Borderlands and Arab American Identity in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008)

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Original Article

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Abstract

Arabs have always been configured racially inferior in Western popular cultural representation. This mythical, monolithic representation of Arabs and Arab Americans as Others further became entrenched after the 9/11 incident. Hence, Arab American identity has been the subject of various fictional, critical, theoretical, and literary explorations over the past few decades that seek to foreground the multiply constructed Arab American identity. Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008) is one such narrative that challenges the dominant unilateral representation of Arab American identity through the character of its protagonist Nidali Ammar who struggles to make sense of her borderland identity amidst war, migration, and cultural dislocation. While previous studies have explored the text from linguistic, cultural, historical, and narratological perspectives, this qualitative study explores the complexity of a borderland identity as represented through the protagonist. Drawing on a framework developed from Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "borderlands" and Homi K. Bhaba's notion of the "third space," this paper argues that Jarrar's protagonist reflects a "borderland consciousness" that owes to her constant shifting along borders. While this constant movement is disruptive, violent, and traumatic, Jarrar's protagonist deploys this unending journey as a liberatory mechanism to reject her reductive characterization as an Arab woman and reshapes her sense of self at the crossroads of various conflicting identities grounded in her Palestinian, Greek, Egyptian, Kuwaitian, and American roots. In doing so, the protagonist constantly straddles the third space between various cultures that helps her navigate the political, social, and cultural turmoil marking her life from the very beginning. The paper concludes that while the border experience is a constant source of anxiety, trauma, and displacement, Jarrar's characters also embark on a rite of passage that allows them to embrace borderland with both its traumatic underpinning and its liberatory potential.

Keywords: Arab American identity, borderland, Randa Jarrar, third space, Palestine.

Arab American Identity: A Brief Overview

The terms "Arab" and "Arab American" represent different geographical, ethnic, religious, and socio-political identities. Interestingly, "[t] he term Arab is neither racial nor religious. One can find people with blue eyes and white skin; others are dark skinned; many are somewhere in between. Most Arabs are Muslims but there are also millions of Christians and thousands of Jews" (Alwuraafi, May 2014, p. 4). Contrary to the rich and complex ancient Arab civilization, the works of writers like T. E. Lawrence, Carsten Niebuhr, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, Snouck Hurgronje, Mark Twain, and many others, represent the Arab world as an alien and exotic land of primitive tribes with violent men, harem girls, and camel jockeys (Alwuraafi, May 2014, p. 1). Indeed, this characterization of Arabs or Arab Americans as religious fanatics, with tribal origins, patriarchal

dynasties, and autocratic dictatorships has obscured the multiplicity of Arab American identity (Naber, pp. 1-45). The assumption that "not the majority of Arabs. Not some Arabs. Not a minority of Arabs. All Arabs are evil" (Salaita, 2006, p. 39) is one of the most glaring kinds of racism (Marranci, 2004, p. 105) that "is often tolerated by mainstream society" (Abraham, 1994, p. 170). To generalize the action of a few by "portraying a scowling, bearded, turbaned Muslim" (Esposito, 1993, p. 174) as a "menacing militant fundamentalist" (Esposito, 1993, p. 173) and hostile racial terrorist *Other* is, indeed, reflective of "religious intolerance" (López, p. 556) that has been a common practice in Western literature. In the aftermath of 9/11, this characterization of Arabs was further entrenched in America, making Arab Americans easy victims and "safe to hate" (Majaj L. S., 1999, p. 321) amid the persisting political hostilities. Fear of the dominance of a subordinate Arab Muslim group was fortified in the American psyche (Cainkar, 2009, p. 65), without viewing the role played by the U.S. in destabilizing the map of the Middle East in the historical Lebanese civil war (Said, Orientalism, 1979). In this situation, "the most invisible of the invisible" (Kadi, 1994, pp. xiii-xx) Arab Americans felt the need to re-render their idea of belonging which was at stake because of their complex cultural identities. Amid this building tension, contemporary writers have been making a conscious "effort to grapple more directly with the racialization and politicization of Arab American experience and assert their Arab American identity without apology" Majaj, 2000, p.330).

