

## FOLKTALES AND RITES OF PASSAGE IN RANDA JARRAR'S *A MAP OF HOME*

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### Abstract

This paper examines the struggle of American-Muslim women to negotiate their identities in literary works published after the invasion of Iraq (20 March-1 May 2003). In this case, I examine Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008) in order to investigate how Jarrar both negotiates her identity through folktales, naming, and rites of passages. By engaging with postcolonial studies, and working within the frameworks of cultural studies, this paper aims to investigate aesthetic strategies that Jarrar (Egyptian-Palestinian-American) deploys in her writing. Jarrar also respects her Muslim intellectual forebears, such as Muhammad al-Ghazali (Iran), Muhyiddin al-Arabi (Spain), and Jalaluddin Rumi (Turkey), by emulating their tendency to combine in their writings allusions to the Qur'an, ancient storytelling traditions, and contemporary social issues in order to engage with their readers. In doing so, Jarrar uses folktales, naming, and rites of passages to question American belonging and eurocentrism in her fiction. These techniques enable Jarrar to reveal her multiple and complex identities and work to represent both her pride in being Muslims and her desire to claim her rights as American citizens of Muslim descent.

**Keywords:** Randa Jarrar, *A Map of Home*, folktales, Rites of Passages, US-Muslim women's literature

### Abstrak

*Artikel ini membahas perjuangan perempuan Amerika-Muslim untuk menegosiasikan identitas mereka dalam karya sastra yang diterbitkan setelah invasi ke Irak (20 Maret-1 Mei 2003). Dalam hal ini, saya meneliti Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008) untuk menyelidiki bagaimana Jarrar menegosiasikan identitasnya dan menentang orientalisme di sepanjang novelnya. Dengan menggunakan studi postkolonial dan studi budaya, artikel ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki strategi estetika yang Jarrar (Mesir-Palestina-Amerika) gunakan dalam tulisannya. Jarrar juga menghormati leluhur intelektual Muslimnya, seperti Muhammad al-Ghazali (Iran), Muhyiddin al-Arabi (Spanyol), dan Jalaluddin Rumi (Turki), dengan meniru kecenderungan mereka untuk menggabungkan dalam tulisan-tulisan mereka kiasan Alquran, kuno tradisi mendongeng, dan masalah sosial kontemporer untuk menarik pembaca mereka. Dalam hal ini, Jarrar juga menggunakan dongeng, penamaan, dan ritus-ritus untuk mempertanyakan kepemilikan Amerika dan Eurosentrisme dalam fiksinya. Teknik-teknik ini memungkinkan Jarrar untuk mengungkapkan identitasnya yang beragam dan kompleks yang berfungsi untuk menunjukkan kebanggaannya sebagai Muslim dan keinginannya untuk mengklaim hak-haknya sebagai warga negara Amerika keturunan Muslim.*

**Kata kunci:** Randa Jarrar, *A Map of Home*, cerita rakyat, ritus peralihan, sastra Muslimah-Amerika

## Introduction

In the wake of 9/11, the prejudice towards Muslims living in the US tends to increase. This can be seen through the case that Americans who are not Muslim view their fellow Muslim citizens with increasing fear and suspicion in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. According to a survey conducted by the Arab American Institute, which was published in the *Washington Post* on August 24, 2012, the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim Americans deteriorated significantly after 2000. In 2000 (23 August), 41 percent of non-Muslim Americans had unfavourable views of Muslims, compared to 40 percent who held favourable views. In 2003, 47 percent of Americans viewed Muslims favourably compared to 32 percent who did not. This tension is increased in 2010: 55 percent of Americans viewed Muslims unfavourably, compared to 35 percent with favourable views. The latest poll surveyed 1,052 people between August 15–16, 2012. These polls show how the prejudices towards Muslims in America have seriously increased.

Another perspective on how portrayals of Muslims in popular culture have developed since 9/11 is provided by Alsultany in *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. She notes that in U.S. movies and TV dramas such as *The Practice* (1997), *Boston Public* (2005), and *Law and Order* (1990) Muslims are depicted in more sympathetic ways. However, even sympathetic representations of Muslims might work in the service of hegemonic constructions of race

and racial difference. As Alsultany (2012) puts it, “sympathetic images of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11 give the impression that racism is not tolerated in the United States, despite the slew of policies that have targeted and disproportionately affected Arabs and Muslims” (p. 15). Indeed, although some sympathetic depiction about Muslims has emerged in American popular culture, this depiction seemingly functions to cover American racism, which still exists in the dominant society, including at the airports where many officers target Muslims for their inspection.

