

# **The Portrayal of Islamophobia in The Girl In The Tangerine Scarf**

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## **Abstrak**

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki wacana Islamofobia serta mencari penyebab dan efeknya terhadap karakter dalam novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan hasil penelitian ini disajikan dengan menggunakan model deskriptif. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian studi kasus. Teori yang digunakan untuk menganalisa data temuan adalah teori analisis wacana. Data primer penelitian ini bersumber dari novel karya Mohja Kahf yang berjudul *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* yang diterbitkan pada tahun 2006. Penelitian ini menemukan beberapa penggambaran Islamofobia melalui narasi novel dan dialog para karakter. Studi ini menemukan bahwa Islamofobia dapat menempatkan korban dalam situasi yang sangat menegangkan dan dapat menyebabkan krisis identitas.

***Kata kunci: Anti-Islam, Islamofobia, The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf, Wacana***

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the Islamophobia discourse, and to examine the cause and effect to the characters in the in the novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. The study used qualitative approach and the results of this study are presented using a descriptive model. The case study approach was used in this study, and the theoretical framework which is used to analyzed the data was discourse anlysis. The primary source of this study is Mohja Kahf's novel entitled *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, which was pulblished in. The study finds several portrayal of Islamophobia through the narative of the novel and the characters dialog and act. This study discovered that Islamophobia may put victims in very stressful situations and can cause them to undergo identity crisis.

***Keywords: Anti-Islam, Islamophobia, The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf, Discourse***

## A. Introduction

The phenomenon of Islamophobia started to emerge in the 1980s (Widjayanti, 2017). Islamophobia is consisted of two morphemes, *islam* and *phobia* (Istriyani & Yuliatun, 2016). Islam is a monotheistic belief which originated in Mecca (in modern day Saudi Arabia). The religion believes in the existence of one God (Allah) and Mohammed as the messenger of God. Meanwhile the term phobia can be defined as a persistent unrealistic fear or anxiety of an object, person, animal, activity or situation (LeWine, 2022)

According to a report from Runnymede Trust, the term "Islamophobia" refers to a fear or aversion of Islam and, consequently, of all or most Muslims (Conway, 1997). Islamophobia, defined by Imran Awan as a fear, prejudice, and hatred towards Muslims and Non-Muslims that results in provocations, hostility, and intolerance by means of threatening, harassing, abusing, inciting, and intimidating Muslims and Non-Muslims both in offline and online worlds. It targets the symbols and signs of being a Muslim and is driven by institutional, ideological, political, and religious animosity that transcends into structural and cultural racism (Awan & Zempi, 2020).

The phobia has really become stronger in the United States after the attack of World Trade Center. Right after George W. Bush announced the global war on terror, Muslim is seen as a threat. The existence of Islamic extremist group in the middle-east such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda-which does not represent muslim at all-has changed the public perspective about muslim and islam. Furthermore, the Iranian revolution also plays a role in creating the negative sentiment towards Muslim (Zaidi & Sahibzada, 2018). The stereotypes that muslim is a terrorist, suicide-bomber, radicals, etc is embedded to the general muslim population. Although it is understandable that such stereotype emerge because of the constant terrorist attack in all over the world which was committed by the self-proclaimed islamic group, their agendas do not represent the general muslim community. However, the fear of Islam is not merely caused by the terrorism and war. Dr Saba Zaidi argues that Islamophobia and consequently the negative stereotyping towards muslim, is in fact, the fear of a growing culture and civilization that may one day encompass all of the entire imperialist, capitalist and materialist cultures in the world. For that reason, the west participate in the propagandas against Muslim and Islam (Zaidi & Sahibzada, 2018).

Media and government plays a significant role in cultivating this phobia. Various campaign and propaganda towards muslim is launched to establish the negative image of Islam. Furthermore, anti-muslim literary works such as novel also contribute in spreading Islamophobia. To counter this Islamophobic naration, many creative thinkers criticize anti-muslim narrative through their works. For instance, Mohja Kahf, a muslim American, who was born in Syria. One of the example of her works is *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, was thought to be her autobiography, although she herself deny it. Islamophobia that she broguht to her novel is not an attempt to strenghten or promote the sentiment, but to criticize the Islamophobia in America.

