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Zainab Abdali

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Resisting Borders, Resisting Control

Examining the multiplicity of identities in *A Map of Home* and *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors
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Abstract

In this project I examine identities as they are expressed through the use of language in the novels *A Map of Home* by Randa Jarrar and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf. Both novels are coming-of-age narratives of two Arab and Muslim-American female protagonists that depict their exploration of identity as they undergo experiences of war, migration, displacement, and racism in their respective contexts. I explore the protagonists' negotiation of identity in the face of familial and societal pressure to conform to clearly demarcated categorizations of identity, arguing that the protagonists recognize clear borders between identities as a form of control. The use of language in both texts that combines multiple languages, dialects, and cultural and religious registers thus acts as a form of resistance to a fixed identity, to physical and figurative borders and to control, as the protagonists construct through their language a "third space," a space in which "home" and "identity" can be multiple and hybrid and where such hybridity opens up possibilities of negotiating and recreating identities beyond fixed borders.

Executive Summary

In this paper I examine identity through the use of language in the two novels *A Map of Home* by Randa Jarrar and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf. In particular, I examine how the Muslim and Arab American female protagonists – Nidali and Khadra - in both novels are expected by the mainstream as well as by their own communities to understand identity, how they actually understand identity, and the ways in which they explore their own identities in terms of race, religion, nationality, and sexuality. Although their families, communities and societies tell them to choose one identity over the other, and to consider identity as unchanging, Nidali and Khadra push back in different ways against this pressure. I argue that through the use of language in these two narratives, Nidali and Khadra resist fixed and singular understandings of identity and instead insist on a multiplicity and fluidity of identity.

I ground my reading of these novels in the theoretical work of Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, primarily drawing on her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in which Anzaldúa discusses borders, both physical and figurative, as a form of control and violence. Whether it is the border between Mexico and the U.S., or the figurative border between the languages English and Spanish, borders set up hierarchies that privilege one side over the other and exert control over identity. Anzaldúa resists the idea of being able to speak only English or only Spanish, discussing how this strict divide sets up English as superior to Spanish, and also how being able to switch between English and Spanish without translating, or speaking a new, hybridized language like Tex-Mex or Spanglish is more true to her identity as a Chicana woman who grew up in the borderlands. Anzaldúa refuses to let borders have control over her identity, insisting that visualizing identity (and language) not in terms of a strict binary or as unchanging but rather as multiple, complex, and unstable is crucial to achieving true equality.

Throughout my paper, I also draw on the theories of other feminists of color, especially Arab and Muslim-American feminists, in order to place my project within the scholarship produced by feminists like Lisa Majaj, Evelyn Alsultany, and Amira Jarmakani alongside feminists of color such as Chela Sandoval and others. I engage with their theories about the place of Arab-American feminists within the broader field of feminist studies, the ways in which fixed definitions of identity can serve to oppress marginalized people, and how destabilizing identity through an insistence on multiple and complex identities can be a form of resisting such oppression.

I start my project with an analysis of *A Map of Home* in the first chapter, in which I examine the use of language and the understanding of home as articulated by the protagonist Nidali. The novel tells the coming-of-age story of Nidali, an Egyptian-Palestinian-American woman who moves from Kuwait to Egypt to the U.S. and who dreams of becoming a writer. As she moves from place to place, Nidali tries to pinpoint a location for “home” and is pressured by family and friends, most significantly her father, to pick one location and be satisfied with that. However, despite this pressure, Nidali does not pick one specific location as “home,” and I explore in this chapter how this resistance to choosing “home” is also a form of resisting control.

To develop my analysis of such forms of resistance, in this chapter I focus on connections between the idea of home and language, and how Nidali experiments with language to assert her agency when it comes to “home” and where she belongs. As Nidali lives in different places and tries to figure out how to speak the local language or dialect, she also takes great care to incorporate her own background, experience, and personality into her speech. Beyond speech, cultural fluency and references to music are also a significant part of the novel, with Arab musicians like Fairuz and Abdel-Halim being discussed alongside American hip hop groups like

A Tribe Called Quest or TV shows like *Dallas*. Nidali's insistence on multiple languages, on not sticking to just Arabic or just English (or just Egyptian Arabic or Kuwaiti Arabic or Standard English or colloquial English), but rather mixing her languages and different music and pop culture together in her narration indicates that she refuses to choose. She speaks with all her voices and languages and refuses to give up parts of who she is in order to fit into easily defined categorizations of identity. Her insistence on refusing to choose provides us with the possibility of reimagining identity outside of fixed borders and fixed hierarchies and within a third space where multiplicity, fluidity and equality is possible.

In the second chapter, I focus on Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, which tells the story of Khadra Shamy, a Muslim Syrian-American woman who grows up in a small town in Indiana. Much of the novel depicts Khadra's struggle to define her own identity in the face of her family, community, and wider society trying to define it for her. Growing up in a highly religious family, Khadra is told repeatedly by her parents that she is Muslim and Syrian, *not* American, while bullies in school who target her because she is Muslim tell her the same thing. Indiana, however, is the only home Khadra knows for all of her childhood, and it is not until she is a college student that she even visits Syria. When it comes to configurations of "home" and "belonging," we see Khadra resisting everyone else's attempts to define home (and hence her identity) for her as she recognizes that strict boundaries between these geographical locations keep her from embracing all aspects of who she is and where she is from. She move from place to place, is deeply connected to multiple geographical locations, and embraces the contradictions that lie in being Syrian, Muslim *and* American.

When examining Khadra's resistance to fixed identity, I focus especially on her understanding of religious identity and how that is connected to language. Over the course of the

book, Khadra comes to recognize the Islams that exist *within* Islam as she notes the divides across national, racial, and sectarian lines within and across Muslim communities, and starts to see the validity of different approaches to Islam and Muslim identity. I examine the decisions Khadra makes, such as getting an abortion, getting divorced, moving away from home and re-examining her relationship with the hijab, and explore how these decisions resist the idea of a singular and monolithic understanding of Islam. I also look at the language used in the narrative, and the linguistic experimentation in the text. Khadra not only combines English and Arabic in her speech, but also relies on the use of Islamic terminology, such that readers are exposed to another language woven into the narrative. Islamic terminology is often left untranslated and frequently presented in the form of vocabulary that is neither Arabic nor English but a hybridized form of both, and these unique words that Khadra uses are specific to her context as a Muslim-American woman living in Indiana. I note the moments in the text where such hybridization of language occurs, and explore the implications of the novel switching between multiple languages and multiple contexts without accommodating readers or compromising on any of Khadra's identities. In this way, the project the novel engages in echoes Anzaldúa's stance in *Borderlands*, where we see that an insistence on using multiple and hybridized languages is an assertion of multiple and hybridized identities and a resistance to systems of hierarchy and oppression that binaristic conceptions of identities contribute to.

I conclude my project with a comparison of both novels as I examine the similarities and differences in both protagonists' approaches to resistance, recognizing the need for these different approaches. I also connect the project that these novels are engaging in to wider critiques by feminists of color that emphasize the limitations of fixed and stable identities and point to the rich possibilities of fluid ones. By building on the work of Arab and Muslim-

American feminists in my analysis of these Arab-American novels, I hope to expand the body of scholarship produced on Muslim and Arab-American women's literature and contribute to a longstanding feminists of color critique and resistance through scholarship.

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Introduction

“She didn’t expect Chrif to be arguing for the same thing as her mother, that Islam was rigid and homogeneous. It’s like, they both wanted Islam to be this monolith, only for her mother it was good, for him bad. She knew it wasn’t so simple.” (Mohja Kahf, 344)

At a particular moment in Mohja Kahf’s novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, the protagonist, Khadra Shamy, finds herself caught between two different understandings of Islam; her mother’s, a conservative Muslim who believes Islam and Islamic culture to be singularly positive, and her boyfriend Chrif’s, who believes Islam and Islamic culture to be inherently backward and negative. Khadra, however, has trouble subscribing to either belief, since both of these understandings of Islam and Muslim identity render it rigid and unchanging, whereas for Khadra “it wasn’t so simple”; she recognizes that there is more complexity and fluidity within religion and religious identities.

This idea of a complexity and fluidity of identities (religious as well as linguistic, ethnic, and national identities) is echoed in both this novel and in Randa Jarrar’s novel *A Map of Home*, in which Nidali, an Egyptian-Palestinian-American woman explores her multiple identities, drawing and re-drawing the map of home and recognizing that it encompasses many different places. Understandings of home, language, religion, and nationality are not clear-cut but rather are unstable and constantly shifting, which means that identity is also not clear-cut or singular for Nidali but rather complex, fluid and multiple.

Of course, Kahf and Jarrar are hardly the first writers to explore the complexity and multiplicity of identity. Chicana feminist writer and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa wrote at length about identity in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, connecting the idea of fixed physical

borders – those between nations - to fixed *figurative* borders – those between identities - as being forms of violence and control. Referring specifically to the Mexican-American border, Anzaldúa discusses how borders serve to “define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them” (Anzaldúa 25). Just as the border sets up a hierarchy that places the Third World in opposition to and as inferior to the First World – Anzaldúa refers to the border as the place “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” – there are also manifestations of borders that might not be physical, but which serve a similar purpose of creating binaries and which necessarily impose a hierarchy (25). Anzaldúa writes of a “despot duality” that creates binaries like masculine vs. feminine, Mexican vs. American, white vs. non-white, Indigenous vs. Spanish, and, in terms of language, English vs. Spanish, with all of these binaries also setting up a hierarchy that defines one identity or one language as superior to the other (41).

Anzaldúa recognizes such borders and binaries, both physical and figurative, as a form of violence, describing the Mexican-American border as a “1,950 mile-long open wound...running down the length of my body, /staking fence rods in my flesh,/splits me splits me” and pointing out that being forced to pick English over Spanish, or a more “pure” dialect of Spanish over Tex-Mex or Chicano Spanish is a form of “linguistic terrorism” (24, 80). Being forced to pick one side of the border or one specific language erases some part of who one is and attempts to lock one into an oppositional position as always inferior or superior to the person on the other side of this binary, enacting violence and maintaining inequality across a power differential. So what is the solution for this endless violence, this seemingly perpetual “duel of oppressor and oppressed” (100)? According to Anzaldúa, “the answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts” (102). Rather than

choosing the dominant stance or the counterstance, the dominant language or the minority language, Anzaldúa instead suggests the “uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness” (102). Resisting borders, physical and figurative, means a transcendence of all borders and an embrace of a hybrid, *mestiza* identity that refuses to sacrifice any part of one’s identity or language and that is comfortable with contradictions and ambiguities.¹

The theories of hybridity that Anzaldúa articulates in *Borderlands* specifically refer to the Mexican-American border and the relationship between the English and Spanish languages, and are interwoven with detailed historical narratives about colonial encounters and the potential for resistance in the borderlands of Mexico and the US. While it is important to note the specific context in which Anzaldúa grounded her theoretical framework, a fundamental aspect of this framework is to radically reimagine identities and the artificial borders/boundaries placed between identities to construct them as oppositional or different. This not only allows for Anzaldúa’s theories to be applied to more than Chicana identity but rather *encourages* creating connections to other configurations of identity and language, and breaking down the borders between different disciplines. Feminist scholar Anne Donadey, while recognizing the specific historical and geographical context to Anzaldúa’s work, suggests that Anzaldúa’s work offers a vital inroad into carving out spaces for radical interdisciplinary work. She states that “discrete fields of knowledge can be seen as being separated by disciplinary borders; the interdisciplinary and comparative areas where they meet and are brought together can be viewed as borderland

¹ As the Encyclopedia of American Studies explains, “The word *mestiza* refers to a female who is both Spanish Caucasian and Central or South American Indian. From this specific ethnic/racial category Anzaldúa abstracts an identity that includes Spanish, Caucasian, Indian, and African racial and cultural heritage, and a consciousness that is conceptually inclusive rather than limited by any one social status or biological reality.”

zones in which new knowledge is created” (Donadey 23). Donadey points out how postcolonial feminism emerged out of the borderland between postcolonial and feminist studies, and how U.S. feminists of color, inhabiting “a borderland that was rendered invisible by the boundaries erected by various fields of knowledge such as ethnic and women's studies,” managed to “carve out an intellectual borderland in which the interconnections of race, class, and gender could be attended to” (24).

