

Occidentalism as a Strategy for Self-exclusion and Recognition in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

Mohja Kahf'in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* adlı Eserinde Kendini-dışlama ve Tanınma Stratejisi Olarak Oksidentalizm

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Abstract

Arab American women's literature has emerged noticeably in the early years of the 21st century. The social and political atmosphere of post 9/11 America encouraged the growth of such literature and brought it to international attention. This diasporic literature is imbued with the discourse of Occidentalism; this not only creates a set of counter-stereotypes and representations to challenge Orientalism and write back to Orientalists, but it also works as a strategy for self-exclusion—by which Arab Americans exclude themselves from wider US society—and paves the way to self-realization. Taking Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) as a sample of Arab American literature, this paper examines the extent to which Arab American characters including Téta, Wajdy, and Khadra represent and identify white Americans from an Occidental point of view to exclude themselves from wider American society, and promote their self-realization and recognition. The arguments and analysis in this paper are outlined within a social identity theoretical framework.

Keywords: Diaspora, exclusion, recognition, representation, stereotypes.

Öz

21. yüzyılın ilk yıllarında Arap Amerikalı kadın yazını büyük önem kazanmaya başlamıştır. 11 Eylül sonrası Amerika'daki toplumsal ve siyasi atmosfer bu edebiyatın büyümesini beraberinde getirmiş, uluslararası bir önem kazanmasının yolunu açmıştır. Bu diaspora edebiyatı Oksidental bir söylemle doludur; bu durum sadece Oryantalizme meydan okuyan ve Oryantalistlere cevap veren bir dizi karşı-stereotipi ve temsili oluşturmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda Arap Amerikalıların kendilerini Amerikan toplumunun genelini dışında tuttıkları bir kendini-dışlama stratejisi olarak da işlev görür; böylelikle kendini gerçekleştirmenin de yolu açılmış olur. Bu makalede, Arap Amerikan edebiyatının bir örneği olarak Mohja Kahf'in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* adlı romanı üzerinden, Téta, Wajdy ve Khadra gibi Arap Amerikan karakterlerin kendilerini Amerikan toplumundan ayrı tutarak beyaz Amerikalıları ne kadar Oksidental bir bakış açısıyla yansıttığı ve tanımladığı, bu sayede kendilerini gerçekleştirmeleri ve tanınmaları irdelenmiştir. Bu çalışmanın öne sürdüğü argüman ve analizler sosyal kimlik kuramı çerçevesi temelinde şekillenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Diaspora, dışlama, tanıma, temsil, stereotip.

Introduction

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf (2006) is an example of the kind of Arab American women's literature that has emerged remarkably in the beginning of the 21st century. It is written in a form of a bildungsroman that revolves around the life of an Arab-Muslim girl named Khadra Shamy and her journey of self-discovery. She comes to the USA with her parents from Syria as immigrants. Khadra grows up in a strict Muslim community in the city of Indianapolis where the children are brought up believing in one definition of Islam and rejecting all differences. The novel portrays the hardship that Muslims characters of different nationalities go through in the USA to better position themselves in the wider American society. It discusses a wide range of issues and concerns that affect their daily life in different aspects—mainly political and cultural. As the novel progresses, Khadra goes through several experiences, giving her the ability to exploring her true self as opposed to the identity that she embraces from her parents and reconsidering the meaning of life from different angle. Mohja Kahf weaves her novel in a way that shows the extent to which diasporic figures find it difficult to understand their self-identity and develop sufficient sense of belonging given their dual identities. She is an example of the type of Arab American authors who discuss and assess the discourse of Orientalism and its repercussions in their literary production—it is difficult for them [Arab American authors] to produce their literature without challenging Western stereotypes and Orientalist assumptions that circumscribe their identity and self-understanding.

