

## ***Assalamualaikum Beijing* Repackaged: Habitus, Symbolic Power and Indonesian Cultural Production**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the adaptation of Asma Nadia's *Assalamualaikum Beijing* from novel to film to comic book as the reproduction of symbolic cultural goods. According to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, people are conditioned to perform repetitive acts devoid of any preceding consideration or deliberation, while symbolic power represents the tacit modes of social/cultural domination ingrained and preserved through everyday social practices. Taking a sociology of literature approach, this study discovers that the habitus of the Indonesian canon literary tradition has hindered contemporary literary works from achieving the same level of legitimacy through the boundary work performed by literary awards. Contemporary pop authors, who rarely win these awards, have set up a new standard through which they can gain influential status over the Indonesian field of cultural production through the repeated "repackaging" of their literary works. In addition, the study finds that Asma Nadia's use of Beijing as the setting for her work is represents her desire to introduce the existence of Islam in China, while implicitly hinting at "a solution" to the problematic existence of Chinese Indonesians who can only be "fixed" through religious conversion.

### ***Assalamualaikum Beijing* dalam Kemasan Baru: Habitus, Kuasa Simbolis dan Arena Produksi Kultural Indonesia**

#### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini berupaya untuk menguraikan praktik adaptasi ulang dari komik *Assalamualaikum Beijing* (2015), dari novel menjadi film dan dari film menjadi komik, oleh karena hal tersebut dipandang sebagai praktik reproduksi kultural. Konsep habitus Bourdieu dapat didefinisikan bahwa masyarakat dikondisikan untuk melakukan hal yang sama berulang-ulang tanpa memikirkan maknanya terlebih dahulu, sementara kuasa simbolis merepresentasikan model-model dominasi sosial/kultural yang tak tampak namun terpelihara dalam aktivitas sehari-hari masyarakat. Melalui pendekatan sosiologi sastra terhadap objek, studi ini menemukan bahwa habitus dari sastra Indonesia kanon telah menghambat karya-karya kontemporer untuk meraih status legitimasi yang setara lewat penetapan kriteria sejumlah penghargaan sastra. Oleh karena para penulis sastra kontemporer jarang meraih penghargaan-penghargaan tersebut, maka mereka akhirnya menetapkan standar sendiri dalam arena produksi kultural Indonesia, yakni dengan berulang kali mengadaptasi 'kemasan' dari karya-karya mereka. Selain itu, studi ini juga menemukan bahwa Asma Nadia sengaja menggunakan Beijing sebagai latar tempat dari karyanya karena ia hendak memperkenalkan keberadaan Islam di negeri Tiongkok, sekaligus mengisyaratkan 'sebuah solusi' implisit bahwa keberadaan etnis Tionghoa yang problematik di Indonesia hanya dapat 'diperbaiki' lewat perpindahan kepercayaan (agama).

*Keywords: parental mediation, privacy concern, network size, visual information disclosure*

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### **1. Introduction**

The owners of the means of production have always repeated the cycle of reproducing "reportoire" goods

with the intention of attracting more consumers and more money (Storey, 2006). This strategy for the reproduction of symbolic power through the repeated repackaging of cultural goods is deeply ingrained in the

capitalist system of contemporary popular culture. According to a phenotypical reading, cultural reproduction is a term that refers to the implementation and control by those who have the power to sustain the continuation of the mechanisms of cultural experience (Jenks, 1993). In this reading, the idea of reproduction triggers images of imitation, replication, constraint, and symbolic violence. Meanwhile, in a genotypical reading, the concept of cultural reproduction is related to excitement and newness of patterns and formulations which are depicted as both innovative and creative, and the practice probably exemplifies the highest development in cultural transformation.

In Indonesia, cultural reproduction practices have evolved rapidly since 1998 and the end of the Soeharto authoritarian regime. Specifically, the dictator's downfall was significant as it marked the beginning of freedom of expression, and the end of media censorship. The euphoria was exemplified in the success of *Kuldesak* (1998), Indonesia's first independent film, which inspired the emergence of other short films, film festivals and film magazines (Clark, 2012). Many of these were concerned with themes of teenage sexuality, domestic violence, drug trafficking, criminal gangs, corruption, homosexuality, and the impact of the Aceh tsunami. Interestingly, there has been a more recent trend in the publication of novel versions of these films (in which the book retailer Gramedia plays an active part), which boosts the sale of cinema tickets, DVDs and VCDs (Clark, 2012). The publication of novel versions of *Mengejar Matahari*, *Gerbang 13*, *Brownies* (2015), *Jomblo* (2006), *Ada Apa dengan Cinta? Sebuah Skenario* (2002) and *Eliana Eliana* (2002) continues. A number of very successful films have also been adapted from novels, including *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2008), *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (2009), *Laskar Pelangi* (2008), *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009), *9 Summers 10 Autumns* (2011), *Negeri 5 Menara* (2012), *99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa* (2013), *Assalamualaikum Beijing* (2014) and *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* (2015).

