The Malleability of Identity

An Exploration of the Muslim-Arab Detroit Community

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Introduction

In comparison to other Arab-American populations in the United States, the concentrated population of Arab Americans in Michigan and their institutional strength within the state make it a unique community. Indeed, Michigan boasts the largest and most diverse population of Arab Americans in the United States, most of whom live in or in near proximity to the cities of Detroit and Dearborn. Estimates of the number of Arab Americans living in the state range from between 190,000 and 500,000.¹ Not surprisingly, given these numbers, the members of the Arab Detroit populace are very civic minded and Michigan has become the national center for many of the most well established Arab American political, social and religious institutions representing their communities both on a local and national level.² These include the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS), the Arab American National Museum (AANM), the Center for Arab American Philanthropy (CAAP), the National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC), the Islamic Center of America (ICA),³ the American Arab Chamber of Commerce, and the American Center for Civil and Human Rights.⁴ Arab Detroit also boasts a number of elected officials on the local, state and national levels of government including mayors, city councilors, sheriffs, and treasures,

² According to the Arab American Institute’s "Roster of Arab Americans in Public Service and Political Life", Michigan boasts the largest number of politically active Arab Americans - http://www.aaiusa.org/index_ee.php/pages/arab-american-roster#michigan
³ The ICA is currently ranked as the nation’s largest mosque, in terms of the size of the center and its congregation. Estimates of 10,000 congregation members and a building occupying a space of 120,000 square feet - "Center Profile." The Pluralism Project at Harvard University. http://www.pluralism.org/profiles/view/68767 (accessed September 9, 2013).
as well as serving in the capacity of state representatives, state legislatures and judges.\textsuperscript{5} Further, in addition to its many secular institutions, the city is also home to a plethora of religious institutions, including Islamic centers, schools and associations, churches, Sunday schools and synagogues, which constitute the epicenter of religious and social life for the various Arab communities.\textsuperscript{6} Although these institutions and the communities they serve may often identify under the umbrella of a larger ‘Arab-American’ identity, as this thesis will demonstrate, the religious, ethnic, sectarian and class differences that characterize Muslim Arab-Americans in Michigan, as well as the distinct historical experiences faced by the different generations of Arab Americans, offer a more complicated story than the image of homogeneity and unity presented by some of the community’s most prominent members and institutions.

Through a deep historical analysis of the Detroit Arab-American Muslim community and one of its primary institutions, the Islamic Center of America, this thesis argues that Arab-American identities are more complicated than linear assimilationist models would have us believe. Instead of a ‘natural progression’ from Arab to American, Arab American Muslims in Detroit have adapted to their local and historical circumstances by creating new identities that move beyond just the ‘Arab-American’ or ‘Muslim-American’ nomenclatures that scholars have used to label them. This thesis documents a marked shift in Arab American identification over time, from a wider affiliation with other Muslims and Arabs (including Arab Christians) in the first generations or ‘waves’ of Arab-American migration to a deeper identification with


sectarian identity in subsequent years. But this shift did not end there, later generations of Arabs and Arab Americans increasingly also affirmed their ethnic origins as core elements of their Arab-American identities. What has emerged from this complex history of multi-generational waves of Arab migration from increasingly disparate geographical areas is not one homogenous Arab-American Muslim community. Instead, what emerges is a heterogeneous array of Arab-American communities, as opposed to one Arab-American community understood only in relationship to ‘American society.’

This thesis demonstrates that these diverse Arab-American communities in Detroit have also defined and shaped their identities as much in relationship to each other and in relation to non-Arab Muslims, and Muslims outside the United States, as they do to ‘mainstream’ American society. This thesis does not ignore the ways in which being an ‘Arab-American’ may unite some Arab Americans in Michigan in an ‘imaginary community’ of solidarity, nor does it argue that ‘being an American’ is not also an essential part of how they identify, but it demonstrates that on the ground, these larger affiliations are complicated by the diverse ethnic and sectarian affiliations that also lead Arab-American communities to compete with each other for political, national, social, religious and cultural influence. By demonstrating the malleability and complexity of Arab-American identity in the Arab Muslim communities of Detroit, this thesis moves scholarship away from an outsized focus on the ‘hyphenation’ of American immigrant identities that only posits movement between two limited and artificially constructed categories that in themselves, have little meaning: Arab and American, and instead analyzes Arab Americans on their own terms.

