

## The Non-Western Representation of Third World Woman in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf: A Transnational Feminist Study*

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### Article History

Received:  
April 02, 2023

Accepted:  
May 04, 2023

Keywords: *third world women; transnational feminism; Mohja Kahf; and The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

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### ABSTRACT

Western feminists have exerted the power they have owned from their position in passive discourses to cast third world women as silent victims who need the aid of their western sisters. Framing third world women in a category of analysis as oppressed, subjugated, helpless, pawn, dependent, and savage have evoked many non-western writers to enhance the real image of women relying upon their diverse experiences and resistance to the gendered oppression of women in their literary works. Mohja Kahf, the Syrian-American writer, sets a different portrayal of third world women, emphasizing their hardships, contributions, ordeals, and struggle to survive and prove their potentials. This study aims to show how Kahf challenges the western thoughts and stereotypical images, drawing on transnational feminist theory as a radical theoretical framework to expose and delineate the west hegemonic practices, transcending the nation-state limits, and address the inequalities worldwide. The research plan was based on an introduction, a preamble, three demands and a conclusion; The title of the introduction was: A brief summary of the term grammatical breadth. The first demand: the deletion of the verb is obligatory. The second demand: the deletion of the verb is permissible. And the third demand: the deletion of the verb to indicate a grammatical style. Finally, the conclusion, which included the most important results of the research.



## 1. Introduction

Arab women are portrayed in a conventional, stereotypical frame as victim of gender persecution, an escapee from her intrinsically repressive culture, and as a pawn of Arab male authority (Amireh & Majaj, 2000). In the United States, the media has described Muslim women who live in Western nations in one of two distinct ways: “as women who modernize and assimilate, and often publicly critique patriarchal Islam: or as observant women with no agency, rights,” or devotion to the country in which they reside (Haque, 2014, p. 805). Moreover, “the Muslim woman is produced as a performative battleground of ideological and normative contradictions; as a commodity product with a rearranged voice, not an arranger of voicings.” (Zeit, 2017, p.1)

Arab American women writers struggle to create a space for themselves and “give their bicultural upbringings”; they fight to “claim an identity without being” alienated by American culture. Those Arab American women writers like Mohja Kahf, Leila Ahmed, Laila Halaby, and Diana Abu-Jaber criticize the intellectual tendencies in both the West and the East that produce concessions to fundamentalist regimes. Via their works, those women writers defy both the east, with its suppressive, fundamental governments, and the west, which deems them as unenlightened and/or domesticated other (Abdelrazek, 2007, p.2). They tend to utilize writing as a kind of resistance to investigate what it implies to be a member of a country that wages war on their Arab home countries, describing racially Arab males as terrorists and oppresses Arab women. They have examined the Eurocentric recognition of Arab culture as inherently uncivilized, patriarchal, and backward. These authors also criticize the American feminists who see Arab and Arab American women as helpless victims of patriarchal tyranny in need to be rescued, and more usefully, they identify the urging troubles which American feminists failed to address (Abdelrazek, 2007).

Syrian-born Mohja Kahf migrated to the US with her family in 1971 after being born there in 1967. Later, Kahf pursued a Ph.D. in comparative literature at Rutgers University. At the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, she is now an assistant professor of comparative literature and a faculty member of the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies (Layton, 2010). Kahf’s parents moved to the United States to pursue doctoral studies at the University of Utah. Her father obtained a position with the Islamic Society of North America in Plainfield, Indiana, after receiving Ph. D in economics



(Twair, 1999). The quiet city in America's heartland presented such an ominous and unlucky landing for Kahf and her younger brother. It was the place of the Ku Klux Klan's regional headquarters, and for the two Muslim children who joined their midst were not welcomed. Kahf and her brother endured ostracism, torment, and threats. The taunts Kahf got upon wearing the veil was nothing comparing it to the mockery she encountered "during the 444 days of the Iranian hostage crisis." (p. 38). Kahf owns the credit of the remarkable poetry book *E-mails from Scheherazad*, and a scholarly book *Western Representation of the Muslim Women from Termagant to Odalisque* (Charara, 2008). Kahf is the author of short fiction, poetry, essays, creative nonfiction, academic scholarship, and literary criticism (Layton, 2010). She was only three years old when her family migrated to the United States in 1971. As a professor in the aforementioned university, she also teaches Middle Eastern studies (Richards, 2014).

As a Muslim feminist, Kahf trends a delicate line between contemporary feminism and Islamic tradition. Her creative approach "to being a practicing, moderate Muslim" who is also devoted to women's rights earned her both acclaim and criticism from her fellow Muslims. Lisa Suhair Majaj, a fellow scholar and writer, has described Kahf as "Whatever her genre, Kahf offers articulate, passionate challenges to common place perceptions of the Middle East, Muslim women and Arab Americans, striking notes of humor, compassion, outrage and celebration that resonate across the literary register." (Layton, 2010, p. 101). Simply, Kahf exquisitely fetched a thorough understanding of Arab women in the Middle East and those in America that both through her art and the worldwide facts, she laid a healthy set of portrayal to the real lives of those women, traditions, cultures as well as direct and indirect resolutions in her sightly works.

Kahf made reference to the significant occurrences that followed the 9/11 attacks in the United States in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, since these events shown to have a significant impact on the lives of Arab Americans (Alkarawi & Bahar, 2013). The book critiques the historical and current abuse of Muslims. It represents a variety of international political conditions, from the Cham's repression in "Cambodia to the Iranian revolution" (Haque, 2014, p. 813). One of the most distinctive aspects of Kahf's narrative is the conflict between the West and the East. Her novel addresses the idea of 'otherness', where the main issue is how the 'other' is seen and portrayed, also, it illustrated the problem of a hybrid identity and its deleterious effects on its bearer (Chebil, 2021). In this



respect, reading Arab American literature may be helpful for the study of “how cultures perceive themselves via their projections of 'otherness'” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 17).

