# 'BRUNA' Muslims and Bedtime Stories: Exploring Dutch Islamic Children's Literature in The Netherlands

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## Exploring Dutch Islamic Children's Literature in The Netherlands



Fig. 1 — Moessie: Papa is mijn beste vriend — Abdelhakim Chouaati & Yana Zybina

Fig. 2 — Petra van Helden, Kinderen van Adam: VERHALEN UIT DE KORAN — ploegsma

Fig. 3 — Rayan en Rania vragen Allah om hulp — Hadieth Benelux

Fig. 4 — NORDIN HET NIJLPAARD: Leert om niet te liegen — UITGEVERIJ VOOR ISLAMITISCH ONDERWIJS
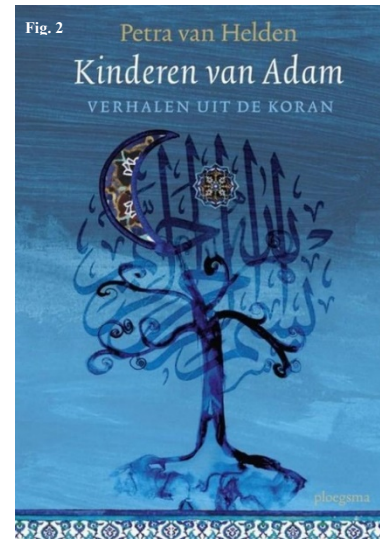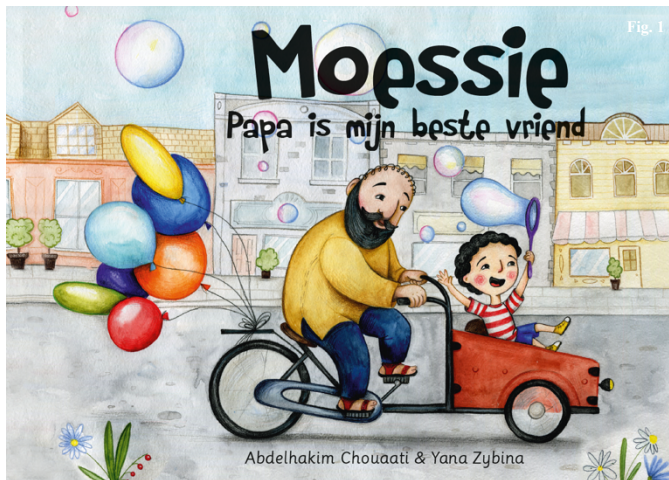
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# ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, the genre of Dutch Islamic children's literature has seen an impressive boom in terms of quantity and quality. With increasing numbers of publishers active in the field and books published, the genre is growing with an exponential speed and continuously transforming in character. Building upon the gradually developing field of study that deals with the everyday lives of Muslims in 'the West', this study provides an exploratory insight into a specific manifestation of the daily experiences of Muslims in diaspora: Islamic children's literature. Through 25 qualitative in-depth interviews with those actors most closely involved in the phenomenon, being publishers, authors, and producers, this explorative study aimed to understand the main intentions and motivations for both producing and using these books. Providing a bottom-up account of the phenomenon, this research intended to answer the following research question: *What explains the increasing popularity of Dutch Islamic children's literature since its emergence in the 1990s?* With a new generation of Dutch Muslims, born and raised in The Netherlands themselves, facing an increasing need for renewed pedagogical materials that fit contemporary Dutch context, the genre of Islamic children's literature is the materialised response to a need for educational and socialising materials in a non-Muslim majority context. Characterised by a diversity of both actors involved and books produced, the genre of Islamic children's literature serves multiple functions, ranging from the strict didactic teaching of virtue to playful modes of representation. Serving both as a complementary tool in the Islamic upbringing of a future generation at home and as a means of strengthening children in their Dutch Muslim identity, the genre is continuously adaptive to the needs of its 'BRUNA' Muslim audience.

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**NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION**

Various possible transcription systems exist to convert the Arabic script to the Latin alphabet. In this research Arabic words are transcribed according to the standard of the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS). This method is based on the system used by the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and in Hans Wehr's *Arabic-English dictionary*. [1] The following rules apply:

- The alif (ا) of the article al- is not written after a vowel (fī l-bayt; wa-l-rajul).
- The lām (ل) of al- is not assimilated to the next consonant.
- Hamza (ء) at the beginning of a word is not written (islām not 'islām; ilā not 'ilā, but ra's).
- Tā' marbūṭa (ة) is represented by a (not ah) and in the status constructus as -at.
- The adjective yā' followed by tā' marbū ṭ a is represented by –iyya.
- Nisbas are written as –iyya.

Throughout the research, interviews were conducted in Dutch, as this is the language in which both my respondents and me felt most comfortable conversing. The English translations of quotes and paraphrases of interviews are my own and are my responsibility. In the case of quoting the words of respondents, the translations have been 'member checked' by the respondent in question.

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[1] Universiteit Leiden, "Schrijven van papers en scriptie," Onderwijsinformatie, Studie, Studie&Studeren, Studentenwebsite. Accessed on September 13, 2021, https://www.student.universiteitleiden.nl/studie-en-studeren/studie/onderwijsinformatie/schrijven-van-papers-en-scriptie/geesteswetenschappen/midden-oostenstudies-ba?cf=geesteswetenschappen&cd=middle-eastern-studies-research-ma#farah-bazzi,joachim-detailleur

*In the corner of an abandoned industrial estate in Vlaardingen, amidst the noise of logistic trucks, warehouses filled with stock, and head offices of large logistic companies, I arrive at a huge industrial distribution centre. It is a Friday afternoon. After a while of waiting, a man looks around the corner and asks me whether I have an appointment. I nod. Today I will be talking to the owner of one of many distributors of Islamic products in both the Netherlands and Belgium. Once inside, I stand still in silent awe and amazement. No people seem to be present in this building, but the space is filled to the brim. In every corner I look boxes of meters high are piled up, shelves cover every single wall in the hall, and pallets full of materials stand everywhere. From colourful prayer rugs for the little Muslim child to little buckets depicting the different steps to perform wudū - the ritual washing performed prior to prayer – to key rings with funny and commonly known sayings with an Islamic wink,[2] it is clear that these materials are aimed at an audience of Muslim consumers. I also see plenty of books. In every corner of the room, books intended for adults are piled high. From stories about the life of the Prophet, the most reliable duʿāʾ prayers from the Qurʾān and 'al-Sahihayn'[3] to books introducing the best ways to read the Qurʾān. But it is not only these commodities that strike my eyes. Substantial amounts of children's books lay packed and stacked, ready to be sold. Colourful, attractive, and playful in appearance, these books immediately appeal to one's eyes. From stories about the Islamic history of Europe to the most beautiful Islamic places to be discovered or stories about the known and less-known friends of the Prophet, these booklets for young Muslims are eye-catching. It is clear that I have arrived at the warehouse of the largest wholesaler and distributor of Islamic products in both the Netherlands and Belgium: Hadieth Benelux.*

Describing my observations of a visit to one of the largest distributors of Islamic products in The Netherlands and Belgium, this piece of text illustrates the rich field of study at hand. In the past decades, an exponential growth in the number of children's books aimed at the Muslim child, from here on referred to as Dutch Islamic children's literature, can be observed. Illustrated with the most colourful drawings, written in accessible language, and purchasable both off- and online, these children's books are written by adult Muslims, yet target an audience of Muslim children and their

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[2] Examples of such phrases include "Just *du'a it''*, *an* Islamic allusion to the internationally known Nike slogan; a depiction of the Adidas logo stating "Aqidah"; and a key ring stating "I love you to the *ka'ba* and back."

[3] Referring to the two most trusted (*sahih*) of the hadith collections, being Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. These compilations of hadith are collectively frequently referred as '*al-Sahihayn,*' using the dual marker or 'al-muthanna' distinct in Arabic grammar.

educators – parents, teachers, and those who read these books to a new generation of Muslims in The Netherlands.[4] Continuously adapting to the desires of its audience, the supply of Islamic children's literature currently available is highly diverse. With titles visibly 'Islamic' in character, ranging from *My First Qur'ān Stories*, *The 25 Prophets of the Qur'ān: Stories, Art and Activities book for the Entire Family* or *Adam's Children: Stories from the Qur'ān* to less seemingly religiously inspired titles such as *Moessie Boekie: Daddy is My Best Friend* and *Hilmy the Hippo Learns to Share*, the genre is diversified in terms of authors, topics, and style. Following the expanding markets of the genre in Britain and the United States, as contexts of diaspora, Islamic children's literature in The Netherlands developed throughout the 1990s, a period when Dutch Muslims were actively rethinking matters of identity, societal position, and educating a future generation of Muslims. Nowadays, the supply of Dutch Islamic children's books is rapidly expanding, both in terms of actors involved in the production of these books as in terms of titles published, with new publications launched on a monthly basis.[5]

Despite the abundant scholarly research on Biblical literature reshaped for children,[6] the absence or misrepresentation of Muslims in books,[7] and 'cultural diversity' in children's literature,[8] research on the growing phenomenon of Islamic children's literature remains limited. Nevertheless, the genre of Islamic children's books is a growing market in various West-European countries, following its booming market in the Muslim world.[9] Although Islamic children's books themselves, as published in Britain and the United States, have been studied to some extent,[10] no academic research so far has focused on the phenomenon from the perspective of the actors most involved in the production and consumption of such literature, let alone on the phenomenon in The

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[4] It should be noted that the Dutch linguistic area encompasses different countries, including The Netherlands, Belgium, Surinam, Aruba, and the former Netherlands Antilles. The Flemish Belgian and Dutch markets of Islamic children's literature are closely connected to one another, yet this research's focus is on the Dutch context, as the majority of Dutch books are produced there.

[5] For an approximate overview of the titles currently available in The Netherlands, see appendix 1.

[6] See for example: Penny Schine Goldt, *Making the Bible Modern* (Ithaca: Cornall University Press, 2003); Willem van der Meiden, *'Zoo Heerlijk Eenvoudig': Geschiedenis van de Kinderbijbel in Nederland* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009); and Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

[7] See for example: Heidi Torres, "On the Margins: The Depiction of Muslims in Young Children's Picturebooks," *Children's literature in education 47,* no. 3 (2016): 191-208; Seemin Raina, "Critical content analysis of postcolonial texts: Representations of Muslims within children's and adolescent literature," PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2009.

[8] See for example: Hazel Rochman, *Against Borders: Promoting Books for a Multicultural World* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1993); Ambika Gopalakrishnan, *Multicultural Children's Literature: A Critical Issues Approach* (Thoasand Oaks: SAGE, 2011).

[9] Petra Dunges, "Arabic children's literature today: Determining factors and tendencies," *PMLA 126,* no. 1 (2011): 170-181.

[10] See for example: Torsten Janson, *Your Cradle is Green: the Islamic Foundation and the Call to Islam in Children's Literature (*Lund: Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, 2003)'; Torsten Janson, "Imaging Islamic Identity: Negotiated Norms of Representation in British Muslim Picture Books," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 32,* No. 2 (2012): 323-338; Robert A. Williams, "Passing on Religion as Identity? Anglo-western Islamic children's literature and Muslim acculturation," *Journal for Cultural Research 24,* no. 2 (2020): 85-100.

Netherlands in particular. As such, the actual intentions, motivations, and experiences of the people using and producing these books have been mostly neglected in research.

Building upon the gradually developing field of study that deals with the everyday lives of Muslims in 'the West',[11] this study intends to provide a bottom-up account of a specific manifestation of the daily experiences of Muslims in diaspora: Islamic children's literature. Providing a valuable insight in "how Muslims make sense of their lives […] from the perspectives of what Muslims 'do' and […] 'make',"[12] this research focuses on the experiences, intentions, and motivations of Muslims themselves with regard to the production and consumption of Islamic children's literature. Such a perspective allows us to consider the practices of Muslims in the West from a bottom-up perspective, building upon a shift from institution to practice in terms of epistemology and methodology. The research question that will be addressed in this study is: *What explains the increasing popularity of Dutch Islamic children's literature since its emergence in the 1990s?* Given the novelty of research on Islamic children's literature in The Netherlands, this research is explorative in nature, focusing on the 'why', the 'how', and the 'what'. In order to find a suitable answer to the research question, following sub-questions have been addressed: How can we conceptualize Islamic children's literature as a distinct literary genre other than children's literature read by Muslim children? For what reasons, and according to what criteria, are Dutch Islamic children's books produced and used by Dutch Muslims?

To gain insight into the driving factors behind the popularity of Islamic children's literature, the actors most actively involved in the process of producing and consuming these books – authors, publishers, and parents – were asked in 25 semi-structured qualitative interviews about their views on Islamic children's literature and their main intentions in either creating or reading these books for children. Although the genre of children's literature targets an audience of children, it is the adults who write, buy, recommend, prescribe and read aloud the books or, in short, decide what children will read.[13] Focusing on the words of those actors most closely involved in the phenomenon, this research aims to understand the reasons, needs, and desires behind the production and consumption of Dutch Islamic children's literature. Although the interviews with

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[11] See for example: Nancy Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Perss, 2007); Nathal Dessing et al. (eds), *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Samuel Schielke and Liza Debevec, *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes. An Anthropology of Everyday Religion* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012).

[12] Thijl Sunier, "Everyday Experiences, Moral Dilemmas and the Making of Muslim Life Worlds: Introductory Reflections," In *Everyday Life Experiences of Muslims in Europe,* ed. Erkan Toguslu (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015).

[13] Barbara Wall, *The Narrators Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 13.

these actors form the core of this thesis, as this inductive research is 'data-driven,' the analysis has been put into more theoretical terms throughout the chapters and in the discussion, placing the research in broader trends visible. Lastly, this research also builds upon some Dutch Islamic children's books themselves for exemplary and illustrative purposes. Not only, then, does it provide insights into the ways in which Islamic classical sources adapt to and are mediated to different contexts and audiences, it also provides an insight into the present and future of Islam in The Netherlands, given that "sacred texts reshaped for children provide an especially clear window on contemporary values, as they tend to stress prominent, widely agreed upon values."[14]

An introductory chapter looks into some main theoretical considerations and available literature on the conceptualization of Islamic children's literature, and the field of 'everyday Islam' in 'the West,' after which a methodological section elaborates upon the research design. A second chapter will put the genre of Dutch Islamic children's literature into historical perspective, considering the presence of Islamic children's literature internationally and its emergence in a context of The Netherlands. Chapter 3 and 4, then, focus on the underlying reasons expressed for the emergence of the genre, elaborating why producers and parents consider the genre of importance. Chapter 3 emphasizes the genre as a means of transmitting knowledge and basic principles of Islam in a fun manner, showcasing that the medium serves an auxiliary tool for Dutch Muslims in the Islamic upbringing of their children, complementing to more traditional means of Islamic education. Chapter 4, then, discovers the genre as a tool of strengthening a Muslim identity in the face of minority existence in The Netherlands, fulfilling the needs of Dutch Muslims to feel represented and find an 'Islamic option' on the Dutch bookshelves. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the major criteria expressed by respondents for the genre of Islamic children's literature. In this chapter, it becomes clear that the genre is driven by a desire of Dutch Muslims for 'BRUNA' quality, illustrating the influence of a Dutch cultural frame of reference on the genre, but also their desire for both 'Islamically' and 'pedagogically responsible' formats and contents. In a final discussion, the phenomenon of Dutch Islamic children's literature will be put into the perspective of 'everyday Islam' in the West, considering its development as a changing approach to Islamic pedagogy and upbringing in diaspora. This final chapter will reiterate main observations made, and providing ideas for possible future research.

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[14] Goldt, *Making the Bible Modern*, 7.

# CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This research provides an example of how Muslims in The Netherlands negotiate their religious beliefs, practices, and identities in a context that is non-Islamic. Given the exploratory and inductive character of this research, a wide variety of topics will be delved into throughout the chapters, but prior to analysis some theoretical elements underpinning this thesis need to be elaborated. Following this theoretical section, a methodological overview provides insight into the research design.

## 1.1. The Concepts of 'Muslim', 'Islam', 'Islamic'

First of all, a theoretical clarification on the notions 'Muslim' and 'Islamic' is necessary to avoid any misconceptions, as these concepts are often perceived with considerable vagueness and often used variously in academia, media outlets, and public debates. Aware of the various degrees of "Muslim-ness"[15] – practicing, non-practicing, those with a Muslim background or from a non-Muslim background but having embraced Islam – in this study the term 'Muslim' is utilized in a descriptive manner as a generic denominator that refers to all matters that can be attributed to *Muslims* as people, institutions, and communities. One's identity as 'Muslim', in this sense, is broader conceptualised than merely 'Islamic.'

Similarly, the concept of 'Islam' is problematic. More than just a source of identity, Islam above all, is a religion. One of the ways that has been proposed to do justice to the meaning of Islam and avoid adopting an essentialist conception is to treat religion as a "discursive tradition,"[16] as proposed by Talal Asad and further elaborated by others.[17] Building upon the work of Asad, a discursive tradition can be defined as a heterogeneous set of "discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history."[18] An important characteristic of this conceptualization is its regard to constitutive modalities of such discourses in everyday life. Not merely defining tradition as a "set of symbols," this approach equally comprises a practical dimension that trains practitioners

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[15] Anne Sofie Roald, *New Muslims in the European Context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 11.

[16] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle 17,* no. 2 (2009): 1-30.

[17] See for example: Schirin Amir-Moazami and Armando Salvatore, "Gender, generation and the reform of tradition: from Muslim majority societies into Western Europe," In: *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and Across Europe,* edited by Stefano Allievi and Jørgen Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 52-77.

[18] Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 14.

on how to act and think in certain ways.[19] Additionally, Asad's approach views heterogeneity, conflict, and disagreement to be intrinsic to every tradition,[20] allowing for a more sophisticated understanding of how this development occurs. Central to this approach is that Islam, even in a migration situation, is a living tradition and that Islamic discourses play an important role in the construction of identity. This thesis, nevertheless, agrees with a critique proposed by Samueli Schielke in response to the increasing focus on 'Islam as a discursive tradition'. According to Schielke, "most people are not dedicated activists,"[21] and one can be many other things besides Muslim. In his view, to be a Muslim, desiring to live piously and practice Islam in a public environment implies constantly reflecting upon personal normative projects in relation to that environment.[22] This point is closely related to the important idea that there are multiple ways of 'being Muslim,' as Islam can be different things for differing persons. Nevertheless, it is important "not to take the Islam out of Muslims altogether," because "even if the Islamic habitus is only one part of any individual Muslim [...] it is precisely what it is that makes a Muslim."[23]

In this thesis, when using the term 'Muslim', this term refers to *Muslims* as people, organizations, and societies. When using the adjective 'Islamic', on the other hand, the term is used as an encompassing notion that refers to the thoughts and practices related to Islam as a discursive tradition. Important to note is that present study does not intend to immerge itself in the debate on what is and what is not 'Islamic.' Such normative debates continue to occur among Muslims themselves, as the example of Islamic children's literature itself illustrates.[24]

### 1.2. What Makes Islamic Children's Literature 'Islamic'?

The term 'Islamic children's literature' itself similarly requires some attention. What defines a work of children's literature in the first place and, secondly, what defines such literature as *Islamic*? Conceptions of childhood differ per tradition and time,[25] and the boundaries of childhood

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[19] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 115.
[20] Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 16.
[21] Samueli Schielke, "Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life," *ZMO Working papers 2* (2010), 1.
[22] Schielke and Debevec, *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes.*
[23] Mark Sedgwick, *Making European Muslims: Religious Socialization among Young Muslims in Scandinavia and Western Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 4-5.
[24] For example, in the genre of Islamic children's literature a topic of theological discussion is the question of 'figurative representations' in illustrations. See chapter 4 for more information.
[25] Marcia Bunge, *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

are not uniformly agreed upon. The increasing production of children's literature in contemporary society is the consequence of the luxury of acknowledging and engaging with a renewed cultural conceptualization of childhood.[26] Children's literature includes knowledge that is socially and culturally constructed, holding 'socializing power' and disseminating cultural information.[27] As such, focusing on children's literature through study provides interesting insights into "general ideological trends and [...] important cultural debates."[28] Although scholarly debates continue on the characteristics and purpose of children's literature,[29] this thesis builds upon Rita Ghesquiere's definition who considers it those books and texts "aimed at children from a toddler age to about 11 to 12 years (puberty)."[30]

What, then, defines Islamic children's literature? In the words of Robert Williams, the concept of Islamic children's literature can be understood as "storied (re)constructions of Muslims with varying degrees of faith development situated within the dominant culture."[31] Despite observing a variety in faith developing content, acknowledging some diversity within the genre, William's definition is limited. Rather than merely developing one's faith, this research will show, an important function of the genre is the strengthening of a Muslim identity existence – broader conceived than merely 'Islamic.' The definition as proposed by Torsten Janson, currently the leading academic in studying Islamic children's literature, does include such focus on identity. In his eyes, the genre refers to "pedagogical-literary products with the explicit religio-ideological purpose of preserving and adjusting young religious identity in accordance with the needs of European minority existence."[32] Focusing particularly on pedagogical-*literary* products, consciously leaving out purely instrumental and educational-methodical works merely aimed at the classroom, the definition proposed by Janson is useful for this thesis. Not only does he include a component of transmitting religious knowledge, as captured by the adjective 'pedagogic,' he similarly acknowledges the genre's role in preserving a religious identity in the face of a non-

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[26] Zohar Shavit, *Poetics of children's literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

[27] Perry Nodelman, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (New York: Longman, 1992).

[28] Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Children's Literature," *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World 4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 227.

[29] See for example: Nodelman, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature;* Charles Temple, Miriam Martinez, and Junko Yokota, *Children's books in children's hands: An introduction to their literature* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2006).

[30] Rita Ghesquiere, *Het Verschijnsel Jeugdliteratuur* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Acco, 1993), 10.

[31] Williams, "Passing on religion as identity?" 92-93.

[32] Torsten Janson, "Visual Staging of Virtues in Islamic Children's Literature: Discipline and Pleasure," In: *More Words about Pictures: Current Research on Picturebooks and Visual/Verbal Texts for Young People,* ed. Perry Nodelman, Naomi Hamer, and Mavis Reimer (New York: Routledge, 2017), 129.

Muslim society. However, Janson's definition neglects one remaining question: what characteristics make an Islamic children's book 'Islamic'?

