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Khadra's Fight for her Hyphenated Identity in Mohja Kahf's "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" (2006)

كفاح خضرة من أجل ازدواجية الهوية في رواية " فتاة الوشاح البرتقالي المحمر " للكاتبة مهجة كهف *(2006) The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

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Abstract

This paper highlights the plight of the Arab Muslim American Woman facing estrangement both in the American society and in her Muslim community in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). More precisely, it explores the American Muslim woman's hyphenated identity through the female protagonist Khadra who grapples with her identity owing to Arab Muslims' and Americans' fixed notions of cultural, national, and religious identities. My analysis traces the protagonist's various forms of resistance to the essentialized perception of "Arabness" and "Americaness". It is by rejecting and denouncing the conventional Muslim limited constructions and refuting the Eurocentric monolithic clichés about Muslim women that the writer inserts Arab hijabi women's individualism, hyphenated or pluralistic identity, and belongingness to the US society. This paper, thus, maintains that *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* erodes and replaces the homogenizing formulations by multicultural, trans-ethnic, and transnational perceptions of identity.

Key Words

Arabness; Americanness; Arab Muslim women; hyphenated identity; clichés.

الملخص

تبرز هذه الورقة الوضعية الصعبة للمرأة العربية المسلمة التي تواجه الاغتراب في كل من المجتمع الأمريكي والمجتمع المسلم في رواية "فتاة الوشاح البرتقالي المحمر" *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (*2006*). وبتعبير أدق، فهي تسلط الضوء و تحلل الهوية المزدوجة للمرأة المسلمة الأمريكية من خلال شخصية بطلة الرواية خضرة التي تتصارع مع هويتها بسبب المفاهيم الثابتة للعرب المسلمين والأمريكيين والمتعلقة بالهوية الثقافية و الوطنية والدينية. يبين تحليلنا الأشكال المتنوعة لمقاومة خضرة للتصور الجوهراني "للعروبة" و "الأمركة". من خلال رفض وإدانة التصورات الإسلامية الراديكالية المحدودة ودحض الأكليشيهات العقيمة للمنظور الأوروبي حول المرأة المسلمة المتحجبة، تبين الكاتبة تميز و خصوصية المرأة العربية المتحجبة ،هويتها المزدوجة، و كذا انتماءها للمجتمع الأمريكي. وعليه، فإن هذه المقالة تؤكد أن " فتاة الوشاح البرتقالي المحمر" تفكك الصياغات التنميطية المتعلقة بالهوية و تستبدلها بمنظور التعددية الثقافية والإثنية و الوطنية العابرة للحدود .

الكلمات المفتاحية

العروبة ; الأمركة; المرأة العربية المسلمة ; الهوية المزدوجة ;الأكليشيهات.

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Introduction

A conspicuous growing body of research has flourished during the twentieth century, especially within migration studies and ethnic literature, about the notion of the stranger.[1] The latter is mainly due to the fact that identity formation is a complex process that entails the merger of historical, social, economic, and ethnic forces as well as human agency. More modern studies show that the state of strangeness can refer even to marginalized people or minorities within a particular community. In the USA, the issue becomes striking especially as far as Muslims are concerned. In a country that is often considered as a melting pot and where massive inclusive policies[2] are often used, Muslims still suffer from estrangement. Being neither mainstream Arabs nor mainstream Americans, non-belonging and alienation become the norm for Arab Muslims in the States. More precisely, Muslim women suffer from a more ubiquitous estrangement because of the veil which is often considered as a marker of their Islam and of their identity. Muslim women seem to be subject to overwhelming forms of pigeonholing and segregation. While in the USA and according to most Westerners, Hijabis[3] are often seen as victims/perpetrator or figures of risk, in Muslim communities they are often modeled and expected to fit in the ideal conventional image of the Muslim woman. They, often, engage in a series of negotiations in the face of the American reductive stereotypes as well as their Muslim communities' strict configurations of their identities.