No discussion of contemporary scholarship treating the representation of Muslims is complete without mention of Edward Said’s seminal work *Orientalism* (1978). Said (1978) argues that “as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that has given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other” (p. 13). Indeed, the questions raised by Said (1981) were ones he returned to as late as 1981 in *Covering Islam*, where he argued that “knowledge of Islam and of Islamic peoples has generally proceeded not only from dominance and confrontation but also from cultural antipathy” (p. 155). To challenge the reductionist views of orientalism towards Muslims, Wail Hassan (2014) provides some solution, such as “cultural translators”. Hassan (2014) argues that American-Muslim writers “have positioned themselves not only as interpreters of the Orient to the Occident, but also as interpreters of the Occident both to itself and to the Orient—that is to say, as two-

way translators” (p. 29). The idea of the “two-way translator” is one that has proven particularly useful to my own research, particularly in a discussion of the idea of multiculturalism as lived experience, here conceived of as a dialogue between diverse communities, and as political idea, a dialogue between politicians and citizens in the public sphere. In “A Cultural Translator in Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*”, Djohar (2015) asserts that “dialogue transforms different opinions from dead-end perspectives into a process like a circular cul-de-sac, into which different perspectives can enter and re-emerge with better understanding” (p. 165). Equally, the role of “two-way translator” is relevant to the works of Randa Jarrar, particularly in her novel, *A Map of Home*, discussed in this paper, where her protagonist, Nidali, acts as a translator for her parents, Baba and Mama, who are originally from Palestine and Egypt.

Before discussing this novel, it is important to understand how the (miss) representation of Muslims in American popular culture can be linked to the idea of Stuart Hall (2005) about “Identity Politics One”, which is one of the main reactions against the politics of racism. Hall (2005) defines the “Identity Politics One” as it has to do with “the constitution of some defensive collective identity against the practices of racist society” (p. 148). It has to do with the fact that “people [are] being blocked out of and refused an identity and identification within the majority nation, having to find some other roots on which to stand” (p. 148). Searching for roots to stance is important because

people have to find “some ground, some place, some position on which to stand” (p. 148). Indeed, after having experienced of being blocked out of any access to an English or British identity, Hall claims that “people had to try to discover who they were [...] It is the crucial moment of the rediscovery of the search for roots” (p. 148). Significantly, in Jarrar’s text, the protagonist, Nidali, searches for their roots by not only using their own traditions but also by discovering of lost histories of her homeland. Indeed, these lost stories are recovered by her grandfather through folktales, which are delivered to Nidali.

Before discussing these ideas in further detail, it is useful to understand the background of the writer. Jarrar is a professor at California State University, Fresno, and an award-winning novelist, short-story writer, essayist, and translator. Her novel, *A Map of Home* (2008), which I discussed in this paper, won the Hopwood Award (a range of prizes for students at the University of Michigan, founded by Avery Hopwood) and the Arab American Book Award, and was named one of the best novels of 2008 by the *Barnes & Noble Review*. The stories in her collection, *Him, Me, Muhammad Ali*, first appeared in publications including *The Utne Reader*, *Salon.com*, *Guernica*, *The Rumpus*, *The Oxford American*, *Ploughshares*, and *Five Chapters*. Jarrar published her collection with Sarabande Books (2016), a not-for-profit literary press located in Louisville, Kentucky, and Brooklyn, New York. It was founded in 1994 to champion poetry, short fiction, and essays, and is “committed to creating lasting editions that honour exceptional writing” (p. 204). In this

way, Sarabande Books has become a place for marginal writers to recount their stories.

