

## REDEFINING ISLAM AND ISLAMIC TERMS IN MOHJA KAHF'S THE GIRL IN THE TANGERINE SCARF

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### Abstract

Historically, Orientalism has perceived Islam in reductionist views for centuries. To resist this basic view, it is crucial to investigate Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2005), which redefines Islam and Islamic terms, such as Jihad, Hijrah, and Caliph in more positive insights. Kahf's text questions orientalists, which tend to misrepresent Muslims in a limited way, such as Jihad associated with terrorism and killing others instead of fighting against worldly desires. To contest these negative misrepresentations of the Muslim world, in her novel, Kahf uses Islamic sacred texts, such as Surah At-Taubah (Repentance) and Al-A'raf (The Heights), to redefine Islam as a religion, which promotes Salam (peace) and tolerance in the world instead of violence as misrepresented in Western liberalism. By engaging with postcolonial and Islamic studies, this paper investigates how Kahf uses the Quran and hadiths in her novel to reject imperialist perspectives. Thus, Kahf's novel explores the Islamic sacred texts to inspire people how to live in a modern society by appreciating different people regardless of their different races and faiths and practicing tolerance to establish a more global civilized society.

**Keyword:** US-Muslimah's fiction, Quran and Hadiths, Jihad , Hijrah, Caliph and leader, Tolerance

### Abstract

*Secara historis, Orientalisme telah memandang Islam dalam pandangan reduksionis selama berabad-abad. Untuk menolak pandangan dasar ini, penting untuk menyelidiki The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf (2005) karya Mohja Kahf, yang mendefinisikan ulang Islam dan istilah-istilah Islam, seperti Jihad, Hijrah, dan Khalifah dalam wawasan yang lebih positif. Teks Kahfi mempertanyakan para orientalis yang cenderung memberikan gambaran keliru tentang umat Islam secara terbatas, seperti Jihad yang dikaitkan dengan terorisme dan membunuh orang lain alih-alih berperang melawan keinginan duniawi. Untuk melawan kesalahpahaman negatif tentang dunia Muslim, dalam novelnya, Kahfi menggunakan teks suci Islam, seperti Surah At-Taubah (Pertobatan) dan Al-A'raf (Ketinggian), untuk mendefinisikan kembali Islam sebagai agama yang mengedepankan Salam ( perdamaian) dan toleransi di dunia dibandingkan kekerasan seperti yang disalahartikan dalam liberalisme Barat. Dengan terlibat dalam studi pascakolonial dan Islam, makalah ini menyelidiki bagaimana Kahf menggunakan Al-Quran dan hadis dalam novelnya untuk menolak perspektif imperialis. Oleh karena itu, novel Kahfi mengeksplorasi kitab-kitab suci Islam untuk menginspirasi masyarakat bagaimana hidup dalam masyarakat modern dengan menghargai orang yang berbeda tanpa membedakan ras dan keyakinannya serta mengamalkan toleransi untuk mewujudkan masyarakat beradab yang lebih global.*

**Kata Kunci:** Fiksi AS-Muslimah, Quran and Hadits, Jihad, Hijrah, Khalifah, Tolerance

## Introduction

Arguably, since 9/11, the 7/7 London Bombing, and the 11/13 Paris attack, Muslims are frequently attached to the ideas of terrorism. In *The Framing of Muslims*, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin explain how the media has an inescapable connection with politicians in shaping the audience's opinions. They state, "There is no conspiracy between politicians and the media to restrict how Muslims are represented and treated"<sup>1</sup>. They emphasize, however, "the habitual workings of the mainstream press and news media [lead] to a sometimes inadvertent complicity with power agendas"<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, in *The Framing of Muslims*, there is a connection between politicians and the media, primarily through the way politicians tend to shape certain fundamental opinions about Muslims in reductionist views, such as violence and terrorism, in the media that have been circulated for centuries. This is why Edward Said's *Orientalism*<sup>3</sup> is still relevant nowadays, as he criticizes the way European scholars, especially Orientalists, tend to misrepresent non-European cultures, including Islam and Muslims, in negative ways, such as by associating Jihad with killing others instead of fighting against worldly desires as this paper seeks to address.

Said's student, Joseph Massad, critiques "The act of proselytization," which aims "to

convert Muslims and Islam to Western liberalism and its values as the only just and sane system to which the entire planet must be converted"<sup>4</sup>. This criticism emerged after Massad criticized Paul Kahn, who claims, "We do not imagine that the global community of the future will be led by an Islamic cleric"<sup>5</sup>. Thus, it is crucial for Kahn to increase Western missionaries to convert and rescue "Muslim women and increasingly male (and female, though less attention is paid to the latter) Muslim 'homosexuals' from Islam's misogyny, homophobia, and intolerance"<sup>6</sup>. Thus, to question prejudice and hatred toward Islam, it is essential to explore Islamic sacred texts, such as the Quran and Hadiths, in Muslimah's or Muslim women's fiction, in this case, Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. This text utilizes the Quran, especially Surah At-Tawbah and Al-A'raf, which promote the ideas of Jihad, Hijrah, and Caliph, which work to undermine orientalist prejudice toward Islam. *Hadiths* are the Prophet's saying and deeds, and the second Holy Book for Muslims, a word deriving from Arabic meaning 'tradition', especially traditions relating to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s words and deeds.

This paper is inspired by Amin Malak's book, which studies "Muslim narrative writers who produce works in English, the world's latter-day lingua franca, and who project the culture and civilization of Islam from within"<sup>7</sup>. This

<sup>1</sup> Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (Harvard University Press, 2011), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Morey and Yaqin, 77.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph A Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Paul W Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Kahn, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Amina Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (SUNY Press, 2004), 2.