This article, thus, highlights the dilemma of the Muslim woman, through the protagonist Khadra, facing estrangement both in the American society and in her Muslim community in the novel of Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). Khadra grapples with her identity owing to Arab Muslims' and Americans' fixed notions of cultural, national, and religious identities. It is by rejecting and denouncing the conventional and traditional Muslim limited constructions and refuting the Eurocentric clichés about Muslim women that the writer inserts hijabi women's individualism, hyphenated identity, and belongingness to the US society.

1.Khadra in the Indiana Muslim Community: Constant Rejection and Isolation vs. Perseverance to Secure Islamic Identity and Prevent Assimilation

The opening word in the novel "liar" is very significant in the way it encapsulates Khadra's feeling about the welcome sign in the entrance of Indiana- a preponderantly white community. Khadra expresses her discomfort, her sense of estrangement, and the constant rejection she faces as an Arab Muslim in Indiana. Because of that isolation, many Muslims in the novel created their own community and their own Dawah Center- a center to teach Muslims Islamic principles. And though they thought that their tightly-knit community will secure their identity and prevent assimilation, it did foster and widen the gap between the Muslims representing the "us" and Americans standing for the "others"[4].

This gap was intentional for the Muslims of Indiana and of the Dawah center. In that, one of the programs in the Dawah center in Indiana was "Preserving Our Islamic Identity in the Midwest". The latter meant that for the Muslims in Indiana community, the religious identity surpasses any ethnic or national belonging (Ameri,2012,p.161). Muslims in Indiana in general and Khadra's parents in particular are but an example of the many Arab immigrants in America who were eager to practice their "non-American" religion privately, turn to each other for communal connections, and form small associations for fellowship (McCould, 2003,p. 161).

2.The Shamy Family as *Being in* and not *of* the American Community

While normally hyphenated communities represent rhyzomatic identities just like the "hyphen representing the compromise" in their names (Nicholls, 2014, p.111), the Shamy family, Khadra's family, reject any state of in-betweenness or affinity with their American surrounding. The Shamys' attempts to seclude themselves mirror what Voicu explains as follows: "all collective/global identity (clan, nation, region, ethnic group) identifies its-self by denying the other, demarcates inside from outside, stretches a distance between 'us' and 'them'" (2014,p. 87). In the same vein and after realizing that it is impossible to create the ideal of one integrated *Ummah* [5]without class and racial boundaries due to the American social norms and regulations, many Muslim immigrants strive to preserve their homelands' culture despite the overwhelming pressures of conformity and assimilation (McCloud, 2003,p. 164-65). In sum, they want to build an "Islamopolis, a city where Muslims could live according to Islamic laws and culture within the United States" (Khan, 2003,p. 177).

As such, it is no surprise that Khadra's sense of estrangement starts with her family. Her complex identity as an Arab American is undermined by her parents' teachings. They strived to ensure their children's belonging as *being in* and not *of* the American community. Khadra's parents are "Muslim isolationists"[6], par excellence, in the way they see "*kufr*"[7] everywhere in the American mindset and life style (Khan, 2003,p. 190). For the Shamys, *being in* and *not of* is the unique way to preserve their children's religion and good conduct and prevent them from being tarnished by the American excessive individualism, solipsism, freedom and hedonism.

According to the Shamys,

> The Americans were the white people who surrounded them, a crashing sea of unbelief in which the Dawah Center bobbed, a brave boat.…Generally speaking, Americans cussed, smoke, and drank, and the Shamys had it on good authority that a fair number of them used drugs. Americans dated and fornicated and committed adultery. They had broken families and lots of divorces. Americans were not generous or hospitable like Uncle Abdulla and Aunt Fatma…. Americans believed the individual was more important than

> the family, and money was more important than anything.… All in all, Americans led shallow, wasteful, materialistic lives. Islam could solve many of their social ills, if they but knew.(Kahf, 2006,p. 67-68)

For the Shamys, being a Muslim can never correspond to being an American. Thus, they instill in Khadra and her brother Eyad values of Islam, on the one hand, and values of separatism, on the other rendering any sort of belonging to the American society intolerable even impossible. They reject any sort of assimilation even as "a social process that occurs spontaneously and often unintendedly in the course of interaction between majority and minority groups" (Alba and Nee,1997,p. 827). Due to the numerous practices in the West that are deemed unethical according to Islamic beliefs, many Muslim immigrants are distressed about their children's morality in the American society. For the Shamys, embracing values of the American culture equals relinquishing Islam and being sullied. When Khadra and Eyad once came back home late, their parents became more terrified when they saw their children dirty. Because of her children's dirt, Ibtehaj, Khadra's mother, accentuates the difference between the Shamys and the Americans while cleaning them and stating "We are not Americans" (Kahf,2006,p. 67).

