

Who Marries Whom on Silver Screen? Religion, Social Class, and Marriage Patterns in Contemporary Indonesian Films

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ABSTRACT

Popular culture, where cinema is part, is an important site where ideas of acceptable and unacceptable marriage pairing is confirmed and/or contested. In any cinema tradition, including Indonesian, romance films offer a rich site to investigate broader societal ideals around who should or should not marry whom. In this article, we report our study on conjugal pairing patterns in Indonesian blockbuster films produced and released between 2008 and 2018. We investigate how protagonists in the films decide whom they marry; this question then led us to critically examine the extent to which religion and social class shape marriage decisions. The findings show that marriage pairing patterns on Indonesian silver screen during the period are largely assortative; the characters in the selected films tend to marry people adhering to the same religion and belonging to the same social class as themselves. The increasingly visible trend of religious endogamy and the sustained trend of class homogamy are inseparable from the heightened Islamization in the post authoritarian era, the improving economic outlook at the macro and micro levels in the post Asian financial crisis, as well as the promotion of gender equality during the period.

KEYWORDS: Marriage | Religion | Class | Indonesian Cinema | Gender

PREFACE

This article explores on the cinematic representations of who marries whom in contemporary Indonesian blockbuster films between 2008 and 2018. We selected romance films making the top-ten list of films with the highest reported number of moviegoers in each year. To be more specific, we selected films which offer a narrative involving marriage or aspiration to marry among characters representing Indonesian youths, aged between 18 and 35 years. We examined how protagonists in the films decide whom they marry; this question then led to examine the extent to which religion and social class shape marriage decisions on screen. As this paper unfolds, marriage patterns among Indonesian youths are cinematically represented as mostly assortative. We argue that the films tend to normalize religious and class assortative mating among Indo-

nesian youths by depicting characters being highly likely to marry within their own religious groups and social class, and such decisions are barely problematized. Reading the films against the off-screen socio, economic and political condition, we demonstrate that the continued trend of religious and class assortative mating is inseparable from the heightened Islamization in the post authoritarian era, the improving economic outlook at the macro and micro levels in the post Asian financial crisis, the promotion of gender equality during the period.

Off-screen, patterns of conjugal relationships can offer insights to various issues. First and foremost, it provides insights to gender relations and attitudes to gender roles (Utomo 2014). For instance, when women seek to marry men who have relatively stable income in the context where male breadwin-

ning is valorized, it informs us of women's attitudes towards gendered division of labor. Putri et.al. (2020) in this volume argue that in the post-*reformasi* Indonesia, there is the tendency that even women with university education still seek for potential husbands who are financially more secure. In addition, investigation of marriage patterns can give us insights of social mobility (Utomo 2020), i.e. whether they marry into their social class groups, whether they marry richer spouses, which eventually can inform of any social inequalities. In addition, we believe that investigation of patterns of marriage pairing can afford us understanding of conceptions of gender ideals – what it takes to be the ideal husband and the ideal wife, what can and cannot be tolerated in deciding whether s/he is the right match. In turn, such understanding leads to understanding of conceptions of the ideal masculinity, generally to be sought in men, and femininity, generally to be sought in women in the context of heteronormative society such as Indonesia.

To investigate marriage patterns in cinema thus becomes important primarily because cinema is a terrain for ideological contestations. This is particularly timely in light of increasingly contested narratives on marriage and the family in post-*Reformasi* Indonesia (Utomo and Rahadiano 2020). Ideas of who should and should not marry whom have been strongly contested on the silver screen. Ideas of which marriage patterns are endorsed or shunned by whom, why, and when are integral to many romance dramas. By understanding patterns of marital pairings in cinema, we are able to draw a conclusion on the popular conceptions of what it takes for an ideal marriage, and to what extent social identities such as religion, social classes, and gender roles for instance matter in representing desirable and undesirable marriage on screen.

The period of 2008-2018 was chosen as the focus in our investigation with the assumption that Indonesian society has undergone a lot of substantial changes in its economy, politics, and culture since the turn of the new millennium. Eliyanah (2019) in her research on the shift in ideal masculinity for instance argues that the economic crisis has inspired

the emergence of alternative ideal masculinity on and off screen which no longer places significance in men's ability to become a breadwinner; such alternatives contrast the hegemonic ideal *bapakism*, literally translated as fatherism, which promotes men's breadwinning capacity. In addition, the demise of the New Order authoritarian regime in 1998 has set fundamental changes in the society. Democratization has given way to alternative forces, such as Islam, contending power in the post-authoritarian era. Islamization has been heightened in the post-authoritarian era. It has become the single most visible phenomenon in the period and strongly influenced various facets of life in the country. In politics for instance, although Islam-based political parties have not yet won majority votes, symbols related to Islamic piety have been extensively used by political agents to garner votes (see Baswedan 2004; Tanuwidjaja 2010). Islam also emerged as a strong force in Indonesian economic sector. *Halal* and *syar'i* labels on products from finance, food, fashion, travels to pop culture and white goods are being sought after by consumers (see Fealy 2008). In cinema, films with Islamic themes, better known as film *Islami*, began to flourish. These films promote Islamic values as ultimate solutions to any life problems experienced by their characters (Hoesterey and Clark 2012). A number of films under this category have made it to the top ten highest grossing films between 2000 and 2020. Ten years after the economic crisis and *reformasi*, how are these social changes reflected through patterns of who marries whom in Indonesian cinema? Thus, the period between 2008-2018 is significant to be studied.

