

# **SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES IN COMIC BOOKS: A SEMIOLOGY STUDY ON *ARDIAN SYAF'S* CASE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The research aimed at knowing the meaning behind the symbols and messages, both the signifier and the signified which in the end could reveal the meta-language meaning. This research used Semiology approach to analyze the images inside the panels of the comic book of Ardian Syaf's the 'X-Men Gold vol.1: Back to the Basics. The qualitative method of Semiology could successfully explain the media phenomena. The approach was mostly leaned on Barthes' work on new Semiology doctrine which enables the researchers to figure out and prove that the non-verbal communication could have a wide interpretation of some significance meanings. The result of the study indicates that (1) all of the messages are related to the 212 event and Al-Maidah 51, (2) the messages portray the relation between Moslems, Jews, and Christians in the artist's perspective; and (3) all of the messages, though they have a bigger agenda, are related to one character, Kitty Pryde.*

**Keywords:** *subliminal messages, Comic book, semiology*

## **INTRODUCTION**

What is comic? Is it just a collection of pictures with some narratives filled with people in tights and bright colors? Is it just a read-and-throw-away bundle of paper with no literature or art worth keeping? One might argue that comic is not an art or literature, but there are large numbers of scholars that have done some researches about comics. They produce many definitions, approaches, techniques, philosophies, problems, and solutions for that particular field of study. If talk about definition, then the most cherished and largely used definition of the comic comes from McCloud (1994) that has stated that juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer. In short, the comic is a sequential art that tells a story that becomes a medium to bound and mix images and words and involves every sense of the readers. Carrier in Meskin (2007) argues for three essential features of the comic; the speech balloon, the closely linked narrative, and the booksize scale. And yet, the comic is not only consist of those three features; there are the panels, the gutter, color, effects and of course, theme. In another work, Meskin (2009) has said that the best comics (...) develop their themes. That is, readers are not simply confronted with clichés — they are encouraged to work out themes, contemplate them, and make sense of the comics in light of them. Finally, careful and intelligent plotting is a central part of many of the best comics. Therefore, based on those arguments, it might say that comic is a form of art and literature.

A comic is an art and at the same time, a literature in the sense of quality, the number of hours of labors, the number of people involved, the development, and the number of appreciations (through awards, museums, discussion panels, up until conventions). Some comics are of course have a low standard and quality, but some others reach the highest level of literary awards, such as Pulitzer, Hugo, Bram Stoker, National Book Award, etc. *Maus*, for example, a comic book series (serialized from 1980 to 1991) in which later turns into a graphic novel from Art Spiegelman that received the Pulitzer Prize

in 1992. The Comics museums are spread across the world, from Belgium to France, from Canada to the United States, and from Japan to Singapore. Also, the Comic-Cons (Comics Conferences) is held annually in several countries which draw the attention of tens of thousands people from various backgrounds. The University of Florida even opens Comics Studies Course in their English Department. These things make comics have earned the right to be considered art on their own merits. Works such as George Herriman's *Krazy Kat strips*, Spiegel-man's *Maus*, Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (New York, Pantheon: 2000), and the Crumb oeuvre provide incontrovertible evidence of the artistic possibility of the form (Meskin, 2007).

Thus, the act that can connect and influence so many people from many backgrounds to work, to develop, to love, and/or simply to enjoy, is a form of art and literature. LaPlante (2008) has said that comics are no more simply a work of prose than they are simply a collection of unrelated pictures. Comics, under the umbrella of sequential art, constitute their own special medium with their own vocabulary, conventions, and use of symbols. As other kinds of arts and literature, the comic can also be used as a means of communication. All six elements of communication (addresser, context, message, contact, code, and addressee) is really well accommodated in the comic. The visual art of a comic helps the readers to shape a context and thus, ease them to convey more meaning of a message that is given by the team.

