

Contemporary representations of adolescent Muslim girls
in Australia and the United States: reinforcing or
challenging the stereotypes.

By

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Thesis

The degree of Master of Research in English Literature

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University of Macquarie at Sydney-Australia, October 2014

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Abstract:

This thesis analyses the representation of teenage Muslim girls in Randa Abdel-Fattah's novels *Ten Things I Hate About Me* and *Does My Head Look Big In This?*, Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Aliya Husain's *Neither This Nor That*. All are set in the United States and Australia, with the central motif of the hijab as a symbol of female oppression. These four novels are analysed through the perspective of Mohja Kahf's *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque*, an extension of Said's Orientalism critique of the representation of Muslim women in western literature.

The research demonstrates that while adolescent Muslim girls share similar concerns as their non-Muslim peers, their cultural and religious beliefs add complexity to their struggle to develop or reject their Islamic heritage and its symbols; such as the hijab. In current western political discourse in which Islam has become synonymous with terrorism, the four novels are significant in their attempts to represent the complexities of living in the 'west' as a Muslim and the pressure on young Muslim women in particular, to assimilate.

Theories on class and power relations inform much of this thesis, drawing on theorists including Foucault, Bhabha, Spivak and Said. As well as the few academic papers and reviews on these novels, other sources include contemporary critiques and analyses of Islamic women as well as social and political discourse in Australia and the US.

Statement:

This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Research at Macquarie University. I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that I have given fully documented reference to the work of others. The thesis has not previously, in part or in whole, been submitted for assessment in any formal course of study.

Signature:

Maram Almatani

Acknowledgements:

This thesis could not have been completed without the help and the support of many people.

First, I would like to thank my wonderful supervisor, Dr. Marcelle Freiman, who was with me from the start and who has always supported and encouraged me to do my best. Also, I would like to thank the staff in the Faculty of English at Macquarie University for providing me with the resources I needed to complete my thesis and for their understanding during the writing process. Importantly, thanks also goes to my sweet mother and father who made this dream seem possible. Finally, I want to say thank you to my family, husband, friends and my little angel, Mayar.

Chapter One: Introduction/ Literature review

The image of the Muslim women is invariably one of oppressed, submissive, black-shrouded women. Such negative colonial conceptions are associated with being identified as a practicing Muslim, of which the most external and visible manifestation is the hijab (the veil). However, prevalent conceptions of hijabi (Muslim women who wear hijab) are almost inevitably based on representations of Muslim women in the Western media and, to a certain extent, in Western fiction. While the coverage in United States (US) and Australian media of major events such as the 1979 Iranian hostage incident and the OPEC-related oil price increases fomented anti-Islamic sentiment, the 1991 Gulf War, September 11 terrorist attacks (known as 9/11) and the Bali bombings in 2002 reinforced these sentiments and simultaneously thrust Muslim women into the media spotlight. Muslim women were represented in the media as either victims, or as potential terrorists.

Such media representations of Muslim women increased after 9/11 terrorist attacks (Ameri, *National Identity* 3), media reporting of 9/11 has served to malign all of Islam, with women in particular serving as either potent symbols of militant Islam or as victims of oppression requiring liberation. Such representations are inextricably linked with justifications for war, or at the very least, 'humanitarian' intervention to 'rescue' Muslim women from their patriarchal and barbarous culture. For instance, Ferguson, notes that:

After September 11, the recognition of women's rights is figured as a sign of respect for women. Civilized nations and civilized peoples respect women, and therefore treat them with dignity and recognize their rights. The United States clearly respects women since it has for almost a century recognized women's rights. Afghanistan by contrast did not respect women under Taliban rule. Accordingly, Afghanistan was uncivilized and needed to be brought under control and

domesticated...Those who respect their women are civilized, those who do not are barbarians (21).

There is no doubting on the oppression of Muslim women in Afghanistan exists, but that was not new to Washington; the Clinton administration had been informed by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch of the myriad abuses against and lack of any human or democratic rights for women in Afghanistan, but no action was taken then (Mitchell 2013). Muslim women have become the symbol of oppression in the 'War on Terrorism' after 9/11. It is in this context that this thesis analyses the representation of Muslim women in contemporary fiction, taking into account the nexus of contemporary political discourse and media representations of Muslims more broadly, and Muslim women specifically.

The stereotyping of Islam and Muslims was prevalent in the American media before 9/11 and intensified in its aftermath, will also be examined, in particular the focus on Muslim women who soon became the subject of much media attention and public scrutiny. During the war with in Afghanistan in 2001, women in hijab as well as burqas (a loose outer garment worn by Muslim women that covers the head and face), were epitomised as the victims of a patriarchal and misogynistic society from which they must be liberated. The result was that the occupation increasingly assumed in the media more of a women's liberation campaign. In the West, the conflation of the burqa with the hijab became the most visual manifestation of Islam with hijabis as victims (Hatem91; Abu-Lughod 784; Yasmeen 42). Hijabis in western societies are also victimized more often than Muslim men (Williams and Vashi 276).

Little is said in the media about the choice that some women have about wearing the hijab, equating instead the Taliban's edicts and fundamentalist interpretations of the Qur'an (which they maintain demands that women wear burqas) as representative of all Muslims. It is the visual aspect of Muslim women's dress,

which is interpreted as a symbol of oppression in the context of the global ‘War on Terrorism’ that has seen legislation introduced in France banning the burqa (Bradford 24; Abu-Lughod 784).

Out of all this political manipulation and military aggression linked with the ‘War on Terrorism’ and the concomitant anti-Islam rhetoric, Muslim women have increasingly become the focus of contemporary literature in Australia and the United States, especially by Muslim diaspora writers living in the West such as those analysed in this thesis as well as Leila Aboulela, Fatima Mernissi, Assia Djebar and Ahdaf Soueif. In opposition to the stereotypes of Muslim women in the media, such writers attempt to represent the more complex and nuanced lives of Muslim women in western societies. These narratives challenge the media-manufactured images of the stereotypical Muslim women and Islam and subvert the perceptions of Muslim women as one-dimensional and submissive.

Giving Muslim women a voice by controlling the narrative has been the focus of several Australian and American writers, some of which will be discussed in this thesis. In the representation of Muslim women, the hijab functions as a powerful symbol, which has formed the basis for the selection of novels to analyse in this thesis: Randa Abdel-Fattah’s *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) and *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (2007) Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) and Aliya Husain’s *Neither This Nor That* (2010). Fattah is an Australian author, which is also the setting of her novels while Kahf and Husain are American writers whose novels are set in the United States.

This thesis argues that the collective stigmatisation of Muslims is expressed in western attitudes towards the hijab, which has come to constitute a symbol of oppression in the aftermath of 9/11. For this reason the theories on feminism, class

and power relations drawing on theorists including Foucault, Said, Kahf, Bhabha and Spivak will inform the analysis of the novels. As well as the very few academic papers and reviews on these novels, other sources include contemporary critiques and analyses of Muslim women in fiction as well as contemporary western fiction about Muslim women.

Although the novels are limited to the representation of women only, thereby omitting the representation of Muslim men, this approach enables me to focus on the west's identification of the symbols of oppression: the hijab, which is also the symbol by which Muslim women express conformity with the tenets of their faith and by which they are accepted in their communities. The hijab is also a barrier in terms of the misconceptions of Muslim women in the West (Borchgrevink 8-10). Their plight is bound up with their decision about which community to be excluded from: their Islamic one or broader society. This dilemma is central to all four novels.

Muslim societies have been a source of much wonder for the Western world. Implicit in this wonder is the 'othering' of Muslims and cultural imperialism. It is the apparent enigma of women in Muslim society that fascinates the west, which is a vision of women in veils, symbolising oppression, that seems something of an anachronism in the public sphere (Mabro 301; Poynting and Mason 81; Elia 156). Muslim women continue to be the pawns in this imperialist discourse as means of demonstrating the power over the other. Mabro, notes that:

The Western literature has always 'known' that Muslim women are particularly oppressed, for it has been described for a very long time in Western travel books and literature, and depicted in art. This is taken as an unquestioned fact, there for all to see in the veil and the institution of the harem – and reactions to both are as strong today as they ever were (111).

Discussions about the representation of Muslim women since the 1990s have centred on the debate between Western paradigms such as modernisation or feminism, and that which is considered to dominate the Middle East and Islam (Abu-Lughod 786; Poynting and Mason 81; Yasmeeen 49; Kabir 249). Spoelders (1998) challenges the separation of male and female in the social sciences into public or private spaces, arguing that the realities of gender interaction are ignored, therefore development initiatives such as the 1995 Beijing Platform are not taken seriously (299).¹ This “private/public dichotomy” has worsened stereotypes about Middle Eastern women (Spoelders 301; Thompson 52), and is an artificial construct concealing “the fact that many women are active in economics and in voice”, yet this is ignored because of the dominance of Western conceptualisations of gender in the Middle East (Spoelders 301).

Islamic identity and the question of authentic culture often revolve around the question of ideology as a determining factor. For Afzal- Khan and Seshadri-Crooks, the reinstatement of cultural authenticity must manifest through political engagement rather than artistic representation alone; the artistic platform for cultural authenticity relies on the development of a counter-narrative and a struggle for representation (10). Political engagement, on the other hand involves deep level theorisations of the elements of authenticity such as race, culture and ethnicity to constitute a more valuable struggle for acknowledged positions within society (Afzal- Khan and Seshadri-Crooks 10). For instance, wearing the hijab female young adults and adult Muslim women has emerged after 9/11 as a growing strategy to formulate unique tie of an Islamic identity (Haddad 254). Afzal- Khan and Seshadri-Crooks maintain that

¹ The Beijing Platform named also “Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace” was a conference held by the United Nations in Beijing, China 1995 which discusses women’s rights.

political engagement, presents a more enduring platform for the legitimate recognition of difference (10).

Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1979, is perhaps the most visceral critique of the "latent and active prejudice" (201) in western scholarship regarding the Orient. The foundations of postcolonial studies about the fantasy of the Orient and Oriental discourse can be attributed largely to Said. Utilising Foucault's notion of discourse as a mechanism of control that is systematically used by the institutions and regimes of knowledge, Said claims that "orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). The authority and strength of Orientalism was attained through western philosophy, anthropology, aspects of Oriental literature, thereby constituting "strategic formation" (Said 20).

The Orientalist created the text outside of the Orient through the exteriority of his/her representation; the Orientalist text, thus, is not a natural representation of the Orient (Said 21). Based on scientific and artistic texts, Western audiences believed these texts as "truth" or accurate representations in cultural discourse. Responding more to the culture that produced it, the imaginary "Orient" was not a "stable reality that exist[ed] as a natural fact," but rather "as [an] idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that give it reality and presence" (Said 5) in the dominant Western culture. Thus, the Orient is not a specific place, but the cognitive model placed in opposition to the Occident in order to ensure the Westerner's superiority by way of the Manichean dichotomy (Said 5).

About the process of constructing stereotypes for the Oriental Other, Said notes that the world is divided into the East and West, and the East is further subdivided into the relatively well known Near East and the mysterious Far East (39-288). Therefore, the Westerner has conflicting ambivalent stereotypes of the East.

This Said refers to as manifest Orientalism, stating that “[t]he Orient at large vacillates between the familiar and its shivers of delight in –or fear of –novelty” (59).

Despite the Westerner’s confusion about the East (*manifest Orientalism*), the West reveals its “deepest and most recurring images of the Other as inferior, and then envisions its consistent desire to dominate the East (*latent Orientalism*)” (107-201). Said’s concept of Arabic literature also forms the basis for the selection of novels analysed in this thesis. Central to all four novels is the issue of conflicting loyalties and social pressure on Muslim women in a western context. All four novels were written in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, which have now entered the political lexicon and social discourse as ‘9/11’.

The four novels are analysed here through the perspective of Kahf’s *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (1999), which covers the early medieval period through to the beginning of the Romantic period in the 1830s in what is an extension of Said’s Orientalist critique of the representation of Muslims in western literature. Kahf argues that Muslim women in the mediaeval period were exotic represented as warrior types, or termagants (3).

Their transformation, Kahf contends, corresponds with the representations of the role of women in the West as docile and subordinate to heroic males (2). 19th century Romantic representations of Muslim women, however, excluded the termagant: Muslim women in the colonial period are represented as oppressed, as willing and submissive victims of their culture. These Romantic representations correspond with the precepts of colonialism’s “civilising missions” of imperialist powers such as England (10). For Kahf (1999), the narrative of the Muslim woman today is so ubiquitous that it is rarely substantiated. She points out that it is only “deployed in a direct fashion, as during Operation Desert Storm, when the narrative of

the Muslim woman was activated” to reinforce the justification for a “civilizing American presence in the Gulf” (2). The research in this thesis will analyse whether the authors of the four novels are informed by either the colonial representations in Western literature of the Muslim woman as odalisque, or via the western medieval literary conceptions of the Muslim woman as termagant in challenging the media stereotypes.

