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**NEGOTIATING FEMINIST IDEOLOGY IN ASMA NADIA'S NOVEL  
ASSALAMUALAIKUM BEIJING**  
(Negosiasi Ideologi Feminis dalam Novel Asma Nadia *Assalamualaikum Beijing*)

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**Abstrak**

*Feminis dan Islam sering dibenturkan sebagai ideologi yang berlawanan. Islam sebagai agama seringkali dipandang sebagai sumber munculnya praktik-praktik ketidakadilan terhadap perempuan. Akhir-akhir ini, ada upaya untuk menghidupkan kembali nilai-nilai Islam untuk memperkuat posisi perempuan, terutama bagi mereka yang lahir dan hidup dalam konteks budaya berbasis Islam. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap upaya negosiasi ideologi feminis dalam novel Assalamualaikum Beijing karya Asma Nadia. Feminisme multikultural digunakan sebagai perspektif dalam mengkaji isu ideologi feminis dalam novel dengan asumsi bahwa perempuan tidak diciptakan dan dikonstruksi dengan cara yang sama tetapi bergantung pada latar belakang sosial budayanya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa novel ini menekankan kemandirian perempuan dengan mendorong mereka melalui pendidikan dan karir untuk melepaskan diri dari masalah ekonomi dan sosial. Namun, kemandirian dan kesetaraan perempuan juga harus didukung oleh nilai-nilai agama (Islam). Tampaknya novel ini melawan stereotip yang menganggap atribut agama (Islam) yang melekat pada perempuan sebagai kurungan atau bentuk subordinasi, seperti hijab dan taaruf, namun atribut tersebut justru menjadi bentuk pembebasan dan otonomi perempuan.*

**Kata-kata kunci:** *feminis, Ideologi, nilai-nilai Islam, negosiasi, novel*

**Abstract**

*Feminism and Islam are often viewed as opposing ideologies. Islam as a religion is seen by feminists as the source of the emergence of fraudulent practices against women. However, in the present decade, feminists have developed their ideas dealing with cultural attributes, particularly about Islamic rule on women. There has been an effort to enliven Islamic values to strengthen the position of women, especially for those who were born and live in an Islamic-based culture. This article aims to reveal the negotiation of feminist ideology in Assalamualaikum Beijing novel written by Asma Nadia. Multicultural feminism is used as a perspective in examining how feminist ideology is negotiated in the novel. The assumption that women are not created and constructed in the same social and cultural circumstances, thereby having a different way to exist in society. The results show that the novel emphasizes women's independence by encouraging women's education and career to liberate themselves from economic and social shortcomings. However, women's independence and equality must also be in line with religious (Islamic) values. It seems that the novel fights against the stereotypes of Islamic attributes attached to women as confinement or a form of subordination, such as hijab and taaruf, these attributes, on the other hand, become a form of women's self-liberation and autonomy.*

**Keywords:** *feminist, ideology, Islamic values, negotiation, novel*

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## INTRODUCTION

It cannot be denied that many literary works, like novels, represent religion being conflicted with feminism that promotes the idea of women's liberation. The works used to depict the oppression and subordination of women in patriarchal society are rationalized and legalized by the religious rules, not only in Islam but also other Abrahamic (*Samawi*) religions. Some considered that religion has been accused as the source of doctrine of inferiority and injustice against women since it is considered has given birth to the myth of women's body and their role has become the source of women's bitter oppression that continue to be reproduced in patriarchal discourse (Rasiah, 2021). As a result, literature promotes the struggle of feminists in relegating religion in their movement, and attacks its thoughts, rules, and attributions as the sources of woman inequality, marginalization, and even violence.

Ade Putra, Yasnur Asri, and Yenni Hayat (2018) depicted the construction of the role of women in Indonesia novels in the 1920s by focusing on the novel *Sitti Nurbaya*, *Azab dan Senggsara*, *Kehilangan Mestika*, and *Manusia Bebas*. They revealed that the construction of women in these novels are obedient to their parents, because they cannot resist the tradition of seclusion, married out of necessity, marry someone she did not love, being disobedient wife to the husband for marrying without the basis of love, and to be a woman who only work in the domestic areas instead of the public sector. It seems that the construction of women is based on the Islamic principle on women that emphasized women as docile either to their parents and husband.