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paper investigates how Kahf projects Islamic culture, in this case, Islamic sacred texts from Muslimah's perspective. This investigation is also important to decolonize white supremacy, which tends to exclude Muslims from American belonging. Hasnul Djohar argues that we need to break white supremacy in our local traditions "by structuring solidarity among bordering groups and preserving our traditions instead of perpetuating white narrative ideologies 'The more things change, the more they stay the same'"<sup>8</sup>. One way to preserve Muslim cultures is by returning to Islamic sacred texts, such as Qur'an and Hadiths, as Kahf alludes throughout her novel. Talal Asad argues that Western liberalism aims to have Islamic civilization "remade in the image of liberal Protestant Christianity"<sup>9</sup>. However, prejudice may lead to pain and suffering for marginal people who want to live and practice Islamic values "by being humanized"<sup>10</sup>. Thus, to understand what it means to be a Muslimah or Muslim woman who struggles to live in the US, this paper examines how Kahf utilizes Islamic sacred texts, which function to resist the ideas of Orientalism and Western liberalism, which aim to rescue Muslimahs from Islamic values.

There are many scholars, such as Daniel Haque, Purnima Bose, Claire Chambers, Amrah Abdul Majid, and Sulaiman Suraiya et al., who investigated Kahf's novel. However, only a few use Islamic sacred texts that Kahf uses in her novel to question secular values. For example,

Haque argues that Kahf's novel highlights "the secular context as a place to foster the *umma*—the global, transnational community, thus challenging and expanding secular rights and values"<sup>11</sup>. Haque investigates this novel by focusing on how this novel focuses on the ideas of secularism develop the Ummah or multinational societies. However, this paper focuses on Islamic sacred texts to foster the Ummah by exploring the Quran and hadiths, which inspire Muslims how to live in secular countries, in this case, the US. Moreover, Purnima Bose argues that Kahf depicts her protagonist, Khadra, who travels to her homeland, Syria, where she has "an epiphany regarding Sufism"<sup>12</sup>. This experience contests "the religious orthodoxy of her youth and helps to solidarity her burgeoning feminism"<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, Kahf's novel explores the ideas of Sufism, which can be seen through the way Kahf alludes to Gibran and Rumi's poems, which this paper also discusses. However, this paper examines these poems, which allude to the Quran, especially Gibran's poem about the ideas of existence or "being", especially about the goal of "being" a Muslim is to be a caliph or the most helpful person in their community that this paper also discuss.

Many scholars, such as Claire Chambers and Martina Koegeler-Abdi, tend to investigate Kahf's novel from Western perspectives as Chambers argues that Kahf's novel likely explores "the abuse, forced marriage or

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<sup>8</sup> Hasnul Insani Djohar, *Rewriting Islam: Decolonialism, Justice, and Cotemporary Muslimah Literature* (Ohio State University Press, 2024), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Asad, Talal, "Europe against Islam: Islam in Europe," *Muslim World* 87, April 1997, 2 edition, 189.

<sup>10</sup> Asad, Talal, 189.

<sup>11</sup> Danielle Haque, "The Post-Secular Turn and Muslim American Literature," *American Literature* 86, no. 4 (2014), 801.

<sup>12</sup> Purnima Bose, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf by Mohja Kahf* (Indiana Magazine of History, 2009), 90.

<sup>13</sup> Bose, 90.

kidnapping of the passive, oppressed Muslim female”<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, Koegeler-Abdi claims that Arab-American-feminist-writers struggle "not only with patriarchal frameworks in Muslim communities that consider feminism a Western intervention but their work is often caught in between US orientalism and global feminism' stereotypes"<sup>15</sup>. Simultaneously, Nawel Meriem Ouhiba affirms that Western feminists are primarily shaped by “gender relations, economy, radical change in objectives and lifestyles, and capitalism”<sup>16</sup>. To contest this limited perspective, Sulaiman Suraiya et al. claim that Kahf's protagonist is depicted more positively "to negotiate their sense of belonging in the American diaspora space, through Islamic jurisprudence or a more dialectic approach to Islamic doctrine”<sup>17</sup>. However, Suraiya Sulaiman et al. lack focus on Islamic sacred texts, such as the Quran and Hadith, as this paper seeks to address the question of white supremacy.

Moreover, Amrah Abdul Majid asserts that Kahf's woman, Khadra, "considers Islam not only as a way of life in the West but also as an important element in developing her identity as a Muslim in America"<sup>18</sup>. Khadra develops her identity by alluding to Islamic sacred texts, as this paper illuminates, especially whenever

Khadra feels threatened by white American extremists; she often recites Surah or verses of the Quran. This is why it is essential to explore Islamic sacred texts in Kahf's novel: to illuminate how the protagonist both preserves her Islamic roots and undermines imperialism, which tends to see Muslimah or Muslim women as passive and oppressed. Moreover, Djohar argues that "Kahf shows the formation of the global Ummah, which is created through the Islamic greeting, which integrates all Muslims in the world”<sup>19</sup>. This is why Kahf names the mosque or Da'wah centre where her protagonist, Khadra, grows up in Indiana, the mosque “Masjid Salam Alaikum, or Salam Mosque” (31) to question US liberalism. This liberalism tends to exclude Islam from the ideas of modernity and creativity as Joseph Massad explores in his book, *Islam in Liberalism*<sup>20</sup>, which is also discussed in the following section.

