

EXPLORING ISLAMOPHOBIA AND RACISM: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE OF SAMIRA AHMAD'S *HOLLOW FIRES*

KaiPing Wang^{*1}, Aqsa Nazar², Khushboo Kainat³

^{*1}Assistant Professor (English), JiLin International studies University, China

²M. Phil Scholar (English), The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus

³Visiting lecturer English, the University of Layya

^{*1}wangkaiping@jisu.edu.cn, ²aqsanazar810@gmail.com, ³khushbookainat5@gmail.com

^{*1}<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2010-9378>

Corresponding Author: *

KaiPing Wang

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21232704>

Received
24 April 2026

Accepted
06 June 2026

Published
21 June 2026

ABSTRACT

The notion of Islamophobia was coined to shed light on anti-Muslim attitudes and Islam. A growing trend in scholarly writing is the examination of xenophobic attitudes and discourse. This troubling tendency, which is fueling Islamophobia and is on the increase primarily in the West, has psychological, social, political, and historical roots. Islamophobia, as a key theme in literature, illustrates racism and other social ills that are deeply embedded in society as a result of religion affiliation. The piece of literature that brings up issues of racism and Islamophobia is *Hollow Fires* (2022) by Samira Ahmed. This study seeks to examine how racism and Islamophobia are shown, as well as their origins and consequences, in *Hollow Fires*. Because this research looks at human issues that have their origins in religious prejudice, it makes use of the theories of racism, Islamophobia, and religious discrimination. In particular, this study employs Kevin Boyle's (2004) religious discrimination theory, which traces the origins of Islamophobia and racism to various forms of religious discrimination. Additionally, the effects of religious intolerance on Muslim protagonists. *Hollow Fires*, written by Samira Ahmed, is the source for the data. It is a collection of narratives and conversations drawn from the book. The research proves that Samira Ahmed's depictions of Islamophobia and racism in *Hollow Fires* amount to overt religious bigotry. Two things also contribute to the novel's racist and Islamophobic depictions. Specifically, bigotry and hatred based on Muslims' faith leads to discrimination against Muslims. The research goes on to classify the bullying and bad treatment that the Muslim community in the book endured as two negative impacts of religious prejudice.

Keywords: Racism, Islamophobia, religious discrimination, Samira Ahmed, *Hollow Fires*, Kevin Boyle

INTRDODUCTION

Racism and Islamophobia in Ahmed's *Hollow Fires*

Ahmed used to pose challenging questions on a number of pressing subjects while serving as the editor of the high school newspaper in Batavia, Illinois. In her interview with Time, Ahmed discusses that one of the reasons she wrote *Hollow Fires* (2022) was to challenge the way the media portrays murder and hate crimes, especially when it comes to issues of race, ethnicity, and religion (Mansoor, 2022). Ahmed incorporates societal themes into the novel's parts by employing a number of real-life events to build the story as she begins to pose questions through Samira Ahmed's novel. One example of racism and Islamophobia is the story of Dina Ali, who was used to go her house and she was harassed in the meanwhile of a men and called her with racial slur and attempted to remove her headscarf.

In literature, Islamophobia also only looks at one kind. According to Theodorson (1969) the unequal and maltreatment of less favourable group deal with discrimination which lead to the segregation of social class and groups, religion segregation, ethnicity and race. Accordingly, Ritmi and Marlina (2021) examine how *Hollow Fires* represents the Islamophobia and racism led to inequality which is similar to encountering in *We Cast A Shadow* (2019) through an analysis based on the racial discrimination shown in the book. In a similar vein, Idris, Wahyuni, and Prautomo's (2020) work focuses on determining how social class affects racial prejudice and its impact. Firdausy (2021) presents another research that focuses on gender discrimination, the uneven treatment that female characters experience, and the factors that help them fight against prejudice. Additionally, Mu'ad (2020) uses his undergraduate thesis to deliver a study on religious prejudice. The types, reasons, and methods that *The Golden Legend* depicts discrimination against Pakistani Christians which is also racism.

Samira Ahmed's literary work, *Hollow Fires* (2022), addresses societal issues. Religious prejudice against the Muslim community is one of the many social concerns that are depicted in

this book. To put it simply, religious discrimination occurs when a specific member of a religious group—or perhaps the whole group—is subjected to prejudice. Boyle (2004) states that unjust treatment based on religion is the most broad way to define religious discrimination (p. 67). Direct and indirect religious discrimination are the two types of religious discrimination that Boyle (2004) distinguishes in his book. Additionally, Boyle (2004) distinguishes between two motivations for religious discrimination: religious hate and religious prejudice, the leading components for racism and Islamophoba. In line with this, Ahmed also describes this societal issue in her novel *Hollow Fires* (2022). In addition, the researcher aims to examine how religious prejudice, Islamophobia and racism are portrayed and what causes are reflected on both readers and the writer's personal life.

Direct discrimination leading to racism and Islamophobia based on religion is defined similarly to other forms of direct discrimination. The distinction is found in the victim of discrimination's social membership. Regarding discrimination based on religion, religious affiliation is a prerequisite for social membership. When someone or a group of people of a certain faith is treated unfairly, it is known as direct religious discrimination. In a similar vein, Boyle's notion indicates that religious prejudice and hatred are the root causes of direct religious discrimination. When these factors and dynamics influence the choices made by those in positions of authority in the public, corporate, and nonprofit sectors, they may result in overtly discriminatory actions (Boyle, 2004, p. 73). Such discriminations in the West led to racism against the Muslims which are directly the images of Islamophobia in the novel.

