



Khadra's Journey of Finding Her True Identity Across Different Cultures in Mohja Kahf's The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf

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Abstract

The novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* tells the story of a Muslim woman, Khadra Shamy, living in a non-Muslim country, experiencing various cultural and value clashes. Mohja Kahf, the author of the novel, portrays Khadra's journey in trying to discover her true identity as a Muslim woman. This article discusses the formation of Khadra Shamy's identity in America. The study applies a descriptive qualitative method using Stuart Hall's theory of identity. The article also takes a feminist approach to examine the issues related to women, as the process of identity formation cannot be separated from her status as a woman. The research findings show that, in her quest to find her true identity, there are barriers to women's rights, such as negative prejudice, stereotypes, the existence of a patriarchal society, and injustice. In her search for identity, she resists through several actions, including divorce, abortion, removing her hijab, and trying photography. The process of forming her identity as both an Arab and American Muslim is influenced by various factors, including the Islamic teachings from her parents, which were strict yet did not limit women's rights, and photography, which allowed her to capture various objects and made her realize that there are many different perspectives in society.

Kata kunci:
Pembentukan
identitas,
Perempuan
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Abstrak

Novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* menceritakan kehidupan perempuan Muslim 'Khadra Shamy' di negara non muslim yang mengalami berbagai macam benturan nilai dan budaya. Mohja Kahf, penulis novel tersebut, mengungkapkan perjalanan Khadra yang mencoba menemukan identitas sejatinya sebagai wanita Muslim. Artikel ini membahas pembentukan identitas Khadra Shamy tersebut di Amerika. Penelitian ini menerapkan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan menggunakan teori identitas Stuart Hall. Teori yang digunakan dalam artikel ini adalah teori identitas oleh Stuart Hall. Penelitian ini juga melihat secara feminis untuk melihat isu perempuannya karena pada pembahasan pembentukan identitas tidak bisa lepas dari statusnya sebagai perempuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan dalam menemukan identitas sejatinya, terdapat penghalang terhadap hak-hak perempuan, seperti prasangka buruk, stereotipe, keberadaan masyarakat patriarkal, dan ketidakadilan. Dalam menemukan identitas sejatinya ia melakukan perlawanan dengan beberapa sikap yaitu bercerai, melakukan aborsi, melepas jilbab, dan mencoba fotografi. Proses pembentukan jati dirinya sebagai seorang muslim Arab dan Amerika dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor yaitu ajaran Islam dari orang tuanya yang keras namun tidak membatasi hak-hak perempuan, kemudian fotografi yang membuatnya memotret berbagai objek dan membuatnya menyadari bahwa ada begitu banyak perspektif dalam masyarakat.

ملخص

الكلمات الرئيسية:
تشكيل الهوية،
النساء المسلمات،
المهاجرات،
أمريكا

تدور أحداث رواية *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* حول حياة امرأة مسلمة، خضراء شامي، في بلد غير مسلم، حيث تواجه العديد من الصدمات الثقافية والقيمية. تكشف الكاتبة موهجة كهف في روايتها عن رحلة خضراء في محاولتها لاكتشاف هويتها الحقيقية كإمرأة مسلمة. يتناول هذا المقال تشكيل هوية خضراء شامي في أمريكا. تطبق الدراسة منهجًا وصفيًا نوعيًا باستخدام نظرية الهوية لستيوارت هول. كما يتبنى المقال نهجًا نسويًا لدراسة قضايا النساء، حيث أن عملية تشكيل الهوية لا يمكن فصلها عن وضعها كإمرأة. تشير نتائج البحث إلى أنه في سعيها لاكتشاف هويتها الحقيقية، واجهت العديد من العقبات تجاه حقوق النساء، مثل الأحكام المسبقة السلبية، الصور النمطية، وجود المجتمع الأبوي، وعدم العدالة. في بحثها عن هويتها، قاومت من خلال عدة تصرفات، مثل الطلاق، الإجهاض، خلع الحجاب، وتجربة التصوير الفوتوغرافي. تأثر تشكيل هويتها كمسلمة عربية وأمريكية بعدة عوامل، بما في ذلك التعليمات الإسلامية من والديها التي كانت صارمة ولكنها لم تحد من حقوق النساء، وكذلك التصوير الفوتوغرافي الذي مكنها من التقاط صور لعدة مواضيع وجعلها تدرك أنه هناك العديد من المنظورات المختلفة في المجتمع.

