



Hermeneutical Manifestations of Hijabphobia in Mohja Kahf's Selected Poems

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Abstract

The term Hijabphobia is one of the forms of discourse that is founded on painful racial and religious discrimination against women who wear hijab, and it has received the attention of researchers, scholars, and poets. The study is centered on tracing the notion and its effects according to the theory of the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey in Hermeneutics, where the poems are selected from the collection of the poet Mohja Kahf's *E-mails from Scheherazad*. In addition to emphasizing the fact that women who wear hijab have a right to do so, this mission merits investigating potential explanations for this discourse and pinpointing potential causes. This paper will help to shed light on the systematic discourse that is directed against hijab.

Keywords: Hijabphobia, lived experience, Hermeneutics, Muslim women



التجليات التأويلية لرهاب الحجاب في أشعار مهجة قحف المختارة

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المستخلص :

يستعرض البحث كيف تعكس مهجة قحف فوبيا الحجاب في قصائدها من خلال تحليل الأبعاد التأويلية لهذه الظاهرة. يعتمد البحث على الأطر النظرية للفوبيا والتأويل من منظور علم النفس والاجتماع، ويحلل مجموعة مختارة من قصائد قحف. يتم تسليط الضوء على كيفية تصوير قحف للحجاب كرمز للمقاومة والهوية الثقافية، وكيف تبرز الفوبيا المتعلقة بالحجاب في نصوصها. يتناول البحث اللغة الشعرية التي تستخدمها قحف لمواجهة الفوبيا والتحديات التي تواجهها النساء المسلمات في المجتمعات الغربية مسلطة الضوء على الأبعاد الثقافية والنفسية والسياسية لفوبيا الحجاب، مع التركيز على تقديم رؤى جديدة ومغايرة للحجاب. تُختتم الدراسة بتلخيص النقاط الرئيسية واستكشاف مخاوف المجتمع من الحجاب وكيف تعبر عن التوترات الثقافية والسياسية المرتبطة به، موضحة تأثير قصائد قحف في تغيير الفهم السائد عن الحجاب وفوبياه، وتعزيز الحوار الثقافي من خلال الأدب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رهاب الحجاب، التجربة المعاشة، التأويلية، النساء المسلمات.

1. Introduction

Chouki Hamel observes in the book *Women and Islam: Women's Movements in Muslim Societies* (2005) Hijab is an important cultural and religious symbol in the Islamic culture, expressing the identity of Muslim women and their relationship with religion (Funk, 2023, p.6). However, Western societies have witnessed an increase in the discourse related to Hijabphobia, which manifests itself in various forms of prejudice and discrimination against Muslim women. This discourse treats hijab as a symbol of oppression and backwardness, leading to a profound misunderstanding of its true nature and meanings for Muslim women. This study attempts to investigate the ways how Hijabphobia is manifested in the poems of the poet Mohja Kahf. She is a Syrian-American poet and writer, born in Damascus and moved to the United States at a young age. She studied English literature and served as a professor of comparative literature and women's studies at the University of Arkansas (Majaj & Amireh, 2000, p. 223).

Kahf is known for her literary works that focus on issues of identity, culture, and religion. Her most notable works include her collection of Poems *E-mails from Scheherazad*, the novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. In her works, she addresses contemporary issues faced by Muslim women in the West, using literature as a means of expressing their experiences and the challenges they face (Ortega & Alcoff, 2009, p. 82).

Kahf is considered one of the most prominent literary voices confronting Hijabphobia in western societies. She uses her poetry and writing to deconstruct negative stereotypes associated with hijab and to offer a deeper and more complex vision of this cultural and social symbol. Kahf sees Hijabphobia as not just a social phenomenon, but rather part of a broader discourse that promotes a negative and distorted image of Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular (Haddad & Smith, 2006, p.177).