To facilitate this analysis, the thesis will provide a general view of the traditional representations of Muslim women in Western literature historically. Following this, the thesis examines contemporary media representations of the Muslim women during important socio-political periods including the 1970s through to 9/11 and its aftermath as these periods feature prominently as contexts significant to the development of the protagonists and their families in all four novels. Kahf’s seminal work, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (1999) is a key text, but not the only theoretical work, which informs the analysis in this thesis.

The Muslim woman as odalisque has been revived in media representations in the 20th and 21st century. It is not surprising that current representations coincide with the increasing Western military interventions in the Middle East over the last forty years and, more significantly, over the last ten years (Hatem 78). The “imperialist penchant for reducing Muslim society to the veil” (Hasan 44), is implicit in current media representations. As Kahf notes, this is incongruent with representations of the Muslim woman as termagant in medieval Western literature.

Homi Bhabha asserts in his book *the location of culture* (1994), that the Oriental colonized person was overlooked because of the objectification of colonial discourse, and suggests that the alternative answer is for the colonised other to be the

focus of subjectivity in this discourse (101). Employing Freud's fetishism theory, Bhabha explains the psychological process of making ambivalent stereotypes of the colonized other in colonial discourse (Bhabha 156). Freud's concept of fetishism, the recognition of differences in sexuality, brings about anxieties of castration. Thus, to normalize the differences and disturbances, the subject substitutes the lack of the woman's (his mother's) penis with the fetishized object (Bhabha 105).

Replacing stereotypes in the context of fetishism, Bhabha asserts that, in colonial situations, the colonizer recognizes racial differences, bringing about the anxiety of "the myth of historical origination — racial purity, [or] cultural priority" (Bhabha 106). Then, to normalize the threat, stereotypes are created. Spivak also indicts Said's supposedly 'incomplete' Oriental discourse arguing that Said does not consider "the interrelations between empire and issues of gender" (Moore-Gilbert 454). Spivak argues that:

Both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (287).

In relation to the subaltern woman particularly, Parry examines how the Muslim woman's voice has been doubly silenced through the convergence of patriarchal codes inherent in the social context with the colonial narration of the culture (36). The response from the subaltern woman writer is, therefore an attempt to intervene in the homogenisation of "woman's subject constitution" (37) as a result of the converged forces through re-writings of the subaltern victimhood narrative (Parry 36). This then points to the role of the post-colonial woman intellectual whose task it is to develop a narrative that helps to reinstate the voice of the silenced native woman (Parry 37). Where Parry is particularly critical of Spivak is in her claim that

Spivak engages in “deliberate deafness to the native voice” (40) of resistance from the subaltern woman apparent in the dominant colonialist narrative. Parry argues that as a result of Spivak’s “deafness” there are greater restrictions placed around the “space in which the colonised can be written back into history” (40). In contrast, Parry points to Bhabha, as one who affords the colonised voice autonomy within the hegemonic imperialist discourse (40). Bhabha, claims Parry, explores “the range of stereotypes and subject positions assigned to the colonised in colonial texts” and in doing so provides a platform from which the colonised can be established as “autonomous native difference” (41). As such, the re-articulation of the colonialist narrative by the native delivers a “qualitatively different thing-in-itself” (42), which denies the colonial text its authorial presence by exposing its uncertainties and incongruities.

Moreover, Mignolo (2000) examines the emergence of the subaltern reason within the framework of “colonial legacies and contemporary globalization” (86) and points to the grand narratives of the West and the way in which this narrative remains independent of the local histories, which it subsumes in its design (86). Exploring the grand narrative designs of the post-colonial era. Mignolo identifies the ways in which the primary focus has been to reinstate local histories and subaltern forms of knowledge once consumed and marginalised in the hegemonic colonial grand narrative (87). The subaltern’s critical reasoning and voice of opposition provides the basis for new directions in post-colonial and post-Occidental theorising (Mignolo 115). This is fundamental to the emergence of new paradigms for understanding global imperialism both past and present. As Mignolo explains, the integrity and legitimacy of post-colonial theorising lies in its capacity to transform societies and cultures. In turn, this is achieved by “transforming knowledge as representation to knowledge of enactment” (115) in order to unravel subject/object delineations.

Another area of discussion pertinent to this thesis is the way in which feminist paradigms have affected women in the Middle East (Lazreg, *Feminism and difference* 81). Kandiyoti (1996) suggests that "Middle East studies have been characterized by the selective incorporation of the broader agendas generated by feminist criticism, alongside home grown debates firmly grounded in local historical and political specificities" (1). Western approaches to women in the Middle East have become tied to feminism and the agendas that Western feminism brings to the discussion.

Mojab (1998) contrasts the particularizations emphasized by postmodernist Western feminists with those who stress generalizations (30). She also argues that the assumption of an "Islam" and a culture of Islam that is common and is the most significant denominator for millions of women refuse the authenticity of other cultural or social challenges which connect them to common struggles of women around the world (25). According to Mojab:

We can, instead, adopt a dialectical approach, which recognizes the individuality and particularity of each woman and each feminist movement; each within its specific historical context but at the same time acknowledges that, even in their uniqueness, they share common struggles against capitalist and precapitalist patriarchy. We can respect the voluntary choice of any woman to wear the veil, and we can oppose forcible unveiling (e.g., in Iran in 1936-1941), yet we can at the same time criticize veiling or any segregation of human beings along sex lines (27).

Mojab argues that moving beyond these binary paradigms must eclipse this dichotomy, just as the Western modernisation/Islam'ism' dichotomy (29). There has been a clear challenge set forth in the literature regarding women in the Middle East to move beyond binary paradigmatic conceptualisations which neglect the tensions and contradictions that are a part of social reality and social change. For example, the wearing of the hijab as commanded in the Qur'an has come to represent

submission to Allah and modesty but in recent years, the hijab has taken on more of a political meaning as the Islamic revival gained popularity in the 1970s (Kabir 242).

In the counter-hegemonic narrative Arab/Muslim feminists have been creating, they unravel the significations that the veil assumed pre-9/11 in resistance to hegemonic discourses and interpretations of it. When there is no threat, such principles may be considered unimportant, but in times of war or occupation, resistance is expressed in a return to the Islamic faith. This is partly due to the fact that the Middle East cannot match the military might to defend itself physically, but it is also bound up with the fact that human justice has failed it. The loss of faith in such justice revives their Islamic faith and its practices.

From this conceptualisation of multiculturalism the notions of marginalisation, exclusion and non-integration emerge. Afzal- Khan and Seshadri-Crooks (2000) position part of their discussion of the post-colonial narrative in the context of multiculturalism and its potential to silence voices (1-2). Drawing on the work of Charles Taylor and his assertions that identity is constructed through “relations with others”, Afzal- Khan and Seshadri-Crooks explore the notion that having one’s voice silenced or ignored, or being subject to negative misrepresentations is potentially detrimental to one’s sense of self (5). This leads to a discussion of Taylor’s conceptualisation of authenticity in multiculturalism and the notion that even dominant or imperialist forces that “provide horizons of meaning for large numbers of human beings” are deserving of some degree of admiration and respect (Afzal- Khan and Seshadri-Crooks 6).

Afzal- Khan and Seshadri-Crooks then seek to interrogate the proposition from post-colonial theorists such as Chambers, that it is from the marginalised space that the excluded and unintegrated can challenge the dominant discourse (7). Also,

they argue that the argument is that the margins are “essentially an innovative space” (8) and the voice at the periphery can therefore challenge the voice at the centre as a means to rejuvenate its own authenticity (8). Afzal- Khan and Seshadri-Crooks (2000) declare Chambers’ notion untenable on the basis that it assumes all marginalised subjects “inevitably constitutes a subculture” (10). In other words, there is no guarantee that a person within a marginalised group will provide a useful platform for the reinvigoration of the authenticity of the marginalised group simply because he or she is marginalised (Afzal- Khan and Seshadri-Crooks 10).

Although theoretical frameworks for analysing these novels abound, to date, very little critical work has been undertaken on the four novels selected for analysis in this thesis. This research will therefore not only contribute to the body of knowledge on the representation in contemporary fiction of Islamic women in Western societies, but will also draw attention to the lives of a population that is often misunderstood and marginalized. In doing so, it will hopefully engender further discourse on issues germane to the situation confronting Muslim women in the West, such as exploring questions of class within their own Muslim communities and how this impacts on their identity and practice.

It also problematizes the nature of democratic norms and values in Western society, how the media shape our understanding of Islam, and of Muslim women in particular and the aesthetic implications of attempting to deal with what are essentially, prevalent and tense contemporary political issues. While many of these issues relate to politics, history and the media, of vital concern in this thesis is how these elements inform the narrative in the novels and the extent to which the writers are able to challenge dominant stereotypes and misconceptions in an aesthetically successful manner.

Some of these concerns include the question of didacticism and how successfully the writers are able to navigate this tense political terrain to convincingly bring to life the complex life of the Muslim woman in the West. This thesis, therefore, will analyse the representation of Muslim women by comparing, through a textual analysis, these representations of Muslim women in the Australian and American contexts. This approach and the aims of the thesis, therefore, address a gap in the literature about Muslim women and by Muslim diaspora writers in the west.

This thesis addresses the issue representation contributes to the literature by focusing on the hijab as a symbol of oppression/liberation of Muslim women as what little analysis there is of the novels, none of it is from this particular perspective. Ameri (2012), for instance, in her analysis of *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2007) posits that it is possible to be a “patriotic Australian” and a “good Muslim”. This thesis will extend this conception, but examine why it is necessary for hijabis to adapt to the nationalism of the dominant culture in order to be free to exercise their democratic right of religion.

Class is also a factor that is relevant to Muslim women’s representation. For example, is Fattah inadvertently implying, through her representations of middle-class Muslim families in her novels, that Islam is not regressive because the main Muslim protagonist is from a middle-class background? Where do the working class Muslims fit in this representation? Must they also be patriotic Australians? Or must they be fundamentalists? Are they minor caricatured figures, perennially on the periphery of the discourse by literate and literary Muslims who speak of the Muslim experience from only one perspective? Why, in Fattah’s novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, is it emphasised by the main protagonist Amal, “My dad’s a doctor and my mum’s a dentist” (Abdel-Fattah 3), that her parents have high academic qualifications? Are the

representations of Muslim females in these novels predicated on the assumption that to subvert the negative stereotypes it is necessary to embrace at best, benign nationalism, or at worst, patriotic jingoism and to emphasise class distinctions?

Fattah, in her article '*Living in a Material World*' (2005) emphasises that the political context is central to her two novels, explaining that her works constitute a sort of "defence" against such media representations of the Muslim woman as victim or of lacking the agency that seems to be the natural proclivity of the Western woman (197-209). Kahf's main protagonists also middle-class and the context of *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* is a little more expansive than Fattah's novels, referencing events such as the 1979 Iranian revolution, opposition movements in Syria and other relevant contemporary political events.

All four writers are, in effect, not only articulating the Muslim woman's experience in a Western context, but are doing so in a politically significant context: post 9/11 when being Muslim has become synonymous with terrorism and the supposed oppression of Muslim women. Though such narratives they articulate how exercising their democratic right to freedom of expression including religion, to openly identify themselves as Muslim women by wearing the hijab, is not only a cultural act, but a political one. It challenges the hegemony of the west not only in the representation of women in fiction, but politically in how these representations of Muslim women have provided a pretext and justified colonial and imperialist ventures in the Middle East. This has vast implications, both personal and public, for Muslim women.

Chapter Two: Legislation regarding Islamic traditions and the development of a counter discourse

The following section provides a brief overview of the social and political factors that have caused the emergence of contemporary Western perceptions of Islam more generally and the representation of Muslim women in particular. The Western context discussed here primarily refers to the United States (US) and Australia, although it should be noted that the issues discussed are also relevant to other Western contexts including Britain and Germany. The focus in this chapter is on changes in legislation in relation to the 'War on Terrorism' in the US and Australia to provide a the basis for better understanding of the social and political context of the novels analysed in this thesis. The novels to be critically analysed were in part selected because of their representations of young adult and adult Muslim women's search for identity within the Australia and US in the post 9/11 context. Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) and *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (2007) were both published in Australia, and set after 9/11 where Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) and Alyia Husain's *Neither This Nor That* (2010) were both published in the US and set in the late decades of 20th century. Moreover, this chapter establishes the contextual background for analyses presented in the following chapters and facilitates a better understanding of the issues that motivated the authors to challenge the stereotypes and prevailing discourses within these contexts. Four key domains will be examined: US and Australian 'anti-terrorist' legislation post 9/11; media representations of Islam before and after the events of 9/11; representations of Islam in Western literature more broadly and the symbols in literature associated with

the oppression of Muslim women. The intention here is to introduce some of the key themes and issues relevant to each of the domains as they relate to this thesis.

