Representation of Muslim Women in Manga *Satoko & Nada*

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ABSTRAK Mulai dari dekade 2000-an, Media massa mengonstruksi citra Islam yang cenderung negatif dan telah terinternalisasi pada masyarakat di negara-negara non-mayoritas Islam, termasuk Jepang. Masyarakat Jepang modern sangat tergantung pada media massa untuk mendapatkan informasi dengan ringkas dan cepat. Imaji Islam yang terinternalisasi di dalam masyarakat Jepang pun terasosiasi pada terorisme dan keterbelakangan. Dalam makalah ini akan dipaparkan representasi muslim yang berbeda dalam manga Jepang berjudul *Satoko&Nada* yang menceritakan persahabatan Satoko, gadis yang berasal dari Jepang dan Nada, gadis yang berasal dari Arab di Amerika Serikat. Dari analisis visual dan verbal terlihat konstruksi identitas wanita muslim yang tidak sepenuhnya tertutup. Diperlihatkan bahwa wanita muslim di dalam *Satoko&Nada* memiliki kebebasan untuk mengekspresikan dirinya walaupun terbatas. Selain itu diperlihatkan pula wanita muslim yang memiliki pemikiran terbuka dan mengikuti arus modernisasi. Karakteristik-karakteristik tersebut sangat berlawanan dengan popular belief mengenai wanita muslim yang telah dikonstruksi dalam media massa. Manga *Satoko&Nada* sebagai salah satu dari media populer Jepang menyampaikan wacana tandingan mengenai wanita muslim yang tidak pernah terlihat di dalam media massa.

ABSTRACT Since the beginning of the 21st century, the mass media has been inclined towards constructing a negative image of Islam, which is internalized by the societies in countries where Muslims are in the minority, including Japan. Modern Japanese society is very dependent on the mass media for quick and concise information. The image of Islam internalized by the Japanese society is the one associated with terrorism and backwardness. This paper presents a different representation of Islam as reflected in a Japanese manga Satoko & Nada which focuses on the friendship between a Japanese girl Satoko and an Arab girl Nada in the United States. Visual and verbal analysis on the manga reveals an uncommon image of Muslim women which is not inclined towards excessive self-limitation. The manga shows that Muslim women really have a degree of freedom to express themselves, albeit with some limitation. Besides that, it also features open-minded Muslim women who are not hesitant to welcome modernization. Those characteristics are very different from the popular beliefs about Muslim women as constructed by mainstream mass media. As one of Japanese popular media, manga Satoko & Nada serves as a counter narrative by offering a different image of Muslim women as never shown in common mass media.

Keywords: Islam and mass media, Islam in manga, representation of Muslims, Japanese popular culture.
Kata Kunci: Islam dan media massa, Islam dalam manga, Representasi muslim, Budaya populer Jepang.

Introduction

The attack on the World Trade Center by al-Qaeda terrorist group on 11 September 2001 in the United States, which is also known as the 9/11 tragedy, marked the beginning of an era when Islam was constructed by global mass media as a religion with a strong extremist-fundamentalist orientation. Since the tragedy, the media throughout the world have viewed Islam in a negative light. In 2002, a bombing attack by Jemaah Islamiyah took place at a nightclub in Kuta area, Bali, Indonesia. More than a hundred

international tourists were killed in the incident. This event further blackened the image of Islam in the eyes of the mass media, which had already considered it as an extremist religion. Several characteristics have since been constructed and associated with Islam, such as fundamentalism, terrorism, intolerance, backwardness, and oppression against women. In Western media, Islam is frequently associated with terrorism, and such image builds a collective fear of Muslims. Such collective fear in turn sparks hatred towards Muslims in several Western countries, which is reflected in various hate speech and discriminatory acts. These developments raise concern among some Muslims who have never associated themselves with any terrorist group and considered themselves as liberal Muslims who value multiculturalism. Their effort to repair the image which has been negatively constructed by the mass media can be seen in various popular media, such as magazines, social media, and YouTube, which offer counter narratives about Muslims.

This paper discusses the image of Islam within the context of Japanese popular media. As an East Asian country, Japan does not seem to have any cultural contact with Islam because Islamic culture does not show much development in the country. Nevertheless, Japan still has some historical ties with Islam. In 1931, a mosque was built in Nagoya and became the first mosque in Japan. Five years later, a second mosque was built in Kobe and, at the same time, a Japanese translation of the Koran was introduced for the first time.