INTRODUCTION

Literature holds a significant impact to the world. Since literary works are written in a form of writings or books with high and lasting artistic value (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), literature conveys ideas, ideology, and messages from the author to the readers. The author is in charge of delivering the important message through literary work in a way that attracts the readers to, also, be concerned about the problem shown in the work. One of the authors who participate in delivering messages is Mohja Kahf. Mohja Kahf is an Arab-American poet and author who was born in Syria in 1967, and is one of the diasporic literature authors. Diasporic literature is the literary works that are written by a diasporic author. Diaspora usually related to terms like exile, alienation, nostalgia, despair, abandonment, and disintegration. However, Aizaz Ahmad states that diasporic writings can denote a new angle to enter reality, which is a great tool of postmodernism to challenge the issues that happen in the world (Bano, n. d.).

As a diasporic author, Mohja Kahf unveils the problem that a Muslim woman faced in a non-Muslim country like America through her novel entitled *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. The novel was published in 2006. It unfolds the story about Khadra Shamy, a Syrian immigrant who grew up in Indiana. Khadra lives with her pious family. Growing up, Khadra never really knew about her true identity. This leads her to simply follow her family's decisions without having the ability to decide things for her own self. Later on, when she is an adult, she got married to a guy of her family's (or father's) choice. And one day, she found out that she is pregnant. However, she feels like she is not ready to be a mother. This situation leads her to come up with a decision to do an abortion, and to get a divorce with her husband. Moreover, Khadra also chooses to fly back to Syria and live with her aunt to help her overcome the situation. Then she moves to Philadelphia and, eventually, finds her true identity. Khadra's decisions are seen as taboo to her family since Muslim women in Arab culture is usually seen as devout and obedient.

In Arab culture, the power between men and women is imbalanced in their family. Thus, women do not have the equal experience to voice their concern. According to Doumat, in family law, men tend to be more at an advantage. For example, men are allowed to have four wives, have the right to divorce at will, and have custody of children (Doumato, 2010). As a pious family, Khadra's parents believe in the same ideas of women should be obedient to men. Moreover, in the novel, Khadra needs to marry someone from the same culture as theirs to maintain their Arab culture. Women in Arab culture, mostly, cannot decide for themselves whom to marry. Their family and the male partner are the ones who decide the marriage. This means that women have low participation in family's decision and society (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). Also, in having the opportunity on education, women in Arab culture are expected to not have more knowledge than men, which means that wives can only listen to their husband and do not have the right to talk back. With those examples of gender inequality in Arab culture, it shows that, usually, women's rights are ignored.

Having different culture makes Khadra question her true identity. As Stuart Hall explains in his book, identity is the core of someone's action. A very similar psychological concept of the self is the idea of on the ongoing, independent, developing, unfolding inner dialectics of selfhood. We are never quite there, but we are always moving in that direction, and once we get there, we will finally learn who we are as an individual. Thus, the great collective social identities of class, race, nation, gender, and of the West are examples of large-scale, all-encompassing, homogenous, unified collective identities that could be discussed as if they were singular entities in their own right. However, these identities actually placed,

positioned, stabilized, and allowed us to understand and read the desires of the individual like a code (Hall, 2000).

These broad, long-term historical processes that gave the rise to the modern world were responsible for the creation and stabilization of the social identities, just as modernity's theories and conceptualizations were what gave it its self-reflective character. Industrialization, capitalism, urbanization, the creation of the global market, the social and sexual division of labor, the significant punctuation of civil and social life into the public and the private, the dominance of the nation state, and the association between Westernization and the idea of modernity itself all played a role in staging and stabilizing them. It is nearly impossible to determine whether the major collective social identities are more damaging when they are falling than when they are increasing (Hall, 2000).

