

# **MohjaKahf's Poetry: Promoting Intercultural Understanding Between Muslim and Non- Muslim Americans**

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## **Abstract**

MohjaKahf (b. 1967) is a Syrian- American poet whose poetry is characterized by its cultural opposition to any American stereotyping of Muslims and Islam in general and Arab - Muslim Americans in specific. The American mainstream culture has its own misconceptions about Arab-Muslims which result in a wave of Islamophobia and anti-Arab hate throughforming a stereotype of the Arab-Muslim people as ignorant terrorists. This paper examines the struggle between Kahf's Islamic concepts and the concepts of the American culture in which she lives. Being a hybrid Arab-Muslim American, Kahf is fully aware of both cultures and understands both languages which qualify her to play the role of a compromiser to bring the opponents into terms.

The paper affirms that Kahf, through celebrating her Islamic identity, undertakes the task of a mediator between Islamic cultural customs and the modern American culture.

**Keywords: Arab- Muslim Americans, culture, hijab (veil), Islam.**

## **La Poesía De Mohjakahf: Promoción De La Comprensión Intercultural Entre Musulmanes Y No Musulmanes Estadounidenses**

### **Resumen**

MohjaKahf (n. 1967) es un poeta sirio-estadounidense cuya poesía se caracteriza por su oposición cultural a cualquier estereotipo estadounidense de musulmanes e islam en general y de árabes-musulmanes estadounidenses en particular. La cultura dominante estadounidense tiene sus propios

conceptos erróneos sobre los musulmanes árabes que resultan en una ola de islamofobia y odio antiárabe a través de la formación de un estereotipo del pueblo árabe-musulmán como terroristas ignorantes. Este documento examina la lucha entre los conceptos islámicos de Kahf y los conceptos de la cultura estadounidense en la que vive. Al ser una híbrida árabe-musulmana estadounidense, Kahf es plenamente consciente de ambas culturas y comprende los dos idiomas que la califican para desempeñar el papel de un transigente. para poner a los oponentes en términos.

El documento afirma que Kahf, al celebrar su identidad islámica, asume la tarea de mediadora entre las costumbres culturales islámicas y la cultura estadounidense moderna.

Palabras clave: árabes-musulmanes estadounidenses, cultura, hijab (velo), Islam.

### Introduction

Being a hybrid Arab - Muslim American poet who is aware of the two cultures (Arab and American) and masters both languages, Mohjakahf (b.1967) sets off her mission as a spokeswoman for Arab-Muslim Americans. She articulates, in her writings, the challenges facing Arab –Muslims living in the U.S, especially after September 11, 2001 attacks of the World Trade Center Towers which result in a wave of Islamophobia and anti-Arab hate through “which the Westerners see Muslims as fanatical, violent and lacking in tolerance.” (Abdu Al-Gabali, 2016) Kahf’s poetry emphasizes Arab-Americans loyalty to Islamic traditions and beliefs and the rejection of the host’s community’s traditions and way of life. She positions herself as a “joint” between the conceptions of two different cultures, different races and different colours trying to formulate a new space that belongs to both cultures and to create a sense of peaceful contradictions amongst them. In this connection, Stuart Hall affirms (cited in Hayes’ *The Practice of Diaspora*, 2003):

Articulation is central to the study of workings of race and culture in social formations because the image of the joint ... is a curious place, as it is both the point of separation... and linkage ... articulation is always a strange and ambivalent gesture, because finally, in the body it is only difference—the separation between bones and members – that allows movement.

The idea of the joint which bridges the gaps between two different cul-

tures, can be clearly traced in Kahf's two volumes of poetry: *E-mails from Scheherazad* (2003) and *Hagar Poems* (2016). In the two volumes, Kahf seeks to resolve the problem of prejudice against Muslims in America by expressing what it feels like being an Arab-Muslim living in USA. She believes that "the way in which American Muslims and American Christians can understand one another is through the power of speech and the art of poetry" (Pazargadi, 2017), hence, she attempts to spur dialogue as a potential solution for fighting racism and promoting intercultural understanding.