*Assalamualaikum Beijing* began life in 2013 as a novel by Asma Nadia. Born on 26 March, 1972 in Jakarta to Amin Usman (Aceh) and Maria Eri Susanti (a Chinese descent *mualaf* from Medan), Asmarani Rosalba writes under the pen name "Asma Nadia." She pursued her undergraduate studies at Bogor Agricultural University (IPB). Asma is a well-known writer who, together with her older sister, Helvy Tiana Rosa, an influential Indonesian playwright and author, founded the *Forum Lingkar Pena* (FLP, Pen Circle Forum), a writing community specializing in Islamic romance. She has presided over national and international writing workshops held by *Republika News Paper* and South East Asia Literary Council (MASTERA), as well as writing workshops for migrant workers in Hong Kong and for students in Egypt, and at the Universities of

Malaysia, Tokyo, Fukuoka, Nagoya, Kyoto, Manchester, and elsewhere.

Asma Nadia is also the founder and CEO of Asma Nadia Publishing House, which has published many fiction and non-fiction works, including *Aisyah Putri 1: Operasi Milenia* (2000), *Aisyah Putri 2: Chat On-Line!* (2000), *Rembulan di Mata Ibu* (2000), *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2007), *Catatan Hati Seorang Istri* (2007), *Sakinah Bersamamu* (2010) and *Assalamualaikum, Beijing!* (2013). She has received a number of literary awards, including the 2008 Best Islamic Indonesia Novel for *Istana Kedua* ("The Second Palace"), the 2005 MASTERA (South East Asia Literary Council) prize as the best participant over 10 years, the Mizan Award for the best fiction writer in 20 years, the 2001 Adikarya IKAPI Award for *Rembulan di Mata Ibu* (The Moon in the Mother's Eye, a short story collection), the 2005 Adikarya IKAPI Award for *101 Dating*, and many more (Nadia, 2012). Like her sister Helvy, she has opened public libraries in numerous provinces all over Indonesia under the name *Rumah Baca Asma Nadia*.

Of all Nadia's works, *Assalamualaikum Beijing* is the most well-known, due to the release of a film adaptation by Maxima Pictures in 2014, starring Revalina S. Temat, Laudya Cynthia Bella, Morgan Oey, and Ibnu Jamil. *Assalamualaikum Beijing* tells the story of Asmara (nicknamed Asma by her close friends and family, and Ashima by her future lover, Zhong Wen), a young woman who breaks up with her fiancée after he cheats on her with another woman. To relieve her sadness, Asma applies to work as a journalist in the People's Republic of China and is happily welcomed by an old friend who already lives there. During one of her visits to an historical site, she meets a local guide, Zhong Wen. The two quickly fall in love, but their relationship is threatened when Asma suddenly is diagnosed with Antiphospholipid syndrome and becomes mute. On top of that, the arrival of her ex-fiancée Dewa also creates some disturbance in her life. The film adaptation, released in 2014, was then adapted, in 2015, into a comic book of black-and-white panel illustrations of scenes taken directly from the film. At the end of 2015, Asma Nadia announced that *Assalamualaikum Beijing* would be made into a *sinetron religi* (Indonesian religious-themed soap opera) on television network RCTI with a new title, *Assalamualaikum Beijing The Series*, starring Citra Kirana, Anthony Xie, Lian Firman and Raya Kohandi (Wowkeren.com, 2015). However, the *sinetron* was not filmed in 2016 or 2017. In March 2018, it was announced that the *sinetron* would be filmed and released on TV during the holy month of Ramadan (Kurniawan, 2018).

*Assalamualaikum Beijing* is an example of an Indonesian literary work that has been adapted and re-adapted from novel to film to comic book to *sinetron*

*religi*. Iwan Setiawan's *9 Summers 10 Autumns* has undergone an almost identical reproduction process. It has been adapted from novel to film and then into an augmented motion picture hinted illustrative book, which is a short story book where each full page of text is accompanied by a full-colored page of paneled pictures, resembling a children's story book. In order to read the book, the Amphi-B app must be downloaded from Google Play. The reader then scans the pictures, and watches an illustrated animation of the story (Setyawan, 2015). However, the comic book version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing* remains the foremost example of Indonesian cultural reproduction practice.

This article analyzes the repackaging of the comic version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing* as it is related to the habitus of Indonesian society, to symbolic power, and to the field of Indonesian cultural (re)production. This article highlights how these three aspects affect each other through the phenomenon of the re-adaptation of the novel *Assalamualaikum Beijing* into a film and the film into a comic book. Since the plan to adapt it into a *sinetron religi* has not yet been realized, the research only focuses on the comic book re-adaptation. Through the sociology of literature, this article examines the social production of Indonesian literature and social implications embodied in the ongoing adaptation of Asma Nadia's *Assalamualaikum Beijing*.

