Identity Malaise of Exiled characters in Ethnic Fiction
Case study: Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006)

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical study of how a contemporary ethnic writer presents exile cases and counter-hegemonic discourses throughout it as regards to notions of belonging and identity. The process of identity-making is discussed through an examination of the protagonist's development in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). This study focuses on how the protagonist constructs a new meaning of exile that challenges previous conventions and seeks to recuperate the sense of pride in cultural difference. It also attempts to highlight how this literary work is a counter-narrative regarding the cultural practices that hitherto have been regarded as archaic; backward; and yet fit to adapt the new changes of the Western World.

Keywords: belonging, dislocation, ethnic fiction, exile, home, identity, Mohja Kahf

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1. Introduction

Exile has been one of the significant productive literary topics in twentieth-century literature. Together with related themes of displacement; Diaspora, and alienation, it features prominently in the works of writers who quitted their homelands due to suffocating totalitarian regimes. More recently, the notion of exile has been adopted in postcolonial literature as a central theme.

In its conventional sense, the notion of exile pertains to geographical displacement. It has often been discussed in spatial terms as a composite of the prefix “ex” meaning “out” “ile” meaning island. However, postmodern literature on exile provides a new interpretation of the concept of exile in which “ex” means “previous,” and connotes life in the past and its inconsistency with the present. This is mainly due to mass mobility that has fragmented the sense of attachment to local communities.

Because there is a multitude of works profiling the hardships of exile subjects, this work is devoted to probing into the life of a different generation of exile. This category assembles refugees that were born, and educated and come of age in the host land because their parents are exiled or voluntarily choose to self-exile. These exiles constitute what Rumbaut, (1991) calls the “one and half generation” (p. 22). Although not directly shattered by expulsion, this generation experiences the exile of the previous generation, albeit differently.

Throughout the examination of topics that pertain to displacement and nostalgia in this literary oeuvre at work here, the aim is to answer the following interrogation: is the postmodern exile a temporal or a spatial experience? Noting that the displaced subjects often live through hope of an eventual return, do the one and half refugees hold place-bound identities like first generation exiles?

In probing these questions, two hypothetical scenarios are envisaged. First, taking into account the close bond between parents and children and the impact of this parental relationship on the formation of children’s identities; it is suggested that the one and halfers are likely to share the nostalgia and nationalistic ideals of their parents.

Second and last, taking into account the fact that the one and halfers, unlike their parents, grow up in the host land they are more likely to consider it as a homeland, albeit feelingly. Culturally speaking; however, it is suggested that due to the nostalgic stories they learn from their parents and that partly shape their identities, the one and halfers are likely to create their new hybrid characters that combine the host and home cultures.

A prolific scholarship and research done about the notion of exile from a sociological point of view were available. Works like Edward Said’s *Reflections on Exile*(2002), Sophia McClennen’s *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Literatures* (2004), Paul Tabori’s *The Anatomy of Exile* (1972), John Newbauer’s *Exile: Home of the Twentieth Century* (1991), or Michael Hanne’s edited collection of articles entitled *Creativity in Exile* were very instrumental in the discussion of exile and related concepts. Since this work is dedicated to an examination of the state of exile in literature (2004), Claudio Guillén’s article “On the Literature

of Exile and Counter-Exile”(1972) forms the basis of the theory advanced in this work since it distinguishes two categories of exile writing.

Before examining the central aspect of this paper, we will investigate the basic concepts that explain the condition of exile. These concepts tend to frame a theoretically informed methodology for this study, where the aspects of trans-disciplinary work on memory and nostalgia relate it to the mainstream.

