



Interfaith Marriage in Salatiga (Indonesia) and Yala (Thailand): Legal Constraints, Social Realities and Human Rights Implications

Fu'ad Riyadi¹, Abdurrahman Mahae² Inna Fauziatal Ngazizah³

UIN Sunan Kudus¹, JISDA Thailand², UIN Sunan Kudus³

Email: fuadriyadi@iainkudus.ac.id¹, abdurrahmanmahae@gmail.com²,

innafauzi@iainkudus.ac.id³

Abstract

Salatiga City in Indonesia and Yala Province in Thailand are known for their multicultural and multi-religious people. Both show complex social dynamics in dealing with religious issues, including the practice of interfaith marriage. This study aims to: (1) describe the practice of interfaith marriage in Salatiga and Yala; (2) analyze the differences and similarities in the perspectives of Islamic law and state law in both regions on interfaith marriage; and (3) examine the responses of human rights activists to this phenomenon in their respective social and cultural contexts. The method used is qualitative research with a juridical-empirical approach and legal comparison. Primary data was obtained through interviews with Islamic religious leaders, human rights activists, and representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Salatiga and Yala. In Salatiga, the practice of interfaith marriage is generally facilitated by NGOs such as Percik who provide assistance and education to couples. In Yala, which is Thailand's Muslim-majority region, interfaith marriages also occur albeit in a more closed social sphere, and are more influenced by conservative Islamic norms and a dualistic legal system between state law and local Islamic law (Sharia). Responses from human rights activists in both regions have also varied. Most of them say that individual freedom in choosing a life partner is part of the human rights that the state should guarantee. This research confirms that interfaith marriage is not only a legal issue, but also a reflection of identity dynamics, pluralism, and the tension between individual rights and collective norms in multicultural societies.

Keywords: *Interfaith Marriage; Legal Constrain; Social Realty; Human Rights.*

Abstract

Kota Salatiga di Indonesia dan Provinsi Yala di Thailand dikenal merupakan dua wilayah yang dikenal dengan kehidupan masyarakatnya yang multikultural dan multireligius. Keduanya menunjukkan dinamika sosial yang kompleks dalam menghadapi isu-isu keagamaan, termasuk praktik pernikahan beda agama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk: (1) menggambarkan praktik pernikahan beda agama di Salatiga dan Yala; (2) menganalisis perbedaan dan persamaan perspektif hukum Islam serta hukum negara di kedua wilayah terhadap pernikahan beda agama; dan (3) mengkaji respons para pegiat hak asasi manusia terhadap fenomena ini dalam konteks sosial dan budaya masing-masing. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan yuridis-empiris dan

perbandingan hukum. Data primer diperoleh melalui wawancara dengan tokoh agama Islam, aktivis hak asasi manusia, serta perwakilan Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat (LSM) di Salatiga dan Yala. Di Salatiga, praktik pernikahan beda agama umumnya difasilitasi oleh LSM seperti Percik yang memberikan pendampingan dan edukasi kepada pasangan. Di Yala, yang merupakan wilayah mayoritas Muslim di Thailand, pernikahan beda agama juga terjadi meskipun dalam ruang lingkup sosial yang lebih tertutup, dan lebih banyak dipengaruhi oleh norma-norma Islam konservatif serta sistem hukum dualistik antara hukum negara dan hukum Islam lokal (Syariah). Tanggapan dari para pegiat hak asasi manusia di kedua wilayah juga bervariasi. Sebagian besar menyuarakan bahwa kebebasan individu dalam memilih pasangan hidup merupakan bagian dari hak asasi yang seharusnya dijamin negara. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa interfaith marriage tidak hanya menjadi isu legal, tetapi juga refleksi dari dinamika identitas, pluralisme, dan ketegangan antara hak individu dan norma kolektif dalam masyarakat multikultural.

Keywords: Interfaith Marriage; Legal Constrain; Social Realty; Human Rights.

