Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences (2016) Volume 8 No 1, 1-22

Resistance and Uncanny Moments of In-Betweenness in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in Tangerine Scarf*

Abbasali Borhan, PhD Candidate, Shiraz University, I. R. Iran.
Alireza Anushiravani, Professor, Shiraz University, I. R. Iran.

Abstract: *The multiethnic literature of the United States is replete with (hi)stories of people of hyphenated identities narrated from subaltern's perspectives. A contemporary Scheherazade of Arab-American literature, Mohja Kahf (2006) has illustrated the precarious positioning of Arab Americans as inbetweeners of cultures in her novel, The Girl in Tangerine Scarf. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's (1994) concepts of the third space and hybridity, this paper studies the ways "naturalized" boundaries of us/them identifications are revealed to be permeable and subject to change in Kahf's novel. A tripartite model of subjectivity is also presented for classification of the inbetweener subjects into nativist, assimilationist, and hybrid groups. It is asserted that hybridity, as an empowerment, is not achieved by all subjects located in the third space, for it demands dynamic re-evaluation of dominant discourses of representation which are narratives of power as well. Orientalism, multiculturalism, and feminism are the main discourses challenged in Kahf's novel.*

Keywords: *Arab-American, Muslims, Orientalism, multiethnic, Mohja Kahf, Bhabha*

1. Introduction

Constituting a major part of the fabric of Asian-American literature, Arab-American writing has proved to be an efficient venue for Oriental subjects of variegated languages, cultures, races, and histories to express their anxieties pertaining to their peculiar positioning as "others" in the host community of "us," Americans. The tacit resistance implicated in these works, however, more often than not, appears in unexpected forms, mainly through discursive fissures and ideological cracks in an in-between area of enunciation in which narratives lose their firm grips on the subject's consciousness, hence leaving him/her wandering in a mediatory state of free-floating meanings and power-willed images of identification. In this study, drawing on Bhabha's (1994) conceptions of hybridity and the third space, it is argued as to how his theory can be deployed efficiently to expand the anti-colonial horizons of postcolonial theory by exposing the unwelcome truths embedded in Kahf's (2006) novel, The Girl in Tangerine Scarf, as an instance of Arab-American literature written in English and produced in the United States.

Of all ethnic literatures to have appeared in the United States, Arab-American writings occupy a precarious position and this is while it almost spans over a century-old tradition from which such eminent a figure as Gibran Kahlil Gibran has emerged. Several reasons can be pointed out for this unstable positioning such as the ambivalent racial categorization, affinity with Islam, mainstream representations of Arabs as terrorists, and (in)visibility and (mis)recognition based on appearance and the dress code associated with both Arab men and women. And of course, the powerful functioning of Orientalist discourse cannot be emphasized less. As such, it can be asserted that Arab-American literature is a rich source for the study of the ways "in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of 'otherness'" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 17). Nevertheless, Arab-American literature is not solely characterized with or confined to these specific issues as it is widely credited for its diversity and dissonance. Speaking of the heterogeneity of the genre, Majaj (n.d.) notes that it includes "people from different countries and different religious

denominations; those who speak no Arabic and who speak no English; people who identify primarily with the 'Arab' side of their heritage and those who identify primarily with the 'American' side" (p. 1). As Majaj (n.d.) has aptly pointed out, Arab-American literature itself can be subdivided into diverse categories in terms of authors' generation, homeland, religion, language, hence the cultural differences among them.

Born in Syria to a family of practicing Muslims, Kahf moved to the US in 1971 when she was four of age. Brought up in the Midwest, Kahf has persistently written about the hardships of living in a borderland of cultures as an American Muslim woman. Describing her hybrid style in writing, Majaj (2008) notes, "[it] draws on American colloquialisms and Quranic suras; it is informed not only by American free verse . . . but also by a lush energy that draws on the heart of the Arabic oral tradition and Arabic poetry" (p. 1). As a Scheherazade to narrate of the strained lives of Arab Americans in the post-9/11 America, Kahf has been able to present alternative perspectives on social, political, and cultural events as perceived and experienced by the hybrid subjects who are placed in-between us (Americans) and them (Arabs or Muslims).

2. Literature Review

In the wake of 9/11, Fadda-Conrey (2006) notes, the "moments of [national] crisis" in the US have been used as an effective excuse to make Arab Americans the first suspects placed under "an interrogative and suspicious light" (p. 190), thereby questioning their very right of belonging to the US. Nevertheless, the provisionality of the US belonging for Arabs is not an immediate result of 9/11, as it rather has a long history. The 9/11 attacks instigated racial redefinition of such concepts as terrorism, fanaticism, and anti-modernism based on Arab identity. Touching upon the same issue, Stubbs (2003-2004) goes so far as to say that after 9/11, American Muslims became America's New Niggers (p. 115). This issue is addressed in the writings of such writers as Joseph Geha, Mohja Kahf, and

Laila Halaby. Fadda-Conrey (2011) believes that these writers offer "revisionary spaces respond[ing] to racial stereotyping, blanket labeling, and discriminatory profiling" exerted on Arabs in the American society (p. 533).

