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**Four Stages of Fitting In: Exploring Identity and Belonging in Three
Muslim Young Adult Novels**

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Thank you to you who are reading this right now. I hope I am able to inspire and guide you, even if it is just a little bit.

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Hadia Ahmed

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Abstract

This study looks at identity and belonging in three Muslim American young adult novels using the theory of George Shannon (1988) on how identity and belonging in multicultural literature is a process consisting of four stages. These stages reflect the experiences multicultural children go through in real life as well. The four stages begin with stage 1 where the multicultural child is rejected by both cultures he or she is a part of. In stage 2 the child is either forcibly or willingly part of one culture, but not the other. In the third stage the child tries to be a part of both cultures, but is met with challenges as the cultures are conflicting. Finally, in stage 4, the child is able to create an identity consisting of both cultures and is now happy being able to be a part of both cultures.

Norway is getting more and more diverse. The importance of using multicultural literature in the classroom can be explained using Bishop's (1990) mirrors, windows and sliding glass door metaphor. Literature can be a mirror where students see their own cultures reflected in what they read. This helps promote belonging as the readers feel like they too can be a part of the society. Literature can also be a window allowing students from one culture to read about a different culture. The window can also be a sliding glass door where the reader can walk through and be a part of the world they are reading about.

The novels analyzed in this study are *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga (2019), *Barakah Beats* by Maleeha Siddiqui (2021), and *You Truly Assumed* by Laila Sabreen (2022). The novels show a diverse representation of Muslims, with protagonists that are respectively a Syrian immigrant, a Pakistani American and three Black Muslims. The characters in these novels go through the four stages in differing ways, sometimes skipping stages, moving backwards, or wanting to go beyond the stages.

Keywords: Identity, Belonging, Muslim young adult novels, *Other Words for Home*, *Barakah Beats*, *You Truly Assumed*

Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven ser på identitet og tilhørighet i tre muslimske amerikanske ungdomsromaner ved bruk av teorien til George Shannon (1988) om hvordan identitet og tilhørighet i multikulturell litteratur er en prosess bestående av fire stadier. Disse stadiene reflekterer opplevelsene multikulturelle barn går gjennom i virkeligheten også. De fire stadiene begynner med stadium 1 hvor det multikulturelle barnet er avvist fra begge kulturene han eller hun er en del av. I stadium 2 er barnet enten tvunget til eller villig en del av den ene kulturen, men ikke den andre. I det tredje stadiet prøver barnet å bli en del av begge kulturene, men møter på utfordringer da kulturene er motstridende. Til slutt, i stadium 4, skaper barnet en identitet bestående av begge kulturene og er nå glad for å være en del av begge kulturer.

Norge blir mer og mer mangfoldig. Viktigheten av å bruke multikulturell litteratur i klasserommet kan bli forklart ved bruk av Bishops (1990) speil, vinduer og skyvedører i glass metafor. Litteratur kan være et speil hvor elever kan se deres egen kultur reflektert i det de leser. Dette hjelper å fremme tilhørighet ved at leserne føler at de også kan være en del av samfunnet. Litteratur kan også være et vindu ved å la elever fra en kultur lese om en annen kultur. Dette vinduet kan også bli en skyvedør som leseren kan gå gjennom og bli en del av den verdenen de leser om.

Romanene analysert i denne oppgaven er *Other Words for Home* av Jasmine Warga (2019), *Barakah Beats* av Maleeha Siddiqui (2021), og *You Truly Assumed* av Laila Sabreen (2022). Romanene viser en mangfoldig representasjon av muslimer, med hovedkarakterer som er henholdsvis en syrisk flyktning, en pakistansk amerikaner og tre svarte amerikanere. Karakterene i disse romanene går gjennom de fire stadiene på ulike måter, av og til blir stadiene hoppet over, karakterene beveger seg bakover, eller de har ønsker om å gå utover stadiene.

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Introduction

Norway is becoming more and more diverse and the number of people who belong to a Muslim community in Norway has increased 144% from 2006 to 2022 (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2022). As teachers it is important that the literature used in the classroom reflects the lives of both the pupils in the classroom as well as the people outside of the classroom. Islam is one of the largest religions in the world, yet according to Muslim students as well as their parents in Canada they “experience a sense of exclusion in public schools” (Panjwani, 2020, p. 5). Due to lack of materials and knowledge, teachers often do not have enough skills and resources to teach about and resonate with Muslims and other minorities (Panjwani, 2020, p. 5). In this thesis I have chosen to analyse 3 young adult novels featuring Muslim characters that could be used in the 7th grade classroom.

Norwegian school curriculum

LK20 is the curriculum Norwegian schools follow. LK20 consists of a core curriculum where values and principles are presented (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019b). Under the core value “Human dignity” it states that schools should consider the diversity of its pupils and “facilitate for each pupil to experience belonging in school and society. We may all experience that we feel different and stand out from the others around us. Therefore we need acknowledgement and appreciation of differences” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019c). Schools should assist “the development of each person's identity, make the pupils confident in who they are, and also present common values that are needed to participate in this diverse society and to open doors to the world” is written under the core value “Identity and cultural diversity” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a).

LK20 also provides a list of competence aims in each subject. I have chosen to focus on the 7th grade English classroom due to the fact that they are required to read longer texts at this point. They are also at the age where they go through processes of constructing their own identity, regardless of what background they have (Illeris, 2002, p. 74-76). Two competence aims from the curriculum that are relevant for this thesis are that pupils should “read and listen to English language [...] literature for children and young people [...] and talk about the content” and “investigate ways of living and traditions in different societies in the English-speaking world [...] and reflect on identity and cultural belonging” (Norwegian Directorate for

Education and Training, 2019d). Due to the latter competence aim specifically mentioning the English-speaking world, all the novels I have chosen to focus on in this thesis are set in the United States.

By using Muslim literature in the classroom one has the possibility to “promote the bridging of cultures, creating responsiveness around Muslim students’ background, alleviating misconceptions in the students, and promoting confidence in the parents of Muslim children” (Panjwani, 2020, p. 13). Panjwani adds that Muslim children’s literature can help break stereotypes surrounding Muslims (Panjwani, 2020, p. 12). Literature has the power to change how people view the world and how one understands people that are different from oneself (Bishop, 1990, p. 16). By analysing three young adult novels related to Muslims living in a non-Muslim majority English-speaking country, I attempt to help students, teachers and other educators reflect on identity and help promote belonging, which ties into what the curriculum says.

Research question

This study aims to contribute to the emergent field of scholarship on Muslim young adult literature. This study examines three young adult novels featuring Muslim protagonists, and how all three novels include characters dealing with issues relating to identity and belonging. The three novels are *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga (2019), *Barakah Beats* by Maleeha Siddiqui (2021), and *You Truly Assumed* by Laila Sabreen (2022). Specifically, this study asks:

- How are identity and belonging explored in three Muslim young adult novels?
- Why is it important to include Muslim (and other minority) literature in the classroom?

As this study demonstrates, there are stages the characters in these three novels go through on the journey of discovering themselves. George Shannon created four stages characters in multicultural literature often go through and these stages mirror the experiences multicultural children tend to go through in real life as well (Shannon, 1988, p. 14). Multicultural children and characters often have two cultures to deal with, and the stages begin with stage 1 where the character is rejected by both of the cultures, before moving on to stage 2 where the character is accepted by one of the two cultures but rejected by the other. In stage 3 the

character tries to be a part of both cultures at the same time, and finally in stage 4 the character creates a dual-identity consisting of both cultures and is content (Shannon, 1988, p. 14). This thesis places the characters from the three novels in these four stages, and follows their journey of constructing their own identities.

Central concepts

Muslim literature

There are various definitions of Muslim literature. Scholars, such as Panjwani, Narayan and Torres, argue whether the term solely refers to literature written by Muslim authors (insiders), or whether it should be enough that the characters present in the stories practice the religion of Islam even if the authors are non-Muslim (outsiders). Panjwani writes that Muslim literature does not necessarily have to be written by Muslim authors, it only needs Muslim characters, as non-Muslim authors would be able to write from an outsider's point of view which could be interesting (Panjwani, 2020, p. 5). However, Narayan argues that insiders have a deeper knowledge about their own cultures as they have lived their entire lives with their culture, and that outsiders “should try and learn from the perceptions of insiders” (Narayan, 1988, p. 45). Torres, who analyzed how Muslims were presented in picturebooks for children, noted that the books that were written by insiders appeared to be more nuanced than those authored by outsiders (Torres, 2016, p. 203). After reading these differing definitions, I decided to choose novels written by insiders, namely Muslim authors, for the more authentic stories. As mentioned earlier, the materials used in the classrooms should reflect the diversity within the classroom and outside of it, and therefore novels written by authors that practice Islam help bring credible stories in to the classrooms.

Panjwani divides Muslim literature into three types that can be used in the classroom (Panjwani, 2020). The first category is “stories from the Quran and the life of Prophets”, which form the basis of what Muslims believe in (Panjwani, 2020, p. 8). These stories often have specific messages that are meant to convey a way of life, and can be used in the classroom for their “historical, cultural, as well as literary value” (Panjwani, 2020, p. 8). The second category is folklore, “traditional and historical stories”, which can help students learn about something unfamiliar by taking use of something similar (Panjwani, 2020, p. 8-9). The *Arabian Nights* stories are widely known, and can be used alongside modern stories to help break stereotypes. The final category, and what this thesis will focus on, is fictional literature.

These stories can be novels, short stories, picturebooks, or retellings, and often revolve around “cultural, ethical, and moral values” that any child can relate to (Panjwani, 2020, p. 9). Literature in this category can be what Rudine Sims Bishop has called “mirrors and windows” (1990) that show how Muslims live and practice their religion in their daily lives, which make them an attractive resource for the classroom.

Muslims

This thesis revolves around concepts of identity and belonging as they are expressed in Muslim American young adult fiction and, in particular, how characters negotiate religious identity in a society where that identity is not well represented. With that being said, a discussion regarding what makes a person Muslim seems important. An individual’s relationship to their religion is different from person to person. The novels I have chosen are all novels where the characters refer to themselves as Muslim, being Muslim is a part of their identity. As this is what they refer to themselves as and what the readers will see them as, it is also what I view them as.

Muslims practice their religion in different ways and presenting characters that vary in how religious they are highlights the diversity that exists within the religion. Presenting a diverse set of characters, instead of only one depiction, can also avoid the students assuming there is one definitive way to be characterized as Muslim (Memon, 2011, p. 293).

Mosques serve as both an arena for learning about Islam, but also as “a social and cultural arena” for Muslim minorities in the West (Östberg, 2000, p. 95). Muslim parents often send their children to mosques to learn more about their religion but also as a way for them to meet other Muslim children. When living as a minority, a place where one can attend and feel at home in an otherwise foreign area gives a sense of comfort (Östberg, 2000, p. 96). As will be discussed, Mosques and areas where Muslims gather are often deemed a source of safety and comfort for the characters in the novels considered here.

Identity

Identity is a recurring theme in young adult multicultural literature (Superle, 2010, p. 120), as the characters have to deal with multiple identities throughout their daily life. When analyzing novels with immigrant girls as protagonists Stewart found six recurring themes relating to

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language learning, language brokering, legal issues, racism, struggling to fit in and being stuck between two differing cultures (Stewart, 2012, p. 20). The latter two are the themes this thesis will explore, specifically identity and belonging.

