

THE EMERGENCE OF WESTERN ISLAMIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the emergence of Islamic children's literature and identifies a paradigm shift giving rise to religious and cultural hybridity. It reflects on the initial avoidance of Muslim publishing houses to produce Islamic fiction. The article further outlines the reasons why Islamic children's literature is now *slowly* gaining momentum. Definitions of Islamic children's fiction have been included to allow an understanding of how this genre may differ from other forms of children's literature. Additionally, the article seeks to highlight the obscure position of Islamic children's literature with the hope that stakeholders within the international community will begin to provide an academic space for its study.

Keywords: Islamic children's literature, cultural hybridity, child visibility

1. GARNERING LITTLE ATTENTION FROM ACADEMIA

Islamic children's literature has not yet been recognised as a classification by the Book Industry Standards and Commissions in the United States (US) or Book

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Industry Communication in the United Kingdom (UK). Companies like Gaylord provide book spine labels for libraries to classify books as Jewish Holiday, Christian Fiction, Jewish and Young Adult Christian Fiction. However, Gaylord does not have any spine label for Islamic or Muslim literature. This underscores the point that public libraries do not have a significant number of Islamic books suggesting its general meagre presence. This further explains the obscure academic position of Islamic children's literature. For instance, when looking through the archives of children's literature journals, such as: *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*; *School Library Journal*; *The Lion and the Unicorn*; *The Looking Glass*; *The Horn Book*; *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*; *Children's Literature in Education*; and *The Journal of Children's Literature Studies* there are virtually no references to Islamic children's literature.

However, a special issue of *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* featuring children's literature of the Islamic world was published in 1997. Four main articles dealt with various elements of children's literature, but only one dealt with Islamic children's literature, which was Ghazi's *Islamic literature for children adopts the English language*. Staples's article discussed authenticity on writing about the Islamic world; while Garret compared Islam to other belief systems in West African children's literature. Other articles discussed India's Birbal and Akbar; the changing image of Arabs in hostage dramas; and Iranian children's literature alongside the Iranian revolution. Islamic children's literature, however, has not been revisited by *Bookbird* over the past 19 years although there are now more Islamic children's publishers and writers to warrant this.

The online children's book magazine, *Books for keeps* (<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/>), has reviewed books and written articles about Islam and Muslims. In January 2002, the editorial discussed concern for the increase in Islamophobia. It highlighted a publication by the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (1997, iii) which stated that a consequence of Islamophobia was 'injustice, characterised by social exclusion; a sense of cultural inferiority among young British Muslims; and an increasing likelihood of serious social disorder'. The editor of *Books for keeps* noted that, according to another British study after the tragedy of 11 September 2001, the 'British Muslim community was facing unprecedented hostility' (Stones 2002, 2). The editor's remark underscored the scarcity of children's Islamic literature stating: 'It was also striking how few titles, both fiction and non-fiction, we could find to recommend in this Guide relevant to the contemporary realities, history and culture of the British Muslim community and of Muslims in the wider world' (ibid.). More poignantly the editor asked:

But what about the depiction of Muslims of whatever nationality in the books available to young readers in Britain? When racial violence is so clearly linked to anti-Muslim prejudice, there is a pressing need for books which challenge distorted and negative images. In our March edition, BfK will carry the first of a number of articles on this important issue. (Ibid.)

Janson (2003) has produced the only English study investigating children's Islamic literature with his doctoral dissertation, *Your cradle is green: The Islamic Foundation and the call to Islam in children's literature*. Janson was concerned with understanding the production of children's literature in light of the tradition of dawa (inviting others to Islam) and how it had been renegotiated in a British setting. *Your cradle is green* investigates an Islamic publishing house, the Islamic Foundation and its production of children's books geared towards English speaking Muslim children (ibid., 13). The observation that Islamic children's literature gathered 'historically scant interest' (ibid., 19) remains largely true to the present day. There has not been any significant interest in Islamic children's literature compared to say Canadian children's multicultural literature which shares an identical timeline.