### **Redefining Jihad and Hijrah (Migration)**

Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* redefines Jihad as the ways Muslims spend their wealth and their souls in Allah's ways, such as Sedeqah or charity and developing the global Ummah (Muslim community). Unlike orientalist perspectives, which tend to perceive Jihad as

<sup>14</sup> Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fiction: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (Springer, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Martina Koegeler-Abdi, “Muslim Feminist Agency and Arab American Literature: A Case Study of Mohja Kahf's the Girl in the Tangerine Scarf,” *Gender Forum*, no. 65 (2017), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Nawel Meriem Ouhiba, “Beyond the Veil: Exploring Muslim Women's Multidimensional Identities in Laila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*,” *International Journal of English and Comparative Literary Studies* 2, no. 5 (2021): 25–38.

<sup>17</sup> Sulaiman, Suraiya, Mohammad A. Quayum, and NOR FARIDAH ABDUL MANAF, “Negotiating Muslim Women's

Rights and Identity in American Diaspora Space: An Islamic Feminist Study of Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*,” *KEMANUSIAAN: The Asian Journal of Humanities* 25, no. 1 (2018), 43.

<sup>18</sup> Amrah Abdul Majid, “The Many Ways of Being Muslim: The Practice of Immanent Critique in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*,” *Akademika* 87, no. 1 (2017), 222.

<sup>19</sup> Hasnul Insani Djohar, “The Crossroads of America” and *Bildungsroman* in Mohja Kahf's and Randa Jarrar's Fiction,” *College Literature* 48, no. 1 (2021), 68.

<sup>20</sup> Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*.

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killing others, Kahf's woman, Khadra, defines Jihad as "striving your wealth and yourself in the path of God"<sup>21</sup>. In Kahf's contexts, the primary role of sacred texts such as the Quran is to inspire Muslims how to deal with their problems by following God's teaching, especially Quran Surah At-Taubah, 9:21, defining Jihad as fighting against hedonism. This Surah or verse inspires Muslims not to be afraid of living in a foreign country, as Allah promises to protect Muslims as long as they follow His orders. These orders include Jihad by spending their wealth and their time to worship Allah as this is the main goal of Muslims to live in the world to prepare themselves to live in the afterlife. At the beginning of one of her chapters, Kahf quotes Quran Surah 9:21: "*Go forth lightly and heavily and strive with your wealth and your selves in the path of God, that is best for you if you knew*"<sup>22</sup>. In Nabawi tafsir or exegesis, this Surah explains that Allah will grant Muslims His grace and His blessing and provide them with heaven if they perform Jihad or follow Allah's ways and continue Hijrah (migration) or moving from one place to another to find God's paths. Historically, Hijrah is defined as the journey of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH/Peace be Upon Him) from Mecca to Medina when Islam first emerged in 622. This year is also defined as the epoch of the year of Hijriyah. Relevantly, this verse tells Muslims how to cope with the difficulties of living in the US by spending their wealth and efforts in God's ways. Suppose Muslims spend their money and wealth in Allah's paths, including building masjids or mosques and feeding the poor and orphans. In that case,

Muslims consider performing Jihad, which is misunderstood in orientalist's debates that tend to associate the word Jihad with war and terrorism. Thus, by alluding to QS. At-Taubah, ayah or verse 21, Kahf's novel undermines the orientalist misconceptions, which tend to define Arabic names, including Jihad and Hijrah, in a very limited way. Joseph Massad argues that "Some of the new meanings and referents of Islam had a significant impact on political and social thought as well as on national and international politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and may have even more of an impact in the twenty-first"<sup>23</sup>. These Islamic names, including Jihad has been attached to the ideas of terrorism and "killer" in orientalist's debates. Thus, Kahf's novel needs to explore the term Jihad, including by quoting the Quran, Surah 9:21, which discusses the ideas of Jihad to contest imperialism by redefining Jihad as "striving your wealth and yourself in the path of God"<sup>24</sup>.

As argued previously, Jihad and Hijrah can be linked to the journey of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who migrated from Mecca to Madinah in the seventh century. This process of moving on is considered as Hijrah, which is better for Muslims; if they are stuck on one problem, they should migrate to find a better place. Simultaneously, Khadra's father, Wajdy, also keeps moving on and did *Hijrah* from Syria, during the Civil war period under the Bashar Al-Assad regime, to a foreign land, the US, and from the Rocky Mountain to "The Crossroads of America"<sup>25</sup>, Indiana, when Khadra Shamy and

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<sup>21</sup> Mohja Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (NY: Carrol & Graf Publishers., n.d.), 14.

<sup>22</sup> Kahf, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Kahf, 14.



her elder brother, Eyad Shamy were seven and nine years old. Wajdy tries to find a new job in Hoosier's land as a "Chapter Coordinator, Dawah Center"<sup>26</sup> to stay on God's path and practice the real Jihad, which gives his wealth and effort in Dawah centre as an imam or a Chapter Coordinator. However, living as a Muslim in the US is not easy for Wajdy, especially after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Although the setting of the novel is in the 1970s, this novel is still relevant nowadays as US Muslims are still struggling to live in the US. This condition can be linked to Edward Said's *Orientalism*<sup>27</sup>, which is still connected to the current situation as we can see that the orientalist's debates about Jihad and Hijrah remained attached to the ideas of terrorism. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary OED defines Jihad as "a religious war of Muslims against unbelievers, inculcated as a duty by the Quran and traditions." OED claims Jihad is a Muslim religious war to fight against nonbelievers; thus, OED needs to renew this definition since it defines this term in an old-fashioned way. Unlike OED, Kahf initially defines the Jihad: "Go wherever in the country there were Muslims who wanted to learn Islam better, to teach it to their children, to build mosques, to help suffer Muslims in other countries, and to find solutions to how living in kuffar land made practising Islam hard"<sup>28</sup>. Khadra's father, Wajdy, migrates to the US wants to teach Muslim communities in the US about Islam and the Quran as he works as the Imam in Da'wah Center in Indiana. In this sense,

Kahf's text defines Jihad, as the ways for Muslims who live in a foreign country want to educate Muslims about Islamic principles including praying, reading the Quran, and other worshipping in Islam, such as fasting and conducting pilgrimage. This educating role function to help Muslims who are struggling to live in the host land, because of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism by redefining Jihad and Hijrah based on Islamic sacred Texts. This definition contests the OED, which fundamentally defines Jihad as a religious war, which tends to associate Jihad with radical groups, violence, and war instead of helping Muslims who are suffering while living in a foreign land, as Kahf discusses in her novel in the following examples.

