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**Reconstructing the Muslim American Identity Through
Religious Rituals and Traditions in:**
**Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in The
Tangerine Scarf***

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Dedication

To my late father “El Hadj”

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ABSTRACT

The present research delves into the process of identity formation at its core the paradigm of religion. Recent research has highlighted the crucial role of religion in Muslim Americans identification and the making of identity especially in the aftermath of 9/11 events and the U.S war on terror which have distorted the image of Islam in the world.

This study examines two Muslim American novels: Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) to explore and explicate the processes underlying religious identity construction. The study also attempts to explain how these fictional texts can be read as countering the representations of Islam in the West and how they variously write back to dominant Western discourses about Islam and Muslim communities. Therefore, it is important to start this study with a brief historical overview on Muslim Americans immigration, an analysis of the socio-psychological theories of identity formation and identification, and the second generation's religious commitment and religiosity. The second chapter deals with Khaled Hosseini's debut novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) by presenting and introducing the Afghan culture and traditions, and showing how the identity of Amir the protagonist goes through identity forming moments. While the last chapter focuses on Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) whose main protagonist struggles to identify herself within her family and community and who at a certain moment starts to doubt her religious faith.

The study comes out to the conclusion that post 9/11 Muslim American literature has engaged, deeply, in questions of making the cultural and religious identity. And that the process of identity formation is highly affected by religious traditions.

List of Abbreviations

(ISI): Identity Status Interview.

(EOMEIS-II): Adams' Measure of Ego Identity Status-II.

(ADC): American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

(AAI): The Arab American Institute.

(CAIR): The Council on American-Islamic Relations.

(MPAC): The Muslim Public Affairs Council.

(MYNA): The Muslim Youth of North America.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Research on the formation and functioning of identity has gained much attention over the last few decades. Since, an intense interest has been given to identity. Individuals consider that their own identity is what makes them unique, their natural response is to define it by a characteristic that associates them with a larger group. Self-identification patterns of Muslim Americans and how they are negotiating their dual nationalistic and religious identities -in post 9/11 America- have become a topic for investigation and empirical research, in which , the goal is to discover how young adult Muslim Americans formed their identities. The 9/11/2001 attacks reopened the question of religion especially as resulted in the vilification of Islam. Islam is portrayed through a lens of intolerance and violence, both by people who claim Muslim identity and yet perform horrendous terrorist acts, and by the Western media and publishing industries, which perpetuate negative images of Islam and Muslims .The dominant image of Islam in the West conveys the idea that the religion of approximately one fifth of humanity is an intolerantly ideological and prone to violence.

The lack of knowledge about Islam only fuels negative sentiments toward the Muslims in USA. 9/11 introduced an era of intensified suspicion about Islam and Muslims on the part of Americans. An accurate portrayal of Muslims in literature can help alleviate American misconceptions. The Muslim American writers' response to 9/11 has been more emotional. They create a new Muslim identity in their writing, helping other Muslims create their identities, or perhaps reshape existing ones, and foreground the spiritual dimension of Islam. Muslim American writers can, effectively, contribute in understanding Islam and Muslim traditions and provide Americans with a well-rounded picture of Islam. Through the study of their

literature we contribute as well in serving our religion by focusing primarily on the cultural aspects of the religion and how they interfere in the formation of the collective identity of the group.

Research recognizes that religion is a powerful force in human society, and demonstrates the relation between religion and identity among ethnic groups. Muslim Americans experienced a deepening of their faith following the 9/11 attacks. Many previously non-practicing Muslims began to practice, and many Muslims also felt obligated to increase their religious knowledge. For my dissertation, I propose a study of how religious manifestation, through traditions and rituals, functions in the formation of the identity of Muslim Americans by highlighting the role of religious traditions and rituals in the preservation of the collective identity. For this purpose I will analyze two novels; Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*(2003) and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl In The Tangerine Scarf* (2006) to underline the religious identity construction processes , the predicted psychological outcomes of religious identification ,and the predicted patterns of self-categorization. The study also attempts to explain how these fictional texts can be read as countering the representations of Islam in the West and how they variously write back to dominant Western discourses about Islam and Muslim communities. Importantly, these novels deal with the engagement of Muslim characters with the sacred through Islamic rituals and practices, and emphasize the importance to them of the form of the religious rituals and symbols, they also suggest that personal spiritual experiences of Muslims are not dissimilar to those of people of other creeds. Thus, these texts use a familiar vehicle to convey points about Islam that are different to those conveyed by more mainstream representations.

The aim of this study is to investigate on the interplay between religion and culture and how and why Muslim Americans tend to attribute higher importance to the value of tradition, the current experience of Muslims in America and search for clues as to the future interaction between Islam and the American culture, the interaction between American culture and Islamic traditions. Muslim American narratives especially after 9/11 provide invaluable information about the understandings that the protagonists have concerning the nature of their conflict and the driving motivations. These narratives derive their subject matter both from the geopolitical tensions of the present and from the politicized cultural legacies of the past.

The body of knowledge regarding the traditions and experiences of Muslim Americans continues to grow yet few empirical investigations have specifically explored identity development processes among Muslims in the United States. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to address this gap in our sociological knowledge. In particular, the analysis focuses on the development maintenance, and negotiation of religious identity for young Muslim Americans. It is important to undertake this study because there is a need for a deeper understanding of the experiences and social identity construction of non-dominant religious populations in the U.S.A.

The present study argues that through religious rituals behavior and traditions Muslim Americans develop their identity and assert themselves as an essential part of the American society. While no doubt the events of that day had far-reaching effects on Muslim Americans' psyches, their influence on young Muslims was perhaps more catalytic than formative, raising questions, primarily about their

place in society and the role of religion in their lives. Islamic law and tradition are often portrayed as drivers of violence, the adherents of Islam are also often portrayed as villainous assassins.

The relevance of this study is justified by the fact that we should acknowledge the inevitabilities of behavioral shifts brought about by social and cultural pressures resulting from immigration into an alien culture. Immigrant families directly feel the impact when moving from home to an alien culture that essentially celebrates another religion. Therefore, this research can provide an adequate understanding of the complex ways in which religion and religious affiliations of immigrants can impact their integration in the host society (U.S.A), their social and cultural segregation from the rest of the society, and how religiosity influences cultural and civic integration of immigrant Muslim Americans.

Central to this study is the question of to what extent does the religious background affect the identity formation process of the Muslim Americans? Then the study will be extended to illustrate the following sub-questions; Muslim identity in modern times faces specific challenges felt more intensely by Muslims in the West. Muslim identity is the new complexities of modern life and the age of information, which require Muslims to evaluate their religious identities and experiences against different discourses and ideologies to which they are exposed. Consequently, do Muslims need to defend and define their religious identity? Will religions and cultures persist as core criteria for identity formation? How do Muslim women in such hostile environment make decisions about the extent to which they participate in Islamic religious rituals such as wearing a headscarf and adhering to the five pillars of Islam?

What is hypothesized therefore is that: religious manifestation, in both novels, does not spring from religious learning or constant practice of religion but from deep pride of tradition. And that religion may be the principal constraint to assimilation. Also we assume that religious traditions give the group its own intrinsic unity and spatial roots.

Contemporary psycho-sociology is abundant with literature pertaining to the theory of identity and the self. Yet, literature has not remained immune to the impact of these theories. Particularly, literatures in English written by Muslim American writers have invariably dealt with the varying notions of identity set in multiple socio-political backdrops. My literature review deals with the socio-psychological theoretical assumptions presented by Erik Erikson, Phinney, etc surrounding the notions of identity, identity crisis, identity formation and religious identity.

During the last century, with English becoming the official language in some of the colonized countries, some Muslim writers from these countries began to give their own accounts of the Muslim world and produced literary works about Muslim issues and characters. Amin Malik, in his book *Muslim Narratives and the discourse of English* (2005), reports that Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*, published in 1940, was a major novel of this kind (2005, p.19), though, he says that *Sultana's dream* (1905) by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, should be given the credit for being the first fictional contribution by a Muslim to English literature about Muslim characters and themes (2005, p.30). Many other Muslim writers of fiction have created works in English about Muslim communities, including Adib Khan, Mena Abdullah, M.G

Vassanji, Farhana Sheikh, Ahdaf Sueif, Nurroddin Farah, Nawel Esadaoui, Fadia Fakir, and Abdulrazak Gurnah.

Yvonne Haddad's (2007) finding is described by the author as the result of years of research and in-depth interviews, as well as two focus groups with 30 young American Muslim women attending college in several locations in the United States. She states that the process of re-Islamization among second-generation adolescent and young adult Muslims has accelerated in the United States as a consequence of the oppression sensed following 9/11.

In terms of methodology, the nature of the subject of my dissertation necessitates a descriptive –analytical approach with a return to Postcolonial Theory. These approaches are positioned within the broader field of cultural studies which, typically, examines the ways in which writers from colonized countries attempt to articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities and reclaim them from the colonizers.

Social psychological approaches based on social categorization and social identity theories discussed the importance of religious participation in enhancing one's religious social identity, and in turn that formation of the identity would positively lead to one's psychological well-being. Ashmore et al.'s framework on collective identity and Erickson's early theory of identity development contributed in the understanding of religious identity by adding a theoretical component. Both note that religious community offers the opportunity for the search for meaning and belonging that is central to the task of identity exploration. Erikson (1965) argues that adolescents may discover a profound sense of belonging as members of a faith community through religious rituals. Erikson's early theory detected a link between

religious socialization, religious identity development and its influence on psychological well-being. Erikson (1959) highlights the role of religious traditions as providing a worldview and a rich ideological context in which one forms his/her identity. He states that an adolescent achieves a sense of identity, purpose and belonging by interacting with individuals who share and model religious ideologies, histories and tradition (Erikson, 1968).

It is important to signal and draw attention to the fact that although the authors of these novels as well as the protagonists are from different sexes, the study is not based on gender and does not pertain on the male female attitude or difference. It rather asserts that both protagonists, Amir and Khadra, share the same need of returning to religion and spirituality at special moments of identity transformation, when selves are shaped.

My dissertation is made up of three chapters; the first one discusses the study's theoretical context by addressing existing scholarship on identity and religious identification. Religion promotes a sense of identity that transcends the self and promotes a concern for the social good and provides a unique setting for ethnic groups' identity formation. Religious identity is developed theoretically in this dissertation as a core factor in the psychology of religion and in the overall psychosocial development. Further, these various processes of establishing religious identity salience and status may be one of the central factors operating in both cultural cohesion and conflict.

Chapter two is devoted to the debut novel Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003). The novel presents the 9/11 attacks briefly and shows how the attacks affect Amir's, the Afghan protagonist, identity. The various moments of

identity formation for Amir lead him to a strong sense of alignment with American ideals, and the forming of a common enemy after the 9/11 attacks allows him to forge a stronger bond with America. Although it is briefly referred to 9/11, it offers a defining moment in the novel by demonstrating the way in which Amir distances himself from negative representations of Afghanistan and of Islam, and how the verses of the Quran, the space of the mosque, the sound of azan, or other uniquely Muslim symbols and rituals, create a space of identity construction.

My third chapter analyzes Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* (2006). This novel defeats another aspect of the dominant Western discourse on Muslim women, the idea that Muslim women either miserably submit to their Muslim culture and definition of Muslim identity defined for them by others or abandon Islam and opt for a Western way of life. I try to show that the narrative, through employing specific narrative techniques, suggests a complexity for Muslim women's identities and experiences. This complexity entails a dialectical process between loving and admiring Islam on the one hand, and allowing oneself to be self-reflexive about Muslim identity and Muslim communities on the other. Khadra, the main character of *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*, is a Syrian-American girl brought up in a highly devout Muslim family and community in Indiana, and who, at a certain moment in her life, starts to doubt her religious community and subsequently her religious faith. However, this moment of doubt becomes a starting point for her to embark on a spiritual journey which culminates in a much deeper faith than she had before.

This study could help mobilize discussion and encourage further research in this domain. It offers valuable insights into Muslim Americans life. This research is

not only to answer the above question, but also to better understand the potential causes of the challenges many Muslim Americans face when deciding what religion means to them. It will highlight the fact that the construction of our identity is not an abstract process in a vacuum; it is historically grounded in culture and involves a lot of emotions and feelings. For many it can be traumatic as we move from childhood to adulthood if we do not find the support to be ourselves in the face of stressful or even harmful social and cultural expectations.

CHAPTER ONE

Religion and the Making of Identity

Introduction:

Identity is the crucible out of which we come: our background, our race, our gender, our tribal affiliations, and our religion all go into making up who we are. "Identity" in its present incarnation has a double sense. It refers at the same time to social categories and to the sources of an individual's self-respect or dignity. In ordinary language, it refers to personal characteristics or attributes that cannot naturally be expressed in terms of a social category, and in some contexts certain categories can be described as "identities" even though no one sees them as central to their personal identity.¹ Erikson refers to identity as "some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image².

In this chapter, I will first present a historical overview of Muslim Americans besides exploring identity and identification of the latter from different perspectives and within its various dimensions and paradigms. Then in an attempt to illustrate the psychological construct of "religious identity"; I will expose a variety of interesting research works in the domain. The third section will be devoted to the Muslim American identity representation and reconstruction in the wake of 9/11.

¹ James D.Fearon. *What Is Identity (As We Now Use The Word)?* Department of Political Science Stanford University Stanford, CA 94305, email: jfearon@stanford.edu; November 3, 1999.

² E.H. Erikson, (1970). *Reflections on the Dissent of Contemporary Youth*. International Journal of Psychoanalysis, p.18.

Section One: Muslim Americans Identity

A-Muslim Americans:

The term “Muslim American”, according to Sirin and Fine, came into existence after September 11, 2001. Prior to the terrorists’ attacks on the USA, the same young people referred to themselves as Pakistani-American or Indian-American, Iranian-American or Arab- Americans.³Crockatt notes that:

The United States contains a substantial and rising Muslim population. No official figures for religious affiliation exist and estimates vary widely, but the figure currently accepted by the US State Department is approximately 6 million. Some estimate that by 2010 the Muslim population will overtake the Jewish population by virtue both of immigration and natural increase. (Richard Crockatt, 2007 .P:70).

Hence, Muslim American’s population witnesses an increasing growth .

Throughout the last two centuries, America has been the land of opportunities for those who were denied equal opportunities in their homeland. Many people who aspired for a life of freedom and better opportunities chose the United States as their new adopted home. Muslims are no exception. After the revocation of the Asia Exclusion Act of 1965, successive waves of immigrants arrived, with the result that the religious demography of the United States changed. A definition of America as Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish was promoted as an alternative to the melting-pot metaphor. Immigrant Muslims,

³ Sirin, S.R. and Michelle Fine (2007). Hyphenated Selves: Muslim American youth negotiating Identities on the fault lines of global conflict. *Applied Development Science* 11:3; 151-163.

latecomers to the American scene, have actively sought recognition, some even calling for a definition of America as Judeo-Christian-Muslim.

Muslim Americans are a diverse population in race, ethnicity, and cultural background. They constitute a microcosm of the multinational global community of Islam. Most Americans equate Islam and Muslims with the Arabs and the Middle East. In reality, not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. Muslim immigrants to the United States come from at least 68 countries, and have different traditions, practices, doctrines, languages and beliefs.

There is a distinctive difference between those who emigrated in the 1960s and the children and grandchildren of the immigrants of the 1870s. They have moved into the middle class and identify as Americans. They and their relatives have been drafted into the American military forces and have served their country with distinction.

The Muslims of America are far from homogeneous in their composition and in their attitudes and practices. Islam in America is a mosaic of many ethnic, racial, and national groups. The majority are first- or second generation immigrants or African-American converts. Their problems, like those of their religious minorities, centre on assimilation or integration and the preservation and practice of religious faith (Y. Y. Haddad & J. L. Esposito 1998 p:4).

