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Writing Body and Culture: Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

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Books by and about Muslim Americans are becoming more widely read. One such book is *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf, A Novel* (2006) by Mohja Kahf. Novels like *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* tend to deal with significant issues for Muslim American women such as education, family obligations, marriage, the body and sexuality, and independence. Although these novels are becoming more popular, they have not garnered much attention. Moreover, these books must be analyzed in feminist and postcolonial ways in order to understand fully the importance and meaning of their characters, situations, and how they reflect the lives of some Muslim American women. This article will focus on the imperialist overtones of double consciousness and "unhomeliness" in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and will analyze how the main character, Khadra, challenges imperialism and presents a different view of colonialism than perhaps expected and previously conveyed in older articles and books. Khadra manages to challenge imperialism by coming to terms with her double consciousness and her own unique, hybrid, identity. By deciding for herself how much of each culture to adapt, Khadra also exhibits a transnational feminist stance concerning her body, sexuality, education, and life.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf is essentially a *bildungsroman* that follows the story of Khadra, an American Muslim, from her childhood through her twenties. As she matures, she shares her experiences regarding the veil, assuming religious duties such as fasting during Ramadan, going on the Hajj, and interacting with American culture in the public school and university setting. Khadra follows through with the lifestyle expected from some Muslim women by marrying young. Then her life changes: she gets an abortion, divorces her husband, recovers from a mental breakdown in Syria, and moves to Philadelphia to study photography. While learning photography, Khadra also learns more about her religion and other

religions, eventually arriving at a more comprehensive understanding of herself as a woman, a Muslim, and a Muslim American, which leaves her, at the end of the novel, with more potential to grow in her faith, individuality, and relationships.

As a woman, Khadra, can also be seen through a postcolonialist lens as the colonized subject. In this case, the theory of double consciousness can help elucidate Khadra's character by explaining her reactions to her ethnic culture, religion, family, and American culture. The idea of double consciousness was first presented by W. E. B. DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. In this work, DuBois explained that as a black man in predominantly white America, he felt that he had two different identities and cultures shaping him: "One ever feels his twoness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (9). DuBois's description of double consciousness for African Americans can also be applied to Khadra and to how she navigates the different events in her life as a Muslim, American, and woman. Not only does Khadra experience a similar twoness as a Muslim American, but she also senses a "thirdness" that is a result of her womanhood. Specifically, she is a woman who experiences "femaleness" and sexuality in ways that are complicated by the seemingly warring cultural practices of Islam and American secularism. The meaning of womanhood for Khadra is determined by how she blends her two cultures.

Khadra, in addition to experiencing double consciousness, also undergoes "unhomeliness" as delineated by Homi K. Bhabha:

> The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the "beyond" that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where "presencing" begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness — that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. (Bhabha 13)

Khadra experiences unhomeliness and double consciousness when she travels to Mecca and Syria. Khadra recognizes the two very different cultures of Americans and Muslims as both of her cultures and the three main locations that shape her life — America, Mecca, and Syria — as her homes, yet she struggles to feel comfortable within her two cultures and their physical spaces. As she attempts to resolve her double consciousness, she experiments with adjusting and adapting her cultural practices to the specific physical place in which she resides.

Applying the theories of double consciousness and unhomeliness to Khadra allows the reader to understand why Khadra acts in sometimes contradictory ways and why she sometimes seizes opportunities, yet, at other times, remains passive. The "twoness" and "threeness" — or multiple consciousnesses — that struggle within her make discovering her identity and "perfect mix of culture" a personal feat that she must overcome throughout her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. This struggle also affects how she sees herself as a woman, and what kind of feminist action she eventually takes. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes in her article, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," feminists from the United States and other western countries apply their own stereotypes of "third world women" onto women from other cultures. However, western feminists need to acknowledge that women from developing countries experience different social, economic, political, and religious influences. Therefore, cultural sensitivity needs to be exercised when formulating transnational feminist solutions since western values cannot, and should not, be forced upon individuals operating in such dramatically different spheres. Likewise, Khadra must be considered in light of Mohanty's observations regarding women from nonwestern cultures. When one examines Khadra's familial life, social life, economic background, and religion, it becomes clear that Khadra must create a feminism of her own that incorporates her specific cultural contexts. As a woman who does not neatly fit into one particular group, her actions and thoughts about her "female self" must be analyzed with a vision of feminism that takes into consideration her unique situation. Khadra, whose name, in Arabic, evokes images of lush green foliage akin to that found in the Garden of Eden, flourishes into a feminist on her own terms, just as she creates her own hybrid culture for herself.