The West's perceptions of Islam and Muslim identity were present prior to the events of 9/11, particularly in relation to the West's relationship with Iran. Emerging during the 1970's as a more industrialised and modernised nation, Iran remained under the autocratic rule of the Shah who had been installed on the "Peacock Throne" by the US (Hunter 136). The overthrow of the Shah's regime by Khomeini in 1979 affected a significant shift towards conservative social norms (Hunter 140). Islamic traditions including elements of Sharia law, for example, women returning to traditional veiled attire, were once again embraced more forthrightly (Hunter 88).

These were attempts to eradicate Western influence, culminating with the seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979. Islamic militants took 52 American hostages as a means of compelling the US to return the Shah to Iran so he could be tried for crimes committed during his reign (Hunter 128). This affected US geopolitical interests in the Middle East, especially when the new government nationalised major industries. The geopolitical significance of Iran remains an unresolved issue for the US and its allies, and the demonisation of Islam there needs to be seen in this context. .

In October 2001, the US Congress passed the USA Patriot Act 2001 in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The Patriot Act includes the authorisation of indefinite detention of immigrants; grants powers to law enforcement officers to search properties such as homes and businesses without the owner's knowledge or consent; and the right to surveillance of citizens (Beckman 24). The laws include a sunset clause designed to promote the gradual remission of many of the powers granted to US national security agencies as the perceived threat of terrorism wanes

(Ramraj, Hor and Roach 165). These extreme legislative reforms have been criticised for impinging on civil liberties and democratic rights (Rackow 1655; Abdolian and Takooshian 1429; Wong and Mich 161).

In Australia, the Bali bombings in Indonesia 2002, in which close to 100 Australians perished, prompted the enactment of anti-terrorism laws in 2004. In addition to the Anti-Terrorism Act 2005, the Australian Government introduced more than fifty rules of legislation related to counter-terrorism (Ramraj, Hor and Roach 542). Many of the laws were introduced as temporary emergency responses to the indiscriminate violence of terrorist attacks internationally. Although these laws also have a sunset clause, none have been repealed despite the fact that no terrorist attacks have occurred in Australia (Ramraj et al. 165). Seemingly to justify the continuation and expansion of such laws, the Australian Government (2010) declared in a White Paper that "... the threat of terrorism ... has become a persistent and permanent feature of Australia's security environment" (ii).

It is evident, therefore, that 9/11 terrorist attacks marked a pivotal moment in American contemporary history, politics and culture. The events received immediate extensive media coverage and had significant long-term consequences for America's national security, foreign policy and economy. The attacks were soon attributed to and claimed by al Qaeda, a radical Islamist terrorist organisation based in the Middle East with Osama bin Laden as its leader (Hoffman, *Al Qaeda* 429). Al Qaeda leaders justified the terrorism as a direct attack on America and all it represents - the centre of world capitalism and its apparent concomitant "corrupt" values.

More importantly, the terrorists claimed to be challenging America's global economic and political hegemony. The 'War on Terrorism' did not only produce legislative reforms; it provided the pretext for US military interventions in

Afghanistan and Iraq, areas rich in resources and of geopolitical and strategic significance for US interests. The ideology accompanying the 'War on Terrorism' necessarily demonised Islam and Muslims as the "other". For instance, from its inception the 'War on Terrorism' was marked by a Manichean vision and definition of the world as expressed in official statements by then president George W. Bush - on one side, America, and on the other side its enemy, radical Arab Islamic terrorists. There has of course recently been a troublesome resurgence of this discourse in the West, particularly in Australia, the US and Britain, with the emergence of ISIS. Although this group has supplanted al Qaeda as the enemy of the West, the discourse positioning it as a threat to global security and to Western way of life is the same, as are the unfortunate implications for all law-abiding and moderate Muslims living in the West.

At the beginning of the 21st century, however, it was al Qaeda that presented as the primary threat to national security and the enemy of the US and its allies. Overnight, Islam became associated with terrorism and anti-Americanism (Kabir 245). Meanwhile, American Muslims - or Muslim Americans - were thrust into the spotlight, often regarded with suspicion as potential home-grown terrorists: the enemy within. The Arabic words 'jihad' and 'jihadists' entered the media lexicon. Perceptions of Islam in the US, especially those promoted in the media, increasingly assumed sinister connotations not only as a religion but also as a culture that promotes violence, war and terrorism.

There is little argument that can be mounted against a country's sovereign right to ensure homeland security and to protect its citizens against the threat of harm. The extent of the powers granted to national security authorities in both the US and Australia raises many civil liberty concerns (Beckman 32). At the heart of the

concerns is the extent to which the protection of national security should be allowed to impinge upon the civil liberties of citizens (Beckman 32). According to some media reports, the anti-terrorism laws risk “discriminating against Muslims” and “criminalising ethnic minorities” (Dodd 1).

It is well documented that 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent legislative response from the Australian and US governments have resulted in socio-political ramifications that continue to be felt by Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in these countries. Evidence demonstrates that the way in which some citizens in Western countries engage and interact with Muslim people and communities has unquestionably shifted, often negatively (Forstenlechner and Al-Waqfi 767). Evidence of this shift is very pronounced in US workplaces with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reporting in 2002 a 153% increase in incidents of religious discrimination against Muslims in the workplace from pre-September 2001 figures (Forstenlechner and Al-Waqfi 772). In Australia, a 2004 study by Poynting and Noble (2004) found that 75% of the Muslim and Arab people surveyed indicated that they had experienced higher rates of race-based abuse or violence following the events of 9/11 and the 2002 Bali bombings (4).

Media fear-mongering generated through framing techniques of the Middle Eastern ‘other’ was of course apparent prior to 9/11. In the early 1980s, Said’s book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981), commented that the attention of the US media had consistently focused on how countries “like Iran and Iraq threaten us [the US] and our way of life” and speculated on “possible future attacks” (18). Since 9/11, the nexus of the Middle East, Islam and terrorism engendered by the media has fostered a climate of fear whereby being Muslim carries with it the risk of persecution and, more often,

harassment. In fact, post 9/11 Islam has been represented in the US as the spiritual heart of terrorism (Powell 107). From an Orientalist paradigmatic perspective, it is argued that this conceptualisation of Islam has supported the creation of a dichotomous religious dynamic between righteous Christianity and terrorist Islam (Powell 105).

This conceptualisation also serves to justify their agendas in the fight against terrorism, often as a pretext to carry out long-standing domestic and foreign policy goals. The media play a vital role in the dissemination of such propaganda, and there is a long history of governments using the media to “endorse” such goals (Perl 4). This is primarily because the general public relies primarily on the media for their understanding of terrorism (Hoffman, *Inside terrorism* 194). Consequently, public support for anti-terrorist laws - even those that are considered as impinging on civil and democratic rights - is often garnered through the media’s coverage and representation of terrorism (Perl 3).

To shape public opinion about the importance of anti-terrorism legislation to Australia’s national security, and to form a more fluid transition of the legislation into practice, the Australian Government introduced sedition laws into the Anti-terrorism Bill in 2005 (Pearson and Busst 12-13). The campaign by the government was to exert more pressure on the media by subjecting it to greater “scrutiny and restriction” in their reporting on terrorism (Pearson and Busst 17). This included the provision of greater powers to the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) to control the media’s reporting on terrorism. Both the AFP and ASIO were accorded greater powers to act against media reporting they deemed was not in accord with the domestic and foreign policy objectives of the government (Pearson and Busst 12).

According to Haddad, links between the media framing techniques and the emergence in the West of 'Islamophobia', defined by Weedon (2004) as "the creation and demonstration of unfounded hostility towards Islam ... [and] unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities" (165), have been established (254). Evidence of this is the fact that in the more than ten years since 9/11, Muslim minorities in Australia continue to be subject to negative stereotypes and misconceptions pertaining to their religious and ethnic identity (Syed and Pio 116).

Australia's media is contributing to the perpetuation of the stereotypes and misrepresentation of Muslims. Bloul asserts that the media in Australia post 9/11 has contributed to anti-Islamic sentiment, at best fostering a general feeling of mistrust, and at worst fomenting feelings of intense hatred towards Muslims, particularly in the workplace (10). At issue is the role the media plays in representing Muslim identity and the pressure such representations exert on Muslims to either explain and justify their religious beliefs and practices or to assimilate more fully into society by foregoing the more visible aspects of their religion, such as wearing the burqa or hijab, or being less overtly disciplined in their religious commitment (Forstenlechner and Al-Waqfi 776).

Increasingly, post-9/11 Islam has been viewed through the prism of the "clash of civilizations", with Islam and Muslims as "the foils for modernity, freedom and the civilized world" (Zine, *Between orientalism and fundamentalism* 2). It is perhaps for these reasons that Western literature throughout the ages has generally characterised Islam as blasphemous and oppressive (Kahf, *Western representations* 4). 9/11 prompted a renewed interest in the representation of Islam and Muslims in Western literature (Ameri n.d. 1). According to Byng, there is consensus amongst scholars

that in much of this literature there has tended to be Islamic characters that epitomise the traditional and somewhat problematic role of the 'other' (4).

To create representation of 'otherness', Islam in general and Muslims more specifically are often represented according to stereotypes in contemporary Western literature and Western media (Byng 7). Such stereotypes are usually forged from biased Western conceptualisations of fundamentalism and provide authors with a ready platform from which to juxtapose representations of the civilised and modern Westerner with the seemingly "barbarous" Muslim (Ameri n.d. 2). The South Asian Literary Association (2014) cites a range of contemporary counter-discursive narratives, such as *My Son the Fanatic* by Hanif Kureishi (1994), *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali (2004), *Terrorist* by John Updike (2006), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid (2008) and *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position* by Tabish Khair (2012), to illustrate this point as these texts use stereotypes of Muslims to reinforce the 'other' of Islamism (1).

These texts are often produced with clearly counter-discursive intentions in response to contemporary media and conservative Western representations of Islam as they attempt to explore the complex and manifold nature of Muslim identity in contemporary society. In doing so, they challenge the notion that Muslims are inherently hostile or antagonistic to the West's supposedly 'democratic values' and norms. Often, loyalties are divided for the Muslim protagonists who are torn between their Muslim heritage and their adopted homeland. It is also often the case that the characters have successful careers, but they experience an epiphany in the aftermath of 9/11 that impels them to alter the course of their lives. This is the case in a novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Pakistani author, Mohsin Hamid, adapted for

film in 2012. The narrative tells of a successful financial analyst originally from India who experiences the demonization of Muslims first-hand after 9/11.

It has also been the case more recently, particularly among women writers such as Leila Ahmed in *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (2011) and Asma Barlas in *"Believing women" in Islam* (2002), that representations of Islam and of Muslim women living in the West focus more on the spiritualism of Islam. In doing so, the authors seek to portray a highly spiritual relationship between Muslim female characters and their experience of the Islamic religion (Ameri n.d. 1). As such, literary representations of Muslim characters' engagement in sacred Islamic rituals and practices provide a means to explore the importance of Islam to the characters and the deeply personal spiritual connection between their religious beliefs and their everyday practice, including wearing the hijab (Ameri n.d. 2).

There is also a growing body of contemporary Western literature that explores the complexities of Islam and the multi-faceted nature of Muslim identity. These representations of the religion of Islam offer a counter-balance to the narrow characterisations of what it means to be Muslim in pre and post 9/11 literary texts (Ameri n.d. 14). For instance, one might look to the non-fiction book *Being Arab* by Samir Kassir (2006) and the history book *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East* by Robert Fisk (2007) as examples of such literary texts (South Asian Literary Association 1). For instance, Fisk counters the arguments such as those articulated by Lee (2008) that the problems in the Middle East reside in the "incompatibility between Locke and precepts of tolerance and current interpretations of Islam" (71). Such a strident categorisation of the Muslim world renders Islam as

inherently reactionary and regressive and overlooks the role of British and then American imperialism in reshaping the region according to their interests.