## Methods

The aim of this paper is to investigate how Randa Jarrar negotiates her identity as an American citizen with Muslim descent through folktales and rites of passages. In investigating Jarrar's novel, I use the method of close textual analysis by engaging with other critics who also examine this novel and with postcolonial theorists, such as Edward Said (1978) and Waill Hassan (2014) discussed previously. For the technique of analysis data, this paper uses close reading analysis by examining the primary text or the novel in order to search what techniques that the writer uses to negotiate her identities through folktales, naming, and rites of passages; by evaluating other scholars' writings to participate in debates around the novel and the themes; by responding to postcolonial studies, which aims to give more voices for marginal groups, in this case American-Muslim women; and by referring to Arab/Muslim cultures and the US contexts, where this novel is set.

A critic who has investigated Jarrar's novel is Nancy El-Gendy (2016) who argues that Jarrar employs trickster humour, which "exemplifies one mode of resistance, for it helps to desacralize social conventions that have long created body ideologies and mythologies" (p. 14). Indeed, this trickster humour connects Jarrar not only with African folklore (e.g. Henry Louis Gates' *Signifying Monkey*) but also with Native American writ-

ers who have used tricksters in their works. If El-Gendy evaluates Jarrar's book by focusing on humour, this paper explores how Jarrar uses folktales, naming, and rites of passage to establish her identity or interrogate American belonging, and question orientalism, which are discussed in the following sections.

## Discussion

### Naming and Rites of Passage in Jarrar's *A Map of Home*

In the traditional canonical literature, the protagonist's name is usually invested with significant meaning. As s/he embarks on his/her journey of formation, his/her name is often alluded to when the protagonist undergoes various rites of passage: birth, adolescence, first romance and/or sexual experience, marriage. In one key scene in *A Map of Home*, Nidali describes participating in a Qur'an competition as follows:

I crossed my arms over my chest and recited the verses, keeping the "Comfort" verse last. I didn't make a single mistake; in fact, I felt almost as though I was singing: Have We not lifted up your heart and relieved you of the burden which weighed down your back? Have We not Given you high renown? For with every hardship there is ease. With every hardship there is ease. When your prayers are ended resume your toil, and seek your lord with all fervor (Jarrar, 2008: 51).

This *surah* invites Muslims to work hard and never give up, no matter how difficult their situation. This effort, in Islam, is called, as is *jihad* (struggle), which is also the name of the protagonist, Nidali, meaning, "struggle". At a historical moment when *jihad* became discursively very important in a U.S. context, Jarrar's insistence on invoking *jihad* is a powerful counter-hegemonic gesture which

raises awareness of how the meaning of *jihad* has been degraded in the dominant culture by associating it with terrorism.

*Jihad* is an Arabic word, *juhd*, which means “effort,” and “struggle.” The person who commits *jihad* is called *Mujahid* or “struggler.” *Jihad* may be understood in two ways: the first involves an observant Muslim subject striving against his/her own and worldly desires (the greater *jihad*); the second focuses on combat through fighting against unbelievers (the lesser *jihad*). U.S. scholarship on *jihad* published after 9/11 defines *jihad* in a limited way, focusing on violent acts committed by radical groups against non-Muslims. These limitations can be seen through the works of U.S. scholars such as Gills Kepel, Rudolph Peter, David Cook, and Michael Borner. In spite of the complexities evident in the work of those scholars in their analysis of *jihad* from 2002 to 2015, they fail to emphasize the greater *jihad*, but remain centred on the lowest level of *jihad*, acts of terror against non-Muslims in the name of Islam, such as the tactics used by Osama Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda networks, including Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 1999. This terrorist organization (ISIL) has misused the concept of *jihad* and *khalifah* (leaders) for personal gain, which digress from the original teachings of Islam. The majority of international Muslim scholars condemn this terrorist organization (ISIL).

As this brief discussion of “*jihad*” indicates, Jarrar is both interested in the idea of naming functions as shorthand for the ways