Certainly, Khadra suffers from unhomeliness or a displaced cultural identity because she was born in Syria and moved to Indiana as a young child, growing up in the United States. As a Syrian who has been told by her parents that they would soon move back to Syria, she — along with her family — tried to maintain their culture at the expense of American culture. During her childhood and early teen years, Khadra appears to have done a competent job separating herself from American culture by not having "American" friends. It is not until she and her family go on the Hajj to Mecca that she realizes the intensity of her two cultures — Muslim and American — as they become evident in her thinking and actions. Thus, her experience in Mecca encourages her to confront these two cultures and what they mean to her, and Khadra's experiences in this context attest that she, like other immigrants, will always struggle with her cultural identity.

As a woman who identifies with both Muslim and American culture, Khadra is a construct of both of these cultures. "By asking and answering the third question [To what country or countries or to what culture(s) am I forever linked?], [Khadra] confronts the fact that…she is both an individual and a social construct created and shaped primarily by the dominant culture" (Bressler 242). She knows her dominant culture is Muslim and as she matures, she increasingly begins to make decisions for herself that are informed and guided by this culture. For instance, Khadra begins wearing the veil at a young age because her parents and culture dictate that girls must veil. Along with veiling, however, comes physical limitations that Khadra begins to question such as swimming in the community pool and riding a bicycle.

Nevertheless, when Khadra grows older she consciously "redecides" to veil. On one occasion in Syria, a slight breeze blows her veil to her shoulders, baring her face, hair, and neck. She revels in the feeling of the sun on her skin and hair, interpreting this as a gift from Allah and something to cherish. Yet Khadra repositions her veil, wearing it as she has always done, recognizing that it is actually a part of her. While it is arguable that Khadra has, in this case, internalized her oppression to the extent that she is now embracing it, feeling "naked" without the veil, as Samaa Abdurraquib recognizes, the veil can become "the visual repository for the Muslim identity that is being preserved, and veiling shifts from being construed as somewhat normal behavior into an action that proclaims identity and (sometimes) allegiances" (59). Thus, it is just as possible that

Khadra transforms her veil from an item that has meaning within her family and community to a personal practice and decision, recognizing that it visually proclaims her identity.

One morning when Khadra is in Mecca, she hears beautiful music coming from a mosque. She dresses and leaves the house with the intention of worshipping at the mosque. However, guards restrict her from entering the mosque, asserting that only men are allowed to worship there; women must worship at home. At home in America, she and the other women worship in the same room with the men. Moreover, mosques usually "have separate entrances for women. Where women sit during the prayer is related to tradition, the inclination of the imam or other mosque leaders, and the mosque facility itself" (Smith 135), and in many cases, women are even given their own prayer facilities. Yet here, in Mecca, Islam's holiest city, Khadra is not allowed inside the mosque. The distinctions — "in America" and "in Mecca" — thus underscore the differences between the two cultures as she experiences them. It becomes apparent to her that even the construct of Muslim culture has changed in America: it has become more American, more western, more equal. She has benefitted from worshipping in the same room with other women and men, hearing their prayers, which has added her religious efforts, but in Mecca, this is denied. Khadra suddenly recognizes that she prefers worshipping with men. For her, the Hajj morphs from a spiritual journey into a cultural journey: she has visited the true homeland for Muslims, and she has found that she is an unwanted stranger. Indiana and Mecca have different ways of observing the Islamic faith, and she notices that she cannot force her own version and experience of Islam onto the kind of Islam practiced in Mecca — nor does she desire the enforcement of the type of Islam practiced in Mecca onto her.