These texts in many ways are examples of what Haddad (2007) refers to as the “process of re-Islamisation” (253). What is argued by the author is that many post-9/11 publications are representative of “new voices” (254), particularly of young Muslim women who are keen to challenge prevalent stereotypes and narrow representations of Muslim identity (Haddad 254). Similarly, Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005) point to the “positive counter-construction” of Islam and Muslim identity that was slowly emerging in Western media around 2005 (35). According to the authors, there was increasing recognition in the media of some of the differences “between Australian Muslims who live here with ‘Us’ and non-Australian Muslims who live in international contexts” (Akbarzadeh and Smith 35). This was evident in some news items which attempted to differentiate “between ‘extremist’ and ‘moderate’ modes of Islam” by portraying “Muslim children, women and men as part of Australian culture, as family oriented, anti-terrorist and good Australian citizens” (Akbarzadeh and Smith 35).

Notwithstanding these attempts, the veiled Muslim woman has come to symbolise Muslim women’s relationship with Islam in a wide range of Western literary works both pre and post-9/11 (Ameri n.d. 1). In the proliferation of narratives depicting the lives of Muslim women written by Western authors (who in most cases are Muslim), the most salient representations of Islam are those of a religion that is largely misogynistic and primitive and which demands the subjugation of women (Whitlock 118). In contemporary Western literature, Muslim women are regularly represented as either victims of Islam or as once subjugated escapees of Islam (Ali 1).

It is also the case that the hijab is often the symbol of this subjugation. Ahmed (1992) explains that the veil and gender segregation in Islamic societies are readily seized upon by some social commentators who use these to position Islam as “oppressive to women” (152). Zine (2002) argues that such representations are the inexorable corollary of European colonialism and the colonisation of Muslim countries by European powers (7). The hijab worn by Muslim women was forged into a symbol of oppression by European powers (Zine, *Muslim Women* 11). It functioned as a marker of the subjugated and as validation for colonialist practices. Consequently, as noted by Kahf (1999), Muslim women became so “ubiquitous as to be invisible” in the post-colonial era (1-2).

Kahf (1999) asserts that, along with the hijab, the concept of the harem also emerged as a symbol of oppression for Muslim women during the colonial era, pointing to the appearance of Muslim slave women (5), or concubines, either as “abject and angry or virginal and victimized” (6), which emerged in Western literary texts during this period. It is through the continued and increasingly prevalent use of the veil and harem as symbols of the oppression of Muslim women during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the Muslim woman was positioned as a “representation [of a] sort of negative female ideal” against the domestic middle-class woman of the West (Kahf 7).

As has been demonstrated, there is an inextricable link between media representations of Islam in general as regressive, and of Muslim women, more specifically, as oppressed. These representations often correspond with government legislation, such as the anti-terrorism laws enacted in the US and Australia in the aftermath of 9/11. These media representations have contributed to the shaping of views in the public about Muslims, more often than not in a negative way as most

reportage in mainstream media is, as has been demonstrated, often biased. Such representations contribute to the ‘othering’ of Islam and juxtapose it and its values to those of the supposedly ‘progressive’ West.

Western literary representations variously uphold such conceptions of Islam as the violent “other” generally and of the Muslim women specifically, while others attempt a more nuanced examination of being a Muslim woman in Western society in the aftermath of 9/11. What is evident is that perceptions of Muslim women are the corollary of the representations generated by the media, drawn from Western literary traditions to perpetuate the stereotype of the oppressed Muslim woman and of the supposed intrinsic violence of Islam.

Chapter Three: To Veil or Not To Veil – Abdel-Fattah's *Ten Things I Hate About Me* and *Does My Head Look Big In This?*

This chapter presents an analysis of Abdel-Fattah's *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) and *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (2007). The primary focus in the analysis of each novel is the way in which Abdel-Fattah has developed her literary representation of identity formulation of young adult Muslim women living in Australia. Of particular importance is the author's use of the hijab as a symbol of identity formation. As such, the analysis of each text will identify and discuss the challenges experienced by each protagonist in their pursuit of self-identity examining social stereotyping, cultural and religious expectations, and anti-Islamic sentiment within the broader society. The analysis will draw upon feminist theory and post-colonialist representations of Muslim women to understand the extent to which the post-colonialist paradigms of Islam in general and the representation of Muslim women in particular are challenged and/or subverted. Lastly, a comparative analysis of Abdel-Fattah's representation of a young adult modern and progressive Muslim woman in each of her novels will be provided.

Ten Things I Hate About Me is set in Australia in 2005, a period in which debates about national identity increasingly questioned the viability of the policy of multiculturalism in Australia. The Liberal government of Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007), seemingly appealed to the social conservatism of the Australian public (Kelly 7). Of particular significance is the social unrest that forms the backdrop to the narrative, especially the 2005 "Cronulla Riots". This was a confrontation that erupted at Cronulla Beach, in a southern shire of Sydney, between local Cronulla males and Middle Eastern Muslim males following accusations by the

former of the latter's "aggressive and misogynistic behaviour" in the Shire (Ho 290). When asked his views about the riots, Prime Minister Howard commented that he "did not believe there was an underlying racism in Australia" (cited in Due 1).² Howard's claim was belied by media images of Australian youths and young adults wearing T-shirts stating "No Lebs", and chanting "we grew here you flew here" and "go home" (Due 1).

Abdel-Fattah opens her novel with a group of students discussing the Cronulla riots. A Muslim class member of Arab background recounts how he was injured as a result of his participation. The response of the students to the riot and to the Arab Muslim student vary; some are supportive of him while others seek to legitimise the claims of the local shire males. One student, Peter, maintains that the Middle Eastern males deserve little sympathy: "Man, you ethnics and Asians are always complaining. '... Oh, help me! I'm a victim of racism. The white people are out to get me.' Get over yourselves!" (Abdel-Fattah 3).

The literary device used by Abdel-Fattah to frame the opening conversation in her narrative within the context of the Cronulla Riots allows her to establish a platform from which to explore the role that cultural discourse plays in the social positioning of minority immigrant groups. Piller draws a strong connection between the discourse about cultural practices or ethnic groups, with its reliance on identity markers, and racism, stating, "it does not really take a discourse analyst to point out that this is racism masquerading as talk about culture" (129). From a broader perspective it may be suggested that Piller (2011) is alluding to Orientalist paradigms. As Bayoumi and Rubin (2001) explain, Orientalism is a "body of theory and practice" developed over many generations in Europe to construct a "system of knowledge

² The Liberal government, and Howard in particular, not only denied that racism exists in Australia; they also sought to challenge the "black armband" view of history that argued that the colonisation of Australia had a detrimental impact on the Indigenous population.

about the Orient” (73). As such, there developed in Western consciousness a belief that individuals belonging to the “other” culture of the Orient were not only different but also fundamentally inferior (Bayoumi and Rubin 73). In turn, those of the Orient were vilified and their practices belittled so that a false representation of superiority of the alternative cultural perspective, that is, the Western perspective, could be established (Bayoumi and Rubin 73).

Ho (2007) argues that the brand of Australian nationalism that has emerged in recent years, which is “increasingly framed against a dangerous Muslim other” has clear implications for young Muslim women in Australia (291). The allegations of aggressive and misogynistic behaviour directed at Middle Eastern, and by implication, Muslim males (according to the flawed logic of racist perspectives that views all Middle Eastern people as Muslim) which were the catalyst for the Cronulla riots demonstrate the way in which the discourse about women’s rights has positioned Islam as “inherently misogynistic and therefore a threat to Australia’s egalitarian culture” (Ho 291). To account for this discursive trend, Ho points to the broad history of colonial feminism and representations of colonised societies that oppressed their women as a way for Western societies to legitimise their cultural supremacy (290).

Ho argues that “struggles over women’s bodies” have long been an integral focal point in constructions of national identity and in unfolding international relations (294). Perhaps most notable in relation to this ‘struggle’ is the contrasting position established by Western colonial powers towards the colonised Eastern nations. Ho argues that the European imperialists compared the “supposed civilised gender regimes of their own societies with the barbarism of colonised societies” and that “the mistreatment of women and the need for their liberation emerged in order to justify colonialism” (294). Thus, colonial feminism, or feminist principles applied to

other cultures to justify colonialism, was a lens through which to demonstrate a society's treatment of women as evidence of its "incapacity for self-governance" (Ahmed 244).

Ahmed (1992) explains that veiling was adopted as a "visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies" and of the "degradation of women" (152). English and French colonists promulgated the notion that it was incumbent upon them to readdress the "backwardness of Islam" and to "de-veil [the] women" as part of their "civilising mission" (Ahmed 152). This supposed "backwardness" is a prevalent conception in contemporary political discourse and one which post-colonial representations of Muslim women in literature is concerned to address. Kahf (1999) writes that the essence of the post-colonial Western characterisation of Muslim women is that "the Muslim woman is being victimised" (1). The source of this victimisation is located in Islam, which so often in Western literature is represented as "innately and immutably oppressive to women" (Ahmed 152).

In *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010), the "victimisation" of the central protagonist is manifest through the author's development of the identity construct, evident in the construction of her dual identity: at school she is Jamie who has blond hair and coloured contact lenses; at home she is Jamilah, the dutiful Muslim daughter. This identity construct is an expression of her attempt to separate her Muslim identity from her Australian identity. To rationalise her behaviour, Jamilah explains, "being Jamie at school shelters me from confronting [people's judgements]" (Abdel-Fattah 9).

The main thematic concern to emerge from Abdel-Fattah's representation of a young Muslim woman in Australia at the turn of the century is that of the silenced voice. Jamilah's decision to create an alternate identity while at school to escape

from and to protect herself against the perceived prejudice and bigotry is in fact silencing her voice against such elements in society. It may be argued that Abdel-Fattah's characterisation of a young female Muslim protagonist, vulnerable to racism and uncertain of her identity, is reflective of post-colonial feminist ideas.

Post-colonial feminism looks to examine and explain the ways in which non-western women in the post-colonial world are affected by the racism and enduring socio-political and cultural effects of colonialism (Sa'ar 696). For Jamilah, the effects are evident: the perceived need for self-preservation to the point of self-silencing and, ultimately, the impact on her social status and identity amongst her peers. As she concedes to her classmate, Peter, who contrasts her lack of self-absorption with that of her peers, "I'm not obsessed with the sound of my own voice because I don't have a voice. I'm stifling it beneath layers of deceit and shame" (Abdel-Fattah 57).

Moreover, what of the novel's attempts to counter the post-colonial representations of "Muslim woman as victimised" (Kahf, *Western representations* 1); that is, the extent to which the core Western narrative of Muslim woman is being mobilised in a progressive way in the text? Ho asserts that to counter colonialist representations of Muslim women it is fundamental that Muslim women express their views and assert their rights as women and resolutely demarcate their identity from Western colonialist representations (291). Abdel-Fattah alludes to this in her use of metaphorical language. For instance, Jamilah concedes, "even though my silence protects me, I'm the one walking with my head down" (Abdel-Fattah 139). She also confesses that "the Jamilah in me longs to be respected for who she is, not tolerated and put up with ... But it takes guts to command that respect ..." (Abdel-Fattah 9).

A core aspect of the representation of Muslim woman as victim in Western discourse is the notion of female subjugation to patriarchal constructs (Kahf, *Western*

representations 4). Abdel-Fattah explores this notion in the relationship dynamic she establishes between Jamilah and her father. Jamilah's father can be described as strict and overprotective. These traits Jamilah attributes to their "cultural and religious" values and beliefs, but, paradoxically, it is her father's overprotectiveness that compels Jamilah to forge dual identities - that of blonde-haired, blue-eyed (thanks to contact lenses) student, and rebellious yet dutiful daughter. Abdel-Fattah also alludes to culture-based sexism in her representation of Jamilah's family context.

While Jamilah's father is strict with her, he is far more liberal with his son who goes to clubs and drinks alcohol without fear of reprisal. These double standards frustrate Jamilah and, in certain ways, perpetuate aspects of colonialist representations of the Muslim woman as victim. Such representations rely on the stereotype of the Muslim family dynamic as inherently sexist, oppressive and, by and large, patriarchal (Mirza 101-107). Moreover, Jamilah's decision to lie to her closest friend and to "do everything in my power to protect myself from being seen as [a stereotype]" (Abdel-Fattah 47), does little to diminish the perception of herself as a victim.

A key motivation in post-colonial feminist ideology is to encourage women to acknowledge and confront the presumptions embedded in stereotypes and to bring an end to such presumptions through their exposure (Sa'ar 692). On the basis of this premise, it is worth acknowledging the context in which Jamilah's characterisation is to be understood. Jamilah's gendered subjectivity and her experience at school are framed to no small extent by the parameters of post 9/11 perceptions of Islam. It is the discourse on the events and ramifications of 9/11 that take place within the school grounds among her peers and within the media.