If Arab American men's identity is grounded in historical stereotypes, Arab American women have been further stereotyped in being "portrayed as submissive veiled women who are culturally abused, oppressed, or enslaved to their religion" (Stephen & Aprahamian, 2015, p. 122). In response to their historic demonization, contemporary Arab American literature seeks to articulate an alternative Arab American identity that is grounded in their hybrid, multicultural experiences. In this context, Arab American women writers have produced an impressive array of fictional and nonfictional works that tease out the complexity of Arab American women's identities. Evelyn Shakir's *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (1997), Elmaz Abinader's *The Children of Roojme: A Family's Journey from Lebanon* (1991), Samia Serageldine's *Cairo House* (2000), straddle between different cultures to reflect the complexity of the Arab American identity. Likewise, Rabih Alameddine's *Koolaids* (1999), *The Prev* (1999), *I*, *the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* (2001), and *The Hakawati* (2008) situate their narratives both within the U.S. and the Arab world in order to show the hybrid Arab American identities. Diana Abu-Jaber's memoir *The Language of Baklava* (2005), *Arabian Jazz* (1993) and *Crescent* (2003) are based on autobiographical experiences once again grounded in their multiplicitous and diverse cultural experiences. Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* (2003) and *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) underscore the inseparability of American and Arab identities. And works like Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) and *Minaret* (2005), Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does my head look big in this?* (2005), Camilla Gibb's *Sweetness in the Belly* (2005), and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) also challenge the monolithic portrayal of Muslim women through the multifaceted identities of Arab American women which is based on their religion, nationality as well as their diasporic American experience.

A Map of Home (2009) by Randa Jarar is one such narrative that seeks to redefine Arab American women's complex identity at the crossroads of religion, ethnicity, nation, culture, and the diasporic experience. Recent studies of *A Map of Home* have explored the text from linguistic, cultural, historical, and narratological perspectives. Al-Bakry and Siler investigate the specific linguistic features of the narrative which create a "dynamic borderland space in which the bilingual creativity of the novel mirrors the protagonist's identity hybridization" in "the contexts of Middle

Eastern and American cross-cultural interaction" (Albakry & Siler, 2012, p. 3). Lisa Suhair Majaj and Assmaa Mohamed Naguib explore the question of immigrant identity in the novel (Naguib & Majaj, 2012). Djohar has explored the use of folktale, naming, and rites of passage in the novel to negotiate Arab American women's identities (Djohar, 2019). Nancy El Gendy has explored the use of "trickster humour as a way to resist the ideological manufacture of the Muslim female body propounded by US orientalism, Islamist orthodoxy and secular Arab patriarchy" (Gendy, 2016, p. 1). Darwich and Harb explore "the relationship between power, normativity, and value in Arab American fiction" and "interpret the characters' experiences, not as struggles of identity and belonging but as tense processes of gendered and classed racialization, self-representation, and political determination" (Darwich & Harb, 2018).

Building on this scholarship on re-visioning Arab American women's identities, this paper focuses, in particular, on understanding the identity struggle of the protagonist, Nidali, amid war, migration, and displacement. Through a qualitative method that uses close reading and textual analysis within the conceptual framework of Gloria Anzaldúa and Homi K. Bhaba's theoretical ideas, this paper seeks to understand the liberating potential inherent to borderland identities. Drawing on Anzaldúa's concept of the "borderlands" and Bhaba's notion of the "third space," this paper argues that Jarrar's protagonist reflects a "borderland consciousness" that owes to her constant shifting along borderlands. While this constant movement is disruptive, violent, and traumatic, Jarrar's protagonist deploys this unending journey as a liberatory mechanism to reject her binary characterization as an Arab woman and reshapes her identity by residing on the borderlands of various conflicting identities as a Palestinian, Egyptian, Kuwaitian, and American. In doing so, the protagonist constantly straddles the third space between various cultures that helps her navigate the political, social, and cultural turmoil that marks her life from the very beginning. As such, while the border experience is a constant source of anxiety, trauma, and displacement, Jarrar's characters embark on a rite of passage that allows them to embrace the borderland with both its traumatic underpinning and its liberatory potential.