Introduction

Interfaith marriage is a complex issue and often triggers social, cultural, and religious debates in Indonesia. The practice not only caused resistance among the community, but also gave rise to complicated administrative problems. As noted by Maloko et al. (2024), the practice of interfaith marriage can trigger social friction because it deals with fundamental values in local religion and culture. Legally, SEMA Number 2 of 2023 does open up opportunities for the registration of interfaith marriages through the method of court determination, which is then recorded at the Civil Registration Office. However, the realization of these practices still faces various regulatory and sociological challenges. From the Islamic religious side, interfaith marriage is considered contrary to the principle of maintaining the quality of faith and creed, as reflected in the prohibition of marrying non-Muslim couples except in certain very limited conditions (Jack Donnelly, 2020). On the other hand, the guarantee of Human Rights (HAM) in Indonesia as contained in Article 28B paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution and Article 22 of Law Number 39 of 1999 affirms that every individual has the right to build a family through marriage and is free to embrace religion. The tension between individual freedom in human rights and the normative limits of religion is at the heart of the problem in the issue of interfaith marriage in Indonesia (Triwahyuningsih, 2018).

This situation becomes even more interesting to study when drawn into local contexts, such as in Salatiga City, Indonesia, and Yala Province, Thailand. Both are known as multicultural and multi-religious regions with a history of tolerance and distinctive social dynamics. This city consistently

occupies the top position as the most tolerant city in Indonesia (Hakim, 2021). This tolerance is formed by high religious diversity as seen in the distribution of the population in four sub-districts: Argomulyo, Tingkir, Sidomukti, and Sidorejo. For example, in Argomulyo District in 2021 there were 40,093 Muslims, 8,066 Protestants, and 1,911 Catholics, which shows a fairly balanced distribution between religions.

Meanwhile, Yala Province in Southern Thailand is also a Muslim-majority region that is under dual legal system: Thai state law and local Islamic law (sharia), both affect the legal and social status of interfaith marriages. Yala presents a different social context, where interfaith marriages are often carried out clandestinely or with their own legal strategies (Samah, 2020), reflecting more conservative social and religious pressures compared to Salatiga.

Pre-research data noted that throughout 2021 there were 23 cases of interfaith marriage in Salatiga, most of them involving Muslim and Christian couples. This phenomenon not only reflects the reality of pluralism, but also poses new challenges in religious practice, marriage regulation, and interfaith family harmonization. The harmonization of two families of different religions requires a high tolerance attitude, which is generally more developed in areas with a high level of diversity (Triwahyuningsih, 2018).

The previous research focused on Moh. Zainudin entitled *Interfaith Marriage in the Perspective of Dignified Justice* (Zeinudin, 2019). The focus of this research lies in the combination of normative legal research and sociological law research that uses the constructivist paradigm. Research by Made Wifya Sekarbuana, Ida Ayu Putu Widiawati, I Wayan Arthanaya with the title "Interfaith Marriage in the Perspective of Human Rights in Indonesia" shows that the Marriage Law has not provided certainty for interfaith marriage perpetrators, even though on the other hand the state provides guarantees for religious believers. So that the state tends to overlap in responding to regulations, especially regarding interfaith marriage, which seems to discriminate against interfaith marriage perpetrators (Made Widya Sekarbuana, Ida Ayu Putu Widiawati, 2021). Tengku Erwinsyahbana's research with the title *Legal Aspects of Interreligious Marriage and Its Juridical Problems*. This research focuses on the problems caused by interfaith marriage, including marriage registration. The registration of interfaith marriages may result in rejection from the KUA (Religious Affairs Office) or KCS (Civil Registry Office), thus raising problems regarding the status of the child born and the position of the couple's status in the marriage (Erwinsyahbana, 2018).

