



Good Children in Contemporary Islamic Indonesian Children's Books: A Question of Inclusivity

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Abstract

This paper examines the constructions of the good Muslim children in Indonesian contemporary children literature. Following *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) methodology, it approached the series of *Rahmatan lil Aalam* by discussing the following questions: (1) how does the series portray the good children; and, (2) what modes of representation does the series use to portray the good children. Having unpacked the series' visual and linguistic representation of children, it found four constructions of children. They are, namely, *children as the proud bearers of differences*, *children as the role-models of service/sacrifice*, *young persons of high self-regulation*, and *children as nurturers of solidarity and shapers of good-behaviours*. In addition, three dominant modes of representation were identified, namely, *good girls over boys*, *good Muslim versus trouble others*, and *social over ritual piety*. While the series aims at promoting peaceful, inclusive Islam, its images of children perpetuate instead a less inclusive view of social life. This paper recommends for preschool teachers to critically approach any literary works targeting young children. In this way, they can promote inclusive social life, in addition to their mandate of school preparation.

Keywords: *childhood, children's book, good children, discourse analysis, Islam, Indonesia*

1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper has three layers of objectives. First, it aims at unpacking the dominant discourses that form the basis of the construction of good, idealized Muslim child/childhood. Second, it questions and problematizes the social legitimacy of images and constructions of good Muslim children. Third, it tries to put forward the silenced (invisible) constructions about good Muslim children. The research behind the present paper, departed

from the "Islamic" children book publications that recently have thrived as part of contemporary Indonesian children's literature and popular culture [1]. More

specifically, it uses the children's book under the "Rahmatan lil 'Aalamiin" (the gift for the universe) series as the main materials [2], [3], [4], [5]. This choice was made considering that this series is apparently directly related to the campaign and mobilization of the discourse of "peaceful Islam" which is also called "Islam rahmatan lil aalamin" in the Indonesian Muslim public sphere [6].

The "Rahmatan lil 'Alaamin" series was chosen, considering that this publication is the only illustrated publication that clearly promotes "Rahmatan lil 'Aalamin" as its tagline. As a matter of fact the tagline is an alternative or antithesis to the literal, harsh, anti-traditional or old-fashioned face and representation of Islam, which originates from the doctrine of the Qur'an when explaining the prophetic task and roles of Muhammad: "wa maa arsalnaa-ka illaa rahmatan lil 'aalamiin ", and "We did not send you (Prophet Muhammad), except as a mercy for all the worlds" [7], [8], [9], [10].

The series is assumed to be the most apparent adoption and adaptation of the campaign in the context of contemporary Indonesian children's culture. Critical analysis of the construction of reading materials about good Muslim children (good Muslim children/childhood) is important, at least by considering the following socio-theoretical contexts.

Firstly, Islam has emerged as an alternative discourse and basis for the construction of good children in Indonesia. This phenomenon is especially visible after the 1998 Reformasi which degraded and demystified almost all official discourses that the state used to govern the population, including the state's way of shaping the self and behaviour of young children and their childhood (governing children/childhood). Before the Reformasi, the state actively mobilized and used, among other things, nationalism, development, and Pancasila as official discourse to describe and construct the population, including children, both through policy instruments Formen [11], Formen at al [12], as well as children's cultural icons. The 1998 Reformasi in this case is a cultural and political crack that allows the penetration of Islam into the center stage of the discourse about good children and childhood.

Second, the constructions of a good children have been so far dominated by the western, developmentalist views of children. The construction of good children in current studies and literature is dominated by the idealization of children which is based on developmentalism Formen [13], Moss & Dahlberg [14], which is actually full of Western Euro-American centric biases [15], [16]. As a result, alternative voices—Islamic, Indonesian—regarding children are not only not heard but are even marginalized and silenced, and often give rise to tension due to the incompatibility of each individual's basic values and assumptions about children [17], [18].