This novel tells a story about Khadra, a muslim woman who was migrated from Syria to Indianapolis, America when she was still a young lady. Khadra was raised in a fairly conservative family. For instance, her mother does not allowed her to ride a bicycle with a boy except her brother because of religious reason. Her parents are quite active in the muslim community, they both work in Dawah Center, an Islamic educational organization in Indianapolis. Young Khadra grew up facing the harsh relaity about being a muslim immigrant in the United States. She was discriminated in her school while her teacher cannot do anything to help her. Her neighbor even pshyically assaulted her just because she wear a hijab. As a result, young Khadra does not feel to belong in America. She manages to survive all of the discriminations, goes to college, and get married to a Kuwait guy, Juma. Unfortunately, her marriage did not goes well becacuse of Juma's patriarchal behavior, and she divorced at the age of twenty-one. At the end, she decided to become a photographer to show the reality of muslim women, beyond what the mainstream media shows.

Safeer Awan had done a research regarding the rise of xenophobia or Islamophobia in America cultural production since the 9/11. He investigate several novels such as Martin Amis's *The Last Day of Muhammad Atta*, John Updike's *Terrorist*, and Mohsin Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist*. He found that Updike was deliberately misrepresenting the muslim character to make his narrative more convicing to the American reader (Awan & Zempi, 2020). Another research on Islamophobia is an article entitled A Political Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia though the novel *Home Boy* (Zaidi & Sahibzada, 2018). This research use PDA to analyze the usage of language in the novel that projects the negative *they* (muslim) and the

positive *us* (the west) vocabulary. Different from the two previous studies, this study focuses on a novel entitled *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf, and it aims to explain the type of Islamophobia along with the cause, and its effect to the characters.

## **B. Method**

To give a thorough explanation of the results, this study used a qualitative methodology and is given in a descriptive model. A qualitative approach does not utilize statistical or numerical data (A. M. Ali & Yusof, 2011). Its objective is to provide an explanation for a certain social phenomenon. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf, which was published in 2006, served as the study's primary source. Secondary data which were collected from several relevant articles are used as references. The researchers gather the data by carefully reading the novel. Afterwards, the researchers identify and make notes on any suspected Islamophobic discourse. Lastly, discourse analysis theory was used to analyze the data.

## **C. Result and Discussion**

The novel 'The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf' discusses a variety of issues concerning diasporic Muslim women. One such issue that is depicted early in the story is the Islamophobia and hate crime that the main character, Khadra, experienced as a youngster. Islamophobia is the fear of, hate for, or prejudice towards Islam or Muslims in general, particularly when regarded as a geopolitical power or source of terrorism. Islamophobia is comprised of emotional and behavioural components that stem from a cultural bias towards Islam and Muslims. To some, it is a phrase expressing a fear or hate of Islam — and hence a fear or dislike of all or most Muslims (Khan et al., 2012). This article discovered numerous sorts of Islamophobias or hate crimes perpetrated against the main character and other Muslim characters in the novel by their predominantly white surroundings.

### **C.1. The Portrayal of Islamophobia in the Novel**

#### **1. Verbal Abuse**

Verbal abuse, also known as verbal aggression, verbal attack, verbal violence, or verbal assault, is a sort of psychological/mental abuse that involves the use of spoken, gesticulated, or written words

aimed at a victim. Harassing, labelling, insulting, scolding, rebuking, or excessive yelling at someone is an example of verbal abuse (Rosenthal et al., 2018). It can also involve using derogatory terms and making remarks designed to intimidate, humiliate, demean, or degrade someone (Koller & Darida, 2020).