According to Gonçalves and Braga (2014), the contemporary Arab-American writers are functioning as new Scheherazades struggling for survival in American society of post 9/11 (p. 85). Scheherazade, an oriental icon of resistance to power, emblematizes the role taken up by the Arab woman writers whose tales function as strategies of survival in the face of pressures inflicted upon them. The Arab feminists, according to these writers, have to fight two battles simultaneously. On the one hand, they are expected to challenge Arab patriarchy, and on the other hand, they have a greater problem persuading the "Western sisters" that they shouldn't expect them to do away with Arab culture altogether at the cost of erasing their own Arab woman identity. Authors like Halaby, Kahf, and Abu-Jaber, Gonçalves and Braga (2014) remark, "allow contemporary Scheherazades to tell their stories, and give voice to characters who were formerly silent like Dinarzad" (p. 85).

The veil is one of the effective discursive tools employed in representation of both Arab and Muslim women. Toossi (2014) studies the polaristic designations attached to this clothing item based on binary opposition of freedom and oppression. Trapped in this totalizing dynamics, a Muslim woman is forced to fit into an either-or structure of signification based on her apparent practice of the veil. Wearing it would likely cost her losing the respect of the western feminist sisters and not wearing it may equally endanger her position among the Muslim community. In this binarist approach to hijab, Muslim woman is deprived of her right to be a feminist and at the same time practice her hijab as illustrated in Kahf's *The Girl in Tangerine Scarf* (2006) and *E-mails from Scheherazade* (2003) which "problematize cultural assumptions and stereotyping preconceptions about veiling Muslim women" (Toossi, 2014, p. 8).

Harb (2012) addresses the ways Arab-American writers, such as Kahf, view 9/11 through a contrapuntal reading. Adopting an anti-Orientalist perspective, these writers, Harb (2014) contends, work against the mechanisms of officially sanctified narratives. In the wake of 9/11, Harb (2014) maintains, American mainstream media reworked the Orientalist Arab "stereotypes" trying to view "terrorism to be part of the nature and essence of the Arab race" (p. 34). Denying the possibility of being Arab and American at the same time, official accounts of 9/11 are premised upon the either/or structuring of us and them in Arab/American relations. Enjoying their hybrid position in the crisscross of cultures, authors like Kahf, however, have the chance to challenge the discursive self-sufficiency of these dominating discourses and expose their situatedness in history.

3. Discussion

In his theorization of culture, Bhabha (1994) largely draws on Freud's (1919) concept of uncanny in order to show how cultures are constructed as much for what they exclude as for what they inscribe. According to Freud (1919), uncanny (unheimlich) is defined in differential relation to what is deemed canny (heimlich), yet since it is otherized as that which is not familiar or homely, it is suppressed and kept at bay. That is to say, it does not appear as a wholly strange thing to "us," as we have already used it as the "other" against which to construct our identity as "us," hence its "terrifying" effect when encountered unexpectedly. In his article "The Uncanny," Freud (1919) notes, "uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old— established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (p. 13). Thus, in Freud's (1919) account of uncanny, it is not totally separated from its postulated opposite, canny, as it is already a "feared" part of what we perceive as being familiar and homely. It is based on this ambivalent view of the term that Bhabha (1994) develops his theory of culture. In "Articulating the Archaic," for instance, he asserts that "culture is *heimlich,* with its disciplinary generalizations, its mimetic narratives . . . But cultural authority is also *unheimlich,* for to be distinctive, signifactory, influential

and identifiable, it has to be translated, disseminated, differentiated" (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 136-137).

Based on these two interrelated definitions, it can be asserted that what distinguishes the writings produced at intersection of cultures is their peculiar positioning in an intermediary site between canny and uncanny, with the former designating subject's inherited narratives of sameness and the latter indicating what had been excluded and regulated into otherness to be feared. It is feared because it contains the potential to unsettle and threaten the unified sense of selfhood, the serenity attached to it, and the imagined links to the real. Thus, in these "hybrid" narratives, the critic can explore how multiethnic writers represent the unexpected uncanny encounters occurring to the subjects within the third space.