In contrast to previous studies that emphasized normative legal frameworks, regulatory ambiguity, or administrative status, this research

departs from the local context of Salatiga City as a plural and tolerant social space (Berman, Paul Schiff, 2020, Sani, 2020). Its main focus is on the deconstruction of interfaith marriage practices from two main perspectives: Islamic law and human rights. This study also examines the role of civil society institutions such as the NGO Percik which are actively providing assistance to interfaith couples. Preliminary findings show that these NGOs are important facilitators in the process of legalizing and advocating for interfaith marriage, as well as bridging the issue between religious norms, positive law, and individual rights.

Based on this background, this study aims to answer the main question: How does the practice of interfaith marriage take place in Salatiga City and Yala Province, and what are the perspectives of Islamic law and human rights activists in responding to this phenomenon? This research is expected to broaden insights into socio-religious practices in plural areas, as well as contribute to the formulation of fair and inclusive policies in managing diversity in the realm of family and marriage.

Research Methods

This research is a field research with a descriptive-comparative qualitative approach conducted in two locations; Salatiga City (Indonesia) and Yala Province (Thailand). Field research allows researchers to understand in depth the social phenomena that occur in their natural environment (Tohirin, 2013), a qualitative-descriptive-comparative approach was chosen to describe in depth and compare the legal perspectives and social experiences of the parties regarding the practice of interfaith marriage in the two regions (Sugiyono, 2013). This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring the meaning, perspective, and social interpretation of informants that cannot be reached through a quantitative approach. The determination of the research subject was carried out by purposive sampling technique, which is the selection of informants based on certain criteria adjusted to the research objectives (Moleong, 1993). These criteria include: (1) having direct experience in handling or witnessing interfaith marriage practices, (2) having an adequate understanding of human rights principles or Islamic Law, and (3) being active in organizations or activities related to socio-religious issues in Salatiga and Yala. Based on these criteria, the selected informants consisted of human rights activists, Islamic religious leaders, legal academics, and representatives of civil society institutions in Salatiga and Yala. The data collection technique is carried out through three main methods, those are in-depth interviews with informants to explore their views, experiences, and arguments related to interfaith marriage practices. Direct observation is carried out in Non-Governmental Organizations (especially Percik

NGOs) local religious institutions in Yala which are known to be active in facilitating interfaith couples, as well as in social and religious activities of the community. Documentation study, which examines supporting documents such as court decisions, institutional records, advocacy documents, and legal products relevant to interfaith marriage. The data analysis technique uses the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis method which consists of three main stages. Data reduction, which is the process of sorting, summarizing, and simplifying raw data obtained from the field. Data presentation is carried out in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, or tables to make it easier to analyze and draw conclusions. Drawing conclusions and verification, namely formulating research findings based on data that has been processed and validating findings through triangulation of sources and techniques.

Result and Discussion

Contrasting Legal and Social Responses to Interfaith Marriages in Salatiga, Indonesia and Yala, Thailand

The registration of interfaith marriages in Salatiga City has been going on for a long time. The Salatiga City Government, through the Population and Civil Registration Office (Disdukcapil), has taken policies that tend to be inclusive of these social realities. This policy is based on the mandate of Article 4 Chapter II of Regional Government Affairs, which stipulates that the field of population and civil registration is a mandatory government affair and must be carried out based on norms, standards, procedures, and criteria set by the central government (RUDY HARJANTO et al., 2023). One of the legal bases used by the Disdukcapil in legitimizing the registration of interfaith marriages is Law Number 23 of 2006 concerning Population Administration. In Article 34 paragraph (1) it is stated that every valid marriage according to religious law must be reported to the implementing agency no later than 60 days from the date of marriage. Based on these provisions, the Salatiga City Disdukcapil interprets that if a marriage is religiously valid, then the state is obliged to register it, including if it is carried out by a couple of different religions. Failure to register will actually cause legal losses for the couple, especially related to the status of children and other civil rights. Based on Nugraha's (2016) research, the approach of the Salatiga Disdukcapil shows alignment with the principle of *equal citizenship*, where every citizen has the right to the equal administrative services, without discrimination based on religion. This kind of approach is very relevant to the context of social plurality in the city of Salatiga (Xavier Nugraha, Risdiana Izzaty, 2019).