One example of verbal abuse that can be seen acted on towards Muslims in the novel is Hate speech. Hate speech can be defined as public speech that displays hatred or provokes violence against a person or group because of their race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). According to Sellars (2016, pp. 25–30), there are numerous shared traits that classify a speech as a hate speech: targeting of a group or individual as a member of a group; content in the message expressing hatred; the speech harms people; the speaker intends danger or terrible action; the speech instigates evil actions beyond the speech itself; the speech is either public or aimed at a member of the group; the context allows for a violent response; and the speech has no redeeming intent.

The Muslim characters in the novel face several acts of hostility in the form of hate speech. For example, Muslims are sometimes referred to as "ragheads," (Kahf, 2006, pp. 7 & 91) an ethnic and religious insult hurled at any Muslim, Arab, Sikh, or member of any group that wears a headpiece such as a turban or veil (hijab). Khadra, the novel's main protagonist, is called a "raghead" and bullied for wearing a veil by her hostile neighbours in Indiana, as well as by some of the students at her school, while the teachers pretend as if nothing had happened to her (Kahf, 2006, p. 51). They also frequently yell at her to "go back where you came from," (Kahf, 2006, p. 8) implying that they absolutely despise Muslims and wish that the Muslims leave the country.

Khadra was about to be assaulted by her Islamophobic neighbour's kids before she was rescued by her family (Kahf, 2006, p. 6). In other part of the novel, some kids in her school assaulted Khadra, called her 'raghead', held her down and forcibly taking of her veil by ripping it apart (Kahf, 2006, p. 91).

*"FUCK YOU, RAGHEADS. DIE. They were signed: KKK, 100% USA"* (Kahf, 2006, p. 62). This scene speaks for itself about how this slur is a hate speech and has no other intention behind them other than expressing hatred and threats towards Muslim community. Therefore, this slur meets all of the typical features described above.

This insult is solely directed at particular groups: Muslims, Arabs, and those who wear headdresses, and it expresses horrible hostility and is harmful to people who are targeted, and it was all done in public (school, neighbourhood, etc). This slur has no redeeming reason, and it is used by individuals who intend to inflict harm to the Muslim characters in the novel with their hearts, which leads to the following form of Islamophobia or hate crime against Muslims in the novel that will be described later on in this paper.

## 2. Physical Assault and Homicide

*“Days later, Zuhura's body was found in a ravine near Beanblossom Bridge. Murdered. Raped. Cuts on her hands, her hijab and clothes in shreds. The grown-ups didn't want to give details in front of the children, but it was in the news.”* (Kahf, 2006, p. 69)

Zuhura is the novel's first example of a strong, Muslim woman who isn't scared to mix with American society, and she serves as a role model for Khadra. Zuhura is not scared to stand out and voice her thoughts. She does not fit in with the rest of Indiana's citizens, but that does not stop her from speaking her thoughts, like when she lectures a zoning inspector on how zoning legislation is frequently manipulated to keep immigrants out of specific neighbourhoods (Kahf, 2006, p. 34).

However, Zuhura was murdered because she is a woman who sticks out from the crowd by speaking her opinions and supporting Muslim issues in an area where racist organisations like the Ku Klux Klan thrive. According to Blee and Latif (2019, p. 31), the KKK's efforts to mobilise vigilante violence and threats against racial, ethnic, religious, and national minority groups, as well as non-white immigration to the United States, are persistent. Jews and those with ancestors from Africa and Latin America, whether native-born or immigrants, have always been the Klan's most vexing foes. Catholics, Mormons, Muslims, and persons with Asian heritage have all been victims of Klan vigilantism at various times, as have labour union activists, homosexual men, lesbians, and other sexual minorities, and workers and supporters of the federal government.

Nevertheless, because of the racism that is prevalent around the setting of the murder case, Zuhura's murderer was never caught, and many people in the region were unconcerned with the situation. She was also raped and tortured before being brutally killed. The local media, on the other hand, placed her case in a small section of the

newspaper that is frequently overlooked by readers, treating the assault and homicide case as if it were not a major crime at all, while others did not mention her race at all in the news, as if the murder was never racially and religiously motivated. This act of Islamophobia has resulted in the death of an innocent life.