Arguably, Kahf's definition of Jihad is relevant to the Quran, QS. At-Taubah 21 urges Muslims to devote their lives and wealth to God's ways, including feeding the poor, as Kahf explores in her story. For example, when Kahf's woman, Khadra, is active on the CMC campus, Khadra spends her time as an activist with her friends to support Muslims within the US and beyond. Khadra, with other Campus Muslim Council (CMC) activists, is active in holding the CMC's annual Ramadan screening and conferences on Muslims' suffering in different countries, such as "divestment from South Africa"<sup>29</sup>, "Hindu terrorism against Muslims in India"<sup>30</sup>, and "Afghan camps in Peshawar"<sup>31</sup>, where the US government support in Afghanistan is merely "to help free Soviet Jews"<sup>32</sup>. By illuminating the suffering of

<sup>26</sup> Kahf, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>28</sup> Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Kahf, 202.

<sup>30</sup> Kahf, 202.

<sup>31</sup> Kahf, 202.

<sup>32</sup> Kahf, 202.

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Muslims in other countries, Kahf highlights why it is essential to build mutual understanding and tolerance among different people to reduce prejudice and hatred; thus, wars between two countries, such as Palestine and Israel, can be solved through dialogue instead of violence and oppression as Israel as occupied Palestine for more than seventy-five years. To reject limited definition of Jihad as killing instead of tolerance, Khadra and her family practice Islamic pillars, such as Shalah or praying by pointing to Ka'bah (praying point in Mecca) in public life to let Anglo-American society understand about Islam or Muslims who need to perform Shalah five times a day. When Khadra and her father, Wajdi, are travelling, they want to pray, but they do not have a prayer mat; Wajdi believes that "[a]ll the world is a prayer mat," and that earth is pure<sup>33</sup>. By depicting the earth, especially the US land, is pure Wajdi illuminates how we should appreciate different people, including their cultures and their lands, with respects no matter how different our faiths and skins are. Nosaybah Awajan and M. Al-Shetami (2021) argue that "Kahf presents Islam as a comprehensive approach to life that is not detached from day-to-day experiences and dealings"<sup>34</sup>. How Wajdi practices Islam based on day-to-day experiences can be understood through the way Cariello states that "Kahf introduces that Islam is "a fact of ordinary, everyday and anywhere practice"<sup>35</sup>. This daily activity can also be seen throughout Kahf's stories, especially when the Shamy family practices Islam within the mosque or Da'wah

Center and beyond the Masjid. This practice is vital to introduce Islam and make it familiar among Anglo-Americans to reduce prejudice and hatred towards Muslims. In other words, by depicting Wajdi is praying in public space, Kahf's text questions Islamophobia mind-set who are afraid to see Islam or Muslims praying in public space where some Anglo-Americans believe that faiths and religions should not practice in public space but private ones. However, by practising different actions from Anglo-American dominance, Kahf's characters, Wajdi and Khadra reject Western liberalism, which is seemingly accommodate individual freedom but deny it if it is practised by Muslims. This practice can be read as an irony in Kahf's novel, where US individual freedom is mainly for Anglo-American society, instead of minority like Khadra and Wajdi.

### **Redefining Islam and Caliph (Leadership)**

Kahf's novel questions orientalism by redefining Islamic terms, such as Caliph or leadership, which tends to be attached to the idea of Jihad, which is degenerated its meaning in Western liberalism. In doing so, Kahf arguably alludes to the Quran, Surah the Poets 27 dealing with the inspiration of being Caliph: "Say, 'He is Lord of the East and of the West and of all that is between the two.' If you have intelligence"<sup>36</sup>. This Ayah (verse) inspires Muslims to be caliphs or leaders who can think positively and intelligently that their existence to live in this world is to promote tolerance and mutual

<sup>33</sup> Kahf, 104.

<sup>34</sup> Awajan, Nosaybah Waled, and Mahmoud Flayeh Al-Shetawi, "Empowering Muslims in Leila Aboulela's Minaret and Mohja Kahf's The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf," *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies* 21, no. 1 (2021), 135.

<sup>35</sup> Cariello, Marta, *Homeland, America, Bismillah': Mohja Kahf's The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf and the Dissonance of Nationhood* (Tolomeo, 2017), 232.

<sup>36</sup> Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, 187.

understanding between different groups. This Ayah educates Muslims that Allah creates human beings with different races and skins but similar goal, which is worshipping Allah who forms Muslims for being a Caliph who has Taqwa or Iman (faith) in his/her heart. Additionally, this Surah explains how God creates the East representing sunrises and the West representing sunsets to highlight various cultures where the countries have sunrises and sunsets, which may represent East and West, where many people live with different cultural and religious backgrounds. Indeed, creating sunrises and sunsets representing East and West reminds us of how to respect other cultures, which have unique places and conditions where sunrises and sunsets happen. Sunrises and sunsets also represent the beginning and the ending of our lives, which reminds us of the beginning of our lives in the world and the ending of our lives in the hereafter. Arguably, human beings have the same functions and goals living in this world, which should be shared peacefully without any culture dominating over another. Our lives depend on the sun as the centre of the world instead of a dominant culture, which tends to control marginal groups who seemingly live in the margin of the world. Thus, this Surah, Poet 27, inspires Muslims how to be caliphs or leaders who can use their intelligence to think wisely and respect different cultures to live peacefully and harmoniously no matters how different their cultures and religions.