A great number of scholars have explored the original (novel) version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing*. These have focused on, among other things, *dakwah* (preaching) communication (Ratnasari, 2015), *dakwah* messages (Zakaria, 2016), the representation and identification of moral values (Masriah, 2016), the characteristics of Asmara as the protagonist (Santi, 2015), the implementation of the novel's religious values and how these implications affect the high school study of literature (Sulastri, 2016), and Marxist feminist values depicted in the novel's characters (Juliah, 2015). The film version, with its predictable and common storyline and conflicts, released in 2014, was criticized for not presenting a new perspective among myriad Indonesian romantic films (Rulianto, 2014). This research, therefore, is crucial for two reasons: 1) little is known about the comic book version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing* and, as a result, 2) there has been no analytical discussion of this second adaptation, which is perceived as belonging to the practice of cultural reproduction within the Indonesian literary and cultural tradition.

Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith define the term comic as "...a useful general term for designating the phenomenon of juxtaposing images in a sequence" (2009: 3). The word refers to the phenomenon where images are printed and put into side-by-side panels. Comics were originally created for the purpose of combining images and texts in one page, thus presenting

a unity of "live but framed" sequences to captivate the many turn of events in a narrative. A number of Indonesian comics have gained attention over the decades, including *Jampang si Jago Betawi* (1960s, by Ganes T.H.), *Gundala Putra Petir* (1969, by Hasmi), *Mice Cartoon* (1980, by Muhammad "Mice" Misrad), *Bharatayudha* (1955, by R.A. Kosasih), Javanese *wayang* (Indonesian puppets) comics by Tatang S., and more contemporary *wayang* comics, such as *Wind Rider* (2005), *Garudayana* (2009), and *The Grand Legend of Ramayana* (2015, by Is Yuniarto). Among these well-known Indonesian comics, the comic version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing* (2015) emerges as one of the first Islamic romantic comic books which originated through a process of cultural reproduction.

Pierre Bourdieu suggests that popular culture possesses certain patterns found in daily life. Popular culture serves to legitimize works of art but also deprive them of their greatness and complexity and, thus, trivialize them (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu argues that, while educated elites are taught to choose, appreciate and learn "original" works of art, the value of high culture, such as theatre and canon literary works, is threatened by the birth of popular culture, whereby uneducated commoners are led to believe that the value of replicated and copied works of art and representation is the same as that of the original. These representations, indeed, have been created, maintained, exploited, and produced for many decades by the media and have been both consciously and unconsciously consumed by the public, resulting in a distortion of established meaning. As such there is an ongoing struggle for those with authority and legitimacy to maintain symbolic power (Karnanta, 2013). The existence and regulation of artists, authors, writers, critics, literary studies, awards, and so on, will, therefore, never be free from political influence.

Habitus draws from a mixture of production practice and perception systems, together with the acknowledgement attributed to those practices (Bourdieu, 1989). Indeed, through habitus, a society's tastes, passions and the so-called social image are formed and structured, and a system is shaped that guides societal norms (Swartz, 2002). Bourdieu emphasizes that one's taste, passion, and social perspectives are not inborn characteristics. On the contrary, they are taught and practiced from generation to generation. One can easily assume that appearances, habits, and consumer preferences mark an individual's social class and status affiliation. Yet, the core of this practice strategy is derived from patterns of behavior, used as tools by the dominant class to achieve and maintain their distinctive position (Haryatmoko, 2016). From this perspective, a woman with an Esprit brand bag will be perceived as "lower" than another woman with a Louis Vuitton bag. However, the woman with the Louis Vuitton bag will

feel herself lower than another woman with a Hermes bag, and so on. Habitus thus serves as a label which categorizes members of society into segmented positions, in which members in lower positions work their way up the competitive social ladder while members in higher positions struggle to maintain those positions. This same disposition practice occurs in the realm of literature.

In the field of literature, every author struggles to compete to achieve a certain legitimized position with his or her own writing skills, influential connections, or genre specialization. Bourdieu (2010) states that the utmost “compulsory” aspect, and the highest stake, of any author’s reputation and position is his or her literary legitimacy, which is essential to confirming the author’s position as a writer whose works are worthy of acclaim. This legitimacy consists of a monopoly over the power owned by the ruling authorities, those who, in this case, serve as the only legitimate party to bestow the ‘official’ title of *litterateur* on the aspiring writer.