3.Structuring Identity According to Spatiality for Khadra as a Bicultural Individual

Khadra often thinks that if she was living in a Muslim Arab country, she would have never undergone this estrangement and sense of loss. As a bicultural individual, Khadra wishes to live in a Muslim country thinking that it is there where she belongs. Her conviction is grounded in what Voicu explains as "structuring of identities" according to "spatiality" (2014,p. 592). In other words, hybridity and/or biculturalism are often linked to space as a major marker for shaping and safeguarding individuals' identities. Bicultural individuals are often nostalgic about their homelands due to the conspicuous displacement they feel in their host countries. However, Khadra does not only suffer from non-belonging in America, but she also suffers from estrangement in Saudi Arabia the land she thought she belongs to as a Muslim. Initially, Khadra thought that Saudi Arabia is "*someplace where* we really belong. It's the land of the Prophet. The land of all Muslims" (Kahf, 2006,p.159). She is inherently delighted with the thought that she will finally belong to the majority where there is no rivalry and antagonism between the "us" and the "them".

Once in Saudi Arabia, Khadra is taken by her cousin Afaaf to a mixed party. And because of her accent, one of her cousin's friends asked her "What kind of Arab?" Khadra answers, "The Muslim kind". "'I mean, what Arab country? I can't tell from your accent.' … 'Syria.' 'Ohhh . . . Syria, huh,' he grinned. 'Syrian girls have a reputation'" (Kahf,2006,p. 176). Having Khadra answering "the Muslim kind" accentuates her allegiance to her religious identity on the one hand, and her rejection to be categorized in a monolithic identity or again belong to a minority. Interestingly enough, this conversation marks khadra's smashing image about Muslims as being pure, tolerant, and friendly. The segregational attitude of her

cousin's friend demonstrates that, unlike her parents' teachings, even Muslims can "other" and have biased perceptions about other Muslims. Surprisingly enough, another friend wonders if Khadra is really American because she does not look like one (Kahf,2006,p. 174). Ironically, considering Khadra as a non-American reminds her of her "othering" by the Americans. Because of her hybrid status, Khadra finds herself unfitting in both the Muslim and American contexts.

4.Othering in Saudi Arabia and Khadra's Burgeoning Understanding

Owing to being an American, all the Saudi youths in the party mock what they see as Khadra's exaggerated pious conduct and one even tries to molest her. Shocked by the Saudi's limited and deformed mindset as well as her parents' erroneous teachings about Muslims, Khadra comes to understand that Muslims can be immoral and filthy just like Americans. In that, she tells Afaaf*:"'I hate you—you're a FILTHY girl, with FILTHY friends—you take me home—you take me home RIGHT NOW. You—you—you goddamn bitch.*"' (Kahf,2006,p. 178). In fact, it is the first stance where Khadra comes to understand that neither being a Muslim means perfection nor being an American equals immorality, that dirt has nothing to do with being American, that the hijabi taking the example of Afaaf is not always inherently pure, and that her parents have been indoctrinating them. It is also the first time that she looks forwards going back home to Indiana with the "sweet relief of her own clean bed awaited her there—and only there, of all the earth" (Kahf,2006,p.179). As a Muslim Arab American woman and because of her constant sense of displacement in relation to both Arab Muslim and American communities, Khadra realizes that it is not about the geographic location but the whole issue is due to the ideologies of people belonging to both cultures. The statement "she had never felt so far from home" does not only mark Khadra's altering liaison with Muslims and America (Kahf, 2006,p.177), but most importantly marks her burgeoning understanding of home. Khadra comes to comprehend that home lies within; it is not about one's ethnic, racial or religious affiliation but about one's harmony with him/her self.

