

# IIUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies

---

Volume 5

Issue 2

2022



**International Islamic University Malaysia**

**IJUM JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND CIVILISATIONAL STUDIES**  
**(E-ISSN: 2637-112X)**

**EDITORIAL COMMITTEE**

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fauziah Fathil*, Editor-in-Chief

*Dr. Mohd Helmi Mohd Sobri*, Editor

*Dr. Alwi Alatas*, Associate Editor

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

*Prof. Dr. Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk*, Qatar University, Qatar

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Adibah Binti Abdul Rahim*, International Islamic University Malaysia

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fatmir Shehu*, International Islamic University Malaysia

*Prof. Dr. Hafiz Zakariya*, International Islamic University

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rahimah Embong*, UniSZA, Malaysia

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rohaiza Rokis*, International Islamic University Malaysia

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sharifah Syahirah Binti Shikh*, Kolej Universiti Poly-Tech MARA, Malaysia

*Prof. Dr. Abdullahil Ahsan*, Istanbul Sehir University, Turkey

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmed Alibasic*, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina

*Prof. Dr. Alparslan Acikgenc*, Uskudar University, Turkey

*Prof. Dr. Fadzli Adam*, UniSZA, Malaysia

*Prof. Dr. Syed Farid Alatas*, Singapore National University, Singapore

*Prof. Dr. Fahimah Ulfat*, Tubingen University, Germany

*Prof. Dr. James Piscatori*, Durham University, United Kingdom

*Prof. Dr. Jorgen Nielsen*, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Samim Akgonul*, Strasbourg University, France

© 2022 IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia. All Rights Reserved

**Editorial Correspondence:**

Editor, IIUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies (IJRCS)

Research Management Centre, RMC

International Islamic University Malaysia

53100 Gombak Campus

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tel: (+603) 6421 5002/5010

Fax: (+603) 6421 4862

Website: <http://journals.iium.edu.my/irkh/index.php/ijrcs>

Comments and suggestions to: [alwialatas@iium.edu.my](mailto:alwialatas@iium.edu.my)

E-ISSN: 2637-112X

**Published by:**

IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia

P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Phone (+603) 6421-5018/5014, Fax: (+603) 6421-6298

Website: <https://www.iium.edu.my/office/iiumpress>

Papers published in the Journal present the views of the authors  
and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Journal.

# CONTENTS

Editorial	113
<i>Fauziah Fathil</i>	

## Articles

Mystical Dimensions of Morality in the Selected Short Stories of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī	117
--	-----

*Homam Altabaa and Muhammad Naqib bin Othman*

The Phenomenology of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's Community Engagement: A Theoretical Model for Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) Sustainability	143
--	-----

*Saheed Abdullahi Busari and Noor Mohammad Osmani*

<i>Tawhīd</i> as a Fundamental Element of the Islamic Worldview and Its Implications for Moral Thoughts and Values	158
--	-----

*Akeem Olayinka Kazeem*

Civil Society in Iraqi Kurdistan: A Historical Perspective	177
--	-----

*Jamal Mohammed Ameen Hussein and Abdulwahed Jalal Nori*

The Importance of Alhambra as a Fortress and Palaces during the Nasrid Dynasty: The Case of the Alcazaba, the Palace of Comares, and the Palace of the Lions	202
--	-----

*Nurul Shahirah binti Majlan and Alwi Alatas*

Countering Islamophobia through Webcomics on Instagram	220
--	-----

*Dwimay Fawzy, Aini Maznina A. Manaf and Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen*

Coping Strategies IIUM Malay Undergraduate Students Adopted to Proceed with Online Learning during COVID-19	243
---	-----

*Nur Atiera Binti Yunus and Iyad M. Y. Eid*

## Book Review

Andrew F. March, <i>The Caliphate of Man: Popular Sovereignty in Modern Islamic Thought</i>	259
---	-----

*Makmor Tumin*

## Countering Islamophobia through Webcomics on Instagram

**Dwimay Fawzy,<sup>1</sup> Aini Maznina A. Manaf<sup>2</sup> and Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen<sup>3</sup>**

**Abstract:** The widespread use of social media is directly proportional to the widespread practice of spreading Islamophobia in the digital realm, especially in Western societies whose understanding of Islam or Muslims is primarily based on negative media stereotypes. Various efforts were made, including from Muslim groups to counter against these negative stereotypes through social media and form a counter-narrative. One of them is the Instagram account @yesimhotinthis, which conveys a message countering Islamophobia from an Egyptian-American Muslim's perspective through the format of autobiographical webcomics. The approach taken is different from mainstream comics, which are mostly superhero themed. This study analyzes how countering Islamophobia is represented and how Instagram is used to counter Islamophobia. A qualitative analysis of seven webcomics of @yesimhotinthis was conducted. Results indicated that representation of countering Islamophobia emphasized more on the aspect of equality and highlighting similarities between Muslims and non-Muslims in social aspects. In addition, Instagram is utilized by adjusting the relations between webcomics

---

<sup>1</sup> *Dwimay Fawzy* is a postgraduate student at the Department of Communication, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of IRKHS, International Islamic University Malaysia. She can be reached at [fawzy.dwimay@live.iium.edu.my](mailto:fawzy.dwimay@live.iium.edu.my).