2. PIONEERS OF ISLAMIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The pioneers of Western Islamic children's fiction initially focused their writing on the prophets ﷺ and companions of Muhammad ﷺ (Feroze 1976; Sardar 1978). Murad (1982) and Kayani (1981) wrote a series of Islamic hero books which were based on hadith (collected sayings and actions approved of by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) and therefore were not considered fiction but historical. Nazlee, a British writer, began writing levelled reading books for children in the 1990s. Her books include the *Imran learns* series and later *The twins* mystery series. Emerick was the first American Muslim writer to refer to his stories as Islamic fiction. He began with *The seafaring beggar and other tales* (1992). While working as a teacher in an Islamic school, Emerick noticed that there were no fictional tales that promoted an Islamic identity for his students. Omar wrote *New friends new place* in 1993 which was the first book published by the Islamic Foundation, UK with British Muslim characters. In 1992, Hutchinson wrote the American *Invincible Abdullah* series. A landmark book was *Zaki's Ramadan fast* (1994) by El-Moslimany which was probably the first hardback picture book written and produced by Muslims. The Islamic Foundation produced a number of other books set in contemporary Britain including Bouroubi's *A caring neighbour* (1996) and Imtiaz's *A gift of friendship* (1997). The *Islamic Rose* series (2003) was written by Delgado in the US. Gilani's *Cinderella: An Islamic tale* (2010) synthesised Islamic belief into a traditionally Western story to create a literature that demonstrated religious and cultural hybridity.

Many Muslim Islamic fiction writers in the UK and US come from Christian backgrounds and therefore bring a comparative perspective. Delgado (2011) says that when she became aware of the disparity in books for Muslim children she began to write Islamic fiction. Similarly, Emerick (2007) says: 'I felt compelled to begin writing some short stories I could share with the youth. I had never been a writer before.' Emerick also produced the *Ahmad Deen* series in 1993 which was followed by the *Layla Deen* books. Within Canada a similar venture was initiated by Canadian

writer Khan who wrote *The roses in my carpets* (1998) and *Muslim child* (1999) both of which were published by non-Muslim Canadian publishing companies. About the latter title, she recalls at the time Muslim publishers were unwilling to publish it.

2.1. The Paradigm Shift

Western Islamic children's literature experienced a paradigm shift during the 1990s. The types of books that Islamic publishers were producing in the 1970s were limited to stories about the prophetsﷺ and companions of Muhammadﷺ (Feroze 1976; Sardar 1978). These stories were initially without illustrations. This can be tagged as the first stage where authors' national origins generally came from countries outside the West. The second stage was marked by the inclusion of inanimate objects and later animate objects but these were restricted to abstract art. The authors of these books remained non-Western (Kayani 1981; Murad 1982). The contemporary third stage, which generally began in the 1990s, was marked by authors being indigenous converts or first generation Muslims. Their stories were located in a Western setting with the inclusion of realistic images. Writers of this stage have generally sought to Islamize their respective indigenous Western cultures to reflect their Islamic belief system (El-Moslimany 1994; Messaoudi 1999). These authors ventured to give Muslim children a sense of place in the West which was something that mainstream Western children's publishers had continued to ignore. However, even Islamic publishers were at first not supportive of Islamic fiction as Khan discovered when she tried to get *Muslim child* published (Gilani-Williams 2015).

Islamic publishers were initially hesitant to publish Islam-based fiction based on their interpretation of the Qur'anic verse, 'those who purchase idle tales, without knowledge (or meaning), to mislead (men) from the Path' (31:06). Fiction was generally construed as un-Islamic and by some groups it still is. Similarly, the avoidance of animate objects was based on the interpretation of the following hadith narrated by Bukhari, 'Those who make images will be punished on the Day of Resurrection, and it will be said to them: "Bring to life that which you have created."' El-Shamy (2005, 244) writes, 'Islamic teachers, who assumed the responsibility for telling the best and most truthful narratives, considered narrating for entertainment an idle activity that bordered on violation of religious doctrine.' There are some publishers who adhere to a literal interpretation of this hadith for instance, *Little explorers* a UK-based Islamic magazine for children, does not depict eyes, mouths and noses on faces.