An answer to this question can be found the work of Allen Douglas and Fewda Malti-Douglas on Arab comic strips. For them, the 'Islamic' character of such strips is visible in two ways: either when "moral guidance is presented in Islamic terms or with Islamic legitimization," such as applying Islamic terminology to non-religious matters, or when "specifically Islamic topics are treated, whether religious discussions, historical evocations, or even the presentation of material from the sacred texts themselves from the *hadith* (teachings of the Prophet) to the Qur'ān."[33] Such an understanding of 'Islamic' is partly applicable to current market of Islamic children's literature, as many books indeed are visibly Islamic in terms of terminology, topics, or elements treated. Nevertheless, such books are not the only ones currently available in both Islamic bookstores and online web shops. As this research will illustrate, contemporary market of Dutch Islamic children's literature is heterogeneous, both in terms of producers behind the genre as in terms of the continuously changing character of the books. In the work of Williams, the market is even understood to transform "from Islamic to Muslim children's literature."[34] Although my research definitely underscores such a transformation, most of my respondents themselves referred to the genre as 'Islamic children's literature.' Complicating the matter even more, for them this term could apply to different works. Whereas some interpreted the term as being 'recognisably Islamic', mentioning Allah, the Prophets, and Islamic terminology, other respondents defined the genre as broad as content that could be considered 'Islamically responsible' or 'in lines with an Islamic worldview,' understood by different respondents to vary from *Donald Duck* strips to any story with a good moral.

What becomes clear is that there exists no single 'Islamic way' within the genre. As such, building upon the work of Janson and Douglas, this thesis makes use of the following definition: *those pedagogical-literary products with the religio-ideological purpose of passing on one or more Islamic stories, values, norms or identities to children (to about 12 years old) in accordance with the needs of European minority existence.* It should be noted that excluded from such a definition, then, are the purely instrumental and educational-methodical materials produced for the classroom. Making use of this definition, the term itself leaves room for diversity and

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[33] Allen Douglas and Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Arab Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 83-84.
[34] Williams, "Passing on religion as identity?" 92.

heterogeneity within the supply of books available, but also allows for a critical consideration of the change within the supply available since the genre's emergence in The Netherlands.

Until now, little research has focused on the topic of Islamic children's literature. This marginality of research available can be ascribed to the marginal position of children's literature within academia in general, as for a long time the genre was merely regarded as an adapted, pedagogic, and thus literary inferior variant of adult literature.[35] The genre of Islamic children's literature in itself, however, is similarly marginal "in capacity of *Islamic children's* literature."[36] Depictions of immigration, 'multiculturalism,' and diaspora remain less prominent in children's literature, which indicates "a correspondence between literary quality (as defined by Euro-American academic hegemony) and academic interest."[37] However, some works exist that have dealt with the genre. For example, sociologist Ayse Saktanber provides an extensive overview of Turkish children's and adolescent literature in Turkey.[38] Observing a recent increase in Islamic publications, Saktanber considers this development an indication of a contemporary literacy of Islam that "produces its own realm of knowledge and information and expresses its own politico-religious claims at the intellectual level by using modern social vehicles."[39] This observation is shared by Janson, who has prominently focused on the genre in a West-European context. In his dissertation on British-based publisher 'Islamic Foundation', Janson considers the genre as a new modality "for the negotiation of norms and identities," relating to earlier conventions of *da'wa,*[40] understood as the 'invitation' to and 'edification' of Islam. In his eyes, the genre emerged as the result of an "activist interpretation of Islam," typical for "a moderate Islamist understanding of religious identity and social agency."[41] Although he himself acknowledges that such an interpretation of Islam is far from representative of Muslims generally, his work merely focuses on the publications of one British publisher originating in the South Asian reform movement *Jamā'at-i-Islāmi,*[42] indirectly neglecting the diversity of the genre itself and the people behind it.

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[35] Maria Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic* (New York: Garland, 1996), 48.

[36] Janson, *Your Cradle is Green*, 25.

[37] Ibid.*,* 23.

[38] Ayse Saktanber, "Muslim Identity in Children's Picture-Books," In: *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics, and Literature in a Secular State,* ed. Richard Tapper (London: I.P. Tauris, 1991).

[39] Ibid., 172.

[40] Janson, *Your Cradle is Green,* 27.

[41] Torsten Janson, "Islamic children's literature: Informal Religious Education in Diaspora," *Handbook of Islamic Education: International Handbook of Religion and Education 7,* no. 7 (2017), 3.

[42] Founded in nineteenth century India by Abu al-'Ala Mawdudi, a prominent figure of Sunni moderate Islamism, *Jama'at-i-Islami* was one of the first influential Islamist organizations worldwide.

Approaching the topic through a considerate study of the texts and images of the books themselves, Janson's work fails to explain for what diverse reasons these books are actually produced and used.

A second author that delved into the genre of Islamic children's literature in a context of diaspora is Robert Williams. Drawing upon a classical cultural studies perspective, Williams explores the socio-cultural limits of passing on religion as identity through these books. Specifically focusing "Anglo-Western Islamic children's literature," published in Britain and the United States, Williams argues that Muslim authors increasingly "appropriate the cultural logics and language of colonial and neo-colonial power in their discursive practice."[43] In contrast to Janson, Williams does consider the phenomenon from an ethnographic perspective through participant observation as a "one-time ghost writer"[44] and at book festivals across Britain, Canada, and the United States, however, his work is similarly limited. Mainly focused on the rethinking of cultural studies, Williams' work does provide a sense of the phenomenon as a site of cultural visibility yet neglects to focus on the particularities of the genre and its actors.

The works of Janson and Williams have been of importance to this thesis, yet both merely focus on the Anglo-Western context. Different from their studies, this research is aimed at the unexplored phenomenon of Islamic children's literature in a Dutch context.[45] Different from abovementioned examples of research, this thesis aims to contribute to the field of study on Islamic children's literature in the sense that it provides a bottom-up account of its phenomenon in The Netherlands, building upon the broader field of research on Muslims in a West-European context.

### 1.3.'Everyday Islam' in the 'West'

Whereas already in the seventh century the first Muslims arrived in the Iberian Peninsula, marking the start of thirteen centuries of interaction between Europe and Islam, the arrival of Islam "by means of migration, violence and media images"[46] since the 1970s has sparked a wave of interest in the so-called field of 'Islam in the West.'[47] Dealing with two seemingly well-known concepts,

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[43] Williams, "Passing on Religion as Identity?" 85.
[44] Ibid.
[45] One article somehow related to the topic can be found in the literary magazine *Literatuur zonder Leeftijd,* providing a limited account of titles for young adults – excluding children's books – in which Islam plays some role. See: Karen Ghonem-Woets, "Ali en Amel en hun zoektocht naarde gulden middenweg: Over de rol van de islam in boeken voor jongeren," *Literatuur Zonder Leeftijd 21* (2007): 99-115.
[46] Maurits Berger, *A Brief History of Islam in Europe: Thirteen Centuries of Creed, Conflict, and Coexistence* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2014).
[47] See for example: Yvonne Yazbek Haddad (ed.), *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Roberto Tottoli (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West* (Abingdon, Routledge: 2015).

previously often juxtaposed to one another in research,[48] the term 'Islam in the West' is a problematic one and complex to define. Although 'the West' as a geographical denominator, yet culturally constructed in contraposition to the image of an Orient,[49] may refer to North-America, Oceania, and Europe, this thesis preliminary focuses on the presence of Islam and Muslims in a West-European context, specifically The Netherlands.

Within the field of study on Islam in West-Europe, increasingly focus has been paid to the question whether Muslim beliefs and practices are transforming in this environment, and whether can be spoken of a 'Europeanization' of Islam.[50] In order to find an answer to such matters, an important question to address first is: "what does it mean to be a Muslim in Europe today?"[51] 'Being Muslim' in a West-European society might differ from 'being Muslim' elsewhere in several ways. An often-mentioned factor is that its social environment is generally characterised by low levels of religiosity and a strongly secularising tendency,[52] on a societal level but also in the lives of individuals.[53] Further, in West-European societies religious belief is regularly considered to be a choice, rather than a given. Living in multicultural societies, outside a "sacred canopy," Muslims in West-Europe belong to a religious minority and 'being Muslim,' then, is not self-evident.[54] Outside the "monopoly" of an Islamic worldview, Muslims "are forced to be conscious of what previously could be taken for granted."[55] In the face of minority-existence, as will become clear, practices of Islam seem to transform.

This thesis contributes to a field of study that, in recent years, has been described as "everyday Islam."[56] Covering mundane, ordinary, and seemingly banal practices, this field of study deals with topics such as food, art, leisure time, and sexuality of Muslims in Europe. Rather than showing how Muslims make sense of their lives from a top-down perspective, this thesis

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[48] See for example: Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Samuel Huntington, *Class of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[49] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

[50] See for example: Frank Peter, "Individualization and Religious Authority in Western European Islam," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations 17,* no. 1 (2006): 105-118; Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999).

[51] Dessing et al., *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*, 1.

[52] Btissam Abaaziz, "'Ze waren onwetend.' Een onderzoek naar de religieuze beleving van de eerste en tweede 'generatie' Marokkaanse Nederlanders." PhD diss., Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 2021, 35; Jocelyne Cesari, "Muslim Minorities in Europe: The silent revolution," In: *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East,* ed. J.L. Esposito & F. Burgat (Rutgers University Press, 2003), 251-269.

[53] Sipco Vellenga et al., *Mist in de Polder: Zicht op ontwikkelingen omtrent de islam in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Aksant, 2009), 18.

[54] Cesari, "Muslim Minorities in Europe," 259; Stephen Vertovec and Alisdair Rogers, *Muslim European Youth: Reproducing Ethnicity, Religion, Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 11.

[55] David Voas and Fenella Fleischmann, "Islam Moves West: Religious Change in the First and Second Generations," *Ann. Rev. Sociol. 38* (2012): 531.

[56] Sunier, "Everyday Experiences, Moral Dilemmas and the Making of Muslim Life Worlds," 9.

contributes to the field by focusing on what Muslims "do" and "make,"[57] in line with Michel de Certeau's essay *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Such a "bottom-up" practice theory aims "to bring light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups of individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'."[58] Studying 'everyday religion' or, as the title of Nancy Ammerman's work states, "observing modern religious lives,"[59] assumes that theologies are not merely constructed in formal venues by religious authorities, but rather in numerous places and moments, and similarly by non-experts.[60] As such, breaking open the academic "bias towards elite, socially-established and state-inflected forms of religion," the study of everyday practice allows for the consideration of "previously invisible or overlooked dimensions of religious life."[61]

Contributing to the understanding of what it means to be Muslim in West-Europe, this thesis approaches such a question from the perspective of what people themselves produce and consume. As will become clear throughout, the genre of Islamic children's literature is one manifestation of the everyday lived experiences of Muslims in diaspora, but similarly focused on and used in a domestic setting. As such, this research provides an example of "what is "made" of Islam in daily, ordinary, everyday situations."[62] Studying such an everyday practice, in the words of Erkan Toguslu, then allows us to:

> discover and penetrate this deeper experience of Muslims in social life. The practices concern a mode of operation, logic of doing, a way of being and a meaning. The everyday practices create free areas through hobbies, games, art, clothes to the users in which one can see an essential formation of the self. We would need to discuss the increased sense that Muslims have of their distinctive similar spatial locations that serve a free area or refuge to realize him or herself.[63]

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[57] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).
[58] Ibid., xv.
[59] Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives.*
[60] Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[61] Linda Woodhead, "Tactical and Strategic Religion," In: *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*, ed. Natal Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft, Jørgen S. Nielsen, and Linda Woodhead (Farnham: Routledge, 2013), 9-22.
[62] Sunier, "Everyday Experiences, Moral Dilemmas and the Making of Muslim Life Worlds," 13.
[63] Erkan Toguslu, *Everyday Life Practices of Muslims in Europe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015).

To say this differently, the everyday practices of Muslims can provide an insight into the life worlds of Muslims, being individual or collective, in continuously changing contexts. Studying Dutch Islamic children's literature through the words and experiences of its producers and users contributes to the field of 'everyday Islam,' as it builds upon a transformation in approach from institution to everyday practice. Not focusing on religious experts in particular, but talking to 'ordinary' Muslims,[64] this research opens up the possibility to "focus on the creative, subtle, tacit, innovative, and sometimes invisible ways in which social agents navigate in the world attempting to make it meaningful."[65] Talking to them about Islamic children's literature does not only tell us something about why these books exist, it similarly provides an insight into the things relevant or important to them, how they perceive themselves, but also their futures in The Netherlands. It shows changing wishes, needs and desires among different Muslims, but it also draws an image of the materialisation of contemporary lived religion in The Netherlands.

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[64] In this research it became clear that the 'ordinary', in general, refers to those readers who do not have formal training in Qur'anic exegesis and hermeneutics. For a research on the 'ordinary' Bible-reading practices of Dutch Christians, see: Annemarie Foppen, Anne-Mareike Schol-Wetter, Peter-Ben Smit and Eva van Urk-Coster, "The Most Significant Book of the Netherlands – and its Ordinary Readers," *Journal of the Bible and its Reception 8,* no. 1 (2021): 107-133.
[65] Dessing et al., *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*.

## 1.4. Methodology

Islamic children's books, at the moment of writing present study, have existed for several decades and in the past years the topic has mostly been a subject that is written 'about', as the voices of the actors involved have been overlooked in such research. As such, the enormous diversity and heterogeneity within and behind the field has been neglected. This research worked from two basic assumptions: the observation that the genre of Islamic children's literature has been increasingly produced, used and read in The Netherlands since its emergence in the 1990s, but also the assumption that mostly Muslim adults are involved in this process of producing and consuming such literature. As Barbara Wall points out, "if books are to be published, marketed and bought, adults first must be attracted, persuaded and convinced."[66] In order to be bought, children's books need to conform to the tastes, likes, and dislikes of the adult.[67] Therefore, the ones who produce the books, those who publish, but also those who decide to buy and read aloud Dutch Islamic children's literature were the focus of this study. The starting point in gathering data on this topic was to define who these Muslim adults are and how they engaged themselves with the genre.

## 1.4.1. Data Gathering

Given the unchartered character of the phenomenon in The Netherlands, this research is explorative in nature. According to Hennie Boeije, a study based on qualitative interviews provides a suitable manner to research underexplored phenomena.[68] Using in-depth interviews allows respondents to express experiences, motivations and meanings in their own words.[69] Conversing with the most involved actors in the field of Islamic children's literature this research allowed me to gain insights into the motives, motivations, and personal goals for writing and using such children's books.

In total, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a variety of respondents in the period from May to September 2021.[70] A total of 15 respondents comprised the category of 'producers' of Islamic children's literature, including both authors – 9 in total – and publishers actively responsible for the creation of books currently available on the Dutch market. Within this

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[66] Wall, *The Narrators Voice*, 13.

[67] Riita Oittinen, "No Innocent Act: On the Ethics of Translating for Children," In *Children's Literature in Translation: Challenges and Strategies,* ed. Jan van Coillie and Walter P. Verschueren (Routledge: London and New York, 2006), 36.

[68] Hennie Boeije, *Analysis in Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 32.

[69] Ibid., 62.

[70] In appendix 2, an overview is provided of all respondents who participated in this research.

group, also one 'online promoter' of Islamic children's literature was interviewed, himself active in the production of YouTube videos for Muslim children and sometimes requested to promote recently published titles. A second group of five respondents consisted of Dutch Muslim parents who currently raise their children in The Netherlands. Although this group was smaller, it should be noted that most of the producers interviewed are also parents themselves, leading to a total of 17 respondents denominated by the characteristic 'parent'. A final group of five respondents were adult Muslims themselves raised in The Netherlands, but without any children at the time of conducting this research. Interviewing such 'childless' adults allowed me to gain insights into their experiences with being raised as a Muslim in the Dutch context, but also learn about their familiarity with Islamic children's books and observe a possible generational shift in terms of upbringing and education, one main observation of this research. Among all respondents interviewed, nine of them had been raised in non-Islamic, Dutch families themselves, and had 'converted' or, as one respondent preferred to name it, 'returned' to Islam at some point.[71] As will become clear throughout, distinguishing between such denominators contributed to the analysis.

Based on the books themselves, I started looking for those actors behind the phenomenon, resulting in a relatively arbitrary sample of interviewees. Mainly contacting producing actors through their websites, contact information online, and Instagram accounts in the initial phase of research, the sample was indirectly influenced by the online and material visibility of such producers. In the case of parents and adults raised in The Netherlands, the personal and professional networks of both me and my supervisor were of great help. Using a 'snowball' sampling technique, every respondent was asked for suggestions of potential future interviewees. Although the sample of interviewees is not fully representative of the wide variety of Muslims living in The Netherlands in terms of ethnicity, age, educational levels, and other demographic characteristics, an interesting observation lies at the basis of this limited sample. Comprising the sample looking at the supply of Islamic children's currently available, it turned out that most people active in the field can be ascribed to particular demographics: Dutch Muslims of the second generation – mostly from Moroccan descent or 'converted' Muslims – living in urban areas, and highly-educated in the Dutch educational system. Additionally, despite different ideological and theological interpretations of my respondents, all of them adhere to a Sunni interpretation of Islam,

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[71] Some Muslims prefer to use the term 'returning' or 'reverting' rather than 'converting', referring to the idea of Islam as *din-al-fitrah*, the "natural religion." See: Christine Jacobsen, *Islamic Traditions and Muslim Youth in Norway* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 298.

an observation similarly made by Janson who stated that "most Islamic children's literature flourishes within the Sunni Islamic movement."[72] Important to address is that this movement is not static nor homogeneous, and interpretational differences among my respondents were visible in some cases.

Following two introductory interviews, I was able to formulate a coherent questionnaire for later interviews. Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to shift in topics of conversation and created room for the participants to talk about the themes they considered important within the scope of my research. So, although I entered the field with a sense of what I desired to examine, throughout the research process I remained open to change and flexibility.[73] The medium through which interviews were conducted differed. As the research was fully conducted during the corona-crisis in 2021, influencing the mobility of people to a great extent as governmental advises were to remain home as much as possible, some interviews were conducted through online platforms such as ZOOM or Google Meet. On a rare occasion, an interview had to be conducted through telephone. Luckily, however, most interviews could take place in-person, some in public spaces such as cafés or libraries and others in the private spaces of a respondent's house. In general, interviews lasted between 1,5 to two hours.

### 1.4.2. Data Analysis

Given the explorative character of this research, as a previously unexplored topic, this research was "data-driven."[74] Rather than basing the analysis on *preconceived* categories, codes or theoretical assumptions, using an inductive approach allowed me to *generate* codes and theoretical insights by closely studying the data itself. Following the phase of interviewing, I transcribed the audio recordings and analysed the interviews using an inductive reflexive thematic analysis as proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. Intended to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes across the data collected, such a reflexive thematic analysis "provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data,"[75] given its theoretical freedom. Familiarising myself with the data, I generated initial codes throughout. Using the online program *ATLAS.ti* allowed me to create codes and search for specific

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[72] Janson, "Imaging Islamic Identity," 329.
[73] Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (New York: Longman, 1999): 46.
[74] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology 3* no. 2 (2006), 83.
[75] Ibid., 78.

codes or quotations easily in order to support the analysis. Primarily interested in people's stated opinions and experiences, this research preliminary based itself on semantic coding. Following this step, I identified patterns throughout the data and collated codes into identified themes relevant to the research questions, constantly comparing the sayings of respondents and gathering relevant data into each potential theme. Emphasizing meaning and meaningfulness as ascribed by participants themselves, this thematic analysis followed an experiential orientation to data interpretation. Such an approach proved to be most suitable as the aim of this study was to prioritize respondents' own accounts of their experiences and motivations.[76] After a "recursive"[77] and reflexive process of moving back and forth through phases of analysis, I was able to create a coherent narrative on the data and put it in the context of relevant existing literature, attempting to analyse patterns and their broader meanings and implications. In some cases, I closely considered a selection of children's books for illustrative purposes of the report, supporting the words of a respondent or demonstrating a phenomenon observed through analysis.

### 1.4.3. Ethical Considerations

In general, my request for interviews was met with enthusiasm and reciprocal interest. Nevertheless, some respondents initially remained cautious to participate in the research. Some respondents had had negative experiences in participating in interviews, underlining the importance of "beneficence"[78] in qualitative research. In order to ensure the maximization of outcomes whilst avoiding any unnecessary harm for my respondents, I did apply some practical ethical measures. Prior to interviewing, I asked respondents for their consent to record the audio of our conversations and unanimously all respondents consented to this. Secondly, to all respondents the nature and purpose of data collection were communicated through informed consent forms, ensuring that respondents were fully aware of and approved of their participation in the research. Such consent forms similarly respected the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of respondents, as all could indicate how their data would be disclosed. Ensuring their anonymity, I did remove unique identifiers of respondents, such as name, date of birth, and place. Finally, conducting a 'member check' allowed me to communicate and double-check the quotes of my respondents, ensuring their consent in using these particular phrases.

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[76] Ibid., 85.
[77] Ibid., 86.
[78] Boeije, *Analysis in Qualitative Research*, 44.

### 1.4.4. Positionality

Given that qualitative research was conducted, producing a contextual real-world account on the experiences and intentions of both producers and consumers of Islamic children's literature, the outcomes of this research were influenced by my position as a researcher. This already became clear in the initial stage of the research. Born and raised in a Protestant Christian household myself, familiar with the ways in which religious norms, values, and knowledge are conveyed to children both in church and at home, an important challenge of doing research on Islamic children's literature was to become aware of my personal unintended and unconscious assumptions. For example, being familiar with the usage of Christian children's Bibles, I assumed at the start of this research project that a similar product – such as a 'children's Qur'ān'[79] - would inevitably exist within the Islamic tradition. Quickly, nevertheless, I came to the realisation that this assumption was wrong and, although some examples of books exist that do focus on the conveying of Qur'anic stories to an audience of children, the broader genre of Islamic children's literature proved to be more diverse and heterogeneous than I previously assumed.

The fact that I am non-Muslim similarly had some research-technical benefits. For example, in some cases, certain subjects were explained to me more elaborately that one would consider self-evident for a Muslim interviewer. Similarly, my personal experiences with children's Bibles enabled me to particularly connect with reverted Muslims raised in Christian families and familiar with such children's literature. Throughout the research, several respondents were curious about my personal intentions and motivations to study Dutch Islamic children's literature. To answer such questions and ease the interaction between the respondents and me, I was open about my interests in the study and frequently narrated about my personal love for reading and (children's) books, but also did I share experiences about my religious upbringing at home and Christian stories narrated to me. Sharing such personal stories often lighted the air and proved to be the point where people started to share their experiences with books and reading themselves.

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[79] The existence of a 'children's Qur'ān' has similarly been assumed by others. In 2003 an article was published in Dutch newspaper *Trouw* on the absence of a 'children's Qur'ān' in The Netherlands. Back then, a first attempt at such a Qur'ān aimed at children was initiated, *Wij Vertellen je het Mooiste Verhaal* by Farouk Achour and published by Dutch publisher Bulaaq, yet received with a lot of controversy. See: Trouw. "Ik mijn geloof, jij het jouwe," Trouw. Published November 3, 2003. https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/ik-mijn-geloof-jij-het-jouwe~b87cb95f/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F.