This article examines marriage patterns depicted in romance films making the top ten list in terms of number of moviegoers during its theatrical release between 2008 and 2018. It centers around the question how marriage patterns are represented in the selected films and to what extent religion and social class, in this case represented in education and financial security, influence the selection of marriage partner on screen.

CONTESTING MARRIAGE PATTERN(S) ON THE SILVER SCREEN

In this section, we argue that commercial cinema is a contested terrain to win popular consent on what constitutes a good marriage pairing. Films must be understood as a historically specific cultural product. They bear marks of their time, including what is considered normal, peculiar, out of date, or even subversive. Understanding cinema as a terrain for ideological contestation, including on who should or should not marry whom, can give us insights on the off-screen ideological contestation on the same issues.

Commercial films, like other products of popular culture, should not be seen as mere commercial entertainment products. Instead, they should also be seen as an arena of ideological contestation where ideals are contested by various actors with their respective vested interests. This is because popular culture, cinema included, is not produced in a social and historical vacuum. Simon During (2005:6) asserts:

[C]ultural objects are simultaneously 'texts' (that is, they have meaning) and events and experiences, produced out of and thrown back into, a social force field constituted unevenly by power flows, status hierarchies and opportunities for many kinds of transportation, identification and pleasure.

The people behind the production, distribution and consumption of popular culture products, of which cinema is part, themselves make up their contemporary society. Their experience of belonging to certain social groups and involvement in certain events shape their artistry, be it directly or indirectly. The plurality of individuals behind and around the silver screen eventually lead to contestation, negotiation, subversion, or marginalization of ideologies, which are reflected on what can and cannot be screened in cinema, including how marriage should be represented.

Such ideological contestations on the silver screen have been subject to various research. In Hollywood, for instance, the debate on US role in the Vietnam war was clearly reflected in American cinema. *John Wayne and Ray Kellogg's The Green*

Beret (1968) was clearly a propaganda intended to appeal to Americans to support the war. Yet, the film did not go uncontested. *Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Ted Kotcheff's First Blood* (1982) offer a critical and thought-provoking representations of war, especially by showing the deep emotional scar the war left on the soldiers. These films show that cinema is an arena where off-screen debates manifest on screen. In the context of Indonesian cinema, a public debate on polygamy which was heated in the first decade of the twenty first century also manifested in cinema. Nia Dinata's *Berbagi Suami (Love for Share, 2006)* offers a complex representation of the marriage practice and the positions of women involved in such marital relationship. A more ambiguous take on polygamy can be found in *Ayat-ayat Cinta (Verses of Love, 2008, Hanung Bramantyo)*, which on the one hand romanticizes the relationship but on the other depicts the difficulties in running a polygamous household.

In the same veneer of thoughts, commercial cinema is where ideas of who can and cannot pair in conjugal relationship are proposed, challenged, or dismissed. Qian (2011) made an interesting observation on the shifting cinematic representation of interracial marriage in Hollywood cinematic tradition. In the 1960s, when racial segregation policies reigned in the US, interracial marriage pairing was barely depicted in cinema; films which represent interracial marriage in positive light, such as Stanley Kramer's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), were likely to cause a public stir; however, things gradually change and interracial marriage has become a normal in Hollywood, such as in *Die Another Day* (Lee Tamahori 2002; Qian 2011, p. 33). The shift in the prevalence of cinematic interracial marriage and public's acceptance of it give us insights on the off-screen social change in the US in the past fifty years—that the American society is more open to such ideal compared in the 1960s. In Indonesian context, the 1974's Marriage Act and social norms tend to discourage marriage between couple adhering different religions. It is thus, understandable that endogamous marriage in religious context is normalized in Indonesian cinema. We will explain the almost absent idealization of interreligious mar-

riage in Indonesian cinema in the findings section.

This is not to mention that cinema also has power to influence its viewers to do or act in certain manners. A great deal of research has been conducted by scholars on the power of Hollywood films in shaping consumption patterns of their viewers. Bollywood is no exception. Wilkinson-Weber (2005) observed the influence of Bollywood films on Indian's middle and upper classes' sense of fashion, which eventually shows the power of cinema in inspiring viewers to act in a particular manner. Although films do not always have instructive effects on viewers, at least they have the power to create or shape public discourse or to invite debates on certain issues. Ben Murtagh (2011, 2013), found that many members of Indonesian LGBT community were very critical of the cinematic representations of LGBT subjects and their issues. They were very critical towards the contemporary films, such as *Arisan!* (Nia Dinata 2003), despite it being hailed many critics as monumental in positively portraying gay masculinity (Eliyanah 2019) and gay romance (Harvey 2004; Munir 2011), they criticized its affluence and excess, which is far from their everyday reality where many gay men continue to struggle against social stigma and economic marginalization. Films, in short, have potentials to influence its viewers' perception on certain issues. Considering such potential, it is fair to say that every stage of cinema: production, representation, distribution and consumption, is a site where ideas of what is in trend, what is (in)appropriate, what is ideal, are contested. Thus, disregarding cinema in research on who marries whom leaves a scholarly void cultural studies scholar must address.