When an individual or a specific set of religious groups is purposefully denied opportunities or services due to their religious identity, practice, or belief, this is known as direct religious discrimination and such religious discrimination against the Muslim Islamophobia and racism against the Muslims. According to Boyle (2004), choices taken by prospective employers to deny Muslims employment due to their religious

identity, practice, or belief would constitute direct discrimination (Boyle, 2004, p. 73).

The first instance of direct Islamophobic stances and actions brought on by religious prejudice in Samira Ahmed *Hollow Fires* (2022) is when Patricia Jansen, Jawad Ali's English instructor, discriminated against Jawad directly. "Jawad Ali was thrilled to display a cosplay jet pack he had constructed in an after-school lesson when he got to school on Tuesday morning. However, things did not turn out quite the way he had intended. The costume item was mistaken for a bomb by his English instructor, who informed the officials, who then contacted the Chicago Police Department. English instructor Patricia Jensen can be heard hysterically characterizing Ali as an Arab student who was wearing "something like a suicide bomber vest" in the police-released 911 call transcript" (Ahmed, 2022, p. 7).

The data demonstrates how religious prejudice directly leads to religious discrimination reflecting Islamophobia and racism in the novel. Religious prejudice, as defined by Boyle (2004, p. 68), is the practice of characterizing a certain religious community through exclusionary views. Jawad's Honors English instructor, Patricia Jensen, misidentified the Halloween costume that Jawad constructed as a bomb vest and informed the school principal, according to the transcript of an article published by News/Crunch Online Magazine.

In addition, Jawad eagerly shows off his cosplay jet pack for his Halloween costume on Tuesday morning when his Honors English teacher frantically reports him for carrying a "suicide bomber vest" because she believes that Jawad, being Muslim and Arab, is always linked to terrorist activities. The US government is actively fighting terrorism, particularly after the "War on terrorism" as the motto of the 9/11 attacks (Rahayu and Mediyansyah, 2020, p. 2) as noted in the *Hollow Fires* given below:

"How could she have thought my jet pack costume was a bomb? Simple. She never gave it any attention. All she could see was me. I mean, a portion of myself. the portion about Iraq. the portion on Muslims. The portion that is difficult to pronounce. My name was never correctly

spelled by her. I am not even sure whether she made an effort. It is strange because she would occasionally discuss her passion for this deceased Russian author. He penned a novel about a man who killed an elderly woman after becoming insane. His name seemed to be easy for my teacher to pronounce" (Ahmed, 2022: 44-45)

In the second piece of information, Jawad also states that his Honors English teacher has excluded him before. Jawad has long been the target of Patricia Jensen's discriminatory actions, which stem from his religious beliefs. Jawad describes in this story how his English instructor treated him differently every time, how ignorant she was, and how she never made an effort to treat him fairly—just the way she does other people. Patricia consistently treats Jawad differently, exhibiting double-standard conduct as a result of the exclusion. She just does not think twice before reporting Jawad to 911, despite the fact that she does not check his jet pack to make sure it is not a bomb vest.

The behavior of Safiya and Usman's US history instructor provides more evidence of how religious prejudice leads to discrimination. According to the data, when Safiya tries to inform the police officer about the current prejudice she has encountered, she recalls her past encounters with religious discrimination with Usman. "My thoughts drifted back to when my US history instructor essentially forced Usman and I to share our thoughts on 9/11 with the class. When it occurred, we were not around! Additionally, he asked us foolish questions regarding our condemnation of the behavior. Of course. However, he never once questioned white children if they were against slavery, the Trail of Tears, the Capitol attack, or the culinary crime of chocolate hummus". (Ahmed, 2022, 247).

Therefore, when the instructor forced Safiya and Usman to describe their sentiments about something they had never lived to experience, it was a blatant act of religious discrimination against them. They are asked to explain the 9/11 incident in front of the class by US History, but they never ask or do the same to the other students, even if they have a history class that deals with US history.

Jawad had previously encountered overt religious discrimination as a result of the bad attitudes society had toward Muslims. Jawad and his mother had been subjected to religious exclusion by strangers on the street when they were little.

"I could not have been more thrilled to board the bus and pull the rope to signal our stop. I heard footsteps behind us, like someone running, as we got off and started to move toward the store. A loud voice said, Go home, terrorist! Ragheads!" . .

. . "Without without looking, my mother took hold of my hand and rushed to the store. At that moment, a white male, who could have been a teenager, raced up along the sidewalk on the street side and attempted to remove my mom's hijab. She pushed me in the direction of the store while she yelled and jerked away. The man who had attacked us fled across the street and down another block after an uncle inside seen us through the large window and hurried out. My mother was in tears. (Ahmed, 2022: 285-286).

One of the elements that causes society to make unfavorable assumptions about those to whom it belongs is religious identification. The data indicates that Dina Ali and Jawad Ali were directly excluded by the attacker, who identified them as Muslims based on Dina's religious identifying signals. For Muslim women, the hijab is a sign of their religious identity. According to the story, Dina and Jawad experienced physical assaults and hate speech as forms of discrimination. A man abruptly screams racial epithets at Jawad and his mother as they make their way to a store, accusing them of being terrorists because of their Jawad's mother's headscarf, a symbol of Muslim religious identity, and the Westerner's preconceived notion that Muslims are inherently linked to terrorism. Furthermore, a second assailant makes a violent attempt to remove Dina's headscarf off her head. The discrimination is categorized as direct religious discrimination driven by anti-Muslim sentiment.

