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The value of religious tolerance and controversy in the film “Tanda Tanya (?)”: Peirce’s semiotics

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ABSTRACT

The development of the times has brought changes in people's mindsets and perspectives, including the interpretation of religious tolerance and controversy in pluralistic Indonesia. This change is supported by various media as part of technological development. Movies are one such medium. Film, as a visual communication medium, functions not only as entertainment but also as a means of conveying social and cultural values through a signal/sign system. This study aims to describe the sign system that represents the value of religious tolerance and controversy in the film ‘Tanda Tanya (?)’ by Hanung Bramantyo. This study used a qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of documentation, namely, repeated monitoring to understand the context thoroughly. Data in the form of film scenes were analyzed using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, which includes icons, indexes, and symbols. The results showed that there were 11 scenes that represented the value of religious tolerance and controversy. Based on this data, each data point represents a system of three sign systems that specifically find 17 symbols, 16 indexes, and 13 icons. The dominant data found was a system of symbolic signs in the form of certain words, actions, colors, and goods that represent the value of religious tolerance and its controversy. This means that symbols with conventional properties in society are an effective means of instilling these values in the flow of the film.

Keywords: Peirce’s semiotics; tolerance; controversy; the film Tanda Tanya

1. INTRODUCTION

The socio-cultural transformation that occurs in society also affects various social, ideological and cultural structures. These changes are not only seen in the economic and social fields but also in the way people view and interpret various life phenomena. In the context of a pluralistic Indonesian society, one of the discourses that continues to develop is religious pluralism and tolerance. The issue of tolerance is becoming increasingly relevant, especially in societies that coexist with diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Discussions about religious tolerance often come to the fore at certain moments, such as the celebration of officially recognized religious holidays in Indonesia, which often give rise to reflections on the practice of tolerance in people's social lives.

There are various ways to strengthen and instill the values of tolerance. One of these is through language. Language serves as an effective means of cross-cultural communication and becomes a symbol of unifying nations that strengthen collective identities in the midst of diversity (Afif & Junadi, 2025). Language can be considered the main means of transferring the value of tolerance in a pluralistic society. Communication plays an important role in building understanding and tolerance among religious communities. Through interaction, dialogue, and mutual respect, people can strengthen their social relationships and reduce negative stereotypes. Therefore, good communication and tolerance are the keys to maintaining harmony amidst diversity (Siregar & Sikumbang, 2024).

Language serves as a means of communication and as a system of signals that shape and convey meaning. Through the sign system, the speaker produces and conveys meanings that are interpreted by the other speaker in the communication process. Communication establishes relationships and interacts with other people and the surrounding environment (Mailani et al., 2022). Thus, language not only conveys messages but also becomes a medium that represents and transmits cultural values in people's lives. Nonetheless, language does not exist alone. Language can be a means of work that can be enjoyed by the community without a patronizing impression. The language used in a work allows for an indirect communication process that is acceptable in society. For example, novels, poems, plays, and even movies use the right language to implicitly convey certain messages.

Films are one of the works or products of the development of the times that is familiar. Through a wide variety of films, meanings or messages can be found implicitly in each sign system (language as a sign system). The director and film crew aim to convey information, ideas, and points of view related to a problem. Films are one of the media that have the greatest influence compared to others. In addition, films are considered a powerful communication medium because they involve audiovisual (Waliulu et al., 2024). Therefore, the message conveyed in the film can be more easily accepted by the *audience*. Thus, films function not only as entertainment but also as a medium to convey messages and social values to the public.

One of them is a religious genre film titled "Tanda Tanya (?)". The film managed to reach 30 thousand viewers during its first week in theaters (reported by republika.co.id). The film was directed by Bramantyo. This film tells the story of Menuk who works in a Chinese restaurant that is synonymous with pork cooking, Surya who works as an actor by playing the character of Jesus, Rika who chooses to change religion and let her son continue to embrace Islam, Saleh who works as a Banser NU, and various kinds of conflicts in it that are very thick with attitudes in religion. Although it was released a few years ago, the film can still be enjoyed through the YouTube channel. This film reminds the audience of the importance of religious tolerance and various issues and controversies related to religion.