Based on the two contexts above, this paper tries to examine Islam's leap to the center stage of discourse about children in Indonesia, which so far has not been explored much. For the record, studies on post-Reformation Indonesian children are

more of a peripheral subject—for example related to women Newberry [19] [20] or educational politics Bjork [21], and do not place children and ideas about ideal children as their poles. More crucially, these studies, seen from the perspective of childhood as social construction James, Jenks, & Prout [22], Jenks [23], deny Islam as one of the basic ingredients for the construction of ideal children in Indonesia. As a comparison, Islamic-Indonesian voices regarding the construction of a good child (idealized child/childhood) are still rare or at least in contemporary global academic literature and conversations. In this sense the present paper aims to fill this gap.

2. METHOD

This study generally takes a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen considering that this research seeks to reveal information expressed in the form of words, interwoven words and illustrations. However, this study still uses quantitative descriptions as long as they are relevant to the objective, for example to highlight data related to the frequency of words, phrases or other linguistic devices to image good Muslim children.

This study specifically follows a critical discourse analysis approach, especially one that moves from the Foucauldian tradition [24], [25], [26], [27]. The use of content analysis and/or discourse analysis in the context of early childhood education or publications for children is for example found in studies [28], [29], [30].

2.1 Overview of research materials

The children's reading series "Rahmatan lil Aalam Series" which is the material for this study consists of four books. The four of them raised different themes and titles, namely "Love of the Motherland", "Morals of Neighborhood", "The Beauty of Difference", and "Dear Friends". Each of these themes presents stories in different numbers and settings, as will be presented in further sections of this report.

Visually, this series is printed on glossy paper, full of full-color illustrations and decorations. The price for each unit of this series is Rp. 55,000.00. This series is also available in an electronic version at a price of Rp. 49,000.00. This study did not specifically explore data regarding the affordability of this book in terms of price. However, the publisher's website, until this report was submitted, showed that the electronic version of this series had sold between 5 and 8 units. The visual information provided on the back cover of each series refers to U5+, indicating this series is aimed at children between 4 – 6 years old. Each main page (the page containing the story plot) consists of narrative and supporting illustrations in the form of the main and supporting characters as well as a description of the settings or contexts of the stories.

In all series there are no instructions for use, but there are three supporting pages in the form of; (1) the "This Book Belongs" (Buku ini milik) page, which allows the book owner to write their identity at the beginning of the book; (2) "Activity Pages" (Halaman Aktivitas), which are picture quizzes at the end of the entire series of stories that appear to be intended for child-users to summarize the message of the entire story; And; (3) "Notes" (Catatan) at the end of the book which allows users to convey in writing things they feel are important. This supporting page also suggests that this book appears to be aimed at children who are beginning to show not only an interest in reading but also an interest in writing.

Quantitative analysis of these four materials obtained the following information. Overall there are 126 pages in this series not including the supporting pages referred to above. Each book contains five 5 different stories, which represent a theme. There are a total of 49 characters in the four books, with details of 47 human characters (men = 19, women = 28) and animals (cats = 1; fish = 1). Of the 47 characters, 34 are children and the other 13 are adults (male = 4, female = 9). Different from the general tendency in children's literature that animals and the animal world often dominate stories and animal behaviour is "humanized" (anthropomorphic) Burke & Copenhaver [31], Williams [32], in this series, animals, in this case fish and cats, actually occupy a quantitatively minor position. . Apart from that, these two animals are not presented anthropomorphically. The non-anthropomorphic placement of animals in Muslim children's reading material is the subject of a separate study that can be deepened in the future.