In essence, Jawad was taken to the police for an inquiry into allegations of terrorism after his honors English instructor denounced him to the authorities. By disregarding Jawad's statement and placing him under arrest, the police

discriminated against him rather than providing justice. "Jim Leary, a spokesman for the Chicago Police Department, told reporters, Police tried to interrogate the youngster several times, but he maintained maintaining that it was not genuine. He refused to provide any information. Leary said, Ali was arrested to make sure he was not a sleeper, taught to blend in or distract." (Ahmed, 2022, 8).

Jawad's experience of prejudice does not end there. In a media interview following Jawad's release, a police commander also discriminated against him. "Th"e police stated that the boy will not face any criminal charges for carrying a "suspicious item" to school after he was released . . . Instead of repeatedly calling the device a "jet pack," Commander Phillip McCarthy felt that Ali ought to have been more candid and forthright. McCarthy stated that "the department is aware of his age and, at this moment, will not be prosecuting him for any offenses, including a potential felony charge of placing a fake bomb" (Ahmed, 2022, p. 8).

Jawad also recounts and remembers the incidents in which the police forcefully detained him. Neither his mental state nor the fact that he was still a child at the time of the arrest raised any issues. The fact that Jawad is a terrorist wearing a "bomb vest" at school is all that matters to the police officers. "On a lovely October day, they handcuffed me and escorted me out the school entrance. As if I were a criminal, hands behind my back. I repeatedly explained that it was a jet pack for my costume for Halloween. However, it seemed as though they were unable to comprehend English. I really tried not to weep. It is not real was all I could think or say. It is a jet pack. It is not authentic. It is not authentic. Please. Children were whispering, livestreaming, and taking photographs in the corridor". (Ahmed, 2022, 12).

It is evident from the data that the police officers directly discriminate against Jawad based on his religion. Jawad's Honors English instructor reported him for carrying a "bomb vest" because he is a Muslim. Both the police and the school board conclude that Jawad is a terrorist because of the historical prejudice that the United States

has had toward Muslims. After receiving Patricia Jansen's report accusing Jawad of terrorism, the police detained him right away without any other information. Jawad should be "treated differently depending on his age" since he is still a juvenile. Jawad, on the other hand, was harassed because of his alleged crime and the fact that he is a Muslim, despite his repeated claims that he is carrying a jet pack rather than a bomb, given how negatively Muslims are seen in Western society.

He continues to defend himself, but the police would not listen. Because of a fictitious crime complaint, Jawad was detained and handled like a criminal without a clear justification for the charge. This bigotry stems from Westerners' religious prejudice that links Muslims to terrorism, that Jawad's explanation was not given any consideration by the police during the arresting practice.

Additionally, via the transcript of Safiya Mirza's phone conversation with Jawad's previous Honors English instructor Patricia Jansen. The police officer's affirmation of what Jansen said demonstrates the overt religious bigotry.

"Safiya: I want to discuss Jawad Ali and his toy jet pack with you. It was you who reported it to the police".

"Ms. Jensen: I did, of course. He was carrying a bomb! Every youngster in the school has their life in my hands. I was doing out my duties".

"Safiya: You stated, "An Arab kid has a bomb," according to the 911 audio. All of us are gonna be killed. Why do they despise us? It was not a bomb, though. It was a costume".

"I am aware of what that was, Ms. Jensen. A danger. I am aware that you are attempting to misrepresent and distort what I have said. I had done the correct thing, according to one of the officers. that these individuals enter our educational institutions. They remain silent, oblivious. He described them as ghosts". (Ahmed 2022: 48-49).

Safiya is essentially addressing Jansen about her charge against Jawad in the above paragraph. Jawad accidentally brought a "bomb vest" to school, and Jansen was the one who reported him to the police and school board. since of the stereotype in Western society that Jawad is

associated with terrorism since he is Muslim, Jansen believes that he had a bomb when she reported him to the police, even though Jawad is clean from the charge. By reporting Jawad to the police, Jansen supports her bias and accusations against him because of those prejudices and her own opinions about Jawad's jet pack. According to Jansen, the police officer concurs with him in a statement, stating that Jansen's reporting of a purported threat was "the correct thing" to do.

The account that follows provides the final example of religious prejudice. The discovery of Jawad Ali was covered in an item by the Chicago Nightly News on Channel 13.

"To find out whether anyone has observed anything odd, police are scouting the area. Although the woodlands in Jackson Park were part of an early search for Jawad, it seems that the hunt ended at the lagoons. Why the cops did not press further into the park is a question that the neighbors are asking". . . "Local resident Lizzie Chao had participated in the first search. "I find it incomprehensible that they did not go around Jackson Park in its entirety. We paused at the Garden of the Phoenix when the cops set up the search perimeters. My God. "I wish we could have done more." [shaking head] "To think that he was here the entire time. For him. for his impoverished parents. That should not have to be endured by anyone". (Ahmed, 2022, p. 274)

After going missing for over two weeks, Jawad was discovered dead after the police were chastised by the public and locals. A seldom-visited section of Jackson Park is where Jawad was discovered. In the past, the police conducted an early search for Jawad across the neighborhood, including Jackson Park's woodlands. However, the police ceased searching the lagoons at Jackson Park and did not bother searching any other areas of the park because of certain potential allegations related to Jawad's case. Rather, because of the prevalent negative stereotype that charges the Alis with terrorism owing to their Muslim faith. The police's decision to alter the potential kidnapping case to a potential runaway is not criticized by society, but Jawad and his family are excluded for perhaps fabricating his case.

According to Boyle (2004), there may be no observable discriminatory effects from religious bias. Consequently, this conduct has the potential to develop into religious hate as it becomes more severe. Furthermore, in some cases, extreme "religious hate" can lead to violent and/or intimidating actions against the religiously "other" (Boyle, 2004, p. 69). In addition to religious prejudice, Ahmed depicts another form of religious discrimination driven by religious hatred in his book *Hollow Fires* (2022).