Kahf resists, deconstructs, and critiques the western perceptions about Muslim women, which regard them as suppressed, silenced, and victimized. Likewise, she challenges the patriarchal agency over women, the control that aims to restrict them, cast away their independence, and stands as an abominable barrier confronting their intellectual growth and autonomy (Chebil, 2021). Kahf as an author who identifies with both Muslim and American culture, knits a web that link the writing of Arab American to the American novel tradition by leaning on another set of traditions “that is the founding myths of America,” like the prairie myth, and on diverse imagined and actual geographical places, so that to address emigrant identity cases, and redefine subjectivity of Muslim American Women (Arami, 2018, p. 43).

The body of writing of Kahf’s novel is often defined as an emphatic call for mainstream American society to change its attitude toward Arab American immigrants. Further, her oeuvre incorporates an internal critique of the injustice in Arab American communities (Bujupaj, 2015). In addition to Arab Americans, Kahf represents a variety of ethnic groups; an Orthodox Jew, Hindu of South Asian descent born in America, and Arab Christian are among the novel’s characters. As a result, the narrative is not only a multi-layered examination of modern multicultural America, but also a daring adherence to realism (Salaita, 2011). It is “often reads like a social document embedded in the genre of fiction.” (p. 40).

Kahf’s novel launched as a part of the notable surge in literary productivity by Arab American authors and poets that dates back at least three decades. Over this time, new urgencies in United States have evolved and resulting in new factors that have made it pressing for the Arab American writers to self-fashion and self-identity their own works to take into account the existence of a community (As Cited in Cariello, 2017, pp. 225-226). The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf is a semi-autobiography narrative of a young Muslim growing up in Indiana during the 1970s and 1980s when the Ku Klux Klan was still operating in large parts of the State (Richards & Omidvar, 2014). The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf is a bildungsroman, a story of a young woman told from her point of view, Khadra Shamy’s view. The story follows the protagonist's development morally, psychologically, and intellectually from infancy to adulthood (Sulaiman et al., 2018). It chronicles the tale of Khadra, a Muslim immigrant from Syria who settled in America



that her diverse interpretations of her religion and cultural practises serve to highlight her struggle in the nation in which she was nurtured (Marques, 2017). Kahf's appreciably genuine work has received recognition from critics, and it has been discussed in scholarly works, book chapters, and several book reviews (Sulaiman et al., 2018).

#### Literature Review

Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, is a fine piece that firmly associated with different fields and approaches to be investigated. It received a noteworthy acclaim by critics, writers, and scholars. As Salaita (2011) states, "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf, which quickly went on to become one of the most critically and commercially successful Arab American novels" (32). In this respect, the researcher began looking for prior studies on this work to designate both the study focus and the originality of the current study by manifesting the sides that are not tackled in the previous studies.

Sana Ayed Chebil (2021) in her article "Images of Veiled Women in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*." attempts to present not only how the veiled women viewed as a racial other but also reflecting upon the heroine's character Khadra Shamy, her experience and suffering with the rest of other stories of female characters to permit a side of her study marked with feminist perspective; highlighting the multiple roles Muslim women can do. Professor Lin Ling (2020) in "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf: Constructing Diasporic Muslim Identities in a Coming-of-Age Narrative" offers a platform to get a better understanding of diasporic Muslims in United States along with the focus on the socio-political questions, addressing them throughout the representation of cultural hybridity within the literary discourses in the light of postcolonial theory. Suraiya Sulaiman, Mohammad A. Quayum, and Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (2018) in "Negotiating Muslim Women's Rights and Identity in American Diaspora Space: An Islamic Feminist Study of Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*." have explored Kahf's work to tackle identity, diasporic space, embracing the Islamic Feminism approach to enhance readers' knowledge of some concepts and issues like patriarchy. Those lecturers showed how the diasporic space allowed Muslim women to negotiate their rights freely, reinterpreting numerous perspectives in a new light.

Sara Arami (2018) "Encounter, Clash, and Confluence: Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*." concentrates on how Kahf places the protagonist Khadra in a religious Muslim community in Indiana to provide the readers with different various versions of Islam and reacts against the passive accusations against Muslims since 9/11.





Further, Arami examines the clashes Khadra underwent both in America and the east, and how through the process of suffering, shocks, and the different phases she experienced; Khadra gets along with the notion of diverse identities and perspectives around her worldwide. Marta Cariello (2017) "Homeland America, Bismillah: Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and the Dissonance of Nationhood." examines Kahf's work in the context of increasing critical debate in Arab-American literature on the borders and predicaments of US nationhood. So, Mohja Kahf's poetics of dissonance, which questions prevailing narratives of American national identity and its exclusionary cultural politics, is what Cariello explored. Carine Pereira Marques (2017), in her dissertation "Narratives of Displacement in Space and Time: A Study of *Brick Lane*, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, *The Lowland* and *Americanah*" investigated the impact of time and space categories on the gender roles' reconfiguration, with a focus on the identity elements that mediate the changes seen in the characters. In his study of Kahf's novel, the researcher underlined the significance of key identity aspects particularly, in addition to highlighting how race, religion, and trauma intervene into gender reconfiguration's process.