The appearance of animate objects transitioning from abstract illustrations to representational illustrations and stories moving from Muslim populated lands to Western lands can be attributed to a range of factors, including generational change in editorship, converts and first generation Western Muslim illustrators and authors. The authors of the 1980s wrote from a foreign perspective limiting Islam to Arab

lands. They failed to speak in terms that were familiar to the cultural language of indigenous UK and North American people of Judeo-Christian heritage. This also served to further 'otherize' Islam. The 'otherization' therefore was not only being caused by the indigenous non-Muslim population who saw Muslims as outsiders, but also by the power élite Muslims who controlled publishing. These Muslims appeared to equate Islam with their own homelands based in the East and not the new Western countries where their families were being raised or where the indigenous people were embracing Islam.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Muslim publishing companies in the UK were mostly influenced by Muslim individuals from the Indian subcontinent; however, since the 1990s and 2000s, a growing number have been influenced by indigenous Muslim converts from the US or UK (Gilani-Williams 2012). This small group, along with first or second generation Muslims, interpret Islamic teaching with a different religious and cultural lens. Their religious-cultural lens does not 'otherize' stories that are generally associated with British literary heritage because they consider it to be their heritage.

3. BOUNDARIES AND CULTURAL GATEKEEPING

Throughout the 2000s, an Islamised Cinderella manuscript was presented to various Muslim publishers. This manuscript was not a Cinderella based in Eastern lands, such as Climo's *The Egyptian Cinderella* (1992) and *The Persian Cinderella* (2001), or Hickox's *The golden sandal: A Middle Eastern Cinderella story* (1999), but was an indigenous Western Cinderella situated in the West and she was Muslim. The manuscript of this Islamic adaptation was rejected by Muslim editors just as Khan's *Muslim child* was. Cinderella, a popular Western character did not fit into an identifiably Islamic persona. Therefore, it was declined by those whose origins were not Western. Where concerns for the preservation of cultural heritage are an aim, stories might be seen as 'an integral part of the process by which nation states create themselves and distinguish themselves from other nations' (Corse 1997, 7). Since stories are viewed through a cultural lens, eventually it was accepted by a Muslim convert American editor. Two personal incidents illustrate the notion of boundaries and cultural gate-keeping concerning Islamic children's literature. In the early 1980s, a young Muslim acquaintance in the UK, born in Pakistan, disapproved of the Islamisation of English nursery rhymes. Speaking from an immigrant perspective she asserted: 'We have our own. We don't need theirs.' Later in 2004, an American non-Muslim editor criticised the submission of *The jinn who stole Eid* (Gilani-Williams 2003) saying, 'You're taking a traditional Christmas story and making it into an Islamic story. This will probably offend Christian readers so we're declining it.' Both individuals demonstrated a strong sense of cultural ownership and exclusivity which was tied to their culturally bound designs of identity. However, identities remain in

a perpetual state of flux, cultural persistence, and cultural change (Williams 2015) as hybrid individuals arise (children whose parents are from different countries, ethnicities and faiths) who see themselves belonging to more than one culture. Cultural and religious hybridity therefore, whether invited or not, is challenging perceptions of heritage and identity which has impacted Islamic children's literature.

4. REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAMIC CHILDREN'S FICTION

There are a number of reasons why writers and publishers have advocated for the production of Islamic children's fiction. These reasons include a provision for enhancing the personal, social and spiritual understanding of a Muslim child. Muslim children have access to a wide range of fictional stories from the time they begin school, however, books beginning with emergent readers to young adult fiction include very few, if any, Muslim characters. This is still apparent in many Islamic schools in the US and Canada (Gilani-Williams 2014). A result of this textual invisibility is that children avoid writing about themselves, their religion and their culture (Gilani-Williams 2014; Gilani-Williams and Bigger 2010).

Self-invisibility was evident in one Islamic Canadian school that strongly promoted and supported multiculturalism. A teacher had worked on a story writing project with her children; however, the stories and illustrations lacked Islamic cultural and religious markers. They were not to be found. The books could easily have been written by a monocultural class of children from the 1970s in the UK. The stories espoused and advocated a culture, but the culture resonated only of English names, English norms and English pictures.

Another incident that highlighted child self-invisibility was noted through a sample of stories written to identify writing levels of children aged between eight and fourteen. Looking past the punctuation, spelling and writing elements, it would not be amiss to read something in the text that would identify the child's Islamic identity since the children's everyday actions and speech were overtly Islamic. When they spoke, their sentences were punctuated with *salaams* (peace), *alhamdulillah* (praised God) and *inshallahs* (God willing). They called the *adhan* (prayer call) and the *iqama* (second prayer call just before prayer begins). Every day they stood together side by side and bowed in worship. They fasted together. They wore headscarves, some wore prayer caps. But these symbols that represented their spiritual dimension did not transfer to paper. There was no Muslim self-visibility.