The materials analysed in this article are three children story books under the series of Rahmatan lil 'aalamiin as initial materials Herliana [2], [3], [4], [5], for the reasons mentioned in the previous section. The analysis of research materials was carried out at three levels, as suggested by Paltridge [27]. First, a general analysis. At this level attention is directed to the visual and linguistic aspects of the material, such as the use of illustrations, words, phrases and sentences. Second, theme analysis. At this level, attention is directed to the themes that dominantly appear in the research material. This is aimed at gathering information about the possibility of dominant or marginalized themes. This information will later be useful, for example for preparing recommendations for enriching the themes of printed teaching materials. Third, critical analysis (coherence-incoherence). This analysis is aimed at seeing the coherence and incoherence of existing materials with socio-political-cultural issues outside the reading material. For example, this analysis tests whether there is hidden, invisible discourses behind clear statements (visible statements/representations) which may conflict with humanitarian issues: for example racism, sexism or the like. Chronologically, the research stages can be seen in the flow diagram of the research stages, which can be illustrated as follows.

Discourse theory, especially the critical ones Gee [33] [34] and more specifically those rooted in the Foucauldian tradition Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine [24], Michel

Foucault [35] [36], Khan & MacEachen [26], underlies this paper. Considering that discourse operates through language, it is also important to place the views of Foucault and his followers on language.

Foucault views 'discourse' as alternative and operating similarly to ideology [37]. Foucault identified two main features of discourse. First, he understands 'discourse' as 'statements' or 'groups of statements'. A 'discourse', to be precise, is "a group of statements belonging to a system of formation" Michel Foucault [35], such as a 'clinical system' or an 'economic system'. Second, he characterizes discourse as power-laden. Discourse for Foucault not only shows an object, but also forms (constitutive) objects within its reach. This constitutive description of discourse is clear in his explanation that it is "a weapon of power, control, subjection, qualification and disqualification" [38]. This means that Islam may be the main discourse, but its operation in forming the ideal image of young Muslims is "assisted" by other formation systems (discourse).

Foucauldians Fairclough [39], Gee [34], Taylor [40], believe that discourse is manifested through language. In the context of this paper, the discourse used in the construction of good children is projected through words, phrases, or other linguistic devices used in the reading material that is the material. Furthermore, considering the power-laden nature of discourse, these expressions reflect power which suggests boundaries, what is included, and what is excluded Mills [41], in the vision of good Muslim youth. However, a good image of children can also be shown in the visual representation of children's figures in reading materials.

Previous studies, based on the Foucauldian tradition, regarding children's constructions in children's reading materials have found a number of dominant discourses. There is no consistency in these studies, because the use of these discourses is closely related to the socio-political-cultural conditions in which the reading materials are set. Studies in Czechoslovakia, for example, show the representations of children as victims, supporters), and rebels [29].

Studies on children's reading materials and literature in Iran also show a close connection between the construction of the ideal child and the local socio-political-cultural situation. Reading materials and children's literature are tools of state ideology. Although it does not specifically point to the discourse used in children's literature to shape the figure of children, studies of children's literature in Iran, especially after the 1979 Revolution, clearly indicate that good children are those who support the country's socio-political-cultural revolution [42].

Other research in China Tesar, Tong, Gibbons, Arndt, & Sansom [43] found three main discourses used in the construction of children, namely the Confucian child, the modern child, and the Maoist child. The first emphasizes children who are full of filial piety. The second emphasizes the child as a unique figure, as opposed to emphasizing the child as part of a collectivity. The latter emphasizes the ideal of the hero, considering the context of Mao's revolution in Chinese society.

So far, it has not been clearly identified how good children are constructed in Indonesian children's literature, especially in the "Islamic" category. However, as a comparison, there are two studies with a discourse analysis approach to children's construction in Indonesia. The first uses policy texts as its analytical materials Formen [13] [44] [18] [12], while the second, by combining gender analysis, uses observation and interview data as its material. The first study finds construction, in the light of the discourse of nationalism, human capital theory, and development theory, respectively as heirs of the nation, as agents of the future economy, and as needing to be directed towards the normality of development. Meanwhile, the second study, which is based on the idea of masculinity, shows the opposite construction, namely the image of children as undesirable (unidealised) by teachers and fellow children. This study found two discourses used to image children, namely passive boys and Barbie boys.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As presented in the previous section, this study has three layers of objectives. The three are identifying dominant discourses that form the basis of constructions about good, idealized Muslim child/childhood; questioning (problematizing) the social legitimacy of image constructions of good Muslim children; and in that way, put forward silenced (invisible) constructions about good Muslim children. In this section, findings relevant to these objectives will be presented. However, following Paltridge's suggestion [27], the analysis initially focused on external, extrinsic and quantitative aspects of the research material used, in this case the children's reading book series Rahmatan Lil 'Aalamiin.