Moreover, this verse, the Poet 27, advocates that Muslims apply their critical thinking skills to become helpful caliphs and

successful leaders, including self-leadership. Muslims must be caliphs while living in a foreign country to maintain their Islamic traditions and help other Muslims to learn about Islam. Similarly, being a caliph, Muslims need to understand what they do, why they do Islamic tradition, and how they do it. Regarding the ideas of the caliph, especially self-leadership, Kahf depicts her protagonist, Khadra, as leading herself by preserving her Islamic culture to avoid the loss of her roots of the Muslim world in the foreign land. This loss of culture is also described by representing Khadra's friend, Joy, who has lost her ancestor who had immigrated to the State in the 1950s but "had failed to preserve their identity"<sup>37</sup>, and they did whatever the Ellis Island officer said"<sup>38</sup>. By depicting the Arab ancestors failing to preserve their heritage, Kahf shows the importance of the Quran in reminding Muslims to be caliphs by applying critical thinking not to lose their Islamic heritage. Kahf also describes how Joy's mother fails to preserve Islamic values in her daily life and becomes a Christian. However, Joy's father successfully became a caliph as he practised Islamic tradition daily while living in the US. Khadra spies on Joy's father when he is "on his prayer rug, his back to her, finishing off a slow-moving rakat"<sup>39</sup>. Although Joy has parents with different religious backgrounds, she respects them as they have the same roots or culture, the Islamic culture. In this sense, Kahf's novel highlights the ideas of the caliph or self-leadership in practising Islam daily to maintain its roots and traditions. Being the caliph is likely a key success for Khadra and Joy, who are Arab second generations who need to continue to promote the caliph's ideas by

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<sup>37</sup> Kahf, 184.

<sup>38</sup> Kahf, 184.

<sup>39</sup> Kahf, 192.



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preserving their cultures and respecting others' traditions.

Kahf needs to refer to the Quran in her story to reveal how Muslims read and practice *Surah* or chapter in the Quran, which inspires Muslims to be caliphs who have a strong will to maintain their Islamic traditions no matter how difficult it is to preserve them. The *Surah* means not only "a chapter or large section of the Quran" (OED) but also "the fermented sap of various species of palms, such as the wild date, the coconut, and the Palmyra" (OED). The OED likely defines the *Surah* as a juice, which is a symbol of a healthy drink for Muslims to be the caliph who also has a role in supporting and helping other marginal groups living in the host lands. This supporting role can be seen through how Khadra is depicted as reading the Quran in public events conducted by the CMC or "Campus Muslim Community"<sup>40</sup>. The CMC opens "one of the public events with a reading from the Quran"<sup>41</sup>, where Khadra recites and "choosing the *Surah* called 'The Friday/Congregation'<sup>42</sup>. Muslims practice *Jemaah* (together) prayer every Friday to maintain their brotherhood and congregation, especially when they live in the host land; they need a sense of belonging and unity from other Muslims. The ideas of unity and solidarity can be seen through how Khadra and her CMC activists often help Muslims living within the US and beyond. Assisting other people, both Muslims and non-Muslims, is also one of the characteristics of a caliph who is

helpful to other people instead of being individualistic and selfish.

Regarding the idea of the caliph, Kahf also quotes Gibran's poems, which remind Muslims of their existence in this world, which is for being a caliph. Kahf quotes Gibran's famous poem: "Give me the flute, then, and sing to me. For in song lies the mystery of being"<sup>43</sup>. The aesthetic part of this poem can be seen in the phrase "the mystery of being," which may refer to the mystery of life and the goal of being human, especially the life goal for Muslims is to be the caliph who is the most helpful person in this world. To be the caliph, a Muslim should appreciate different people and work together with various people. The cooperation between different people can be seen through the way Kahf describes Joy's mother, Rose, who recites Gibran's poem and "pick[s] up a guitar from the corner of the porch and strum[s] it as the fireflies of the evening came out"<sup>44</sup>. Rose sings this poem after Joy's dad, Baker, explains to Khadra and Joy the history of America and the Middle East: "Incredible, how fertile this land is, Amreeka"<sup>45</sup>. He compares it to the Middle East, which was as prosperous as well. "But the kings of the old days—now, I am talking pre-Islam, pre-Christianity, pre-Roman even, going way back—well, the kings, they cut down the cedar forests to finance war after war, see. Moreover, now we have what we have"<sup>46</sup>. Kahf uses kings representing caliphs to remind the leaders of their existence and maintain peace and harmony between people of various natures. Cedar forests represent nature, which needs to be protected to

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<sup>40</sup> Kahf, 203.

<sup>41</sup> Kahf.

<sup>42</sup> Kahf, 203.

<sup>43</sup> Kahf, 191.

<sup>44</sup> Kahf, 191.

<sup>45</sup> Kahf, 190.