The new immigrants who came as adults in the 1960s with preformed identities and a distinctive worldview are in the process of negotiating their identity in a hostile American environment. Gradually, their children are reshaping them into Americans. America ,thus, represents the only homeland they know. They often repeat, “I want my parents’ religion but not their culture.” The parents, on the other hand, have been teaching their Arab culture as Islam, and they want to keep their children within the tradition.

B-Muslim American Identification:

Identification constitutes a psychological link between the individual and the group. As soon as people identify with their group, that group becomes the basis for thinking, feeling and acting.

.....identification matters because it is the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively. This is a ‘baseline’ sorting that is fundamental to the organisation of the human world: it is how we know who’s who and what’s what. We couldn’t do whatever we do, as humans, without also being able to do this. (Richard Jenkins, 2008.P:13).

Constructionist approaches to identity are based on the assumption that identity is socially constructed and is therefore subject to change and adjustment (Anderson 1991, Cerulo 1997). Within this constructionist framework, symbolic interaction theory seems to be of crucial importance to the study of Muslim Americans. This paradigm assumes that individuals develop their identities through their encounters with social symbols, other

individuals and society as a whole (Howard 2000). One of the most important works on both national identity and symbolic interaction was Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991). He employed a historical perspective to argue that nationalism was a constructed affiliation born out of cultural artefacts and moments of history. As a part of American society, Muslims American are imbued with any number of the social and cultural symbols inducting them into the 'imagined community' of Americans. The specificities of this identity and what it implies for this minority group are complex. In his famous *Human Nature and the Social Order* Charles Cooley argues that individuals actually create their identities based on what their understanding of society's perception of them (1902). This process, termed the Looking Glass Self (Cooley 1902), can help us understand how interactions with non-Muslims can shape American Muslims' views of their own American identity.

The social self is simply any idea, or system of ideas, drawn from the communicative life... As connected with the thought of other persons the self-idea is always a consciousness of the peculiar or differentiated aspect of one's life, because that is the aspect that has to be sustained by purpose and endeavor, and its more aggressive forms tend to attach themselves to whatever one finds to be at once congenial to one's own tendencies and at variance with those of others with whom one is in mental contact. (Cooley, 1998.P:94).

According to this view, a Muslim American child could interpret society's view of him or herself through media images of Arabs and Muslims, direct interaction with other Americans, or Muslim institutions' presentations of the surrounding society. By examining the shape of the Muslim community and the way it manages these interactions, we can understand this socialization process and the American identity it produces. Still, the identities that emerge are not stagnant. Impression management and self-presentation play a role in the consistent renegotiation of Muslim American identity. Here the negotiation of social systems by choosing the appropriate methods to present one's self generates identities (Goffman 1959).⁴

Collective beliefs and values that characterize the in-group should become normative and part of the psychological self. People start to think, feel and act in terms of the way that the in-group is understood. These group understandings can be relatively stable or enduring and reflecting, such as, cultural features, but they are also responsive to social events and current threats (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

⁴ Eman Abdelhadi, *Manufacturing Muslim American: The Construction of American Identity among Second--Generation Muslim Americans of Michigan and Missouri*.

C-Americanization and National Identity:

In plural societies, the central issue for immigrants is how reconciling their cultural and ethnic heritage with a new national identity constitutes (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Identity is our understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us). It is a very practical matter, synthesising relationships of similarity and difference. The outcome of agreement and disagreement, and at least in principle always negotiable, identification is not fixed. (Richard Jenkins, 2008.P:18).

Thus, the challenge for immigrants is how to negotiate their identity in harmony with the host society without losing one's uniqueness.

Stepick and Stepick (2002), argue that acquiring a national identity does not imply immigrants to relinquish their cultural roots. Yet, in a society where cultural diversity is not celebrated, immigrants may perceive their cultural identity as being derided and may experience discrimination, negative stereotypes and prejudice based on their group membership.⁵

The relationship between the immigrant and the host nation and, more particularly, the immigrant's transformation from a potential to an actual Threatening Other are linked to the

⁵ Jonas Kunst ,Coping With Islamophobia: The Effects Of Religious Stigma On Muslim Minorities' Identity Formation more, international Journal of Intercultural Relations;36 (2012) 518–532.

preservation of the host nation's identity and/or to its overcoming a period of crisis. A thorough understanding of the immigrant's role as a Significant Other involves the study of this double dynamic: the immigrant as a contradiction within the national order *and* the functions that the Othering of the immigrant has for the in-group and the host society.. (Anna Triandafyllidou, 2003.P:56).

According to this view, the immigrant poses a challenge by threatening the nation unity and authenticity.

Sirin and Fine's (2007) findings assert that the successful integration of both one's own culture and the dominant culture leads to successful adolescent identity development. Nonetheless, political events, beyond the immediate control of both dominate and sub-culture group members, may hinder successful integration. For instance, in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001 many Muslim American youth and their families have reported being the victims of blatant discrimination and harassment in public school settings, public parks, places of employment, etc.

The reality of the destruction of 9/11, a defining moment in United States history, has brought major changes both within the Muslim community and in the consciousness and response of the American public... ...despite the wide-ranging efforts of American Muslims to present their religion as the antithesis of the terrorist ideology illustrated on 9/11 and in subsequent attacks abroad. Muslims struggle to model good citizenship. (Jocelyne Cesari, 2010.P:28).

Muslims actually were invisible in schools, universities, publications, and media. Today, Islam and Muslims often dominate the negative headlines. This sort of overt discrimination that can negatively scare adolescents and cause a significant retardation in the more normal process of psychosocial development, especially, if individuals prove to be less resilient.

D-Muslim American Marginalization:

Among religious communities in America , Muslims seem to have experienced increased marginalization and racialization. Ba-Yunus Ilyas and kassim kone argue that:

Most Americans are hyphenated Americans: African Americans, white Americans, Italian Americans, Arab Americans, or Asian Americans, just to name a few. There are also Americans who are Catholics, but they are not known as Catholic Americans. Mormons are not called Mormon Americans and Buddhists are not addressed as Buddhist Americans. Among religious communities, this distinction, it seems, goes to the Muslims. (Ba-Yunus Ilyas and kassim kone, 2006.P:23).

They also state that:

...After that fateful day, like after the sneak attack on Pearl HarborThis marginalization of the Muslim population has meant that all Muslims residing in the United States, citizens included, are suspect automatically. Even before 9/11, there existed legal provisions for racial profiling, which, more often than not, selectively apprehended and grilled “Middle Eastern looking” motorists and other travelers in the buses, trains and the nation’s

airports.. (Ba-Yunus Ilyas and kassim kone, 2006.P:23).

According to Ba-Yunnus and Kone, 9/11 events constitute a turning point in the lives of Muslims in America. Immediately before 9/11, racial profiling had become such a serious issue in the Muslim American community. However, Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr note that:

According to Louise Calkins (2006), Arab Americans have experienced increased marginalization and racialization since the 1960s. This is not due to “the domestic distribution of power and resources” (273) or even religious differences and distinctive institutions formed by Arab immigrants. (Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr ,2009.P:81).

In reality many factors have led to their exclusion from political and civic life and a heightened incidence of discrimination and hate crimes against them such as ; international political developments, America’s relationship to the region, and the media’s negative depictions of Arabs as violent . (A. Bakalian and M. Bozorgmehr ,2009).

That is, the history of Arabs and Muslims marginalization goes beyond the 9/11 attacks. In the West in general and in the United States in particular, Islam has suffered from what Edward Said once described as “bad press.” Although not a Muslim himself, in his *Covering Islam* (1981), immediately followed by his classic *Orientalism* (1982), Edward Said laments extremely biased and negative coverage that Islam generally received in

Western academia, among policy-making elites and in the media. But that was before 9/11. Lori Peek states:

Muslims have been isolated and isolation causes harm. Some Muslims abandoned their religion, others became more religious after 9/11. But many young second generation Muslims are now standing up and saying: we have the tools and the power. They stand firmly in both their parents' culture and their culture in the U.S., and if there is going to be any progress, it will start with them. That's a place of hope. (Lori Peek, 2011).

Apparently, they seem to represent a deep anti-American resentment pervading the Muslim people especially of Arab origin⁶.

⁶ Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone, *Muslims in the United States*. Greenwood Press Westport, Connecticut _ London. 2006

Section two: Religious Identity and Religious Commitment

A- Religion and Identity:

It has always been recognized that religion is a powerful force in human society, associated with the strongest feelings and dramatic behavior and with powerful social forces. Religion is often of profound importance to people's lives and religious groups are among the more salient buttresses of identity. Religion tends to be a key determinant of identity formation depending on circumstances, the groups covered and the period covered in the analysis (S.H. Oppong, 2013). The lives of observant believers are organized around their religious beliefs, values and practices. These ideas and values involve religious truth-claims and absolute moral principles that define what it means to be a believer of a particular religion and that lead to dogmatic thinking (Altemeyer, 2002)⁷.

Religion offers a sense of identity that in turn is an important ingredient for group cohesiveness.

It seems apparent that in societies where religion is deeply embedded in social life, people tend to derive their emotional strength and stability from religious identity and traditions which set them apart from those not adhering to them. (Saira Yamin, 2008).

⁷ Altemeyer, B. (2002). Dogmatic behavior among students: Testing a new measure of dogmatism. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 142, 713–721.

It offers the immigrant group a place of strength to seek assimilation into the dominant society. When the religious belief system is the same as that of members of the dominant society, a sense of commonality and shared values between the subordinate and the core group is expected and with this a diminishing of tension and conflict. However, religion is also used to counteract the indigenous belief system on which the values, norms, and ethos of the conquered people rest.

A religion is a conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it, bases an account of how life should be lived given that interpretation, and expresses this interpretation and lifestyle in a set of rituals, institutions, and practices. (Keith E. Yandell, 2002. P: 16).

Another definition:

Religion is one manifestation of spirituality and, as a cultural phenomenon, tends to involve societal institutions, shared beliefs, symbols, and rituals. Religion can be very spiritual when it is well integrated and internalized, or it can be devoid of spirituality when rituals and beliefs are meaningless (Wong, 1998. P: 367).

Thus, Religion is defined in terms of the beliefs of its adherents, and tends to focus on the institutions, rituals, and practices either collectively or individually.

Religion is a complex of behaviors and ideologies consisting of rituals and myths. By identifying the root and core of the Muslim faith, and by

recognizing those elements in the practice of that faith which are cultural rather than theological (those things that are historical and temporal in the practice and those things that are understood by the faithful to be transcendently indispensable to the practice of the faith), a way can be chartered for the assimilation into another culture without jeopardizing either the core of the faith or that which is indispensably cherished in the culture (Khan).⁸

Muslim Americans have distinctive religious beliefs and practices. Yet their overall approach to religion is not all that different from the way that U.S. Christians approach their faith. Comparable numbers of Christians and Muslims in the United States say they attend religious services at least once a week (45% and 40%, respectively). Somewhat more Christians than Muslims say they pray every day, while more Muslims than Christians say religion is “very important” in their lives.

Salience of religious identities and practices, how the religious affiliations of immigrant communities impact their integration have been central and incited questions regarding why they become more post-migration. Religious rituals may represent temporal continuity between life in home country and life in host country, thus making it easier to find commonalities between the old and the new. Prayers, ceremonies and rituals recur as they have always done and provide one with a familiar cyclical rhythm (Tiilikainen, 2003). In addition to meeting spiritual needs, religious communities can

⁸ John H. Morgan; *Islam and Assimilation in the West :Religious and Cultural Ingredients in American Muslim Experience*, Journal of Religion & Society; volume16(2014)

provide material, psychological and social benefits for newcomers, help them find jobs and housing. Religious affiliation can help immigrants overcome social isolation.⁹

B- Definition of Religious Identity:

Through religious teachings, social learning, and participation in rituals, a foreclosed religious identity is uncritically adopted. A person needs approval and belonging, along with the need of religious communities to socialize their members.

Religious authority, beliefs, ceremony, membership, participation, practices, ritual, and the religious group itself are used as a personality support or haven for personal comfort, relief and strength. Consensual religionists are characterized by a shallow and restrictive mode of thinking resulting in a simple conformist orientation to life including steady, routine, and regular participation in institutionalized religious beliefs and practices. (Fleck, 1976.P: 198).

Hence, adolescents who conform to a peer culture become aware of how different they act depending on the social context in which they find themselves. Religious identity salience may represent one of the main factors operating in both cultural cohesion and conflict. Lori Peek notes that:

Following September 11, for the students interviewed for this study, being Muslim American has new meaning, as religious identity has become even more central to their social and personal selves. (Lori Peek, 2005).

⁹ Saba Senses Ozyurt ;*Living Islam in Non-Muslim Spaces*: The Centre for Comparative Immigration Studies University of California, San Diego p:6.

Several studies have looked at how religiosity is affected by identity processes. And sociocultural scholars regularly use the phrase 'religious identity' to refer to self-ascribed labelling. In various different fields of study, especially through work rooted in the humanities, the term "religious identity" has incrementally appeared, although without theoretical precision or empirical validation. Abby day asserts that:

....scholars of religion may employ religious identity to describe isolated phenomena in small cultural groups, and social statisticians may refer to religious identity as social capital...yet, the scholars have been reticent to work with the domain of religious identity .(Abby Day,2008 .P:128) .

In psychology and sociology, the growing understanding of identity domains and differing identity statuses has stimulated research per each domain; yet, the scholars have been reticent to work with the domain of religious identity.

When conducting psychological research in religion, scholars should not only analyze extrinsics, intrinsics, and questors (the most common measures), but the degree of salience of religious identity, both implicitly (not prompted for religion) and explicitly (subsequently prompted for religion and ranks identity domains including religion) held by the subject. An explicit religious identity refers to an individual who consciously identifies with a religious community and/or supernatural entity. (Abby Day,2008.P:138).

Thus , religious identity refers to people's ways of relating to religion, including whether they choose to belong to a religious community, how strongly they feel about their beliefs, and how they choose to demonstrate those beliefs in their daily lives. All of these choices and values make statements about who people understand themselves to be.

The American Psychological Association's Division 36 Conference (Psychology of Religion) (Bell, 2006) gave the first presentation for the possibility of a psychological construct for religious identity (empirically measurable and separable from other identity domains)¹⁰. About thirty articles have used various measures of religiosity with a measure of overall global identity to see the impact of religion on the overall identity development, usually in adolescence. Most of these studies find that religiosity is a significant variable in relation to identity achievement. Nevertheless, Marcia's Identity Status Interview (ISI) and Adams' Measure of Ego Identity Status-II (EOMEIS-II) (the two primary measures of identity) contain significant content that measures religiosity. These research articles essentially use a measure of religiosity to see if it impacts a measure of identity that also includes a measure of religiosity.

¹⁰ Bell, D.B. (2006) *Religious Identity: Conceptualizing a measure for research and practice*. Unpublished paper presented at APA Div. 36 Mid-Conference, March 3-4, 2006.

Deriving from Erikson's psychosocial conceptualization of identity¹¹, Marcia sought to validate Erikson's theory of identity formation through a semi-structured interview, the Identity Status Interview (ISI). In his early clinical work, Marcia's had come across cases of individuals who were suffering identity problems but could only be clinically diagnosed with severe disorders, such as schizophrenia. With agreement with Erikson's theory, he tried to validate it empirically so it could be used as a clinical tool for adolescents. Despite his several false starts, he found a way to conduct and measure an interview that empirically established the four identity statuses¹² (Marcia, 2004). Stemming from Marcia's original status paradigm, commitment means that one has formed a degree of attachment to this identity. Thus a foreclosed religious identity should be at least somewhat paramount to the person holding it.

¹¹ Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth, and crisis*. New York: Norton.

¹²Religious identity was hypothesized to consist of four components of importance/centrality, belonging, satisfaction with the religious group and religious behaviors. The first three components (importance/centrality, belonging and satisfaction with the religious group) were measured by the In-group Identification Scale.