Fragmentation within the Muslim Arab Detroit community emerged during the early twentieth century, during a time when the Arab Detroit community was beginning to establish itself and institutionalize its presence. This shift was primarily driven by the
first generation of Arab Shiite immigrants during the 1920s and 1930s, who strove to create their own distinct congregation separate from the dominant Sunni congregations. This shift was then exacerbated by the creation and objectives of the ICA; which formally declared its Shiite identity in their institution’s official constitution. Despite the ICA’s pronounced claim of being representative of the Arab Muslim community in its entirety, in reality, their pronounced objectives differed from their constitutional objectives. Indeed, despite portraying themselves as non-sectarian, they have prioritized a strictly Shi’a doctrine, and declared their congregation as a Shi’a congregation from its inception. This is particularly important as the Detroit Arab Muslim community comprises one of the largest and most concentrated populations of Arab Muslims in the US, and as such they could potentially serve as a base of political leadership for all Muslims in Detroit and in the US. Instead, this ethnic and sectarian fragmentation has created animosity, infighting and competition and has weakened the political strength of the community as a whole, and their strength as a political constituency.

**Literature Review**

The majority of scholarly work written on Arab Americans focuses on the history of Arab immigration; scholars have concentrated their focus on the multiple factors that propelled Arabs to emigrate to the United States, as well as Arabs’ process of integration into the ‘host’ nation. This form of scholarly work is consistent with the ‘third generation’ of historiography on 'Immigration history', deemed as the ‘Transnational Turn’, which began in the mid-1990s continuing into the twenty first century. The ‘Transnational Turn’ analyzes immigration through a wider narrative of globalization,

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whereby immigration is no longer viewed as a singular journey (from ‘home’ nation to ‘host’ nation), but rather through “circular or multiple migration patterns.” Historians have thus placed more emphasis on both political and cultural influences that spurred immigrants to leave certain nations and settle in others. In accordance with the historiographical trend of the ‘Transnational Turn’, the current scholarly work on Arab Americans tends to focus on Arab migration during one of these three historical periods: first-wave of immigration, second and third wave of Arab immigration, and finally Arab Americans experience post-Sept 11. These historical periods are analyzed using a constrictive lens of a linear process of assimilation into the ‘host nation’. The main flaw of the current literature on Arab Americans is its focus on binary oppositions; this emphasis on oppositional poles of reality and being within Arab-American communities is extremely problematic. Such interpretations are unable to accord assimilation with maintaining cultural traditions, and instead describe ‘an either/or’ relationship between maintaining traditions and the adoption of ‘new, American’ norms. Depicting cultural interactions through this perspective of dueling oppositional poles can prove to be extremely limiting and fails to grasp the complexity of Arab-American experiences.

Scholars on Arab Americans have placed the history of Arab immigration at the locus of their work. These scholars have divided Arabs’ migration into the US into three historical periods or ‘waves’; scholars writing on the first wave (1870-1930s) emphasize immigrants’ political and social integration into mainstream US society,

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8 Ibid. 364.
predominately focusing on naturalization laws. Consequently depicting immigrant’s integration into the US through the analytical lens of assimilation. In order to illustrate that Arab immigrants’ integration into the US follows a linear process, which begins when they enter into the US, and ends with their complete ‘adaption’ of a ‘mainstream American lifestyle.’ Scholars focusing on the second (1940s-1965) and third (1965-to present day) waves of Arab immigration to the United States have been mostly concerned with issues immigrants faced during their assimilation attempts. These scholars have focused on issues of ‘culture shock’ and ‘culture clashes.’