In her poems, Kahf depicts the hijab as a symbol of identity and resistance, noting that Muslim women who wear it face dual challenges related to prejudice and discrimination. The researchers such as Ruth O'Brien and Joan Wallach Scott suggest that racism, fear, and nationalism are the driving forces behind laws prohibiting the Islamic hijab in Western societies (Scott, 2009, p. ix).

Hijab is perceived as a danger to secular and liberal principles. This fear is a part of the larger discourse surrounding Islamophobia, which supports unfavorable preconceptions about Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular. This study aims to comprehend how literature addresses this

phobia and how it can challenge and demolish these prejudices through an interpretation of Mohja Kahf's poems.

2. Theoretical Framework

Recently, literary studies have witnessed an increasing interest in deconstructing stereotypes and cultural symbols in contemporary literature, particularly in relation to sensitive religious and cultural issues. Hijab is regarded as one of the cultural and religious symbols that has generated widespread controversy in Western contexts, where it is often analyzed through the lens of imperialism and negative stereotypes. Several conducted previous studies have addressed the topic of hijab and its impact on Muslim women in Western societies, focusing on how this phenomenon is portrayed in literature and poetry. These studies address the psychological and social dimensions of hijab, as well as the role of literature in confronting this topic promoting cultural understanding. Katherine Bullock's (2010) *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes*; is a pioneering work that examines how the veil is portrayed in Western literature and discusses the impact of negative stereotypes on Muslim women. Bullock focuses on the role of the veil as a symbol of identity and culture and how literature can be used to combat prejudice and discrimination.

And Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Janie Smith, Kathleen. Moore (2006) *Muslim Women in America the Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*. This study presents the challenges faced by Muslim women in the United States, focusing on the impact of hijab on their daily lives. The book examines the social and cultural dimensions. Other previous studies suggested that literature and poetry can be effective tool to confront hijab and promote cultural understanding. By presenting real-life stories and experiences, literature can help dismantle stereotypes and promote dialogue between different cultures, contributing to building bridges of understanding and mutual respect.

2.1 Related Works

Numerous academic studies have addressed the hijab in the post-9/11 context, where it has been re-emerged as a problematic symbol laden with political and cultural connotations in the West, often associated with negative images ranging from male oppression to religious extremism. Leila Ahmed in her book *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (2011) discussed how the hijab has become a site of ideological conflict used to justify discriminatory policies, particularly in Western societies witnessing a rise in Islamophobia and its ramifications, such as Hijabphobia.

In the literary context, Syrian-American poet Mohja Kahf has emerged as an important critical voice in deconstructing stereotypes of Muslim women, particularly through the use of poetry as a rhetorical tool that challenges Western cultural hegemony. Several scholars, such as Miriam Cooke, Margort Badran and Jasmine Zine (2009), have examined the articulation of concepts of identity, belonging, and gender in the diaspora. However, studies specifically addressing the hermeneutical analysis of representations of the hijab in Kahf's poetry remain limited, highlighting the importance of this research in bridging this knowledge gap.

3. The Analytical Part

The study uses hermeneutics to identify recurring themes in Kahf's poems, such as cultural identity and resistance. This identification is followed by a contextual analysis to understand social and political issues associated with Hijabphobia and how they are reflected in poetry. A hermeneutic approach based on Wilhelm Dilthey's theory of hermeneutic is applied to understand more meanings and philosophical implications in the poetry, exploring how Kahf's background and personal experiences influence her depiction of hijab. Data collection involves careful reading of poems and review of relevant literature. The study is presented honestly and adheres to ethical guidelines in literary research.

A comprehensive literary analysis is conducted of the selected poems, focusing on the poetic form, language, and symbolic images that Kahf uses to depict hijab and its phobia. This analysis includes examining how phobia is embodied in the texts and how Kahf presents the concept of hijab as a symbol of identity and resistance.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the interpretive manifestations of Hijabphobia in selected poems by the poet Mohja Kahf. The study begins by selecting specific texts of poems from her collections *E-mails from Scheherazad* that address the topic of the hijab and the experiences of Muslim women in Western contexts.