While doing the research, the writers found out that Mohja Kahf's novel, particularly *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, has been the topic of discussion in different theories, methods, and point of views. The previous study by Nawel Meriem Ouhiba, entitled *Beyond the Veil: Exploring Muslim Women's Multidimensional Identities in Laila Abuolela's The Translator and Mohja Kahf's The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* talked about how the author of both novels critique, resist, and disrupt the presentation of Muslim women as monolithic and homogeneous category. The paper analyzes the cultural imagery of Muslim women who wear veil in order to deconstruct the image of veil today.

The following study by Latifa Chikhi with *From Separation to Integration: the Journey of Khadra Shamy in "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" through Berry's Conception of Acculturation Modes* also discusses the issues that happened in the novel. The writer uses conception of acculturation modes by Berry to analyze the process of accumulative emancipation of Khadra. The paper found that when someone wants to succeed as immigrant in America, they need to learn and understand the culture and slowly adjust themselves to it but still maintaining their original identity. The process of acculturation that Khadra went through is marked by different events from the phase of separation to integration. The other article that uses the same novel is *Cognitive Mapping of Migrants' Identity in Mohja Kahf's: The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Kawthar Yasser Al Othman. The paper explores the migration experience with cognitive cartographic analysis. The author classified the migrant's space into three types, which are space of conflict, space of illumination and space of reconciliation. Khadra's physical engagement with specific geographic, urban, and cultural areas helps to shape her personality. This essay emphasizes the role literature provides in what Fredric Jameson refers to as "cognitive mapping" and offers insight into the experience of migration.

The above studies point out that seeing the problems that are shown in the novel is fascinating. Since the previous studies investigate the cultural imagery, imperialism, and cognitive cartographic, the researchers think that it is necessary to look at the topic from the theory of identity. This paper aims to examine the ways of finding true identity of the main character with Stuart Hall identity theory and feminist approach to have a better understanding about the issues from the main character's point of view. Therefore, the researchers formulate two research questions to discuss the issue further: how does Khadra's identity represented as a Muslim woman in the novel, what are the factors that influenced Khadra's identity and how do the factors take part in shaping Khadra's identity, and how does Khadra resist the stereotype to find her true identity?

METHOD

This paper uses qualitative descriptive method to look at the issue with identity theory by Stuart Hall and uses feminist approach as the point of view. According to Creswell on his book entitled *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (cited in Putri & Harnadi, 2019), the significance of various individuals or groups' positions on human social problems can be discovered and evaluated using the qualitative research method. When using descriptive study, the paper is expected to create a comprehensive summarization of the events that the individuals or group experience in everyday terms (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Thus, the data accumulated will support the arguments with facts and truth. In qualitative research, the data collected is generally in the form of words, which is only as support. The primary source of this research is the novel. Meanwhile, the secondary source of this research is from books and journal articles on the internet to support the researcher's arguments towards the issues in the novel, which are delivered in the findings and discussion section below.

The research process begins with looking for and gathering several journals or earlier research. Afterwards, the researchers in this paper identify all documents and related publications by researchers and scholars that were found, and choose the suitable documents for the research. Then, the researchers evaluate the topic related to the issues in the novel through the lens of identity theory with feminist approach. Through this approach, it allows researchers to understand and be able to explain how Khadra's identity represented in the novel and how does Khadra, as the main character, take us to the journey of finding her true identity by upholding the women's rights.

The theory used in this research is the theory of identity by Stuart Hall. He stated that the question of how to approach identity related issues, whether they be social or personal, no longer arises in the wake of their disappearance but rather in the wake of their erosion, fading, and loss of the kind of traction and all-encompassing explanatory power they once enjoyed. They used to be referred to as "master concepts," or the "master concepts" of the class, which is a brilliantly gendered description (Hall, 2000). The feminist approach is used in this research to support the theory to see the issues and analyze it to get the answer of the research questions. According to Wilkinson (1996) supporting the suppressed voice and empowerment of women and girls with several backgrounds who experience marginalization or discrimination in both social world and the creation of knowledge is a necessity in the feminist approach (Laher et al., 2019).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Restrictions on Women's Right

The *Girl in the Tangerine* by Mohja Kahf tells how bitter the reality of a Muslim immigrant in America is. Although the novel's narrative displays a positive perspective on America and encourages cultural dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims, it also raises issues of racial discrimination and Islamophobia, which have a significant impact on the lives of Muslim women in America and the construction of their identity (Sulaiman et al., 2018). Several experiences of the main character, Khadra, who experienced racial prejudice, harassment, and religious bigotry, are examples that outline how Muslim women became victims of hostility towards Islam after the events of 9/11 (Berrebbah, 2020). This is also because Muslim identity can be recognized easily through the hijab worn by Muslim women. In Kahf's story, Khadra had a childhood experience that she still recalls as an adult, namely

when she was bullied at school and made fun of by her friends for wearing the hijab.