Offscreen, marriage patterns among Indonesian youths, especially in the twenty-first century have been concerns of demographers. Research conducted by Utomo (2014, 2016), Utomo and McDonald (2016), Qibthiyah and Utomo (2016) generally highlight homogamous and endogamous tendency in the choice of marriage partners among this demographic segment. Despite the ethnic and religious diversity, Indonesian youths tend to marry within their own religious and ethnic groups. Statis-

tics from the 2010 Population Census show that only 10.7% percent of couples in Indonesia identified themselves as interethnic, and only 0.5% percent is interreligious.

Are the abovementioned conjugal pairing patterns reflected in cinema and how? Unfortunately, there has not been a single study which focuses on investigating who marries whom in Indonesian cinema to date. It is a scholarly lacuna in cultural studies on Indonesia that we aim to contribute. We should reiterate that the absence of research on who marries whom in cinema, in this context: Indonesian cinema, implies that we have little information on how certain marriage patterns are encouraged, normalized, socially shunned on screen, and how certain cinematic representations of marriage pairings are received by consumers of films. We will focus on the first question in this article. Here, we are to provide insights into contemporary popular attitude towards marriage, especially what constitutes ideal marriage partners, as they are reflected on Indonesian silver screen between 2008 and 2018.

METHODS

The main methods of this research is content analysis. Adopting Krippendorff's definition of the method (2004), in this research content analysis refers to a research method which aims at "making replicable and valid inferences (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). In doing so, we analyze a purposive sample of forty-three romance films belonging to the top-ten list of each year between 2008 and 2018 to provide insights on marriage pairing trend depicted in popular Indonesian films of the period. The results of this research will be our basis to expand to deeper cultural analyses on the particular trends.

We began by identifying top ten highest grossing films in each year within the period of 2008-2018. We used data provided by a website dedicated to cataloguing Indonesian film <http://film-indonesia.or.id>. In addition to offering brief information on each film released in Indonesia, the website provides a tally of twenty films earning the highest number of movie goers each year. We chose to focus

on films making the top ten each year of the chosen period because they are the films which captivated the attention of most filmgoers. Many of them are films considered monumental in the history of Indonesian cinema due to the trend they set in and outside cinemascapes. Take for example, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*, 2008, Hanung Bramantyo) and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (*When Love Glorifies God*, 2009, Chaerul Umam), which made into the top ten in 2008 and 2009 respectively. They set the trend romance films with strong Islamic themes for the following years. They are among the milestones of film Islami, a generic category of films which promotes Islam as solutions to any problems faced by characters in film narratives (Imanda 2012). Outside cinema, these films reinforce the burgeoning Muslim modest fashion trend with their female protagonists constantly wearing the hijab as a symbol of their piety. Thus, by selecting the top ten, we expected to encounter with films with higher potentials in meeting their audience, thus making a dialogue with them about certain social issues, in the case of this research: who marries whom.

After deciding on studying the top ten highest grossing films, we narrowed down the focus to only include films belonging to romance. In this article, the term romance is an umbrella category for films centered on intimate relations between two people (Todd 2014, p. 1). We do not distinguish between romantic drama and romantic comedy genres in our study. We selected films which feature narratives involving Indonesian youths intending to marry or to develop a more serious relationship beyond merely dating. At this point, we used the film synopsis as our basis of selection. Of the 110 films in our data pool, there were forty-three films which made the cut for the study. The list of the forty-three films being studied is attached in the appendix.

The next step is coding the variables of marriage patterns: religion and social class depicted in the films' narratives. Being Indonesian ourselves, we are aware that questions of religion and social class very often come up in conversations about marriage pairing. We are often prompted with these questions when we introduce potential marriage suitors to our

parents and members of extended family. Thus, our attitudes towards these variables are to some degree shaped by how we take the questions. The question of religion is of the most common. It can be understood since Indonesia only recognizes marriage between couple of the same religion. Moreover, amidst the heightened Islamization in contemporary Indonesia, the question of religion tends to go beyond whether the potential marriage partner adheres the same religion; it often touches the person's religiosity – how religious or how pious he or she is. We will elaborate further in the discussion section. Furthermore, the question concerning social class that often come up include what his/her occupation is, how much s/he earns, and even what his/her parents do for a living. These questions refer to one's financial security, indicating one's ability to support the future family's financially. Taking this emic perspective, we coded the religion and social class variables considered to matter in the film characters' decision to marry.

In investigating the extent to which religion matters, we examined three variables. The first is similarity of religion between the characters under study. We investigated whether religious endogamy is still the most prevalent trend on screen, or the screen culture has been more open towards inter-religious marriage. The second variable is whether one's quality of religiosity matters in deciding whom to marry. Amidst the intensifying Islamization in Indonesia, as previously mentioned, Islamic religiosity has become an increasingly important ideal and a quality to be sought in politicians and public figures. People also more visibly adorn Islamic symbols to publicly display their religiosity. Taking this social change into account, we investigated whether the films also promote religiosity as an important criterion of marriage partner. The last variable in examining religion in marriage pairing on screen is the courtship method—whether they get married through an Islamic arrangement or ta'aruf or conventional dating practice. With the intensifying Islamization in Indonesia, the campaign against conventional pre-marital dating practice among Indonesian youths and the promotion of ta'aruf have been massive. Not only have they permeated literature, social media

and other forms of popular culture. Ta'aruf is a process that promises its believers of purity of love and quality candidate, in terms of religiosity. Thus, we investigated whether ta'aruf is also a prevalent trend to preserve religious endogamy on screen.

