

# VOLUME 10 ISSUE 1

2025

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Published online: 5 March 2025



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## Embodied Faith and Heroic Narratives

### Decoding the Visual and Narrative Tapestry of Indonesian Muslim Superhero Comics

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To cite this article:

Fauzan, Muhammad Nuril. "Embodied Faith and Heroic Narratives: Decoding the Visual and Narrative Tapestry of Indonesian Muslim Superhero Comics." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025): 105-125. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v10i1.707>.

# EMBODIED FAITH AND HEROIC NARRATIVES: DECODING THE VISUAL AND NARRATIVE TAPESTRY OF INDONESIAN MUSLIM SUPERHERO COMICS

Muhammad Nuril Fauzan\*

**Abstract:** The realm of Indonesian comics has developed as people incorporate popular culture, due to the impact of globalisation. Islamic heroism in comics, predominantly depicted as an Islamic character, has debuted a new and original Muslim superhero. This article analyses the ideal standard of Muslim superheroes in Indonesian comics using a qualitative approach, focusing on the *Janisaris* and *Ultimate Glad* comics. It also examines what the author wrote about religious beliefs and socio-cultural influences in those two comics. Using Frisk's heroism as a theoretical framework, the research found that Muslim superheroes in Indonesian comics have special characteristics, depicting them uniquely in the way the integration between piety and heroic acts walks hand in hand. Likewise, the portrayal of villains is also unique, influenced by the socio-cultural and religious backgrounds of the story setting and author. The comics have their roots in a specific narrative and style, which differ from one another.

**Keywords:** *Muslim superhero, Indonesian comic, popular culture, Janisaris, Ultimate Glad*

## INTRODUCTION

Globalisation—the process by which social interactions between distant places are intensified and result in the mutual influence of events happening in different locations—has myriad impacts on many aspects of human life. One notable example appears in the spread of popular culture phenomenon, which reflects the culture of people's everyday lives that encompasses current widely accepted cultural phenomena in modern society, covering diverse forms of expression, such as music, fashion, media etc. Among these various forms and in the middle of its development, comics stand out as a visible component: a graphic novel produced as a global cultural form of literature developed simultaneously across several regions, including parts of Western Europe, the United States and Japan, each with distinctive stylistic traditions. The spread of comics as a medium of popular culture has even come to intersect with some discourses on religion, such as Islam. This is evident in how Muslims' identity is

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represented in the narratives and illustrations of some major Western comics, despite a history of underrepresentation or stereotypical depictions in certain periods. In 2014, Marvel Comics introduced a comic featuring the first Muslim superhero character, Ms. Marvel, and it became a turning point for Muslim representation in that media. Written by an American revert Muslim author, Gwendolyn Willow Wilson, the comic offers a nuanced portrayal of Muslim identity, highlighting diversity within Islam and challenging monolithic Arab-centric representations. Through its narrative and visuals, the author has written a series that addresses cultural differences and disrupts common stereotypes.

Amid the period of globalisation, the popularity of comics as a prominent component of modern pop culture has extended beyond mere regional particularity. It is disseminated as a transnational movement, bypassing certain boundary limitations. The effect of this has reached places beyond its origins. For instance, Indonesia, a nation in Southeast Asia with a predominantly Muslim population, has been significantly influenced. Comics emerged as a top-rated and widely consumed form of entertainment, particularly among the youth, with initial narratives in Indonesia revolving around Western superheroes. However, there seems to be an alteration in how Western comics impact the narratives manifest in comics produced by Indonesian authors. Given its status as a Muslim-majority country, Muslim creators recognise the importance of offering educational media to consumers, especially those who identify as Muslims. Consequently, a growing demand for comics incorporating Islamic elements began in the 2000s.<sup>1</sup>

The portrayal of superheroes in Western culture significantly impacts the storytelling of Islamic superhero comics in the Indonesian context. Nevertheless, the distinction between Western and Indonesian comics lies mainly in the cultural expression and perception of identity, particularly in the author's portrayal of the ideal Muslim superhero figure. For instance, in the Ms. Marvel comic series, the storyline explores not only the theme of Islamic diversity but also delves into the questioning of traditional masculine norms, prejudices faced by Muslims and the portrayal of women as catalysts for societal transformation. The author's residency may influence this in a nation that prioritises the discussion of certain current societal matters.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, in the context of Islamic comics in Indonesia, the theme displayed concerns primarily with *da'wa* (Islamic message), or Islamic heroism, often represented by national or historically renowned figures. For the former, some instances can be observed in several comics, such as *99 Pesan Nabi* [99 Prophet's Message] by Vbi Djenggoten, *Komik 100*

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<sup>1</sup> Irawati Tirtaatmadja, Nina Nurviana, and Alvanov Zpalanzani Mansoor, "Pemetaan Komik Indonesia Periode Tahun 1995-2008" [Mapping Indonesian Comics from 1995-2008], *Wimba: Jurnal Komunikasi Visual* 4, no. 1 (2015), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Shenila S. Khoja-Moolji and Alyssa D. Niccolini, "Comics as Public Pedagogy: Reading Muslim Masculinities through Muslim Femininities in Ms. Marvel," *Girlhood Studies* 8, no. 3 (2015), 36-37; Adnan Mahmutovic, "Ms. Marvel: Transnational Superhero Iconography," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 13, no. 6 (2022), 877; Johannes Smit and Denzil Chetty, "Debunking Marvel Comics' First Pakistani-American Born Muslim Female Superhero: Reading Religion, Race and Gender in Ms. Marvel (Kamala Khan)," *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 24, no. 2 (2018), 19.

*Kebiasaan Nabi* [100 Prophet's Habits] by Wawan Kungkang, *Liqomik: Antologi Komik Islam* [Liqomik: An Anthology of Islamic Comics] and many others. Consequently, studies on this Indonesian comics genre have gained considerable scholarly attention, especially from Indonesian researchers and academics. For instance, Suryadilaga integrated *99 Pesan Nabi* with a *ḥadīth* (sayings of the Prophet) study in search of its *sharḥ* (the act of explaining or commenting on *ḥadīth*). For Bukhārī, his study mainly presents selected *matn* (text), rather than comprehensive commentary, and does not relate his discussion to any theme of Islamic *da'wa*. While it is absent in Suryadilaga's, many studies have been conducted on this theme, specifically on how comics facilitate the spread of the Islamic message (i.e., *da'wa*).<sup>3</sup>

The latter is the Islamic superhero theme, generally represented by Islamic historical characters.<sup>4</sup> Examples include *Sirah Nabi Muhammad* [Biography of the Prophet Muhammad] and *Kisah Dakwah Wali Songo* [The Story of the Wali Songo's (Nine Saints) Da'wa] by Gerdi W. K., *Muhammad al-Fatih* by Handri Satria or *Laksamana Malahayati* by Nurul Chomariah. Putra, for example, examines the *Muhammad al-Fatih* comic, its portrayal of the subtleties found in Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, and its reception in Indonesia, with the comic portraying Islamic heroism in the essential figures of Ottoman Islamic history.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, Hamdanu investigated the incorporation of Japanese cultural themes in the *Ultimate Glad* comic.<sup>6</sup>