**CHAPTER 2: MAPPING THE FIELD – A DEVELOPING PHENOMENON**

Islamic children's literature in The Netherlands appears to be part of a much wider global phenomenon in the Muslim world. Also, Islamic children's literature must be placed in the broader socio-historical context of a growing market of Islam-related commodities as well as the increasing institutionalisation of Muslims living in non-Muslim majority societies. This chapter maps the field of an expanding Islamic children's literature market. Starting with an introduction to the broader international context of (Islamic) children's literature, indicating that the phenomenon is connected to broader developments in the Muslim world, the chapter then delves into the specificities of the Dutch Islamic children's literature market.

### 2.1. An International Market of 'Islamic' Children's Literature

The phenomenon of Islamic children's literature does not stand on itself and is to be understood within the broader historical development of a growing market that nourishes the consumerist attitudes of Muslims worldwide. In this age of "the global Halal industry,"[80] in which numerous Muslim middle classes embrace their consumerist attitudes and desires by mixing these with essential aspects of their personal Islamic practice and identity, it would be incorrect to assume that the emergence of Islamic children's literature is merely a result of local developments among Muslim communities in diaspora. Rather, the genre reflects broader trends throughout the Middle East and Arabic speaking world in general.[81]

Little scholarly attention has been paid to "images of children and childhood in modern Muslim contexts."[82] The market of children's literature in the Arabic world, nevertheless, is gradually expanding. As the first state to produce Arabic children's literature, Egypt is one of the centres of Arabic publishing today – for both adult and children's books, but similarly in Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates the genre is growing.[83] The rapid growth of this market has been ascribed to various factors in the work of Nisreen Anati. Anati argues that the most important

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[80] Karim Douglas Crow, "Consuming Islam: Branding 'Wholesome' as a Lifestyle Fetish," *Islamic Sciences 13,* no. 1 (2015): 4.

[81] It should be acknowledged that both terms are controversial, as the former is set in colonial and orientalist description of the world and the latter neglects the multiple spoken dialects of the Arabic language. In this chapter, the term 'Middle East' is used as a geographical denominator, and 'Arabic speaking world' as a descriptive term regarding literature produced in one of the Arabic language(s).

[82] Pamela Karimi and Christiane Gruber, "Introduction: The politics and poetics of child image in Muslim contexts," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 32,* no. 2 (2012), 291.

[83] Dunges, "Arabic children's literature today," 170.

developments influencing the increased interest in producing and using Arabic children's literature are globalization, resulting in an increased access of translations to and from Arabic;[84] growing government support and funding; and a cultural 'reawakening.'[85] Besides the increasing number of translated materials available as a consequence of processes of globalization, increasingly authors are supported through funding by Arab governments in combination with the founding of international awards recognizing Arabic children's literature. Mainly centred in and funded by the Arabian Gulf states, such awards provide an interesting incentive for publishers who desire to develop their business, but also challenge them to improve the quality of their productions.[86] A final theory for the rapid growth of the Arabic children's books market, additionally, is the idea that the genre is a product of the so-called 'reawakening' occurring in the Arab world. This 'reawakening,' particularly occurring in the oil-rich Arabian Gulf States, inspires Arabs to return to their roots and strengthen ties with their distinctive cultural traits, traditions, and origins. Emphasising the need to return to one's roots, the genre of Arabic children's literature is considered to be a tool to strengthen Arabic authenticity and pride in the Arabic language.[87]

Imparting values like patriotism, admiration for Arab culture and heritage, but also love for Islam, children's literature in the Middle East has a preliminary didactic and heavily moralizing function. Focused on dichotomous themes as good-evil, ethical-unethical, moral-immoral,[88] the genre is didactic in nature and mostly regarded a means to an end rather than an end by itself. Other major themes in Arabic children's literature promote nationalism and Islamic values, and it is believed by many scholars that the role of literature is "to transmit to children tales of the good, the pious and the nationalistic."[89] Ranging from traditional stories, such as *The Thousand and One Nights* or *Kalilah and Dimnah*, to narrations on the life of Prophet Muhammad, many books remain socio-culturally conservative, and often non-appealing to children in terms of illustrations and

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[84] Ursula Lindsey, "A Potential Renaissance for Arabic Translation," *Al-Fanar Media*, June 3, 2013, https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2013/06/a-new-dawn-for-arabic-translation/.

[85] Nisreen Anati, "A Voice from the Middle East: Political Content in Arabic Children's Literature," *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies 11,* no. 1 (2020): 71-91.

[86] Hanada Taha Thomure, Shereen Kreidieh, and Sandra Baroudi, "Arabic children's literature: Glitzy production, disciplinary content," *Issues in Educational Research 30,* no. 1 (2020): 326.

[87] See for example: Nisreen Anati, "The Influence of the Arab Spring on Arabic YA Literature," *Children's Literature in Education 44,* no. 4 (2017): 1-17; Lindsey, "A Potential Renaissance for Arabic Translation."

[88] See for example: Alaa Al-Daragi, "Tensions between didacticism, entertainment and translatorial practices: Deletion and omission in the Arabic translations of Harry Potter," (Unpublished PhD diss., University of London, 2016), https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/16071/; Sabeur Mdallel, "Translating Children's Literature in the Arab World: The State of the Art," *Translators' Journal 48,* no. 1-2 (2003), 298-203.

[89] Thomure, Kreidieh, and Baroudi, "Arabic children's literature," 324.

graphics.[90] Illustrating that the preservation of a distinct cultural identity seems to lay at the basis of the production of children's literature in the Arabic speaking world, a cultural 'reawakening' similarly forms one of the driving factors behind the emergence of diasporic Islamic children's literature.

In 1977, the First World Conference on Muslim Education was held in Mecca, as a result of common experiences "of xenophobia and increasing hostility for 'diaspora Muslims' in the Anglo-west."[91] Prior to this year, according to Robert Williams, only three English-language texts had been produced specifically for an audience of Muslim children.[92] Driven by a sense of urgency to preserve a distinct Islamic identity in diaspora, the main topics of discussion in the conference were the existing conditions of contemporary educational institutions and their role in the education of the Islamic faith. It was established that a dichotomy existed between education in the Muslim world and secular education, resulting in a call for action to "address rising Islamic illiteracy and the fading of Islam for Muslim identity."[93] Referred to as *The Crisis in Muslim Education,*[94] this event marked an initial stage in the production of Islamic children's literature in the Western world. Muslim organisation such as IQRA' Foundation, American Trust Publications, and the Islamic Foundation, the latter two Saudi-subsidised initiatives, started to publish literature focusing on an English-speaking Muslim audience in the United Kingdom and the United States. Following the example of these countries, the genre slowly but gradually spreads across other Anglo-European countries, as Islamic children's literature is now increasingly available in France, Germany, Belgium, and The Netherlands. [95]

## 2.2. The Dutch Context

As the above illustrates, the emergence of an Islamic children's literature genre can be traced back to questions of preserving an Islamic identity in diaspora throughout the 1970s. A similar development is visible in the Dutch context, in which questions of identity, societal position, and institutionalisation of Muslim communities similarly start to arise in this period. Despite earlier

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[90] Ibid.
[91] Williams, "Passing on religion as identity?" 89.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Syed Sajjad Husain and Syed Ali Ashraf, *Crisis in Muslim Education* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979).
[95] See for example: Janson, "Imaging Islamic Identity."

presence of differing Muslim communities in The Netherlands,[96] this number grew exponentially throughout the 1960s, when Dutch factories started to recruit labourers from Turkey and Morocco willing to do unskilled work in the industry-sector. Following the implementation of a law on family reunification in 1974, for these labourers the opportunity emerged to remain in The Netherlands and bring over their families. In a brief period, the number of migrants increased, and their presence proved to be no longer temporary.[97] It is in the 1980s, then, that the effects of this family reunification become visible. The number of mosques, Islamic organisations, and airtime for Muslims on public television grew evidently, often organized along ethnic and national lines.[98] Nevertheless, whilst Muslim communities gained an increasingly public character through this institutionalisation, the importance and influence of religion in Dutch society, particularly among citizens without a migrant background, decreased due to a continuous process of secularisation.[99] It is in this context that the question of how to raise future generations of Muslims became a central one: how could an Islamic identity be safeguarded in a cultural context with cultural roots in Christianity, that is largely secular, and occasionally even hostile to religion?

Children of the first generation grow up in this context of de-pillarization on the one hand and Islamic institutionalisation on the other hand. With their children often registered in public primary schools, many migrant parents were dissatisfied with such education. In general, a pressing matter for parents was that pedagogical and educational ideas differed between their households and those imparted by the Dutch educational system. For example, some parents were highly critical of Dutch schools, as these would insufficiently stimulate the moral development of their children.[100] Finding it difficult to identify with norms and values of secular Dutch society as promoted through its educational system,[101] these Muslim parents became increasingly afraid that their children would eventually alienate from their Islamic religion and identity. Arising from this concern the urge and necessity originated to spend attention to the transmission of – for parents

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[96] Think for example of communities such as Ahmadi missionaries, Moluccan exiles and students from both Indonesia and Surinam. See: Nico Landman, *Van Mat tot Minaret* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1992), 39.

[97] Maurits Berger, "The Netherlands," *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, ed. Jocelyne Cesari (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 158-222.

[98] Vellenga et al., *Mist in de Polder*, 15.

[99] Ibid., 18.

[100] Trees Pels, *Marrokkaanse kleuters en hun culturele kapitaal: Opvoeden en leren in het gezin en op school* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1991).

[101] Marjo Buitelaar, *Van Huis uit Marrokaans*: *over verweven loyaliteiten van hoogopgeleide migrantendochters* (Amsterdam: Bulaaq 2009), 139-140.

considered self-evident – norms and values.[102] Counterbalancing such perceived limitations in education, Muslim parents sent their children in their spare time to mosque schools, where religious and moral transmission were central. Nevertheless, in many cases mosques could not live up towards a growing demand for pedagogic-didactic qualified teachers.[103] It is this context of an increasing number of Muslim children growing up in The Netherlands, the possible alienation from their own culture among these children, and limited accessible and qualitative Islamic religious education that together form the basis for the necessity of Islamic primary schools and other means of religious transmission.

## 2.3. From Education to Wholesaler – A Developing Genre

Although the very first Islamic children's books published in the Dutch language were translations of English materials,[104] the phenomenon in The Netherlands mainly found its origins within an educational setting. From the emergence of children's literature in general, the genre has been closely connected to matters of upbringing and pedagogy.[105] Educational institutions have played a fundamental role in the development of literature for youth in general, as it was often actors active in the educational field who contributed to the renewal of both content and format, and in the case of Christian children's literature in particular, such "religious-didactic instructional works"[106] were initially produced by educational institutions. A similar development is visible in the emergence of Dutch Islamic children's literature.

Raising a new generation of Muslim children in a non-Muslim majority context and non-Islamic cultural hegemony, initiatives with the intention of teaching and internalising religious culture and identity become visible during the 1980s and 1990s. Children, regarded as mostly exposed to the cultural norms of the majority through public education, cultural consumption, and relations with peers, became the focus group for this process of religious socialization. In this period, small organisations and individuals active within the field of Islamic primary education and mosque education recognized this need and started thinking of renewed methods to educate

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[102] Stella van de Wetering and Arslan Karagül, *Zoek Kennis van de Wieg tot het Graf* (Antwerpen and Apeldoorn: Garant Uitgevers 2013), 113-116.
[103] Ibid., 32-33.
[104] For example one of the first Dutch Islamic children's books *De Betekenis van Soerah Fatihah: Een Geïllustreerd Kinderboek* was initially published by an Ahmadiyya organization in the United States, after which it became translated into Dutch by Jeroen Rietberg in 1999.
[105] Ghesquiere, *Het Verschijnsel Jeugdliteratuur*, 14-17.
[106] Rob Resoort, "Een proper profitelijc boek: Eind Vijftiende en Zestiende Eeuw," In: *De Hele Bibelebontse Berg,* ed. Nettie Heimeriksen and Willem van Toorn (Amsterdam: EM. Querido's Uitgeverij B.V., 1989), 103.

children religiously. With the establishment of the first Islamic primary schools in The Netherlands in 1988,[107] it is no wonder that the first books published in the Dutch context originate in the 1990s. In this period, the need for educational materials for children was urgent, as many Islamic schools faced the challenge of fostering an exclusively Islamic culture in school. With low numbers of fully trained Muslim teachers and "little money to develop specifically Muslim materials or to translate and publisher materials developed elsewhere,"[108] a need for improvement of an Islamic curriculum was deemed necessary. As one converted Muslim author, experienced as a teacher of religious education in various Dutch Islamic primary schools, mentioned:

> We actually started from [the board of two Islamic primary schools]. The director there at the time [...] was really progressive. He said: 'you know what, we can set up our own publishing house together,' because schools are not allowed to do that themselves, they are not allowed to become a publisher or trader or anything. Then the three of us, [....], set up a foundation together and we started publishing books, teaching methods, but also children's books. And yes, in the beginning also by promoting the name of the schools on it, so that they also became known and parents would consider visiting the schools.
>
> - Author (convert, female, 53)

Producing teaching methods and educational materials with teacher guidelines, actors within Islamic primary education start realising the production of materials aimed at supporting teachers and schools in the education of Muslim children. Different than in the cases of Great Britain and the United States, contexts where it was often large Gulf-subsidised Muslim organisations that started to produce books, in The Netherlands the initial publishers of Islamic children's literature mainly emerged from the field of Islamic primary education, developing materials primarily aimed at usage in the classroom and in mosque education. Primarily written with a cognitive approach, most of these early books aim at the acquiring of knowledge and titles include distinct Islamic topics, such as rituals, prayer, and prophets.

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[107] Bahaeddin Budak, *Waarom stichten jullie niet een eigen school?: religieuze identiteitsontwikkeling van islamitische basisscholen 1988-2013* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij IUA-Publication, 2021).
[108] Geoffrey Walford, "Classification and framing of the curriculum in evangelical Christian and Muslim schools in England and the Netherlands," *Educational Studies 28* (2002): 406.
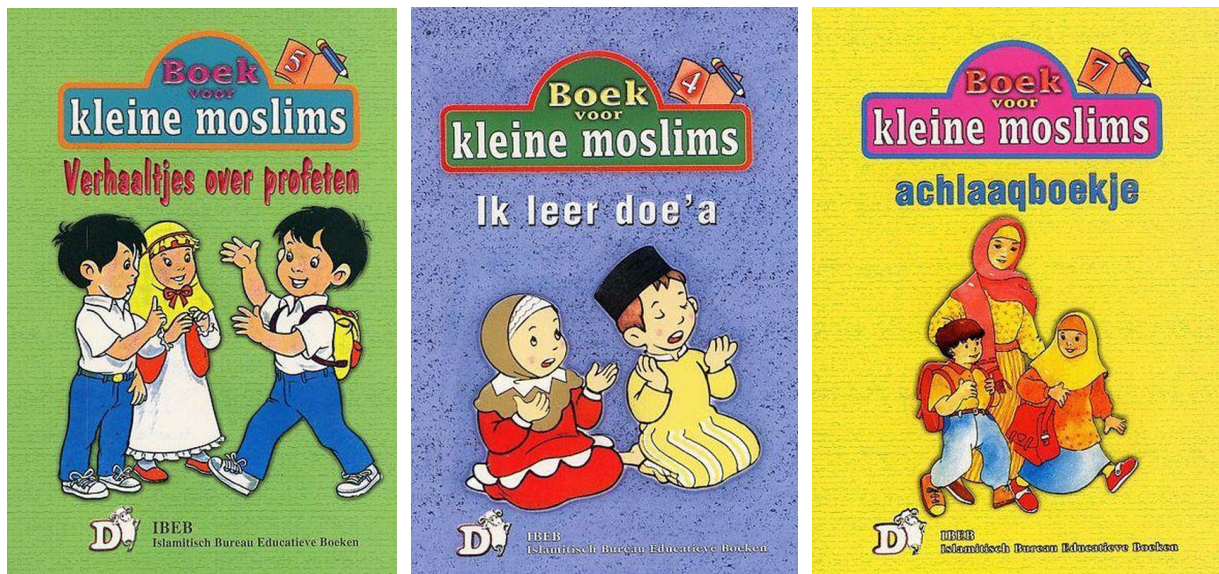
**Fig. 5-7:** Front covers of three early Dutch Islamic children's books, published in 2002 by the *Islamic Bureau Educational Books* (commonly known as IBEB), as part of the *Books for Little Muslims* series. The titles respectively refer to the Prophet stories, learning about *du'ā'* and *akhlāq*.

Throughout time, however, the scope of Dutch Islamic children's literatures broadened. In the two decades following the very first publications, the supply of materials became increasingly diversified, as growing numbers of individual actors started to produce books themselves – outside the boundaries of primary educational organisations or mosques. With an exponential speed, the number of books published continuous to grow and the niche market seems to enter a period of professionalization. Increasingly, books become published that are no longer merely shaped by the educational demands of schools, and the genre starts to transform in terms of content and layout.[109] Different from cognitive and religious-didactic instructional works, as exemplified by the three books in the *Books for Little Muslims* series, the topics of books seem to shift to an increased focus on the context in which children grow up, as will be highlighted later.

With the market of Islamic children's literature professionalising and broadening its scope, besides a growing number of individual producers, even some wholesalers and professional publishers become established. Focused on the extensive publication of qualitative Islamic materials, examples of such wholesalers are *Hadieth Benelux* and *Moslim Kids Entertainment*. Entirely focused on "creating content for Muslims" and aimed at "professionals active in the

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[109] Williams, "Passing on religion as identity?" 92-95.

Islamic market,"[110] such retailers currently dominate the market of Islamic children's literature. In the case of *Hadieth Benelux*, this wholesaler is currently employing about 20 employees, and cooperating with more than 400 entrepreneurs in Europe,[111] illustrating the professional character of contemporary Islamic children's literature market.

Certainly, this paragraph illustrates, the market of Dutch Islamic children's literature is not static and rapidly growing. Characterized by diversity in terms of books published and actors active behind such publications, the market continuously transforms and rapidly expands its borders. With growing numbers of publishers, authors, and even initiatives to translate Dutch-written books to enter the European market, the Dutch market of Islamic children's literature has entered a professionalising phase. Varying from large wholesalers that employ authors to write books for publishing on an international scale or publishing organisations that produce for a mainly educational purpose within Islamic primary education to individual actors that publish these books in-house. In the following chapters, the main motivations and intentions expressed by those actors behind the genre will be delved into, elaborating upon the driving factors behind its increasing popularity in contemporary times.

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[110] Hadieth Benelux, "Over ons," Home. Hadieth Benelux. Accessed on February 4, 2022. https://hadiethbenelux.nl/content/4-over-ons.
[111] Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3: TEACHING PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM AT HOME

Having highlighted the rapidly transforming character of the genre of Dutch Islamic children's literature in terms of available supply and its wide variety of involved actors, this chapter delves into the primary purpose of Islamic children's literature. In the face of a generation that has little knowledge on Islam in terms of its practices, norms, and values, growing up in a non-Muslim majority society, the market of Islamic children's literature is driven by intentions to fill this perceived gap in knowledge and transmit basic principles of Islam in a fun manner. Responding to the changing needs of the Dutch Muslim community in terms of religious education, the medium of Islamic children's books is considered a suitable auxiliary tool for parents in the Islamic upbringing of their children. This chapter will highlight the intention of Islamic children's literature as a means to convey the teachings and principles of Islam to an audience of children in a fun and lasting manner.

### 3.1. "Acquainting them with Islam"

Every ethnic and religious group desires the transmission of one's own language, culture, and religion,[112] and this desire is similarly reflected in the intentions of my respondents with regard to Islamic children's literature. The first and foremost intention to either produce or use Islamic children's literature is the common desire to raise children with Islam. Interviewees perceive the primary purpose of Dutch Islamic children's literature to learn children basic principles of Islam in a fun manner, and provide them with the necessary basic knowledge, principles, norms and values to adopt Islam as a way of life.

> The basic knowledge that we hope to impart is that children get to know their religion. That they explain the basics, the basic knowledge. So basically, that they learn who Allah is, that they learn about the purpose of Creation, of their lives, learn how to deal with everything and everyone, learn to be thankful for everything that Allah has given them and know where everything comes from. That's actually the *tawhīd*.
>
> - Publisher (male, 27)

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[112] Wetering and Karagül*, Zoek kennis van de Wieg tot het Graf,* 18.

Introducing Islam to children, in the eyes of this publisher, is the main function of Islamic children's literature. Familiarising them with, what he considers, basic knowledge of Islam, children become acquainted with 'their religion' through the books. Intentions to familiarise children with 'basic knowledge' and transmit 'the essence of Islam' indicate that the genre is perceived to serve a religiously socialising function, referring to the process through which an individual obtains and internalizes religious orientations, ideas, practices, and values.[113] Various elements reoccur in the narratives of respondents when discussing the content of such basic knowledge. As this publisher illustrates, a frequently mentioned topic of basic knowledge refers to *tawhīd,* the oneness of God, encompassing books on Allah, his names and characteristics, but also his creation and nature. Underscoring divine presence in the world, the central idea following from this focus is that God is the creator of all life. Other reoccurring themes are the Prophetic stories; matters of *akhlāq,* also known as the practice of virtue, morality and manners in Islamic theology; and introducing Islamic rituals, such as fasting during Ramadan and praying.

Intentions to familiarise children with Islam in terms of its belief system, practices, and principles can be understood in terms of stimulating an Islamic *habitus,* "a quality that is acquired through human industry, assiduous practice and discipline that it becomes a permanent feature of a person's character."[114] Referring to a way of being, including both practice and doctrine, but also relating the individual to larger society and culture, fostering an "Islamic habitus" aims to "incorporate Islamic practice into general life."[115] This is no wonder, as "the aim of producing good Muslims with an understanding of Islamic rules and behaviour and a strong knowledge of and commitment to the faith,"[116] lies at the heart of the Muslim concept of education. The obtaining of religious knowledge, many respondents indicate, is of importance to every believer.

> The principle of learning [is important]. The first word of what has been revealed from the Qur'ān is *iqrā',* which translates as 'read'. Reading is often explained by scholars as not only meaning 'reading' or 'reciting', but also 'acquiring knowledge'. That whole *āya'* says "*iqrā' bismi rabbika*", so not just 'read', but most importantly 'read in the name of your

[113] Vern L. Bengtson et al., "A Longitudinal Study of the Intergenerational Transmission of Religion," *International Sociology 24,* no. 3 (2009): 325-345.

[114] Saba Mahmood, "Rehearsed spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Salat," *American ethnologist 28,* no. 4 (2011): 838.

[115] Sedgwick, *Making European Muslims,* 5.

