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The Fourth Space as an Escape from Colliding Cultures in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

ABSTRACT

The main axis of Arab American literature is its portrayal of the experiences that Arab Americans go through in their daily life inside and outside the USA. Taking Mohja Kahf's novel as a literary sample, this paper examines the extent to which triple consciousness, faith development, and existentialist thought forge Khadra's perplexity in understanding her identity – she struggles to explore her true self in two different cultural realms i.e., Mecca and Indianapolis. By employing points of view and criticism of well-known scholars and critics such as Erik Erikson, Henri Tajfel and James Fowler, this paper concludes that Khadra, as an escape from her psychological unrest in two incompatible cultures, locates herself in what I call as the fourth space.

Keywords: Mohja Kahf, arab american, fourth space, identity, triple consciousness

Introduction

Diaspora is a complex notion; its figures are always in continuous struggle to reconcile the host-country they are living in and the motherland they are attached to, whether for cultural, political, and in some cases, religious reasons. William Safran (1991) draws attention to some of the main tenets of the term diaspora and the characteristics of its societies. He argues that there are six features with which to categorize a diasporic society. These are:

A construction of a collective memory, vision and myth about their homeland of origin, a specific transition from the centre to the foreign and the periphery, a feeling of alienation as a result of non-belonging to or non-acceptance by the host community, a vivid desire to return to the ideal homeland, being embedded in nationalism and having the will to contribute to the homeland's security and prosperity, and finally, a constant attachment to the motherland and its people (pp. 83–84).

Safran's conceptualisation of diaspora is greatly reflected in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. The novel is written in a form of a bildungsroman by Arab American author of Syrian origin Mohja Kahf. It revolves around the life of an Arab-Muslim girl named Khadra Shamy and her journey to self-discovery. She comes to the USA with her parents from Syria as immigrants. Khadra grows up in a strict Muslim community in the city of Indianapolis where the children are brought up thinking of only one definition of Islam and rejecting all differences. The novel portrays the hardship that Muslims characters of different nationalities go through in the USA to better position themselves in the wider American society. It ties in an impressive range of issues that circumscribe their daily life – mainly political and cultural. As the novel progresses, Khadra goes through several experiences, giving her the ability to exploring her true self as opposed to the identity that she inherited from her parents and reconsidering the meaning of life from different angle.

Mohja Kahf weaves her novel in a way that shows the extent to which diasporic figures find it difficult to understand their self-identity and develop sufficient sense of belonging given their dual identities. She is an example of the type of Arab American authors who discuss and assess the daily lives of Arab Americans in their literary production that emerged quickly in recent times. Steven Salaita (2011), for instance, discusses the quickly escalating visibility of Arab American literature in the USA, describing it as “a product of the twentieth century which started to develop exponentially only in the past thirty years” (p. 3). This diasporic literature projects various concerns and preoccupations that surround the life of Arab Americans, especially in the years following the events of 9/11.

Arab Americans have always struggled to negotiate their religious, political, cultural, and social identity in the dominant US culture. Their quest to position themselves between two incompatible cultures, namely American and Arab, adds more perplexities to their sense of belonging. Arab American women, particularly Muslims, unlike their male counterpart, find it difficult to manage their daily life without being visible by their dress code, such as the veil, or committed to Arab traditional culture that is characterized by gender roles and patriarchy. In addition, the burden of being a woman with dual national backgrounds, like the case of Khadra Shamy in the novel, functions as a major factor that causes psychological perplexity and cultural disturbance in understanding identity. Arab American women authors, therefore, celebrate their writings by humanizing Arab and Arab American women and voice their concerns to reach international prominence. Mohja Kahf, for instance, projects her voice in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* through her female protagonist Khadra. She attempts to open up new channels to present the Arab American woman in all aspects of life from a female writer's perspective. Kahf points out that the figure of Arab American woman is constructed in narratives to suffer a triangular socio-cultural status that consequently positions

her in a fragile condition. This includes the perception of her as “a victim of gender oppression [...] as an escapee from her intrinsically oppressive culture [...] and as the pawn of Arab male power” (Kahf, as cit. in Amel & Majaj, 2000, p. 17). In this context, through the analysis of Khadra’s experiences in Kahf’s novel, and as a mere reflection to Kahf’s claim, I aim to broaden the horizon of what constitute Arab American woman’s fragile condition. I argue that there are three basic factors: triple consciousness, faith development, and existentialist thought. The amalgamation of these components causes Khadra to position herself in what I call as the fourth space.