<sup>2</sup> *Aini Maznina A. Manaf* is an Associate Professor at the Department of Communication, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of IRKHS, International Islamic University Malaysia. She can be reached at [maznina@iium.edu.my](mailto:maznina@iium.edu.my).

<sup>3</sup> *Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen* is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of IRKHS, International Islamic University Malaysia. She can be reached at [taisha@iium.edu.my](mailto:taisha@iium.edu.my).

and its captions, giving the impression that although Islamophobia is countered in a casual way, it is still a serious problem.

**Keywords:** Instagram, Islamophobia, Multimodal Analysis, Representation Theory, Webcomics

## Introduction

The negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in various mainstream media tends to dominate Western media, especially after September 11, 2001 when a terrorist attack occurred in the United States. Even after more than two decades of the incident, this trend still exists. Hussam Ayloush, the Executive Director of the Los Angeles chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-LA) asserts that the Muslim community must still strive to amplify accurate narratives through various mediums about Muslims, in order to counter misinformation that is overly entrenched in the minds of the American people, and has the potential to settle in school curriculum to government policies regarding these negative stereotypes of Muslims (Lyn, 2022). Even though the post-Trump administration has accommodated the Muslim community more in its policies, such as opening travel bans for the Muslim community to enter America, according to Ali Aqeel, the Imam of the Muslim American Cultural Center in Nashville, Tennessee, there is a stereotype at the grassroots that Muslims are a uniform entity, namely terrorists, which has become a residue that is difficult to overcome especially in this digital era (Fam, Hajela & Henao, 2021).

The rapid development of digital culture, as well as the widespread use of social media, is in direct proportion to the massive increase of Islamophobia (Oboler, 2016). This is especially apparent in the form of popular culture products, such as memes and comics, which are often used due to their characteristics of being massively produced and easy to consume in general (Heryanto, 2012). By utilizing knowledge and understanding that has been widely believed by many people through continuous news references and framing on the certain phenomenon, the use of popular cultural products including comics can provide different touches that influence or further convince the public of an issue raised (Zaytoon, 2017). Due to that reason, there is an increase in attempts

among Muslim groups to counter issues such as Islamophobia using those mediums or format.

Such efforts appear in artistic works illustrated by a comic artist named Huda Fahmy, an Egyptian-American woman who portrays her life as a Muslim minority in America through her comics as a counter-narrative, uploaded via Instagram platform - @yesimhotinthis. By using an autobiographical theme approach, @yesimhotinthis gives a different impression by representing the resistance of Muslims against Islamophobia which considers them to be an oppressed group; a contrast from comics who depict Muslim characters as superheroes in the context of countering islamophobia and tend to have an adage - the hero will always win (Leitch, 2004).

Counter-narrative by Muslims themselves is important in the effort to reduce phobia of Islam through the media, because it has factually been shown that content about Islam and Muslims are influenced by an important factor, namely representative groups or simply Muslim content creators in a broad sense who participate in constructing the content (Sutkuté, 2019).

The role of content creators has also resulted in, over a long period of time, the image of Islam and Muslims, especially through a Western perspective, being shifted even though it remains identical to Arabic. For example, the narrative has changed from the depiction of 'Angry Arab' to 'Arab Spring'. The exotic depiction of Islam, its angry nature due to the influence of hot desert geographical conditions, has shifted to the depiction of Arab countries full of conflict, and matters related to terrorism and narratives of insecurity (Winch, 2014). Thus, the counter-narrative produced by Muslim community groups who are also part of the representative groups of Western society, in this context Huda Fahmy with her webcomics, @yesimhotinthis, is adding new perspectives in viewing Islam and Muslims in the midst of a shifting image in media.

Although studies that specifically address the theme of countering Islamophobia in the format of webcomics through the medium of Instagram are widely used, most are dominated by studies that focus more on forms of Islamophobia in cyberspace, rather than forms of its resistance or struggle against, such as studies conducted by Rajan and Venkatraman (2021) or Civila, Romero-Rodríguez, and Civila (2020).

In addition, Instagram, as a popular social media that prioritizes the visual aspect, requires a study that also focuses on analyzing visual content, considering that the visual aspect in cyberspace is the main currency nowadays (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014). Moreover, the caption feature is a tool that allows the relationship between visual and textual aspects represented by captions, and thus can produce more complex messages (Kruk et al., 2019). In sum, the countering Islamophobia form through the Instagram instruments, both visual, textual in images and the relationship between the two functions within the framework of countering Islamophobia strategy, are much needed. Therefore, this research attempts to accommodate those needs by highlighting the relationship between visual and textual aspects of captions in producing messages that counter Islamophobia.

## Literature Review

### *Representation of Muslims in Comics*

Islamophobia is indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims (Bleich, 2011). This attitude is perpetuated through the negative portrayal of Muslims in American popular culture products, such as Hollywood films and American superhero comics. Even the supposed superhero characters that are meant to bring the values of truth and justice, become trapped with the same disease (Dar, 2010).

A mistake often repeated about the representation of Muslims in comics is the blending of definitions of Muslim and Arab due to the depiction based on stereotypes, so that Arabs are no longer seen as an ethnicity but a representation of Muslim identity. After the 9/11 tragedy, stereotypes that Muslims are violent and engage in terrorist activities are increasing in intensity. Through comics depiction based on the haphazard imagination that Arabs are conservative people, easily angered by hot desert atmosphere, there is an interconnection that the Arab community equals Muslim equals Terrorist (Dar, 2010; Strömberg, 2011).