2. Exile, Identity and Belonging in a Liminal Space

The notion of exile is polysemous and can be discussed from various perspectives. While expulsion is related initially to geographical displacement, some writers and critics discuss feelings of deportation even though they have never quitted their homelands. In this sense, exile cannot be confined to spatial uprootedness; however its definition can rely on other parameters such as time. Conveniently, many scholars deal with the experience of exile in terms of their nostalgia for, what Marcel Proust calls, “times past.” Concepts of mobility and displacement lie at the center of the Western canon beginning with the idea that to be a human is to be exiled from God. In terms of ontology, some critics like Buruma, (2001) regard the entire human race as an exiled race:

Exile as a metaphor did not begin with the Jewish Diaspora. The first story of exile in our tradition is the story of Adam and Eve. No matter how we interpret the story of their expulsion from the Garden of Eden – original sin or not – we may be certain of one thing: there is no way back to paradise. After that fatal bite of the apple, the return to pure innocence was cut off forever. The exile of Adam and Eve is the mark of maturity, the consequence of growing up. (p.3)

The theme of exile has floated through myriad scholarly texts by authors like Said (2002), Bhabha (1994) among many others whose aim was to report various experiences of exile and analyze its consequential losses from different perspectives. Depicting exile as a condemnation, Tabori, (1972) begins *The Anatomy of exile* with “Song of Exile” wherein he writes:

Exile is a song that only the singer can hear.
Exile is an illness that not even death can cure—for how
Can you rest in a soil that did not nourish you? (p.6)

Identifying exile as an incurable illness, Tabori overlooks any opportunity of well-being offered in the host land, and discusses deportation in terms of Ovidian nostalgia. However, exile in the postmodern age has conversely come to signify relief from strenuous life conditions in the homeland, or is synonymously used with the term refugee. It has also come to denote not a fragmented identity but an “international one” (2004, p.24) to use Abani’s terms. In the postmodern globalized age marked by transnationalism and multiculturalism, exile becomes a source of creativity rather than a source of despair. Taking into account the multiple enclaves in the United States, for instance, an exile subject’s strangeness in the host land is no more as acute

as it used to be in the past. In this typical case, his difference is allowed and tolerated in the sense that his cultural practices are no more regarded as awkward.

3. Exile and Home Matters

One of the basic concepts explaining the condition of exile is the feeling of homelessness. The latter points to an individual's perceptions of anguish and estrangement while out of home. But what does home mean? Is it necessarily the place where one is born and brought up? Or a place where one feels security and exercises all liberties and enjoys all rights? If we consider the first alternative, homelessness is felt outside the geographical contours of one's country of birth. The second alternative, however, puts a link between one's well being and feelings of homelessness. In this sense, home is not a place but space. In a precisely distinctive manner, Tuan, (1977) points to the difference between place and space in his seminal work *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*:

Space that is stretched over a grid of cardinal points makes the idea of place vivid, but it does not make any particular geographical locality the place. A spatial frame determined by the stars is anthropocentric rather than place-centric, and it can be moved as human beings themselves move. (p.150)

Therefore, the conceptions of home are problematic. Home, following Tuan's logic, refers either to a country or to a particular locus that one occupies and is a signifier of the homeland, or as Tuan, (1977) put it in *Space and Place*, "Homeland is an important type of place at the medium scale. It is a region (city or countryside) large enough to support a people's livelihood" (p.149)

So, rather than concretely defined through geographical contours, the home has become an abstract notion reflecting a feeling of belonging in a space and not a place where someone resides. Said, (2002) provides an excellent example for this argument in "*Reflections on Exile*," although non-referential of the link between home, belonging, and space. In an entirely narrative mode, Said tells his readers about the time he spent with Faiz Ahmad Faiz, the most distinguished of Urdu poets who was exiled from Pakistan by Zia's military regime and found shelter in strife-torn Beirut. Said explains that despite the affinity of spirit between Faiz Ahmad Faiz and his Palestinian closest friends, nothing matched – language, life history, culture or poetic convention.

Understandably, twentieth-century exiles' feelings of estrangement and homelessness are also different from pre-modern conceptions of homelessness. These means that in a globalized world characterized by constant displacement, either urged or voluntary and were cultural as well as national borders tend to dissolve; the feeling of homelessness tends to be present always and everywhere.