The reality for many Muslim girls and women living in Western societies is that the 9/11 discourse and social tensions like the Cronulla riots have led to what

Mirza and Meeto refer to as “an increase in surveillance” (126). Muslim girls, in particular, are subjected to “heightened regulation from their families and the community” as a way to protect them from the threat of religious based persecution (Mirza and Meeto 126). As such, in many respects Muslim girls have become both “visible and invisible” in the post-9/11 Western context and it is this sense of visibility (Mirza and Meeto 126), (manifest through the ‘Jamie’ identity) and invisibility (manifest through the ‘Jamilah’ identify) that confronts Abdel-Fattah’s main protagonist.

One may look to the conclusion of the novel for some evidence of Abdel-Fattah’s attempt to mobilise the Western narrative away from the seemingly ubiquitous post-colonial representation of the subjugated Muslim woman. Reflective of post-colonial feminist theory, which posits the importance of women, is acknowledgement of the racist presumptions and practices in their lives along with the overt prejudices they experience and their endeavours to halt the perpetuation of these assumptions and practices through this acknowledgement (Marchand 932).

Jamilah’s attempt to bring an end to the racist presumptions and prejudices in her life is primarily demonstrated through her decision to perform at the school tenth-grade formal with the band she performs with at her madrassa, or Islamic school. It is significant that Kahf (1999), points to the veil (and the harem) as the primary symbol within the Western narrative of irredeemable difference and exoticism, and “powerlessness [of Muslim women] in the form of imprisonment, seclusion, silence, or invisibility” (6-8). The use of the veil as a symbol of these elements by other authors will be discussed at length in the analyses of the other novels. It is of some note, however, that Abdel-Fattah does not identify her protagonist through the veil in

Ten Things I Hate About Me (2010), choosing instead to use the *darabuka*, a Middle Eastern hand-drum, to symbolise Jamilah's connection to her true identity.

Thus, in *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010), Jamilah is a young Muslim woman experiencing issues related to self-identity as she transitions into adulthood. The subjective experience of identity for Jamilah is clearly one of conflict as she grapples to determine who she is and how she should choose to represent her 'self' to the world. That she undergoes this crisis in a supposedly multicultural society is something of a paradox in itself, if not an irony, and undoubtedly worthy of further investigation, which is currently beyond the scope of this thesis. In *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2007) Abdel-Fattah presents to readers a young female Muslim protagonist who, like Jamilah/Jamie, is also seeking to find her place in the world through identity affirmation.

While both novels primarily explore the notion of identity for young Muslim women in terms of personal discovery and social representation, Amal's subjective experience of identity in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2007) is couched in terms of identity affirmation; whereas, by contrast, Jamilah's subjective experience of identity in *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) is depicted more from the perspective of identity formulation. Notwithstanding this difference, in both novels by Abdel-Fattah, the community and broader social contexts are integral to each protagonist's formulation of her perception of self and her place in the world.

The unfolding narrative in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* evolves from Amal Abdel-Hakim's decision to change from part-time hijabi to full-time hijabi. Amal is a 16 year-old Muslim Palestinian Australian and her decision to wear the hijab full-time is central to the formulation of her self-identity. Amal's identity formulation is set within a post-9/11 context. For her, it is difficult being "a Muslim

today” and she “feels like [she’s] drowning” (Abdel-Fattah 148) in all of the negative reporting of Muslims and Islam by the media. As such, the types of reactions she receives are central to her identity formation and to her understanding of her decision to wear the hijab full time.

Abdel-Fattah establishes a clear connection between the hijab as a symbol of Islamic faith and obligation and the notion of individual choice. In this sense, the hijab operates as a multifaceted symbol throughout much of the novel’s narrative. All at once it is a symbol of Amal’s religious faith, her autonomy as a young Muslim woman, and her sense of religious obligation. When explaining her reasons for choosing to wear the hijab, Amal declares; “I’m doing it because it’s my duty and defines me as a Muslim female” (Abdel-Fattah 52). Although Amal does not elaborate on what she means by the term ‘duty’, it is implied that her notion of duty is linked to her sense of “connection” to other Muslim women and her place within the “universal sisterhood” (Abdel-Fattah 28) more than to fulfil some patriarchal cultural condition.

Amal’s self-identity construction runs as a thread through the narrative to demonstrate how she must respond to various external factors during the process. The “To Wear or not To Wear List” (Abdel-Fattah 17-18) she formulates at the beginning of the narrative is reflective of what Claude Steele (cited in Moya 45-96) refers to as “identity contingencies”. There is a dualistic element to the identity construct in that it is built upon the individual’s conscious perception of themselves as well as the perceptions imposed upon them by others (Moya 97).

Amal’s identity construction throughout the narrative touches upon some of the core challenges to overcoming the post-colonial stereotypes that have persisted in Western representations of Muslim women. The notion of identity, that is, Muslim

identity, is inextricably linked to the hijab. Considering identity from a broad perspective, some contemporary social commentators in Australia assert that Muslim communities in the West often base the very notion of (Muslim) identity upon points of differentiation with non-Muslims (Aly 37). For Aly, the points of differentiation then operate to strengthen the connections one has between identity and social belonging (37). Individual identity is neither fully shaped by the social groups to which the individual belongs, nor is the individual fully free of them (Moya 99). Thus, group identity may be linked to individual identity. In terms of the novel, the underlying premise of the narrative is that Amal belongs to what Moya calls a “stigmatised group” (99); that is, a Muslim woman as subjugated and victimised (Kahf, *Western representations* 6). In this context, the hijab functions as an important symbol within the stigma formation.

In Western colonial representations of Muslim women and the wearing of the hijab that prevail to some degree, it is difficult to dismiss the “stigma formation” articulated by Aly whereby the fixation on the headscarf as an article of clothing has little to do with attire and more to do with conceptualisation of the Muslim woman (112). As a result, there is a concern that narratives that focus on Muslim women in “varying degrees of cover” are at risk of positioning the Muslim woman as a concept rather than as a “person with interests, aspirations, struggles and feelings” (Aly 112).

Furthermore, the symbolism of the hijab is often considered, in literary texts and in social discourse, within a framework of sexuality (Aly 118). The Western representation of the hijab’s significance in relation to female modesty is to sexualise the veil; it functions as the vehicle or symbol through which the Muslim woman increases her mystique and allure, or to signify her virginity and victimhood (Kahf, *Western representations* 6). Aly (2007) points out that these misguided

representations invariably position the hijab within the “male universe” (118). Implicit in such representations is the assumption that the hijab is symbolic only of Muslim’s women’s sexuality and that, therefore, “the only relevant consideration is what impact the hijab has on men” (Aly 118). In giving salience to the hijab in her novel and to her central character’s freedom to decide whether to wear the hijab full-time rather than not wear it at all, Abdel-Fattah contributes to the reconfiguring of contemporary discourse on historical representations of the veil or headscarf as symbolic of “sexual and social oppression and imprisonment” (Aly 106).

Amal’s decision about whether or not to wear the hijab full-time rests upon her understanding of her identity as a young adult Muslim and, therefore, her relationship with God. This symbolic relationship between the hijab and one’s devotion to God is articulated by Maha Abdo from the Sydney Muslim Women’s Association. Abdo stated in an interview with CNN (2006) that “the hijab is not a tool to be a deterrent to sexual assault. ... It is a spiritual connection between myself and God”. (1)

Thus, throughout the narrative the notion of Muslim woman as subjugated or oppressed is essentially given no credence in the way Abdel-Fattah develops her main character; at no time is Amal forced or even pressured to wear the hijab by family or others. As Amal explicitly avers, “nobody, has made me wear it, Ms Walsh. It’s my decision” (Abdel-Fattah 35). In addition, the physical characteristics of her protagonist may be interpreted as an intention by Abdel-Fattah to challenge stereotypical representations and understandings of Muslim women. Amal has light hair and green eyes which, as she explains, surprises people when they learn she is a Muslim. Thus, it is through the depiction of a somewhat free-spirited protagonist who is autonomous in her decision-making about how she will represent herself as a

Muslim that Abdel-Fattah attempts to break down the stereotype of Muslim girls and women as oppressed.

McWilliams alludes to issues of literary representations in her discussion of authentic representation and the notion that someone may best explain the 'Other' woman "from a dominant cultural vantage point" (255). Just as the author's representation of the 'Other' woman may influence the perceived authenticity of the presentation, so too may the context in which the representation is being read (McWilliams 257). For Muslim authors who write about contemporary Muslims raised in the West, there is often the need to address the "victim mentality" (Aly 33) experienced by many Muslim women due to the (misguided) perceptions of many non-Muslims.

In some respects the characterisation of Amal as simultaneously accepting of religious obligation, symbolised through her decision to be a full-time hijabi, and as autonomous and free-spirited is reflective of contemporary feminist ideology and its attempts to deal with the representation of the 'Other' woman. Lazreg (2000) points to the way in which explanation of the 'Other' woman to improve social awareness and understanding is increasingly the domain of writers and academics who are themselves 'Other' women (34).

In this sense, writers such as Abdel-Fattah establishing a 'voice' in their main characters through which they can articulate their response to "generalisations and stereotypes" (Lazreg, *The Triumphant Discourse* 38) perpetuate notions of otherness. As Lazreg (2000) explains, contemporary representations of 'Other' women in literature and academia continues to emphasise "what customs, traditions, religions" *do* to women rather than what 'Other' women are doing "for the customs, traditions, religions" (38).

In some respects, Abdel-Fattah develops a central female character that clearly represents mainstream Muslim ideas; she wears a hijab out of a (willing) sense of duty and believes in abstaining from romantic relationships until marriage. However, the author seeks to frame these identifiable and mainstream representations within the context of a free-spirited and independent young adult Muslim woman. Amal's free-spiritedness and autonomy is accentuated, to some degree, through the comparisons that may be made with her friend, Leila. That is, it is through Leila's characterisation that Abdel-Fattah can position issues of sexism and oppression in Islam as points of focus and also challenge their validity. Leila is pressured by her mother who desires to see her married and wants her to settle for a life of domesticity.

Amal's predicament with modern life in Australia in having to deal with stereotypes of Islam as sexist and oppressive is epitomised in her concern about confiding in her non-Muslim friends about Leila's situation. She states, "I'm worried that she'll think, 'Oh, typical Muslim nutters. Locking their girls up in the house'" (Abdel-Fattah 281). As such, there is evidence throughout the narrative that Abdel-Fattah is seeking to draw a distinction between Middle Eastern cultural traditions and Islamic religion more broadly in the context of the events surrounding Leila. For instance, Amal's reminder that Leila's mother is following "her village's culture, not Islam" (Abdel-Fattah 83) and her sense of relief when her friends "understand it is a Leila story" (Abdel-Fattah 285) rather than a story about female Muslim oppression may be viewed as examples of Abdel-Fattah's intent to separate culture from religion in her representation of what it means to be a young adult Muslim woman in Australia.

Post-colonial feminism posits the need to reject homogenised and universal constructions of women (Mills 98). As a corollary to this, there is the need to

understand how individuality in the context of social, cultural and historical differences contributes to identity constructs. In *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2007) Abdel-Fattah presents to readers a young adult female Muslim protagonist who demonstrates how self-identity is inextricably linked to these elements. Using the hijab as a multifaceted symbol of faith, autonomy and obligation, Abdel-Fattah challenges representations of Muslim women as subjugated and marginalised.

The potentially subversive nature of challenging the representation of the Muslim woman as odalisque in Western literature may perhaps be lost on adolescent readers who are the target audience of Abdel-Fattah's novels. Nevertheless, a key function of an author writing for adolescent readers is often "to express the ideas, values and attitudes of what it means to be" in the context of the broader social and culture landscape (Nimon and Foster 187). In both *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) and *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2007) Abdel-Fattah positions the notion of Muslim identity formulation and affirmation within a distinctly middle-class social setting.

It is important to explore the implications of this for our understanding of how literary representations are re-shaping the image of the young adult Muslim woman living in the West. In both novels, the young adult woman is positioned within a particular framework of social and cultural politics that influences her worldview and her understanding of Muslim identity. As a result, the protagonists are on a journey of awareness in relation to how their religious sensibility correlates with mainstream society (Mydin, Kassim and Hashim 62-63). The correlation between religious and broader social constructs is integral to the young woman's transition from 'other' outsider to 'authentic' insider (Mazawi 187), and this is explored figuratively through the symbolism of the hijab.