Organized cadres, like those of extreme racist and fascist parties, can also incite and foster religious hate (Boyle, 2004, p. 69). In keeping with this, two characters in the book, Richard Reynolds and Nate Chase, are also White supremacists who believe they are better than people of other races and religions. As a result of their hatred for Muslims and Islam, they engaged in direct religious discrimination.

First of all, the death threat message that Richard Reynolds and Nate Chase wrote to Jawad Ali, a Muslim youngster who was suspected of being a terrorist for carrying a jet pack, is an example of overt religious prejudice driven by religious hatred.

In addition to the white nationalist quotations from Nietzsche, Reynold and Chase make threats against Jawad. "Exhibit 1 of the State, From November 8-11, 2021, Jawad Ali received texts using the Burner app that said, "Stare into the abyss, and the abyss stares back. The Bomb Boy finishes like this. The Bomb Boy finishes like this. With a whimper instead of a bang, those who insist on equality are the most inferior." Bomb Boy. Boy Bomb. Tick Tick Tick Tick ? (Ahmed, 2022: 23).

According to the State's exhibit, which the police displayed, Jawad's exclusion took the form of death threats and hate speech. By hinting that Jawad's life will end "Not with a boom but a whimper," Richard and Nate threaten to kill him. Richard and Nate's animosity for Muslims, whom they perceive as inferior, is the driving force behind this discriminatory conduct.

Additionally, it emailed Jawad Ali a death threat. Additionally, Reynolds and Chase threatened the

South Side Mosque's Muslim community with murder. Located on Chicago's South Side, the South Side Mosque is a site of worship and religious significance for Muslims. It is where the Muslim community congregates and prays. "Greetings, Muslim Scum: We intend to visit your mosque. It will be a slaughter of unprecedented proportions. Christchurch will not measure up. You may ask your God anything you desire. However, God has died". (Ahmed, 2022, 24).

The story above describes the death threat letters that were sent to the South Side Mosque over the winter break and postmarked in London. The sender vowed to carry out a massacre on the Muslim community at the South Side Mosque, specifically targeting them with this death threat. A bloodbath of a magnitude never previously witnessed, even greater than the Christchurch. Reynolds and Chase's animosity for Islam is the driving force behind this discriminatory conduct. Reynolds and Chase's discriminatory actions against the Muslim community extend beyond threatening to kill Jawad and the members of the South Side Mosque. The act of discrimination turned into a terrifying act of vandalism. "My parents usually put a lot of effort into keeping the windows clean, yet they were stained by red paint: Go Home, Fucking Terroritor 14/88 (Ahmed, 2022: p. 238).

One of the causes of overt religious discrimination is exclusion based on hatred for religion. The racist name and slurred word that Reynolds painted on the windows of a Muslim family's home—Safiya's—can be seen in the datum above. Reynolds engages in hate speech when he excludes people because of their religion. To express his anger toward Safiya's family as a Muslim who is always associated with terrorism, Reynolds paints and vandalizes the window of her home, urging them to "go home." This suggests that Safiya's family should leave the United States, and he calls them "fucking terrorists" in a slurred word. Boyle's thesis states that because Reynolds intentionally excluded a particular religious group—the Muslim community—this behavior qualifies as direct religious discrimination.

Reynolds and Chase's acts of outright religious discrimination against the Muslim community are still the result of hatred. Reynolds and Chase later work together once more to assault Safiya Mirza, a Muslim adolescent who is also Reynolds and Chase's classmate, who suffers from outright marginalization due to their dislike of religion. "Richard took my left hand in his. Hard. Hold on. Remember, I wanted to talk? His tone remained serene, almost charming". "Nice. He gripped my hand, twisting my wrist when I attempted to tear it away. "We can get a table and discuss inside." "No. This seems excellent to me". "The words "Let go of me" came out as a hoarse whisper, even though I wanted to scream them. I was no longer even able to detect my breathing. I had no sense of breath passing through my lungs. Up at me, Richard was still grinning. Grinning. My arm began to ache sharply as he twisted my fingers. (Ahmed 2022: 331).

Physical attacks are a direct form of religious exclusion. According to the story above, Reynolds is shown physically abusing Safiya during their encounter by snatching her hand without getting her permission. When Safiya attempted to draw her hand away, Reynolds' anger and hatred for Muslims turned the religious prejudice into a purposeful, violent physical attack, but Richard would not let her go. Rather, he twists her wrist and squeezes her hand. Richard becomes enraged when Safiya tries to attack him, and the altercation becomes violent.

"You filthy jerk! He let out a roar. When I looked over my shoulder, I watched him get to his feet and stagger slightly as he entered a pool of streetlamp light. His face was covered in blood, and anger filled his eyes. I made myself move even though my hand hurt and my legs felt like lead. I tried to flag down a car that was speeding down the street by jumping off the curb and waving my hands, but the driver put on the horn and swerved around me" (Ahmed, 2022, p. 332). The aforementioned information clarifies the circumstances behind Safiya and Richard's heated altercation, in which Safiya attempted to defend herself from Richard's assault. Richard uses Safiya a derogatory slur for the Muslim community during their altercation. People frequently use the

pejorative term "raghead" to make fun of Muslims because to their religious identifying markers, which include headdresses.

Like the turban, keffiyeh, and headscarf. This word has been used to disparage Muslims in general, even though not all of them wear headdresses. "Diaz: He contradicts himself. said that you hacked the school newspaper because you wanted to play with Safiya and believed it was a fun. You purchased the burner phones, he said. said that you choose the location for the body's disposal and— Richard: That damned liar! That pathetic bit of garbage. He succeeded! Everything! That raghead skittle never came into contact with me. I just drove". (Ahmed, 2022, 358–359).