It may be overwhelming for multicultural children to deal with two cultures (Superle, 2010, p. 128). As they have one culture at home but a different one when outside of home, “bicultural people have to deal with two different sets of cultural values.” (Leu, 2010, p. 64). As will be presented, the characters main struggle stems from feeling like they do not belong, and they often long for the times when they did not have two cultures to relate to.

Chapter 1: Theory and methodology

Theory

Importance of representation

The importance of representation in literature can be explained by the metaphor of mirrors, mirrors and sliding glass doors. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) wrote how literature functions as windows by allowing people of one culture to see people from other cultures, and it is important for students to be exposed to cultures that differ from theirs so they can avoid having an “exaggerated view of their importance and value in the world” (Bishop, 1990, p. 15). The window can also be a sliding glass door where the reader can “walk through in imagination to become a part of whatever world has been created or re-created in the book” (Bishop, 1990, p. 11). Bishop also writes that literature can be a mirror where we can see ourselves and the lives we live, and it helps us feel like we belong in the society (Bishop, 1990, p. 11).

A lack of representation can lead to students believing they are worth less in society than those who are represented more (Bishop, 1990, p. 13). Literature helps student learn about “their cultures and roles in society” (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001, p. 810). If Muslim students are only presented with stories of characters with other religious beliefs, they might start believing that Muslims do not have a place in society. A lack of representation can also lead to pupils being frustrated because they never see themselves in literature and thus make them not enjoy reading because “repeated frustration is not likely to lead to personal affirmations and the development of a love of reading” (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001, p. 810). Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd wrote guidelines for picking African American literature to use in the classroom, and also interviewed African American adults and students about representation in literature (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). One of the adults interviewed, Tracy, mentioned that once she finally found books she could relate to, her love of reading started (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001, p. 811). Another adult mentioned that “When the characters look like, talk like, think like, and act like us, it’s easy to share in the experience” (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001, p. 811).

In Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd’s study the importance of representation was highlighted by a third-grade student named Marisa who said that Black people are often portrayed with no manners and no education, saying “they portray us as not having any manners. When you see

[black] people like that, [white] people think that we're stupid" (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001, p. 811). Here Marisa, who is African American, views books with Black characters from the perspective of a White person. She imagines how a White person would look through the window overlooking Black people and assume they were all like the way Black people were portrayed in literature. "But, that's not always true cause the black people, they get a good education too" Marisa mentions (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001, p. 811), expressing her frustration over how rarely the positive aspects of Black people are shown in literature the same way it does for White people.

Even though some students might be outside of the culture presented in the novels, that does not mean they will not be able to relate and engage with the text they read (Suh & Hinton, 2015, p. 33). When reading a novel depicting Korean and Japanese people living in Japan during World War II, African American Karen with no ties to the aforementioned countries was able to connect the story to experiences she knows of or has experienced herself (Suh & Hinton, 2015, p. 32-33). Thus, the stories can become mirrors in other ways than might be originally intended.

"Touching stories about human life and relationships transcend all the boundaries of religion, politics, history, and geography" and "also offer insight into Muslim ways of life and cultural value systems attached to their beliefs and practices" (Panjwani, 2020, p. 12). While it is easy to label Muslim stories as only Muslim stories, they are at their core just stories about people who share a specific belief. One of the third-grade students Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd interviewed said that although there is nothing wrong with white people he would prefer if he could read more stories about black people stating that white people are "people, so they're the same as us, but a different color. But, I would like to see more, you know, black people in stories" (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001, p. 811). This emphasizes how he understands that the skin color is the only thing that is different, yet the lack of representation is so apparent that he truly wishes he could read more stories where he could see himself be mirrored.

In the classroom

Classrooms should be a place where everyone can feel like they belong. Students should be able to see their cultures represented, focusing on "their values, beliefs, attitudes, institutions, social relations, language, customs" (Bishop, 1990, p. 13). Literature can be used to teach students to think critically as well as "expand, advance, and/or shift perspectives, particularly

around those whose experiences have been marginalized and/or silenced.” (Ginsberg & Glenn, 2020, p. 603).

Using literature with Muslim characters in the classroom can have two pedagogical goals closely relating to Bishop’s (1990) aforementioned windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors metaphors. Firstly, through hearing stories of other characters going on a journey of figuring out their identities, multicultural children have the ability to learn to negotiate their own identities as well (Shannon, 1988, p. 14). The stories they read will then become mirrors and give room for the pupils to develop and figure out themselves. Secondly, the literature can also be windows and sliding glass doors, where pupils who are not familiar with Islam could learn about Muslims and people that live in a different place. The novels chosen in this study present Muslim protagonists with different backgrounds, a Syrian immigrant, a Pakistani American, and three Black Muslims. By choosing books that show a range of Muslims with different ethnic backgrounds, novels featuring Muslim characters could also be windows for students that practice Islam, as they would have the possibility to learn about different ways their religion is practiced and understood by others. An Iranian Muslim living in Norway reading a book about a Pakistani Muslim in America would make the Iranian Muslim a cultural insider in terms of being Muslim, however, the Iranian Muslim would simultaneously be an outsider as they are neither American nor Pakistani.

Shannon’s four stages

George Shannon noticed a pattern of four stages that many multicultural people go through, and these four stages are often presented in literature featuring multicultural characters as well (Shannon, 1988). The four stages document the journey a child navigates through, beginning with not fitting in either culture to finally feeling a sense of belonging. The stages begin with stage 1 where the multicultural child is rejected by both cultures. In stage 2 the child is accepted by one of the cultures, but denies the other, either choosing to not be a part of the other culture, or being forced to only be a part of one culture by others. In the stage 3 the child tries to be a part of both cultures simultaneously, but faces challenges as the cultures might be conflicting. For the child “the life of the hyphen and duality is like living on a tight rope”, causing frustration because both the cultures they are a part of view them as *too much* of the other culture (Shannon, 1988, p. 16). Finally, in the fourth stage the child is able to create an identity consisting of both cultures, realizing that a collage “of multiple cultures” is truer to the identity that feels at home than “a single image” (Shannon, 1988, p.17). Shannon

highlights that it is only after the child has created their own identity *and* shared their story with someone else, that they will be able to “find a physical home, a community of caring and kindred souls” (Shannon, 1988, p. 17). As will be presented later, stage 4 is often reached once the character talks about the struggles of stage 3 with an older person that has previously been through the four stages and is familiar with this process. This older person becomes a mentor and guides the character from stage 3 to stage 4, helping the character realize that no one but oneself can define one’s identity.

Shannon’s four stages have previously been applied in two works. Superle, when analyzing three novels with protagonists of Indian heritage, found that all of the characters went through these four stages (Superle, 2010). Leu found that 12 Asian American undergraduate and graduate students, whose ages ranged from younger than 20 and older than 30, could all be placed in one of the four stages based on responses given to questions surrounding identity and belonging after reading a Chinese American novel (Leu, 2010).

Methodology

Central to this thesis has been the work of Rudine Shims Bishop (1990) whose work on multicultural literature for the classroom inspired me on the earlier stages of my education at OsloMet. My decision to work with representation and identity has been heavily influenced by Bishop’s work, and I knew early on that her work would form the foundation for this thesis.

I mainly used OsloMet’s search engine Oria to look for articles, but Google Scholar and ERIC were also used when Oria failed to deliver the results needed. I used the advanced search features to search using phrases and multiple words at the same time, and the search words used were “representation AND young adult novels AND Muslim AND identity AND education”. As my search terms were all related to education and novels used in the classroom, articles that could be relevant, but written for a different purpose, would not have appeared in my search. On Oria those search words resulted in 51 peer-reviewed articles. Naturally these 51 articles were not all relevant for my thesis, but after skimming through them and reading the ones that I knew I could use, I had a starting point. Bolderston writes that after doing the first search, “the reference lists of the articles found can be scanned for more articles that may have been missed” (Bolderston, 2008, p. 89), therefore after I had

found articles that were relevant the next step I took was to look for what they referenced and work my way backwards.

Novel selection process

In the beginning of my research process I chose novels with Muslim protagonists at random, but quickly realized I needed a certain bit of structure to my selection process. I chose to look at the competence aims and see what would be relevant to the novels I wanted to select. That was when I realized the competence aim “investigate ways of living and traditions in different societies in the English-speaking world [...] and reflect on identity and cultural belonging” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019d) was highly relevant. The first part of the competence aim helped narrow down the novels I selected to only focus on the English-speaking world, and then later on only the United States. The second part of the competence aim made it easier to select novels that contained a form of struggle relating to identity and belonging.

To gather an overview of novels featuring Muslim protagonists I used the Goodreads website. Goodreads contains reviews of different forms of literature by users as well as lists of recommendations divided into genres or keywords. I used these lists to look for young adult novels with Muslim protagonists written by Muslim authors. The novels featured in these lists often contained adult novels as well, therefore to assure that the novels were indeed young adult I read some of the reviews to gain a proper insight into what the novels were about before reading them myself. To narrow down my choices more I made sure that the novels were realistic fiction. I also read the blurb and reviews to see if the novels dealt with identity struggles. After going through the process of ensuring that the novels would be (1) suitable for a 7th grade class, (2) fell under the genre realistic fiction, (3) were authored by Muslims, (4) contained Muslim protagonists, (5) dealt with identity struggles, and (6) were set in the United States, I had 15 novels to pick from. To narrow down even more, I decided to focus on novels published in a certain time period. I did the selection process in 2022 and decided to use novels published in the three-year period between 2019 and 2022. This narrowed down the novels I had to three novels, which ended up being the three I chose.

The novels I picked were published within the last four years (2019, 2021, 2022), and little research has been done on them. I searched my three novels on Oria, and excluding reviews, there was only one article that appeared. This article looked at how to use novels as a way to

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discuss racism with students, and *Other Words for Home* (2019) was one of the novels included in the analysis (Ramirez & Donovan, 2021). Other than this one article, there appears to not have been any scholarly work done on the novels I picked.

The novels had to be read multiple times, and to make the writing process easier I created a structure I followed while reading. The first time I read the novels I did it to gain a general overview of them; to know what they were about and if they were truly fitting for my thesis. The second time reading them I had the stages written out in front of me and took notes whenever I found an instance that could fit into any of the four stages. This was then followed by placing the notes into Shannon's four stages the way I saw best fit. By doing this I managed to have specific examples relating to each stage, and could visualize whether a character went through a specific stage or not. When writing I was able to use the examples under each stage as the basis for my analysis, which made the writing process straightforward, as the majority of the work had already been done.

Chapter 2: Other Words for Home

Other Words for Home, a 2020 Newbery Honor book, is a free verse novel written by Jasmine Warga published in 2019. The novel is about 12-year-old Jude, and follows her journey from living in Syria to immigrating to the United States due to the war. She lives in Syria with her parents and older brother and is one day told that she will be going to Cincinnati to stay with her uncle along with her pregnant mother. Jude is happy in Syria, and is therefore disheartened to hear she will be leaving her home with her family and friends, but decides to be strong for her mother and unborn younger sibling. In the U.S. they stay with her uncle's family, and Jude starts attending school there. The readers are taken on a journey of Jude figuring herself out and where she belongs, and as the title suggests, finding other words for home. As the novel begins in Syria, before Jude has two conflicting identities to handle, this chapter begins with a stage 0. Jude does not appear to be in stage 1, being rejected by both cultures, therefore the remaining part of this chapter will place her in Shannon's (1988) stages 2 to 4.