Various reports have shown that religious tolerance remains a concern in Indonesia. Several cases of violations of freedom of religion and belief still occur every year, such as the rejection of the establishment of houses of worship and acts of intolerance in the community. For example, in 2024, 42 cases of destruction of places of worship were reported in various regions. This condition shows that strengthening the value of tolerance between religions is still an important effort in maintaining harmony in social life in Indonesia. This shows that religious issues are still a relevant and interesting topic to be discussed as a foundation in the life of the nation and state in Indonesia, based on the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

The story and conflict shown in the film are conveyed not only through storylines and dialogues but also through various signs that appear in the visuals, symbols, and actions of the characters. These elements contain meanings that represent values, views, and social realities related to religious tolerance. To understand the meaning implied in these signs, an approach that can interpret the sign system in more depth is needed. Semiotics, the study of how signs are created, used, and interpreted to produce meaning in social and cultural life, is one of the fields of linguistics that can be used to study this. Humans create and interpret signs as meaning-makers, just as cultures primarily generate and interpret signs classified as icons, indexes, and symbols (Adeyemo et al., 2022).

Humans create and interpret signs to create meaning, for example, in a cultural context. The signs mentioned here mainly generate and interpret signs that are classified as icons, indexes, and symbols. This is in line with the semiotic theory proposed by Peirce. Peirce's theory states that something can be called a sign if it represents something else (Nurgiyantoro, 2013). In other words, to be called a sign, something must be able to refer to a specific object. In this case, it is usually referred to as the reference. This reference process is called the semiosis process. Peirce distinguishes the relationship between signs and references into three, which are as follows.

First, icons are signs in the form of similar relationships. For example, photos, geographic maps, and mentions at the beginning. Second, the index is a sign in the form of a relationship of proximity to existence. For example, thick black smoke indicates a fire, lightning strikes indicate rain, and so on. Third, symbols are signs in the form of relationships that have been established by convention. For example, body movements that signify something (waving to mark leaving someone and saying goodbye), certain colors that signify something (red/white indicates death), and language that is the most complete symbol for thinking. Chandler (2007) also states the meaning of the three sign systems. Symbols are markers that do not resemble the marked items but are conventional. These symbols can be common language (plus specific languages, alphabets, punctuation, words, phrases, and sentences), numbers, Morse codes, traffic lights, and national flags. The symbols are not specific but have a general meaning understood by the community.

Icons have the main features representing their objects, so they pay attention to their similarities. In this case, the marker is considered to resemble or mimic the marked one. For example, portraits, cartoons, scale models, onomatopoeia, metaphors, realistic sounds in 'music programs', sound effects in radio dramas, dubbed movie soundtracks, and artificial movements. An index is a sign of something that is marked directly. The index indicates genuine relationships, for example, 'natural signs' (smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic smells and tastes), medical symptoms (pain, rash, pulse), instrument measurements (wind direction, thermometer, clock, water level), 'signals' (doorknobs, phone rings), instructions (pointing 'fingers,' direction indicators), recordings (photographs, films, video or television recordings, audio recordings), and personal " trademarks (handwriting, catchy phrases).

Each text, including a film or television drama, can be interpreted differently by the audience depending on their social, cultural, and personal contexts. Although the film "Tanda Tanya (?)", it has been widely discussed in relation to the issue of religious tolerance, and most studies still focus on moral messages and social conflicts displayed in the storyline. Studies that specifically analyze how the value of tolerance and controversy are represented through the film rating system are still relatively limited. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the representation of the value of tolerance and controversy in the film "Tanda Tanya (?)" using a semiotic approach. The research problem is formulated in the question: how the mark system represents the value of tolerance and controversy in the film "Tanda Tanya (?)". This study aims to explain the forms of signs that appear in the film and the meanings produced in representing the value of tolerance and controversy. Semiotic analysis is important because it can reveal the hidden meaning behind the dialogue, visuals, symbols, and actions of the characters in the film. Thus, this research is expected to enrich the study of linguistics and semiotics, especially in understanding how film media represent social and religious values in a diverse society.

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a semiotic analysis design. Qualitative research aims to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon through interpreting the meaning contained in the data (Sugiyono, 2021). This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the interpretation of the sign system that appears in films.