One of the key constructs to consider for analysis is social class and how it is positioned within the context of identity politics as explored within each novel. Abdel-Fattah gives salience to middle class social values in both of her novels. In *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010), for instance, the author explores the notion of identity for young Muslim women by using the prism of middle class social paradigms. As such, particular importance is placed on such aspects as education attainment, family reputation, and upward social mobility. Although Jamilah's father works as a taxi driver, he is university educated with a PhD in agriculture (Abdel-Fattah 25). He is on the *Madrassa* committee and encourages Jamilah to develop herself intellectually (Abdel-Fattah 29). Similarly, Jamilah's sister, Shereen, attends university and is proactive in her desire to challenge social injustices (Abdel-Fattah 74).

An author seeks to define the central protagonists by writing through his or her "perspectives and interpretations" (Mertz and England 120). In turn, the "world" in which Abdel-Fattah positions Jamilah to forge her identity as a Muslim woman is one where her protagonist perceives a connection between social status and Muslim identity. This is evident in Jamilah's revelation that she wished her father was "more ambitious" (Abdel-Fattah 53) in his pursuit of a career. For Jamilah, breaking the Muslim stereotype is about embracing dominant socio-cultural middle class values. It is for this reason Jamilah sees no value or significance in the hijab as a part of her identity formation. The pressure to achieve upward social mobility is further demonstrated in her father's response to the career choices made by his other children. For instance, Bilal's choice to pursue a career as a mechanic and Shereen's choice to complete an Arts degree are questioned by their father as he thinks their choices reflect badly on his "job" (Abdel-Fattah 82) as a father.

Similarly, in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2007) Abdel-Fattah sets her protagonist's quest to affirm her Muslim identity firmly within middle class upwardly mobile social paradigms. Amal's father is a doctor who "drives a metallic-red convertible" and her mother is a dentist who also "polishes door-knobs and dusts extension cords" (Abdel-Fattah 3). In contrast to Jamilah in *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010), Amal lives a more affluent lifestyle in "Camberwell, one of Melbourne's trendy suburbs" (Abdel-Fattah 5). Despite this difference, Abdel-Fattah subjects Amal to the same social and cultural pressures experienced by Jamilah in relation to her identity as a young Muslim woman; that is, the need to demonstrate constant awareness of expectations placed upon them with regard to their social behaviour, education attainment, and relationships with young men. Amal receives tacit approval from her parents in her decision to seek affirmation of her Muslim identity on her terms. Although the parents initially express their concern when first informed of Amal's intention to wear a hijab to McClean, the new school she will be attending, they nonetheless do not try to challenge her in her quest to develop her identity (Abdel-Fattah 23).

In contrast, Abdel-Fattah depicts a starkly different context experienced by Amal's cousin, Leila, in her attempt to forge her identity as a young Muslim woman. Leila's mother (Aunty) fails to understand her daughter's journey of self-discovery and is subsequently over-controlling and over-protective. In this instance, Abdel-Fattah develops in Aunty a representation of Muslim women where limited education attainment manifests as a "village culture" (Abdel-Fattah 89). As a result, Abdel-Fattah juxtaposes an old view of Muslim womanhood where the "right path" as shown by God (260) is a life of domesticity against a seemingly modern view of

Muslim womanhood, which includes the pursuit of intellectual and personal development, as demonstrated by the young modern Muslim protagonists.

The notion that the social (along with the cultural and religious) space in which a young Muslim woman finds herself will influence her identity formation (Mydin, Kassim and Hashim 63) has important implications. For example, is Abdel-Fattah suggesting through her representation of her protagonists, their families, and their social class that affirming one's identity as a Muslim woman may only be regarded as non-regressive if it emerges from a middle-class background? If so, does this, therefore, inadvertently assign working class Muslims to the realm of stereotypes or caricatures of fundamentalists who are perennially on the periphery of the discourse? Of course, the answers to these questions are open to debate, but the questions, nonetheless, point to the problem of literary representations of the Muslim experience from only one perspective. One may reflect on the extent to which Abdel-Fattah's representation of Muslim females through the characterisations of her protagonists are predicated on a key assumption: to redress the issue of negative Western literary stereotypes of Muslim women it is necessary to emphasise middle class upward social mobility values and to have them embrace the nationalistic values of the dominant culture.

This chapter has analysed the representation of young adult Muslim women's identity formation in Abdel-Fattah's *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) and *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2007). Particular attention was given to the author's use of the post 9/11 social contexts in Australia and its ramifications for Muslim identity to frame her protagonists' search for identity and identity affirmation. The hijab is identified as an important literary device used by Abdel-Fattah to represent each of her protagonist's perceptions of Muslim womanhood. Whether the choice is to wear

the hijab (Amal) or not to wear the hijab (Jamilah), the garment functions to illustrate the challenges experienced by Muslim women in their attempt to forge their own identity and to determine how their identity is expressed. As such, the analysis establishes a foundation to further explore the extent to which Abdel-Fattah's fictional works subvert post-colonial stereotypes of Muslim women and contribute to literary representations of young Muslim women in Australia as unique and individual.

Chapter Four: Aliya Husain's *Neither This Nor That* and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*.

In this chapter Aliya Husain's *Neither This Nor That* (2010) and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) are analysed. Both novels are set in pre-9/11 United States of America (hereafter America) during the 1970s and 1980s at a time of increasing anti-Muslim sentiment due to escalating tensions in international relations with Iran. Similar to the analyses of the texts presented in the previous chapter, the central focus in the analysis of each novel in this chapter is on the author's representation of religious and self-identity formulation in the life narrative of the young adult Muslim protagonist and the use of the hijab by the author as a symbolic marker of identity formulation. A common theme explored in each novel is the sentiment in Islam pertaining to the importance of hijab to the demonstration of female modesty and how this sentiment has been usurped and perverted in Western post-colonial paradigms to be reconfigured as a demonstration of female subjugation at the hands of a misogynistic religion from which Muslim women invariably wish to escape (Kahf, *Western representations* 6-7).

This chapter will investigate the extent to which *Neither This Nor That* (2010) and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) challenge the validity of post-colonial discourses, which dominate Western representations of Muslim woman's religious identity and her relationship with Islam more broadly. Moreover, it will argue that each novel is ultimately representative of a growing number of literary works by women authors writing in English and published in Western countries which seek to depict the life narratives of young Muslim women and their relationship with Islam (Ameri n.d. 1) beyond the limitations of post-colonial stereotypes.

Neither This Nor That (2010) and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) are novels set in a period of significant social change in America, which had particular implications for Muslim identity. The doors through which to immigrate to America widened during the 1970s and this resulted in a significant number of skilled professional workers from Muslim countries arriving in America (Haniff 305). As the liberalisation of immigration laws in America continued during the 1980s, even more Muslim students, professionals and skilled workers arrived on American shores. However, the 1980s was also a time of increasing tension in international relations. In America in particular, the presence of Muslims became a point of intense focus within the broader community in response to the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and the subsequent Iran hostage crisis (Elver 68). In addition, the hijacking of the TWA flight in Lebanon in 1985 exacerbated “deep prejudices in American society” (Brown 220), which often fuelled anti-Islamic media reporting and political rhetoric. As a result, the decades prior to the turn of the 21st century were a time when many Muslim citizens residing in multicultural societies such as America felt their national identity was threatened and their legitimacy as citizens in that society was questioned (Ameri, *National identity* 55).

The young adult Muslim protagonist in *Neither This Nor That* (2010), Fatima Husain, is a child of Indian immigrants who is confronted with many challenges as she seeks to adjust to life and establish her Muslim identity in a secular foreign country. Although Fatima was born in America the key element in her character development by Husain is her quest to feel a sense of belonging. She strives to reconcile her *Desi* (Indian cultural) upbringing with her deep Islamic sensibility while immersed in the American cultural context. The problem with identity experienced by Fatima is encapsulated in the title of the novel *Neither This Nor That* (2010).

Although Fatima is quick to defend her “Americanness” (Husain 33) she nonetheless acknowledges at a young age how “embarrassed she was at being different” (Husain 6) and that a key challenge for her was to “balance the two worlds she was growing up in” (Husain 50).

A significant challenge to the process of identity formulation experienced by Fatima is the broader social context, particularly perceptions of Muslims living in America during the 1980s. Fatima is trying to forge her self-identity against a social backdrop where Muslims are stereotyped as “violent people” (Husain 55-56) as a result of “the international politics of the time [that] were ... typecasting the common Muslim as a terrorist” (Husain 81). It is within this anti-Islamic context that Fatima strives to learn who she is as an American Muslim of deep faith and how she will choose to “represent Islam” (Husain 55).

In *Neither This Nor That* (2010) the reader is presented with a protagonist who is overtly far more reflective of her religious identity and who is arguably experiencing her connection to Islam at a much deeper level than the protagonists in Abdel-Fattah’s texts discussed in the previous chapter. For Fatima, religion is intensely personal and a guiding path, with the depth of her religious sensibilities encapsulated in the solace she finds not only in Islam, but also in the enjoyment she experiences in the “company of devout Christians and Jews” who also “enriched her life” (Husain 206). Fatima’s experience of the *Hajj* (her spiritual pilgrimage to Mecca) with her family at age 13, for instance, highlights that even at a young age “her love for the creator was deep” (Husain 66).

Fatima places greater importance on religion than on culture as is evident in her remark to her Dadima (grandmother) that “it’s more important for me to be a good Muslim girl” [than a good *Desi* girl] (Husain 90). Moreover, Fatima’s emerging

religious identity takes place alongside emerging “semi-feminist ideals” (Husain 39) about the rights of women. These ideals develop in response to the “*Desi* mentality” that favoured a domestic role for women, which sometimes “got to be too much for Fatima” (Husain 39). Significantly, Husain makes explicit to the reader that the semi-feminist ideals her protagonist begins to develop emerge from her understanding of Islam and its teachings on Muslim womanhood rather than from her exposure to American culture (Husain 39-40)

Husain explores the association between attire and values and modesty. Fatima perceives a difference between “modest” and “risqué” attire and believes “modest attire was imperative among Muslims and that there was no room for deviation in what parts of their body were to be covered and what was allowed to show” (Husain 10). The most significant piece of attire used by Husain as a symbolic device in *Neither This Nor That* (2010), is the hijab. As Husain explained in an interview (2014), “adherence to the wearing of hijab is one of the major dilemmas that Muslim women face both in America and throughout the rest of the world” (1). As the narrative unfolds, Fatima develops a deepening understanding of the hijab as a symbol of her authenticity as a Muslim. This developing view of Islamic authenticity is, in turn, founded upon the reconciliation of her cultural, social, and religious identities.

The decision by young Muslim women to wear the hijab may be understood as both an affirmation of Islamic faith and as a symbol of trust in a social system that supports freedom of speech and religion (Haddad 254). When this premise is applied to Husain’s characterisation of Fatima and the consideration she gives to her reasons for wearing, or for not wearing the hijab, it is clear that the association between hijab

and Muslim woman developed in the novel is symbolic of one's agency in formulating and expressing one's identity (Bilge 13).

Bilge explores the concept of agency in relation to veiled Muslim women, primarily from the perspective of personal autonomy, emancipation and empowerment (11). In turn, the authors discuss the somewhat dichotomous conceptualisation of agency that often pervades feminist discourse and literary representations of Muslim women. As Bilge explains, even in feminist scholarship women who wear a veil are sometimes represented as "devoid of agency" (10) and are therefore disempowered and remain non-emancipated (11). This is compared to non-veil wearing (Western) women who enjoy freedom of self-determination. Bilge alludes to the difficulty feminist scholarship has with the conceptualisation of female agency in relation veil wearing and argues that the focus should be more on how the veil functions as a tool for inclusion and citizenry (11).

Muslim women's motivations for veiling (wearing the hijab) vary greatly. As suggested by Read and Bartkowski, some Muslim veil in order to express deep-seated convictions pertaining to gender difference whereas others may veil "as a means of critiquing Western colonialism in the Middle East" (396). While theological rationales are often cited by Muslim women as justification for their choice to veil, Read and Bartkowski (396) identify and discuss a range of other motivations influencing Muslim's women's choices. For instance, the authors cite examples of some women's "strategic motivations" for veiling such as to feel more "closely connected to significant others" (Read and Bartkowski 403). Moreover, they suggest some Muslim women are motivated by the significance of the veil to Islamic women's friendship networks, particularly those living in a non-Muslim country such as America (Read and Bartkowski 403).

Studies of Muslim women's motivations for veiling which illustrate the inherently complex nature of the 'relationship' between Muslim woman and the veil thus pose a challenge to post-colonial representations of "the veil as a symbol of oppression" (Bilge 14). With this premise in mind, it may be argued that the *hijab* is used by Husain as a literary device in *Neither This Nor That* (2010) to similarly diminish post-colonial literary representations of Muslim woman as victim and oppressed. Certainly, Fatima is conscious of the growing stereotyping of Muslims and misrepresentation of Islam among the American public during the 1980s. It is the values and belief pertaining to issues of modesty and propriety that Fatima most associates with the hijab that appear to be her main motivation for wearing the hijab. This is perhaps due to Husain's understanding of the hijab as not only a form of religious attire, but also as an expression of one's attitude and "appropriateness in behaviour and mannerisms that exhibit decency and honor" (Husain 8).