Stage 0 – No conflicting identities

The novel starts off with Jude living in Syria. Syria is her birthplace, and the only home she has ever known. She only knows herself as being Syrian and Muslim, two identities that make her fit in with the people around her. Shannon's four stages focus on the lives of multicultural children, thus the four stages are not applicable in the beginning of the novel. With that being said, there are examples of Jude struggling with the concept of belonging and identity present early in the novel. As a child, dealing with identity struggles is a natural process and part of growing up. Seeing as this is before Jude is personally a part of a different culture than one she was born into, I will name it stage 0.

Jude does not wear the hijab, as she has not had her period yet. She wishes she too would come of age like her best friend Fatima so that she too can “feel like I have something worth covering” (Warga, 2019, p. 8). This is at the very beginning, and already Jude is longing to fit in. Jude enjoys watching Hollywood movies with Fatima, and while watching these movies the two best friends look for similarities between themselves and the actors on TV (Warga, 2019, p. 12). Jude admits that her dream is to be an actress and one day some other little girl will see her on screen and look for the similar facial features they might have. Despite living in Syria, she notices that the, mostly white American, celebrities she admires look different

from herself. She wishes that she could be famous so that she could be looked at and admired for her features, features that she knows are different from the ones she has seen on screen.

Jude and her family live near the beach, where many tourists come to visit. Jude, who loves being a center of attention, smiles at everyone that walks by, but notices that not all of them smile back. She admits that she wants to tell them “You don’t have to worry about me. I am just a girl who likes movies.” (Warga, 2019, p. 38). Jude’s older brother, Issa, used to watch the movies with Jude and Fatima, but as he got older he stopped. Issa is critical of the way the government works and openly opposes the politicians and the elite in the country. One day while walking on the beach with Issa, Jude looks over to the part of the beach that is closed for locals, reserved only for rich tourists (Warga, 2019, p. 19). She knows her brother hates that hotel and how it divides the people of their country even more, but she secretly dreams of one day becoming famous and coming back home and staying at that hotel and walking on the part of the beach which she is not allowed to walk on right now. Jude notices the difference between herself and the wealthy people that come to visit Syria and wishes she could be like that one day. She shows signs of wanting a different life than the one she is living and wanting to be noticed by people, and often feels guilty as she feels she is the only one who wants to change the way she lives. Thus, while Jude shows signs of longing to fit in, at this moment in the story she has no conflicting identities to relate to, which is why she is placed in stage 0. This does however change when she arrives in the United States.

Stage 2 - Acceptance of (or by) one culture, with denial of the other

As described earlier, Shannon’s stage 2 is characterized by the child being accepted in, or by, one culture, while the other culture is denied. For Jude this becomes relevant when she arrives in the U.S. and now has a conflicting identity to deal with as well. Jude feels excluded in American society because of her English-speaking ability and how different life is in the U.S. compared to in Syria.

The first sign of an apparent stage 2 is when Jude and her mother walk out of the airport in Cincinnati. As they are walking out Jude spots her uncle and his family and she is quick to analyze the situation she is in (Warga, 2019, p. 68-69). Jude looks at the situation from her uncle’s perspective and sees that it appears like they came to America because they needed saving and that her uncle is the savior. She wants to show that she did not need to be saved,

and wants to appear as independent as she can when approaching them. This is immediately forgotten when Jude spots her aunt Michelle, Uncle Mazin's white American wife, who looks and talks exactly like the movie stars Jude loves to watch. Upon arriving at Uncle Mazin's house Jude is met with an old creaky house and does not believe she will ever enjoy living there. After living at Uncle Mazin's house for a few days, the creaking sound coming from the house sounds like the house saying hello to her, and Jude feels like she has made her first American friend (Warga, 2019, p. 74).

Jude and her mother experiencing how different Uncle Mazin lives compared to themselves showcases stage 2 quite well. For Jude this is shown as trying strongly to highlight the difference between her Syrian background and the new American lifestyle she is experiencing, whereas her mother is saddened that her brother appears not to be a practicing Muslim and that he seems like a non-Syrian. Although Jude is aware of the fact that her uncle speaks Arabic, he still speaks to her in English and tries to impress her by showing her expensive computers and speakers. While Jude is impressed she avoids showing it as she believes she would be betraying her father and her home by being easily swayed by these technological gadgets (Warga, 2019, p. 75-76). Jude's mom is also not impressed by the house, which is mostly white, and says to her brother that "I don't see anything from home here," to which he responds "This is home" (Warga, 2019, p. 88). When her mom tells Jude that she does not like that Michelle had made Uncle Mazin forget his home, Jude admits that she wants to tell her mother that America "is his home now" but looking at her mother's belly she decides to stay quiet (Warga, 2019, p. 90).

Jude feels excluded, but also refuses a newfound American identity when she is around her cousin Sarah. Sarah asks her mom about when Jude and her mother are going to leave and notes that Jude cannot start school here seeing as she does not speak English (Warga, 2019, p. 78). Jude overhears this and locks herself in the bathroom trying to convince herself that she does indeed speak English, regardless of what her cousin thinks. Some days later Jude goes out to eat lunch with Sarah and aunt Michelle, and they order ham on their sandwich. Jude wants to order ham too, but thinks about how her mother would feel if she ate ham, something Muslims do not eat, and decides to order a cheese and tomato sandwich instead (Warga, 2019, p. 91). When Jude starts school, she sees Sarah standing with her friends, but Sarah ignores her, which makes her feel like she is not welcome with her and her friends (Warga, 2019, p. 114-115). When Sarah is later questioned by Jude, she responds saying she was too busy to

notice Jude, but then asks Jude if she could teach her some Arabic stating how lucky Jude is since she can speak it. While Jude appears to be in stage 2, not being recognized as an American by Sarah but also trying to not seem too American so she does not hurt her mother's feelings, Sarah is shown in a different light. Despite Sarah's actions and words towards Jude when she is with other people, when she is alone with Jude she confides in her cousin and expresses her desire for speaking her father's native language. This is the only instance in the novel where Sarah shows interest in her Arab heritage. This shows how Sarah is on a journey towards stage 3, trying to fit into both cultures in her life.

Living in the US and now being in a completely different country, Jude notices how different it is there compared to life in Syria, but also how it is similar as well. When first arriving in America, Jude cannot help but be impressed with how everything is big and fast here, and how everyone seems to be rich. However, she then starts noticing that some people beg for money and struggle to survive here as well, saying that "America, I realize, / has its sad and tired / parts too." (Warga, 2019, p. 80-82). One thing Jude notices is how Americans use labels for everything, instead of food being hummus or pita bread like it was back home, it is now Middle Eastern food (Warga, 2019, p. 92). She specifically notes that she is longer just a girl, here she is now "a Middle Eastern girl. / A Syrian girl. / A Muslim girl" (Warga, 2019, p. 92). Trying to explain the labels to herself Jude says "They help them know what to expect. / Sometimes, though, / I think labels stop them from / thinking." (Warga, 2019, p. 92). Jude now realizes that she is not accepted as an American because of these labels. This clearly shows how Jude is in stage 2 as she is not accepted by people as an American, only her Syrian Muslim identity is acknowledged.

When Jude starts school, she is lost in the hallways, both figuratively and literally, "taking wrong turn after wrong turn, / eventually ending up in the right place, / but still somehow feeling like it / is the wrong one" (Warga, 2019, p. 103). She is late on her way to pre-algebra class when she thinks about how pre Jude would have known the way to class. When she finally arrives in the classroom she notices everyone looking at her. "Pre Jude reveled in her classmates' attention, / but now I just want to blend in" (Warga, 2019, p. 104-105) is her thought when her classmates look at her, and this highlights how she does not feel like she belongs, but longs to fit in with everyone else.

When walking around the neighborhood one day Jude notices a Middle Eastern restaurant, she wants to go inside the restaurant but also does not want to walk in, and instead walks away (Warga, 2019, p. 135). Jude admits why she does not go inside:

I am scared that I do not belong in
a Middle Eastern restaurant
in the middle of America.

I am scared that the only place
in Middle America that I belong
is a Middle Eastern restaurant. (Warga, 2019, p. 136)

This highlights Jude's fear of being in stage 2, not being accepted in a Middle Eastern restaurant despite herself being Middle Eastern, or the Middle Eastern restaurant being the only place she belongs and not fitting in with the rest of America. Despite her own feelings, she braves her fears and upon entering the restaurant immediately feels at home. Here she meets Layla, whom Jude recognizes from school because she is the only girl there who wears a hijab, and they become friends.

Stage 3 - Attempting to belong to both conflicting cultures at once

In Shannon's description of stage 3, the child tries to fit into both conflicting cultures at the same time. As Jude has now started school she realizes she has to fit in with her peers not to stand out. Jude makes friends and her relationship with her uncle changes for the better, making her feel more comfortable as she tries to be a Syrian Muslim and an American.

Jude is placed in an English as a second language (ESL) class with three other students. When she first makes her way to the ESL classroom she almost does not walk in because she is embarrassed and starts remembering that her cousin said she could not speak English (Warga, 2019, p. 109). However, once she is settled and the four students start talking to each other she is immediately happy to be in that classroom. Grace, one of the students, says that some words in English are hard to differentiate "like knight and night", and upon hearing this, the other three students in the class start laughing (Warga, 2019, p. 111). Jude notes that she was relieved she finally found someone she could relate to "in this school / in this city / in this country" (Warga, 2019, p. 111). This feeling of belonging and wanting to fit in is also reflected in Jude's mother. Despite initially being shocked her brother does not go to the mosque anymore, Jude's mother starts attending the mosque and starts taking an English class

(Warga, 2019, p. 130). Jude and her mother start practicing their English together, and one day her mother says, in English, that she misses home (Warga, 2019, p. 131). Jude hugs her proudly saying that she does too. This shows how not only Jude, but her mother as well, are slowly entering stage 3 as they are both trying to belong to both of the cultures.

Jude's relationship with Uncle Mazin changes as she begins to know and understand him better. He takes her out to a steak dinner and Jude is convinced he is trying to impress her yet again (Warga, 2019, p. 124). He asks her if she is happy in the U.S. and instead of answering his question Jude starts talking about the difference between an entrée and an appetizer. He smiles at her "like he is seeing an old picture / of himself / or reliving a memory / that he had almost forgotten" and tells her that it will become easier with time (Warga, 2019, p. 126). That is when Jude realizes that he was not showing her the fancy computers and steaks to impress her, but to convince her and himself. She also notices that he reads about Syria in the newspaper a lot, and finds it comforting that even if he does not talk about Syria he still finds the time to stay updated on the war going on there (Warga, 2019, p. 167). She notices how her uncle appears to be secure in his identity, and enjoys knowing he has not forgotten his Syrian background.

Finally feeling comfortable in America, Jude walks around the neighborhood and smiles at everyone she sees, and for the first time in her life, people smile back (Warga, 2019, p. 133). As Jude's English becomes better she starts reading more and learns that many people do not want people like her to be in America (Warga, 2019, p. 170-171). One day when Jude is out with her mother they are both enjoying the Christmas decorations and Jude feels like she is invited to celebrate as well, but upon seeing her mother's headscarf a woman tells her that "You don't have to wear that anymore" and "You're in America now. You're / free" (Warga, 2019, p. 187). Both Jude and her mother are shocked and scared to hear that, but Jude tells her that they are happy and walks away. She is worried her English sounded broken, but is content having told a stranger that she was happy. Despite being initially surprised to hear a comment like that when she was enjoying herself, Jude now realizes that she has just as much right to be happy and content as everyone else does. Jude standing up for herself, and telling the woman that they are happy in America being the way they are, shows that she is balancing her two identities and is now in stage 3.