Critique on religious principle on women also depicted in the contemporary Indonesian novel. Solichah and Sudrajat (2016) investigated representation of feminism in Ayu Utami's novel trilogy (*Si Parasit Lajang*, *Cerita Cinta Enrico* and *Pengakuan ex-Parasit Lajang*). Women in these novels pictured struggling to exist and liberate their sexuality. The women's struggle consisted against the concept of marriage, beauty, virginity, and sexual behavior. These novels seem radically stricken back the ideas of being women in patriarchal society that extracted one of them, from religion rules on how to be an ideal woman.

Being ideal women in Islam is clear dealing with marriage and beauty. However, feminist often considered the attribute that women should be obliged by women is somewhat unfair in case it is juxtaposed to men. Mernisi, a Moroccan feminist, for example, used to consider that Islam is bigoted towards women (Asyadily, 2019). Mernisi (Asyadily, 2019) flicked on the attribution of hijab that has nothing to do with the women purity and piety. Hijab, however, is a manifestation of the decline of social attitudes for women. Hasyim (2013) argued that attributes of clothing; hijab, pre-marital engagement; *ta'aruf*, and polygamy are three of a series of rules that seen as form of restraint against women liberation.

However, the backlash emerged in the present time of Indonesian literature. Feminists, specifically Muslim feminist turned to enliven Islamic rules upon women as a power since the Holy Qur'an has been recognizing women's rights and elevating their honor. Hakim (2012), argued that contemporary Indonesian literature, let's say, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, represented the image of a

modernist Muslim woman. Muslim woman in the novel (and film) is portrayed as an independent figure in the social and economic sectors as well as exists with the outstanding attribute of Islam, like wearing hijab. This novel seems to promote the idea of gender equality in Islam, that women since the beginning of their creation have been equated with men, as God has determined that there is no any difference between men and women except the level of piety (Hasyim, 2013; Kencana, 2012). In addition, the presence of the Muslim middle-class community has formed a social identity including religious identity, class, race, ethnicity, and gender, which determined an individual's position in his or her social relationships or interactions. The social class of Muslims also remarked a political identity; nationality, and citizenship, which is this political identity determines the position of individuals in a community through a sense of belonging and, at the same time, marks the 'otherness' that becomes outstanding (Harahap, 2014).

Negotiation of identity for Muslim women is a must in almost context of society, since they fought harder for the striking differences in culture and idealism that they have to embrace. Nur Aisyah (2020) identified Pakistani-American Muslim Women identity negotiation in diaspora literature, such as *Saffron Dreams* (2009) written by Shaila Abdullah. The novel showed that American Muslim women negotiated mindfully by adapting American culture and shaping hybrid identity. They changed their fashion style, one of them, by putting off their *hijab*. They also changed their Arabic names into Americans to hide their religious identity. Sujinah & Savira Isnah (2020) observed the representation of Muslim identity in children's cyber literature; *Upin & Ipin*, *Nussa & Rara*. *Upin Ipin* in Malaysian

context represented Islam without forcing Islamic symbols through its main character, otherwise *Nussa-Rara* (Indonesian's product) attached Islamic symbols to the main characters. *Upin Ipin* more emphasized in utterances as representation of Islamic attributes, on the other hand, *Nussa-Rara* represented Islamic attributes through a cap, koko shirt, hijab, calligraphy, and quotations from the Quran. *Upin Ipin* provides a new meaning of the status quo about Muslim representation, namely "no cap does not mean non-Muslim". Meanwhile *Nussa-Rara* represented Islamic attributes as commodity in Indonesia.

Al-Abdallah (2022) examines the way in which cultural critique and representation of Islamic traditions have been achieved through images, multi-narrative perspective, and verbal description of images using Western symbols to avoid offense against doctrine. Yousef Al-Mohameed's *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* was one of the objects. Through Anthropological analysis, Al-Abdallah argued that representation of Saudi Arabian culture through Western symbols in the novel was mistranslated, and the Arabian adoption of Western symbols used by the novelist as a form of critique. Michel Tournier's *The Golden Droplet* critiques the western representation of Islamic cultural appropriation which forces and imposes a false image of the Algerian Islamic world during French imperialism. Al-Abdallah concluded that the Islamic representation of the West has been generated a critique against the colonial haze. The Islamic form of representation is indicated to mediate truth more than a form of western representation.