Pargament, et al. (2005) introduce a strong case for religion being unique in psychological functioning. With an attachment to a notion of holy or sacred, religious motivation seems to operate separately from other sources of motivation. King (2003) argues that religion uniquely provides a rich nexus of ideological, spiritual, and social resources which prove quite helpful in reaching identity achievement. No other social resource has the ability to provide such powerful motivation, rich social interaction, resources for ideological purpose, and the ability to facilitate experiences of the holy or sacred. Finally, Furrow and Wagener (2003) suggest that transcendence is a unique variable in identity. Given Erikson's psychosocial model, we may be able to see how religion typically provides rich social resources for identity (potentially distinct from other resources because of the unique role of the holy or sacred), and we can suggest that transcendence may be a unique element in the psychological construction of identity.

Smidt's (2004) study of Muslim identity formation in the West described the identity quest in this way:

The existence, paradoxes and challenges of transnational Muslim identity formation in the West (Europe and the United States) ... due to the politicized status of Muslims in Western secular nation-states. This has both to do with the complicated re-entering of religion on the public square that these communities bring with them, and with their status as Diasporas (Smidt, 2004: 42).

The disorientation and stress caused by migration process can be a theologizing experience (Smith, 1978). Will Herberg (1960) who first drew attention to the role of religion in the process of assimilation in his seminal work *Protestant, Catholic and Jew*. As one of the primary social identities, he argued that religion has the potential of replacing ethnic and national allegiances and forging social solidarities. Early immigrants hold fast to their parent's faith even as they forgot their parent's language.

Most Muslims living in the U.S. identify with both Muslims *and* Americans to some extent (eg. Esposito 2007 Haddad 2009; Lin 2009), suggesting a motivation to conform to the norms of both communities. Also, as a religious group, Muslim Americans include individuals of varying races and ethnicities (see, e.g., Pew 2011).

C-Muslim Americans Religious Commitment:

The first decade of immigration witnessed a reluctance and little motivation of the Muslim immigrant for religious activities, they just earned money, saved, and sent it to their families in the mother countries. As soon as, they have settled with their families in the mid-1970s, Islam has been revitalized as the norm and value of their life, for fear that infiltration of the Western life style and behavior into the Muslim youth would seriously damage the unity of family which is the most precious value for the Muslim. In addition, racial, ethnic and cultural discrimination also formed a wall between host and immigrant society. Thus, Islam became their strongest ties.

The state of religious knowledge and practice among 1980's Muslim immigrants are the result of being in the United States. Factors such as; Modernity, foreign occupation, Westernization, secularism, communism, and nationalism all marginalize religious rituals and practices in much of the post-colonial Islamic world. As a result, Muslims immigrants from the Middle East had already cast aside a number of religious practices.

The everyday experience of being a Muslim in the United States was, obviously, different from being a Muslim in a Muslim country. Furthermore, Islam reduced of its rituals and practices may entail adjustment to American society and culture easier than it might have been otherwise; this was not the primary reason for the secularism of immigrants and their children. Life in the US was not easy and negative stereotypes of Arabs were abundant. Ideas based upon nationalism, pan-Arabism and the historic magnificence and resilience of

culture gave strength and pride to immigrant and second-generation Arabs of all religious faith; they also maintained deep, transnational relationships.

Another indicator of the degree the religion is practiced relates to the historical and cultural heritage a certain Muslim population might have. Depending on the historical and cultural heritage of the region, certain influences might be present in the way Muslims practice their religion. In a sense, while Muslims roughly adhere to a set of commonly held values or beliefs they might differ in the way they practice, articulate, and incorporate Islam in their lives.

D- Second Generation Muslim American Religious Experience:

Religion duly plays significant role in identity formation in a culture where youth confront a continually fluctuating social and political milieu. Second generation foreignness is quite clear through their Islamic identity and practice. Yang and Baugh (2001) accurately observe that a return to theological foundations (their term for a type of fundamentalism) occurs among second generations because they must bridge differences of culture and ethnic origins (internal pluralism) among co-religionists and because the “authority of a religion that is based simply on tradition loses its power” (280).

Muslim Americans find strength in the spirituality of Islam and hope in its message of justice and equality. According to Schneiders:

Spirituality is the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.... (Schneiders, 1989. P: 684).

There is evidence that young Muslim Americans besides being cultivated, they also prioritize their religious identity. In a 2007 Pew survey, for example, 47% of American respondents considered themselves “Muslim first.” While this ratio is much lower than in Britain, Germany, or Spain (81%, 66%, and 69%, respectively), the numbers converge somewhat when focused on the youth demographic, with 60% of 18-29 year olds in America choosing Islam as

their primary identifier.¹³ Yet, Muslims are not alone in giving preference to their religious, rather than national background. Notably, in a 2006 Pew survey, 42% of American Christians considered themselves “Christian first.” That this statistic is not similarly bandied about like the one specific to Muslim-Americans speaks to the air of suspicion uniquely surrounding Muslim religiosity.

It is presumed that Muslim Americans religiosity and alienation often go hand-in-hand. An Oxford Analytica brief distributed in the fall of 2009, as incidents of domestic terrorism in America were beginning to multiply, exemplifies this development: A sizeable portion of the immigrant Muslim-American population is becoming more religious and alienated from mainstream US society. This is true particularly among second-generation Muslims. This trend is similar to the growing religiosity among Muslims in many countries in Western Europe.

¹³Pew Research Center; Americans Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream for Immediate Release: May 22, 2007.

In America, effectively, young Muslim Americans do not want to practice their faith blindly; they want rational explanations for why behavior is acceptable or not. Moreover, they have benefitted from the state's *laissez-faire* approach to religious expression, which has enhanced a more apolitical and self-defined identity.¹⁴ It seems, therefore, that the experience of young Muslims in the United States evidences that their growing religiosity is an articulation of, rather than a threat to, America's freedoms, liberties, and societal norms.

¹⁴Yasir Qadhi; "Muslims in the West: Where are we Going– Yasir Qadhi - Part 2 of 2," [sic] 32min 15sec; fromGoogle Videos, Flashvideo[http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=- 527213427005200992#](http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-527213427005200992#) (accessed November 29, 2010).

Section three: Muslim Americans After September 11:

A- Representation and Identity in the Wake of 9/11:

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, stands as one of the darkest days in modern U.S. history. It will long be remembered as the day of the collapse of the Twin Towers .

For Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans, “9/11” likewise signifies a shocking and sad day, but it also marks the beginning of a new era in which they became the victims of backlash. For many, the tragic events ushered in a period of hate crimes, profiling, and discrimination. Though stereotypes and discriminatory actions were not new to these minorities, the post-9/11 backlash was overwhelming and relentless. (Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, 2009.P:1).

Many Arab and Muslim Americans quickly recognized the magnitude and significance of the events of September 11 and anticipated potential hostile repercussions (Nimer 2002). In part because they were aware of a history in the United States of violence against Arabs and Muslims following previous crises advocacy groups and Islamic scholars swiftly denounced the events of September 11.

During World War I, German Americans were under attack. Though the Japanese were the prime targets during World War II...During the Red Scare, Bolshevik sympathizers and anarchists were suspected of sedition. Many were immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe, and a sizable number were Jewish. McCarthyism most severely affected

former Communist Party members... Since the 9/11 hijackers were young Arab/Muslim men, the government profiled immigrants with these personal characteristics. (Ibid P: 49).

Throughout the American history, one would notice that specific groups were targeted after specific events.

Despite sustained efforts by the media, government, and civic leaders to combat intolerance in the days, weeks, and months after September 11, many individuals in the United States who share a common ethnic and/or religious background with the hijackers became the targets of hostility. Arabs and Muslims (as well as South Asians, Latinos, Sikhs, Hindus, and other individuals who were mistakenly perceived to be Arab or Muslim) suffered threats, harassment, discrimination, racial and religious profiling, property damage, and verbal and physical assault. Although the most dramatic increase in acts of violence against Arabs and Muslims occurred in the months immediately following September 11, reports of bias, civil rights violations, and hate crimes continue (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2005).

Apocalyptic images may seem appropriate for depicting the dilemmas that face beleaguered Muslim communities in the West in the bleak post-9/11 era. Even without the rising hostility to a Muslim presence in the West, emigrant communities have faced the challenge of adapting to exogenous

cultural norms and values, making it an uphill task to maintain an “authentic Muslim life.”¹⁵ Evelyn Alsultany states that:

after September 11, I remained glued to my television. I watched the endless clips of the planes crashing, of the towers falling, ...Arab and Muslim Americans were portrayed as the unjust target of hate crimes. Certainly, xenophobia and outright racism flourished on the airwaves. (Evelyn Alsultany, 2012.P:15).

Alsultany adds:

My surprise was twofold. First, at such an opportune moment for further stereotyping....media has stereotyped and misrepresented Arabs and Muslims for over a century, with very few exceptions, I couldn't believe that sympathetic portrayals would appear during such a fraught moment. (Ibid .p:15).

An atmosphere of general suspicion toward Muslim Americans, bordering on animosity, was not always as pervasive as it is today. Importantly, the months following 9/11 saw politicians speak of Muslim Americans in terms of necessary allies rather than potential enemies, even amidst a populist backlash against Islam and its adherents.

¹⁵ Abdelwahab El-Affendi :*The People on the Edge: Religious Reform and the Burden of the Western Muslim Intellectual* ,Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review 8, (2009), 19–50.

Recent research points to the resurgence and, in many cases, primacy of an Islamic identity among second-generation Muslim-Americans. A number of these studies highlights the central role 9/11 played in this regard. Given the widespread backlash against religious and ethnic minorities following the September 11 attacks, political leaders, local, state, and federal authorities, and several government agencies instituted extra measures to protect individuals, Islamic schools, mosques, and Arab- and Muslim-owned businesses (Human Rights Watch 2002). In fact, on September 12, 2001, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution condemning bigotry and violence against Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians. On September 13, 2001, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights made a hotline available for people wishing to report hate crimes. Since September 11, the U.S. Department of Transportation has investigated over a hundred complaints from airline passengers who claimed they were singled out at security screenings or barred altogether from boarding airplanes because of their distinct names or physical appearance. In response to a substantial increase in reports of employment discrimination after September 11, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2002) disseminated information in an attempt to improve cultural awareness and stop workplace discrimination against Muslim, Arab, and South Asian Americans.

Arab and Muslim American writers, artists, organizations, and even a few mainstream sitcoms¹⁶, have sought to challenge dominant images of Arabs and Muslims... Such

¹⁶ A *sitcom* is an amusing television drama series about a set of characters. *Sitcom* is an abbreviation for 'situation comedy'....a classic TV sitcom.(Collins Dictionary).

organizations include the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the Arab American Institute (AAI), the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC). CAIR has prepared a guide to understanding Islam for journalists, and MPAC opened a Hollywood bureau in April 2007 that offers consulting service...to recognize achievements in challenging stereotypes.(Ibid:P:183).

Stronger individual religious identification may result in enhanced group solidarity, cohesion, and collective identification. At the same time, visible demonstration of a minority religious identity may provoke hostility and discrimination from the dominant population, as occurred following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Haddad (1994: 79) asserts that the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and the resultant American support for the effort, shocked the Arab community in the United States and led to the creation of the Arab-American hyphenated identity.

The 9/11 events intensified Muslim American identity and made it a stronger social and political force. Muslim Americans recognized their role in the public sphere prior to the tragic events of September 11, nonetheless, that catastrophe and the complex social and political response that followed led to an identity formed in response to crisis as Islam came under intense scrutiny by non-Muslim Americans.

B -Reconstructing the Muslim American Identity:

Following September 11, being Muslim American has new meaning, as religious identity has become even more central to their social and personal selves. Indeed, Muslim Americans experienced September 11 as a “turning point” moment.

An unanticipated outcome of the post-9/11 backlash was the empowerment of young people, ...They demonstrated pride in their dual identities and courage to speak out.... One leader commented, “I see young Arab or Middle Eastern students who became now actively involved because of the backlash.” Another respondent ..“become more visible and known to the community than before. (Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, 2009.P:196).

Portes and Rumbaut (1996, 2001) introduced the concept of “reactive ethnicity” to describe the rise of defensive identities and solidarities to counter confrontations with an adverse native mainstream. Similarly, religious, ethnic, and gender identities were shaped and further strengthened by the post-September 11 hostility as well as the perceived threat to both Islam and their individual identities. Events within the West shaped the self-awareness of Muslim communities.

[The] activities [of Muslim American organizations] display a conscious effort to make for themselves in American society, American Muslim advocacy groups have tackled stereotyping of Muslims as a matter of public debate, and they have aggressively worked toward resolving incidents of discrimination and civil rights abuses. (Huda 2006, 17–18).

The resulting and progressive polarization of identities set Muslims apart from other immigrants as well as from the rest of their European or American compatriots, and Muslims from different backgrounds united around common causes and a shared identity¹⁷.

After 9/11 the U.S. Department of State sheds light on the issue of anti-Arab and Muslim attitudes and acts of racism against them in America. In a conference on “Human Rights and the Fight against Terrorism,” Timothy Keefer of the Department of Homeland Security office for Civil Rights made a statement on freedom and security and the prevention of discrimination. Keefer declared, “We believe that people should be viewed as individuals, based on the content of their character, on what they do, not on their race or ethnicity or religious beliefs” (Department of State). Keefer added that the Muslim-American and Arab-American communities have been part of the fabric of the country, in academia, in military service, the medical profession, industry and

¹⁷ Abdelwahab El-Affendi : *The People on the Edge: Religious Reform and the Burden of the Western Muslim Intellectual* ,Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review 8, (2009), 19–50.

in government service, and thus, “Like all Americans, Muslim-Americans and Arab-Americans suffered on September 11, 2001.”¹⁸

....since September, perhaps for the first time, Islam is being recognized as an American religion..... The Arab in America is no longer invisible. Neither is some of the ugliness in America, and it's not coming from Arabs and Muslims. (Louise Cainkar, 2002.P:29).

Consequently, Muslim immigrants in the U.S.A. began to identify themselves as Muslims first, and Arabs or other ethnicities second.

¹⁸ Keefer: U.S. Government Defending Rights of Muslims, Arab- Americans.17 July 2005. U.S. Department of State. 17 March 2009. <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=July>

Conclusion:

In short, this chapter provides a theoretical framework to the whole study. The emphasis on the role of religious identity, the psychological theories of identity formation and Muslim American identity and identification, actually, paves the way to what follows in the next chapters.

In light of America's actual demographic landscape, identity formation among Muslim Americans is becoming a highly important area of study as ethnic minorities integrate into American society. The degree to which the sociocultural constructs influence each other, profoundly shapes identity formation.

Questions persist about the assumed tension between western and Muslim identities, as well as about the role of culture versus religion in shaping identity. Can Muslims be fully Western and still live as Muslims? In this chapter I tried to find answers to these questions, by delving into the very dimension of the Muslim Americans' spiritual life and experience. Besides, I explored the mechanisms of the construction of the Muslim Americans prior and post 9/11.

Chapter Two

The Kite Runner: Faith and Tradition

Introduction

During the last two centuries, the representations of Islam and of Muslims in dominant Western discourses in media and scholarly and literary works have often been less than appreciative; Islam and its adherents, both in popular culture and scholarly texts, have often been represented as backward and uncivilized, a point most emphatically argued by the late Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978). The popular genres of Muslim life narratives, which have proliferated in the years after the events of 9/11, have reiterated the account of Islam as a backward and misogynist religion and Muslim women as powerless victims of Islam as many scholars agree, Muslim women in contemporary western discourses have often been depicted as either victims or escapees of Islam or, more recently, as the pawns of militant Islam..¹

This chapter will be devoted to Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, which mainly revolves around the role of religious practices ,rituals ,traditions and culture in the life and the formation of identity of the Muslim protagonist .The study will explore the change and metamorphosis in the protagonists 'identities by focusing on their spiritual moments.

¹ Firouzeh Ameri, *Sacred Spaces in Contemporary English Literature: Muslim Contributions*, Murdoch University; p: 1.