Indeed, the dominant party within the arena of literature has the power to determine which authors are worthy of legitimacy and which are not. The dominant party permits access to every form of capital and, therefore, separates those on whom it bestows legitimacy from those in “lower” classes or positions (Bourdieu, 1993). The struggle, of course, occurs between established senior authors and young newcomers. While established authors struggle to preserve their legitimacy, young authors fight to achieve equivalent legitimacy in order to surpass their current position. Prevailing rules and regulations unconsciously create symbolic violence toward the new authors who, if they aspire to become litterateurs, are impelled to follow the same established path as their predecessors (Arsitowati, 2017). Such an established path can be achieved by entering literary competitions and winning literary awards. However, the number of new authors who succeed in doing so is very small compared to the total number of new writers (Escarpit, 2005). In addition to all of this, the hosts and judges of literary competitions are not free of political interests and influences from the capitalist institutions which support them, such as publishers or other political, literary, and religious institutions. Bourdieu (1993) highlights that categories of “canon literature” and “popular literature” are actually planned strategies established to distribute power relations and to strengthen the dominant group’s position in achieving symbolic and cultural power. In this way, the dominant group can place itself in strategic influential positions to attract public attention. Because the seizure of symbolic power through such means is extremely limited, both publishers and authors have adopted new strategies to achieve legitimacy, through trends toward the production of commercially viable literature.

## 2. Methods

This research employed two techniques of data collection. The first was a textual analysis performed on the comic version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, published by PT Maleo Creative in 2015, together with data concerning the condition of Indonesia’s social arena, and the literary strategy and practice performed by Asma Nadia in her symbolic contestation of the Indonesian literary arena. Data consisting of interviews with Asma Nadia, were derived from books, journals, and website articles. Cuts of comic panels in the book were examined, some of which are included in the analysis section of this paper. The second technique of data collection was informed by Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of literature approach, which consisted of identifying the practices of adapting *Assalamualaikum Beijing* from a novel to a film and from a film to a comic book. The *sinetron religi* version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing* has not included in the analysis as, at the time of writing, it had not been officially released.

In what follows, the issue is elucidated by applying the perspectives of Bourdieu’s arena of cultural production and symbolic power to Asma Nadia’s *Assalamualaikum Beijing*. This section focuses on the role of authors (both canon and contemporary), publishers, literary awards, the Indonesian film industry, and Indonesian popular culture in general. These aspects are perceived as contributing factors in triggering the emergence of the “stratagem” phenomenon, such as this article’s object of interest, the comic book adaptation. Interdependent phenomena are related to what happened to popular culture during the Reformasi period, following the fall of Soeharto’s authoritarian New Order in 1998. Particular attention is paid to the dynamics of the Indonesian literary polemic which occurred between “senior” authors, the literary community, literary agents, literary awards, and literary festivals, all of which triggered phenomena similar to the multiple adaptations of Asma Nadia’s *Assalamualaikum Beijing*.

The habitus of Asma Nadia is also investigated with regard to both the commercial literary trend and Islamic literature. In the commercialization of literature, affiliations to sponsors and supporting agencies are crucial in determining the course of literary and cultural production. Since Nadia is associated with a legitimate literary agent, FLP, well-known for its *dakwah* messages inserted into literary works, the discussion also includes these two close interrelated elements. In this paper, it is assumed that the comic version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing* was published to strengthen the position and reputation of the author within the Indonesian literary canon.

### 3. Results and Analysis

Similar to the translation and paraphrasing of texts, the adaptation of literary work is perceived as a means of understanding and transforming these literary works into new media which are presumed to be easier for a wider audience to comprehend, by adjusting them to a certain contexts and surrounding environments (Hutcheon, 2006). The term adaptation is synonymous with such terms as transmutation and transcoding, meaning transferring the content of a text into a new form within intercultural, interlanguage, and interperiod contexts. The transformation or shift in medium that occurs when a novel is adapted into a film and the film is later adapted into a comic book is a continuous adaptation practice aimed at communicating, repeating, and spreading the content via different media to wider audiences.

Being relatively new to the world of Indonesian literature, Asma Nadia was at an advantages by being co-founder, in 1997, of *FLP* (Pen Cicle Forum), a literary organization with over 5,000 members (Arimbi, 2009). Although she does not belong to proclaimed legitimate agents such as *Komunitas Utan Kayu* (literally, “Wooden Forest Community”), *Dewan Kesenian Jakarta* (the Art Council of Jakarta), *Horison* literary magazine or *HISKI* (*Himpunan Ikatan Sarjana Kesusastraan Indonesia* or the Set of Scholarly Ties of Indonesian Literature), she and her sister have maintained their own literary organization and attract many members to their Islamic imprint. With her older sister, Helvy Tiana Rosa, a well-known author prior to her sister’s success, who has written a number of famous plays, and been invited to numerous countries to discuss her work, exposure to these writing experiences set Asma Nadia’s habitus from an early age. Through watching the blossoming of her sister’s successful writing career and becoming a mentor in a large writing community, Asma Nadia was instilled with an intense desire to produce books.