One lacuna remaining is that this last genre of Indonesian Islamic comics has largely yet to introduce an original, locally rooted superhero. While Islamic heroism is often depicted through well-known historical figures, only a few introduce entirely original characters within an Indonesian context. These few include Handri Satria's *Janisaris* and Ayyub Nurmana's

<sup>3</sup> For more intensive explanations of this topic, see Romario Romario and Lisda Aisyah, "Komik Islam di Media Sosial Instagram: Dakwah Kreatif Melalui Komik" [Islamic Comics on Instagram Social Media: Creative Da'wa Through Comics], *Islamuna: Jurnal Studi Islam* 6, no. 2 (2019); Firza Muhammad Alaydrus, "Komik Islami (Kolami) Sebagai Media Pembelajaran Agama Bagi Anak Jalanan" [Islamic Comics (Kolami) as Religious Learning Media for Street Children], *Jurnal al-Hikmah* 6, no. 2 (2018); Rulli Nasrullah and Novita Intan Sari, "Komik sebagai Media Dakwah: Analisis Semiotika Kepemimpinan Islam dalam Komik 'Si Bujang'" [Comics as Da'wa Media: A Semiotic Analysis of Islamic Leadership in the Comic 'Si Bujang'], *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Study* 6, no. 19 (2012); Raisa Maya Agustin, "Nilai-Nilai Akhlak Dalam Seri Komik Islami Dunia Sementara Tertawalah Seperlunya (Analisis Semiotik)" [Moral Values in Islamic Comic Series While Laughing as Needed (Semiotic Analysis)], *Al-Mishbah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 14, no. 1 (2018); Anip Dwi Saputro, "Novel Komik Sebagai Media Pembelajaran Dan Dakwah Al-Islam Kemuhmadiyah" [Comic Novels as Learning Media and Da'wa Al-Islam Muhammadiyah's Ideology Driven], *Istawa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 2 (2016): 81; Anip Dwi Saputro, "Implementasi Media Pembelajaran Komik Islam Untuk Meningkatkan Prestasi belajar dalam berpikir Kritis Siswa di Sekolah" [Implementation of Islamic Comic Learning Media to Improve Learning Achievement in Critical Thinking of Students at School], *Ulul Albab Jurnal Studi Islam* 17, no. 1 (2016): 110.

<sup>4</sup> One of the older comic strips related to Islamic superheroes is the story of General Sudirman in *Suara Muhammadiyah* newspaper from 1966-1967. Muhammad Yuanda Zara, "Islamic Patriotism in General Sudirman Comic Strips of Suara Muhammadiyah Magazine (1966-1967)," *Studia Islamika* 29, no. 2 (2022), 311.

<sup>5</sup> D. I. Ansusa Putra, "Recognizing an Islamic Hero: The Quran-Hadith's Vision about Muhammad al-Fatih in Indonesian Comics," *Ulumuna* 26, no. 1 (2022): 122.

<sup>6</sup> Ayyub Hbn Hamdanu, Dena Naufa Nabilla and Santi Widiastuti, "The Gaya Tokusatsu Pada Komik Islami Berjudul Ultimate Glad" [The Tokusatsu Style in the Islamic Comic titled Ultimate Glad], *Pixel: Jurnal Ilmiah Komputer Grafis* 16, no. 2 (2023): 96-97.

*Ultimate Glad*, two contemporary comic authors who feature imagined and illustrated original Muslim superheroes.

In addition, the convergence of pop culture and religious identity has distinctly materialised within the dynamic realm of Indonesian comics. Muslim superheroes' portrayal provides an intriguing perspective to examine the complex interaction between cultural representation, artistic expression, and societal narratives. It is significant to undertake the task of comprehending the visual and narrative constructions of Muslim superheroes, as certain ideologies might have influenced the author's creative process. This article explores the visual and narrative storytelling of two Indonesian Muslim superhero comics, *Janisaris* by Handri Satria and *Ultimate Glad* by Ayyub Nurmana. The rationale for selecting these two is twofold: first, they include unique original Muslim superhero characters, which sets them apart from other comics that predominantly focus on historical Islamic heroes; and second, both comics are relatively recent in their production.

The significance of this study lies not only in the analysis of visual and narrative components but also in the broader ramifications for cultural comprehension, religious depiction and the interaction between fiction and society perspectives. It is possible to argue that these superheroes embody a combination of cultural nuances, religious symbolism and the authors' artistic aspirations, which might be different from place to place. In proving that, therefore, this study uses four core formulations: first, how have Islamic comics in Indonesia developed? Second, how do *Janisaris* and *Ultimate Glad* represent their Muslim superhero narratives and stories? Third, how do the authors of Indonesian comic creators imagine their ideal Muslim superheroes? Fourth, how do the authors implement world-building and the villains' stories to develop the character?

To answer these enquiries, this article will examine Indonesian Muslim superhero comics through a qualitative study of audio and visual materials in two Indonesian Muslim superhero genre representatives, *Janisaris* by Handri Satria and *Ultimate Glad* by Ayyub Nurmana, which become the primary sources. The article limits the object of research to seeking only the visuals and narratives deployed by the authors in imagining ideal Muslim superheroes, villains and socio-cultural influences. The secondary resources will be obtained from books, journals, articles, webpages, websites, theses and other sources relevant to the theme. Some key findings from both comics will be compared and unpacked to identify shared and divergent features, leading to conclusions about the ideal characteristics of Muslim superheroes and their socio-cultural and religious contexts. In doing so, this article draws primarily on Kristian Frisk's sociological theorisation of heroism to analyse the construction of Muslim superheroes in Indonesian comics. In doing so, this article draws primarily on Kristian Frisk's sociological theorisation of heroism to analyse the construction of Muslim superheroes in Indonesian comics. In his definition, Frisk argues that heroism is not an innate or intrinsic attribute of individuals; rather, it is a socially constructed phenomenon that arises through cultural narratives, institutional legitimation and collective recognition. Heroic figures, therefore, are shaped by prevailing social norms, ideological values and the expectations of their cultural communities. From this framework, the article will unpack how the theorisation of Frisk's

heroism can be implemented in the context of Indonesian Muslim superheroes, such as *Janisaris* and *Ultimate Glad*, which differ in regionality and culture compared to the standard narrative. It examines how the narratives and visual representations of Muslim superheroes (i.e., Indonesian Muslim superheroes) reflect a process of negotiation in constructing Islamic heroism in a globalised cultural environment.