The study of Kahf’s novel is based on two approaches. The first approach is featured with critical, descriptive, and analytical tendency by which to understand the personality of Khadra and her interaction with the surrounding environment. This is to better examine the extent to which cultural and social circumstances pave the way for the latter to locate herself in the fourth space. The second approach, while it leads to examining the existentialist entity of Khadra, is designed with psychology-related conceptual framework – such as triple consciousness – and social identity theoretical points of view to investigate how the protagonist of the novel socially locates herself in relation to other groups. Relevantly, Social Identity Theory suggests that individual’s identity is not only achieved through differentiation or identification with group of individuals who share a distinct or common outlook, but also through recognizable performative repertoires that are expressive and embodied. It underlies the idea that the formation of identity can be considered as a long interiorizing process through which the personality is exposed to different conflicts and imbalance that should be interpreted and processed by the individual so that he/she can negotiate the requirements of life and society, and consequently, develop.

Deconstructing the Fourth Space: Triple Consciousness, Faith Development, and Existentialism.

The quest to explore identity for Khadra starts when she questions her sense of belonging. The social and cultural rejection she gets from the wider American society in the city of Indianapolis, and the struggle she goes through when encountering the Arab culture and strict Islamic conventions in Mecca, pave the way for her to embrace the choice of isolating herself into a space in which she could re-define her identity, re-consider her true belonging, and also re-examine her faith – a fourth space. It could be possible to reflect on what Khadra experiences as an outcome of many factors: triple consciousness, faith development, and existentialist thought. First, to understand the ways triple consciousness works, it should be first appropriate to shed the light on the constructions of the three identities that inform it: Muslim, woman and American. This describes Khadra’s feeling as though her identity is divided into

multiple parts, making it difficult to have one unified identity; she views her identity through three lenses. Triple consciousness is an extension of William Du Bois' concept of double consciousness first introduced in his article entitled *Striving of the Negro People* (1897) which was published in *The Atlantic*. He used this term to describe Afro-Americans' experience of being both black and American – he labeled it “a peculiar sensation”.

Khadra's peculiar sensation is broader and actually more complex. It encompasses a third consciousness. It starts when she experiences the first consciousness particularly in the wider American society in which she encounters incidents of prejudice, discrimination and violence because she is seen as the Muslim other – a foreigner. For instance, due to her wearing of the veil, Khadra experiences incidents of harassment from her American school colleagues Brent Lott and Curtis Stephenson who corner her, label her as raghead, and ask her to take off her towel [veil]. In a moment of resistance, they rip her veil off from her head and yank at her. Curtis crows: “look, raghead has got hair under that piece a shit” (Kahf, 2006, p. 124). Such incidents prompt Khadra to position herself in the category of otherness and question her true belonging. She thinks that her belonging should be “in a place where she would not get shoved and called raghead every other day in the school hallway” (p. 97). It is possible to argue that Khadra experiences such discriminating attitude due to her stereotypes-based identity. This can be relevant to Charles Stangor's opinion that “when stereotypes or prejudice produce negative behaviours toward others, the behaviour is called discrimination” (Stangor, 2008, p. 11). Stereotyping has long been manipulated by mainstream cultures to maintain authority over other minority groups. Stereotypes, according to Bhabha (1994), “construct the group or the individual as the other [...] the stereotype is an ideological operation that aims to maintain authority and superiority over the oppressed groups and individuals” (p. 66). In this context, Kahf, in an interview conducted with her, states that “there is no forgetting that the stereotypes – and the bigotry behind them – dog us. They are real, and malign. They have real-life repercussions, often enough, on Muslim lives” (Taylor, Zine & Davis, 2007, p. 388). The ramifications and repercussions of stereotypes are probably the cause of the anti-assimilationist approach that Khadra adopts in the USA. The non-assimilation project is evidenced through her opinion on the possibility of marrying a Kuwaiti student named Juma and go and live in Kuwait. She reflects on this as “the answer to not belonging to America all these years” (Kahf, 2006, p. 205). In fact, her parents, Ebtihaj and Wajdy, in spite of their long period of residence in the USA, make it clear that, alongside their children, they are not Americans. They adhere to a commitment to differentiate themselves particularly from the white Americans and non-Muslim in general (pp. 67–69). This is probably because of their worries to lose the ability of effectively preserving their Islamic and Arab identities.