Section One: *The kite Runner* a Novel about Afghanistan:

A-The Novel's Background:

Afghanistan is multicultural and multi-ethnic country. The state was formed by the political expansion of Pashtun tribes in the middle of the eighteenth century but was not unified until the end of the nineteenth century. Persian-speaking (Tajiks, Hazaras, and Aymaqs) and Turkic-speaking (Uzbeks and Turkmens) populations have been incorporated in the state.² Afghanistan constitutes a mosaic of languages and ethnicities. 90% of the population are Muslims, among which 80% of them are Sunni Muslim, and the remaining are Shi'a. Membership of each sect is linked to ethnicity so, for example, most ethnic Hazaras are also Shi'a Muslims.

During the last two decades, Afghanistan became the focus of world attention due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Taliban's activities. Khaled Hosseini's novel is set mainly in Kabul. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the text a look to Afghanistan's twentieth century political history is recommended.

The relative peace that marked the reign of the king, Zahir Shah, from 1933 to 1973 provides the background for the chapters dealing with Amir's childhood in Kabul. In 1979 the Soviet Union (the USSR) invaded Afghanistan to prevent the Islamic militia (later known as the Mujahedin, or 'holy warriors') from taking power. It was during this time of Soviet rule that Amir and Baba fled Afghanistan to

² *Countries and Their Cultures* (2001). Macmillan Reference USA, an imprint of Gale Group.P:1.

take refuge in the United States. The Taliban³, which was established on fundamentalist Islamic principles, was formed by Afghan Islamic clerics and students, and one of its major aims was to enforce strict conformity with Islamic customs. Once it gained political control of Afghanistan in 1996–1997, the Taliban established the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice to police compliance with the tenets of Islam.

The Kite Runner narrator and main character is Amir, the son of a wealthy Afghan businessman, who immigrates to America with his father after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. *The Kite Runner* primarily focuses on three significant periods in Amir's life: his Kabul childhood, his and his father's first years as immigrants in 1980s California, and Amir's 2001 return to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Each of these sections effectively foregrounds a different stage in Amir's sense of self-identity against the backdrop of a developing national history:

Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is divided into three major sections. The first part of the story takes place in Kabul.... The second section begins in 1981 after Amir and his father leave Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation.... In the final section of the novel, it is 2001 and Amir returns to Afghanistan by way of Pakistan. Amir receives a phone call from his mentor and his father's best friend, Rahim Khan,to do that will help Amir "to be good again." (Rebecca Stuhr, 2009.P:26).

³ The Taliban ("Students of Islamic Knowledge Movement") ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001. They came to power during Afghanistan's long civil war. Although they managed to hold 90% of the country's territory, their policies. Including their treatment of women and support of terrorists. Ostracized them from the world community. <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/taliban.html>. Accessed on January 6, 2008.

Hosseini's choice of time period for the book, though corresponding with his own life, also goes beyond his personal experiences. It covers a crucial era in the history of Afghanistan.

Hosseini wants readers to respond to his work as literature and storytelling; he also hopes that “the novel has provided Western readers with a fresh perspective.” He laments the fact that stories from Afghanistan “center around the various wars, the opium trade, and the war on terrorism. Precious little is said about the Afghan people themselves, their culture, their traditions, how they lived in their country and how they manage abroad as exiles” (Rebecca Stuhr, 2009.P:5).

Khaled Hosseini's, famous novel, *The Kite Runner* is a depiction of identity, betrayal, deception and atonement. It retells the story of a boy's journey escaping from his haunted childhood while torturing himself with his own contrition. Identity and redemption play a vital role in creating the string that binds the characters together. *The Kite Runner*, embarks on Amir's journey that leads him to face the good and evil inside himself. Amir's “unatoned sins”, as they are described in the first chapter of the novel, have plagued his conscience and cast an oppressive shadow over his joys and triumphs. *The Kite Runner* revolves around the motivation for an individual to seek redemption and attain the satisfaction of self-fulfilment. The novel is structured like the memory lane of the protagonist Amir whose sense of remorse and guilt forces him to return to Afghanistan. Amir's return to homeland, tarnished and tattered by war, fundamentalism and the turbulence of a Taliban led regime unfolds his journey towards self-identity and redemption.

The narrative tells the story of Amir, a successful writer living with his wife in California, receives a phone call from his father's friend in Pakistan he is forced to re visit his past but also given a chance to redeem the wrongs of both himself and his father in 1970s Afghanistan. Amir and Hassan are friends growing up in 1970s Afghanistan. Hassan is Amir's servant, son of Baba's servant, Ali. In a culture where the Hazaras are treated as inferior to Pashtuns, Hassan and Ali are victimised by members of the Pashtun community, particularly a boy called Assef and his friends. Hassan, one of the fastest kite runners in Kabul, protects Amir from trouble but when the time comes for Hassan to need protection Amir hides in an alleyway. Haunted by his cowardice Amir makes life impossible for Ali and Hassan who eventually leave despite the pleading of Amir's father Baba. With the Russian control of Afghanistan becoming unbearable, Baba and Amir leave Afghanistan in an empty fuel tanker and escape first to Pakistan and then to America where Amir graduates from high school and marries Soraya. Baba dies shortly after their marriage. Amir and Soraya are unable to have children. Rahim Khan summons Amir back to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Hassan and his wife have been killed by the Taliban leaving a child, Sohrab. As Amir learns that Hassan was actually his half-brother and that therefore Sohrab is his nephew, he fights both Assef and the authorities in order to rescue Sohrab and bring him back to the USA to live with him and Soraya. The novel ends in San Francisco, with Amir and Sohrab kite flying in the park.

B-The Impact of 9/11 on Afghanistan:

After the 9/11 attacks, Afghanistan was seen as a haven for some of the terrorists and their allies responsible for the attack, and the United States and others attempted retaliation. David Holloway notes that:

By 2001, al-Qaeda-linked attacks against Americans were just one part of a burgeoning insurgency that was global in scope and significantly emboldened by its Afghan successes. During the early years of the war on terror, Islamist insurgencies were under way in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq...China. (David Holloway, 2008.P:2).

He adds:

Ten days after 9/11, President Bush told Congress and a worldwidethat the 9/11 bombers 'hate our freedoms' and 'way of life', 'our freedom of religion...the president also described al-Qaeda as 'a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics; a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam' (Ibid.P:6).

Afghanistan was the target of U.S.A in its war on terror. In an interview with Riverhead Books, Hosseini describes what he hopes readers will get from his novel:

I want them to see that the Afghan people existed before there was a war with the Soviets and before there was a Taliban. I want them to understand that the things we're seeing now in Afghanistan -the tribal chiefs vying for their own interests and the various ethnicities colliding with each other—have roots that go back several centuries. . . . I want readers to have a really good time reading this story. I want them to be touched by it because to me novel writing, first and foremost, is storytelling. . . .And I want people to simply

remember Afghanistan. If the book is successful at all in sparking some dialogue on Afghanistan, and keeping it in the public consciousness, then I think it will have achieved a lot.⁴(Hosseini, 2008).

Literature changed, as well as, the world changed, Muslim writers with a purely insider view also have something to say about a 9/11-stricken world. Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, without focussing on the 9/11 attacks shows how the identity of the Afghan protagonist Amir is affected in the wake of the attacks. Even though, the novel takes advantage from the 9/11 events by popularising the terms "Taliban" and "fundamentalism" which are dealt with in Hosseini's narrative, and propelling Afghanistan into the popular consciousness. 9/11 becomes a space of resolution in this novel, where difficulties of identity and representation for Amir and his own conflict with terrorism are cathartically highlighted through his adoptive home America's newly formed War on Terror:

With the destruction of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, Americans were faced with the unfamiliar reality of terrorist acts occurring in their own nation. Afghanistan was seen as a haven for some of the terrorists and their allies responsible for the attack,... By 2003, there had been published an increasing number of nonfiction books about Afghanistan, its recent history, and U.S. involvement there, but Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, published that year, gained attention for providing a different perspective.(Harold Bloom,2009.P:12).

⁴ Khaled Hosseini Interview: Afghanistan's Tumultuous History." Interview. *Academy of Achievement and Khaled Hosseini*. Achievement.org, 3 July 2008. Web. 25 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/hos0int-3>>.

The various identity-forming moments for Amir all lead him to a strong sense of alignment with American ideals, and the forming of a common enemy after the 9/11 attacks allows him to forge a stronger bond with America.⁵Rebecca Stuhr has rightly said that:⁶

Hosseini writes compelling stories through which he questions assumptions and breaks apart stereotypes through the strengths and weaknesses of his characters. He interweaves into the action of his stories the details of history, culture, and daily life in Afghanistan. He challenges his readers to reflect on discrimination and political abuse within their own experience in light of instances of such abuses in a different and unfamiliar country. (Rebecca Stuhr, 2009.P: 77-78)

As the majority of migration literature, the idea of return to homeland is strongly present in *The Kite Runner*. Paul White notes that it must be noted that amongst all the literature of migration the highest proportion deals in some way with ideas of return, whether actualized or remaining imaginary.

To return may be to go back but it may equally be to start again: to seek but also to lose. Return has both a temporal and a spatial dimension. For the individual returning to their 'own' past and place it is rarely fully satisfying: circumstances change, borders in all senses are altered, and identities change too. (White, 1995.P:14).

⁵ Grant Andrews, *Representation and Identity in the Wake of 9/11: Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner, Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Frédéric Beigbeder's Windows on the World and Don DeLillo's Falling Man.*; University of Stellenbosch.

⁶ Stuhr, Rebecca, (2009). *Reading Khaled Hosseini*. California: Greenwood. Print.

It is when the protagonist of *The Kite Runner*, Amir, returns to Afghanistan that he finds spiritual peace. Hosseini, through Amir, represents important aspects of the Afghan immigrant, aspects that he himself shares. Especially, as he mentions *The Kite Runner's* protagonist Amir's longing and nostalgia for his homeland.

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), as the first novel written in English by an Afghan writer, dealt with the theme of Taliban fundamentalism. . Through the novel, Hosseini has given an authentic insight to the people of the world about the Taliban In particular:

..“Well, it's like this. In the aftermath of a disaster, whether it be natural or man-made—and the Taliban are a disaster, Amir, believe me—it's always difficult to ascertain that a child is an orphan.”. (Hosseini, 2003.P:337).

In another scene Amir, the protagonist, narrates a vivid picture of fundamentalism, extremism and intolerance of the Taliban. Amir attends a soccer match at Ghazi Stadium that is entirely different:

When the prayer was done, the cleric cleared his throat. “Brothers and sisters!” he called, speaking in Farsi, his voice booming through the stadium. “We are here today to carry out *Shari'a*. We are here today to carry out justice. We are here today because the will of Allah and the word of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, are alive and well here in Afghanistan,I ask you! WHAT DOES GOD SAY? (Hosseini, 2003.P:270).

The writer makes the point that the Taliban are responsible for social inequalities and injustices. They continue and legitimize their activities in the name of Islam.

Then I shot him in the balls. I've been on a mission since." "What mission is that?" I heard myself say. "Stoning adulterers? Raping children? Flogging women for wearing high heels? Massacring Hazaras? All in the name of Islam?". I wished I could take them back. Swallow them. But they were out. (Ibid.P:284).

Besides, he introduces the customs and traditions of the people of Afghanistan in general. Moreover, the distance of time helps him to take a separate and objective view of the events depicted in the novel. In an interview Hosseini says that he has written a short story called *The Kite Runner* back in spring of 1999. He had seen a story about the Taliban banning kite flying in Kabul, and since he grew up in Kabul flying kites with his brother and his cousins, his friends, it struck a personal chord, and he wrote a short story, which he thought was going to be about kite flying, and it ended up being about something altogether different. (Hosseini, *Achievement.org*)

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* has also portrayed the incident of the collapse of the Twin Towers (in 2001) very skilfully .He narrates:

One Tuesday morning last September, the Twin Towers came crumbling down and, overnight, the world changed...Soon after the attacks, America bombed Afghanistan,.... Suddenly, people were standing in grocery store lines and talking about the cities of my childhood, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif. (Hosseini, 2003.P:362).

But the most radical change that took place was in Afghanistan. The American president converted his fury into action.

Now Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, and people sipping lattes at Starbucks were talking about the battle for Kunduz, the Taliban's last stronghold in the north. That December, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras gathered in Bonn and under the watchful eye of the UN, began the process that might someday end over twenty years of unhappiness in their *watan*. Hamid Karzai's caracul hat and green *chapan* became famous. (Ibid, P: 363).

Both *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* deal with issues of war, discrimination, abuse, and good and bad family relationships. The “war on terror” and its Taliban target led to drastic changes in the Afghan history, geography, culture, and politics. Much was heard of the brutality of Taliban rule, of the plight of Afghan women, and of the tenacious spirit of the Afghan warrior who had managed to defend his country from foreign rule for more than 2,000 years.

Section two: Afghan Cultural Dimensions

A-Beyond the Title:

Hosseini's novel takes its title from national custom of doing battle with kites. It provides an extraordinary perspective on the struggles of a country that had been for too long ignored or misunderstood. The colourful kite running on the blue sky reflects optimism about Afghanistan's future.

The Kite Runner" lurks a metaphor so apt and evocative that even the author never fully exploits its power. For the benefit of readers who didn't grow up in Afghanistan—as Hosseini and his alter ego Amir did—a kite runner is a sort of spotter in the ancient sport of kite fighting. In a kite fight, competitors coat their kite strings in glue and ground glass, the better to cut their rivals' moorings. (Harold Bloom,2009.P:49).

For the Afghans, Kite flying is more than a pastime. It is a national obsession. Shops selling kite-flying equipment filled the streets of the capital, Kabul, and the skies above the city are decorated each day with hundreds of colourful kites fluttering in the wind. In Afghanistan kite flying festivals are a tradition. Kite fighting is very popular and the aim is to cut the kite's string while in the air so that it falls. Kite runners run after the falling kites. Within Afghan culture, the first person to pick up the fallen kite can claim it as his/her own. With kites continuing a long way after they have been cut, kite running can be very dangerous as the runner can be injured through running across dangerous terrain or not paying attention to surroundings and being knocked over by moving vehicles. During the Taliban

regime kite flying was Banned .The Taliban regime banned hobbies such as kite flying and bird keeping, in the belief that such pastimes were un-Islamic.

The Kite is a significant symbol with multiple layers of meanings .The Metaphor of Kite is highly significant in the text of the novel, *The Kite Runner*. The kite tournament of 1975 is particularly significant regarding betrayal and redemption. Hassan has been sexually offended by Amir's rival Asif. Amir didn't do anything and did not defend Hassan. Consequently, Amir is feeling ashamed and guilty. Kites are also a symbol of life. When Amir hears of Hassan's death at the hands of the Taliban, he ponders Hassan's:

Then I saw something else: a man dressed in a herringbone vest pressing the muzzle of his Kalashnikov to the back of Has-san's head. The blast echoes through the street of my father's house. Hassan slumps to the asphalt, his life of unrequited loyalty drifting from him like the windblown kites he used to chase. (Hosseini, 2003.P:219).

If Hassan's kite of life gets cut and blows away, he has still left behind a son. It is a kite that rouses Sohrab from his withdrawn state of traumatic shock on a spring day in a California park, as he helps Amir fly a victorious kite, using the strategies that Hassan and Amir had perfected.

B-Power of Tradition:

Hosseini's characterization of Afghan cultural identity attracts Western readers. Khaled Hosseini's (2003) novel *The Kite Runner* presents itself as a powerful depiction of the formation of a complex Afghan-American cultural identity against the backdrop of the turbulence of modern Afghanistan. For Amir, who associates strongly with America, the Afghan subculture becomes the main point of identification.

....as Hosseini emphasizes a symbolic intertwining of characters' individual experiences with the national experience of Afghanistan.....culture concludes Hosseini's exploration of the fundamental tensions involved in forming an identity rooted in a multifaceted culture and an always- developing historical experience. It is this examination of self in the context of culture and history that makes Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* a compelling debut. (Harold Bloom, 2009.P:57).

In fact, due to his economic success Amir's identification as American is possible because he achieves his American dream and he appropriates the main symbol of power. He does not seem to experience or acknowledge ethno-cultural boundaries to this identification primarily since he only represents the Afghan subculture.