Furthermore, the uncanny presence of what is expected to be absent within these encounters may be conducive to acquisition of an empowering state of higher consciousness— what Bhabha (1994) considers as hybridity— which transcends the discursive either/or structures involved in cultural narratives of identification. That is to say, the hierarchical binary opposition of us/them loses its certainty, and accordingly, the subject is given the chance to meet his doubles, as "us" substitutes "them" and what was formerly perceived as "strangeness" loses its credibility. Hence, the idea that— as Freud (1919) delineates, in uncanny moments, one is confronted with a familiar thing which had been rendered unfamiliar to him. Thus, when this eye-opening encounter occurs, subject is shocked to find the boundaries securing his sense of unity and wholeness against the otherness of the other violated. In other words, it can be asserted that the subject can be shown to be deprived of his/her claim to righteousness and purity when brought to encounter his/her uncanny double(s) in unexpected situations arising in this genre. Furthermore, subject is confronted with a more "real" in these multiethnic texts owing to their transitional placement between cultures, being posed between us and them, canny and uncanny, narrative and non-narrative. To substantiate this point, in what follows,

ample evidence is provided from Kahf's (2006) *The Girl in Tangerine Scarf*.

In the analysis of the inbetweeners located in the third space, a tripartite model of subjectivity is used: nativist, assimilationist, and hybrid. The nativist subjects are those who withdraw from facing the "other," viewing it as a threat to the integrity of their shared collective ethnic identity; assimilationist subjects seek to totally break from all bonds of the past, homeland and native culture, in favor of assimilation into the host culture; and hybrid subjects, unlike the former two groups, appreciate their position in the borderline of cultures and come to realize how every cultural sign could be a matter of contingency, not fixity and authenticity, hence eluding the hierarchical and polar politics of culture and identity.

A coming-of-age novel, Kahf's (2006) *Girl* recounts different phases of the growth of the narrator, Khadra, the child of an immigrant family of Syrian decent. The story can be divided into three parts, each one corresponding to a different stage in Khadra's process of self-realization. In the early stage, Khadra's life is imbued with nativist ambitions and characteristics. This phase reaches its bottom line with Khadra's failed marriage with another nativist character, Juma. It prompts Khadra to distance herself from her domineering family and thereby, she reconsiders her past "self" from a critical standpoint. This self-critical stage enables her to gauge the values she had inherited from her parents and the community in which she was brought up. In the third stage, Khadra begins to refashion a new self, disengaged from cultural, racial, and religious ties, hence apprehending how "us" can be part of "them" and vice versa. Thus, Khadra's self-realization occurs in three stages: nativist reproduction of the past, transitional self-criticism, and hybrid refashioning.

3.1 Nativist Self-Fashioning

Before moving to Indianapolis, the Shamy reside in the Square One which turns out to be an imaginary state in Lacanian sense, striking Khadra

as a heaven in which "you didn't need to speak the same language to exchange friendship" with other kids, American or not (Kahf, 2006, p. 10). Even the American kids living there had not yet entered the symbolic order of differentiation. As the grown-up Khadra puts it, they "didn't seem to know yet that they were supposed to be better than the rest because it was their country" (p. 10). This prelinguistic phase draws to its close when Khadra's parents discover Dawah Center, an Islamic institute in Indianapolis. Joining the community, her parents consider it as a "noble jihad" which requires them "to find solutions to the ways in which living in a kuffar land made practicing Islam hard" (p. 13). The discovery of the Islamic Center marks the initiation of Khadra's nativist self-fashioning under the influence of the teachings of her parents and those advocated by the community.

To Khadra's parents, the United States means no better than a "kuffar land" (land of the heretic) (Kahf, 2006, p. 13) as they appraise American people according to their own "Islamic" standards; those which, as Khadra comes to realize, constitute one among many interpretations of Islam (p. 3). Islam in the hands of the Shamy functions more as a defensive mechanism against the new culture than a possibility to reach a better understanding of both the self and the other. In other words, Islam here is mostly used as a means to an end which is strengthening of sameness and demonization of otherness. The parents' ambiguous use of Islam in furthering their own nativist standpoint is evidenced in their quite un-Islamic rejection of "Sudanese doctor's daughter . . . whose color was rich and dark" (p. 154). As Eyad starts to hint about his feelings toward her, the whole issue is truncated by a simple "no." Wajdy, the father, says: "But for heaven's sake, she's black as coal!" (p. 85). This is while Maha had "[p]iety, character, beauty, brains, the right language, the right home culture-what more to ask in a bride?" (p. 85). Thus, the Islam practiced and advocated by Khadra's parents merely functions as a marker of difference used to bolster up the boundaries between "good" Muslims and "filthy" Americans.