## INDONESIAN ISLAMIC COMIC DEVELOPMENT

The history of Islamic-themed comics in Indonesia is a subject of varying interpretations. For instance, in an article written by Tirtaatmadja, he stated the religious comic genre emerged in the 2000s, with the bearer being an Islamic publisher driven to spread Islamic religious education.<sup>7</sup> However, in a study conducted by Bonneff, he contended the earliest genealogy of Islamic comics could be traced back to the 1970s, with the comics being closely related to the idea of nationality.<sup>8</sup> An earlier example is the General Sudirman comic strip (1966-1967) in *Suara Muhammadiyah* newspaper, an official magazine of Muhammadiyah, one of the most prominent Islamic organisations in Indonesia. Zara has conducted a further study of this comic, showing it was intended to redefine the significance of Islam during the Dutch Indonesian War in 1945-1949.<sup>9</sup> This period also saw other appearances of Islamic comics, such as those published by Melodi Publisher, with their major theme focusing on Muslim morality. Example includes the comic by K. T. Ahmar titled *Surga di Bawah Telapak Kaki Ibu* [Heaven beneath Mother's Feet],<sup>10</sup> whose purpose is projected to be a medium of spreading religious education and message. Comics in the press also appeared within this period in Jogja on *Minggu Abadi*, the Sunday supplement of the daily *Islam Abadi*.<sup>11</sup>

A major milestone came in the 1980s with *Surga Neraka* [Heaven and Hell], one of the most famous Indonesian Islamic-themed comics. Starting as a sole comic title, it developed to be one of the dominant genres of Islamic comics, with its narratives tending towards a visualisation of heaven's beauty and hell's horror. Multiple authors were included in making this comic theme, including Eka Wardana, M. B. Rahimsyah, Irsyadul Anam and others. This theme saw a tremendous trend afterwards, enabling the production of a wide variety of comics with varied titles, such as *Siksa Bagi Mereka Yang Tidak Puasa* [Torment for Those Who Do Not Fast], *Siksa Bagi Pelacur* [Torment for the Prostitutes], *Penghuni Neraka Hawiyah* [Residents of Hawiyah Hell] or *Siksa Bagi Ahli Selingkuh* [Torment for Affairs Makers]. As the title changes, the content of this comic genre has also transformed, with a more dominant

<sup>7</sup> Tirtaatmadja, Nurviana, and Mansoor, "Pemetaan Komik Indonesia Periode Tahun 1995-2008," 77.

<sup>8</sup> Marcel Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia* [Indonesian Comics], Cetakan ketiga (KPG, 2008), 37-38.

<sup>9</sup> Zara, "Islamic Patriotism in General Sudirman Comic Strips," 326.

<sup>10</sup> According to an interview conducted by CNN of Henry Ismono, a comic collector, the comics appeared around 1958 with the intention of spreading *da'wa*. Before publishing *Surga di Bawah Kaki Kaum Ibu*, Ahmar had finished writing *Taman Firdaus*. He also produced a comic titled *Surga dan Wanita* after *Surga di Bawah Kaki Kaum Ibu*. "Komik Siksa Neraka, Dari 'Surga' Dakwah Ke 'Neraka' Komoditas" [Hell Torture Comic, From Da'wa 'Heaven' to Commodity 'Hell'], CNN Indonesia, May 12, 2019, accessed January 20, 2024, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/hiburan/20190511213923-241-394066/komik-siksa-neraka-dari-surga-dakwah-ke-neraka-komoditas>.

<sup>11</sup> Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*, 56.

portion of hellish torment, translated in Indonesia as *Siksa Neraka*. Reported by CNN, quoting the words of Hikmat Darmawan, an Indonesian art observer, in which he categorises the comic as torture porn, due to their graphic content and sensational appeal.<sup>12</sup> Remarkably, the hype of this comic category has been preserved until the recent period, which resulted in this comic being adapted into a movie in 2023 with the title *Siksa Neraka* [Torment of Hell] by Anggi Umbara.

In the 1990s, several publishers specialising in Islamic literature, such as *Aku Anak Saleh*, As-Syaamil, MQ and Dar Mizan, initiated efforts to delve more into the realm of Islamic comics with a stronger educational focus. An exemplary Islamic-themed comic books includes *Komik Nabi Muhammad Saw* [Prophet Muhammad Comic], authored by Nur Wahidin from Dar Mizan in 1997. This collection has 12 volumes, encompassing approximately 1,825 pages. Subsequently, by the early 2000s, Islamic-themed comics started to be showcased in numerous prominent retailers, national book fairs and school bazaars, exemplified by titles like *Bidadari Besi* [Steel Angel] by Eka Wardhana and Johan Manandin, which is 70 pages long. This comic has a narrative setting in the Middle East, with the main character, Khaulah, a Muslim woman who participates in several Muslim wars.

The 21st century saw the expansion of Islamic comics, predominantly promoting *da'wa*, Islamic teachings, or the Islamic heroism of certain renowned figures. Some instances of comics, like *99 Pesan Nabi* [99 Prophet's Messages] by Vbi Djenggoten (Veby Surya Wibawa), *Komik 100 Kebiasaan Nabi* [Comic 100 Habits of the Prophet] by Wawan Kungkang, *Liqomik: Antologi Komik Islam* [Liqomik: An Anthology of Islamic Comics], and others, became a significant milestone of this period. *99 Pesan Nabi* comic, which appeared in 2014, provided a new nuance in Islamic comic content and triggered the production of myriad Islamic comics. This comic is a compilation of three previous volumes, each with a main title of *33 Pesan Nabi* [33 Prophet's Messages], produced between 2011 and 2014. There has been extensive research on this type of Indonesian comics, notably by Indonesian writers and researchers. As an example, Suryadilaga integrated *99 Pesan Nabi* with a study of *ḥadīth* to find an explanation of the *ḥadīth* Bukhārī.<sup>13</sup> Although Suryadilaga claimed to have scrutinised the commentary on the *ḥadīth*, it appears he only presented the original text from Bukhārī and Muslim. Therefore, Suryadilaga's work is not comprehensive in its coverage of research on the use of comics for Islamic *da'wa*. Furthermore, as previously discussed, other works explore Islamic comics as a *da'wa* medium.

The Islamic superhero theme, which predominantly features Islamic historical characters, is another genre that garners interest and boasts significant attention. Some representatives of this genre include *Sirah Nabi Muhammad* [Biography of Prophet Muhammad] and *Kisah Dakwah*

<sup>12</sup> Torture porn is a category of sadistic movies. Darmawan adds, this comic is also enjoyed because it has an element of pornography with the presentation of torture. "Komik Siksa Neraka, Dari 'Surga' Dakwah Ke 'Neraka' Komoditas."

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Alfatih Suryadilaga, "Syarah Hadis Sahih Bukhari dan Muslim Dalam Komik: Studi atas Deskripsi 99 Pesan Nabi: Komik Hadis Bukhari Muslim (Edisi Lengkap)" [Syarah Hadith Sahih Bukhari and Muslim in Comics: A Study of the Description of 99 Prophetic Messages: Bukhari Muslim Hadith Comics (Complete Edition)], *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 16, no. 2 (October 1, 2015), 3.