In the field, the implementation of interfaith marriage can be carried out in various ways. Some couples choose to hold a marriage in front of

their respective religious institutions, then register it with the Disdukcapil. Non-governmental organizations such as Percik Salatiga and several churches, such as GKJ Sidomukti, are facilitators who assist this process, both administratively and socially. The assistance is not only to facilitate marriage, but also to provide legal education and spiritual reflection on the consequences of interfaith marriage. According to an informant from the NGO Percik, interfaith couples are complex couples. They face not only legal challenges, but also social burdens and psychological distress due to differences in beliefs. Religious differences are seen as personal and private, but the impact is very public. Therefore, they require assistance that includes three dimensions at once: legal legality, religious suitability, and social acceptance (Gede Agung et al., 2024).

The NGO Percik asserts that they are not in a position to direct the couple's decision, but provide objective information about the possibilities and consequences of interfaith marriage. In practice, not all couples who come to Percik end up getting married. Some cancel wedding plans after gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges ahead. This suggests that a dialogical and reflective approach is more effective than a rigid normative approach. The main factor underlying the Salatiga City Government's inclusive policy is the high level of pluralism of its community. Based on population data, the people of Salatiga consist of various religious believers. In this context, the emergence of the practice of interfaith marriage is not something surprising. Instead, it is a challenge for local governments to provide non-discriminatory administrative services and still respect their respective religious laws (Setiawan et al., 2024). The purpose of the institution to accompany interfaith marriage is if taken from a general point of view regarding marriage, as he said in the interview, he argued:

if it is indeed fate that brings them together, then what can we do, and it is imperative that if we are going to hold a marriage, then like the state of law in general, the marriage must be given legality" (Agung, 2023).

In addition to this, Staff Percik said that interfaith couples are complex couples, where they understand how their love can be tied to marriage (X, 2023), but with differences in beliefs there is something that makes it restrictive, considering that faith is a privacy and non-negotiable. Therefore, they really need strong assistance both in terms of legality and in terms of religion and social so that they have provisions and stability (Agung, 2023).

Feelings are human nature. For couples who come to us for help, we will also try to help as much as we can. Basically, we do not intervene with interfaith couples who are going to get married. We only give a briefing on the possibilities that occur if interfaith marriages are still held. We return the rest to the person concerned.

Percik staff emphasized that the position of the institution is as a companion in the scope of social programs, Mr. Agung also emphasized that, of all couples who come to the Percik institution, not all of them proceed to a marriage, but there are also those who then cancel in the sense of not continuing the relationship, some delay because they consider. It can be said that their position here is as a companion or providing a fair point to their problems, either by explaining the pros and cons of religious policies and later the decision to marry or not depends on each of them.

The cases found in this study show variations in the form of marriage implementation. For example, couples C (Catholic) and TM (Buddhist) get married in a Catholic church, while couples B (Christian) and R (Buddhist) use Buddhist ceremonies. Couples D (Christian) and N (Muslim) got married with Islamic rites. Interestingly, after getting married, the three returned to their respective religions. This means that religious rituals are seen more as a form of legal or administrative compliance than a theological commitment (Sonafist & Yuningsih, 2023). In practice, institutions that help interfaith marriages, including Percik, do not guarantee the sustainability or validity of marriage from the perspective of all religions. They only provide information, administrative assistance, and mediation if necessary. The responsibility remains with the spouse concerned, including to deal with possible internal and external conflicts after marriage.

In contrast to the administrative approach in Salatiga, Yala as one of the provinces in Southern Thailand has a more complex legal system due to the application of a dual legal system: Thai national law and Islamic law (Sharia) which applies specifically to Malay-Patani Muslims in Muslim-majority areas such as Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat (Agustar, A., 2024). Under this jurisdiction, Thailand's National Marriage Law regulates marriage in general, but there are local Sharia Courts that have the authority to legalize and regulate Muslim marriages, including those involving interfaith couples (Pandu & Nurdiansyah, 2024).