Scholarship on the third historical period focused primarily on Arab Americans’ experience post-Sept 11; portraying the backlash of ‘the war-on-terror’ on Arab Americans and other Muslims. These scholarly works depict a turning point in Arab

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American experience. As one scholar notes, “once hailed as an ‘immigrant success story’, as ‘the capital of Arab America’, the image of Arab Detroit changed within hours of the 9/11 attack. Suddenly it was a scene of threat, ‘divided loyalties’…. Non-Arabs... began to use terms like ‘you people.’”\textsuperscript{14} These scholars discuss a shift in the way Arab Americans are perceived in ‘mainstream’ US society, and how the event shaped and changed Arab American communities.\textsuperscript{15} Scholarly work focused on this period tends to solely emphasize the ways in which American Muslims tried to defend themselves and their American identity after the events of 9/11. Notwithstanding, there is a more important aspect, which is that after 9/11 the Arab American community of Detroit became more self-contained. The community became more dependent on their institutions, and utilized the strength of their institutions as a form of protection from the abuse they were exposed to from the media, society and federal agencies. Arab Americans utilized their organizations as protective shields from an increasingly Islamophobic United States. This reliance became increasingly evident with the rise in the number of schools run by Arab American institutions; this points to a significant turn, whereby Arab Detroit is becoming increasingly self-sufficient as a means to protect itself from undue violence. This tendency towards self-containment is also reflective of the community’s desire to further consolidate their society within Metro-


Detroit’s larger populace. Despite this tendency, the community remained increasingly fragmented; on the macro-level they are a tight-knit community, but on the micro-level, Arab Americans re-identify with their ethnic and sectarian communities.

The scholarly focus on Arab immigration history and their experiences post 9/11 to the exclusion of other topics has generated a number of gaps in the current scholarly work. For instance, there is an extremely limited amount of literature written on the topic of the mosques in Michigan and in the US more generally.16 There are only a few studies conducted on mosque attendance and participation, as well as a few ethnographic narratives on the Shi’a practices within the mosque and the Arab-American communities in Michigan.17 Additionally there are a few studies written on the subject of the influence of Imams on their congregations.18 This is reflective of the fact that the immigration history of Arab Americans constitutes a relatively new field of scholarly work; Arab immigration to the United States was largely ignored throughout the early ‘immigration histories’. This was largely on account of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), who classified Arabs arriving in the US beginning in the late nineteenth century first as ‘white’, and then as ‘Turks’ and/or ‘Asians.’19

Furthermore, the current literature on Muslim Arab Americans tends to deny sectarian

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differences or downplay disputes that occur in the community by explaining them through the ‘old vs. new generation’ lens, ignoring other factors that might have attributed to the dispute (such as ethnic, cultural, socio-economic). In an attempt to place Arab Americans within the larger literature of immigrant groups, scholars further limit their scope by sticking to a constrictive narrative that does not apply in this case. As such, we need to complicate our understanding of the various factors that have divided and shaped the experiences and relationships of these diverse Muslim groups.

The current scholarly discourse on the Muslim Arab-American community is both inaccurate and ineffectual. Since, as of late Scholars studying Arab Muslim communities in the United States have often put forth a discourse on Arab Americans that relies on Samuel Huntington’s paradigm of the ‘Clash of Civilizations’; whereby the prevailing notions that Islam is synonymous with the ‘oriental’ other and thus incompatible with ‘western’ norms and values has been continually re-appropriated and re-worked to fit into the current discourse. This notion of a ‘Clash of Civilizations’ has been perpetuated by the study of Muslim Arab Americans; whereby they have appropriated a constrictive lens, which views their identity in a linear spectrum. Thereby depicting Arab-American identity as a linear progression beginning at a point of complete otherness (those holding on to ‘old world’ and ‘traditional values’) and ending at a point of complete assimilation (those individuals who are deemed as

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20 Whereby many of these scholars have internalized both Bernard Lewis’ and Samuel Huntington’s visions of Islam, and used their work to defend the position of Muslim Arab Americans as ‘different’ from other Arabs and Muslims. – Scholars such as Alixa Naff, who constantly refers to the ‘assimilation process’, Yvonne Haddad who consistently discusses the notion of ‘being American’, as well as Sally Howell, Andrew Shryock, Amaney Jamal, Nabeel Abraham who all discuss identity within the linear spectrum of the ‘assimilation process’.

21 Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ divides the world up into ‘civilizations’ based on shared culture and religion. According to Huntington the most significant clash between these ‘civilizations’ is the one between the ‘Western civilization’ and the joint ‘Confucian-Islamic civilizations’ – “western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures.” – Huntington, Samuel. “The Clash of Civilizations?” In The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate (New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), 17.
‘Americanized’). The use of this lens limits the scope of discourse and as such ignores historical facts that impact the discourse on Arab Americans, such as the long history of Islam in the US, dating back to the nation’s inception, as well as Islam’s presence and impact in many of the nations’ pivotal moments such as the Civil Rights movement.