*Wali Songo* [The Story of the Wali Songo's (Nine Saints) Da'wa] by Gerdi Wirata Kusuma, *Muhammad al-Fatih*, *Imaduddin Zanki*, *Preman Tobat* [Thugs Repent], and *Janisaris* by Handri Satria, *Ultimate Glad* by Ayyub Nurmana, or *Laksamana Malahayati* by Nurul Chomariah. Among these, *Muhammad al-Fatih*, which features the story of one of the leaders of the Ottoman Empire, is positively accepted by Indonesian consumers, proven by its 14 reprints, and it has become a best seller in book markets.<sup>14</sup> This comic also became a pioneer of Indonesian Islamic comics on the theme of heroism in recent periods. Putra analyses the *Muhammad al-Fatih* comic and its depiction of the intricacies present in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth.<sup>15</sup> Another example can be observed in the research conducted by Hamdanu, who examined the integration of Japanese cultural motifs in the *Ultimate Glad* comic by Ayyub Nurmana.

The development of Islamic comics in Indonesia continues to evolve alongside the broader growth of pop culture. New genres of Islamic comics may yet emerge as part of this dynamic landscape. As a form of popular culture integrated with Islamic teachings, comics have become an increasingly consumed medium, particularly among Indonesia's growing middle-class Muslim community. It is possible to say that more Islamic comic genres will emerge in Indonesia in the future.

### ***JANISARIS AND ULTIMATE GLAD AT A GLANCE***

*Janisaris* is a comic series illustrated by Handri Satria Handjaya, an established Indonesian visual artist who previously worked on several Islamic Indonesian comics, such as *Muhammad al-Fatih*, *Imaduddin Zanki*, *Khalid bin Walid*, *Barbarossa*, *Preman Tobat* [Thugs Repent], and many others. The comic debuted in December 2021 under the publication of Adeen Publishing and has since had a second printing two years later, in 2023. Currently, three volumes of *Janisaris* comics are in circulation. The initial volume is titled *Janisaris: Penemu Hebat* [*Janisaris: A Great Inventor*],<sup>16</sup> with the first and second printings occurring in December 2021 and March 2023, respectively. The second volume, *Janisaris: Serangan Digital* [*Janisaris: Digital Attack*]<sup>17</sup> was printed in July 2022 and October 2023. The third volume, which came with the title *Janisaris: Semangat Baru* [*Janisaris: New Spirit*],<sup>18</sup> was first printed in July 2023.

The story follows an idealistic young prosecutor named Nadindra, who upholds the value of justice. He and his brother inherited science and religious teachings from their father, who gave them *Janisaris*, a technology intended to benefit many. *Janisaris*, which Nadindra uses with the help of his brother, faces intertwined issues of politics and power while concealing his superhero identity. There are plenty of heroic deeds by *Janisaris*, with one being toppling a threatening terrorist group and rescuing prisoners. In the end, however, *Janisaris* finds a more decisive evil enemy, Dracula, which sets the story in motion and makes it more intense. The

<sup>14</sup> Putra, "Recognizing an Islamic Hero," 123.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>16</sup> Handri Satria, *Janisaris: Penemu Hebat* [*Janisaris: Great Inventor*], vol. 1 (Adeen Publishing, 2023).

<sup>17</sup> Handri Satria, *Janisaris: Serangan Digital* [*Janisaris: Digital Attack*], vol. 2 (Adeen Publishing, 2023).

<sup>18</sup> Handri Satria, *Janisaris: Semangat Baru* [*Janisaris: New Spirit*], vol. 3 (Adeen Publishing, 2023).

complex storytelling with Islamic trivia makes this comic more unique. It is further refined by the settings and places in this comic, which take place in an imagined futuristic Indonesia, making some of the atmosphere feel familiar. This comic has many art styles that are influenced by Turkish deep cultural roots, especially the Ottoman Empire, which is characterised by the many repeated appearances of the influence of the story of Muhammad al-Fatih's sultanate.



Figure 1. *Janisaris* comics volumes 1, 2 and 3 by Handri Satria

This comic has received praise from fans and comic creators, especially those involved in Indonesian comics, such as Vby Djenggoten (creator of *99 Pesan Nabi*) and Ardian Syaf (a former illustrator of DC and Marvel comics). Vby Djenggoten's impression is visible on the back cover of the book, stating that:

I'm intrigued by this comic. It reminds me of the superhero actions of Captain America and Iron Man, but the advantage is that it inserts many Islamic values. It's clear, not vague. And the title is already visible. Can you imagine there is a dramatic superhero action out of his base, but he is reminded to read the prayer outside the house? This is really unique! Children who read *Insha Allah* are still more familiar with Islamic values. No matter how great a superhero is, he is still a human being who must submit to the rules of Allah! *Jos Gandos!*<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, *Ultimate Glad*, a comic by Ayyub Nurmana, has a storyline based on a Muslim superhero tale. This comic is one of the many works of Ayyub Nurmana, whose concept was initiated in 2009. In the introduction, the author states that *Ultimate Glad* has been published in different versions in 2010, 2012, 2017 and most recently, 2020. So far, there have been four volumes of the *Ultimate Glad* comic series: the first volume is titled *Ultimate Glad: Kekuatan Iman* [Ultimate Glad: Power of Faith],<sup>20</sup> printed by Ihsan Comic in 2020 with 176 pages; the second volume is *Ultimate Glad: Para Kesatria* [Ultimate Glad: The Knights],<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Satria, *Janisaris: Penemu Hebat*.

<sup>20</sup> Ayyub Nurmana, *Ultimate Glad: Kekuatan Iman* [Ultimate Glad: Power of Faith], vol. 1 (Ihsan Comic, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Ayyub Nurmana, *Ultimate Glad: Para Kesatria* [Ultimate Glad: The Knights], vol. 2 (Ihsan Comic, 2020).

printed in 2020 with 200 pages; the third volume is titled *Ultimate Glad: Spirit*,<sup>22</sup> which was printed in 2021 with 180 pages; and the fourth volume is titled *Ultimate Glad: Sang Mujahid* [Ultimate Glad: The Strivers],<sup>23</sup> which has 180 pages.



**Figure 2.** *Ultimate Glad* comics volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 by Ayyub Nurmana

The story revolves around a young man named Zetrow who aspires to become a superhero and is involved in a mission to save the world from the terrorism of an evil group called Dark Coat. However, he does not possess the powers other superheroes have, so he often risks his life. Despite his limitations, Zetrow persists, embodying the values of perseverance, faith and resilience. Eventually, he gains accumulated powers from the fallen heroes. As a *da'wa* comic, *Ultimate Glad* is filled with many elements of Islamic values displayed, from forms of worship, good values and Islamic cultural influences that affected the depiction of this comic.

