

## FAMILY ROOM NEGOTIATIONS IN INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

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### ABSTRACT

*For Indonesia, the issue of interfaith marriage is a sensitive one. The most important issue is the legality of interfaith marriages, which has caused some couples who will or have entered interfaith marriages to ask the court as a forum that can legalize their marriages. The purpose of this research is to find out the negotiation process in families doing interfaith marriages, especially in Kupang. Methods used in this research are qualitative approach and case study methods. Data collection through interviews with credible sources. Result of this research, conclude dialogue and communication prevent latent conflicts from becoming a hot wild ball in the community. Interfaith marriages conducted by couples who are old enough, economically stable, and psychologically mature seem more acceptable to both families because they can think, examine, and articulate their desires more rationally than marriages conducted by couples at an early age.*

**Keywords:** family, interfaith marriages, negotiation

### 1. PREFACE

For Indonesia, the issue of interfaith marriage is a sensitive one. The most important issue is the legality of interfaith marriages, which has caused some couples who will or have entered into interfaith marriages to ask the court as a forum that can legalize their marriages (Bachtiyar et al., 2022; Rajafi et al., 2024). In the matter of interfaith marriages, the District Court and the Supreme Court have the same authority, namely, to hear concrete cases relating to applications for marriage registration permits. The difference is that the District Court adjudicates at the first level, which covers districts/cities, while the Supreme Court adjudicates at the classification level. Unlike the two, the Constitutional Court in this case adjudicates whether norms relating to marriage and the registration of interfaith marriages are in accordance with or contrary to the constitution (Mursalin, 2023).

This research originated from the identification of the problem in the previous research that one of the potential latent conflicts that can arise in Kupang is interfaith marriage. Kupang was chosen as the research site because at the end of January 2024 the city was re-elected by SETARA Institute as one of the most tolerant cities in Indonesia. Kupang ranked ninth with a score of 5,953. Meanwhile, the highest score was achieved by Singkawang City with a score of 6,500 (Selly, 2024).

Not many studies have examined interfaith marriages in NTT. In addition to the research of Heriyati and Zein mentioned above, there is research on the application of religious moderation values in families of different religions (Daffa & Anggara, 2023; Lao et al., 2022). However, there has not been much research on interfaith marriage as a potential latent conflict in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara. Including how negotiations are carried out in the family room to minimize conflict. Based on the background, the purpose of this research is to find out the negotiation process in families doing interfaith marriages, especially in Kupang. Because, interfaith marriages can have a potential to be a latent conflict.

In conducting this research, several theories will be used, including conflict theory. Conflict has the nature of a tool for forming and maintaining social structures. Conflict theory is a theory that has the view that changes in social structure do not arise from adjusting values that lead to transformation but are caused by conflicts that produce various compromises that are different from the original situation (Littlejohn, S. W., & Domenici, 2001; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2006). Conflict according to Dahrendorf in Izza can be seen as an inherent phenomenon in society. Conflict is considered a manifestation of social interaction and not something dysfunctional for the social system. (Hillesund, 2021; Toyosaki, 2011)

Conflict is divided into two types, namely realistic conflict related to a sense of disappointment that is owned in a relationship and non-realistic conflict related to the existence of grudges between relationships that cause humans to try to damage the happiness of other individuals (Nugroho, 2021; Tualeka, 2017). The occurrence of conflict between groups can strengthen the group structure and provide a response to internal conflict. This indicates that when conflict occurs, groups tend to strengthen internal identities which ultimately provide added value to the conflict experienced previously (Effy, 2010; Toyosaki, 2011). Another theory used in this research is latent conflict theory. Latent conflict or closed conflict is a condition where many problems are hidden and need to be disclosed to be resolved. Social conditions that look stable and harmonious do not always indicate the absence of hostility and opposition in them. Latent conflict is described as a form of hidden conflict that can begin under several conditions. This conflict is triggered by competition for limited resources and differences in organizational goals and orientation. (Dunaetz, 2020; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2018)

Based on the explanation above, it can be summarized that latent conflict is a hidden conflict condition. Conflict is divided into five stages, namely latent conflict, perceived conflict, intentional conflict, conflict resolution and aftermath conflict. The relationship between the concept of latent conflict and this research is that marriage between different religions is one of the potential latent conflicts in Kupang.

Another theory referred to in this study is conflict communication in the family. To bridge a conflict that arises, communication is needed as the main tool. Conflicts that occur in families can be divided into two categories, namely the first conflict that focuses on fundamental issues and the second conflict that is less focused on fundamental issues. The fundamental issues are related to religion, child ownership and education (Wardyaningrum, 2013). Latent conflicts that occur in Kupang also occur for religious reasons. There are five principles of how communication can reduce conflict. The first is the encoding and decoding model. The second is the intentionalist model, then the perspective taking model, then becoming an active listener and finally the dialogic model. In the dialogic model, communication is seen as a cooperative collaborative process. Listeners are treated as active participants who ask questions, clarify unclear or ambiguous questions and ensure that all parties have the same understanding of the dialog (Dunaetz, 2020; Lowry & Littlejohn, 2006).