Those who try to portray a more moderate portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in the comics, especially in the American comics, often depict Arabs as royal figures (i.e., king) and seems to be an attempt to improve the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims. However, the role of the Arab king



is minimal and reduced as a figurehead aristocrat forced to place the fate of the kingdom on the knights, who are depicted as white people who dominate the story (Woodal, 2010). This can also be seen as a form of claim to the Western superiority over the Eastern.

### *The Efforts to Counter Islamophobia in Comics*

Historically, webcomics do have a closeness to the narratives of resistance to various forms of discrimination. The early tradition of webcomics departed from comic artists whose works raised such themes and were rejected by the mainstream industries because they were not in accordance with market interests. Therefore, the Internet, at that time when access was still limited, was the only means to publish their comic works, so that the term underground appeared for themes that did not surface and escaped from public views (Fenty et al., 2004).

Along the journey, there has been a paradigm shift within the industries. The idea of equality began to be embedded in comic stories that were dominated by superhero stories. For example, in countering Islamophobia, there are names like Sooraya Qadir or Dust, a member of X-Men, one of the superhero characters in comics made by Marvel. Her depiction is illustrated as a female figure using all black hijab and veil and she possesses a power to transform into a cloud of dust. However, instead of reducing negative stereotypes about Islam, they strengthened them. There are some deviations concerning the depiction of the figure of Dust, starting from the initial story that she was rescued by X-Men from slavery in Afghanistan because of the potential strength she had. Also, her illustrations are depicted by wearing clothes completely covering her, even veiled, but with a size that fits perfectly on her body until it seems to show off the body shape. Even when she transforms, she is illustrated as turning into a form of sand with no clothes. It could be said that there is a problem in portraying the character of Dust by objectifying her through the point of view of the male gaze, and it reinforces the negative view of Muslim women (Hosein, 2020).

Webcomics, in this case, are a medium that have the opportunity to reduce misconceptions and biases regarding the views of oppressed people made by mainstream industries. For example, there is an effort made by Deena Mohammed, an Egyptian-based indie comic artist who publishes her comics via platforms on the internet. She created

a character named Qahera, a figure of a superhero Muslim woman in Egypt with unique powers, and the ability to listen to conversations that are misogynistic from a great distance. Visually, Qahera is also illustrated as a woman wearing a veil, but her description does not objectify the common traits commonly exploited in the characters of women (Hosein, 2020).

Nevertheless, the efforts made by Marvel and other mainstream industries that seek to reduce these issues should be appreciated regardless of their various shortcomings, especially if the discussion shifts slightly to the economic sphere, by seeing this effort as one of the techniques of market expansion to the Muslim community. As for webcomics, this is an opportunity to use the medium as a resistance or counter-narrative to the mainstream industries, which are often trapped in misconceptions and biases.

### *@yesimhotinthis Webcomics*

As a webcomic with an autobiographical genre, there is a significant difference with Qahera in comparison to other comics. Deena Mohammed, as the creator of Qahera, emphasizes that the character does not represent herself; Deena and Qahera are different personalities. Overall, her comic stories are inspired and derived from the misogynistic phenomenon she observed in her environment generally, but wrapped hyperbolically using heroic approaches (Landis, 2019). Whereas Huda Fahmy converted herself into a digital comic form, and most of her comic stories resulted from her personal experiences in dealing with Islamophobia. Therefore, there is an opportunity for the reader to interpret @yesimhotinthis webcomics differently, as compared to interpreting superhero comics which are based on fantasy and heroic action. Even though the illustrations from @yesimhotinthis are sometimes hyperbolic, she has taken the initial discretion about her personal experience as the basis of the comic stories, and that seems more real, and more representative of the minorities' feelings (Quds, 2020).

To accommodate the idea, the use of the medium is also something to consider. One of the reasons Huda Fahmy decided to choose Instagram as a medium to publish her comic works was due to the popularity of the platform (Sobh, 2017). However, Instagram has its uniqueness when it is

read from the webcomics perspective. One of the unique characteristics of webcomics compared to conventional comics is the existence of what is called alternative text (alt text) that is represented through Instagram captions. Initially, alt text is a function that allows an image to be given an additional description by the authors. Alt text usually appears when the cursor is directed over the image for approximately one to two seconds. Alt text is unique because it is usually filled with explanations or other jokes, which are sometimes intended to break the statements illustrated in the comics, even changing the story (Kogel, 2013).

### **Methodology**

The aim of this research is to explore webcomics on Instagram visual and textual messages by analyzing their representation in countering Islamophobia. Additionally, this study aims to observe the connection between webcomics and their captions in countering Islamophobia; hence qualitative methodology is used in this research.

In order to understand how messages of countering Islamophobia are represented in the webcomics of Instagram, deepening of the message contents through external factors needs to be studied. Some examples are comic artists' background, socio-cultural conditions of community and even the cyberspace atmosphere that fluctuates following the latest issues. Several factors, as mentioned above, would certainly affect how a message is made and delivered (Uyenne & Oti, 2012). Therefore, qualitative methodology is seen as a more suitable approach to this study because the authors could collect data based on its historical and cultural order. Inversely, quantitative methodology is considered limited to quantification analysis, such as effectiveness, frequency, or pattern of messages, and not focused on details (Neuman, 2014).