Until the eve of the Pacific War, Islam had never been considered a great issue in the Japanese society. Islam was considered more as a foreign culture than as a religious doctrine. Even though Islam has been known as a monotheistic religion, there has never been any Japanese historical document which records any frictions between Islam and the pantheistic Japanese society. A remarkably different fate was experienced by Christianity which suffered antagonism during the Tokugawa regime and the Pacific War, which was triggered by the internalization of Shintoism as national identity.

The 9/11 tragedy did not only shake the United States and other Western countries. The Japanese society at that time was also dependent on the mass media to obtain information about other countries in a fast and economical way. The terrorist attack, which was allegedly launched by an extremist Muslim group, helped build the Japanese's negative perception of Muslims and Islamic countries. It can be said that the Japanese society can obtain information and construct their collective image of Islam with the aid of various electronic media which were in rapid development at the time when the issue of terrorism and radical Muslims began to surface. The mass media have played an enormous role in narrating various terrorist attacks abroad and have certainly influenced the construction of the image of Islam and its adherents in the minds of modern Japanese people. The next section briefly discusses the way Islam is constructed in the mass media and the impacts of such construction on the Japanese society.

Islam in Japanese Mass Media

In his research *Isuramu wa dou Katararetaka* ('How Islam Is Narrated'), Fukuda Mitsuru (2007) explains how Islam is narrated in Japanese mass media by applying Edward Said's ideas about the construction of Islam's image by the mass media as theoretical basis. The paper mentions Said's several key points about the coverage of Islam in the mass media which tends to produce a monolithic but somewhat narrow representation of Islam. As mentioned in those key points, Said observed that news about Islam communicated by the mass media circulates around the topics of oil, terrorism, violence, and anti-Western sentiment. Such coverage helps create a myth that Islam is a fundamentalist and closed religion. Said also points out that the media have labeled Islam in such a way as to create a simplistic version of Muslim identity. Such labeling attitude is reflected in the tendency to use the pronoun "they" (third person) to refer to Muslims and pronoun "we" (first person) to refer to non-Muslims with regard to media coverage. Fukuda also adds that such phenomenon is also prevalent among media consumers in Japan. Fukuda argues that reports about terrorism in Japanese mass media have influenced the government's policies, such as the decision to send combatives to Iraq and other policies which are intended to prevent terrorism. All of these developments suggest that, in the eyes of the Japanese, Islam has been associated with terrorism.

Himawan Pratama (2009) argues that the mass media, especially television, greatly affects Japanese students' perception of Islam. Television is one type of mass media most accessible to the Japanese and provides them with most information about Islam. Because of the lack of interaction between the Japanese and the people from Islamic countries, the mass media, especially television, become the only means by which the Japanese build their own perception of Islam. Pratama found that Japanese students tend to have a negative perception of Islam and Islamic countries because of horrible news about terrorism which they often watch on television, the most common source of information for the Japanese. Based on the interviews with a number of Japanese students, the most common keywords associated with Islam are superstition, poverty, and violence.

Besides that, in 2015 two Japanese reporters who specialized in Middle East went to Syria and were kidnapped by ISIS. ISIS broadcast a video addressed to the Japanese government, demanding a ransom if Japan wanted its two citizens to be released. The two reporters were eventually beheaded by ISIS members. This atrocity reignited Japan's collective fear for Islam. Moreover, Japanese mass media started to use the term *isuramu koku* (Islamic country) to refer to ISIS. Such unfortunate generalization may lead the Japanese to consider Muslim-majority countries as terrorist countries. Hate speech erupted in the same year in Shizuoka prefecture, which was addressed to Muslim foreign residents in Japan.[1] The hate speech took the form of a poison pen letter written in Japanese. The local Muslim association and the police could not identify whether the

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[1]   More detailed news is available online at https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2016/07/19/shizuoka-muslim_n_11064580.html

writer was Japanese. Nevertheless, this must count as a reaction to terrorism in the name of Islam in Japan.