[116] Mark Halstead, "An Islamic concept of education," *Comparative Education 40* (2004): 519.

Lord'. That basically means that all knowledge you gain, you do that in the name of God. With the intention to take Islam as a basis, to take it as a starting point.

- Author (convert, female, 53)

Referring to the Qur'anic verse *al-'alaq*, which is believed to comprise the first lines of Qur'anic revelation,[117] this author underlines the importance of learning and obtaining knowledge in the name of God. Driven by this understanding of the Qur'ān, multiple respondents underscore the importance of both learning and knowledge transmission. In the words of one mother, the act of transmitting knowledge on religion is even a religious obligation:

It is my duty as a Muslim. It must not end with this generation. For the people who don't believe, that's really nonsense, because [for them] it ends with the dead at the grave, but for us it's… you can't shut up Islam, you can't bury Islam.

- Parent (female, 34)

Transmitting Islam to a future generation is perceived as a religious obligation in order to preserve the faith and protect the community. Throughout the interviews, acts of learning, reading and obtaining knowledge are frequently mentioned as Islamic principles obligatory to all Muslims. This is not remarkable, given a "long-standing tradition of respect for education within Islam."[118] Theologically speaking, the pursuit for knowledge (*'ilm*) of any kind, and specifically religious knowledge, is considered an obligation, as Stella van de Wetering and Arslan Karagül elaborate in their work *Zoek Kennis van de Wieg tot het Graf*[119] – illustratively translated as 'Seek Knowledge from Cradle to Grave.' Sharing and obtaining knowledge, it is believed, will be eternally rewarded.[120] "Securing the afterlife," as one respondent mentioned, indeed is one of the driving motivations behind the production of Islamic children's books.

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[117] M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 428.
[118] Halstead, "An Islamic concept of education," 519.
[119] Wetering and Karagül, *Zoek kennis van de Wieg tot het Graf.*
[120] Many stimulating, warning, admonishing, even threatening *surah*s can be found in the Qur'ān. See for example Q20:114, Q58:11 or Q23:1-11.

That is one of our traditions, that when the son of Adam, men, dies all but three things stop: his knowledge that he left behind; his charity; and a child who makes supplication to Allah for him to have mercy upon him. Those three things continue after one's death. So that knowledge we leave behind [through Islamic children's books] [...] Sooner or later, you will leave this world and then you still want to have a large account of rewards with Allah to secure your hereafter. That's our goal. We do not do it for the money. This is what we do it for, that religious interpretation.

- Online promoter (male, 41)

In different wordings, producing Islamic children's literature is for most respondents not a matter of making profit, rather it is ensuring a legacy of knowledge in order to be rewarded by Allah in the afterlife. The consideration of producing and using Islamic children's literature as a religious duty or religious responsibility is mentioned to some extent by almost all producers. Whereas some consider it a way of seeking Allah's satisfaction or a matter of *fi sabīlillāh,* translated as "for the sake of Allah" and closely associated with doing something charitably or disinterestedly,[121] others explicitly strive towards securing the rewardings of Allah in the hereafter. Desiring to acquaint children with Islam, in terms of knowledge, values, and traditions, the genre of Islamic children's literature is understood to ensure such goals.

### 3.2. A Need for Islamic Knowledge

From the above, it can be established that the genre of Islamic children's literature is perceived as a means of education and socialisation. Although perceived as a suitable vehicle for the transmission of Islamic knowledge and habitus, this factor does not fully explain why the genre emerged. Throughout the interviews it becomes clear that, besides underscoring the importance of religious transmission, renewed educational resources were deemed necessary. Many publishers point out that the production of Islamic children's literature was actually a way to "fill the gap" and respond to "an existing need." This perceived need, the interviews illustrate, can be distinguished into different needs present among Dutch Muslims: a need for *accessible*

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[121] Clifford Bosworth and Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Sabīl," In: *Enclycopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* ed. Peri Bearman et al, accessed on February 5, 2022. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0954.

*information* by Dutch converts, a need for *deepening knowledge* of Islam by second-generation Muslims with a migration background, and a need for *complementary* tools to 'traditional' institutions of Islamic education.

Among the group of producing actors interviewed, interestingly two different groups could be mainly distinguished: converted Muslims and second-generation Muslims from Moroccan descent. Let us first focus on the former. Raised in Christian families and familiar with religious stories narrated to children as most grew up with children's Bibles,[122] their motivation to start producing Islamic literature for a young Muslim audience generally reflects personal experiences with such Christian children's literature. Speaking about their personal needs for and intentions to produce Islamic children's literature, these respondents often invoked various phrases related to their personal religious background, their positive experiences with children's Bibles in particular, and the desire for informative books on Islam throughout their conversion. One of the respondents elaborated that, throughout the initial phase of her conversion and amazed by her limited familiarity with Islam, her longing for more knowledge on the faith resulted in a search for children's literature:

> Do children's books exist on this topic? That was one of my first questions, because I myself am raised with the children's Bible. I wondered what it would look like [in the Islamic tradition]. How can children learn about this, especially seeing that [the monotheistic religions] are so close to one another? Then, I immediately started looking for that, children's books that show how those traditions run parallel to one another.
>
> -   Author (convert, female, 43)

Perceiving children's books as suitable means to become acquainted with and informed about religion, this respondent illustrates that her search for Islamic children's books similar to the format of children's Bibles was based upon her need for informational material on Islam in Dutch, her mother tongue. Bewildered by the fact that she had had no clue about the similarities between Islam and other monotheistic religions prior to converting, she emphasizes that little such informative materials existed that could help her throughout her conversion. Motivated by a sense

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[122] The Netherlands has a long tradition of approximately three centuries of children's Bibles. For a historical examination of this phenomenon, see: Meiden, van der, *'Zoo Heerlijk Eenvoudig.'*

of responsibility to share more knowledge on Islam, presenting herself as an "ambassador of Islam"[123] in representing her religion positively to non-Muslims, her need for Islamic children's literature derived from a gap in accessible knowledge on Islam in a non-Muslim majority context. Various other converted producers similarly confess that their inspiration to start producing Islamic children's literature was somehow based on personal experiences with children's Bibles and their search for similar tools within Islam. One respondent indicates that: "What you have received in the children's Bible all your life, from its stories and [the idea that] you can do something with its teachings that is perhaps close to daily existence, that is in development within Islam." Conceiving children's Bibles as broader than merely transmitting teachings, this author expresses that such books did not only provide her with stories but also with a practical idea of how to put religion into practice. As such a means within Islam did not yet exist, this author was sparked in her interest to create such a tool, illustrating the active role of converts in changing practices of Islam in a new cultural context, having "one foot in each culture."[124] A need for materials that provided accessible knowledge on Islam in Dutch, in these cases, did not only derive from their personal search for knowledge in a newly found religion, additionally children's Bibles served an inspirational function to start producing Islamic children's literature.

For a second group of respondents most actively involved in the production of Islamic children's literature, second-generation Muslims from Moroccan descent, the need for its genre is visibly based on a different "gap" in knowledge. The words of one author illustrate an important factor for this perceived limited knowledge on Islam among second and later generations of Dutch Muslims:

> I also grew up with Islamic children's books and the like, but in Arabic. Look, it's hard to compare, because in Morocco I went to kindergarten and there we learned about the Quran but also Arabic, through songs and the like. Of course, there were stories, children's books, and also the mosque that was opposite our house. Everywhere you heard the call to prayer. So, it's something very different from here. […] Imagine that your child is in a public school or Christian school here, [in comparison to] Islamic countries, where those worlds – the

[123] Margaretha van Es, "Muslim women as 'ambassadors of Islam": breaking stereotypes in everyday life," *Identities 26,* No. 4 (2019), 375-392.
[124] Roald, *New Muslims in the European Context*, 289.

home situation, the street and the school – fit together seamlessly. Here you don't have that. That's the challenge.

- Author (male, 51)

Himself raised in Morocco, a context in which "Islam was a taken for granted part of the social fabric,"[125] this author underlines the generational differences underlying the emergence of Islamic children's literature in The Netherlands. Highlighting the inherently social characteristic of learning religion,[126] this author acknowledges that an Islamic upbringing in such a context raises challenges previously unfamiliar to those brought up in Muslim majority contexts. In other words, ensuring an Islamic upbringing in The Netherlands, a context where children are continuously faced with non-Islamic social spheres and Islam is not part of everyday life, required different tools and attitudes than the ones familiar to previous generations. Raised in families of first-generation parents, who had been born and raised in Muslim-majority countries and then migrated to The Netherlands throughout the 1960s and 70s, the awareness of such need for renewed pedagogic recourses grew among second-generation Muslims. Although all of them born in Muslim families, familiarised with Islam and Islamic practices from a young age, this group of respondents did perceive a lack in basic knowledge on their faith. Stressing that for first-generation Dutch Muslims the focus lay more on surviving and establishing a new life in The Netherlands, many respondents acknowledge that this might have indirectly resulted in parents' limited focus on the conscious transmission of religion.

My parents weren't involved [in how to convey their religion to children] at all. Maybe it was a completely different time. I also notice in that generation, when it comes to my grandfather's generation – really the guest workers generation – that they were primarily concerned with survival. I have seen that with my parents as well.

- 'Childless' adult (female, 30)

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[125] Peter Mandaville, "Towards a Critical Islam: European Muslims and the Changing Boundaries of Transnational Religious Discourse," In: *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and Across Europe,* ed. Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen (2003), 133.
[126] David Berliner and Ramon Sarro, *Learning Religion, Anthropological Approaches* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007), 10-11.

As this respondent indicates, in her experience religion was not something purposefully educated at home, rather it was self-evidently present. Raised by first generation Muslims, "habitual Muslims, just traditional Muslims" in the words of one respondent, the matter of religious education was a given fact and part of culture. Strongly reminiscent of studies on young Muslims who talk about parents of the first generation in similar terms,[127] many second-generation respondents expressed an urge "not only to maintain their religious identity, but also to develop that aspect of themselves."[128] Growing up in a social context that failed to affirm this "Islam of the parents,"[129] second-generation Muslims faced challenges in their personal knowledge on Islam. Although many parents of respondents had sent their children to mosque education, many of them indicated that they had experienced such education as insufficient. One respondent states:

> We're talking about a generation that now has children, who didn't actually grow up with that basic knowledge [about Islam]. Who had to have it from the mosque and, by then, that consisted only of learning the Qur'ān. That's it.
>
> -   Publisher (male, 27)

Merely consisting of Qur'anic learning, in the words of this respondent, mosques did not fully succeed in transmitting, what he considers, 'basic knowledge.' In hindsight, for many second-generation respondents, mosque education was limited in providing them with sufficient knowledge and, more importantly, understanding of Islam. Apparently, the socialisation of a new generation of Muslims in terms of education would require more than Qur'anic learning only and a renewed *complementary* format was deemed necessary. Similar criticisms of already existing forms of education can be traced throughout the interviews.

> A lot 'from the book' and very, as far as I remember, very monotonous and a lot of sending, sending, sending. And parrot, parrot, parrot. And not really case-oriented or interactive – I

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[127] See for example: Santi Rozario, "Islamic piety against the family: from 'traditional' to 'pure' Islam," *Contemporary Islam 5,* no. 3 (2011), 285-308; Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam. The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst, 2004); Vertovec and Rogers, *Muslim European Youth;* Mandaville, "Towards a Critical Islam."

[128] Lori Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The development of a religious identity," *Sociology of Religion 66,* no. 3 (2005): 229.

[129] Mandaville, "Towards a critical Islam," 133.

would approach that very differently now, if I were to give a lesson or if I was presenting, for example. I would do that very differently from how you got the information back then. So, at the time, it was memorizing *surahs*, the alphabet, and stuff like that.

- ‘Childless’ adult (male, 28)

Often perceived to have focused primarily on memorizing, repeating, and mimetic learning, many respondents indicate that Islamic education as personally experienced in mosques was not sufficient and had resulted in a ‘gap’ in their knowledge on Islam, particularly in terms of *understanding* what was presented to them.

[Religious education] used to focus on memorisation and my criticism, particularly in hindsight, is that you learn to memorise, so you learn Arabic terms, but you do not learn to understand. It is as if you are reading music notes. […] As a result, in my opinion, there is a huge lack within my generation of internalisation of the material. What have I read? What does it mean? How do I translate this to my personal life?

- Parent (male, 33)

Having mostly ‘parroted’ and ‘imitated’ teachers of religious knowledge themselves, for these second-generation respondents such methods of mechanically repeating the words and phrases of an educator were not deemed the most suitable nor lasting techniques of internalising faith. Resulting in a call for renewed pedagogic resources, the genre of Islamic children’s literature partly emerged as a result of this perceived gap in knowledge. Eventually, as chapter 5 will illustrate more elaborately, such literature would actively break away from earlier experiences of religious education and change in terms of content and pedagogy.

### 3.3. “Learning and Entertaining”

Critical of “teacher, text and instruction-centred pedagogic discourse,”[130] second-generation Muslims desired a renewal of pedagogic and socializing tools, resulting in the emergence and transformation of Islamic children’s literature. Throughout the research, one important stipulation

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[130] Abdullah Sahin, *New Directions in Islamic Education: Pedagogy and Identity Formation* (Markfield: Kube Publishing Ltd, 2013), 168.

is believed to contribute to such a goal: introducing religion and transmitting knowledge is to be a fun and entertaining matter. Different than mimetic learning, respondents believe, Islamic children's literature guarantees the internalisation of religion given its combination of learning and entertaining characteristics. All criteria posed to Islamic children's books, as chapter 5 will elaborate, serve one purpose: ensuring knowledge that sticks. Putting this in a broader context, one author elaborates:

> How are you going to make sure that, if there isn't a social movement that stimulates them to do the prayer, there's more intrinsic motivation and more understanding of religion, so that there's a kind of motivation that is actually much stronger and much better in that sense.
>
> - Author (convert, male, 35)

In a context where the dominant social and cultural fabric is non-Islamic, this author elaborates, an intrinsic motivation and understanding of religion is required. For many, the answer to this challenge lies in approaching socialisation through a lens of fun and entertaining content. Considering the Muslim child as its main audience, respondents indicate, Islamic children's books produced should be suitable, but more importantly, enjoyable to children in sharing a moral message. Allowing for the conveying of "knowledge that sticks," Islamic children's books should be "fun to read," written in a narrative manner, containing colourful images, attracting in terms of layout, and "appealing" in all its characteristics. Such a "child-friendly" approach is mentioned numerously and indicates a transformation in terms of Islamic upbringing, particularly when taking into account personal experiences with religious upbringing. Discussing the earliest children's books available, mostly produced within educational settings, this increasing call for enjoyable books seems one explanation for the genre's changing character:

> The earliest children's books, there were some, but they were very theoretical, and they were more of a summary of what adults should also know about the faith, the foundations and the basics. But for a child – I noticed that with my own children, they are 6 and 3,5 – for them it was very boring matter, frankly.
>
> - Author (convert, male, 35)

Merely conveying a lesson, this author and mother of two indicates, is not sufficient. Rather, children's books should hold the child's attention. Another respondent underlines this observation:

> The surprising element [in children's books] is important to me. You can provide a child with a lot of lessons about facts, but nothing sticks. I noticed that many children receive so many lessons, yet nothing sticks. But the moment you do something with it, you create a story about it, you make it your own – you will never forget that in your life.
>
> - Author (convert, female, 65)

Creating knowledge that lasts a lifetime and accepting Islam as a way of life, this quote underlines, are considered important functions of Islamic children's literature. Islam, it is believed, provides lessons that need to be conveyed, but more importantly, lessons to be remembered for a lifetime. Assuring the books' entertaining values, ensuring a promotional character of the books, respondents indicate that they wish their children to enjoy themselves. Emphasizing entertaining and enticing characteristic of children's literature, these aspects can be interpreted as apologetic, balancing evident moral objectives included in the books. Regardless of religious or ideological beliefs, parents want their children to entertain themselves when reading. Such amusing characteristics of children's books provide a counterweight to their expressively instrumental and utilitarian purposes, designed to convey lessons. The child is considered the main audience, and all elements in the books should serve this purpose through the usage of accessible language, an approachable layout, understandability of the message.

> We realized 'it doesn't all have to be cognitive'. It's not all knowledge transfer. It is more about giving the child a certain sense of values and norms in a playful way through stories, but also the understanding that Allah - God - is always connected in one way or another with everything we do in life.
>
> - Author (convert, female, 53)

Illustrating the ultimate goal of strengthening the child in accepting Islam as a way of life, this author underlines that the socialisation process of children into becoming Muslim encompasses

more than mere knowledge transmission. It similarly includes the obtaining of values and norms, an understanding of the world, and acting in accordance with Islamic principles. Desiring knowledge that lasts a lifetime and an intrinsic motivation to learn about religion, the fun characteristic of Islamic children's literature is believed to contribute to these intended goals.

### 3.4. Parents as Educators

Serving a socialising function, characterised by fun and enjoyable content, the genre increasingly started to focus on usage in the domestic setting, providing an auxiliary function. Among parents of the second generation, themselves facing a gap in knowledge on the Arabic language and Islam, the need for tools to raise their children religiously increased. Although the market of Islamic children's literature originated in the establishment of Islamic primary education, with many producers active in this field, unanimously all respondents indicate that the primary responsibility for an Islamic upbringing lays with the parents of children. As one mother contends, "an Islamic education is a task especially for us as parents and it is nice that a school can also help, but the main task lies with us." Such statements are in line with, what Trees Pels has described as, the increasing central position of parents as educators in younger generations with a migration background.[131] Different than the experiences of first-generation Muslims in their countries of origin, where often mimicking the exemplary behaviour of others had been an essential means of religious socialisation,[132] and learning about Islam did primarily take place at school through lessons as *tarbiyya islāmiyya wa dīniyya* ('Islamic and religious education'),[133] respondents expressed their intention to actively provide children with a religious upbringing at home themselves. Desiring pedagogic renewing, choosing for religious or moral education outside the boundaries of the mosque,[134] interviewees conceive parents as the primary actors responsible for the Islamic upbringing of children. In some cases, respondents are even critical of parents sending their children merely to mosque education:

> Religious rules were important to [my parents], but they often just didn't know everything. I think they were like 'I want to overcome my own shortcomings by sending you to the

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[131] Trees Pels, "Oratie: Opvoeden in de multi-etnische stad," *Pedagogiek 30,* no. 3 (2010): 215.

[132] Trees Pels, "Educational Strategies of Moroccan Mothers in the Netherlands," *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal 11* (2003), 70-74.

[133] Abaaziz, "'Ze waren onwetend,'" 77-79.

[134] Pels, "Oratie," 223.

mosque, there you learn from experts.' I sometimes thought that was an easy route, like: 'the mosque fixes it for you, and you get a ready-made baby back.' That way you can easily get rid of [the responsibility].

- 'Childless' adult (female, 30)

In some instances critical of the way in which their parents dealt with religious upbringing, some respondents express an awareness of the responsibility of a parent in addition to available institutions for Islamic upbringing. 'Merely' sending children to the mosque, this respondent indicates, is not considered sufficient. Acting on a gap in the market and noticing the lack in knowledge on Islam among second-generation parents in The Netherlands, actors already active in the field of production or new actors willing to contribute to community start to realize there is a need for auxiliary tools in Islamic upbringing.

I see and saw during courses I gave about parenting, and actually all those contact moments with Muslim parents that were focused on Islamic upbringing, that there were always questions about 'okay, so what is the appropriate offer? What books would you recommend?' Parents are actively looking for tools to support their religious upbringing. So in that sense, put simply, there is a demand from the market.

- Author (convert, male, 35)

With a demand from the market by a generation of Dutch Muslims that is eager to acquire more knowledge on Islam themselves and pass this onto a future generation, the tool of Islamic children's literature responded to a need for supportive materials in religious upbringing at home. Such supportive materials were deemed necessary, not only as parents realised, they were not able to provide children with knowledge on Islam themselves, but also as these parents contented that taking the time to transmit religion actively could be difficult given their hectic schedules. For many parents the tool of Islamic children's literature did actually provide a solution to a busy Dutch everyday life. One mother recounts:

Well *voilà*, so I do have a busy life as a self-employed person, as a young family, so that when it is about [religion] - religion is an important aspect in our lives - but if you are that

busy then it frequently shifts to the background and [...] for us those booklets are really a bit of a less heavy, but still contemporary way to convey religion to the children in a fun way. So yes, those books are so nice, and because we have them in Dutch - because yes, we mainly speak Dutch with each other - it makes our lives much easier. The threshold [to reading religious stories] is much higher when you have to look it up in Arabic, have to translate, have to convert [the text] into children's language.

- Parent (female, 34)

Convinced that Islam is to be conveyed on a daily basis, as religion is an important element in her daily life, this mother illustrates that a tool to support her in this responsible task is necessary. Particularly in a daily life that is driven by hectic schedules of work-life. Illustrating that, for her, the tool of Islamic children's literature helped her in the conveying of Islam on a daily basis, yet in a "less heavy," "contemporary," and "fun" manner, this mother is exemplary of the driving generation behind current market of Dutch Islamic children's literature. Desiring the personal transmission of knowledge, ensuring moments of quality-time between parent and child through regular moments of reading together, Islamic children's books are visibly aimed at the socialisation of an Islamic identity within the boundaries of one's domestic setting. Strongly focused on the parents as the most important educator in the socialisation of a child, the genre is not intended to replace existing tools of Islamic education yet provides parents with a supportive means in the construction of an Islamic identity in the private spaces of Dutch Muslims' homes.

**Conclusion**

As this chapter illustrated, the need for renewed educational and socialisation materials proved to be persistent in a context with a socio-cultural majority that is non-Muslim. Having been raised in The Netherlands, where being a Muslim was not self-evident, second-generation Dutch Muslims became challenged to reinvent their religious practices to fit the context. In that sense, the emergence of Islamic children's literature can be considered a result of, what Danièle Hervieu-Léger has referred to as a "crisis of transmission."[135] Referring to the "visible discontinuities

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[135] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "The Transmission and Formation of Socioreligious Identities in Modernity: An Analytical Essay on the Trajectories of Identification," *International Sociology 13,* no. 2 (1998), 214.

between the cultural universes of different generations,"[136] particularly visible in a context of migration,[137] second-generation Muslims deemed it necessary to rethink earlier means of religious transmission. Facing this need for innovation, the genre of Islamic children's literature emerged as a tool of religious socialisation, ensuring "social and cultural continuity."[138] Intended to raise a future generation of Muslims with Islamic values, norms, and ideas, the genre developed according to the expressed needs of second-generation Muslims, whom either had perceived a gap in knowledge as recently converted Muslims already familiar with the concept of children's Bibles or as a result of differences in religiosity vis-à-vis previous generations. The emergence of Islamic children's literature proved to be of help to many parents who themselves struggled with limited active knowledge on Islam in combination with a busy schedule. Welcomed as a complementary tool to existing forms of religious education and believed to contribute to the long-lasting socialisation of Muslim children in a fun manner, the genre of Islamic children's literature consequently broadened spaces of Islamic upbringing into the homes of Dutch Muslim families. Centring around the thought that Islamic identity should be an inherent element of the child's daily life, evenly present in different settings, this attitude stimulated renewed modes of socialisation and education in increasingly creative and playful ways. This is not to say that the genre of Islamic children's literature fully started to replace educational spaces as the mosque and Islamic primary schools. Rather, the moulding of an Islamic identity, this chapter has shown, is considered to be of importance in all aspects of everyday-life: both during leisure-time and by bedside.