Moreover, being a devout Muslim, she has used her writing career to spread her *dakwah* (preaching), making her one of the most prolific authors of Indonesian Islamic literature. She explains her motivation to unrelentingly produce so many works of fiction and non-fiction:

“Up until now, *Alhamdulillah* I still carry on with my writing. The number of my published novels has reached the 40s, and I still encourage the young generation of Muslims and Muslimahs to take part in the world of writing. However, keep in mind that our initial intention is to spread *dakwah* (preaching). Whenever there is an opportunity to preach in the media with a wider audience, then why not take the opportunity?”

“When a book is adapted into film, it means it has become a much bigger medium for *dakwah*. You know, one book can only have around 50 thousand readers. But when it is filmed, let alone a *box office* film, our *dakwah* could reach 4,6 million people!” (Asma Nadia’s interview with Rahma, 2016)

It is evident from this quote that Asma Nadia has transformed her desire to spread *dakwah* into her writing of books suited to film adaptation, so that they can gain a wider audience for the Islamic teachings they contain. Asma acknowledges, and has taken advantage, of the fact that, nowadays, films have a huge power to attract urban, and particularly young, audiences. Julia Suryakusuma (2013) states that, during the era of the New Order, Islamic practices were carefully monitored, but with the modernization, globalization and democratization of the *Reformasi*, Indonesian Muslims are free to express their faith in the spheres of politics, economics, and popular culture. Asma Nadia’s strategy is, thus, in line with Ariel Heryanto’s (2015) argument that the rising trend in Islamic literature and films, an important element of Indonesian popular culture, takes a contrary approach to the otherwise destructive influence of the entertainment world. Heryanto argues that middle-class Indonesian Muslims have adopted perspectives different to their predecessors in commercializing their Islamic lifestyle. He also suggests that this expanding trend is manifested in a capitalist industry that penetrates all aspects of art and culture.

Therefore, what is perceived by many scholars as post-Islamic politics has become a substantial aspect of the daily life of Indonesian society, overshadowing the cultural perspectives of minority groups. This speaks for the growth of conservative Islamic novels and films released around the end of the 2000s, namely *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*, 2008), the most successful of all, *Laskar Pelangi* (2008), *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (2009), *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009), *99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa* (2013), *Assalamualaikum Beijing* (2014), *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015), *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* (2015) and many more. While not all of these films have attained the level of success of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, the consistent emergence of Islamic literature and films has confirmed the significant stronghold of this genre in the realms of Indonesian art, literature, and culture.

From the departure point of her conservative religious perspective, Asma Nadia has attempted to pinpoint her goal of producing Islamic literature and adapting that literature to film:

“Let us take a look. These days, stand up comedy is very popular, right? Then, they made them into films. But why the jokes are dirty? Why are the

artists' clothes sexy? Why are the scenes like that? This is very unfortunate. Our children, some of whom idolize those comics, are even exposed to movies that are unsuitable for them.” (Asma Nadia's Interview with Rahma, 2016)

Asma Nadia makes it clear that her works have been produced to counter the stereotypes of mainstream popular novels and films, which are loaded with romantic and even vulgar content. Asma explains her reasoning by mentioning the negative aspects of this trend in stand up comedy, which, according to her, lacks moral value and is, therefore, unworthy of viewing. She highlights that many Indonesian children and young adults are prone to “losing” themselves in this “unhealthy” trend, which draws them away from Islam’s conservative and “golden” teachings. Furthermore, Asma Nadia argues that her films are the means for many conservative Muslim families to perform jihad. With her older sister Helvy serving as a member of the scholar’s board at *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperous Justice Party, a rising Indonesian Islamic political party) (Arimbi, 2009), Asma is undoubtedly close to the principles of conservative Muslims who strive to write and publish materials promoting their pious views.

She expands her explanation by referring to her adapted novel, *Jilbab Traveler: Love Sparks in Korea* (filmed in 2016):

“This is what has become the value in *Jilbab Traveler* movie. This film can also motivate children and adolescents to have the dreams of seeing and exploring the big world, adding their closeness to the Creator. The awareness of being ‘ambassadors of Indonesia’ and ‘Islamic ambassadors,’ of which we decorate ourselves with good *akhlak* wherever we are, can also become an implicit message from a film which features a loving romance without any physical touch scene between Rania, Hyun Geun dan Ilhan.” (Asma Nadia's Interview with Rahma, 2016)

Just like *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, this book and its adapted movie also present values and themes embedded in Islam, such as the absence of physical touch in romantic relationships and the introduction of Islam to foreigners who are mostly non-believers and agnostics, and then welcoming them into the religion through love and matrimony. It is truly apparent, therefore, that Asma Nadia intends her films to epitomize and symbolize the greatness of Islam, with the expectation that they will be recognized and acknowledged all over the world. Her steady production of novels serves as affirmative confirmation to the rising trend in popular culture infused with Islamic values.