Normatively, Islamic law in Yala does not allow Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men, while Muslim men are allowed to marry Muslim women (Jewish or Christian) (Maylinda et al., 2023), but this is rare due to conservative cultural and social considerations. Meanwhile, Thailand's national law requires that marriage registration be done civilly in order to obtain formal legal recognition. This condition causes many interfaith marriages to unofficially recorded and take place informally or even secretly.

Social stigma against interfaith couples in Yala tends to be stronger than in Salatiga. This is influenced by the values of the Malay-Patani community who view interfaith marriage as a violation of collective norms and local Islamic identity (Irawan et al., 2025). In interviews with religious

and community leaders, it was found that the rejection of interfaith marriage is based more on socio-cultural considerations than on the legal aspects of the state (Chelong Wa, 2024). Rejection comes not only from families, but also from the social structure of the community, including mosque imams and traditional leaders.

Religious institutions in Yala, especially mosques and the Provincial Islamic Council, do not provide mediation or counseling services for interfaith couples. In fact, most scholars refuse to marry such couples, and suggest religious conversion as an absolute requirement (Abdoeh, 2024). In some cases, non-Muslim couples who marry Muslims choose to change religion as a form of social compromise and in order to gain community legitimacy. However, these decisions are often not based on spiritual beliefs, but rather as a pragmatic solution to social pressures.

Socio-Religious Constraints and Personal Negotiation in Interfaith Marriages: The Case of Salatiga, Indonesia and Yala, Thailand

Interfaith marriage serves as a complex intersection between personal autonomy, religious norms, and sociocultural realities. In the case studies of Salatiga, Indonesia and Yala, Thailand, we find two contrasting socio-legal environments that frame how couples negotiate love, belief, and institutional authority. While Salatiga reflects a more inclusive and adaptive pluralistic setting, Yala presents a deeply conservative and normatively restrictive structure. Yet in both contexts, the theory of *human agency* (Moore, 1973) proves useful to understand how individuals exercise autonomy within, or in resistance to, the structures surrounding them. Salatiga, a city known for its high religious and ethnic diversity, offers an environment that is relatively tolerant and inclusive toward interfaith relationships.

Based on field interviews and data, the main motivation for couples to pursue interfaith marriage is emotional closeness and love, accounting for approximately 60% of the driving factors. In such cases, religious difference is perceived not as a barrier but as a personal challenge to be navigated with mutual respect and tolerance (B, 2025). Another significant factor is the pluralistic social environment of Salatiga (20%), which encourages openness to interfaith interactions (Yakub Aiyub Kadir & Rizki, 2023). In addition, rejection of religious conversion (10%) highlights the couple's intent to retain their individual spiritual identity without compromising relational harmony. The role of NGOs such as Percik, which contributes another 10%, provides legal assistance, counseling, and mediation—further enabling interfaith unions to gain recognition and legitimacy (Agung, 2023). This interplay of emotional, social, and institutional support systems reveals that agency in Salatiga is

institutionally supported and socially accommodated. Love becomes not only a private affair but also a source of social negotiation and transformation. As agents of change, interfaith couples contribute to the reshaping of religious norms within society, making diversity not a threat, but a lived and celebrated reality (Maula, 2024).

