

NEGOTIATING MEANINGS OF MUSLIMNESS, AMERICANNESSE, ARABNESS AND BORDERLANDS IN MOHJA KAHF'S *THE GIRL IN THE TANGERINE SCARF* (2006)

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ABSTRACT

Anglophone Arab writings have come of age after years of ethnic-, religious- and gender-based invisibility. This literature has carved out a niche for itself as a literature of minority, of womanhood and of borderland. On borderland zone(s), recent theorizations were put forward to comprehend journeys of de-territorialization and re-territorialization immigrants may experience. In this regard, the present paper offers an investigation of how the border zone, be it geographical or psychological, is fictionalized in Arab Anglophone women narratives. As case study, I have selected the novel of the Arab American Mohja Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). I contend that this novel may respond to the main query of the present research paper which is to identify the borderland zone Arabs in the Diaspora represented by the protagonist of the novel, Khadra, occupy style. In the course of my interpretation of this novel, meanings of veil, *Arabness*, *Americanness*, Islam and hyphenation will be negotiated.

Key words: Borderlands, Anglophone Arab writings, deterritorialization, Arab Diaspora.

Introduction

An important rise of literary works produced in English –and other foreign languages like French and German –by Arab writers living in the Diaspora has marked the last few decades. These authors are of Arabic decent; either academics and/or intellectuals who migrated to Britain or U.S.A and decided to write in English or British / American writers who are sons and daughters of early twentieth century first Arab immigrants settling mainly in the U.S. and whose mother language is English. With the spread of this new trend of English literature that crosses the borders of divergent literatures and fuses different – at times opposing literary traditions, more

attention is now given to understanding how diasporic Arab writers fictionalize reality related to their countries of origin in an attempt of understanding the *Other* who is Muslim and/or Arab and who is threatening the Western world mainly after the many terrorist attacks and events America and other European countries were terrified by.

Anglophone Arab literature of the Diaspora is certainly not new; this literature dates back to the turn of the century when the first Arabs to migrate to the United States of America had to grapple with the language and culture of the host country. As stated by Wail Hassan, it was in America that writers produced the first Anglo-Arab literary productions, notably by Gibran Khalil Gibran, Ameen Rihani, Abraham Mirtie Rihany and others who were nearly all originally from Mashreq (the Middle East) countries, and from Lebanon in particular, and who were far better known for their works in Arabic rather than in English. However, except for Gibran, Rihani and Mikhail Naimy very few writers were known to average American and Western readers at that time.

The current body of literature dealing with Anglophone Arab narratives insists on the particularity of Anglophone Arab literature which lies in the exceptional fusion of cultural features and linguistic elements of two divergent worlds: the Arab world and the Western world¹. Many critics argue that the specificity of these works is due to the fact that they are produced by writers who, in different ways, feel displaced and at the very contact zone of many cultures at the same time. As a matter of fact, this characteristic may have brought an important element of distinctiveness and individuality to Anglophone Arab writings– their ideas, desires, emotions and strategies for survival.

As suggested by Geoffrey Nash (2007) in his study *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: fiction and autobiography by Arab writers in English*, contemporary Anglophone Arab writers use English rather than Arabic as the language for their fiction either for personal preference, avoidance of cultural restriction and censorship, or optimizing exposure. Some Anglo-Arab writers were embedded within an English-speaking environment either in their country of origin or in Britain/United States of America, and this made English virtually a native language, so it is natural that they would choose to write in English. Others, especially those for whom Arabic is their first language but who acquired English through the medium of education at a relatively late stage, may make a conscious choice of English aware that there will be both losses and gains, acceptance and rejection. For these various reasons behind Anglophone Arab writers' choice of English for their literary expression, I argue that the literary discourse of each group of these authors must be then different. Though 'multicolored' and distinct, in terms of themes and literary discourse, works by writers contribute to the emergence of an independent literature that is neither Arabic nor English, but that is both, i.e. a hybrid literature.