Another experience in Mecca that challenges Khadra's cultural perceptions is the joy ride with her cousin and his friends. They drive to an isolated place and commence flirting and making out, and one boy forces himself on her: "Without warning, he was pulling her veil down the back of her head and pushing his other hand up against her breasts and his mouth was grazing her now exposed neck. She was squeezed up against the car door, and then he was pushing himself on top of her, his jeaned thighs taut" (Kahf 177). Khadra has been raised on the assumption that good Muslim girls do not flirt, kiss, or even date. Yet here she is in Mecca, surrounded by Muslim teenagers who do not adhere to these fundamental

Islamic values. The hypocrisy of the experience also exposes yet another complicated layer of the immigrant experience — the often shocking realization that the homeland has not remained frozen or static. In many cases, values associated with the homeland sometimes cease to exist years, and even decades, before they are abandoned by diasporic communities.

The collapse of the idea of being "respectable and modest" affects Khadra deeply, as does the assumption that she is American and therefore immoral and sexually permissive. In an attempt to set the record straight, Khadra yells, in Arabic, "I'm *not* American!" (Kahf 178). In fact, she has spent most of her life persuading herself and her family that she is not American. Her parents have told her repeatedly that they are living in America only temporarily and that soon they will be back in Syria, safe in a Muslim culture and away from the decadence of American culture. Thus Khadra especially resents being labeled as an American because in her mind, she is not American and she has invested so much of her time and energy fighting this category. She embraces the fact that she does not adhere to certain American customs, such as dating and pre-marital romantic relationships. She understands that there are American girls who are moral, but she encounters the problem of communicating this to Muslims from other cultures who may have internalized negative stereotypes concerning American women (in much the same way that Americans have internalized stereotypes about Muslim women).

What exacerbates this problem for Khadra is the fact that in neither culture is she safe when it comes to romantic relationships. As an American, she is seen as sexually active by her cousin who tells her: "'What *is* it — what is the big *deal* — we're not doing anything you have to worry about,' Ghazi said thickly. '— we've got our clothes on — and you grew up in *America* — don't tell me you never do stuff like this in America—'" (Khaf 177–178). However, because her cousin and his friends are "immoral" and hypocritical, they assume that she, too, is like them: "'Ohhh […] Syria, huh,' he grinned. 'Syrian girls have a reputation'" (Khaf 176). Here, Khadra is not only dealing with the knowledge that she must learn to operate in two different cultures, but she is also simultaneously revising her perception of these cultures. In this instance, the perception of her two cultures is at odds with who she really is, increasing her sense of alienation and unhomeliness — specifically the feeling of not fitting in with either group.

Throughout the novel Khadra operates in this liminal middle space between cultures, which is why Transnational Feminism — a type of feminism that transcends boundaries and labels — is able to provide her with the philosophical foundation to cope with her world. Khadra realizes through the two experiences in Mecca — the mosque and the joy ride — that her thinking has been profoundly shaped by the local Muslim culture that exists in her small town. Her modesty does not make her jealous of her cousins, and Khadra in no way believes that she has been cheated out of sexual experiences. She embraces and appreciates the *local* culture that has adopted, which becomes a source of strength as her life becomes increasingly complicated and she embarks on *global* adventures.

Khadra's alienation returns when she is newly married. Throughout her childhood and teenage years, her parents and community allowed her the freedom to ride her bike, participate in student organizations on campus, work, and pursue an education. These liberties do not disappear with marriage, but one by one her husband reveals the fact that he does not want his wife to be engaging with the public sphere because "He hadn't expected her to be doing things that would embarrass him" (Kahf 227). Asma Gull Hasan, in writing about Muslim culture, recognizes that some men will limit women's rights by forcing them to wear the hijab, confining them to the house, and not allowing them to mix with the opposite sex, all with the end goal of exerting patriarchal power over women. Khadra's husband, Juma, fits Hasan's description of such Muslim men. Though Khadra does not elaborate on the sexual implications of bike riding, one can read her husband's discomfort as a sign that he dislikes the idea of his wife riding with the bicycle seat between her legs. Juma pleads with her: "'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" (Kah 228). The sexual dimension of cycling is implied when he manages to convince her to abandon her pastime by substituting it with actual sex. However, after this encounter Khadra informs him that he will not be able to prevent her from bike riding since there is also a practical aspect to it: it is a form of transportation that allows her to acquire household needs, such as groceries. Juma responds through another power exercise: he tells her that he does not want her to participate

in the Muslim student organization at her university, even though she is one of the leaders of the group.