Let us recall that home is not necessarily a physical structure or a geographical location but always an emotional space. Moreover, it is among the most emotionally complex and resonant concepts in our psychic vocabularies. In a pre-global epoch, identifying a place as home could be delineated through the feeling of belonging in a specific place, whereas the lack thereof translates

into feelings of homelessness. The feeling of belonging is relatively linked to experiences of exclusion or inclusion. The sense of being at home and the sense of harmony between one's innermost self and the cosmos prevent the need for political markers of identity to feel belonging in a specific home.

From a clinical point of view, one's home can also be one's memories. Take for instance people affected by Alzheimer's disease. These people feel estrangement vis-à-vis the time they are living, and their sense of "homeless" or "placeness" is to be found in their memories. Therefore, this consolidates the argument that the concept of exile is not only related to places, but pertains to spaces and time as well.

As a result, conceptions of home can be framed within geographical as well as historical contexts. Exile narratives, in their earlier forms, emphasized the impossibility to separate history from its geographical context or more appropriately the place of its birth and emergence, and hence the sorrow of more previous authors of exile. Modern narratives of exile, however, seek to create their histories in new geographical locales. Thus, contemporaneous representations of home in exile stories pertain more to the way history can be transplanted in a geographical locus. This new approach has been made possible by multiculturalism and globalization.

4. The Dynamics of Exile in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

Thematically, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* mostly concerns itself with the issue of psychological and social alienation both at home and abroad and features its protagonist as a double-exile, i.e. an exile from her ancestral homeland and later an exile in the host land. Exile is foisted upon Khadra, the protagonist of the novel, by her dissident Syrian parents. Therefore, Khadra belongs to what Rumbault, (1991) has labeled the "1.5 generation" (p.51). Constrained by her hijab and Islamic religious practices in a land hostile to Islam, Khadra attempts to discover the meaning of a homeland throughout her brief journeys in Middle Eastern countries.

At the beginning of the novel, we learn that Khadra's parents viewed themselves as temporary residents in the United States. They thought that within a matter of time, Hafiz al Assad would be overthrown and they would be able to return to their homeland:

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. Money saved buying beat-up furniture in America was money that could be spent back home in Syria one day. (Kahf, p.131)

However, that seemed less likely to happen and it became bright for the Shamy family that they were going to have more extended stay in the United States of America:

But the return kept getting postponed. Wajdy's idea had been to set things on a good course, train his replacement, and leave. But year piled on top year, and soon two whole children, Khadra and Eyad, had practically grown up, with Eyad in college and Khadra in high

school. And Jihad was halfway through a childhood spent in America only by default. (Kahf, p.132)

The Muslim characters in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* hold the same view as Wajdy and view themselves as temporary exiles. To mitigate their pain and console the Muslim newcomers in the United States, they created the Dawah Center intending to provide a haven for the newly arrived homesick.

Khadra inscribes her identity on an Islamic religious register that stigmatizes her in a western society utterly hostile to her spiritual values. Henceforth, Kahf's novel draws a woman's trajectory of double self-exile from the first American community and second Arab American Muslim community. Her self-exile is motivated by her eagerness to discover who she really is and where she most appropriately belongs.

What explains Khadra's feeling of exile is her nostalgia for Syria, although she almost remembers nothing about it. Khadra's "little boomerang-shaped scar on her right knee that had been made on a broken tile in Syria" (Kahf, p.15) makes her always think of Syria. Although Khadra had only vague memories of Syria, her nostalgia for it is propelled by the scar that has become an organic part of her body. The scar is visible and ineffaceable permanently reminds Khadra of an invisible and yet ineffaceable place in her memory, i.e. Syria. Khadra's inability to link a real life- long memorable scar with an unmemorable place justifies her urge to undertake a journey back into the past.