Richard's interrogation of the police officer was another instance of his religious animosity turning into overt bigotry. Because of the attack on Safiya Mirza and the crime he perpetrated against Jawad Ali, Richard is interrogated at the police station. Officer Diaz tries to elicit information from Richard throughout the interrogation by claiming that Nate has already told him the specifics of the crime they committed. Richard becomes enraged by this remark and calls Safiya a "skittle raghead."

There are repercussions for actions. The impact of religious prejudice experienced by Muslim characters in the book will be examined in the second research problem. Discrimination based on religion has a cascading effect. First of all, in Hollow Fires (2022), non-Muslims have never treated Muslim characters in this way. Thus, the recent instances of religious prejudice that the Muslim protagonists in the book have encountered are the reason behind their activities.

The effects that resulted from this investigation revealed how Muslim characters in the book were portrayed and the reasons behind their religious prejudice. Those As a result of religious prejudice, the discriminated characters had a number of unpleasant situations.

According to Gladden (2014), bullying is defined as any unwanted aggressive behavior by a youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated

repeatedly or is very likely to be repeated. This definition was provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a national public health agency of the United States—on page 7. Bullying can occur online and in real-world settings. Bullying can include a variety of actions, such as intentionally isolating a certain individual to damage their reputation in society, verbally assaulting them by making or writing a hurtful remark, or physically harming them.

The impact of Jawad Ali's religious prejudice is seen in the following data. A member of Bethune High, Jawad's school, engages in bullying behavior as a result of religious prejudice. "In my actual life, someone had attached a shooting target—the sort that resembles a bull's-eye—to my locker on my first day back after I had been suspended for three days for the "bomb hoax." Then I heard someone shout at me. Others began shouting as well. Like the phrase "Bomb Boy." Boy Bomb. Boy Bomb. I felt as though I was dying within at that very moment". (Ahmed, 2022: 16).

Jawad was returning to school for the first time following a three-day suspension due to recent discriminatory behavior. One of his classmates at Bethune High begins to bully him. According to the story, Jawad's locker had a shooting target attached on it. He also brings up another bullying that he experiences. When someone at school loses it and begins shouting at him, the others follow suit. This is known as verbal bullying. "Bomb Boy." Boy Bomb. The term they use to harass Jawad is "Bomb Boy," a chant-like shout that made Jawad feel like he was going to die inside.

Jawad Ali was the victim of bullying, but the effects of prejudice do not end there. The following data illustrates yet another instance of verbal aggression: "I then went to my former locker. It was never redistributed. Perhaps they believe it to be haunted. It is empty (spoiler alert: it is). A shell. Another notice was duct-taped to my locker three days after my suspension ended: Go home, raghead! Even when I took it off, the tape's sticky residue remains. I was outlasted by that streak of crusty goo". (Ahmed, 2022, p. 18)

According to Jawad, he went to see his former locker at Bethune High. Neither his locker nor the sticky residue from the tape he attempted to remove have been transferred by the school board. The sticky remains of a placard that was duct-taped to his locker in an attempt to intimidate him. The sign that said, "Raghead, go home! as well as the verbal abuse that had Jawad being called derogatory names for Muslims. "I never got my jet pack back from the cops. Apparently, they demolished it to ensure it was not a bomb. I did not feel like dressing up anymore, therefore it was good that I did not have a costume for Halloween. After I returned from suspension, things eventually began to slow down a few weeks later. Although "Bomb Boy" persisted, most aspects of life were returning to normal. After winter break, my parents even suggested that I may return to Makerspace Club". (Ahmed, 2022: 21).

Additionally, following the suspension and a few weeks after the bomb accusation. Things about the latest accusation finally began to calm down. Jawad's parents even suggested that he would return to the makerspace club after they requested him to take a break from attending. But even though things eventually subsided, the bullying persisted, and he continued to be called "Bomb Boy" by others. Bullying may happen on digital platforms like computers and cellphones. This type of bullying is known as "cyberbullying," and it can happen via chat rooms, online forums, short message services, and other social media platforms where anyone can view, participate, and share. Sending, publishing, or disseminating hurtful, inaccurate, or disparaging material about another individual is known as cyberbullying.

Twitter users who share their unfavorable opinions on Jawad and Muslims as members of the Muslim community are engaging in cyberbullying. They posted anti-Muslim messages, as shown in the Twitter transcript below:

"I was furious when I browsed Twitter seeking Jawad news and instead came across vicious, anti-Muslim posts that were encouraged by a racist, right-wing radio host: A deceased Muslim is the only decent one. #JWad #bombboy ~That jerk had his just desserts. #JWad #NoShariaLaw

#bombboy #Bombboy orchestrated his own "kidnapping" in order to receive the bounty. Is #JWad Ready to Aim Fire? #bombboy [Photo of Jawad in a target]..You will need to appear far more redeemed if you want me to believe in your Redeemer. #bombboy". (Ahmed 2022: 147-148) Safiya discovered those vile and anti-Muslim messages regarding Jawad Ali and the Muslim community while she was browsing Twitter for news on Jawad Ali. Following Jawad's death and discovery, the mass media also reported on the murder, conspiracy websites, and societal ideas that were gaining traction. One such platform was Twitter. Safiya discovered the tweets that were used for the cyberbullying. As part of the bullying agenda, Twitter users created a conspiracy theory about Jawad's case, accusing him of fabricating his absence and calling him a racist term.