The research method used is qualitative content analysis, that is subjective interpretation of the content text data through a systematic classification process of coding, as well as identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). However, the authors use the term proposed by Serafini and Reid (2019), that is a multimodal qualitative content analysis referring to the object of this research which has more than one mode. For qualitative content analysis, the function is quite restrictive and focuses too much on the analysis of verbal texts for which its

potential is not fully maximized. Nevertheless, the analytical procedure is the same. The authors looked for the main theme of the message, both textual and visual, on the webcomics @yesimhotinthis.

This multimodal approach in qualitative content analysis methods is essential, considering that almost all forms of communication nowadays are composed of more than just one mode, particularly in digitized content. Thus, embedding the term multimodal in the qualitative content analysis method is deemed necessary in this research.

The data of this research was taken from Huda Fahmy's Instagram account, @yesimhotinthis. The type of posts analyzed are only those related to Islamophobic themes, which are selected by the authors based on the content compiled. The authors choose webcomics that present the depictions of Muslim characters countering Islamophobia, so that webcomics contain at least two interacting characters; the characters who commit Islamophobic acts, and the Muslim characters who counter them. Accordingly, this research analyzed seven webcomics of @yesimhotinthis according to the characteristics described, including supporting elements, as well as each of its captions.

This research applied multimodal analysis by utilizing Kress and van Leeuwen's visual analysis on the visual or image aspects of webcomics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), Halliday's systematic functional linguistics (SFL) analysis on the textual aspects of conversation between characters in webcomics (Halliday, 1994), and van Leeuwen's inter-mode analysis, which perceives the relationship between webcomics and captions (van Leeuwen, 2005). Instagram captions are placed to support or re-explain the message conveyed in the webcomics. The basis of this thought refers to Barthes in Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 18), "The meaning of an image will always be related even dependent on verbal text (or textual) because the image has a polysemous character that opens too many possibilities for meaning. Therefore, the function of writing is a guide so that both can walk hand in hand and arrive at the intended meaning". Nevertheless, it should be noted that the concept that underlies Kress and van Leeuwen's thinking in compiling an analysis of visual grammar is based on Halliday's SFL.

The three concepts mentioned above are used as data analysis tools that have more than one mode. Because each mode has different characteristics, different analysis tools are needed. The results of the

analysis are interpreted by the authors through the main theoretical approach of this research, Stuart Hall's representation theory.

## **Analysis and Findings**

### *Visual Mode Analysis*

Almost all images in @yesimhotinthis' webcomics are narrative processes; that is, there are at least two characters (represented participants) in one image panel. So, the message is formed through the interaction between these characters.

The depictions of Muslims in the face of or against Islamophobia do not always end in victory. In several webcomics, Muslims are depicted as more passive when dealing with Islamophobia, or not resisting. In order to reduce confusion in understanding the words non-Muslim and Muslim woman in the analysis part of the comics, the authors abbreviate them with the words NM and MW respectively.

In the Figure 1 below, the first picture panel depicts a person who is categorized as a NM being the master of ceremonies in a fashion show. It also depicts several models wearing clothes with masks as a new fashion model that has emerged since the pandemic. The next picture panel can be categorized as a conceptual process because there is only one character in one picture panel, that is a MW who wears a veil and all-black clothes. In conceptual process analysis, there is what is referred to as symbolic attributive visuals, or briefly referred to as attributes, namely objects other than represented participants in the image. There are several characteristics of the attributes, but in this picture panel, it can be interpreted as a symbolic value (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), such as the veil as one of the symbols of clothing identical to Muslim. In the context of the story in this webcomics, the veiled MW seems happy about the new fashion, covering her face. So, it can be said that the joy is due to the use of face covers or veils, which are almost always identified with restraint against women, and the orthodox symbol of a Muslim woman, which is currently a trend in the fashion world.

In the third panel, it is depicted that the NM shouts to make the MW flinch as a form of disapproval or even anger over the excitement of MW who considers the veil, which is synonymous with a symbol

of Islam, to have been accepted in the fashion world. Therefore, the depiction of MW in the Figure 1 is on the losing side, as a group that is unable to respond to the double standard behavior of NM. This can also be seen through the size of the image of NM which is larger as a form of domination. Besides that, the veil symbol in this webcomic can also be interpreted as applying the principle of freedom through fashion.



**Figure 1:** @yesimhotinthis webcomics (Posted date: March, 13 2020)

In addition to the representational process analysis above, this study also applies a compositional process in analyzing visual messages, which is salient in exploring striking colors used in webcomics. The most prominent element is the color of the MW character's clothing in webcomic which is almost entirely represented by Huda Fahmy's character. The colors are dark blue for the clothes and light blue for the hijab. The authors interpret that the color element is the thing that is highlighted in this webcomic because the dominant color used in the @yesimhotinthis webcomics is pastel which tends to be soft. So, the color of the clothes worn by Huda Fahmy in her webcomic looks striking in comparison.

In the semiotic perspective, color can also be categorized as a semiotic mode because the use of color can be interpreted differently in specific contexts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). As for the color blue in general, according to color psychology experts in the early 20th century, Stefanescu-Goanga, it can be interpreted as calming, sad, peaceful, serious, and nostalgic (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002). When associated with a male object, it can be interpreted as sharp and spiritual.