The data source in this study is the film “Tanda Tanya (?)”, directed by Hanung Bramantyo. The research data are not only in the form of verbal data but also cinematic data that include visual and audio elements, such as character dialogue, scenes, expressions, visual symbols, and events that represent certain values in the film. In this study, the value of tolerance is interpreted as an attitude of mutual respect and appreciation of differences in beliefs, while controversy refers to conflicts or debates that arise regarding religious practices and views.

The data collection technique is carried out by the documentation method, namely by watching the film “Tanda Tanya (?)” repeatedly to thoroughly understand the context of the story. Furthermore, the researcher recorded and documented scenes that represented the values of tolerance and religious controversy. Subsequently, the scene was classified. The scenes chosen as data clearly show the interaction between characters, religious symbols, or events related to differences in beliefs in the film.

Data analysis was carried out using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, which classifies signs into three types: icons, indexes, and symbols. The analysis process was carried out through several stages: (1) identifying signs related to the value of tolerance or controversy in movie scenes, (2) classifying the signs into categories of icons, indexes, or symbols, and (3) interpreting the meaning of signs in relation to the representation of the values of tolerance and religious controversy. The results of the analysis were then concluded to explain how the marking system in the film “Tanda Tanya (?)” represent the value of tolerance and controversy in the context of diverse lives.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The results of this study are in the form of screenshots of several scenes that can be analyzed and classified as containing tolerance values or even controversies. Each scene is depicted with one screenshot, while the others are depicted with two or more screenshots as needed. This scene is equipped with an analysis of the sign system in the form of icons, indexes, and symbols, which are simultaneously equipped with the meaning of the *sign system*. Based on the scene, which includes a simple description of the context, a fragment of a dialogue excerpt, and an analysis of the three sign systems, the researcher will complement it with a description of the value of tolerance and the controversy that arises through the scene. The researchers identified a total of eleven scenes.

Before discussing further, it should be noted that the film “Tanda Tanya (?)”. It has a fairly long duration of 1 h 24 minutes and 15 seconds. During this duration, not all existing scenes will be analyzed, but the researcher will select and classify the data as described in the methods section.

In general, the synopsis of this film presents the background of diverse people's lives. In this film, various characters are shown to have their own conflicts. This film contains important characters who carry the plot, namely Menuk, Soleh, Hendra, Surya, Rika, Tan, and Liem. The conflict in this film is diversity, and the film carries the content of tolerance values. However, not everyone accepts the value of tolerance that the film brings to the fore. It also indicates that there will be scenes that contain controversy. However, we need to prove this through the data of the sign system contained in films. The sign system is analyzed based on the three components of the Peircean sign system: icons, indexes, and symbols. The following are the results and discussion (see [Figure 1](#)).



Figure 1. Data 1

Sections

Scene 1 (05.40-07.08)

(Tok... tok... tok...) (Knock... knock... knock...)

Menuk : "*Assalamualaikum. Pagi Koh*" (Peace be upon you. Good morning, Koh.)

Tan : "*Walaikumsalam. Pagi, Nuk.*" (And peace be upon you. Good morning, Nuk.)

Explanation

First, identify signs. The scene shows Menuk coming to Tan's restaurant and knocking on the door while saying, Hello. Second, the classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons, the Chinese restaurants visually displayed represent places that are synonymous with Chinese specialties, including pork-based foods; (2) index, the knock on the door becomes an index that indicates the presence of someone who wants to enter the room; and (3) symbols, the hijab worn by Menuk is a symbol of the identity of a Muslim. The saying "Assalamualaikum" is also a symbol of greetings in the Islamic tradition. The third, interpretation of meaning. Menuk's presence as a Muslim employee working in a Chinese restaurant shows the harmonious social relationship between individuals of different religious backgrounds. This is evidenced by the permission of Menuk (Muslim employees) to work in the establishment. He was dressed in Muslim clothes and did not hesitate to say "Assalamu'alaikum" which was answered with a friendly reply from the restaurant owner. This scene represents the value of tolerance, which is the attitude of mutual respect and cooperation in social life, despite differences in beliefs. The first symbol, the hijab, and the way one of the employees dresses in the restaurant, is interpreted as a Muslim. The Muslim in question was Menuk, the wife of Soleh, who was allowed to dress like this and felt comfortable working in a Chinese restaurant. The second symbol is the saying "Assalamualaikum" indicating the arrival of a Muslim (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Data 2

Sections

Scene 2 (09.01-11.24)

Ibu pembeli : "*Tapi pancinya sama ama panci buat masak babi?*" (But is the pot the same as the one used to cook pork?)