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[136] Ibid.

[137] Werner Schiffauer, "Migration and Religiousness," In: *The New Islamic Presence in Europe,* ed. Tomas Gerholm and Yngve Litman, 146-158 (London: Mansell, 1990).

[138] John Clausen, *Socialisation and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968).

## CHAPTER 4: STRENGTHENING A DUTCH MUSLIM IDENTITY

Besides serving a supplementary tool for Islamic upbringing, the tool of Islamic children's literature is considered a means of strengthening the social identity of Muslim children, specifically in relation to their minority existence in the Dutch context. Many respondents wish to provide their children with some form of *identification,* providing images and stories of recognition for the Dutch Muslim child. At the same time, a desire to raise children with an awareness of the multicultural context in which they are growing up, making them aware of their minority status in society, lies at the basis of the genre. For a few respondents, however, the genre provides an actual 'Islamic alternative' to exclude unwanted external influences in the form of non-Islamic children's materials. This chapter illustrates that Islamic children's literature, for many, is perceived as a practical tool of navigating Dutch society as a Muslim, instilling a sense of *belonging,* but more importantly instills in children a sense of proudness to be Muslim. A main intention of these books, in this aspect closely related to the broader genre of 'multicultural children's literature', is to strengthen a Muslim identity in the face of minority existence.

### 4.1. Stories to Identify With

Strengthening an Islamic identity of the Muslim child in connection to its non-Muslim majority environment is expressed by respondents as an important component of Islamic children's literature. As discovered earlier, such an Islamic identity is interpreted in the sense of raising children with basic knowledge on Islam and its principles, but the function of Islamic children's literature is broader than the mere transmission of religious knowledge. Throughout the interviews, an intention to provide children with some form of *identification* is reoccurring.

> There is a lot of Christian books. When you go to the library, you will find a whole section on religion, but almost nothing on Islam. So, if I go to the library with my children and I wish to learn them something about their faith [there is nothing]. But they are young and they seek recognition in books.
>
> - Author (convert, female, 31)

Parents desire for their children to read and visit libraries for multiple reasons, ranging from the development of a child's literacy skills to improving its vocabulary. However, this respondent

indicates, growing up in a context in which the dominant culture is non-Islamic, books on the bookshelves are mostly non-religious or written in a Christian tradition. A main driving factor in the emergence of Islamic children's literature, then, is to provide options with which the Muslim child can relate, in which they can recognize themselves.

> I think that this has a very positive impact on your self-image, if you see things in the dominant culture that you recognize – in which you really recognize yourself – which then come out in a positive way.
>
> -   Parent (male, 33)

As this father states, recognising oneself in a book may contribute to affirming your sense of self. Identification, for respondents, is important as it ultimately results in the strengthening identities. Similar ideas can be traced in the work of Richard Jenkins, who considers identity the result of continuous processes of identification. Identity, the human capacity to know who we are and to know who others are, then, is not something we have, but rather something we 'do.'[139] Similar calls for stories and images of recognition can be traced throughout the interviews, often focusing on the child's positive identity development. For a long time having faced cultural "invisibility [...] exacerbated by their Western cultural absence in these texts,"[140] an important factor behind the growing supply of Islamic children's literature, then, is to actively provide children with images of identification. Such desires for identification refer to different forms of books, such as identification in terms of 'Islamic' recognition using Islamic terminology, focusing on Islamic practices or characters. However, increasingly a different call for identification is expressed. Ranging from calls for 'recognition' to 'providing a realistic story' or 'connecting to the child's world of experiences', respondents indicate that they wish to provide their children with an image of Islam that is closely connected to the everyday lives of Dutch Muslims. Although plenty of books exist within the genre that focus primarily on knowledge transmission and depicting the stories of the prophets, this call for identification focuses on another aspect of being Muslim:

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[139] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 5.
[140] Williams, "Passing on religion as identity?" 90.

> You have a lot of children's books – and that is what I mean with 'the ideal Muslim' – [that merely depict images in which] they all walk around in long covering clothing and that you see a child of about 3 or 4 years old wearing a headscarf. Well, super good to see of course, that's not the point, but how realistic is that for the average Muslim?
>
> - Author (convert, male, 35)

In some cases, respondents express a highly critical stance towards the depiction of 'ideal images' and 'ideal Muslims' only. Critical of the 'unrealistic' image that some books portray, in this case referring to images that depict young children wearing a specific kind of modest dress but in other cases also aimed at the depiction of prophets as unflawed examples, this author and parent exemplifies an increasing call for depictions of the *everyday*. Intending to provide children with an image of Islam that is closely connected to the everyday-life situation of Dutch Muslims in diaspora, the picture of Islam and Muslims in children's books is to be relatable to its audience. The child should be able to recognise the images and stories presented. Whilst showing a page in his work *The 5 Pillars of Islam,* one author illustrates this point perfectly, as he states:

> For me it was important that it is recognizable to children. Look, when you create an illustration that only depicts camels and sand – as you often see in Islamic books – then that is not recognizable for children growing up here [in The Netherlands]. This, for example, is the interior of a Turkish mosque. For Turkish children raised here this is recognizable, because if they go to the mosque then this is what they will see.
>
> - Author (male, 51)

Referring to the earliest supply of books, often translated from either Turkish or Arabic, this author expresses the importance of including images and narratives that are reconcilable with the context in which the child is growing up. Rather than depicting elements connected to an Islamic identity or practices as something far-away, from a foreign place – a distant, contiguous part of the world – this author consciously decided to put such elements in a setting that is recognizable to children growing up in the Dutch context. Providing them with the idea that Islam can also belong to the place where the child is raised, a non-Muslim majority society such as The Netherlands, is a conscious strategy.
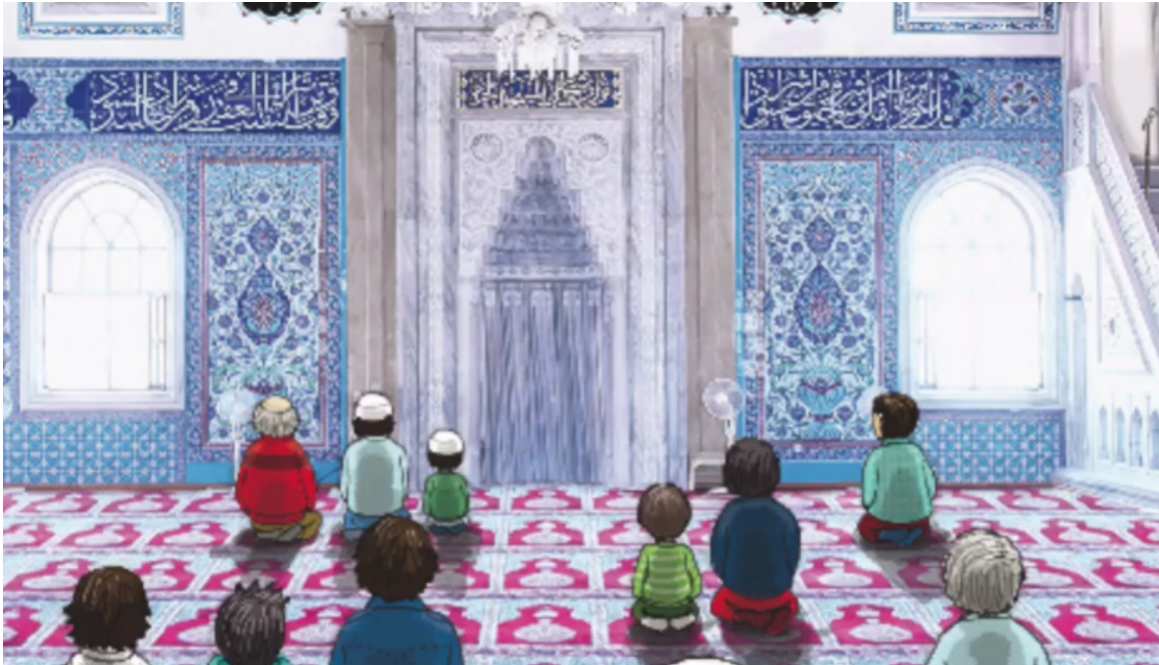
**Fig. 8:** An illustration in the children's book *The Five Pillars of Islam,* depicting various characters praying in a mosque with a characteristic Dutch Turkish architectural style.

Placing Muslim protagonists in the role of main character, visibly showing their connection to Dutch society, these producers seem to counter the idea that Muslims do not belong, a discourse that has continued to persist in Dutch society. Building upon a long discursive Orientalist tradition of depicting 'the Orient' and its inhabitants as the ultimate Other,[141] Dutch identity and 'its nation' are frequently articulated in contrast to cultural 'others,' with Muslims and their offspring usually perceived as the quintessential 'other.'[142] Such processes of 'othering', referring to the objectification and reduction of a group of people to a stereotypical and inferior character,[143] have resulted in a persisting discourse and frame that Islam is inherently irreconcilable with and culturally distinct from assumedly progressive 'Dutch' values.[144] Actively bridging such an assumed gap between 'self' and 'other,' the genre of Islamic children's literature is conceived by many respondents as a means of positively encountering persisting stereotypes of Muslims and strengthen the child in its Dutch Muslim identity. Countering the idea that the "moral geography

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[141] Said, *Orientalism.*

[142] Marieke Slootman and Jan Willem Duyvendak, "The Politics of belonging: Religiosity and identification among second-generation Moroccan Dutch," *Growing Up Muslim in Europe and the United States,* eds. Medhi Bozorgmehr and Philip Kasinitz (London: Routledge, 2018), 111.

[143] Fred Dervin, "Cultural identity, representation and othering," In: *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication,* ed. Jane Jackson, 181-194 (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[144] Justus Uitermark, Paul Mepschen, and Jan Willem Duyvendak, "Populism, Sexual Politics, and the Exclusion of Muslims in the Netherlands," In: *European States and Their Muslim Citizens,* ed. John Bowen et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 235-255.

of the 'Muslim World'" is "a foreign place and a source of foreigners in the West,"[145] the creation of Islamic children's literature situated in the Dutch context allows for Muslim parents and children to visualize and narrate that Islam *belongs* to the place where they live, exemplifying the universality of Islam. This strategy of mixing elements to create a sense of belonging is similarly visible in the words and publications of other producers. Another author elaborates:

> I use a mix of [elements], for example, you see a man with a beard, but he is also wearing modern clothes. One moment, he is wearing Islamic clothes, another time he is wearing a strange bathing suit. Sometimes he is on his cargo bike, cycling through Amsterdam. The message I try to spread is: there is a place for us Muslims in The Netherlands. We also live here and that is what I want to show. This is also our country.
>
> - Author (male, 40)

Creatively blurring such symbolic boundaries, showing affinity and identification with both a religious tradition and a Dutch identity, these authors attempt to counter assumptions that the two are irreconcilable and unbridgeable. Contributing to a "politics of belonging,"[146] referring to processes of inclusion and exclusion that construct, maintain, and reinforce symbolic boundaries between 'us' and 'them,' such attempts seem to actively contest the idea that Muslims are not Dutch. Placing Muslim characters and Islamic elements in a contemporary and recognisable context, the message of these authors to the Muslim child narrates: 'you belong'.



**Fig. 9.** Illustrations in *Moessie: Daddy is My Best Friend*, depicting a father and a son in different settings.

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[145] Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 6.
[146] Nira Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (Los Angeles, Sage: 2011).

The importance of *identification,* the abovementioned cases illustrate, seems to be a primary driving factor behind the need for Dutch Islamic children's literature. Highlighting that identity formation is an ongoing process, influenced by a dialectics between self-image and public image,[147] these producers seem to be highly aware that identity is the ability to recognize who we are, who others are, but also how others perceive Muslims to be. Rich in cultural memes, language and familiarity with everyday Dutch Muslim identity, the attempt to produce and use "culturally conscious"[148] or "culturally specific"[149] elements emphasizes a desire of producers and parents to produce books that contain specific nuances and experiences of Dutch Muslim children, in order to provide an image with which children may identify. Written *by* Muslims themselves, providing an authentic or insider's perspective, increasingly the genre of Islamic children's literature is utilized to reflect what children come across in their everyday lives. Such culturally conscious elements, then, validate the experiences of its audience and strengthen them in their identity.

It is in these characteristics that the genre of Islamic children's literature, broader than a tool for religious transmission, gradually approaches the broader genre of so-called 'multicultural children's literature.' Usually understood to be "about the sociocultural experiences of previously underrepresented groups," the aim of multicultural children's literature is to validate "these groups' experiences."[150] Books, in the words of Rudine Sims Bishop, function as "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors,"[151] and have the ability to respectively reflect people's own experiences and identities. Ultimately books, then, serve as a means of self-affirmation, allowing its readers to wander through one's imagination and possibly even become part of the author's created world. In this sense, Islamic children's literature is visibly perceived and used as a tool for 'mirroring' Muslim children, reflecting their experiences and identities growing up in The Netherlands, affirming their lifeways as real, and legitimate examples of human experience. Rather than passively accepting persisting ideas on Islam and Muslims as something 'far away from here,' these Dutch authors actively combine elements that bridge generally assumed dichotomous identities of 'being Dutch' and 'being Muslim.' In their eyes, the tool of Islamic children's literature is considered effective in that regard.

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[147] Jenkins, *Social Identity.*
[148] Rudine Sims Bishop, *Shadow and substance: Afro-American experience in contemporary children's fiction* *Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1982).
[149] Temple, Martinez, and Yokota, *Children's books in children's hands.*
[150] Gopalakrishnan, *Multicultural Children's Literature*, 5.
[151] Rudine Sims Bishop, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom 6,* no. 3 (1990).

## 4.2. Raising Context-Aware Children

In addition to serving as a tool of *identification*, narrating stories in which the Dutch Muslim child can recognise itself, another intention behind the genre is to enhance the child's Muslim identity in the face of minority existence. A vast number of respondents expressed their intentions to make children aware of the context in which they are growing up, considering Islamic children's books as a suitable tool to maintain and strengthen a Muslim identity and self-esteem in practicing the Islamic faith, specifically in a multicultural context. One author elaborates:

> I think it is very good for them to know that we can be who we are, and we can be very proud of this. We can perfectly be part of any society, with our norms and values, without having to make any concessions. And we can also go very far without taking that [outside] criticism very seriously. Because that is actually quite a thing at a young age these days. I think books are very important in supporting their identity, yes.
>
> - Author (convert, female, 31)

From a young age, this author believes, children are faced with external criticism on their religious identity. In order to strengthen the child in its identity, then, the tool of children's literature aimed at the Muslim child is perceived to instil its audience a sense of being *proud* to be Muslim. Such a perception is reoccurring among the respondents: Islamic children's literature does not merely help craft and enhance an Islamic identity; it also stimulates it to prosper and endure in the face of minority status. Several respondents indicate that children are faced with a society in which Islamophobia and fear for religion are very much present. Perceived as the 'other,' as elaborated earlier, in The Netherlands Muslims face a society in which a negative discourse on Muslims persists.[152] Particularly persistent following both international (e.g. 'September 11' and the Rushdie Affair) and national events (e.g. the election campaign of Pim Fortuyn in 2002, and the death of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004) negative and hostile sentiments towards Muslims are detectable in The Netherlands.[153] In the face of such societal sentiments, these Dutch Muslims

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[152] Stuart Hall, "The west and the rest: Discourse and power," In: *Formations of Modernity,* ed. Stuart Hall, B. Gieblin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 276-320.
[153] Martijn de Koning, "Zoeken naar een 'zuivere Islam': *geloofsbeleving en identiteitsvorming van jonge Marokkaanse-Nederlandse moslims* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2008), 86.

deem it necessary to strengthen their children in their Muslim identity, preparing them for a life in society.

> You are a minority in the Netherlands, but you still think it is important that your children are given your own identity and you can do that through those booklets, [by doing so] you make children aware of their identity and you make them stronger. And it's important that we don't have blinders on about what else is happening in our outside world, huh?
>
> -    Author (convert, female, 53)

Making children aware of their identity, this author states, is an important characteristic of Islamic children's literature, and ultimately results in strengthening their confidence. At the same time, she highlights that children should become familiarised with the context in which they are growing up. 'Familiarising them with a multicultural society' or 'normalising diversity', then, are reoccurring expressions throughout the interviews. Besides strengthening children in their identity in the face of a minority position, respondents similarly seem to be concerned with the question: how to actually *be* a Muslim in a non-Muslim majority society? What issues or obstacles will children have to deal with in navigating Dutch society as a Muslim?

 The focus on *navigating* society as a young Muslim child is approached through different tactics. Many respondents indicate that, for them, it is important that children become acquainted with their environment from an early age onward. Familiarising them with multicultural society, the diversity among people and beliefs present in society, but also stimulating children to respect those people who think differently are intentions expressed by various respondents.

> We live in a society in which there is a lot of diversity, with which children can be made familiar in this way. So, on the one hand you may dedicate your own identity strongly to your own life, to your own religion, but at the same time in your environment there are also people [who are different from you]. For example, children might be friends with the boy next door who, for example, is not Muslim. You generally do not find that in children's books published in Morocco or in Turkey or whatever, that is a different context. [...] You can stand strong in your own identity, but also just be very open and confident towards

others and interact with each other. And I think that is something unique about the Netherlands, to be honest. That you can also pay attention to that in your books.

- Author (convert, female, 57)

Different than books produced in Muslim majority societies such as Morocco and Turkey, this author states, Islamic children's books published on Dutch soil require to consider possible encounters with dissenters or non-believers. Growing up in a multicultural context such as The Netherlands, she states, inevitably results in encountering different people in society. Learning how to deal with such matters, whilst aware of your own Islamic identity, books are considered to be suitable tool in both *preserving* one's own identity whilst *acquainting* children with diversity and multiculturalism in society. Similar views are expressed by other producers:

I don't want to create discord. I want to teach the children that they are part of this society, in which very different cultures and religions live together in peace. And it just has to stay that way, so the only thing I teach the children is: 'this is part of our identity, this is what we believe as Muslims' and I stop there. [...] I want to create a kind of understanding among the children that they will come across dissenters. And that there are people who believe with full conviction in something different from us, but still you can just live together.

- Online promoter (male, 41)

Despite differences among people in terms of cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and convictions, these respondents indicate, Muslim children can stand strong in their Islamic identity. Depicting diversity in children's books, according to Rudine Sims Bishop, "will help [children] understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans."[154] In that sense, Islamic children's books do not only mirror Muslim children themselves, the genre is similarly perceived and intended to prepare them for society, showing them "windows onto reality."[155]

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[154] Sims Bishop, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors."
[155] Ibid.

Providing a tool for Muslim children to become acquainted with diversity in society, besides feeling represented as Muslims on the bookshelf the genre of Islamic children's literature increasingly focuses on presenting a view of contemporary and everyday Dutch Muslims in a multicultural context. "If you write a children's book for today's children on a certain topic," one author mentions, "you may have to consider that the characters in it are not all Muslims or not all deal with Islam in the same way." Visible in the images included in contemporary supply of Islamic children's literature, depicting not only Muslim protagonists but also non-Muslim neighbours, friends, and citizens, the books familiarize its audience with a life of being Muslim in a non-Muslim society. As such, the genre of Islamic children's literature is increasingly intended to raise children who are aware of their environment, both in terms of their minority status in a non-Muslim majority society, but also in terms of dealing with differences among people. Desiring to depict and acquaint children with difference in the world, whilst validating their own Islamic and Muslim identity, it is in these characteristics that the genre of Islamic children's literature can somehow be considered similar to multicultural children's literature.

### 4.3. Providing an Islamic 'Alternative'

Finally, from a few interviews another motive emerges, which seems to relate to what Richard Antoun has called "a search for purity in an inpure world."[156] Although not necessarily excluding earlier-expressed motivations, for these respondents Islamic children's books provide a much-needed alternative to non-religious children's books available on the Dutch book market. Whereas most interviewees state that non-religious children's books are enthusiastically read at home – indicating that the genre complements existing literary materials available – a minority of producers on the market considers the genre a substitutional tool to keep unwanted external influences of the dominant culture 'out'. Growing up in a non-Muslim majority society, they state, children continuously face a one-way flow of non-Islamic external influences and are to be protected from some of these influences. One author elaborates upon this point:

> Most Dutch children's books do not have a moral message, frequently not. Or they do
> contain a certain form of humour that I do not find appropriate for children. I call that some

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[156] Richard Antoun, *Understanding Fundamentalisms: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Movements* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2001).

kind of an 'anal fixation'. Often those books make jokes about buttocks and being naked, that kind of things. That is what they consider funny. I do not think that's funny and I don't want my child to read that either.

- Author (male, 40)

Disapproving of specific elements included in Dutch children's literature in general, this author states that his need for Islamic children's literature is actually based upon the idea of protecting his child from unwanted external influences. Desiring a moral message, but particularly critical of the inclusion of sensitive topics in Western literature, this author wishes to retain control over the kind of information that is provided to his child. An Islamic alternative on the bookshelves, contrasting dominant cultural artefacts available, is a solution to this. This view, critical of "seemingly alien ideas and values"[157] in the dominant non-Muslim majority setting and somewhat hesitant about the influences of the 'free' and 'loose' Dutch society,[158] is similarly visible in the words of another publisher:

Now at least you have some Islamic input instead of something Western that parents do not wish to have inside their houses. Then it might be the case that parents do not wish the child to read. Because: what does it actually all say? All kind of things are included that Muslims do not support. Then that would result in the child not reading and that would be bad for the child's development.

- Publisher (male, 27)

Desiring an Islamic alternative to the overflow of 'Western' materials available, this publisher states that Muslims living in The Netherlands wish to prevent their children to read anything unsuitable or inappropriate for their child. Although he does not specify what he does mean with 'Islamic input', he seems to elaborate upon the matter one moment later in the interview:

There is a gap that needs to be filled and you notice that when you have children yourself. Only then you notice 'what exactly are they looking at?' Then it is Peppa Pig or Miffy. All

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[157] Omar Sayfo, *Arab Animation: Images of Identity.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 8.
[158] Berger, "The Netherlands," 166–167, 180.

those Western videos where very often they play music, such things Muslims now struggle with, et cetera. Apart from the differences of opinion about whether music is allowed or not for children, a very large part of the Muslim community who believes that music is not allowed does not actually have Islamically responsible content.