Keeping in the same line, the second consciousness can essentially be explored in relation to her gender. As a result of being a woman in her Muslim community, Khadra confronts unpleasant experiences of patriarchy and gender inequality. This is manifested through the patriarchal attitude of her husband Juma towards her (p. 241) and the refusal she gets from the Dawah Centre – a form of Islamic organization that invites people to understand Islam as outlined in the Quran and the Sunnah – to participate in the Quran reciting competition only because she is a woman (p. 199). In the same respect, Kahf exposes the patriarchal treatment that Khadra receives from Muslim males in Mecca where Khadra's family performs pilgrimage as part of their religion, Islam. Khadra finds herself escorted to home by Muslim policemen who depreciate her like she is a joke and laugh at her because she wants to pray Fajr at mosque. She is prevented from entering the Mosque because of her gender. This incident invokes both gender inequality and social injustice: an infringement of women's rights. In this respect, and in a discussion with her father Wajdy, Khadra says:

Women have always gone to the mosque. It's part of Islam [...] What about Aisha? What about how Omar wished his wife would not go to the mosque for fajr but he could not stop her because he knew it was her right? What about the Prophet saying you must never prevent the female servants of God from attending the houses of God? I told the Matawwa that hadith and he laughed – he laughed at me, and said listen to this woman quoting scriptures at us! (p. 168).

The response that Khadra gets from Wajdy and the Matawwa men – a group of Islamic religious officers who survey ethical and religious breach in Saudi Arabia – denotes the extent to which the Islamic rules towards women in the Mecca are manipulated through a patriarchal system outside and inside the domestic sphere: a system that does not allow women “to go out from house without permission” (p. 167) or “travel abroad alone” (p. 153). In fact, Khadra realizes that it is peculiar for her, unlike in Mecca, to be granted the right to pray at mosque in the non-Muslim USA, Indianapolis particularly. This fact is validated by her father Wajdy who, addressing Khadra, says: “you are used to America, benti [...] in most of Muslim world, it has not been the custom for hundreds of years” (p. 168). Neither her father nor Uncle Zaid listens to her arguments, she starts sobbing and feeling misfortune for being a woman. She does not have the right to argue against the authority of men. This incident makes Khadra “very angry – angry that they would treat her that way, and angry that she let them get inside her feelings – and she wanted to come out swinging” (p. 169).

Through the above mentioned incidents, Kahf showcases what it means to be a woman in a conservative Muslim community as seen in Mecca. She gives insight into Mecca, the holiest city of Muslims, as a patriarchal and misogynist social realm in which women are constrained by male's rules in the name of Islam.

The gender inequality and the patriarchal domination of women's rights as seen in Khadra's experience are key aspects of the Arab society and Arab culture in the name of Islam, particularly in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where women "are subjected to the authority of men on the basis of conservative Islamic traditions" (Fernea, 1998, p. 332). Consequently, what happens in Mecca causes Khadra to realize that "she should appreciate the freedom she enjoys in America where she is free to practice her religion without persecution" (Alakarawi & Bahar, 2013, p. 104). In relation to her realization, Rasheed El-Enany (2006) says that "the West to Arabs, with an emphasis on women, is no longer an oppressor but a saviour, a place of refuge from repression at home, a space of freedom with the promise of prosperity" (p. 186).

Equally important, the third consciousness that completes Khadra's fragmented identity is the perception of her as American in Mecca. This causes her to experience sexual assault and mistreatment by her Arab companions Afaaf, Ghalya and Ghazi. They disrespect her because she lives in the USA and has American background. When Khadra curses and complains Ghalya replies: "Listen to her go off in American!" (Kahf, 2006, p. 178). This provokes Khadra to draw borderlines between herself and others in terms of social and cultural differences and belonging. As a mere reflection on these incidents, it is possible to borrow Homi Bhabha's words to describe Khadra's fragile condition. He claims that "it is in the emergence of interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interests, or cultural values are negotiated" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). Bhabha asserts that differences between individuals and groups create new layers for identities, especially social and cultural ones. The development of identities, on the basis of differences, reshape the relation between society members as well as individuals of different background and belonging.