Ismet Bujupaj (2015) "Nature in Arab American Literature Majaj, Nye, and Kahf" discussed Kahf's work in regard of Ecocriticism; considering the relationship of human being to the nature (environment). How the nature is treated in Kahf's work was the vital key to be investigated, thus, understating nature in Arab American Literature. Hasnul Insani Djohar (2015) in "A Cultural Translator in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*" analyzed Kahf's work using Post-colonial approach, considering the relationship between Americans and Muslims after 9/11. the research justifiably underlined the protagonist's role as a cultural translator between Muslims and non-Muslims Americans throughout her depiction and the challenges she faced. Susan Taha Alkarawi and Ida Baizura Bahar (2013). "Negotiating Liminal Identities in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*." used the concept of liminality that is coined by British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983), to evaluate the narrator's character, in which the latter was suffering kind of identity split, so the personal and social conflicts portrayed in the light of liminality. Additionally, Muslim women's suffering and the connotations of false accusations investigated in this study. Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (2009) in their study "Notions of Home for Diasporic Muslim Women Writers" explored the narrative of Kahf by focusing on the diasporic concept of being ambivalent along with the notion of 'home'.



The current study is unique in that it explores third world women's resistance to the mainstream universalization of first-world women via their diverse ordeals. The current study contributes to enrich third world women literature; it intends to empower third world women and engendering new feminine assertion by showing how Mohja Kahf uses her craft to create multiple portrayals of third-world women, reflecting varied and vivid images of women's activism in the light of transnational feminist theory that had never been employed previously with Kahf's work, which is a radical framework that utilized to speak to the links and disparities situated between the global north and south. Nevertheless, most of the researchers tackled Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* from a literary perspective, adopting new literary techniques which the predominantly were qualitative, thematic in nature, contrarily, linguistic analysis was uncommon. Studies that investigated Kahf's novel with concentration on feminist concepts were few and did not examine the work from a transnational feminist framework and this comes to assure the gap in literature to fulfill the present study and look at it with transnational feminist lens; to comprehend and expose the west feminist's negative attitudes toward their counterparts in third world.

#### Methodology

This study comes within the broad category of thematic analysis in literature as it concentrates on the ideology of third world women; capturing their actual challenges, diverse experiences and their authentic image. The study adopted transnational feminist theory as a framework since it flawlessly fits the content of Mohja Kahf's novel. The substance of this approach is to address the pervasive conceptions of the white, classist and western feminists against their counterparts in third world also it disproves the notion that individuals from various geographic areas have the same subjectivities and experiences. It is attentive to the activism that is not confined within the limits of the nation-states, transnational feminism opposes idealistic notions of global sisterhood while also attempting to establish the foundation for more beneficial and fair interactions amongst women across boundaries and cultural contexts. Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* addresses the subject of third world woman, for this it serves as the source of the information that is suitable to be analysed here with a transnational feminist lens. Further, the discussion concentrated on the narratives of the female characters presented by Mohja Kahf's novel to manifest their strong role, diverse stories and ordeals, and constructing a new image of those women who stand for the rest of third world women as a reaction to



the passive characterization by their western sisters. Eventually, the examination of this work is further reinforced by several critical insights on both the novel and the methodology, so demonstrating the validity of the research.

### Theory

Feminism as a movement is for people seeking change beyond and across national borders, “not of representatives of nation-state or national governments” (Bunch, 1987, p. 301). Transnational Feminism signals a movement in respect of scrutinizing how western nations are for better or worse, for instance, the United States involved in global affairs that influence women’s lives (Tunç, 2013). The term Transnational is an overarching concept that engendered as a method to address the dramatically expanding flows of things, ideas, people, and images across national boundaries in an era of globalization (Conway, 2017).

Transnational feminist study is a radical framework with the capability to speak to the disparities and connections amongst the Global North and South, and to set one’s face against the histories and current practices of nationalism, imperialism and colonialism and their impact on women, sexuality, and gender matters, as well as to unsettle Eurocentric and liberal feminist beliefs and theories. Decentering the western epistemologies is what the transnational perspective in feminist studies attempts, in addition to destabilizing the basis of western countries notably United Kingdom, United States or Europe focused feminist frameworks that are frequently taken for granted. It seeks to shake the embedded hegemonies “of nationalist ideologies, in all of their heteropatriarchal” manifestations (Hundle et al., 2019, pp. 1-3) so that transnational feminist as a theory seeks not only to construct new standards distant from the rigid temples that have been put up by the aforementioned states but also to delineate the authority of those states.

Transnational Feminism was evolved by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan who published *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* in 1994, which established transnational feminism as a theory. Grewal and Kaplan’s book (project), stems from their work on theories of travel “and the intersections of feminism, colonial and postcolonial discourses, modernism, and postmodern hybridity” (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, p.1). Transnational Feminism arose from postcolonial and women of color feminism, together they questioned the concept of ‘global sisterhood’. Nevertheless, Transnational Feminism argues that the benchmarks of sisterhood which assume the





white, middle class feminist subject situated in the Global North decried and neglected the differences among women both globally and locally (Nadkarni & Gooptu, 2019). As a result, transnational feminism straightens out to divulge western feminists' denial of their peers colorful stories, contributions, adventures, and lives within the same universe.

The binarism of “global-local” is often “indefinable or indistinct” because these divisions quietly infiltrate each other. Therefore, Transnational as a term used to problematize the “purely locational politics” which neglected gender issues. Thus, in a rebuttal appeal feminists saw to challenge the “inadequate and inaccurate binary divisions” of “global-local or center-periphery”. These divisions are serious, due to this, it is inadmissible “makes no sense at all” as it may “erase the existence of multiple expressions of local identities and concerns and multiple globalities” (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, pp.11-13). Likewise, diversity and difference are essential values here to be respected and acknowledged, not erased in the process of building alliances (Mohanty, 2003).

Power is seen and used considerably in the discourses of contemporary western feminists, this needed to be identified and challenged. The western feminist discourses about Third World Women must be viewed in the perspective of the “global hegemony of western scholarship”. The picture of typical woman in Third World is constructed with the homogenous understanding of women’s persecution as a group. The “average Third World Woman” results in a truncated life founded on her third world status- uneducated, destitute, victimized, ignorant, tradition-bound, family oriented, and her feminine gender of being sexually restricted. On the contrary, western women (implicit) self-representation as modern, intellectual, free to make their own choices, and having the authority over their own bodies. Women bind together under the framework of sameness of their struggles and oppression which articulated by the sociological notion. With these assumptions, women:

labeled powerless, exploited, sexually harassed, victims of male violence, universal dependents, victims of the colonial process, victims of the Arab familial system, victims of the Islamic code, and Victims of the economic development progress (Mohanty, 2003, pp. 20-23).