- Publisher (male, 27)

Perceiving a distinct dichotomy between what is 'Islamic' and what is 'Western', this publisher is visibly focused on the production of materials that serve as a counterforce against unwanted external influences deriving from the non-Islamic market. Undesired influences, such as music, but also illustrations with figurative images – as this producer does not include any illustrations with facial features in his publications – are to be neglected in his strategy to provide an Islamic alternative. In this view, Islamic children's literature can be considered a form of "halalscapes," referring to an alternative space created "in order to have fun within the permission limits of Islam, and their moral exigencies and perceptions of what is ethical or not."[159] Aimed at having fun 'in a halal manner,' these producers seem to explicitly consider the genre as a means of leisure that is primarily focused on the personal development of oneself. Some parents, these producers indicate, might find it difficult to read an 'average' book from the library, but become stimulated to read with their children when – using the words of one author - "it feels safe or familiar," finding Islamic children's books on the shelves. In the words of another author, the genre of Islamic children's literature "provides a good counterbalance to everything that children already ingest from cartoons, social media, you don't know what." Such "entertainment without idolatry (*shirk*), without criticizing fate, without distorting the ego (*nefs*) to the carnal desires,"[160] protects children from perceived negative external influences by the dominant culture, thereby creating a 'safe haven' for these Muslims. The prerequisite for such literature, then, is a strict interpretation of what they consider to be 'Islamically responsible' content, a criterion that will be addressed more elaborately in the following chapter. Such an approach to Islamic children's literature as a tool to actively protect children from unwanted and perceived inappropriate external influences seems indicative of a more conservative interpretation of Islam and is not one heard too often throughout the

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[159] Sümeyye Ulu Sametoglu, "Halalscapes: Leisure, Fun and Aesthetic Spaces Created by Young Muslim Women of the Gülen Movement in France and Germany," In: *Everyday Life Practices of Muslims in Europe,* ed. Erkan Toguslu (2015). 145.
[160] Ibid., 146.

interviews. Thus, although it might not be representative of a larger majority of Dutch Muslims, it does illustrate one of the driving factors behind the emergence of Dutch Islamic children's literature

**Conclusion**

From this chapter it becomes clear that the genre of Islamic children's literature did not only emerge and transform in the need for renewed educational resources to transmit religious knowledge onto a future generation but is similarly driven by intentions comparable to the broader genre of 'multicultural children's literature,' validating the experiences of a marginalized community.[161] Driven by desires for *identification,* depicting images and narratives that are recognisable to the Dutch Muslim child and provide a realistic account of what it is like to be Muslim in a non-Muslim majority society, the genre of Islamic children's literature is gradually transforming. Illustrating the diversity and hybridity of the genre, acknowledging the diversity of intentions behind its emergence, this chapter exemplifies the difficulty of defining 'Islamic children's literature,' in this case visibly marking a transformation from 'Islamic' to 'Muslim' literature.[162] Gradually focused on the literary representation of mundane, ordinary protagonists in whom its audience can recognise itself, producers of the genre actively work towards creating images of identification. The Muslim child is faced with ideas that Islam can be an inherent part of one's identity and connected to all aspects of the child's everyday life, whilst living in The Netherlands. Whereas for most respondents the genre provides a complementary product to existing children's literature, in some cases the genre seems to be a "site of resistance"[163] against the flow of non-Islamic children's books. For them, the genre is intended to actively keep unwanted external influences out to protect the child. What becomes clear in all cases, however, is that the genre of Islamic children's literature is intended to strengthen the Muslim's child identity, particularly in the face of challenges of minority existence. Not only countering negative stereotypes of Muslim characters by providing realistic and 'authentic' images of Dutch Muslims, produced by Muslims themselves and aimed at diversifying the bookshelf, the books do also provide a tool to familiarise Muslim children with a multicultural context and diversity in society.

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[161] Gopalakrishnan, *Multicultural children's literature,* 5.
[162] Williams, "Passing on religion as identity?" 92.
[163] Omar Sayfo, "Mediating a Disney-style Islam: The Emergence of Egyptian Islamic Animated Cartoons," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal 13,* no. 2 (2018), 8.

**CHAPTER 5: CRITERIA OF A 'BRUNA' GENERATION**

Besides serving as a means of religious transmission and identity strengthening in a Dutch multicultural context, as elaborated in chapter three and four, the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic children's literature is visibly bound by particular demands set by its producers and users. Focusing on the desires of this 'BRUNA' generation of Muslims, referring to a generation of Muslims that takes a critical stance towards the books and their content, this chapter focuses on their main criteria expressed. Doing so, this chapter showcases that the phenomenon is a locally embedded and influenced phenomenon. With an audience that is born and raised in the Dutch context, the market of Islamic children's literature is perceived within, but also influenced by a Dutch frame of reference. Criteria for Islamic children's books, as expressed by my respondents, can be divided into three major themes: *'BRUNA' quality, Islamically responsible,* and *pedagogically responsible.* Increasingly, the genre of Islamic children's books adapts to these criteria, as producers wish to respond to the needs of their consumers, explaining the changing character of the market.

**5.1. 'BRUNA' Quality**

The genre of Dutch Islamic children's literature is a cultural product that is visibly influenced by and produced for the socio-historical context of a generation of Muslims growing up in The Netherlands. In his work on the genre of Islamic animated cartoons in the Arab world, Omar Sayfo states that such products are not only a business for creating and selling marketable products, driven by commercial interests and market mechanisms, but similarly "reflect and advocate the cultural values and identities of its producers and of the social conditions under which it is produced."[164] Produced by Dutch Muslims and intended to be used by Dutch Muslim parents and their children, the genre of Dutch Islamic children's literature is closely connected to its socio-historical context.

Indicated earlier, the actors most closely involved in the process of producing and using Dutch Islamic children's literature can be grouped in the category of 'second generation'. Born and raised in the Dutch context and familiar with Dutch culture, this and future generations of Dutch Muslims mostly agree that their futures and the futures of their children lie within The

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[164] Ibid., 103.

Netherlands.[165] The demands of this generation, themselves grown up and accustomed to the Dutch context, can be grasped in the term 'BRUNA generation',  as a quote by the 27-year-old owner of wholesaler *Hadieth Benelux* illustrates: "I get a lot of inquiries about greeting cards. Some greeting cards are available on the market, but not professionally. Not the BRUNA quality that Dutch Muslims are used to. And so, we focused on that too." Although his words focus on the demand from consumers for greeting cards – as this monopolist on contemporary Dutch Islamic children's literature market produces more than just books – his words indicate an important and often-expressed critical stance of his clientele towards the quality of materials available. Islamic products produced need to be highly qualitative, considering that its audience is used to – what he calls – 'BRUNA quality.' Referring to a well-known and renown Dutch wholesaler of books, magazines, and greeting cards, using the term 'BRUNA quality' illustrates that this audience takes the Dutch context as its frame of reference. Responding to this demand, producers all over the Islamic children's literature market intend to produce materials that are similar in terms of quality, yet different in content. The same publisher continuous to explain what he considers essential elements of such BRUNA quality:

> We've given everything a new look. If you walk past our books now – apart from the content, apart from the texts – you will see that you see no difference between the Bruna, the Primera and these books. [...] We print at the same printing company where BRUNA, Primera, and Kruidvat print their products. So really European book quality. Illustrations exactly the same.
>
> -    Publisher (male, 27)

According to this wholesaler, BRUNA books – which he regards as of the highest quality in terms of press work, language, and graphics – were among the main inspirations when designing the products currently offered by *Hadieth Benelux*. This inspiration is visible in the books of, for example, *Sara and Hamza: 21 Islamic Reading Stories.*

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[165] Trees Pels, "Dilemmas of Educating Muslim Children in the Dutch Immigration Context," In: *Making European Muslims: Religious Socialization among Young Muslims in Scandinavia and Western Europe,* ed. Mark Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 2015), 58.

**Fig. 10-11:** Book covers of *Sara and Hamza: 21 Islamic Reading Stories 1* and *2*, published by *Hadieth Benelux.*

Written in a linear narrative, illustrated with colourful and appealing drawings of twin-siblings, and even followed with a sequel, the books are similar to any children's book available in non-Islamic Dutch bookstores. Such similarities were intentional: aware of a Dutch Muslim audience that is used to high-quality Dutch productions, as offered by Dutch bookstores like BRUNA, this producer elaborates that he intended to create a production that is comparable in terms of style and quality, yet different in content – articulating an Islamic identity. In this sense, the genre can be considered both a response to such non-religious cultural products and an adaptation of these to the 'self', producing similar products with an Islamic touch or from an Islamic perspective. Dutch non-religious children's books, then, serves both as models for and rivals to Islamic productions, an observation reminiscent of broader research on Islamic commodification.[166]

A 'BRUNA generation' of Muslims distinguishes itself from earlier generations in the sense that an increasing focus on quality in the products demanded can be observed. This change in demands is visible when respondents express their experiences with the earliest supply of Islamic children's books in The Netherlands.

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[166] See for example: Gregory Starrett, "The margins of print: Children's religious literature in Egypt," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 2,* no. 1 (1996): 117-139; Reina Lewis, "Marketing Muslim Lifestyle: A New Media Genre," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies 6,* no. 3 (2010): 58-90.

Then the books that were available – in the late 90s, early 2000s – they were very amateurish. Its quality was very low. I am now talking about books aimed at children. The illustrations, which were truly amateurish, but also the content. Sometimes [the language contained] a lot of mistakes and I was annoyed by that.

- Author (male, 51)

Written in poor language and containing, what this author calls, amateurish illustrations, books from that period did no longer meet contemporary expectations and needs of its audience. Reflecting broader criticisms on the supply of Arabic children's literature, generally considered to be insufficiently appealing to children, using complicated or symbolic language, and over-emphasizing morality through text,[167] contemporary desires of Dutch Muslims seem to have transformed since the genre's emergence, forcing the market to change.

When discussing what constitutes 'quality', respondents consider similar elements of importance. One author mentions that quality, for him, is "in everything, in the illustrations, in the press-work, in the content. Everything must be right." Indicating the importance of the inter-connected parts of a children's book, many agree, quality is a total package: different elements in the books should contribute to one another. This increasing demand for quality can be explained in terms of generational change, as one author illustrates:

Now you actually get a group of people, basically the first generation who is born and raised here themselves, who actually raise their children here. This group is, on average, higher educated and thinks more critically of the question 'what does being a Muslim mean to me?'. This generation knows what kind of Dutch children's books are available, and they think: 'Why do I have to read these – how to put this nicely – less qualitative books when it comes to my own faith, which is so important to me?

- Author (convert, male, 35)

Critically considering questions of identity, this respondent indicates, his generation's desire for qualitative materials in Dutch is closely connected to this critical stance and a sense of being proud

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[167] Mdallel, "Translating Children's Literature in the Arab World."

to be Muslim. With Islam as an important source for the definition of identity in the face of minority existence, and willing to assert their identity in a more assertive manner than previous generation,[168] this respondent indicates that the desire for qualitative materials in Dutch is closely connected to the importance of religion for these Muslims. Accustomed to the book shops, materials and publications available on the Dutch market, this audience considers the Dutch book market as its cultural frame of reference and desires similar products "in an Islamic manner," as one parent indicates. "Children," one author states, "have a right to qualitative materials," particularly when the materials provided to them are concerned with their religious and cultural identity. Such an increasingly professionalising supply of Islamic children's literature available can be explained in the words of Robert Williams, citing the work of Osman, stating that "as generational change in society reflects growing Muslim acculturation to dominant cultural logics, the 'character and function' of Anglo-Western Islamic children's literature also change."[169]

## 5.2. "Islamically Responsible"

A second major criterion expressed in the interviews is the importance of 'Islamically responsible' or 'Islamically correct' content, referring to quality in terms of religious content provided to the child. Whereas for some, as elaborated earlier, providing such content is a way of keeping unwanted external influences out and providing Islamic 'alternatives' to dominant culture, the phrase 'Islamically responsible' seems to be important for almost all respondents to some extent. Building upon the idea that Islamic children's books are a means of transmitting knowledge on Islam, and that such a matter is part of one's religious duty, particularly producers see it as their responsibility to produce 'religiously correct' content. Unanimously, they express desires for 'correct', 'trustworthy' or 'reliable' information. Quality, in this sense, is a matter of accuracy.

> Because it is a critical audience, which is also allowed of course, we don't want to produce fables, we really want to tell the stories that are known and that are just right, so to speak, [the stories] about which there is certainty. That is what we want to pass on to the children.
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> - Author (convert, female, 31)

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[168] Adis Duderija, "Emergence of Western Muslim Identity: factors, agents, and discourses," In: *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West,* ed. Roberto Totoli (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 202.
[169] R. Osman, *Islam and Literature: An Analysis of the Discussions in the Middle East and Malaysia* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of London: 2003], 53, quoted in Williams, "Passing on religion as identity?" 87.

Emphasizing the critical stance of her audience towards content provided, this author underlines the importance of reproducing the 'known' and 'certain' stories. The production of children's literature, then, is to be handled with care and a sense of responsibility. Adhering to a Sunni-interpretation of Islam, despite possible interpretational differences among them,[170] for respondents the usage of 'correct' sources unanimously refers to those sources agreed upon by the majority of Sunni Muslims. One of them elaborates:

> [I use] sources all Muslims agree on. Because if you look beyond those sources, differences of opinion about different topics exist among the recognized scholars. I don't want to concern myself with [those discussions] in my children's content. That's such a far-from-my-bed show for those kids, I'm not even going to mention that. What I focus on for the children is *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. These are very clear sources: what did Allah say, what did the Prophet say, and that's it. Easy to understand for children, easy to explain for parents.
>
> -   Online promoter (male, 41)

Sources considered to be 'correct' or 'trustworthy' are the *Qur'ān,* which is perceived to be the literal revelation of Allah's words, and the *sunnah,* the teachings, deeds, and sayings of Prophet Muhammad as documented through verbally transmitted *ahādīth.* Emphasizing that Islamic children's literature is primarily considered a tool to familiarise children with basic knowledge on Islam, this author explicitly states that topics of theological discussion are to be neglected in the genre. For children, producers agree, topics of possible disagreement among the Muslim community are not relevant, and only topics of consensus are to be dealt with.

> What I mainly focus on is the *hadith*, so the narrations of the Prophet that are considered *sahih* ['authentic']. You have different degrees in the traditions, and you have for example *sahih* hadith, but there are also some stricter scholars - like Saudi Arabia - they have a stricter version. [For them, certain *hadith*] cannot be quoted as evidence or as an argument. So I always avoid [those kind of discussions]. I always try to go for that which has very

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[170] See for example: Willem Huijnk, *De Religieuze Beleving van Moslims in Nederland: Diversiteit en Verandering in Beeld* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2018), 25.

clear sources, so the *sahih hadith* and the *Quran*. [...] These are known, these have been declared reliable by the great scholars of what the majority follows.

- Author (convert, female, 31)

As this author elaborates, in order to prevent to touch upon topics of possible theological discussion among different interpreters of Islam, she only makes use of those *ahādīth* that are considered to be 'authentic' by the majority of Muslims.[171]

Interestingly, differences exist in the ways in which both producers and parents make sure whether the information included can be considered 'correct' or 'religiously responsible.' In the case of producers, many indicate that they are in close contact with a recognized religious authority or fellow Muslims in order to check whether the topics included in the book only focus on correct information. In some cases, producers even include a bibliography, to ensure that adults using the books can check themselves whether they agree with included information. Others, on the other hand, consider their own knowledge on Islamic matters sufficient – not double-checking the information included with a religious authority – and the inclusion of a bibliography unnecessary. For them, merely dealing with topics of basic knowledge in their publications, such knowledge is self-evidently known by its audience, therefore not requiring a list of references. According to one author, this is also unnecessary as his intention is to appeal to all Muslims, despite possible interpretational differences among them:

I do not work with citation. And the reason for that is that I try, let's put it this way, to organize my books in such a way that regardless of what your background is, you can find yourself in it. And in some cases that is just a bit more difficult than in others. [...] In that sense: I provide the lines and the colouring is up to the parents themselves.

- Author (convert, male, 35)

Illustrative of, what has been referred to as, contemporary "democratization of access to Islamic knowledge,"[172] this criterion of Islamically responsible content highlights that 'ordinary' Muslims

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[171] Within the Muslim community the validity of *ahādīth*, believed to be the reported words, actions, and (silent) approval of the Prophet Muhammad, rests on reliability of transmission. As such, great importance has been placed on tracing the chain of transmitters (*isnād*) and on the report itself (*matn*) to evaluate the degree of certainty attributed to a *hadith*. Categories of classification range from sound or authentic reports (*sahīh*) to weak reports (*da'if*). See: John Bowen, *A New Anthropology of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20.

[172] Jacobsen, *Islamic Traditions and Muslim Youth in Norway*, 269.

themselves increasingly engage in debates about what Islam is and what its sources say. Reaching out to such audiences, a tactic frequently used by producers is to merely engage with topics in such a way that the books themselves can be read by a broad Muslim audience, despite possible different interpretations amongst them.

This tactic of 'appealing to the majority' is visible in some books themselves as well. In cases of possible differences in interpretation among the audience, some producers adopt creative manners of carefully dealing with such issues. For example, one author narrated that – in order to prevent discussion upon the question whether boys and girls beyond the borders of familial relationships are allowed to play together – she decided to include two main characters as twins, similar to the *Sara and Hamza* series, intending to keep as wide an audience as possible in sight. Another author stated that – in order to appeal to the majority of Dutch Muslims – he decided to only include images of the mother protagonist in his book with her head covered, on some pages wearing a *hijāb* whilst in other cases creatively tackling the matter by depicting her with a towel draped around her head, as if just left the shower. Carefully and creatively dealing with matters of interpretational differences, these examples illustrate that producers actively consider the ways in which they can speak to a broad audience, precluding any topic of debate on what is 'Islamically correct' or 'responsible.'



**Fig. 12-13:** Covers of *The Friends of the Prophet: The Story of Barakah Oem Ayman* and *Nora Misses Grandpa*, published by *Hadieth Benelux*, illustrating the visible differences in the matter of 'figural representation'.

Although the above might seem to indicate that Islamic children's books provide a shared 'curriculum' of Islamic knowledge, one point of ideological difference is frequently mentioned throughout this research and similarly visible in the books themselves: the controversial debate on

"figural representation."[173] As Janson observes, "the issue of figurative representation remains highly sensitive, since Sunni theology has tended to consider images of animated beings as infringing on the basic principle of monotheism – namely, that God is sole creator."[174] Such theological discussions, centring around the matter of depicting animate figures, is both expressed throughout the interviews, but also visibly present in the supply of Islamic children's books available. For some producers and parents, the depiction of images is considered inappropriate and to be neglected in order to reach those audiences who consider it 'Islamically incorrect' to depict animate beings. As one author observed, "in recent years there has been a trend of no faces at once, so apparently parents are very excited that children's books start to emerge without faces. 'Yay, because then it's very Islamic.'" In other cases, both producers and parents consider the depiction of animate beings no problem in the case of children, even considering it a more approachable factor for non-Muslims possibly interested in the books, and for some it even is a decisive point in their book purchase:

> There is also the contradiction with some movements within Islam who consider images inappropriate. Well, how child-friendly can you make a book then? Or then you have some children's books where they leave out the faces and that annoys me because that's not how I interpret my religion. So, then I automatically have the inclination to simply not buy those booklets. [...] I feel like the development of that kind of material comes mostly – I hate to use such terms – but from an orthodox angle, you could say.
>
> -   Parent (male, 33)

Ideological and interpretational differences do exist in the supply of Islamic children's literature available, as this parent illustrates, and such differences do at times play a decisive role in the willingness of parents to purchase books. Yet, although such differences may be visible in the books when examining critically, almost all interviewees indicate that interpretational differences are secondary to the larger goal of knowledge transmission and identity strengthening of the child, provided that the sources and content included can be considered 'correct'.

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[173] Christiane Gruber, *The Image Debate: Figural Representation in Islam and Across the World* (London: Gingko, 2019).
[174] Janson, "Imaging Islamic Identity," 330.

Overall, the call for 'religiously correct' content does illustrate the delicate negotiation processes at play in both the production and usage of Islamic children's literature. Illustrative of the ways in which individual Muslims increasingly have the ability to critically engage with, reflect upon, and investigate religious sources, in an era of globalization and digitalisation, the call for 'religiously correct' content is an example of what Btissam Abaaziz has described as a 'symbolic battle' about who should accept what from whom.[175] Desiring to speak to a majority of Muslims in The Netherlands, topics of controversial nature are dealt with in creative manners or neglected at all. In many cases, theological discussions are considered secondary to the larger goal of raising children with a 'true', or more importantly 'not false,' understanding of religion, highlighting the critical stance of contemporary generation of Muslims towards their religion and the ways in which they wish to transmit it to a future generation.

### 5.3. "Pedagogically Responsible"

Besides critical of the quality of books produced and the content included in it, Muslims interviewed are above all critical towards the manner in which books narrate their messages to its audience. As became clear in chapter three already, a call for renewed pedagogic resources often derived from personal experiences with religious upbringing and was primarily aimed at socialising the child in terms of lasting knowledge. Providing content in a "fun" and "entertaining" manner, but also the 'BRUNA quality' mentioned earlier, are perceived to contribute to such goals. Such examples of producing "child friendly" means can be considered one aspect of what, in the words of respondents, comprises a "pedagogically responsible" criterion of Islamic children's books. In the following paragraphs, this call for 'pedagogic responsible' content will be further elaborated upon, highlighting a demand for quality in terms of pedagogy.

### 5.3.1. A Pedagogy of 'Love'

As mentioned earlier, the genre of Islamic children's literature as it exists in contemporary times partly emerged in reaction to personal experiences with religious upbringing. The words of one mother illustrate this perfectly, acknowledging that her memories of religious education back home went hand in hand with feelings of fright and scare. Discusses memories of her own youth and the way her father dealt with raising her, she narrates:

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[175] Abaaziz, "'Ze waren onwetend,'" 191.