In comic, the messages can come in many different ways and intentions. It can be really bold and clear through the panels, or it can be quite subliminal. The writer and artist can deliver their messages through the pictures, the colors, and even the words. Subliminal messages are often performed in order to express the artists' intention in saying their personal and/or group interests. Pictures are considered the best way to carry the message because of their combination of lines, shapes, and colors. This way, comics become a media that can hold those messages, and in its turn, deliver them to the readers. Weselby (2017) writes that the messages can come in the form of different patterns, such as hiding in the complex lines of the hair or bushes in *New X-Men #118*, in the form of scream lines in *Strange Adventures*, in a newspaper headline in *Uncanny X-Men #325*, through shattering glass or chain in *Superman Unchained #3* or even in a billboard *Batgirl #9 New 52*. From the readers' point-of-view, they can easily find and understand those messages or need to do a little research to understand it completely.

Messages can also come from many sources, ranging from personal ideas up until the government's reservation. Most of the artists usually have the own personal agenda concerning their messages. But sometimes, there are some messages that involve a larger group and organization, even country. DC and Marvel, two giant American comics publishers, are often involved in subliminal message war. Recently, through *Deadpool* with his 'funny' character, Marvel mocks DC's *Batman VS Superman* franchise. The appearance of a movie poster in a background that shows a quite similar resemblance to that DC movie in *Spiderman/Deadpool #6* (Kubai, 2017). And from *comicbook.com*, there is a "remake" of *Batman VS Superman's* most popular tagline, "Martha" in *Deadpool Versus The Punisher #5* (Schmidt, 2017).

The creation of *Flash Gordon*, *Captain America*, *Watchmen* – to name a few, is a national agenda that are used as a form of propaganda. *Flash Gordon* is created to portray the supremacy of white people; blond, handsome, highly educated, smart, and strong, while his enemy, *Ming the Mercilles* is created as a representation of an unexplored world of East; oriental-looking, barbaric, uncivilized, treacherous, and evil. *Captain America* is intended to boost the spirit of the American to embrace patriotism and educate them "the American Way". The American super soldier fights the evil Nazi agents bravely and portrayed to be always won his battle.

In order to understand the comics, it also needs the understanding of how the comics are made. The comic industry in the United States cherishes a lot of different aspects. Apart from the marketing and selling of the product, the comic making process involves a lot of talents. There are at least four

people involved in making a comic book. A writer writes a story which then collaborates with an artist, the penciller who would make the story come to life with his/her drawings. The pages of pencil drawing version of the story then reprint into a larger media (usually in A3 paper size) which then deliver to the inker. The inker's job is not only to put ink lines over the pencil version of the drawings but also determines the ink's thickness, the light and dark shadows, the background and the details. The colorist then colors the result with the agreed color tones. The creativity is challenged here since the mainstream comics in the United States have its own story archs (e.g., Superman's suit is blue with a red cape, Batman's is black or dark blue, etc.). During those process, the communication between those four talents should be properly maintained and intensively done. Thus, hundreds of hours of work labor are spent and invested in order to make a 24 to 28 pages of a comic book story.

The story arch is usually determined by the company and/or the creator of the characters. The writer, the penciler, the inker, and the colorist are bound to that arch, although there is a portion of the story left for the creativity and development. The penciler, since he/she is the one who materializes the writer's ideas of the story, has the most of the creativity at hand. He/she could put or add small details to his/her drawings without disrupting the story as a whole. That details are sometimes meant as an announcement, an act of protest or faith, or just humor. Essentially, it contains messages that can be big or small, but it is still messages that are never meant to be random 'fillers' for empty backgrounds.

In early 2017, Ardian Syaf, an Indonesian comic artist, penciled *The X-Men Gold Series* under Marvel Publishing. According to [www.ew.com](http://www.ew.com), this series is an ongoing comic book that is published twice monthly and initially created by Marc Guggenheim as the writer and Syaf as the artist (Serrao, 2016). The first comic book was released in April 2017 and soon became a controversy for some subliminal messages in the drawings. This case becomes an international controversy since the messages involve some political, racist, and religious agenda that involve the Indonesian 212 Muslim rally, a Holy Quran verse, and other anti-semitic messages. The writer needs to see the meaning behind those messages and its impact on the people, both in the comic book industry and the people in general. The nature of the American comic book industry and Semiology perspective are used in order to understand the meta-language behind those messages and then, it is expected to reveal the intention of the artist and the meaning behind them.