The term representation according to Spivak indicates two different meanings. On the one hand, political representation: getting the right to vote, and “having politicians who speak for their various constituent groups.” On the other hand, visual or textual



representation: “the ways that various groups are portrayed in society through stereotypes, as well as counter-narratives and resistance to stereotypes.” (Scott et al., 2017, p.8). The representation of transnational feminist movements work across local and global configurations, in general, they are dedicated to solidarity across distinctions and shared values. They also aim to change structural injustices and the growing negative effects of globalisation on race, gender, class, and ethnic relations. (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015). Transnational feminist networks which others “refer to as women’s international nongovernmental organizations (WINGO)” (p. 53) also contributed in the formation of what some have called global civil society (As Cited in Bakish & Harcourt, 2015) engage with the problems concerning women’s human rights, health, oppression, feminist economics, social equity, and the negative impact of globalization (Moghadam, 2005).

Third-world women who have been marginalized or rendered invisible by much of liberal feminism's illusory universalism must come to an end by the process of “unmasking the particular woman embodied in the unitary category woman” and this demanded the white women to realize their role as oppressors (Mullally, 2006, p. xxx). Diverse feminisms have argued to erase the differences, to adhere the Universalist discourses of rights which neglect the importance of these differences between women or men and women. To achieve just multiculturalism, first is to perceive the difference, provoke solidarity and a sense of belonging for assorted communities and to call for the ‘other’ to be included. Much of modern feminist thought urges to return to the local, stating the contestation by contending that Universalist discourses dismiss and ignore the significance of cultural, religious and other differences among women (Mullally, 2006).

Women's Studies have evolved to enable broader communication and variation, and much of the feminist debate has shifted on from theoretical schools of feminism and arguments concerning different waves (Scott et al., 2017). Women’s studies equip students with the analytical abilities as well as the historical, political, and cultural Knowledge to deal with the modern world “in all of its complexity” (Grewal & Kaplan, 2006, p. xvii). Transnational feminism has been recognized as a considerable discipline within women’s studies over the last decade, and it has therefore become an essential component of academic study and college-level courses (Tunç, 2013,).

Transnational Feminism emerged in the North American academy, in part, as a result of postcolonial critiques and introspection which is often connected to the writings of authors like Trinh (1991), Lazreg (1988), and Mohanty (1986) (Swarr& Nagar, 2010).



More non-western writers like Spivak examined the dominant narratives of the west and institutions' inclination to exclude and disempower the 'subaltern' of the Third World (Kapoor, 2004). These non-western writers and many others verbalized the west hegemonic practices against third world women to react against and delineate them. Mohja Kahf is one of those feminists' writers who constructed a platform to show the real activism of third world women.

#### Analysis

Mohja Kahf presents the character of Khadra Shamy as a young Muslim woman from a conservative Muslim family, driving on her way coming back to Indiana after "living for years away" (Kahf, 2006, p. 4), where she spent the most of her growing years. Khadra's family, the Shamys, moved from Syria to America to settle first at Rocky Mountains where Khadra's father Wajdy "decided to take his family to a place in the middle of the country called Indiana, the Crossroads of America." (p.12), a small town called Simonsville, to establish the Dawah Center, which is devoted to stand up for Islamic values, a nonprofit office. The novel has revealed the native hostility in Indiana towards Shamys' family and the rest of Muslims, who aren't American residents. Khadra and her brother Eyad were cautious in dealing with the Americans upon the advices of their parents, especially their mother Ebtehaj "You never knew with Americans" (p. 5).

There were many opponents to the Dawah Center and the Muslims, who were trying to maintain their religion and rituals. One of those, the so called 'protectors' Hubbard was causing problems to get rid of the Muslim families and demolish the center from the city; one of his moves, claimed to invoke zoning ordinances. Shamys' family was surrounded by many other Muslim families from different parts of the world: Pakistan, Kenya, Sudan, etc. Zuhura, from the Thorean's family, looks like her mother Ayesha, the Kenyan one who does the secretarial work at the Dawah Center. Zuhura is a well-spoken girl, "She was likely to accost and question you, man or woman, even if you had an air of authority," (p.30). Kahf presents Zuhura in an advocating role against the Americans' practices when the zoning inspector arrived to check, she uttered "Did you know that zoning law has often been used as a tool to keep people of other races out?" (p. 30). By her defiant manner, whose part of it inherited from her mother, the author affirms the void invasive accusations westerners cast upon third world women, and how the latter voices are not disconnected. Moreover, the author introduces Zuhura as an educated female who chose to attain Indiana University, Bloomington, and bear the hardships of



travel late at night alone by herself rather than joining the city branch of IU. Leadership viewed by Zuhura's character, her strong presence and intelligence; she started to be active in the Muslim Council's Campus, "she helped lobby the university administration to recognize Muslim holidays, and organized speaking events on "Islam, the Misunderstood Religion" and on social justice issues." (p. 41) thus, featured as "the first Muslim woman to head the African Students Organization at IU." (p. 48). This is an affirming role to break away from western feminists dispersing of third world women's ability and what they can achieve. Zuhura proves the strength that stands for the rest of third world women with the coalitions she makes. The author intends to say that;

The issue of who counts as a feminist is much less important than creating coalitions based on the practices that different women use in various locations to counter the scattered hegemonies that affect their lives... Feminist movements must be open to rethinking and self-reflexivity as an ongoing process if we are to avoid creating new orthodoxies that are exclusionary and reifying." (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, p. 18)

Khadra's parents considered their stay in the United States temporary; they even raised their children according to this but when their children reach adulthood and enter high school and college, it was too late to hold such thoughts, and on top of that, Wajdy was unable to return to Syria for political reasons; opposing Asad regime in the Islamic Foreunner and supported the Islamic movement to over throw him, for this Khadra's father was made a terrorist, tracked by government forces. The situation in the Middle East was deteriorating whether in Pakistan, Lebanon, and Iran (the hostage crisis) also, it extended to other problems in other countries, where none of these incidents were significant enough for the American press to cover.