Moona Maghfirah (2020) also displayed more specifically on the representation of hijab as seen in American brands advertisements, such as Nike, American Eagle, Covergirl, Fenty

Beauty, and GAP. The meaning of Muslim women models refer to the current phenomena of Muslim beauty and lifestyle. It is implied a deconstruction of a negative stereotype of Muslim women in America, beauty standard, and egalitarianism values. It could be argued the advertisement is an underground movement of Muslim women as their resistance to negative stigmas in American society by expressing Muslim identities as particular and outstanding.

This study discusses the negotiation of feminist ideology (and Islam) in the novel *Assalamualaikum Beijing* (2014) written by Asma Nadia. This novel presents three prominent female characters: Asma, Anita, and Sekar to present how Islamic attributes and feminism incorporated to generate a new representation of women. They are displayed to reconstruct women representation in literature by negotiating elements of feminist ideas and Islamic principles. Islam and feminism often clash as if they are in a big and opposite relationship. However, Islam and Feminists in the novel *Assalamualaikum Beijing* appear in close relation. The author chose characters, events, and settings that allowed the readers understand that women have to internalize Islamic values and feminism in order to exist in the Indonesian context of life. This article then intends to show how the negotiation of feminism ideas and Islamic values in the novel *Assalamualaikum Beijing* performed.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Humm in the *Dictionary of Feminist Theories* (1990) defined feminism as an ideology of women's liberation by assuming that women experienced injustice and inequality because of their gender. In its development, feminism promotes

resistance against oppression, domination, hegemony, injustice, and violence experienced by women (Heroepoetri & Valentina, 2004). From the ideology of resistance, feminism triggers the action of liberating women from all injustices. Thus, feminism is "a movement to end sexism, exploitation, oppressions" (Hooks, 2000: 1).

Within the scope of literature, feminism relates to the concept of feminist literary criticism, it is an approach that directs the focus of analysis on women. Feminism is a source for feminist literary criticism. Ruthven (1984: 32) added that feminist literary criticism works by tracing the ideology that shapes literary works and showing the differences between what the works say and what appear from a reading. Feminist literary criticism actually presents a critical concept of the perspective of a work with a special awareness, namely the awareness that there is a gender that has a lot to do with culture, literature, and life. Reading literature from feminist point of view means reading with an awareness of dismantling preconceived notions and ideologies of endocentric and patriarchal male power that dominate the process of writing and reading of literature (Culler, cited in Rasiah, 2021).

The problem of the negotiation of ideologies feminism and Islam in *Assalamualaikum Beijing* novel was analyzed through a multicultural feminist perspective, since it is representing feminist thought in a specific society and culture. Multicultural feminism is the recent movement in the timeline of feminist waves.

Krolokke & Sorensen (2006) divided the feminist movement into three waves. The first wave took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It developed in the context of industrial society and liberal politics and connected

with equal access and opportunities for women, especially to open opportunities for women with a focus on voting rights. The second wave of feminists emerged in the second half of the 20th century, namely the 1960s and 1970s. It emerged in the context of the anti-war and civil rights movements and the growing of self-consciousness of various minority groups around the world. Sexuality and reproductive rights became the dominant issues, and much of the movement's energy was focused on passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution which guaranteed social equality regardless of gender. The third wave of feminism began around the mid-90s which was influenced by postcolonial and postmodern thought. Krollokke & Sorensen (2006) revealed that third wave feminism opposes the notion of a universal definition of feminism and embraces the various theories, ambiguities, politics, and personal experiences that shape feminism. Rampton (2008) argued that in the third phase of feminism, there are many constructions that are not stable, including the notions of "universal femininity", body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity. Third wave feminists are defined as celebrating ambiguity by refusing to think in terms of "us-them".

The problem of negotiation of feminism ideology (and Islamic values) as exposed in this study actually deals with the third wave of feminism that promotes diversity. Postmodern thought has allowed the rise of, one of them, multicultural feminism that emphasizes ideologies to support diversity. It assumes that women are not created or constructed in the same circumstances, but in a different context of social background; race, ethnicity, and class, as well as sexual tendencies, age, religion and educational attainment, occupation, marital status, and health conditions

(Tong, 1998). Through their diverse backgrounds, women believed they would have different experiences, different problems, and different ways to solve not referring to an axis centered on Western women.