The responses and feedback elicited by this comic are diverse, ranging from fans, who submit their art after each volume, to art enthusiasts, who provide favourable remarks about this comic. Among those authors, Handri Satria, the creator of *Janisaris*, stated:

Throughout my childhood, I developed a strong affinity for superhero comics and films from Japan to America. However, as I gained a deeper understanding of the clash of ideologies, I became aware of the influence of certain cultures that contradict religious beliefs, which have become deeply ingrained in my psyche and are challenging to overcome. The *Ultimate Glad* comic series may be convenient for accessing contemporary and comprehensible superhero guidance.<sup>24</sup>

## AN OTTOMAN-ISLAMIC ROOT OF *JANISARIS* COMICS

In the narrative of *Janisaris*, the author appears heavily influenced by Turkish cultural roots, particularly drawing on the legacy and characterisation of Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih, a prominent sultan of the Ottoman Empire. From the title alone (i.e., *Janisari*), the author grasped its notion from the term Janissaries or *يڭيچرى* (*yeñiçeri*), an elite special combat troops of the

<sup>22</sup> Ayyub Nurmana, *Ultimate Glad: Spirit*, vol. 3 (Ihsan Comic, 2021).

<sup>23</sup> Ayyub Nurmana, *Ultimate Glad: Sang Mujahid* [Ultimate Glad: The Strivers], vol. 4 (Ihsan Comic, n.d.).

<sup>24</sup> Nurmana, *Ultimate Glad: Kekuatan Iman*.

Ottoman dynasty formed in the 14th century (around the 1370s) under Murad II.<sup>25</sup> They started as a state commission (i.e., sultan's bodyguard), but over time, they evolved into a special force that participated in multiple wars, with the invention of the firearm as the benchmark.<sup>26</sup> They are also known to be close to a Sufi order of the Ottoman Empire called Bektashism.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the author said the naming of this comic was based on the strength of the Janissaries, who were considered to be gallant warriors who had a strong faith (*īmān*).

The overall visual design of *Janisaris* clearly draws inspiration from Ottoman military traditions. To exemplify, the armour design of *Janisari* was absorbed from the armour of *Sipahi*, a mounted troop and tribal horsemen serving under the Ottoman Empire. The author seems to fuse elements from two elite Ottoman forces—the Janissaries and *Sipahi*—symbolising a blend of strength and bravery embodied in the superhero figure. Furthermore, *Janisaris* wears a turbaned helmet, a distinctive Ottoman combat headgear characterised by its bulbous, onion-like shape and flowing fabric contours. The turbaned *Baha* derives its name from its typical attire atop the turban. However, this turban symbolises Islamic Sufism, which is commonly used in religious missions, claiming the wearer of this hat is a holy warrior. It is also implied that the hat is often integrated with heavy cavalry, such as the *Sipahis*.<sup>28</sup>

The story of Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih is also repeatedly mentioned in this comic, portraying how the Islamic heroism of a famous Ottoman leader inspires the protagonist. For instance, the story of Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih is mentioned in the second volume of *Janisaris* on pages 37-41. Its contextual background is based on the story of a just judge deciding a case where the defendant is Sultan al-Fatih. He was found guilty, but accepted his mistake and guilt. In the third volume, on pages 71-75, the story of Muhammad al-Fatih is referenced to illustrate that he, too, once faced a significant impasse in his life, yet ultimately surrendered to Allah to overcome his challenges.

Speaking of Islamic nuance, many of the comic's values are implemented by the author in his work. Not only in the way the author portrays the main character as a heroic Muslim but also in the way he incorporates verses of the Qur'ān, *aḥadīth* (pl. *ḥadīth*), prayers and a diverse Muslim landscape in *Janisaris*. To exemplify, the initial volume of the comics mentions seven Qur'ān verses and two distinct *ḥadīth*.<sup>29</sup> The second volume includes seven Qur'ānic verses

<sup>25</sup> Jason Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire*, 1st Owl books ed (H. Holt, 2000), 59, 179-181; Patrick Balfour Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (Morrow, 1979), 52; Douglas E. Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Westview Press, 2011), 83; Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Alan Masters, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, Facts on File Library of World History (Facts On File, 2009), 183-185.

<sup>26</sup> Ágoston and Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*.

<sup>27</sup> Gilles Veinstein, "On the Ottoman Janissaries (Fourteenth-Nineteenth Centuries)," in *Fighting for Living: A Comparative Study of Military Labour 1500-2000*, ed. Erik-Jan Zürcher (Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 125.

<sup>28</sup> "Turban Helmet. Turkish, Possibly Istanbul, in the Style of Turkman Armor," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/21978>.

<sup>29</sup> In this part, the Qur'ān verses are 17:7, 2:45, 48:13-14, 31: 20, 5:2, 5:32 and 17:49, and the other was *ḥadīth* transmitted by Thabranī.

and the third volume mentions five *ḥadīth* narrations and four Qur'ānic verses.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the author inserts a reference to a book about the justice of Muslims towards other religions listed in *rawā'iu min al-tārīkh al-'uthmānī*, a brief Islamic book about the history of the Ottoman dynasty. The author often includes recitations of prayers on certain occasions and inserts historical Muslim figures.

Considering all factors, the author appears greatly influenced by the illustrations and heroic aspects of the Ottoman dynasty, representing a significant period in Islamic history. This could also be attributed to the author's prior experience as the creator of the *Muhammad al-Fatih* comic, which significantly impacted his creation of the *Janisaris* comics. Moreover, the heroism of al-Fatih has been widely recognised by Indonesian Muslims since the publication of the *Muhammad al-Fatih* comics. It is accepted mainly because of the characterisation of al-Fatih as a virtuous and devout character, as well as his courageous deeds as the conqueror of Constantinople, which holds significance in relation to the Prophet's *ḥadīth*.

### **ULTIMATE GLAD: A TOKUSATSU-STYLED MUSLIM SUPERHERO**

In contrast to Handri Satria, which does not mention any reference of his art style, Ayyub Nurmana, the creator of *Ultimate Glad*, states the art style he adopts is *Tokusatsu*—an innovative photography style originating from Japan.<sup>31</sup> He claims that *Ultimate Glad* is classified as *Tokusatsu* due to its artistic qualities. He adds the notable aspect is the author's skilful conversion of the *Tokusatsu* style into a comic that prominently features Islamic *da'wa* components. The author's story highlights the comic's originality through the innovative presentation of the *Tokusatsu* style in *da'wa* comics, a previously unexplored approach.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of characterisation, one of the *Tokusatsu* characters depicted in this comic is inspired by a renowned Muslim figure who has a great history in the propagation of Islam. The superhero is named Saladin, in apparent homage to Salāḥuddīn al-Ayyubī, an Egyptian Muslim military leader who achieved a significant triumph for the Muslim side during the Crusades. Not only is the name absorbed from the Muslim figure, but the characterisation of the outfit displayed also resembles the Muslim war attire of the Ayyubid military. Saladin's character in the *Ultimate Glad* is represented by a bowl-shaped helmet that covers the back of the head up to the ears and body armour in the form of chainmail, which was the standard battle outfit of the Ayyubid army.<sup>33</sup> In addition, this Saladin character uses a sword as his weapon, similar to

<sup>30</sup> The second part consists of Qur'ān verses 17:23, 5:49, 16:90, 48:13-14, 14:42, 83:10-17 and 54:46. The third, consists of: a *ḥadīth* transmitted by Bukhārī, a *ḥadīth* transmitted by Aḥmad, Nasā'ī, and Turmudhī, two *ḥadīth* transmitted by Bukhārī and Muslim, and Qur'ān verses 14:42, 94:5-6, 65:2-3 and 2:286.