Sarah takes Jude to go sledding with her friends and on the way there she tells Jude not to be weird like Layla. Jude asks what about Layla is weird and Sarah responds saying “She just acts like she isn’t from here, you know” (Warga, 2019, p. 196). That makes Jude question her own identity “I am not from here, / that I don’t belong here, / that I will never belong here” (Warga, 2019, p. 196). She wants to defend Layla and say that she is American but Sarah had already walked away leaving Jude behind. She then thinks about how she has “to figure out how not to act weird, / trying to figure out how to belong” (Warga, 2019, p. 197). Sarah’s comment reminded Jude that no matter how much she tries to become American, she will still be questioned on her identity. Jude’s attempts at trying to belong are met with questions surrounding who she really is because despite now being in stage 3 and feeling like she is a Muslim Syrian American, she realizes that some people will still not accept her.

The school is staging a musical and Jude wants to try out for a role in the show. When she excitedly tells Layla that she is considering trying out, Layla tells her that girls like them do not have parts in the musical, “We’re the type of girls that design the sets, / that stay backstage. / We’re not girls who / glow in the spotlight” (Warga, 2019, p. 206). But Jude, who had dreamt to be on stage since she was little, simply responds “But I want to be” (Warga, 2019, p. 206). After saying that, Jude feels like Layla is looking at her differently and finally sees the real her. By admitting to herself that she wants to participate in the play, despite feeling not completely confident in her English skills, she goes back to the personality she had before immigrating. Going on stage and performing is a trait pre Jude had, not the Jude that arrived in America. But now, as she has gained friends and feels like she belongs at school she has the confidence to pursue the dreams she always has had. She is slowly but surely making her way towards stage 4, creating an identity of her own.

Jude starts wearing the hijab and quickly realizes that everyone has some sort of a reaction upon seeing the new her (Warga, 2019, p. 233). Strangers that would usually ignore her now start staring when she walks down the street. Layla’s mother kisses her on the cheek and approaches her “like I am a brand-new person” (Warga, 2019, p. 233). Aunt Michelle questions if it is truly her decision even after Jude multiple times assures her that this is what she has been waiting to do for a long time. Jude wants Aunt Michelle and the other Americans to know that “it is not only women who look like them / who are free” and that by covering her hair she is proud and wants to be seen as who she actually is (Warga, 2019, p. 235). This showcases how when she attempts to belong to both cultures she is met with reactions from

everyone, but despite this she stays firm in her identity as she is learning to be herself regardless of what people say.

An explosion happened in a city far away and Layla quickly tells Jude that she will now “learn what it means to be a / Muslim / in America” (Warga, 2019, p. 261). Jude does not want to believe what Layla told her, but that same day she starts noticing the different stares she receives, “Each glare demanding an apology / an explanation / for something / I did not do” (Warga, 2019, p. 262-263). When walking home she sees a man and smiles at him, but he does not smile back, instead he stops her “*Go back to where you came from, he says / We don’t want you here*” (Warga, 2019, p. 263). Jude freezes when she hears that. She wants to tell him that he does not have to be scared and has no reason to hate her, but all she manages to do is walk away. Jude questions why this attack was a big deal but not other attacks in Lebanon or Pakistan, to which Layla responds by explaining that it is expected to happen in those countries but not in the West (Warga, 2019, p. 270). That is when Jude realizes that Americans:

think it’s normal
for there to be violence
in places where
people like me are from,
where people like me
and people who look like me
live. (Warga, 2019, p. 271)

Later on, someone paints the word *terrorist* on Layla’s parents’ restaurant. When Jude tries to talk to Layla about it she tells her to stop and that she is lucky because “You belong somewhere. / I don’t belong anywhere. / Not here, / not there” (Warga, 2019, 280-281). Jude wants to tell her that her statement is not true, but Layla tells her that in America she will look like someone who did the attack, but if she goes home to her parents’ country she will always be the American, and concludes by saying “So you see, / I don’t belong anywhere” (Warga, 2019, 282). Jude assumed that by being born in America Layla would feel at home here, but after hearing this Jude is shocked at how Layla truly feels. By saying this, Layla places herself in stage 1, feeling rejected by both cultures, as she does not feel like she fits in anywhere.

Jude befriends a boy from class called Miles whom Layla considers weird because he wears all black outfits (Warga, 2019, p. 255). When Miles sees Jude with the hijab for the first time

he stares at her, making Jude wonder if he is looking at her hijab and deciding that she is too different now. Miles surprises her by telling her that he thinks it is cool that Jude has lived an entirely different life and Jude cannot help but be excited to receive a compliment like that (Warga, 2019, p. 257). After the terror attack Miles tells Jude that he too understands “what it’s like to not fit in. / To have people look at you like you’re different / and weird / and like that’s somehow a bad thing” (Warga, 2019, p. 267). Jude feels comforted hearing his words as she has felt out of place and *weird* several times since arriving in America. Realizing that she has someone to lean on that understands her even if it just a little bit gives Jude hope and relief.

Stage 4 - A self-created dual identity

Shannon’s stage 4 is reached when the child is able to create an identity consisting of both of the conflicting cultures. Uncle Mazin aids in Jude’s arrival at stage 4 by reminding her that she does not have to choose between belonging here or there. He wants her to know that she does not have to choose between her two identities when she can have both.

After the terror attack Jude asks her uncle “Why do they hate us?” and he reminds her that it was one person that did it and tells her that she cannot let that cause her to define the entirety of America (Warga, 2019, p. 296). Uncle Mazin tells her “You belong here. / And so do I” (Warga, 2019, p. 297). To this, Jude responds by telling him that she belongs back home too and he smiles and says “I know. / It’s not a contest between here / and there. / You don’t have to choose” (Warga, 2019, p. 297). By telling Jude this, Uncle Mazin lets Jude know that she can safely be who she wants to be, both an American and a Syrian Muslim. After going to the mosque for the first time in a while and talking to people from other Middle Eastern countries, Uncle Mazin tells Jude in Arabic that “*It felt good to talk about home with people who understood*” (Warga, 2019, p. 303-304). Jude is happy that he called Syria home because now they both consider both the creaky old house and Syria home.

By realizing that she belongs in America now, and can consider both America and Syria her home, Jude wants the people around her to know that they belong too. Jude tells Layla her painting is beautiful and she thinks that by saying that she also wants Layla to know that she belongs here (Warga, 2019, p. 311). Similarly, when Jude’s little sister is about to be born she thinks “You will belong here. You will belong wherever you want” (Warga, 2019, p. 311).

When they have the final practice for the play and clap for each other Jude is proud of what she has done and thinks “It is lovely / to be a part of something / that feels bigger than you.” (Warga, 2019, p. 328-329). After going through periods of not belonging, Jude understands the importance of feeling at home wherever one is. It was only when Jude managed to create an identity consisting of both cultures, having reached stage 4, that she truly felt happy and at home.

In the classroom

This novel shows the experiences of a Syrian immigrant arriving in the United States. The novel follows an immigrant’s journey from leaving her home to arriving in a new country. As the story of an immigrant to a predominantly non-Muslim country, *Other Words for Home* is also relevant to immigrants in Norway. 16% of Norway’s population are immigrants (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2023) and as stated earlier, the materials used in by teachers should mirror the lives of the students in the classroom as well as the lives of people outside of it.

This novel offers a mirror for students with an immigrant background. Jude’s journey of enjoying her life in her home country to feeling frustrated at not fitting in the U.S. are experiences some students could relate to. Students who were born in Norway with immigrant parents have the possibility to relate to Layla or Sarah, who offer two different representations of children of immigrants. Layla works in her parents’ restaurant and feels like she does not fit in anywhere. Sarah, on the other hand, often denies her Syrian background. She does not speak Arabic but sometimes wishes she did so she could relate more to her father’s background.

Similarly, this novel has the potential to be a window for students who are not aware of what life is like for an immigrant. Jude struggles with language, deals with racism, and misses home a lot, all of which are ways students can learn about the troubles immigrants go through. This novel also emphasizes the idea that females who wear the hijab often times wear it because they want to. For Jude it was a sign of maturing and being seen as she had something worth covering, and that was why it was important for her to start wearing the hijab. This offers a different representation than the negative one which is often presented in media, which was why Jude’s aunt wanted to ask if wearing the hijab was truly Jude’s choice. After reading about how much Jude wanted to wear the hijab, the readers, having walked through

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the sliding glass doors, might be able to relate to Jude's frustrations at the reactions she got when wearing it for the first time.

Chapter 3: Barakah Beats

Barakah Beats is a novel by Maleeha Siddiqui published in 2021 and is about thirteen-year-old Nimra Sharif who is a third-generation Pakistani Muslim. The novel follows Nimra as she leaves her small private Islamic school to start seventh grade at the local public school. Her best friend and neighbor Jenna attends this school as well, and while they always used to discuss going to the same school, Nimra cannot help but feel like Jenna ignores her when school starts. Nimra personally believes Muslims should not make music, but to make herself look cool for Jenna and win her back, Nimra joins the band Barakah Beats. The band decides to enter a talent show hosted by the mosque, and Nimra has to decide what she should do. Drop the band and risk losing her friendship with Jenna and her bandmates, or perform in the talent show and have her parents be disappointed in her for being in a band. The novel follows Nimra on her journey as she tries to figure out who she is and where she belongs in her new school with her new friends. In regards to Shannon's four stages (1988), Nimra appears to have been in all of them except stage 1. The following part of the chapter will be structured in these four stages, showing Nimra's journey from stage 2 to stage 4.

Stage 1 - Rejection by both cultures

Nimra is never presented in stage 1. In stage 1 the character would be rejected by both the cultures the character is a part of (Shannon, 1988). Nimra was homeschooled until the age of eight, and then attended a private Islamic school until the seventh grade (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 3). When the readers are introduced to Nimra she is fully content with the Muslim aspect of her identity, seeing as this is the only part of herself she has ever known. She has never not been recognized as a Muslim, having been surrounded with, and accepted by, Muslims her entire life. After starting public school and struggling to fit in, Nimra thinks back to when she attended the Islamic school and says "I miss never questioning where I belonged" (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 249).

Stage 2 - Acceptance of (or by) one culture, with denial of the other

In Stage 2 the child is accepted by one culture, but denies the other, either willingly or forcibly (Shannon, 1988). In the beginning, Nimra faces acceptance by her former school and her Muslim identity, but the American side of her identity is denied by Jenna's reaction to her hijab and Muslim identity, and her teachers' inability and unwillingness to pronounce her name correctly.

Where the story starts off Nimra is definitely secure in her Muslim identity. She has just finished memorizing the Quran, which is celebrated with a party thrown for her. The only person in Nimra's life at this point who does not practice Islam is her best friend and neighbor Jenna, whom she has been friends with since they were both four. While the two friends enjoy watching movies and gushing over celebrities together, Nimra admits that Jenna "rarely gets to see the Pakistani Muslim side of my life" (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 3). Nimra is asked to perform a part of the Quran for the guests at the party, and when she finishes and looks at the audience clapping she notices that Jenna is on her phone not paying attention to her. Nimra is fine with Jenna not caring about her Muslim side, because she does not care about sports which is a big part of Jenna's life (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 7). Later that night Jenna said she had a good time at the party, but wishes there was music and dancing (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 15). "It wouldn't have been appropriate. Besides, it's not something that our family generally does," Nimra's mom explains (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 16). Nimra then quickly changes the subject, explaining to the reader that she prefers to not discuss religion with her best friend.