To explain further, one has to mention that Anglophone Arab narratives grew out of a different context than that of their Francophone compatriots. This difference originates in the divergent colonial policy practiced by France and Britain. As for France, it exercised a policy of cultural adjustment and simply tried to "*francophy*" its territories, making great effort to repress the cultural specificity of dominated peoples. Britain, due to a racist assumption that Arabs and other colonized peoples could ever be part of the British *cultural fabric*, eschewed such assimilation. As a matter of fact, Arab francophone literature is generally produced by writers whose French is their sole written language and they are familiar only with the colloquial Arabic, and not the standard classical one. On another hand, Arab Anglophone literature is produced by writers who

¹ See Dalal Sarnou, "Narratives of Arab Anglophone Women and the Articulation of a Major Discourse in a Minor Literature," *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal*, Vol.16, No.1 (2014), 65-81.

are generally well-acquainted with standard Arabic, and they have other reasons for writing in English, like having grown up in areas or having studied in institutions dominated by English, or simply having migrated to English speaking countries as it is the case with the Egyptian Ahdaf Soueif, the Syrian Mohja Kahf, the Palestinian Soraya Antonius, the Sudanese Leila Abulela or the Jordanian Fadia Faqir.

Anglophone Arab writers of the Diaspora, mainly women authors, are highly conscious of historically established modes of representing Arab and Muslim women. The literary critic Hillauer points out that the women covered in her *Encyclopedia of Arab Women Filmmakers* (2005) are, like these writers, still exceptional in their societies; their observations are seldom an unbroken gaze from within, but have been shaped by a higher education or experiences of having lived abroad for many years, and frequently also by an upbringing in a privileged social class. (4) This gaze from within, I add, localizes them in a particular zone that is bordered by their *Arabness*, sometimes *Muslimness*, and often *womanness*. This zone becomes their *borderland(s)* as I will argue in the next sections. So, the question this article will tackle is ‘what borderland(s) are Arabs in the Diaspora deterritorialized and reterritorialized in considering Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of the concept as being *the movement by which one leaves a territory*?² End of the quote?

Writing from/on the Border

Writing from the border or border writing has become one of the most appealing literary genres that contemporary critics are theorizing and (re-)conceptualizing. Emily Hicks (1991) states that border writings are to be considered as universal literature. She says:

What makes border writing a world literature with a “universal” appeal is its emphasis upon the multiplicity of languages within any single; by choosing a strategy of translation rather than representation, border writers ultimately undermine the distinction between original and alien culture. (xxiii)

In fact, questioning the idea of writing without borders recalls immediately a re-thinking of border and borderland as two concepts widely used in the humanities. The two terms refer to words like boundaries, frontiers, barriers, margins and liminal spaces. Theorized by many academics and scholars –Deleuze and Guattari (1986), Derrida and others –it is owed style to the American Mexican theorist Gloria Anzaldúa that the concepts of Borderland, border and in-between-ness have been re-conceptualized and re-contextualized into various areas specific to minority groups: immigrants, women, gays and lesbians.

In the preface to the *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa states: “*I am a border woman*” (Anzaldúa, 1987). This declaration entails a new journey into the border-zone and how people who live on borders –whether these are physical, geographical or emotional –view the other from this space. As Anzaldúa points out, the image of the border has become fully meaningful not only when we consider it as physical line, but when we de-center and liberate it from the notion of space to encompass notions of sex, class, gender, ethnicity, identity, community and even language³. In this sense, the crossing of the border is not a stepping of a physical body into a “protected” other

²Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 585-587.

³ Crossing the borders of languages may manifest in linguistic phenomena as code switching and code mixing. Shifting from one language to another is also shifting from one culture to another, from one linguistic territory to another, and from one sound system to another particularly for languages that are widely distinct as if the case of English vs. Arabic or French vs. Arabic.

national space, as much as it is a constant and potentially creative encounter where differences meet and interact.