## METHODS

This research uses Semiology approach to analyze the images inside the panels of the comic book. The qualitative method of Semiology can successfully explain the media phenomena, which in this case, comic book images. The approach is mostly leaned on Barthes' work on new Semiology doctrine which enables the researchers to figure out and prove that the non-verbal communication can have a wide interpretation of some significance meanings. Bouzida (2014) has explained:

“Barthes works show new semiotics doctrine that allowed analyzing the sign systems to prove how even nonverbal communication is open to interpretations through connotative meanings.” And the semiological analysis of the visual signs/image deals with reading, explaining, analyzing the image and explaining its significance in the sign system. This process represents a symbolic interaction between the denotative and the connotative meanings. Barthes expressed that the photographic image contains two co-existent messages: the first without a code which is denoted and the second with a code which is connoted.”

Along with Bouzida's research method (2014), the author also uses the theories from Meskin (2007); (2009), and LaPlante (2008) for the comic theories, while Chandler (2007) and Bouzida (2014)

for the Semiology theories. This research is designed to reveal the denotative and connotative meanings of an image, and in the end, can affirm its new meta-language. The subliminal messages in a comic book are chosen because of its unique presentation and its impact, both for the artist and the readers.

The subliminal messages case of Ardian Syaf is chosen because of several reasons. Media of the messages is drawn in a very popular comic book franchise, the *X-Men Gold #1* from a very popular publisher, Marvel Comics. The intentions of the messages itself concern the political and religious matter in Indonesia. This impact of this case has become viral within days around the net that draws the attention of many parties. It makes Marvel as publisher withdrawn all of its first issues, both the hard copy and e-book editions and discontinues the artist's contract.

There are 5 steps that are used to collect and analyze the data, they are to get the original drawings (pencil edition or the first issue before its withdrawal), to get the revised issue of the comic book, to put both panels (the original and the replacement one side-by-side), to compare those two images (the original and the replacement one) to see the differences; and to analyze the original images using Semiology method. The data is collected through internet and literature search. Although the author is unable to get the original copy of the comic book (which now becomes a collectible item because of its rarity), the images can easily be gained through Syaf's Facebook page or other websites. The revised copy is available freely and downloaded from [www.getcomics.com](http://www.getcomics.com).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ardian Syaf, a comic artist from East Java, Indonesia, has already roamed the United States's comic book industry for approximately 10 years. He is involved in many story projects with some major comic book industries such as DC Comics, Marvel, and The Dabel Brothers Publishing. In 2009 and 2010, he was nominated for Hugo Award for Best Graphic Story that makes him the first Indonesian to have that kind of nomination, two times in a row. As an artist, he does not only become a penciler for a comic book but also expands his services into inking and coloring which makes him a quite all-around artist in the comics industry.

After having an exclusive 2-year contract with DC in 2009, he then moved to Marvel. As a penciler, Syaf has put his subliminal messages several times in his art. In *Batgirl #9 – The New 52*, 2011, he drew an advertisement of the Jakarta's Governor candidate (now president), Mr. Joko Widodo in a billboard, along with Masakan Padang restaurant and *warung* Soto Ayam (Chicken Soup's street food stall) as the background. He put the number "212" in a fireman's helmet which refers to a famous fictional martial artist in Indonesia, Wiro Sableng. Recently, he makes the Hulk run amok in Bagian Neurologi Rumah Sakit Hasan Sadikin Bandung (Neurology section, Hasan Sadikin's Hospital) as a variant cover for the *Incredible Hulk #3* by Aaron and Silvestri (Syaf, 2017).