Identity, Borderlands, and the Third Space

Identity is created out of an interplay of multiple ideologies and discourses. Despite our attempt to fix identities in rigid categories, identities continue to evolve, disrupting the binary divisions of religious, ethnic, racial, national, gender, and cultural categories. In this context, Homi K. Bhabha has given the concepts of hybridity and the third space. Hybridity, for Bhabha, "is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (Bhabha, 2012, p. 112). A hybrid identity reflects one's belonging to multiple locations and cultures; it is that in-between space where different categories cross and a new space of belonging is created out of multiple, defined identities. Hybridity challenges ethnocentric and nationalist binaries via a migrant identity which is created out of multiple discourses and ideologies. Bhabha seeks to move

> [b]eyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments of processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (Bhabha, 2012, p. 2).

Bhabha uses the term the "Third Space" for the "in- between" state of hybrid identity where its dwellers keep on negotiating and translating "their cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual

temporality of cultural difference" (Bhabha 55). Bhabha defines the third space as "discursive sites or conditions that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (Bhabha, 2012, p. 37). This third space "carries the burden of the meaning of culture"; therefore, "by exploring this Third Space," Bhabha argues, "we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (Bhabha, 2012, p. 56). Bhabha further notes that at this "cultural space . …. the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (Bhabha, 2012, p. 312). This notion of "borderline existence" is similar to Gloria Anzaldúa's conception of the borderlands that she develops in her seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) that explores the Chicano and Latino experience in the context of gender, race, class, and colonialism. Anzaldúa defines "borderlands" as a "place of contact between the dominant culture and non-dominant cultures." This borderline existence assigns the Chicana a hybrid as opposed to a fragmented identity (Overman, 2016, p. 170). "Borderlands" is like the third space in that it gives rise to a consciousness of difference, hybridity, and multiplicity. While Anzaldúa focuses on the borderlands between Mexican and American cultural, political, and geographical contexts and while Bhabha locates his hybrid identity at the crossroads of the colonizer-colonized boundary, this paper argues that the hybrid identities in Jarrar's text intersect continually at multiple borders. The protagonist, Nidali, migrates several times and each time, she experiences borderland existence with reference to a different colonizer; however, instead of succumbing to trauma, Nidali's borderland experience of continually straddling the third space furnishes her with a multifaceted identity grounded in a borderland consciousness that not only subverts the stereotypes associated with Arab women but also proves liberatory in negotiating the racial, gender, ethnic, religious, and political inflections of her identity.

Identity, Displacement, and Borderland Consciousness in *A Map of Home*

While "a denial of the national identity of the Palestinians" is rooted in the 1948 Palestine war, the notion of Palestinian identity with respect to its "territorial, historical, demographic and moral aspects" has been a subject of rigorous debate since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war (Sa'di, 2004 , p. 151). Historian Rashid Khalidi opens his foundational text on Palestinian identity, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (1997) by observing that the "quintessential Palestinian experience … takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint . . . one of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified." It is this experience at the "crossing points" that "brings home to them how much they share in common as a people" and gives them a sense of "identity: of who they are, and of why they are different from others" (Khalidi, 1997, p. 1). This borderland experience defines the entire life of the protagonist (Nidali) of Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* who is in a constant search for home not least because the idea of a physical "map" of home is only imagined and does not exist in reality (Bujupaj, 2016, pp. 13-20) due to the constantly changing physical and geographical face of the Palestinian land. In this situation, those having Palestinian roots constantly struggle to hold on to their ephemeral sense of identity (Alghaberi, pp. 13-20).

A Map of Home is a coming-of-age novel that chronicles the "struggle" of its protagonist, Nidali as she navigates several borderlands. Born in Boston to a Palestinian father and an Egyptian-Greek mother, Nidali's identity already intersects four cultures. However, her true struggle to reconcile various conflicting identities begins once her family is set on a long journey of displacement from Boston to Kuwait, Egypt, and finally Texas. Indeed, Nidali's name epitomizes this struggle, for the word "Nidali" is the feminine of the masculine noun "Nidal," meaning "my struggle". In the text, this symbolizes Arab American Nidali's struggle for a sense of self that is tied

in with her Palestinian refugee father's search for home, both physical and metaphorical. While the shadow of a lost home that hovers over the entire novel is that of Palestine, Jarrar ties it in with Nidali's search for a sense of self amid her family's fragmented life that starts from her childhood in Boston to her teens in Kuwait as migrants, her adolescence in Egypt in asylum amid the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, her adulthood in Texas, and finally comes full circle with her admission to college in Boston.