The term "hermeneutics" was initially used by philosophers who examined how spiritual ideas or messages from God are communicated in human language. It is derived from the ancient Greek word "hermeneuein" which means "to utter, to explain, to translate". Aristotle (384–322 BCE) wrote the first extant treatise on hermeneutics, demonstrating how spoken and written words were expressions of inner thoughts. Plato (427–347), an ancient Greek philosopher, used the term hermeneutics in his discussion of poets as "hermeneuts of the divine" As a result, the term "hermeneuein" and its later Latin equivalent "interpretari" were linked to the work of comprehending spoken or written communication from the moment they were first used.

(Zimmerman, 2015, p. 3).

Schleiermacher is considered one of the foremost pioneers in hermeneutical theory. He shifted the focus of hermeneutics from the interpretation of sacred texts to the interpretation of the humanities in his work *Hermeneutics: Outline of a Theory of Understanding* published in 1819. (Schrift & Ormiston, 1990, p. 83)

The general project of hermeneutics declined after Schleiermacher's death. However, the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey revived it in the late 19th century. Dilthey saw hermeneutics as the foundation for all spiritual sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), including humanities and social sciences. These branches of research are concerned with interpreting the inner life of humans, whether these expressions are gestures, historical actions, written laws, or literary and artistic works (Palmer, 1969, p. 98) .

Dilthey argues that we perceive, think, and understand in light of the past, present, and future, as well as our feelings, demands, and ethical obligations. Because the centrality of life in the process of knowledge should be based on the formative role played by history in shaping the encounter between human self-awareness and humanity itself. This encounter, according to Dilthey, occurs through the interaction of the knowing self with the surrounding truths in life. Therefore, understanding arises and evolves from experience and from understanding selves rooted in history and in the continuous interaction between them. As a result, knowledge of ourselves and others arises through history rather than through deduction. The interpretive formula proposed by Dilthey relies on three important principles: experience, expression, and understanding (Palmer, 1969, p.247).

According to Dilthey, who relies on "Erfahrung" (lived experience) as the basis for human knowledge, this experience involves sensory perception, which in turn is formed within a living historical process. It is not merely about discovering reality but about the individual's fusion within collective memory and anticipation, where each person's experience of reality and life's trials contribute to what Dilthey terms as "lived experience". The experience is based on understanding, and understanding in turn is derived from the experience from which human learns and gains expertise through their actions, enabling them to understand others through expressive practice. The interpretive phenomenological approach to life experience stems from a philosophical background and knowledge centered on philosophical statements associated with a dialectical movement (understanding, expression, experience). It emphasizes that understanding arises from within the lived experience that individuals undergo. Understanding emerges from

the practical concerns of life, where people rely on mutual communication and reciprocal understanding, focusing on the workings of the human mind and rediscovering the self in the other by re-experiencing it through phenomenological analysis. Dilthey was fascinated by the poetic potential of poets and held a great regard for the German poet Goethe.

His approach to poetic imagination is connected to his perceptual interpretation of history. Dilthey held the opinion that "all genuine poetry feeds on historical facts", he did not separate the poet's psychological existence from its historical setting. Poetry is an accumulation of the poet's lived experiences through their direct connection with reality. These experiences are organized in terms of the gradual development of acquired psychological relationships. Past experiences are organized through this connection, which in turn creates multiple links, and these links "Are lived and experienced". They represent the acquired psychological relationship, the poets' comprehensive response to reality, which can be expressed according to Dilthey as "a world view" because poetry "Is a meaningful articulation of lived experience". (Dilthey, 2002, pp. 8-9).

The second crucial term in Dilthey's interpretive approach is "expression" translated from the German word "Ausdruck". The term "expression" does not mean merely expressing emotions and feelings, as known in expressive theories in art and poetry. Instead, it refers to it being an embodiment of the human mind, knowledge, feeling, and will. The interpretive significance of this embodiment arises from its focus on understanding a fixed expression of lived experience rather than comprehending it through deduction, which Dilthey considers unreliable. Through expression, one articulates life, as Dilthey emphasized: "Everything in which the spirit of man has objectified itself falls in the area of the Geisteswissenschaften" (Dilthey, 2002, p. 24).