Studies have shown that when children are not visible in the literature through text and image, what results is poor self-esteem. Discussing the absence of positive images for African-American children, MacCann and Woodard (1985, 183) refer to the power of the image: 'The visual image is the most engaging of sensory messages ... Experiments in the subliminal suggestion in advertising offer proof of

the lingering and insidious power of even the most fleeting visual image to influence decision making.'

Children's books commonly discuss themes that are used to encourage children to undertake a grand role in society. Children's books seek to instil a particular ideology and a sense of identity. This allows children to see themselves as purposeful, accepted and needed individuals who can contribute to society. With regard to Muslim children, can a positive self-image and sense of belonging be nurtured if children are nourished on books that accord no place to them, their parents or members of their community? As the Runnymede Trust publication (1997, iii) suggested, 'social exclusion; a sense of cultural inferiority among young British Muslims' can lead to an 'increasing likelihood of serious social disorder'.

An example of Islamic and Muslim invisibility can be seen in a book written by Chancellor, *Holiday! Celebration days around the world* (2002) aimed at early readers. Listed in the index page are holidays including All Saint's Day, April Fool's Day, Chinese New Year, Christmas, Diwali, Easter, Father's Day, Halloween, Hanukkah, Hina Matsuri, Kwanzaa, Mother's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Valentine's Day. Missing, however, are Islamic holidays despite the fact those who were responsible for producing the book consisted of an impressive array of experts. These experts failed to notice that the second largest celebration in the world was missing. When there is a failure or resistance from mainstream publishers to include the culture of Muslim children, it provides another reason for Muslim publishers to take the initiative. Muslim publishers have essentially followed the same path as other minority groups experiencing marginality and invisibility. This deliberate invisibility was the catalyst that triggered the formation of minority publishers.

Back in 1988, Palomino asked, 'What about Asian Americans? What are today's Japanese American children and young people finding in public libraries and schools about themselves' (Bacon 1988, 125). The same questions can be asked about Muslim children. As an educator working in Islamic schools, I have found the creative writing produced by students is remarkable for its total lack of Islamic representation or even representation outside of the European Anglo-American and Anglo-Canadian culture. That their own daily lives and practices are absent in their writing is significant. Another possible reason for this lack of self-visibility is their non-familiarity with Islamic fiction. A 2013 discussion on the forum for Islamic educators showed that many schools still do not use Islamic literature. A study conducted on Canadian teachers had transferable elements that are applicable to Islamic children's literature:

The study revealed many reasons why teachers do not use Canadian children's literature, among them the perceived high cost of Canadian books (as compared to the mostly American books available through book clubs); difficulty in finding information about Canadian books; the lack of trained teacher-librarians in the schools; and a lack of time to access professional resources such as book reviews, relevant websites, or professional journals. Alberta teachers

were also heavily dependent on locally provided in-service workshops and book lists and on the teacher support material provided by textbook publishers (e.g., reading series). (Bainbridge, Oberg and Carbonaro 2005, 3)

The children's Islamic fiction movement on the whole has been very slow. Purchasers of Islamic children's fiction are generally Muslim parents. Very few Islamic schools invest in Islamic fiction. According to Delgado (Pers. comm., June 8, 2012), who worked towards making Islamic fiction visible, there are a number of reasons why Islamic fiction is not abundantly available in Islamic schools. She explains those responsible for making

money decisions at masjids rarely provide adequate funding for library books. Most do not even provide any money at all. This is why the schools have annual and/or semi-annual book fairs to raise funds and get parents involved in buying books for their children. Unfortunately Scholastic and other non-Muslim publishing and book retailers have the funds and large inventories of many genres to offer. They give deep discounts, offer free shipment, and give the schools free board games and other educational products as inducements to have their products promoted by the school. (Ibid.)

Islamic publishers, says Delgado, are unable to compete, and she is critical of Islamic school principals and teachers in the US, who she says,

told me they didn't buy Islamic fiction because they did not have time to read the books prior to using them with students. Does this mean they don't read the non Muslim authored and published books? ... Teachers and principals told me that they buy secular books because many have teacher study guides. So I had developed five teaching study guides ... but they still did not buy the novels ... wouldn't even get one copy for review. (Ibid.)