The novel's title "A Map of Home" thus refers to Nidali and her family's struggle to find a home that is an emotional, psychological, geographical, and cultural anchor for them. This motif of the map reappears throughout the text. Nidali's father, Waheed Ammar, is a Palestinian refugee, who is an architect by profession and a poet by passion, famous for the widely acclaimed poem about Palestine "Revolutionary" that he wrote during the 1973 Arab Israeli war. Displaced from his homeland, Nidali's father, called "Baba" lives in Boston; however, soon after Nidali's birth, the family moves to Kuwait for Baba's new job. In the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the family once again is displaced from Kuwait to Egypt via Jordan. At the end of the war, they are denied return to their new home, Kuwait, owing to their Palestinian origin. Spending the next few years in Egypt, the family then gets an opportunity to move to the US and finally settles in Texas. Despite this constant displacement, Baba carries an image of home in his mind that is his emotional anchor. Afraid of losing his Palestinian identity, he tries to inculcate a sense of Palestinian "Home" in Nidali's memory by drawing his own version of the historic Palestinian map, which has been redrawn multiple times. When Nidali confuses Palestine with Israel, Baba's wrath makes Nidali stay up the whole night to redraw the map of Palestine as per his image of "the map of home" (68) that persists in his memory as witness to his Palestinian identity. However, while Baba eventually resigns to the constant political redrawing of the Palestinian map noting dejectedly that "there's no telling where home starts and where it ends," for Nidali, this lack of fixed borders is not cause for conflict. In fact, she consciously erases all borders on her map: "I erased the western border, the northern border. I erased the southern and eastern border. I surveyed what remained: a blank page, save for the Galilee. I stared at the whiteness of the paper's edges for a long, long time. The whiteness of the page blended with the whiteness of my sheets. 'You are here,' I thought as I looked at the page and all around me. And oddly, I felt free" (Jarrar, 2008, p. 177). This third space that she increasingly discovers via each displacement and migration through the novel reflects her borderland consciousness that comes to be at home with multiple, even conflicting identities.

Indeed, the novel begins with an ambivalent sense of identity for Nidali. Assuming that the newborn will be a boy, Nidali's father gives her a male name, Nidal, at the time of her birth without inquiring about the gender of the child. He had "always known I was a boy, had spoken to me as a boy while I was tucked safely in Mama's uterus" (3). However, once he was informed of the gender of the baby, he "added at the end of [her] name a heavy, reflexive, feminizing, possessive, cursive, cursing 'I'" (5). The irony lies in the alphabet "I", which instead of the possession of oneself implies the non-possession of women's own self. It is also to make the daughter realize that her future struggle should remain within the premise of her parents' expectations and cultural norms despite their displacement, immigration, and exile. Jarrar assigns several layers of complexity to Nidali's identity in the act of naming: it represents her status in a patriarchal world; it situates her within the context of an otherized Arab American identity in the US; and it portends her "struggle" to find a sense of self amid her displaced family's search for home.

While Nidali's father is a Palestinian refugee, her mother, Fairuza, is an Egyptian with Greek origins. A graduate in music composition, Fairuza accepts her homeless fiancé' who "didn't really know who he was or where he belonged, having been forbidden from re-entering Palestine after the 1967 war" (37) just because he "was going to take her away to Boston where he'd secured a one-year internship with a lower-tier architecture firm" (37). America represents opportunity, freedom, and prosperity for the couple; however, their personal relationship goes on to become as strained as their overall sense of identity. The attempt of Waheed and Fairuza to establish a home for their family continually falters due to the surrounding political and economic crises. This is further exacerbated by their inability to fulfill their artistic passions, poetry and music, which initially brought them together. Her parents' conflicts thus further complicate a young Nidali's vision of home and search for identity.