Brooks (1998) argued that multicultural feminist as inspired by postmodernism opposes the hegemonic assumptions held by previous feminists' epistemology which considered patriarchal and imperialist oppression as a universal experience of oppression. The way of women exist will be dispersed in various social classes, racial and ethnic groups, sexual communities, subcultures, and religions. Multicultural feminist perspective enabled the analysis on how women exist and find solutions to their problem of life and embraced their distinct socio-cultural environment. Bryant-Davis (2019) stated that multicultural feminist attempt to attend the marginalized voices in the field and the larger society. It centers on women of color, whom many psychologists have historically polished over or painted in quiet tones. Bryant-Davis takes an example in American context that psychologists—including feminist and multicultural psychologists—have often suspended the voices and experiences of girls of color like; Africa, Asia, and Latin Americans. Least work exists on the application of empirical studies for cultivating treatment approaches and strategies that centralize the concerns, strengths, and well-being of adolescent girls of color. Multicultural feminist psychology recognizes the need for the creation of practical. For the most part, they did not want to maintain their ethnic identities. On the contrary they "*expected*" to become a new one.

Although multicultural feminism is centered and born in American social context that promotes a variety of feminist thought that called women-of-

color feminism in the United States, it relates to see the multicultural feminist in the rest of the globe. The assumption of multicultural feminist that women who settle in specific cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those minorities group deserve special acknowledgment of their differences within dominant political culture justify the possibility to apply the perspective in seeing the phenomena of feminist in other context of culture, like in Indonesia with its local indigenous and Islamic values.

Multicultural feminist perspective is applied to see how Indonesian woman writer represents Indonesian women dealing with gender equality in Indonesian Islamic context. It is about how Islamic values are incorporated with feminist ideas to support and strengthen women existence in Indonesia. The incorporation of feminist ideas and Islamic rules, some called it as Muslim feminist in the context of Islamic states. Hidayatullah (2011) explain that since 1999s and early 2000s Muslim feminist theology theory flourished by connecting the vision and mission of feminism in struggling for human equality and spirit of equality in Islam. Islam had already equalized the degrees of women and men humanity. It is obviously declared in the Holy Qur'an. Meanwhile, this has been a center of critique in other feminist thought either; the *hijab* is the prison etc.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design with descriptive-interpretive analysis. The source of data of this study is the text of novel *Assalamualaikum Beijing* which published in 2014 by Asma Nadia Publishing Company. It was also supported by the secondary data, such as other relevant novels and articles to support the finding. Data gathered

through reading, note-taking, identifying, and cataloging to cultivate the subheading as the finding of this study.

## DISCUSSION

There are two main findings that indicate negotiation of feminist ideology in the novel *Assalamualaikum Beijing*. First, encouraging women's education and career to overcome economic and social problems, the second is attaching Islamic attributes to women identity and behavior.

Encouraging women's education and career are becoming the essence of feminist ideas on struggling women's nonphysical quality to deserve independence and equality in the societal life system. However, to gain self-independence and equality in the Indonesian-Muslim context, women must also internalize Islamic values to define themselves as particular and individual. *Hijab* is the symbol of women compulsory outfit and *Taaruf* is a way to befriending a fiancé. The mingling of Islamic and feminist values is the alternative way since women need to enhance their own qualities, not only through intellectual and position in the public sphere but also spiritual quality. Nadia represented the intersection of Islamic and feminist values, who was later confirmed as the conveyer of the mission of feminism who internalized Islamic values in the novel.

### Educated and Career Women

In *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, the idea of educated women is maintained as the convention of a feminist novel. Educated women are presented through two main characters, namely Asma and Anita. Asma is the main protagonist character, who is described as an educated and working woman.

Information that Asma is an educated woman is explained in Asma's university days with a man named Dewa. Dewa and Asma studied at the same campus and they used to meet at several places and occasion on campus, such as the library, campus mosque, and bus stops (Nadia, 2014: 3). However, it is not explained in detail what Asma's education is like and how her achievements on campus are. However, she is explained as a bachelor.