The discourse of Orientalism was first introduced by Edward Said in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978). In his own words, Orientalism is “an instrument of Western imperialism, a style of thought, based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between the Orient and Occident [...] and a Western strategy that aims at dominating, restricting, and having authority over the Orient” (2-3). The discourse of Orientalism to some extent revolves around the manifestation of biased perception and subtle persistent prejudice against Arabs and Muslims in the Orient to construct their inferiority which consequently affects their sense of identity. Importantly, such a discourse had its intense form in post-9/11 which resulted in cultural, political, and social changes around the world and, in the USA in particular. It is practiced through multiple outlooks designed with, as Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad affirms, “tendencies of prejudice, otherness, discrimination and misunderstanding” (3) which in turn create a space to “categorise the identity of a Muslim on the basis of such agenda and representations” (Yaqin and Morey 20). Many Arab American authors, however, in a response to their lived experiences, embrace certain strategies in their writings to challenge, resist, and even debunk that Orientalist thought. As such, Occidentalism comes as one of the prominent strategies which Arab American authors consider to be an effective counter-discourse to Orientalism and an approach that enables them to write back from the margin to the center to re-configure their identity and self-realization.

In this paper I aim to explain the extent to which Mohja Kahf, in her novel, tends to politicize her Arab American characters' identity, image, and their struggle for recognition through stereotyping white Americans within an Occidental framework; she seems to construct a conclusion that stereotypes and

representations are part of cross-cultural and even cross-civilisational dialogue. Stereotyping and representing the other promote a process of self-identification, self-exclusion and paves the way to better understand one's own identity and achieve self-realization on the basis of the discourse that lies between *Us* [Arab Americans] and *Them* [White Americans]. The power of stereotypes and representations is echoed by Kahf in her novel as a reality that determines intra-relationships as well as inter-relationships between people of different nationalities and ethnicities. The analysis of Occidentalism as strategy for self-exclusion and self-realization in Kahf's novel, and the arguments in this paper, are based on social identity theory with perspectives of several prominent scholars and theorists such as Henri Tajfel and Joep Leerssen, to name a few.

Occidentalism: a Counter-discourse and Strategy for Self-exclusion

Identity is a key word and problematic concern in diaspora studies; Madan Sarup reflects on the nature of identity when he says that "it can be displaced; it can be hybrid or multiple. It can be constituted through community: family, region, and the nation-state" (1). Sarup's definition of identity meets to a great extent the status quo of Arab Americans whose major concerns oscillate between the problems of stereotypes and the complexity of hybridity that cause confusion in understanding their self-identity; the idea of the *other* is a significant milestone to define the identity of the self. Occidentalism is a style of thought that defines the other; it is a practice constituted in third world countries in order to complete the process of decolonization, more particularly in its cultural aspects. It is a "counter-field of conceptions and representations which were developed in the Orient to construct the idea of the West from a non-Western perspective" (Elshefif 624; Lindstrom qtd in Carrier 36). It reverses the dichotomy between the two polarities into the West as the *other* and the Orient as the *self*. Such discourse "discusses the relationship of inferiority-superiority complex between the Orient and the Occident" (Hanafy 29). In other words, if Orientalism is the product of the centre [West], Occidentalism is the creation of the margin [Orient]. The image of the West has changed through time; it was first portrayed as a "monotonous landscape of industrialism and rationalism and now it is painted as a scene of social anarchy and idleness" (Bonnet 12), or from Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit's historical perspective, "an enemy" (5).

The purpose of Occidentalism, moreover, is to resist the process of Westernization and encourage self-liberation from the control of the other, or, as Diana Lary argues, it comes in a form of a "reaction to the Western imperialism and colonization" (9) and also a "challenge to the discourse of Orientalism through the unsettledness of Occidentalism as a style of representation that produces polarised and hierarchical conceptions of the West and its others" (qtd. in Bonnet 7). It should be noted, however, that Occidentalism can be expressed through both positive and negative points of views and "is not an academic discipline per se but merely a way or a style of conceiving and representing the Occident, not in an academically scientific manner but mostly in a literary, artistic or polemical manner" (Salhi 256).

Arab writers and intellectuals of the diaspora, especially women, have been deeply affected by the experience of cultural encounter with the West and the discourse of representation and counter-representation. The USA in particular has been subject to Occidental discourse, generated by Orientals, especially Arabs. Rasheed El-enany opines upon the deteriorating vision that the Arabs hold of the USA when he argues that the representations and images of the USA in Arab literary creations “started to change radically towards the negative in the post-colonial era; it has rapidly come to be seen as a malign and hostile neo-colonial power due to the hardening of the American policies since the events of 9/11 and subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003” (154). The representation of the Occident, particularly the USA, are reflected within political, cultural, and moral stereotypes.