Anzaldúa’s work highlights not only the possibility but also the *need* to reach across such borders erected between and among disciplines such as feminist studies, where feminists of color find Anzaldúa’s theories particularly useful in creating a broader network of U.S. third world, transnational and postcolonial feminism that is not limited by disciplinary boundaries separating Race and Ethnic Studies from Women’s Studies from African-American Studies from Chicana Studies from Asian-American Studies and so on. Chela Sandoval, a third world and postcolonial feminist scholar, relied in part on Anzaldúa’s theories to develop a “decolonizing theory and method” in her seminal book, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Sandoval 4). In an essay entitled “Mestizaje as Method,” Sandoval acknowledges the influence that Anzaldúa’s ideas about mestiza consciousness have had on U.S. third world and postcolonial feminism, writing that U.S. feminists of color rely on ““the differential” “*mestiza*” (or “womanist,” “*Sister Outsider*,” “third force” it has generated many names) mode of U.S. third world feminist praxis” to resist U.S. social hierarchy (Sandoval 354, 360). Relying on this mestiza mode is crucial because, according to Sandoval, U.S. feminists of color recognize that “hegemonic white consciousness trapped in a prison-house of identity...[made] alliance across difference impossible” and in order to allow for a wide network of alliances, U.S. woman of color feminism thus served as “a “third” space, a bridging house of difference” which “engaged the imaginations and commitments of diverse

artists throughout the 1980s, including Angela Davis, Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, bell hooks, Maxine Baca Zinn, Aida Hurtado, Kitty Tsui, Gayatri Spivak, Beth Brant, Janice Gould, June Jordan, Cherrie Moraga, and Barbara Christian” (Sandoval 358).

It is in keeping with this rich feminists of color tradition of relying on “a mestiza mode of U.S third world feminist praxis” in order to “intervene and transform social relations” and resist U.S. social hierarchy that I use Anzaldúa’s theories to analyze configurations of identity, language, and national belonging in the Arab American and Muslim American context through the novels *A Map of Home* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (Sandoval 360). I argue that the protagonists in these two novels push back against social and familial pressure to adopt singular identities, instead insisting on embracing multiple identities through the use of multiple languages and the identification of multiple places as “home” or as places of belonging. In resisting physical and figurative borders, Nidali and Khadra refuse to let anyone else define and control them. An analysis of this resistance serves to formulate a transnational feminist methodology of embracing fluidity and multiplicity as a means of resisting control and oppression. If borders and dualistic thought impose a hierarchy, where one side of the border or one identity compared to another must always be superior, refusing to accept any borders means refusing any sort of hierarchy of identity or place and insisting on real equality. In Nidali and Khadra’s case, their efforts to resist borders work to create a space where identity and national belonging can be reimagined as multiple and fluid and where the potential for true equality begins to emerge.

I situate my paper within the works of transnational feminists, including Arab American feminists, focusing on the idea of existing in and expanding a “third space” that resists boundaries and borders. I have discussed how U.S. feminists of color emphasize the need to

produce scholarship and create alliances across disciplines and across racial and ethnic backgrounds, and how, as Sandoval points out, a wide range of feminists of color use the ideas of hybridity and the project of creating this “third space” to ground their work (358). However, the place of Arab and Arab American feminists within “U.S. Third World feminism” has historically been “tenuous” (Saliba 313). Arab American feminists’ relationship to feminist of color movements has been uncertain in part because of the confusing state of affairs when it comes to the larger Arab American population and its place in the racial landscape of the United States, and because of how Arab Americans (and especially Arab American women) seem to move between invisibility and hypervisibility (Jarmakani 238). Sarah Guialtieri, in her article “Strange Fruit?” in which she traces the history of Arab racial formation in the United States and offers up a specific case of a Syrian-American being both recognized as white *and* lynched for not being white enough, says that “despite their official status as white, Arabs are a minority without minority status” (64). This confusing relationship with whiteness, Saliba suggests, is because of a mixture of factors; while Arabs have been defined as white because they “defy the categories that constitute minority status,” they have also historically “strategically embraced ‘whiteness’ to gain access to privileges conferred by the dominant society” (306). Whether this lack of minority status and the categorization as white is chosen or imposed, Lisa Suhair Majaj, a Palestinian-American scholar and poet, points out that “Arab-American whiteness is at best a merely ‘honorary’ status, one readily stripped away at moments of crisis” (321). In these moments of crisis, one of which is certainly the September 11 attacks, Arab Americans are no longer invisible but rather become hypervisible as the non-white, threatening “Other.”

Such ambiguity in terms of Arab American identification means, according to Majaj, that “Arab Americans are relegated to an undefined space... [and] pushed to the margins of available

definitions” (324). In the case of Arab American feminists, this means that their position within feminist of color collectives and US third world feminism is also undefined and that they are often rendered invisible or relegated to area studies work and Middle Eastern Studies departments. However, this “undefined space” that Arab Americans occupy is not purely a negative positioning; it offers as well an opportunity to reimagine identity as more than one fixed concept, to move beyond simplistic binaries that cannot accommodate a multiplicity of identities and to forge dynamic and fluid understandings of identity. The historically confusing and frustrating ambiguity of racial categories when it comes to Arab Americans can serve as a way to examine identities in *los intersticios*, the interstices, a term used by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* when she explains: “Alienated from her mother culture, ‘alien’ in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can’t respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits” (20). The woman of color occupies *los intersticios* if she cannot or does not pick one culture over the other, or one language over the other, or one side of the border over the other.

While living in *los intersticios* can be painful and alienating and there is immense pressure to escape the interstices by picking only one identity, Arab American feminists have noted the control and violence that takes place when a woman of color is made to choose one identity and sacrifice all other aspects of herself. Evelyn Alsultany points out how being made to pick one identity is a type of erasure and a way to keep different oppressed groups divided; she recognizes racial categories as remnants of colonialism, wherein a “colonial ideology of categorization and separation based on a ‘pure blood’ criteria” allowed “the white colonists to maintain power” (109). The racial categories of today also serve geopolitical purposes, and “meanings attached to identities shift not only over time and space but also according to political

circumstance” (109). Multiple identities, then, are discouraged because they “transgress the constructed categories” and singular identities are encouraged because they “allow people to place us, to make sense within the schemas available for understanding people and the world” (110). Similarly, Lisa Suhair Majaj writes about how as an Arab American woman she had a strong desire “to be wholly one thing or another: to be something that [she] and the rest of the world could understand, categorize, label predict,” suggesting again the pressure faced by women of color to conform, to pick an easily categorizable identity (79). Amira Jarmakani’s explanation of the invisibility and hypervisibility of Arab American women points to another articulation of this sort of control through “both the ways that Arab and Muslim women are silenced” *and* “the ways they are made hypervisible, paradoxically, as markers of invisibility, exoticism, or oppression” (234). Jarmakani suggests here that the latter situation, hyper visible as it is, also renders Arab and Muslim women invisible because it overlooks Arab American feminist thought and instead pushes Arab American feminists into doing the (often) unproductive and repetitive work of constantly battling pervasive stereotypes about Arab and Muslim women. Invisibility and hypervisibility again serve as ways in which Arab and Muslim women can be defined in an essentialist manner and without recognition of their multiple identities.

In response to these politics of essentializing Arab and Muslim women’s identities, and building on Chela Sandoval’s work, Jarmakani suggests using “the skills and tools we have gained from an oppositional consciousness in order to forge more spaces of possibility for the lives of Arab and Arab American women” (240). Oppositional consciousness within feminism, which means to shift modes of consciousness in order to deal with multiple oppressions, is a concept articulated by Sandoval who poses oppositional consciousness as a vital strategy for U.S. third world feminists (Garrison 384). According to Jarmakani, shifting modes of

consciousness will allow Arab American feminists (and their allies) “to support the urgent work of carving and crafting new spaces for the expression of Arab American feminisms” and “to illustrate the brilliant complexities of Arab and Arab American women’s lives” (240-41). Jarmakani’s suggestion of using oppositional consciousness aligns with Anzaldúa’s articulation of resistance through adopting a mestiza consciousness that rejects rigidity and takes on a divergent way of thinking (Anzaldua 101).

Such a divergent way of thinking necessarily means embracing the borderlands, embracing los intersticios, and proposing the expansion of this space in order to accommodate all aspects of oneself. Alsultany sees the malleability of meanings attached to identity as an opportunity to reconceptualize identity, to “expand los intersticios, creating a space for us all in our multiplicities to exist as unified subjects” (110). Alsultany here directly refers to Anzaldúa’s theories when using the term “los intersticios” as she advocates for moving beyond “the narrow ways in which the body is read, the rigid frameworks imposed on the body in public space” and to instead reconceptualize identity “so that we can speak our own identities as we live and interpret them in *multiple* contexts” (109). Majaj too points out a need to go beyond singular understandings of identity, to resist “the larger patterns that map us” as she declares: “I am tired of being afraid to speak who I am: American and Palestinian, not merely half of one thing and half of another, but both at once – and in that inexplicable melding that occurs when two cultures come together, not quite either” (83, 67-68). That “inexplicable melding,” that recognition of “the contradictions, the excesses, which spill over the neat boundaries within which [one is] often expected to...reside” is strongly reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s insistence on “developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (Majaj 79, 82; Anzaldúa 101). Interestingly enough, Majaj thinks of the borders of the cultural divide in terms of translation,

saying that “the logic of translation” makes her want to pick one side of the cultural divide, that is, pick Arab OR American, but that she realizes there is something to be gained by refusing to choose; “but the infinitely more complex web of music beckons, speaking beyond translation” (84). The use of the word translation here suggests a connection to language, and how linguistic identity – which Anzaldúa believes is “twin skin” to ethnic identity - is also simplified or flattened by “the logic of translation” that only allows for the use of one language to express oneself (80). The “complex web of music” that Majaj recognizes refers to something like Alsultany’s new space where a multiplicity of identities can exist, but also can refer to a space for hybridized languages to exist.

We see then how Arab American and Muslim-American feminists have long been engaging with the idea of embracing a multiplicity of identities and developing a new space as identities, languages, and understandings of home come together to create new, hybrid versions of languages and identities. It is this new space that I explore in this project as I examine *A Map of Home* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. Jarrar’s *A Map of Home* follows the life of Nidali, an Egyptian-Palestinian-American woman raised in Kuwait and Egypt who eventually moves to Texas, while Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* is the story of Khadra, a Syrian-American woman who grows up in Indiana and eventually goes on a trip back to Syria in an attempt to learn more about herself. Both novels are coming-of-age narratives, with the protagonists exploring their own linguistic, national, sexual and religious identities while also undergoing displacement and immigration and facing pressure to conform to a fixed understanding of Arab Muslim identity. I argue that both Nidali and Khadra recognize that the pressures they encounter to choose a singular and fixed identity stem from an attempt to define them in fixed terms and thus to limit and control them, and that choosing just Arabic or just English or choosing just one

of Palestine/Kuwait/Egypt/Syria/America as “home” would be a denial of some aspect of their identities. Instead, they resist control and a flattening of their identities through frequent code-switching, incorporating both English and Arabic into their speech and narration, and identifying multiple places as home. Insisting on embracing their multiple linguistic and geographical contexts simultaneously means that Nidali and Khadra push readers to expand their understanding of identity and belonging beyond binaries and to start to see the possibility and potential of multiple belongings.