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

The research conducted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is a research method aimed at understanding phenomena about something experienced by the research subject using descriptions through words and language in a special natural context by utilizing various natural methods (Creswell, 2014; Hennink et al., 2011). Researchers use qualitative research

methods because it allows them to explain narratively about the potential latent conflicts that occur in interfaith marriages in Kupang.

In this research, the author used the research method of case study method. Case studies involve intensive observation, the use of multiple sources, increasing understanding of an event, and the collection of detailed and accurate information related to the case. This strategy is suitable for use when the researcher asks 'how or why' questions, the researcher has little control over the events to be studied and focuses on contemporary phenomena in real life (Cope, 2015; Yin, 2014).

The data collection technique was carried out by conducting in-depth interviews with two resource persons through zoom. The first interviewee is an activist of KOMPAK (Community of Interfaith Youth in Kupang), who is Catholic and the perpetrator of an interfaith marriage with her Protestant husband. The second interviewee is a woman pastor from the Evangelical Church of Kupang who has been active for 40 years as an intermediary for couples who marry differently in Kupang.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Interfaith marriage in Kupang**

In general, the people of East Nusa Tenggara are strongly influenced by family lines based on patriarchy. Patriarchy is a social formation of male gender power with a certain structure that is found in various aspects of social life ranging from small scales such as in families, kinship groups and friendship groups to larger institutional contexts such as the state, religious institutions, the military and many more (Ortner, 2022). Briefly, it can be summarized that this patriarchal culture is a socio-cultural condition that provides space for male groups to control and dominate female groups. An example of this patriarchal socio-cultural condition is the culture in the East Flores area which prioritizes boys as the priority in obtaining various opportunities including education from parents. A study in Lamaholot, East Flores showed a significant relationship between patriarchal culture in society and the health conditions of toddlers. This is because in the Lamaholot community, male groups have an extraordinarily large role in controlling both households and society. On the other hand, women's groups have little influence, if not no role, in the public domain, both in the political and economic sectors, including in marriage. (Lolan & Sutriyawan, 2023)

The deeply rooted patriarchal culture in this society is intertwined with religious doctrine. So, what emerges to the surface are customs with a religious face. For example, if the parents do not object to their child's interfaith marriage, there is rejection from the extended family. When the marriage plan is discussed in the extended family, the figure of the uncle or "little father" as the customary leader who strongly adheres to his religious beliefs will intervene and try to prevent the marriage from happening. As a result, the energy of the prospective bride and groom is used up to win the approval of the extended family. And there is quite a high dynamic. The couple will continue the marriage process even though they have not received approval from the family and after both are married and have children, both will begin the process of reconciliation with the family. According to the second source, there was even a case of a prospective bride allowing herself to get pregnant first to get approval from the family.

As a mover in the field of diversity, the second resource person is often asked to mediate in families who are at odds due to religious differences. He tries to provide understanding even though it is not easy at all. This is because in the family there is a latent customary structure. It

often takes a relatively long time to achieve reconciliation between the extended family and the couple. The longest case ever handled by the second resource person was the process of resolving a dispute between an extended family and a couple of different religions that lasted for three years. Reconciliation was finally achieved because one of the extended family members who opposed the marriage was a customary leader and a member of the church council where the resource person served. As a result, the space to provide an understanding of diversity and theology in open families is relatively easy.

The dialogue space with the woman's family was also used by the resource person to provide an understanding of diversity. Diversity in East Nusa Tenggara Province is characterized by cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. As a result, if the dialogue space is not opened widely and communicated openly, it is feared that the issue of religious conversion will develop into an opportunity for wild cards to emerge. Each religion will prioritize ethnocentrism, namely having a feeling of superiority over its own culture and being prejudiced against other religions. Cultural diversity on the one hand can produce harmonious cultural integration and can strengthen national integration, but on the other hand, the existence of primordial attitudes can trigger the persistence of traditional cultural practices that may not be in accordance with the contemporary social context. (Chang et al., 2014; Croucher, 2011)

There has been much research supporting the importance of opening this open space by linking it to openness to experience and various prejudiced attitudes including ethnic prejudice. Prejudicial attitudes towards various out-groups have been found to be related to each other and reflect general prejudice (Dervin, 2012; Johnstone et al., 2016).

When asked by the first source why she as a Catholic still chose to continue marrying someone of a different religion, she firmly answered that even though her future husband was Protestant, she felt she had found the right person. Her future husband, even though he was from a different church, had never committed violence against women, had never said harsh words and prioritized religious values so that the second source felt comfortable putting aside the fact that her family could not accept it.

The way out began to open when the mother of the first source began to take steps to discuss and have intensive dialogue with Catholic religious leaders in Flores, where the source came from. From the discussion with the religious leader, the source's mother felt enlightened because the Catholic church institution in East Nusa Tenggara has long had regulations that allow interfaith marriages. This can only be done if several requirements are met, namely having to get married in a Catholic church. So that children born from the marriage can continue to practice Catholic traditions and rituals such as receiving several sacraments. If they do not get married in a Catholic church or leave the Catholic religion, then the person concerned cannot receive the Catholic marriage sacrament in addition to not being able to follow other Catholic religious traditions. The next requirement is that the marriage is registered in the Catholic church and not in other religious institutions.