According to the Diltheyan perspective, expression occurs within a historical context. Thus, this theory becomes not only about interpreting texts but also about how life reveals itself and expresses itself through actions, whether literary or artistic. Therefore, expression here is not about an individual reality exclusive to one person over another but about written expression between mutually participating parties in similar structures through which objective understanding is achieved. Hence, hermeneutics differs in its approach to expression from psychological logic and focuses on lived experience within the socio-historical reality (Dilthey, 2002, p.24).

Dilthey questions the ability to extract universally valid principles from limited personal internal experiences. Dilthey believes that the solution to this dilemma lies in the fact that internal experience (the poet's experience) receives external expression (a poem) as long as this experience is presented

within the sensory world (the external world). Thus, it is possible to access the inner world (*Erscheinung*) through these expressions, and through these expressions, we come to understand the experiences of others. Given Dilthey's strong interest in poetry and the formation of expression and poetic style, he provides a tentative definition of expression: "A process by which something outer is enlivened by something inner or something inner is made visible and intuitable by something outer" (Murphy, 2010, p.145).

The third term his theory in hermeneutics is understanding. According to Dilthey, this term carries a specific meaning that differs from its conventional definition. Dilthey coined the term "*Erebnis Ausdruck*" which means "expression of lived experience". The distinctive feature of this term is that it signifies the embodiment of lived experience. Unlike the previous two categories, it does not align with a specific aspect of life. Dilthey emphasizes, this situation is entirely different for "*The Erebnis Ausdruck*" because "a special relation exists between it, the life from which it arises and the understanding that it produces". This term, according to Dilthey, extensively delves into human life, thus addressing significant challenges in understanding. It is essential to differentiate between the processes of understanding and interpretation. While interpretation involves purely intellectual operations, understanding occurs through the collective activity of all mental faculties in perception. Dilthey encapsulates this idea in his famous statement, "We interpret nature, but we must understand man". In this process of understanding, Dilthey distinguishes between the higher and the initial levels.

The initial expression implies the direct comprehension of a single aspect of life in the previous categories (experience, expression), where no conscious inference is required regarding the relationship between expression and its meaning, such as facial expressions of joy or sadness, where the expression is straightforward and uncomplicated. Transitioning from this initial direct understanding to a higher level occurs when doubts arise regarding the meaning due to ambiguity, contradictions, and differences, as the unity of expression at this stage is no longer assured. Clarifying the meaning of an expression at this stage requires testing its content by linking it to other expressions. In such cases, the task of understanding becomes correcting or clarifying a specific meaning. Another function of higher understanding, apart from clarification, is deepening understanding (meaningful objectification). In this case, linking expressions more consciously to the holistic structure of meanings by connecting individual expressions to define unity is required. This understanding is specific to the third category of expression, *Erebnis Ausdruck*, where Dilthey elucidates this process through understanding expressions of artistic life in literary works. Dilthey believes

that artists can reveal their Erelbins in Erelbnis Ausdruck, where great works of art represent special cases that overcome the problem of deception (Makkreel, 1992, p.324-326).

Moreover, the process of understanding occurs within the hermeneutic circle where everyone derives their significance and meaning of the parts, while the parts themselves cannot be understood except by reference to the whole. Meaning is what understanding acquires through the essential mutual interaction between the whole and the parts. (Ghosh & Ghosh, 2007, p. 200).

4. Data Analysis

Dilthey's experience, or the lived experience, can be linked back to Mohja Kahf's poetic experience. In an effort to uncover possible interpretations of portions of the selected poems, the poems will be analyzed using the terms Dilthey used in the field of hermeneutics. This research will address the subject of Hijabphobia in selected poems of Mohja Kahf. It will be exploring how Kahf advocated the right of the Muslim migrant woman to wear hijab, who has been marginalized and confined to the realm of the "other". It is worth noting that highlighting this feminist subject does not necessarily mean approaching it from a feminist perspective, although there may be overlaps at times. Rather, it is an interpretive approach aligned with Dilthey's hermeneutic theory.