Placing these novel within the framework of hybridity that Gloria Anzaldúa provides in *Borderlands*, I will be analyzing the use of Arabic and English (and various dialects of these languages as well as other languages) in both novels, as well as the protagonists’ different and varying configurations of home to explore the protagonists understanding and assertion of their own identities. I am also particularly interested in exploring the pressures Nidali and Khadra face to only choose a single language or a single place to call home. Where do these pressures originate, and how do the protagonists work on resisting such pressures? What are the complexities involved in resisting familial pressure to conform to a fixed language and a fixed understanding of home, while also facing societal pressure from American or Egyptian or Muslim communities to adopt an easily definable identity? Are the protagonists able to achieve the sort of “true integration” of one’s multiple identities that Anzaldúa suggests in *Borderlands*? As two novels with entirely different protagonists, I am also interested in examining how using multiple languages and understandings of home to adopt a hybrid identity is necessarily also different in the two books, and how resisting physical and figurative borders cannot (and should not) be reduced to one easily mapped formula.

In the first chapter, I examine the use of language and the understanding of home in *A Map of Home*. The protagonist, Nidali, attempts to translate herself fully upon moving to the United States, to not only speak English, but speak it in a way that represents her Arabness, to write pieces in English that are influenced by her Egyptian-Palestinian background, to listen to both hip-hop and Arabic music, and to recognize that they are not completely separate from one another. She also tries to pinpoint where she belongs – Kuwait, Egypt, Palestine, Texas; the map of home for her spans several countries - but she never does come to a final decision, not perhaps because she cannot just choose one place, but because she does not want to. No one place defines her. Her father pushes her to think of Palestine or of Texas as home, as permanent, but Nidali persistently resists, not because she does not feel an attachment to either place but because she recognizes that letting anyone else choose “home” for her would be to give someone else control over her. She chooses multiplicity, fluidity: operating in both Arabic and English, identifying multiple places as home, and resisting everybody’s expectations about what an Arab woman should be or behave like.

In the second chapter, I analyze the ways in which Khadra in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* uses language and different registers to resist strict boundaries and strict control of a “pure” religious identity and of a singular national affiliation. She makes decisions such as getting a divorce, getting an abortion, and going back and forth between wearing or removing the hijab - all decisions that others characterize as her moving between being either “a good Muslim” or “a bad Muslim.” She recognizes that these decisions are necessary for her to make while still identifying as a Muslim, while not succumbing to the binary of good Muslim vs. bad Muslim.²

² Mamdani, Mahmood. "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism." *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 766-775. Print. 5 February 2018.

Khadra moves between Indiana and Syria and Philadelphia, not fully identifying as Syrian or American, as a Hoosier or not a Hoosier, realizing that all of these places are home in different ways, that no one place can be home entirely and learning to be comfortable with this lack of certainty.

The process of *creating* a new space, of *learning* to be comfortable with uncertainty and no fixed idea of home, of *insisting* on speaking in both Arabic and English and melding the two together without offering translations, and of *refusing* to pick one religious or linguistic or national identity is not straightforward or always successful, and Nidali and Khadra both certainly have moments where they, like Majaj, wish they could pick one side of the border, identify wholly as one thing or the other, and be easily definable. But the moments where they do assert the multiplicity of their identities, where they defiantly speak in Arabic and English without accommodating anyone else, and where they push back against borders despite facing constant pressure to pick a side are moments that can give one insight into the dynamic and complex forms of resistance that Arab American and Muslim-American feminists and other feminists of color have articulated and which, according to Anzaldúa, “is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war” (102).

Anzaldúa’s words here seem to be overly ambitious but they articulate a clear-eyed vision for the world that recognizes the power of pushing back against borders. Applying Anzaldúa’s vision to novels like the ones selected here is important because literature offers a vital point of intervention within social relations: if an absolute “despot duality” has taken hold of society, certainly literary texts (including texts within different media) have played a significant role in enforcing this duality. In terms of literature, television, and film,

oversimplified and overwhelmingly negative portrayals of Arab and Muslim women are common; film scholar Jack Shaheen's writings on the TV and Hollywood Arab from the early 2000s still hold salience as portrayals of Muslim women "either as gun-toters or bumbling subservients...as uneducated, unattractive and enslaved beings" are still common and feed into what Sahar Aziz describes as narratives about Arab and Muslim women ranging "from the oppressed to the terrorist" (Shaheen 26, Aziz 191). Beyond portrayals in works of fiction, within mainstream media outlets,³ state-propagated narratives,⁴ and even within western feminist scholarship,⁵ we consistently see a wide array of restricted and one-dimensional narratives about Muslim and Arab American women's identities permeating Western understandings and knowledges.

This massive investment in promulgating fixed articulations of Muslim and Arab American women's identities makes novels like *A Map of Home* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (which refuse to follow the scripts set up for Muslim and Arab women) revolutionary, and makes the production of literary criticism on such novels of utmost necessity. Furthermore, producing this scholarship from an interdisciplinary standpoint also becomes essential because incorporating the theories of feminists of color from multiple disciplines as well as multiple "area studies" departments offers an opportunity to reach beyond the artificial and institutional borders created between disciplines⁶. It also forms radical collectives of feminists of color in

³ Kahf, Mohja. "The Pity Committee and the Careful Reader: How Not to Buy Stereotypes about Muslim Women." Naber, Nadine, Evelyn Alsultany and Rabab Abdulhadi. *Arab and Arab-American Feminisms: Gender, Violence and Belonging*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011. 111-123.

⁴ Mamdani, Mahmood. "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism." *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 766-775. Print. 5 February 2018.

⁵ Thobani, Sunera. "White Wars: White Feminisms and the "War on Terror"." *Feminist Theory* 8.2 (2007): 169-185.

⁶ Shohat, Ella. "Gendered Cartographies of Knowledge." *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*. Durham and London: Ed. Ella Shohat. Duke University Press, 2006. 1-16.

which a fluidity of identities, the multiplicity of oppressions, and a constant resistance to borders and boundaries are recognized and enacted.

Chapter I

Nidali in *A Map of Home* and her refusal to choose

Randa Jarrar's novel *A Map of Home* begins with the story of the day the protagonist and narrator of the novel was born. Nidali details how her father, mistakenly thinking his newborn child was a boy, had rushed to fill out the birth certificate and named her "Nidal," a masculine name meaning "strife" or "struggle" in Arabic. Upon realizing that his child was, in fact, a girl, he changed it to "Nidali," the feminine form of the same name, much to his wife's disapproval. Nidali narrates his frantic rush to correct his mistake: "...And Baba, who is not usually known for laziness, grabbed a pen and added at the end of my name a heavy, reflexive, feminizing, possessive, cursive, cursing 'I'" (Jarrar 5).

From the beginning then, we can see that in Nidali's narrative, language is powerful and can influence identity, enforce categorizations – one letter indicates a firm shift from masculine to feminine – and decide belonging and unbelonging. The fact that her father was ultimately the one who named her, despite her mother's protestations, is a further signifier of how powerful language can be; the letter "i" makes the name possessive, changing the meaning to "my struggle," and suggests that Nidali is her father's struggle, that her future in some sense belongs to him, and that through language, he has some sort of control over her.

In this chapter, however, it is *Nidali's* struggle to define her identity that I will be examining. I argue that through the use of language in her narration, dialogue, and writing excerpts, Nidali resists others' attempts to control her identity and her configuration of home. As Nidali moves from Kuwait to Egypt to Texas and explores her national, religious, and sexual identities, language plays a vital role in her understanding of identity and home, and in the rich mixture of Arabic(s) and English(s) she employs, we see a resistance to choosing just one

language, just one location, or just one identity. Instead, the novel is permeated by Nidali's insistence on creating new languages and new, complex spaces to call her own. In this chapter, I first identify the pressures Nidali faces from her father and the communities surrounding her to choose a fixed identity or a fixed home, after which I turn to examine her relationship with language, and then explore the ways in which she uses language to resist fixed identities and fixed borders.

Waheed and Nidali – Her Father's Imposition of Borders and Control

Much of the pressure that Nidali faces to pick one identity or one understanding of home over others comes from her father, Waheed. As the opening scene of the novel suggests, in which Nidali is named, defined, and categorized by her father, Waheed has many expectations for Nidali's future and her career. From a young age, Nidali is told by Waheed that she is not to date or stay out late with boys: "we don't have boyfriends...boyfriends are fiancés, and then you marry them," he tells her when she is seven. He accuses her of "running around like a whore all day until midnight" when she is in eighth grade and insists that "[Nidali's] not going to rap concerts and getting drunk and pregnant" when she is in high school (16, 122, 234). Waheed sets strict borders for Nidali's sexuality and quite literally for her movements, refusing to extend her curfew, and growing livid when she transgresses these borders.

Along with her behavior and sexuality, Waheed also exerts control over her academics and career goals, insisting that she has to be academically exceptional, must pursue graduate studies, earn her PhD from a university close to home, and should aim to "write the greatest dissertation of all human times" (239). We see as well his insistence on Nidali identifying strongly with Palestine, with being Palestinian, with her Arabness and the Arabic language: he is outraged when he finds out that her British school in Kuwait has not taught her about Arab

history or her Palestinian heritage; “Goddamn your school!...They’ve taught you nothing!”, he states, and makes her stay up all night drawing and re-drawing the map of Palestine (66, 68). He also later on in the novel makes her write compositions on “something purely Arab, or relating to [her] Arabness” (260). He makes her write compositions in both English and Arabic, expects her to become a professor proclaiming the greatness of Arabic literature, and asks her to listen to Arabic music and to appreciate the Arabic language. Waheed also repeatedly hits Nidali when she disobeys him or goes out without his permission, or does not exceptionally perform academically, further exerting control over her behavior, her mobility, her choices, her body and her identity.

It would be inaccurate to read Nidali and Waheed’s relationship as entirely negative – it is certainly much more complicated than that, with Nidali pointing out that she “could never hate him,” and recognizing that his control of her and attempt to keep her close to home stemmed from his desire to protect her from what he perceived as the dangers of the world, many of which he had faced himself; “he didn’t want me to struggle...he wanted to be there to help me when I did” and “he loved me and didn’t want me to go away from him” (240, 259). Nidali also realizes that Waheed’s aspirations for her to pursue a PhD are well-intentioned in the sense that he wants her to be independent and have a career, since he had noticed his own sisters not receiving an education and getting married young, “each one more miserable than the last” and tells a young Nidali that she needed to be educated and get a doctorate so that she could be free (5, 24).

However, even if Waheed restricts Nidali’s choices and mobility out of love and good intention, the fact remains that he does restrict her and does try to tell her who she needs to be. After all, even when insisting that Nidali should not be like her aunts who were uneducated and dependent on their husbands, he dictates to her what she should be, answering for her, telling her

“you want to be free,” and then telling her exactly how to be free, that is, “by doing excellent work and finishing every year of school possible” (24). So even though Nidali certainly loves her father and recognizes that his control of her is often well-intentioned, she still recognizes it as control, as an attempt to make her define herself by a certain definition of what it means to be an Arab woman, to make certain choices, and to adopt a certain national, linguistic, and cultural identity.

The Imposition of Physical Borders: The Violence of Borders and Citizenships

Nidali faces pressure to adopt a fixed idea of identity and borders not only from Waheed but from social expectations determined by the shifting landscapes she inhabits. When she is in ninth grade, Nidali and her family flee Kuwait for Egypt because of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. During the car ride, Nidali thinks to herself, “In northern Kuwait I kept waiting for the border to come. I didn’t know that there wouldn’t be a fence stretched for miles and miles, or a clearly marked thick black line in the sand the way it is on a map....Nothing would mark our entry into Iraq...it could have all been the same country – it had been before” (147). Here we see Nidali recognizing the artificiality of borders while also recognizing the control that borders, artificial or not, exert over her and her family as they are forced to flee from one country to the other because possessing certain passports and citizenships guarantee safety, while others do not.