Meanwhile, when associated with a female object, it can be interpreted as attractive and rare in nature (Gage, 1999). Through these various meanings, in the context of the object of this research, the clothes used by MW characters can be judged as the creator's effort to highlight the depiction of Muslim women who are different and unique from the stereotypes of Western media, which always identifies them with all-black clothes, as a sign of orthodoxy or lack of freedom.

### *Textual Mode Analysis*

Through ideational analysis, which looks at how a text represents an event, experience, or awareness of a particular event, most of the stories in the analyzed webcomics show one similar characteristic about negative Muslim stereotypes. This can be seen through the theme of the story conveyed through conversations between represented participants in webcomics.

In the Figure 2, the terminology close to the American culture, the American college party culture, is seen in the textual elements, which also departs from the theme of negative Muslim stereotypes. The textual elements are Muslim-only conversations depicted on a phone call as described in the previous subsection of visual analysis. In the first sentence, the Muslim utters the statement "The party was the BOMB", which was then continued by, "Oh yeah I had a BLAST", as if she was talking to someone whom the writer considers to be her friend over the phone. The next sentence indicates that her phone call was interrupted by a call from her husband, Gehad, "Hang on, Gehad is calling". And in the last sentence, she says to her husband, "Sorry babe. I'll call you back. It happened again," after discovering that a police officer was behind her due to a report from a NM who had been watching her from the start of the webcomic story.

The terminology that indicates the negative stereotype of Muslims as terrorists in the initial sentences of the webcomics, in which even the creator uses capital letters in writing, is the theme used by the creator herself as the basis for countering Islamophobia. The use of capital letters is important in comics, as an indication of shouting, or words that the creator thinks need to be a reader's attention (Bradley, 2014; Plummer, 2019). This can be observed using other terms that are also

used, “party” as one of the American cultures which shows the side, especially liberalism or freedom, embraced by most of its people (Wade, 2017; Walker, 2019). The use of the term “party” in the story describes a different Muslim figure compared to the depiction in the media. A MW is represented as doing activities similar to most Americans, such as partying. So, the use of the term “party” becomes important to describe normal Muslim life in this webcomic as a form of countering Islamophobia.



**Figure 2:** @yesimhotinthis Webcomics  
(Posted date: September, 27 2017)

The results of the textual analysis above show a form of countering Islamophobia through depictions of Muslims that highlight aspects of similarities between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as characters that are contrary to what has been described by the media, which tends to lead to negative stereotypes.

### *Inter-Mode Analysis*

Using inter-mode analysis on the webcomics studied, it is found that most of the relations between webcomics and their captions use elaboration relations. In other words, six out of seven of the captions that are displayed are used as explanations or story details from webcomics.

In several webcomics, the type of elaboration relation used is the explanation; that is, Instagram captions are used to explain the stories



displayed in webcomics. The messages of webcomics and their captions are displaying the same countering Islamophobia messages, but each uses a different form of delivery. In figure 3, the caption of the webcomics is, “Sing it with me: double staaandaardss”. The authors interpret the caption as if the creator invites viewers or readers to sing using the lyrics in the caption. When connected between the stories displayed in the webcomic and the caption, it was found that the caption re-explains the stories in a different form of the phenomenon and as a resistance to Islamophobic behavior. In addition, the word ‘sing’ can also be insinuated like a choir in a church, so that the caption can be more in line with the idea visualized in the last picture panel, namely the nun’s clothes. The visual and textual blend also stimulates the reader to notice a new perspective on MW who satirize stereotypes about themselves with terminology that is intended to increase tolerance.



**Figure 3:** @yesimhotinthis Webcomics  
(Posted date: March, 2 2018)

In the webcomics, the theme of the story is about countering against negative stereotypes of MW, about clothes that symbolize restraint and are not in accordance with the American culture that upholds freedom (Blakeman, 2014; Clemente, 2015). In the last panel, the picture shows a depiction of MW character wearing nun clothes as a form of resistance using satire, that such a stereotypical statement is a violation of the values of freedom adopted by America. Or in other words, that kind of thinking is a double standard. Through a different delivery, the caption of the webcomic also has the same content, that is, subtly quip

the behavior or thoughts of double standards regarding the concept of freedom in the realm of fashion.

## Discussion

### *Representations of Countering Islamophobia*

The findings from the visual and textual analyses of the webcomics @yesimhotinthis show how the concept of resistance to Islamophobia is represented quite similarly, although through different depictions, as well as stories with various themes of the Islamophobia phenomenon.

The first form of resistance is to use the principle of depicting the various realities of Muslim character as a minority. The authors find that one of the depictions is through the attitude shown by MW in dealing with Islamophobic behavior. Several webcomics describe the courageous attitude shown by MW characters in general. Even NM character who initiates the negative behavior becomes the one who is afraid and loses in the face of the courage shown by the Muslim character. Through the depiction of the size of the character, it is made larger, even suggesting the dominance of the MW's side in the story. MW characters on the other hand, are also sometimes depicted as inferior in the webcomics, not always brave, and not always winning.

The second countering Islamophobia message is the inclusive depiction of MW characters. This representation is a counter-narrative that departs from the general rhetoric that claims that Muslims and their religion are an exclusive group. The underlying reason is the claim that their teachings are the most correct, followed by the assumption that outside them are heretics or misfortune (Wijaya, 2019). So, in the end, it seems that such webcomics cannot get out of that assumption.