The issue of hijab, which Kahf seeks to highlight, is one of the most significant topics directly and strictly associated with the Islamic faith. The paper does not aim to provide an interpretive understanding from a religious perspective but rather to approach it from a purely humanistic standpoint, focusing on the rights of Muslim women to choose to wear the hijab.

Mohja Kahf advocates for one of the most fundamental human rights that Muslim girls in the diaspora struggle to retain which is the right to wear hijab. The word hijab, derived from the Arabic word "hajaba" means "to veil, to seclude, to screen, to conceal, to form a separation, to mask". According to Faegheh Shirazi, hijab is part of Islamic culture. For many Muslim women, hijab has additional functional aspects, as it conveys messages about social class and status within the community. It also serves a political purpose; during the post-colonial period, many women in Egypt and Palestine used hijab as a means to resist colonial and secular domination, as well as modern Islamic governments (Hill, 2011, 160). It is what reveals Orientalist studies whose origins go back to traditional Orientalist thought in the eighteenth century (Juma, 2024)

Shirley A. Fedorak, in her book *Anthropology Matters* (2013), believes that since September 11, Muslims in North America have found themselves

facing a new era, described by European Parliament member Alan Lebleigiz as Islamophobia. The discrimination and harassment of Muslim women in countries like Canada have shocked the Muslim community, especially within the context of a modern liberal system that emphasizes the importance of human rights in general and religious rights in particular. Women in host countries have been attacked, and countries like Canada have banned the Niqab at citizenship ceremonies and are considering banning it in schools, hospitals, and government buildings. Muslim women have been assaulted by Canadians and accused of bringing backwardness (Fedorak, 2013, P.12), hijab has been associated with terrorism, leading to the emergence of the term Hijab phobia.

The term Hijabphobia is coined by Manal Hamzeh who first used it in her book *Pedagogies of Deveiling: Muslim Girls and the Hijab Discourse* (2012). She believes that hijab phobia could be a form of racial, religious, and gender discrimination directed against Muslim women. It is an implicit discourse within Islamophobia that conceals the essential significance of hijab. Hijab phobia represents a historically entrenched hate speech rooted in Orientalist representations that depict colonized women as different and oppressed victims of misogynistic societies (Hamzeh, 2012, P.9).

Hence, the discourse appears to be ideological, and this study will attempt to uncover its causes and implications by analyzing Kahf's poems, which should reveal the ideologization of the anti-hijab discourse. In the introduction to her book *E-mails from Scheherazad*, Mohja Kahf declares that her poems emerged from conversations with remarkable women in her literary salon, which she started in 1995 (Kahf, 2003). Accordingly, Kahf's experience during her journey in diaspora is not an individual experience but rather the collective experience of a generation of women living in diaspora.

The Diltheyan experience formed through Kahf's sensory and cognitive awareness, represents Kahf's expertise in the USA, knowledgeable about the tragic reality experienced by Muslim women living in diaspora countries, who suffer from deliberate exclusion policies branding them as backward due to wearing hijab.

Kahf derived her humanitarian expertise by being among marginalized Muslims, where her individual experience as a Muslim who wears hijab merged with collective experience. Her understanding of women's suffering found expression through her poetry. Her personal essence dissolved within the collective feminist consciousness, allowing her to articulate a lived communal experience, particularly in poems dedicated to studying hijab's theme. Kahf often appears in public wearing hijab, asserting that she wears

it to affirm her Muslim identity rather than for religious reasons. In this sense, Kahf moves away from her individuality to dissolve into the collective understanding, attempting to advocate the rights of women who wear hijab (Al-Maleh, 2019, p. 31).