As an adolescent, although Fatima is generally willing and proud to wear the hijab, she resists her parents' efforts to get her to wear the hijab to high school. Fatima is acutely aware of the "baggage that accompanied wearing the hijab" (Husain 107) and as she states, she "needed to grow more secure" in her school friendships (Husain 83). Fearing that "wearing the hijab might jeopardise these friendships" (Husain 72), Fatima is thus characterised as not only a young Muslim girl with strong Islamic sensibilities, but also as a young American girl who, like most teenagers, feels insecure about her sense of belonging and identity.

Fatima's appreciation of the importance of choice rather than sense of obligation in relation to wearing the hijab is affirmed during her attendance at College. While noting that the women on campus who wear hijab were easily identified as Muslim, she readily seeks to foster a relationship with Muslim women

who chose not to wear the hijab as it is a “common theology” (Husain 213) that is the true point of connection. In this sense, Husain contributes to the diminishment of post-colonial literary representations by explicitly opposing the ‘colonial’ structures of power inherent in subjugation. In such power structures, Muslim women who wear hijab are positioned as servile and disempowered. To reconfigure the reader’s understanding of what the hijab may mean to Muslim woman Husain employs the hijab as a symbol of choice and “a statement of ... independence and individuality, that garners self-respect and self-worth” (Husain 10).

As discussed in the previous analyses of Abdel-Fattah’s *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) and *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2007), the literary representations of young adult Muslim womanhood are clearly positioned within middle class ideals. The families of both Jamilah and Amal in those novels represent upwardly mobile middle-class aspirations and it is from this social perspective that Abdel-Fattah shapes the reader’s understanding of young adult Muslim female identity formulation in the post-9/11 era in Australia. In *Neither This Nor That* (2010) the reader is again presented with a contemporary (albeit pre-9/11) literary representation of young adult Muslim female closely aligned to middle class social paradigms and aspirations. Fatima’s parents are well educated and they have “very high hopes for their daughters [Ayesha and Fatima]” regarding their educational attainment (Husain 31). Fatima is characterised by Husain as a Muslim girl during her formative years who not only values and enjoys learning, but who also combines a strong sense of Islamic moral awareness and obligation with “academic goals and ideals for achieving success” (Husain 73).

Thus, as with the protagonists developed by Abdel-Fattah in her Australian novels, the young adult Muslim female protagonist in Husain’s *Neither This Nor That*

(2010) contributes to the reconfiguration of contemporary literary representations of Muslim female identity. Each of the female protagonists help to diminish the notions of Muslim female subjugation and oppression for readers through their characterisations as independent young adult women who demonstrate autonomy in their decision making with regard to the formulation and expression of their Muslim identity. Yet, in each novel, a representation of Muslim female identity that is firmly embedded in paradigms representing upwardly mobile middle class aspirations and ideals is perhaps in one sense a limitation as the literary representation of young adult Muslim woman's transition from 'Other' to 'authentic' insider (Mazawi 187) is legitimised in relation to only one type of social context.

In Fatima Husain the reader is presented with a Muslim female who engages with her Islamic faith at a progressively deeper level as she matures and who exercises her freewill to determine how she will express her relationship with her God. As such, it is her depth of religious sensibility and her understanding of her freedom of choice from an Islamic rather than a cultural perspective, which shapes her actions, including her decision to wear the hijab. In this regard a clear point of difference can be established between Husain's novel and the two novels by Abdel-Fattah. The representation of the young-adult Muslim protagonists in Abdel-Fattah's novels primarily aims to examine Muslim woman's identity formulation in relation to their right to be free express within the secular social context rather than a context of faith in which they are growing up.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf (2006) by Mohja Kahf is primarily set in the United States of America (USA) during the 1970s and 1980s at a time when Islam was identified with marginalisation, subjugation, fear and threat (Abrahamian 533; Byng 2). It is the journey of central protagonist, Khadra Shamy, who discovers what

it means to her to be a “real Muslim” (Kahf 24) and to experience an authentic and fulfilling relationship with Islam. As a Syrian-American girl being brought up by devout Muslim parents in an equally devout Muslim community in Indiana, USA, Islam has a powerful role in Khadra’s journey of self-discovery and identity formulation. However, what emerges for the reader as the narrative unfolds is that it is an identity that emerges from her own understanding of Islam and what it means to her, rather than an understanding of Muslim identity endorsed by her parents, Wajdy and Ebtehaj, or by the broader Muslim community.

As with the Muslim female protagonists in the other novels, Khadra must forge her sense of self – both as a social being and as a religious being – in a disharmonious social context. From the outset of the novel the reader is given clear indications of Khadra’s sense of displacement or Otherness as a Syrian-American Muslim growing up in Indiana. Her ironic understanding of the sign that reads: “The People of Indiana Welcome You” (Kahf 1) as she returns to the city she grew up in is quickly qualified by her memories of the constant taunts to “go back to where you came from” (Kahf 7) from some within the community, and through her attempt to “calm the panic that coming back to Indiana brings to her” (Kahf 3).

Kahf’s inclusion of this episode to open the narrative in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) alludes to the bigotry and intolerance towards Muslims by many non-Muslim members of the community in the decades prior to the September 11 attacks on America 9/11. In the early stages of the narrative in Khadra and her family are subject to such bigotry and intolerance from American non-Muslims which, the reader may sense, is primarily intended to create a sense of dislocation and discomfort among the members of the Muslim community. One example of community intolerance towards the Shamy family is presented early in the novel.

Specifically, the Shamy family home is pelted with beer bottles by children from the neighbourhood (the Lotts) and when Mr Shamy presents to the children's parents to address the issue he is told in no uncertain terms to get "off my porch" and to go "back where you people came from" (Kahf 7). Such intolerance clearly leaves the Shamy family with the burden of having to defend their Muslim identity and their rightful place within the community.

Kahf's depiction of the rape and murder of Zuhura, a young adult Muslim girl living in the community is the most confronting example from the author of the bigotry and intolerance many American Muslims had to endure during the pre-9/11 decades. The reaction from the Dawah community Muslims is understandably one of shock and outrage, but it is also one, which draws heavily on religious faith. The Dawah community including Khadra and her family is galvanised in its determination to "not be passive about enacting your faith" (Kahf 96).

Husain (2010) also imbues in the narrative of *Neither This nor That* a sense of the tension pervading some American communities in the pre-9/11 decades; often manifesting as hostility towards Muslims and the Islamic faith. However, her representation of this social climate is far more subtle when compared to the approach from Kahf. Husain primarily explores the notion of community tension between Muslims and non-Muslims through the prism of Fatima's perceptions. In turn, it is through Fatima's reflections on social acceptance, her comparisons of Islamic and secular morality, and her reluctance to wear hijab to school that the reader is given an insight into the journey to belong.

Kahf (2006) foregrounds for the reader the journey Khadra will undertake to reconcile her understanding of religious obedience with religious authenticity in the dialogue which unfolds between Khadra and her Aunt Khadija during the opening

chapters of the novel. During their conversation, Khadra is asked by her Aunt, “What is a real Muslim?” (24). Khadra replies, “when you do the five pillars” (24). From this response it is evident to the reader that even at a young age Khadra associated being a “real Muslim” (24) with practicing Islamic rituals. It is also during this conversation that Khadra is first introduced to the notion that being a “real Muslim” may be about more than just outward displays of ritual; that is, it is also about believing “that God is One” (24) and surrendering to this belief.

One of the key literary devices used by Kahf (2006) to explore the nature of the relationship between religious ritual and religious authenticity is the hijab or headscarf. In Khadra’s journey of discovery of the meaning of the veil to her during her formative years she must first try to reconcile the seemingly dichotomous worlds of which she belongs. On one side is the world of Islam, idealised and romanticised through the Dawah prism of strict obedience to Islamic values and practices; where the hijab is a vehicle for the “*teachings of modesty*” (Kahf 171 italics in original). Alternatively, in American culture with its emphasis on materialism and its demonstrations of loose morality (Kahf 68) the hijab is broadly thought by the non-Muslim public to symbolise “the oppression of women in Islam” (Kahf 97). What Khadra later comes to understand, as an adult Muslim woman is that neither of these representations of Muslim woman’s relationship with the veil accurately reflects her relationship with the veil.

Khadra first starts to consider wearing the hijab in fourth grade (Kahf 25), where her understanding of its significance is tied to notions of modesty. The importance of modesty and how it is protected through the veil is reinforced to Khadra through comments from her Aunt such as, “covering up is a strong thing” (Kahf 25); and by her mother who raises Khadra to believe that wearing hijab to cover

up is one step a woman must take to “perfect Islam” (Kahf 42). However, rather than the association between the veil and female modesty in Islam being depicted as forced obedience in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Kahf (2006) demonstrates how it is more a rite of passage in the life narrative of many Muslim girls.

Going to Washington Square Shopping Centre to pick out the material “of her first hijabs” (112) is clearly a rite of passage for Khadra. As Kahf describes it “the sensation of being hijabed was a thrill ... as natural to her as a second skin without which if she ventured into the outside world she felt naked” (113). As Khadra continues to develop her sense of Muslim identity she begins to understand the hijab as more than just a display and commitment to modesty. Similar to Fatima Husain in *Neither This Nor That* (2010), it is during her years at university when the hijab for Khadra becomes a symbol of connection and belonging as evidenced in Kahf’s declaration of her protagonist’s reflections on campus life, “Khadra loves being in this forest of women in hijab” (55).

It is through a series of life events that Khadra begins to question her understanding of Muslim identity and of what the hijab signifies to her and her Islamic authenticity. For instance, her disillusionment from her less than satisfying Hajj experience where, being in “the land of all Muslims” (Kahf 159), she nonetheless “never felt so far from home” (Kahf 177). Also, Khadra’s failed marriage to Juma and the overriding sense she feels at times that she must conform to others’ expectations of the meaning to be a real Muslim woman also prompts her to re-evaluate her understanding of the hijab. This is evidenced in her disputes with Juma over her choice to wear hijab while riding her bicycle and the sense the reader has that as a married woman Khadra somehow feels chained to modesty of the hijab (Kahf 229). Moreover, during her trip to Syria she disappointed to find that her cousins,

Reem and Roddy, take little interest in the atrocities waged against Muslims by fellow Muslims (Kahf 279). She also learns her Uncle Mazen blamed her parents, on the basis of his false perception of them as political dissidents, for politicising the hijab (Kahf 282).

Reinforcing the notion that a young adult Muslim woman's engagement in Islamic practices and rituals – such as wearing the veil – is primarily about her personal relationship with God is Khadra's choice to go unveiled outside her home. The significance of this choice is somewhat accentuated by the fact that Khadra is traveling in Damascus when it takes place. In this setting Khadra is away from her family and it here also where she unexpectedly encounters an Arab Rabbi. In turn, it is this unexpected event and the embarrassment she feels towards her own surprised response that allows Khadra for the first time to experience “with her heart” (Kahf 306) how humanity transcends religion. As she imagines to herself the normalcy of being the Rabbi's grand-daughter or of him “dozing in his chair”, Khadra develops a new and deeper understanding of life as “great gasping sobs poured out and wouldn't stop” (Kahf 306). This new awareness offers Khadra a sense of liberation, which is reflected in her own sense of religious identity. Thus, in the scene where her scarf slips off as she is walking the streets of Damascus, she “shrugged” (309). Khadra's experience of the warm sunshine is described by Kahf (2006) as “a blessing on her shoulders” and as “a gift from God” (309) for which she felt immense gratitude. Rather than representing an act of disobedience, Khadra's new liberated sense of self and of Muslim identity leads her to consider how going unveiled serves to deepen her religious sensibilities as she comes to the view that “veiling and unveiling are ... both ... necessary” (Kahf 309) in her relationship with God.

Thus, in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) Khadra's young adulthood is shown to be a period of disillusionment and doubt with regard to her understanding of being a Muslim and to her own relationship with Islam. There is much about what surrounds Khadra during her formative years (such as, family and broader community expectations), which endorse a somewhat inflexible representation of Muslim identity. For instance, the 'inflexibility' within the family dynamic is evidenced in Khadra's relationship with her mother and other older female relatives. The representations of female Muslim identity by these women are invariably linked to conceptualisations of modesty and its importance to moral conduct. As a maturing woman Khadra develops her own understanding of what it means to be "a *moral girl*" (Kahf 171). She actively seeks to explore physical and social boundaries outside of the Dawah community and the pervasive value placed on strict obedience to Islamic values and practices in order to, as Khadra's mother states, "perfect her Islam" (Kahf 42). This is evidenced in her travels abroad and determination to seek personal fulfilment in her relationships rather than social acceptance. It is Khadra's defiance of this inflexibility that enables her to ultimately experience a deeper level of spirituality.