The *X-Men Gold Series* under Marvel Publishing was his project during the end of 2016 until the April 2017. The first issue was released on April 5, 2017, and soon became a warm controversy around the world when Haykal Al-Qasimi, a Marvel fan, put an open letter to Marvel on his Facebook page (now deleted) on April 8, 2017. He happened to be so observant by mentioning the three clearest subliminal messages (the 212 number, the QS 5:51 on Colossus's shirt, and the 'Jew' writing on the building). He also added some links regarding those matters and asked Marvel to do something about it. Later, Marvel released a statement through [comicbook.com](http://comicbook.com) (Lovett, 2017),

"The mentioned artwork in *X-Men Gold #1* was inserted without knowledge behind its reported meanings. These implied references do not reflect the views of the writer, editors or anyone else at Marvel and are in direct opposition of the inclusiveness of

Marvel Comics and what the X-Men have stood for since their creation. This artwork will be removed from subsequent printings, digital versions, and trade paperbacks and disciplinary action is being taken.”

Since then, Syaf is being non-activated by Marvel and no longer continuing his work on *X-Men Gold*, although some of his previous art are still being used in the series (by that time, he has already drawn series #1-#3 and several cover arts). The first issue (both hard and soft copy) though, is withdrawn that very same week and replaced with a revised version.

All those things are signs and in order to properly understand the meaning of them and need to employ the science of Semiology. But then, in order to do the Semiology research on comics, it needs to make the understanding in comics be in the same frequency that compares a paragraph (in writings) to a panel (in comics). If a word can be understood to be equal with a single image, then a sentence should be considered to be in par with a panel, then, a paragraph (or several, depends on the readers' reading skill, knowledge, context understanding) can be taken as the sequence of panels. Thus, one inexperienced comics reader can read comics simply just like reading a novel, like LaPlante (2008) has said,

“... if a single word can be thought of as being equivalent to a single image (each has a fairly limited range of readings, but allows for some variety depending on who is doing the reading) then cannot a string of separate pictures be sequenced to form a meaningful unit in the same way that a string of words can be sequenced to form a sentence? Once this connection is made, it becomes apparent that in the same way that the grammar of a written language controls the meaning of words based on their relation to each other in sequence, so too is the meaning of a sequence of images dependent on their spatial relationship to one another. In a sense, a visual grammar is established.”

The ability of the visual medium of comics to emphasize eyes, mouths, hand/arm positions, and volume can easily represent the certain manifestation of human feeling (Stamenković & Tasić, 2014). That statement is in line with Cohn (2012) that said the ultimate objects of the (comic) study should be the abstract representations and principles in the human mind that motivate comprehension of various domains. The human comprehension is based on the number of information that they have about one or some certain objects and from an information design perspective, and comics have the ability to fuse graphical and informational content in a unique way that traditional works of literature do not (Ayer, 2014). The understanding of the story of the comic depends on how many signs and messages (both graphical and informational) at the medium that can convey and understand.

Signs, in Saussurean Semiology, should be able to be examined and understood its systems and meanings, as it has been explained in Chandler (2007), that said it is possible to conceive of a science which learns the role of signs as part of social life. It would form part of social psychology, and hence of general psychology that shall call it semiology (from the Greek *sēmēion*, ‘sign’). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. That explanation then is added and developed by Barthes as it is described in Bouzida (2014),

“Semiology as a qualitative method applied in media research helps the researcher to discover the hidden meanings of the visual texts: films, adverts, posters... within the socio-cultural context, it means the analysis of media phenomenon as a system through the manifested signs whether verbal or non-verbal that can be studied as Barthes proposed in his approach according to the two levels of signification, i.e., denotation and connotation. Media messages/visual ones are studied by using this analytical approach as texts need deep reading in order to develop the different interpretations of this message.”