Al-Sowaidi (2023) argues that religion occupies a prominent place in poetry (Al-Sowaidi, 2023, p.408). In her poem "Hijab Scene" from her collection *E-mails from scheherazad* which was published in 2003, Kahf depicts the politics of excluding Muslim women who wear the hijab. Using a dramatic style akin to a one-act play, which she presents in a clever and striking manner:

You people have such restrictive dress for woman,

She said, hobbling away in three-inch heels and pantyhose

To finish out another pink-collar temp pool day.

(Kahf, 2003, p. 43)

The title of the poem shows Kahf's tendency to defend the rights of Muslim women living in Western societies, particularly their right to wear hijab. Sheth (2022) argues that a review of television and newspaper reports over nearly two decades, especially following the events of September 11, reveals the extent of hostility directed at the women who wear hijab. Daily news reports highlight persistent efforts to forcibly remove hijab or Niqab from young girls or Muslim women walking in the streets or working in public spaces. These forms of persecution fall under the category of racial or religious discrimination (Sheth 2022, p. 1)

Kahf, in these lines reflects the Lacanian mirror stage, attempting to discover her dilemma within the crises of her feminist generation. She draws parallels and analogies between the Western beliefs that hijab restricts Muslim women's freedom. As a poetic device the poetess structured the poem without meter or rhyme, allowing her freedom of expression. She employs irony to highlight hidden truths without direct statements. Muslim women are constrained and marginalized based on their hijab, as illustrated by the line "you people have such restrictive dress" In contrast, in the line "hobbling away in three-inch heels" western women are not similarly constrained or marginalized for wearing elaborate and tight clothing merely to keep up with societal expectations! (Kahf, 2003, p. 43).

From this perspective, Kahf, as a poet, scholar, and intellectual, recognizes that Western norms somehow impose a certain appearance on Western women (such as wearing three-inch heels) and that narrow societal conventions have further restricted women's freedoms. Kahf critiques the

intolerant Western society that imposes strict dress codes on women, contributing to the restriction of their liberties through her use of this contradictory poetic image. Although the poetic structure of the poem does not explicitly mention women who wear hijab. Kahf relies on the reader's ability to connect the poem's title with its theme, like in her poems "Hijab Scene #1", "Hijab Scene #7", "Hijab Scene#" (Kahf, 2003 pp.41, 39, 42). This connection is further supported by her other poems that address the issue of the hijab directly, as if this poem were a continuation of previous scenes discussing the same topic.

Kahf suggests that the politicized surveillance of the lifestyles of women in exile not only kills spontaneity and personal freedom but also dehumanizes them, reducing their humanity to a state that must be restricted. This political discourse could be comprehended through the understanding of Karla McKanders' interpretation of the ban of the hijab as an imperial act: "bodies are never naked, they are always clothed with meaning, but the meaning may be restricted by imperialism & globalization" (McKanders, 2019, p. 3) According to this discourse, hijab is considered a code with profound symbolic dimensions; therefore this conflict is not devoid of ideologies and plans executed under sensitive arguments. Imperialist countries argue against the right to wear the hijab, claiming that it violates national commitments to liberal secularism and thus must be banned. (McKanders, 2019, P. 10).

Based on Dilthey's hermeneutical perspective by integrating the poet's individual experience with the historical context to reach the stage of "deep understanding", an economic viewpoint can be used to interpret the need for hijab's prohibition in the West. According to Birsan Filip in his book *The Rise of Neoliberalism and the Decline of Freedom* (2020), who believes that since 1991 led to fundamental changes in the understanding and definition of humanity, society's goals, institutions, and the role of the state. The neoliberal economy has profoundly influenced every aspect of society by transforming everything into something calculable and exchangeable, akin to a commodity or service within the market consumption concept. Since the 1980s, all facets of social and political life including government institutions, associations, universities, corporations, technology, and modern systems have adopted these principles, which are fundamentally essentially market oriented. Consequently, everything has been commodified, leading to an era of intellectual and moral bankruptcy. As a result, people can no longer live according to their freedoms, independence, logic, convictions, values, and conscience. Instead, they are strictly confined by the values of the neoliberal economy, which is developed for the market (Filip, 2020, p. 2).