The political-occidental representations of white Americans in Kahf’s novel is apparent through Arab American characters’ points of view and conversation. Kahf, on the one hand, inserts in her narratives an Occidental portrayal of the USA as a racist and hostile neo-colonial power that oppresses non-Western countries; the narrator states that “blacks were oppressed by America just like third world people” (118). Wajdy, on the other hand, claims that white Americans “make everyone else in the world suffer while they live like lords [...] they create terror in other people’s countries while they live in safety and luxury” (118-119). These statements not only suggest the extent to which the USA is viewed through the lens of Arabs, but it also expresses postcolonial and imperial dialogue based on the dichotomy of *us* versus *them*—a longstanding dilemma in the Orient-West relationship. The Occidental point of view as seen in previous passages can be interpreted as a reflection that denotes the result of “the post-9/11 colonial presence of the USA in the Middle East that contributes to the replacement of negative images of the old colonial powers (i.e. French, English, and Italian) with new American ones” (Eid 4). Téta, Khadra’s grandmother of Syrian origin, affirms the bad image that white Americans have amongst Arabs and Muslims after the killing of Zuhura, an Afro-American Muslim character, by a racist American group. She claims that they are “terrorists wearing white masks” (117). Téta’s Occidental view of white Americans illustrates the opposite discourse of representations that Arab Americans steer against the USA.

Khadra, in another instance, demonstrates her Arab political identity through her Occidental opinion of the USA as a cause of conflict in the Arab world and the Orient. Her Occidental vision permeates her essay about “how hypocritical America was to say it was democratic while it dropped dictators like the Shah in Iran and supported Israel’s domination of Lebanon” (123). Khadra, therefore, portrays the USA, her country of residence, as an entity that represents the essence of political intervention and anti-democracy; her stereotypical image of the USA as hypocritical meets Hassan Hanafy’s definition of Occidentalism as “not a history of events, but a description of essences” (121). Furthermore, Khadra fuels her concern about the political upheavals in the Arab world with the Palestinian case. In her conversation with Blu Froehlig, a Jewish female character who emerged from a highly observant orthodox religious upbringing, Khadra defends the rights of Palestinians to live in dignity and security. She passionately claims that Israel, with the help of the USA, “was illegally made by terrorists emptying out villages and forcing a mass exodus of Palestinians” (320).

The sense of Occidentalism echoed by Khadra towards US policy in the Arab world and her preoccupation with the Palestinian case reveals to a great extent her Arab nationalist identity. Gaby Semaan, in agreement with Naff (1985) and Shain (1996), draws attention to the role that the 'Palestinian Cause' has in "uniting Arabs and also reviving the national identity of Arab Americans, thus effecting their experience" (21). Indeed, Khadra's nationalistic debate over the impact of the US malign foreign policy in the Arab world causes her to deal with experiences of prejudice, especially from her American teacher Mrs Tarkington—Khadra got low grades with big red D's and was not allowed to discuss what is political or religious neither in her essays nor classroom discussion (123). Such an experience recalls Gayatri Spivak's concept of the *Subaltern* who, according to Khadra, "cannot speak" (351).

Spivak in her extensive essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" suggests a theory of subalternity by which, within a postcolonial context, she refers to the subaltern as the oppressed or the one who is positioned in an inferior class and does not receive adequate feedback and attention from the superior other. Although Khadra holds American citizenship, she is still seen as an entity that represents the *Third World* due to her Arab origin and Islamic affiliation and therefore she is silenced and ignored when she expresses her Occidental political thought to Mrs Tarkington who, in this case, acts as the superior other. Moreover, Spivak draws attention to female identity as a burden that worsens the status of the subaltern in the colonizer-colonized dialogue; she says that "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak 287). Khadra, in this sense, does not struggle because she belongs to the Third World community only, but also, because of her gender. Consequently, such experience forms her identity as the *subaltern*. It is relevant, in accordance to what happened between Khadra and Mrs Tarkington, to weave a link between Occidentalism as an expression of the inferior other and the subalternity as a strategy to reinforce the superiority of the imperial counterpart.