In fact, crossing the borders leads to the conception of a borderland or a contact zone which both relates and separates two spaces. There is, certainly, a semantic and ideological difference between the two concepts of border and borderland. In her seminal book *Borderlands/ La Fronera*, Anzaldúa seems to identify “borderlands” with the Spanish “frontera” or English “border”. She explains: “*a border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.*” (03)

In fact, one would argue that borders engender border zones or those *liminal* spaces which are allowed for mestizaje⁴ and racial and cultural hybridization. As a matter of fact, however thin and demarcated the line is, it requires its own negation, that is the borderlands. Obviously, different ways of communication evolve and result from these exchanges across the border. Next to ‘borderland’, Mary Louise Pratt has theorized an equivalent concept “contact zones” which is extremely illuminating to focus on dialogues on the two sides of the border:

I use the term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today. (34)

Pratt, with this formulation, has added the social dimension to “borderlands” as contact zones. Above and beyond, another illuminating formulation of “border zones” and how the term can be pertinent to non-native literatures appears in Carolyn Porter’s essay “*What We Know that We Don’t Know: remapping American literary studies*” where porter amplifies the range of contact zone through the term “cultural force fields” which addresses a wider series of different transcultural axes and exchanges.

According to recent literature, borders are situated neither at the periphery nor at the margins of a state, but rather, at the core. This is evident especially when dealing with issues of security; not only because after the 9/11 attacks borders became increasingly regarded as a line of defense that needs to be constantly monitored and secured, but because, as a structure, the nation-form produces and perpetuates a differentiation that must be defended. (Balibar, 23). An interesting and relevant example might be America’s new president Donald Trump’s new policy which, according to him, seeks to secure the U.S borders with Mexico on the one hand, and control who moves into the United States from countries assumed to be the cradle of Islamic Terrorism on the other hand. Building a wall along the Mexican-American borders and banning people coming from six Muslim countries to travel to America are Trump’s policy to besiege the borderlands zones and border people. Now, Arab Americans, Mexican Americans and Muslims of America

⁴ The concept of mestizaje –which means racial mixture –is not of interest only to Latin Americans and Latin Americanists; in the USA, Europe and even postcolonial countries, increasing attention has been paid to processes of racial and cultural mixture, usually referred to by a series of different terms such as hybridity, syncretism, métissage, mélange and creolization, all or some of which may be related to other concepts, such as diaspora, which evoke the kinds of migrations and movements that lead to mixture.

only feel excluded from mainstream culture to be located in a particular borderland zone that is both physical and psychological.

In another context where the borderland is highlighted, Arab Anglophone women narratives portray different types of borderlands. Some of these writers attempt to represent what I allegedly refer to as a social borderland, particularly Arab women writers who have travelled abroad and have become women of two worlds –as is the case with Ahdaf Soueif, Leila Abulela, Laila Alalami, Sabiha Elkhemir, Mohja Kahf and others. To cross the borders of their countries of origin is indeed a stepping of patriarchal boundaries to live in Western societies and become acknowledged writers. Their border is also cultural since these women have developed a vision from a margin position standing in-between two cultures that have long been opposing entities. Crossing the border of the Arab culture to integrate into a host Western culture is one of the fundamental transnational and cross-cultural characteristics of narratives produced by Anglophone Arab women, and is an essential aspect of a different perception of both the Arab world and the West that these women represent in their literary productions.

The border for Arab women writers of the Diaspora is also intellectual, for it is with the crossing of a rigid ideological boundary imposed by undemocratic political systems –that are ruling the countries in the Middle East and North African (henceforth MENA) region since the independence –that a new unbiased view of the political scene in the region is developed. In this respect, I may refer to the Egyptian British novelist and commentator Ahdaf Soueif who has been defending democratic Egypt both under the Brothers' ruling and now under the military ruling of the country. Her political awareness has risen from a crossing of the home-country's borders in the 70s to live long years in a different cultural and political context of the British nation. Soueif, I argue, has developed a new philosophy that is neither Western liberal nor Arab Islamist. Her own beliefs are, in fact, ideology-free. To illustrate, Soueif supported young rebels in Tahrir quarter in 2011, and she was also against the massive killing of the Brothers.⁵