### 3. Racial Profiling

Another instance of Islamophobia that can be found in the novel is racial profiling. American Civil Liberties Union defines racial profiling as the discriminating practise of law enforcement officers of targeting persons for criminal suspicion based on their race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. Criminal profiling, as applied by police, is the reliance on a set of traits that authorities believe are related with crime (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). The public's impression of racial profiling is a modern by-product of America's police history. The current relationship between minorities and police in America is shaped by the historical legacies of slavery, segregation, and discrimination (Wilkins & Williams, 2008).

The novel's racial profiling can be seen in how the local police detained Luqman (Kahf, 2006, p. 73), a middle eastern guy from Egypt who was later revealed to be innocent, rather than investigating the organisation that was clearly formed based on their hatred and unjustifiable prejudice against Muslims and other minorities in the city. The local media even published a headline claiming that Luqman, the innocent suspect, committed the murder in the name of honour killing, with oppression against women in Islam, creating a false narrative that women were completely oppressed and helpless in Islam, as if women had no freedom, when all of these narratives are completely fabricated. Even though no murder charges were filed against Luqman after he was proven to be innocent, he was deported nevertheless 'on a technical visa violation' about which no one knows the truth. This demonstrates how far the racist and Islamophobic community will go to criminalise innocent individuals because they have specific physical characteristics that identify them as Arabs/Muslims, even going so far as to deport an innocent man who has committed no crime.

### **C.2 The Cause of Islamophobia in The Novel**

In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, it is clearly shown that Islamophobia is normalized in American society. Khadra, who is the

main character, often has an encounter with Islamophobia people of all ages, from kids to elders. There must be a cause for such a thing because an ideology or an action will not happen without any cause, whether it is little or big, visible or invisible. Due to that, the researchers try to find the cause of Islamophobia that is clued in the story's narrations. Turns out there are three reasons why Islamophobia exists and is normalized in American society; ideology differences, generational Islamophobia, and the lack of media exposure.

### 1. Ideological differences

As it is known, the United States has Christians as their majority, which makes Muslims and Islam, in general, become foreigners and minorities. As Kambiz stated, Christianity is not only a religion in the United States, but it is also a political and economic principle to establish the country's identity (GhaneaBassiri, 2013). For that reason, since the first arrival of foreign religion, Americans had been acting offensive towards the "non-local". As an example, in 1855, Catholics entered the United States through Catholic immigrants, as foreigners, they indeed expect a good response from the country where they will be staying at. However, instead, they got treated like a friend or relatives, the Catholic immigrants were called human beings and the way of life is far from the "American lifestyle", or the "un-American". Not only that, besides being called alien beings, they were also called the Pope's foot soldiers whose lives only had a purpose to preach the Pope's power. Besides that, some Jewish people were bullied, stigmatized, and violated by American law and citizens which resulted in anti-semitism in the country. Jewish people were exiled and persecuted by the Anglo-Saxon Christian people throughout centuries, which makes it clear that America had been a country that hates newcomers due to the bigotry towards Christianity (Sundquist, 2005).

In Kahf's novel itself, the Islamophobia that is manifested from the ideological differences between Muslim immigrants with white Americans is shown in sentences, "The struggling boxwood hedge at the entrance was slimed with rotten eggs and tomatoes. Toilet paper was everywhere. Markings in white spray paint were blazoned across the windowpanes of the clubhouse. Aghast, Khadra snapped pictures of them: FUCK YOU, RAGHEADS. DIE. They were signed: KKK, 100% USA," (Kahf, 2006). KKK or Ku Klux Klan is a group of white Americans that historically had been intimidating, scaring, and violating non-white or/and non-Christian immigrants. Since its birth, KKK had attempted to deny the existence of minority, marginalized,

or immigrated groups because they have a purpose to preserve the social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of white hegemony in the United States (Bickford & Clabough, 2019). Based on that, it is clear that the terror and vandalism that Khadra's family gets in the novel is a result of the ideological difference between the KKK who want white American domination to stand still and Muslim immigrants who want to be a part of American society.