in which an individual’s formative experiences are negotiated through language. In *A Map of Home*, the narrator describes the day on which she was born in Boston: “On August 2, the day I was born, my baba stood at the nurses’ station of St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center of Boston with a pen between his fingers and filled out my birth certificate [...] He wrote with a quivering hand and in his best English cursive, Nidal (strive; struggle)” (p. 1). The next day, the narrator describes how Nidali’s father adds a letter “i” at the end of her name, “Nidali” (p. 2), in order to make it sounds more feminine, after realizing that his baby is female. It is clear evidence of how Baba is eager to have a son instead of a daughter in order to expand his patriarchal power. In doing so, Jarrar not only complicates the idea of naming with gender, but also challenges the patriarchal system by depicting her protagonist both as a strong baby girl and a “rebellious” daughter. This rebellion can be seen throughout the novel, which often depicts Nidali as protesting against her father’s “unfair” decision for her, including going to the library at night and going to the bar to enjoy poetry night. This is why Jarrar names her protagonist Nidali or *jihad* to emphasise how she is struggling to empower herself and her female friends. As Nidali grows up, she continues to negotiate and challenge, through language, gendered expectations of her. When she wins a Qur’an reading competition, she forces the Arab school to change its policy, which previously published certificates with “student, or *til-mith*—which indicated a male student” (p. 17). The narrator adds: “The judge had been forced to alter the word and add a feminizing ha to

make the male student, the *tilmith*, a *tilmitha*" (p. 17).

Similarly, in *A Map of Home*, Jarrar depicts Nidali as having periods, engaging in masturbation, and having a romance with Fakhr, in order to highlight the significant rites of passage in her novel. Nidali describes her first period, which occurs when she and her family migrate from Kuwait to Egypt because of the Iraq invasion, stating:

I started my period in a village in the west called al-Rahhaliya—the Travelers—and didn't want to tell anyone because I could imagine, from the sparse agricultural surroundings and the smell of the sheep and gasoline and burning garbage that had been following us, that there would be no walled "rest stops" (p. 148).

Indeed, Jarrar complicates her rites of passage by intertwining self, culture, and religion. In Nidali's case, her period first appeared the same as the Kuwait and Iraq War was happening. In Islam, when a daughter has a period, she is not allowed to worship, such as praying and reading the *Qur'an*, because her body is considered unclean. Nidali is not able to clean her body because she is travelling in the areas of conflict. In this way, Nidali not only faces conflict within her own body, but also within her own community.

Another rite-of-passage in this story is when Nidali describes how she enjoys her own body through masturbation, and when her girlfriend, Rama, also gives her pleasure. Nidali describes, "I grabbed her thigh and guided the circle until I felt the way I felt whenever I sat over the bidet for too long" (p. 142). Indeed, Nidali learns and explores her own body by herself and with her girlfriend, despite the fact that both of them have no ideas what this means, as she confesses, "I

had no idea what had just happened and Rama seemed just as confused as I was" (p. 142). In this light, this text not only highlights rites of passage, but also participates in wider debates about feminism, especially queerness. Indeed, when she is a teenager, Nidali also has a boyfriend, Fakhr, who kisses her at their school, thus this text reveals Nidali's sexual development. Nidali remembers her first kiss with Fakhr: "His lips were full and wet and he let me suck on them. I like his scent; he smelled like sweat and he never tried to touch my breasts" (p. 119). Thus, this text discusses rites of passages, which narrate how and where Nidali was born, how she explores her own body through masturbation, and how she pursues her sexual awakening with both her girlfriend and her boyfriend.

### **Storytelling in Jarrar's *A Map of Home***

Jarrar also emphasises the importance of Islamic cultural traditions through her use of folktales in order to question American belonging and interrogate the ideas of Orientalism and Eurocentrism. Similar to the Muslim forebears, such as Muhammad al-Ghazali and Jalaluddin Rumi who tended to use folktales and moral issues in their writings, the folktales recounted to Nidali by her Palestinian grandmother, Sitto, enable her to reconcile her Muslim heritage with her life as an American-Muslim. By connecting her cultural legacy with her current life, Jarrar's protagonist is able to recount her stories in order to proclaim her own identity as an American citizen of Muslim descent. These didactic folktales also influence Nidali's development, helping her to acquire the values and morals described in the stories. Thus, this novel can also be compared to

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), which uses Chinese folktales. Sitto tells Nidali a tale about "two sisters, one poor and one rich" [...] (p. 101). When the rich one fails to offer her sister some of the cabbage leaves she is stuffing, the poor sister goes home to make her own. When the poor sister then offers the cabbage leaves to the visiting mayor, she is ashamed when she farts in front of him. In a fantastical twist, the poor sister wishes the ground would swallow her up, which it does. Underneath the earth, the poor sister encounters the (personified) fart, who is pleased he was liberated from her stomach and agrees to compensate her for embarrassing her in front of the mayor by transforming her into a rich woman. Meanwhile, the rich sister learns of the other's good fortune and attempts to emulate her by farting in front of the mayor and having the earth swallow her up. However, her own fart is not nearly as pleased at having been released from her stomach and he punishes her by having scorpions emerge from her mouth the next time she opens it. The rich sister dies of the bites she receives from these scorpions.