In fact, the threshold for Arab Anglophone women writers might be the English language that can be regarded as the vehicle through which women authors of Arabic decent carry a female view of a world that is Western and another that is Arab. This threshold allows these writers to reach further borders and audiences. *Liminality*, for Aguirre, designates the condition ascribed to those things or persons who occupy or find themselves in the vicinity of the threshold, either on a permanent basis or a temporary phenomenon (6-7)

To go back to Pratt's conceptualization of the space where different cultures, different races, different genders and different ideologies meet, I will employ this perception of zones where an amalgam of cultures and religions and even languages manifests in understanding a zone I would identify as a 'borderlands'. Therefore, I will present a reading of the Arab American Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* whereby I will probe for a new borderland zone occupied by young Arab American Muslim women.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf: on Arabs living in/searching for a Borderland

⁵ See <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/arab-spring-five-years-on-writers-look-back>
<https://www.jsrd-humanities.com>

It is presumed that contemporary Anglophone Arab women writings are primarily committed to echoing how Arab women living in the Diaspora are caught between a rock and a hard place when both celebrating the hyphen which represents a trans-cultural bridge between the Diaspora and the country of origins, and expressing outspokenly their standpoints a propos the different foreign policies embraced by both the West and countries of the MENA region. Accordingly, recent works by Anglophone women writers have indeed been giving voice to silenced women who are often forcibly or unwillingly displaced to an in-between space where a journey of dislocation and relocation is experienced. In this respect, Miriam Cook comments:

During the past twenty-five years, women from the Arab world have been writing themselves into visibility at both national and international levels. Historically invisible, they are becoming agents of possible transformations in the societies in which their voices had traditionally not been heard. (150)

A pertinent literary production where Arab women in the Diaspora are articulately voiced is Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). In this novel, the main character negotiates her hyphenated identity in the space of Diaspora and she does so through her commitment to an Islam that is neither the one embraced by her parents nor the one fiercely criticized by the West; it is an Islam of a 'borderland space' born out of a permanent encounter with a heterogeneous *otherness*: other people from other cultures, religions and ideologies. It is an Islam that is born in the very contact zone with other minority groups.

Just like Khadra in the novel, Mohja Kahf was born in Damascus, Syria in 1971, but just before she turned four, her family migrated to America so that her father could pursue a graduate degree and her mother could finish a B. S. in pharmacy. Kahf received her B. A. at Rutgers University; where she studied Comparative Literature and Political Science and then went on to complete her Ph. D. in Comparative Literature from Rutgers in 1988. As she grew up in America, Kahf became aware of Islamophobic sentiments and ignorance in America where, after the family moved to Plainville, Indiana, Kahf experienced painful incidents of racism and oppression. Kahf, among other contemporary Arab American authors, writes of cultural inequalities faced by Arab Muslims in America, focusing thereby on both Muslim to non-Muslim conflict and Muslim to Muslim associations and/or contentions amongst them. *Her viewpoint disputes hegemonic imageries of Arab-Americans, Muslim women in particular, reviewing mainstream representations of the culture.*⁶

In fact, Kahf's commitment has doubled since 2011. The author is now more pre-occupied with the terrifying situation experienced by the people of her home-country, Syria as much as other American Syrian and British Syrian writers are concerned with the suffering of Syrians back home. In a facebook message sent by Kahf, she says: "*thank you, and eid mubarak to you. Syria is not about religious struggle -- Syrian Christians, Alawites, Sunnis, Druze, Shias are all in solidarity...*" (8/25/2013, 6:18pm Mohja Kahf). **Kahf's words reflect her new commitment to Syria as a nation regardless of any kind of schism. Another metamorphosis in Kahf's attitude is the fact that she gave up on her headscarf since the beginning of the Syrian**