Additionally, Wajdy, in his Juma prayer that he managed at the Afro-American Salam Mosque, conveys a message fuelled with Occidentalism from a positive point of view about America. In one of his speeches he says that "inside America there are many good qualities. Law and order, cleanliness, democracy, freedom to work and honestly seek the provision of the lord—freedom to practice religion. These are Islamic qualities, America is like Islam without Muslims" (144). Although expressed positively, Wajdy, through such Occidental representation of the USA, provides an account of his Americanized version that is not warmly received by his Muslim fellow brother Taher who, addressing Wajdy, says: "you are just discovering that you are American and you want to wave a flag now? [...] I have been American all my life. And I still don't want to wave no flag" (144). Interestingly, Brother Taher's response is supported by Brother Derek who chimes in and continues the argument by stating that "Muslims and Arabs been here [America] longer and this country was built on our backs. I don't see anybody trying to give us silver platter" (145). The Occidentalism-based debate between Wajdy, Brother Taher, and Brother Derek showcases the various types of representations of the USA by this ethnic minority and also, the different political

stances that define Arab American identity; such a debate reveals the ambiguity of the term “Occidentalism” in that it constantly refers to either Americanization as a means of alienating the I from its origins, i.e. to categorize the self as American first and Muslim second, or, to anti-Americanization which defines the term as anti-hegemonic discourse and self-identical concept.

It is possible to justify Brother Taher and Brother Derek’s stance against America with Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit’s points of view about anti-Americanism; they state that “it should be pointed out that anti-Americanism is sometimes the result of specific American policies which are normally used as a shorthand of US imperialism. Some people are agnostic to the USA simply because it is so powerful” (8). The opposition to American foreign policy is to a great extent a celebration of the mother identity and an affirmation of the unity that ties the Arab diaspora together not only in the USA, but also around the world—this is evident in Wajdy’s speech at the mosque where he appeals to his Muslim and Arab fellows to resist the detested US foreign policy: “not for a minute think that we will stop protesting against the immoral and unfair policies of America outside, in the Muslim world” (144).

Through his speech about America Wajdy marks Occidentalism as a source of hybrid identity, or in other words, a ‘double view’; on the one hand he cherishes the American values and worthiness of its civilization with a stance of being American, and on the other hand he supports the Islamic rivalry against American foreign policy in the Muslim world—the world of his origin. Wajdy through his Occidental variations of belonging creates for himself a space that Homi Bhabha calls as “in-between the designation of identity”; Bhabha argues that the “interstitial passage between fixed identification opens up the possibility of hybridity that entertains a difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (4). Wajdy, in this case, promotes and negotiates a difference between himself as an American citizen and his Arab fellows through Occidentalism which, in accordance with the sensitivity between the Arab world and the West – mainly Europe and the USA, leads to establishing a new form of inter-communal socio-political boundary that outlines relations between diverse identities. The term thus is practiced by both people who call themselves American and people who do not. Equally important, Wajdy’s double view of his belonging, i.e. Arab-Muslim and American, can be critically examined as a manifestation of his double consciousness – this multi-layered consciousness perfectly describes his identity as being divided into multiple parts, making it difficult to have one unified identity, i.e. he views his identity through different lenses. The concept of double consciousness was first introduced by W. Du Bois in his article entitled “Striving of the Negro People” (1897) which was published in *The Atlantic*. He used this term to describe Afro-Americans’ experience of being both black and American; he labelled it “a peculiar sensation”. Wajdy’s peculiar sensation, as such, is a construction of both the Occidental perception of the USA and the identification of himself as an Arab-Muslim.

Occidentalism to a great extent can be regarded as a strategy for cultural and social division and self-exclusion; it promotes the relationship between Arabs, particularly Muslims, and white Americans as unstable and divided along ethnic and cultural lines. The division that lies between the aforementioned groups can

be justified through the rejection of assimilation of the former group [Arabs] to the wider group [white Americans]. Park and Burgess defined assimilation as “a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (735). This definition equates assimilation with the social process that brings an ethnic minority into the mainstream of the American life. Kahf, however, provides opposing characterizations of assimilation through Arab American characters who implement a rudimentary anti-assimilation process and resistance to a cultural fusion through their representations and stereotyping of white Americans. Ebtihaj, an Arab-Muslim female character, demonstrates her cultural non-belonging and anti-assimilationist agenda through her Occidentalism-based reaction towards Khadra and Eyad’s attempts to assimilate into the American lifestyle by sleeping over at American neighbours, spending the night out and also for their breaking the rules of the proper Muslim family. In a moment of anger she shouts: “Do you think we are Americans? Do you think we have no limits? Do you think we leave our children wandering in the streets? Is that what you think we are? Is It? (66-85). Then she bursts into sobs.