Menuk : "*Nggak bu. Semua panci, penggorengan, minyak, pisau, talenan, sampai piring sendok semua beda. Di sini peraturannya begitu.*" (No, ma'am. All pots, frying pans, oils, knives, cutting boards, plates, and spoons were separate. That is the rule here.)

Ibu pembeli : "*Nggak deh.*" (No, thanks.)

Menuk : "*Maaf pak. Dia tetep gak mau.*" (Sorry, sir. She still doesn't want it.)

Tan : "*Gak papa. Yang lain udah salat tuh. Kamu udah?*" (Menuk stares at Pak Tan) (It is okay. The others had already prayed. Have you?) (Menuk looks at Mr. Tan.)

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows a conversation between a buyer and Menuk about the use of cooking utensils in the restaurant. The buyer asks if the pot used to cook halal food is the same as the one used to cook pork. Menuk then explained that all cooking utensils were separated, ranging from pots, frying pans, oil, knives, cutting boards, and tableware. After the buyer refused to buy food, Menuk reported the matter to Koh Tan. Koh Tan responded casually and asked if Menuk had performed the prayer. The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons: cooking utensils such as pots, frying pans, knives, and cutting boards seen in the scene become icons of cooking activities in the restaurant's kitchen; (2) worship equipment such as mukena and prayer mats are also icons that visually represent the worship activities of Muslims; (2) index: (a) buyers' questions about the pot used to cook pork are an index of concerns related to halal food; (b) Menuk looked at Koh Tan after being asked about prayer as an index that Menuk was considering or realizing his duty of worship; and (c) the separation of cooking utensils is an index of efforts to maintain halal food for Muslim customers; (3) symbols: (a) Menuk's explanation of the separation of all cooking utensils is a symbol of the restaurant's commitment to respect halal food rules for Muslims; (b) the implementation of worship (salat) is a symbol of a person's obedience to the religious teachings he adheres to; and (3) worship equipment such as mukena and prayer mats for Muslims as well as incense or prayer utensils for the Chinese community became symbols of their respective religious identities and practices. Third, interpretation of meaning. This scene represents the value of tolerance and respect for differences in belief in social life. The separation of cooking utensils between pork and other foods shows respect for Muslims who follow halal rules regarding food consumption.

In addition, Koh Tan's attitude of asking whether Menuk had prayed showed that there was support for Muslim employees to carry out their worship. This scene illustrates that each individual can exercise their beliefs without interference. Thus, this scene confirms that tolerance is not only shown through verbal mutual respect but also through tangible actions, such as providing facilities and rules that respect the religious needs of others. This value shows that religious differences can coexist harmoniously in the work environment and in daily life (see [Figure 3](#)).



Figure 3. Data 3

Sections

Scene 3 (19.24-19.51)

- Tan : "*Ini pisau yang ada tandanya buat motong babi, yang ini bukan babi (gerakan tangannya menunjukkan alat-alat masak tersebut). Sudet buat ngegoreng juga beda. Ada yang merah, ini buat babi, no ini bukan yang babi.*" (This knife with the mark is for cutting pork; this one is not for pork (his hand gestures toward the cooking utensils). The spatulas used for frying are also different. The red one is for pork; no, this one is not for pork.)
- Hendra : "*Ya. Aku pergi dulu, Pak!*" (Yes. I'll go first, sir!)

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows Tan explaining to Hendra about the separation of cooking utensils in the restaurant, especially between the utensils used to cook pork and those used for other meals. Tan shows some cookware that has certain markings to distinguish them. The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) Icons: The red mark on the cookware becomes an icon that visually indicates that the appliance is used to cook pork. This red color is synonymous with Chinese, which is synonymous with pork cuisine; (2) index, Tan's explanation of the difference between cooking utensils shows that there is a causal relationship between the use of marks on the appliance with the aim of avoiding mixing food; and (3) symbols, the red color on the cookware can also be interpreted as a special identification symbol agreed upon in the restaurant to distinguish the use of the utensils. The third, interpretation of meaning. This scene shows a form of tolerance through the real actions of the restaurant owner, who separates the cooking utensils between pork-based food and other foods. This is done to respect Muslim customers and employees who are not allowed to consume pork products. The presence of special markings on the cookware can prevent the mixing of the utensils (see [Figure 4](#)).