That summer of 1983, I graduated from high school at the age of twenty, by far the oldest senior tossing his mortarboard on the football field that day. I remember losing Baba in the swarm of families, He walked to me, curled his arm around my neck, and gave my brow a single kiss. "I am *moftakhir*, Amir," he said. Proud. His eyes

gleamed when he said that and I liked being on the receiving end of that look. (Hosseini, 2003.P:131).

Indeed, by representing the poverty of these groups and their identification solely based on their past in Afghanistan, Amir is able to strengthen his own identity as American by contrast, since he achieves wealth and feels no attachment to Afghanistan when he returns there.⁷

The Kite Runner novel has been a triumph. Hosseini utilizes the father–son relationship to explore the qualities traditionally ascribed to Afghan men physical prowess and courage.

Maybe it was because I had been raised by men; I hadn't grown up around women and had never been exposed first hand to the double standard with which Afghan society sometimes treated them. Maybe it was because Baba had been such an unusual Afghan father, a liberal who had lived by his own rules, a maverick who had disregarded or embraced societal customs as he had seen fit.(Hosseini,2003.P:180).

Hosseini's story of two Afghan boys' friendship, the brutal interruption of that relationship, and the eventual redemption of the protagonist has sold more than four million copies in the United States and several more million worldwide.⁸

⁷ Grant Andrews, *Representation and Identity in the Wake of 9/11: Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner, Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Frédéric Beigbeder's Windows on the World and Don DeLillo's Falling Man.*; University of Stellenbosch.

⁸ Janette Edwards, *Expatriate Literature and the Problem of Contested Representation: The Case of Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner.*

I loved him because he was my friend, but also because he was a good man, maybe even a great man. And this is what I want you to understand, that good, *real* good, was born out of your father's remorse. Sometimes, I think everything he did, feeding the poor on the streets, building the orphanage, giving money to friends in need, it was all his way of redeeming himself. I hope you can do the same. Forgive your father if you can. Forgive me if you wish. But, most important, forgive yourself. (Hosseini, 2003.P:302).

The text highlights Afghan families' ties, relationships, celebrations, customs and rituals. Much of the spirit of Afghan culture comes to us through Hosseini's description of gatherings of families, friends and *qaom*⁹.

I heard her blowing her nose. "But I know this much: You have to bring him home. I want you to." "Are you sure?" I said, closing my eyes and smiling. "Am I sure?" she said. "Amir, he's your *qaom*, your family, so he's my *qaom* too. Of course I'm sure. You can't leave him to the streets." There was a short pause. "What's he like?" I looked over at Sohrab sleeping on the bed. "He's sweet, in a solemn kind of way." "Who can blame him?" she said. "I want to see him, Amir. I really do." "Soraya?" "Yeah." "*Dostet darum.*" I love you. (Hosseini, 2003.P:326).

⁹ *Qaom* (also spelled *qaum*) is a unit of Afghan society that links individuals to a larger group. You may find that Baba's parties and excursions involve a bewildering variety of people; you might also notice that many different people who seem to have nothing in common visit Baba when he is in hospital. The Afghan notion of *Qaom* helps to explain this. *Qaom* works most strongly within the family, then the tribe, clan, ethnic group and region. *Qaom* is contextual; that is, when two Afghans from the same mountain area belong to different tribes they may show animosity to one another, but when the same two individuals meet in Kabul or in America they are part of the same *qaom* because they come from the same area. *Qaom* works to support the individuals within it, giving them aid when they need it and providing protection from outsiders. *Qaom* is as important as ethnic background as a marker of identity.

Hosseini uses the metaphor of the 'yelda', the darkest and longest night further to outline the significance of Amir's feelings for Soraya.

In Afghanistan, *yelda* is the first night of the month of *Jadi*, the first night of winter, and the longest night of the year. As was the tradition, *yelda* was the starless night tormented lovers kept vigil, enduring the endless dark, waiting for the sun to rise and bring with it their loved one. After I met Soraya Taheri, every night of the week became a *yelda* for me. (Khaled el Hosseini, 2003.P:143)

In Afghanistan, Buzkashi is a national sport that is similar to polo and played by the horsemen into two teams, each trying to grab and hold of a goat carcass. Before the kite tournament, they sat under the *kursi* and played *panjpar* as wind-rattled tree branches tapped on the window.

I drove the Torino up the hills of Los Altos, idling past estates with picture windows and silver lions guarding the wrought-iron gates, homes with cherub fountains lining the manicured walkways and no Ford Torinos in the driveways. Homes that made Baba's house in Wazir Akbar Khan look like a servant's hut. (Ibid.P:135).

The kite-fighting tournament is an old winter tradition in Afghanistan. It is started early in the morning on the day of the contest and does not end until only the winning kite fly in the sky.

After that kite tournament, he came home a little bloodied and his shirt was torn. I asked him what had happened and he said it was nothing that he'd gotten into a little scuffle with some kids over the kite. (Ibid.P:81).

In that moment, all of the boys from different ethnic groups come gather on sidewalks and roofs to cheer for them who follow competition *highlight of the cold season*:

Every winter, districts in Kabul held a kite-fighting tournament. And if you were a boy living in Kabul, the day of the tournament was undeniably the highlight of the cold season.... I felt like a soldier trying to sleep in the trenches the night before a major battle. And that wasn't so far off. In Kabul, fighting kites *was* a little like going to war. As with any war, you had to ready yourself for battle. For a while, Hassan and I used to build our own kites. (Hosseini 2003, 50).

Their cultural identity is very strong that cannot be changed by anything.¹⁰

¹⁰ Nina Farlina,104026000902;*The Issue Of Cultural Identity In Khaled Hosseini.S The Kite Runner* A Thesis

C-Religious Rituals:

The novel variously refers to Muslim tradition and beliefs. Religion seems to have many interpretations for people in this book. Baba embraced in part for his exceptionally secular ways in a traditional society. Amir practices it in an entirely private way, as if his faith were more repentance than conversion. Hassan is a victim of discrimination and bigotry and in Assef's Taliban rendition, Islam is essentially just a pretext for his cruel deeds. Ashton Maude (2010) argues that:

Religion plays an important part in *The Kite Runner*, either as a set of beliefs open to dispute, as it is for Baba, or as a source of immutable truths which are taken as the central tenets for government, as in the case of the Taliban. At the beginning of the text Amir is undecided about religion: 'Caught between Baba and the mullahs at school, I still hadn't made up my mind about God' (p.55). However, he becomes a devout Muslim by the end of the text. (Ashton Maude.2010.P).

While Amir, Baba and their immediate circle are Sunni Muslims, Ali and Hassan are Shi'a Muslims. The distinction between Shi'a and Sunni sects is as important as the distinction between Pashtun and Hazara ethnic groups, and it is also a source of discrimination against Hassan and Ali.

The Kite Runner is critical of the discrimination against Shi'a Muslims by the majority Sunni Muslims in Afghanistan. The book also argues against the fundamentalist Muslim practices of the Taliban, but this should not be read as an anti-Muslim stance. In fact, the critique that Amir offers of the Taliban and its practices is that they do not honour the spirit of Islam. (p.248).¹¹

¹¹ © Insight Publications 2010, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*: text guide.

The Kite Runner presents a plethora of Muslim rituals and traditions varying from Muslim holidays to special ceremonies:

On *Eid*, the three days of celebration after the holy month of Ramadan, Kabulis dressed in their best and newest clothes and visited their families. People hugged and kissed and greeted each other with "*Eid Mubarak*." Happy Eid. Children opened gifts and played with dyed hard-boiled eggs. (Hosseini, 2003.P:43-44).

Amir and Hassan have tradition according to Islam. In the tenth day of Dhul-Hijjah, the last month of the Muslim calendar, and the first of three days of Eid Al-Adha, or Eid-e-Qorban, as Afghans call it:

Tomorrow is the tenth day of Dhul-Hijjah, the last month of the Muslim calendar, and the first of three days of Eid Al-Adha, or Eid-e-Qorban, as Afghans call it—a day to celebrate how the prophet Ibrahim almost sacrificed his own son for God.. But he respects the tradition of Eid-e-Qorban. The custom is to divide the meat in thirds, one for the family, one for friends, and one for the poor. Every year, Baba gives it all to the poor.. (Khaled el Hosseini, 2003.P:76).

Chapter thirteen of *The Kite Runner* is abundant with Islamic cultural traditions, especially, wedding's ceremony .In details, Hosseini tells the reader about the richness and warmth of the Afghan traditions. The writer very skilfully talks about the Afghan culture. Afghans' wedding ceremony is too special. It magically embodies traditions:

... Looking in the mirror, part of the traditional ceremony, Mariam sees her own face and the face of her husband for the first time. Mariam must answer for herself that she will accept Rasheed,

and, although she hesitates, she does answer affirmatively. (Hosseini, 2003.P:49).

As this moment has its significance in the life of every bride; Amir comments on Soraya, his wife, status that weddings had come and gone and no one had sung “*ahesta boro*” for Soraya, no one had painted her palms with henna, no one had held a Koran over her headdress, and it had been her father who had danced with her at every wedding.

In Afghan traditions, “Lafz” ceremony comes first:

When we arrived at the Taheris’ home the next evening—for *lafz*, the ceremony of “giving word”—..... I checked my tie in the rearview mirror. “You look *khoshtee*,” Baba said. Handsome. “Thank you, Baba. Are you all right? Do you feel up to this?” “Up to this? It’s the happiest day of my life, Amir,” he said, smiling tiredly.

Amir describes that moment with details “The living room was packed with about two dozen guests seated on chairs placed along the walls”. As family is highly respected in Afghan culture especially elders, Amir continues saying “When Baba entered, everybody stood up. We went around the room, Baba leading slowly, me behind him, shaking hands and greeting the guests. The general—still in his gray suit—and Baba embraced, gently tapping each other on the back. They said their *Salaams* in respectful hushed tones. The general held me at arm’s length and smiled knowingly, as if saying, “Now, this is the right way—the Afghan way—to do it, *bachem*.” We kissed three times on the cheek. (Ibid.P:167).

At an Afghan wedding, many traditions are followed. The bride and groom dress in green, the color of Islam but also symbolic of spring. Part of the Koran is read, Amir, the groom, describing his special day narrates:

I remember walking toward the stage, now in my tuxedo, Soraya a veiled *pari* in white, our hands locked...., Soraya's hand in mine, as three hundred or so faces looked on. We did *Ayena Masshaf*, where they gave us a mirror and threw a veil over our heads, so we'd be alone to gaze at each other's reflection. Looking at Soraya's smiling face in that mirror, in the momentary privacy of the veil, , *sholeh-goshti*, and wild-orange rice. I see Baba between us on the sofa, smiling.the traditional *attan* in a circle, bouncing, spinning faster and faster with the feverish tempo of the tabla, until all but a few dropped out of the ring with exhaustion.(Hosseini,2003.P:171).

In fact, *The Kite Runner* revolves around the idea that the narrator converts from a secular Muslim to a devoutly practicing one. This conversion is not a sign of any adherence to a particular set of theological beliefs, yet it generalizes spirituality reflecting Amir's moral development over the course of the novel. The ritual prayer is a chance for him to renew his covenant with Allah and to seek His guidance anew. The excellence of prayer consists in the fact that it constitutes the context in, which man may communicate with God . Amir, in very highly devoted spiritual moment ,says a *chahada* “ *La illaha il Allah, Muhammad u rasul ullah.* “ and declares :

There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. I see now that Baba was wrong, there is a God, there always had been. I see Him here, in the eyes of the people in this corridor of desperation. ...There is a God, there has to be, and now I will pray, I will pray that He forgive that I have neglected Him all of these years,I bow to

the west and kiss the ground and promise that I will do *zakat*, I will do *namaz*, I will and when Ramadan has passed I will go on fasting, I will commit to memory every last word of His holy book, and I will set on a pilgrimage to that sweltering city in the desert and bow before the Ka'bah too. (Khaled Hosseini 2003.p:346)

Islamic rituals (the prayer (*salah*), *zakat*, The month-long fast of Ramadan (*siyam*), and the annual pilgrimage to the House of Allah (the Ka'bah) in Makkah train the individual in such a way that he loves his Creator even more, which causes him to gain an unyielding will and spins to wipe out all evil and oppression from his society and to make the word of God triumphant.

The Kite Runner is actually allegory of redemption and healing. Amir's quest to redeem himself makes up the heart of the novel. Throughout the novel, Amir struggles to find his true purpose and to forge an identity through noble actions. He grows up as a child who is uncertain about his own identity and struggles to discover his "real" self. In Afghanistan, Amir realizes that he has always been wrong Amir narrates:

For me, America was a place to bury my memories. For Baba, a place to mourn his. "Maybe we should go back to Peshawar," I said, watching the ice float in my glass of water. We'd spent six months in Peshawar waiting for the INS to issue our visas. (Ibid.P:129).

To be good again is actually what Amir looks for:

Baba saying that the only sin that mattered was theft. *When you tell a lie, you steal a man's right to the truth.* Rahim Khan on the phone, telling me

there was a way to be good again. *A way to be good again . . .* (Hosseini, 2003.P:310).

The novel graciously conveys the conclusive message of forgiveness that is the core of Islam:

.....Forgive your father if you can. Forgive me if you wish. But, most important, forgive yourself. (Hosseini, 2003.P:302).

The Kite Runner portrays Amir's spiritual journey escaping from his haunted childhood while torturing himself with his own contrition to find who he is and his real identity in the mosque while praying. At that special moment of redemption, Amir forgives himself and asserts his identity as a good Muslim. The novel sheds light on the challenges facing immigrants trying to maintain cultural traditions, the weight of regret and the freedom that comes with making amends, and the spiritual glory of forgiveness of others and especially of oneself.

At his childhood, Amir learns in school about the Islamic faith and what Muslims believe is right and wrong. There is a whole list of both, which he asks his father about. Yet his father ridicules the highly religious and teaches Amir that there is only one kind of sin ; stealing. Killing someone is stealing a man's right to life and his family's right to a father and husband. Stealing food is stealing someone's right to make a profit and run a business.

Khaled Hosseini's novel is abundant with Muslim vocabulary. Beyond these words a whole culture lies:

"Salaam, bachem." Hello, my child. *"Salaam, General Sahib,"* I said, shaking his hand. His thin hands belied a firm grip, as if steel hid beneath the moisturized skin. (Hosseini2003.P:139).

And:

“Junior college,” I corrected him. “*Mashallah*,” General Taheri said. “Will you be writing about our country, history perhaps? Economics?”(Ibid).

.....and everyone says ‘*Allah-u-akbar!*’ And on those days when no one offends, well, there is always random violence, isn’t there?”(Hosseini2003.P:248).

He twirled his fingers, snapped them, fist opening and closing. “So, *Inshallah*, you enjoyed the show today?”(Ibid.P:6)

And I saw Farid running toward us. “*Bismillah!* *Bismillah!*” he said, eyes bulging at the sight of me. (Ibid.P:291).

.....many pigeons outside the *masjid*, and they weren’t afraid of people. (Hosseini, 2003.P:317).

The interpretation of Islamic practice represents a significant manner to the understanding of the various aspects the Islamic religious experience and its ritual expressions. The scene of Amir praying reflects his goodwill insisting on the renewal of the surrender to God, the purifying regeneration essentially a re-actualization of the spiritual relationship between Amir and God.

Conclusion

Since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, there has been a sudden emphasis on conditions there. This second chapter examines Khaled Hosseini's debut novel and highlights the role of literary works in defending Islam and Muslims against Western stereotyping and representation of Islam as a source of terrorism. As it provides readers with opportunities to learn more about Afghanistan; its culture and traditions. Through *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini introduces the English-speaking reader to Afghanistan. He presents the beauty and culture of the Afghanistan of his childhood.

For the immigrants' children, customs become harder to maintain. They quickly adapt to their new surroundings. Amir moves away from his Afghan community, but it is through close ties relationships and mutual support, developed through family and social networks. Hosseini portrays Amir as proud and, for the most part, self-sufficient.