The anti-Americanism evinced in the attitudes and manners of the nativist characters are predicated upon several main presuppositions such as "essential" immorality, impurity, wastefulness, faithlessness, and dysfunctional family values of Americans. From this monolithic perspective, the majority of Americans are tainted with such depravities. Prevalent use of pig fat or meat in some American foods, drinking habits, sexual liberties, and certain housekeeping manners such as allowing pets in beds and sharing foods with them are underscored in this negative frame of mind. When it comes to foods, "danger abound[s]. Pork [is] everywhere," Khadra observes (Kahf, 2006, p. 12). And, it is not just a matter of avoiding pig meat for, one way or another, it is incorporated into many other items: "Sometimes it was called bacon, other times it was called sausage, or bologna, or ham. Its fat was called lard" (p. 12). For the Shamy, the filth attributed to pig in this context exemplifies all American foods and, by extension, its culture. Having this in mind, Khadra's mother cautions her before eating "anything [she takes] from kuffar hands" (p. 12). The same filth is also detected in the ways Americans keep pets at home, sharing their personal stuffs such as bed and dish. Early in the story, Khadra, for instance, observes that her mother "always ran the laundry twice . . . Because what if the person who used the washer before you had a dog? You never knew with Americans" (p. 6). In this totalizing view, all Americans are homogenized into a fixed number of disagreeable stereotypes and the differences between cultures are essentialized at the expense of commonalities, hence functioning as a means of constructing an agreeable image for "us," being good and pure, as the opposite pole to "them," being filthy and impure.

The nativist predisposition of the Muslim characters aside, the way they are received as "enemies" by the host community also reinforces their anti-Americanism. Being constantly threatened by the Lott boys, the American kids living across the street, Khadra, still a kid, comes to realize that she does not belong to where she is living. Ganging up on her, the Lott boys always call her racist names such as "raghead" (Kahf, 2006, p. 53) and even threaten her to death, foreshadowing the merciless slaying of

Zuhura, an active member of the Islamic Center. And, more importantly, Muslims are shown to have no place to go in order to legally sue such harassments. When Khadra's parents complain to the bullying kids' parents, they receive the same response: "BACK WHERE YOU PEOPLE CAME FROM!" (p. 8). This imperative reverberates throughout the whole story especially at the moments Khadra encounters nativist Americans. Another instance of such encounters occurs when she has just started wearing hijab at school. Cornered again, this time by her fellow students, Khadra is coerced to take off her scarf and when she shows resistance, it is violently torn off her head.

Perhaps the most important event indicating xenophobic sentiments of nativist Americans in the story is the terrorist murder of Zuhura whose unique position as an immigrant-black-Muslim woman makes her the number one target for terrorist attacks. Famous for her "leadership energy, . . . easy command of speech, . . . [and] forward drive" (Kahf, 2006, p. 40), Zuhura is caught up in several battlegrounds all at the same time striving to have her voice heard as representative of various subaltern groups conflated, namely immigrant, black, and Muslim women. As a Muslim woman, she has to fight against limiting norms and values imposed upon her inside the Muslim community. An example of such challenges is evidenced in the negative attitude of her family about her going to a university far from home, entailing her to commute alone. Speaking of which, Khadra says: "Khadra's parents . . . believed a Muslim girl should go to college close to home" (p. 40).

After her murder also, Zuhura receives similar censure for having crossed the off-limits of proper manners expected from a Muslim woman. "She should not have been traipsing about the highways at midnight alone," Khadra's parents agree in retrospect (Kahf, 2006, p. 61). The community also whispers dismissive accounts of her behavior as one who "had been asking for trouble" (p. 61). Misunderstood by both fellow Muslims, "us," and the Americans, "them," Zuhura, as Khadra aptly puts, "didn't fit into this landscape" (p. 30). When Zuhura is reported missing,

the police simply undermine her parents' concerns by applying the same prescription they use for a "typical American girl," suggesting she might be "at a party" and that they had "to wait forty-eight hours because she was an adult" (p. 57). With the police refusing to offer immediate help, it takes four days before Zuhura's family and other members of the community can finally find her "Murdered. Raped. [with] Cuts on her hands, [and] her hijab and clothes in shreds" (p. 59).

Another significant point about Zuhura's character and what befalls her is that she represents the complex positioning of (black) Muslim women in the society. Be it among "us" or "them," they are bound to fight several battles at the same time. At home, they have to resist the traditional patriarchy which denies them such basic rights as working outside home, pursuing higher education, etc. and when abroad, they need to fight for their right to be different from their Western counterparts. To be recognized, they are deprived of their right to practice Islam or any other cultures outside the western feminist scope of recognition. The way her murder is covered in the local media is also very telling. Reduced to cliché images and stereotypes, Zuhura, in the newspapers, is represented either as a victim of racism or a "foreign woman," (Kahf, 2006, p. 41) glossing over her Islamic identity and American citizenship. That Zuhura's murderers are never found and no serious attempt is made by the police to find them also points out the complicated relations of power and exclusionary processes at work in the society against Muslim minority groups. Feeling ignored and discriminated against, Khadra thinks to herself: "maybe we don't belong here . . . Maybe she belonged in a place where she would not get shoved and called "raghead" every other day in the school hallway (p. 62). From this marginalized perspective, terrorism is dismantled of its power-willed identification with Islam and Arabs.