5. Khadra's Marriage Reflecting the Conflict between the Western Vision about Islam and Women vs. The Patriarchal Islamic Communities

After her return to Indiana, Khadra got a suitor- Juma from Kuwait. Both Khadra and Juma thought that they found what they needed in each other. Khadra wished to be with a good Muslim who was born and lived in a Muslim country, and Juma wanted a wife like Khadra who "had not lost her Arab identity despite being raised entirely in America" (Kahf, 2006,p. 201). Khadra "fit[s] the profile of the wife Juma always knew he'd have. An observant Muslim, of course, but also a modern, educated woman, not old-fashioned and boring" (Kahf,201,p.222).

After their marriage, however, the idealistic image they had about each other shattered. For Juma, khadra was not the conventional Arab girl and wife he wanted.

"He hadn't expected her to be doing things that would embarrass him. If he'd wanted to have to explain every limit of proper behavior, he'd have married an American" (Kahf, 2006,p. 227-28). He is troubled by Khadra's convictions about her right and freedom of riding a bicycle, participating in academic and social activism, or the need to share and help her in the domestic tasks. Eventually, Khadra recognized that Juma was not pious as she thought, but he was conventional and an ardent adherer to the patriarchal system he was raised in. "But it wasn't God's rulings. It was just his own sensibilities, the way he'd been raised in Kuwait. So why was he bringing God into it?", Khadra maintains (Kahf, 2006,p. 229). Juma's attitude towards Khadra is but an example of a larger androcentric system where gender roles are based on sexism, yet utilizes religious grounds to back up its legitimization (Sorgun,2011,p.139). From the same perspective, Fatima Mernissi explains:

> If women's rights are problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite. The elite fraction is trying to convince us that their egotistic, highly subjective, and mediocre view of culture and society has a sacred basis. (1991,p. ix)

Furthermore, Khadra's use of the Quran to defend herself and correct her husband's vision does not only refute the Eurocentric feminist idea that Islam is oppressive and Muslim women as passive victims, but also asserts the fact that Khadra can be said to be an Islamic feminist. Khadra is an Islamic feminist in the way, just like her husband who relies on religion to rationalize his superiority and his wife's necessary obedience, she uses the Quran to prove that Islam is a religion that has always honored women and considered them companions and not servants of men. "If there is one thing that the women and men . . . can be sure of, it is that Islam was not sent from heaven to foster egotism . . . It came to achieve higher spiritual goals and equality for all" (Mernissi, 1991,p. ix).

Khadra's unconventional attitude towards marriage, her abortion, and asking for divorce stirs Juma's wrath and his "othering" attitude towards Khadra as a woman growing up in America. In that, the narrator explains:

> Juma's pride was deeply offended by khulu' [a wife-initiated divorce]. She, repudiates him? He'd never even heard of it. Was Khadra making it up? No matter how many courses with sheikhs she may have taken, she was just a girl in Juma's eyes, a girl who'd grown up in America, to boot, and so couldn't possibly be trusted when it came to shariah matters. (Kahf, 2006,p. 251)

Khadra's decision to initiate divorce disrupts the Western beliefs about Muslim women as victims lacking all sorts of freedom and rights. According to John L. Esposito, "the status of women in Muslim countries has long been looked to as evidence of Islam's oppression in matters ranging from the freedom to dress as they please to legal rights in divorce. The true picture of women in Islam is far more complex" (2002,p.89). Interestingly, Khadra's initiated divorce undermines the myopic depiction of Islam as a fundamentalist religion that oppresses women, and the reductionist vision of Western feminists about Muslim women resulting in their

constant "othering" in Western societies. Furthermore, her divorce and abortion are symbolic for her revulsion about her community and desire to terminate an entire phase of her life governed by her surrounding. She wanted to "abort the Dawah Center and its entire community. Its trim-bearded uncles in middle-management suits, its aunties fussing over her headscarf and her ovaries, its snotty Muslim children competing for brownie points with God" (Kahf, 2006,p. 262).