Nimra first questions her identity on the first day of school when Jenna asks why Nimra is wearing her hijab as they are about to leave for school (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 28). Jenna has seen Nimra with a hijab on multiple occasions, so Nimra wonders where that thought comes from. Upon hearing this from Jenna, Nimra's parents become concerned and her dad even offers to walk with them to school, but Nimra quickly rejects his offer. With the hijab on her head Nimra makes her way to school and in her first class meets Jenna's friend Julie, who introduces herself slowly with a long pause between each word (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 35). Nimra initially wonders why Julie is speaking like that, but quickly realizes that Julie must assume she does not know English. Nimra clarifies that she does in fact speak English and Julie admits she only thought that as she heard Nimra came from a religious school. Nimra, annoyed, states she was actually born in Virginia. After that encounter she wonders why Julie would even think otherwise as Northern Virginia is a diverse area with people from all backgrounds. This encounter with Julie highlights Nimra's place in stage 2, as Julie only accepted the Muslim side of her identity while ignoring the idea of Nimra being American as well.

Nimra's old school was small and her class only consisted of her and two other girls (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 44). Navigating through the much bigger public school is a struggle for

her, and when she stands confused in the hallway nobody offers to help her. She looks over to a group of South Asian students, but they ignore her as she locks eyes with them (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 36). It was at that moment she realized she was the only one wearing a hijab at school. She feels helpless and does not understand how no one offers to help her, because if the roles were switched, she would not hesitate to help anyone if they were new.

Nimra's hijab once again becomes the topic of conversation during lunch period when she sits with Jenna and her friends, Julie, Val and Evelyn. The friend group discusses their various athletic hobbies and Nimra feels out of place sitting with them, "The more they talk, the further I get pushed out of the circle—if I was even in it to begin with" she states (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 44). When asked if she plays any sports she says she prefers drawing, and then Evelyn asks "You wouldn't be able to do sports in that thing anyway, right? Wouldn't you get super-duper hot and sweaty?" (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 45). Nimra, while offended and angry, tries to calmly explain that she simply does not enjoy sports, and also adds that "Ibtihaj Muhammad is an Olympic athlete who wears hijab" (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 44). While this happens, Jenna makes no attempt to include Nimra in the conversation, with Nimra noticing her body is facing the other girls and not towards her.

Nimra also experiences a lack of belonging when none of her teachers pronounce her name correctly, despite her continuing attempts to correct them. Nimra's name is wrongly pronounced as Neemra, but by the fourth time it happens she gives up correcting them (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 39). This contrasts the way her Islamic school teacher, Sister Sadia, used to lovingly address her as "female tiger", the Arabic meaning of her name (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 121).

Nimra was, due to her circumstances, always comfortable being a Muslim. By attending a school specifically for Muslims, she never stood out amongst her classmates. The American side of her was not a thought she had ever considered, but as she started public school she experienced things she had not met before. Jenna asking about her hijab was the first meeting she had of a culture where wearing a headscarf in public would be considered uncommon. Due to Nimra's religious background Julie approached her as if Nimra did not know English. These instances showcase Nimra being denied her American identity, and only having her Muslim identity be recognized, which places her in stage 2.

Stage 3 - Attempting to belong to both conflicting cultures at once

In stage 3 the child tries to belong to both of the conflicting cultures at the same time (Shannon, 1988). When Nimra reaches stage 3 she tries combining her Muslim identity with her newly-found American identity. Wanting to fit in with her peers she joins the band, but constantly feels guilty because it is against her and her parents' beliefs. She does however prefer making music with the band as opposed to not having any friends at school. Being in the band also leads to her gaining popularity at school, making Jenna want to spend more time with her as well. She refuses to tell her parents about the band, because she fears telling them would strain the relationship between them. Towards the end of stage 3 Nimra realizes that she needs to figure out what she wants for herself. She needs to put her own needs and herself first, not her parents, not the band, and not Jenna.

A turning point for Nimra is when she meets the band Barakah Beats. Nimra wants to pray at school and ask the principal for a quiet place, and Khadijah, a girl from Nimra's class, tells her that the band room is quiet during lunch as she also prays there. While Nimra prays the band starts practicing. To focus on her own prayer Nimra loudly recites the Arabic prayer, and when she finishes she is met with the three band members, Waleed, Bilal, and Matthew, looking at her (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 50). Nimra realizes they are all Muslim, and is shocked Matthew, who does not look like he is Muslim, practices the religion as well. She is pleased to finally meet other Muslims at school, but prefers to stay away from them as she does not like the idea of boy bands. They ask Nimra to join the band because they liked her voice, but Nimra hesitates. Even though she likes listening to music (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 16), willingly creating music goes against what she believes in, "Me, join a band? Actively helping to create music? That crosses my boundaries. I've never gone against what I believe in before," she discusses with herself (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 56). She admits that they are the first people who have been nice to her all day, and would hate to miss the possibility of making friends, so she promises the band she would think about their offer. She cannot help but think of the advice her father gave her to "Just be yourself", but to herself she thinks "I can't afford to be myself. Not in middle school. Not if I want to make new friends" (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 58). On her way home with Jenna, Nimra wants to tell her about the meeting with Barakah Beats, because she wants to "impress her and have her think I'm just as cool as the other girls" but she ultimately decided not to because Jenna would not understand why Nimra did not immediately accept their offer (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 61).

Nimra knows her parents believe Muslims are not allowed to make music. She has her entire life seen how her mother argues with her grandmother, Nano, and cannot stop thinking that if she joins the band her relationship with her parents would mirror the relationship her Mama has with her mother. She realizes that it is not a risk she is willing to take and decides to not join the band for the sake of her parents (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 70). However, Nimra still wants to join the band because that would make her look cool for Jenna and make her want to be around her at school. But at the same time, she realizes that using the Barakah Band members to gain popularity is “the most un-Islamic thought I've ever had,” (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 75-76). The next day at lunch Jenna ignores Nimra, so Nimra joins the band hoping to stay long enough for Jenna to see how cool she is, and then leave the band without her parents ever finding out (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 80). Nimra struggling to decide her future with the band highlights her being in stage 3 well. She wants to stay true to her Muslim identity, and therefore thinks joining the band would be a bad idea. However, her American identity, which is tied to the new school and Jenna, wants to fit in, and ultimately that is more important for Nimra. When Nimra is out with her parents they run into Waleed and his father. Waleed's father leads prayers at the local mosque and is highly respected in the Muslim community. Waleed tells them he wants to pursue music. Nimra's dad later admits he would be heartbroken if Nimra would go against their beliefs as Waleed is doing. Nimra starts wondering if her parents would ever trust her again if they find out she is in the same band as him (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 93).

Waleed admits that he thinks it is cool Nimra and Khadijah, who is Bilal's little sister, pray during school. Nimra cannot believe Waleed would say those words and thinks: “I don't realize how much I needed to hear them until I go to prepare for namaz with a little more skip in my step” (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 80-81). This was the first time her Muslim identity was noticed and commented on for a positive reason, which Nimra appreciated. She feels for once that her Muslim side is cool, a contrast to how she has felt around Jenna recently. Having this Muslim aspect of her identity affirmed by Waleed allows Nimra to see herself in a different light than she had when hanging out with Jenna.

Nimra says she loves being in a creative group even though it is a band because “feeling wanted trumps feeling guilty by a little. Even though I'm not being true to myself. Even though I don't want to be making music when it burns like a fire in my mind” (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 117). The members compliment her voice and her notes on songwriting. But despite

enjoying spending time with the band members and Khadjiah, she still feels like an outcast in the band because of her actual opinion on music. She fears how the others would react if they found out how she really feels about making music (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 124). She feels that if they know what kind of a Muslim she really is they would not want to be friends anymore, and probably not trust her anymore either (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 157). She constantly struggles between what she really *wants* to do, because despite feeling guilty for singing, it is still something she wants to do and she hates that feeling (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 183). The band signs up for a talent show at the mosque, and creates a new song for the competition. When Nimra hears the demo recording of it, she feels happy she helped create a song like that but stops herself and says “*You’re not supposed to be proud of it. It’s wrong.*” (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 232-233).

Nimra realizes that making music has led to her changing herself, and wonders whether she the wrong choice. Nimra goes back to her old school and hopes to feel at home in the Islamic School as she has always done. because that was the one place she felt like she belonged. When she sees that there are changes made in the few days she has been gone she cannot help but feel like she is “being replaced everywhere” (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 123), referring to her not being Jenna’s best friend anymore and now realizing that even her old school is not the way it used to be after only a week of being gone. She meets Sister Sadia who asks how she feels about now attending a new and different school, and when Nimra lies about her feelings she starts thinking of how much she has changed recently. She thinks about how the old Nimra would have never lied or used people like she is currently doing (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 123). She later catches herself lying again and cannot help but think that her lies are making her become a mess (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 158-159). She realizes that she feels shame when she is with the band making music. Being stuck in stage 3, trying to belong to both conflicting cultures, Nimra realizes she is not staying true to herself. As Shannon wrote about stage 3, “the life of the hyphen and duality is like living on a tight rope” (Shannon, 1988, p. 16), and the struggle of trying to be both Muslim and American when they strongly disagree is a challenge for Nimra. Having to hide the band from her parents and her opinions on music from her bandmates leads to Nimra lying to everyone, which she knows is wrong and wants to avoid doing.

When Nimra talks to her mother about sharing her art with the world on social media, her mother tells her that she should be “brave enough to share what you love” (Siddiqui, 2021, p.

171). Nimra thinks about how she should be brave and not lie or participate in things she does not agree with. She considers telling her mother about the band but at that moment realizes that music is not that important for her. If she wants to be brave and fight for something, it is her art. Her parents did not allow her to take art class as an elective, which led to Nimra begging to take art multiple times only to be shut down each time (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 26, 94). After the talk with her mother she yet again asks if she can take art, and now her mother says she will discuss it with her dad. For the first time in a while Nimra feels victorious.

Nimra thinks about how the entire reason the relationship between her mom and Nano is bad is because Nano does not like that her mom chose a different life than the one her grandmother had planned for her. She wonders if she is heading down the same path “by being a part of something *I don't even feel good about*. What's *wrong* with me?” (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 234). She promises herself that she's going to drop out of the band tomorrow because she can't let it split up her and her parents. She thinks that no matter what she does she will have to let someone down. “No matter what I do, I'm always disappointing someone. But as bad as it feels to let Mama and Baba or the guys down, it feels even worse to disappoint myself” (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 234).

After being told by Waleed that she does not take the band seriously she admits how she never wanted to make music in the first place because it goes against Islam and tells them she only joined to impress Jenna (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 240). Surprised she said all of that to the band members she goes off to find Jenna to tell her she no longer is part of the group. Nimra tells Jenna she dropped out and says “I—I didn't feel like I was being true to myself by being in the band” (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 244). Jenna however seems to not care about Nimra's feelings, and Nimra responds by telling Jenna that she hasn't paid attention to her since she realized she was going to wear a hijab to school and “I'm not going to be friends with someone who doesn't care about me for who I am. You might be embarrassed by it, but I'm *not*.” (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 245). She then walks away from Jenna and realizes that by revealing how she really felt she had lost all her friends.