Nidali, who is Greek-Egyptian-Palestinian-American, realizes the power that nationalities, borders, and citizenships have over her even as a very young child as she compares herself to Russian dolls: “I was split in half: I was Egyptian and Palestinian. I was Greek and American. My little blue passport, the one that looked nothing like Mama’s medium green one or Baba’s big brown one, said I was American. I didn’t have to stand in a different line at airports yet, but soon I would. And Mama would stand in a different line, and Baba would stand in yet

another line. It would make me feel all alone and different” (9). Nidali’s passport tells her she is only American, not Palestinian, Waheed tells Nidali she is only Palestinian and is in America solely to get an education and make money, and Nidali’s experience at the Jordanian-Israeli border suggests to her that she is both very much Palestinian – hence the demeaning and thorough search – and not Palestinian at all, and thus has no right to freely enter Palestine (229, 101). The politics of war and borders and narratives of singular, fixed national identities, whether propagated by Waheed or Saddam Hussein or the Israeli government, offer contradictory understandings of national identity and often erase parts of who Nidali is – she can be only American or only Palestinian at any given point in time, or think of only Kuwait or Texas as home.

The Possibilities of Resistance

“1,950 mile-long open wound/dividing a *pueblo*, a culture/running down the length of my body/staking fence rods in my flesh/splits me splits me/*me raja me raja*,” Gloria Anzaldúa writes in the first chapter of *Borderlands* in reference to the Mexican-American border (24). The violence and control of borders that Anzaldúa articulates here is similar to the violence and control that Nidali experiences in terms of the impact that physical borders have on her life because of wars, passports, and checkpoints and also in terms of how Waheed and others force her to choose between being Arab or American or between English or Arabic. However, it is these same points of violence and splitting that can be used to forge a path to resistance. “This is my home/This thin edge of/barbwire,” Anzaldúa writes about the borderland, which she calls “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (25). The vagueness of the borderland is its potential to accommodate those who refuse to be split and those who refuse to abide by the hierarchies and divisions of borders.

Nancy El Gendy, in her article “Trickster Humor in Randra Jarrar’s *A Map of Home*,” argues that Nidali uses the figure of the trickster to move “from one ‘sexual category’ to another in a non-linear, liberated, egalitarian fashion,” and that “*A Map of Home* rejects policing sexuality through labelling or expurgating” (7, 8). According to El Gendy, Nidali questions “sexual boundaries” through the use of humor and asserts her sexual power in a way that resists both Orientalist stereotypes and her father’s paternalistic discourse (12). While El Gendy is primarily focused on the use of humor and the trickster figure to disrupt strict sexual borders, and to embrace a fluidity and complexity of sexual identities that can exist in the “vague” place in between borders, I argue that the mobilization of language plays a similar role in the novel. Nidali uses language that cannot be categorized as simply Arabic or simply English, one that instead exists in the “third space” in between strict linguistic borders. In this way, she resists her father’s and society’s attempts to define her or to erase some of her identities, offering up the possibility for all of her identities to co-exist simultaneously in this third space.

Nidali’s juggling of multiple languages is not always depicted as a form of resistance, for she often exists uneasily between these languages, namely Arabic and English. She relates her experiences of going to school in Kuwait, where the British teacher Mrs. Caruthers mentions things like “stew” or “plaits” that baffle her and her (Arab) peers, and where the entire mode of education is in English. This alienation from English is exemplified in another scene in the novel, for one, when Nidali, upon getting a chance to read Arabic books while in a hospital waiting room, says that she “loved to read from right to left” because “my eyes didn’t hurt the way they did when I was at school reading from left to right” (12, 21, 20). Thus, Nidali’s relationship with English is strained, and her experiences at her school show a reluctance to take on a language that is to some extent divorced from her life and her national identity. Apart from

Mrs. Caruthers' use of foreign concepts like taxidermists or stew, there is also a scene where Nidali's father is outraged to find out that her English school has taught her nothing about Arab history or her Palestinian heritage, but instead teaches her about the Vikings. Speaking, learning, and gaining an education in English seems to be a source of tension for Nidali, with the expectations accompanying that education forming an identity that she is not comfortable with. At the same time, however, Nidali is also immersed in English-language media: she quotes a Bill Withers song, idolizes Wonder Woman, is surrounded by the popularity of the American TV show *Dallas* in Alexandria, and reads *A Tale of Two Cities* in front of a mosque after school (8, 42, 93, 168). Her connection to English becomes even stronger when she moves to the United States, when she is still unsure about English – she remarks how difficult it is for her to start a new school because in Texas she cannot speak the language in the right accent as she could in Alexandria or Kuwait – but also embraces English in her speech, writing and music taste (219). While Nidali does not seem entirely comfortable with English, she does not renounce it either, finding her own way to live between both English and Arabic.

At the same time, Arabic is also not without complications. Nidali's first language is Arabic, she enjoys reading Arabic books and listening to music by Arab artists like Umm Kulthum or Abdel Helim. Most of the dialogue before she moves to the US presumably takes place in Arabic, and she feels able to express herself fully in Arabic, mentioning later on in the novel that she misses being in Egypt because when she spoke in Arabic her "language was full of songs and lilt and catchy turns of phrase" and she misses being able to truly be herself when she has to speak English instead (225). However, Arabic too comes with conflict and the possibility of being controlled or made to assume an identity she is not entirely comfortable with, which comes across most clearly in the way her father expects her to utilize Arabic. Waheed wants

Nidali to use Arabic to achieve success, academic and otherwise, and to represent Arab culture, telling her “You can be...a big professor of literature!... Write poetry and teach in England. Show those bastards the greatness of our literature” (65). After they move to the United States and Nidali is expected to get her doctorate in an English-medium institution, he still insists on her writing compositions in both Arabic and English, because he wants her to write about “something purely Arab, or relating to [her] Arabness.” His attitude shows that he sees her speaking and writing in Arabic as a way to stay connected to her Arab identity (260). Waheed’s insistence on Nidali using Arabic to achieve a sort of Arab identity that *he* thinks she should have or should achieve constantly brings the two of them into conflict.

A useful example of this conflict is when Nidali enters a Quran recitation competition and her father helps her prepare for it. In his efforts to have her recite perfectly and win the competition, Waheed becomes violent and demanding, bringing out a hanger and hitting her repeatedly when she cannot recite the verses properly:

I didn’t want to anger Baba further but he was standing in front of me with a hanger, and it was making me more nervous than before. So I tried the verse again but I got it all wrong. “It’s not, ‘have we not dreamed up your chest and relieved you of the minister!’” he said, making fun of my mistakes. “It’s ‘have we not lifted up your heart,’” he hit my chest for emphasis, “‘and relieved you of the burden which weighed down your back?’”

The hanger whipped my back. I was crying now, and I couldn’t speak. (49-50)

We see here that Arabic is a direct source of tension between Nidali and her father, as it is her pronunciation, memorization, and recitation of Arabic verses that causes her father to hit her. The fact that Waheed makes fun of Nidali’s mistakes and misunderstanding of the meaning of the verses further points to how he expects her to have an impeccable grasp on (classical) Arabic

and wants her to speak or use the language in a certain way, so that she can go on to become the distinguished professor of Arabic literature that he expects her to be. He hits her on her chest and back in an attempt to make her remember the verses, showing how his abuse is often presented as an attempt to discipline or teach her, or to make her a better student and to secure the future that he foresees for her. Thus Arabic becomes a way for him to control her, to dictate what her identity is, and to tell her what her future should be.

It would seem, then, that resisting her father's control would mean that Nidali would naturally gravitate towards the English language and an American identity. And it does seem, at times, that Nidali uses English to resist her father's expectations, especially after she moves to the US. We see that Nidali and her brother, Gemal, speak English fluently and grow fond of American music and pop culture, whereas their parents retain their strong accents, are not as comfortable speaking English, and remain strongly connected to Arabic music and culture when they move to the US. Nidali says that "Mama and Baba tried to make us speak nothing but Arabic in the house; instead, they spoke to us in Arabic and we answered in English....outside the house, they had to speak in English, their accents keeping them company when no one else would" (219). By not responding in Arabic and by making friends and becoming culturally adjusted in a place that her father insists is only for gaining an education, it already seems that Nidali is resisting Waheed's control by identifying closely with an American identity and by speaking in English.

However, what is significant about Nidali's narration and dialogue is that Arabic and her Arab identity remain intact throughout the novel, even as she adopts English and an American identity. While she refuses to adopt her father's version of Arabness, she also refuses to discard Arabness and Arabic altogether. She remembers thinking: "What a fucking waste," when an

attractive young man at school asks her if she used to live in a tent. Her incisive reading of the differences between the US and the Arab world points out that “neighbors in America don’t call the cops when they see their Arab neighbor chasing his daughter around the house with a knife....Cops in America don’t like Arabs and they definitely don’t like Arabs who hit their teenage daughters.” She further suggests that if she died of a bee sting, people would assume her father killed her “just because he was Arab,” and gets angry at a teacher who expects her to talk about her Palestinian father because she was “reducing [her] to [her] Palestinianness” (234, 248-9, 273). All these incidents highlight people’s ignorance about Arab countries and the widespread prejudice against Arabs. Such portrayals also suggest that while Nidali may resist her father’s patriarchal ideas of what it means to be an Arab woman, she *also* resists Orientalist ideas of what it means to be an Arab woman and stereotypes about Arab and Muslim women.

Such resistance to Orientalist tropes and to her father’s ideas manifests itself through language and a refusal to choose. Nidali’s refusal to choose between Arabic and English is obvious through her frequent reliance on Arabic in the primarily English text. “On August 2, the day I was born, my *baba* stood at the nurses’ station of St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center of Boston...” (3). In the very first paragraph of the very first chapter of the novel, we encounter the first Arabic word placed in the midst of the English text: *baba*, the word Nidali uses to refer to her father. Noticeably, the word *baba* is not translated and is only italicized the first time and afterwards is used repeatedly throughout the novel without italics. Arabic (or Greek) terms to refer to relations are common in the novel, with words like *Yia Yia* (the Greek word for grandmother) and *geddo*, *Sido*, ‘*Ami*, *Amaat* and *Tante* (the Arabic words for grandfather, uncle, aunts respectively) repeated without translation or italics after the first usage (8, 15, 92 22, 23). Arabic phrases like “*kaffik*” “*dammak tiqil*” “*mish naqsa*” “*atfoo*” and “*aiwa*” appear frequently

in the novel, interspersed within the English and sometimes without any translation, which is especially effective in reminding readers that Nidali is in Arabic-speaking countries for most of the novel and that the dialogue is actually taking place in Arabic (98, 84, 64, 61, 196). But the use of these words serves as more than a practical way to set the plot in Egypt or Kuwait or Palestine: it also serves to remind readers that Nidali lives in multiple languages and occupies multiple contexts.

Pointing out the complexity and multiplicity that exists even within one language, Nidali also notices and switches between different dialects of Arabic and English. She uses Arabic words specific to certain dialects: for example, words like *Sitto* and *mish naqsa* are not just Arabic, but specifically Egyptian Arabic, while her discussion of Quranic verses points to the use of classical Arabic⁷. Similarly, when speaking in English, Nidali notices subtle differences *within* English such as when, upon her arrival to the U.S., her friends correct her English because she speaks “like a white girl on NPR, all boring and with nary a crazy emotion” (225). She notes that her friends have to translate her English for one another: “They...want you to hang out at the park with them when it’s dark. You tell them your Baba doesn’t allow it. ‘She said her papi don’t play that,’ they translate to each other” (233). While this points to Nidali’s difficulty in adjusting to the United States and having to pick up different local contexts, it also points to Nidali’s recognition of instability of language (and how it relates to identity), even in the context of one language, and her negotiation of languages within languages. Dimi and Camilla use the colloquial Spanish word for dad, “papi,” in their speech, much like Nidali uses “baba” in her

⁷ Janet Watson describes classical Arabic as the medieval variant of standard Arabic, “based primarily on the language of the western Hijazi tribe of Quraysh, with some interference from pre-Islamic poetic koiné and eastern dialects” and “codified in the Qur’an, the holy book of Islam,” with Modern Standard Arabic being the modern variant of the same. (Watson 8)

everyday speech, indicating how English itself is complicated by different contexts and has different dialects and influences, just as Arabic does. Not only does Nidali embrace a multiplicity of languages in her narration, she also refuses to offer a simple roadmap to integrating all of one's languages and identities, and instead recognizes the difficulties, complexities and contradictions that exist even within one language and within one identity.