Semiology cherishes the implications that a sign can ever give. Any kinds of signs from the alphabet to words, from a single image to a movie, bear the significant messages and meaning behind the existence. Those signs of messages can be really visible to the readers (or viewers), or can also be needed to be examined a little deeper under research in order to reveal the true meaning. There are, of course, a personal intention of the writer (and the artist) to put the message in his/her arts, a phenomenon behind the message(s), and the creativity that determines the placing of the message. The sign then carries a concept and a pattern. In Chandler (2007), Saussure has explained the concept and pattern as a speech act (*parole*) which is created from a system (*langue*). The comics have a similar concept with speech, in which if it puts in the code overlay, it may say that the image is the sign, the material aspect of the image is the signifier, and the mental aspect/the concept that is given by the image is the signified. That image, then, can be considered as a new sign in a new meta-language. Figure 1 contains several subliminal messages in the first issue of the *X-Men Gold #1: Back to the Basics, Part 1*, page 9.



Figure 1 Subliminal Messages Panel Comparison Page 9

The first picture [1] in Figure 1 is the original comic and the second picture [2] in Figure 1 is the revised one. It can be seen there are 5 visible differences from those two pictures; (1) the 'Jewelry' writing on a building next to a character in yellow and black which is then removed, (2) the number '212' on a building above the bald man which is then replaced by "Grocery Store" writings, (3) the 'Pierre' writing on a building above the man in brown cap which is then removed and replaced with 'Pizza' writing, (4) the number '51' on the brown cap which is removed, and (5) the number '51' on the man's shirt which is then also removed.

The whole panel (number 1) can be considered as a sign. The first subliminal message is the 'Jewelry' writing on a building. It is quite common if a jewelry store stands in a row of stores in the middle of the city. The foreground is a character from the X-Men, Katherine "Kitty" Pryde, which is explaining the meaning of tolerance between human beings. Semiotically speaking, the writing and the

character are the signifiers. The writing contains the physical structure of a word in the English language: j-e-w-e-l-r-y and Kitty Pryde, with all of her common X-Men appearance (the hair and the outfit), is also a signifier. At first, it seems that nothing wrong with the picture, then it comes the signified explanation. In the story, Kitty is also the leader of the X-Men (a team of good mutants).

It is really clear that Syaf puts the word 'Jewelry' (with the letter e/l/r/y slightly covered in her hair, thus leaving the word 'jew') next to Kitty Pryde because, in the story, she is indeed from a Jewish origin. The word 'Jew' is a kind of mockery and belittle which has a cultural holocaust background during the World War II and used by the Nazi German. This kind of thing, according to the marvel universe database (marvel.wikia.com) makes her quite sensitive about all kinds of prejudice of her origin. By drawing that messages, it can be concluded that Syaf (although he is the artist of the comic) does not agree with the choice of Guggenheim (the writer, who happened to be a Jewish too) that poses Kitty Pryde as the leader of the X-Men.

The second message is the number '212'. As a signifier, it is just a random number being put on the part of a building in the picture. Normally, it can be read as a single row of numbers as 'two-one-two' or one single number, 'two hundred and twelve'. In Indonesia, the number 212 is quite popular, thanks to the widely known character from Bastian Tito's novel, Wiro Sableng. It can be considered as the signified, but in this matter, in the picture [2] in Figure 1, it is not about Wiro Sableng. The signified of the sign (the number 212) is the code of Moslem Rally Protesting former Jakarta's Governor Mr. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016. According to Syaf on his Facebook status dated April 6, that occasion is very memorable to him, and so he wants to put it somewhere in his art. In fact, he admits that he draws the panel right after coming back from the rally.

There is no reference to the third message, the 'Pierre' word from both Marvel or Syaf. But somehow it is also removed from the original panel of the comic and replaced with 'pizza' writing a little bit below its original place. The fourth and fifth message, the number '51' on both brown cap and t-shirt refers to verse 51 from al-Maidah. This reference ties to the panel on the next page, the Colossus t-shirt in Figure 2.