### MohjaKahf's Poetry: Promoting Intercultural Understanding Between Muslim and Non- Muslim Americans

Motivated by her conviction in Islamic principles and values, MohjaKahf dedicates her pen to break the negative image constantly attributed to her fellow Muslims and to defend her Islamic cultural heritage. She states in an interview with Hilary Davis et al (2007):

In my upbringing, the foremost factor in bringing me to my voice was religion, and the religion of Islam as manifested in my family had a modern, political Islamist orientation ... I am dismayed that it is being painted as terroristic, ... in Western media... and others who consider themselves as 'progressive.' These progressives are often extremists themselves, favoring undemocratic secular rule over democracy that gives room to Islamists, whom they see as the apocalypse.

She always sheds light on the superiority of Islamic legislations and laws to those of the Europeans, especially laws which concern women rights, reminding of the fact that Islam has granted and secured many rights to Muslim women centuries before those same rights were gained by western women. She writes:

There are "givens" that I take for granted as a Muslim woman that women of other faiths had to struggle to gain. For example, it took European and American women centuries to catch up to Islamic law on a woman's fully equal right to own property. And it's not an airy abstraction; it's a right Muslim women have practiced, ... women own businesses, donate land for schools and endow trusts, just as they did in 14th-century Egypt, 9th-century Iraq and anywhere else Islamic law has been in effect. (Kahf, 2008)

Kahf defends her Islamic cultural heritage by speaking about her religion and tackling different Islamic affairs in her poetry, such as the adherence to take the onus of wearing hijab, the Islamic veil, as part of women's Islamic-identity, the honoring of Islamic rituals like "wudu" (the cleaning ritual in preparation of formal prayers) and most importantly the depiction of Qur'anic stories about Prophet Abraham's wives Hagar and Sarah. As a religious symbol, the hijab or the headscarf, constructs a debatable issue that seems to non-Muslim Americans clear evidence about the incivility and backwardness of Islamic culture from which women need to be liberated. Kahf chooses to speak about Islam through the hijab to express challenging ideas and attitudes. "The Hijab Scene" poems from *Emails from Scheherazad* display certain situations in the lives of Muslim women who live in America and who choose to wear the hijab. The speakers in these scenes express their experiences in the American society which holds them accountable for the whole Islamic community and traditions, because women are always "assigned the role of bearers of cultural values, carriers of traditions, and symbols of the community." (Moghadam, 1994). The poems are randomly numbered without following a chronological order.

In the first poem of the sequence, "Hijab Scene #3", Kahf depicts a situation that might face any Muslim woman wearing a headscarf in America. In the poem, a Muslim woman is standing next to an "American mother" and both request to join the PTA (the Parent Teacher Association). The woman responsible for the registration intentionally ignores the Muslim woman with the headscarf in a very humiliating way:

"Would you like to join the PTA?" she asked,  
tapping her clipboard with her pen.  
"I would," I said, but it was no good,  
she wasn't seeing me.  
"Would you like to join the PTA?" she repeated,  
"I would," I said,  
but I could've been antimatter. (Kahf, 2003, p. 25)

The speaker finds out that the responsible woman was addressing "A regu-

lar American mother next to me.” She treats the speaker with the headscarf as invisible. Though felt humiliated and hurt by this prejudiced conduct, the speaker humorously describes her attempts to attract the attention of the lady:

“I would I would,” I sent flares,  
beat on drums, waved navy flags,  
tried smoke signal, American Sign Language,  
Morse code, Western Union, telex, fax, (Kahf, 2003, p.25)

Mais Yusuf Al- Qutami sees that Kahf uses humor in this scene as “a strategy of resistance to monolithic images of Muslim/ Arab American Women.” (2009) Finally the speaker lets out her anger explaining to the American woman that she is a human being not an alien creature:

“Dammit, Jim, I’m a Muslim woman, not a Klingon!”  
but the positronic force field of hijab  
jammed all her cosmic coordinates  
Can we save the ship we’re both on,  
can we save  
the dilithium crystals ? (Kahf, 2003, p. 25)

This scene is an instance of the suffering and marginalization Muslims undergo in American society and in educational institutions, but at the same time it records the strength of the veiled Muslim woman, and her opposition to such conducts directed against Muslims in America by treating them as invisible, demanding to be acknowledged as American citizens.