⁶Susan Taha Alkarawi, "Negotiating Liminal Identities in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*", *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*. Australian International Academic Centre, Australia (100-106), 2013.

uprising. A similar image is to be found in her novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* where Khadra also gives up on her veil at a given moment of her journey of relocation at two different levels: a micro level represented by her family and the extremist Islamic approach they embrace, and a macro level represented by the larger American community and the racist marginalization of religious and ethnic minorities.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf (2006) tells the story of Khadra Shamy's journey of self discovery. Khadra grows up in a strict Muslim community where people are brought up believing in one definition of Islam and rejecting all differences. As the novel progresses, Khadra's perception of her own community, her religion and her identity metamorphoses because she goes through different experiences, bringing her closer to finding her true self as opposed to the identity that she inherits from her parents. Khadra experiences a journey of deterritorialization to a borderland that suits her American-ness, Arab-ness, woman-ness and young age.

The story is told by an omniscient narrator who uses flashbacks and flash-forwards. Several of the events in the story take place in Indianapolis, where Khadra "spent most of her growing-up years" (Kahf, 1). Her father had decided to move there in order to work at the Dawah Center, a Muslim community center, where he believed he would answer God's call and help other Muslims. Before that, the first place Khadra lived in the United States was Square One, in the Rocky Mountains. Despite living among American kids, she did not face any kind of discrimination: "*The American kids in Square One didn't seem to know yet that they were supposed to be better than the rest because it was their country. Their parents were all students at the same university*" (10). Nevertheless, the sense of non-belonging was soon to come to her as they moved to Indiana. In their first day, when they were still unpacking their belongings, some boys threw glass bottles at their doorstep, and the Shamy family realized they were not welcome. At school, things were not different. She felt that she not only had to face the prejudice on the part of other students, but she also had to live with the indifference.

Khadra begins with the following lines that immediately recall the difficult journey of re-location in a society that –despite the fact of being (after Maha Said) a "patch-work quilt" –still rejects minorities and discriminates ethnic groups:

'Liar,' she says to the highway sign that claims "The People of Indiana Welcome You." The olive-skinned, dark-haired young woman drives west on the old National Road. A small zippered Quran and a camera are on the hatchback's passenger seat in easy reach, covered by an open map — *States of the Heartland*. Khadra Shamy spent most of her growing-up years in Indiana. She knows better than the sign. (Kahf, 1)

In Kahf's novel, there is a clear undermining of the subversive representation of Muslim women that has long been common in America. Through the novel's cover photo, of a young lady wearing a tangerine scarf, many symbolic representations and messages can be identified. The veil that is to Westerners, a symbol of oppression, is worn by a white blond woman. It is widely acknowledged that Muslim women are usually denied from wearing clothes with bright colors in the most conservative societies like in Saudi Arabia. However, a different representation of the *hijab* is to be in the picture of the Muslim woman on Kahf's cover who wears a black T-shirt and blue jeans. This symbolic representation may also mean that Kahf is offering to the Western reader an authentic image of modern Muslim women who indeed are *mestizas* or hybrid

subjectivities of their own kind. There is a cultural and religious *métissage* we could have read through this representation: being a blond white Arab woman, wearing black T-shirt and blue jeans but also a tangerine headscarf, is the new *mestiza* we are highlighting in this book. It is the space which this culturally and religiously blend occupies I identify as ‘borderland’.

Thus, the novel is about an Arab-American *mestiza*’s journey in search of identity where, through the protagonist’s journey into herself and the Middle East, Khadra attempts coming to terms with her Arab and Islam identities as well as her American identity, and ends being re-territorialized in a new borderland that is religiously and culturally distinct from her parents’. Khadra does give up wearing the veil by the novel’s end yet embraces a new persona emerging from the deep strife she underwent throughout her childhood and early adult life. Taking off the headscarf may be either due to religiously strict life Khadra’s parents and family circle imposed on her, or due to the racist behavior of the outer world she had to confront. Khadra’s decision may be a one of a new Muslim *mestiza* who has, at last, found her border zone.