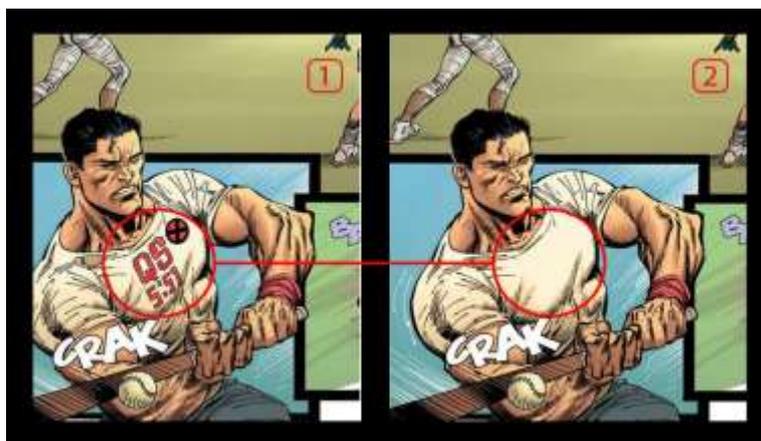


Figure 2 Subliminal Message Panel Comparison Page 10

In Figure 2 (page 10), Colossus, an X-Men mutant is drawn playing softball with other members of the team. At the original comic, he is drawn with wearing a t-shirt with 'QS 5:51' lettering and the X-Men logo. Later, on the revised version, both lettering and the logo are missing. There are two points of analysis from this panel. The first one is the lettering. The signifier of the sign is that two letters, a colon, and three numbers; Q-S-5-(:)-5-1. As a signifier, they are just letters and numbers, only a decoration for the t-shirt. The interpretation of the readers though can be varied. It can be taken as a

message concerning time, 5:51, nine minutes to six o'clock, or perhaps a reminder of a book he read, chapter 5, page 51, while QS can be the title of a book, for example, *Quantum Space*. But, in accordance with the previous page of the comic, it refers to Quran Surah 5 (al-Maidah) verse 51, a verse that states for the moslem in order not to choose Jews and Christian as their leader. The content of the verse state that all moslems are prohibited to take a non moslem (Jews and Christians) as their leader. It can only be related to the former Jakarta's governor, Ahok, which is a Christian. This case can be seen from the Holy Quran and its *tafsir* (meaning) book (Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, 1995).

The October 2016 – February 2017 is the first campaign stage of Jakarta's Governor Election. There are three governor candidates where the other two contenders are Moslems. Despite his ethnicity and religion (Ahok is also happened to be a Chinese origin), he gains great popularity among Jakarta's citizen because of his work and is predicted to win the election. That Holy Quran verse is used to accuse Ahok of his blasphemy over Islam, while is also used as a tool to gain the vote of the Muslim voters.

The second message is the logo. As a signifier, it is a drawing of the letter 'X' inside a ring or a circle with the black lines and red filler which is placed in the left corner of the t-shirt. The signified is that the drawing is a logo of a famous team of the mutant in the Marvel universe called the X-Men. It is no longer just an ordinary 'X' inside a circle and only understood as the (professor) Xavier's Men, it bears a spirit of equality among human beings and heroism, defending earth from all kinds of enemies, ranging from other mutants to the aliens.

The next subliminal message appears in a man's outfit; his t-shirt and his cap in Figure 3. He wears a cap with a number 51 (the 1 is not visible) and a t-shirt with three letters, the letters 'A' and 'L' in a row, and a larger 'M' under those letters. The signifier of the picture [1] is that there are four characters visible on the panel. There is a character wearing a cap with number '5' on it. He is also wearing a t-shirt with three letters on it, A-L-M. The signified of the picture is that the number on his cap is actually 51. It means the verse number and the three letters on his t-shirt is an abbreviation of the Surah Al-Maidah. Thus, Syaf wants to show that one of the people that are on the scene is a Muslim. From the gesture, it can be seen that he is not quite happy with the situation.