3.2 Third-Space Encounters; "US" and "Them" Defamiliarized

While depicting the nativist predilections of Americans and Muslims, Kahf is also keen to wedge in some incongruous encounters between the two sides, thereby contesting serenity of the purist accounts of both us and them. One of the early instances of these third-space encounters occurs when Khadra befriends an American girl, Livvy. To Khadra's surprise, she happens to come from a religious family of "strict" values. Livvy's parents "don't drink or smoke. They don't approve of dancing or rock music. And Livvy and her sister . . . are not allowed to date" (Kahf, 2006, p. 55). Interestingly enough, Livvy is not popular among the fellow students at school and is subjected to similar mistreatments by Americans (p. 55). Or on their first trip to Mecca for hajj pilgrimage, the Shamy run across a European couple on their flight to Saudi Arabia. At first, Khadra, still a nativist, thinks they are there to "to prey on Saudi oil" (p. 97), but to her surprise, she learns they are going to make haj just like them. Further complications are observed as Khadra realizes that they come from Albania, a Muslim country in Europe, and are even born Muslim, though not allowed to practice it for many years during the "communist takeover" (p. 97).

Inside "us" also there are nativist Muslims who subject Khadra to similar judgmental behaviors. One of such people is Juma, Khadra's Kuwaiti husband, who reduces her to an object of desire to be owned and bossed around. Still in her early stage of self-realization, Khadra says yes to Juma's proposal without considering the consequences of such a blind-folded marriage. When taken to Kuwait, where Juma plans to reside permanently, Khadra again experiences the problems of cultural displacement, this time in a country of Muslims. The first thing she notices about Kuwait is its shopping centers and the zeal of her sisters in law for shopping. She says: "the shopping centers overspilled with stuff you never saw in America, the latest appliance brands from Europe and Japan and China, a dizzying smorgasbord" (Kahf, 2006, p. 133). Another instance of such cultural misunderstanding occurs over the question of gender roles. To Juma, raised with patriarchal values, women are born with natural ability and obligation to cook and prepare foods for the family. One day,

when Juma sees no dinner prepared for him, he reprimands Khadra of not observing her role as wife in their relationship. When she tries to convince him by resorting to their common knowledge of the Prophet's ways of helping his wife at home in such supposedly "womanly" tasks, he objects that he "wasn't a graduate student. He wasn't studying engineering" (p. 145), indicating his flawed and insular understanding of Islam and the symbolic acts of the Prophet. He is also against Khadra's social activities such as attending "campus demonstrations," (p. 146) deeming it inappropriate for a Muslim woman. What Khadra learns from her failed marriage with Juma are two things: firstly, it is a false expectation to think of Muslims as constituting a homogenous community with no internal differences and secondly, not all customs and cultural values practiced by Muslims are valid and defensible, hence the urge she feels to depart from them. Revolting against Juma's patriarchy marks Khadra's break from her past nativist self.

Moreover, in her Mecca trip, Khadra experiences unhomely encounters with some Muslims who turn out to be "stranger" to her than the American Bill Lott kids. Still basking in the Islamic ambience of Mecca, one day, Khadra awakes "to the adhan for fajr as if to the call of love" (Kahf, 2006, p. 101). She decides to say her prayers at a mosque near their residence, but once outside the house, she is caught and brought back home, escorted by two Saudi policemen. To the host's shame and Khadra's bewilderment, the policemen say that they found her "trying to get into the mosque" as if she was a burglar or a terrorist (p. 101). And even when she tries to defend herself by quoting some hadiths from the Prophet— that "you must never prevent the female servants of God from attending the houses of God"— they just "laugh [it off] . . . like she was a joke, like what she said didn't even matter" (p. 102). Ironically, in the middle of Mecca, Khadra realizes she cannot practice Islam as she wishes and this is while she can pray at whichever mosque she likes in the "land of kuffar."

Another revealing moment in which Khadra feels like a "bad woman" (Kahf, 2006, p. 102) in Saudi Arabia occurs when Afaaf (meaning