Khadra suffered much from the hatred the Americans showed upon many crises; "she was a hostage to the rage the hostage crisis produced in Americans. It was a battle zone. Her job was to get through the day dodging verbal blows-and sometimes physical ones." (Kahf, 2006, p. 78). She is also experiencing the culture and traditions that differ from what she has gotten used to or grown up with. In high school, Khadra wanted to express herself and mirror the things that were taking place outside. She wrote essay about "how hypocritical America was to say it was democratic while it propped dictators... and supported Israel's domination of Lebanon, and then they wonder why people over there hate them," (p. 79). Her teacher, Mrs. Tarkington, used to give her the lowest mark upon such composition. While other topics away from politics and religion,



Khadra gets a full mark. Kahf portrays Khadra at her teenage age in high school, not afraid to expose what she sees and hears, disclosing the double-faced stance of America with her Activism. Presenting the character of Mrs. Tarkington, the white American female teacher, Kahf hints to the role those western women play, who want to silences the 'other' by the power they exert from their position, this corresponds with Robin Morgan's notion of 'Universal Sisterhood' which based on erasing the history and influence of contemporary imperialism, for transcendence rather than interaction is the paradigm for future social transformation. Thus, places all women outside the history of contemporary world. For this, Mohanty reacts to describe it as "a model which can have dangerous implications for women who do not and cannot speak from a location of white, western, middle-class privilege." (Barrett & Phillips, 1992, pp. 78- 79).

Khadra's family went to do the haj in Mecca; the whole family was pleased to be there, in the land of Muslims and prophet. The Shamys stayed in Saweem's house, Ebtehaj's milk sister. Afaaf, the daughter of Saweem, asked Khadra to go and visit her aunt Sheikha; the time the girls arrived there, Sheikha was about to leave for an urgent interview with a writer who was in the city for a short time, "I must interview her. I've been trying to get her for my Saudi women writers series... You're welcome to use the library but don't disturb the files on my desk." (Kahf, 2006, p. 108) states Sheikha. The latter was a journalist, put on her abaya and veil in a hurry to reach her destination. The kindest interpretation the reader can glean is Kahf's questioning to westerners' discourses on third world women, which eschews them from what a woman can accomplish, from being smart and educated, locate them in a motionless frame, disabled to fulfill anything on their own. Ignorant, uneducated, inferior, stupid for which those in the north are superior. This set third world women as signifiers of difference by their western sisters. The author skillfully exploits the character of Sheikha and her job to valorize the space of third world women who operate in different vital fields despite the restriction they are living in, successful, prone to communicate, give, change, and create. As a result, deconstructing the normative understanding of the western feminists, this stands for transnational feminism in creating:

strategies of resistance to oppression and on the importance of women's agency (the awareness that women are not just oppressed and victimized but that they also find ways, both large and small, of setting their own course and making their own decisions even in contexts in which they have very limited options)... it is important to recognize





that people still manage to exert some amount of agency and should not only be seen as disempowered victims. (Scott et al., 2017, p. 7).

After Shamys' trip to Mecca, life went back as it was. Khadra was happy to be accepted at Indiana University, Bloomington. She joined the Campus Muslim Council (CMC) which is "the heart of the Muslim scene in Bloomington." (Kahf, 2006, p. 114). It combines a mix of south Asians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Algerians, and Egyptians. Khadra had an active role in the CMC, attending as well as opening public events, reciting verses from Quran, arranging and organizing. For instance, in one of the events, "she was the one who had reserved the room, designed the flyer, made copies of it, and booked the flight for the speaker, just as she had for the last speaker," (p. 128). Khadra managed both languages, Arabic and English. Her Arabic especially in reciting was pure, that after one of the events, Sidky, the president of the CMC, asked her to open their weekly meetings. Kahf's enhancement to Khadra's character with an effective role to play is a response to the anomalous attitudes of the western feminists who "operate on their own social and intellectual ground and under the unstated assumption that their societies are perfectible." (Lazreg, 1988, p. 81). The author undermines the western feminists' self-indulgence by such Arab feminist commander, cultured, not primitive, insurgent, well-known, and admirable.

Patterns of marriage in the Middle East and of Arabs who live abroad are inconstant, yet the norm of relationships is governed by religious ideals and customs. Marriage is still essential to legitimize a union whether operating through arranged marriages or forced marriages, since dating is not a criterion. The process of marriage requires each partnership to have a sense of ownership of his/ her own self; not to be dominated, for it is meant to be based on love, respect, intimacy and deep sharing. Unfortunately, the burdens families placed on their daughters to make a pause to their previous stage or lifestyle and start a new phase of playing the role of angel in the house, likewise, men should only be the providers of domestic needs; seemed to have a significant negative impact on marital ideologies. This led to a generation with misconceived notions about marriage and this is what happened with Khadra and the rest of her peers. Khadra got married from her brother's friend, Juma al- Tashkenti, "a mechanical engineering graduate student from Kuwait." (Kahf, 2006, p. 126) who proposed to her family and after taking her approval, they accepted. The newlywed couple stayed in Bloomington due to their study and at that time many changes took place in



Khadra's marriage as well as those issues concerning her family. The Dawah Center started to shift many of its concepts that her parents decided to step aside, even they planned to move to the south. Problems arose in Khadra's marriage; Juma started to restrict her.

