mom doesn't see at school."* From the dialogue above, Maria's resilience as a single mother or victim of persecution is seen to be strong because she takes care of her child alone even though she is tired and not recognized by others, shows the ability to withstand daily pressure, is independent and full of love, and remains strong without complaining - this helps her recover from difficulties and take care of her family even though she is alone. Analysis:In the dialogue "From the time Laila wakes up, goes to school, until she goes back to sleep, I take care of myself, I prepare food, clothes, medicine if she is sick. Everything that mother doesn't see at school," from a Malay perspective (Malay cultural values such as endeavor, patience, and mutual cooperation which are adapted independently), the speaker's resilience (resilience) is very strong because he shows patience against hardship (patience in facing daily affairs alone without help), full endeavor (taking care of children from morning to night with love), and taqwa family (taking care of the child even though no one else sees it) is in accordance with the Malay teaching "effort + mercy of Allah," making him remain strong despite persecution or isolation, becoming an example of a tough Malay mother.	(1:16:25)

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CONCLUSION

This research shows that the character of Maria in the film " *Jangan Panggil Mama Kafir* " represents Malay feminism rooted in resilience, compassion, and the struggle to maintain women's dignity amidst patriarchal pressure, religious stigma, and family domination. Maria is not portrayed as an aggressive resistance figure, but rather through identity negotiation, courage to defend child custody, and steadfastness in maintaining authentic beliefs. The research findings show that Malay culture is not always oppressive to women, but rather has a value space that can support respect for the role of mother, tolerance, and humanity. The film also emphasizes that the label "kafir" is a social instrument that can perpetuate the subordination of women across religions. Thus, Maria's representation shows how women can maintain Malay cultural values while rejecting discriminatory practices that limit their freedom and rights as individuals and mothers.

However, this study has limitations because it only focuses on one character and one film, so the results cannot describe the overall representation of Malay feminism in Indonesian cinema. The analysis also places more emphasis on dialogue and does not delve into the cinematography, visuals, or audience reception aspects of the film. Therefore, further research is recommended to examine the representation of women across religions in various films using interdisciplinary approaches, such as discourse analysis, audience reception, or visual semiotics to obtain a broader and deeper understanding. Practically, this study can serve as a reference for filmmakers, academics, and the public to build film narratives that are more inclusive and humanistic, and support respect for women's rights and interfaith tolerance in Indonesia's multicultural society.

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