3.1 Four constructions of the good children

Each story in the series that is the material for this study's analysis offers a diverse representation of ideal childhoods. However, by paying attention to the linguistic-visual representation of children's characters and the context contained therein, this study identified four dominant constructs of good children, namely; (1) children as the proud bearers of differences; (2) children as role-models for service and empathy; (3) young persons with strong self-regulation; and, (4) children as nurturers of solidarity and shapers of good-behaviours. These four dominant representations and constructions can then be explained in more detail as follows.

3.2 Children as the proud bearers of differences

The representation of children as the "bearers of differences who are proud of their religious identity" is consistently presented by the five stories in the Beautiful Differences series. The five stories are Waiting for Maria, Beautiful Cards, One Day in Bali, No Snacks Today, and Putri Salimah. These five stories all use human

characters as the medium of their messages (13, Male = 3; Female = 10). There are no non-human characters in this material.

The themes of difference spoken in this material are all related to religion, or religious identity, as indicated on the back cover of this material, which emphasizes the importance of religious tolerance. The religious differences that appear in this series are Islam – Christianity, Islam – Hinduism, fasting vs. not fasting, and wearing a headscarf (*hijab*) vs not wearing a headscarf.

The main image that forms a good Muslim child in this material is the child as a person who understands differences and is proud of his religious identity. This impression is captured, for example, in the second story in this material, Beautiful Cards, which tells the story of Muslim students who made a masterpiece in the form of an Eid greeting card with a picture of a ketupat and a non-Muslim student who made a Christmas greeting card with a picture of a pine tree. In this story, Muslim students are depicted as figures who "comfort" their worried non-Muslim friends and as "kind friends." Rauf, a Muslim student is depicted consoling his non-Muslim Viennese friend, assumed to be Catholic/Christian, by stating "We are different, but still friends". This statement seems to suggest that good Muslim children should be proud of their religious identity, which is depicted in the story. Beautiful cards with cards depicting ketupat, assumed to be Eid al-Fitr greeting cards; However, at the same time we must accept the reality of religious differences which are represented in the form of greeting cards depicting pine trees—the traditional symbol of Christmas celebrations.

Table 1. Brief overview of the materials

Book theme	Stories	Main characters and their distribution in the story
The beauty of difference <i>Indahnya Perbedaan</i> , 32 pages.)	Waiting for Mary (Menunggu Maria)	F (3): Fitri, Maria, Ibu Guru
	Beautiful Cards (Kartu-Kartu Indah)	M (1): Ra'uf; F (1): Wina
	One Day in Bali (Suatu Hari di Bali)	M (1): Adik Karima; F (3): Karima, Ibunda Karima, Penyunggi Buah (Wanita Bali)
	No Snacks Today (Tidak Ada Jajan Hari Ini)	M (2): Ahsan, Jojo
	Princess Salimah (Putri Salimah)	F (2): Salimah, Salimah's Sister
Love of the motherland <i>Cinta Tanah Air</i> , 30 pages)	For the sake of the Red and White Flag (Demi Sang Merah Putih)	F (1): Kanya; M : Teacher
	Alif and Three Little Guests (Alif dan Tiga Tamu Cilik)	Laki-laki (1): Alif
	Piggy Bank of Love (Celengan Cinta)	F (1): Nur
	The Bamboo-Sopel Fighters (Pejuang Bambu Runcing)	M (2): Ilham, Ilham's Grandfather
	Bent-over Door (Pintu Merunduk)	F (2): Butet, Alya
Being good with the neighbours	Oma-marked Mango (Mangga Cap Oma)	F (2): Azizah, Oma Tuti
		M (1): Fatih