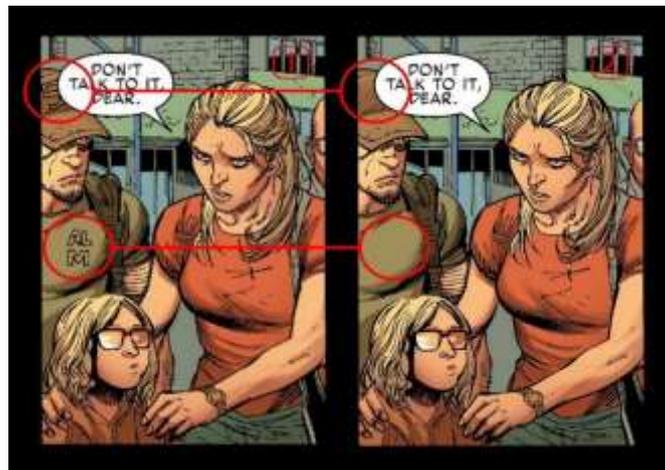


Figure 3 Subliminal Messages of the ALM 51

The other subliminal message is about Colossus and Kitty Pryde that can be seen in Figure 4. In the arch story of this comic book, Colossus is a member of the X-Men lead by Kitty Pryde. According to History of the X-Men comics (Marvel Database, 2017), Kitty Pryde is a Jewish-American teenager who could "phase" through solid objects, walk on thin air, utilize her powers to scramble electronic systems, and extend her intangibility to anything she touches, while Colossus, a quiet, contemplative

Russian who could transform his entire body into "organic steel", increasing his size, strength, speed, and endurance while making him virtually indestructible.



Figure 4 Subliminal Messages of Kitty Pryde and Colossus

The signifier of those panels in Figure 4 is that there are two panels with two characters of X-Men in doing something. In the first panel, Kitty Pryde is standing, facing backward with the Jewelry writings as her background. And in the second panel, Colossus is swinging his bat towards a ball, wearing a t-shirt with QS 5:51 lettering. The signified explanation is really astonishing since, in the story arch line, they are pictured as lovers. They once have a love story behind their actions in X-Men, but then after some battles, they become just friends and no longer have a mutual feeling of each other. Figure 4 really makes a contradictory message for the readers because it shows that Colossus, through his t-shirt, is made a real impression to stand on Islamic perspectives and thus against the idea of making Kitty Pryde, his former lover and friend is leading the team. Syaf seems to put them (Kitty and Colossus/Piotr) silently against each other on how they view their position in the team.

Another subliminal message that concerns the religion base is shown on the next page on the *X-Men Gold Vol. 1: Back to the Basics* comic book where Nightcrawler is drawn swinging his bat; still in the softball game scene. Kurt Wagner or Nightcrawler is a mutant with the demonic appearance. Born with an unnatural level of gymnastic agility, and later gaining the ability to teleport, Kurt is joining the X-Men. After some missions, he, with the two other surviving X-Men, finds Excalibur. Kurt matures to the point of leading Excalibur but eventually returns to the X-Men. For a short time, Kurt leaves the superhero life to become a priest but again returns to the X-Men. The subliminal message of Nightcrawler can be seen in Figure 5.

From the picture [1] in Figure 5, it can be seen that both panels are the signifier. The first panel pictures five characters with a blue character as the main point of interest. He is holding a bat and seems ready to hit the ball. The two characters in the background are having a conversation while the other two (those who only legs are visible) are watching the game. The second panel is the copy of the first panel but with the blue character swinging his bat for the ball. The signified is that on the second panel of the picture [1], the blue character (Kurt Wagner/Nightcrawler) appears to hit the character in the background. That character would be Kitty Pryde, the leader of X-Men who happens to be a Jewish. The artist (Syaf) draws this panel with a clear message, that is, to make Kurt Wagner seems to have a grudge against Kitty Pryde. In a deeper exploration, Kurt Wagner is a good Christian, who has been raised in a church and has been a priest for a little while. Syaf implies the contradiction of beliefs in the society.



Figure 5 Subliminal Message of Nightcrawler

If compare those two pictures (number 1 and 2), it can be seen that there is a revision on the second panel of the picture [2]. The bat Kurt holds is tilted downward just enough not to give the impression of him hitting Kitty Pryde (Kitty's face can be seen now). The ball's movement is also being revised to make the picture reasonable to that modification.