“Take off your towel first, raghead.” “Give it!” “Why don’t we take it off for her?” Brent Lott’s hammy handclamped on the nape of her neck, yanking her backward. The scarf went down around her shoulders.”” (p. 91)

In that scene, Khadra’s friends refer to her as “raghead”. There is a child at school who bullied her by taking her Malcolm X book and saying that she would return it after Khadra opened her “towel”. These terms are used to demean the way Khadra wears her hijab which creates the impression that she is a devout Muslim. For many people, the hijab symbolizes oppression, while for most Muslim women, it is an identity (Ruby, 2006). This incident vividly illustrates the ordeal that some Muslim female students have to go through in American schools. Moreover, Khadra is a woman who sticks to her identity as a Muslim woman. She tried to fight and defend her hijab as an effort to fight for women’s rights.

Then, Khadra also found bad prejudice in a patriarchal and authoritarian “Muslim” society. One of these experiences she got was during a pilgrimage trip with her family to Saudi Arabia. Khadra was detained and embarrassed by several religious police and *Mattawa* when she went to a mosque not far from where she lived to pray. Naturally, this is still tied to Khadra’s misstep because she was unaware of the common customs and traditions in Saudi Arabia that forbid women from praying in mosques; instead, they must pray at home. This incident certainly made Khadra demand her rights as a Muslim woman, especially because she felt the difference in practice between Saudi Arabia and America. In America, the mosque is a place to carry out various activities. A mosque was a place for worship, a place for Sunday school, and a place to play when she was little. While in Saudi Arabia, she experienced detention just because she was a woman who visited the mosque.

“Everyone knows women go to the mosque. Women have always gone to the mosque. It’s part of Islam [...] You always said it was part of Islam. What about Aisha? What about how Omar wished his wife would not go to the mosque for fajr but he couldn’t stop her because he knew it was her right? What about the Prophet saying ‘You must never prevent the female servants of God from attending the houses of God?’ I told the *matawwa* that hadith and he laughed-he laughed at me, and said ‘listen to this woman quoting scriptures at us’” (p. 121)

Through this incident, readers can also know that Khadra understands Islam as a religion that clearly mentions gender equality between men and women in the Qur’an. She found that God has never discriminated between men and women. Thus, it is not Islamic teachings that prevent Muslim women from achieving the rights granted by God, but it is patriarchy that shapes these norms and regulations (Badran, 2002; Barlas, 2001). Her attitude in mentioning hadiths related to the rights of Muslim women and her protest against her father shows that she is against gender discrimination that makes religion an excuse. Moreover, men always hold power and make all the regulations that only benefit them, while women are only treated like poppets.

Besides the experiences Khadra had as a Muslim woman both in America and in Saudi Arabia, this novel also showed injustice towards Muslim women when she visited Syria, where her aunt lived and told what happened to Muslim women under the Baathist regime. Bibi Khadra recalls a situation where state police forced Muslim women to take off their headscarves when walking on the street.

“On September 28, 1982, during the height of the troubles in Syria, President Asad’s

brother Rifat dropped a thousand girl paratroopers over Damascus, with a guy backup soldier behind each one. They blocked off a section of the city. Within it, they grabbed any woman who was wearing hijab. Khadra remembered reading about it in *The Islamic Forerunner* and being outraged. She'd never heard an eyewitness account, though. That kind of thing didn't get out of Syria. "You could strip off your hijab and jilbab, or get a gun to your head,"" (p. 203).