Her anger bursts out in “Hijab Scene # 7”. The speaker, a Muslim woman with a headscarf, confronts all the assumptions of the American society with bold answers, boldly defying their prejudice against Muslims and affirming that she and her fellow Muslim Americans are lawful American citizens who abide by American laws and regulations such as “buying insurance” and “opening a bank account”:

No I’m not bald under the scarf  
.....  
No, I would not like to defect  
I am already American  
.....  
What else do you need to know

relevant to my buying insurance,  
opening a bank account,  
reserving a seat on a flight?(Kahf, 2003, p. 29)

The speaker in this scene concludes with confirming that she does speak English and she does carry explosives. Metaphorically speaking, these explosives are her words and the power of her poetry, with which she will fight all these prejudiced assumptions and blow them away:

Yes, I speak English  
Yes, I carry explosives  
They're called words  
And if you don't get up  
Off your assumptions,  
They're going to blow you away (Kahf, 2003, p. 39)

The poem gives voice to the accusation of terrorism and all other negative assumptions that may come to the minds of American people whenever they meet Arab Muslim- Americans. She refutes them one by one ending with the shocking confession of carrying explosives which marks the climax of all assumptions, to ironically uncover that her explosives are mere words. Ingrid Kerkhoff argues that "Hijab Scene #7" articulates:

the inner monologue of a hijab wearing woman, who feels discriminated against or otherwise pressurised by prejudices she presumes follow her everywhere she goes. It could be the ticket counter of an airline, the foyer of a bank, or the office of an insurance company. (Kerkhoff, 2016)

The next poem in the sequence, "Hijab Scene #1", juxtaposes two images, one is of an Arab Muslim- American school girl with a headscarf and the other is of an American boy "with bright blue hair" and "tongue-rings". Ironically, it is the boy who considers the Muslim girl's appearance "strange":

"You dress strange," said a tenth- grade boy with bright blue hair to the new Muslim girl with the headscarf in homeroom, his tongue-rings clicking on the "tr" in "strange." (Kahf, 2003, p. 41)

In this scene Kahf "depicts the moment in which two aesthetically-different Americans come into contact and evaluate each other." (Pazargadi, 2017) Similarly, in "Hijab Scene #2" Kahf juxtaposes the dress of a Mus-

lim- American woman with that of a non-Muslim one. The non- Muslim woman in high heels and “panty hose” criticizes the headscarf of the Muslim- woman calling it “restrictive”:

“You people have such restrictive dress for women,” she said, hobbling away in three-inch heels and panty hose (Kahf, 2003, p. 42)

By giving minute description of the non-Muslim woman's way of dress, Kahf skillfully overturns the situation in favor of the Muslim woman. She shows how uncomfortable the dress of the other lady compared to the dress of the veiled Muslim woman, and therefore, reversing the American mainstream attitude which considers veiling as sign of “female oppression” as SaharAmer argues in her book *What is Veiling?*

high heels, panty hose, and thongs seem liberating because they display a woman's body. Veiling, in contrast, is often considered a symbol of female oppression precisely because it hides women's bodies... Yet Kahf playfully reverses this type of logic in her last line ... Muslim women's dress, described as “restrictive” in the first line of the poem, becomes the more liberating form of dress in an unexpected reversal in the last line, the one not just fit for “pink- collar temp” jobs, but rather for stabler, more serious, and permanent employment and social standing.(Amer, 2014)

The boy in “Scene #1” is not aware of his weird appearance with his blue hair and tongue-ring and the same is true for the woman in “Scene #2”. Both of them see the Muslim women's veil “strange”. Through comparing wearing the headscarf to these cultural forms, Kahf avers that it is culture rather than wearing headscarf that captures Muslim women in a socially inferior position. She argues, in her poetry, that wearing headscarf is not inharmonious with being American citizen who carries out all the obligations like all other Americans, and thus, Muslim- Americans should be acknowledged and dealt with equally to other American subjects.

The struggle betweenKahf'sreligious faith and the society in which she-livesis the subject of her poem “My Grandmother Washes Her Feet in the Sink of the Bathroom at Sears”. In the poem she paints a picture of her grandmother, washing her feet in the sink of the bathroom in Sears, one of the famous department stores in America. The scene depicted in the poem humorously deals with the issue of clash of civilizations and cultures in America. The speaker's grandmother goes to the bathroom in Sears to

perform “wudu”, the Islamic cleaning ritual, preparing herself for prayers. While the grandmother washing her feet, as part of the ritual, the Midwestern matrons who are present in the bathroom are horrified watching this old lady pumps and supports knee-highs to continue her religious rite. For them the old lady’s act is not only “unhygienic”, but it is also obscene and uncivilized:

Respectable Sears matrons shakes their heads and frown

As they notice what my grandmother is doing,

An affront to American porcelain,

A contamination of American Standards

By something foreign an unhygienic

Requiring civic action and possible use of disinfectant spray

They fluster about and flutter their hands and I can see

A clash of civilizations brewing in the Sears bathroom. (Kahf, 2003, p.26)

Heather Marie Hoyt in An “I” for Intimacy: Rhetorical Appeal in Arab American Women’s Literature comments:

The reference to American products undermine the seriousness of the issue about American values ... the scene signifies upon the exaggerated reaction these American matrons have to someone exhibiting signs of difference. Something as unusual as washing one’s feet in a public sink creates a social disturbance described on a global scale. (Hoyt, 2006)

Though “speak no English”, the grandmother is clever enough to interpret the meaning of the American ladies’ looks and reactions replying with her proud look:

My grandmother, though she speaks no English,

catches their meaning and her look in the mirror says,

I have washed my feet over Iznik tile in Istanbul

with water from the world’s ancient irrigation systems

I have washed my feet in the bathhouses of Dmascus

over painted bowels imported from China

.....  
And if you Americans knew anything

about civilization and cleanliness,

you’d make wider washbasins anyway

My grandmother knows one culture – the right one.

(Kahf, 2003, pp. 26- 27)

The clash of cultures between the west and Islam is encapsulated in this situation of the bathroom, it is “reconstructed in the context of this bathroom scene: the key is for people to see such differences in non-threaten-



ing terms, whether in the microcosm of a women's bathroom or the macrocosm of international politics."(Abdlrazak, 2007 )

The representatives of these two cultures have no clues about the particular traits of each other which result in huge misunderstanding of cultural behaviour such as "wudu". The American women in the bathroom, cannot absorb the grandmother's behaviour which leads to a kind of cultural clash. This situation at Sears is an example of many other situations that often face American Muslims in their daily life.

Here comes the poet's role as a mediator between these two different cultural concepts. Being well oriented in both cultures the poet stands in the midway between her grandmother and the Mid-Western women. It is her duty to make amends and bring the opponents into terms:

Standing between the door and mirror, I can see  
at multiple angles, my grandmother and the other shoppers,  
all of them decent and goodhearted women, diligent  
in cleanliness, grooming, and decorum. (Kahf, 2003, p. 27)

From her position in the middle, the poet tries to fill the cultural gaps between her grandmother and the other women in order to create a peaceful zone that combines the two cultures. Both sides should:

hold the door open for everyone  
and we all emerge on the sales floor  
and lose ourselves in the great common ground  
of housewares on markdown. (Kahf, 2003, p. 28)

In her poem "Lateefa", Kahf displays a similar situation of cultural clash but in a different context. The western ladies at Sears are replaced by an officer, the representative of authority, which adds even more seriousness to the question of cultural clash. The scene depicted in this poem is of a ceremonial celebration of Arab-Muslim American wedding. The speaker in the poem is aware of the American culture, but she could not make the officer understand the situation, simply because he is familiar with one form of wedding ceremony that is of his western culture. The speaker's attempt to convince him is useless and he insists that they should leave or else, to face the consequence of breaking the law:

"Officer, if you could just wait for the wedding to--"

' What wedding, lady? I see no priest.

Where is the priest?"

We don't have-, we aren't- we're--"

"Lady, you people gotta move your cars or they get  
Tickets, see?"

“But Connie’s getting- this is a wedding! Just wait one sec  
Till the ceremony-”

“Lady move these cars or I give them tickets,

“But, Officer-”

“Lady-!” (Kahf, 2003, p. 24)

The Arab- Muslim wedding ceremony seems at odds with the Christian wedding ceremonies usually held in America which explains the officer’s refusal to “identify it as such”:

What is made clear in these lines is the loss of communication between the officer and the lady; she is not able to explain to him that this is a Muslim wedding and that they do not need a priest. This piece of information never finds a way out of the mouth of the speaker either because of the officer’s interruptions or because of the difficulty in explaining them. (Hussain, 2014)

By portraying such pictures in her E- mails from Scheherazad, Kahf highlights the racial discrimination that Arab-Muslim Americans suffer from in the hosting country. Yet, as a poet, she believes that her mission is to bring about convergence of views and intercultural understanding between the two different cultures.