Also, in the novel, Kahf gives Khadra this example of a Muslim woman who created a new identity and a new *borderland* zone for herself to balance between the two opposing sides of the hyphen so as to be accepted by mainstream America. By creating such a hyphenated character, Kahf spotlights the conflict between the secular and the devout Muslims and how they view each other. To Americans, Muslims are often reduced to a single image of brainwashed followers of Islam and terrorists. However, Khadra is not thwarted by a single image of Islam; she has many examples to choose from and emulate as she lives the life she wants. It is this perception that may explain the choice of wearing or taking off the headscarf by both the author and her character. As it is the case for Khadra, for Kahf what she must fight for and be devoted to is the freeing of her people from an oppressed regime; it is also the freeing of Arabs and Muslims from a discriminating mainstream culture, and it is the rescue of women from a patriarchal society.

All through the novel, Khadra is constantly confronted with various images of Muslim women that represent the heterogeneity within the Muslim community often left out from media representations and the hegemonic discourse. At the beginning, we are introduced to the image of Khadra’s mother who is an ambitious educated woman who wanted to go to medical school. She explains to her daughter that she thought she would go to medical school, “*But after [she] graduated, [she] chose to stay home. “For the children”*” (p. 21). Khadra’s mother had sacrificed her interest in furthering her education in order to care for her children, “*I used to dream I would be a doctor one day, and open a free clinic for poor people*” (p. 26). Khadra’s grandmother, Teta, also represents that image of empowered Muslim Arab women. She was a telephone operator long ago and was among “*the very first wave of working women*” (p. 271) as it was one of the new jobs that had opened up for women in the old days. Teta did not conform to a society that decided that “*a telephone girl’s job was a bad thing, a thing for loozies.*” Teta insists on saying “*We wanted to be the New Woman*” (p. 271).

Khadra’s unique perception of important issues like the veil, women rights, and rebelling against oppression of whatever kind goes back to her many location shifts and travelling from coast to coast, from continent to continent and from country to country. It is also due to her universally-shaped consciousness which found in a border zone the safest space to occupy. The most significant of these journeys is her voyage to Syria. She visits Syria to ‘find’ herself, believing

that a spiritual discovery of her cultural origins will help her further understand what to do regarding her own identity, without external pressure. In her homeland, she comes to learn about her mother's suffering from her grandmother, who reveals some truths Khadra never knew about. Khadra knew that, after the death of her mother, Ebtehaj, Ebtehaj's stepmother, who was secular, mistreated her and forced her not to wear the veil because she was mocked at for wearing it. It is here that we read a different story about *hijab* and its impact on the identity construction of Khadra later in the story. Kahf may shock her Western readers with this truth about oppressing Arab women to take off the veil.

According to Khadra's Teta, "*The city was against it, the tide was against it*" (p. 275). Teta narrates "*she tried everything-she'd yank it right off her head. I heard she put it in the pot and shat on it*" (p. 275) and she was embarrassed to be seen in public with her veiled stepdaughter; she even made Ebtehaj walk on the other side of the street. Ebtehaj's stepmother did not allow her to continue with her Quran circle that she became interested in after her mother's death and tried to force her into a marriage with a man "*who drank and whored, just to make her misery lifelong*" (p. 276). Through these stories about her mother's past, Khadra bonds with her grandmother and comes to a better appreciation of her mother.

Eventually, Khadra realizes that her mother was strong enough to hold on to the veil that had caused her so much trouble and was determined to follow her Islamic beliefs no matter what the trend was at the time. The struggles she has learnt made her aware of the fact that she is not alone in her experiences of dislocation, separation and feeling '*betwixt and between*'. So, through Khadra's journey to Syria, one may identify the way Kahf's Syria is also used to epitomize how women were persecuted because they chose to wear the veil. Khadra hears her aunt tell of events in Syria in 1982 where, during this period, the Islamic front rebelled against the Syrian government that was repressive, corrupt, and dictatorial (Cleveland, 2004, p. 362). They seized control of parts of the city of Hama and the government in response launched "a deadly campaign" against the city and its civilians.