The Way Khadra Resists Stereotypes and Find Her True Identity

The ideology of patriarchy and male dominance is clearly illustrated in Kahf's novel (Handayani, 2022). These two things have created a passive and inferior female stereotype. However, with the main concern of constructing Muslim women's identities which have been largely formulated by the Western media, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* serves as one instance of a Muslim female author's work that aids in decolonizing the epistemological spaces through which one learns about Islam and Muslims and reclaiming the space to recognize their own identities and realities (Zine, 2002). Through the novel's protagonist and other Muslim female characters, the author tries to redefine the realities of Muslim women's lives while breaking some stereotypes about Islam and Muslim women.

In Kahf's novel, Khadra makes considerable progress in his surrogate state. She ultimately adjusts to living in a diverse culture and decides to take a chance to challenge several misconceptions about Islam that her parents and the instructors at the Dawah Center have implanted in her. Through her experiences, exposure to other American Muslims, and contacts with non-Muslim friends, Khadra progressively changes her perception of Islam and her worldview. Additionally, the story offers several alternative perspectives on Muslim women. The novel's cover and title, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, present us with a different perception of a Muslim woman. It shows a woman looking defiantly at readers while wearing a vividly colored head scarf, a black blouse, and a pair of jeans. According to Clyne (2003), this new representation of a Muslim woman might be interpreted as a sign of a new type of Muslim woman that rejects the Orientalist portrayal of persecuted Muslim women that appears in "airport literature" or the "oppressed, abducted genre" (Chambers, 2013; Clyne, 2003). Muslim women are frequently depicted on book covers with their faces hidden by a mysterious black veil, revealing just their eyes. This narrative's traditional structure depicts Muslim women as runaways from the oppression of Muslim misogynists; they are ultimately freed by Western saviors, who are almost always men (Sulaiman et al., 2018).

The story also dispels stereotypes about Muslim women by giving them a powerful voice. It exposes active Muslim women who are proud of their Islamic background and brave enough to enter the uncharted territory of life on the edge of two different cultures (Bhabha, 2012). They have an intense desire to dominate society and are hugely competitive. As a result, the novel's various representations of Muslim women contribute to readers' increased awareness of these women's identities.

Through the story, Khadra tried to destroy the stereotype of Muslim women with various actions. It started when she was just getting married, when her husband, Juma, prohibited her from participating in various public activities. As long as she lived with her parents, she was never banned from riding a bicycle. She can also join student organizations, apply for jobs, or even prioritize education. However, it was different when she married, and her husband limited her space for expression. According to her husband, Juma, these things would only embarrass him. "'It's unIslamic. It displays your body,'" (p. 165). In fact, Khadra

did not find anything wrong with cycling as long as she still covered her private parts. In the following quote, her husband even begs her to stop riding her bicycle. “‘Please don’t do it. Don’t do it,’ he begged. Plus, he leaned in and whispered that he’d make it worth her while to stay home. She felt a tingling where the bicycle seat pressed between her legs. They stayed in all afternoon and didn’t even miss the milk and groceries that earlier had seemed so urgently needed” (p. 228). According to Asma Gull Hasan, some men limit women’s rights by forcing them to wear the hijab, locking them up in the house, and not letting them associate with the opposite sex, all with the ultimate goal of imposing patriarchal power over women (Hasan, 2002).

The stereotype about women who cannot be involved in many public activities is applied by Khadra’s husband in their household. He also even banned cycling just because Khadra is a woman. Juma is portrayed as practicing restraint toward Khadra and claiming that his behaviors are also culturally motivated because custom is important, “It’s not that simple. You know Islamic law is not that simple. And custom is important. Custom is recognized by the Law.” (p. 165). In other words, Juma received his education in a society that values patriarchy. According to Al Mutawah, family and education have a crucial role in instilling values about women’s reliance on men in Arab society. However, Khadra showed resistance through her protests against her husband. Khadra asked for the truth in the Koran about prohibiting women from riding a bicycle.