Japan does not shut itself off from the Muslim world, in spite of the negative construction of Islam by the mass media. On the contrary, Japan seems to have an open attitude to Muslims. In the last few years, Japan has been very enthusiastic about developing *halal* food industry. Many culinary entrepreneurs have been studying *halal* food ingredients in order to serve *halal* foods in their own restaurants. Furthermore, *halal* food production has become one of main topics of discussion within the culinary and tourism industry in Japan. This apparent openness to Islam in terms of halal food industry seems to have been shown in order to promote Japan's interests, that is, to develop and preserve the stability of Japanese tourism by attracting tourists from countries with a large number of Muslim population to visit Japan, which in turn will help boost Japan's economy.

However, this apparent openness to foreign cultures—Islam, in this case—does not guarantee the openness of the Japanese society in general to Islam. An article written by Iwasaki Ken'ichi, a columnist, in Asahi News on 19 April 2018 tells about a foreign female student from Indonesia who was studying at Waseda University, one of the best universities in Japan. She wore a headscarf as part of her religious duties as a Muslim. The article says that her applications for part-time jobs were frequently rejected due to her headscarf. She was even directly rejected during a phone interview when she asked whether she was allowed to wear a

headscarf. Iwasaki argues that Japan has entered a difficult time by showing a closed attitude towards foreigners, even though the country cannot prevail without the support of foreigners, including Muslims. This is because Japan gradually becomes an aging society, which means that its elderly, less productive population will be greater than its young, more productive population. It can be said that intense mass media exposure and the murder of Japanese reporters by ISIS have influenced Japanese's perception of Islam, as well as policies in several institutions. In short, due to media exposure, Islam has achieved neither a positive image nor acceptance among the Japanese society in general.

Previous Studies

This section briefly discusses previous studies which have examined the issue of Muslim identity construction over the last decade for comparison purposes and for designing our research model. Danny Susanto in his dissertation *Representasi Islam di Media Massa Spanyol* or "Representation of Islam in Spanish Media" (2012) reveals that there is a prevalent battle of meanings in Spanish mass media over the representation of Islam. The negative image of Islam is interpreted as the outcome of orientalist ideology which tends to separate between the West and the East, with Islam being positioned as the representative of the East. Susanto added that the negative image of Islam has been strengthened by the *la reconquista* ideology which embodies Spaniards' negative perception of the Moros in the distant past,

who resemble the modern-day Moroccans. Such fear is the manifestation of the Spaniards' collective fear for the "second" invasion of the Moros in the modern age in the form of Moroccan immigrants. Susanto's is one example of studies which demonstrate that a fusion between social and historical backgrounds may influence the construction of Islam's image by Western mass media.

A study by Annisa Ridzkynoor Beta entitled *Konstruksi Identitas Perempuan Muslim dalam Aquila Asia* or 'Construction of Muslim Women's Identity in Aquila Asia' (2012) explains how the identity of Muslim women is constructed in printed editions of AA (Aquila Asia) magazine and how the ideal image of Muslim women is debated in AA'a Facebook page. In Aquila Asia, Muslim women are presented as open-minded individuals who are able to follow the course of globalization as the manifestation of modern Muslims. Textual analysis shows that the text tends to construct ideal Muslim women as moderate and progressive individuals. These characteristics are represented by highly-educated and cosmopolitan female Muslim figures who are aware of gender inequality in patriarchal space. In addition to textual analysis, Beta also reveals clashes of opinions on ideal Muslim women in AA's Facebook page by examining the comments posted by AA readers who are debating about the essence of Muslim women in various different aspects, one of which is clothing.

Susanto and Beta's studies show that popular media have become an arena where Muslim identity is debated. The perspective of Western media can obviously be seen as a perfect trigger for such debate,

which can also be interpreted as an effort of a group of people who want to counter the negative image of Islam established by popular media. The next question is whether such debate over the construction of Islam exists in East Asian media, especially in Japan as the focus of this research. In 2017 a manga entitled Satoko to Nada ('Satoko and Nada')—hereafter abbreviated to SN— was published. The manga was written by a mangaka (manga artist) under the pseudonym Yupechika, whose real identity is not revealed at all throughout the comic.

SN revolves around the friendship of a Japanese girl named Satoko and an Arab girl named Nada in the United States. SN was the first Japanese manga which deals with the theme of Muslim life. Nada is presented as an open-minded character who is also a devout Muslim. A closer look at the comic reveals that SN seems to offer a new representation of Muslims, that is, another side of Muslim life which is rarely covered by the mass media or popular media. This research seeks to reveal the construction of Muslim women and various discourses contained in SN.