The treatment that Khadra receives in Mecca positions her mostly as intruder. The out-grouping process that she struggles against is maintained by 'otherization' which is fueled by stereotyping and representations of her as American. It is the key factor that triggers identification and differentiation. It is, from Henri Tajfel's (1978) point of view, within social identity theoretical thought, the axis that creates social categorization, social identification, and also social comparison. Turner and Oakes (1986) suggest that part of an individual's self-concept relies on the significance and relevance placed on the group membership to which that individual belongs. It generates "personal self-categorization as one level of social self-concept; this type of categorization is based on differentiation between oneself as a unique individual and other [relevant] in-group members" (p. 241). Khadra, in this context, categorizes herself as an intruder and a foreigner in Mecca on the basis of differences in terms of values and belonging. In other words, Khadra positions herself on the basis of the negative evaluation she holds towards the

Arab culture and Muslim society that she encounters in Mecca and consciously excludes herself from it. This is strongly related to Tajfel's opinion that:

divisions of people into social categories which matter to the individual are usually associated with positive or negative evaluations of these categories [...] which in turn, can be considered as a system of orientation that helps to create and define the individual's place in society (Tajfel, 1978, pp. 62–63).

Khadra's experience of triple consciousness is, to a great extent, similar to the case of Afro-Latinos living in the USA; they are of both African and Latin American descent. Miriam Jiménez Roman and Juan Flores (2010) compile personal accounts, fiction, autobiographies, poetry and academic essays from various disciplines such as politics and cultural studies to introduce the culture and history of Afro-Latinos to the broader literature of diaspora and ethnic studies. Building their arguments on William Du Bois's work (1897), Roman and Flores (2010) suggest that triple consciousness is a concept that effectively describes US Afro-Latinos' three constructions of their identity: an entanglement of Black, an American, and Latin. African Latinos thus struggle to position themselves in the wider American society and also in the African diaspora due the fact that blackness is considered as a property of Afro-Americans. This complex construction of Afro-Latinos' identity is further demonstrated through Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's autobiographical essay included in the compilation; it is titled *Reflections about Race by a Negrito Acomplejao*. He uses his own experiences to explain how triple consciousness affects his life; this concerns the hardship he experiences from the Afro-American mainstream because of linguistic and ethnic discrepancies, by Latinos because of the racism and sensitivity between the Americas, and by White Americans due to both racial and ethnic prejudice. He concludes that "Afro-Latinos in the USA negotiate life as Latinos, Blacks, and an under-lens segment of the American wider mainstream" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, pp. 447–449). The complex entanglement of Bonilla-Silva's identity relevantly matches Khadra's difficult negotiation of her realities as a woman in her conservative Muslim community, as a Muslim in the American wider society, and as a pre-conceived American in the Arab world which is exemplified by Mecca as explained before. The given parallel between Khadra and Bonilla-Silva explicates the formation of triple consciousness and its complexity.

Khadra's experience of triple consciousness is, however, a unique experience from that of Bonilla-Silva because it has an entanglement with gender issues and the status of being a woman who seeks to prove herself in the surrounding environment. Khadra's triple consciousness is even more complicated because of the position she inhabits between the Arab culture and the American one. Having a hyphenated identity and fragmented sense of belonging makes her construction of consciousness a complex one which triggers new form of identity. This has

relation to Homi Bhabha's statement that such "in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood [...] that initiate new signs of identity" (1994, p. 1). Keeping in the same vein, the linkage drawn between Khadra and Bonilla-Silva in terms of their triple consciousness suggests that ethnic minorities in the USA remarkably share similar experiences – especially psychological ones. Nathalie Handal, an Arab American feminist author, points out that "Arab American women writers have found a cultural and psychological connection with other ethnic groups, since these groups share similar feelings of marginality and alienation" (Handal, 2005, p. 56). As such, though both produce distinct literary genres, Kahf and Bonilla-Silva establish a bridge between their writings.

In addition, Kahf, through her narratives, seems to expose her female protagonist Khadra to multiple experiences with an ability to be outside and inside the host culture. The multiplicity of her consciousness is a backdrop that leads her to discover her personal identity and explore her existential entity in depth: faith and relationship with God. Khadra starts questioning her true knowledge of her faith and Islam in a German Islamic Studies class headed by Professor Eschenbach. It is the time when she begins to see what her belief looks like by stepping away and observing it from a distance (Kahf, 2006, p. 231). She realizes that her faith needs re-consideration and further contemplation. The narrator in the novel concludes that

The belief system of her parents and their entire circle, including the Dawah Centre, was just one point on a whole spectrum of Islamic faith [...] what was difficult to accept was that these other paths had always existed beyond the confines of her world (Kahf, 2006, pp. 232–233).