The @yesimhotinthis webcomics present the exact opposite depiction. As displayed in figure 4, when MW are mocked as “goat-lover”, MW counterattacks by saying that goats are adorable for her. The word adorable in this connotation is a pet close to the American culture, where a good majority of Americans are considered as pet lovers (Herzog, 2015). So, apart from being interpreted as a counter-narrative for MW views, synonymous with violence and cruelty, it

can also be interpreted that Muslims in America are also part of the American society that loves animals.

These findings are in line with the efforts to reduce the stereotype that Muslims are always connoted as Arab, which is difficult to separate because the initiative is dominated by the Muslim community of Arab ethnicity, and the need for a community perspective to produce a non-Western-centric depiction. Therefore, the effort made is to blend together the local values adopted (Dar, 2010; Strömberg, 2011). The @yesimhotinthis webcomics use terminologies and other aspects associated with American values such as America's college party culture and America's common pet-loving culture. Thus, the face of Islam is expected to be seen more diversely.



**Figure 4:** @yesimhotinthis Webcomics (Posted date: January, 7 2019)

The depiction of Muslims' inclusiveness in @yesimhotinthis, in general, is through the depiction of Muslim characters as normal figures or in contrast to the depiction of Western media in general. Figure 2 is another example of how this depiction of normal Muslims is applied. The Muslim figure (MW) is depicted in a clothing store, on the phone while picking clothes. In simple terms, this description can be interpreted as a description of normal Muslim activities and most people in general. More specifically, the webcomic recounts that MW was calling her friend and talking about a party she attended earlier. The use of the word party is synonymous with the concept of freedom embraced by American society. According to the authors, this is also one of the efforts to portray the inclusiveness of American Muslims

as part of American society as well. At the same time as a counter-narrative which denies that Muslims are synonymous with orthodoxy and restraint (Zaytoon, 2017).

The third representation of countering Islamophobia is through depictions that emphasize the aspect of equality. In general, the concept of equality on @yesimhotinthis is depicted through freedom of dressing. Departing from the stereotype that Muslim women's clothing are a symbol of restraint, @yesimhotinthis presents a different view that Muslim women's clothing are a form of application of the concept of freedom, as depicted in figure 3. Through a depiction that seems to satirize the idea of double standards of fully covered clothes not only synonymous with Muslims but also nuns' clothes, @yesimhotinthis emphasizes highlighting the similarities between Muslims and non-Muslims, not highlighting differences that have the potential to widen the gap of negative prejudice against Muslims as what Said (1978) called, "the Other".

Through visual and textual analyses, the authors conclude that the language used, both visual and textual, the representation of countering Islamophobia in @yesimhotinthis is constructed by depicting the main idea of equality. The depiction is mostly filled as a counter-narrative of what is usually shown by Western media, as well as highlighting aspects of equality at the level of social life. In a research conducted by Mirrlees and Ibaid (2021), the depictions of violence (shown through war games) against Muslims is an attempt to normalize the understanding that violence against Muslims is what they should get, and in the context of this research, depictions of normal Muslims can also be interpreted as an attempt to present a narrative of how Muslims should be seen and treated.

### ***Utilizing Instagram Captions to Counter Islamophobia***

The results of the analysis found by the authors are that the relationship between webcomics and Instagram captions, @yesimhotinthis in this study, mostly uses elaboration relations. Thus, Instagram captions are used to re-explain the message to be conveyed in webcomics through a different method or approach. Some webcomics, such as figure 4 and 5, even use the elaboration relation with the type of specification. In these

two webcomics, as explained earlier, each caption in the webcomics is based on personal experiences, which of course are then packaged in hyperbolic depictions or improvised on in a satirical and humorous way in the visual and conversational aspects.



**Figure 5:** @yesimhotinthis Webcomics (Posted date: July, 12 2019)

However, what is interesting is that the approach is presented in almost all captions on every webcomic, which is the use of a serious approach. The nuances presented contradict with what is shown in the visual and textual aspects or conversations between characters in the story. This includes how the creator explains in greater detail through the captions of webcomics in figure 4 and 5, which is also a form of presenting a more serious atmosphere. In fact, it is explicitly stated in the caption of the webcomic in figure 4, a kind of suggestion for viewers or readers who use serious sentences to explain the phenomenon in webcomics, "... on a more serious note, when horrible people use insults like this, it's a power move. They're trying to control your emotions, hurt you, demean you. Don't let them. Laugh at them". This finding is in accordance with the early tradition of webcomics, namely the use of alt text as a unique characteristic to re-explain, emphasize, or complement the visual and textual messages featured in webcomics (Kogel, 2013).

In addition to the contrast presented in conveying messages between webcomics and Instagram captions, in the webcomics studied, some also use a similar nuance between webcomics and captions that are satirical and humorous nuances. In figure 3, the caption used is as if to invite

viewers or readers to sing along with the creator with the lyrics, “... double standaaaandaardss”, as well as re-explaining the phenomenon depicted in the webcomics. The relationship between webcomics and such captions can be interpreted as highlighting the importance of countering Islamophobia in a casual way because some of those people who seem to hate Islam or Muslims do not really hate them, but do not fully understand Muslims and their religion.