Asma is described working as a Columnist in an Islamic magazine. Through this work, she had an opportunity to visit Beijing to trace and report Islamic sites and the history of Islam in China to be published in the magazine. The following quote illustrates Asma's trip to Beijing with her self-attribute as a Muslim woman.

Jilbab warna cerahnya tertiuip angin kencang yang menembuskan hawa dingin November. Jauh dari suhu di Hong Kong beberapa jam lalu yang dingin, tetapi tidak sampai menimbulkan kebas hingga sulit menggerakkan bibir, memaksa gadis itu merapatkan jaket tebalnya. "Jangan khawatir, China setelah olimpiade maju kok. Pasti banyak yang bisa bahasa Inggris!" Sekar menjelaskannya (Nadia, 2014: 9).

The important clues that can be underlined from the quote are trips abroad and the English language. These two important codes emphasize Asma's education: she has the opportunity to get a job because she has the skills or abilities to support her career. Proficiency in English shows that Asma is an up-to-date woman and her mobility. The mobility leads to a wide opportunity for a career.

Suatu berkah tersendiri jika saat traveling bisa berjalan bersama warga lokal, seperti hari terakhir ini. Banyak detail yang memperkuat reportase

perjalanan untuk majalah tempat Ra (Asma-ra) bekerja. Hal-hal yang tidak diperoleh hanya dengan riset computer atau pustaka, dan biasanya dimiliki penduduk setempat (Nadia, 2014: 113).

Travel reportage is not an ordinary job; it requires skill and courage. The ability to negotiate and communicate with local residents is also very much needed in this job. When Asma became a columnist in the magazine, it is certain that she has not only good literacy skills but also the courage to travel long distances. This kind of ability is presented to prove that if women have the ability and the opportunity, they can do heavy jobs as men do.

Similar to Anita in the novel, information about her education is implicitly found in the excerpt when her mother counted the *primbon* to fit the selection of Anita's major in college, supported by an explanation of her family background as an educated family (Nadia, 2014: 48). Meanwhile, Anita is described working in a private company. She is having a 'decent' position (Nadia, 2014: 106) which led her to an established economic outcome.

Education and career seem to be inseparable in the representation of women in the feminist novel. Education becomes a capital for women to enter a public world and insist themselves as dominants and quit labeling themselves as the inferior and second after the men. As proposed by Beauvoir (cited in Tong, 1998: 274) that if women intent to stop their label as the second or "other" sex, they must be able to overcome the forces of the environment by education. Through education, women can become intellectuals (educated), women can work to achieve social transformation. Women can also identify themselves as dominants in society. Asma Nadia, the author of the

novel, sustains the idea of education in elevating women's existence in societal life. Asma and Anita are the representation of the ideal women in the feminist perspective in the novel. They are described as the most up-to-date women who fit the spirit of the present era.

### **Islamic Attributes as the Code of Identity and Behavior**

*Assalamualaikum Beijing* is a novel that can be clustered in the Islamic-themed novel since the story is tied to Islamic principles. As the Islamic-themed novel, *Assalamualaikum Beijing* engaged itself with Islamic-based art to present a favorable impression and emphasize goodness (*ma'ruf*) and Islamic principles (Musa, 2012). The favorable impression and goodness based on Islamic principles are displayed in the novel by presenting the Islamic attributes in positive construction. Two outstanding attributes denoted in this novel are *jilbab* or *hijab* as the mandatory outfit for Muslim women and *taaruf* as the way of acknowledging a fiancé.

Different from the previous feminist view, *jilbab* here denotes women's independence and individuality. The bearer of the mission is the main female character named Asma who returns to apply Islamic principles in her life after doing a long reflection on the events that have happened to women so far. Likewise, *Taaruf* is also presented to glorify the approaching manner of man and woman as fiancés in Islamic rule.

### ***Jilbab as a Code of Women Freedom and Individuality***

*Jilbab* in *Assalamualaikum Beijing* can be identified through two female characters: Asma and Sekar. Asma wears short *jilbab* while Sekar wears long *jilbab*. The two women insist

on identifying themselves as Muslim women who are emancipated and individual. *Jilbab* as an identity code is seen when Asma travels to Beijing. In the novel, it is stated that:

Jilbab warna cerahnya tertup angin kencang yang menembuskan hawa dingin November. Jauh dari suhu di Hong Kong beberapa jam lalu yang dingin, tetapi tidak sampai menimbulkan kebas hingga sulit menggerakkan bibir, memaksa gadis itu merapatkan jaket tebalnya.