Nidali's "struggle" is thus about gaining a sense of self in the face of both strained personal relationships in a patriarchal family "home" and a displaced cultural identity in a foreign country. At first, Nidali feels that her multiple identities have split her into different parts: "I was split in half: I was Egyptian and Palestinian. I was Greek and American" (8). Nidali's father plays an important role in reinforcing this through inculcating in her the sense that moving "was a part of being Palestinian" (9). At the beginning of the novel, their Palestinian home is in the control of Israeli forces. At the death of her grandfather, they have to fly to Jordan first in order to take a detour to reach Palestine by road after the embarrassing and rigorous security checks and a humiliating physical X-ray (98) to cross the Allenby Bridge on foot (96). Nidali feels compassion for Palestinians like her father who carry such a heavy burden of "the homeland in their souls" (9). Her bedtime story while tucked in father's arms at the age of three or four is also centered on inculcating in her a strong sense of her Palestinian identity: "You can go wherever you want, but you'll always have it in your heart" (9). The oral depiction of Palestinian history from the Egyptian king Farook in 1952, Suez Canal of 1956, Jamal Abdun-Nasser and historical fighter figure Geddo (67) is to sustain the Palestinian culture in the present. However, gradually, Nidali comes to accept this identity of "a half and-half one" (104), which does not unsettle her, unlike her father who is constantly pained by the ambivalent space he has to reside. Nidali thinks of herself as stronger than those with a singular uniform identity like a half-human boy in the story of Sitto who "was stronger and better than the kids that came from the whole pomegranate" (104). This borderland consciousness is a constant feature of Nidali's identity from the outset; however, it is in conflict with her father's sense of home and identity that she is expected to comply with.

A rather liberal Arab father, Baba has brought up Nidali "like a boy" (22). He checks her excitement at "girly earrings" (23) and advises her to do her "homework perfectly" (23) not only to make him proud but also to steer her fate apart from her aunts, who with their sixth-grade schooling were restricted to being housewives "slapping their cheeks and rending their dresses" at funerals (103). Baba wants Nidali "to be free…[and] to be free, you must be educated" (23). This education, for Baba, will allow them to disrupt the dominant narratives about the Palestinian people: "[s]inging is not bad, but you can do better. You can be a doctor! A big professor of literature! Write poetry like I used to do. Write poetry and teach in English. Show those bastards the greatness of our literature" (65). In other words, a reclamation of his Palestinian identity is tied to her daughter's prosperous future.

However, while her father seeks to reinforce her Palestinian identity, he also serves as a patriarchal figure who wishes to control his family through his violent behavior. Baba forces Nidali

to participate in the Quranic recital competition which she eventually wins creating a record as the first girl winner of the contest. He hits her with a hanger in front of her orthodox religious cousin Esam on the wrong pronunciation of the *surat ul-sharh* and abuses her for going out of the house without permission. He kicks and drags her mother Fairuza on the floor for burning his favorite shirt, and eventually leaves her in the desert for noncompliance with his wishes. Nidali is unable to understand this gender inequality: "I wondered how Baba could want me to win a boy's contest and behave so cruelly to Mama, who's a girl, like me, and I wondered why Mama let him" (66). Domestic violence makes Nidali detest marriage as she resolves to remain "free and forever unmarried like Umm Kulthum was, and someday have my own money and my own home so I wouldn't have to answer to anyone" (123). Nidali's inability to understand the contradictory nature of her father's attitude further propels her search for a sense of self whose contradictions are not a source of pain. Sitting in the corner of the bathtub, she repeats: "ana ana, ana ana, ana ana? – Am I am I am I am I am I?...When I'd tricked my mind, it would float away, and I could see that I am just I. I'd see myself from outside my own mind: my life, my body, and I was not half something and half another, I was one whole, a circle" (58-59). By repeating this to herself, she hopes to assert her identity without the contradictions imposed upon it.

Indeed, in order to escape these contradictions, especially with reference to her father's attitude, Nidali solaces herself in the stickers of Wonder Woman that she puts up on her headboard, whose superhero attire with her black hair like mother's and wavy curls like hers inspires her: "when I saw the stars on her shorts, I was reminded of my blue passport, of how I was born in America. I wondered if Wonder Woman was Egyptian and Palestinian and American, like me" (41-42). At this point in her life, she can relate more to the wonder woman than any of her ancestral identities. However, her patriarchal cousin removes the stickers of wonder woman from her room calling her "a shameless prostitute" (53). This conflict between her desire to reside peacefully at the third space and the patriarchal wish to pull her into the binaries continues to define Nidali's struggle.