As to whether social class matters in marriage pairing on screen, we examined two variables: education and economic background. In investigating the screen couples' education background, we wanted to know whether education level plays important role in deciding whom to marry. Thus, we devised two categories: individual education background of the couple and problematization of education gap. We further explored whether the characters tend to marry someone of the same level of education and whether education gap matter in their decision of whom to marry. As to economic background, we focus on identifying the financial security of individual characters who are married or intending to marry, identifying who earns more, and identifying if gap of financial security matters in the decision to marry.

Eventually, the data obtained from the study were then tallied to map the patterns of marriage pairings depicted in the selected films. Data from the discourse analysis were used to provide nuances in the presentation of the data. We contextualized the data with the socio, political, and economic contexts of the film production and distribution. By doing so, we can understand why certain patterns of marriage pairing are promoted or criticized on screen at the given time.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Generally, our findings show that characters in the selected films tend to marry within their own social groups. They tend to marry people of the religion and social class specifically. Such findings do not rule out the existing cinematic challenges against normalized endogamous marriage in Indonesian cinema. Yet, the fact that such challenges hardly make into box office list leaves a question whether they can appeal to contemporary audience.

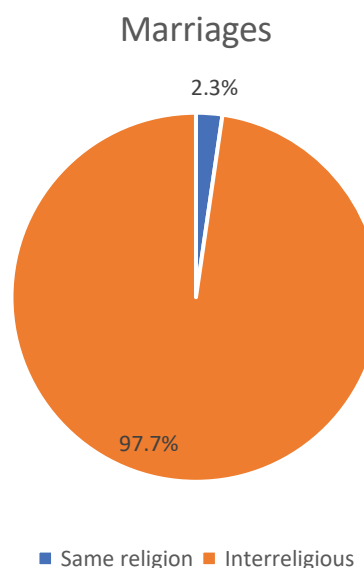
Before scrutinizing the findings, we must flag

that we include both marriages preceded by a romantic dating relationship and marriages arranged by third parties in the selected films. In fact, our data shows that most of the marriage pairing involve pre-marital dating, thirty out of forty-three films (67%), yet the increasing prevalence of portrayals of arranged marriage, for religious or other reasons, fourteen out of forty-three films (33%). By recognizing both dating based and arranged marriage in the data, we can derive an assumption that criteria of prospective marriage partner is not the sole domain of bride and groom, but also people directly involved in making the pairing possible. The third parties involved in determining marriage pairing range from peers, parents, to religious mentors. The latter will be discussed further in the subsection on religion.

Religion

The data clearly show that religious endogamy is prevalent and in a significant number of films, religiosity becomes an important criterion being sought after in a prospective marriage partner. Marriage between characters adhering the same religious belief is normalized in the selected films. Even in films featuring inter-religious couple, conversion is the most common practice to make the marriage more desirable.

Figure 1.
Relative Religion of the Couples: Selected Films



In fact, among the selected films, there is only one film featuring interreligious couple. More than ninety per cent of the samples show couples who adhere the same religious beliefs. Only one film, the first instalment of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*, Hanung Bramantyo, 2008), features interreligious marriage between a Muslim man and a Coptic Christian girl, who becomes the protagonist's second wife. Yet, even in this, eventually conversion even after marriage is shown as a desired outcome of an interreligious relationship. According to Paramaditha (2010, p. 73), the conversion of the Coptic Christian girl to Islam is inseparable in the celebration of Muslim converts, muallaf, in contemporary Indonesia. Muslim converts celebrities like Dian Sastrowardoyo and Marsha Timothy become celebrated as symbols of Islam being the true religion illuminated to selected individuals (Ade 2015). In the context of dating, non-Muslims celebrities who date Muslims are likely to be confronted by media whether different religions become an issue in their romantic relationship and whether their conversion is due to their intention to marry their Muslim partner. When celebrities Nadine Chandra Winata, a Christian, was to marry Dimas Anggara, a Muslim, the media were highly interested whether any of them converted to follow their spouse (Ismalia 2018).

The prevalence of religious endogamy on screen is in line with the off-screen reality. The research conducted by Aini, Utomo and McDonald (2019) shows that interreligious couples only make

up 0.5% of the total number of married couples registered in Indonesia. Existing regulations, such as the Marriage Law, and social norms tend to prevent interreligious marriage. As a result, pre-marital conversion is common among inter-religious couples (Aini, Utomo and McDonald 2019, p. 192). Thus, it is not surprising when religious endogamy is normalized in cinema.

Moreover, amidst the heightened Islamization in Indonesia, religiosity, especially Islam, is depicted as a highly desirable quality of future marriage partner. There are at least fifteen films, or thirty-five per cent, in the selection that feature religiosity as an important characteristic to be sought in marriage partners. Such feature is prevalent among those films categorized in film Islami, such as *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*, 2008, Hanung Bramantyo) and its sequel *Ayat-ayat Cinta 2* (*Verses of Love 2*, 2018, Guntur Soeharjanto), and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1* (*When Love Glorifies God 1*, 2009, Chaerul Umam) and its sequel *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 2* (*When Love Glorifies God 2*, 2009, Chaerul Umam). In these films, an ideal marriage partner, man or woman, must be religiously pious. Even in the one and only inter religious marriage present in the selection, both are devout adherents of their respective religion.