### **Negotiations conducted by both parties**

Communication is needed as the primary tool to bridge a conflict that arises. Conflicts that occur in educational families, are divided into two categories namely first, conflicts that focus on fundamental issues such as religion, child ownership, and education, and second, conflicts that are less focused on fundamental issues (Wardyaningrum, 2013) In order to resolve the problems that occur due to interfaith marriages, the two families negotiate by continuously carrying out the

communication process carried out in closed family rooms. According to source Z, because usually both families are already inflamed with emotions and disappointment, negotiations are generally carried out using mediators from religious figures whom both families can accept.

Traditionally, families in East Nusa Tenggara are very patriarchal. Men play an essential role in maintaining local cultural customs. In order to prevent the marriage from taking place, the extended family will intervene with the prospective bride, who will move and follow the beliefs of her prospective partner. However, suppose the bride and groom get the approval of the extended family to bless this interfaith marriage. In that case, the uncle or "little father" from the woman's family will ask for a high dowry because, in the customs of East Nusa Tenggara, the little father gets a share of the dowry.

The tradition of determining the dowry varies greatly in East Nusa Tenggara due to the existence of various tribes. The dowry is generally measured from the cattle and uses the size of the pen. One pen is usually filled with ten cows; the price of one cow this year in East Nusa Tenggara is around IDR 5 - 7 million/head. So, according to source X, if the woman asks for a dowry of one pen containing ten cows, the funds spent by the man can be around IDR 70 million. If the woman's family asks for a reasonably high dowry, the man's family will make a lower offer during the negotiation process. The "little father" or uncle from the woman's family will negotiate until the amount of dowry that is acceptable to both families is reached. If the "little father" agrees to the request of the man's family, who asks for a lower dowry, the "little father" will ask that the livestock given be a female cow so that if the female cow later gives birth, the calf that is born will be considered as a replacement for the cow that was offered.

In East Flores, the woman's family generally asks for a dowry in the form of elephant ivory or money worth 50 to 250 million rupiah. In Maumere, the dowry requested is a horse worth 50 million rupiahs. In Ende, the dowry requested by the woman's family is gold, equivalent to 50 to 100 million. This dowry is divided into IDR 25 million for the biological mother, IDR 15 million for ancestors, IDR 10 million for uncles or fathers, IDR 5 million for siblings, and IDR 2.5 million for burning candles. In East Sumba, the dowry requested is worth 50 to 100 animals for noble families, and around 50 - 70 animals are requested for grooms with a bachelor's degree (Jena et al., 2024)

In the negotiation process, generally, the prospective bride will ask the "little father" and his extended family not to be too harsh or rigid regarding the request for the amount of dowry from the prospective groom. The prospective bride will ask the "little father" and his extended family to reduce the cage size so that the amount of dowry does not burden the groom too much. According to the prospective bride, if her family asks for a high dowry from the groom's family, then when she starts her household life with her husband, they will be in debt. In order to avoid this, the prospective bride will try her best to persuade during the negotiation process so that the amount of dowry set by her family is reasonable. Apart from showing the degree of the woman's family, a large amount of dowry will also be divided among several elements of the extended family. In some cases, the complex negotiation process between the two families can be seen from the fact that the woman's family only agreed on the dowry requested only a few hours before the proposal.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Generally, interfaith marriages are carried out in two ways. The first one is when the partners follow the partner's religion and then marry at the partner's religious institution. After marriage,

the person who converts has two choices: returning to their original religion or becoming a loyal follower of the new religion. The second way is for the couple to marry by following their respective religious rituals and then registering it at the local District Court. However, this second method is now closed based on the Circular of the Supreme Court No. 2/2023, which requires churches to no longer provide interfaith marriage services. The intervention of the state into this private space has the potential to cause conflict in society because it means that one must leave their old religion and follow their partner's new religion in order to be legally married. Before the Circular of the Supreme Court was issued, couples who were going to marry different religions could continue to practice their respective religions.

To address this interfaith marriage, Catholicism, as the majority religion, has created standard rules when faced with the case of one of its congregations marrying someone from a different church. This rule was made to prevent its congregation from changing religions to follow their partner's religion, which would mean the Catholic church would lose one of its congregation members. The Catholic and Protestant churches also agreed in 2019 to marry couples of different religions in their respective religious institutions. In addition to the rules made by religious institutions, the space for dialogue and negotiation is opened wide, both between two extended families and between families and the church, to provide an understanding of diversity and theology. Dialogue and communication prevent latent conflicts from becoming a hot wild ball in the community. Interfaith marriages conducted by couples who are old enough, economically stable, and psychologically mature seem more acceptable to both families because they can think, examine, and articulate their desires more rationally than marriages conducted by couples at an early age.

As a suggestion, various diversity movements at the local level should be involved if there is a conflict due to interfaith marriage. In addition, it is necessary to continue to educate to increase literacy between religious communities, both through education in their respective religious institutions and through mainstream media or social media. Because choosing a partner varies greatly.

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