Once again, Khadra's two cultures clash: she enjoys the freedom of being an American woman but is limited by her husband's definition of Muslim culture which is different than hers, partly because he grew up in a different city in the United States. Negotiating between her two cultures eventually leads to a breakdown: "And finally one day she was done. Exhausted. As if she'd traveled down the seven gates of hell, discarding at every door some breastplate or amulet that used to shore her up. She felt empty. Crumpled and empty, that was her. Like a jilbab [headscarf] you've taken off your body and hung on a nail" (Kahf 264–265). Like other colonized and displaced women, Khadra not only confronts her cultural heritage, but also the added fact that she is a woman. Being a female refugee and Muslim in America affects her thoughts and actions so dramatically that she can no longer deal with her multiple crises as a Muslim, a woman, an American, and a young diasporic immigrant.

Hasan observes that "American Muslim women are really between two worlds: the old world of traditions, preserved and passed down by immigrant parents or older members of the indigenous community, and the new world, as presented to us by the feminist movement, American emphasis on gender equality, and the Qur'an, in a sense, too" (111). Khadra most definitely is caught between these two worlds of tradition and progress. Although her husband is a member of her generation, he, like her parents and others in her Muslim community, represents the old world with its traditions and customs. Khadra may have been trying to convince herself that she is not American, but ideas of progress and women's advancement influence her life decisions. Khadra recognizes that if she and Juma were raised in the same Muslim American community, then she probably would not have had any problems with her arranged marriage. However, she comes from a different Muslim American community, and embraces the diversity of Muslims in America while resisting the dominant tendency to conflate all Muslims into one indiscernible group. Her community and parents are comparably liberal, even to the point of encouraging her, and Khadra must reconcile herself to the kind of woman she will be, which affects her marriage to Juma.

After Juma attempts to exert more control over her actions, Khadra reacts by obtaining an abortion and a divorce, which ends with her

emotional breakdown, mainly because of the "shame" which she has now brought to her family. As Susan Muaddi Darraj conveys, "the fathers of many Arab American women emphasize the fact that the behavior of an Arab woman reflect[s] upon the family as a whole" (253). Khadra is caught between fulfilling her desires and choosing her own path in life, especially when she knows that any action she takes, whether it is good or bad, will reflect upon her family, and that her family, to a certain extent, will be judged by her actions.

With such a breakdown in identity, there is nothing left for Khadra to do but try to mend her life on her own terms. As a divorced woman who has had an abortion, Khadra cannot reach out to her Muslim community. Moreover, as a Muslim, she will not allow herself to become entirely Americanized by asking help from non-Muslims. While a hybridity of cultures has served Khadra well so far, the divorce serves as a turning point in her life and she temporarily returns to the shelter of her cultural roots, Syria. Surrounded by Syrian and Muslim culture, Khadra finds asylum from her struggle. By returning to her home country and culture, she returns to a place where she can heal herself, the space where her cultural consciousness began. "Back where she came from: Syria. Land where her fathers died. Land that made a little boomerang scar on her knee" (Kahf 266). Khadra appears alone, without announcement, at her aunt's house, and her aunt takes her in and nurses her back to mental, spiritual, and cultural health. Thinking and participating in only one culture helps Khadra focus on herself and mitigate her cultural consciousness. She does not have to be self-conscious about cultural practices, specifically what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. "Somehow all the unfamiliarity seemed familiar to Khadra" (Kahf 268). By re-centering on herself, she begins her healing process.

Khadra resists colonial discourse as she does not bring from the United States an imperialist attitude toward the people of Syria. She lets Syrian culture surround her, which is contrary to the American/imperialist attitude of forcing western values onto other countries. As someone who knows what it feels like to be judged, Khadra refrains from criticizing Syrians, which enables her to leave Syria refreshed and whole.