Figure 4. Data 4

Scene 4 (44.06-44.30)

- Ustadz Wahyu : "*Gak ada salahnya nyoba.*" (There is nothing wrong with trying.)
- Surya : "*Tapi itu berarti saya harus masuk ke gereja.*" (But that means I have to go into a church.)
- Ustadz Wahyu : "*Di manapun elo berada, itu kan cuma fisik. Cuma tubuh lo. Mau elo masuk ke negeri yang paling lalim sekalipun, yang penting iman lo... hati lo... cuma untuk Allah SWT. Kalo elo bisa jaga hati elo, gua yakin gak ada apa-apa. Tanya dulu hati lo ...*" (Wherever you are, that is only physical). It is only your body. Even if you enter the most oppressive land, what matters is your faith... your heart... only for Allah SWT. If you can guard your heart, I am sure nothing will happen to you. Ask your heart first...)

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows a conversation between Surya and Ustadz Wahyu about Surya's offer of a role in a drama that requires him to enter the church. The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons, (a) the church mentioned in the dialogue has become an icon of a place of worship for

Christians, and (b) Ustadz figures with distinctive appearances such as clothes or ways of speaking have become icons of Islamic religious leaders; (2) index, (a) Surya's expression of doubt is an index of indecision in making decisions, and (b) Surya's question about entering the church is an index of concerns about possible conflicts with his religious beliefs; and (3) symbols, (a) Ustadz's advice about maintaining faith is a symbol of the belief that one's faith is not determined by place, but by determination, and (b) the mention of "faith only for Allah SWT" is a symbol of belief in Islamic teachings. The third, interpretation of meaning. This scene illustrates the difference in views on the limits of tolerance in religion. Ustadz's advice shows that a person can keep their faith even though they are in another religious environment as long as their faith remains strong (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Data 5

Scene 5 (53.35-54.12)

- Male 1 : “*Kamu tahu tidak, yang memerankan Yesus itu orang islam? Itu bisa mencemarkan kebesaran Tuhan kita? Nggak bisa Koh, harus dibatalkan*” (Do you know that the one playing Jesus is a Muslim? This could defile the greatness of God. No, Koh, it must be canceled.)
- Female : “*Apaan sih lebay deh?*” (What is this? You are being too dramatic.)
- Male 1 : “*Diam kamu!*” (Be quiet!)
- Romo : “*Hey-hey kenapa musti mempermasalahkan persoalan yang kecil dan mengorbankan hal yang besar?*” (Hey, hey, why must you make an issue out of a small matter and sacrifice something greater?)
- Male 2 : “*Romo, Romo, menurut Romo, tokoh Yesus diperankan orang islam itu hal yang kecil?*” (Father, Father, according to you, is a Muslim playing Jesus a small matter?)
- Romo : “*Pernahkah kalian mendengar kehancuran iman karena adegan drama? Sejarah telah membuktikan bahwa kehancuran iman dan agama adalah kebodohan, jangan sekali-kali berbuat kebodohan!*” (Have you ever heard of faith being destroyed because of a drama scene? History has proven that the destruction of faith and religion is foolishness; never commit foolishness.)

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows a debate between several characters regarding Surya's role as Jesus in the church drama. Some characters refused to participate because they thought it was inappropriate, while the Father tried to defuse the conflict by providing a wiser view. The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons, the place in the scene is on the terrace of the house. This indicates that the conversation was conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. (2) Indices: (a) loud tones and angry expressions are indicative of a strong rejection of Surya's role, and (b) the commotion in the conversation is an index of differences of opinion among the figures. (3) Symbols: The rejection of Surya, who plays Jesus, is a symbol of concern about the pollution of religious figures. In addition, the father's statement became a symbol of wisdom and the value of tolerance. The third, interpretation of meaning. This scene shows that society has different views on interreligious relations. Some parties consider this a form of respect and cooperation, whereas others consider it inappropriate.