Historically, stereotypical perceptions have been common between peoples of the Middle East (Arabs, Persians and Turks) and Europe and the United States. Perceptions of Islam being a "fanatical" religion and Muslims being "hate-filled extremists" have fueled the growth of anti-Islamic sentiment or a deeper kind of Islamophobia. Thus, an understanding of Islam and Muslim cultures becomes a need.

CHAPTER THREE

*The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf: A Spiritual
Journey*

Introduction

For many people in the West, Islam means terrorism and veiled women. Muslim American women learn how to deal with the hostility of Western society. Muslim Women writers have always been expected to play some kind of role in encountering the stereotype. Contemporary Muslim American writers grapple with exclusionary forces as they embrace culture and the traditional family as a bulwark against the presumed instability of American life.

In this chapter, I will try to explore the ways by which Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* can contribute to the empowerment of the image of Islam and Muslim in the West and in U.S in particular. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* exposes the issues of racial and religious bigotry. The writer succeeds to reveal Khadra's desire to discard the too spiritual fissure in her life so as to set out on a journey to discern reality. The dilemma of identification options is explored more fully in Kahf's novel. I will try to explain from where Kahf's voice takes power? How does Kahf celebrate Arabic language and culture and identity even as she creates a new language that can negotiate the passage between Arab and American?

Section One: Belonging to the Muslim Community

A-The Portrait of the Muslim American Women:

Western popular culture has portrayed Muslims as religious fanatics and terrorists and Muslim women as submissive and exotic objects of men's desire.

In the "Arabian Nights" fantasy films, such as *The Sheikh* (1921) and its sequel, *Return of the Sheikh* (1926), The trope of the harem still exists in today's motion picture industry. Disney's 2004 remake of the film *Around the World in 80 Days*, for example, featured Arnold Schwarzenegger in the role of Prince Hapi, a sheikh with "100 or so wives." (Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, Kathleen M. Moore, 2006.P:28).

Unfortunately, this constant stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims , consequently, implies a the issue which of ; how does the public distinguish between reality and images.

Films that feature Arabs are understood to be telling stories about Muslim religious and cultural values and practices. In popular culture, Arab and Muslim women have long been associated with demeaning fantasies of violence, sex, and oppression. Women from other Muslim cultures fare no better. (Ibid.P:29).

However, the process of claiming an Islamic identity in America, especially for Arab Americans, has involved challenging prevailing stereotypes, embraced by non-Muslims, of Islam and Muslims as inferior. Islam as a faith is a source of identification (Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, Kathleen M. Moore, 2006). .A number of rap music scene provides many examples of Muslim cultural pride. In a song, called "Busy Bees," Native Deen speaks directly to Muslim women:

*You just came back from a cool MYNA conference,
Islamical atmosphere, was there and had its influence on you, ...*

*You said you wanna cover wear Hijab (Islamic head covering) it's cool.
You thought how happy Allah was gonna be for you!
You walk right out of the bathroom with a super-strong conviction.
You realized in this world we Muslims have a mission!
We have a mission to complete Allah we want to please.
We know we are the best and we never ever rest.
We understand that this life was only but a test!*

Native Deen, skilfully, describes the experience and psyche of the young veiled Muslim women “Muslima” in the Western societies, in general, and America in particular. As a result, it has become a necessity for Muslim women in the United States to be engaged in new and evolving forms of citizenship, grassroots, and other diplomacies.

Muslim women in the United States are ,increasingly, becoming aware of the importance of their own education as a means of contributing to the effort to spread accurate information about the religion of Islam to a perplexed American public.

Education of the public is one of the important ways in which da‘wah, or calling to Islam, is being carried out in post 9/11 America. Muslim women now find that many opportunities are opening up for them to become more literate in the faith, to learn leadership skills, and to become proficient in certain areas that have traditionally been reserved for men.(Katherine Bullock.2005.P:48).

9/11 has been a setback for the Muslim American women. It seemed urgent that they should seek to restore their position in the community, as equal partners in its maintenance and reproduction with men. Thus, beginning from the day, Muslim American women are negotiating family relations, their faith, their identity, and the stereotypes that surround them.

Women coming from Islamic countries, or who are from families who immigrated in earlier generations, must find a balance among the various commitments that claim them, specifically, to the particularities of the cultures to which they are related, to Islam as the common bond among all American Muslims, and, given their current residence or citizenship, to the reality of living in the United States. They must determine whether one or another of these options claims priority or whether it is possible to try to balance them altogether. (Haddad, Smith and Moore, 2006.P:17).The significance of their identity lies in the process of negotiating religious and cultural paradigms as firm ground to build a strong Muslim identity.

B-Beyond the Headscarf:

Hijab, veil, and scarf refer to a head cover, which is worn either with conservative clothing such as a long skirt and long sleeves or with some kind of robe which may have different names determined by regional or cultural association. ¹As Fadwa El Guindi points out:

....*hijab* is not the Arabic word for ‘veil’; in fact there is no one word which describes the various head and body coverings. Numerous words are used to describe the diverse articles of women’s clothing, including: *abaya* (Saudi Arabia), *chador* (Iran), *gallibiyyah* (Egypt), *burnus* and *haik* (Algeria), *jilbab* (Indonesia); while others such as *burqa*, *niqab* and *qina* refer to the face masks worn, for example, by Bedouin and other desert tribal women (El Guindi, 1999 .P: 7).

The Islamic veil, head scarf, or *hijab* symbolizes in the Western mind, especially in the popular imagination, Islam. A Muslim woman affirms, visibly, her Muslim identity by wearing Islamic dress. For many American Muslim women, wearing *hijab* is not about coercion but about making choices, about “choosing” an identity and expressing a religiosity through their mode of dress. A number of women says that:

.....by veiling they are making a statement against Western imperialism, which sees Muslim piety as a sign of terrorism, and against conservative Islam, which seeks to impose a traditionalist understanding of Islam that oppresses women. Others consider it a signal of purity, and say that it curbs their sexuality and/or their sex appeal. Paradoxically, some have noted that they had expected that wearing the headscarf would end the objectification of their bodies but instead have found that

¹ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, Kathleen M. Moore (2006). *Muslim Women in America*. Oxford University Press, Inc.

they became more frequent “objects” of Western gaze.
(Haddad, Smith and Moore, 2006.P:10).

Many young Muslim women are wearing the headscarf as a means of expressing identity and spirituality as well as modesty. Muslim Arab American women have not only been victimized by the reductive and oppressive images of them in U.S. popular culture and the media, but have also been marginalized by many Western feminists who are controlled by imperialist thoughts and the colonial discourse. According to many Westerners, Muslim women are hidden behind a veil of negative stereotypes that portray them as either oppressed, subservient wives or daughters or, more recently, as potential terrorists. Most Westerners, actually, view veiled women as necessarily more oppressed, more passive, and more ignorant than unveiled women.

Most Euro-American feminists and Asian feminists agree that the veiling of women is a result of oppression and domination of women by patriarchy *in the name of* religion. I will now turn to an area, which, for many in the western world, is regarded as the most important cultural reference point of the veiling of women: that of So-called ‘fundamentalism’ or Islamism. (Daphne Grace, 2004.P:26).

Yet, for the majority of the Islamic world, wearing *hijab* indicates that a woman is a good Muslim, and that she takes pride in her religion and culture.

What most Muslim women do agree on, whatever they choose to wear, is that conservative dress does not represent constriction, repression, or any of the other terms by which Westerners have generally understood the Muslim woman’s “condition.” Women who dress Islamically insist that their choice affords them freedom, liberation, relief, and even great joy. (Ibid.P:9).

Zahra Rahnavard, an Iranian writer, argues that:

...the *hijab* removes woman from being 'an object whose value lies solely in her looks'. Furthermore, she regards western criticism of veiling as part of a wider imperialist stratagem designed to attract the Muslim to the rotten surplus goods of Western capitalist economies,... [*Hijab*] is not a prison ... it is a weapon, a fortress, a sanctuary of decency and chastity, which enshrines not only your physical attributes ... but also the divine essence of your womanhood. (Rahnavard, 1990.P: 9).

Yet, this view comes to be obsolete; as its argument is no longer valid. The relationship between women and Islam and the position of women within Islamic states are both volatile and ambivalent. While western feminists once took up the veiling argument to demonstrate the oppression of women in Islam, it is no longer viable to talk in such Manichaean terms while women all over the world are actively choosing to veil as an expression of their own sexual, religious, and national identity (Ibid.P:206).

In fact, the veil is as older as humanity. Several studies have discussed the origins of veiling and traced the development of the veil through different civilizations, both Mediterranean and Mesopotamian, arguing that the veil predates Islamic and Christian cultures.

Although in popular perception the veil has long been associated with Arab women, evidence shows that it has existed for longer outside Arab culture than within it. It has been suggested that veiling originated with slavery, a system perpetrated by all three monotheistic religions that developed in the Arabian Desert, and even that justification for the veil goes back as far as the myth of Adam and Eve. (Daphne Grace, 2004.P:14)

The struggle of Muslim women in the West involves challenging the negative interpretations of the veil and Islam created by the imperial West, starting from British colonization and continuing with the American empire. Some Western feminists and theorists paid great attention to the issue of Muslim woman's veil because in their eyes it only signified extreme oppression and submission.

Many feminists do not realize that the veil has taken on such a negative meaning mostly by Westerners during periods of colonization and Western imperialism but held an entirely different significance in many native cultures prior to their colonization. These types of misinterpretations of cultural norms and the situation of Third World women necessitate the formation of feminisms that can attend to the needs of the women of that particular culture, feminisms that take into consideration various elements such as culture, history, social values, religion, and geopolitical contexts.

Section two: Muslim Women's Identities and Experiences:

A-Kahf' Literary Contribution :

Literature reflects the way people look at the world and the manner in which they use their language. It also signifies the endeavors of intellectual individuals to mould the hearts and minds of the multitudes in line with their own convictions. Works like the novel by Mohja Kahf, an Arab American writer, *The Girl in Tangerine Scarf* (2006) depict the dilemma of a settling young Muslim immigrant girl in Indiana (USA). Her satirical *She Carries Weapons; They are Called Words*, published in 2007—highlights the lines of demarcation between contemporary Muslim women in the West and their non-Muslim counterparts. As Mohja Kahf states:

The dominant narrative of the Muslim women in Western discourse from about the eighteenth century to the present basically states, often in quite sophisticated ways, that the Muslim woman is innately oppressed (1999, 177).

Muslim women's oppression is explained as the effect of Islam, which is portrayed as a religion imposed on Muslim women.

The backbone of religious identity and the emphasis on the experiences of Muslim women, who deem their religious identity as inseparable from and empowering of their identity, have raised a range of issues related to Muslim women. Muslim women's literary works have challenged the dominant image of Muslim women at two levels: at one level is a also an articulate writer, who sees and talks about the problems of women in her society; at another level, is the depiction of a fictional character who refuses to remain silent and oppressed when faced with oppressive forces. Some of the more well-known of these writers in the West are

Nawal el Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi, Ahdaf Soueif, Assia Djebar, whose major works have dealt with women in Muslim societies.

In dominant Western representations, a close relationship between the religion of Islam and the condition of the oppressed Muslim woman has been depicted. As Leila Ahmed argues:

...a central part of colonial discourse on Islam has been 'that Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies' (Ahmed 1992, 152).²

Kahf argues that this image before the eighteenth century had not been a unified one. And that what could affect the representations of Muslim women and the construction of knowledge about them had been the geographical origins of the representing texts, the preoccupations of the time, the material or ideological conditions affecting the relationship between the West and Islamic societies, and the shift in the balance of power relations between the West and the Muslim world. (Kahf 1999). As Kahf puts it:

The dominant narrative of the Muslim women in Western discourse from about the eighteenth century to the present basically states, often in quite sophisticated ways, that the Muslim woman is innately oppressed; it produces Muslim women who affirm this statement by being either submissive nonentities or rebellious renegades—rebellious against their own Islamic world, that is, and conforming to Western gender roles. (1999, P: 177)

² Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and gender in Islam: historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

In fact, such stereotypes of Muslim women denote Islam as the cause of all problems Muslim women face.

B- The Novels' Background:

In recent years a new image, that of a militant pawn of male power, has also appeared in Western discourses, in addition to the image of the victim or escapee Muslim woman; 'still these new images are being absorbed into the paradigm of the oppressed Muslim female .(Kahf 1999, P:177 2000) . Kahf answering at Hilary Davis asserts:

Hilary Davis: What has been your inspiration and influence as an artist?

Mohja Kahf: In my upbringing, 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....I come from an extended family that has Muslim Brotherhood roots going back three generations, and I am proud of their activism. (Hilary E. Davis, Jasmin Zine & Lisa K. Taylor, 2007).

Current representation of Muslim women and Islam is not very different from Orientalist discourse on Muslim women: the Muslim women in these memoirs are still represented as 'exotic others' and as victims in need of liberation (as discussed above). This discourse fixes Muslim woman's identity and emphasises that Muslim identity is imposed on Muslim women, situating them as victims. Nevertheless,

Muslim/ Arab- American women have not only been victimized by the reductive and oppressive images of them in U.S. popular culture and the media, but have also been marginalized by many Western feminists who are controlled by imperialist thoughts and the colonial discourse. Leila Ahmed explains in her book *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* how certain

strands of feminism were historically used against other cultures in the service of colonialism. Ahmed points out that:

...within the colonial discourse Islam was viewed as “innately and immutably oppressive to women, [and] that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies” Veiling became the symbol of the oppression of women to Western eyes and it became the target of colonial attack on Muslim societies (152).

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf tells the story of Khadra Shamy, a Syrian-American woman returning to her hometown of Indianapolis for the first time in several years. Most of the novel looks back to her childhood and early adulthood during the 1970s and 1980s, as she negotiates questions of religion, identity, racism, and belonging. She returns to the community at the age of 28 as a magazine photographer doing a story on minority religious communities in America. Covering a long time span and a variety of geographic locations, the novel follows Khadra’s religious paths, from being the daughter of a Dawah Center worker, through a surge of religious austerity in her early teens, a new phase of traditional learning as she gets older, a sense of disillusionment and uncertainty as she comes to question the monolithic image of Islam she grew up with, and ultimately a reconciliation of sorts as she comes to feel more comfortable in her own religious path while appreciating the community where she was raised.

The novel also ties in an impressive range of political issues, reflected in local community relations (Sunni-Shi'a tensions within the Muslim community, and KKK violence and other racism directed at the Muslim community from some others in the city) as well as international issues. Kahf argues that it was agreed that the Shah was a tyrant. She states:

Iranian Muslims were rallying for change and being persecuted for rallying. The Islamic Forerunner tried to keep Muslims in America up to date on exciting stirrings toward, possibly, the first Islamic state in the modern world since the destruction of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924.... who worked for the Dawah Center, believed that an Islamic state and an Islamic society was, or should be, the hope of every believing Muslim today. (Kahf, 2006.P:39).

Historical references give literary works credibility and put them in a range where they can be considered as resources for history documentation.

C-Khadra's Spiritual Journey to Self-Recognition:

The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf deals with these conflicts and the Muslim woman's struggle to assimilate but at the same time to preserve her culture. Khadra, the protagonist, is forced to make a decision about shedding the veil to gain acceptance within American society. Due to the multiple pressures by parents, culture and society, which Muslim women experience in America, Kahf builds her narrative to revolve around these issues and the development of her protagonist's identity. This pressure to preserve the original culture and system of beliefs can be illustrated by Khadra parent's plans. Wajdy and Ebtehaj always viewed their stay in America as temporary. That was part of the reason they were always reluctant to buy many things; they'd just be more attachments to leave behind when the time came. They saved money in America to be spent back home in Syria one day. The plan was to return to the House of Islam, ramshackle as it was. Later on in the narrative, her aunt reiterates the same concern stating that:

We put a lot of weight on your shoulders... Not just you- all our children ... But especially you girls. You had a lot to measure up to ... Young in a strange land, your mother was, like me ... Afraid ... of being swallowed up by this land, reduced to nothing ... 'And we were so idealistic ... But we put it all on you ... Wanting you to carry our vision for us, our identity,- our entire identity, on your heads (Kahf,2006.P: 404).