Apart from her speech, dialogue, and narration, one of the most powerful ways in which Nidali utilizes multiple languages to assert her multiple identities is her use of Arabic and English in her writings, as expressed in her ambition to be a writer. We see how Nidali finds out that *The Decameron* is inspired by old Arabic tales. The idea of writing a story based on *The Decameron* but with an Egyptian character is exciting to her, suggesting that she wants to incorporate her Arab identity into her writing. Such an investment is further evidenced by the fact that she writes essays like "I Come From Crazy Stubborn, Mad Lovin' Hoes," which are in part inspired by family and Egyptian/Palestinian history (222, 262). The use of the colloquialism "Mad Lovin' Hoes" also points to a complexity within English and Nidali's mobilizations of multiple English(s) to more fully represent the complexity of her own identity. Many of her other compositions also include bits and pieces of her religious or cultural identity, such as when she writes: "The Koran was memorized for centuries until someone realized that it could disappear, that people might take it with them to the grave, and so he wrote it down...A dictator made us leave our home, and now a dictator rules it." Other examples include her composition essay that she titles "Shoes, or, We are Rootless," which talks about her experiences of migration and also includes an Islamic tradition of turning shoes around so that it is flat against the ground (267, 265). These brief references to Islamic traditions and Islamic history are often quite obscure and

very specific to a Muslim context, again showcasing Nidali's integration of multiple identities and contexts into the language she uses.

Since Nidali wants to be a writer in the future, and writing appears to be her assertion of independence from her father— she secretly applies to a Boston school with a strong writing program and fights long and hard with her father to attend that college. The fact that she wants to incorporate her own Arab and Muslim identities into her writing is significant, as writing is such a big part of her identity (257). Nidali includes not just historical or cultural references from her Arab background into her writing, but also uses Arabic phrases, so that there are Arabic words like “hikayye khuraffiyye” and “Sitto” (the word for grandmother) in her compositions, frequently without translation. (262, 267).

We see, then, that Nidali's understanding of identity and language seems to go beyond a strict binary. She does not see her identities or her languages as completely different or irreconcilable, but rather sees ways to bring them together, using all of her Arab-Palestinian-Greek-American identities and both the Arabic and English languages and the dialects within these languages. When it comes to who she is, what she writes, what she speaks, or the music she listens to, Nidali refuses to choose one identity or language over the other, refuses to adhere to a fixed identity or a fixed tongue as a way of control, but instead chooses multiplicity and fluidity. An example of her figuring out the possibility of pursuing such multiplicity and fluidity is made evident in the text when Nidali's father comes to her room asking her to sign her college application. Upon walking in, the following exchange takes place between father and daughter:

“What is that music?” he said.

I rolled my eyes. “Jay-Z. You know, hip-hop?”

“Turn it up!” he said, urgently.

“OK, OK,” I said surprised, and turned the volume knob clockwise.

“Sons of the whore!” he said.

“What’s wrong?” I said.

“It’s Abdel Halim’s song.”

“It’s Jay-Z’s song.”

“Zay-G? He is thief,” Baba said. “Don’t you understand? Listen,” he said, and sang the

percussion in the sample. “Khosara ya gara,”- a pity, neighbor girl.

“Wow!” I said. “Jay-Z sampled Ab-Halim! Do we have it? The original?”

“We have every tape of every song the man ever recorded. But were you interested before Mr. Zay-G stole song?” (Jarrar 254)

In this portion of the text, Nidali starts out by being skeptical about her father appreciating Jay-Z and the English music she enjoys listening to. When her father walks into her room, she expects an argument with him over their differences about her college plans, and it seems like her American music – what could be more American than hip-hop after all? - is likely to be another point of difference with her Palestinian father. She is thus surprised when her father finds the song not to be alien and strange, but rather strikingly familiar. His unfamiliarity with American culture is visible when he refers to Jay-Z as “Zay-G,” and his foreignness is visible in his speech when he says “He is thief” or “Mr. Zay-G stole song” or “Sons of the whore,” dropping or changing the articles that a native speaker would use. Clearly, American English and American culture are not as familiar to him as they are to Nidali, suggesting a distance between father and daughter. But within all this unfamiliarity is also a strong sense of familiarity, as he can instantly recognize the tune of the song being sampled and sing or whistle along to it. This impresses

Nidali, who expresses an interest in the original Abdel-Halim song. She and her father engage in a humorous discussion of the song and Abdel-Halim's sexual orientation, which momentarily alleviates the tension in their relationship. The discussion soon turns into an argument, however, as Nidali wishes to go to college far from home, whereas her father is insistent that she should be grateful for the opportunity to go to a nearby school. Abdel-Halim features again in Nidali's thoughts and narration when she then runs outside, lies on the grass and cries:

I...stretched my mind's arm to the stereo in my head, and pressed PLAY. I listened to Ab-Halim and cried. No one here knew who Ab-Halim was, no one knew who I was, and I'd never be like Ab-Halim's neighbor girl, I'd never part, never go away. (Jarrar 256)

It is interesting to see how an Arabic song by an Egyptian singer in this instance plays a rather conciliatory role rather than causing more conflict between Nidali and Waheed. They laugh while discussing the song and the artist, and Nidali also declares her love for Arabic music and singers like Umm Kulthum and Fairuz. Abdel-Halim and Jay-Z are more similar than Nidali expected them to be, and Waheed and Nidali's music interests appear to be more similar than their constantly strained relationship would lead one to expect. Later on, it is significant that it is Abdel-Halim's song that Nidali thinks of while crying; it is this Arabic song that she can relate to more and that she chooses to think about at such an emotional moment.

This one song is not, of course, a moment of complete reconciliation between Nidali and Waheed, for he still thinks she appreciates Jay-Z and American music more than her Arab culture, and they do end up arguing. It does however offer us a moment where Nidali sees the possibility of her Arab and her American identities or her Arabic and English languages coming together to form a new and hybridized identity or language. She can and does appreciate both languages, but she also realizes in this moment that both are not as different as one might think.

Rather than just coexisting alongside each other, Arabic and English for Nidali merge and overlap. Both songs serve a very different purpose for her; Jay-Z's *Big Pimpin'* – at least initially – gives her a reassuring emotional distance from her father and a sense of belonging in the United States, and Abdel-Halim's song reminds her of who she is, and the ways in which she does not belong in the US; "No one here knew who Ab-Halim was, no one knew who I was" (256). But along with the differences, these songs are also strikingly familiar, pointing out how Nidali's American and Arab identities do not exist in entirely separate spheres. She further develops this idea later on in an essay she writes, in which she places a song by Abdel Halim side-by-side with one by the American hip-hop group A Tribe Called Quest, pointing out the "freakish proximity in purpose of the two musical entities" (263). The songs may be in different languages and have different lyrics, but there is a sort of similarity that exists between them that allows them to convey similar meanings and carry out similar purposes. Similarly, while difficulties and conflicts exist between her two identities, Nidali also realizes that her identities are in many ways inseparable because multiple identities inform her perspective, her language and, very importantly for a character who dreams of being a writer, they influence her writing.

Conclusion

The novel ends with a short anecdote about Nidali's family driving out in the middle of the night to throw away a pen they were convinced had a microphone in it and had been recording their family conversations for years:

Baba recited from *Luqman*, "If all the trees of the earth were pens, and the sea, replenished by seven more seas, were ink, the words of God could not be finished still."

Mama reached over and threw the pen out the window.

I catch the pen now and listen to all our stories. (290)

Not only does this story demonstrate again how Nidali interweaves multiple contexts into her narrative – we see it here through the insertion of a verse from the chapter Luqman in the Quran in the dialogue without too much explanation or contextualization – but also shows how important the multiplicity and complexity of “stories” are to Nidali. The Quranic verse talks about how even seven seas’ worth of ink could not suffice to tell the words of God, and perhaps this can apply as well to Nidali’s own stories and contexts and identities: they are multiple and fluid, and incredibly complicated, and they require not only lots of ink and lots of pens, but also a new, re-imagined understanding of language and identity, one that is comfortable with multiplicity, contradictions and hybridity.

In her essay “Boundaries,” Arab American scholar and poet Lisa Suhair Majaj writes: “our choices allow us a measure of resistance against the larger patterns that map us, a measure of self-creation... I live at borders that are always overdetermined, constantly shifting. Grippled by the logic of translation, I still long to find my reflection on either side of the cultural divide. But the infinitely more complex web of music beckons, speaking beyond translation. Who can say how this will end?” (84). Majaj here identifies a refusal to be mapped or translated as a form of resistance, recognizing the importance of not choosing one side of the cultural divide over another. In *A Map of Home*, Nidali too resists being mapped by others through her choices and her repeated transgressions against the borders Waheed or others impose on her. She explores her sexuality and asserts her sexual power, runs away from home twice, applies to a school in Boston (far, far out of the physical boundaries Waheed has set for her), and refuses to give up either Arabic or English or any of the dialects within these languages in order to fit neatly into

the box of “Arab,” “American,” “Palestinian,” or “Egyptian.” In doing so, she embraces “the complex web of music” beyond translation that Majaj mentions, and recognizes the potential for multiplicity and hybridity that exists in the borderlands.

But why exactly is it so important for Nidali to assert the complexity and hybridity of her identity? To refuse simple and singular identities is to resist control, of course, and Nidali’s linguistic and personal choices show how she resists all sorts of control, be it from her father or from any of her communities. Beyond Nidali as an individual, however, it is also possible to find in Nidali’s assertion of complexity and hybridity a wider methodology of resistance that draws on and contributes to feminists of color visualization of resistance and radical reimagining of freedom. Nidali’s multiplicity draws for us the vision of a space where hybridity is welcomed, where multiple contexts are lived at the same time, where there is no strict binary and thus no hierarchy, where one finally breaks free from the “inner struggle” in between one’s different selves and the outer struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor (Anzaldúa 85). While such a space is not yet existent, Nidali’s narrative and her insistence on inserting all of her contexts into her voices starts the work of creating this space and pushes readers to recognize the radical potential of such a space.

Chapter II

Linguistic and Religious Hybridity in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* follows the life of Khadra Shamy, a Syrian-American woman whose parents immigrate to the US when she is a child and who grows up in a small town in Indiana. As she grows up in a majority white town and within the tight-knit Muslim community of the Islamic center her parents are heavily involved in, Khadra navigates her religious, national, and linguistic identities and tries to figure out her identity on her own terms. Simultaneously faced with bullying in school and the persecution of members of her community for being Muslim/Arab/non-white, as well as with social policing and rigid understandings of Islam from within her community and her own family, Khadra leaves Indiana for a visit to Syria, and then moves to Philadelphia to carve out a path of her own. We eventually see her come back to Indiana and reconnect with her community while possessing a new understanding of Islam and her Muslim-American identity.

In this chapter, I will be examining Khadra's understanding of identity as she grows up within the Indiana "Dawah Center" community and starts to see fissures in the singular and rigid identity that her family, community and other parties try to apply to her. I am particularly focused on analyzing her resistance to this singular identity through the use of language, both in the way her character utilizes or understands language and in the use of language in the text. Not only are both Arabic and English used in the narrative and dialogue, but there is also a recognition of instability within these languages themselves: Khadra notes the use of Africanized Arabic, Saudi-ized Arabic, Damascene Arabic, American English, black vernacular English, British English, and more within her community and during her travels. Furthermore, Islamic terminology takes on the form of another language that is used consciously by Khadra as well as

used throughout the narration, intermixed without translation or without italics at some points within the (American) English text. I argue that Khadra's (and the narration's) utilization of multiple languages – Arabic, English, dialects of Arabic/English, Islamic terminology – are a form of resistance to a simplistic and singular identity, and an assertion of multiple, changing, and complex identities. Indeed, the narrative's use of all these languages results in the creation of an entirely new language, one that intertwines multiple languages and multiple contexts without translation or compromise, with these contexts being specific to Khadra and cannot be generalized to speak for all Arab women or Arab American women or Muslim women. This new language, then, makes it impossible to place Khadra within strictly defined borders of linguistic/national/religious identity and forces readers to see Khadra in her multiple and complex contexts and identities.