Such a conclusion positions her in a situation of different directions – a situation that further enlightens her quest to develop her faith and understanding of Islam. Furthermore, Khadra's life and relationships with others, including her mother and husband, reach utmost complexity after her realization that she is pregnant. After several reflections, she decides to abort and put an end to such unexpected nightmare. This decision, however, can be regarded as a turning-point that provides her with other possibilities to question her self-consciousness and the meaning of life:

Hello self, can we meet at last? It was not vainglorious to have a self. It was not the same as selfish individualism. You have to have a self to even start on a journey to God. To cultivate your nafs [self] whom God invites to enter the garden at the end of *Surat al-Fajr* [...] her self was a meagre thing [...] what she hadn't given away too much to Mama, to Juma [...] she will not give the last inches of her body, will not let them fill her up with a life she does not want (Kahf, 2006, p. 248).

Effectively, it is possible to apply James Fowler's stages of faith theory (1995) to better understand Khadra's faith development and self-consciousness. According

to him, stages of faith are: stage of infancy and undifferentiated faith, stage of the intuitive-projective faith, stage of mythical-literal faith, stage of the synthetic-conventional faith, stage of the individuative-reflective faith, stage of conjunctive faith, and the last stage of faith is universalizing faith. I argue that the convenient stages that strongly explain Khadra's attitude and reflections are the individuative-reflective faith and synthetic-conventional faith. The former is explained by Fowler as a faith that "requires a deep critical distance from the pre-obtained values and system which is now scrutinized with skepticism and probability" (Fowler, 1981, p. 179). It is a stage in which a person re-examines the choices and requirements to maintain self-development. The latter stage of faith, as Fowler contends, allows the development of a high-standard operational thinking to have the ability to effectively reflect on both realities and possibilities that circumscribe individual's situation. It contributes the evolvement of self-consciousness. It often appears when an individual judges and re-assesses his/her relationship with others and re-evaluates views of surrounding people (Fowler, 1981, p. 152).

Fowler's approach is helpful to examine Kahf's female protagonist as a literary device that portrays an Arab-Muslim American woman's attempts to reflect on her life and living experiences, which in turn, affects her identity construction. Though Khadra is not a real person but merely fictional, Fowler's arguments are substantial to understand the transformation in and development of her personal identity. Khadra, in this sense, while being distant and in isolation, goes through both stages to re-shape the meaning of her life and identity, particularly the personal one. As such, it is evident to say that faith development is the key factor that gives meaning to Khadra's life and identity. Fowler (1981) says:

Faith is not always religious in its content or context [...] Faith is a person's or a group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him – or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose (p. 4).

Equally important, the decision to abort causes Khadra to lose the bond with her family and Muslim community, especially the Dawah Centre members. Khadra feels frustrated because of "the awkward glances she was getting on campus from the girls in hijab and the bearded boys" (Kahf, 2006, p. 251). She realizes that her image as the good conservative Muslim girl is now spoiled and vanished. The burden of triple consciousness, the question of her faith, and the ramifications of her decision to abort lead her into a situation of psychological breakdown and depression; she stays in her apartment lonely for several days and isolates herself away from everyone. This includes "the Dawah Centre and its entire community. Its trim-bearded uncles in middle-management suits, its aunties fussing over her headscarf and her ovaries" (p. 262).

Khadra creates for herself a space in which she forms a new version of herself. She decides to get rid of anything related to her past life, all that “twenty-one years of useless head-clutter. It all had to go. All those polished surfaces posing as spiritual guidance. All that smug knowledge [...] it needed to be cleared out so she could find out for herself this time” (p. 262). In other words, she decides to get rid of “all that part of some previous life lived by some other Khadra who accepted things she didn’t really want” (p. 263). As a repercussion, Khadra revolts against the Islamic spiritual guidance that she knew since her childhood when she starts missing her prayers and addressing God with profane nihilistic expressions:

There, she said, flinging at God. Here’s what you demanded. Two rakats? Four? Four-three-four? Take it, take them all! Was this what prayer was for, to stave off an exciting bean counter? Ticks on some kind of scorecard He was keeping on her? Fuck it (p. 263).

It is possible to explain what Khadra goes through with Chittock’s analysis which she once doubted in her German Islamic Studies class. It suggests that “the move from the lower ego to the self-examining ego can be a traumatic one” (p. 235). Indeed, the accumulation of all these thoughts causes Khadra to experience a feeling of loss and melancholy – a traumatizing experience. In a moment of severe depression she wishes to put an end to her life with Juma’s razor, she wants to terminate the haunting of her “old miserable self, she loathed it, despised it, blamed it for it all” (p. 264).