In sharp contrast, interfaith marriage in Yala, Thailand, unfolds within a restrictive religious-legal framework. Yala is located in Thailand’s Deep South, home to a predominantly Malay-Muslim population, where marriage is heavily regulated by Islamic norms, ethnic loyalty, and communal expectations (Sojirat Supanichwatana, 2024). Religious courts operate alongside the civil system, creating structural rigidity that frames interfaith marriage as both a religious violation and a social taboo. In this context, social pressure and family loyalty constitute the most dominant limiting factors (40%), followed by conversion requirements (30%). Love or emotional attachment exists (20%), but it often becomes subordinated to communal norms. A small portion of couples (10%) attempt to escape these constraints by marrying outside the province or even abroad. Unlike in Salatiga, institutional support for such couples is practically non-existent, and civil society organizations rarely engage in interfaith advocacy. Yet even in Yala, traces of agency persist. Couples negotiate their paths by either resisting conversion, pursuing informal or overseas marriages, or finding legal loopholes (S, 2025). These actions, although limited and marginal, illustrate a hidden form of agency a silent resistance to structural determinism. However, the lack of institutional tolerance means that such agency remains largely unrecognized, and social transformation is slower and more fragmented.

Comparative Table: Factor of Interfaith Marriage in Salatiga and Yala

Factors	Salatiga (Indonesia)	Yala (Thailand)
Love/emotional closeness	60% - Primary motivation	20% - Subordinated to social norms
Social/cultural environment	20% - Open and pluralistic	40% - Conservative and pressuring
Rejection of religious conversion	10% - Personal autonomy emphasized	30% - Conversion as a requirement
Institutional/NGO support	10% - Provided by NGOs (e.g., Percik)	0% - Almost no institutional support
Escape from structural constraints	Rare - Marriage possible locally	10% - Some marry outside Yala

Source: Personal Interviews, 2025

The comparison reveals a fundamental contrast in the structure-agency dynamic. In Salatiga, pluralism and legal flexibility empower individual agency, enabling couples to make autonomous marital decisions

while contributing to societal change. Institutions, especially civil society organizations, act as facilitators rather than barriers. In Yala, by contrast, structure dominates agency. Religious norms and communal expectations dictate marital legitimacy, leaving little room for deviation. Individuals must either conform or operate in the margins, with limited support and often at significant social cost. Nonetheless, the existence of interfaith marriages even in Yala highlights the persistence of human agency in navigating rigid systems. While Salatiga demonstrates agency in negotiation with structure, Yala illustrates agency in resistance to structure. Both cases underscore the importance of understanding interfaith marriage not merely as a legal anomaly, but as a site of social contestation, transformation, and human resilience in the face of normative rigidity.

Between Devine Norms and Universal Rights: A Comparative Reflection on Islamic Law and Human Rights in Interfaith Marriages

Interfaith marriage stands at the intersection of two normative frameworks: divine religious law (Islamic law) and universal human rights, both of which influence how states and societies regulate marriage. The tension becomes even more pronounced in plural societies such as Indonesia and Thailand, where religion plays a strong role in personal status law, yet modern constitutions also promote equality, freedom, and non-discrimination. In Indonesia, interfaith marriage is heavily shaped by Islamic legal norms, particularly the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) which explicitly prohibits a Muslim woman from marrying a non-Muslim man (Article 44) and discourages any form of interfaith union (Article 40c). The dominant interpretation among Indonesian *ulama* (Islamic scholars), as revealed in this study, affirms this prohibition. Out of five religious leaders interviewed, four categorically rejected interfaith marriages, citing Surah al-Baqarah (2:221) and the danger of spiritual disharmony.

However, the human rights perspective in Indonesia, grounded in Article 28B(1) of the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights, asserts that every individual has the right to marry and form a family (Jack Donnelly, 2020). Human rights activists in Salatiga diverge in their responses: while some fully support interfaith marriage as part of personal liberty and religious freedom, others emphasize that freedom must be bounded by social and religious values.

This tension intensified following Supreme Court Circular Letter (SEMA) No. 2 of 2023, which prohibits courts from granting applications for interfaith marriage registration. The SEMA formalizes a legal barrier to interfaith unions, aligning with religious law but contradicting universal human rights norms. Yet, in local practice (e.g., Salatiga), a pragmatic compromise is emerging. Civil registry offices such as Disdukcapil and

NGOs like Percik accommodate interfaith couples by offering administrative pathways without direct religious endorsement. This allows civil rights to be partially protected, even as doctrinal objections remain unresolved (Maloko et al., 2024).