<sup>46</sup> Kahf, 191.

maintain the endurance of our world, as cedar also represents both new beginnings and longevity or immortality. Indeed, Baker reviews the kings representing the caliphs who finance the wars by cutting down the forest, which can be linked to the way the present kings representing the US foreign policy prefer to finance Israel in supporting Israel's occupation in Palestine, instead of promoting peace and justice in Palestine. Moreover, referring to cutting forests can be understood as a critique of significant US companies, such as Google, Facebook, and Apple, representing global, transnational capitalism, which tends to exploit both humans and nature to reach their capitalist agenda. Thus, Kahf's text redefines Islamic terms, such as Caliph as an intelligent leader who has life goal to worship God and promote peace and justice in this worldly life to establish a more civilized global society.

### **Redefining Islam and Tasamuh (Tolerance)**

Kahf's text redefines Islam as promoting the ideas of Tasamuh (tolerance) or peace by alluding to Surah Al—A'raf: 199. This Surah also emphasizes that the key to being a good caliph is understanding different people through tolerance and social justice. Especially a good leader should be able to promote these ideas. Kahf quotes the Quran—The Wall Between Heaven and Hell: 199, highlighting Tasamuh (tolerance): "Cultivate tolerance, and enjoin justice, and avoid the fools"<sup>47</sup> (345). This verse teaches Muslims how to develop tolerance and practice justice as a caliph always practices in daily-based activities. Ibn Kathir also explains this Surah: "Show forgiveness, enjoin Al-'Urf

(the good), and turn away from the foolish (do not punish them)" Surah Al-A'raf Ayat 199 (7:199 Quran) With Tafsir - My Islam. Allah reminds Muslims to forgive and respect others as this forgiveness can lead Muslims to be caliphs who can control their temper and selfishness, including hatred and prejudice toward people who have different religious and cultural backgrounds.

In line with this verse, Kahf describes how Khadra often faces generalization and injustices from certain Anglo-Americans who have a limited understanding of Islamic traditions and intolerant or prejudice toward Muslimah. When Khadra goes to an American bank to get a loan to buy a house, an Anglo-American mortgage officer, Mr Kawalski, thinks that a man, a Sikh, who sits next to her, is her husband just because he covers his head with his turban just like Khadra who wears the hijab. After Khadra waits for the officer for a long time, she asks the receptionist, who tells her that Mr Kawalski has left and "wondered why [Khadra] did not go in with [her] husband. He assumed [Khadra was not] allowed to—"48. By assuming that Khadra is the Sikh's wife, Mr. Kawalski has a generalization toward Muslim women who are often attached to the ideas of being passive and oppressed as they "are not allowed"<sup>49</sup> to be active and independent. In this sense, Kahf's text also uses satires in her novel by depicting how prejudice and stereotypes are "rampant" among Anglo-Americans who often perceive Muslim women as being dependent on their men. To undermine these old-fashioned ideas about Muslimah, Kahf depicts Khadra as being an

<sup>47</sup> Kahf, 345.

<sup>48</sup> Kahf.

<sup>49</sup> Kahf.

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independent woman who can build her home, representing her identity regardless of borrowing money from the bank. However, her dream to have a home in the US remains an illusion as the banker has prejudice toward Muslimah. This is why Kahf's novel is important, as it highlights the struggles of Muslim women living in the US, as they often face prejudice and discrimination because of stereotypes of the veils. To resist these stereotypes, Kahf uses the Quran, especially Surah Al-A'raf, which inspires Muslims how to be a caliph who can understand people who are different from them, but Kahf represents Anglo-Americans as intolerant and prejudice toward Muslimah to reject white supremacy.

Moreover, Kahf applies sacred texts, such as Hadiths, in her writings to teach Muslimah how to live with their neighbors who are prejudice by promoting tolerance and respecting people with different cultural and religious backgrounds.

"Whose believeth in God and the Last Day, let them be generous to the guests, and whoso believeth in God and the Last Day, Let them be generous to the neighbour, and whoso believeth in God and the Last Day, let them speak kindly or keep silent—Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him"<sup>50</sup>.

This Hadith encourages Muslims to treat their guests and neighbours respectfully or keep silent rather than hurting others. In this scene, Kahf also describes how the Shamy have good relationships with their unique neighbours, such

as the transgender couple of Lindsey and Leslie, who are looking for "an intentional community"<sup>51</sup>, and the Mormon couple of John Whitcomb and Norma Whitcomb who believe that "coffee and tea were against their religion"<sup>52</sup>. Despite having different faiths from their neighbours, the Shamy respect them and visit each other. By returning to the Hadith, Kahf shows how US Muslims live based on the Hadith (traditions) and promotes mutual understanding and tolerance, which can develop by being generous to their neighbours. Additionally, by depicting the Shamy's diverse neighbours, Kahf seemingly indicates that not only US Muslims are heterogenous, but also US non-Muslims. Through Kahf's multicultural narratives, which are not merely about the religiosity of Islam and Christianity, she shows how those two different ethnicities and religious groups can interact well. Thus, diversity and tolerance can be actually practiced in US modern society.

Kahf's novel reveals how Islam or Muslim-Americans promote tolerance and sympathy by highlighting the similarities between two cultures, Arabs and Americans. For example, when the Shamy meet their new neighbour, the Whitcomb, they are surprised as they find that, the Whitcomb also do not "smoke, either, or drink alcohol"<sup>53</sup>. Kahf further depicts the Shamys who also have shared values with their neighbour, John Whitcomb, who is "a hard-working family man who stay[s] close to home in the evenings. Norma Whitcomb ha[s] married young, just like Ebtehaj, and dress[es] modestly"<sup>54</sup>. By emphasizing these equal values,

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<sup>50</sup> Kahf, 146.

<sup>51</sup> Kahf, 146.

<sup>52</sup> Kahf, 147.

<sup>53</sup> Kahf, 147.

<sup>54</sup> Kahf, 147.