By allowing Syria to speak to her, Khadra learns that she is not the person everyone thought her to be, herself included. Prior to her

breakdown, she majors in science in college, but afterward when she moves to Philadelphia, she changes to photography — a hobby she began in Syria. Photography may not be as acceptable as science to her parents, but it is what she wants to do. Through professional photography, she gains an empowered voice and is in control: when she takes pictures for herself, she decides what to photograph and what to ignore. She becomes interested in photographing other Muslim women in America, which not only adds to the symbolic significance of what she is doing by breaking her own silence, but also provides a physical space to depict the hidden stories of Muslim women. As a woman, she is allowed access to places where men are forbidden. She photographs Muslim women as they prepare for weddings and celebrate birthdays, and Khadra's newly acquired knowledge of photography — including her expert hand for holding the camera and expert eye for catching great shots — gives a voice to these women.

Implicitly, Khadra's photographs significantly influence how the bodies of Muslim women are perceived. Even if women are the only viewers of the photographs, Muslim women's bodies become more of a visual object in pictures. The typically photographed female — the western fashion model — is in stark contrast to the image of many Muslim American women, mostly because of the practice of veiling. The veil, or headscarf, and the *burqa* — a piece of fabric, no matter how large or small, thin or thick — acts as a barrier between the woman being seen as an individual. Women wearing veils and *burqas* are usually portrayed as victims of Muslim fundamentalism and are seen as powerless, even when many of them are not (Haddad 31). Khadra's photographs thus go "behind the veil" into the private spaces of women, and in the process, reveals their personalities and lives, showing that they are not victims of Muslim fundamentalism. By taking the pictures, she also demonstrates that she is not a victim either because she chooses what to photograph and is able to capture moments that a male photographer would never be able to capture.

As a photographer, Khadra also attains a transnational feminist reach: she is in control because she holds the lens that can capture any image she desires, which she can then share with the rest of the world. This power is conveyed through an assignment Khadra is given by her magazine editor who tells her to go home and take pictures of her Muslim American community. This assignment frames the narrative of Khadra's story, which opens with her returning home and taking pictures. Her memories then

take over, providing the reader with a narrative of her background and experiences. The end of her story is the assignment itself, for which she takes pictures of her home, community, and the people she knows. She sees her Muslim American community through a photographer's lens and through her own lens, which she shares with the magazine editor, who will ensure that the images captured will be distributed among the masses, particularly Americans who know little about the Muslim American community, and beyond. This becomes a source of agency for Khadra because as one person, she is now able to exert authority over how Americans will see her neighbors, culture, and religion. This is a direct result of her coming to terms with her identity, with deciding who she really is as a cultural and social construct. She recognizes that her community likewise needs to come to terms with its own identity, and she serves as a powerful vehicle for this process. She seeks to represent accurately her people and its practices, conveying that the way in which they conceive of family and worship is just as legitimate as any other community in America, or around the world.

Khadra also intensifies the voice and perspective of the Muslim woman's body by revealing her thoughts about her own body throughout the text. Khadra takes the reader — even the male reader — behind the veil to reveal how much Muslim women share with other women, thus establishing a transnational sisterhood of sorts. Khadra's candidness simultaneously serves as a means of negotiating two facets of her identity struggle: the Muslim interpretation of "decency" versus the American proclivity towards revealing the private aspects of one's life. Khadra discusses her period, abortion, sex, cutting her pubic hair with scissors and inadvertently cutting herself, and wearing the veil. Blood serves as a reoccurring, even "cleansing," motif in the text: almost like a sacrificial lamb, Khadra bleeds in the bathroom during the pubic hair incident, and once again when she describes her abortion. "Khadra had some cramping and bleeding like a heavy period. Not really any more than she usually got. Some lower-back pain the day after she lugged around a chem textbook, her Trapper Keeper, and *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma* in her backpack" (Kahf 250). Khadra even glorifies the power that her period gives her over religious rites during Ramadan (menstruating women are forbidden from fasting). While her mother and brother fast, she prepares a large sandwich and eats in front of them, which, for fasting Muslims, is actually sacrilegious on two levels: women are supposed to be ashamed of the fact that their period is