Furthermore, to maintain religious endogamy, religious-based arranged marriage among characters representing devout Muslims is also reinforced on screen. As previously mentioned, there are fourteen

Figure 2.
Importance of Religiosity in Marriage: Selected Films



films which depict arranged marriage, nine of which are religious based, in this case Islam with only one offers negative representation of the practice. The films which value Islamic arranged marriage include: *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*, 2008, Hanung Bramantyo) and its sequel *Ayat-ayat Cinta 2* (*Verses of Love 2*, 2018, Guntur Soeharjanto), *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1* (*When Love Glorifies God 1*, 2009, Chaerul Umam) and its sequel *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 2* (*When Love Glorifies God 2*, 2009, Chaerul Umam), *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (*In Love's Alcove*, 2012, Habiburrahman Elshirazy), *Assalamu'alaikum Beijing* (*May Peace be with You Beijing*, 2014, Guntur Soeharjanto), *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (*Unwanted Heaven*, 2015, Kuntz Agus) and its sequel *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan 2* (*Unwanted Heaven*, 2017, Hanung Bramantyo). The one film which is very critical of this practice is *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (*Woman with Keffiyeh*, 2009, Hanung Bramantyo). One of the primary decisive point in ta'aruf is one's religiosity, which in most cases is translated as marrying a fellow pious Muslim.

Indeed, among Muslims off-screen, Muslim arranged marriage or better known as ta'aruf, is one of the most prominent ways to meet marriage partner. Generally, ta'aruf is a broad concept of 'knowing each other' in Islam. This concept is used in a variety of settings, including coexisting and tolerance in a plural society (see Selcuk 2006). Yet, in Indonesian context, the popular use of the term refers to a practice of arranged marriage deemed to be in accordance with Islamic law. Asyari and Abid (2016, p. 350) define *ta'aruf* as a stage of introduction between prospective groom and bride facilitated by a third partner and in the presence of family representatives of both sides. Interestingly, as highlighted by Nurriszky (2020), in this volume, in his review of Nancy Smith-Hefner's book *Islamizing Intimacies* (2019), early marriage in Islamic way, ta'aruf, is seen by Indonesian Muslim youths as their ideal path towards becoming modern Muslims.

The flourishing film Islami and its promotion of ta'aruf based marriage, we can get insights on a social change currently taking place in Indonesia—

the strengthening Islamization in the post reform era. Before twenty-first century, focus on Muslim arranged marriage especially with romantic and happy ending was hard to find in Indonesian cinema. Yet, as we mentioned earlier, in the span of eleven years, thirty percent of blockbuster films featuring desire of marriage, positively portray this practice. This recent trend of *ta'aruf* and its prevalence positive portrayals in cinema cannot be separated from the heightened Islamization in contemporary Indonesia. The desire to portray personal piety is also shown in the form of detesting pre-marital dating practice. The emergence of social movement supporting ta'aruf such as *Gerakan Indonesia Tanpa Pacaran* (Indonesia without Dating Movement) and *Gerakan Nikah Muda* (Early Marriage Movement) in social media is a further evidence of this social change.

To conclude, our study has shown that endogamous marriage is still normalized in contemporary Indonesian films. Often the need to marry in the same religious group is assumed. Very rarely do Indonesian box-office films blatantly depict interreligious marriage. In addition, our data also show the prevalence of religiosity being made as a desired criterion of potential marriage partners. Finally, religious endogamy is also depicted to be maintained through religious practice popularly known as *ta'aruf*.

Social Class

The study generally shows that most of the films depict characters who marry within their own social groups (homogamy). Such is reflected in their marrying people who have relatively equal education background and financial security. Variations are available, for instance cases of marrying up and marrying down in terms of education and financial security. Yet, homogamy is still the most prevalent and normalized practice in Indonesian cinema.

In the selected films, it was clear that most of the protagonists are members of the middle classes. They mostly tick the boxes of the defining feature of middle classes suggested by Heryanto (1999, p. 28): having relatively secure economic standing distinguishable from the working class and the elites, tend

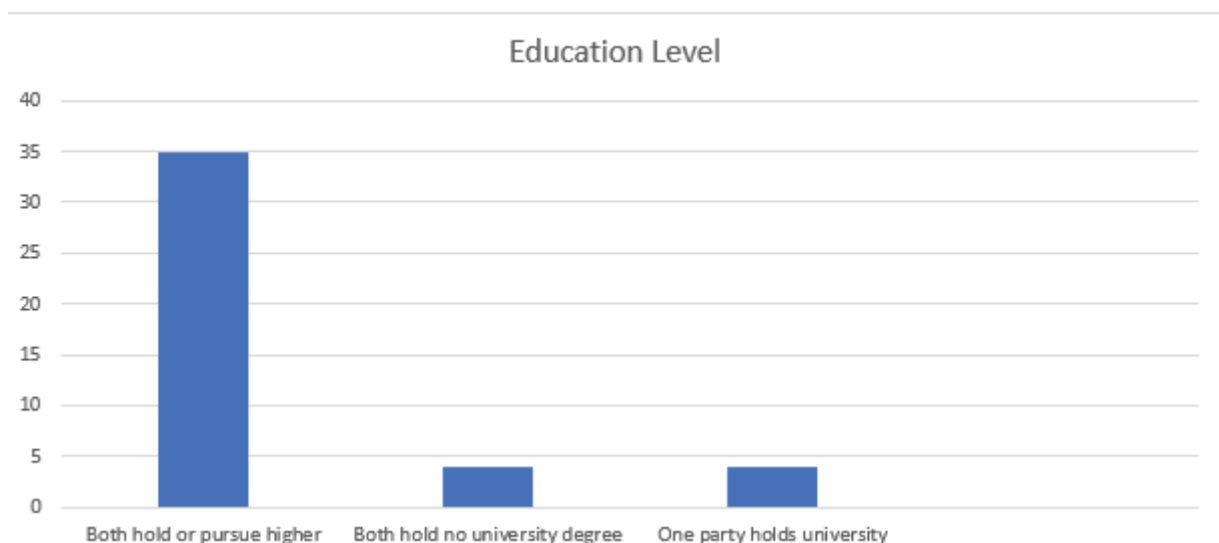
to be highly educated, reside mostly in urban areas, having or pursuing modern education qualifications and occupations, and are engaged in consumer culture as consumers. We use the plural form of the term to recognize the diversity within this social category. Only a few films, such as *Kabayan Jadi Milyuner* (*Kabayan Becomes a Billionaire*, Guntur Soeharjanto, 2013) and *Cinlok* (*A Fling*, 2008, Guntur Soeharjanto) has protagonists who are poor. Even then, the narrative is about the protagonist aspire into middle class status.