This folktale is funny and irreverent with its focus on scatology and bodily functions. But it is also about the transformation of the two different sisters: the poor sister, who is helpful and generous, becomes wealthy, while the rich sister, who is greedy, dies. This folktale can be understood as a message to the mighty not to repress the weak. Thus, the protagonist learns from Sitto's tale how to be generous and helpful to others in order to

develop her morality and virtue in life. Indeed, the author depicts Nidali as being helpful to her friends at school and she remains humble, even though she excels at math, writing, and reciting the Qur'an (p. 67). In this way, this text illustrates how the protagonist develops her personality through her grandmother's folktales, which can also be read as a strategy for the author to illustrate how Nidali's identity is being woven together from stories of her homelands and the narrative of her current life as an American-Muslim.

Moreover, the folktale above is also about a journey, about morality, and about education, which are similar to Nidali's stories. The two sisters in Sitto's tale perform their journeys by having adventures, going beneath the earth in order to search for their farts, which have embarrassed them in front of the mayor. Below the earth, they find townspeople, who force the fart to send the sisters back to the earth. The townspeople decide to send the poor sister back with gold because she is good and makes the fart happy, while the rich sister is sent back to the earth with scorpions because she is greedy and makes the fart angry. This tale inspires the protagonist to be brave and to pursue her own path, including challenging the norms prescribed by religious and social institutions which often exclude women from public spheres. This is seen most forcefully when Nidali challenges her school's tradition by competing in a Qur'an competition usually reserved for boys, eventually becoming the winner. In this way, this text illustrates how the protagonist develops her characters through the inspiration of her grandmother's folktales, which tell

the story about women's heroism and morality in order to challenge male supremacy and establish her identity.

Similarly, the folktales in *A Map of Home* often depict subjects with mixed or hyphenated identities in order to think through Nidali's own multiple identity positions. The second folktale that Sitto tells Nidali is about "the half-and-half boy who was half a human because his father ate half the pomegranate he was supposed to give his infertile wife to help her carry his child" (p. 104). Since Sitto tells Nidali that "the boy in the story was stronger and better than the kids that came from the whole pomegranate" (p.104) Nidali understands that her grandmother calling her a "half-and-half one" is also a declaration that Sitto believes Nidali to be "stronger and better" than children from "pure" backgrounds.

Jarrar also uses folktales in order to illustrate the significance of telling stories in Nidali's development in reaching adulthood. Thus, the author deploys the folktales through the role of the grandmother's stories to help the protagonist to develop moral values. Many the traditional canon feature guides that encourages the protagonist's moral development—for example, Joe Gargery in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) who is not very educated but is the most significant moral guide in Pip's life. Similar to Joe Gargery in Dicken's novel, Sitto teaches Nidali about moral lessons through her folktales. In this way, Jarrar's fiction explores the roles of female forebears in providing a moral education for the protago-

nist. The novel is thus very much consistent with Stella Bolaki's argument that contemporary ethnic American women writers are invested in the relationship between mothers and daughters in order to recount their stories. Bolaki (2011) suggests that in the late twentieth century, "American women writers often use plots that centre on the relationship between mothers and daughters, and in this way revise myths of individualism and unbounded mobility that continue to have a hold on the American imagination" (p. 23). Bolaki's work is important because it provides a model for considering how American-Muslim writers depict their characters' relationships with their family and their community. This strategy can be seen in the works of Kingston and Cisneros. Equally, in Jarrar's work, the plot is not only centred on parents and daughters, but also on grandparents and granddaughters.