Research Method

This study aims to reveal a new representation of Islam in a popular medium. Previous studies on Islam in Japanese media usually focused on the issue of terrorism. Manga or Japanese comic can be considered as a popular medium which plays a significant role in the formation of identity, as long as the work is not categorized as fantastic literature. The object of this study is a manga entitled *Satoko & Nada* which is assumed to

offer a counternarrative to the mainstream image of Islam built by other popular media. As a text, manga relies on verbal and visual elements, so our units of analysis consist of pictures and dialogues which play a great role in the articulation of the ideology used to construct identity. The basis of our analysis is a body of knowledge about Islam in Japanese media. Therefore, the arguments used in our analysis are based on the formation of Islam's image in Japanese media as elaborated in previous "Islam in Japanese Media" section.

This research utilizes the concept of identity representation proposed by Stuart Hall as a tool of analysis. Hall argues that identity is a never-ending process of production. Identity is formed by past experiences, but this does not mean that the resulting identity will stick to a single form as dictated by the past because it will continuously be brought to "discussion", and such discussion would change the prevailing perception or myth surrounding the identity. This study examines the ways a group of people display themselves as one of the components of identity. This study also examines how such discussions may provide meanings to an identity.

According to Hall, representation is a process of meaning production and concept formation which takes place in human mind through language (p.17). Comic can be viewed as a form of language which conveys messages visually with the support of a narrative. Hall divides the process of representation into two stages, i.e. mental representation and language representation. Mental representation takes place inside our minds. At this stage, a person's mind forms a concept based on the fusion between reality and the initial concept which the person already has. For instance, our minds already possess a concept that comic is an illustration of alternative reality which is usually imbued with dramatic expressions. When we read a Japanese manga, subconsciously we tend to think that Japan in general is represented by the comic. However, the constructed image is also influenced by the background knowledge of each reader.

Language representation is the expression of the concept which has been formed at mental representation stage by means of language which serves as a cultural code. Comic is a cultural product which uses both verbal and visual languages. This means that both the verbal and visual elements of the comic can be considered as a cultural code which contains various meanings, one of which is identity. After knowing the cultural code used in the text, we can now connect it with the concept in relation to reality. In the context of manga, the social reality is the one which serves as the basis for constructing characters, as well as the intended spatial and temporal settings. This leads to the process of signification which we must undergo in order to identify the way SN as a form of "language" presents its version of Muslim women identity.

Muslim Women: Women with Limited Freedom

Satoko: "Oh, I'm gonna start my room sharing life today. I wonder what kind of girl that will be my roommate...."

Nada: "Hello, so you're Satoko?"

Satoko: "!? (Now I wonder if I could get along with her... (first meeting))"

Nada: "For the fridge, please use the second tray, alright?"

Satoko: "Okay..."

Figure 1.
Satoko's first meeting with Nada.

The above picture is the first scene of SN which illustrates the first meeting between Satoko and Nada. The first panel at the top shows the faces of imaginary American girls in the mind of Satoko, a Japanese girl who is going to start her new life in the United States. Those imaginary girls can each be described as a stylish blonde girl like Hollywood actresses, a kindly-faced blonde girl with pigtails, and a crew cut girl with an easy-going expression. Satoko's imaginary figures represent the stereotypical images of American women in the minds of the Japanese in general. Satoko did not expect that she was going to meet, and even to share a room, with a girl wearing *hijab* (Islamic head cover) and

niqab (face veil) in the United States. This irregularity of the situation is emphasized in the second panel which shows a close-up face of Nada—a common technique for focusing readers' attention to a particular comic character. Such emphasis suggests that, for the Japanese, Islam is not associated with the United States.

This interpretation is reinforced by the third panel which displays Satoko's surprised face with a black background and white speech balloon containing only two punctuations "!?" displayed with shaded outline. The technique is used to emphasize Satoko's surprise upon seeing Nada from the perspective introduced in the second panel. In the last panel, both characters are displayed together in parallel, looking at each other. Two drops of sweat on Satoko's face suggest that Satoko is anxious. The sweat is a common dramatic device in comics which shows that the character feels that something is not right. It can be interpreted that Satoko is anxious because she now has to deal with a roommate who is far beyond her expectations. Satoko's anxiety when meeting Nada can be said to represent the general reaction of most Japanese when they encounter a Muslim who wears very conspicuous Islamic attributes. It can be assumed from this that Islam's association with terrorism, as propagated by the mass media, has been internalized by the modern Japanese society, as predicted by Fukuda and Pratama. Therefore, it can be inferred that Islam's image in Satoko's mind before she interacts with Nada was a negative one, which is in conformity with the common image constructed by the mass media.