Ebtihaj’s reaction can be illustrated through Elsherif’s argument that “Occidentalism is part of the process of liberation of consciousness from blind imitation. This revolution in consciousness is supposed to lead to actual liberation and consequently to the construction of an independent identity” (625). Following this, the narrator in Kahf’s novel lays out one of the problematic questions Muslims usually ask: “Who were the Americans?” Giving a response to this question, the narrator identifies Americans with the “*white* people who surrounded them,” a “crashing sea of unbelief in which the Dawah Centre¹ bobbed, a brave boat” (67). This statement denotes the struggle of Arab Americans as an ethnic minority to cope with the social, political and cultural streams of the wider American society. It points out that Arab American characters are compelled to resist the tendency of assimilation if they truly tend to preserve and contain their origins and mother-identity.

In the same vein, Kahf positions her female protagonist as a child who practices a significant simplistic absorption of Occidentalist views by which Khadra endeavours to define, in terms of representations, the American other, particularly the white one as stated previously. Khadra projects her voice ironically to represent white Americans as heterogeneous by dividing them into four categories: nice Americans, nasty and filthy Americans, ignorant Americans, and typical Americans. This categorization establishes a tendency to “perceive individuals from same social group [Muslims] as more similar and homogenous than the members of the out-group [white Americans]. This occurs particularly when the size of the in-group [Muslims] is small in relationship to the out-group [white Americans]” (Stangor 12). With such regard, Kahf’s female protagonist depicts Muslims as a homogeneous group and white Americans as a heterogeneous one. It is possible to justify the reason behind the representation of white Americans as heterogeneous group as part of the process of writing back to

¹ It is a form of Islamic organization that invites people to understand Islam as outlined in the Quran and the Sunnah.

the centre. In other words, it is a response, and mainly as a reaction, to the discourse of Orientalism through which Westerns tend to perceive Muslim communities as entities in constant clash, divided, and made up of diverse affiliations i.e. religious, cultural, and nationalist, etc. Kahf's application of Occidentalism in her narratives, as such, can be regarded as a form of resistance to the Western stereotypes and representations of Muslims in particular and the Orient in general. The narratives in Kahf's novel tend to define white Americans through stereotypes and representations in the same way that the latter did for the people of the Orient.

The process of stereotyping white Americans goes further when the narration in the novel provides a counter-discourse to Orientalism with an elaborate Oriental essentialization of white American other—a description of how Arab American characters, particularly Khadra's family, view and represent white Americans from a moral, social, and cultural perspective. The description of white Americans is perpetuated within an Occidentalist aura:

American cussed, smoke, and drank, and the Shamys [Khadra's family] had it on good authority that a fair number of them used drugs. Americans dated and fornicated and committed adultery. They had broken families and lots of divorces. Americans were not generous or hospitable [...] they ate out wastefully often [...] Americans believed the individual was more important than the family, and money was more important than anything [...] All in all, Americans led, shallow wasteful, materialistic lives. (68)

The representation of Americans as drawn in this passage, besides its propensities to cultural and self-exclusion, can be well explained through an imagological theoretical approach. *Imagology* revolves around the portrayal of identities in literary fiction; it is mainly studied within the European literary canon to make the discrepancies between nationalities visible through stereotypes. Such an approach can be applicable in analysing Kahf's attempt to create a sense of image-based ethnotype which, according to Joep Leerssen, looks to “invoke self-other oppositions” (17). Leerssen continues to argue that:

The rhetoric of ethnotyping often involves a so called *effet de typique*: the characteristics presented as being meaningfully representative of the nation as a type, are in fact selected and highlighted because they set that nation apart from others [...] what is specific about ethnotypes is that they single out a nation from the rest of humanity by ascribing a particular character to it. (17)