...begitu selesai dengan urusan bagasi, dia memerlukan waktu hampir empat puluh menit dan enam orang bermata sipit, hanya untuk menemukan bus yang akan membawanya ke Youth Hostel sederhana yang telah dipesan (Nadia, 2014: 9).

The quote asserts three significances of *jilbab*; *jilbab* is a symbol of identity, freedom, and individuality. *Jilbab* and identity in the quote were clearly performed when she traveled to Beijing. The choice of bright *jilbab* color on Asma's trip to Beijing is certainly encoding the affirmation of Muslim women's identity and autonomy in the midst of Communist society as labeled by Chinese people. The slanted eyes and the cold November temperature explain the differences in Asma's physical and geographical space. The color of the red *jilbab* seems to be able to confront Beijing's cold temperatures and emphasize her distinct identity among different people.

Traveling to Beijing also indicated *jilbab* as a symbol of freedom and individuality. Asma can travel without anxiety with her *jilbab*. This way, at once negating the stereotype of the *jilbab* which is often symbolized as a form of women subordination. Asma, in contrast, can manage herself to travel wherever she

wants and determines herself as particular and outstanding with her specific attributes.

Sekar, on the other hand, is described as a woman who wears a longer jilbab after getting married. In the novel, Sekar is described by Asma as a best friend:

Sekar tak bosan mengobati rasa apatisnya tentang cinta. Gadis yang sebelum berjilbab mudah patah hati semudah dia jatuh cinta, dan dikemudian hari malah menikah dengan seseorang yang tidak dikenalnya. "Kenapa"? Satu kata yang tidak bisa dicegahnya meluncur saat Sekar dengan wajah riang menyampaikan kabar baik, hari lamaran yang segera tiba. "Kenapa tidak"? jawaban sahabat yang kerudungnya semakin lebar setelah menikah itu, membuat Asma merenung berhari-hari.

Sekar is represented as an independent woman who decided to marry a man by arrangement without knowing each other before. After marriage, she is getting her *jilbab* longer to insist her identity without stopping her way to adore Korean artists or enjoy Korean Drama as her favorite. It signified that wearing *jilbab* is not meant caging women or restricting women preference as long as it is not forbidden in the context of Islam.

The attribution of women with Islamic dress codes is to assert the changing meaning of *jilbab* in the novel. In the past, the jilbab or *hijab* was often accused of being a means to restrict women's movement and mobility. This view can be found in the opinion of Mernissi, for example, who said that *hijab* is a form of inequality for women (Khairunnisa, 2017). The same response was also proposed by Asma Barlas (Khalil & Thahir, 2021). Barlas criticized

the understanding of Muslims, especially the products of conservative cleric interpretation, which reduces the meaning of the *hijāb* to the obligation to wear the headscarf. According to her, the obligation to perform *hijāb* by wearing the headscarf is still influenced by the mindset of the 'jāhiliyyah' society, which is patriarchal and misogynistic (Khalil & Thahir, 2021: 76). *Jilbab* is seen as a force, used to protect herself from potential chaos and disobedience.

Lately, *hijab* actually has developed its meaning. It is not only related to the obligation to cover genitalia but has also become a women's lifestyle. Umam (2020) elaborates the change of Leila Ahmed's opinion about *jilbab*. Previously, she used to think that *jilbab* was a symbol of intolerance and not the main symbol of piety; she now understands that for many women, *jilbab* is a symbol of individuality and justice. Leila observed years of developments that have taken place, especially in Egypt and the Arab world and the lives of Muslims in America after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Leila admits that the vision of social justice from Islam is now being implanted into a pluralist and democratic society. Gender equality and justice became the common voices that brought Islamic feminism to life in America. Today, there are many descendants of American political Islamic activists at the forefront of fighting for women's rights.

The facts showed that in order to exist in society, Muslim women must look back at their socio-cultural context since they were born into and shaped by the Islamic cultural context. Asma and Sekar in the novel have a vision of freedom and individuality that is shown through her *jilbab* or *hijab* as a code of identity and behavior as Muslim women. It is clearly asserted when she traveled to different countries and people.