This is in accordance with the basic principle that has been used so far, that is “laughing at one’s own clichés” (Aguilera-Carnerero, 2019). However, at certain times, it is necessary to use a more assertive method in dealing with Islamophobic acts to show that Islamophobia is a serious problem that must be overcome together with showing serious commitment. Through Instagram, @yesimhotinthis manages the relationship between each webcomic and its caption in conveying a general message that counters Islamophobia. On several occasions, a contrasting nuanced approach is used between webcomics and captions, but there are times when these two elements are in harmony. In a multimodal perspective, this can be interpreted as what Barthes called “amplification between one aspect to another” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002), which in this case is webcomics and Instagram captions.

## Conclusion

The representation of countering Islamophobia depicted refers to the concept of equality and emphasizes the similarities rather than differences at the social level. The authors find at least three main depictions, namely the depiction of various Muslim realities as a minority, the depiction of inclusive Muslims, and the depiction that emphasizes equality.

In describing the various realities of Muslims as minorities, Muslims are not always positioned as winners in the face of Islamophobic behavior, because as a minority group who tends to be inferior, it is certainly not easy to face such behavior. There are moments when the minority group is at its lowest point, so support and help from others are needed. Through the depiction of the various realities of Muslims as minorities, @yesimhotinthis seems to convey the message that the fight against Islamophobia must continue while conveying to each Muslim

group, and even to other minority groups, that they are not alone in fighting against oppression and injustice.

As for the depiction of an inclusive Muslim, it is generally depicted through a regular Muslim figure or contrary to the depiction of Muslims in the Western media in general. In addition, sometimes the creator uses terminology or symbols that are close to the American culture as if to imply that American Muslims are also part of American society and even apply similar values, such as freedom in some social aspects.

Another depiction of countering Islamophobia, that is, the depiction that emphasizes equality, is mainly conveyed through the application of the concept of freedom through fashion. This is based on the stereotype that Muslim women's clothing are a form of restraint, an orthodox way of life, and backwardness. Thus, the fashion aspect through cloth colors, symbols, and terminology used in webcomics are used as a counter-narrative for these negative stereotypes.

In addition to the representation of countering Islamophobia, this study also analyzes how Instagram captions by @yesimhotinthis function as a platform for countering Islamophobia. The authors find that the way the creator uses Instagram regulates how the relationship between webcomics, which consists of visual and textual aspects in the form of conversations between characters, is strengthened using Instagram captions. Through a multimodal perspective, it was found that the creator used an approach with different nuances between these aspects. Often, webcomics are delivered through a satirical and humorous approach, but in contrast to what is shown in the caption, which seems to be serious. Although, in general, what is conveyed by both webcomics and captions are similar, but with different nuances, the authors interpret it as a concept and even a strategy used by creators in countering Islamophobia.

However, not all webcomics use a contrasting approach between webcomics and captions. Some of them also found that both webcomics and captions can be satirical and humorous. Thus, while the authors conclude that the concept or strategy is effective, and the best way to deal with this form of Islamophobia is through casual means, it is still necessary to emphasize that the phenomenon of Islamophobia is a serious problem. Or at least, this seriousness is the creator's effort in conveying her commitment to counter Islamophobia.

The findings of this study can broaden the understanding of representation theory, which explains that the most important thing in a representation system is that certain groups who have the same background will be able to produce and exchange meaning well (Hall, 2009). However, in the case of this study, the depiction of Muslims that is different from the general depiction in the media or Western society is bridged by the values held by these different groups of understanding, which in this case is the Western society in general. Thus, the experience of a different meaning still has the potential to be understood by different groups.

The authors also suggest future research, that should not only focus on one webcomic creator but can instead focus on multiple creators and conduct comparative analyses so that the results obtained are more comprehensive. Additionally, future research can implement multiple gender perspectives because this study only analyzes the representation of countering Islamophobia through the depiction of Muslims in general, although the object of the research studied mainly depicts female characters. In addition, the study only analyzed text and visuals, thus, future research can explore more modes in multimodal analysis, using a wider format, such as audio-visual.

## References

- Aguilera-Carnerero, C. (2019, April 17). *Memes of hate: Countering cyber Islamophobia*. Fair Observer. <https://www.fairobserver.com/world-news/cyber-islamophobia-memes-hate-speech-muslims-news-19112/>
- Blakeman, H. R. (2014). *The Muslim veil in America: A symbol of oppression or empowerment?* (Unpublished thesis). University of Maine.
- Bleich, E. (2011). What is Islamophobia and how much is there? Theorizing and measuring an emerging comparative concept. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(12), 1581-1600. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211409387>
- Bradley, D. (2014, April 22). *Looking at lettering: Caps vs mixed case*. Multiversity Comics. <http://www.multiversitycomics.com/news-columns/looking-at-lettering-caps-vs-mixed-case/>