“‘Is this willfulness of yours pleasing to God? Or are you following your desires and seeking the pleasures of this world in defiance of God’s ruling.’ But it wasn’t God’s rulings. It was just his own sensibilities, the way he’d been raised in Kuwait. So why was he bringing God into it? .She laid a copy of the Quran in front him-their wedding mushaf with the indigo and gilt Moroccan binding, the one they always read from together. “Show me where in the Quran it says women can’t ride bikes in public.”” (p. 165). Khadra rejected Juma’s views on Islamic teachings. She sticks to her stance, even though she has to bear the risk, namely Juma’s anger, “Whenever she biked after that, Juma would get in his black car and roar off. Not tell her he was going.” (p. 165).

The many women’s rights restricted by Khadra’s husband then led to conflict between the two. “What the hell do you mean, none of my business? You’re my wife.” (p. 175). According to Juma, in the Arab culture that he knows, a wife should do what her husband says. If the wife opposes it, it will damage his reputation as a husband and be poorly viewed by people, especially those with the same cultural background (CHEMMAR, n.d.). Therefore, this is where many conflicts began. Khadra felt that she could not live up to the ideal wife’s expectations that her husband wanted. She believed she possessed numerous distinctive qualities she had never been aware of. “I just-I don’t know if I can stay married to him, Eyad. I feel like I can’t go on in this marriage without killing off the ‘me’ that I am,” (p. 175). Khadra and Juma are two individuals who have not had the same vision and mission since the beginning of their marriage. Juma’s expectations of marrying Khadra are because she is an Arab girl. He places great importance on cultural identity and how people will see her as an Arab girl. Meanwhile, Khadra’s expectations of marrying Juma are because she cares about her husband’s religious identity. According to Juma’s conservative thought, a wife should only stay at home, serving her husband and taking care of the household. In contrast, Khadra grew up under the guidance of her teachers at the Dakwah Center and her parents, who may appear conservative in many ways but are aware of women’s rights in Islam.

Another stereotype in this novel is that a married woman must have children. Khadra is

forced to have a baby by her family just because it is believed that being pregnant is what women should do. Women are not given the right to determine what they want for their own bodies. "Juma's mother, on the weekly phone call from Kuwait, concurred. "Have just one," she cajoled. "At least then you'll know you're able to have them." (p. 163) Through the quotes, it can be assumed that children symbolize the success of married women. The patriarchal system requires women to be able to have children, or if they do not have them, other assumptions will appear, such as that they are infertile, have health problems, and other narratives that discredit women (Makama, 2013).

After successfully getting pregnant amidst the conflict between herself and Juma, Khadra decided to have an abortion because Khadra felt she was not ready to have children and for the sake of her health. Here, Khadra feels that she has the right to determine her future, including whether to maintain her pregnancy or not. Khadra emphasized that her solid knowledge of Islamic regulation enabled her to conclude that a woman could have an abortion within the first 120 days of pregnancy. She asserted her right of *ijtihad* and right over her body and life in this regard. Implicitly, she stated that her body was her own. Then, she also decided to divorce Juma. The series of decisions she made herself made her feel devastated, mainly because of the "shame" which she has now brought to her family. According to Susan Muaddi Darraj, the fathers of many Arab American women stress that an Arab woman's actions affect the entire family (Darraj, 2005) (Darraj, 2005). Khadra is torn between following her heart and forging her own path in life, especially given that she is aware that every decision she makes will impact her family, whether for the better or worse (Lashley, 2013).