preventing them from fasting, and it is considered to be disrespectful to eat in front of fasting individuals. Khadra thus challenges both directives: "The big bonus from getting her period, of course, was that Khadra got to break her fast. She pulled her fist toward her in triumph: Yessss! She made a triple-decker beef salami sandwich on sesame-seed bread with tomato, lettuce, mushrooms, mayo, ketchup of course, and beet pickles. 'Periods rock,' she mumbled with her mouth full" (Kahf 109). By eating publically, she openly proclaims that she is not ashamed of the fact that she is menstruating and shares this relatively personal information with her mother and brother.

Khadra even takes the reader into her bedroom after she and her husband have had sex. "It took her twice the work to get where he got with half the effort. It got easier as they got more experience together. 'I had no idea it was that much work,' Juma said, his hand cupped over her crotch afterward, as she lay breathing hard, her whole heart pounding under his hand" (Kahf 222). She adds more of her female body to the text by describing where her husband touches her, and explaining the role her sexuality plays in the negotiation of her identity. For Khadra, decisions pertaining to her sexuality are surprisingly easy to make given the privacy and mystery that usually enshroud these aspects of a Muslim woman's life. Ironically, it is the more outwardly visible and public parts of her life — her clothing, education, and marriage — that take more time and effort.

Unlike a woman who accepts unquestioningly the teachings of Islam, Khadra exerts her human rights, specifically her right to understand her religion. Kahf says in an interview that "the foremost factor in bringing me to my voice was religion, and the religion of Islam as manifested in my family which had a modern, political Islamist orientation" (qtd. in Davis 383). Khadra reflects the author's personal experiences through her relationship with Islam. She is encouraged by her family to study religion by learning Arabic and reading the Qur'an. Accordingly, part of Khadra's voice comes from learning Arabic and reading commentaries on the Qur'an. Khadra joins a women's study group where she can discuss Arabic, the Qur'an, the *hadiths*, and the commentaries.

By studying the Qur'an, Khadra takes her religious education into her own hands, directing it for herself, and "reading back" from the margins (Zine). This action is particularly significant for Muslim women,

for female scholars have noted numerous areas in which male writers have misinterpreted the Qur'an. Moreover, such gynocentric groups are important in producing feminist readings of the Qur'an. Irshad Manji, a reformist Muslim who advocates moral courage, says that Islam has become irrelevant for many people because not all of the Qur'an is "God-authored." However, it is still uncertain how these feminist readings will be accepted or rejected by the Islamic community, and in many circles such interpretation is considered sacrilegious and inflammatory (Smith 154). Hasan notes: "The debates over the status of women in Islam is probably the best example of how culture affects interpretation. Men like my grandfather have taken a few Qur'anic passages and, coupled with a patriarchal culture, have interpreted them in the most literal and self-serving way" (108–109). Some topics that have been impacted by misinterpretation, which has turned rule into law in many Muslim subcultures, include the wearing of the veil, the immorality of abortion, and the separation of worship spaces for women. Indeed, the Prophet Mohammed's wife Khadija was the first Muslim woman, and "American Muslim women often invoke the 'mothers of the faithful,' as Muhammad's wives have been referred to, as models for their own behavior and professional involvement" (Smith 130). Khadra does the same, recognizing how the Qur'an speaks about the Prophet Mohammed's wives and other women.

Through her studies, Khadra discovers that according to Islam, the breath of life is not instilled in an unborn child until the fourth month. This leads her to the conclusion that abortion is acceptable for the first 120 days of pregnancy. "Yeah, well, Islamic law allows abortion up to four months [….] All the schools of thought allow it. The only thing they differ on is how long it's allowed. Four weeks to four months. That's the range" (Kahf 225). Khadra's statements convey the feminist understanding that without the persistent and dramatic push of women's rights in Islam, women will not gain, but lose, their freedom and equality. Their liberties will continue to be limited due to the writings of deceased male scholars who have misinterpreted or misapplied the Qur'an, inserting their own beliefs concerning gender and sexuality — all of which reinforce patriarchal male domination — instead of actually following the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed.