The entire situation between Khadra and her husband reflects the conflict between the Western image about Islam and women as well as the patriarchal Islamic communities and women on the other hand. Though in certain Islamic societies women are subject to noticeable domination and subjection, Western commentators belabor that point on Islamophobic premises adding that Muslim women are the very perpetrators of their own oppression. What the Western gaze ignores, however, is that the percepts of Islam are not fully respected and are replaced by conservative androcentric regulations. More importantly, and contrary to the Western beliefs, the legacy of women's empowerment is inherently rooted in Islamic teachings. The latter accentuates the fact that Muslim women are in no need of importing Western feminism but rather in need of ijtihad [8]and perseverance in implementing true Islam (Daniels, 2015,p.19).

6.Khadra's Strife for "Ijtihad" rather than Western Feminism

During her marriage and through her Islamic feminism, Khadra again strives to cast away the reductive images about the Muslim Arab woman as a wife. Though her marriage was more a deception, the whole experience enables Khadra to question the Islamic teachings she has received in the Dawah center, ponder about the traditional practices that affect implementing Islam, and approach her hyphenated identity. Consequently, she decides to go to Syria to "dig out the core principles from underneath all the customs that may have accrued around them" (Kahf, 2006,p.96). Furthermore, Khadra thought that: "It was not vain-glorious to have a self. It was not the same as selfish individualism, no. You have to have a self to even start on a journey to God. To cultivate your *nafs* whom God invites to enter the Garden at the end of Surat al-Fajr" (Kahf, 2006,p.248).

7. Khadra's Veiling, Unveiling, and Ultimate Re-veiling: a Nascent Critical Mind and a Religious Revelation

Ethnic Americans' hyphenated identity commonly connotes hybridity, dismissal of homogenous monolithic identities, and emphasis on multiple identities. This idea is not really the case of Arab Muslim Americans in general and Arab Muslim American women in particular due to the rationalized binary discourse. They are in fact subject to essentialized notions of a unified national identity where any display of difference is considered to be a deviation from the norm (Singh and Schmidt, 2002,p. 23). It is especially after America's war on terrorism that Muslim Arab Americans and Muslim women become highly stigmatized according to the binaries of "good/evil, West/Islam, us/them" (Moallem,2014,p.300). And because of

Americans' constant hostility and stigmatization, Arab Muslim Americans' self-identification and self-distinction becomes pertinent.

It is the case of the khadra's veil and her non-Muslim surrounding. In school, she was often ridiculed and harassed because of her veil[9]- the marker of her difference and non-Americanism. A group of boys even removed Khadra's veil from her head- an act that aims at removing that sign of difference and strangeness because, according to Gottschalk and Greenberg, "Islam and Muslims have come to inherently evoke suspicion and fear on the part of many" (2008, p 4). Though the act of removing Khadra's veil may be considered as a simple childish act, it reflects the rooted "othering" of Muslims in the USA based on accentuating differences and generating hatred and conflict (Samiei,2010,p.1115). This applies to Khadra too. When hearing that her parents will apply for citizenship, she is wrathed.

> To her, taking citizenship felt like giving up, giving in. After all she'd been through at school, defending her identity against the jeering kids who vaunted America's superiority as the clincher put-down to everything she said, everything she was. Wasn't she supposed to be an Islamic warrior woman, a Nusayba, a Sumaya, an Um Salamah in exile, by the waters dark, of Babylon? (Kahf, 2006,p. 141)

Khadra's reasoning reflects the reciprocal stereotyping and hatred between Muslims and Americans.

In fact, Khadra's veiling, unveiling, and ultimate re-veiling is not a mere crisis of faith, but rather a confirmation of a nascent critical mind and most importantly a religious revelation. Without Hijab and in

> The first few days without her lifelong armor she felt wobbly, like a child on new legs. Her body felt off-balance, carried differently. Gone was the flutter about her, the flutter and sweep of fabric that was so comforting and familiar. Having waist and legs encircled now, being compactly outlined by clothing that fit to the line of her body-that defined her body, instead of giving it freedom and space like hijab did-was all so new. At first she felt like a butterfly pinned in a glass case, splayed out and exposed. (Kahf, 2006,p.310-11)

Khadra thought that unveiling would probably strengthen her sense of Americanness, freedom, and liberation from the conventional religious regulations of her Muslim community. Eventually, she comes to understand that veiling is neither a means of belonging to the American society nor a sign of oppression, but the veil is part of her own self and reflects her personal conviction. For Khadra, "hijab had been her comrade through many years. Her body would not forget its caress. Her loose clothes from the days of hijab were old friends. She had no wish to send them packing"(Kahf, 2006,p.312). Her ultimate decision about wearing the veil while coming back to the United State from Syria invalidates the premise that Islam

is an un-American religion, and challenges the biased standards of belongingness to America (Fadda-Conrey, 2014,p. 77).