Leerssen's hypotheses of ethnotyping falls within Kahf's Arab American characters' portrayal and representation of white American other with specified characteristics to set them apart from Muslim humanity. As a result, she puts both white Americans and Arab American characters in dichotomous positions in which the identity of the self and the other, on the basis of a group of stereotypes, is determined through social and cultural exclusion. Leerssen's hypotheses may function as a continuity of Louk Hagendoorn's idea (2010) that ideological representations and stereotypes lead to social and cultural differentiation which in turn “contributes to a ranking of out-groups [white Americans] closer or further away from the in-group [Muslims] depending on how socially desirable the out-

group is perceived by the in-group” (Snellman et al. 84). Thus, on the basis of the way Arab Americans perceive white Americans, the latter dominant group is considered as undesirable, farther from the Muslim in-group—this is a type of “bias that is generated from intense stereotypes” (McGarty et al. 4).

In addition, the in-group and out-group distinction process is further maintained through idealizing the Muslim community in Indianapolis as good humans who help each other, save refugees and practice the right religion. In fact, Muslims are portrayed in the narratives as good citizens living in the country (26-31). Kahf’s narratives give further a positive account of her Islamic society in her novel by referring to the views of the Dawah Centre workers. For them Islamic society is “the hope of every believing Muslim today. In it, everyone would be good and God-fearing and decent and hardworking; there would be no corruption or bribes; the rich would help the poor; and all would have work and food and live cleanly, because an Islamic state would provide the solution for every social ill” (62). Though it is expressed ironically to some extent, the process of glorifying the image of Khadra’s society through stereotypes as shown in this passage is, as Tajfel and Turner (1979) drew upon, a technique for self-enhancement—that is, “accentuating or magnifying differences on relevant dimensions may serve to underscore the positive features of some in-group [Muslims] with respect to out-group members [white Americans] thereby contributing to a positive social identity” (qtd in McGarty et al. 7) i.e. it works to debunk and correct the American and Western misrepresentation and misconception of the Islamic identity and the image of Muslim community.

Henry Tajfel’s views upon social identity theory (1978) clarify the process of distinction between Muslims as in-group and white Americans as out-group. He suggested that the assemblage and groups which people belong to are a significant source of self-esteem and pride; in order to enhance the self-image it may be necessary to meliorate the status of the group to which we belong. We, therefore, divide the world into *us* and *them* through a process of categorization which is, according to Tajfel, known as the in-group [us] and the out-group [them]. Social identity theory proposes that the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to improve their self-image. The axis and the central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group will look to find negative facets and aspects of an out-group to enhance the self-image and clarify the identification. Moreover, otherization through stereotyping is the key factor that leads to such identification and difference. It is, from Tajfel’s point of view, the axis that creates social categorisation, social identification, and also social comparison (McLeod 2008). The Muslim and white American groups, as depicted in Kahf’s narratives, exemplify the underlined arguments in social identity theory over the process of in-grouping and out-grouping respectively.

Kahf’s narratives, through her process of stereotyping both Muslim and American characters, give insight into her “in-group favouritism,” as Charles Stangor calls it. Stangor explains this notion as a method of differentiating *us* from *them*; this distinction “generally occurs in a particular direction, such that the in-group as a whole [Muslims], as well as individual members of the in-groups are seen as having particularly positive characteristics, whereas the members of the out-groups [white Americans] are seen to have relatively less positive or more

negative characteristics” (130). Relevantly, in-group favouritism as explained by Stangor may to a great extent reflect of what it is termed as ethnocentrism; it is defined as “a kind of ethnic or cultural group egocentrism, which involves a belief in the superiority of one’s group including its values and practices, and often contempt, hatred and hostility towards those outside the groups” (Bizumic 2; Bizumic et al. 887). It results in glorification of the in-group’s culture that serves as a reference point from which other alien cultures are evaluated and judged; this glorification is further manifested by Khadra as she surveys the crowd of white Americans and Muslims in the Speedway. Despite her realization that she is American too and a member of the Hoosiers² in the city of Indianapolis, she maintains the comparison and distinction between the two groups in the scene, i.e. Muslim and white American Hoosiers. She says: “they’re *us* and we’re *them*. Hah! My folks are the perfect *Hoosiers*” (438). The rubrics of ethnocentrism are further strengthened by Occidentalism assumptions that occur in a discussion between Ebtehaj and Aunt Saweem in Mecca—the holiest city in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that the Shamy family travels to for pilgrimage.