Unlike the Dawah center members' exile that is geographically and nationalistically defined, Khadra's exile is related to time and not to place. She is in Proustian terms in search of times lost. For Khadra, Syria is often either a hazy memory or a place she has learned about second-hand, through stories, photos or family visitors. Therefore, Khadra can retrieve the past through memory in spite of the geographical separation. Eventually, what teenage Khadra cannot secure in space, throughout her physical return to Syria, she constructs in time, by returning through memory.

Khadra's remembrance of Syria is refreshed by the smell of dry, sunny days and the gustatory effects produced by tart plum or dark cherries. When Khadra "bit into a tart plum or a dark cherry, her mouth felt like Syria" (Kahf, p.15). Syria, here, refers to the childhood time spent herein and not the place: Syria. The tart plum and the dark cherry, on the other hand, are analogous to Swann's petite Madeleine in Marcel Proust's "Swann's way".

In the same way, Swann recollects many images of his past life immediately after he tastes the Madeleine dipped into tea, the plum tart and dark cherry remind Khadra of times spent in Syria, albeit hazily. In this sense, Khadra's exile is explained by her nostalgia for times past that is fostered either by olfactory or gustatory sensations. Associating home with comfort and homelessness with discomfort and taking into account the exquisite joy felt at moments of recollection, Khadra's exile is clinically identified with her amnesia and her sense of home is to

be found in her memories. Proust (1992) views the olfactory and gustatory sensations as the last vestiges that challenge extinction after everything past dies:

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection. (Pp.63-64)

Khadra's exile is also explained in culinary terms. Her nostalgia for Syria is elucidated throughout her gastronomic preferences. Middle Eastern cuisine with its variety of foods is an apt space for Khadra. For instance, she was "overwhelmed with a sense of home as she entered Im Litfy's kitchen" (p.188). For Khadra and Eyad, Im Litfy "felt as familiar as their grandmother, whose kitchen felt like home" (p.189). Kahf establishes a link between exile and Syrian cuisine since the latter is relocated and transplanted to mitigate feelings of homelessness. In the case of refugees, "Food becomes the mother's love-potion for her family, a potent talisman of care and protection that envelops them in the aroma of memorable enchantment" (as cited in Mehta, 2009, p.216). Im Litfy's kitchen re-creates the familiarity of home through the dynamic of the home cooking; its typical and familiar tastes and fragrances are potent signifiers of memory. Thus, food becomes an ostensible agent for identity exploration and identification as well. It also becomes a memorial keeping a cherished memory alive.

Khadra's adult years oscillated between East and West. In her particular case, exile is extended to the Arab context. Perceived as a foreigner in Mecca, Khadra infinitely argues with her cousin's friends who refuse to believe that she is an Arab observant Muslim and keep on regarding her as an American. The social ailments that affect the Muslim world urge Khadra, who cannot identify with contemporary Muslims, to undertake a journey back in time. In so doing, she harbored a delusive hope that she would live in a Mohammedan Islamic society. Eventually, she "went on a regime of dates and water to emulate the diet of the Prophet" (p.153) and creates her world where she is surrounded by monumental figures of the Prophet's generation. Mimicking the Prophet's diet, although it was not one as Wajdy explains that, "The Prophet ate dates because they were the most abundant food of his land" (p.154); Khadra refuses the excesses of American society together with its McDonaldization.

Thus, becoming an Islamic activist, Khadra economically self-exiles from the American consumer society by first refusing its food excesses and second rejecting its fashion markets. Indeed, wearing "a black scarf and a navy-blue jilbab her father had sewn at her request" (p.149) and not being interested in attracting men's gaze towards her, Khadra represents a threat to fashion designers and consumerism. This clothing style is her way to individuate as a Muslim in America and at the same time constitutes her cultural and economic self-exile from American society. Another scene clarifying Khadra's feeling of estrangement in the USA is when her parents opted for American citizenship as a last resort. This infuriates Khadra who cannot help regarding her

parents as hypocrites. This event gives more unobstructed view of her attitude towards America and her state of exile, more particularly. The following interior monologue offers direct access to Khadra's thought, yet only to the reader, and deprives the other characters of seeing the different path Khadra was following to identify:

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? Wasn't she supposed to remember always the children in Syria who had to scour toilets on their knees at her age? For whom her tongue cleaved to the roof of her mouth, hamburgers, with the guilt of one who got away? It was an ache that had gnawed her gut for years. (Kahf, p.141)

Here, Khadra is still in a dumb phase when she cannot deliver her dreams. Keeping her thoughts for herself represents both her doubt about them and her fear to communicate them with other characters. However, Khadra's silence will not last for long as she soon breaks it and unashamedly creates her discourse about many taboo issues in the Dawah center community like khulu, abortion, dating and so on. Khadra identifies with three notorious exiled women in the history of Islam whose exile brought relief and rendered the practice of the Islamic faith easier.

Similarly, Khadra identifies with Syrian children and pains for their miserable status, and thus feels exiled from a community of children with whom she could share many things. Like Sumaya, Nusayba and Um Salamah, Khadra feels exiled for a noble purpose. Although she identifies with these three women in terms of displacement, her exile is different from theirs. Nusayba, Sumaya and Um Salamah self-exiled from the land of non-Muslims to the land of Muslims; however, Khadra is exiled from the land of Muslims to the land of Kuffar, to use Wajdy's characterization of Americans.

In the case of the three women, the effect of exile is reversed as displacement becomes advantageous because the loci of exile, Mecca or Medina, is home to Muslims while the places these women left behind were home to Kuffar. Similarly, exile for Khadra is advantageous as the host land offers more freedom than the homeland. Unable to find her version of Islam in Muslim nations, mainly because of the social scourge that has affected Muslim societies, Khadra recognizes that home is not to be found in the Middle Eastern Muslim countries. In recourse, she turns toward a self-wrought homemaking that is grounded in dislocation, celebrating and claiming exile on its home ground. As a result, exile becomes an existential necessity.

However, while Khadra ultimately chooses the United States as a homeland, she still feels exiled because as her name indicates she cannot abandon Islam for the secular norms of American life. The name Khadra, meaning the color green is very symbolic in the novel. It provides a hint about Khadra's belonging and destiny. Green is a holy color in Islam. It is the color of various flags of Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia. It is also the color used in the ornamentation of mosques. Green is the color of the soft covers of the graves of saints. More importantly, green is the color of paradise, and even the garments of the inhabitants of heaven are green. In fact, the choice of this color as a name for Khadra is very symbolic and might be considered as an indication

that Khadra cannot dissociate herself from the Muslim community and is thus condemned to eternal exile.

5. Khadra's Scheherazadian Narrative of Survival

Exile narratives deal primarily with the theme of survival, and their characters are similar to Defoe's Robinson Crusoe in that both, regardless of the motives, try to carve a new home after being, accidentally or not, displaced. However, unlike Crusoe who found himself on a desert island and could act as master, exiles of the 21st century can only be slaves to the host land masters as Friday was to Crusoe. However, if we take the two issues of gender and religion into account, Muslim women exiled in the West might be compared to *The Thousand and One Nights* heroine Scheherazad. The fact of always having to tell new entertaining stories to survive in her new home, Scheherazad's trajectory resembles exiled Muslim women's one who is continually arguing against the Western discourse describing them as debased and subservient.

Kahf's narrative in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* revolves around her heroine's attempt to survive and resist the Western effort to efface the existence of Muslim women through ethnic cleansing. Metaphorically, Khadra's infinite arguments in favor of Islam to save the whole Muslim community resemble Scheherazad's narratives to save other women from Shahryar's homicide. Like Scheherazad's attempt to survive in a misogynistic locus, Khadra refused to die out in an Islamophobic society, and both are eager to save endangered species. Golley, (2003) describes Scheherazad's narrative in terms of resistance and self-assertion when he states:

Through the act of telling stories that is, through the medium of the reproduction of words Shahrazad managed to save not only her own life but also the lives of hundreds of potential wives of Shahriar. Death is conquered by narrative; silence is broken by discourse. The narrative becomes indispensable for life. Shahrazad's "Cogito, ergo sum" becomes "I narrate; therefore, I am." (p.80)

Similarly, Kahf's narrative saves not only her protagonist Khadra, but Muslim women living in the West, in general. Narrating, in the case of Khadra becomes indispensable as it allows her to resist the hegemonic discourse held by the West. As a counter- hegemonic discourse, her narrative creates equilibrium between what they say about her and what she says about herself. Khadra's identity is thus like a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces are collected from her narratives and joined together to form her harmonious identity. Henceforth, Khadra's "cogito, ergo sum" becomes "I speak for myself, therefore, I am."

By entertaining the Sultan, the primary purpose of Scheherazade's narrative was to divert his attention from the desire to kill her to the desire to listen to her never-ending stories. Likewise, Khadra's narrative reflects her willingness to distract the West's attention from judging her on what she wears to judging her on what she is. Following this line of thought, Khadra's frustration may be compared to Khaleda's in Kahf's poem "*Descent into JFK*". The speaker states that no matter how Khaleda is enlightened, Americans would never acknowledge it, and continue to judge her as a backward woman because of the veil:

They'd never know Khaleda
 Has a Ph.D.
 Because she wears a veil, they'll
 Never see beyond (Kahf, p.23)

Being reduced to a piece of cloth renders breaking silence a commitment for Khadra who thematically engages in an autobiography whose aim is to correct and criticize the biography authored by the Western hegemony. Therefore, the importance of the strategy of retelling history as a way of criticizing hegemonic narratives can be clarified throughout the following Gramscian statement, "In a given state, history is the history of the ruling classes, so, on a world scale, history is the history of the hegemonic states. The history of the subaltern states is explained by the history of the hegemonic states" (1995, pp.222-223). Using narrative as a strategy to counter the hegemonic scripts becomes Kahf's commitment also. At the author's level, the words ending the poem *Hijab Scene #7* characterize the whole set of Kahf's writing as counter- discursive:

Yes I carry explosives
 they're called words
 and, if you don't get up off your assumptions,
 They're going to blow you away (p.14)

In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Khadra starts her resistance narrative at an early age in high school where she starts penning her real view of America and the world in her essays. Khadra cannot grasp her teacher's grading when she explains:

Whenever Khadra wrote an essay about how it was hypocritical of America to say it was democratic while it propped dictators like the Shah and supported Israel's domination of Lebanon, "and then they wonder why people over there hate them," she got big red D's and Mrs. Tarkington found a reason to circle every other word with red ink. As soon as she turned in a composition on a neutral topic, no politics or religion, the Tark gave her a big fat A. It was that black-and-white. (Kahf, p.123)

Finding the way history is taught in American high schools very selective, Khadra engages in a Zinnia approach to writing a new colored history from the standpoint of the conquered and not the conquerors. The relationship between Khadra and her teacher and the way the latter powerfully acts and the former reacts describe the dynamics of power and the way they control history writing. Khadra is in a position that does not enable her to be heard or read while the teacher is in a situation that allows her to silence Khadra by metaphorically censoring what she writes. In this sense, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* reports many historical events, political as well as social, from the standpoint of ordinary people. For instance, it is the victims of the Hama Massacre and the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Reem's mother and Bitsy, respectively, who tell the history of these genocidal events. Khadra's aunt Razanne narrates how her daughter Reem was forced to take off her hijab during the Hama Massacre days. The protagonist also shapes a new idea about the Iranian Islamic Revolution when she learns from Bitsy that:

[Her] parents died in '78 ... killed by the Islamic Revolution. I was very little. I remember running through the street, terrified, and being surrounded by women dressed like you are dressed right now, and Islamic phrases ringing out all around me. It was the scariest time of my life. (Kahf, p.375)

Let us note here that to Bitsy, Khadra belongs to the world of conquerors who swept her Persian civilization. The fact of having Bitsy voice her story of the Iranian Islamic Revolution and having Khadra feel apologetic is a way to say that civilizational victories are always bloody as they are based on violence.