In contrast, Yala, Thailand, presents a context where religious law is not just influential—it is institutionalized and socially dominant, particularly among the Malay-Muslim population. As part of Thailand's "Deep South," Yala is governed by both Thai civil law and Sharia courts, especially in matters of marriage and family among Muslims (Machae et al., 2015). This dual-legal system reinforces religious norms that prohibit interfaith marriages, especially for Muslim women. The practice in Yala follows classical Islamic legal rules, where Muslim men may (conditionally) marry women of the non-Muslims, but Muslim women are strictly prohibited from marrying non-Muslims. Unlike in Indonesia, there is little institutional space or civil society support for negotiating alternative arrangements. Interviews indicate that most interfaith couples in Yala face three choices: (1) forced religious conversion, (2) relocation to Bangkok or Malaysia to marry under civil law, or (3) separation. Emotional love exists, but is often overruled by social, familial, and legal pressures.

From the lens of human rights, the Yala context offers very limited recognition of interfaith marriage. There are no local NGOs providing legal or social mediation, and freedom of religion is subordinated to collective identity and religious authority. In such a setting, Giddens' theory of human agency still applies—but with narrower margins. Individuals may attempt to assert autonomy by marrying outside the region, but these actions are largely invisible, unrecognized, and unsupported institutionally. The Salatiga-Yala comparison reveals key differences in how Islamic law and human rights are interpreted and mediated in interfaith marriages. The comparison between interfaith marriage practices in Salatiga and Yala reveals two distinct approaches in negotiating the tension between religious norms and human rights. In terms of the legal framework, both regions operate under a dual legal system, but with differing characteristics. In Salatiga, there is a legal dualism between Islamic law and civil rights, where the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) strictly prohibits interfaith marriage, yet this restriction can sometimes be bypassed through administrative means, such as civil registration by the Population and Civil Registry Office (Disdukcapil). In contrast, Yala, governed by both Sharia and Thai civil law, exhibits a stricter adherence to Islamic jurisprudence, especially under the influence of strong communal and religious authority (Samah, Mahamatayuding, Raihanah Abdullah, 2017). Regarding religious law, Salatiga enforces KHI-based prohibitions, but with flexibility in practice, allowing some administrative recognition even when religious endorsement is absent. Meanwhile, in Yala, religious doctrine is

applied rigidly interfaith marriages are generally only accepted when the non-Muslim party converts to Islam, reflecting a strong cultural and religious imperative for conformity.

The role of human rights also differs significantly. In Salatiga, human rights are recognized but contested, particularly after the issuance of Supreme Court Circular Letter (SEMA) No. 2 of 2023, which prohibits courts from approving interfaith marriage registrations (Azizah, 2023). Activists who do not approve of interfaith marriage or who approve the implementation of the Supreme Court Circular Letter Number 2 of 2023 concerning the application for registration of marriages between people of different religions and beliefs think that the state's attitude is appropriate to affirm the prohibition of interfaith marriage in Indonesia (Nasir, 2022). The view of interfaith marriage in the context of human rights is related to the basic principles of human rights, such as religious freedom, equality, and non-discrimination (Elmali-Karakaya, 2022). Despite this, human rights discourse remains vibrant, with ongoing debates among legal experts and activists. In contrast, in Yala, human rights considerations are largely suppressed by communal norms, where societal expectations and religious orthodoxy override individual autonomy, and legal options are far more constrained. Civil society involvement provides another contrast. In Salatiga, NGOs such as Percik actively support interfaith couples by providing legal assistance, counselling, and advocacy. These organizations act as bridges between religious norms and civil rights. In Yala, however, civil society engagement is minimal or nonexistent. There are no prominent local NGOs that publicly support interfaith marriage, largely due to the prevailing conservative and religious atmosphere. Human rights, which in this case include civil rights and private rights, continue to develop along with human development (Yakub Aiyub Kadir & Rizki, 2023). The issue of human rights has been agreed upon in Indonesia as per the emergence of Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights which contains 11 Chapter 106 Articles. On the other hand, Human Rights has also experienced quite serious debates related to its implementation or application in Indonesia, for example the right to perform interfaith marriages which are aggressively prohibited by religion (Idris & Alam, 2022).