<sup>31</sup> In the *Ultimate Glad* comics, the claim that the art style follows Tokusatsu is shown by the appearance of Tokusatsu substances, such as special effects, superheroes with armour, monsters in the form of kaiju or mecha robots. Hamdanu, Nabilla and Widiastuti, "The Gaya Tokusatsu Pada Komik Islami Berjudul Ultimate Glad," 98.

<sup>32</sup> Hamdanu, Nabilla and Widiastuti, "The Gaya Tokusatsu Pada Komik Islami Berjudul Ultimate Glad," 100.

<sup>33</sup> Hayden Chakra, "The Army of Saladin, their Tactics and Equipment for Fighting Against the Crusaders," About History, April 27, 2023, <https://about-history.com/the-army-of-saladin-their-tactics-and-equipment-for-fighting-against-the-crusaders/>.

the Ayyubid army, with its roots returning to the old Arabic sword.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the one who can transform into this Saladin character is depicted as a pious man called *ustādh* (Islamic teacher) due to his background as a *santri* (student) and ability to teach. This is also interconnected with Salāḥuddīn al-Ayyubī's personality and religious leanings as a person who had a strong affinity for Qur'ānic recitation and prayed diligently. He was also regarded as a fervent supporter of *jihād*.<sup>35</sup>

In the narrative of this comic, the characters who appear as superheroes are idealistic Muslims and portrayed as obedient to their God. The depiction of superhero characters follows the general superhero archetype, portraying them as tireless figures who never give up and are always willing to lend a helping hand. This is reinforced by the description of their struggle against the enemy, but still surrendering to their God. In other scenes, it is common for superheroes in this series to shout the word *takbīr* to increase their enthusiasm in battle.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, the substance of Islamic values is often found in *Ultimate Glad*, such as Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*), painting symbols with the calligraphy of Allah and portrayals of people praying (*ṣalāh*), which show a representative Islamic environment. Although the author does not imply that the setting of the *Ultimate Glad* story is in a specific place and replaces it with another name (Multiworld), the explicit reference points indicate the setting might allude to Indonesia.

## THE ANALYSIS OF IMAGINING IDEAL MUSLIM SUPERHEROES IN INDONESIAN COMICS

The idea of heroism can be defined in multiple ways. Zeno Franco states that heroism is the apex of human behaviour, the act of someone who courageously defends the values of a community, willingly facing physical peril or social detriment without seeking personal gain.<sup>37</sup> Others might believe conversely by saying that heroism is a social construct that a group intentionally establishes to serve a particular objective.<sup>38</sup> When associated with Islam, heroism often refers to stories of historical figures whose struggles contribute to the development of the faith, leading to the notion of Islamic heroism—and, by extension, the concept of a Muslim superhero.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Francesco Gabrieli and E. J. Costello, eds., *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, repr (University of California Press, 1984), 101.

<sup>36</sup> In a broader context, saying *takbīr* is intended differently, but at the same time, it is also commonly used in many Islamic superhero narratives. One notable instance is in Ms. Marvel, in the scene when they celebrate happiness. Fitra Kanza Mujahidah, Aceng Abdullah, and Jimi N Mahameruaji, "Representasi Umat Islam Dalam Miniseri Ms. Marvel" [Representation of Muslims in Ms Marvel Miniseries], *Jurnal Komunikasi UHO: Jurnal Penelitian Kajian Ilmu Komunikasi dan Informasi* 8, no. 4 (2023), 861-862.

<sup>37</sup> Zeno E. Franco, Kathy Blau and Philip G. Zimbardo, "Heroism: A Conceptual Analysis and Differentiation between Heroic Action and Altruism," *Review of General Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2011), 99.

<sup>38</sup> Kristian Frisk, "What Makes a Hero? Theorising the Social Structuring of Heroism," *Sociology* 53, no. 1 (2019), 88.

In defining the idea of a superhero, various definitions are related; for instance, Peter Coogan refers to a dictionary that defines a superhero as:

A heroic character with a universal, selfless, prosocial mission who possesses superpowers – extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical and mental skills (including mystical abilities); who has a superhero identity embodied in a code name and iconic costume, which typically express his biography or character, powers, and origin (transformation from ordinary person to superhero); and is genetically distinct by a preponderance of generic conventions.<sup>39</sup>

When it comes to being integrated with the word Muslim, which stands for the identity of Islamic adherents, this results in a definition of a Muslim who possesses exceptional abilities. The significance of Muslim superheroes in comic narratives can also differ, contingent on factors such as the regional context and cultural milieu in which the comic is released. Nevertheless, while examining Muslim superhero comics in Indonesia, specifically *Janisaris* and *Ultimate Glad*, a pattern emerges, delineating the desired fictional attributes of comic writers when portraying Muslim superhero characters. The protagonist of the Muslim superhero possesses unique characteristics that set it apart from other Muslim superhero comics. Some imaginary characteristics of Muslim superheroes include those detailed below.

First, Muslim superheroes possess extraordinary abilities or cutting-edge technology in their endeavours. Similar to other superhero figures in typical comics, Muslim superheroes possess abilities that aid them in their heroic endeavours, whether through superhuman capabilities or advanced technological aids. This aligns with the description and definition of a superhero as given formerly by Peter Coogan. This essential criterion should be universally included in the definition of superheroes. For example, in *Janisaris*, the protagonist Nadindra possesses sophisticated technology passed down from his father, named *Janisaris*, which he employs to assist society, in addition to his expertise in martial arts. Another instance may be observed in the superhero characters of *Ultimate Glad*, who gain abilities via the Glad system, a belt that can be activated by the quantum emission coming from the superhero character.

Second, the portrayal of Muslim superheroes combines elements of superhero culture with representations of Islamic historical figures. Muslim superhero characters are typically shaped by Western superhero characters and Islamic history, resulting in adjustments and adaptations between the two. The amalgamation of the two cultures is what renders this Muslim superhero character as distinctive. The *Janisaris* picture demonstrates the significant influence of Western culture on superhero comics, as it serves as their site of origin. The attire of the superhero in *Janisaris* bears a resemblance to the fashion of Western superheroes, such as Iron Man, for instance. However, the outfit incorporates elements of Ottoman Empire fashion, which originated from an Islamic empire. The same applies to *Ultimate Glad*, which derives its superhero concept from Japan, specifically *Tokusatsu*. The author incorporated cultural dissemination by introducing the figure of Saladin, who possesses a distinct Middle Eastern aesthetic. This is an interpretation by the author to absorb the meaning of Western superheroes

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<sup>39</sup> Robin S. Rosenberg and Peter M. Coogan, eds., *What is a Superhero?* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

into the Islamic context. Ultimately, this results in a *heteroglossic* story, which integrates cultural aspects from different places and times.<sup>40</sup> This shows that superheroes not only operate in a diffusion process but can also be a catalyst for cultural fusion.