As Khadra — and even her parents to a lesser extent — educate themselves and reevaluate the teachings of the Qur'an, other areas of

Khadra's life begin to change as well, specifically education, marriage, and divorce. Since the Prophet Mohammed's wife Khadija was an educated woman, both Khadra and her parents conclude that all women should be educated. Moreover, Muslims hold educating women in high regard because in the Qur'an Allah says that it is of great importance to learn and to recite. Some believe that God will ask women on the Day of Judgment if they took advantage of all the knowledge available to them. Others believe that women need to educate themselves if they want to gain advantages in the Muslim community. They also need to be intelligent in order to help run the household and the community (Smith 132). Khadra's parents, particularly her father, encourage her to apply to numerous colleges and consider various majors. However, even though she chooses a major that initially interests her — science — even this field of education represents a suffocating and patriarchal mechanism of cultural control: according to her parents, a science-based field is more prestigious than the field Khadra ultimately chooses for herself, photography. In science, she cannot convey her personality, but through photography, she can capture part of herself in her photographs, even when taking pictures of objects or strangers.

Khadra challenges another mechanism of male dominance, marriage, which replaces one patriarchal figure (her father) with another (her husband) and ensures future patriarchal generations (her sons). Khadra marries young, supposedly securing her place in the Muslim social community (which expects her to marry), since now has a husband to answer for her. However, without having experienced the secular or American experience of dating, Khadra is unaware of the relationship dynamics between couples: she does not understand that one or both people in a relationship can change their way of interacting with the other, and that letting down inner barriers to reveal their true feelings about certain issues is normal. Cultural and religious dictates inform her that she must endure everything in marriage, but it is her aunt who warns her about its traps: "Marriage is a legal arrangement in Islam, not a sacrament as in the Christian sense, and is secured with written contract" (Smith 142). A progressive Muslim, Khadra's aunt gives her money to hide from her husband just in case she needs it in the future: "Three fat gold coins lay in her [aunt's] palm. Fat gold coins with mysterious writing, the alphabet neither Arabic nor Latin, nothing Khadra recognized. '*Osmanli liras*' [Ottoman

liras], Téta [aunt] said. 'This is called security, my dear, and we never show it to our husbands. A woman must keep something for herself, in case of circumstances'" (Kahf 209). Her cultural model tells Khadra that keeping secrets, especially her own stash of money, from her husband is sinful, but, as this incident illustrates, the private information that women give each other subversively challenges such patriarchal dictates. Fortunately, she has enough sense to listen to her aunt. This money supports her after the divorce and during her breakdown, paying for her plane ticket to Syria. Through her trying marriage and divorce, Khadra realizes that her cultural view of marriage and its meaning will not work for an educated woman. Islamic definitions of marriage can sometimes clash with a feminist point of view that advocates freedom and equality for both partners, including the right for a wife to abort the couple's child.

All of Khadra's actions point to the complex identity of a Muslim American woman who comes to terms with not only her cultural identity, but also her voice as a woman as determined by Islam. Indeed, in the beginning, she reflects a woman who is lost and unsure of what to do with her life and religion. However, as she shares her story, Khadra begins to understand herself and find her own empowered voice. Ultimately, the events in Khadra's life force her to face her double, or even multiple, consciousness and unhomeliness. She decides how much of each culture she will combine and make her own. She also discovers how her cultural combination will affect her identity as a woman, including her sexuality and legal and political rights. By facing her oppression on numerous levels, Khadra also gains agency for herself and other Muslim women. Khadra creates a place for herself in the world and learns how to use her voice and skills in order to accurately represent herself and her identity, and the tangerine scarf, with its vibrant color, symbolizes Khadra's acceptance of this hybridity. Through wearing the tangerine scarf — a scarf that she buys when she is in Syria as she is learning who she is — Khadra demonstrates that she now has an identity as a woman who combines practices from both her Muslim and American cultures. Thus Khadra, along with other Muslim American women characters in memoirs and novels, collectively contribute to the destruction of stereotypes concerning Muslim American women, placing in their stead a revised, uncensored version of what it means to be Muslim in America.

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