(Akhlak Bertetangga, 32 pages)	The Guests of the Blue House (Tamu Rumah Biru)	
	Belang the Cat (Si Belang)	M: Azam, Ayah Azam; F (1): Masyita; Non-human: cat (1), fish (1)
	Crispy Tempeh (Tempe Kriuk)	M (1): Abyan; F (3): Isna, Isna's Grandmother, Abyan's mother
	Make more gravy (Kuah yang Banyak)	F (3): Alma, Bunda Alma, Siti; F (1): Doni
Love your friend (Sayang Teman, 32 pages)	Shhh (Ssst)	M (2): Aldy, Dokter
	Adelia's Secret (Rahasia Adelia)	F (2): Hana, Adelia
	When Rafi was Angry (Ketika Rafi Marah)	M (2): Rafi, Yusuf; F: Ibu Rafi
	Whispers (Bisik-Bisik)	M (1): Azmi; F (2): Kinan, Rahma
	Because I'm Your Friend (Karena Aku Temanmu)	M (1): Mahren; F (1) Syifa
<i>Total male characters (19); female character (28); children (34); adult (13); non-human (2).</i>		

Understanding and acceptance of religious differences is also shown in the story *Waiting for Maria*, in which the Muslim child characters negotiate their group work time on Sunday with Maria having to go to church. A similar message is also conveyed in the story of *One Day in Bali*, in which a Muslim family on holiday in Bali saw a woman carrying fruit on her way to the temple to pray. What is worth noting about this story is the message of the Muslim family's mother who forbids her child, Karima, when the child says he wants the fruit that the Balinese woman they saw was eating. Even though the mother "disguised" the prohibition by saying "...[the fruit] does not belong to the younger brother", it was implied in the prohibition that Muslims were not allowed to eat fruit brought to Hindu prayers.

This series conveys pride in religious identity and identity in the story of *Putri Salima*, which tells the story of a young Muslim woman, who wears a hijab, but has to play the role of a king's daughter. In short, this story conveys the message that the hijab is not an obstacle to being a princess, amidst the fact that popular children's culture tends to normalize princesses as white women with blonde hair [45].

3.3 Children as role-models for service and empathy

The image of good Muslim youth as exemplars of service and empathy is consistently represented in the *Cinta Tanah Air* series. This series presents five short stories, namely *Demi Sang Merah Putih*, *Alif and the Three Little Guests*, *Piggy Bank of Love*, *Sharp Bamboo Fighters*, and *Doors Down*. Like the *Beautiful Differences* series, this series features characters who are all human (8, Male = 4; Female = 4).

As the title suggests, *Love for the Motherland*, this series presents the main theme of the importance of Muslim youth for love of the Motherland. To operationalize this ideal, this series emphasizes the importance of exemplary service to others and empathy.

The main image of good young Muslims as role models in service and empathy is consistently captured in a series of stories in this series. The first story in this series, *Demi the Merah Putih*, tells the story of students, especially a female student wearing a headscarf, Kanya, who learns to fly the flag and is willing to work hard to do it perfectly. The author, describes Kanya as being so tired from practicing, that she had to take a break, and makes her two companions in the flag-raising team, both men, as well as their teacher, who is also a man, seem to doubt her ability and strength, by asking: "Are you still strong, right?" Due to these doubts, Kanya stated that he was still strong, until in the end he actually carried the flag at the ceremony.