Khadra’s psychological turbulence has a significant impact on her identity formation process. Her psychological-related crisis of identity can be well examined through Erik Erikson’s analysis of the concept ‘identity and identity crisis’ (1963). He argued that the social context has a deep influence on individual personality development and that identity is to be considered psychological in nature. To support his argument, he described the identity confusion of a group of veteran patients returning from World War Two with the term ego identity. This group was diagnosed with shell shock – currently called post-traumatic stress disorder – and experienced a fragmented continuity in their lives, he concluded:

What impressed me most was the loss in these men of a sense of identity. They knew who they were; they had a personal identity. But it was as if subjectively, their lives no longer hung together – and never would again. There was a central disturbance in what I then started to call ego identity (p. 36).

Through examining the void in the veterans’ identity, Erikson suggested that identity is endangered by social, biological, and psychological factors. This strongly reflects Khadra’s tripartite nature of reality that encompasses her gender as a reflection of biology, psychology as a product of faith development and traumatizing experiences, and also social environment as projected through

Muslim and American communities in both Mecca and Indianapolis respectively. Khadra's condition thus, in accordance to Erikson analysis, is characterized with what the latter calls ego identity – a term that best describes her central disturbance that reflects her own inadequate self-understanding. The use of Erikson's results contributes to show the extent to which traumatizing experiences lead to identity loss and crisis. In other words, the link between the soldiers in Erikson's experiment and the female protagonist Khadra in Kahf's novel is that psychological experiences have profound impact on the individual's search of identity and self-understanding.

In the same line, the central disturbance of Khadra leads her to ponder the meaninglessness of her life and the nothingness of her existence by examining the validity of the religious practices and convictions and considering Islam from different perspective (p. 263–265). She consciously adopts an existentialist approach to enhance her understanding of the reality that confines her identity. In this context, Basma and Gibbson (2016) argue that the existential approach is helpful to understand in depth the experiences and anxieties of the Arab American diaspora, particularly immigrants and refugees. It is essential to explore their self-development. It operates effectively with individuals struggling with their understanding of identity. The given approach to analyze Khadra's situation is important because, as Van Deurzen (2002) contends, it relevantly “meets the needs of individuals undergoing situational crisis, struggling with the feeling of isolation, suffering with the ability to cope with societal expectations, and facing difficulties with creating meaning in their lives” (Deurzen 2002, as cit. in Basma & Gibbson, 2016, p. 152). Deurzen's argument reflects Khadra's attempts to raise an existentialist thought through which she questions her faith and contemplates about the purpose of her life:

And then what? Where do you go when the first part of your life is coming to an end, and you don't know what is yet unborn inside you? Where do you go and you are in a free fall, unmoored, safety net gone and nothing nothing to anchor you? (Kahf, 2006, p. 265).

This interestingly meets Marjorie Green's definition of Existentialism “as an attempt at a new revaluation of values and its interpretation, in this light, of the individual himself and his relation to others” (Green, 1959, p. iii). Khadra, in this sense, does not want only to rearrange her life and commitments to religion, but also, to reconfigure her relationship with others including those who live across the borders, particularly in Syria – her motherland: “it was time for retreat. She would betake herself unto an eastern place [...] back where she came from: Syria” (2006, p. 266). Khadra's decision to go back home after all the lived dread experiences in Mecca and Indianapolis – when it is time for a retreat – reflects William Safran's opinion that “diaspora always plan a return to homeland when the time is right”

(Safran, 1991, p. 83). For Khadra, it was the right time to resurrect her bond with Syria, her country of origin, and escape the life that has always been a source of fragility and otherness.

Conclusion

It should be concluded through Khadra's experiences in Kahf's novel that both triple consciousness and faith development contribute to locate Khadra in a distant space in which she attempts, with an isolationist attitude and existentialist thinking, to re-connect with her personal identity and fulfill a complete sense of belonging as well as to revolutionize her perceptions towards life. I call this space as a fourth space: she doesn't reconcile her identity between the two incompatible cultures i.e., Arab and American, but instead, she escapes from both and distances herself to examine her cultural, social, religious, and psychological situation clearly and effectively to better understand who she is i.e., she opens the door to explore a new version of herself. In other words, the articulation of the shifting identities within two spaces as demonstrated through Indianapolis and Mecca, provides a ground for constructing a new self and paves the way to transforming subjectivities. Significantly, Kahf, through her portrayal of Khadra's unpleasant experiences in her surrounding environment, suggests that Arab American women are easily exposed to vulnerability due to social and cultural pressures, but mainly, psychological.

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