Asma Nadia uses “pure, polite” romance based on Islamic core teachings as her *cultural modals*. Similar to the self-motivational “rags-to-riches” theme found in many emerging Indonesian contemporary works of fiction, such as those by Andrea Hirata, Ahmad Fuadi, and Iwan Setyawan, Asma Nadia’s work stresses the significance of pursuing one’s dreams to travel, work, and study abroad, as well as spreading one’s religious teachings to others. Most importantly, she inserts her own dogmatic and conservative values into her novels, employing her creativity and adaptability to create bestselling fiction wrapped in foreign cultural attributes.

In the sociology of literature, it is commonly assumed that the success of any publication of literary work heavily depends on the role of the publisher and the bookstore network (Escarpit, 2005). The more popular the publisher, i.e. Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Kompas Gramedia, Bentang Pustaka, and Mizan, the easier it is for the author to attract the interest and attention of the audience. Therefore, publishers become ruling agents with the power to set the course of literary culture and public opinion, and are responsible for the methods of distribution that deliver a literary product and adapt it for society.

*Assalamualaikum, Beijing!*, the novel (2013), was published by Noura Books, an imprint of Mizan, one of Indonesia’s leading publishers, which has published the works of such influential contemporary authors as Andrea Hirata (Trilogi *Laskar Pelangi* or *The Rainbow Troops* trilogy) and Dewi “Dee” Lestari (the *Supernova* series) under its another imprint, Bentang Pustaka. Following the skyrocketing success of these two authors, both Bentang Pustaka and Mizan have become widely known, sought-after, and often associated with being giant publishers second only to Gramedia. Because of Mizan’s reputation, and because it has, for years, focused on publishing Islamic-themed fiction and non-fiction works, Asma Nadia chose to publish her religious romance books under that imprint.

Asma hoped her works might become as influential to readers as the works of Andrea Hirata and Dewi “Dee” Lestari. However, although *Assalamualaikum Beijing* attracted a significant number of readers and was finally adapted into a film (presumably because of its eye-catching and easy-to-remember title), so far, her other works have not shown as much promise. Furthermore, both Dewi “Dee” Lestari and Andrea Hirata were selected as sixth and seventh authors in a top 10 list, ahead of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Mochtar Lubis and W.S. Rendra (authors of canon Indonesian literature), and given the opportunity to give public readings at the 2015 Frankfurt Book Fair, when the world’s biggest book trade fair for international deals and trading chose Indonesia as its guest of honor (Griebeler, 2015). Asma Nadia was also invited to Frankfurt, but only as a

literary activist and was, thus, not listed as a literary and fiction author (Jemadu, 2015). It is commonly known that any literary figure selected by the National Committee Indonesia to represent the country in the category of literary and fiction authors can proclaim him or herself as an author with a solid and acknowledged legitimacy. During the Frankfurt Book Fair, from October 14–18, 2015, Asma Nadia was paired with Dian Pelangi, a famous young Muslim fashion designer, to deliver an introduction to the use of hijab in an event called “Beauty and Belief” at the pavilion of Indonesia (Indriani, 2015). Meanwhile, her older sister, Helvy Tiana Rosa, was invited to that event as a literary and fiction author (DW (Indonesia), 2015).

Relating Asma Nadia’s experience at the Frankfurt Book Fair to her own struggle in the literary and cultural field of production, she must have perceived that, while the *Assalamualaikum Beijing* novel and film have certainly made her famous, that fame has lasted only a short while and has not matched the influence of Habiburrahman El Shirazy’s legendary *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*, 2008). Therefore, she set about a new strategy to “prolong” the life of her most notable work and, at the same time, find a way to make her work more memorable to her Indonesian audience for longer. She did this through the comic book adaptation. Since novels are often adapted into graphic novels and only very rarely into full comic books (Duncan, Randy, & Smith, 2009), Asma Nadia chose this medium so that she would be remembered for her unorthodox choice of literary adaptation. According to Angela Ndalians (2009), there is a general misperception that comics are identical to illustrations of paneled pictures, telling stories that are static and stiff. She argues that comics are surprisingly dynamic and always moving, since they are similar to the concept of animation, which displays bits and pieces of fast-moving images.