Exemplary service is also shown in the story of *Alif and three young guests*. This story is about three foreign children (blonde hair) who visit the village of Alif, which is described as a traditional tourist village—traditional equipment and games. The blonde-haired children were full of curiosity, even about things that seemed mundane to Alif as a local child. The tourists were described as following Alif wherever he went, making him confused. However, Alif is described as a young

Muslim who is aware and "remembers that he must always honor [serve well] his guests (ingat kalau dia harus tetap memuliakan [melayani dengan baik para] tamu) [3].

The story Piggy bank of love depicts an example of empathy. This story is about the willingness of a young Muslim woman wearing a headscarf, Nur, to donate her savings (piggy bank) to help victims of a disaster, an earthquake.

It is depicted that Nur even cries, resembling her sympathy and empathy for the earthquake victims and casualties as reported on television. He then decided to break out the savings in his piggy bank to donate to the victims, saying to his friends: "Do you also want to help the earthquake victims"? Here, a young Muslim Nur show empathy while presenting herself as a pioneer and example of goodness among his peers.

3.4 Young persons of strong self-regulation

The representation of young Muslims as figures with a strong capacity for self-regulation is depicted in the five stories contained in the Akhlak of Neighbors series. Quantitatively, this material consists of five stories. The five are Mango Cap Oma, Blue House Guest, Si Belang, Tempe Kriuk, and Lots of Gravy. All of the characters featured in this material are humans (16, Men = 5; Women = 9; Animals = 2). There are two non-human characters in this material, namely cats and fish.

The strength of self-regulation as the main shaper of the ideal image of young Muslims is illustrated in the first story in this material, Mangga Cap Oma. This story tells of Aziza who is tempted to have and enjoy a mango that falls from a tree belonging to her neighbor, who is described as a woman without a headscarf: Oma Tuti. After almost being tempted to have and enjoy it, Aziza decided to hand over the mango she "found" to Oma Tuti. At the end of the story, Aziza receives a gift of mangoes from Oma Tuti, who praises her as a "good and honest neighbor."

The strength in self-regulation, namely holding back their desires, is also shown by the boys in the story of Guests of the Blue House, which tells of boys who resisted their desire to play football in the place they usually do, because the house near that place had lots of guests. They reasoned, "[we] Afraid of disturbing. When we play football, we scream and shout. I'm also afraid that our ball will hit the [guests'] cars." Self-regulation is also consistently used to form a good image of young Muslims in the story of Si Belang, the cat character who steals the fish caught by Azzam and his father. This story tells of Masyita's striped cat who ran away and almost ate Azzam's fish. It is described that Masyita was frightened because of Belang's behaviour, which Azzam then forgave it.

3.5 Children as nurturers solidarity and shapers of good-behaviours

The image of good young Muslims as nurturers of solidarity and shapers of good behaviours" is depicted in the fourth series of Rahmatan Lil 'Aalamiin which raises

the theme of Neighborly Morals. Quantitatively, this material consists of five stories. The five are Ssst, Adelia's Secret, When Rafi is Angry, Whispering, and Because I'm Your Friend. All of the characters featured in this material are human (12, Male = 6; Female = 6). There are no non-human characters in this material.

The image of young Muslims as cultivators of solidarity is strongly impressed in the story of Adelia's Secret, a Muslim girl who still wets the bed. Hana, Adelia's friend, found signs that her friend, Adelia, was still wetting the bed from the smell of urine coming from a mattress drying in the yard of her house. Adelia is depicted as harbouring shame due to her condition of still wetting the bed, even after she was seen by a doctor. Hana, who knew that Adelia felt shame, showed solidarity by promising to make it a secret that she would not tell anyone else, "I won't tell anyone," she promised.

The ideal image of young Muslims as nurturer of solidarity is displayed together with another construction, namely young Muslims as shapers of positive behaviour. This image is captured in Ssst, which tells the story of Aldy, a male student who tends to shout when he talks. As a result of his habit of shouting, Aldy experienced inflammation of his vocal cords which made his friends unable to understand his speech. As a result, Aldy became embarrassed. His friends encouraged him and comforted him with gentle words. At the end of the story, it is stated that after the inflammation in his vocal cords disappeared and his voice returned to normal, Aldy's behaviour seemed friendlier and more polite, as a result of the hard efforts of his friends.