At home Nimra is devastated at what has happened since she started public school. She picks up her Quran and starts reciting it from memory, but struggles to remember. She thinks about how she is struggling doing something she was known to be good at. “I miss never questioning where I belonged. I miss not having to do wrong things to make other people

happy. I wish I hadn't lied to anyone or changed into someone I can't stand to get Jenna back" she says while crying (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 249). Her parents come in and ask what's wrong she tells them that she wants her old life back (p. 249). After explaining everything about the band, Jenna, and why she hid it from her parents, they comfort her and tell her that she needs to figure out what she wants to do for herself.

Nimra's mother tells her how she struggled with depression after giving birth to Nimra, and music helped her battle the depression (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 252). Her mom has created an identity which she is happy with, in which she knows she can listen to music and be content. Her mother reminds her that music is a subject that Muslims deal with in different ways, which shows that her mother is in stage 4. She becomes a guide for Nimra to arrive at stage 4 by wanting Nimra to know that Nimra too can decide to do exactly what she wants.

Stage 4 - A self-created dual identity

In stage 4 the child must create an identity consisting of the two cultures. The child has to pick and choose what aspect of each culture he or she wants, which in turn leads to the child creating his or her own identity (Shannon, 1988). As Shannon wrote, Nimra reaches stage 4 once she talks to her parents about the struggles she is facing. Her parents remind her that she is the only one in charge of who she is and help her reach stage 4. Nimra admits that she knows exactly what she wants (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 253). She does not want to be a member of the band anymore, but wants to still keep her friendship with the three boys and Khadijah.

Nimra meets the band and apologizes for everything, and lets them know that she will participate in the talent show but leave the band after that. Together they finalize the song, and on the day of the talent show after finishing the song, Nimra sings a verse of the Quran, Surah Yasin, to round off their performance (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 268). After this Nimra realizes that what she truly wants to pursue is not music, but art. Using an art metaphor Nimra describes her journey of finding herself and thus creating her own identity: "As long as there are those who love us for who we are, we don't have to be the rough sketch version of ourselves. We can be the final product." (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 271).

The verse from the Quran that Nimra recites at the end is the same one she recited at the very beginning of the novel. The first time Nimra performed it she was disappointed that Jenna

was not paying attention. The second time around, with friends on stage with her, she now felt happy and basked in the glory of performing in front of people. Having reached stage 4 she is now comfortable with who she is and is happy being her Muslim Pakistani American self.

At the end of the novel there is an author's note that discusses the relationship between Islam and music. Siddiqui points out that Muslims follow their religion in different ways, and that "Nimra and her family's opinions are just one of a multifaceted, diverse, and beautiful global community" (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 278). Showing that Siddiqui is also in stage 4, wanting to highlight the diversity that exists within the religion.

In the classroom

This novel highlights the different interpretations of, and cultures, within Islam. These differences can act as both mirrors and windows. Firstly, there is the differing relationship to music all the Muslim characters have. Nimra admits that she enjoys listening to music, but does not want to participate in making it as she believes that is a major sin. Nimra's mother tells her that when she was depressed, music is what helped her through her depression. Waleed, Bilal and Matthew, who are all Muslim, believe they can make music. They know their music makes people happy, and that is what they want to do. These all demonstrate the various beliefs individual Muslims have. It also demonstrates to both Muslims and non-Muslims the different interpretations within Islam.

Furthermore, the band members are different ethnicities, highlighting that there is no one way to look Muslim. Waleed is ethnically Pakistani like Nimra, Bilal and Khadijah are both Somali and Matthew is a White convert. This diversity is also visible on the cover of the novel which showcases the five band members, making it potentially encouraging for students to read novels as they might see someone that looks like themselves represented. A white Muslim might not fully relate to what Nimra experiences, but could relate to Matthew admitting that people are always surprised to find out he is Muslim too.

This also emphasizes the importance of not assuming that simply because a book has Muslim characters, all Muslims are represented in that book. This challenges Bishop's mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors metaphor. A Muslim student might see a mirror in Nimra and her relationship to music, whilst another Muslim student might want to be a singer and

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does not agree with Nimra's views. For the second student, Nimra is a window, despite both of them being Muslim. When reading this novel, the second student will go through the sliding glass door and realize why Nimra is opposed to being in a band.

In the acknowledgments the author highlights that the book is written for Muslims children who feel as if they do not see proper representation of themselves. Siddiqui specifically writes "I hope Nimra's journey to self-acceptance brings you hope and courage to live your own lives without worrying about what other people will think" (Siddiqui, 2021, p. 282), encouraging the readers to reach stage 4 on their own terms.

Chapter 4: You Truly Assumed

You Truly Assumed is a young adult novel written by Laila Sabreen published in 2022. The novel follows three Black Muslim girls, Sabriya, Zakat, and Farah, as they deal with the aftermath of a terror attack and create an online blog where they share their feelings. The blog becomes a safe place for them as they battle Islamophobia in real life. Readers of the blog comment how they relate to the posts and how much they need a platform like this where they feel like they belong, but when hate comments reach their blog the three girls have to make a decision. They have to decide whether to delete the blog and the online community they have created or keep the blog but deal with negative comments.

The story takes place during the month of June and all the girls will be high school seniors when summer ends. Sabriya is a ballerina and lives in Virginia with her Muslim dad, Christian mother, and little sister. Her goal is to attend a ballet intensive program and she is working hard to audition for it. Zakat lives in Lullwood, Georgia and loves drawing and dreams of becoming an animator. Her parents oppose the idea of her studying something that is not guaranteed a stable career, but Zakat tries hard to convince them. During the summer break she works at a bookstore with her best friend. Finally, there is Farah, who lives in California with her mother. Her father lives in Massachusetts and for the month of June she stays with him and his family. She enjoys programming and attends a computer science course at a local college when visiting her father.

Lack of stage 1

Shannon's stage one focuses on the child being rejected by both cultures, but in this novel none of the three protagonists appear in stage 1. Being Black is not something the girls can change or refuse in any way, therefore they have been regarded as Black their entire lives. Due to this fact, the three girls have never been rejected by both cultures, and thus have never been in stage 1.

Unlike the other novels considered in this thesis, the characters in *You Truly Assumed* appear to move back and forth between stages. This would suggest that the stages are not as linear and progressive as Shannon's analysis implies. When the readers are introduced to the three girls Sabriya seem to be steady in stage 3, while Zakat and Farah are in stage 4, having created their own identities based on the cultures they are a part of. As Shannon (1988) wrote,

stage 3 is when the child attempts to belong to both cultures at the same time, while in stage 4 the child itself creates an identity based on the two cultures. The girls do, however, mention the hardships they went through to reach the place they are today. All three girls are narrators in the story, and the following analysis will be divided into three to reflect this. The chapter begins with Sabriya's journey through the stages, followed by Zakat's, and, finally, by Farah's.

Sabriya

Stage 2 - Acceptance of (or by) one culture, with denial of the other

In Shannon's stage 2, the child is accepted by one culture, but denied by the other (Shannon, 1988). Sabriya feels that it can sometimes be "exhausting living at the intersection where people in both communities don't see" her (Sabreen, 2022, p. 46). When she meets Muslims who are not Black, they are surprised to find out she is Muslim because "they are shocked that Black Muslims actually exist" (Sabreen, 2022, p. 46). When she meets other Black people, on the other hand, they always tell her that she does not look Muslim. This showcases stage 2 well, because for Sabriya both cultures seem to deny the Muslim side of her identity.

Shifting between stage 3 and 4

Sabriya appears to move between stage 3 and 4 throughout the story. She often mentions how she has managed to create an identity of her own that she is content with as stage 4 suggests, but she also admits that there are struggles at attempting to belong in both conflicting cultures as stage 3 indicates. The rest of the section dedicated to Sabriya's journey will show her navigating through both of these stages.

Sabriya is in ballet class in Downtown Washington DC when there is an explosion at a metro station near the Capitol. Her first question when her dad calls her is if they have mentioned the attacker's religion (Sabreen, 2022, p. 14). When the attacker's name is revealed to be Hakeem Waters Sabrina hopes he is not Muslim "because if it turns out that they are, then the consequences of their actions will be put on Muslims across the country" (Sabreen, 2022, p. 15). She checks Twitter and as she expected the people are blaming the entirety of Islam for the attack. She always wears a necklace with a charm that says Allah, and quickly closes Twitter because "too many of those comments will make my necklace feel as if it's choking me" (Sabreen, 2022, p. 16).

In the first entry on the blog *You Truly Assumed* (YTA) Sabriya writes how she hoped the attacker wasn't Muslim and that it is terrifying how names "speak for someone before they're given the chance to even open their mouth. Names can decide between [...] those who can tell their own story and those whose stories are assumed before they can even pick up a pen" (Sabreen, 2022, p. 55). She also adds that because she is a Black Muslim woman people judge her before knowing her, and that is why she prefers journaling. By journaling she has the opportunity to tell her own story. On the blog Sabriya writes "I know what it's like to feel unseen and unheard. To read books or watch shows and not see yourselves represented, or to see yourselves misrepresented [...] Everyone deserves to see themselves represented as the protagonist" (Sabreen, 2022, p. 95). Sabriya appears to almost want to go above stage 4. By sharing her thoughts and experiences she has the potential to guide other young people who are dealing with things she has already gone through. She can, and wants to, be a mirror for her readers.

Sabriya puts on gospel music to calm herself down after the attack and admits that she previously used to think she was not Muslim enough because she listened to gospel (Sabreen, 2022, p. 47). She always used to think that she had to prove herself when she was younger because receiving gifts in Ramadan as well as on Christmas and listening to gospel meant she was doing something wrong. That was when she started wearing her Allah necklace so that people could see it and hopefully know she was Muslim. But after a while she realized that "I don't have to prove myself to anyone, and that's really all there is to it [...] Now, I only wear my Allah necklace for me" (Sabreen, 2022, p. 47). This shows her journey through the stages leading up to stage 4. She used to feel like she was not Muslim enough, but now knows that she only has herself to convince. She has managed to create her own identity that she now feels happy with.

Sabriya writes about how her identity as a Black Muslim woman has always been politicized. She has also experienced other people trying to highlight one of these while minimizing the others, and she admits that she used to do the same until she realized all three of them were her. "I'm Black and Muslim and a young woman. Have you ever felt like this before? Feeling like you have to separate your different identities to fit a particular space?" she asks the readers on her blog, wanting to spark a conversation about belonging (Sabreen, 2022, p. 160). Sabriya receives a comment on the blog by a Muslim woman of color who wrote that she felt

seen by her post and Sabriya admits to herself that she has never fully seen herself represented in the “mainstream Muslim community” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 82). If she did try to participate in the Muslim community her being Black was not acknowledged, “and those two identities are so tangled that I can’t separate them” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 82). She tried for years to separate the two identities to fit into each group but realized she was breaking off a piece of herself and trying to fit them into different puzzles when they all belonged to the same one. Highlighting how she has been through the different stages of belonging, but is now in stage 4. Now she has created her own identity and she is happy someone else saw themselves reflected in her words.