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Satoko: "(Actually Nada is a very elegant girl, but it's only when she's at home and at girls' parties...)"

Nada: "Look at this, Satoko! I bought this dress at last!"

Satoko: "(I was very surprised at first) Oh my, please don't make me laugh..."

Nada: "I only wanted to surprise you!"

Satoko:"(Nada is just an ordinary girl.)"

Figure 2.
Nada flashes her dress to Satoko

The above scene takes place after Satoko has known Nada for some time. The first panel shows Nada sporting her long hair, wearing a tight dress, and even displaying half of her thighs up to her ankles. Her pose is quite daring and even accompanied with flashes of light which produces an elegant image. In Satoko's mind, Nada's appearance is stylish or elegant (おしゃれ). However, Nada only dresses like that when she is at home or attends girls' parties. Satoko's opinion suggests that Nada has a limited amount of freedom.

The second panel displays bursts of lines to produce an effect of surprise. The use of this feature suggests that there is another side of Muslim women, which is quite unexpected by most readers. In the mass media, Muslim women are frequently shown wearing clothes which cover almost all parts of their bodies, except faces and palms. If we enter the keywords "Muslim women" on an online search engine to search for images, the topmost results would display faces of women with black head covers, some of whom even wear *niqabs* which cover everything else except their eyes. The same also holds true when we enter the same keywords in Japanese "musurimu josei" (Muslim women). This demonstrates that, in popular imagination, Muslim women are those who always wear dark, unpretentious, and body-covering clothes.

Such image is obviously in stark contrast with Nada's appearance in the first panel. This contrast is preserved in the second panel which displays Nada lifting her long dress in front of Satoko to show her newly-bought dress which exposes her cleavage. Her action obviously shocks Satoko who, prior to meeting Nada, had very little interaction with Muslim women. The scene's significance lies in the fact that it offers a new image of Muslim women. Such combination of surprise effect and contrastive viewpoints conveys a message that there is another, different side of Muslim women which has not been shown in mainstream popular media in Japan.

American students: "Hi, let's take photos with us!"

Nada and her friends: "We're so sorry. Please take photos without us."

(At Satoko and Nada's house)

Nada: "All right, everybody's ready?"

Nada and her friends: "LET THE PARTY BEGINS!!"

Nada's friend 1: "Ah, just look at these cakepops, very cute! This cake is added with incense, so fragrant!"

Nada's friend 2: "Aaaaa!! This cake is very delicious!"

Nada: "Erm, Satoko, what's the matter?"

Satoko: "I'm dizzy, the temperature changed so suddenly..."

Figure 3.
Girls' party at Nada and Satoko's home

The above scene shares some similarities with the previous one. In the first panel, there is a group of American students who are inviting Nada and her friends to take photos with them, but they are positioned quite afar from Nada and her fellow Muslim friends. Such positioning suggests distance between the two groups, as if establishing a dichotomy between "us" and "them". The attitude of Nada and her fellow Muslim friends indicates their feeling of alienation while they are in the United States. This is because their appearance is very different or even in stark contrast with the appearance of other American students. Such stigmatized representation of Muslim women in the United States may suggest that both parties are aware of Muslim women's feeling of alienation. Those Muslim women refuse the offer to take photographs together perhaps because they feel that they are not compatible to the other American students.

The next panel raises the issue of distance even further. Satoko seems very awkward when she has to join a party whose participants are dominated by Muslim women. She is aware that she is different and worried that she might behave in a wrong way. This feeling is further dramatized by a drop of sweat on her face. Her awkwardness indicates that she still harbors some stigmatized feeling towards Muslim women. Perhaps Satoko thinks that she ought to control her manners and way of speaking in front of Muslim women who seem very closed. However, the third panel shows something remarkably different from the previous two panels. One of Satoko's feet is lifted, which is a common dramatic effect to express an extraordinary level of surprise. The three Muslim women suddenly wear daring clothes (suggesting that they have suddenly taken off their Muslim robes), accompanied with bursts and flashes of light, a common effect to indicate a flashy atmosphere, another image of Islam which

is very different from those promoted by mainstream mass media.