Table 1 shows all of the subliminal messages analysis results of this research.

Table 1 The Subliminal Messages Analysis Result

No.	Subliminal Message	Signifier	Signified	Meta-Language
1	Figure 1: Kitty Pryde and Jewelry Store	A character standing in front of row of store and the people.	The character is Kitty Pryde, and next to her is writing, 'Jewelry' with the 'JEW' part is really visible. A strong signification that Kitty Pryde is a Jewish.	A Jewish leader of a team that talks about equality among the people of different religions. Syaf shows his 'position' in this matter; in which he does not agree with the fact that a Jew can lead a team.
2	Figure 1: The number 212	Row of number 2-1-2	A code of a Muslim protest Act in Jakarta that happens because of Ahok, is accused of mocking a verse of the Holy Quran.	A date, as a reminder for the reader that the Muslims have protested against the choosing of Ahok.
3	Figure 1: The number 51	Row of numbers 5-1	A verse number from Al-Maidah, a Surah from the Holy Quran. The verse explains the prohibition of choosing leader from different religion.	The verse becomes a political tool to make the Jakartanese Muslim not to choose Ahok because he is a Christian during the Jakarta Governor Election in 2016/2017.

Table 1 The Subliminal Messages Analysis Result (Continued)

No.	Subliminal Message	Signifier	Signified	Meta-Language
4	Figure 2: QS. 5:51	A character wearing t-shirt with a logo and a row of letters, a punctuation mark, and numbers Q-S-5-:-5-1	Colossus, a member of the X-Men, wears an official X-Men t-shirt (because of the logo) which has an imprint of writings QS 5:51, an abbreviation of Quran Surah Al-Maidah verse 51.	Although a t-shirt does not always determine its wearer, this picture gives an impression that Colossus, an atheist, chose to supports the idea of not choosing Jews or Christian believers as the leader of his team.
5	Figure 3: The letters ALM	Row of letters A-L-M	An abbreviation of Surah Al-Maidah, a surah that talks about some regulations and laws in Islam.	The artist, Syaf, wants to let the reader know that the wearer of the t-shirt is a Muslim and live by conduction Islamic laws and regulations.
6	Figure 4: Kitty Pryde and Piotr Rasputin (Colossus)	Two characters from two different panels	These two main characters was a lover, but in this comic book, through the panels, they are pictured to have a clearly different stand on religion.	Again, by comparing this picture, it can be concluded that Syaf wants the reader to know that these two (former) lover and member of the team have different perspectives and view of religion.
7	Figure 5: Kitty Pryde and Kurt Wagner (Night crawler)	Two characters from one panel	These two characters are both members of the X-Men. Kurt Wagner is pictured as if he hit Kitty's face with a bat.	This picture shows that Syaf wants the reader know that even Kurt Wagner, an obedient Christian and a former priest does not like the idea of a Jew leading his team.

## CONCLUSIONS

There are seven subliminal messages that discussed in this research. All of the subliminal messages are focused on the 212 Indonesian Muslim rally protest on December 2nd, 2016 and Quran Surah Al-Maidah verse 51 (QS. 5:51). The whole subliminal messages drawn by Syaf are, more or less, not only related to the 212 Moslem Act in Jakarta, Indonesia, and his perspective about it but also about the perspective of Islam towards Jewish and Christians based on the artist's viewpoints of Al-Maidah verse 51.

Although Syaf repeatedly says that all of the messages are drawn because he wants to commemorate the 212 moment along with Al-Maidah 51, but Kitty Pryde seems to be the central character who becomes Syaf's victim. Starting from the 'JEW' writings, 212, up until Colossus and Nightcrawler, are positioned and posed against her very being. All because of her position as the X-Men leader, her religion, and her origin. All of the subliminal messages are then revised, and the original issue of the comic book is withdrawn and replaced with the new-revised one. The revised version is no longer have the subliminal messages and thus clear the matter away.

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