Third, Muslim superheroes are depicted not only as heroic figures but also as individuals who adhere to Islamic doctrines. The author of Indonesian comics envisions the ideal Muslim superhero characters as individuals who not only engage in heroic acts to assist others but also faithfully adhere to their religious beliefs, encompassing acts of worship and embodying many virtuous characteristics. The example can be analysed from *Janisaris* comics, in which the protagonist performs a prayer or *ṣalāh*. Alternatively, he consistently engages in prayer and recites the *basmala* (Islamic phrase for “In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”) before undertaking any heroic actions. This is also depicted in *Ultimate Glad*, where one of the heroic characters is an *ustādh* who instructs pupils at an Indonesian Islamic boarding school named *Pesantren Al-Ihsan*. On the other hand, secondary characters also exhibit Islamic beliefs, such as the protagonist’s father, who is depicted engaging in prayer, demonstrating specific movements like *rukū’* (bowing down), *sujūd* (prostration) and *takbīratul ihram* (the initial declaration of “Allāhu Akbar” (God is the Greatest) that begins the prayer in Islam). The author also shows the protagonist’s piety through the *‘umrah* he experienced. Furthermore, the author suggests that Muslim superhero figures frequently exhibit commendable conduct by uttering *ṭayyibah* words, in addition to exemplifying piety of character.<sup>41</sup>

Fourth, Muslim superheroes are depicted as possessing unwavering spirit and devotion to their God (*ikhhlāṣ* (sincerity) and *tawakkal* (complete trust and reliance on God)). That is to say, Muslim superheroes possess formidable combat abilities, demonstrating unwavering determination in the face of challenges and ultimately surrendering their lives to their deity (*ikhhlāṣ* and *tawakkal*) following their endeavours. To simplify, they do not easily give up and surrender their problems to God. *Janisaris* has a scene where it is evident that the protagonist experienced a profound feeling of despair. Nevertheless, his spirits were revived when recollecting the tale of al-Fatih’s triumphant capture of Constantinople. An evident illustration may also be observed in *Ultimate Glad*, where its superhero protagonists consistently engage in *du‘ā* (prayer) whenever they encounter difficulties. This phenomenon becomes evident when the superheroes experience a loss of their inherent abilities, although they persistently engage in *du‘ā* and maintain optimism towards their God, with the intention of regaining their former skills.

These characteristics of Muslim superheroes, as identified in *Janisaris* and *Ultimate Glad*, demonstrate that heroism is not an innate quality but a culturally and socially constructed ideal. Drawing on Kristian Frisk’s sociological theory of heroism, it becomes clear that the depiction of Muslim superheroes in Indonesian comics is shaped by a collective process of cultural

<sup>40</sup> Kyle Hammonds, “The Globalization of Superheroes: Diffusion, Genre, and Cultural Adaptations,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, by Kyle Hammonds (Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>41</sup> In Islamic tradition, *ṭayyibah* words literally stand for good phrases to always say, including *ta‘āwudh*, *basmalah*, *takbir*, *tahmīd*, *istigfār* etc. Ridhoul Wahidi, *Keajaiban Melimpah Dari Kalimat Tayyibah* [The Abundant Miracles of Kalimat Tayyibah] (MediaPressindo, 2014), 9.

negotiation and social recognition, rather than by intrinsic heroism alone. As Frisk argues, heroic figures emerge through the interplay of cultural narratives, ideological expectations and institutional validation within a given society.<sup>42</sup> In this context, Nadindra and Zetrow are not simply portrayed as brave individuals; they are constructed as symbols of Islamic virtue, national aspiration and moral fortitude within Indonesia's Muslim majority culture. Their characteristics—such as unwavering faith, acts of piety, technological prowess and perseverance—reflect the broader social values that Indonesian Muslim communities seek to promote and affirm. Thus, the ideal Muslim superhero is not a naturally occurring phenomenon, but the outcome of a socially structured effort to embody religious devotion and heroic action in a form that resonates with contemporary Indonesian popular culture.<sup>43</sup>

In the case of *Janisaris*, the construction of Nadindra, the main character, as a pious yet technologically advanced hero reflects, in Frisk's terms, a socially orchestrated effort to embody Islamic virtue alongside modern heroic ideals within Indonesian popular imagination. The resemblance also occurs in *Ultimate Glad*, in which the portrayal of Zetrow and the *ustadh* figure as devout Muslims and heroic defenders similarly exemplifies Frisk's view of heroism as a social construction, designed to align moral, religious and communal values within a popular narrative form. These characteristics are the author's way of conveying their preferences in constructing ideal Indonesian Muslim superhero figures. They integrate the Western conception of superheroes with Islamic values, resulting in the diffusion of two distinct cultures, as Hammonds notes.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, the preferences and characterisation of these Muslim superheroes are based on the author's subjectivity in portraying their ideal Muslim superheroes, which display more pious men who possess superpower abilities. From there, it can be inferred that most Indonesian superhero characters are built and depicted as they are.

## THE AUTHOR'S BRUSHSTROKE: COMIC WORLD BUILDING AND VILLAINS

The significance of representing Islamic values and beliefs in a comic is not solely portrayed by the internal component of the Muslim superhero in the plot. Factors external to the narrative, such as the portrayal of the antagonist (villains) who oppose the protagonist, the author's constructed setting and the use of Islamic symbols, have the potential to influence the progression of Muslim superhero characters in a comic storyline. While it might be subjective, this encompasses the impact of socio-cultural and theological factors on the author's construction of the superhero story's setting.