An analysis of several early scenes of SN reveals another side of Muslim women which has never been featured in the mass media or popular media. The two last scenes clearly show the artist's effort to present Muslim women as ordinary people using mind-blowing visualization and plot, which suggests that Muslim women actually share many things in common with "us" (non-Muslim people), even though some visual elements of the manga still portray and position Muslim women as "them". Our analysis of the above three scenes from SN reveals a new construction of Muslim women as individuals who actually have much freedom, but with certain limitations, which is reflected in the spatial distance.

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Modern Muslim Women

Figure 4.
Satoko and Nada's cooking scene

Satoko and Nada: "Now we're gonna make the American chicken soup!"
Satoko: "Put everything in the pan and wait until the chicken bouillon melts."
Nada: "Let's put some salt to make a perfect taste."
Satoko and Nada: "Huh? Just that?"
Author's note: (It is believed that Japanese and Arabic foods take a relatively long time to cook.)

The above scene takes place when Satoko and Nada have been living in the United States for quite some time. Nada now wears brighter-colored clothes than before. The second panel shows a cooking activity with flowers in the background to create a fun or peaceful setting. The same panel depicts Nada putting salt into the soup while posing like "the Salt Bae" whose photographs which are now very famous on the Internet and is often used to make memes. Such depiction can be read as an effort to make Nada look more modern, which reinforces the manga's viewpoint that Muslim women do not shut themselves off from modern civilization or current trends. This representation greatly contributes to the creation of a new image of Muslim women which has never been seen before in the mass media.

Nada: "Nekomimi is so cute... don't you think?"
Satoko: "Hey, that's kinda random..."
Nada: "Ugh, after I bought it in such passion... I guess it just doesn't fit (with *hijab*)... looks like some stupid ornament"
Satoko: "Then, what about this? TADAAAA!"

Nada: "Waaa, this is THE new genre! *Nekomimi Hijab*!"

Author's note: (By the way, I saw usa*hijab* (rabbit ear *hijab*) when I was reading an Indonesian comic, they are so CUUUTE!

Figure 5.
Satoko made *nekomimi hijab*

The above scene depicts Nada who is impressed by *nekomimi* or a headband with cat ears ornament. In Japan, *nekomimi* is often worn by waitresses at maid cafes and cosplayers to project an image of cuteness (*kawaii*). The first panel shows that Nada really wants to have a *nekomimi*, which suggests that Nada is actually open to popular culture outside the Arabic world. In the next panel, Nada realizes that a *nekomimi* does not seem compatible with a head covered with a *hijab*. Nada's disappointment can be interpreted as a sign that Nada herself realizes her own limitation as a Muslim woman. However, Satoko then modifies Nada's *hijab* by inserting the *nekomimi* into it, so that the *hijab* now has a pair of cat ears. The third panel displays bursts of light

in the form of thick lines emanating from the center in order to draw readers' attention to the *nekomimi* worn by Nada. The *nekomimi hijab* which is worn by Nada and her fellow Muslim friends can be read as Muslim women's effort to achieve compromise between their religious duties and modern fashion. Seen from the pragmatic viewpoint, it can be assumed that SN is trying to bring together a feature of Japanese popular culture (*nekomimi*) and a feature of Islamic culture (*hijab*). It is expected that SN readers can get an impression of closeness between the two cultures.

Figure 6.
Nada explaining Hajj pilgrimage

Author's note: Islam's holy land is located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Nada's home country. Mecca and its surrounding areas within a radius of 20 km can only be entered by Muslims. All Muslims around the world always face the Kaaba, the holiest structure in the city, when they perform *salah* or regular prayers.)"

Nada: "...yea, that's it."

Satoko: "I know I can't go there, but I'm excited all the same. Just like being in ancient stories."

Nada: "Huh? What do you mean? The mosque is air-conditioned and the *salah*s can even be streamed online."

Satoko: "Really? It's so modern!!"

Figure 7.
Nada showing praying support
smartphone application

Nada: "It's the time for *salah*."

Satoko: "Nada seems to always know the direction of Kaaba wherever she is!"

Nada: "Oh, that's because I have this..."

Satoko: "(Oh... oh! A compass, it must be a compass!!)"

Nada: "This! We can also know the time for *salahs* using this, of course."

Satoko: "My goodness! A smartphone application!!"