Amid this conflict, Nidali's relationship with her mother is a source of comfort and protection for her as opposed to the strained and complicated relationship with her father. Fairuza is a rebel of sorts as Nidali notes: "Most of my friends had mamas who prayed; Mama did not. Their mamas cooked and didn't play piano. Their mamas didn't say bad words and didn't yell at their husbands. Their mamas weren't Mama" (19). Fairuza is not a practicing Muslim but recites "*sura* from Koran" (87) in tears while taking flowers to her Christian mother in the cemetery. Her seamless blending of Muslim, Christian, and Arab values further helps strengthen Nidali's borderland consciousness. Nidali's multicultural upbringing by her mother, watching *Thousand Nights and a Night* Ramadan special, discussing the Egyptian actress like Nelly's beauty, and singing along with the memorization of "the *fateha* from the Koran" (14) is driven by her mother's acceptance that "different people believe different things" (18) as well as her belief that people are like waves: "They are not the same thousand waves, but they are not completely different. May be people are like those waves, made of the same ocean of souls" (19). Her only religious belief is that "God has no son. He's all alone" (13) and that the "people of the book go to heaven if they're good" (13). She finds stories of Adam and Eve and heaven and hell the same in both religions and thinks of their unity in the hereafter (87). Despite the political turmoil, cultural loss, social injustice, and ballooning sorrows that define their lives, she hopes to raise a family that is open and dynamic without rigid adherence to tradition. Indeed, it is Nidali's mother's faith in the

goodness of all humans regardless of their religious, national, and ethnic affiliations that inspires and sustains Nidali in the face of her father's rigid boundaries.

As such, together Nidali and her mother continue to defy father's patriarchal authority; the text depicts them as strong women who come out of multiple crises that they confront. Despite her father's constant opposition to Fairuza's piano practice that he thought deterred her from domestic responsibilities, Fairuza, in the end, wins at the domestic front by keeping her piano and making Waheed realize, through a short absence, her inevitability to the management of the house. Likewise, Nidali's constant struggle against Baba allows her to eventually explore her sexuality, discover her sense of self, and embark on a professional journey of her choice. Living at the borderlands means living with contradictions. Contrary to her father's fixed sense of belonging, Nidali resides at the Third Space that allows her to explore her own borderland identity from multiple angles.

At the age of 11 as Nidali embarks on puberty, her struggle to attain a sense of self also gains momentum as her family is faced with yet another crisis. In the wake of the Iraqi invasion of war, the family is once again faced with forced evacuation from their Kuwaiti home they had painstakingly established for their children. Nidali's mind has permanent prints of the eerie feeling of emergency alarms, bombing of the buildings, and the clouds of smoke that come to characterize her life in Kuwait before they are forced to evacuate. Leaving behind their home, friends, school, and the places they were attached to unsettles Nidali: "I cried quietly on the way home, at my bewilderment and at all the injustice that had been decreed unto me, unto us. I felt as though I no longer understood the world" (143). It is not the simple evacuation but a barefoot running to protect their lives with Aunt Naila's family "in a caravan of cars through Iraq and into Jordan" (138) and finally stopping in Alexandria, Egypt at their mother's "beach apartment until the war ended" (139), with an unending wish to settle at some place that traumatizes them. This trauma of the disintegration of home, work, and ambitions is reinforced at various check posts where they are subjected to dehumanizing treatment as Nidali's family uses different passports to avoid trouble, especially regarding Nidali's father's Jordanian passport.

The journey is both painful and bizarre; going through sand tornadoes, nauseating toilets, piles of "burning garbage" (149), Nidali wonders how the beautiful historic and religious sites are being reduced to memories of pain and displacement: "how nice it would be to travel just for the sake of traveling, how nice it must be to leave one country for another willingly" (159). This ease of crossing borders that is allowed to certain nationalities (Khalidi, 1997) is contrasted to the anguish that Nidali's family experiences for the history of her family is imprinted within a history of several wars. Her grandmother lost her father in the first war in Palestine and was sold to a family through whom she has met Nidali's grandfather. Her yia yia met her geddo in World War II. And her father met her mother after being displaced from Palestine. Nidali is left wondering "how many wars waited in my future, and if my children—if I had any—would be products of them" (195). Like her displaced Turko-Arab and Greek-o-Egyptian ancestors, she thinks she will have to relate to her children the story of this journey of displacement as such:

> I got in a car and fled Kuwait and then boarded a plane to Egypt. I didn't know where my story would end or how many planes, carriages, cars, or ships my offspring and the offspring they beget would go on, only that I hoped in the future travel would be more comfortable. (160)

While this borderland experience is painful on the one hand, it is also liberatory on the other. Nidali and her family travel through a long route in "a people's tribe" that includes "the Shiites, the Sunnis, and the Kurds ….. the Zoroastrians, the Jews, and the Christians" all sharing this experience of displacement (147). The fact that their differences do not restrict this borderland experience of migration is what is liberating about it. Nidali hopes for a coexistent future without conflict and war where all these communities could live in peace; however, such a future does not seem to be in sight yet.