In her second poetry collection, *Hagar Poems* (2016), Kahf changes her strategy. Instead of picturing sample situations that Arab-Muslim Americans face daily, she unearths the roots of the conflict between Muslims and non- Muslims. She goes back deep in history to the time of Prophet Abraham and his wives, Sarah and Hagar, who are considered the origin of all the disputes between the two cultures. The poet’s aim is to tell the two conflicting parties that they have the same ancestor, Abraham, which means that they are initially brothers. Sarah is the mother of modern day Christianity and Judaism. Hagar is the mother of modern day Islam.

The story of Hagar/Hajar belongs to ancient and diverse sources. It appears in the holy scriptures of Judaism, the Torah, of Christianity, the Bible, and of Islam, the Qur’an. The Old Testament contains the first version of the story of Hagar:

Now Sarai [Sarah], Abram’s (Abraham’s) wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, —The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her. Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her

Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. ... Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her... (Genesis, 16:1-4)

While a detailed story of Hagar appears in Genesis, there is no direct reference of Hagar in the Qur'an. The only reference to the story is the prayer of Abraham asking Allah to protect his "offspring":

O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley without cultivation, by the Sacred House, in order, O our Lord, that they may establish regular prayer. So fill the hearts of some among men with love towards them, and feed them with fruits so that they may give thanks. (Surah 14: Ibrahim, 37)

Yet, the detailed Islamic version of the story appears in Sahih Al-Bukhari: Abraham brought Hagar and her son Ishmael while she was breastfeeding him, to a place near the Ka'bah under a tree on the spot of Zamzam, at the highest place in the mosque. During those days there was nobody in Mecca, nor was there any water. So he made them sit over there and placed near them a leather bag containing some dates and a small water-skin containing some water, and set out homeward ... she asked him, "Has God ordered you to do so?" He said, "Yes." She said, "Then God will not neglectus."

Utilizing the story, Kahf initiates in her second collection, Hagar Poems, a dialogue between Hagar and Sarah to encourage analogous dialogue between their descendants, modern Muslims and Christians. The idea of kinship is running throughout the collection to emphasize the deep rooted relation between the different religions and races. This idea is directly tackled in her poem "Kin". The poem reverses the historical rivalry between the two women into a sisterhood relationship. Hagar, in the poem, addresses Sarah, expressing her appreciation and gratitude for helping her giving birth to Ismail:

Like a priestess of the body, you  
wiped the newborn Ismail clean  
of birthblood and whispered first  
holy words into his ear. You are his mother  
too. We are kin. (Kahf, 20016, p. 13)

The poem goes on to give solid bases to the bond that connects them together. This bond cannot be destroyed despite the growing feud between them, the only fact that deeply rooted in history is they are the members of one family:

Like matter, kinship can be changed  
but not destroyed. Cruelty tarnishes,  
but cannot dissolve it. We are kin

.....  
..... kin

we are from knowledge of the Name; (Kahf, 2016, pp. 14-15)

The poem ends with the emphatic note that they as well as their sons, Ismail and Isaac, carry the same family name, Abraham, and that the blood relations that fasten them together cannot be destroyed, they may “change” but not “dissolve”.

In “Postcards from Hajar, a correspondence in Four Parts”, Kahf gives an imaginary account of the relationship between Abraham and Hagar after leaving her with her baby Ismail in the desert, revealed in exchanged messages. The poem is divided into four parts, each part represents a message, sent and received by the family members: Abraham and Sarah on the one side and Hagar on the other. Kahf asserts that both Abraham and Hagar, though separated, are still on good terms. According to the poem, they exchange their daily news and life events.

In part ‘i’ of the poem, Hagar informs Abraham that she and her son Ismail have managed to survive and lead their life in the desert:

Ismail and I made it

.....  
Weather very hot here,  
but it is dry heat, bearable

.....