Many obstacles compel Khadra to make a decision about who she is and what stance she should take. Throughout her journey, Khadra is exposed to a wide range of options, styles of lives and Muslim individuals that help her in the formation of herself and the development of the identity she chooses for herself.

Khadra is exposed to a variety of practicing and secular Muslims, empowered and traditional Muslim men and women all that add to her experience and knowledge of what Islam is about.

Professor Eschenbach said, with a hint of reproach, "The Islamic view of shariah is that it is the Divine order of the cosmos. One cannot 'produce' it. It is there. An ideal. What Islamic scholars produce is filth. Jurisprudence. What was difficult to accept was that these other paths had always existed beyond the confines of other world, and yet were still Muslim? This Khadra resisted. Heroically resisted. (Kahf.2006.P:136).

She addresses the stereotypes and misconceptions about Arabs and Muslims and puts them into question by providing a wide range of non-monolithic images of Arabs and Muslims through the characters of her narrative. As an Arab/Islamic feminist who is seriously concerned with the status of women.

Kahf places the women at the forefront of her narrative by presenting her readers with various representations of women playing different roles in society that reflect the Muslim and Arab American community and the roles of its women more accurately.

These representations create new alternative readings of the lives of Muslim and Arab-American women in defiance of the sterile, prejudiced and homogenized image of the U.S. Third World woman, Muslim and Arab-American in particular as backward, uncivilized, and suppressed and sexually oppressed. In resistance of the oppression of the Muslim and Arab-American women and discrimination against them, she allows us to take a closer look at their lives and learn about them, their

experiences and suffering in the hope that we are able to appreciate their struggle for a better and more just future.

In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, initially, we are presented with the image of an educated and ambitious woman who wanted to go to medical school. Khadra's mother explains to her daughter that she thought she would go to medical school.

"I have a college degree, like Wajdy," Khadra's mother said to Aunt Khadija. At one time, she thought she might go to medical school. "But after I graduated, I chose to stay home. For the children." She patted her belly, which globed firm and round in front of her. "That is her most important work: making more Muslims," Khadra's father liked to say jovially. "Good-quality Muslims, that is. An educated mother is the child's first school!" (Kahf, 2006.P:17).

Teta shows Khadra how her Muslim parents at the time did not follow the laws of Islam when it came to her marriage but were controlled by their prejudices against other races. She tells Khadra:

What was such a crime? Had I gone against God and the Prophet? Not I. They were the ones in violation ... Doesn't the Prophet say if you find a good god-loving man, accept him? Does the Prophet say unless he's Circassian? Does the Prophet say he must be from your people? (Kahf, 2006.P:158).

During her trip to Syria, Khadra seems to have reflected on those options available to her as a Muslim woman in America. Khadra's journey with the veil ends in Syria where she decides to take off her veil and practice Islam through other manifestations.

The scarf. It was a mess. She didn't want to give anyone in this building the satisfaction of seeing

her bareheaded. She shoved her disheveled hair under ". . . massacre ... Sabra and Shatila ... allege that Israelis allowed Phalangist forces to enter the camps at ... Red Cross estimates ... death toll rising(Kahf,2006.P:75).

She tries to come to terms with herself and her views of religion. She is no longer influenced by others' beliefs and opinion of her, and decides to find her connection with God and religion on her own. She is no longer lost in that huge gulf between the two worlds that are in conflict with each other, the strict Muslim world and the secular world. She remains in that between space where moderate Islam exists but is more at peace with herself. The narrator describes her new experience:

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 long garb offered. This was a rigorous challenge. Some days she just wanted her old friend hijab standing sentry by her side (Kahf, 2006.P:180).

Due to the trouble and misunderstandings, Khadra is not able to bear the consequences of wearing the veil in the U.S .She cannot take further marginalization due to the veil. She would rather shed it and be more accepted by the mainstream society.³

"Give me that." Khadra glared. "Take off your towel first, raghead." "Give it!" "Why don't we take it off for her?" Brent Lott's hammy hand clamped on the nape of her neck, yanking her backward. The scarf went down around her

³ Mais Yusuf Alqutami, *Feminist Resistance In Contemporary American Women Writers Of Color: Unsettling Images Of The Veil And The House In Western Culture* , Indiana University Of Pennsylvania ,August 2009.

shoulders..... "Where is your scarf? Why did you take it off?" (Kahf, 2006.P:73).

Khadra seems to be giving herself some relief from being judged by a piece of cloth. Although the veil was part of her identity, the meanings it took on did not describe her or reflect who she really is.

It was moments like this, and things like Joy's casual blasphemous use of "Christ" that made Khadra doubt the whole "it's okay for Islam to adapt to new locales" argument Joy put forth. It seemed to Khadra that her friend was just an assimilated Muslim, plain and simple.(Kahf,2006.P:107).

Khadra attempts to find peace between her multiple selves. She has strived to reconcile her identity as an American female with her Islamness and Arabness. She resisted the narrative trying to understand what it means to be a Muslim, an American, an Arab and a woman simultaneously. She also tried to find connections between these multiple identities and their handling of the Muslim veil.

In Syria, Khadra stands at the crossroad between religion and culture where she finally decides not to compromise neither with her religion nor with her culture. She does not want to give up on either one but chooses a way that accommodates her through which she can display an identity of her own and develop her own understanding of the components that form her identity.

A little while after returning from the Shelbys, Khadra put on a white scarf with tiny flowers like a village meadow in spring, and a pale blue blouse and soft floral skirt. Her broadcloth navy jilbab and plain black scarves she shoved to the back of her closet. Ebtahaj raised an eyebrow at breakfast but said nothing. (Kahf, 2006.P:112).

At the beginning, she thought that becoming an American citizen meant betraying her Arab and Muslim identity and that it would turn her into another person she would not approve of. Eventually, her family gets the American citizenship and she is forced to deal with her new identity. The narrator reveals the conflicted emotions Khadra experiences as she gets her American citizenship:

To her, taking citizenship felt like giving up, giving in. After all she'd been through at school, defending her identity against the jeering kids who vaunted America's superiority as the clincher put- down to everything she said, everything she was. Wasn't she supposed to be an Islamic warrior woman, a Nusayba, a Sumaya, an Um Salamah in exile, by the waters dark, of Babylon?(Ibid.P:83).

The narrative attempts to build a bridge of peace between Islam and Americanness, challenging perceptions of their incompatibility or contradictoriness. This is clear in Wajdy's sermon after he gets the American citizenship. Khadra's father tries to reconcile the two identities within himself and within other American Muslims illustrated in his speech at the mosque, he argues that in many ways "America is more Islamic than the countries of the Muslim world". There is no widespread corruption. You can enter a judge's offices and not need to bribe his secretary for the simple basic services ... do not ... think that we will stop protesting against the immoral and unfair policies of America outside, in the Muslim world.. But let's face it: here inside America, there are many good qualities. Law and order, cleanliness, democracy, freedom to work ... freedom to practice religion. These are Islamic qualities. (143-4).

After she has been exposed to diverse Muslim communities in the Middle East and in America, and after she travels to Saudi Arabia and Syria in search of an autonomous identity, Khadra learns more about herself and the different paths she can take as a Muslim American. Once she returns to the U.S., she finally realizes she is American and cries out for the first time "Homeland America" (313). The narrator describes Khadra's reconciliation with her newly attained American identity:

...And here she is. Eighteen years distant from that ten- year- old girl terrorized by neighborhood boys shouting 'Foreigners go home!' and the girl bewildered by her mother's sobs of 'We are not American!'.... citizenship papers came, caught between homesick parents and a land that didn't want her. Going overseas was what enabled her to see that she was irrevocably American, in some way she couldn't pin down (390- 391).

Khadra's journey ends with a provisional reconciliation of her multiple identities, as an Arab, an American and a Muslim. Her ambivalence towards the veil does not seem to come to a total end. Khadra's travels and many experiences revolving around the veil and the practice of Muslim principles end in her redefinition of her relationship with religion and the Muslim veil, and the decision not to commit herself to the practice of veiling. She continues to practice Islam and show modesty through her conduct rather than the practice of veiling. Ahmed explains that:

The veil came to symbolize in the resistance narrative, not the inferiority of the culture and the need to cast aside its customs and validity of all native customs, and in particular those customs coming under fiercest colonial attack- the customs relating to women- and the need to tenaciously affirm them as a means of resistance to Western domination (164).

The narrator illustrates how the new and transformed Khadra deals with the veil and how she feels about it stating that:

People stare. She is still in hijab. She pulls the tangerine silk tighter around her head. The stares only ever make her want to pull it on tighter, not take it off the way Seemi keeps suggesting she do after every Middle Eastern crisis dredges up more American hate... It's my connector, " (424).

Khadra has tried to explain to Seemi once about wearing the scarf through hard times. It makes her feel connected to the people in her family, her mosque, where she comes from. "My heritage... Don't be ridiculous", Seemi had said.

Khadra may have chosen not to commit herself to the veil so as to avoid being labeled and misjudged by the dominant culture. It took Khadra a long time to accept her hybrid identity and understand the complexity of her situation as a Muslim and Arab in America.

Yet reclaiming her cultural heritage, publically displays her connection to her Middle Eastern and Muslim origin whenever she needs to and at whatever occasion that seems appropriate. The narrator comments:

She was deeply religious but not a regular mosque-goer. She dropped in on one occasionally. Didn't think it was necessary to attach to a mosque scene at all, didn't find it troubling not to "have" a mosque. She had a zawiya at home, a clean, well-lit corner where her prayer rug was spread. This friend mapped Muslim space in a way new to Khadra., I'm manifesting Muslim values in my life. We don't need a ghetto mentality." (Kahf 2006.P:212).

Khadra, is represented as an ordinary modern person, who, at the same time, can have deep spiritual moments. There is a scene in which Khadra, for the first time, allows herself to unveil outside the house. Doing so, she does not feel disobedient

to God or thereby deprived of His love. Instead, this moment turns to one of intense spirituality for her:

The scarf was slipping off. She shrugged. The chiffon fell across her shoulders. ...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 [certainty] that this was all right, a blessing on her shoulders. *Alhamdu, alhamdulillah*.¹⁶ the sunshine on her head was a gift from God. Gratitude filled her. *Sami allahu liman hamadah*.¹⁷ ... Teta got it. How veiling and unveiling are part of the same process, the same cycle, how both are necessary ;....(Kahf 2006, p.309).

Images of Muslim women and their veiling or unveiling practices prove that the source of their oppression and marginalization is not the Islamic faith or its values but the hegemonic and patriarchal dominance over women and their lives. On the other hand, Kahf presents the image of Afaaf's aunt, Sheikha, who is a journalist. She is also in charge of Saudi women writers' series and is an independent veiled woman. Khadra admired Sheikha because she presented an image of an autonomous Muslim woman who is in control of her life. The image of Sheikha is held against that of the immature Afaaf who veils only for political reasons and not religious ones.

Khadra is portrayed as an empowered Muslim woman who resists male domination and the patriarchal roles assigned to women by multiple, overlapping patriarchal systems. In her relationship with Juma, Khadra was beginning to lose herself and the dreams she had for her future. During this period, she was unable to find a clear definition of her gender role nor her identity as a Muslim American. When Khadra gets pregnant and realizes that she no longer wants to continue her life with Juma who does not accept her the way she is, she decides to have an abortion against everyone's wishes. She thinks having a baby with him will lock her up in a

type of life she does not want for herself. The idea of having to change herself and her whole life for Juma and the child made her suffocate. The narrator shares with the reader what goes on in her subconscious and her dialogue with herself:

Where was it, this will of hers, this misshapen self? She needed to know it. Hello, self. Can we meet at last? It was not vain glorious to have a self. It was not the same as selfish individualism, no. You have to have a self to even start on a journey to God ... She had not taken even a baby step in that direction (248).

At her young age, she misunderstands the Islamic faith's take on individuality and the self. She does not learn about how Islam simultaneously embraces both individualism and the community. Her narrow understanding of the Muslim practices leads to her loss of self because she has the wrong belief that Islam does not cherish the self but cherishes the common good.

The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf presents an important example of alternative representations of Muslim women's experience and identity in a Western context. The narrative attempts to persuade readers that Khadra's self-understanding and self-development depend on her coming to terms with her religious identity. The novel proposes that a Muslim may allow for the reflective evolution of her religious identity without weakening her bonds with the basic tenets of or reducing her emotional attachment to her religion.

The narrative displays its preference for an interpretation of Muslim identity which takes as important both attachment to Islam and flexibility in its interpretation. It then shows that the main character, in spite of her many challenges with her religious identity and doubts about her commitment to Islam, finally remains committed to it, though her understanding of her religious identity is transformed in the course of the novel. The novel, at many points, celebrates Muslim culture, though at many other points finds fault with it.

"I grew up with South Asian Muslim friends," she explained, "but I never really got exposed to the Hindu part of South Asian culture. The emphasis was on the Muslim identity, you know?" "See, that's the opposite of me," Seemi said. "My father is this hard-boiled, whisky-drinking atheist, and my mother is a die-hard feminist. They're divorced. But whatever their differences, they both encouraged me and my brother to be totally open-minded about people from other religions." (Ibid.P:192).

Khadra' family and community's religiosity is represented as inflexible, closely associated with limits and borders. What they are really concerned about in relation to religion are strict observance of religious rules, exact definitions of a 'true' Muslim and the qualities of people they can communicate with. The religious rules they are extremely careful about include those related to purities and impurities; *halal* and *haram* objects and actions; the exact timing of prayer; and the exact ritual of performing ablutions before praying.⁴

"Nuh uh, you were not!" Khadra says, disbelieving but delighted. "How come I never heard of it?" "I kept it quiet. You know why." "Right. Everyone would have hounded you." Islamic, un-Islamic.

⁴ Martina Nosková, "Sex and the Umma": *Sex and Religion Lived in Mohja Kahf's Columns*, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno.

Halal, haram. Is it godly? Is it frivolity? No space to breathe. Everyone must have kept secrets from each other about what they really liked, who they really were. How much had any of them really known each other growing up? (Kahf, 2006.P:229).

The second phase of Khadra's evolution of Muslim identity involves her going through spiritual experience, which is associated with spiritual moments. There are two scenes in Syria in which Khadra's pivotal spiritual moments and deep religious experiences are described. The first scene has to do with how Khadra returns to prayer. She had stopped praying, because she had realized that up to that point in her life she had been praying just to perform a duty.

Khadra came to prayer. She felt as though she were praying now for the first time, as if all that long-ago praying, rakat after rakat, had been only the illusion of prayer, and this—what she began to do now—was the real thing. All that had been lost was returning. All that had been disconnected was connected again—alo, Centrale? (Kahf, 2006.P:177).

It is in Syria that she starts to pray again and it is just before she comes back to prayer that she experiences the deepest inner transformation and the most intense spiritual moments. Khadra starts to pray; however, it is not like the prayers she used to perform habitually and dutifully. Here, as the narrator explains, Khadra has a new experience of prayer: 'she felt as though she were praying for the first time, as if all that long-ago praying, rakat after rakat, had been only the illusion of prayer. And this—what she began to do now—was the real thing. All that had been lost was returning. All that was disconnected was connected again:

"Walk addaleeeeen, "called the imam.
'2laaahmeeeeen, " the congregation responded.
Khadra loved the 'ameens.' The strong vibrations

of the men's voices and the murmurs of the women made her feel safe. subhana-rabialatheems, looking down at your toes in their own little lines. Here comes the signal to rise-"Sami allahu li man hamida," everyone rose from ruku. Khadra's father and all the uncles in Western pants had to pick wedgies out of their butts at this point. But those who wore loose shalvars or dashikis were good to go. "Rabbana wa laka alhamd," one congregant responded loudly. (Kahf, 2003.P:23).