The unfavorable treatment of Muslim characters is another instance of conduct that recurs as a result of religious prejudice. The act of treating someone horribly is known as negative treatment. As the character, Jawad's image has apparently been damaged by religious discrimination, and society treats him and those around him horribly. The narrative that follows illustrates Jawad Ali's unfavorable treatment: "We kept being referred to as Iraqis in the news reports. Eye-rack-eez. They put it that way. As if we were not even Americans. For example, neither my parents nor I had U.S. passports. As if my mother had not guarded them like she would have. However, the reporters did not want to report that story. This was: IRAQI REFUGEES' CHILD DETAINED FOR BOMB HOAX...In light of the alleged bomb threat, the Illinois State Senator questions lax naturalization policies. "POLICE: IRAQI IMMIGRANT STUDENT WITH A RECORD OF TRUANCY ARRESTED FOR HOAX BOMB" (Ahmed, 2022, p. 16)

It is evident from the data that Jawad Ali is subjected to unfavorable treatment as a result of the recent hate speech accusation of terrorism. News reports that repeatedly refer to the Alis as Iraqis or derisively call them "Eye-rack-eez" are examples of hate speech. Furthermore, despite the fact that the Alis are Americans, the mass

media refused to acknowledge this fact in the title of the news report.

It was another instance of hate speech when a state senator from Illinois questioned the laws around citizenship. Americans will never be linked to terrorism, but Muslims and Iraqis will, according to these treatments, which shows how hostile Muslims are. Following the recent incidents of religious bigotry at her mosque and the South Side Mosque, Safiya discusses in the article the consequences that have resulted. Neglect at the hands of law enforcement and social exclusion are the results. No one wanted us to act like it was just another December. Fa fa, la, la. Organize the rooms. Embrace the egg-nog. Turn on the Christmas tree ornament television show. A typical winter vacation—for Muslims whose mosque had received word of an impending mass murder. Probably not much to see there. On December 16th, in London, the message was stamped. London is the city. For the life of them, why would any Englishman choose to harm a little mosque in Chicago's South Side? How were they even aware that we were here? In general, the police department was handling the letter like a practical joke, but after the community pressed for it, they granted us more patrols at Jummah". (Ahmed, 2022: 24-25)

Safiya tells the story of how society handles the possibility of a massacre against the South Side Mosque's Muslim congregation. By not taking the prospect of a massacre seriously, society marginalizes Muslim congregations. The Muslim community was being urged to behave normally, as if it were any other day. By handling the death threat as a joke letter, the police are marginalizing the Muslim community. They are unwilling to provide a thorough assessment and preventative measures. The police only increase patrols during Jummah in response to pressure from the Muslim community.

It is evident from Safiya's story that Jawad Ali was treated negatively. In the story, Safiya highlights some of the hate speech and other unfavorable treatment that Jawad receives from the media by spreading false information about his background. "Even though he was underage, the fake news websites continued to delve into his

background—what sort of "past" can a fourteen-year-old child have? News outlets manipulated and spliced the video to make it appear as though he was "sort of a loner," that he had "missed a lot of school in eighth grade," and that he and his parents had taken "a vacation to Arabia or something." They also got a few other classmates who had attended middle school with him on record claiming suspicious. displayed images of Jawad using the chyron TERRORIST FIST JAB to give another brown child a fist bump". (Ahmed, 2022: 47).

It is evident from the above statistic how worried Safiya is about Jawad's predicament. Through their investigation into Jawad's past and interviews with his old classmates, the media deliberately spread false information about his background. The material provided by Jawad's old classmates was deliberately "edited and spliced" by the media to make their claims on Jawad's previous life appear dubious. In addition, to support the terrorist accusation against Jawad, the media created a conspiracy theory by quoting a photo of Jawad fist-bumping another brown child as a "terrorist fist jab." "After my arrest, I returned to school and was placed in a new Honors English class. Since I did not have to see my former English instructor every day, I was okay with it. She turned around and left the first time she spotted me in the hallway after I returned. I suppose she also did not want to cope with me. My parents expressed to the principal their belief that the instructor had to offer me an apology for her actions. She did not look regretful, and she did not offer an apology". (Ahmed, 2022: 66).

The data above reveals the harsh treatment that Patricia Jansen, Jawad's former Honors English instructor, provides toward Jawad. Marginalization was the terrible abuse that Jansen inflicted. It demonstrates that Jawad was transferred to a separate Honors English class during the period after his arrest. Jawad's predicament at the moment was Jansen's fault. She should actually apologize to him for the disaster she created by calling Jawad a terrorist. By deliberately changing his class and avoiding any meetings with Jawad, Jansen decides to

disregard Jawad's existence at school rather than provide an apology.

Jawad also endured terrible treatment when the principal of Bethune High School confronted him. The following data shows the activity: "When I returned to school after being suspended for the jet pack, I attempted to utilize that statement, but the principal dragged me into his office. . . Do you realize how much trouble you have caused, young man? What are your own thoughts? Me: [whispering, gazing at the floor] Is hindsight always right? When I stated that, he looked down at me with a furious grimace and crossed his arms in front of his chest. I attempted to make myself as tiny as possible by shrinking back. Unless I really wanted to be, I was invisible most of the time. When all I wanted to do was hide, it seemed like everyone was finally taking notice of me". (Ahmed, 2022, 141).

The story above makes it clear that as soon as Jawad's suspension expired, the principal of Bethune High violently dragged him into his office, assaulting him. As the principal of the school, he accused Jawad of deliberately creating turmoil rather than embracing him and attempting to assist him reintegrate into the school in light of the changing circumstances following the bomb charge. He angrily abuses Jawad and accuses him of causing the jet pack mishap, as evidenced by the phrase "understand the commotion you have made." Jawad's principal still believes that Jawad is to blame for the accident, even though the police have previously exonerated him of the charge.