Figure 1. The meeting of Asma and Zhong Wen in the comic version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing* (Nadia, 2015: 10-11)

In the comic book version of *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, the panels contain scenes cut from the movie, resembling one complete movie overview full of pictures. This is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

The comic page in **Figure 1** shows the scene when Asma clasps both her hands in order to politely refuse Zhong Wen’s handshake. It is a gesture familiar to Indonesian Muslims when meeting someone who is not a blood relative. With this kind of cultural practice display, the role of conservative Islamic tradition is made visible and, at the same time, society in general is “educated” about Islamic teaching and practices. Criticizing the content of the comic, on the one hand it presents a progressive young Muslim woman who dares to end a relationship of betrayal and who steps outside her comfort zone in Indonesia to work as a journalist in the People’s Republic of China. On the other hand, most of the illustrated panels palpably display myriad Islamic elements and attributes, such as mosques, *kopiahs*, *halal* food, and the presence of Islamic Chinese in Beijing, rather than revealing how Asma learns Mandarin or incorporates Chinese culture into her Islamic way of life. Moreover, her conversations and deep discussions with Zhong Wen are more related to the basic concepts and religious traditions of Indonesian Islam. In the comic, little is known about Islamic Chinese cultural tradition, even though the story is set in Beijing.

The following dialogue illustrates this point:

**Zhong Wen:** Do all Muslim women in Indonesia shake hands like you do?

**Asma:** Yes, especially if they wear jilbabs. Except if the *mahram* is the same.

**Zhong Wen:** *Mahram*?

**Asma:** *Mahram* means the *haram* (forbidden) men who are not to be married. Besides *mahram*, only husbands can touch and see these women without their jilbabs.

**Zhong Wen:** Including kissing, hugging?

**Asma:** Why, it’s forbidden, of course...

(Nadia, 2015: 30)

In this dialogue, Asma confirms Zhong Wen’s question that yes, all Muslim women in Indonesia clasp their hands rather than shake the hand of a man who is not their *mahram* or spouse. This does not fit with the fact that many Muslimahs in Indonesia, both those who wear and those who do not wear jilbabs, will shake the hands of strangers of the opposite gender in both formal and informal situations. Although this strict rule can be perceived as existing only in Asma Nadia’s *Assalamualaikum Beijing* novel, film, and comic book, such a widely spread generalization could lead to the inevitable misunderstandings that it is a mandatory, unquestionable duty for all Muslims in Indonesia to

refuse to shake hands with colleagues or counterparts of the opposite gender.

Ariel Heryanto (2015) argues that a rising trend in Islamic literature, such as *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, centers around formal religious patterns and symbols, and is not concerned about substantial issues such as women's rights, polygamy, freedom of speech, corruption, and inclusive political practices. These literary works only promote conservative, puritan, and patriarchal values which reject feminism and non-Eastern value considered liberal and in violation of Islamic values. The comic book draws attention to a number of Islamic symbols, failing to highlight the Islamic Chinese cultural context that, in some ways, differs greatly to Indonesian Islam. In addition, Zhong Wen, who initially claims to be an agnostic, proves himself to be surprisingly knowledgeable about one of the Beijing's mosques, and appears to make light (almost without inner or family conflict) of his decision to convert to Islam when he decides to marry Asma and realizes that she is already gravely ill.

The representation of the complete submission of Zhong Wen, an agnostic, to the dogmatic Islamic values of the protagonist Asmara is Asma Nadia's strongest *cultural modal*, hinting that "infidels" (Christians, agnostics, atheists, and others with religious affiliations outside Islam) can be "forgiven" and joyfully accepted into Islam and, of course, perceived to be equal in status to a first-class citizen of Indonesia (such as the majority of Javanese *pribumi*), if they are willing to denounce their previous faith and embrace Islam. With Dewa (Asma's fanatical, domineering, and persistent ex-fiancée) finally giving his blessing to the new couple, Zhong Wen's Chinese identity and ethnic history, which for decades have been considered social, cultural and religious "handicaps" in Indonesia (Heryanto, 2012), are forgiven and forgotten once he converts to Islam and marries a *pribumi* spouse. Somehow, the Chinese setting is an implicit homology of Asma Nadia's own family experience, as she and Helvy are half-Chinese, and their mother, Maria Eri Susanti, was once a non-Muslim of Chinese descent from Medan, who converted to Islam when she married their father.

In Indonesian Chinese history since Dutch colonization, the marriage of a Chinese man and a Javanese woman accelerates the process of Javanization for the Chinese man, since the family of the bride usually demands that the Chinese man adapt himself to the bride's Javanese culture (Rahayu, 2014). This, of course, includes adapting to the cultural, social, and religious affiliations of his wife's Javanese family. Therefore, Chinese people can be fully assimilated and become "Javanese," no longer raising cultural objections from the majority *pribumi* groups, and no longer being threatened by racial or ethnic violence, such as the May 1998 riot in Jakarta,

which saw the rape and murder of Chinese women and children. Indeed, all of these conservative aspects of Islamic teaching are at the core of Asma Nadia's strategy of sharing her *dakwah* message through her fiction.