Lastly, in terms of the space for negotiation, Salatiga offers moderate space for administrative tolerance, where some couples can navigate around religious prohibitions and still obtain civil documentation. In Yala, however, the space is extremely limited interfaith marriage almost always requires conversion, and those who resist this are either socially ostracized or forced to marry outside the region, often in Bangkok or abroad (Somboon, 1986). In summary, while both regions operate within dual legal systems, Salatiga presents a more flexible and pluralistic model, partially

accommodating interfaith unions through administrative and civil channels. Yala, on the other hand, demonstrates a rigid, religiously homogeneous framework that leaves little room for alternative interpretations, making interfaith marriage far more difficult both socially and legally (Sojirat Supanichwatana, 2024).

These contrasts show how Islamic law as divine norm and human rights as universal rights may either clash, coexist, or be renegotiated depending on the legal system, local culture, and institutional context. It is important to note that interfaith marriage laws in Islam can vary depending on local interpretations and practices as well as the rules of law in a particular country (Ash'ari & Fisa, 2022). Some countries may have laws that specifically regulate interfaith marriage, while others may adhere to sharia law more strictly (Jatmiko et al., 2022). Therefore, it is very important for couples planning to marry with different religious beliefs to consult with a cleric or local religious authority and follow the laws and regulations that apply in the country where they live (Hamdani et al., 2023).

In Salatiga, structural pluralism and social tolerance enable limited compromise. In Yala, structure dominates agency, leaving almost no space for interfaith marriages to be socially or legally valid. This study suggests that while theology resists compromise, law and policy can evolve, especially when guided by empathy, human dignity, and the principle of coexistence in diverse societies.

Conclusion

This study concludes that interfaith marriage in both Salatiga, Indonesia and Yala, Thailand reflects a complex intersection of religious norms, human rights, legal systems, and socio-cultural contexts. While both regions operate under dual legal systems, their approaches to interfaith marriage differ significantly. In Salatiga, interfaith marriage practices are shaped by a combination of emotional attachment, plural social environments, and limited legal-administrative tolerance. Despite the normative prohibition in the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) and Supreme Court Circular Letter No. 2 of 2023, administrative mechanisms such as the civil registry office (Disdukcapil) and the role of NGOs like Percik provide room for negotiation and recognition. This enables couples to assert personal agency within a socially accommodating environment. The involvement of human rights activists and legal pluralism fosters a more inclusive space for interfaith unions, even if doctrinal tensions remain unresolved. In Yala, however, interfaith marriage is highly restricted due to strong religious authority, communal expectations, and the operationalization of local Sharia courts alongside Thai civil law. Muslim

women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims, and social pressure often compels conversion as a prerequisite for marriage. There is virtually no institutional support from civil society or religious organizations, and most interfaith marriages either occur clandestinely or are performed outside the region. Personal agency in Yala manifests in hidden or resistant forms, often lacking institutional recognition and leading to marginalization.

Comparatively, Salatiga represents a model of negotiated pluralism, where human rights and religious norms engage in ongoing dialogue through state and civil society mediation. Meanwhile, Yala represents a context of structural rigidity, where religious law dominates and human rights claims are largely subordinated. Despite these differences, both regions illustrate that interfaith marriage is not merely a legal anomaly but a place of negotiation between divine norms and universal rights, where individual actors navigate personal faith, social constraints, and institutional frameworks in pursuit of relational and legal legitimacy.

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