Imposition of a Fixed Identity

In order to examine Khadra's resistance to fixed identity, it is vital to first examine the ways in which a fixed identity is imposed on her. We see that a significant part of Khadra's childhood is spent identifying herself in opposition to Americans, and subscribing to the idea of a Muslim, Arab, and Syrian identity being distinctly non-American. Khadra's mother agonizes over her children growing up into "lazy Americans," and on one occasion, repeats the statement "We are not Americans!" over and over when Khadra and Eyad disobey her (21, 67). It is explained that the Americans "were the white people who surrounded them, a crashing sea of unbelief in which the Dawah Center bobbed, a brave boat" and "Generally speaking, Americans cussed, smoked, and drank, and the Shamys had it on good authority that a fair number of them used drugs....Americans were not generous or hospitable like Uncle Abdulla and Aunt Fatma...Plus Americans ate out wastefully often. Khadra's family ate at home...All in all,

Americans led shallow, wasteful, materialistic lives. Islam could solve many of their social ills, if they but knew” (67, 68). As the narration demonstrates here, for Khadra and her family, Americans were everything that *they* were not in terms of race, religion, values, and class, and American identity is very much used as something to construct Muslim identity in *opposition* to. The idea of being Muslim *and* American is unthinkable in this context.

Muslim identity in opposition to American identity is doubly reinforced for Khadra by the way “Americans” treat her and her community. The Shamys see Americans as divided into “nice Americans” and “nasty Americans,” with the nasty Americans being people like Orvil Hubbard who formed a private citizens’ group to monitor, protest, and harass the Muslim community and children like Brent Lott who bully Khadra relentlessly in school, including calling her “raghead” and at one point ripping off her hijab in the hallway while her teacher did nothing in response (67, 5, 125). As a child, Khadra sees her community being harassed, witnesses how the Dawah Center is repeatedly vandalized, and becomes used to being called racial slurs in school (119). This sort of bullying and harassment points to how, beyond Khadra’s family, the larger community she lives in also tries to define her identity for her and make sure she did not see herself as American.

Being told she was not American by both her family and her school-mates means that Khadra identifies strongly as a Syrian and a Muslim. This is why, when the Shamys become American citizens, Khadra is hurt and upset because “to her, taking citizenship felt like giving up, giving in. After all she’d been through at school, defending her identity against the jeering kids who vaunted America’s superiority as the clincher put-down to everything she said, everything she was” (141). *Not* being American was “everything she was,” and the identity she had defended all this time. But as this moment of taking citizenship and becoming American

teaches Khadra early in her childhood, despite all the times everyone tells her she is not American and that she is only Syrian and Muslim, identity is not so stable. After all, right after becoming citizens, when Wajdy scolds Khadra, she snaps back at her father with the sentence “Just me practicing my First Amendment right to freedom of expression,” thus showing how, regardless of all her protestations of not being American, Syrianness and Americanness are not so easy to separate (143).

A significant moment in the novel where Khadra notices Muslim identity being defined in opposition to American identity and starts to see the problematics and limitations of binaristic thought and representation occurs when Zuhura, a young college student from the community, is raped and murdered on her way home one night. While the perpetrator is not actually revealed, it is strongly suggested that Zuhura, a black Muslim Kenyan-American woman known for being vocal and unapologetic about her identity and politics, became the target of Klansmen or other bigots in the area. Not only is this incident very much an indicator of how Khadra and the Muslim community are constantly (and violently) told that they do not belong in Indiana, but the press coverage of Zuhura’s murder points out how identity is represented as a singular thing. As Khadra notes: “The *Indianapolis Freeman*...said it was about race...it called Zuhura ‘a young black woman’ and didn’t mention that she was Muslim at all. On the other hand, the *Indianapolis Star* pretended like race wasn’t there at all, calling Zuhura a ‘foreign woman’ and ‘an IU international student,’ as if her family didn’t live right there in town” (95). Later on, as Zuhura’s fiancé is questioned by the police, the *Indianapolis Star* publishes another story: “*Murder Possible Honor Killing – Middle Eastern Connection*...with a sidebar on ‘the oppression of women in Islam’” (97).

Zuhura can be black or Muslim or Kenyan or American, but she cannot be all of these identities at the same time: the borders between each of these identities are strictly defined and reinforced by society and the media. Meanwhile, amidst the uncertainty about what happened to Zuhura and where she had been that night, the Muslim community argues about whether “she had been asking for trouble” and had been hiding something, or that she was exactly where she said she was because she was an “honorable girl” and not like “typical American girls” (96, 97, 90). In these conversations and news articles, Khadra witnesses Zuhura’s identity being co-opted by different groups, be they the Dawah Center community or the press, who are all invested in defining Zuhura in simplistic terms and through binaries: either she was a good Muslim or a bad Muslim, Kenyan or American, black or Muslim, Muslim or American. Years later, we see an adult Khadra thinking about Zuhura’s murder again, and recognizing how many simplistic identities had been forced on her, whereas Zuhura had perhaps simply been trying to find a space to be herself, and all that she was: “But what if she’d been just a regular Muslim girl trying to make her way through the obstacle course – through the impossible, contradictory hopes the Muslim community had for her, and the infuriating, confining assumptions the Americans put on her? A girl looking for a way to be, just *be*, outside that tug-of-war?” (358)

Khadra reflects on this simplistic attempt to define Zuhura’s identity, recognizing how it is restrictive and denies Zuhura a space to just *be*. This reflection comes with a recognition that controlling Zuhura’s narrative and identity serves different purposes for different groups, whether it is to sell more newspapers or give hate groups like “The American Protectors of the Environs of Simmonsville” more fuel, or to maintain the idea of a pure and unchanging Muslim identity in the face of bigotry. But whatever purpose it serves and whatever group enacts it, defining Zuhura’s identity in singular, restrictive terms is still a form of control. Similarly,

Khadra herself faces this sort of control, in the shape of her parents telling her she is Muslim and Syrian, *not* American. The Lotts and Orvil Hubbard also reinforce her alienation, while various news outlets and people instill the message that she is an “oppressed Muslim woman,” and her community enforces the message that she could either do certain things and be a “good” Muslim or otherwise be a “bad” Muslim.

These strict boundaries placed segregating different identities come up constantly in Khadra’s narrative, as we see her recognizing the artificiality of such boundaries and the need to resist them. Her act of leaving Indiana, visiting Syria, and then moving to Philadelphia signals a way that she resists control and refuses to take on a simplistic, one-dimensional identity. However, beyond this action of leaving, of searching for, and creating new physical spaces where the borders between identities are fluid and porous (as we see her trying to do in an orchard in Syria or a Sufi mosque in Philadelphia), the use of language within the narration of the novel is a central trope through which Khadra enacts such resistance to borders.

Language as Control, Language as Resistance

Language plays an important role in Khadra’s understanding of identity from early childhood. As new arrivals to the US, “Khadra and Eyad spoke only Arabic at first...Khadra couldn’t remember how she learned the new language, only that she opened her mouth one day and English came out” (10). Khadra narrates how she and her Mexican friend Alessandra-called-Sandra made fun of a Japanese boy for saying “I sreep in my loom,” indicating that she recognizes already how language and accents can be a marker of difference and something that makes one a target for ridicule (10). When she moves to Simmonsville and her family’s house is vandalized by the Lott boys, who target the Shamys because “their talk was gross sounds, like someone throwing up” and whose parents refuse to take Wajdy, who speaks in “stiff British

textbook English, in an Arabic rhythm” seriously, the connection of language to belonging and identity becomes even clearer (6). Speaking Arabic or speaking English in an accent is a sign of being an outsider and maintaining Arabic seems like another fracture between Arabness and Americanness. Language here becomes a form of control: by declaring another’s language and/or accent “gross” or foreign, they can be defined and hence treated as Other.

We see also Khadra’s understanding of language changing over time. Arabic, as a child, is a marker of her Syrianness and Arabness. But even within one language, she realizes, there are instabilities. Watching the miniseries *Roots* with her parents and members of her community, she details the conversation that happens between her father and Uncle Jamal, an African-American Muslim member of the community:

When Umaru, Kunta Kinte’s father, came on screen, Wajdy cried, “You see? They’re Muslims! Umaru is ‘Umar.’ It’s Arabic!”

“Africanized Arabic,” Jamal said, leaning back on the couch in his dashiki shirt.

“Yes, Arabic!” Wajdy repeated, not really listening to him. (84)

That Khadra, even as a child, notices the dynamics of this conversation signals the ways in which she starts to see that Arabic was not a uniform and stable language that could only represent one thing or identity. Jamal’s insistence on the name being *Africanized* Arabic, not just Arabic, is important because as much as Wajdy wants there to be only familiarity when it comes to Arabic and dismisses Jamal to make it seem like there is only one type of Arabic, there is not.

Recognizing that Arabic itself exists in different forms, dialects, and perhaps even entirely different languages is necessary because it recognizes and affirms a complexity of identity. The author makes sure to mention the Jamal is wearing a dashiki shirt – a West African garment – and that Wajdy is “not really listening to him,” which shows how Jamal, who is Muslim-

American just like Wajdy, *is* nevertheless different. To deny the difference, to impose a fixed language, is to attempt to control identity by denying the different parts of Jamal's identity.

We learn from the novel that anti-black racism within the Muslim community is a rampant issue, with Wajdy disapproving of Eyad's choice of a Sudanese-American girl as a potential wife because, as he says involuntarily, "she's black as coal" and because Ebtehaj did not want to have black grandchildren (139). Maha, the girl in question, speaks perfect Arabic – a previously mentioned requirement that Eyad's parents have for his future wife – but her Arabic does not make her a suitable bride for their son because her blackness voids her linguistic identity. The Arabic language, then, is not a stable and straightforward marker of belonging within the Muslim and Arab community. The divide within the Muslim community, as much as Wajdy tries to deny it, is clear when it comes to black and non-black Muslims: a black congregant at Salam Mosque tells Wajdy, after a sermon in which he extolled becoming an American citizen, "You immigrant brothers come in yesterday, and suddenly you white... We been here longer and this country was built on our backs. I don't see nobody trying to give us a silver platter" (144-45). The experiences of black Muslims and the oppressions they face are different from those of Syrian, Arab, or immigrant Muslims, with Muslim-American identity not being a monolithic thing, just as language, even one language, is not a monolithic thing and does not represent simple notions of identity and belonging.

Khadra continues to learn about Arabic and the fissures within Arabic as she grows up, such as when the Shamys perform *hajj* (pilgrimage) and also visit a friend of Ebtehaj's in Saudi Arabia. Ebtehaj says to her friend, who is Syrian but has been living in Saudi Arabia for a long time: "Why, even your speech is Saudi-ized" (165). Later on, when Khadra meets some young Saudis, they are surprised that she speaks Arabic without an accent: "So...you're not really

American? You don't speak Arabic with an accent" (174). When Khadra insists that "No, I'm not really American. I'm an Arab, like you," the other boys and girls find it funny, and keep calling her the American girl. One of the boys, Ghazi, asks her: "What kind of Arab?...I mean, what Arab country? I can't tell from your accent," and Khadra, whose accent is "a mish-mash of Damascene, Palestinian, and Egyptian, all the Arab accent in the Dawah community," tells him she is from Syria, to which he responds, "Ohhh...Syria, huh....Syrian girls have a reputation" (176). Khadra, who has to fend off unwanted sexual advances from Ghazi and is furious with Afaf for putting her in this situation, yells at Afaf "I'm *not* American!" in Arabic, but then switches to English because she knows more insults in English, making Ghazi comment, "Listen to her go off in American!" (178).