Thus, Khadra concludes that for her to survive in a hostile American environment, she should elevate her conception of human relationships from being controlled by the forces of politics, history, nationalism, and patriotism to being governed by human virtues of tolerance, peace and mutual understanding. Khadra's decision to veil occasionally proves that she was ready to take pride in her otherness that she no more defined through the superiority-inferiority dichotomy.

To conclude, let us consider two analogical reflections. First, in the same way, it took Scheherazad *One Thousand and One Nights* to convince Shahryar to spare her life and enable him to see that infidelity is not familiar to all women; Khadra spent her teenage and part of her adult years trying to convince Americans that backwardness and terrorism are not common to all Muslims. Second, willing to secure the lives of many women, no matter where they come from or which class they belong to, Scheherazad is compassionate with all women without exception. Similarly, by profiling a wide array of immigrant and exile characters, Kahf does not exclude non-Muslims from her compassion and internationalizes the state of exile the same way Abani does. Khadra, in this sense, makes a massive move from a very restricted sense of belonging, i.e. a self-absorbed religious community, to a broadened sense of attachment, i.e. the human race in general. This new sense of belonging and the carving of this new international social identity are motivated by Khadra's desire for freedom from the constraints of place as being either "ours" or "theirs."

6. Conclusion

This paper began with an attempt to understand the nuances embedded in the perennial phenomenon of displacement and its representations throughout history. This historical profiling of the concept of exile helped to elucidate how the modern conception of exile has diverged from its conventional sense in the face of multiculturalism and mass migration. The study of characterization in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* revealed that exile is an enriching experience that helps to construct new meanings and discover new or buried truths about one's history and identity. This might be justified by the round trip undertaken by Khadra who decides to go back to her motherlands in order to settle but only to discover that her host land is more homely than her homeland.

Exile in the case of Khadra is considered as a journey towards newness that is essential in learning about one's otherness. However, this is done in reverse, i.e. instead of moving from the

homeland to the host land, Khadra has already found herself living in a host land. The feeling that her respective parents decide to exile on their behalf engenders skepticism within her mind as to whether the decision to leave Syria for the United States was appropriate. Therefore, Khadra goes back to her motherland in the hope of being able to decide by herself whether to settle in her homeland or self-exile like her parents. Following this line of the understanding, Khadra does not trust her parent's experience, and instead of trusting ready-made information about her homeland, she chooses to form her vision about it by returning to the past. She also rejects subordination and silencing and chafes against western as well as local structures of oppression as she rewrites her family and national story to counter the reductive hegemonic narrative produced by the West.

It was in the scope of the present work to highlight the significance of ethnic American writing as reactionary literature and the way it protects us from what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie names "the danger of a single story." We have come to the same conclusion as Adichie that reading ethnic American books makes the reader feel overwhelmed with shame as s/he realizes that the American media coverage about Arabs has controlled the public mind.

Adichie rightfully explains that the West creates a single story by showing a people as one thing, and only one thing over and over again and that is what they become in the public mind. The single-story is fraught with stereotypes that are not necessarily untrue but are compellingly incomplete and make the single story become the only story. Few examples are Westerners' only story of Africans as inferior and starving, their single story of Islam as a religion of terrorism and backwardness, and Muslims' only story of Westerners as kuffar. To put it differently, identity must involve a multitude of determinants.

In conclusion, the chief virtue of this novel at work here is to highlight the damaging effect of ethnic cleansing and the necessity embedded in revisiting the past to cure the identity malaise that is caused by displacement. This author insists on subverting the hegemonic discourse and negative portrayals of their national identities throughout a historiographic metafictional counter-discourse. The novelist; with her style, creates a counter-discourse concerning the representation of her respective homeland and identity.

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