It may be argued that in some respects the narrow application of power constructs related to subjugation in post-colonial paradigms which equate veil wearing by Muslim women with victimhood and lack of agency is exposed through the contrasting central protagonists in *Neither This Nor That* (2010) and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). Although both protagonists recognise the headscarf as an important marker of their Islamic religious and "*precious ... heritage*" (Kahf 313), unlike Fatima Husain, Khadra does not feel the need to wear the headscarf as a way to feel closer to God. It is through Kahf's depiction of Khadra's formative years and her

transition through young adulthood that the reader is given a representation of Muslim womanhood which counters post-colonial stereotypes. In Khadra as a young adult Muslim woman we see the Muslim woman's relationship with, and understanding of, Islam as based upon considered reasoning of Muslim identity in different contexts, growing self-awareness, self-reflection, and freedom of choice.

An important aspect of *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), which helps to reshape former narrow and stereotypical representation of Muslim women within traditional contexts, such as that of Khadra's mother or the people in her childhood community, into representations of women as autonomous, free-spirited individuals is Khadra's engagement in Islamic rituals and practices. Khadra's engagement in these rituals and practices points to her spirituality. Two examples from the novel demonstrate this particularly well. First is her deep reflection at a relatively young age on her Hajj experience and the conclusion she draws regarding the relationship between religious duty and spiritual fulfilment. Second is her emergent understanding as an adult woman of how hijab may be a vehicle for a woman's personal expression of her relationship with God. It is upon this platform that the novel contributes to re-representation of young adult Muslim women, which runs contrary to the mainstream model for Western readers borne out of the Western literary and social discourse that emerged from the middle of the 18th century (Kahf 4-5).

The analysis of Husain's *Neither This Nor That* (2010) and Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) in this chapter focuses on the young adult female protagonists' self-directed journey towards understanding Islam and her determination to shape her own Muslim identity. The primary context in which the identity formulation of the female protagonists takes place is pre-9/11 secular America, circa

1980s. At this time social constructs of Islam by non-Muslims in America were increasingly shaped by links to terrorist extremism and by predilection for post-colonial paradigms purporting the misogynistic oppression of women. It is of some significance that both authors include in their respective life-narrative representations of young adult Muslim womanhood the role of travel and cross-cultural experiences in the development of Muslim identity

This represents a significant point of difference to the representation of female Muslim identity formulation developed by Abdel-Fattah. In Abdel-Fattah's novels, *Does my Head Look Big in This?* (2007) and *Ten Things I Hate About Me* her protagonists engage in what may be described as a sociocultural-centric process of identity formulation. Both Amal's and Jamilah's respective journeys towards discovery of self are framed within the pressures presented by the prevailing socio-cultural discourses of Muslim identity emerging in Australia circa 2005. Thus, significant to the protagonists' Muslim identity formulation is the social positioning of minority immigrant groups and their subjective response to the identity markers (Piller 129) imposed upon them within a specific context. Moreover, it is emphasised throughout the analyses of the novels that Muslim identity is very much restricted to the context of middle-class Australia within the broader scope of upwardly mobile middle-class aspirations and values.

In contrast, the identity formulation experience for Muslim women depicted by Husain and Kahf in their respective novels functions on a deeper level than in Abdel-Fattah's novel. Both Fatima in *Neither This Nor That* (2010) and Khadra in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) engage with socio-cultural and socio-religious contexts beyond US borders, primarily through their travels to the Middle East as part of their spiritual rite of passage (Hajj) or to visit family and friends. As a result, the

processes of Muslim- and self-identity formulation represented by Husain and Kahf in their respective novels are framed within a broader suite of social, political and religious constructs. It is true that the two primary settings represented by the three authors Australia (Abdel-Fattah) and the US (Husain and Kahf) are secular with prevailing middle-class values. However, in relation to the exploration of socio-cultural context and its role in religious identity formulation, Husain and Kahf engage their protagonists (Fatima and Khadra, respectively) in experiences of religious and cultural life outside of the secular prism. In doing so, the religious sensibilities of both Fatima and Khadra (in contrast to the young protagonists in Abdel-Fattah's novels) develop at a deeper level as they are shaped within broader perspectives of Muslims' experiences of Islam and their engagement with other religions.

Finally, integral to the notion of female oppression in Western post-colonial representations of Islam is the hijab and notion that it is worn out of obedience rather than choice. Husain and Kahf demonstrate in their novels the falsity of such representations by depicting the life narrative of their respective Muslim protagonists through a contemporary post-colonialist feminist lens. What each author establishes is that a Muslim woman's choice to wear hijab is primarily related to her desire for religious authenticity rather than obedience to ritual or to submission to patriarchal pressure. As a result, *Neither This Nor That* (2010) and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) both make an important contribution to the growing body of modern fictional works that aim to expose the limitations post-colonial paradigms pertaining to Muslim women.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The central focus of this thesis is the representation of Muslim women and the self-identity formulation in the life narratives of young adult Muslim women in examples of contemporary Western literature. The reason underpinning this choice of focus emerged in response to the growing number of Muslim women authors who are composing and publishing literary works in English that offer a different representation of Muslim womanhood to that evident in post-colonial paradigms, particularly in official political and media discourse. In doing so, the authors contribute to our understanding of young Muslim women as autonomous and free-spirited individuals who actively pursue a deep-level understanding of their Muslim identity and their relationship with Islam.

The four novels *Does my head look big in this?* (2007) and *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) by Abdel-Fattah, Aliya Husain's *Neither This Nor That* (2010) and Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) are specifically chosen for their representations of self-identity formulation and Muslim identity formulation. Furthermore, an important consideration when selecting the novels is the balance they provide to representations of the life narratives of Muslim women during both the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 eras in The United States of America and Australia, respectively. The authors point to the prevailing social discourse in pre-9/11 America or post-9/11 Australia, which gave great currency to post-colonial stereotypes of the Muslim woman as victim of a patriarchal and misogynistic Islamic religion (Ameri, *National identity* 55).

A range of theoretical frameworks and contemporary commentary on identity formulation in general and Muslim identity formulation in particular are applied

throughout the analyses of the novels. Specifically, the theoretical framework for the analyses of the four novels is drawn from post-colonial theories on identity and power relations such as the work of Said on the Orientalist construct while post-colonial feminist theory is utilised as a platform for analysis. In particular, the theory is applied to illuminate how contemporary women authors representing the life narratives of young adult Muslim women expose and examine how Muslim women living in Western societies are subject to stereotypical representations and persistent socio-political and cultural effects of colonialism (Sa'ar 696).

The analyses also draw on theories related to media framing and discourse to explore how perceptions of Muslim women are shaped in the public domain and the implications this has for identity formulation and the pursuit of authenticity as a Muslim. As such, the analyses of the four novels sought to explore the interrelationship between social context, public discourse, religious obligations and personal introspection and reflexivity in the process of identity formulation.

The analysis of the literary representations of the life narratives of young adult female Muslims in each of the four novels is undertaken to examine the nature of the correlations between the discursively constructed identity experiences and subjective identity experiences. Discursive identity construction in relation to young adult Muslim women living in Western societies is to be understood as those shaped by Western media reporting and general attitudes and commentary expressed in social discourse. In contrast, in these novels the subjective identity construction is to be understood as the internal processes of conscious introspection and self-reflexivity engaged in by the young-adult Muslim women themselves.

To effectively explore the impact and implications of discursive constructs on subjective identity formulation for the protagonists in Hussain's and Kahf's novels, a

brief review of the anti-Islamic sentiment in America during the 1970s and 1980s is provided. In particular, the discussion identifies these elements within the social discourse in American communities during the pre-9/11 era and reviews how they are fuelled in large part by Western media representations of Islam and Muslims in response to the West's strained relations with the Arab world. Similarly, a brief account is given of the anti-Islamic sentiment in Australian communities during the post-9/11 era in which both of Abdel-Fattah's novels are set and a focus on the way in which Muslim voices are mediated in a multicultural society such as Australia.

The primary focus in the textual analyses is on the symbolic use of hijab. The discussion of the use of hijab was contextualized within the post-colonial Western understanding of hijab as a marker of Muslim women victimhood and oppression (Bilge 14). The hijab functions as a symbolic device in varied ways. In *Neither This Nor That* (2010) Husain uses the hijab to explore female Muslim identity in relation to female modesty and Muslim authenticity. As such, it is argued that Fatima's choice to wear hijab is integral to the way in which she reconciles her cultural, social, and religious identities. In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) the hijab is similarly used to symbolise the relationship between female modesty, social identity, and Muslim authenticity. It is argued the hijab is used as a symbolic marker in this novel primarily to explore this relationship in relation to religious duty or obligation. Kahf (2006) provides a protagonist in Khadra whose decision to both veil and unveil (309) is integral to her developing religious sensibilities and her relationship with God.

The hijab in *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) and *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (2007) is also used as a symbol of identity formulation. In the latter novel, Jamilah's subjective experience of identity is one based on conflict as she struggles to

reconcile her social and religious self in her representation of her 'self' to the world. It is argued that the hijab is used in this novel as a powerful reminder of the constraints to identity formulation experienced by young adult female Muslims in Western contexts as a result of prevailing social and media discourses. It is also argued that in both of Abdel-Fattah's novels the freedom of choice demonstrated by the main protagonists in their decision to wear hijab is representative of autonomy and self-determination constructs in the young adult Muslim woman's formulation of their Muslim identity.

Notwithstanding the varied ways in which each of the authors employed the hijab as a symbol in their narratives, they all contributed to the development of a more contemporary understanding of the role of hijab in Muslim women's relationship with Islam. Specifically, the argument developed throughout the analyses is that the authors' symbolic use of the hijab provides a compelling counter-representation of Muslim womanhood to the subjugated victim configuration prevalent in Western post-colonial paradigms (Kahf, *Western representations* 6-7). Central to the use of hijab in the narrative is the notion of freedom of choice and individual expressions. To varying degrees the hijab becomes a symbol of Muslim women's freedom of choice and her autonomy in determining what authentic Muslim identity means to her.

In depicting young-adult Muslim women as progressive, free-spirited, and self-reflexive when formulating their Muslim identity, it is argued that the authors are reconfiguring and contemporising literary representations of Muslim womanhood. Central to the argument is the assertion that the author's application of post-colonial feminist ideology provides a platform from which to expose, challenge, and ultimately refute presumptions embedded in post-colonial stereotypes (Sa'ar 692). What is demonstrated is that Hussian, Kahf and Abdel-Fattah provide a collective

contribution to the re-conceptualisation of young adult female Muslim identity in modern Western social contexts. Each author represents in the life narrative of her protagonist the emergence of a young adult Muslim woman who ultimately feels empowered to determine her Muslim identity and the nature of her relationship with Islam. As a result, post-colonial one-dimensional demeaning and stereotypical representations of Muslim women as victims of religious oppression and patriarchal constraint (Bilge 14) are superseded. The analyses presented give some indication of the emerging literary representations of Muslim womanhood that acknowledge and explore the complexities of Muslim identity formulation and the inherent diversity in the expression by Muslim women of their relationship with Islam.

The analysis of each novel demonstrates the central concern addressed by each author regarding the personal, social, and religious dynamics at play in each protagonist's endeavours to reconcile her social and religious identities within the parameters of an authentic relationship with Islam. Abdel-Fattah's two novels, *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (2007) and *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2010) depict this reconciliation process in similar ways. It is argued that Abdel-Fattah presents to her readers young Muslim women who successfully align their personal desire to freely express their religious affiliation in a secular social context with a social identity that is authentic to them. It is similarly argued that in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), Kahf presents a Muslim protagonist who freely achieves her sense of religious authenticity primarily through the intellectualization of her relationship with God and through subsequent self-reflexive processes. Lastly, in *Neither This Nor That* Hussain presents a protagonist with deep religious sensibilities who is determined to challenge discursive constructs of Muslim identity. In so doing, the argument developed in the analysis of the text is that Hussain successfully

provides a contemporary representation of Muslim woman's relationship with Islam as deeply spiritual to one's self-worth. Thus, the analyses of the four selected novels demonstrate how their authors contribute to the growing body of literary works that mount a compelling and long-overdue challenge to the once-dominant post-colonial homogenised and universal constructions of Muslim womanhood (Mills 98).

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