Delgado's experience is indicative of the current situation of Islamic schools that she dealt with and their lack of interest in Islamic fiction. Interestingly there are some similarities with Canadian teachers and Islamic school teachers. Bainbridge, Oberg and Carbonaro (2005, 3) conclude by giving Canadian teachers a challenge:

Finally, we challenge readers of this paper to consider the ways in which they might be complicit in failing to recognize the importance of Canadian children's books in their own practice. The importance of children's books – and of the independent companies that produce those books – are overlooked at our peril.

The emergence of Islamic fiction resulted from individuals who were responding to the invisibility of the Muslim child. This also supported transferring Islamic knowledge as it appears in the Qur'an and ahadith (collection of sayings and actions of Muhammad^(ﷺ)). Muslims in England still use the madrasah or mosque to teach their children how to read the Qur'an. Although some mosques try to include Islamic teaching in the vernacular of the children, most restrict the teaching of the Qur'an to just reading it in Arabic with no translation. As a result, Muslim children do not know what the Qur'an is teaching. By creating fiction that contains elements of

Qur'anic messages, writers and publishers are making Islamic teaching accessible and relevant to a Muslim child's daily living. They are in effect contributing to the child's personal, social and spiritual understanding by empowering the child to make the world a better place.

Cultivating a sense of place is another reason for the development of Islamic fiction, which gives Muslim children positive visibility in the world. If a story setting is within the UK, Canada or the US, Muslim children can feel acknowledged and recognised which fosters an attitude that they belong. Canada has invested heavily in developing Canadian children's literature so that its citizens have a specific Canadian identity. As Black and Jobe (2005) ask:

How do Canadian children come to understand and appreciate the uniqueness of Canada and of their Canadian-ness in the books they read? Young people must see themselves reflected in what they read and view so as to develop a sense of identity.

Similarly, it may be asked how do Muslim children understand Islam and their Islamicness in the books that they read? At a detrimental level Muslim children must also see themselves reflected in the books they read to develop their identity. Reading about practices, such as visiting a mosque, fasting, praying, giving charity, being kind, forgiving, invoking God, is important because:

Familiar emotions, activities, families, and surroundings are sensed through the depiction of the characters and story settings. To evolve a national identity, youngsters need to develop a sense of place, a feeling of 'This is where I belong'. It is crucial, therefore, that they see their communities, regions and country reflected accurately and authentically in literature. Also, it is equally important for children to gain a sense of their nation's past and the impact of the land on our history. (Ibid.)

Stories are a very important self-visibility tool for children. They are a form of validation.

Another reason for the production of Islamic fiction is authenticity. An authentic voice needs to be heard as MacCann and Woodward (1985, 21) note, 'The books that reach children should: authentically depict and interpret their lives and their history.' There is now an abundance of texts that explain the importance of children's literature promoting minorities. Such literature that gives visibility to the Muslim child allows the child to walk in the shoes of the protagonist with confident self-identity and self-assurance. How often has a Muslim child living in North America been able to take a book from the public library that portrays a Muslim character in a positive manner? As Khan (2006) notes:

A few years ago I came across a *For Better or For Worse* cartoon strip in which Elizabeth and a friend are in a cafeteria. In the background, standing in line, was a Muslim girl in hijab. It gave me a ridiculous sense of joy— of validation — to see 'myself' reflected in a cartoon strip. Especially since this Muslim wasn't doing anything bad. No bombs. No threats. No screaming headlines. She was just getting lunch. And she was pretty, too!

Khan (ibid.) echoes the concern of Muslims adding, 'The desire to fit in, the intense longing to be part of the community, is hardwired into our psyches. These days this need is particularly critical for Muslim children in North America.'

5. DEFINITIONS OF CHILDREN'S ISLAMIC FICTION

There are currently only two definitions of Islamic fiction. Delgado (2010) defines Islamic fiction, whilst Khan (2010) defines Islamic science fiction. According to Delgado (2010):

Islamic fiction refers to creative, imaginative, non-preachy fiction books written by Muslims and marketed primarily to Muslims. Islamic fiction may be marketed to mainstream markets, too. The content of these books may incorporate some religious content and themes, and may include non-fictionalized historical or factual Islamic content with or without direct reference to the Qur'an or the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh). The stories may also include modern, real life situations and moral dilemmas.

She elaborates further saying:

Islamic fiction authors intend for readers to learn something positive about Islam when they read Islamic fiction stories ... Islamic fiction does not include **harmful content**: vulgar language, sexually explicit content, unislamic practices that are not identified as unislamic, or content that portrays Islam in a negative way. (Ibid.)