## 2. Generational Islamophobia

In society, it is known that parents' behaviors or beliefs shape their children's behavior or belief, which makes people say that someone's identity can easily be recognized by their behavior or beliefs due to the similarities between the behavior of people from a certain culture. As it is stated by Thompson, children who are raised by X cultural household will have different behavior or beliefs from children who are raised by Y cultural household; due to their parents' perspective and parenting style which is usually grounded on cultural aspects (Bornstein, 2002). As a result, if a child is raised by racist parents, they will likely turn out to be a racist person in adulthood because they think that their parents' beliefs and norms are the best ones. Correspondingly, a generational prejudice like generational racism will be born and become a descending ideology from generation to generation.

In the novel itself, the generational prejudice is not in the form of racism, but Islamophobia. In the novel, there are multiple parts where kids from Khadra's neighborhood and school bullied her just because she is a Muslim, such as, "Hey, Allison-Bone!" one of them called. "Get a load of this." A thickwaisted white girl with a bowl haircut peered over their shoulders. Khadra and Eyad were inside calling dibs on bedrooms when they heard the crash of glass. Beer bottles, a pile of brown and gold shards at their doorstep," (Kahf, 2006). In that part, the perpetrator is Vaughn's boys, children from a white, Christian family. In the novel, it is shown that the boys are just as mean as their parents. In the novel, the parents told Khadra's father to go back to his homeland after being asked about the boys' Islamophobia behavior, "burly man at the door now. "-ACCUSING MY CHILDREN -OFF MY PORCH-BACK WHERE YOU PEOPLE CAME FROM!" (Kahf, 2006). Based on that, it is clear that the Vaughn boys' action toward Khadra's family is an example of generational Islamophobia because it is the result of Mr. and Mrs. Vaughn's Islamophobia that is imprinted on their brains.

### 3. The lack of media exposure

Media has a big role in society because the majority of people find and obtain information from different kinds of media. Therefore, it is important for the media to not be biased or share a piece of false information because it may change people's opinions in an instant and create an uproar in public. In the United States itself, the most famous form of media is documentary films and literary work. There, it has been known that those two media are the most effective tools to spread an ideology, sentiment, or belief. Thus, if there is a documentary or literary work that contains a group's crimes or bad behavior in general, American citizens would likely see that group as an enemy or a threat. Throughout the United States history, there are some events in which the public makes the enemy of some groups, and one of those groups is Muslim.

After the 9/11 attack, many media said that the horrible incident is a result of a terrorist attack from a certain religious group, which was announced as al-Qaeda, but they never made it clear what type of religious group al-Qaeda is (GhaneaBassiri, 2013). As a result, the public who does not know about the true identities of the 9/11 terrorists, thought that al-Qaeda is another "normal" Muslim; meaning that all Muslims from any part of the world or who live in the United States whether work, study, or have a vacation there, are seen as equal. They were seen as threats, as potential terrorists. Due to that, Ali stated that literature works from the perspective of Muslims who live in the United States is important because it can inform western people about what is or who is Muslim and what kind of thing is done to Muslims in their country, with the existence of Islamophobia, xenophobia, and racism (A. Ali, 2017).

In Kahf's novel itself, the needs of media from Muslims' perspectives is found through some scenes where in the story the media only covers crimes that are done by Muslims but not the ones that are done to them; which makes the law institutions in America do favoritism or in other words does not available from Muslim immigrants. An example of such things can be found in the scene where the killer of Khadra's relatives, Zuhura, was not being searched. Instead, the police decided to trap one of Zuhura's friends, Luqman, as the suspect, and deported him for a visa violation, then stop searching for the killer which makes Zuhura's killer never caught; "the Indianapolis Star reported on him being a suspect: Murder Possible Honor Killing-Middle Eastern Connection, they said, with a sidebar on

"the oppression of women in Islam." No charge of murder was brought against Luqman. He was deported anyway, on a technical visa violation. Zuhura's murderer was never caught," (Kahf, 2006). Due to that scene, Kahf shows the reader how important the media is because it can change a person, a group, or even an institution's opinion about Muslim immigrants or American Muslims in general.