3.6 Problems with the dominant constructions: the tensions between agency, developmentalism, and socio-religious ideals of children

The four main images of young Muslims presented above can be discussed further. In this section, the images and representations above will be discussed from a dual perspective, namely by placing these images as an alternative childhood discourse on the one hand, as well as a form of over-idealization of children.

In the first perspective, the four ideal images of Muslim youth shown in the Rahmatan lil 'Alamin series are important to be celebrated as an alternative to the dominant images and ideologies about children (childhood ideologies) which have so far tended to position children as imperfect figures, lacking the capacity for reasoning, moral, and unable to make abstract decisions [46], [47], [48].

In contrast to the dominant childhood ideology circulating in much educational literature, mainly based on developmentalism, the image offered by the Rahmatan lil 'Alamin series actually offers children as active social agents, with the capacity for independent reasoning. In other words, the stories in this series show children as figures with strong agency. Children's agency, conceptually defined as "the ability to will and act independently" Jerome & Starkey [47], or "the child's ability or conversely the inability to make independent choices" [49]. All the main characters

in the Rahmatan lil 'Alamin series show the ability to take and execute decisions effectively. In other words, good young Muslims are agentic. Of course, the true characteristics and agency of the figures shown in this series are the invention of the author, who is an adult. However, the decision to highlight these characteristics is still important to celebrate considering the fact that views dominate which tend to position children as figures who lack agency.

In contrast to the first perspective, in the second perspective, children's agency can be seen as an over-idealization of children. Over-idealization here is understood as an excessively good image of children so that it seems to go beyond reality when weighed against the factuality of the child's development and factual conditions. This condition of over-idealization is understandable as long as the author's interest in fulfilling his agenda in campaigning for the face of Islam Rahmatan Lil Alamin is taken into consideration. However, behind the Rahmatan lil aalamin series is the socio-political reality of [Indonesia] which displays two opposing poles of Islam: "Islam ramah" (smiling Islam) and "Islam marah" (angry Islam) [50], [51]. The author of the series seems to show the ability of Muslim children as agents of friendly Islam, as an alternative or opponent to the image of angry Muslims/Islam that dominates public space. So it becomes clear that the over-idealization of children in this series can be speculated to have a political-ideological-religious character as is also found in other studies Yang [52] on children's literature by Charles Kingsley. In short, the political-ideological-religious motive of the author of the Rahmatan lil Alamin series is more or less: if their Prophet is a blessing to the universe, so too should the children who follow him.

This religious idealization of childhood is beneficial as long as it is understood as an alternative perspective or image of childhood. But it also poses a serious dilemma, considering that over-idealization which actually resides in the author's imagination can encourage readers of the work to ignore the fact that children are developing figures. The implication is that readers may apply excessive standards to children if they do not resemble the ideal of childhood depicted in the readings.

3.7 Three modes of representations: good girls, trouble others, and social over ritual piety

Apart from the four ideal images of childhood as described above, the analysis of the Rahmatan lil Alamin series also shows three modes of representation which are also interesting to discuss. The quantitative and visual data presented above leads this study to three modes of ideal childhood construction, namely; (1) the tendency for female to be used as good characterizations and men as antagonists; (2) the tendencies to place others, non-Muslim as different, trouble and minor; and, (3) the tendency to place social over ritual piety.