Khadra is a strong woman who would not give in to her husband's constant criticism and condemnation of anything. This patriarchal stance was a shock for Khadra, forbidding her from riding her bike and describing her in passive words "stupid and clumsy and clownlike." (Kahf, 2006, p. 144), she did not use to it, even did not hear such a thing between her parents. Khadra steadied herself firmly in Juma's face upon another ill-behavior of stepping right in front of her when one from the Student Government intended to talk to her in one of the Campus demonstrations, which most of them Juma complained to let her join, "Excuse me- Khadra said over Juma's shoulder, standing on tiptoe. She stepped sideways out from behind him. Excuse me, Juma, I was talking to Jim." (p. 153) And later in the house "What did you do that for... Anyway, it's none of your business what he wanted-he wanted to speak to me, not you" (p. 153). Kahf allows third world woman to step out of the pervasive stereotypes of the west in seeing a third world woman as an oppressed victim by her husband (patriarchal agency). The author develops strategies of resistance, breaking silence, refusing verbal abuse, demanding, pride, and dignity. Khadra refused to be only identified with domestic chores and her duties as a wife. She is not a compliant person who must perform according to what her husband determines. Kahf directs readers to Khadra's personality and strength. She is visible and self-determined; she cannot be a vase, doing nothing. Khadra rejected being isolated from the world. LaBelle (2018) states:

Visibility is more than meets the eye. Rather, it operates as an extensive psychological and affective base by which we feel ourselves as part of the world. In this regard, visibility guides us toward having presence in and amongst others. I feel myself being seen. Such a feeling - that palpable sense of being sensed, witnessed as a subject acting within the social field - lends significantly to the greater experiences of personhood and the capacity to act (p. 29).

At a young age, 21 year old Khadra is pregnant. She is thinking of abortion, "I can't have a baby now,... I can't" (Kahf, 2006, p. 154). Kahf presents Khadra as a courageous woman, not ashamed to confess that she is not ready to have a child, to be responsible about another member, giving time while she is still at the beginning of her



journey. The author emphasizes throughout Khadra's words that a woman has the right ownership over her body, feelings, and desire. She is not an instrument to bear a child just because her husband, his family, and her family want it. She is an individual human being who can decide it by herself. It is a total opposition to the west thinking of third world women. Khadra thought her parents would support her decision, yet she was shocked with the opposite, pushing her again to do the things they thought would benefit her, even in such a serious topic as children. Trying to persuade Khadra, her father told her that his mother sacrificed everything, even herself for the sake of the child. Here Khadra could not hold on; "Well, I am not your mother,... I don't want to be your mother." (pp. 155-156), she exploded expressing her resentment. "I didn't raise you to speak to me in that tone," he snapped, as he rarely ever did (pp.155-156). Khadra words rushed to denote her anguish:

Yeah, you did, Khadra thought sullenly. You raised me to go out and learn, but deep down you still want me to be just like your mother. So where did you think all these contradictions would lead me if not to this frustration, this tone of voice? But I am not going to kill myself to fit into the life you have all mapped out for me." (pp. 155-156).

Kahf presents Khadra as a rational agent, free to choose and decide. Her action in determining the abortion shows her fearlessness to encounter the consequences, one of them divorce. Her identity as a woman cannot be deviated by the same dictating she used to listen to. Khadra reacts against the norms and traditions, against the will of her family, and disagrees to be abide to this patriarchal shade. Eisenstein defined patriarchy as "a political structure seeks control and subjugate women so that their possibilities for making choices about their sexuality, child rearing, mothering, loving and laboring are curtailed." (As Cited In Mahdyawati, 2020, 13). Khadra reflects that her husband, family, and what others think and want are not the center of everything. Kahf limits the west's domination by Khadra's protesting, by saying no. Putting an end to what she is no longer capable to continue in. Transnational feminism helped Kahf to find out the west's passive depiction, manifesting the strong female characters struggling and defying the norms, culture, oppression, and false perspectives;

At a deeper level, however, transnationalism represents a paradigm that explicitly seeks to move beyond the presumed parochialism of the territorial boundaries of the United States...Transnationalism is, in effect, both a category that captures particular kinds of processes and a perspective on the world that is embedded within relationships



of power. (Fernandes, 2013, p. 10). transnational feminists have challenged the structural privileges of feminist discourses and practices of the First World. We are well aware of the problems inherent to producing the binary First World/Third World formulation that in no way completely captures feminisms' multiple sites of power and resistance and that tends to reproduce the Third World as a monolithic category. (Ghosh & Bose, 1997, p. xvi)

Khadra's connection especially with her family was not like before; they abandoned her for a while, it was a difficult time for all of them. Khadra was lost, thus, she decided she must move somewhere else, take a break from everything even her study. Khadra travelled on her own to Syria, though it was dangerous due to her father's political case, but she pursued her quest with no hesitation until arrived at "the old Shamy house in Salihiyeh," (p. 170) where Teta was there. Teta is Wajdy's aunt. She raised him and loved him after the early death of his mother. Teta lives in Syria, but she used to visit the Shamys in America with the gifts she brings from her and the extended family back home.