In the common narrative of superhero comics, the protagonists (superheroes) are usually not able to stand independently. They require the presence of villains to be encountered as their enemies. These villains are important to the extent that they can impact the superheroes' character development. Villains, however, are often called supervillains for their strength and

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<sup>42</sup> Frisk, "What Makes a Hero?" 88-90.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>44</sup> Hammonds, "The Globalization of Superheroes."

power, which can equal that of superheroes. Then a further question arises: what are the supervillains? For this matter, Duncan asserts that enemies who have superpowers and garish costumes might be considered supervillains. He refines his argument by quoting Gina Misiroglu and Michael Eury, who contend that the supervillain's propensity to scheme in operatic proportions distinguishes them from ordinary criminals.<sup>45</sup>

In the Islamic setting, villains (or supervillains) in Islamic superhero comics are individuals who harbour malevolent intentions to inflict harm on others and impede the protagonist's pursuit of benevolence, a depiction that is not so different from the common narrative setting. The discrepancy might be in the author's method of constructing the characterisations of these villains by assimilating cultural elements that align with the concepts and backdrop of the narrative. The author could incorporate sociocultural themes that reflect their background knowledge and present them in a comic style. Arjana's statement aligns with the notion that the casting of villains in superhero narratives is frequently linked to contemporary issues.<sup>46</sup>

On reviewing *Janisaris* and *Ultimate Glad*, it is observed that the initial villain is a faction of terrorists who launch a terror attack in a public place. Terrorists, who are mentioned in the *Janisaris*, are one type of villain that is also commonly found in superhero comics. It can be suggested that, as a writer from Indonesia, he might be influenced by this factor to display the terrorist act as an evil deed that need to be fought. It is mainly because the problem of terrorism is significant and receives attention due to its reference to the issue of radicalism, particularly in Indonesia. Accounts on this matter continue to be prevalent in media outlets, which suggests the author was intrigued to challenge the terrorist narrative, which is frequently linked to Islam and Muslim individuals, in a derogatory manner by depicting the Muslim superhero as the saviour. On the other hand, in *Ultimate Glad*, the villain is an evil organisation called Dark Coat, the main enemy of the superheroes. That is, they are a malevolent group that intends to overthrow the government, rule the world and cooperate with the devil. Their acts for overthrowing the government are identical to terrorist acts: to spread fear and terror among humans.

The same principle applies to supervillains if the narratives are occasionally associated with Islamic history. An instance of this can be observed in *Janisaris*, in which a formidable antagonist named Dracula is depicted. This character's name is reminiscent of Vlad Dracula, a prominent adversary of al-Fatih during the Ottoman Empire. The author intends to create a cohesive tale with a context exhibiting parallel progression. As previously stated, the comic creator incorporates numerous aspects of Ottoman Turkish culture, portraying it as a magnificent Islamic empire of its era. He combines the Turkish setting with a narrative

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<sup>45</sup> Duncan refers his argument based on Misiroglu's and Eury's definition of supervillains, but he does not specify a page. Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* (Continuum, 2009), 229; Gina Renée Misiroglu and Michael Eury, *The Supervillain Book: The Evil Side of Comics and Hollywood* (Visible Ink Press, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Sophia Rose Arjana, *Veiled Superheroes: Islam, Feminism, and Popular Culture* (Lexington Books, 2018), 3.

backdrop situated in Indonesia. This is an example of how an author can introduce diffusion into the socio-cultural aspects of a humorous tale, which the author's subjectivity may shape.

Apart from the supervillains who contribute the most to the development of superheroes, other factors must shape the depiction of superheroes. Using the theory of Frisk, who correlated heroism with mainstream social theory, asserting that examining the elements contributing to heroism is intertwined with fundamental sociological enquiries. This encompasses enquiries on the correlation between the individual and societal structure, the historical factors and position of human beings, as well as behaviour and the development of cultural significance. Furthermore, the notion of heroism elucidates the societal framework of characters and acts, in conjunction with the veneration of heroes, by perceiving individuals, activities and events as innate or inherent and possessing heroic qualities.<sup>47</sup>

In making the narrative's world-building, one illustration can be observed from *Janisaris*, which depicts the main character's daily life, with him having a good relationship with his surroundings (e.g., family). One possible example is their nomenclature for family members. Here, the calling of father and mother, or "*abi-umi*," is employed in a conversation within the family in *Janisaris*, which is commonly used within middle-class Muslim communities. However, this type of calling is highly favoured among Salafi Muslims. In this sense, Wahib has written a work related to the characteristics of the traditionalists (Salafists) in Indonesia. In his article, he asserts the use of a nickname is prevalent among Salafists, who are the adherents of orthodox beliefs.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the portrayal of '*umrah*' as part of worship at the end of volume three shows how this act of worship helps to boost the protagonist's flagging morale.

In *Ultimate Glad*, the landscape of Indonesian society is also shown with futuristic images. One example is when a superhero participates in a study at an Islamic boarding school mosque, named *al-Ihsan*, with an *ustādh* as the teacher. The depiction of this activity marks a significant innovation within the conventional framework of superhero comic narratives, which is undoubtedly the result of how the writer's culture influences the depiction. Here, it can be seen how the writer represents Islamic values as trivia to help the development of this Muslim superhero character and how the author implements integration and diffusion to make the story more relatable and make sense. The image of Muslim superheroes and the world-building that are built with a full display of Islamic values shows that Muslim superhero comics in Indonesia have their own criteria and imaginary vision.

## CONCLUSION

Within the diverse realm of Indonesian comics, the appearance of Muslim superheroes such as *Janisaris* and *Ultimate Glad* represents a significant shift in storytelling, as it showcases the fusion of faith and heroism. This incorporation, which deviates from traditional depictions of

<sup>47</sup> Frisk, "What Makes a Hero?" 99.

<sup>48</sup> Although this call is prevalent in Indonesia, it is usually used in families that adhere to the Salafi school of thought. Ahmad Bunyan Wahib, "Being Pious Among Indonesian Salafists," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 1 (2017), 16.

superheroes, represents a notable advancement in the genre. In other words, the two have significantly contributed to the narrative's development of Indonesian Muslim superhero comics. Nevertheless, the lack of Muslim superheroes before this emphasises a yet unexplored potential that is waiting to be discovered. In addition, by employing Frisk's notion of heroism, it becomes clear that the depiction of Muslim superheroes in Indonesian comics, exemplified by *Janisaris* and *Ultimate Glad*, is shaped by a collective process of cultural negotiation and social recognition, rather than a sole intrinsic heroism. It involves several interplays of cultural narratives, ideological expectations and institutional validation within a given society, which, in this sense, are influenced by the Islamic and Indonesian landscape.

As the vivid settings of these comics are already explored, the supervillains and intricately designed universes act as powerful forces driven by the personal imagination of the comics' creators. The subjective values and biases present in these portrayals serve as a catalyst, motivating authors to use their distinct viewpoints to create even more varied and genuine storylines. This has not only made these comics unique but also boosted the comics' value to a higher level, competing with the Western superhero comics, for instance.

Essentially, the trajectory of Indonesian Muslim superhero comics goes beyond mere amusement; it becomes the role of cultural discourse and a source of moral direction. While we enjoy the exciting exploits of these creative heroes, it is important to consider not only observing their development but also promoting a wide range of perspectives. The appeal to authors is to broaden the scope of storytelling, venture into unexplored realms, and contribute to the cultural heritage by creating Indonesian superheroes who, grounded in their faith, serve as sources of inspiration for future generations. Thus, comics in this type of genre are still rarely found and this research is still limited to these two comics. Further study is also required in the field of Muslim superhero comics, not in its *da'wa* message, but to a broader subjectivity and influence of the author on the comics.

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