By using platforms such as the media, neoliberals have managed to hide public support for promoting their consumerist and economic ideologies worldwide. However, a close examination of the arguments put forth by these neoliberal economists reveals that they use the concept of freedom as a tool to enhance and implement the market's consumerist and economic principles in all aspects of life. As a result, the government either significantly reduced or entirely abolished many activities aimed at achieving the public good and social justice. (Filip, 2020, p. 12).

Kahf uses contrast to portray two images of clothed individuals: Muslim women who wear hijab and women who wear high heels, which symbolically represent them performing specific social preference. From a consumption perspective, these material images are linked, as the market relies on consumers to rapidly consume goods it produces. According to the public policy of neoliberal economics, which opposes any attempt to limit consumption, they argue that imposing limits on consumers restricts their freedoms. (11).

According to this unrestrained principle of neoliberal economic logic, Hijab could potentially serve as an obstacle against the policy of consumption, which means that it has a significant impact on the purchasing and consumption decisions of the market by Muslim consumers, especially About 23% of the world's population follow Islam to varying degrees of attachment. The increasing consumer satisfaction of Muslims and the increasing number of Muslims not only require global brands to serve Muslim consumers, but also give an opportunity for local brands to go global. (xiv),

Hence, the Western discourse against hijab and enforcing its removal could be interpreted as an attempt to integrate the women who wear hijab, who constitute a significant portion of consumers worldwide, into unregulated consumer behaviors contributing to the growth of economic liberalism. This poetic image "pink collar temp pool day" (Kahf, 2003, p. 42) can symbolizes the constraints imposed on women who wear hijab, leading to the creation of classism and racial bias.

Kahf's aim appears to be not to defend hijab itself, but rather to defend women against the discourse that restricts them, as reflected in her famous statement: "You people have such restrictive dress for woman" Here she is not trying to defend Islam's imposition of hijab on women, but rather to reclaim women's humanity against the Western discourse cloaked in secularism and freedom. This works as a type of psychological empowerment that targets a person's inner confidence and strength. (Kareem, 2024, 33-36)

Kahf uses the words "no" and "yes" as well as the pronoun "I", which makes the tone of the poem conversational, this emphasizing her rejection of assumptions and stereotypes. Kahf emphasizes that Muslim women wearing hijab are not oppressed or submissive, and this goes against the imperialistic narratives that deepen misunderstandings about Islam and the experiences of Muslim women:

No, I'm not bald under the scarf

No, I, not from that country

Where women can't drive cars

These are all images that refer to specific symbols and represent common misconceptions about Muslim women. The ideas saturated with imperialist ideology about the Islamic religion and the persecution of Muslim women who wear hijab prevent any possible communication between American Muslims and the American collective mind, and the stereotypes "women can't drive a car" and "bald under the scarf" make it difficult for American Muslim women to become (normal Americans). Women who wear hijab are always referred to as harassed, oppressed and submissive by western societies. Chandra Mohanty explains that women who wear hijab are always struggle to deconstruct these stereotypes that are woven like cocoons around them. (Selim, 2014, p. 4).

"I'm already American"

But thank you for offering what else you need to know relevant to my buying insurance, opening a bank account, reserving a seat on a flight"

(Kahf, 2003, p. 39)

The economic policy has made everything commodifiable, consequently humans are now measured by their possession of credit cards, bank balances, and the extent of their prosperity, which determines their place in the orbit of humanity. Kahf employs the term "explosives" in this poem:

"Yes, I carry explosives / they are called words"

(Kahf, 2003, p. 39)

The word "explosives" signifies the impact, strength, and ability of words to challenge biases and assumptions akin to explosives. She emphasizes its entrenched, powerful, and violent nature, akin to explosives themselves. As a poet and immigrant, Kahf believes poetry serves as a human message, and she positions herself as a poetic messenger. She challenges racial and coercive descriptions imposed on Muslim women, portraying them as victims of a violent and oppressed society. Consequently, she warns against

these descriptions with a tone marked by aggression, signifying a retaliatory response.