- Civila, S., Romero-Rodríguez, L. M., & Civila, A. (2020). The demonization of Islam through social media: A case study of #stopislam in Instagram. *Publications*, 8(52), 1-19.
- Clemente, D. (2015, August 5). Why and when did Americans begin to dress so casually. *Time*. <https://time.com/3984690/american-casual-dressing/>
- Dar, J. (2010). Holy Islamophobia, Batman! Demonization of Muslims and Arabs in mainstream American comic books. *Counterpoints*, 346, 99-110.
- Fam, M., Hajela, D., & Henao, L. A. (2021, September 7). *Two decades after 9/11, Muslim Americans still fighting bias*. The Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/September-11-Muslim-Americans-93f97dd9219c25371428f4268a2b33b4>
- Fenty, S., Houpp, T., & Taylor L. (2004). Webcomics: The influence and continuation of the comix revolution. *Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 1(2). [http://imagnetext.english.ufl.edu/archives/v1\\_2/group/](http://imagnetext.english.ufl.edu/archives/v1_2/group/)
- Gage, J. (1999). *Colour and meaning: Art, science and symbolism*. Thames and Hudson.
- Hall, S. (2009). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Edward Arnold.
- Heryanto, A. (2012). *Budaya populer di Indonesia: Mencairnya identitas pasca-orde baru*. Jalasutra.
- Herzog, H. (2015, April 13). *Why people care more about pets than other humans*. *Wired*. <https://www.wired.com/2015/04/people-care-pets-humans/>
- Hosein, S. (2020). Veiling the superhero: A comparative analysis of Dust and Qahera. *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, 4(1), 1-12.
- Hsieh, H-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Hu, Y., Manikonda, L., & Kambhampati, S. (2014). What we Instagram: A first analysis of Instagram photocontent and user types. In Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence Press (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* (pp. 595- 598). Palo Alto, CA: The AAAI Press.

- Kogel, D. (2013). Rethinking webcomics: Webcomics as a screen based medium (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Jyväskylä.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2002). Colour as a semiotic mode: Notes for a grammar of colour. *Visual Communication*, 1(3), 343-368.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Routledge.
- Kruk, J., Lubin, J., Sikka, K., Lin, X., Jurafsky, D., Divakaran, A. (2019). Integrating text and image: Determining multimodal document intent in Instagram posts. arXiv preprint arXiv:1904.09073.
- Landis, W. (2019). Ms Marvel, Qahera, and superheroism in the Muslim diaspora. *Continuum*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2019.1569385>
- Leitch, T. (2004). *Crime Films: Genres in American Cinema*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lyn, D. (2022, September 11). *Decades after 9/11, Muslims battle plague of Islamophobia in US*. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/decades-after-9-11-muslims-battle-plague-of-islamophobia-in-us/2682672>
- Mirrlees, T., & Ibaid, T. (2021). The virtual killing of Muslims: Digital war games, Islamophobia, and the global war on terror. *Islamophobia Studies journal*, 6(1), 33-51.
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson.
- Oboler, A. (2016). The normalisation of Islamophobia through social media: Facebook. In I. Awan (Ed.), *Islamophobia in cyberspace: Hate crimes go viral* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 41-61). Routledge.
- Plummer, J. (2019, August 9). *What's up with the lettering in comics?*. Book Riot. <https://bookriot.com/lettering-in-comics/>
- Quds, H. S. F. (2020). Mematahkan mitos tentang muslim di Amerika melalui komik "Yes I'm Hot in This". *Jurnal Middle East and Islamic Studies*, 7(1), 56-65.
- Rajan, B., & Venkatraman, S. (2021). Insta-hate: An exploration of Islamophobia and right wing nationalism on Instagram amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in India. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 14(1), 71-91.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

- Sobh, R. (2017, October 24). *Yes I'm hot in this! An inside look into the heart and mind of creator, Huda Fahmy*. Miss Muslim. <https://missmuslim.nyc/yes-imhot/>
- Uyanne, M. C., & Oti O. J. (2012). The influence of socio-cultural domains on communication. *African Research Review*, 6(4), 234-247. <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v6i4.16>
- Serafini, F., & Reid, S. F. (2019). Multimodal content analysis: expanding analytical approaches to content analysis. *Visual Communication*, 0(0), 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357219864133>.
- Strömberg, F. (2011). "Yo, rag-head!": Arab and Muslim superheroes in American comic books after 9/11. *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 56(4), 573-601.
- Sutkutė, R. (2019). Media, stereotypes and Muslim representation: World after Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy. *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, (6), 59-72. <https://doi.org/10.21303/2504-5571.2019.001054>
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing social semiotics*. Routledge.
- Wade, L. (2017, January 23). *The birth of college party culture*. Time. <https://time.com/4643036/the-birth-of-college-party-culture/>
- Walker, N. (2019, August 26). *Party culture: The dark side of college partying*. The George-Anne. <https://thegeorgeanne.com/1862/reflector/reflectorfeatures/party-culture-the-dark-side-of-college-partying/>
- Wijaya, A. (2019). *Kontestasi merebut kebenaran Islam di Indonesia: Dari berislam secara teologis ke berislam secara humanis*. IRCiSoD.
- Winch, S. P. (2014). From "angry Arab" to "Arab Spring". In M. Eid (Eds.), *Exchanging Terrorism Oxygen for Media Airwaves: The Age of Terroredia* (218-229). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-5776-2.ch015>
- Woodal, L. A. (2010). *The secret identity of race: Exploring ethnic and racial portrayals in superhero comic books* (Unpublished dissertation). University of Southern Mississippi.
- Zaytoon, H. A. R. (2017). Caricature images for religious profiling: A multimodal analysis of Islamophobia in selected press images. *An International of English Studies*, 26(2), 185-224. <https://doi.org/10.7311/0860-5734.26.2.11>