Based on the system of signs found, it shows a scene that contains controversy because it shows two different opinions. Some Christians allow this, while others see it as forbidden, believing it desecrates the name of Jesus. As is the case on the Muslim side, some allow the role of scenes like this and others do not (see [Figure 6](#)).



Figure 6. Data 6

Scene 6 (1.00.53- 1.02.55)

Tan : *Pake tirai. Biasanya anak-anak udah tau. Paling kamu sampai sana udah dipasang. Jangan jualan babi juga selama sebulan. Kita harus ngebormatin orang islam. Paham kamu Hen? (Use curtains. Usually, the staff already know. Most likely, by the time you get there, they will already be installed. Pork should not be sold for a month. We must respect Muslim beliefs. Do you understand, Hen?)*

Hen : *(mengangguk saja) (just nods)*

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows Tan ordering his son to put up curtains in the restaurant and stop selling pork during Ramadan. The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons, the white curtain installed in front of the restaurant is an icon of a sign that there is a change in activity in the restaurant; (2) index, Tan's order not to sell pigs for a month is an indication that the month of Ramadan is underway; and (3) symbols, the decision to stop the sale of pigs is a symbol of respect for Muslims who are fasting. The third, interpretation of meaning. The white curtain installed in front of the restaurant is an icon of purity, which is interpreted as the month of Ramadan for Muslims. Curtains are put up to let shoppers know that restaurants do not sell pork during the holy month of Ramadan. Meanwhile, the system of signs and index symbols was not found at the scene of the crime. Based on the sign system in this scene, it shows the value of tolerance shown in the form of respecting the holy month of Ramadan by not selling pork during the month (see [Figure 7](#)).



Figure 7. Data 7

Scene 7 (1.05.37- 1.08.58)

- Surya : *Tepatnya, seorang perampok berpakaian Santa Claus. Rika tertawa geli. Muka Surya berkerut.* (Exactly, a robber dressed as Santa Claus. Rika laughs in amusement. Surya's face wrinkles.)
- Rika : *Oke, tuan Antagonis. Maukah kamu menjadi Santa Claus buat anak temenku itu?* (Okay, Mr. Antagonist. Would you be Santa Claus for my friend's child?)
- Surya hanya meringis saja ...* (Surya only grimaces...)

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows a conversation between Surya and Rika when Surya is asked to play the character of Santa Claus in an event for children. The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons, the figure of Santa Claus has become an icon of cultural symbols that are synonymous with Christmas celebrations; (2) index, Surya's grimacing became an index of doubt before accepting the offer; and (3) symbols, Surya's approval to play Santa Claus became a symbol of participation in interfaith social activities. The third, interpretation of meaning. When Surya grimaces, it is a symbol that Surya agrees to play the role of Santa Claus. Meanwhile, the mark system and icon index were not found in the scene. Based on the system of signs found, this is controversial because some scholars (in Islam) assume that playing a character in another religion means believing in the existence of that character. This is because some scholars are still paying attention to Islam. The possibility of shaky beliefs is caused by playing characters. However, there is also the opinion that as long as it is just to help, it is allowed (see [Figure 8](#)).



Figure 8. Data 8

Scene 8 (1.14.00-1.14.20)

The context of the scene is that Rika continues to guide and allow Abi (her son) to continue to carry out worship (fasting) as Muslims do, even though she herself is a Catholic (non-Muslim).

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows Rika continuing to guide her son to fast even though he is Catholic. The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons: prayer activities have become an icon of religious practice; (2) index: Rika's attitude of guiding her child is an index of a mother's affectionate relationship with her child; and (3) symbols: (a) prayer is a symbol of obedience to God and (b) Rika's support for her child's worship is a symbol of respect for children's beliefs. The third, interpretation of meaning. Based on the sign system found, this shows the value of tolerance in this scene in the form of a mother who still respects her child to continue to hold the religion of Islam by supporting him and continuing to guide him well (see [Figure 9](#)).