chastity), the host's daughter, manages to take her out under the pretext of shopping, but as it turns out, she is setting up a blind date of sorts between her boyfriends and Khadra. When picked up by a limo, Khadra is shocked to see "Afaaf throw off her veil and abaya inside the limo" (p. 105). Viewing Khadra as an exotic object of desire coming from the United States, Afaaf's friends keep calling her "American" even though Khadra introduces herself as an Arab and speaks an unaccented Arabic. Their insistence on seeing her as an American and not an Arab gestures to their essentialist identification of Americans with sexual liberty. After offering Khadra some pills to take, one of the Arab guys urges her to take off her veil, reminscient of the American Lott Kids at school. When she resists, he says: "surely you don't wear that thing in America" (p. 107) and without warning, he pulls her veil off and advances to harass her. Resisting his attempts, she reaches out for the door latch and frees herself by tumbling out. His bubbles burst, the disillusioned guy tellingly asks: "you grew up in America-don't tell me you never do stuff like this in America" (p. 107). He speaks of America as though people there have no morals, Muslim or non-Muslim. The same attitude is reflected in Afaaf's words when she turns up from another car and says: "What is your problem? . . . What's the matter, is this not as fun as what you do in America?" (p. 108). When all this is happening, Khadra cannot help thinking "even though she was in a Muslim country at this moment, and not just any Muslim country but the Muslim country, where Islam started, she had never felt so far from home" (p. 107). Besides challenging Khadra's nativist us/them categorization of Muslims and Americans, these two events mark a turning point in Khadra's perception of the idea of "home" as something linked with one's religious origins, here Mecca. When leaving Indianapolis, she didn't feel any particular connection with the city. She even found the phrase "leaving home" funny and irrelevant (p. 95). After the mosque incidence, however, she finds a "gulf" of contradiction between what she had been taught and what was actually practiced in the world outside her community (p. 85).

3.3 Hybridity

As mentioned earlier, Khadra's revisionary phase of self-fashioning begins with her rebellion against the patriarchy inscribed in Juma's nativist vision of family and gender roles. Pressing for an unexpected divorce initiated by herself, she loses the trust and respect of her family and the majority of the Muslim community, as they find it forward of a Muslim woman to even think of separation let alone implement it. Unwelcomed at home, she decides to pay a visit to Teta in Syria, the only person in the story who had expressed forebodings about her marriage. Back in Syria, Khadra gains the space she needs to reconsider her past and undergo a self-refashioning in the process. Disoriented in her new stage of life, Khadra even stops saying prayers and practicing Islam, trying to evaluate them anew in the new context. Syria provides her with a kind of hermitage in which she can appraise the past culture passed down from her parents to her. In this process, Teta, a dialogic character disrupting stereotypical Arab woman image, greatly helps her to come to terms with her past again, though not with the one fashioned by her parents. The past Teta introduces to Khadra is not a black-and-white picture, however, it makes room for the recognition of the shadow as part of us and runs counter to the dominant images replicated in Orientalist discourses.

One of such counter-narratives manifests itself in Teta's character as an anti-Orientalist Arab woman. Contesting the dominant image of the oriental Arab woman concealed behind a cover bereft of any agency and reduced to the level of a submissive wife stationed at home, Teta recounts to Khadra that she used to work as a "telephone operator" (Kahf, 2006, p. 163) for a communications center in her youth till she fell in love with an immigrant guy from Palestine at the time it was being occupied by the "Yahudi terror squads" (p. 166). To Khadra's surprise, she learns that Teta eloped with her lover to Haifa, his homeland, when her parents objected to their marriage on the grounds that the lover was a homeless "filthy gypsy" (p. 164). She also admits that people of Damascus "tend to be very satisfied with themselves" (p. 164). From this self-critical perspective, Khadra gets to see how xenophobia is not specific to Americans and that all communities around the world might practice it on those considered as the

"other." Hence the fact that Damascus like any other places on the earth is not a unified entity.

In Teta's story, a subaltern's perspective is also offered on the Palestinian plight during the Israeli's early days of occupation. When Teta and her lover arrive at Haifa, it is still part of Palestine. Some time later, however, the Israeli guerrillas attack the city in order to occupy it by terrorizing people out of their homes. It is on the same day that she loses her husband who gets shot from behind by one of the Israeli forces. She describes her traumatic experience on that day in this way:

Terrible year, the Nakba. So many were killed in the scattering. . . . Running for our lives, marching madly for the border, leaving willy-nilly, you grabbed what you could, you strapped your baby to your hip and ran. Because the Yahudi terror squads were at our heels, te'ebrini. And that's when I lost him. Killed, shot in the back by one of the Zionist militias. I will never forget those coward Jew terrorists. (Kahf, 2006, p. 166)

However, not all Jews are depicted as such in Teta's narrative. She also speaks of a very close friend of hers named Iman, who was a Jewish Arab girl. Teta remembers her when taking Khadra to one of the oldest Jewish places of worship, synagogues, in Damascus for a visit. Interestingly enough, on a tablet inside the building, they find an inscription written in three languages "Hebrew, Arabic, and French" (Kahf, 2006, p. 183). The multiplicity of languages and religions in Damascus testifies to the peaceful life of people of different religions together in Syria's past. In a moment of epiphany, Khadra realizes that she has always thought of Jews "as Them, these people over There, not all the same of course, she knew that, but, still not part of Us" (p. 184) but now "Damascus demanded that you see all religions as architectural layers of each other" (p. 179).