In all the stories in this series, all the protagonists are female, except in the story Blue House Guest. It is no coincidence that this story has a theme in the form of a

game traditionally played by boys (soccer). The characterization of female as a means of pro-social behaviour, on the one hand, is useful for promoting the strength and equality of women with men who have the same potential to be agents of good. However, this tendency also seems to perpetuate traditional gender perspectives which position women as gentle and men as aggressive. More than that, highlighting the character of women who are portrayed as free, capable, full of initiative and independent, without including a clear social context, also seems to deny the reality of Muslim women's lives which have been widely criticized as being full of constraints. It should be noted here that the available visual data depicting all young Muslim girls in this series tends to suggest that they come from educated and middle class backgrounds. All the young Muslim female characters in this series are represented as having names, none of which show names that conventionally reflect local names.

Related to the issue of characterization of females as agents of prosocial behaviour, this series also uses the body (body, physical representation) as a device of expression. All the ideal young Muslim female characters in this series wear the hijab. Adelia's character, who if we trace the representation of her mother wearing a headscarf, is a young Muslim girl shown without wearing a headscarf, and this character is a Muslim girl who still wets the bed. This representation seems to show that the ideal young female Muslims are those who wear the hijab, even though female Muslims who are not yet adults are not yet required to wear the hijab.

Non-Muslims are consistently placed as others who are different, different, and tend to be minor in this series. This is reflected, among other things, in the figure of young Muslim woman Adelia who still wets the bed, young Muslim Aldy who tends to scream, and Maria and Wina who are filled with anxiety due to differences in beliefs with the majority group. Consistent with this trend is the confusion of child tourists. Oma Tuti, although it is not clear what her religion is, is represented as an elderly woman with narrow eyes, who is the only other person who radiates goodness.

The above tendency confirms the idealization of good young people (ideal childhoods) in this series which tends to be Muslim-centric and seems to deny the possibility and reality that good children may have different religions and beliefs. In other words, children's kindness tends to be presented not from others, but from Muslims themselves. Of course, this idealization is understandable considering the author's political-religious interests in campaigning for a friendly face of Islam, as stated above. However, the absence of others as agents of good behaviour may also perpetuate prejudices about others who are not only different but also minor.

This series in general also shows a tendency to represent the doctrine of *rahmatan lil Alamin* by emphasizing social piety rather than ritual piety. Of the stories contained in this series, none of them offers adequately, both in quantitative and qualitative scales, the activities and ritual observances (worship) of the children who are appointed as the main characters. The four ideal images presented above all show the goodness and image of children in social relations. Of course, it is not the

intention of those who campaign for Islam Rahmatan lil Alamin to deny the ritualistic dimension of religion. However, the absence of representation of this dimension in this series seems to negate the fact that this dimension is one of the general dimensions in religion, with the exception of Islam. This absence also seems to deny the reality of people's enthusiasm for religion and proficiency in religious rituals.

4. CONCLUSION

The Rahmatan lil Alamin series analysed in this article offers alternative construction of young children and has the potential to enrich the treasures of children's literature. Religion, more specifically the friendly face of Islam (Rahmatan lil Alamin) is used by the author as the main discourse that forms the ideal image of a good Muslim child. This series offers the view that just as their Prophet was described by the Qur'an as 'rahmatan lil alamin', so too should the children who follow him. To operate it, the author uses four main images of children, namely children as; (1) recipients of differences who are proud of their religious identity; (2) exemplary service and empathy; (3) a person with strong self-regulation; and, (4) fostering solidarity and forming good behaviour.

Despite their potential as alternatives, the four main images of childhood above have several problems, which are related to; (1) over-idealization of children which goes beyond the reality of child development and the social reality of Muslim children; and (2) the tendency to focus ideal goodness on Muslims (Muslim-centric). Apart from this problem, the Rahmatan lil Alamin series contributes to the treasures of children's literature that is specifically based on the friendly face of Islam, which currently does not get enough space for representation.

While the series aims at fostering peaceful, inclusive Islam, its images of children tend to perpetuate instead exclusive view of social life. This paper therefore recommends for critical reading of children literature especially among early childhood teachers. Through so doing, teachers and preschools can play their strategic role for promoting inclusive social life in addition to their very traditional mandate of school preparation.

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