The continuation of the use of religious language such as a 'blessing' and the Qur'anic sentence 'Alhamdulillah', which means 'Only God is worth worshipping', further implies that the narrative represents her unveiling as a religious act. The scene continues in a language that uses the metaphor of photography, Khadra's new passion, of a film developing under the light, in order to realize a spiritual experience visually.

"Really?" Khadra says with equal care. Did Mahasen leave him or did he leave her?"Alhamdulillah," Hakim says. Khadra hates when people say that as a replacement for specific information."It-it must be. (Ibid.P:37).

The Qur'anic sentences continue into this part as well: 'the sunshine on her head was a gift from God. Gratitude filled her. *Sami allahu liman hamidah* (Allah hears whoever praises Him). Here was an exposure, her soul an unmarked sheet shadowing into distinct shapes under the fluids. Fresh film. Her self-developing.

Khadra arrives on the IU campus knee-deep in the golden Indiana day, time for duhr prayer. It has been transformed into Muslim Land for the weekend. Thousands of Muslims fill Assembly Hall, the great basketball stadium where the Hoosiers practice, turning the Big Ten bastion into a highraftered mosque. Khadra enters the arena just as the imam calls the first "allahu akbar." She steps out of her cute strappy sandals and slips into

a prayer line next to a woman whose petite body, a presence of bone and flesh under the fabric, brushes against her. (Kahf, 2006.P:23).

The narrative suggests that religion and religious identity are important to Khadra, though it also suggests that it is only the flexible and self-reflexive engagement with religion that benefits Khadra morally and spiritually and results in any meaningful evolution of her religious identity.

"Ails I know is, I don't like religion, but I like spirituality," he said. They were walking in the city. "On some level," he added, unnecessarily. Khadra found this glib. "What is religion but spirituality?" She walked a little faster to keep up. She found out when she first moved to Philadelphia that you had to walk fast or people would bump into you and give you dirty looks as if to say, "go back to Indiana, hayseed." (Kahf, 2006.P:198).

In this regard, Khadra understands the importance of privileging spirituality over the rituals and symbols of religion and over insistence on a rigid definition of Muslim identity. However, the narrative suggests that Khadra's religious identity and the symbols of Islam, which at one level distinguish Muslim from other religious identities, still matter to Khadra.

She has no time to think about it. The call to isha prayer is made.... There are a number of new faces in the crowd Khadra surveys as the prayer lines begin to form, new Dawah officers and their families. The position that used to be Uncle Yusuf's is filled now by a hulking, broad-shouldered Bosnian brother with a blond beard. Sister Peaches from Salam Mosque works as the shipping clerk, Sister Habibaty from Malaysia does secretarial, and Brother Obaidah from Iraq has Wajdy's old liaison job. (Kahf, 2006.P:244).

Interestingly, the narrative shows that the rituals and symbols of Islam form part of the attractions of Islam for Khadra. In this way, the novel goes beyond the celebration of spirituality without religion. Rather, it represents the pleasures of spiritual experience through formalized and ritualized religion. The adherents of a religion can feel such an attachment to their religion both because of the spiritual and moral attractions of that religion and because of the fact that people can simply be habituated to the rituals and symbols of their religion and the spiritual and emotional responses that these rituals and symbols evoke.⁵

⁵ Firouzeh Ameri, *Veiled experiences: re-writing women's identities and experiences in contemporary Muslim fiction in English*, B.A. Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, M.A. University of Tehran, Tehran.

Conclusion

Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* (2006), is the story of a family at the intersection of Islamic dress codes. The concept "Muslim woman" connotes submissive or backward. Kahf's literary works portray Muslim women in a new light not commonly seen in the American media. The women are represented as independent, intelligent and in control of their own lives and their decisions. They chose the veil and they dispute common stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed or as forced to wearing it.

This chapter has explored Kahf's novel, deeply, by emphasizing the importance of religious identity in the life of khadra, the protagonist. Kahf grew up in a devout household, she finds the Muslim Brotherhood's interpretation of Islam too narrow. Muslim women struggle to determine what is possible and acceptable. Among the many challenges faced by Muslim women, one is how to keep their Islamic tradition along with resisting American prejudice against Islam. Women play important role in Islamic culture.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

General Conclusion

The present study began with an attempt to explain the processes underlying the formation and construction of the Muslim American identity as well as their identification. It first introduced the Muslim Americans by giving a brief overview on the history of Muslim immigrants, a significant number of socio-psychological research and theories focusing on the issues of social identification, and the challenge for immigrants which is how to negotiate their identity in harmony with the host society. Several studies have looked at how religiosity is affected by identity processes. In fact, Religious affiliations of immigrant communities impact their integration. Actually, there is evidence that young Muslim Americans besides being cultivated, they also prioritize their religious identity.

Post-9/11 attacks, the notion of a ‘Muslim’ stigma becomes significant in literature. Debates about Islam erupted in the public sphere. Furthermore, a generation of Western-educated Muslim immigrants’ children was coming of age, and choosing literature as a medium through which they express their artistic creativity. Consequently, the amount of Muslim-related fiction soared after 9/11 both by non-Muslims and by writers with a Muslim ancestry or a Muslim affiliation.

Western representations including; fiction narratives, films, TV series...etc., often demonize Islam. In literature the change was not as reactive as in the media. Fighting against the stereotyping, Muslim American writers after 9/11 have used their work to challenge and help heal the objectification and de-humanization of their community that have taken place since then. As examples, *Why I Am a Muslim* by Asma Gull Hasan in 2004, *Londonistan* by Gautam Malkani in 2006, *Unimagined, A Muslim Boy Meets the West* by Imran Ahmad in 2007. At this same

General Conclusion

slow pace a subtextual distinction was made between ethnic and Muslim. *The Kite Runner* by Hosseini in 2003, and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf in 2006.

9/11 was not good publicity for Muslims. It created a palpable tension between us and the rest of the world. I know that there is general animosity between Asians of different religions but I had never felt it. To me we were all Asians in a predominantly white country and we stuck together. 9/11 changed all that. Sikhs and Hindus became sick of being banded together with Muslims. (Abdullah 2006:53).¹

The Kite Runner chronicles the life of Amir within the politically, socially and culturally charged landscape that is Afghanistan. It values the moral systems especially in the face of ethnic conflict, war and social stigmas. The novel contains several Muslims' tradition and beliefs references, there is an instrumental role of Islam on the story and its characters. Amir opens his arms wide to America, even though he maintains Afghan traditions regarding courtship and writes a novel about Afghanistan. Because he comes into adulthood in America, Amir does not suffer along with his fellow Afghans. As he discovers, this makes all the difference in defining his national identity.

Family is extremely important in the story, especially because it takes place in Afghanistan. It is a nation where culture and tradition are of monumental importance, especially to the older generation. We see this when Baba and Amir are in America. Even though they are in a different country, Amir is expected to observe

¹ Abdullah, Kia 2006. *Life, Love & assimilation*. Adlibbed Ltd.

General Conclusion

cultural tradition in courting Soraya. Family is the reason why Amir fights to bring Sohrab home and, ultimately, the channel through which he redeems himself.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf delves into the cultural clashes of Muslim life in America, Literature plays a key role in answering these questions. Homi Bhabha argues that the study of world literature involves strategies whereby cultures can recognise themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’ (1994: 12).

Kahf tells the story of Khadra Shamy’s journey of self-discovery. Khadra grows up in a strict Muslim community where the children are brought up believing in one definition of Islam and rejecting all differences. As the novel progresses, we see Khadra going through different experiences, bringing her closer to finding her true self as opposed to the identity that she inherits from her parents.

Khadra starts to unravel the truth about her parents and their hypocrisy, as when her parents tell her that being racist is haram. This gives her the idea that none of the Muslims around her are racist or judgmental when it comes to African Americans; however, when Eyad asks for his parents’ help in asking for the hand of Maha, a Sudanese girl, his parents refuse the idea because of her skin color. “*But for heaven’s sake, she’s black as coal!*” (p. 139) Wajdy and Ebtehaj teach them things about religion and what’s right and wrong, but in some cases do not act on it.

Khadra has grown so much throughout the book. She has maintained most of her basic ideas about her beliefs; what has changed is how she applies these beliefs in her own life and how accepting she is of other people’s choices.

General Conclusion

Khadra sees herself as a girl for she has not yet completed her journey of self-discovery. In her own eyes, she has not yet reached self-realization and does not see herself as a full-grown woman. Her tangerine scarf represents her connection to Teta, Syria and her quest to find herself. When Khadra takes off her scarf in Syria, she is shedding the old, judgmental, black-and-white Khadra. In putting on a tangerine scarf, she is embracing her new, improved, tolerant self. She literally goes from black to color. She also chooses the scarf matching her grandmother's, which is of a bright, attention grabbing color, showing she is no longer ashamed to stand out and be identified as a Muslim Arab-American. She is now accepting of all of the aspects of her hyphenated identity.

By analysing these two novels, I found that in both novels religious practices and rituals present a paramount criteria in identity formation for the protagonists (Amir and Khadra) whose quests for their identities are achieved only when they return to their homeland. There they discover themselves and construct a religious identity through practicing Islamic rituals in a special spiritual moment.

Moreover, Muslim literary productions in the U.S. engage with questions of cultural identity and ethnic relations. In exploring *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf, I focused, respectively, on the hybridization of Khadra and the cultural images through which Arab/Muslim American women are oppressed and misinterpreted by Western discourses. Khadra is highly influenced by her Muslim identity, especially the veil. Her Muslimness is a noticeable characteristic of her identity. Throughout the novel, Khadra struggles to deconstruct some of the stereotypes related to Arab/Muslim American woman

General Conclusion

wearing the veil; and construct her Islamic identity through rituals and religious practices. She resists the Western and Oriental discourses that subordinate them and portray them as silenced women in need of liberation.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks have led to a strongly negative focus on Muslims in the United States. Cankar (2009) argues that hijab represents to those opposed to it an evidence of foreignness and disloyalty to American values. By publishing the two novels, *Mohja Kahf* and *Khaled Hosseini* want to highlight the significance of tolerance by demonstrating that the U.S. is made up of diverse races, ethnicities, and identities.

As the study goes on, it can be observed that the processes of identity formation are extremely influenced by religion and tradition. It, also shows the significance of these attributes in the protagonists' identity formation. With regard to the significance of religion in the identity construction of the protagonists, we can say that traditional and cultural inherited behaviors and teachings along with family strong ties and attachment, overtly as well as covertly, shape and trace the protagonists' lives. In both novels, the two protagonists (Amir and Khadra) display a discontent. Amir and Khadra's identities and the relationship that is founded upon these identities portray this almost impossibility to overcome the past and traditions. Hence, we can say that religious traditions and pride surpass religious commitment.

In discussing the question of assimilation, I have presented a number of theories that tried to explain and studied how an immigrant culture struggling to hang onto its own traditionalist identity may find that adopting some new ways is

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simply not possible and, therefore, will find themselves fighting change at every point.

In conclusion, I maintain that the post-traumatic aftermath of 9/11 has been a turning point in the identity formation and reconstruction of Muslim Americans. And that the 9/11 attacks will have a long-term effect assimilation rate of immigrants from Muslim countries in the United States. Furthermore, the substantial increase in hate crimes, harassment, racial profiling, and discrimination against Muslims in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 started a process of re-Islamization. At the individual level, Muslim Americans renewed their interest in the Quran and traditional Islamic practices .One example is the growing number of young women wearing the *hijab* (headscarf) as an icon of Islamic pride and defiance to a hostile environment (Haddad, 2007).

I hope that my critical analysis of the works of Khaled Hosseini and Mohja Kahf will open up new doors about Muslim American identity issues. I further hope that my project paves the way to a better understanding of the experiences of Muslim Americans who have confronted 9/11 and suffered from disorientation and loss.

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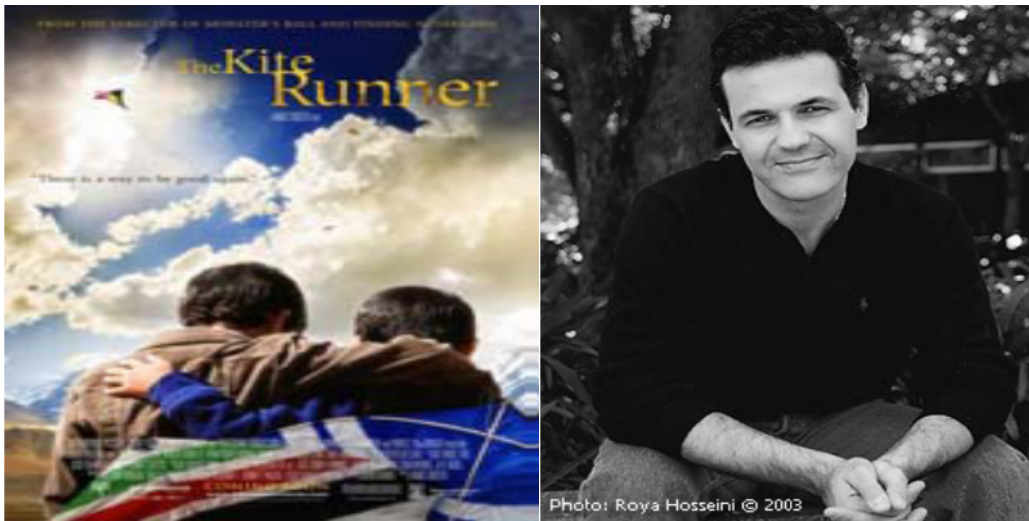
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Appendix A:



About The Author:

Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965, Khaled Hosseini moved to Tehran in 1970, where his father worked for the Afghan embassy. Returning to Kabul in 1973, his father continued as a diplomat with the Afghan Foreign Ministry and his mother taught Farsi and history at a high school. In July of 1973, the night Hosseini's youngest brother was born, the Afghan king, Zahir Shah, was overthrown in a bloodless coup by the king's cousin, Daoud Khan. At the time, Hosseini was in fourth grade and was already drawn to poetry and prose; he read a great deal of Persian poetry as well as Farsi translations of British and American novels. In 1976, the Afghan Foreign Ministry relocated the Hosseini family to Paris. Plans to return to Kabul in 1980 were thwarted by the bloody communist coup and subsequent invasion of the Soviet army. Granted political asylum by the United States, they moved to San Jose, California, in September 1980. Having lost all their property in Afghanistan, they lived on welfare and food stamps while Hosseini's father worked multiple jobs to become financially stable. Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and enrolled at Santa Clara University where he earned a bachelor's degree in biology in 1988. The following year, he entered the University of California-San Diego's School of Medicine, where he earned a medical degree in 1993. He completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. Though Hosseini has practiced internal medicine since 1996, he yearned to write.

Appendix B



About the Author:

Poet and scholar Mohja Kahf was born in Damascus, Syria. Her family moved to the United States in 1971, and Kahf grew up in the Midwest. She earned a PhD in comparative literature from Rutgers University and is the author of the poetry collection *Emails from Scheherazad* (2003) and the novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). Kahf's experiences growing up in the United States shaped her perceptions of the differences and similarities between the cultures of her home and adopted countries. Her poetry is an amalgam of both Syrian and American influences; Lisa Suhair Majaj commented in *Arte News* that Kahf's work "draws on American colloquialisms and Quranic suras; it is informed not only by American free verse ... but also by a lush energy that draws on the heart of the Arabic oral tradition and Arabic poetry." Kahf sometimes satirizes stereotypes about Muslim women—she has tackled hairstyles, sex, and clothing. In *Emails from Scheherazad*, she locates Scheherazad in 21st-century Hackensack, New Jersey. Majaj observed that Kahf "unsettles assumptions about Scheherazad while also emphasizing aspects of the traditional tale that often get overlooked in western portrayals." Kahf has also written about the hardships of immigration; *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* depicts a Muslim girl's coming of age in Indiana. Kahf co-writes a column on sexuality for the website *Muslim Wake Up*. Her nonfiction work includes *Western Representation of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (1999). Kahf is a professor of English at the University of Arkansas.