Those two scenes represent a modern image of Islam. In both scenes, Satoko imagines Islam as something ancient or old-fashioned. According to Pratama (2009), as mentioned earlier in this paper, Japanese young generation associate Islam with superstition, poverty, and violence. Satoko's conception of Islam as something old-fashioned can be said to represent Japanese young generation's perception of Islam in general. The fourth panel of each scene shows how Satoko is surprised when she knows that Islam actually allows its adherents to take advantage of technological advancements, as long as they do not violate the rules prescribed by the religion. Nada's plain expression when explaining Muslims' modern ways of performing their worship shows that she has long been accustomed to technology being used to facilitate religious rituals. These facts serve as a counternarrative to the thesis which says that Islam is identical with poverty and narrow-mindedness.

Figure 8.
Nada explaining how Islam values others

Nada: "Yup, that's right. Muslim women come from various different places around the world. That's because Muslims can be found around the world. That's Pakiza from Afghanistan, and she even wears a *burqa*, right? We mustn't shun or look down on people whose ways of life or clothing are different from ours. We mustn't force them to follow ours, too."

Nada: "My goodness, that one-piece is so cheesy! Just leave it, and choose this one instead!

Satoko: "What? You said we mustn't force others..."

Nada: "This one and that one are entirely different things!"

As the last part of our analysis, the above scene displays the openness of modern Muslim women. The first panel shows a situation where a Muslim woman with a head cover is having a conversation with another Muslim woman who does not cover her hair. Satoko and Nada are drawn close up, which suggests that they are now positioned as observers. The second panel shows a diversity of Muslim women clothes, from a full body cover, a modern *hijab*, to an ordinary shirt without any head cover. These images are different from the popular belief about Muslim women constructed by the mass media or popular media outside Islamic countries. Then, Nada explicitly states that Muslims are not allowed to regulate or force other people to change their ways of life or clothing. This statement constructs a new character of Muslim women who are open to diversity and differences. The last panel

shows that Nada demands Satoko to wear the dress which she chooses for her, which is obviously not a Muslim dress. It clearly serves as a little joke, but it still implies that Nada pays attention not only to Islamic dresses, but also to other styles of dress. She is even depicted as having some fashion sense, which shows that she is very open to non-Islamic cultural features.

Conclusion

A series of terrorist attacks which were widely broadcast by the mass media has given rise to collective fear and hatred among people living in non-Muslim majority countries. In Japan, Islam is associated with poverty, superstition, and violence. Such negative construction has triggered fear, hatred, and discriminatory attitudes. In Japan, few reactions were directed towards Islam, one of which was a hate speech addressed to a Muslim association in Shizuoka, shortly after the media began to spread news about the death of two senior Japanese reporters at the hands of ISIS members. Besides that, an article in Asahi News also reported some discriminatory acts against a woman who wore a *hijab*. Muslim women usually have very conspicuous clothing styles, and they may be stigmatized because of their ways of clothing. In such circumstances, the SN manga offers a different representation of Muslim women.

SN depicts Satoko as a Japanese girl who at first has a prejudice that Islam is very closed and old-fashioned—a belief that she shares with the Japanese in general. However, she gradually comes to understand another side of Muslim women which is

not represented in the mass media. The manga suggests that Muslim women do have freedom, albeit with some limitation. The female Muslim characters are depicted to share many similarities with other women from non-Muslim majority countries, such as wearing daring clothes at girls' parties and being outspoken in their opinions. This new construction serves as a counter narrative to popular belief that Muslim women do not have any freedom wherever they are. Additionally, the manga also demonstrates how Muslim women follow the latest trend and technology, such as the Japanese *kawaii* culture and the use of technology, such as smartphone applications, to facilitate religious rituals. Pragmatically speaking, such depiction reflects Muslim women's familiarity with many features of Japanese culture. This may serve as a counter discourse which can be internalized by Japanese young generation, considering that manga is one of the most widely consumed popular media in Japan.

Of course one cannot assume that SN provides a totally objective representation of Muslim women, especially because the real identity and background of the artist are completely obscure. The contribution of SN to the reconstruction of Islam's image in the eyes of Japanese society in general cannot be observed at present because SN is still a very new manga. Besides religion, SN can be examined and discussed from various other perspectives not covered in this paper, such as gender, myth, and multiculturalism. Further studies of SN may open up new dialogues about Islam in Japanese popular media.

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