Furthermore, it was not just Jawad who experienced the direct effects of religious prejudice and its consequences. Nonetheless, Jawad's parents, Suleyman and Dina Ali, experienced both the prejudice and its effects.

"Suleyman: I did receive an odd text this morning, but unlike the previous texts, it did not include the private number. It made no mention of Jawad and was not a ransom".

"Usman: Have you informed the authorities?"

"Suleyman: Definitely. I also attempted to contact the number. However, all that was shown was the message, "This number is no longer in service".

“Dina: That message about dead gods is so odd. Superman, too? There have also been spoof calls to the shop. referring to Jawad as Bomb Boy and saying horrible things about him. and worse things. Hateful, horrible things”. (Ahmed, 2022: 161).

Furthermore, Suleyman and Dina disclose that because of the religious persecution their family has endured, they have been receiving terrible treatment from strangers.

They claim to have received texts from strangers discussing dead gods and referencing White racists throughout their encounter with Usman. In addition to texting, Dina continues, the business they operate receives angry prank calls from strangers who say dreadful things about Jawad and other things that are ugly and disgusting.

The last and most significant consequence of Jawad Ali's religious prejudice is the actions of the police officers. When Safiya discovers Jawad's dead body, she blames the police officer for the harsh response. Neglecting Jawad's missing case has the detrimental impact of marginalizing him. “As they carefully removed the body, I stood and edged closer to the embankment. I had numb limbs. My mind was obliterated, blank. The yellow crime-scene tape allowed me to go as near as I could. A police officer protested, "I had already stomped on the murder scene." I wanted to shout, but the police's disregard for the crime is the only reason I went near the area. An Iraqi, a refugee, or a missing Muslim youngster did not warrant many news cycles. The complete inquiry was not worth it. Jawad was now deceased. Of course, they did not tell me that it was him. Something about identifying him and alerting his parents. They spoke over me as if I were not there. I had the impression that I wasn't”. (Ahmed, 2022: 269-270).

Safiya describes the events where she discovered Jawad's lifeless body in the narrative above. She was taken aback. She is stunned to discover Jawad's lifeless corpse and to learn that the police were ignoring him because he is an Iraqi, Muslim, and immigrant who has been labeled a "terrorist." Jawad's missing case was handled horribly by the police, who prejudiced against

him and failed to do a thorough investigation until Jawad was discovered dead in a murder case.

Conclusion

The researchers draw a conclusion from the findings of the investigation. In line with this, the researcher offers recommendations for further study on religious prejudice. Based on the aforementioned research, the study's findings suggest that Samira Ahmed's *Hollow Fires* (2022) depicts religious prejudice. This study primarily identifies one kind and two causes of religious prejudice. One instance of overt religious prejudice is the way it is portrayed. Both religious prejudice and religious hate are the root causes of the direct discrimination. The stereotypical behaviors that Westerners have developed toward Muslims as a result of historical incidents involving Muslims, carried out by the school board, police officers, and the media, constitute religious prejudice. In the meanwhile, Richard Reynolds and Nate Chase intentionally discriminated against Muslims in their novels because of their disdain for them.

The novel's depiction of the effects of religious discrimination against Muslim characters stems from the prejudice that these characters faced as Muslims and the discrimination they experienced from others which are called racism and Islamophobia. Importantly, the effects manifest as bullying and the detrimental effects of exclusion. Bullying encompasses a variety of behaviors, including verbal abuse by creating or publishing a written statement, physical violence by physically harming someone, and insulting remarks and purposefully exclude a certain person in order to damage someone's reputation in the community. Furthermore, Muslims are seen negatively by Westerners, who associate them with terrorism, crime, and violence. Muslim characters in the book were harmed by these preconceived notions and anti-Muslim sentiment, particularly Jawad, his family, and the Muslim community at The South Side Mosque. Jawad and the Muslim community were harassed by his classmates and the wider public due to discriminatory practices. Apart from that, Jawad,

his family, and Muslims were mistreated by the police, the school board at Bethune High, and the general public.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, T. (2012). The symbiotic relationship between Islamophobia and radicalization. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 5(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2012.723448>
- Abbas, T. (2020). Islamophobia as racialised biopolitics in the United Kingdom. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 46(5), 497–511.
- Acim, R. (2019). Islamophobia, racism and the vilification of the Muslim diaspora. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 5(1), 26–44.
<http://www.islamic-foundation.org.uk/Resources/SeenandNotHeard-Complete.pdf>
- Ahmed, S., & Matthes, J. (2017). Media representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A meta-analysis. *International Communication Gazette*, 79(3), 219–244.
- Ahmed, S., Raza, S. A., & Yasmin, M. (2020). Islam's racism and discrimination in "My Name is Khan" movie. *Textura Journal*, 63–71.
- Al-Azami, S. (2021). Language of islamophobia in right-wing British newspapers. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 20(4), 159–172.
- Alizai, H. (2020). Impact of Islamophobia on post-secondary Muslim students attending Ontario universities. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 24(3), 357–374.
- Allen, C. (2010). *Islamophobia*. Ashgate.
- Allen, C., & Nielsen, J. (2002). *Summary report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001*. European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.
http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/199-Synthesis-report_en.pdf
- Amin, A. (2010). The remainders of race. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 27(1), 1–23.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409350361>
- Anderson, L. (2015). Countering Islamophobic media representations: The potential role of peace journalism. *Global Media and Communication*, 11(3), 255–270.
- Baumgartl, B., & Favell, A. (1995). *New xenophobia in Europe*. Kluwer Law International.
- BBC. (2014). Miliband promises new immigration laws if he wins election.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-29742865>
- Benhabib, S. (1992). *Situating the self: Gender, community and postmodernism in contemporary ethics*. Routledge.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor Books.
- Bleich, E. (2012). Defining and researching Islamophobia. *Review of Middle East Studies*, 46(2), 180–189.
- Bouma, G. D. (2011). Islamophobia as a constraint to world peace: The case of Australia. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 22(4), 433–441.
- Cheng, J. E. (2015). Islamophobia, Muslimophobia or racism? Parliamentary discourses on Islam and Muslims in debates on the minaret ban in Switzerland. *Discourse & Society*, 26(5), 562–586.
- Ekman, M. (2015). Online Islamophobia and the politics of fear: Manufacturing the green scare. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(11), 1986–2002.
- Elahi, F., & Khan, O. (2017). *Islamophobia: Still a challenge for us all*. Runnymede Trust.
- Esposito, J. L., & Kalin, I. (2011). *Islamophobia: The challenge of pluralism in the 21st century*. Oxford University Press.
- Halliday, F. (1996). *Islam and the myth of confrontation: Religion and politics in the Middle East*. I.B. Tauris.
- Halliday, F. (1999). 'Islamophobia' reconsidered. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22(5), 892–902.
- Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from women's lives*. Cornell University Press.