### ***Taaruf as a Manner of Knowing the Fiance***

Another attribute that appears in the novel *Assalamualaikum Beijing* is the glorification of *ta'aruf* as the way of knowing a fiancé. *Taaruf* is presented explicitly through conversations between Asma and Sekar about how to get closer to a man for a future fiancé or husband.

“Ada taaruf, proses perkenalan. Sebagai Muslimah kita boleh bertanya apa saja untuk menjajaki kesamaan visi, dan melihat apakah ada hal-hal yang akan menimbulkan rasa sayang” (Nadia, 2014: 87).

*Taaruf* as a process of introducing fiancé is fully applied by Asma in responding to the adulterous risk cases. Asma observed her circumstances that many women victimized in the illegal relationship of man and woman, as well as women ends up their life miserable or humiliated. The following quote illustrates the reality of a woman and man's relation before marriage.

Namun realitas di sekitar adalah jawaban yang datang tanpa perlu dicari.

Mulanya berduaan, lalu saling menautkan jari, mencium pipi, dan seterusnya. Tidak selalu berakhir ke perzinahan, tetapi zina tak terjadi tanpa percumbuan.....

Asma mulai mengerti mengapa Islam menetapkan aturan sangat keras terhadap kedekatan fisik laki-laki dan perempuan sebelum menikah. Nasihatnya terhadap teman-teman muslimah yang galau soal cinta pun berubah.

“Dalam Islam nggak ada kamus pedekate tanpa niat menikah”

“Lihat apakah dia merencanakan masa depan bersamamu.”

“Cinta memang harus dibuktikan, tapi ini tidak boleh jadi alasan pacarmu meminta lebih dari yang dibolehkan dalam agama.” (Nadia, 2014: 89).

*Taaruf* is then performed as a solution for finding a fiancé in the context of Indonesia and Islamic society today. Asma's appreciation of the concept of *ta'aruf* is not a speedy decision but the result of a long process of observing the blasphemy and violence experienced by women who committed adulterous and illegal love relationships. A woman was not only sexually abused, she also vulnerable to murder. During school time, Asma was unable to understand how a girl sacrificed her ‘virginity’ to a man who does not even have pride in himself. Many cases of promiscuity ended in abortion and suicide. Asma read newspaper headlines that reported "a girl was found dead naked in a ditch" (Nadia, 2014: 90). Another news is "a beautiful student who went missing was found passed away in her car" (Nadia, 2014: 90).

The series of events above are the implications of freedom, which has been heralded as the right of everyone, including women. However, the impact actually becomes a boomerang for women themselves. The promotion of freedom that is glorified by women in the western world cannot be fully implemented in the context of Indonesian and Islamic society. Asma began to understand why Islam stipulates strict rules on the physical closeness of men and women before marriage. Apparently, there is an impact caused by this closeness, which mostly ends up miserable for women.

It is admitted that women in this era has got and experienced a significant shift in social class positions. In the business

and managerial fields, for example, changes and shifts exist. Positions that were previously dominated by men shifted to women. This is not only happening in highly developed countries but also in newly industrialized countries and even in developing countries, like Indonesia (Lubis, 2006). However, a negative impact emerges from the progress of women's achievements in the era, namely the moral and spiritual lives are now starting to be neglected (Wirosarjono, 1995). Material life, which is often viewed as the level of achievement and the core of all problems in life, actually attacks women. Religion is periodically and gradually repressed, openly ridiculed, and perhaps even criticized and despised (Ahmed, 1992). The dominance of the rationalistic-scientific way of thinking seems to have begun to lead to a loss of understanding of the interrelationships of the spiritual field in human life.

Anita's character can be used as a representation of modern women who are performing the established life of a woman. Her inability to control herself in a relationship with a man dropped her back into the ditch of the patriarchal system.

Bagi Anita, hal tersebut sama sekali bukan alasan untuk mundur, justru menambah semangat menaklukkan lelaki itu. Dia belum pernah ditolak sebelumnya. Parasnya cantik, lekuk tubuh menarik, kulitnya putih dan hidungnya mancung. Entah dari mana Anita mendapatkan nuansa blasteran. Berbeda dengan adiknya yang, walaupun berpendidikan modern, tetapi penampilan, juga cara berpikir dan prilakunya benar-benar Jawa tulen (Nadia, 2014: 49).