In the selected films, educational homogamy among the middle-class youth characters is the most prevalent marriage pattern. About eighty-one percent or thirty five out of forty-three films depict couples who both hold or are pursuing higher education either of any level in Indonesia or abroad. In fact, of that high portion, fourteen of them feature one of or both parties holding degree of higher education earned abroad, such as in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*, Hanung Bramantyo, 2008) and *London Love Story* (Asep Kusdinar, 2016). Most of the films normalize homogamy among members of the middle classes by depicting the pairing occurring naturally, for instance by showing that both parties study at the same education institution or meet

through friends who are of the same league. Pairing between a man and a woman who do not possess higher education background is not problematized. This type of pairing is present in only four films or 9.3 percent.

Only films which feature female characters who have higher degree than their partners tend to problematize equality of education, although eventually such does not constitute as a major issue in the relationship. There are eight films which show women marry down in terms of education. Interestingly, three films which feature female protagonists marrying male protagonists whose education level is lower, are of film Islami category. These films, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*, Hanung Bramantyo, 2008) and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* franchise (*When Love Glorifies God 1 and 2*, Chaerul Umam, 2009), feature female protagonists who hold master's degree marrying male protagonists who hold bachelor's degree. Considering the instructive sense of the films, these films challenge the conventional belief that couple should have equal education level or at least the man is more highly educated than the woman. Other than these films, there are five other films depicting women marrying down in terms of education level. According to Utomo (2014), who studies the

Figure 3.
Marriage Pairing by Education: Selected Films

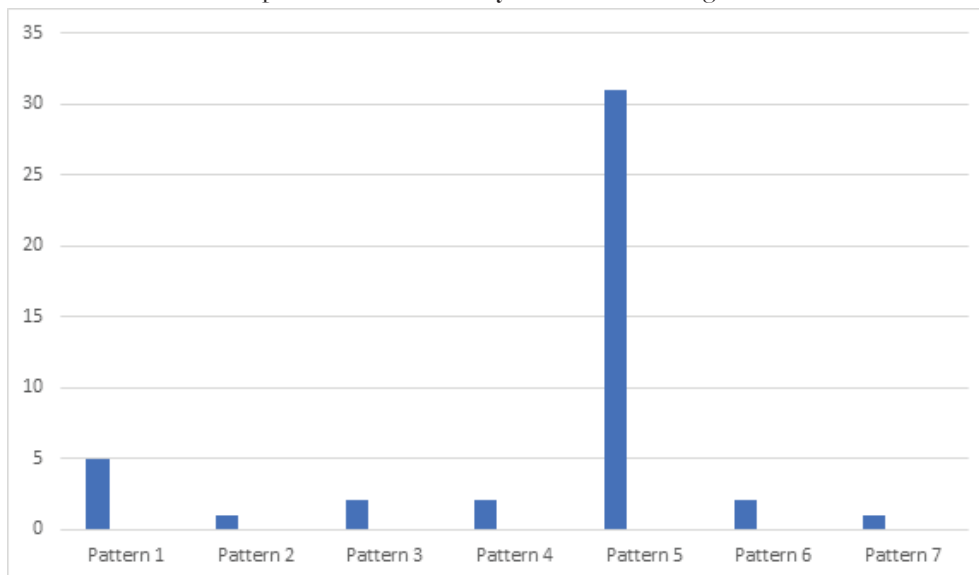


trend in marriage patterns between 1982 and 2010, the crumbling convention of women being more likely to marry up education-wise in contemporary Indonesia is encouraged by the relatively equal education opportunities for men and women; in fact, the research also shows that women who have higher education do not mind marrying men who hold lower education level in relation to themselves.