Kahf shows that despite being diverse communities, both Muslims and Christians still have similar ethics, especially in valuing both neighbourhood and family hood. This neighbour bond can be seen in how Ebtehaj and Norma exchange food and recipes. This food exchange can be seen as a symbol of how Muslims and Christians can also exchange their perspectives on both cultures and faiths. In this sense, Kahf's story provides contemporary American multicultural society by depicting US Muslims and US Non-Muslims interacting by promoting tolerance and respecting different people and various traditions.

The author continuously describes the excellent relationship between Muslims and Christians to promote mutual understanding between different people. Kahf represents an American Christian, Mrs. Moore, who is eager to know about Muslims. Kahf describes Mrs. Moore, who lives near Da'wah Center and shares her garden fruits with the Dawah officers. She says, "I am Mrs. Moore. I am a friend. Here is some rhubarb"<sup>55</sup>. This depiction can be seen as a strategy for the author to highlight the good relationships between Muslims and Christians in contemporary US society to counter hatred and prejudice in global communities. This novel also depicts how Mrs Moore "has lived in Syria and learned Arabic"<sup>56</sup> to highlight how tolerance and sympathy can be learned by visiting other countries and cultures. Thus, hatred and prejudice can be decreased meaningfully. In this sense, this text redefines Islam as a religion that promotes tolerance and peace to establish a more civilized global society.

Another way Kahf's novel redefines Islam as promoting tolerance and developing mutual understanding in contemporary society is by depicting the protagonists visiting different countries and houses, especially neighbours with other cultures and religions, as Kahf reveals in her novel. This idea can be seen through how Khadra is depicted as visiting Joy's house, where she converses with Joy's family; thus, Joy's mother understands Islam more. Khadra explains Muslims to Joy's mother, who thinks that Muslims are very strict, and that "men should be men and women should be women"<sup>57</sup>. Khadra answers that Islam allows "a little more flexibility than that, auntie. I mean, the Prophet used to help his wife with the housework, and Sitna Aisha led a battle once"<sup>58</sup>. Through the allusion to the story of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who often supports his wife, especially in the household, this novel counters stereotypes about Muslims who are usually attached to the ideas of oppression; instead, Muslims appreciate their women as the Prophet (PBUH) provides examples to Muslims. In this sense, the text also offers a good caliph or leader represented by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who often supports his women, including the households. However, Prophet Muhammad's role is frequently excluded in orientalist debates, which usually perceive Muslim men stereotypically as attaching them to the ideas of oppression and violence. To resist these ideas, Kahf renders her male characters, especially her father, Wajdy, as a good caliph or leader as he has been appointed as a Muslim director at Da'wah Center, where he can manage the Da'wah Center professionally, including motivating Muslims at the mosque to

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<sup>55</sup> Kahf, 40.

<sup>56</sup> Kahf, 41.

<sup>57</sup> Kahf, 192.

<sup>58</sup> Kahf, 192.

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work together, especially during hard times. For example, when Da'wah Center has limited finances, they work together to develop the mosque. Wajdy and the Da'wah Center officers "worked long hours for low salaries. Denied themselves other careers where they could have made more money." The Center wives "took turns cleaning the house, right down to the toilet bowls, to save on cleaning bills, and the Dawah men mowed the lawn and did the maintenance work themselves. Service on the sake of the On-High"<sup>59</sup>. In this sense, Kahf's text reveals how the Quran inspires Muslims to be caliphs who can lead themselves and others to live modestly and work together to develop the Ummah, a global Muslim community. In this sense, Kahf's text redefines Islam by illuminating how Islam is well promoting tolerance and compassion, instead of hatred and violence as debated in Western liberalism.

Kahf continues to redefine Islam by depicting how Islam and its prophet, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) appreciate women's existence. In doing so, Kahf describes how Sitna Aisha, the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) wife, leads the war: "Sitna Aisha led a battle once"<sup>60</sup>. Thus, women can also be caliphs or leaders, which is dominated by men not only in Muslim communities but also in Anglo-American society. By providing the example of how Sitna Aisha leads the Camel War, Kahf's text undermines stereotypes about Muslim women who are often perceived as weak and passive. Thus, Kahf's novel alludes to the story of Muslim leaders, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his wife, Sitna Aisha, to illuminate the ideas of caliphs or leaders who can control both

themselves and their communities to find God's ways, including how to live with various ethnicities peacefully and harmoniously regarding their different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Moreover, Kahf redefines Islam and Islamic terms in her novel by quoting some Hadiths at the beginning of her some chapters dealing with the stories of why it is essential for Muslimah to preserve their heritage and traditions to promote the ideas of tolerance and caliph in the host land. Kahf quotes the Hadith Qudsi: "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known" (78). This Hadith describes God and all of His wonderful creations as treasures that need to be searched for and preserved to gain a better life. Arguably, Jalaluddin Rumi quotes this Hadith in his poems to remind Muslims that their existence in this world is to find God's path, which is also the role of a caliph or a leader. In this sense, Kahf quotes this Hadith to remind us of our treasures as humans who are created equally by God regardless of our races and religions. However, we are designed as a caliph to control ourselves from being selfish but caring to our neighbours. Thus, this text reveals how Muslims should live as caliphs, self-leadership, who understand how to live with neighbours peacefully and harmoniously instead of living with hatred and prejudice as Kahf's novel critiques KKK, the Ku Klux Klan, who discriminated against Muslims in the 1970s when this novel is set in Indiana.

Arguably, Kahf depicts this KKK radical group at the beginning of the chapter dealing with the stories of the protagonist faced

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<sup>59</sup> Kahf.