Aunt Saweem, a conservative Saudi female character, tends to catalogue the Arab-Muslim understanding of white American woman. She declares that “American women had to be sluts: that much was clear from the way they dressed” (170). Ebtehaj, though she dislikes such offensive stereotyping, also confesses that “the American culture kills the natural instinct of a woman for modesty, and teaches her instead to expose herself. To please men” (171). Ebtehaj implicitly argues that the American culture has a significant role in spoiling the value of a true woman. On the basis of such conversation, Occidentalism is positioned as a cultural counter-discourse to Orientalism; whereas the veil for white American viewer is a symbol of oppression, backwardness and women submission, the American style of dressing for Muslim viewer is a sign of the lack of modesty and absence of chastity; white American woman’s style of dressing, in this dialogue, serves as an important marker of identity and difference and as a terrain of cultural and social contestations. Such dichotomous paradigms of stereotyping and representations generate a space for a clash of cultural representations between white American and Muslim entities of alterity, hence exploring the identity.

In similar context, in a moment of discussion headed by Wajdy and his mother Téta about how unclean and filthy white Americans are, the former, with a funny tone, expresses his opinion that holds an aura of post-colonialism, he says: “And they think they are more civilized than us, and tell us how to run our countries” (69). Wajdy’s claim does to some extent minimize the American other through stereotyping with his intention to enhancing the self-esteem of his Arab-Muslim identity. This reflection can be illustrated through the theory of social identity (Tajfel et al. 1997; McGarty et al. 7; Leyens et al. 61-62) which states that the out-grouping process is achieved through enhancing the self-esteem and image of the in-group [Muslims], and simultaneously, devaluing and discriminating the out-group [white Americans]. This falls exactly within Wajdy, Khadra, and Téta’s cultural, social and moral attempts of negatively stereotyping the white American other. In other words, Kahf creates her Arab American characters with differing views of white Americans and the USA, very much dependent on their personal

² It is a popular label that refers to the people from the U.S. state of Indiana.

context, to explore the Arab-American *self* and identity that comes as a result of defining white American other from a stereotypes-based vision—Occidentalism—a counter-discourse. In addition, the application of Occidentalism in Kahf's novel, besides challenging Orientalism, serves the purpose of projecting both otherness and selfhood; on the one hand it can be regarded as a representational strategy to affirm the dichotomy between Arab Americans and white Americans and achieve self-exclusion, and on the other hand, it is a set of beliefs with which to better define and understand self-identity.

Conclusion

Kahf's application of Occidental discourse in her novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* functions as a complementary of and a continuity to Edward Said's Orientalism. On the one hand, she perpetuates the opposing discourse [Occidentalism] as a form of resistance and reaction to Orientalism, and on the other hand, she expands its essence and potentiality that stereotypes also divide the world, create social and cultural rifts, and define identities. In other words, she delivers a message through her narratives that the politics of stereotypes and representations are not only controlled by the imperial other—in this case white Americans, but people of the Orient, namely Arabs and Muslims, also perpetuate the clash between the two polarities through stereotyping and representing the Occident and its others. The discourse of Occidentalism, as perpetuated by Arab American characters in the novel, is therefore a representational strategy designed with negative stereotypes as motivated justifications for social, cultural, and mainly moral exclusion from wider American society. Consequently, such exclusion reinforces the dichotomous structures of the world and its civilizations. By this, Kahf seems to sustain Samuel Huntington's hypothesis *Clash of Civilization* first introduced in 1993. He points out that world's civilizations in the contemporary era are in constant conflict and that "the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (1993). His hypothesis maintains the idea that new configuration of conflicts will occur along the boundaries of different cultures and patterns of cohesions will be found within the cultural boundaries. As such, Kahf denotes that clash of civilizations is fuelled with the politics of representations based on a set of cultural, moral, political and social stereotypes. The outcome of such stereotypes, as expressed through Occidentalism in the novel, effectively contributes to inaugurate the process of self-exclusion, recognition, and also ethnic identification.

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