Teta was pleased to have Khadra; she welcomed her without inquiring about the reason of her coming or to go into the details of her divorce. Teta enjoyed talking with Khadra, recalling the past. Third world women ordeals, conditions, and lives differ from those western sisters who include all women and their diverse problems under the pronoun 'we', considering third world women as part of their universal agendas. Kahf intends to say that third world feminism and activism really exist to shatter the aforementioned utopian vision. She takes readers many years back in time with Teta's love story and opposition to her family, who refused their young beautiful daughter to marry a poor man from Palestine and works in Damascus. Teta tells Khadra about the story, "And then we eloped to Haifa-his parents lived there... we married properly, with witnesses." (Kahf, 2006, p. 172). Teta rejected her parents' decision, who dismissed the man she chose; she determined her life even if the consequences would be severe and this is what happened; her family cast her. Her happiness did not last; Teta's husband was killed by one of the Zionist militias in the terrible year 1948, Al- Nakba that she could not even bury him. She was in a real danger with her babies; she could be shot or get arrested in a second. Teta managed to live and continue, raising her sons; she did not surrender, she survived and proved that she is not category; women are not similar everywhere. Kahf plans to imply that western feminists cannot liberate and rescue women like Teta and others, for they are unwilling to appreciate and understand their multiple experiences;



The dominant discourse in regard to international issues constructs U.S. feminists as saviors and rescuers of “oppressed women” elsewhere within a global economy run by powerful states. This new discourse of a global sisterhood misrecognizes the ways many women are treated in the First World itself, without addressing these situations. Furthermore, it creates On the New Global hegemonic notions of freedom and liberation,... feminist and non-feminist, and wishes to “rescue” “Other” women rather than address the imperial policies and practices of the United States that create conditions of exploitation elsewhere (Shohat, 1998, pp. 511-512)

Further, Kahf hints at how those western feminists want to naturalize the anguish and hardships of third world women by sticking to the process of oppression they exert. In her book *The Politics of Reality* (1983), white lesbian feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye provides a critical definition of oppression as “a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group” (p. 33). “For efficient subordination, what's wanted is that the structure” to “appear natural” (p. 34).

The time Khadra spent in the country of her origin, Syria, with Teta, aunt Razanne, cousins, Teta’s friend Hayat, and the stranger poet she met on the mountain aided her to recover and get right on the truck again. Khadra accepted herself as she is, her mind is modest even with her Islamic codes concerning dress; she embraced both the covered and uncovered, “It's in how I act, how I move, what I choose” (Kahf, 2006, p. 197). Khadra’s journey comes to an end; she returned to America. She decided not to go to Bloomington to get a degree she would never use “entomology department” (p. 241). It is “Photography, what she'd wanted from the start, but had not even let herself acknowledge she wanted, because it was not in the Dawah program, in the Wajdy and Ebtehaj program.” (p.199). Photography came to her “While surveying Damascus from Qasyoon through her camera lens, Khadra came to realize that photography was her thing. "Get the training, learn to make a living at it. There you go, she encouraged herself.” (p.187). Kahf celebrates the character of Khadra. She shows both sides of human being, the weak and strong one, and how Khadra who stands for the rest of women whether those in her age, older or younger, is able to detect her strength points, hold them tight to face life adversities. Challenges make her stronger, mature, secure, satisfied, and decisive. As Khadra demonstrates, it is not about how hard the way is, it is about one’s willingness to keep going forward. The author defies the limited descriptions of the west; “submissive,





subservient, ready-to-please, easy-to-get-along” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 37) “Exploited, looked down upon, and lumped together in a convenient term that denies their individualities, a group of “poor” (nations), having once sided with neither of the dominating forces,” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 109) by the data she offers to redefine power and marks the awaking of third world people who;

has slowly learned to turn this denial to the best account. ‘The Third World to Third World peoples’ thus becomes an empowering tool, and one which politically includes all non-whites in their solidarist struggle against all forms of Western dominance (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 109).

With all the impediments, the character Kahf presents woke up to take her battle, did not allow the hopelessness to encapsulate her mind and soul. She changed her major in the last year of graduation and started from the beginning; she did not look back. Khadra is a worrier, a champion. Third world women are heroines. This is what the author intends to convey.

Khadra now lives outside the shell of the community and the close-Knit environment she grew up in. Her new college is in Philadelphia. Kahdra started to work after graduation and getting her photography degree. She got a city- government job at the morgue, and on the side, Khadra conducted anniversaries, weddings, especially events of conservative Muslim Families who tend to held segregated weddings. She was responsible and independent. After working for years doing morgue photography, Khadra was pleased to be accepted in “Philadelphia- based magazine, Alternative Americas, for which she works, is doing a feature on minority religious communities in Middle America” (Kahf, 2006, p. 33). The project features the Muslims in Indianapolis. Khadra hesitates first, felt the dread of that place, then she was sure she could do it “Maybe it will be good for my `self-actualization,” (p. 245). First world feminists put third world women in a position by their depiction to make them lose their equal chance. They looked down upon them. The author offered a well-articulated ideas with an example of a character, who had a hard fight to set this representation as a required reading, criticizing the power of westerners and their misrepresentation of those women as dependents. Beverly Lindsay the editor of *Comparative Perspectives on Third World Women: The impact of race, sex and class*, concluded in the latter book’s conclusion “Dependency relationships, based upon race, sex and class, are being perpetuated through social, educational, and economic



institutions. These are the linkages among Third World Women.” (As Cited in Mohanty, 1988, p. 67). Mohanty (1988) states that:

Lindsay implies that third-world women constitute an identifiable group purely on the basis of shared dependencies. If shared dependencies were all that was needed to bind us together as a group, third-world women would always be seen as an apolitical group with no subject status! (p. 67).

Kahf presents the young generation of the Muslim women in Indiana with multiple roles to perform. Many of the Dawah community women break with programs of their families. They have changed and explored many things. Hanifa, Hakim’s sister is Khadra’s childhood friend. She is a wife, a mother, and professional driver who participates in a car racing;

You do everything you can to stay on track, of course," Hanifa explains. "You've trained. Your car, your engine, is right, down to the last nut and bolt. But in the end, you surrender-that's the only way you're going to get through the lap, going two hundred miles an hour." Here she gets into the race car, and her eyes sparkle like she's about to cartwheel through a mosque. "So you let go! And you feel your body doing it on its own, and your mind is thinking a thousand things and thinking nothing, and your heart is pounding, and you're connected to everything, to your car, to the air whizzing past, to everyone in the stands, to God. It all becomes one great big living thing." She puts the helmet on and waves (Kahf, 2006, p. 276).