I actually remember a book my father had about *harām* – about all that is forbidden – and on its cover a serpent with seven heads, a horrible head. That is effectively stated somewhere in the Quran: if you are not behaving well then you will go to hell and what will you find there, among others, a snake with seven heads and it will eat you. So really, I remember so vividly that if I didn't do something – say my prayer or I wasn't right like my father – he would pick up that book – I really see it before my eyes – and then say 'Look this is what will happen to you'. Which means you do what your father says, but you do it for your father and you actually do it out of fear, so in that period I developed a strong aversion to my faith

- Parent (female, 34)

Having been confronted with scaring images of possible creatures of the afterlife herself, this mother indicates that for her religious upbringing was covered in feelings of fright. A consequence of this scare, she states, was that her actions became mostly dictated by the wishes of her father. Desiring to do it differently, this mother indicates at a later moment in the interview, her ultimate goal is to provide her children with a strong and loving connection to their religion. Such experiences can be traced in the words of another respondent as well:

In the past, the focus [of these books] was more on *fiqh,* so legislation... on what is allowed and what is not. But that's not what [I want for] our children... until a certain age, you let them grow up with love for Allah and only later comes a context and that framework of what is allowed and what is not allowed. But that's not what you're raising your child on. You feed the child's soul and his heart, and you want it to feel connected to his Creator. So, if you can refer to that, to the unity of Allah, to the beauty of Allah, yes then you fill the child's heart with love and that is what we strive for.

- Producer (convert, female, 39)

Intending to break away from older top-down forms of religious upbringing, often described in terms of mimetic teaching, legalistic rules and modelling the child in a specific manner of behaving, these respondents indicate that first and foremost a child should be strengthened in its

relation to its faith. Critical of early legalistic pedagogies of Islamic upbringing in an authoritative manner, in research generally characterized by the importance of moral development, conformity and loyalty to (religious) authority,[176] these second-generation Muslims desire something different for their children. Filling the child's heart with love for Islam, they state, will create lasting connections to Islam. In this sense, the emergence of Dutch Islamic children's literature is a response to a – in the words of another respondent – "old-fashioned and heavy handed" pedagogy of scare, fright, and legalistic rules. Almost all respondents interviewed indicate that they, in an attempt to counter earlier approaches to pedagogy, desire to raise their children with a strong love for Allah and his creation. Strengthening the child's relationship to God is interpreted in different ways. Whereas some state that this love is intended to create a connection between the child and his religion, and some find that "a child should feel safe with its religion," others state that focusing on this love leaves the child feel "at home and in community" with its religion or learns children that "God is just."

Emphasizing the importance of 'love' and strengthening the child's relationship to its religion, the format and content of Islamic children's literature is visibly shaped by questions of *suitability* and appropriateness. Inherent to the genre of children's literature in general,[177] the question of appropriateness for children – in terms of pedagogy and topics – centres around the idea of what defines 'a good children's book'. In the case of religious children's literature, such discussions primarily concern themselves with a book's degree of "usefulness as carrier of religious 'knowledge.'"[178] This is similarly visible in the case of Islamic children's literature, where discussions on the appropriateness of books seem to be primarily driven by the ultimate goal of creating a connection between the child and its religion. *Suitability*, often closely connected to the demand of 'child friendly' content in terms of a child's age, world of experiences, and level of understanding, is a criterion often-expressed by respondents. This becomes particularly visible in the way respondents discuss the topic of 'punishment.' One mother, when thinking about the books available on the market, finds that some of the supply focuses too much on punishment, emphasizing stories on the devil and bad forces. In her opinion, such stories are not considered to be pedagogically responsible. "Those topics are suitable for a later age," is what she concludes.

[176] Marietje Beemsterboer, *Islamitisch Basisonderwijs in Nederland* (Almere: Parthenon, 2018), 40.
[177] Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age,* 5.
[178] Janson, *Your Cradle is Green,* 23.

The topic of punishment and violence, as some respondents indicate, is often considered to be too heavy or too difficult for children to already deal with.

> I had ordered some books, but I found the subjects too heavy. They were not aimed at the child's soul – a Biblical story cannot be translated one-on-one into a children's story. The one thing that a child reads, then, is 'there used to be a people, they were very bad. God became angry, God punished them, everyone died, and everyone went to hell.' That's basically what you're conveying, but what has the child actually learned from this?
>
> - Author (male, 40)

Focusing on the child's soul, ensuring that the child learns something from the stories presented, this author acknowledges that the topic of punishment is a heavy one. Critical of the literal one-on-one translation of Qur'anic stories to an audience of children, this author states that certain topics require particular care. However, the author continues, the topic of punishment does not need to go unmentioned, rather, it is to be discussed in a careful manner:

> The goal of a children's book is to introduce a child to the love for God. And that, in addition to that, God is also just, and that punishment exists, but this [punishment] derives from righteousness. You have people in this life who do everything that goes against God's will, who do injustice to people and animals […] Those kinds of people do not belong in Paradise. So, God made a special place for them.
>
> - Author (male, 40)

Acknowledging that the topic of 'punishment' is a heavy but not to be neglected matter, this author's perspective upon the topic stresses the hybridity of opinions and experiences behind the phenomenon of Islamic children's literature. In his view, any difficult topic can be discussed with children, on the prerequisite that some form of *explanation* and reasoning is provided as to 'why' certain happenings occur. This ultimately leads to another characteristic of 'pedagogically responsible' content, as expressed by interviewees: the importance of an understandable and dialogic message.

### 5.3.2. Providing an Understandable Message

As discussed earlier, many parents desire to break away from earlier methods of religious upbringing that were often characterized by strictly 'parroting' the educator. Rather than merely copying and memorising Qur'anic verses, many respondents indicate, the notions of *understandability* and *dialogue* are important aspects of 'pedagogically responsible' content in Islamic children's literature. This importance of understanding, as narrated by a converted author, is based upon the idea that a child needs to 'internalise' its faith: "For me, it is important that [the child] can comply with the knowledge provided, that the child can understand it, that it touches the child. So not that it is something external, something from the outside." Rather than making the child merely copy and "parrot" knowledge, experiences most adults had throughout their personal upbringing, understanding is considered to be one essential goal of the Islamic children's literature genre.

> I did not understand what was presented to me. Maybe that is difficult to undertake with children, but I missed that part. That the 'why', why we belief, why we belief in Allah as Muslims, was neglected in my upbringing.
>
> - 'Childless' adult (female, 30)

Having missed some form of understanding herself, this respondent indicates that to understand the 'why' is an important component in learning religion. Understanding why Islam is actually presented as part of a child's identity, the importance of an understandable message – supported by the fact that books are produced in the Dutch language, the mother tongue of many contemporary Dutch Muslim children – is repeatedly mentioned.

Such focus on understanding should be seen in light of the minority position of Dutch Muslims in The Netherlands. As Jørgen Nielsen describes, whereas Muslim pedagogy used to be based on "an essentially authoritarian inculcation of content,"[179] such an approach has changed in light of diaspora. Dutch Muslim children growing up now do face choices and possibilities that their parents, let alone grandparents, did not have to cope with. As such, any form of education does not suffice "telling them that this is right and that is wrong, they need to understand why."[180]

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[179] Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam*, 77.
[180] Ibid.

Similar observations can be traced throughout existing literature on second-generation Muslims, elaborating that these Muslims have been raised in a society where reflection, thinking critically and supporting arguments are encouraged, different than in most countries of origin of the first generation.[181] Transforming from "top-down knowledge transfer to a more open interaction with pupils, enabling pupils to bridge the gap with life outside,"[182] the genre of Dutch Islamic children's literature is increasingly characterized by a focus on dialogue and room for the child's interpretation. Supporting children in the exploration and question of their own religious commitment through dialogue with the educator, the genre seems to gradually move towards a more autonomous style of upbringing.[183] One mother elaborates:

> [Dialogue] is super important. That a child learns to enter a discussion and converse, but [also] that it is okay to ask questions. That is so super important. Because if you just have to accept things, then we know the results… then you get those extreme thoughts and that doesn't help our society, does it?
>
> -    Parent (female, 33)

As this mother illustrates, rather than copying the content presented to a child, it is preferred for a child to enter a dialogue and ask questions. Leaving the child free to ask questions, express its ideas, and find meaning in the books itself, such a dialogic approach is understood to result in a stronger connection between the child and its religion, an ultimate goal of Dutch Islamic children's literature. Combined with elements of *understandability,* an *accessible* and *suitable* message, written in a fun manner and aimed at the child's world of experience, an increasing call for 'pedagogically responsible' contents and formats seems to continuously challenge the market of Islamic children's literature to improve itself and fulfil the desires and criterion as expressed by a critical generation of Dutch Muslims.

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[181] See for example: Peek, "Becoming Muslim"; Abaaziz, "'Ze waren onwetend,'" 172; Vertovec and Rogers, *Muslim European Youth,* 12.
[182] Pels, "Dilemmas of Educating Muslim Children," 70.
[183] Pels, "Oratie," 215.

## Conclusion

This chapter illustrates that contemporary Muslims, as interviewed in this research, follow a literary line of thinking in which it is believed that "a literary poor book cannot be pedagogically useful, irrespective of its purposes or confessionality."[184] Attentive to the quality of Islamic children's books, in terms of religious and pedagogic content, but also in terms of materiality and design, this generation does not settle for less for their children. Particularly when it comes to something as important as their religion. Aspiring to further their children's religious education, this chapter illustrates that both producers and users of Islamic children's literature have a clear idea of what defines qualitative Islamic children's literature, visibly influenced by and adapted to Dutch, contemporary standards. First of all, the genre should provide a professional equal to those materials Dutch children are used to, in terms of images, narratives, and presswork. Similarly, the content provided should be religiously correct, and any dubious or insecure topic is to be neglected. Particularly this criterion is illustrative of a broader trend visible among highly educated second-generation Muslims in West-European societies, who increasingly engage with religious sources themselves. Themselves raised in The Netherlands, their parenting and educational ideals increasingly defined by individualistic ideas and goals, such as assertiveness, autonomy of the child, and open communication between parent and child,[185] this is similarly reflected in increasing calls for 'pedagogically responsible' content. In order to let the child internalise its faith, messages included should be understandable and a child is to be stimulated to question and start a dialogue with its educator. As this chapter highlights, the genre of Islamic children's books gradually responds to the changing needs of its consumers, a generation of Muslims that takes its children and its faith seriously.

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[184] Janson, *Your Cradle is Green,* 23.
[185] Beemsterboer, *Islamitisch Basisonderwijs in Nederland,* 41.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research attempted to answer the question: *what explains the increasing popularity of Dutch Islamic children's literature since its emergence in the 1990s?* Given the exploratory nature of the research, having mapped the diverse intentions, motivations, and desires of actors most closely involved in the production and consumption of Islamic children's books, providing one ultimate conclusion is complicated. However, some observations can place the work in broader trends visible in the field of study on Islam in the West.

The means of Islamic children's literature did emerge in a period when second-generation Dutch Muslims – themselves born and raised in The Netherlands – started to actively think about the upbringing of a future generation of Muslims. Facing minority-existence in a "secular age,"[186] making even the most devout believer aware of the fact that children will come across dissenters or non-believers throughout their lives, a need for renewed pedagogic tools was deemed necessary to preserve cultural and religious continuity. Critical of earlier modes of religious instruction and experiencing a personal lack in knowledge on the Arabic language and understanding of Islam, these second-generation Muslims experienced a "crisis"[187] in transmitting cultural and religious knowledge. The genre of Islamic children's literature proved to be the materialised response to this crisis, providing an innovative and renewed format of transmitting Islamic principles, but also strengthening children in their religious and social identity in the face of minority existence. Currently set in a fast process of transformation and professionalisation, the genre of Islamic children's literature reflects the coming-of-age attitudes of contemporary Dutch Muslims. This development is not only reflected in the format through which the Muslim child becomes socialized in its Islamic and Muslim identity – gradually transforming into a medium characterized by simple language, mundane protagonists, colourful drawings, and an understandable message – changes are similarly visibly in the manner in which children become acquainted with their religion and religious identity, increasingly defined by 'pedagogically responsible' criteria.

Drawing from the above, it could be stated that the emergence and transformation of Islamic children's literature throughout time reflects broader calls for reform of 'traditional' Islamic religious education.[188] Advocated by thinkers such as Tariq Ramadan, who emphasizes a

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[186] Francis Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[187] Hervieu-Léger, "The Transmission and Formation of Socioreligious Identities in modernity," 214.

[188] See for example: Pels, "Dilemmas of Educating Muslim Children."; Daud Tauhidi, *Tarbiyah Project: Towards a Renewed Vision of Islamic Education,* accessed on December 6, 2021*;* Sahin, *New Directions in Islamic Education.*

need for education that connects children to their daily realities,[189] such pleas for innovating educational tools are addressed in order to assist young Muslims growing up in diaspora-contexts. Stimulating children to learn about Islam "through questioning and exploration,"[190] Islamic children's literature seems to be the materialization of a growing need for "a critical and dialogic Islamic pedagogy."[191] Although it should be acknowledged that in many cases the books available do still focus on didactic staging of virtue, increasingly the genre itself is changing in its pedagogic and didactic approach, responding to an expressed need by Dutch Muslims currently raising their children in contemporary Dutch society.

What, then, does this phenomenon tell us about the everyday practices of Muslims and its future generation in West-Europe, specifically The Netherlands? Itself a product of the daily life experiences of Dutch Muslims in the face of minority existence, the genre is visibly aimed at an everyday-life usage. Islam, the genre of Islamic children's literature implies, is inherent to any setting: from leisure-time to bedtime. The books seem to indicate a growing importance directed towards the presence of Islam in the everyday, to be present not only in the 'official' and 'strategic' settings of religious life, but also in the 'ordinary' and 'mundane.' Increasingly focused on the parent as primary educator and reading in a domestic setting, one could wonder whether the growing popularity of Islamic children's literature is an example of, what others have referred to as, the increasing 'privatization' or 'individualization' of Islam in Western-Europe.[192] Clear is that parents, as the ones directly buying the books and thus in charge of reading choices, increasingly have the control to decide upon the content provided to its child, illustrating a growing agency in discovering and negotiating their own religious practice. As such, this research shows, ordinary Muslims are not merely passive "consumers" of religious normativity, but rather critically engage with such normativity, comment to it and (re)interpret it according to their own moral frameworks and situations.[193] Increasingly, ordinary Muslims themselves are critically and consciously engaging with their religious traditions and prescriptions of Islam,[194] resulting in the fact that religious authority lies no longer in the hands of religious scholars alone. It is in such processes of

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[189] Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[190] Sahin, *New Directions in Islamic Education*, 209-10.
[191] Ibid., 210.
[192] See for example: Peter, "Individualization and Religious Authority in Western European Islam"; Cesari, "Muslim Minorities in Europe," 257; Karin Phalet, Claudia van Lotringen, and Han Entzinger, *Islam in de Multiculturele Samenleving: opvattingen van jongeren in Rotterdam* (Utrecht: Universiteit Utrecht, 2000), 182.
[193] Sunier, "Everyday Experiences, Moral Dilemmas and the Making of Muslim Life Worlds," 11.
[194] See for example: Vertovec and Rogers, *Muslim European Youth*; Mandaville, "Towards a Critical Islam."

negotiation that, as Nathal Dessing observes, "the Islamic discursive tradition comes to be lived."[195] Actively and consciously pushing the market of Islamic children's literature to answer their needs, a self-aware and self-conscious second-generation of Dutch Muslims currently dictates the genre. Themselves raised in The Netherlands, more than ever familiar with BRUNA quality as found on the Dutch bookshelves and educational ideals defined by individualistic goals, these Muslim adults are visibly aimed at the preservation of an Islamic identity on the one hand, whilst strongly embedded in and focused on Dutch society. Explicitly recognising and accepting the specificities of their European context, in addition to a personal understanding of their Islamic identity, these Muslims actively "promote the social, cultural, and political integration of Western Muslims without the loss of their religious identity and, thereby, attempt to create a distinctly Western Muslim identity which is culturally Western."[196] Desiring cultural products for their children and actively taking up space upon the Dutch bookshelves, they assertively declare the material presence and future of Islam in The Netherlands to the outside world.

As the very first attempt at exploring the field of Dutch Islamic children's literature in The Netherlands, this research provides an interpretation of useful explanatory degree towards understanding why the genre of Islamic children's literature developed. Nevertheless, it yields multiple questions that can be addressed in further research. For example, interesting to discover further is the actual content of books: what kind of Islam do they promote, and what does this tell us about the 'discursive tradition' that is Islam? Closely investigating possible ideological differences present in the books, such research could discover the implications of the genre's hybridity. Similarly unaddressed in this research is the actual usage of Islamic children's books: to what extent do these books indeed contribute to intended goals of religious socialisation and identity construction? Important to note, then, is that we should be aware not to fall into a trap of "generationalism,"[197] essentialising differences between different ages of Muslims along the lines of a generational perspective. Although this research has shown that generational transformations provide one explanatory factor behind the changing market of Islamic children's literature, such generational lines are not static. As Amir-Moazamir and Salvatore rightfully note, "the transmission of religious knowledge and practice, or of religious traditions in a wider sense of the

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[195] Dessing et al., *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*, 3.
[196] Duderija, "Emergence of Western Muslim Identity," 204.
[197] Semi Purhonen, "Generations on Paper: Bourdieau and the critique of 'generationalism'," *Theory and Methods 55,* no. 1 (2016), 94-114.

term, is not necessarily a linear process, a one-sided transmission from one generation to the next, but can very well work the other way around."[198] Therefore, further research on the matter of Islamic children's literature within the Islamic upbringing of future Muslims in contexts of diaspora is needed.

In conclusion, this research has provided a first insight into the phenomenon of Dutch Islamic children's literature, an increasingly popular genre among Dutch Muslims that had not yet been researched in The Netherlands. The growing transformation of Dutch Islamic children's literature can be seen both as a mediated way in which Islamic norms, values, and habits are transmitted to a future generation, yet also indicates the changing needs of Dutch Muslims in strengthening their identity in the face of minority existence. Having highlighted the diversity of actors and motivations behind the genre, it has become clear that Islamic children's literature is a broad phenomenon. It is in responding to the different needs as expressed by its audience that the genre of Islamic children's literature gradually transforms, fulfilling different functions. Ranging from the strict didactic teaching of virtue to playful modes of representation, and even serving as a tool to exclude unwanted societal influences, the genre is considered as a perfect tool for parents to raise their children as Muslims and prepare them for inevitable future encounters with difference and diversity in a multicultural context. Strengthening children in their sense of self and creating content to be proud of as Muslims, children's books provide such future generations of Dutch Muslims with a practical tool in navigating society through knowledge that lasts a lifetime. And it is in moments of the ordinary, one author narrates, that lasting memories are constructed:

> *A lesson is also about how and by whom it is conveyed. It's an intimate moment. Dad, mom and the child lying in bed together.  The child will go to sleep in a moment, so it's a private moment, a moment when the child gets full attention. It's quality time. They read the book together. The child feels safe and secure. Those are things that impress a child.*

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[198] Amir-Moazamir and Salvatore, "Gender, generation and the reform of tradition," 61.

## LIST OF FIGURES

**Fig. 1:** Book-cover of *Moessie Boekie,* published by *Halal Invest*. On the image you see a young boy seated in a typically Dutch cargo-bike, driven around through the streets by his father. Image received from author.

**Fig. 2:** Book-cover of *Kinderen van Adam: Verhalen uit de Koran,* published by Dutch publisher *Ploegsma*. The cover depicts a tree, drawn in calligraphic style. Bol.com. Image received from author.

**Fig. 3:** Book-cover of *Rayan and Rania Ask Allah for Help,* published by wholesaler *Hadieth Benelux.* The image depicts a young boy and girl surrounded by moving boxes in front of a house. HadiethShop.nl. "Rayan en Rania Vragen Allah om Hulp" Kinderboeken. Accessed on January 27, 2022. https://hadiethshop.nl/kinderboeken/9041-rayan-en-rania-vragen-allah-om-hulp-9789083124599.html.

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**Fig. 7:** Book-cover of *Book for Little Muslims: I Learn Du'a,* published by the Islamic Bureau Educational Books (IBEB). Bol.com, "Kleine moslims," Kinderbijbels. Bijbels. Christendom. Religie. Religie, Spiritualiteit & Filosofie. Boeken. Accessed on February 5, 2022. https://www.bol.com/nl/nl/p/kleinemoslims/1001004002131178/?bltgh=jIl5B7NdtrE6zVN5i19C iA.2_18.22.ProductImage.

**Fig. 8:** Picture of the illustration depicted on page 12 in the book *De Vijf Zuilen van de Islam,* published by Anasheed4Kids.

**Fig. 9:** Illustrations of page 6 and 7 of the book *Moessie: Papa is mijn Beste Vriend,* published by Halal Invest in 2019. Images received from author.

**Fig. 10:** Book-cover of *Sara en Hamza: 21 Islamitische Voorleesverhalen,* published by wholesaler Hadieth Benelux. Bol.com. "Sara en Hamza: 21 islamitische voorleesverhalen." Islam. Religie. Religie, Spiritualiteit & Filosofie. Boeken. Accessed on December 6, 2021. https://www.bol.com/nl/nl/p/sara-en-hamza/9300000027398493/.

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**Fig. 12:** Book-cover of *The Friends of the Prophet: The Story of Barakah Oem Ayman*, published by wholesaler Hadieth Benelux. Hadieth Benelux. "De vrienden van de profeet – het verhaal van Barakah Oem Ayman." Islamitische boeken. Accessed on February 13, 2022. https://hadiethshop.nl/islamitische-boeken/9144-vrienden-profeet-barakah-oem-ayman-9789083135816.html.

**Fig. 13:** Book-cover of *Nora Misses Grandpa,* published by wholesaler Hadieth Benelux. Hadieth Benelux. "Nora mist opa." Kinderboeken. Accessed on February 13, 2022. https://hadiethshop.nl/kinderboeken/9918-nora-mist-opa-9789083145891.html.