- Jaber, N. (2022). Islamophobia: Definition, history, and aspects. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 5(2), 327-338. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v5i2.1991>
- Kaminski, J. (2014). The Islamophobia industry, hate, and its impact on Muslim immigrants and OIC state development. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 2(2), 157-176.
- Kassimeris, G., & Jackson, L. (2012). British Muslims and the discourses of dysfunction: Community cohesion and counterterrorism in the West Midlands. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 5(2), 179-196.
- Kunst, J. R., Sam, D. L., & Ulleberg, P. (2013). Perceived islamophobia: Scale development and validation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37(2), 225-237.
- Lathion, S. (2015). Fight islamophobia in Europe? Less Islam and Muslims and more citizenship. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 26(2), 133-144.
- Porter, P. (2015). *The global village myth: Distance, war, and the limits of power*. Georgetown University Press.
- strategies and politics of misrepresentation. *Religion, State & Society*, 48(1), 22-37.
- Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. Oxford University Press.
- Richardson, R. (2012). Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism – or what? – Concepts and terms revisited. *Instead*.
- Runnymede Trust. (1997). *Islamophobia: A challenge for us all*. Runnymede Trust.
- Saeed, A. (2007a). Media, racism and Islamophobia: The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media. *Sociology Compass*, 1(2), 433-462.
- Saeed, A. (2011a). 9/11 and the increase in racism and Islamophobia: A personal reflection. *Radical History Review*, 2011(111), 210-215.
- Sayyid, S., & Vakil, A. (2011). *Thinking through Islamophobia: Global perspectives*. Hurst.
- Sharifi, M., Ansari, N., & Asadollahzadeh, M. (2017). A critical discourse analytic approach to discursive construction of Islam in Western talk shows: The case of CNN talk shows. *International Communication Gazette*, 79(1), 45-63.
- Shukri, S. F. M. (2019). The perception of Indonesian youths toward islamophobia: An exploratory study. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 5(1), 61-75.
- Smith, S. J. (2020). Challenging Islamophobia in Canada: Non-Muslim social workers as allies with the Muslim community. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work*, 39(1), 27-46.
- Solomos, J. (2003). *Race and racism in Britain* (3rd ed.). Palgrave.
- Stein, A., & Salime, Z. (2015). Manufacturing Islamophobia: Rightwing and the paranoid style. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 3(1), 1-19.
- Strabac, Z., & Listhaug, O. (2008). Anti-Muslim prejudice in Europe: A multilevel analysis of survey data from 30 countries. *Social Science Research*, 37(1), 268-286.
- Sumra, A. ul H. (2020). Muslims and Islam in Indian English press: Exploring the Islamophobic discourse. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 5(2), 226-237.
- Taras, R. (2012). *Xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Törnberg, A., & Törnberg, P. (2016). Muslims in social media discourse: Combining topic modeling and critical discourse analysis. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 13, 132-142.
- Trein, L. (2018). Governing the fear of Islam: Thinking Islamophobia through the politics of secular affect in historical debate. *ReOrient*, 4(1), 44-58.
- Trust, R. (1997). *Islamophobia: A challenge for us all*. Runnymede Trust.
- Waikar, P. (2018a). Reading islamophobia in hegemonic neoliberalism through a discourse analysis of donald trump's narratives. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 38(2), 153-178.

- Waikar, P. (2018b). Reading islamophobia in hindutva: An analysis of Narendra Modi's political discourse. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 4(2), 161-180.
- Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 63-94). Sage.
- Yasmin, M., Masso, I. C., Bukhari, N. H., & Aboubakar, M. (2019). Thespians in print: Gender portrayal in Pakistani English print media. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2019.1661647>
- Yılmaz, A., & Geylani, D. (2021). Post truth (Hakikat Sonrası), global siyaset ve Türkiye: Metodolojik bir yaklaşım. In A. Yılmaz & İ. Bağcı (Eds.), *Teoriden pratiğe Türkiye siyaseti* (pp. 15-51). Liberte Yayın Grubu.
- Zempi, I., & Awan, I. (2017). Doing 'dangerous' autoethnography on Islamophobic victimization. *Ethnography*, 18(3), 367-386.