<sup>60</sup> Kahf, 192.



discrimination to remind us that US racism linked to the KKK that wants to maintain white supremacy. In doing so, Kahf describes Zuhura's, Khadra's friend, engagement party when the KKK attacks these Muslimah. At this party, no men come, so Muslim ladies can "remove their headscarves and cover-ups at the door"<sup>61</sup>. Significantly, this hijab removal can be seen as a symbol of how the Muslimah have found and maintained the beautiful treasures of their hair by covering and being seen only by themselves and their Mahram, such as husband, father, and brother, not by other men or in public life. Thus, hairs for Muslimahs are their treasures that need to be covered. By covering their own "treasures", it reveals that Muslimah have been aware of gender issues since the beginning of Islam in the seventh century or a long time before Anglo-feminism emerged because they have understood how to protect their treasures from the man's gaze. However, to shield their treasures, Muslimah have to deal with anti-Islam groups, such as the KKK. The narrator describes that Khadra screams when she sees "Markings in white spray paint were blazoned across the windowpanes of the clubhouse. Aghast, Khadra snapped pictures of them: FUCK YOU, RAGHEADS. DIE. They were dinged: KKK, 100% USA"<sup>62</sup>. In this context, Muslimah struggle to live and preserve their Islamic heritage, especially their treasures of the hijab while living in the US. Ironically, because Muslimah wear the hijab in the US, Ku Klux Klan (KKK) think that they have legitimation to attack Muslimah in the host land. In this sense, Kahf's novel uses irony; when Muslimah are eager to preserve their treasure, which is

represented by their hijabs, as they need to be known or acknowledged, the KKK attack them as the hijab is often attached to terrorism and oppression. To question this prejudice, Kahf renders Khadra as struggling to live in the US as she has to lose her treasure or her hijab. The narrator describes when Khadra has to take off her hijab when she has an interview for being a photographer in Indiana. Ironically, to survive, Kahf's woman has to lose her treasure, the hijab. This is why it is important for Kahf to redefine Islam in her novel to help to reduce prejudice and hatred toward Muslimah as experienced by the protagonist and her friends. Kahf also redefines Islamic terms such as Jihad and Caliph not only to reject imperialist terms, but also to remind Muslims of their existence in this world. Muslims exist in the world to worship Allah by being a caliph or self-control, which is the true meaning of Jihad, which is fighting against, self-desires to follow hedonism instead of following Allah's ways. These ideas are discussed in both the Quran and Kahf's novel, which rewrites Islam and Islamic terms, such as Jihad, Hijrah, and Caliph, which are misrepresented in the orientalist debates. To reject these orientalist ideas, Kahf's novel redefines Islam and Islamic terms, such as Jihad as spending wealth and efforts in Allah's ways instead of pursuing hedonism.

### Conclusion

This paper explores how Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* utilizes and redefines Islamic terminologies, such as Jihad, Hijrah, Caliph, and Tasamuh (tolerance) to undermine Orientalism and Western liberalism, which tend

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<sup>61</sup> Kahf, 78.

<sup>62</sup> Kahf, 82.

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to exclude Islam from the ideas of modernity and civilization. In doing so, Kahf depicts her protagonist, Kahdra, and her family, the Shamy, struggle to practice Islam in US public life as prejudice and hatred towards Muslims are likely increased, especially after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. To reduce tension toward Islam, Kahf depicts the Shamy family practising Islam as a daily activity and reciting the Quran, especially when they face discrimination when they live in the US. Kahf alludes to the Quran, especially Surah At-Taubah and Al-A'raf, which promote the ideas of Jihad, Hijrah, and Caliph, to introduce Islam and make it familiar among Anglo-American society to develop mutual understanding and tolerance. These Arabic terms are important in Kahf's stories to question the "improper" translations of the terms in US liberalism; for example, the words of Jihad, which is often associated with killing and war instead of fighting against worldly desires or individual desires to be selfish or hurt other people. It is important to discuss this contradiction to reduce hatred and misunderstanding between different peoples with different cultural and religious backgrounds, as Kahf describes throughout her stories.

This paper also reveals how Kahf's novel explores the Qur'an, especially Surah Al-A'raf, which promotes the ideas of a caliph or leadership to remind Muslims of their existence in this world to worship God by being a caliph who can control his/her hedonist desires to find God's way as a Jihadi (fighting against hedonism) practice every day. However, these Arabic terms have been translated in a limited way in Western knowledge, including the Oxford

English Dictionary. Thus, it is important to explore these Arabic terms from Muslim perspectives to undermine Western liberalism, which tends to translate Arabic terms inappropriately, as Massad argues in *Islam in Liberalism*<sup>63</sup>. Although this paper discusses how Kahf's novel contests imperialism by exploring Arabic terms, it does not touch on the ideas of Islamic places, such as the Da'wah Center and Masjid, holy places for Muslims to pray. These places also work to question dominant narratives about Islam, including Islamic holy places, which tend to attach to the ideas of terrorism instead of the places to develop Global Ummah, which is the Muslim community working together to support marginal groups. Contemporary literary scholars can explore these ideas further in future research, especially scholars who are involved in the field of MELA, Muslimah English Literary Association, who are interested in investigating literary texts either written by Muslimah writers from around the globe or discussed the Muslim world by both Muslimah and Non-Muslimah writers. Thus, this paper works as a pioneer in developing both CML, Contemporary Muslimah Literature, and MELA, Muslimah English Literary Association, which have been new emerged in the last two decades: please read further Djohar's *Rewriting Islam: Decolonialism, Justice, and Contemporary Muslimah Literature* (2024).

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<sup>63</sup> Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*.

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