This whole incident, with its multiple connections to language, accents, dialects, and Arab and American identities indicates how Arabic and Arab identity are not "pure" and cannot simply be used in opposition to English and American identity, since these too are not stable. Within Arabic, there is "Saudi-ized" Arabic and Syrian/Palestinian/Egyptian dialects, all of which come with a different set of identities, struggles, and assumptions, as demonstrated by Ghazi's comment that Syrian girls "have a reputation," which shows that being Syrian is seen as entirely distinct from being Saudi, and comes with specific prejudices. Similarly, when Ghazi comments on her going off "in American," this too suggests that English as well is fragmented, divided, since Ghazi and the other Saudis also speak English, but they see American English as distinct from what they speak.

Khadra's Exploration of Multiplicity

There are languages within language, cultures within cultures, religions within religions and identities within identities: we see Khadra learning this and embracing this as she grows

more frustrated with the Dawah community's and her parents' insistence on singularity, on "those hard polished surfaces posing as spiritual guidance...Islam is this, Islam is that" (262). She finds a sense of home and familiarity in places she did not expect to, such as in the home of the Christian Arab neighbor of her Muslim friend Jo. This neighbor, Im Litfy, whose features were "so familiarly Syrian, her cadence and voice equally so," and "who felt as familiar as their own grandmother" caught Khadra by surprise because she had not thought of Christians as anything but "Them" (189). The night she spends at Joy's house, she also learns for the first time that it is possible to have a hybridized Arab, Syrian, American identity:

She and Eyad had never seen Arab folk like this: women called Rose who mangled Arabic with an American accent and played Arabic music on American guitars, and men who looked like Hoosier farmers in denim overalls but a shade or two darker. All sitting around eating kibbeh nayyeh on an Indiana evening as the midges and moths played in the porch light. (191)

One of the main features that stands out to her is language: she is struck by the fact that Im Litfy speaks Syrian Arabic and that Rose Shelby mixes Arabic language and music with English. It is language that helps Khadra see the multiplicity and complexity of identity: Arabic does not denote simply Muslim identity or non-American identity but can be part of a Christian or American identity as well in varied, changing, and complicated ways.

It is when Khadra visits Syria that she really begins to explore the complexity of language and identity as manifested through religion and culture. There is a notable scene when she visits a synagogue and notices that the rabbi spoke Arabic with a Damascene accent:

He spoke with the deepest Damascene accent Khadra had ever heard, drawling out the last “m” on every word. “*W’intooh keef? Alhamdi ’llah, tamam. Ey na’am,*” His voice in those chords was like family to her. Something vibrated in her chest.

“Yes, of course, he speaks like a Damascene, darling, he *is* a Damascene,” Téta said, as they emerged, and Khadra felt ashamed for not getting it. Of course, of course; she knew there were Arab Jews..... It’s just that – all this time, she’d thought of them as *Them*, these people over *There*... (305)

Like Im Litfy, like the Shelbys, here again Khadra finds a familiarity in a place she had not expected and learns to think of language in less simplistic ways. This rabbi was Jewish and Damascene, and spoke Arabic like “family” – three descriptors that she had not previously imagined could go together because she had been convinced that Muslim identity could only ever be defined in opposition to other religious identities, and that her Arabness was incompatible with Jewishness. Khadra had already started to see the inconsistencies and the complexities within religious, national, and linguistic identity in her disagreement with her family about the Islamic viewpoint on abortion, her recognition that coming back to Indiana felt like coming back home and seeing that there were different kinds of Arabic, including Americanized Arabic at the Shelbys’ (245, 179). However, it is after meeting the rabbi and hearing him speak Damascene Arabic that Khadra goes into a sort of reverie and spends several days sleeping, waking, thinking, praying as she re-evaluates her past, who she is, and what she believes. Significantly, she remembers at this moment all the people “she had once held at bay, as if behind a fiberglass wall” (306). Remembering Livvy and Hanifa and all the people whom she had seen through rigid notions of Us vs. Them, Khadra starts to see all of them as her kin and as part of herself. The mention of the wall with regard to these people is interesting: Khadra

recognizes the mental borders she had constructed (and which had been constructed for her) when it came to identity, and borders that cut and inflicted violence and separated her from her friends. After this realization, Khadra feels as though “all that had been lost was returning. All that had been disconnected was connected again” (307). Khadra’s epiphany and her recognition of artificial boundaries placed in between identities that create unnecessary hierarchies echo the words of Gloria Anzaldúa as she insists that “a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness....could...bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war” (103). Borders in between identities are a form of control, violence, and separation. Breaking down these borders, as Khadra recognizes, is the pathway to being “connected” again, to “healing the split” between people (Kahf 307; Anzaldúa 102). That it is language that triggers this epiphany for Khadra points to how instrumental language is in Khadra’s shifting understanding of identity, and her recognition of identity as complex and multidimensional.

Language in the novel is mobilized not only in terms of how Khadra’s understanding of language and identity changes, but also in the way that language appears in the text, specifically in the way it resists fixed notions of identity through the use of language. In one of Khadra’s earliest memories from her childhood, she and her brother think about Syria, and what they remember of Syria:

Khadra couldn’t remember Syria, although she thought of it whenever she rubbed a little boomerang-shaped scar on her right knee that had been made on a broken tile in Syria. Red blood running down a white stone step. *Walay himmek. Ey na’am*. Sometimes she had a vague memory of having been on a mountain...Eyad...remembered Syria in complete sentences. Streets busy with people who spoke Arabic in the same rhythms as

his mother and father, *ey wallah*, people whose faces bore his parents' features. Here in 'Mreeka, no one looked like them and they looked like no one. (15)

Arabic here has a specific connotation of being attached to Syria, to Khadra's Syrian identity, and the place where she was born. The longing way in which Syria is discussed, and Khadra's sense of not belonging in "'Mreeka" (America) suggests that the Arabic language (the "rhythms" that Wajdy and Ebtehaj spoke in) as well as being identified as Syrian are a marker of difference.

At the same time, however, the use of Arabic phrases within this passage also points to a way in which Arabic and English, Syrianness and Americanness come together. The fact that Arabic is interwoven with English, and presented without translation, points to how it is an integral part of who Khadra is. Additionally, the fact that the narration is in English points out that English, too, belongs to her as a language. But why is it so important to have both Arabic and English present in the text? In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa sees ethnic identity as a twin skin to linguistic identity, stating: "I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (81). In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Khadra's representation as someone who is thinking and speaking in both of her languages means that she is able to take pride in all of her identities. The co-mingling and co-existence of Arabic and English in the narration suggests that, despite Khadra's sense of being fractured along the lines of Syrian and American identity, both are an undeniable part of who she is and both do exist together, no matter how much everyone tells her she cannot simultaneously be both Syrian and American. So, although accents and bilingualism might seem to further expand the divide between identities, in the novel language actually serves to tie multiple identities together, to offer a way to resist being boxed into one category or the other.

What is even more interesting is how Arabic goes beyond indicating Syrian identity and serves also as the language of Islamic terminology and a representation of Muslim identity. The most significant use of Arabic in the text is through Islamic terms, which are used repeatedly both in narration and dialogue. The first chapter, our first introduction to Khadra, depicts her praying the morning prayer on her way back to her hometown: “And the smell, she thinks, getting out at Glen Miller Park to pray *fajr* on the grass near a statue labeled Madonna of the Trail. God, what is it? She has forgotten it, living for years away....It’s not pollution; not a bad odor, really – nor a good one; just *there*. Silage, soybeans, Hoosier hay, what? she asks the Madonna after *salah*” (2). The Arabic words used here, *fajr* and *salah*, are widely used terms for morning prayer and prayer, respectively, and take on more of a meaning than being an indicator of Khadra’s Arab identity: these terms are Islamic in nature, and indicate how Khadra’s identity as a Muslim is ever-present, even as she thinks about a statue of the Madonna or the smell of Indiana.

Of course, this excerpt is from an adult Khadra’s life, but the narration of her childhood also constantly relies on Arabic Islamic terms. Near the beginning of the novel, we see Khadra praying with her community:

First position, *qiyam*. Standing, feet planted hip-distance apart for balance, focus, before you raise your arms in *allahu*. “Straighten your lines, close the gaps-stand shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot,” the imam at Salam Mosque said before he called the first *allahu*. “Shaytan gets between you if you leave a gap.” Like one of the pushy boys at school, Khadra imagined. She squinched close up against Tayiba and tugged Hanifa’s arm to pull her into line. “No pushy Shaytan gonna get between us, hunh.”

“*Wala addaleeeen*,” called the imam.

“*Aaaahmeeeeen*,” the congregation responded. Khadra loved the ‘ameens.’ The strong vibrations of the men’s voices and the murmurs of the women made her feel safe.

Sandwiched between them, she was right where she belonged. (32-33)

This excerpt makes use of several terms like *qiyam*, *allahu*, *waladdaleen*, and *ameen*, all postures or phrases relating to daily prayers that Khadra comfortably uses, using them and switching back to English without having to think about it. She is not only comfortable but feels safe and feels like she belongs in a prayer hall of people saying *ameen* in unison. She lives in both Arabic and English and talks about school, using English colloquialisms like “gonna” and “hunh” alongside the specific rhythms of Muslim prayer. Language here gives voice to her Muslim identity as well as her American identity, and she finds comfort and belonging in this mix of languages and the hybridity they connote.

This switching between English and Arabic, and specifically Islamic terminologies in Arabic, happens throughout the novel: “Pig meat was filthy...That’s why God made it *haram*, her mother said” (13). Moreover, “[t]aped up by the scratched mirror was a piece of notebook paper with “Cleanliness, is part of *iman*!” scrawled earnestly in black magic marker,” and “Khadra...nestled into Zuhura’s side, shadowing her every motion as Zuhura imamed them through the four *rakats* of duhr prayer” (32, 59) These are just a few examples of Islamic terminology being used in the text without translation. Words like “haram” (forbidden) and “iman” (faith) and “rakats” (units of prayer) would appear to require translation, as they are very specific to Islam, but we are not provided with translations here. Indeed, words like “duhr” (one of the five daily prayers) are not even italicized, taking away the foreignness of the word itself. For Khadra, as a Muslim, these words are part of her everyday life and Islamic terminology is another language she is fluent in. The readers of the novel, if they do not possess the specific

Islamic knowledges that Khadra does, are not accommodated. They are expected to become comfortable with this use of multiple languages (or at least become comfortable with being uncomfortable) and either get used to not knowing, or search up the meanings of these words on their own.

Refusing to translate oneself is an act of resistance, and an embrace of multiple identities. Gloria Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands*: “Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having to always translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate” (81). *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* does something similar: rather than having a narrative only in English or only in Arabic, and rather than providing translations when Arabic phrases or Islamic terms are used, the narrative makes use of it all, switching codes constantly. Khadra might constantly feel her Arab and Muslim identities being at odds with her American identity, and might feel the need to compromise on one to fit in more with her community, but the use of multiple languages without translation shows that it *is* possible to refuse to be just one thing, a refusal to disregard one of her identities in order to make other people comfortable. Instead, she chooses to embody and enact all these identities at once by stressing her unique, multilingual voice. Even as readers are taken on Khadra’s journey as a character who over time figures out that national, religious, and linguistic identities are not singular and fixed, and that she needs to resist impositions of fixed identity, readers are simultaneously also given a practical tool of resistance through Kahf’s manipulation of language in the text.