### **C.3 The Effects of Islamophobia on the Characters**

The previous explanation is the cause of Islamophobia in American society in general and also in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. Related to that, if there is an action, there must be a consequence or any sort of effect that affects Khadra as one of the Muslim immigrants in the novel, and that impact is the disturbance of Khadra's mental health. As it is known, Muslims such as Khadra, are seen as inferior and do not deserve priority in American society. As a result, Muslims like Khadra often went through indescribable stress. According to Ali, Islamophobia is a great stressor and its impact on Muslims is unknown; meaning, there has not been any research that is able to measure the impact level of Islamophobia (A. Ali, 2017). Moreover, it is stated that there are specific types or kinds of the impact of Islamophobia. Nevertheless, there is an impact that is common to get by Muslims who get mistreatment because of Islamophobia, identity distortion, or crisis.

Identity distortion is a condition where a person is uncertain about their goals, feelings, actions, or beliefs. In Kahf's novel, this condition happens to Khadra since she was young and then developed over time until the climax is when she gets a divorce. When she was younger, she got the feeling of being lost in a crowd since she moved to America, she did not feel the sense of belonging as her brother did. However, she never admitted it until her relative, Zuhura, died tragically; "maybe we don't belong here, Khadra thought, standing next to Hanifa in the crowd at Zuhura's graveside. Maybe she belonged in a place where she would not get shoved and called "raghead" every other day in the school hallway. Teachers, classmates-no one ever caught her assailants. They always melted into the crowd behind her," (Kahf, 2006). At the time Khadra said that quotation, her identity crisis did not really affect her because it just appeared. However, when she becomes an adult and aware of what happened to herself, her relatives, and her Muslim friends, she becomes sure that her identity crisis puts her under stress that can disturb her life.

The result of that is when she was divorced and decided to drop

out of her college, she decided to take off her hijab because in her opinion, throughout her childhood and teenage years, hijab was the one that put her in distress more. Unlike other Muslim women who enjoy and are comfortable in their hijab, Khadra was burdened because people will always see her as a Muslim, and not as Khadra. Therefore, she takes off her hijab, "the scarf was slipping off. She shrugged. The chiffon fell across her shoulders. (...) Under the cherry-tree canopy it had felt fine having her scarf slip off. She was safe; she was among friends," (Kahf, 2006) Due to the explanation above, the impact of Islamophobia is important to be talked about and researched, because it has the ability to change a Muslim's life.

#### **D. Closing**

In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, it is found that there are three kinds of actions which were resulted from Islamophobia, they are verbal abuse, physical assault and homicide, and racial profiling. It is found that those three actions were caused by ideology differences between Muslim immigrants and white and Christian Americans, generational Islamophobia that is descending from generation to generation, and the lack of media exposure that is built around the deep part of the Muslim immigrant community and used their perspective which means it is not biased or fabricated by the western media. For the first Islamophobic action, the verbal abuse; it is found that the cause is the ideological differences between the KKK (Ku Klux Klan) with people from the Dawah Center community. In the novel, KKK attacks them with racial insults that aim to make people from the community go back to their country. Then for the physical assault and homicide, the cause related to the action is generational islamophobia. In the novel it is known that Zuhura's death was not investigated thoroughly by the police; due to that, people from the Dawah Center deducted that Zuhura's killer is an Islamophobic and racist person. Next, is racial profiling, the cause for that is the lack of media coverage. In the novel, Zahara's killer was never found, and to cover their inability and abandonment in solving the case; instead of admitting to the public that the case will be closed due to the lack amount of evidence, the police trapped one of Zuhura's friend, Luqman, as a suspect and then deported him from the United States. Based on that explanation, the three quotes and other attacks and crimes towards Muslim people in Kahf's novel could have been prevented if the causes are solved. Thus, it is concluded that assaults against Muslim immigrants in the United States can be solved or erased if the law institution and media stand together with

Muslim immigrants.

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