Regards,

Hagar

P.S I have decided to found a nation. (Kahf, 2016, p.29)

The most important piece of information in the message is Hagar’s decision to “found a nation.” Though she throws the information in a “P.S.” at the end of the message as if she is stating an ordinary decision about everyday affairs, she reveals her powerful resolution as a woman who is capable of great achievements such as founding a whole nation:

Hagar is viewed as the pioneer woman who led the way to the establishment of a new civilization. She is seen not only as “Ishmael’s mother” but also as the mother of all Arabs and of those who later became the followers of the Prophet Muhammad, a descendant of the Prophet Ishmael. Hagar, a blackslave-girl, rose from the lowliest of positions to the highest place of

honor in the Islamic tradition. Hassan, 2006)

The second part of the correspondence, "ii", is a message from Abraham telling Hagar about the pregnancy of Sarah, "Sarah's pregnant, can you believe it!" While the message in part "iii" is from Sarah herself. She tells Hagar about her baby, Isaac. The most important thing in the message is that she promises to teach him to love his big brother Ismail and hopes that the two brothers will be able to "make up for their mothers":

I will teach him to love his big brother.

May be one day they will

Make up for their mothers

.....

You and your son will always

Have a place in my regard

Sincerely

Sarah. (Kahf, 2016, p. 30)

The messages exhibit warm familial relations filled with love. They are messages of love, peace and forgiveness. In The last part of the poem, "iiii", Hagar states that "Ismail sends love / to baby brother Isaac" and that she is busy with her "responsibilities / as a founding mother". It is the message of the poet herself to the conflicting cultures inviting them to embrace each other's differences and love one another because, after all, they are brothers and kindred.

The poem "Threshold" is based on a situation that took place between Abraham and his daughter in law, Ismail's wife. The story says that Abraham passed by his son's house, not knowing him, Ismail's wife did not welcome him. Abraham left a message to his son telling him to change the threshold of the house. At his return, Ismail understood the message and divorced his wife. The story appears in Sahih Al-Bukhari: "Change the threshold of your gate" – a traveller, refused hospitality by Ismail's wife left this message. Recognizing it to be from his father, Ismail divorced her and sought another spouse." Abraham ordered his son to divorce her because she was not kind to strangers. The story, in the poem, is told in the tongue of Abraham himself:

Because I came to her door as an old man without a tribe

.....

she stood on the polished stone

threshold and denied

a small water jug to me. (Kahf, 2016, p. 32)

Though he was so thirsty and needed water, he did not reveal his real iden-

tity to her, “Parched, I did not say/ “I am kin””. Then comes his famous advice:

Change your threshold  
 until you can embrace  
 the stranger, the despised, and say  
 your father Abraham  
 came to visit you today.(Kahf, 2016, p.32)

It is a universal message of love and acceptance. A message to all people, from different religions, races, colors and cultures to embrace each other’s differences and found a solid ground of mutual understanding, in fact, these are the messages of all prophets and all heavenly religions.

### Conclusion

MohjaKahf, as an Arab-Muslim American poet, finds herself responsible for creating a means to bridge the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim Americans, and thus, dedicates her words to draw a real picture about the meaning of Islam and its messages of love, peace, mercy and understanding. She is aware that the first step towards fulfilling her mission is to break the stereotype of the Arab-Muslim people as uncivilized, ignorant and terrorists. She determines to resist all types of cultural discrimination that Muslim Americans are subjected to, hence in her E-mails of Scheherazad, Kahf presents moments of suffering and humiliation that Muslim-Americans go through in daily life. She boldly tackles hot issues that disturb Muslims who live in the US such as the issue of hijab and the way with which Muslim women wearing hijab are discriminated and marginalized. Another important point that Kahf displays in this collection is the right of freely performing Islamic rituals. She wants the other party to understand the importance of performing religious and cultural rituals and traditions without being judged as uncivilized. She does so through juxtaposing images of cultural practices from both cultures as if she is holding a mirror to reflect all negative practices against Muslims in America in a strategy of counter attack.

She changes the strategy in her second collection, Hagar Poems. Instead of expressing her rejection to all kinds of discrimination against her people, she tries to introduce the mainstream society to the core of her religion, Islam, which is love. She does so through presenting the persona of the father and mothers of all religions: Abraham, Hagar and Sarah. She argues, in the collection, that they are the members of one loving and peaceful family, to raise the fundamental question: why, then, their grandchildren,

whether Muslims or Christians, exchange the feelings the enmity towards each other?

In her poetry, MohjaKahf conveys her own message of peaceful co-existence and intercultural understanding in America. She seeks a kind of religious and cultural middle ground: attempting to connect her Muslim brothers and sisters, to non-Muslims in order live peacefully together without any cultural clashes, prejudices and feelings of enmity.

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