The veil is not only a sign of difference but often a one of oppression and subordination. Even feminists, based on Islamophobic, xenophobic, and Eurocentric grounds, misconceive Muslim veiled women (Elia, 2006,p. 155). They often, consider Muslim veiled women as victims/perpetrators, subordinates, and lacking any kind of agency. Through her ultimate decision about veiling, Khadra not only defies and overthrows the Western Islamophobic beliefs about the veil as means of manipulation and oppression, but most importantly condemns the "feminist" bigoted view about the veil. Khadra explains to her friend Seemi that "No matter how much of a feminist you talk me into becoming, Seemi, I won't let go of my hijab" (Kahf, 2006,p.424-25). Khadra's choice about veiling asseverates her rejection of the binary thinking about Arab Muslim women in America. By choosing to be an Arab veiled woman yet American, Khadra asserts her hyphenated identity despite the constant "othering" veiled women face. Furthermore, by changing the color of her headscarf from black to white with tiny flowers to tangerine (Kahf, 2006,p.193-293), Khadra mirrors not only her changing and maturing vision about the veil but also her rejection of the monolithic and fundamentalist image of Islam. Interestingly enough, her veil becomes "a particular expression of Muslim Americanness, rather than foreignness" because it stands for the other part of her hyphenated identity from her old land (Abdurraqib, 2009,p. 63).

8. Towards Embracing her Hyphenated Identity: Khadra Becoming a Site of Reconciliation and Meeting of the East and the West

Another marker of Khadra's nascence and acceptance of her hyphenated selfhood is learning to accept the "other" and learning to be tolerant regardless of the essentialized religious identities. It is through her encounter with non-Muslim people, the Jewish rabbi in Syria and the Christian woman in the States, that Khadra regrets "othering" other Arabs owing to their religious beliefs. After all and despite their difference, their meeting engendered a sense of comfort and familiarity similar to the one generated by her own family. She finally learns to "grow out of that primitive notion of 'there's-us and- then-there's them'" (Kahf, 2006,p.305-06). It is by deconstructing the dichotomous "us" and "them" that khadra surpasses all rigid limitations about identity, recognizes and appreciates the affinities between them, and savvies that she belongs to a larger community undermining racial, religious, or ethnic parcellations. Khadra's ultimate awakening equals what Haddad, Smith, and Moore label as "tolerance" as a "by-product of American pluralism" (2006,p.14). The latter is the sole means that enables American residents to fashion their identities while maintaining their racial, ethnic, or national origins (Haddad, Smith, and Moore, 2006,p.14).

While Khadra's journey started with a profound sense of estrangement due the various fossilized notions of ethnic and religious identities, Khadra ends up casting away all clichés about Arab Muslim veiled women and asserting belongingness to the United States. She, ultimately, celebrates her hyphenated identity and embraces America as her home. In that, the narrator explains:

> She knew by the time she crossed the Atlantic that she was headed home, if there was any home in the world of worlds. She loved the country of her origin, and found that something in the soil there, in the air, in the layout of streets and the architecture of buildings, answered a basic need in her, and corresponded to the deep structure of her taxonomy. She would go back again in a flash if only Syria wasn't so clenched and a path out wasn't so open to her. But she knew at last that it was in the American crucible where her character had been forged, for good or ill. No matter that she had been brought there through no act of her own will. It was too late, it was done, no going back now, no phoning home. She was on her shariah to America. Homeland America, *bismillah*. (Kahf, 2006,p.313)