Khadra's aunt explains that, in 1982, the capital was blocked by the government and a thousand paratroopers got hold of any woman who was wearing the veil. Her aunt states, "*You could strip off your hijab [veil] ..., or get a gun to your head*" (p. 281). She adds that her daughter, Reem, on her way home, got stopped by the paratroops so she took off the scarf right away where her aunt comments "*Why endanger your life for it?*" (p. 281) The paratroops asked her to take off her clothes because she was fully covered with her long garb, but did not wait for Reem to take off her clothes so she ripped it off her and "*holds it up in the air and sets it on fire with a blowtorch*" (p. 281).

However, her uncle Mazen explains to her that such events had happened because of dissidents like Khadra's mother and father who, in his opinion, had politicized the veil and upset the government which then led to this behavior. Hearing the story of her mother shocks Khadra into realizing how momentous her parents' decision to leave their home and migrate to America; she also comes to realize why her mother sticks to wearing the veil.

Because of what her mother suffered in a Muslim country, Khadra comes to appreciate the freedom she enjoys in America where she is able to practice her religion without persecution.

She may have to deal with the reality of stereotypes and misconceptions; nevertheless, her situation as a practicing Muslim in America is better than others in the so-called Muslim countries. However, in America, Khadra and her mother are faced with other forms of challenges: narratives and scenes of immigration and identity imposed by the hegemonic culture that requires them to hold on to a single allegiance and to let go of any other. Their dilemma lies in the fact that they are to make a decision with regards to their identity, and they are limited by the two options made available by the dominant culture: either to express their Muslim identity through the veil or assimilate with the American culture.

Conclusion

Kahf's 2006 novel fictionizes main challenges faced by Muslim Arab American women and it chronicles the reality this minority faces while doing considerable efforts to assimilate with the host culture while preserving their own culture to end up be dislocated in a new zone: a borderland. In fact, Kahf's fiction not only undermines the distorted image of Muslims in America that is promoted by the biased local media and the foreign policy of the States, but also demoralizes the tyrant regimes that govern many MENA countries since the independence of the latter.

Although Khadra, in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, is presented as an enlightened woman who wears the veil because she believes in what it represents,; there are many facts about radical Islam and tyrant secular regimes that the character unearths through her journey of re-territorialization. It is true that she decides to wear the veil in Muslim countries as well as America in spite of the difficulties she faces while wearing it, but the veil is not the focal issue for Khadra as it is the case for Kahf: what it must be worth fighting for is rather the freeing of the oppressed and the search of a zone where meanings of freedom and tolerance are being celebrated. In this connection, we see Khadra refusing to accommodate herself neither to the Western secular but discriminative society's customs and nor to patriarchal oppression in countries that do not give Muslim women the option to practice freedom of choice. Through the novel, Kahf has created a new borderland zone for the Muslim woman who chooses a unique way of living with the Islam that she sees more suitable to her hyphenated identity. It is a zone where religion is an individual choice and not a group's. The new attitude of Muslim-American women we read in this novel goes along with the author's new double-voicedness that cries out the right of oppressed people to be voiced, heard and liberated.

Furthermore, through her narrative, Kahf reflects the heterogeneity within the Muslim and Arab-American community and their negotiation of different patriarchal contexts. The author focuses on Khadra's journey of re-locating an identity that has been lost between Home and Diaspora and between a radical Islam and a discriminating Secularism. Through the main character and other female relations, interestingly Kahf represents the reality of heterogeneity in Muslim women's roles and attitudes. She also presents the various challenges that obstruct these women's ambitions: challenges that are due to cultural patriarchy, western discrimination, religious radicalism and gender-based oppression.

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