Figure 9. Data 9

Scene 9 (1.17.22-1.18.46)

- Hendra : *Besok antar daging ke sini ya. Aku dah ubah peraturan kalau besok restoran sudah mulai buka.* (Deliver the meat here tomorrow, okay? I have changed the rule so the restaurant will start opening tomorrow.)
- Tan : *Anak-Anak diliburkan berapa hari, mih?* (How many days are the staff off, Mih?)
- Liem : (diam) (silent)
- Tan : *Mih, anak-anak berapa hari libur?* (Mih, how many days are the staff off?)
- Pak Tan langsung turun ke restoran.* (Mr. Tan immediately goes down to the restaurant.)
- Tan : *Ping Hen, apa-apaan ini? Hah? Pulang-pulang, pulang semua, Menuk pulang. Ini masih hari kedua lebaran (sambil mendorong-dorong karyawan untuk pulang dan berusaha menutup pintu restoran).* (Ping Hen, what is this? Huh? Go home, everyone, go home. Menuk, go home. This is still the second day of Eid (while pushing the employees to go home and trying to close the restaurant door).)

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows an angry Tan when the restaurant opens on the second day of Eid and orders all the employees to go home. The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons, restaurants that are currently operating have become icons of economic activity; (2) index, Tan's anger became an index of the rules broken by his son; and (3) symbols, the decision to take employees off on the second day of Eid is a symbol of respect for Muslim holidays. The third, interpretation of meaning. Based on the sign system found, this shows the value of tolerance in this scene, namely Tan's character inviting employees, especially Muslims, to celebrate Eid al-Fitr by giving leave on the second day of Eid (see Figure 10).



Figure 10. Data 10

Scene 10 (27.1.23- 28.1.19)

- Rika : *Ini ada novel bagus banget dan ada kata-kata yang aku suka. Ini juga sekaligus kado buat kamu. Kubacain ya?* (Here is a really good novel, and there are words I like. This is also a gift from you. Shall I read it?)
- Surya tersenyum dan mengangguk.* (Surya smiles and nods.)
- Rika : *Manusia tidak hidup sendirian di dunia ini, tapi di jalan setapaknya masing-masing. Tiap manusia berjalan sendirian. Berjalan, berlari, dan sesekali berhenti. Semua jalan setapak itu berbeda-beda. Namun menuju ke arah yang sama. Mencari suatu hal yang dengan satu tujuan yang sama, hingga semakin dekat ke tujuan, manusia semakin*

menyadari bahwa di sepanjang jalan setapak yang sudah dilewati ia takkan pernah benar-benar sendiri. Manusia selalu bersama apa yang ia cari, bersama tujuannya yaitu Tuhan. (Humans do not live alone in this world but on their own paths. Every human being walks alone. Walking, running, and occasional stopping. All these paths are different. However, they headed in the same direction. Searching for something with the same goal, the closer humans get to the goal, the more they realize that along the path they have passed, they were never truly alone. Humans are always with what they seek, with their goal, namely God.)

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows Rika reading a quote from a novel to Surya about the human journey in seeking God: The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons, the books that Rika reads become an icon of a source of knowledge or thought; (2) index, Rika's interest in the content of the book is an index that she is contemplating the concept of spirituality; and (3) symbols, quotes about man's journey to God become a symbol of a universal view of the search for the meaning of life. The third, interpretation of meaning. The book Rika reads symbolizes her current beliefs. Therefore, based on the system of signs found, this is controversial. In Islam, there is only one God, Allah. Meanwhile, in other religions, there are those who recognize the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The principles conveyed by Rika blur the existing concepts of divinity. Even with this assumption, there are people who can accept it, but there are also those who reject it because it has to do with God (the basic principle) (see [Figure 11](#)).



Figure 11. Data 11

Scene 11 (1.31.24 - 1.34.44)

Dialogue in the Past Scene:

- Soleh : *Aku diterima sebagai anggota Banser, Nuk.* (I have been accepted as a member of Banser, Nuk.)
Menuk : *Bukannya itu bahaya ya, Mas?* (Isn't that dangerous, Mas?)
Soleh : *Ini jihad, Nuk* (This is jihad, Nuk.)