“And if u don’t get up

Off your assumptions

They are going to blow you away”

(Kahf, 2003, p39)

The central issue for Kahf regarding humanity is not just the right to wear hijab, but whether women who choose to wear it can access the same resources and opportunities as other Native American women. Many women choose to wear hijab as a kind of resistance against social injustices, where Western societies fail to grant the women who wear hijab the status and treatment they deserve (Fedorak, 2013, p. 169).

Thus, Kahf asserts the lack of opportunities deserving of the woman who wears hijab, even if she holds a high academic degree, as seen in her poem "descent into jfk":

“They would never know Khaleda has a PhD

Because she wears a veil they will never see beyond.”

(Kahf, 2003, p. 37)

Whether Khalida is a real woman depicted or a product of her imagination, the parallelism employed in the poem between the phrases “they would never know” (Kahf, p. 37) and “they will never see her” (Ibid) illustrates the issue of injustice endured and still faced by the women who wear hijab. The word "veil" denotes a metaphorical barrier to understanding and acceptance. Consequently, Muslim women remain distant from being recognized for their individuality and accomplishments, remaining veiled from the societal gaze due to the racialized discourse surrounding hijab (Selim, 2014, p. 4), so scholars think that women of all ages are treated as “others”. (Al-Hassani, 2022)

In the experience of Mohja Kahf as a poet and a migrant woman who wears hijab, Dilthey believes that adopting hermeneutics considers humans as historical beings shaped by and drawing presence from history. According to this view, Kahf’s individual experience formed within the historical context regarding the hijab issue and within what is known as collective memory. This personal experience of the individual is considered an intrinsic experience that cannot be reduced to a concept. This Diltheyan alignment between the self (Mohja Kahf’s personal experience as a poet and migrant) and its transition to the collective (the collective memory of women

who wear hijab) represents a shift from psychological inclination to a hermeneutical approach that achieves effective results. Kahf did not address personal individual topics in her poetry as much as she tackled collective voices through narrative texture, envisioning the collective experience of migrants in Western society who still bear the dust of their journey on their shoulders. Therefore, the crucial line between the personal experience of the writer and the collective experience forms the foundation of Dilthey's approach to hermeneutics. Thus, Bernice Johnson Reagon has characterized this transition from the self to the collective as "cultural autobiography" a phase that Kahf underwent during her shift from the individual (the self-aware) to the communal (the broader world). This transition signifies her experience as a journey through her focus on the mosaic of the American-Islamic collective experience (Golley, 2017, pp. 160-162).

5. Conclusion

The research explores how Mohja Kahf contributes significantly to deconstructing negative stereotypes related to hijab and presents an alternative and complex vision of Muslim women. An interpretive analysis of selected poems related to hijab shows that Kahf skillfully uses rhetorical and poetic devices to challenge prevailing perceptions of hijab as a symbol of oppression and submission. The poet was able to deconstruct stereotypes related to the hijab by presenting hijab as a symbol of identity and empowerment instead of oppression. The paper shows how the poetess Kahf demonstrated in her poetry a profound deep awareness of the cultural and social contexts related to hijab while highlighting the political and economic dimensions related to the racist discourse of hijab. The research provided an interpretive vision that revealed Kahf's contributions to the field of cultural and social criticism through her poetry, making her an influential voice in the dialogue on hijab and Islamophobia, as she reinforced the vision built around the fact that poetry can be a powerful tool for social change and critical thinking. In conclusion, the research highlights that Kahf, through her poetry, offers in-depth interpretive manifestations of Hijab phobia, contributing to the deconstruction of prevailing biases and providing a new and complex vision of the Muslim women's experience in Western society. Her work contributes to enhancing understanding and empathy for Muslim women's issues, opening new horizons for cultural and social dialogue.

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