Khan (2010) defines Islamic science fiction as,

any speculative story that is positively informed by Islamic beliefs and practices ... that strives to state the existence of the One God ... that exhorts universal virtues and/or denigrates universal vices ... that deals in a positive way with any aspect of Islamic practices, like hijab, fasting, etc. ... that features a Muslim as one of its main characters and the actions of this Muslim in the story reflect Islamic values ... which takes on one or more elements from the Qur'an or the teachings of the Messenger.

Whilst the above definitions refer to Islamic fiction, a more recent one was developed which specifically refers to Islamic children's literature. This definition takes into account the empowering nature of Islamic children's books and their focus on personal and social improvement and justice. It states: 'Islamic children's literature is defined as stories that reflect Islamic beliefs and teachings and strive towards personal and social improvement or personal and social justice to make the world a better place' (Gilani-Williams 2015).

Although Delgado disagrees, Islamic children's literature can be said to be confessional, preachy or message driven since it advocates transformation. The definitions of Islamic fiction and Islamic children's fiction provide an idea of how this genre differs from other types of children's literature. The production of more Islamic children's books will eventually lead to more academic research in the field

of Islamic children's literature. This in turn will allow the formulation of more definitions and more discussion.

6. RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND ISLAMIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Islamic children's literature also reflects religious and cultural hybridity. This point can be argued using the Islamic Fairy tale series produced by Kube Publishing (UK). At an international conference in Rome on the topic of *Cinderella* (2013), a space was provided for the discussion of the UK Islamic version. The choice by the indigenous British illustrator, Shireen Adams, to geographically locate the supportive illustrations on the Iberian Peninsula of Europe, specifically in pre-Spanish Andalusia, reinforced a Western perspective. Although the writer and illustrator had constructed the story as a Western tale, it was instead received as a Middle Eastern tale by conference attendees. The recent phenomenon of cultural exchange and the production of religious cultural hybridity in Western Islamic fairy tales seems largely to have been overlooked by the academy. This might account for the general failure or resistance to locate *Cinderella: An Islamic tale* (Gilani 2010) within the West. Hence, the platform at the conference to discuss this phenomenon was timely.

The interpretive disparity in viewing *Cinderella* as a Middle Eastern tale rather than a Western tale suggests that there might be a persistence amongst non-Muslim Europeans and non-Muslim North Americans to 'otherize' Muslims, despite Islam's common origins with Judaism and Christianity (Levenson 2012, 8). The production of religious cultural hybridity in Western Islamic children's fiction has a fairly recent history (Delgado 2003; Emerick 1996; Hutchinson 1992; Khan 2002). Previous Muslim writers sought to convey Islam through oriental story plots that situated the tale within another culture. They wrote from a foreign perspective situating Islam in Arab lands. Failing to speak in terms familiar to the cultural language of the indigenous paradoxically served to further the orientalisation of Islam, which 'hides historical change' (Said 2003, 334). When we consider how the Germanic tribes, as newly-converted Catholics, Christianised their culture (Murdoch and Read 2004, 93) – and then turn our attention to contemporary Western indigenous Muslims – we witness a similar cultural adaptation as they work to Islamize their cultures. This can be demonstrated by McDermott's (1981) Islamisation of English nursery rhymes and Hutchinson's (1992) Muslim adventure heroes in the *Invincible Abdullah* series.

7. CONCLUSION

This article has discussed the emergence of Islamic children's literature and identified a paradigm shift in its development which has given rise to religious and cultural hybridity. It has noted the initial avoidance of Islamic fiction by Muslim

publishing houses and the reasons why Islamic children's literature is now gaining momentum. Definitions of Islamic children's fiction have also been included to allow an understanding of how this genre may differ from other forms of children's literature. The Runnymede Trust publication (1997, iii) highlighted the consequences of Islamophobia as causing 'social exclusion ... cultural inferiority ... and ... serious social disorder' amongst young British Muslims. Children's books, as the Canadians have shown, can go a long way in creating a balance and nurturing a positive identity. It is important that those who have interests in the international study of children's literature begin to provide an academic space for the study of Islamic children's literature.

NOTE

1. This article constitutes a section taken from my research on Islamic children's literature entitled: *Literature-Based Character Development and Islamic Children's Fiction: A Study with American Muslim Children, American Muslim Writers and Middle Eastern Muslim Children* (2015) conducted at the University of Worcester, UK.

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