Robbed, hungry, and hopeless, they finally make a transitory stay in the beach apartment of Nidali's mother in Alexandria, until her father finds a new job. Alexandria has once again proven a shelter for the war-trodden family; earlier her grandmother had shifted here from Crete and her father had moved here from Palestine. For Nidali, however, finding a home is a much more complicated struggle. Each stay is a transitory home for her that disappears before she can come to accept it as home:

> I could see the Mediterranean. The ocean's water was still, like a rug. This was our home now; our old home was gone, and no matter how far I tilted my head, I'd never be able to see it. I went back to my bed and once I'd wrapped the sheets around my head, I cried; I cried a mini-Mediterranean of tears. (162)

In Alaxandria, Nidali is wary of making new associations in fear of losing them like she lost her previous friends, school, homes, as well as her childhood: "Things I miss: My old stereo. The living room wall. My bed. Mama's piano. Za'tar burgers. Fakhr el-Din. The sirens on the first day of every month. The water towers. The gulf. Linda. Rama. Tamer" (179). This is exacerbated by her experience in an Egyptian English school where she faces discrimination based on her family's social and political background (165). Given the family's financial situation, Nidali studies under the lights of the mosque at the street corner, wears borrowed uniform, and eats "meat once a week, if that, and sometimes it was just heated bread or fateera with a little honey" (168). Nobody is there to comfort her for her loss as everyone in the family is going through a struggle of their own: "No one talked about Kuwait or our apartment or if we'd ever go home again. This was home" (168). Indeed, when the war ends, 300,000 jobless Palestinians' hopes of returning to Kuwait are crushed as their entry is banned owing to their Palestinian identity. Nidali's father's work permit is also revoked indefinitely: "We were not wanted there; no Palestinian person or family with a Palestinian member was" due to Yasir Arafat's support of Saddam Hussain owing to the latter's promises of better prospects for Palestinians in Iraq (191).

In the aftermath of this tragic turn of events that prevents their return home, it is Nidali rather than her mother or father that helps the family navigate this loss. As her parents continue to mourn the loss, Nidali is concerned about the family's future: "I worried about us. We couldn't live in a summer apartment forever, could we? Where would our food come from? How would we live?" (192). Thus, in order to help her mother cope with this state of physical homelessness and psychological chaos, Nidali painstakingly writes a musical of a dream home to console her: "she could see a play in it, or a new home, or some sign that I'd make it to the damn exam, or that we'd make it as a family" (195), a home without any knowledge or history of war. Likewise, as her grief-stricken father sits quietly for hours at end staring at the wall with a growing beard, Nidali tries to please him by drawing the Palestinian map from her memory. However, this time, even her father is not sure of where the home is: "There's no telling where home starts and where it ends" (193).

For father, the constant redrawing of the Palestinian map may leave them with a shadow in place of a home; however, for Nidali, a lack of boundaries is liberating, for the Third space offers more than mere dislocation.

This potential of the borderland consciousness at the Third Space is something that Nidali fully experiences as she approaches young adolescence, and the family moves to the US. When her father finds a job in Texas, Nidali's family's hopes for better economic prospects bring them to the US. At first, Nidali is wary of yet another arduous journey to find a new home: "I didn't want to move again, to work at feeling at home again, to lose that home again, then have to start all over again" (207). However, pulled in by the thought of "what it would be like in America" (207), she gives in. For the teenager Nidali, America was a place where "girls and boys holding hands and breaking up and kissing in public" is not a taboo; America means "rock music and rap music and pop music and throngs of people swaying and singing"; it means eating "ketchup and mustard and mayonnaise"; seeing "new cars and sometimes horses and barns, dollar bills and bacon" (201). Indeed, "the idea that we could return to [America] always seemed too much of a dream, one that could never come true" (201); therefore, excited by her return to America, Nidali once again embarks on this journey even if it means another loss of home, identity, language, and culture. However, her initial experience in America is as ambivalent as all her experiences since childhood. While her blue passport declares her national identity as American, she sees herself as having a much more complex and multilayered identity.