Back in the US and now in her hybrid positioning, Khadra finds herself in another telling encounter with an Iranian girl, Bitsy, who turns out to be one of the staunch assimilationist characters of the story. Choosing her out

of necessity as a roommate, Khadra enters a new realm of cultural negotiation with Bitsy who contemptuously "loathe[s] and despise[s] Arabs and [has] successfully avoided them" all her life (Kahf, 2006, p. 208). Were Khadra still a nativist character, she would strongly react to her downright racism, but being in a hybrid state, she tries to listen to Bitsy's story so that she can understand her too. Bitsy believes "Arabs caused the ruination of the once-proud Persian people by corrupting their culture, religion, language, and race" (p. 209). When Khadra demands further elaboration on her statement, Bitsy merely dismisses her, hence putting off the possibility of getting into a genuine dialogue about her antagonism. The defense mechanism Bitsy employs in circumventing this conversation bears witness to her monologic nativism. In Khadra's absence, she drops pieces of paper on which her reasons are written. In this way, no genuine conversation is established between them as one party is always absent to respond back. Some of the reasons Bitsy lists are worth noting: "'Reason #10, for corrupting the Persian language with Arabic words.' 'Reason #11, for changing the 'p' in Persian to 'f' as in Farsi-why did we have to drop our p's just because Arabs can't say them?' [sic]" (p. 211)

One of the main flawed propositions underlying Bitsy's reasoning is her polaristic view of Arabs as opposed to Persians structured around such binaries as host/parasite and pure/impure. That is why she sees every contact between Persians and Arabs as leading to corruption of an essentially pure thing, be it language, color, or religion. She does not see how Persian language was even enriched by the new words loaned from Arabic vocabulary without losing its prominence among Persian speakers. Hence, the fact that the letter /p/ is still used by Persians and not all words underwent such changes. As for the shift to Islam in terms of religion, which again cannot be generalized to all Persians, Bitsy views it as something simply forced upon Iranians against their own will and without them exerting any agency in this negotiation.

Bitsy's character, whose real name turns out to be Fatima-Gordafarid, a symbolic mixture of Arabic and Persian names, signifies the

heterogeneity of the Iranian people who have been identified mostly as Arabs in the American media especially as of 1979 Islamic Revolution. Bitsy, still holding grudge against the historical invasion of her homeland by Arabs in the sixth century, is representative of a fraction of Iranians who still long for a return to the Iranian culture of pre-Islamic era. By bringing them to light, Kahf (2006) aims to represent the Orient, here associated with Arabs and Iranians, in its complex diversity and non-uniformity. This is while she includes the Islamic uprising of Iranians as part of the whole picture too.

Khadra's job as a photographer also carries important ramifications in her hybrid self-fashioning. When assigned by the magazine, tellingly named "Alternative Americas," on a project to depict the ethnic culture of her community in Indiana, Khadra is given the chance to have a say in representation of Muslims (Kahf, 2006, p. 232). This time it is through the lenses of her "viewfinder" (p. 33) that Americans get to know Muslims. This awareness makes her job all the more difficult, as she realizes how a simple tilt at the angle of her camera can cause a huge difference in the way Muslims are perceived. That is why she is careful not to reproduce cliché images of Muslims in compliance with the dominant mainstream media. One of such images she takes care not to shoot is that of "the shouting angry Muslim," (p. 243) because this is what the dominant media keeps selling to the non-Muslim viewers. Instead of such images, however, she turns to those aspects of Muslims' life which are kept at bay. When she hears that her childhood friend, Hanifa, has become a "professional driver" racing in "the Indy 500," she knows this is what should be shown to the world (p. 238). By trying to address such discursive fractures, Khadra hopes to resist the stereotypical images of Muslim women. Ironically though, later on, she is disillusioned with the magazine she works for as she is given the hint that "the shouting angry" face is more fitting into the established image of otherness than "the type of nice kindly religious person that will very gently tell you you're going to hell" (p. 243). And it is when Khadra realizes the magazine is "just another part of the

mainstream establishment," seeking to represent no "alternative" Americas, but an America with co-opted alternatives (p. 243).