Moving on to economic background, it is commonly understood that economic disparity has become a cliché narrative. Such shall lead to disagreement of certain parties on the marital pairing. The couple generally is shown to struggle against the disapproving eyes by proving that love triumphs over wealth. Among the film sampled, there are eleven films that specifically problematized economic gap between the couples. This number makes up almost a quarter of the total film being studied. They include films in which the female characters are richer than the men, such as in *Ayat-ayat Cinta (Verses of Love)*, 2008, Hanung Bramantyo, *Milly dan Ma-*

met (2018, Ernest Prakasa), *Si Doel The Movie (Doel: The Movie)*, 2018, Rano Karno), *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah (Under the Protection of Ka'bah)*, 2011, Hanny Saputra), *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wick (The Sinking of Van Der Wick)*, 2013, Sunil Soraya), and *Get Married (Get Married 4)*, 2014, Monty Tiwa). They also include films in which the male characters are richer than the female characters, such as in *Magic Hour* (2015, Asep Kusdinar), *Get Married 2* (2009, Hanung Bramantyo) and *Get Married 3* (2011, Monty Tiwa). There are also films whose characters are depictions of lower classes who desire to have upward social mobility through marriage; thus, the film narratives tend to focus on the search of future marriage partners who are financially more secure, such as *Kabayan Jadi Milyuner (Kabayan Becomes a Billionaire)*, 2010, Guntur Soeharjanto). Despite the different approaches to narrative being taken by the films, they tend to advocate that financial security should not be a major issue, if not an issue at all.

Figure 4.
Couple's Personal/Family Economic Background



Legends:

- Pattern 1: Man from middle class economic background pairs with woman of the upper class
- Pattern 2: Man from the upper class economic background pairs with woman of middle class
- Pattern 3: Both are from the upper-class economic background
- Pattern 4: Both are of the lower-class economic background
- Pattern 5: Both are of middle-class economic background
- Pattern 6: Man of upper class economic background pairs with woman of lower-class economic background
- Pattern 7: Woman of upper-class economic background pairs with man of lower-class economic background

Love should triumph over wealth. When the films' ending show that the couple are defeated in their struggle, the families who disagree must bear the loss as the couple tend to be psychologically depressed and eventually dying broken hearted, such as in *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah*.

In addition, there are thirty-two films which barely problematized wealth gap or make financial security as a quality being sought in potential marriage partners. Yet, we should not rush to conclusion that financial security is not an issue at all in them. They clearly show that the couples are both of either of middle-class or upper-class economic background. As both parties are relatively secure economically, it is natural that financial security is of less important criterion, thus unproblematized. There are at least 31 films which show the couples are both of middle-class economic background, which make up seventy-two per cent of the total samples, and one film, namely *Ayat-ayat Cinta 2 (Verses of Love 2, 2018, Guntur Soeharjanto)*, which depict the couple coming from the upper class economic background. As these films do not problematize financial security, they tend to problematize other issues, such as education, religiosity, personality compatibility, ethnicity, or others.

The high prevalence of homogamous marriage among the middle classes depicted on screen during the period under study must be read against the off-screen social context of burgeoning middle classes in Indonesia, especially in the post Asian Financial crisis of 1997. Indeed, the Asian Financial Crisis towards the end of twentieth century ravaged Indonesian economy very badly, both at the micro and macro levels. Indonesian middle classes suffered a great deal of income loss at that time (see Poppele, Sumarto and Pritchett 1999). Yet, Indonesia seemed to gradually bounce back and regain its economic strength within tens years after the crisis. In fact, according to van Klinken (2014, p. 1), the number people belonging to middle classes in Indonesia surged between 1999 and 2009 due to millions of poor people crossed over the class threshold due to slight income rises. With the huge number within this diverse category, it is certainly a high proba-

bility for one to find marriage match belonging to the same social group. Thus, the prevalence of homogamous marriage among Indonesian middle classes in the selected films can be said to be reflective of the off-screen condition.

Furthermore, education seems to be a golden ticket for youths in order to aspire to middle class status. Off-screen, Indonesian youths tend to project their future success through higher education, in addition to career pursuit (Parker and Nilan 2013, p. 147). This is despite the fact that not all youths with higher education degree can accomplish success due to limited opportunity of upward mobility (Naafs 2018). Thus, the representations of youths aspiring to accomplish higher education, both in Indonesia or abroad and meet their future marriage partner on the journey is also a common narrative in the films, such as *Negeri van Orange (Orange Country, 2015, Endri Pelita)* and *London Love Story (2016, Asep Kusdinar)*.

To conclude this section, we would like to reiterate that the narratives of the blockbuster films under study tend to revolve around middle class Indonesians. Class homogamy among members of this class is also the most prevalent pattern on the silver screen. They tend to court or marry someone who have relatively equal education background and financial security. This makes the belief that women tend to marry someone who are financially more secure and more highly educated become a thing of the past.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have reported our study on the marriage patterns represented in Indonesian top ten blockbusters released between 2008 and 2018. In our study, we narrowed down our focus on romance films in which characters representing Indonesian youths are married or express intention to get married. Generally, we found that religious endogamy and class homogamy are the most prevalent conjugal patterns depicted on screen. Most of the films continue to normalize the marriage between couples adhering the same religion and belonging to the same social classes. Differences in the

two categories are often depicted as problems which drive the films' narrative, either in whole or in part.

While difference in social class can be solved by being relegated as less important in the decision of whom to marry, difference in religion is likely resolved in conversion, be it prior or after marriage. In the case of religious conversion due to marriage, Islamization in the post reformasi era makes Islam a very powerful force, including in cinema. Non-Muslim characters are more likely to convert to Islam for marriage, instead of the other way around. In regard to Islamization, it is also noticeable that religiosity becomes an increasingly important personal characteristic being sought in ideal marriage partner especially in film Islami. Finally, the trend of women not being hesitant to marry down in terms of education and financial security is also quite noticeable in the selected films.