With such an identity shattered, there is nothing left for Khadra to do but try to improve her life in her own way. As a divorcee who had an abortion, Khadra was unable to reach out to her Muslim community. Also, as a Muslim, she would not allow herself to become thoroughly American by asking non-Muslims for help. Therefore, she decided to travel back to Syria, the nation of her cultural origins. She travels back to her native land and culture in order to go back to the location where her cultural consciousness first originated, a place where she can cure herself. During that journey, Khadra's internal struggle over the veil had come to an end. She made the choice to remove her scarf and adhere to her religion in a different way. "Khadra paused.... The scarf was slipping off. She shrugged. The chiffon fell across her shoulders. She remembered when she'd taken her last swim in the Fallen Timbers pool as a girl. She closed her eyes and let the sun shine through the thin skin of her eyelids, warm her body to the very core of her. She opened her eyes, and she knew deep in the place of *yaqin* that this was all right, a blessing on her shoulders. *Alhamdu, alhamdulillah*. The sunlight on her head was a gift from God. Gratitude filled her. *Sami allahu liman hamadah*. Here was an exposure, her soul an unmarked sheet shadowing into distinct shapes under the fluids. Fresh film. Her self, developing." (p. 223) In here, she makes an effort to reconcile her thoughts on Islam and herself. Khadra was liberated from other people's views and opinions of her when making that decision, and she resolves to explore her own way to connect with God and religion. She is no longer confused about where she belongs—in the strict Muslim world or the liberal Western world. She stays in that in-between where Islam is present, enabling her to live in peace and balance with herself. "The covered and the uncovered, each mode of being had its moment. She embraced them both. Going out without hijab meant she would have to manifest the quality of modesty in her behavior, she realized one day, with a jolt. It's in how I act, how I move, what I choose, every minute. She had to do it on her own, now, without the jump-start that a jilbab offered. This was a rigorous challenge. Some days she just wanted her old friend hijab standing sentry by her side." (p. 225).

Given the numerous issues and misunderstandings her veil brought about, Khadra seems to not be able to handle the implications of being a veiled woman in the United States (Ouhiba, 2021). She can no longer accept further marginalization because of it. She would prefer to get rid of it and fit in better with society as a whole. Khadra might have continued to wear the veil, and the Muslim women might not have needed to demonstrate their freedom, if the veil had not been stigmatized as a symbol of "oppression." By removing her veil, Khadra appears to be freeing herself from being judged based on a clothing item. Others might assume that taking off the veil will increase her possibilities of appearing more American and less Muslim. Despite the fact that wearing the hijab was a part of her identity, she is not who she appears to be.

The Factors that Influence and Shaped Khadra's Identity

Khadra grew up in an environment where her parents believe that Western American culture is inferior to Arab Muslim culture, and there is a significant gap between the two cultures (Abdullah, 2017). That believe naturally internalized into Khadra's mindset, which she separate herself from the American people. She became less tolerable towards other differences, such as other religions and ethnicities. She holds firm her identity as a non-American who lives in America. Even in school, Khadra maintain her non-Amrican identity, and looks like an outsider since she does not want to befriend with American as she thinks that the American culture contradicts with hers. Shamy family becomes American, but they refuse to acknowledge it and continue to identify as themselves as Arab Muslims. Since Wajdy, Khadra's father, works at the Dawah Center, he maintains the Midwest's Islamic community's identity is one of the center's top priorities in order to not lose their identity as Muslim. According to Ameri in her thesis "Veiled Experiences" (cited in (Chemmar, n.d.)), Khadra's parents are more concerned about her muslimness rather than her national, ethnic, or gender identity. Indirectly, her identity is mostly shaped from her religious perspective.

The Dawah Center became one of the places where Khadra learned about Islam, which then has a huge impact on her identity as a Muslim in America. The Dawah Center also exists for the purpose of providing education to Muslims who want to continue learning about Islam and carry out other good activities that are still in line with Islamic teachings.

The goal of Khadra's parents' work for the local Dawah Center is to preach the message of the Prophet and assist other Muslims in improving their observance of Islam. When they moved to the US, they brought the "home space" with them. They aim to recreate nostalgically and reflectively the cultural and emotional specificities of the places and connections left behind, like many other comparable immigrants with creating a space where everyone can feel equal. They do not care if the practice of their religious activities contradicts with accepted American social norms. Muslim families' customs are really held up as the best examples of civilized behavior since they are said to embody the very best aspects of humanism through a culture that values morality and cleanliness (Ling, n.d.).

"One day Khadra's father heard a call in the land and, the love of God his steps controlling, decided to take his family to a place in the middle of the country called Indiana, "The Crossroads of America." He had discovered the Dawah Center. His wife said that a Dawah worker's job was to go wherever in the country there were Muslims who wanted to learn Islam better, to teach it to the children, to build a mosques, to help suffering Muslims in other countries, and to find solutions to the ways in which living in a kufar

land make practicing Islam hard. This was a noble jihad.” (p. 12)

Later, when she grew up and interacts with other people, she wonders about her true identity. With the contradictions that she believes and refusing to assimilate with the American culture, it took her years to find out her true identity, which is the real challenge for her (Rezk, 2019). This confusion leads her to make decisions that she wants to explore what she enjoys and what she actually wants, and create her own freedom. Although Khadra’s family is very strict about the religion and their culture, her family still provide her education and support her hobby. In this case, Khadra’s family gives Khadra some space to find her true identity.