Exhausted by the long journey, when Nidali first lands in the US, she finds it difficult to distinguish "where I was: in Kuwait, in Alexandria, or in Texas" (218), and "where home really was" (221). Gradually, however, Nidali begins to find her place in the US. Her multicultural "half-Egyptian, half-Palestinian" identity does not feel strange next to the "half-German, half-Irish" (219) neighboring girl: "everyone here was half one thing, half another" (219). Indeed, in her search for "a map of home", she ends up finding a "map of the world" in the multicultural Student Center of the school (221). Likewise, America also brings out the best in her mother who wants to settle in the US after years of border crossing; she makes new friends and blends in with the community; starts teaching piano lessons; opens a personal bank account; and wishes to open a Lebanese restaurant. However, steadfast like the Palestinian olive tree, her father is neither enamored by America nor wants to start anew. The fact that his sixteen-hour-long job is unable to furnish them with their own home or conveyance further adds to his dismay. As such: "Like the lilies in the pond, Mama bloomed, while Baba drooped like a weed" (229). Further pushed away from his Palestinian home, his inability to make a home in the US alienates him ever more.

As for Nidali, America gives her the freedom to explore her sense of self, away from both the trauma of forced migrations and the patriarchal hold of her father. It is in America that she is able to resist her father openly for the first time. Although she drops the charges after first reporting her father's physical abuse, the incident changes the power dynamics between them. She also begins to explore her sexuality; from her letters to Fakhr el Din to her crush on Omer Media to her decision to lose her virginity despite her father's insistence on strict adherence to cultural values, Nidali begins to take hold of her life. While initially she struggles to reconcile her Arab identity with her American self, by resisting "the dichotomy between the 'East' and the 'West', between 'Arab' and 'American', between 'here' and 'there,'' she goes on to continually explore the Third Space that furnishes her with a border consciousness which allows all the different facets of her identity to coexist.

Her final act to assert her sense of self is to defy her father's wish to attend college in Texas. While her father insists that they "are here to study and get the best out of America!" (234) and that she "write the greatest dissertation of all human times" that people "make bilgrimage to see your manuscript" making her "a world-renowned scholar!" (239), he nevertheless forbids her to go to a more prestigious college in Boston. Nidali has to secretly apply to a college in Boston and as she continues to face resistance after she gets an admission offer, she flees home for ten days to convince her parents. Interestingly, the admission letter and her father's mortgage letter both arrive together. In fact, for father, Nidali's career and the family home are profoundly linked as he projects his own wish for a successful career onto Nidali. While father wants her to stay "home" so she "may [not] lose sight of everything [father] had planned for [her]," Nidali has her "own plans" that she is "determined to see . . . through". As opposed to adhering to her father's ideology, all Nidali wants is "to be happy" (281), and she finds this happiness in practicing her hybrid identity.

Conclusion

In these defining moments of finding her own self, Nidali decides to live for herself first: "This time it was just me: my whole life, my future" (281). She realizes that Baba named her "My Struggle"' which meant "his struggle" (258). This means that "He just loved me. And his love for me would remain" (259), even if they remained physically apart. Her experience of the diasporic world has helped her to come to the knowledge of her own self by battling both imperialistic and patriarchal forces. The narrative begins with Nidali's father using a pen to write a boy's name for her whereas the narrative ends with her mother throwing the pen out of the house, fearing that it was recording the family secrets with a hidden microphone. This pen thrown away by mother is now picked up by Nidali who wants to use it to not only write her own self into being but also to document the struggles of her Palestinian, Arab American family. Jarrar refers to the Quranic Surah "The Pen" (290), where God promises to refute the propaganda against Muslims. And now Jarrar's pen will challenge the dominant narratives against the Palestinians, Arabs, and Arab Americans through her border consciousness that defies all restrictive binaries. As it documents the struggle of the preceding generations who have lost their home and a sense of belonging, Nidali's narrative of struggle also brings hope for the younger generation that, despite carrying the legacy of a lost home, is furnished with the prospect of finding a sense of self amid their constant reside at the borders. While border experience is forever traumatic for father, the third space also heralds an emancipatory future that Nidali hopes to realize. This future is enriched by the legacy of the various identities that reside concurrently in the third space.

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