Her family and Dawah's teachings, the discrimination she faced by the Americans and Muslims, and her visit to Syria are but factors that helped Khadra to be self-assertive and de-essentialize her religious, ethnic, and national identity. By stating "She was on her shariah to America. Homeland America, *bismillah"* (Kahf, 2006,p.313), the novelist asserts Khadra's comprehension and awareness about her religion and identity. And by linking Islam to America, Khadra renders her identity a site of reconciliation and meeting of the West and the East. No longer alienated because of her race, religion, or veil, Khadra reconstitutes herself as transnational and maintains her disparate attachments to her homeland and new land. Her pertinent concern with Islam and religious awakening after her visit to Syria can be said to be the marrow of Khadra's journey. This religious awakening marks the birth of a new understanding of "self and reality" bearing a sense of wholeness and leading to overcoming the dualism of the "self" and the "other" (Christ, 1986,p.13). From the same spectrum, Aminah Beverly McCloud maintains that second and third-generation immigrants create what she labels as "emerging American Islam"- an Islam that crystallizes them as Muslims yet Americans (2003,p.173-74). These immigrants, though not utterly disassociating themselves from their homeland cultural heritage, reject their ancestors' culture-specific and radical interpretation of Islam as well as their separatist and segregational attitude. They, just like Khadra, contend to belong to an American *Ummah*. They are, in fact, the incarnation of the coexistence of being Muslim and being American within one and unique self.

Conclusion

By creating a narrative about an Arab Muslim woman, Mohja Kahf enables a Muslim woman to narrate her own story and thus destroy the myth of silenced Arab Muslim women on one hand. On the other hand, she enables her to alter her state in both her Arab Muslim and American surrounding and thus undermines the cliché of the objectified and the

subordinate Muslim woman. She departs from the oversimplified depiction of Arab Muslim women and Islam in the Western discourse that Dohra Ahmad describes as "always singular and representative" depicting the Muslim woman as "veiled, subjugated, indomitable in spirit, but still in need of rescue from an enlightened West" (2009,p.105-06). By not solely idealizing Arab Muslims and Americans nor only criticizing them, Kahf intends to humanize her characters and challenge monolithic views about Islam and Americans. The writer succeeds in depicting an Arab Muslim American woman who rejects to be singly Muslim or sly American. She excels in creating a woman dwelling in an in-between space that secures her bicultural identity. In doing so, Mohja Kahf adheres to Anzaldua's belief in the necessity of creating a marginal literary space that "overlap[s] many worlds" and embraces hybrid and bicultural individuals torn between the West and the non-West World (1990,p. xxvi). While Holy Blackford explains that the aim of "the work[s] of the postmodern ethnic novel is to heal and transform the spirit of the ethnic community" (2004,p.225), I maintain that Kahf through her novel strives first to heal the individual to transform not only the ethnic but the entire community. Her novel mirrors the necessity of the constant and continuous interplay between American and non-American values for the formation of a multicultural identity because, after all, identity is never static but in flux. Furthermore, the novel's valorization of the coexistence of disparate cultural facets in a singular identity accentuates America's shift towards being a multicultural community rather than being a melting pot.

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[1] - For further details, see (Payant, K.B. & Rose, T. (Eds.). (1999). *The Immigrant experience in North American Literature: Carving Out a Niche*. London: Greenwood Press.)

[2] - For more information about inclusive policies, See (Collins, P.H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerement.* New York, Routledge.)

[3] - In this study, the words *Hijab/Hijabi* are used interchangeably with *veil/veiled* because this is the meaning given to it in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*.

[4] - The Self/other and Us/Others/them are concepts that are originally attributed to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977).

[5] - In this study, the word *Ummah* means the worldwide Muslim community.

[6] - For further details, see (Basit, A. (1998, March/April). How to Integrate without Losing Muslim Identity, *Islamic Horizons.* 32-34.

[7] - Denial or rejection of Islam

[8] - In this article, *Ijtihad* refers to Muslims' personal understanding and interpretation of the Quran and Sunna.

[9] - For further information on Women's veiling, its history, and prevalence in other cultures see (Macdonald, M. (2006). Muslim Women and the Veil: Problems of Image and Voice in Media Representations. *Feminist Media Studies.* 6(1), 7-23)