Anita's physical association with a beautiful and sexy half-blood is actually in order to emphasize woman with

seductive behavior, especially in establishing relationships with a man. The difference in her way of thinking and behavior from her brother, who is highly educated but still adopts pure Javanese way of life, is a reflection that Anita has far away left the ethics and way of life in her society. She has adopted an independent but uncontrolled lifestyle. She is described as having a perfect physical appearance and then appearing as a seductive woman. The consequences of Anita's courage led her to a forbidden love affair, which was only motivated by sheer lust. One night's love based on lust, in the end, leads to a big regret. Anita is caught in a difficult position. She was neglected and imprisoned by a man she dated; even after marriage, she lived an unhappy life.

Anita is presented differently from Asma in the novel *Assalamualaikum Beijing* to show her feminist view. Anita carries a feminist mission in the context of Western society, which generally views bodily autonomy as a woman's full right, regardless of the socio-cultural context of Indonesia and Islam that surrounds her. As a result, she, although beautiful and well-established, could not escape from the trap of the patriarchal system. She is in a difficult position when she came to a husband who does not want her. After six months of her unhappy marriage, she returned to traditional roles: "treated her husband well, must be "tied" in a good way so the husband is not running away" (Nadia, 2014: 105-106). Her freedom and independence were ruined after she was married. She is burdened by the act of forbidden love as the result of her love affairs. In this position, Anita endures all neglect. She tries to win the man she married by releasing the various attributes she already had; she gives up work in the office and becomes a housewife who fully devotes her life to her husband. She

also became a person who was economically and socially dependent on: her husband and her parents.

The idea of body autonomy belongs to women seems like a challenging idea that Asma Nadia put forward in this novel. Initially, the autonomy of the body is put forwarded by Western feminism in order to respond to the mystical body of women who were seen as 'other' and placed as a second class (Friedan in Gamble, 2004). However, the body autonomy brought uncontrolled freedom that put women back into a patriarchal system cage in Indonesia and the Islamic context. Saptandari (2013: 68) asserts that perspectives, meanings, beliefs, and behaviors related to women's bodies, sexuality, and health are influenced by social, cultural, economic, and political factors that work in symbolic power in a specific context of social culture. Hence, the solution will be to go back to the context of society itself.

Udaya (2021) identified feminism and Islam as the habitus of *the Assalamualaikum Beijing* novel. Asma Nadia, born of Aceh-Muslim blood and a part of the feminist movement in Indonesia, set the story based on Islamic rule and carried out the idea of feminism in the novel. Nurjuman, Restu, & Kusuma (2018) argued that the representation of the concept of Muslim women is part of the construction of Islam as a group identity. The construction of reality occurs as a result of externalization in the form of interactions between the author and the reality of variants of Islamic thought, the reality of women's progress, the reality of the negative stigma of Western civilization against Islam, and the reality of the symbolic trend of religious life. The result of this externalization then becomes an objective reality in the form of awareness

and understanding of the identity of Muslim women, which is signified in the texts of the novel. Internalization occurs when people, especially Muslim women, identify themselves based on their understanding of the texts narrated in the novel as a representation of Muslim women. Asma Nadia's as daily life as an author is indeed supported by the principles of feminism, which are subtly negotiating through Indonesian Islamic social context in her works.

## CONCLUSION

Negotiation of feminist ideology in *Assalamualaikum Beijing* represented through the intersecting of feminist ideas in encouraging of women's non-physical qualities; education and career, to emancipate themselves from economic and social problems. However, it is not merely the point for women in the Indonesian-Islamic context to be completely emancipated; they should also encourage themselves to internalize the attribute and principle of Islam as their life. Wearing a *jilbab* as the Muslim women's outfit and doing *ta'aruf* before marriage are two aspects highlighted in the novels. *Jilbab* and *ta'aruf* are not only to assert Muslim identity, but also to signify the liberation of women. Feminism and Islam can go hand in hand to elevate women's independence in the Indonesian-Islamic context, as expressed in *Assalamualaikum Beijing* novel. By negotiating the two spirits; feminism and Islam, women could exist in Indonesian-Islamic context of life and also identify themselves as Muslim feminists that have the same spirit as other feminists and insist on specific attributes to denote their geographical and cultural hemispheres.

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