After Khadra realizes and comes to a decision to give herself the freedom to choose, she started to try the thing that she loves and away from the Dawah center, which is photography (Charef, 2022). She actually loves taking pictures of people, nature, and architecture. In the past, she did not choose photography major because it is seen as less important and do not have the same value as science major, which her parents agree. “She knew what she loved doing social photography, and nature bugs, mainly yeah, and also architectural. This last came from loving the space inside mosques. She knew what she didn’t want corporate work, advertising, being around people focused on the surfaces of things.” (p. 39). When Khadra choose to be a professional photographer, she empowers herself and gives herself the freedom to decide what she likes (Lashley, 2013). This situation symbolizes that she has her own voice and she has the full control about what she wanted to show from the photographs.

With her photography, she creates a space where everyone can be themselves and be comfortable. Not only that Khadra empowers herself, but she also empowers other women. She takes photographs of the behind the scene of a wedding, which depicts the life of Muslim women without wearing burqa or hijab. Since wearing burqa or hijab often seen as powerless, with the photographs that she took, she shows that Muslim women are not a victim of Muslim fundamentalism or seen as powerless only because of their hijab (Haddad et al., 2006).

“Khadra was glad that she brought her camera, her first, a cheap 110mm she got for Eid. She snapped pictures of Hanifa and Insaf and Nilofar and was about to take one of the bride but Aunt Ayesha shook her head.” (p. 61)

Moreover, through her photographs, she also learns about different perspective that she sees in this world. her religion and promotes Islam as a religion where the people are modest and gentle to the American. In this part, it seems like Khadra already accepts her identity of a Muslim woman. Rather than becoming ignorant of the American culture, she embraces it while Although she looks at the religion differently than she used to, she takes the opportunity to connect with God and her religion more.

“She focuses the camera on the current speaker, his mouth contorted with fierce words, nostrils angry. Do I shoot, do I take these pictures? Khadra sighs. Everyone already knows this face of Muslims. That’s all they know. “But it’s part of the picture,” her photo editor says, when she gets him on the phone, later. “So many religious Muslims are not like this but full of genuine humility and gentleness,” Khadra protest.”

CONCLUSION

The novel *The Girl in the Tangerine* by Kahf demonstrates how society cannot categorize Muslim women according to the narrow stereotypes that are frequently used in the media, shallow genres of literature and entertainment, as well as in certain so-called academic publications. The main character, Khadra, is a clear example of how Muslim women have significantly impacted “the negotiations over what it means to be Muslim in the American context.” (Haddad et al., 2006). Despite the discrimination she encountered as a woman and a Muslim, Khadra exemplifies the strength, tolerance and composure of Muslim women in America. By adhering to Islamic principles and her knowledge that continues to grow, she shows a critical attitude towards impracticality in the Muslim community, encouraging comments from fellow Muslims. Khadra rejects practices that violate or limit women's rights in the name of religion. According to her, Islam does not differentiate between women's and men's rights, let alone limit them. Existing practices and stereotypes are only the results of patriarchy which places women as weak and dependent on men.

In the novel, Khadra also showed resistance to the stereotypes regarding women who were prosecuted for many things. Some of these resistances included having a divorce, having an abortion, taking off her hijab, trying photography, and other things, which led her to find her true identity. The process of forming her identity as an Arab and American Muslim was also influenced by various factors she revealed in her life. Some of them were the Islamic teachings of her parents that were strict but without limiting women's rights, then photography which made her photograph various objects and led her to realize that so many perspectives exist in society.

For Further research, the researchers suggest widening the topic by observing more women characters in the novel to get an even more valid result regarding the representation and the identity of Muslim women in America. Moreover, others can also do a research about the double consciousness that Khadra experience in more detail to understand Khadra's position as a Syrian immigrant who grew up in Indiana with several cultures surrounding her.

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