In-scene dialogue

- Soleh : *Awas minggir, awas minggir, ini bom, ini bom!* (*sambil berlari dengan berteriak*) (Watch out, move aside, move aside, this is a bomb, this is a bomb! (while running and shouting))

Another Banser : (*panik dan berlarian*) (panicking and running around)

Explanation

The first, identify signs. This scene shows Soleh finding a suspicious object in the form of a bomb in the church area and trying to save the people around him from it. The second, classification of marks. There are three points: (1) icons, suspicious boxes become icons of objects that resemble bombs; (2) index, (a) people's panic is an index of the threat of danger and (b) Soleh's shout became an index of the emergency situation; and (3) symbols, the righteous' act of carrying the bomb away became a symbol of sacrifice to save others. Third, the Identification

of Meaning. Based on the mark system found, a tolerance value was determined. This is evidenced by the actions of pious figures who are willing to sacrifice one life (themselves) to save hundreds of lives, both Muslims and non-Muslims, in the area.

3.2. Discussion

Film is a dynamic process between filmmakers and audiences in building meanings. Filmmakers use verbal and nonverbal signs, and audiences interpret their meanings. Emotions are conveyed through dialogue, expressions, movement, sound, music, light, and camera techniques (Krysanova & Shevchenko, 2022). Based on the results of the analysis of eleven scenes in the film “Tanda Tanya (?)”, it can be seen that the most widely used sign is the symbol. This shows that films do not just convey meaning directly but rather use cultural codes that need to be interpreted by the audience.

Symbols are signs whose meanings are formed through social agreements. That is, the meaning of this film is not singular but depends on how the audience understands it. Films are not only an entertainment spectacle but also a medium of reflection on how humans understand and interpret morals in the midst of rapidly changing digital technology and culture (Kurniawan et al., 2025).

Films can influence people's views, attitudes, and behaviors. This is an important basis for filmmaking that emphasizes positive messages such as tolerance and respect for diversity. As part of the mass media, films play a role in shaping culture and encouraging values that support an inclusive and mutually respectful society (Azhari, 2023). The dominance of symbols in this film shows that the meaning of tolerance is not only shown explicitly but is built through cultural representation. For example, religious symbols, interactions between characters, and decisions made in stories are ways in which films convey the value of tolerance.

Controversial issues trigger dissent among the public and open up space for the audience to give their own interpretations of an issue (Aripai & Hilmiyah, 2025). The media also builds a controversial discourse about statements that trigger pros and cons in society. This approach explains that controversial news is not just a fact but a discourse construct influenced by social and linguistic contexts (Chairunnisa et al., 2024).

It can be concluded that the film “Tanda Tanya (?)”. It has a value of tolerance and controversy that is not only displayed simply but constructed through the interaction of different sign systems. The film serves not only as an entertainment medium but also as a space for critical reflection that allows the audience to understand, question, and reinterpret the meaning of diversity in social life.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the film “Tanda Tanya (?)” use semiotic marks in the form of 17 symbols, 16 indices, and 13 icons depicted through 11 classified data. Signs in the form of symbols become dominant data that show representations of the value of religious tolerance and controversy in the form of words (sentences of statements, approvals, decisions), actions, goods, and colors that refer to a conventional nature. This conventional trait refers to things that are generally recognized. Thus, the acceptance of the representation of the values of tolerance and controversy is easily conveyed to the audience because they have pre-agreed preferences through films that are packaged as entertainment and contain value.

Through this conclusion, it is hoped that the readers of the results of this research or the viewers of this film can determine their attitudes in daily life, in relation to the value of tolerance applied in society. To become social beings with strong beliefs and obey religion, people need to sort out and choose the right attitude. For controversial matters, being a thoughtful social creature is also necessary.

This film is recommended for all people in Indonesia. This is because Indonesian society has a variety of ethnicities, cultures, and religions. This film serves as both entertainment and an educational tool. Nevertheless, for children of a certain age, it is expected that they will watch with the help of parents. This is so that the representation of the sign system in the film can be conveyed well, so that children can take the right lessons and not misinterpret the signs found in the film.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable. This study did not require ethical approval because it was based on a qualitative semiotic analysis of publicly accessible film content and did not involve human participants, animal subjects, clinical procedures, or the collection of personal data.

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable. This study did not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures that required informed consent.

Authors' Contributions

KZA conceptualized the study, designed the research methodology, collected the data through documentation and repeated observation of the film, conducted the semiotic analysis, and prepared the original draft. AM contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, interpretation of the findings, validation of the analysis, and critical review of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the revision of the manuscript and approved its final version.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no potential conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data analyzed in this study consist of selected scenes, dialogues, and visual elements from the film "Tanda Tanya (?)". Analytical notes and supporting data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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