The abovementioned marriage patterns, as we propose, should be read against the social, economic and political changes taking place in the twenty-first century Indonesia. The burgeoning Islamization in the post authoritarian era, the improving economic outlook at the major and micro levels in the post Asian financial crisis, the promotion of gender equality are among important factors which shape how (ideal) marriage should be cinematically represented during the period under study. Eventually, popular culture, in this case cinema is part, is not produced in a social vacuum. It is also an arena of ideological contestations where various ideas, including what constitutes a good, acceptable, idealized, or even shunned marriage pattern are visually represented and in battle to gain public consent.

As this study is limited to films categorized in the top ten list of 2008-2018, this study has left out a large portion of films. This study does not include films falling out of the top-ten bestselling films in the period but provocatively criticize the normalized practice of religious endogamy and social class homogamy in Indonesia, such as *Cin(T)a* (God is a Director, 2009, Sammaria Simanjuntak), *3 Hati 2 Dunia 1 Cinta* (*3 Hearts 2 Worlds 1 Love*, 2010, Benni Setiawan), and *Cinta tapi Beda* (*Love but*

Different, 2012, Hanung Bramantyo). The three films did win awards and earned critical reviews from film critics and academics. Indeed, the choice to focus on the most popular films of the period can be justified in terms of gaining insights into popular ideals on marriage among Indonesian youths. Building on the current research, future research can touch on critical undercurrent in Indonesian mainstream cinema regarding the representation of ideal marriage patterns.

Furthermore, as this study is limited to investigating the extent to which religion and social class matter in the decision to marry among characters in the selected films, it has left out other variables which are also important in the decision to marry, such as ethnicity and age gap. Off-screen, the significance of ethnicity and age gap in marriage pairings among Indonesians have been discussed by Utomo (2014, 2020). As a country with diverse ethnic groups and barely interrupted human mobility within the country, it is important to examine the attitude of Indonesians towards inter-ethnic marriage and marriage of people of different age, including its representation on the silver screen. Using the same methods applied in this research, future research can investigate the significance of ethnicity and age in marriage patterns depicted on the silver screen.

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Appendix

List of films being studied

No	Year of Release	Film Titles	Number of Viewers*	Directors
1	2008	Ayat-ayat Cinta	3,676,210	Hanung Bramantyo
2	2008	Cinlok	672,663	Guntur Soeharjanto
3	2009	Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1	2,105,192	Chaerul Umam
4	2009	Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 2	1,494,793	Chaerul Umam
5	2009	Get Married 2	1,199,161	Hanung Bramantyo
6	2009	Perempuan Berkalung Sorban	793,277	Hanung Bramantyo
7	2010	Dalam Mihrab Cinta	1,108,600	Habiburrahman Elshirazy
8	2010	Kabayan Jadi Milyuner	477,076	Guntur Soeharjanto
9	2010	Heart 2 Heart	397,601	Nayato Fio Nuala
10	2011	Get Married 3	601,786	Monty Tiwa
11	2011	Purple Love	520,786	Guntur Soeharjanto
12	2011	Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah	520,267	Hanny Saputra

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13	2011	Habibie & Ainun	4,601,249	Faozan Rizal
14	2012	Perahu Kertas	596,231	Hanung Bramantyo
15	2012	Perahu Kertas 2		Hanung Bramantyo
16	2013	Tenggelamnya Kapal van Der Wijck	1,724,110	Sunil Soraya
17	2013	99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa	1,189,709	Guntur Soeharjanto
18	2013	Cinta Brontosaurus	892,915	Raditya Dika
19	2013	Manusia Setengah Salmon	442,631	Raditya Dika
20	2013	Get Married	315,390	Monty Tiwa
21	2014	Merry Riana: Mimpi Sejuta Dolar	715,851	Hestu Saputra
22	2014	Hijrah Cinta	711,205	Indra Gunawan
23	2014	99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa 2	587,042	Guntur Soeharjanto
24	2014	Assalamu'alaikum Beijing	560,465	Guntur Soeharjanto
25	2014	Supernova: Ksatria, Putri, & Bintang Jatuh	501,258	Rizal Mantovani
26	2015	Surga yang Tak Dirindukan	1,523,617	Hanung Bramantyo & Kuntz Agus
27	2015	Single	1,351,324	Raditya Dika
28	2015	Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika	917,865	Rizal Mantovani
29	2015	Magic Hour	859,705	Asep Kusdinar
30	2015	Ngenest	785,786	Ernest Prakasa
31	2015	Negeri van Oranje	490,788	Endri Pelita
32	2016	Ada apa dengan Cinta? 2	3,665,509	Riri Riza
33	2016	Cek Toko Sebelah	2,642,957	Ernest Prakasa
34	2016	{rudy Habibie}	2,012,025	Hanung Bramantyo
35	2016	Koala Kumal	1,863,541	Raditya Dika
36	2016	I Love You from 38,000 ft	1,574,576	Asep Kusdinar
37	2016	London Love Story	1,124,876	Asep Kusdinar
38	2017	Ayat-ayat Cinta 2	2,840,159	Guntur Soeharjanto
39	2017	Surga yang Tak Dirindukan 2	1,637,472	Hanung Bramantyo
40	2017	Surat Cinta untuk Starla	1,218,317	Rudi Aryanto
41	2018	Si Doel the Movie	1,757,653	Rano Karno
42	2018	#Teman Tapi Menikah	1,655,829	Rako Prijanto
43	2018	Milly & Mamet: Ini Bukan Cinta dan Rangga	1,563,188	Ernest Prakasa