Jarrar also demonstrates that telling stories and oral communication are equally significant to reading literature, and written forms of communication, as their goals are to educate people and to become a moral agent. This agent is able to behave based on moral judgments or the notion of right and wrong and be consistent in performing this behaviour. The narrator asserts that Nidali "remembered that she [Sitto] couldn't read or write. But she could tell stories" (p. 101). Thus, this novel expands the notion of what would be considered of pedagogical value in a formal education system. That is consistent with many other traditional canon, in which formal education is viewed as of limited value—and even oppressive—to the protagonist. In this way, this text varies the literary



canon by suggesting the significance of folktales and oral communication in educating and improving the protagonists' morality. Indeed, as discussed earlier, Jarrar illustrates how Nidali learns and improves her character and morality through the tales told by her grandmother. In doing so, this text reveals how Nidali's present identity intersects with the past story of her homeland.

*A Map of Home* might be described as a *Künstlerroman* in so far as it traces the influence of Nidali's parents' artistic talents – her mother playing music and her father writing poetry – on Nidali's own personal and artistic development. These talents can be seen through the way Jarrar depicts Nidali as writing poems and letters, especially letters to her parents:

Dear Mama, Baba, Gamal:

By the time you read this, I will be dead. I am sorry to have left you like this. I'm sorry about the mess. I'm sure Mama, you'll have to clean it up, all the pieces of my brain and such, and I'm sorry for that. Yeah. See, this thing is, I really wanted to stay at the library till 10. I like the peaceful brown cubicles and the grey carpet. I like the smell of all the books. I also really wanted to go to the poetry slam. They don't serve alcohol to minors there, it's against the law, and it's just a place where people recite poetry, like Baba used to. I just wanted to hear it. But I wasn't allowed to do either, and that is why I'm dead now. Oh, good-bye, world! Good-bye! (p. 240).

At a young age, Nidali learns to declare her own voice through a protest letter. Nidali rebels against Baba's rules and decisions, which prohibit Nidali staying longer at the library and ban her from going to the bar to enjoy the poetry slam. Thus, Nidali uses arts in order to fulfil her desire to read and to enjoy poems, so that she can be an artist like

her parents. Baba prohibits Nidali from enjoying poetry because he himself has failed to achieve recognition as a poet. His poems are either read by few people, or not published at all; frequently, they are simply destroyed because he is not happy with them. Nidali describes how Baba responds to her letter by handing it to her and says: "tear this up and throw it away before your mother finds it and faints" (p. 241). Instead, Nidali screams at her father and protests, "Why don't you rip it up and throw it away [...] the way you rip up your crappy poems" (p. 241). In this sense, since a young age, Nidali has developed her strong character by using her own voice in order to achieve her dreams and desires in reading and writing.

Significantly, the process of reading and writing are also common traits in *A Map of Home*. Nidali consumes Euro-American canonical books, such as Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (1555), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1353), Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879). By connecting between Nidali's sexual awakening and her reading habits, Jarrar undermines the ideas of Orientalism and Eurocentrism, which tend to represent Muslim women as passive and desire-less. Instead, Jarrar's woman has desires both for her own sexuality and for her own dignity and intelligence. Indeed, Nidali's reading habits have influenced her personal development and have helped her to challenge both male and white dominance in defining her own identity. Ironically, Nidali uses Western canonical literature to unsettle

“Anglo-Americans” dominance both in the U.S. and in the world.

Similarly, Nidali’s identities are unique and complex, and cannot be defined by the superficial stereotypes often used to misrepresent Muslim women in the U.S. media, as discussed in the introduction of this paper. In order to challenge these limited representations of Muslim women, Jarrar refers to Muslim forefathers, such as Muhammad al-Ghazali and Jalaluddin Rumi who tend to use folktales and thematise social and moral issues in their writings. Indeed, Jarrar’s protagonist, Nidali, not only develops her intelligence through reading habits of Western canonical literature, but also explores her own desires and goals – sexual, creative, and academic. In this way, this text challenges and widens Western limited views of Muslim women, who have, through Orientalist discourses and Eurocentric world views, suffered misrepresentation and oppression by the West for centuries.

### Conclusion

This paper has discussed how Randa Jarrar negotiates her identity as an American citizen of Muslim descent through the ideas of naming, rites of passages, and storytelling. In doing so, Jarrar respects her Muslim forefathers, such as al-Ghazali and Rumi who tended to use folktales and moral education throughout their writings in order to more engage with their readers. By depicting her

protagonist, Nidali, as intelligent and having passions with her own dreams and desires, Jarrar undermines orientalist views, which tend to exclude Muslim women from the ideas of modernity and creativity.

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