4. Conclusion

In these times that terrorist groups identify themselves with Islam and not a single day passes without mass media coverage of terrorist incidents perpetrated by "Muslims" in different parts of the world, it is not hard to fathom how difficult it is for an American Muslim woman to have given voice to the uncovered accounts of the lives of American Muslims both inside and outside the United States. In this paper, it was investigated as to how Kahf (2006), in her *The Girl in Tangerine Scarf*, has managed to have her (subaltern) voice heard through writing down the story of an Arab-American girl residing in the US. In her resistant account of American Muslims' life, Kahf (2006) has tried to foreground the troubles, challenges, and threats posed to minorities in general, and those coming from Islamic backgrounds, in particular. Underscoring heterogeneity of Islamic communities, she has also taken care not to consolidate all Muslims into a unified whole by depicting Muslim characters of various kinds such as Sunni, Shia, Sufi, etc. At the same time, such concepts as terror, filthiness, purity, and homeliness are effectively de-essentialized when exposed to multifarious cultural positions and contexts. Inside the US, or "the land of kuffar," (Kahf, 2006, p. 13) as Khadra's parents deem it, for instance, Khadra seems to be more at ease with her beliefs as a Muslim woman than in Saudi Arabia, home to holy Mecca. Or in the case of terror, this is some White supremacists, and not Muslims, who perpetrate it, slaughtering Zuhura, a Black Muslim woman for not "fitting into" the dominant culture. Hence the exclusionary measures involved in suppressing the counter-narratives through cooption, as practiced by *Alternative Americas*, the magazine Khadra works for, and on a broader scale, the mainstream media, which is responsible for maintaining the status quo.

Kahf's (2006) *The Girl in Tangerine Scarf*, as an instance of narratives of "freak displacements" (Bhabha, 1992, p. 145), is a good case in point as

to how cultures recognize themselves through difference within the third-space encounters of us and them. The investigation of such liminal spaces gives the writers the chance to bring to light the epistemological rifts and fractures of dominant discourses. As such, it can be cogently reasoned that the study of the works written in between cultures such as the ones grouped under the rubric of multi-ethnic literature does not result in a "null and ideology-free zone" (Parry, 2004, p. 65). However, it can effectively expand the horizons of postcolonialist thinking in literary criticism.

5. References

Bhabha, H. K. (1992). The world and the home. Social Text, 10(31-32): 141-153.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). The Location of Culture, London: Routledge.

Fadda-Conrey, C. (2011). Arab American citizenship in crisis: destabilizing representations of Arabs and Muslims in the US after 9/11. Modern Fiction Studies, 57(3): 532-555.

Fadda-Conrey, C. (n.d.). Arab American literature in the ethnic borderland: cultural intersections in Diana Abu-Jaber's 'crescent'. MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S., 31(4): 187-205.

Foucault, M. (2000). The order of things. In Rivkin, J. & Ryan, M., (Eds.), Literary Theory: An Anthology, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers: 377-384.

Freud, S. (1919). The uncanny. (A. Strachey, Trans.), Retrieved March 11, 2016, from http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf

Gonçalves, G. R., & Braga, C. (2014). A thousand and one voices: re-reading scheherazade in contemporary Arab-American fiction. Ilha do

Desterro, 67: 79-86. Retrieved March 21, 2015, from http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ides/n67/0101-4846-ides-67-00079.pdf

Harb, S. (2012). Arab American women's writing and September 11: contrapuntality and associative remembering. MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S., 37(4): 13-41. Retrieved May 21, 2014, from https://muse.jhu.edu/article/487904

Kahf, M. (2003). E-mails from Scheherazad. Florida: University Press of Florida.

Kahf, M. (2006). The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf. New York: Carroll & Graff.

Majaj, L. S. (2008). Arab-American literature: origins and developments. American Studies Journal 52: n. pag. Retrived August 08, 2015 from http://www.asjournal.org/52-2008/arab-american-literature-origins-and-developments/

Majaj, L. S. (n.d.). The hyphenated author: emerging genre of 'Arab-American literature' poses questions of definition, ethnicity and art. Al Jadid Magazine, n.d. Retrieved May 01, 2015 from http://www.aljadid.com/content/hyphenated-author-emerging-genre-arab-american-literature-poses-questions-definition-ethnici

Mattawa, Kh. (2008). Writing Islam in contemporary American poetry: on Mohja Kahf, Daniel Moore, and Agha Shahid Ali. PMLA, 123(5): 1590-1595. Retrieved April 11, 2014 from https://www.jstor.org/stable/25501962?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Parry, B. (2004). Postcolonial Studies A Materialist Critique. London and New York: Routledge.

Shakir, E. (1991-1992). Arab mothers, American sons: women in Arab-American autobiographies. MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S., 17(3): 5-15. Retrieved May 22, 2014 from http://www.jstor.org/stable/467236?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Stubbs, J. K. (2003-2004). The bottom rung of America's race ladder: after the September 11 catastrophe are American Muslims becoming America's new N .... s?. Journal of Law and Religion, 19(1): 115-151.

Toossi, K. Z. (2014). The conundrum of the veil and Mohja Kahf's literary representations of hijab. Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies, 17(5): 1-17. Retrieved December 12, 2015 from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2014.984617