All the dance auditions Sabriya had planned to audition for end up being canceled due to the attack and her mother tells her it would be better to change her plans for the summer. Her mom tries to convince her by telling her that even though she could audition in a different city, her community here needs her. Sabriya responds by reminding her that it does not seem like Muslims are needed here recalling the Tweets she had read earlier and concludes by telling her “maybe you don’t get that” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 46). While Sabriya admits it was harsh of her to say that, she truly believes that her Christian mother does not understand everything that she has to deal with as a Muslim. When her father called her earlier, she asked him about the attacker’s religion and her father immediately understood why she asked that. Her mother on the other hand, despite living with Muslims, does not follow Islam herself and because of this is not affected by Islamophobia the same way Sabriya does. When asked to help the community that needs her, her mother sees a community that needs help to rebuild itself, while Sabriya sees a community that thinks she could potentially harm people. Here she puts her Muslim identity first, instead of the Black American one her mother wants her to put forward. She shows how comfortable she is in her identities, that her Muslim part comes first, and highlights the difference between stage 3 and 4. In stage 3 she would have tried to make a decision that would have made both of aspects of her identities happy simultaneously, but in stage 4 she knows that she can choose what is more important to her.

Sabriya’s mother suggested they help the community so her entire family decided to volunteer to help out families who were affected by the attack. They are divided into groups and Sabriya’s group leader is coincidentally her father’s new boss, Mr. Smith. The boss makes comments about Sabriya being Muslim and asks about her blog. She wonders if there is a reason he acts like that or “maybe I’m reading too deeply into his comments” (Sabreen, 2022,

p. 171). Sabriya later sees a comment Mr. Smith had started writing on Free the Right, an alt-right website, about how “there needs to be increased surveillance of Muslim communities inside and outside the DC area” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 232). She starts worrying about how he could leak private information about her on this site. When Mr. Smith sees her looking at his computer he dismisses her as if he has not done anything wrong. Sabriya thinks about it and realizes he does not feel guilty about the comments because he truly believed he did not do anything wrong. “He’s likely felt not even an ounce of anxiety or paranoia, unlike what many Muslims have felt since the terrorist attack. [...] The privilege.” she thinks to herself (Sabreen, 2022, p. 232). She doesn’t want to be seen as an angry Black woman but at that moment she doesn’t care because her anger is justified. Mr. Smith said that by broadcasting that they were Black Muslim girls they should be expected to receive negative comments. Comments like what Mr. Smith was writing are what causes the fear that Sabriya has felt since the attack first happened. She first read the Tweets, then later received hate comments on her own blog, but the comment Mr. Smith was writing while she was standing in the same room made her sense the severity of the situation. The comments made make her doubt if it was worth the risk to be a vocal Black Muslim if it could affect her and her family. This situation could be seen as pushing Sabriya back into stage 3, where she had to figure out a way to belong in both her identities. Whereas she had previously felt like she knew exactly who she was, not knowing whether publicly expressing her religion was a good idea or not made her question her identity.

Sabriya’s mom asks what happened with Mr. Smith and Sabriya thinks about how her mom will never understand what it means to be Muslim, but she knows that “she’s always been proud and supportive of who I am and what I do, including *You Truly Assumed*. She’s always been accepting of Islam and my faith” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 240). After telling her mom everything about Mr. Smith and hearing her mom saying she will work out the problem, Sabriya is relieved to hear she does not always have to be perfect. Mr. Smith is her dad’s boss and when explaining the situation to her father, he references her favorite verse from the Quran, “if you keep holding on to the rope of Allah, then you’ll get all the good that He intends for you to have” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 265). Her dad also tells her about when he started college, people told him he was only accepted because he checked “off the majority of their diversity boxes. I was Black, Muslim, and first-generation, a triple whammy” so he spent the first year hiding, but he realized if Allah put him there then he had no reason to hide (Sabreen, 2022, p. 266). Her father tells her about his journey to stage 4, and by sharing his story he aids

in guiding Sabriya there as well. He helps her realize that she does not need to pay attention to what other people say about her, and that the only thing she needs to remember is to have faith and believe in herself.

When receiving a hate message on the blog, Sabriya decides to leave the comment up because “if this person wants to hide their face behind a screen, then the whole world is going to see what they do show: their hate” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 122). After a while the comments start increasing and they assume it is because the blog was named on an alt-right website. When the hate comments overflow the comment section Sabriya debates deleting the blog. The three girls discuss it and decide to keep the blog up but not post anymore. Sabriya picks up her journal and writes that she does not want to be silenced. She says she has to continue with the blog “so that when other young Muslim women come after me and they speak, their voices don’t only echo in isolation. But [...] move mountains, create waterfalls, mend hearts, and make this world closer to what it could be” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 274).

Despite feeling as if she was at stage 4 in the beginning of the novel, the hostility Sabriya was met with both online and offline made her feel as if she could not be Black and Muslim as proudly as she wanted to be. But she realized that she needed to continue with the blog and not let the negativity stop her, because by being at the front and speaking up she can help others that are struggling as well. Sabriya, now being fully content with the identity she has created, wants other young Muslims to also be able to create an identity they are happy with.

Zakat

Stage 2 - Acceptance of (or by) one culture, with denial of the other

While Zakat is mainly presented in stage 4, she does admit that she has felt like she was in stage 2 before. She has never lived in a place where she is the religious minority. She says that there are only 5 black Muslims in Lullwood, two of which are her father and herself. Usually, she does not notice that she is the one of the only Black people around because there are many Muslims around her, however “sometimes that comes at the expense of erasing or minimizing my Blackness because Black Muslims are often overlooked, not only in Lullwood but also the Ummah” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 28). It appears she sometimes feels like she is in stage 2, accepted by one culture but denied by the other, making it seem like she floats between the stages being affected by how people around her act.

Stage 3 – Attempting to belong to both conflicting cultures at once

Zakat has lived in the same place her entire life and has attended an Islamic girls' school since kindergarten. As a Black hijab wearing girl in Lullwood she has always felt safe, but despite this she fears that staying here could make her feel like she is living in a bubble with no contact with the outside world. When Zakat first hears about the attack near the Capitol she also asks if the attacker was Muslim. She goes to the mosque to meet her parents upon hearing the news and is instantly comforted as she feels like the mosque is like her other home. In the mosque Zakat feels like the Muslim community stand united together after what had happened, because even though none of them were directly connected to the attack, they know that they will be seen as accountable because of their faith. Zakat appears to be in stage 3, claiming herself as someone who is both Black and Muslim and feels that she is a part of both, but still longing for a place where she can feel fully like herself.

Stage 4 – A self-created dual identity

Once Zakat starts working on the blog, she finally realizes that she can be a Black Muslim and does not have to choose between being Black or Muslim. Zakat wants to pursue art but her parents tell her that she needs a more stable career. She wants to put Black hijabis “on the page and on the screen” in animation (Sabreen, 2022, p. 31). When she first reads Sabriya's blog post she cannot help but relate to her words. She feels like she has to do something about Islamophobia and to support her community, and thinks that by joining the blog she could help create change. She asks her parents, but they refuse by telling her that people online can be mean and the blog is not as safe as Lullwood is. When someone vandalizes the Islamic School for boys Zakat is shocked and realizes that instead of Muslims being scared and hiding, they need to do something bigger, and she immediately sends Sabriya a message about joining the blog. She hopes that by posting online and seeing the comments she will receive, she could show her parents “what art can do. What I can do” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 109). She also hopes that by posting her art on the blog she “could help other Muslims feel seen, like the way Bri's writing does for me. I could make a difference. I could do something” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 108). After joining YTA and receiving praise on her artwork in the comment section Zakat realizes that “my art is my voice and it can be heard beyond Lullwood” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 185). At this moment she is secure in her identity as a Black Muslim and knows that on the blog her entire identity would be acknowledged, and we see her be in stage 4. Like Sabriya,

Zakat also appears to want to go above and beyond stage 4. Sabriya's writing helped Zakat feel seen, and Zakat wants the same to happen to other young Muslim girls seeing her artwork. Zakat wants Muslim women to have a place in art, and believes that posting on the blog could be a good way to put herself out there.

Seeing the rise in Islamophobia after the attack Zakat realizes that "If I put my pencils and pens down, I'll be giving in to the hate. And I can't let the hate win" (Sabreen, 2022, p. 185), and does not want the hate to stop her from drawing on the blog. However, she one day receives a threatening email on her school email address, and after talking to her parents, decides to quit working on the blog. The threatening email came from Asher Anderson, a lacrosse player from Zakat's rival high school. He is known for his graffiti and Zakat fears he is behind the vandalization of the boys Islamic School. Zakat talks to Imam Farad, an imam at the local mosque, about her struggles, regarding the blog, pursuing art, and the situation with Asher. Imam Farad tells her to follow her heart and that she is not alone in her feelings and reminds her that there is "no right or wrong answer, only the answer that is right for you" (Sabreen, 2022, p. 279). Imam Farad becomes a guide helping Zakat understand that what she needs and wants to do depends on herself and no one else. After debating with herself, Zakat decides to confront Asher. She tells him that she is not scared of him and that he has no control over her feeling powerless anymore. "For the first time in a long time I feel completely free, bound by nothing but Allah, gravity, and air that smells like home" she says while walking away and says she feels invincible (Sabreen, 2022, p. 283-284). Through her talk with Imam Farad and the confidence she gained from working on the blog, she was able to stand up for herself.

By not working on the blog Zakat feels like a part of herself is missing, and that was because YTA ended up becoming a second home to her. When she joins the blog again Sabriya says welcome home to her and Zakat is happy to hear that because she knows those words were true for both her and the two other girls (Sabreen, 2022, p. 318). When she meets Imam Farad later on, she is told she has grown a lot this past month and Zakat thinks to herself that "With Allah's grace, a lot of tears, my sketchbook, and Bri's and Farah's friendship, I made it through the anger, sadness, and fear. I couldn't be prouder of me" (Sabreen, p. 331). By leaving the blog Zakat realized that the one place where she felt like she truly belonged was taken away from her. The blog was the first place she felt like she was truly in stage 4, having created an identity consisting of both her cultures. YTA was a place where she was allowed to

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be Black and Muslim, and those two identities coexisted. The blog also become a way for her to become a guide to help other young people reach stage 4, allowing her to become a sort of guide on their journey.

Farah

The novel begins with Farah comfortable in stage 4, feeling confident in her identity as a Black Muslim. When visiting her father, whom she does not have a good relationship with, and staying with his family, she feels that they do not acknowledge the Muslim side of her identity. Starting in stage 4, she then enters stage 2, before finally arriving in stage 4 again once she feels like her father's family accepts her for who she is. When seeing the YTA posts, Farah too relates with Sabriya's words. As someone who enjoys coding, Farah notices the layout of the blog and asks Sabriya to help with the technological aspect of the blog. Farah does not have an active role in writing for the blog, but does enjoy reading the comments and making sure the site runs smoothly.

Stage 4 - A self-created dual identity

Farah lives in California with her Muslim mother but visits her father in Massachusetts for the month of June. When attending a computer science course at a college her father enrolled her in, Farah notices she is the only person of color in class. The teacher asks if anyone has any experience with web design and when she raises her hand someone tells her to stop showing off because "You already stick out enough" (Sabreen, 2022, p. 209). After class Jamilah, a Black girl who arrived late, tells her to not take the comment too seriously. She then tells Farah about her friend Khadijah who was killed in a mosque attack and when Farah sees her photo she thinks about how that could have easily been her. Jamilah tells her about the vigil that will be held for Khadijah, and Farah asks if there's anything she could do, because even though she did not know her she could not help but feel like she saw herself in the death of Khadijah. "Black girls, especially Black Muslim girls like me, rarely get the justice that they deserve" and "I'm going to do what I can to take a stand for Khadijah. And for me" Farah thinks, seeing Khadijah's death and realizing that could happen to her as well (Sabreen, 2022, p. 211). The way Farah reacted hearing about Khadijah's death shows how she is in stage 4, having created her own identity. Farah, who is Black and Muslim, saw the photo of Khadijah and realized that she needed to help her because if she did not do anything, she had a feeling no one else would either. Having lived her entire life as both Black and Muslim she knows the

way people react towards people with her background. The boy in class telling her that she sticks out enough was an example of how she is told to not take up too much space. Knowing that, Farah wants to do exactly that, make sure to help remember Khadijah as much as she can.