A pivotal scene is shown in **Figure 2**:



**Figure 2. Asma, who is ill, is reunited with Zhong Wen, who has converted to Islam. The two finally receive Dewa's (Asma's former lover) blessing (Nadia, 2015: 76-77)**

Writers and publishers practice the accumulation of symbolic capital through repeatedly displaying their names on their literary and cultural products in what Bourdieu refers to as "a capital of consecration, implying a power to consecrate objects (with a trademark of signature) or persons (through publication, exhibition, etc.)" (Bourdieu, 1993: 75). In the presence of a symbol sanctioned by a party with power, it becomes remarkably easy to "patent" an object to an audience, as it is widely accepted as it is considered to possess specific meanings. Precisely because it has been adapted into a comic, the content and essence of *Assalamualaikum Beijing* becomes more visible because it appears in the form of "frozen" or immobilized panel images that can be more closely examined by readers than those same images in the film version. Because the comic contains far more limited space than either the novel or the film, the black-and-white pictures have been deliberately sorted so that the significance of the entire comic is ensured while continuing to convey the author's original message, despite the removal of some parts of the story. As a result, the decision to give very large proportions to both Asmara and Zhong Wen's appearances in the comic version has a significant impact on audience perception, especially for those who have not yet read the novel or watched the film.

Furthermore, the narrative plot of the comic version is similar to the storylines of many mainstream *sinetrons* which, in their plots, continue to reproduce the values of

traditional gender roles. Because of its dogmatic values, the comic represents good-looking, fashionable young women who do not wear jilbabs as *femme-fatales*. Anita, for example, is Dewa's secret lover who later becomes his wife when she finds out she is pregnant with his child. She is a condemned woman who deserves the rejection and abuse of her husband, and is thus not deserving of the love of the man who succumbed to her charms and consciously allowed himself into a sexual encounter with her. While Asma, the betrayed woman, receives support from her best friend Sekar, Sekar's husband Mas Ridwan, her own mother and later Zhong Wen, Anita receives nothing but scornful spite and the constant threat of divorce from her domineering husband Dewa. Asma Nadia's *dakwah* message in the *Assalamualaikum Beijing* comic is the general notion that only honest, "pure," pious, honorable, and forthright women are worthy of happy marriages and respectable places in society. In the comic version, Asma's message does not present the possibility that women like Anita might one day atone for their sins and mend their ways, so that, they too, are worthy of love, respect, and forgiveness from the society.

This is affirmative evidence that Asma Nadia uses her conservative and dogmatic Islamic teachings as her most important *cultural modal* in her strategy to maintain symbolic power by inserting her moral values into new forms of cultural "packaging," as film, comic book, and upcoming *sinetron*. She has also demanded that *Assalamualaikum Beijing* be reproduced again and again over the next five years so that she can exemplify her significant influence as a legitimate author, being the first one to have her literary works adapted to so many different media. Certainly, when *Assalamualaikum Beijing the Series* (the *sinetron* version) is finally released, other religious literary authors will no doubt try to follow suit.

#### 4. Conclusion

Asma Nadia's habitus was created long ago when her older sister, Helvy Tiana Rosa, became a famous author and writing mentor and won numerous local, national, and international literary awards and achievements. Asma Nadia's focus in religious romance literature has stimulated her to insert conservative and dogmatic Islamic teachings as her *cultural modal*, such as the absence of physical touch in her characters' romantic relationships, the positive representation of pious, obedient, and independent women, the negative representation of temptresses, and the matrimonial faith conversion of agnostic characters. With multiple adaptations of her most notable work, *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, from novel to film to comic book, Asma Nadia has "usurped" the position of Indonesia's canon literary writers', as she is the first author whose work has been adapted into so many different forms. Since it is

difficult to achieve literary legitimacy through literary awards and invitations to prestigious literary festivals, the most sensible choice for contemporary writers to achieve literary legitimacy is through the commercial reproduction of their work in different "packages," so that society has a longer memory of these products having engaged with them in a variety of media.

Moreover, Asma Nadia's use of an eye-catching Chinese-themed title and the Chinese setting of *Assalamualaikum Beijing* can be seen as part of a cultural promotion strategy in which she attempts to alter the troubled attitude of the Javanese majority toward Chinese Indonesians by showing the Chinese cultural relation with Islam in China. In this sense, Asma Nadia's *dakwah* messages implicitly highlight that harmonious unity between opposing prominent ethnic groups (Chinese and Javanese) is possible, if only the Chinese are willing to voluntarily embrace Islam and incorporate themselves completely to Indonesia's Javanese and Islamic cultural and religious traditions. In addition, the emergence of Islamic literature such as *Assalamualaikum Beijing* is related to the rapidly growing trend of Islamic culture among Indonesian middle-class youth which has led to the production of Islamic literature that provides dense definitions and aspirations about how to be a "good" and honorable Muslim. Finally, Asma Nadia's comic book adaptation practice exemplifies a shift in Islamic values, where authors seek to accommodate the needs of the youth in popular culture by transforming and adjusting religious values into secular products for the sake of ease of access and understanding, both for Muslims and for other religious adherents in Indonesia.

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