Kahf’s implications are so clear; Hanifa and the rest of women she portrayed whether old or young are not backward, a house prisoner, illiterate, savage, victim, fragile, and desperate. Hanifa shattered the privileges, the rusted picture of the westerner’s superiority the moment she wore her helmet to be on the speedway track, full of enthusiasm and vigor. As an Arab American author, Kahf demolishes the principle of third world women as inactive; “Through their writings, Arab American writers defy any neat categorization and speak articulately to the diversity of Arab American women and their ideas, desires, emotions, and strategies of resistance.” (Abdelrazek, 2007, p.4)

Khadra attended the race with Hanifa’s family to support her, and there she accepted Hakim’s words to have a chance as adults to get to know each other. She has something towards him, but this time she is not rushed; “I wouldn’t mind, Just to get to know each other, right?” (Kahf, 2006, p. 277). She was happy that she knew at that moment what she had to do “She grabs her camera gear and heads down to the press tier,



where she shows her pass. She climbs up and gets into position, into focus, legs apart to brace herself,” (p.278). Khadra’s stance taking pictures to her old friend Hanifa in an untraditional field to implicate them in the magazine she is working for as a stark achievement, shows her intent to change the deformed image of Muslim women, and provides a constructive criticism against the structures of inequality. Khadra refused to convey the same images those in the west used to view; a group of Muslim men obtaining power, exercising strict religious codes, and “the victim oppressed by the custom or the exotic female clad in difference.” (Abdelrazek, 2007, p.4) She bricked the rife western feminists had opened, showing the uniqueness and liveliness of those Muslim Women. The protagonist here acquires a transnational feminist reach. The author presents those women with different interests to say that their goals, experiences, desires, and the thing they want to accomplish is not the same. With this perspective, Kahf interacts with the west universalization and misconception of third world women;

Some feminists had treated women as one homogeneous group, making the assumption that it was both possible and unproblematic to generalise about all women and their interests. This often meant that the experience of white, middle-class and Western women was generalised to black, working-class and Third World women (Afshar, 1996, p. 9).

Khadra will not bind herself and her work for anyone this time, even for Hakim; on the first stand are her career and future. Kahf presents a realistic portrait of the third world woman who is sensible, knowledgeable, and capable of managing both her personal and professional lives not afraid of what is not seen, seizing the day with gratitude and happiness, experienced enough to behave accordingly. She is the only one who can orient herself and pull her out of her sorrow. Khadra knows very well she is brave and the greatest of God’s creation.

#### Conclusion

The current study has followed the transnational feminist theory as a radical framework to address the differences between both the global south and the global north and to illuminate third world women’s diverse forms of oppression, various adventures, contributions, stories and to stick to the main idea of exposing the western feminist’s hegemonic practices against them. The study analyzed the work of Mohja Kahf, the Syrian-American writer; *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* in a transnational feminist lens. The novel is a neatly appealing piece written with a vibrant cast of female characters that



explores the multiple oppression Muslims encounter in United States, especially women, the challenges they face on a daily basis, the spiritual and social environment of Muslims in America. It is an essential new voice's captivating premiere. Kahf empowered her female characters to step out of the restriction and perceptions of the align characterization to inspire and exist in numerous fields with their wit and fine attitudes; full of surge to serve and capable to travel inside and abroad. Throughout her female characters, specifically the protagonist Khadra Shamy; the author formed new basis to look at those women in the third world. The findings has asserted that Kahf succeeded in constructing a platform to represent third world woman as brave, daring, cultured, activist, cheerful, classy, willful, and commander with unconventional female characters who proved third world women's resistance and activism, revealing the actual image, yet, deconstructing the pervasive stereotyping of third world women in western feminist's discourses.



## التمثيل غير الغربي لامرأة العالم الثالث في "الفتاة ذات وشاح اليوسفي" لمهجة قحف: دراسة

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، مهجة قحف، الفتاة ذات الوشاح اليوسفي

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لقد مارست النسويات الغربيات القوة التي امتلكنها من موقعهن في الخطابات السلبيّة لتصوير نساء العالم الثالث كضحايا صامتات بحاجة إلى مساعدة أخواتهن الغربيات. لقد أثار وضع نساء العالم الثالث في فئة من التحليل على أنهن مضطهدات، وعاجزات، وببيدق، ومعال، ومتوحش العديد من الكتاب غير الغربيين لتعزيز الصورة الحقيقية للمرأة التي تعتمد على خبراتها المتنوعة ومقاومتها للاضطهاد للإناث والنساء. خلق نماذج تمكينية للمرأة في أعمالها الأدبية. مهجة قحف، الكاتبة السورية الأمريكية، تضع صورة مختلفة لنساء العالم الثالث، مؤكدة على المصاعب والمساهمات والمحن والنضال من أجل البقاء وإثبات إمكاناتهن. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إظهار كيف يتحدى الكهف الأفكار الغربية والصور النمطية، بالاعتماد على النظرية النسوية العابرة للحدود كإطار نظري راديكالي لفضح وتحديد ممارسات الهيمنة الغربية، وتجاوز حدود الدولة القومية، ومعالجة عدم المساواة في جميع أنحاء العالم. استندت خطة البحث إلى مقدمة وديباجة وثلاثة مطالب وخاتمة. كان عنوان المقدمة: ملخص موجز لمصطلح الاتساع النحوي. المطلب الأول: حذف الفعل واجب. المطلب الثاني: يجوز حذف الفعل. والمطلب الثالث: حذف الفعل للدلالة على الأسلوب النحوي. وأخيرا الخاتمة التي تضمنت أهم نتائج البحث.





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