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**APPENDIX 1 – Interview Questionnaire**

**Background**

*Who are you and what is your professional background?*

*Can you tell something about your family background?*

*What role does religion and 'being Muslim' play in your daily life?*

*Can you tell something about your personal religious upbringing back home? In what language were you raised?*

*What role did books and the practice of reading play in your (religious) upbringing? Did your family read, did your parents read aloud?*

**Islamic Children's Books**

*How would you define 'Islamic children's literature' yourself? What sort of books do you mean, then?*

*In what capacity have you come across Dutch Islamic children's books? Can you tell more about this encounter?*

*In what places have you come across such Islamic children's literature? How have you been made aware of the availability of such books?*

*For what reasons did you decide to (not) make use of such Islamic children's books? Why (or why not) did you buy these books? For what purposes did you decide to (not) use these books?*

**Islamic Upbringing of Children**

*What role does reading play in the upbringing of your children? Can you tell a bit more about reading practices at home?*

*Do you make use of non-religious children's books in general?*

*Can you tell a bit more about the religious upbringing of your children? What does it look like? (e.g. do they go to mosque education, are they in Islamic primary education?)*

*What role does Dutch Islamic children's literature play in the (religious) upbringing of your children?*

**Desires and Motivations**

*With what intentions do you make use of/produce these books?*

*Why do you make use of/produce Islamic children's books? Why do you think this genre is important?*

*What criteria do you find important in the case of Islamic children's book?*

*What kind of materials would you like to see produced? What kind of products are you currently missing on the market of Dutch Islamic children's literature?*

**Personal Information**

*Can you tell me your name, place of residence, year of birth, educational background, and – if this is the case – which mosque you usually attend?*

**Ending the Interview**

*I have arrived at the end of my list of inquiry. Did you miss something, or would you like to add something that we did not discuss?*

*Do you know any persons, whether a parent, producer or someone else relevant, who might be interested in partaking in this research?*

## APPENDIX 2 – Overview Interviewees

| Capacity | Age | Sex | Parent | Generation | Country of Birth | Country of Origin | Education[199] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 'Childless' | 30 | F | No | 2nd | Netherlands | Morocco | Highly educated |
| 'Childless' | 24 | F | No | 2nd | Netherlands | Morocco | Highly educated |
| 'Childless' | 28 | M | No | 2nd | Netherlands | Morocco / Switzerland | Highly educated |
| 'Childless' | 30 | F | No | 2nd | Netherlands | Turkey | Highly educated |
| 'Childless' | 37 | M | No | 2nd | Netherlands | Turkey | Highly educated |
| Parent | 34 | F | Yes | 2nd | Belgium | Morocco | Highly educated |
| Parent | 33 | M | Yes | 3rd | Netherlands | Turkey | Highly educated |
| Parent | 32 | F | Yes | Convert | Netherlands | Netherlands | Highly educated |
| Parent | 42 | F | Yes | 2nd | Netherlands | Morocco | Highly educated |
| Author | 65 | F | Yes | Convert | Netherlands | Netherlands | Highly educated |
| Publisher | 51 | M | Yes | 2nd | Morocco | Morocco | Highly educated |
| Author | 43 | F | Yes | Convert | Netherlands | Netherlands | Highly educated |
| Author | 68 | F | Yes | Convert | Netherlands | Netherlands | ? |
| Online promoter | 41 | M | Yes | 2nd | Netherlands | Indonesia | Highly educated |
| Author | 40 | M | Yes | 3rd | Netherlands | Morocco | Highly educated |
| Author | 31 | F | Yes | Convert | Belgium | Belgium | ? |
| Author | 53 | F | Yes | Convert | Netherlands | Netherlands | Highly educated |

[199] In this table, highly educated refers to those respondents with a HBO (higher vocational education) or WO-level (university education) in the Dutch educational system.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Author | 35 | M | Yes | Convert | Netherlands | Netherlands | Highly educated |
| Publisher | 27 | M | Yes | 2nd | Netherlands | Morocco | ? |
| Author | 40 | F | No | 2nd | Netherlands | Morocco | Highly educated |
| Author | 39 | F | Yes | Convert | Belgium | Belgium | Highly educated |
| Translator | 39 | M | No | 2nd | Netherlands | Turkey | Highly educated |
| Publisher | 39 | M | ? | 2nd | Netherlands | Morocco | Highly educated |
| Parent | 35 | F | Yes | 2nd | Netherlands | Netherlands | Highly educated |
| Author | ? | F | Yes | Convert | Netherlands | Netherlands | Highly educated |

## APPENDIX 3 – Overview Dutch Islamic Children's Books [200]

Aaras, Atika. *De Ark van Noeh.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

⸺ *Het Cadeau van Allah.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

⸺ *Ik Geloof dat ik Iets Voel Maar ik Zie het Niet.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

⸺ *Profeet Soelaymân en de Miertjes.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

⸺ *De Ramadankalender.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

⸺ *Vrede Met de Buren.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

⸺ *Wat Ben je Mooi.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

⸺ *De Wereld op Zijn Kop: een islamitisch prentenboek over dankbaarheid.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

Aaras, Atika and Bahaeddin Budak. *Op Pad met de Profeten.* Amersfoort: ISBO, 2021.

Aaras, Atika and Selma Erik. *Het Gebed van Hâroen.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

⸺ *Wij Gaan op de Hadj.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

Ababil. *Gids voor Moslimjongens: over de grote veranderingen in het leven.* Schiedam: Ababil, 2009.

⸺ *Gids voor Moslimmeisjes: over de grote veranderingen in het leven.* Schiedam: Ababil, 2009.

Abdellaoui, Najiba, Said El Kaouakibi, Fatima El Allaoui, and Mohammed Aissati. *De Vijf Zuilen van de Islam.* Rotterdam: Anasheed4Kids, 2013.

Achour, Farouk. *Wij Vertellen je het Mooiste Verhaal: Koranvertellingen.* Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 2004.

Ahajjaj, Jamal. *Dua4Kids*. Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

⸺ *Gebed4Kids*. Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2017.

Akdas, Hatice. *De Wonderbaarlijke Schepping van de Hop.* Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Plataan, n.d.

Ashraf, Mahwish. *Ik Lees Top: Met Sara en Hamza.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, 2021.

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[200] Despite attempts to obtain a full overview of Dutch Islamic publishers at the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* in The Hague, which is the national library of The Netherlands and collects, preserves, and archives the majority of publications from and about the Netherlands, such a list did not exist and could not be provided. As such, this list is the result of extensive searches online – closely considering the website of the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek*, Islamic web shops and non-religious bookstores online – to provide an overview of past and present productions of Dutch Islamic children's literature. In creating this list, the definition of the genre 'Islamic children's literature' is used as described in this thesis, excluding purely informative books on Islam written by non-Muslims or books merely written for educational purposes, such as teacher methods written for Islamic primary education. Information on the author, year and place of publication was not always provided by Islamic bookshops online, as such some listed publications do not provide all details. It should be noted that this list is not conclusive, as the market of children's literature continuously expands. This version of the list was compiled until January 26, 2022.

––– *Sara en Hamza: 21 Islamitische Voorleesverhalen.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, 2020.

––– *Sara en Hamza 2: 21 Islamitische Voorleesverhalen.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, 2021.

Asiya, Umm. *Het Allergrootste Cadeau.* Utrecht: MoslimKidsEntertainment, 2019.

Bachiri, Yamina El. *Verhalen van de Profeten: Yoenoes.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Noeh.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Adam.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Ibraahiem.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Saalih.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Hoed.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Loet.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Moessa.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Shoe'ayb.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Yoesoef.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: 'Iesa.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Ayyoeb.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Soelaymaan.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Daawoed.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

––– *Verhalen van de Profeten: Mohammad.* Den Haag: Al-Yaqeen, 2016.

Badr4Kids. *Authentieke Verhalen van de Profeten uit de Koran en de Sunna Deel 1: Adam, Idris, Nûh.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, 2011.

––– *Authentieke Verhalen van de Profeten uit de Koran en de Sunna Deel 2: Hûd, Salih, Ibrahim.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, 2011.

––– *Authentieke Verhalen van de Profeten uit de Koran en de Sunna Deel 3: Lut, Isma'il, Ishaq, Ya'qûb.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, 2011.

––– *Authentieke Verhalen van de Profeten uit de Koran en de Sunna Deel 4: Yûsuf.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, 2011.

––– *Authentieke Verhalen van de Profeten uit de Koran en de Sunna Deel 5: Shu 'ayb, Ayyûb, Dhû-l Kifl.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, 2013.

——— *Authentieke Verhalen van de Profeten uit de Koran en de Sunna Deel 6: Mûsa.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, 2013.

——— *Authentieke Verhalen van de Profeten uit de Koran en de Sunna Deel 7: Yûnus, Harûn.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, 2015.

——— *Authentieke Verhalen van de Profeten uit de Koran en de Sunna Deel 8: Sulayman, Dawud.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, 2015.

——— *Authentieke Verhalen van de Profeten uit de Koran en de Sunna Deel 9: Isa, Zakariyya, Yahya.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, 2015.

——— *De Citadel van de Kleine Moslim: dagelijkse smeekbeden.* Vlaanderen: Uitgeverij Badr, n.d.

Bahhodh, Cindy. *Selma heeft een nare droom.* Translated by Abroudi Mostafa. Amsterdam: Sheijma, 2005.

Bommel, Abdulwahid van. *De Koran Uitleg voor Kinderen 1.* Almere: Parthenon, 2016.

——— *De Koran Uitleg voor Kinderen 2.* Almere: Parthenon, 2016.

Bruyne, Khadija-Ann de. *De Wonderbaarlijke Schepping van de Hond.* Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Plataan, n.d.

——— *De Wonderbaarlijke Schepping van het Paard.* Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Plataan, n.d.

——— *De Wonderbaarlijke Schepping van het Varken.* Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Plataan, n.d.

——— *De Wonderbaarlijke Schepping van de Walvis.* Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Plataan, n.d.

Budak, Bahaeddin. *Op Zoek Naar Jezelf.* Amersfoort: ISBO, n.d.

Centrum voor Islamitische Educatie de Toekomst: Hanan Khajou, Saïda Azabar and Fatima Ben Touhami. *Een Geschenk uit de Hemel: het verhaal van het offerfeest.* Mechelen: Bakermat, 2017.

Chakur, Najat. *De Kleuren van Allah.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, 2021.

——— *Profeet Adam: Mijn Eerste Profetenverhalen.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, 2021.

——— *Profeet Noeh: Mijn Eerste Profetenverhalen.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, 2021.

——— *Profeet Mohammed: Mijn Eerste Profetenverhalen.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, 2021.

Choaati, Abdelhakim. *De grote mond van Koning Tong.* 's Gravenhage: Halal Invest, 2019.

——— *Moessie: Papa is Mijn Beste Vriend.* 's Gravenhage: Halal Invest, 2019.

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—— *Ik Kan Overal Bismillah Zeggen.* Delft: Stichting Uitgeverij voor Islamitisch Onderwijs Nederland, 2016.

—— *Ik Kan Overal Halal en Tayyib Eten.* Delft: Stichting Uitgeverij voor Islamitisch Onderwijs Nederland, 2016.

—— *Ik Kan Overal Hidjaab Dragen.* Delft: Stichting Uitgeverij voor Islamitisch Onderwijs Nederland, 2016.

—— *Ik Kan Overal Doe'a Doen.* Delft: Stichting Uitgeverij voor Islamitisch Onderwijs Nederland, 2016.

—— *Ik Kan Overal Idoel Fitr.* Delft: Stichting Uitgeverij voor Islamitisch Onderwijs Nederland, 2016.

—— *Ik Kan Overal Koran Lezen.* Delft: Stichting Uitgeverij voor Islamitisch Onderwijs Nederland, 2016.

—— *Profeet van de Vrede.* Delft: Stichting Uitgeverij voor Islamitisch Onderwijs Nederland, 2016.

Daar Alaathaar. *Het Leerboekje voor Ieder Moslimkind 1: Het Verhaal van de Profeet Adam.* Daar Alaathaar, 2014.

—— *Het Leerboekje voor Ieder Moslimkind 2: Het Verhaal van de Profeet Idries.* Daar Alaathaar, 2014.

—— *Het Leerboekje voor Ieder Moslimkind 3: Het Verhaal van de Profeet Noeh.* Daar Alaathaar, 2014.

—— *Het Leerboekje voor Ieder Moslimkind 4: Het Verhaal van de Profeet Hoed.* Daar Alaathaar, 2014.

—— *Het Leerboekje voor Ieder Moslimkind 5: Het Verhaal van de Profeet Saalih.* Daar Alaathaar, 2014.

—— *Het Leerboekje voor Ieder Moslimkind 6: Het Verhaal van de Profeet Ibraahiem.* Daar Alaathaar, 2014.

—— *Het Leerboekje voor Ieder Moslimkind 7: Het Verhaal van de Profeet Loet.* Daar Alaathaar, 2014.

Dawud, Oem. *De Vijf Pilaren van de Islaam voor Kinderen.* Moordrecht: Ibn Baaz Bookstore, 2020.

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—— *Boek voor Kleine Moslims 2.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2002.

—— *Boek voor Kleine Moslims 3: ik leer Qoraan.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2002.

—— *Boek voor kleine moslims 4: Ik leer Doe'a.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2002.

—— *Boek voor kleine moslims 5: Verhaaltjes over profeten.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2002.

—— *Boek voor Kleine Moslims 6: Islam van alledag.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2003.

—— *Boek voor Kleine Moslims 7: Achlaaq Boekje.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2003.

—— *Boek voor Kleine Moslims 8: Mohammed is mijn profeet.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2003.

—— *Boek voor Kleine Moslims 9: Boek over Imaan.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2003.

—— *Boek voor Kleine Moslims 11: Ik Leer Bidden.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2004.

—— *Boek voor Kleine Moslims 12: Halal en Haram.* Rotterdam: Islamitisch Bureau Educatieve Boeken, 2005.

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Glabbeek, Jeannet van. *Bij Boer Bas.* Amsterdam: Noen Jeugdpers, n.d.

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—— *Kleren en Kleuren.* Amsterdam: Noen Jeugdpers, 2006.

—— *Een Nat Pak.* Amsterdam: Noen Jeugdpers, n.d.

—— *Noer en de Pier.* Amsterdam: Noen Jeugdpers, n.d.

—— *Een Roos voor Roos.* Amsterdam: Noen Jeugdpers, n.d.

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Haddouti, Ouassila. *De Wonderbaarlijke Schepping van de Spin.* Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Plataan, n.d.

—— *Op Weg naar Adn.* Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Plataan, n.d.

Hadi, Amani. *Mijn Qur'an-woorden ABC.* Utrecht: MoslimKidsEntertainment, 2020.

—— *Op Zoek naar Allah.* Utrecht: MoslimKidsEntertainment, 2020.

Hadieth Benelux. *Hidaya's Hijab.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, 2021.

—— *Ik Leer Bidden (voor jongens).* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, n.d.

—— *Ik Leer Bidden (voor meisjes).* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, n.d.

—— *Ik Leer de Wassing (voor jongens).* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, n.d.

—— *Ik Leer de Wassing (voor meisjes).* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, n.d.

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—— *Mijn Eerste Woorden uit de Qur'an: Natuur.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, n.d.

—— *Mijn Eerste Woorden uit de Qur'an: Dieren.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, n.d.

—— *Mijn Eerste Woorden uit de Qur'an: Voedsel.* Vlaardingen: Hadieth Benelux, n.d.

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**APPENDIX 4 – List of Codes**

- Topics of Books
  - Stories of the Prophets
  - Islamic history
    - Islam in Europe
    - Muslim examples
  - Practicing Islam
    - *Halal*
    - *Hijab*
    - Mosque
    - Reading Qur'an
  - Everyday Life
    - Discrimination
    - Divorce
    - Bullying
    - Child-parent relationship
    - Death
  - *Akhlaaq*
    - Controlling anger
    - Bullying
  - Islamic Rituals
    - Prayer
    - *Du'a*
    - *Hadj*
    - *Ramadan*
  - *Tawhīd*
    - Allah's attributes
    - Allah's creature
      - Nature
      - Animals
  - Interconventional stories
    - Qur'anic and Biblical stories
- Supply of Books
  - Interactive Materials
    - Colour books
    - Islamic quizzes
    - Islamic songs
  - Format
    - Translated

- - - Picture books
      - Big letters
      - Rhyme
    - AVI reading
    - Educational
      - Teacher methods
      - Instruction books
  - Bibliographic information
    - Active in Islamic primary schools
      - Teacher
      - Management
    - Raised in Dutch context
      - Convert
        - Raised with Christian stories
      - Second-generation Muslim
        - Moroccan descent
        - Turkish descent
    - Raised in Belgian context
      - Convert
      - Second-generation Muslim
        - Moroccan descent
    - Raised in non-Muslim context
      - Third-generation Muslim
        - Moroccan descent
      - Second-generation Muslim
        - Moroccan descent
    - Parent
    - 'Childless' adult
    - Producer
      - Author
        - Publishes through publisher
        - Publishes in-house
      - Publisher
      - Online promoter
      - Translator
    - Educational level
      - Highly educated
      - Practical education
    - Place of residence
      - Urban context

- Non-Urban context
    - o Reading practices at home
        - Library
        - Reading aloud
        - Oral stories
- Knowledge transmission
    - o Religious duty
        - Islamic principle of obtaining knowledge
            - *Iqra'*
            - "From Cradle to Grave"
        - Rewardings
            - Securing afterlife
            - Paradise
            - Accountable to Allah
            - God's satisfaction
        - Voluntary effort
            - *Fi sabīlillāh*
            - *Da'wah*
                - o *Tarbiyah*
        - Communal interest
            - Protecting community
            - Preserving legacy of Islam
                - o Fear for alienation
    - o Introducing Islam
        - Basic knowledge
            - Islamic principles
                - o Islamic norms
                - o Islamic values
            - Islamic habitus
                - o How to be Muslim
                - o Practicing Islam
            - Behaviour
                - o Responsibility for actions
                - o Being good for oneself
                    - Self-confidence
                - o Being good for others
                    - Socio-emotional abilities
                - o Relation to nature
            - Educating belief in Allah
                - o Creating awe for Allah's creation

- o Emphasizing love
- o *Ibada* – worshipping God
- Prophetic stories
- Introducing Qur'anic stories
  - ▪ Familiarising
    - Conveying spirituality
    - Familiarising children with traditions
  - ▪ Stimulating Islamic worldview
  - ▪ Sense of community
- o Fill the gap
  - ▪ Deepening knowledge
    - Conscious knowledge
    - Breaking away from cultural Islam
    - Compensating own youth
      - o Negative experiences
      - o Limited knowledge
  - ▪ Accessible information
    - Unavailability of materials
    - Limited Arabic knowledge
    - Converted Muslims
      - o Familiarity with Children's Bibles
      - o Raised with Christian stories
    - Illiteracy
  - ▪ Critical of supply available
    - Language
      - o Incorrect
      - o Difficult vocabulary
      - o Islamic terminology
    - Content
      - o Too basic
      - o Too informative
      - o Too legalistic
    - Manner
      - o Few images
      - o Not context-related
      - o Too scary
      - o Too strict
    - 'Ideal image'
      - o Wonders
      - o Perfect Muslims

- - - - Unrealistic
    - o Prophets stories
  - ▪ Emerging pedagogic questions
    - New generation of parents
    - Non-Muslim context
      - o Minority existence
    - Little knowledge on Islamic pedagogy
- o Internalisation
  - ▪ Understanding of religion
  - ▪ Entertaining
    - Fun manner
    - Exciting stories
    - Creativity and Islam
  - ▪ Creating memories
  - ▪ Stimulating curiosity
- o Complementary tool
  - ▪ Existing means too limited
    - Islamic primary education
      - o Limited materials available
    - Mosque education
      - o Mimetic learning
      - o Top-down
      - o Legalistic
  - ▪ Conservative influences
    - Stimulating mainstream Islam
- o Islamic upbringing at home
  - ▪ Parents primary educators
    - Responsibility
    - Stimulating child-parent relation
      - o Quality time
        - ▪ Reading together
      - o Reading rituals
        - ▪ Reading aloud
        - ▪ Reading in bed
    - Guidance
    - Intermediary
  - ▪ Auxiliary
    - Busy society
      - o Time-saving
    - Parents limited knowledge

- Importance of reading
  - Improving child's vocabulary
  - Improving child's learning skills
  - Book as relaxation
  - Book as gifts
  - Discovering other worlds
- Strengthening Muslim identity
  - Positive image
    - Awareness of Muslim history
    - Creating role models
      - Muslim protagonist
      - Prophets as examples
    - Being proud to be Muslim
      - Islam belongs to Europe
    - Lack of Muslim representation
      - Stereotypes
      - Misrepresentation
        - Flat characters
    - Reaching non-Muslim audience
      - Introducing Islam to non-Muslims
        - Segregated market
      - Diversifying bookshelf
        - Library
        - Representation
  - Identification
    - Recognisably Islamic
      - Terminology
      - Islamic stories
      - Islamic worldview
    - Recognition
      - Everyday Islam
        - Recognisable images
        - Recognisable characters
          - Muslim protagonists
        - Recognisable situations
          - Topics of books
        - Realistic
          - Countering stereotypes
          - 'Full' characters
          - Context specific

- Dutch language
- Dutch frame of reference
  - o Child's world of experience
  - ▪ Providing Islamic option
    - Adding to non-Islamic supply
    - Possibility to choose
    - Stimulating Muslim parents to read
      - o Cultural isolation
      - o Illiterate
- o Context-aware
  - ▪ Minority position
    - Challenges non-Islamic context
      - o Fear for religion
      - o Islamophobia
    - Incongruent worldview
      - o Differences Islamic and non-Islamic context
        - ▪ External influences
  - ▪ Navigating society
    - Normalizing diversity
      - o Multicultural society
      - o Different characters
    - Bridging gap between Muslims and non-Muslims
  - ▪ Connecting child to Dutch context
    - Familiarising with diversity
    - Relating to public debates
  - ▪ Applying principles to everyday lives
    - Islam as way of life
    - Normalizing Islam
    - World awareness
      - o Universal values
- o Islamic 'alternative'
  - ▪ Unwanted external influences
    - Immorality
    - Western influence
  - ▪ Protecting child
  - ▪ Control over child's books


- ▪ Criteria
  - o BRUNA Quality

- Professional quality
  - Press-work
  - Graphic design
- Dutch language
  - Simple language
  - Readability
  - Correct vocabulary
- Layout
  - Images
    - Supporting text
    - Not too much text
- Content
- Islamically responsible
  - Correct
    - Appealing to majority
      - Preventing theological discussion
        - Sensitive topics
        - Basic knowledge
    - Basic Islamic knowledge is universal
    - Within boundaries of Islam
  - Trustworthy
    - Knowledgeable author
      - Trained in Islamic knowledge
      - Self-trained in Islamic knowledge
    - Sources
      - *Qur'ān*
      - *Hadith*
      - *Sunna*
    - Verifiability
      - Bibliography
        - Provided
        - Not provided
      - Religious authority
  - Ideological differences
    - Critical of orthodox interpretation
    - Theological discussions
      - Differentiating in gender
      - Figural images
        - Allowed for children
        - Not allowed

- o Pedagogically responsible
  - ▪ Dialogue
    - • Personal interpretation
      - o Self-expression of child
    - • Stimulating child to question
      - o Critical of legalistic approach
      - o More than factual transmission
      - o Difficult topics
    - • Child-parent dialogue
      - o Quality time
  - ▪ Understanding
    - • Importance of message
      - o Manageability of text
      - o Readability
        - ▪ Simple language
        - ▪ Not too informative
    - • Importance explanation
  - ▪ Suitability / Child Friendly
    - • Emphasising love
      - o Love for Allah
      - o Connection to religion
      - o Non-legalistic
      - o Suitability of topics
        - ▪ Punishment
        - ▪ Violence
    - • Child's world of experience
      - o Context-related
      - o Imagination
    - • Child's level
      - o Age suitability
      - o Gradual knowledge transmission
    - • Appealing
      - o Humor
      - o Illustrations
      - o Colours
      - o In a narrative manner
        - ▪ AVI reading book
      - o Exciting / fun