Stage 2 - Acceptance of (or by) one culture, with denial of the other

When Farah comes home she tells her father, his wife, and his step-daughter about the vigil. Ally, his step-daughter, says she wants to attend the vigil as well to support a friend of hers, but her mother says no because she had heard of threats and does not want to risk Ally going. Farah thinks Ally should be allowed to go, because “Not everyone gets the privilege of being shielded” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 216). Her father’s wife, Jess, tells Farah that she should also consider not going while her father, Tommy, stays silent. Farah believes that by reacting this way they are choosing not to see and care about her. She asks them “Do you even understand what a death like this means?” and Jess just asks “A death like this?” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 218). Farah leaves the conversation but later thinks “A death like this death. A death like mine. A death like Mom’s. A death like Khadijah’s. A death like Bri’s. A death like Zakat’s. A death. A death. A death” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 219). When Farah heard about Khadijah’s death, she realized that the girl who was killed was just a normal Muslim girl. She realized that this death could easily have been hers, or someone she loves and cares about. When Jess and Tommy ignored Khadijah’s death Farah felt like they were ignoring the Muslim side of her, and thus invalidating her identity. Despite being comfortable in her identity earlier, now being with her father’s family it feels as though she is in stage 2 rather than stage 4. One part of her identity, her race, is accepted, though her religion is not.

Stage 4 - A self-created dual identity

After having a talk about the vigil with Tommy, they agree that Ally and Farah can go with him. Farah felt like Jess had something against her because of the way she had been treated. One day her baby sister, Emma, addresses her as sissy for the first time because Jess had taught Emma that. After being called “new sissy” Farah said “there’s a sense of belonging that I didn’t have when I first got here” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 294). After thinking about how she has been accepted into the family for who she is, she thinks about how she does not “have to choose one part of my life over the other because this too is my family. I can have both. I want both” (Sabreen, 2022, p. 295). When they are at Khadijah’s vigil Ally says she is glad

she came, and when Farah looks at the crowds of people all gathered for one person she says me too. After the vigil Farah's mom calls and asks her how she feels and Farah responds "it's like someone superglued all the pieces I didn't know were broken back together. And now I'm going back home to Inglethorne feeling whole" and "it taught me that I can belong to more than one place and not lose anything from the first." (Sabreen, 2022, p. 336). When asked to say something on the blog towards the end of the novel Farah is unsure, but she writes "don't be afraid to tell your story, in whatever form that takes for you. The world needs it." (Sabreen, 2022, p. 342). This showcases how Farah wants the readers not to be silenced and stand up for what they believe in. When Farah first arrived at her father's place she felt like her Muslim identity was not acknowledged which put her in stage 2, but having a talk with her father and making him realize why attending the vigil was important to her, she felt like her Muslim identity was appreciated again, which is when she appears at stage 4 for a second time.

In the classroom

This novel offers different representations of Black Muslims in the United States. An important theme is the feeling that two aspects of one's identity are not equally accepted. All three girls mentioned that their Muslim identity was ignored in favor of their Black identity. The blog became a place where Sabriya, Zakat and Farah were allowed to be Black and Muslim. They all mentioned feeling that they did not fit in at all times, constantly being judged by either the Black community or the Muslim community, or sometimes even both. They managed to create a safe space for themselves where they could post their feelings and connect with their readers. By posting their experiences on the blog they were able to be mirrors to their Black Muslim readers and also be windows to readers who are either non-Black or non-Muslim or neither.

Students in 7th grade are between the ages 12 and 13, and are a couple of years younger than the characters depicted in this novel. The three girls have the ability to act as windows for younger readers. Belonging and struggling with one's identity are something every person goes through, and by reading that one has the possibility to engage with it, it can help students find the courage and motivation to deal with it themselves. It can also act as a mirror, helping students realize that they are not alone in feeling that way. Sabriya asks her readers once if they have ever felt like they have to separate their different identities to fit in somewhere

(Sabreen, 2022, p. 160). This book can be used as a way to start a discussion on belonging by using Sabriya's blog post as a starting point.

This novel also highlights how the stages are not linear and progressive. Farah was comfortably in stage 4, being a Black Muslim, but when she was visiting her father and was asked to not attend Khadijah's vigil it seemed as if she was in stage 2. As this goes against what the stages originally intended the journey of belonging to be, Farah's story has the opportunity to offer a different representation of finding out one's identity. As Farah's environment changed, so did her feeling of belonging, and this could be a way for students to see that one does not automatically fit in everywhere, but that it is a process one might have to go through multiple times.

Conclusion

This study has explored identity and belonging in three Muslim American young adult novels, *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga (2019), *Barakah Beats* by Maleeha Siddiqui (2021), and *You Truly Assumed* by Laila Sabreen (2022). Utilizing the framework of George Shannon (1988), this study has theorized identity and belonging as a process, following stages outlined by Shannon, ranging from stage 1 to stage 4. The four stages showcase the journey many multicultural children go through in the process of creating their identity and finding a place to belong.

As this study has shown, stories about identity and belonging are not a linear or progressive process, but may begin at stages other than Shannon's stage 1 and may move back and forth between stages. When readers are introduced to Jude in *Other Words for Home* she is not a part of two cultures. She is therefore placed in a stage 0. When immigrating to the United States, Jude experiences being only recognized as a Syrian Muslim, but having her American identity denied of people around here, placing her in stage 2. She enters stage 3 as she gets more comfortable in the new country, and with the help of her uncle she reaches stage 4 and manages to create a Muslim Syrian American identity she is content with. Nimra in *Barakah Beats* has always been comfortable in her Muslim identity. When she starts a new school she quickly realizes that everyone ignores her American identity, and she feels that only her Muslim side is acknowledged, placing her in stage 2. Nimra enters stage 3 and decides to be a part of both cultures to make her friends happy, but faces problems when she joins a band

which she thinks goes against her and her parents' beliefs. After talking to her parents Nimra figures out that the only person she needs to make happy is herself, and creates a Muslim American identity that she is happy with, and finally reaches stage 4. In *You Truly Assumed* the three protagonists Sabriya, Zakat, and Farah are never seen in stage 1, being rejected by both cultures. They are Black Americans and have always been recognized as such. All three girls show signs of having been in stage 2, having felt like their Muslim identity has not been accepted at different points in their life. After working on a blog together and realizing that they are both Black and Muslim they all manage to reach stage 4. Sabriya and Zakat also show signs of wanting to go beyond stage 4 by wanting to be guides that can help other young Muslims work on figuring out their own identities.

As Norway is getting more and more diverse, it is important and necessary that students learn about the diversity that exists in the country in a safe classroom environment. LK20, the curriculum, states that after 7th grade students should “read and listen to English language [...] literature for children and young people [...] and talk about the content” and “investigate ways of living and traditions in different societies in the English-speaking world [...] and reflect on identity and cultural belonging” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019d). By using these three novels in the classroom and talking about them one has the possibility to explore how people in the United States live and discuss identity and belonging. LK20 also focuses on helping pupils appreciate the differences between humans and to help them develop their own identities (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a, 2019c). By seeing how the characters in these novels struggle with their identities but overcome the struggles in the end, students have the possibility to learn that they are not alone in dealing with identity issues. Some of the characters become more secure in the identities by talking about their struggles with other people, which can help students realize that they are allowed to seek help if they are having a difficult time.

The importance of including Muslim, and other minority, literature in the classroom can be explained using Bishop's (1990) mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors metaphor. These three novels can act as windows and sliding glass doors for students who are not Muslims. Students who are not familiar with Islam can through these novels learn more about how some Muslims live. The novels offer diverse representations of Muslim and show how Muslims have different relations with music, attending Mosques, and wearing the hijab. These differences highlight how there is no one way to be a Muslim and reminds the readers

that religion can be practiced in various ways. The characters in these three novels can also act as mirrors for Muslim students, students of immigrant backgrounds, students who are children of immigrants, and students who are Black. By allowing these students to see themselves represented in the literature used in the classroom one has the possibility to strengthen their sense of belonging. However, it is also important to remember that even though these stories can be mirrors for these students, the same stories can also be windows and sliding glass doors for the very students. A Black Muslim living in Norway might be able to relate to some of the struggles the characters in *You Truly Assumed* experience, however the struggles the characters face being Black Americans are concepts the students will not be able to relate to. Therefore, the Black American identities presented can also serve as windows for Black Muslims in Norway. And finally, but also most importantly, these novels are not meant to act as mirrors for Muslim students only. Identity and belonging are two concepts every human can relate to which transcend age, religion and any other factor. These stories show the beauty of finding a place where one can belong. It is only when we are comfortable in our identities that we can be happy and enjoy life.

Limitations of the study

These novels could also be looked at through an intersectional lens. The novels all focus on characters that are Muslim and American, but they are also Syrian, Pakistani, or Black. As the characters are all also female, they experience life differently than their male counterparts, especially regarding the hijab three of the five characters wear. One could also look at the distinction in relationship with music Nimra in *Barakah Beats* has and Waleed, with the same ethnic background as Nimra, has, highlighting how they practice religion differently. In an intersectional analysis a Muslim is more than *just* a Muslim. This could be interesting to look at as different characteristics affect the lives the characters live and their identities, however due to the scope of this thesis this was omitted.

While the novels are all suitable for a 7th grade classroom, the reading levels in the classroom vary, and so do they in the three novels. *Other Words for Home* is a free verse novel which can be used in the classroom in differing ways, either by reading the entire book or looking at the different sections in the novel separately. *You Truly Assumed* tackles more mature themes, such as a terror attack, and also focuses on three different characters at the same time which

might be difficult for some students to follow. The fact that the novels suit different reading levels is an interesting discussion, however it goes beyond the scope of this study.

Implications for future research

Shannon's four stages theory (1988) was here used to show how Muslim American protagonists handle their two conflicting identities in three young adult novels. Only three were selected due to the scope of this thesis, however, there are numerous other Muslim young adult novels that could also be analyzed using these four stages. One could also look at one novel in depth and analyze the different characters in that specific novel. Novels like *Barakah Beats* offer different representations and all the characters could be looked at through the four stages.

Since Shannon wrote about the four stages in 1988 there has been an increase in published multicultural literature and also young adult literature in general. Shannon's theoretical framework has the possibility to be applied to all literature where the characters are dealing with issues regarding identity and belonging. This thesis only focused on Muslim American literature, however there is a plethora of other multicultural literature that could be analyzed using this framework as well. Superle looked at Indian characters living in the West (2010) and Leu placed Asian Americans in these four stages after interviewing them (2010), but it would be interesting to see if the four stages could be applied to other types of literature as well.

Shannon wrote how identity and belonging is a process. After each chapter I wrote how the novels have the possibility to be both mirrors and windows for pupils in the classroom. It would be interesting to see how these novels would function in an extensive reading program in Norwegian schools. Could these novels be mirrors and windows that way it was written in this thesis, or do the pupils have different reactions than what is expected? It would be fascinating to see if the results align with Bishop's mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors metaphor, or if the results end up challenging it.

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