Kahf’s utilization of language goes beyond just the use of multiple languages to also utilize a new, hybridized language. There are words in the text such as “imamed” which are

neither Arabic nor English but rather a hybridized form that draws on both languages. “Imamed” means led through prayer. Here Kahf takes the Arabic/Islamic term *Imam*, in reference to someone who leads the prayer, and adds “ed” to the end to turn it into a past tense verb, thus creating a term that is neither Arabic nor English, but makes complete sense in Khadra’s context. Such words are used throughout the novel, such as when Khadra starts wearing the hijab and says “the sensation of being hijabed was a thrill” and calls herself and her friends “the hijab’d girls.” Another instance is when she says “right after they salam’d from praying isha,” or when she calls her car “a good little jihad-wager of a car” (112, 113, 242, 323). If Gloria Anzaldúa talks about mixing Spanish and English together in her speech, switching between the languages effortlessly, and using a whole new language, such as Spanglish or Tex-Mex that is neither Spanish nor English but has new words, new phrases, new ways of communicating realities that are true for Chicano/as, then here we see Mohja Kahf creating a new language for her character Khadra. Being “hijabed” and finishing prayer once you have “salam’d” are neither standard Arabic or standard English phrases, nor are they standard Islamic terminology. But they are phrases that Khadra uses repeatedly because they incorporate the different aspects of her identity – Muslim, Arab, American – into her voice.

Although hybridized and multiple languages are utilized from the beginning of the novel, we eventually see Khadra as a character who also embrace a complexity of identities. Upon going to Syria, she finds it to be strangely “familiar” and still identifies strongly as Syrian, but also recognizes America as home, stating: “she knew by the time she crossed the Atlantic that she was headed home, if there was any home in the world of worlds” (268, 313). The fact that she thinks this last phrase, “if there was any home in the world of worlds,” is significant because it points to how Khadra’s understanding of national belonging has changed: even though she

recognizes “that it was in the American crucible where her character had been forged” and even though Syria held a special place in her heart, she refuses to pick only one country as her true home or where she truly belongs (313). This is a far cry from the Khadra we met as a child, who is determined to think of herself as Syrian, *not* as American. Language is mobilized in a very particular way here in order to demonstrate multiplicity: “She was on her shariah to America. Toto, we’re not in Damascus anymore, Khadra whispered, as the wheels hit the ground. Homeland America, *bismillah*” (313). Just as we see Khadra develop a more complex understanding of national identity, we also see in the language used here that Islamic terminology (shariah and *bismillah*), an American popular cultural reference (the Toto bit), and the English language come together to more completely express Khadra’s thoughts and identities. The borders between languages were broken down throughout the novel, and now the borders between national identities are also broken down.

Similarly, the way Khadra thinks about her religious identity changes as well, imagining a mosque in which “you’d pray, then you’d listen to music and poetry and wisdom from all over the world. You’d go walking arm in arm with your counterpart in every other religion and just relate as humans under the sun.” She also develops a more fluid understanding of hijab: “maybe she knew about *kashf*, the unveiling of light. How veiling and unveiling are part of the same process, the same cycle, how both are necessary, how both light and dark are connected moments in the development of the soul in its darkroom” (328, 309). She practices religion on her own terms after years of being told what Islam was by her family and by people like the Lotts, refusing to let Chrif or Seemi tell her what Islam is or is not. She visits radically different kinds of mosques and accepts Muslims who choose different paths – like Hanifa and Insaf – and people of different faiths as well as atheists, like Seemi and Blu respectively. The hybridity of

the language of the text is emphasized through the development of Khadra's character as she embraces fluidity and hybridity and resists physical and figurative borders.

Conclusion

I characterize Kahf's use of this hybridized language as a tool of resistance because it offers an alternative to a fixed notion of identity. When writing about Arab American author Diana Abu Jaber's book *Crescent*, Magali Cornier Michael writes that hybridity is important to the text "because of its possibilities in the face of the difficult task of representing the complexities of Arab American identities within the present-day context. The novel instantiates the ways in which creating and representing such dynamic identities require constructing new narrative forms" (318-19). While Michael here is referring to specific aspects of Abu Jaber's text, such as combining the western novel format with eastern storytelling techniques, she does point out the potential of using hybridity and an entirely new narrative form to represent a complexity that resists simplistic, one-dimensional understandings of identity. Kahf's utilization of multiple languages in her text, the refusal to translate herself, and the creation of new words serves a similar purpose; if Abu Jaber creates a new narrative form to better represent a complexity of identities, then Kahf is creating a new language to do the same.

But why is creating a new language, relying on hybridity, and representing the complexity of identities so vital and why do I consider it part of a wider feminist of color project? Martina Koegeler-Abdi, in her essay on Kahf's novel, analyzes Khadra's distinct choices and understanding of religion, connecting "the microanalytical context of her character development . . . [and] her own inner access to spirituality and faith" to Anzaldúa's process of "self-writing as de- and reconstructing your own self outside hegemonic cultural imprints" (9). While Koegeler-Abdi identifies Khadra's choices as her insistence on constructing the self

outside hegemonic cultural imprints, I consider Kahf's use of hybridized language as another component of this project of resisting hegemonic cultural imprints.

In this regard, Kahf engages in a project taken on by a wider feminist of color network, including Chicana feminists, black womanists, and Arab and Muslim-American feminists. Resisting the borders of fixed identities and hegemonic cultural imprints is not only about allowing one character (in this case Khadra) to speak for herself, but to create the possibility of broader alliances. What becomes elemental here is Anzaldúa's vision of breaking down borders as a way to heal the split between "the white race and the colored, between males and females" and other binaries. This vision is also articulated by feminists like Chéla Sandoval, who imagines U.S. Third World Feminism serving as a "Third Space" where alliances across differences are made possible and feminists from vastly different backgrounds could form powerful networks of resistance (Anzaldúa 102, Sandoval 358). Sandoval's language here is interesting, because "third space" is also the terminology used by theorist Homi Bhabha when discussing hybridity and the potential of hybridity to destabilize ideas of uniform identity and to directly challenge colonial hierarchies (Klages 160).

"By recognizing the fragmentation and complexity of their identities and their commonalities with others...Arab Americans may begin to join forces with others marginalized by categories of identities or by structures of violence and power," Majaj writes in her essay "Arab American Ethnicity" (332). Majaj here calls for resistance, specifically against "categories of identities," recognizing strict categorizations of identity as a form of oppression, and recognizing an embrace of complexity as a form of resistance. This embrace of complex identities is the creation of a Third Space, as articulated by Sandoval, and by Evelyn Alsultany when she insists that "carving and crafting new spaces for the expression of Arab American

feminisms” will help “illustrate the brilliant complexities of Arab and Arab American women’s lives,” resist categorizations and control, and allow for radical alliances amongst women of color (Alsultany 240-241).

It is this call to resistance that Mohja Kahf answers in her novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* through the development of a character who recognizes fixed identities as a form of control and resists them through her refusal to choose one national identity or one fixed religious identity over another. Instead, she makes her own choices and defines herself on her own terms. Moreover, Kahf also answers this call to resistance by incorporating multiple languages into the narrative and going even beyond that by creating new vocabulary and a new language for Khadra, a language that showcases Khadra’s multiple and complex identities and allows her to speak with all of her voices. Hence, in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, we see the possibility of women of color literature serving as a powerful form of resistance and being part of the project of creating a Third Space where identity is not fixed and where feminists of color can work together, comfortable with difference, contradiction, and complexity.

Conclusion

In her essay “Arab American Citizenship in Crisis: Destabilizing Representations of Arabs and Muslims in the US after 9/11,” Carol Fadda-Conrey examines Arab American fiction by Joseph Geha, Mohja Kahf, and Laila Halaby, and writes that “post-9/11 Arab American fiction ultimately plays a destabilizing role in polemical constructions of US national belonging by imagining counter-hegemonic and heterogeneous enactments of non-formulaic, non-binaristic types of US citizenship” (547). According to Fadda-Conrey, these texts emphasize the need for complexity and “internal multiplicity and difference” within self-representation, which “in turn engenders a discursive as well as literal space in which more complex and engaged forms of national belonging could be imagined and enacted” (548).

Through the utilization of language, Randa Jarrar’s *A Map of Home* and Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* both take part in this project of creating a new space that welcomes complexity and reimagines belonging. Nidali’s language constructs a space where Egyptian Arabic, colloquial English, Islamic traditions, Palestinian history, American pop culture, experiences of migration and Nidali’s own unique relationship with her parents co-exist and intermingle. Khadra’s language constructs a space where Syrian Arabic, American slang, Indiana-specific references, Islamic terminology, and Khadra’s specific experiences of growing up in the “Dawah Center” community all exist together.

That is not to say that all these experiences, identities, and linguistic registers come together seamlessly. In his essay “Living in Arabic,” Edward Said reflects on the “dissonant jolt” that bilingual individuals experience when a concept or word has conflicting meanings in their two languages. Some words “coexist in the bilingual ear, unresolved, never at peace,” Said writes. In the same essay, he goes on to discuss the inevitable inequality of languages in a

bilingual context and the difficulty faced in incorporating both colloquial and classical Arabic in his speech (Said 6, 7). Examining language in *A Map of Home* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* raises similar questions of conflict and imbalance. Despite the incorporation of multiple languages and contexts, the novels are after all English-language novels written primarily in English. Does this mean that English is ultimately privileged over Arabic and that English speakers are ultimately privileged over Arabic speakers? And what does this imbalance mean for the project that Jarrar and Kahf are undertaking?

Similarly, is it fair to examine *A Map of Home* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* as part of the same project when there are such vast differences between these two novels? Nidali and Khadra live drastically different lives from one another: for while Nidali moves from Boston to Kuwait to Egypt to Texas, Khadra was born in Syria and spends most of her life in one small town in Indiana. Moreover, while Nidali's parents do not identify as religious, Khadra's family strongly do. Nidali's father is physically abusive, whereas Khadra's father is not. These and many other specificities of each character's life and circumstances means that their personalities and their methods of resistance are specific to their contexts.

Examining Nidali's and Khadra's paths of self-discovery and rebellion, Ismet Bujupaj points out that "Nidali, in contrast to Khadra, confronts her parents' limitations directly while still a teenager, and begins her journey of self-discovery earlier than Khadra... teenaged Nidali repeatedly does go outside the parental bounds but keeps it a secret, while Khadra does not venture out of parental expectations until her abortion-divorce-breakdown, in adulthood" (199). Depending on their individual personalities and their individual circumstances, Nidali and Khadra resist familial, societal, and national control in different ways and at different times. Their methodologies are unique: Nidali resists control by transgressing the physical and sexual

boundaries that Waheed sets for her, and by defiantly writing with all of her voices in her compositions. Khadra resists control by physically moving away from her family and community, ultimately redefining her connection to religion and the hijab on her own terms.

There are certainly commonalities between these two narratives. After all, both Nidali and Khadra rely on physical transgressions, making their own choices, and constructing a hybridized language that reflects their multiple linguistic, cultural, and national contexts. But recognizing that their visualizations of resistance are different and that their ultimate goals are also different is not just an observation but a crucial element of the project of resistance. Dismantling borders that separate identities and insisting on a fluidity and multiplicity of identities requires relying on multiple modes of resistance, switching from mode to mode as necessary within one's specific context. And just as Nidali and Khadra insist on being able to change their minds and make varying choices, perhaps we can address the question of the imbalance between English and Arabic with the same context. Jarrar and Kahf choose English with Arabic incorporated into their texts because they have a choice to make in terms of language and visualization of resistance when it comes to how best to approach their particular audiences. Resistance cannot be simple, neat, perfectly balanced and without contradiction. Jarrar and Kahf show us that it is through complexity and contradiction that we find one of the most effective forms of resistance.

"En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures," Gloria Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands* (102). Anzaldúa's clear-eyed vision of the future champions the mestiza, the one who possesses multiple and hybridized identities, and recognizes the potential of the mestiza and the mestiza consciousness to transform the world.

The idea of all of one's identities existing simultaneously, of a person switching between their multiple languages without translating or accommodating anybody, of different cultural and religious and national contexts being expressed at the same time seems overwhelming and too rife with contradictions to actually function. And while in Anzaldúa's work we see the theoretical vision of this future, of resisting borders as the only way to achieve the cessation of internal and external conflict, it is in Nidali's and Khadra's narratives that we find practical examples of how hybridized language can be instrumental in moving towards this future.

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