As such, the objective of this thesis is to illustrate the construction of identity and its malleable nature within the Muslim-Arab Detroit community, as it is not clearly articulated in the current literature on Arab Americans. Religion, acculturation and the reciprocity that define processes of culture sharing and adaptations are not clearly depicted in the current literature. The reciprocal natural of ‘culture clashes’ are rarely mentioned, if at all, in the current scholarship about Arab Americans. Rosina Hassoun, who has written extensively on Arab American communities in the US and specifically Michigan, briefly describes this process: “acculturation is a two-way phenomenon, Arab Americans have added something to the fabric of American culture,” Hassoun superficially acknowledges the reciprocal nature of acculturation.

**Methodology**

In order to complicate simple binaries and the notion that Arab Americans’ identity can be traced through a linear progression (from old world to new world) this thesis relies on the voices of Arab Americans themselves to understand the complexity of their identities. This thesis relies on personal narratives of Arab Americans both past and present in order to contextualize Arab Detroit’s community historically. In addition

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22 Further, the spectrum described utilizes the (outdated) terminology of the Arab-American discourse and identity is described from a western point of view.


24 Hassoun. *Arab Americans in Michigan*, 55.
to tracing the historical presence of the community's institutions, which act as extensions of the community and play a significant role in the lives of its citizenry.

Thus, this thesis relies on accounts depicting the experiences of Arab Americans living in Michigan during the late nineteenth century up to today. I have utilized the abundant historical records and collections of the Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection located at the Archives Center of the National Museum of American History and the archives at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, in order to contextualize the notion of identity within a historical framework. I was able to gather a copious amount of information from the combined collections of both these archive centers. The Faris and Yamna Naff collections proved to be very valuable as they were an accumulation of the work of Alixa Naff, who is deemed as the founding mother of scholarship on Arab Americans. This collection held transcripts of key interviews she had conducted during the 1960s-1980s with prominent members of the Arab Detroit community, as well as other community members. Further, the archives from the Bentley Historical Library were invaluable as they offered an in-depth collection specific to the ICA, including papers from the founding Imam himself, Imam Chirri. This collection included papers regarding the day-to-day running of the ICA dating back to the 1960s, such as names of the board members, election results, memos, minutes and agendas from Board meetings...etc. As well as information on the ICA's finances, building plans, ICA reports, guidelines, constitutions, information on their Muslim American Youth Academy (MAYA). In addition to correspondence with inmates, information on the events that took place in the social center/function room of the

mosque, information on the ICA’s youth organizations including some of their publications. Further, in regards to the Imam’s personal papers, those included, drafts of sermons and lessons he conducted, personal memos, drafts of speeches, and clippings of newspaper reports about him. This collection also included an in-depth survey and the findings of that survey (including the participants answer sheets) conducted by Kim Schoppymer in 1994 on the ICA’s congregation.

This thesis also relied on personal interviews that I conducted with key members of the Arab Detroit community, as well as scholars who have written extensively on the Arab Detroit community. These interviews shed light on the differences and divisions evident in the community, since despite their insistence on defining themselves as one community, each interviewee defined that community in a different way. Moreover I have analyzed and utilized video recordings of the various sermons held at the ICA, as well as reports by various national news agencies’ coverage of the mosque (ICA). I have also looked at secondary sources on the mosque’s attendance, on the demographics of its congregation and the rituals/activities of the mosque. As well as statistics and data collected on mosque participation, as well as various demographic statistics on the Arab American population of Metro Detroit. In addition to reviewing material written by the various leaders of the ICA, the Imams that headed the congregation, for example the historical records of Imam Chirri (ICA’s first Imam) and the Autobiography of Imam Qazwini, as well posts on his website (for more current information).

I have then compared the information from the secondary sources to the various first-hand accounts of members of the ICA’s congregation. I have analyzed these various

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26 The construction of interview questions has been informed by the following literature on Oral Histories and ‘good interview habits’: Ritchie, Donald A.. *Doing Oral History* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Janesick, Valerie J.. *Oral history for the Qualitative Researcher: Choreographing The Story* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010).
accounts and sources in order to get a comprehensive view of the construction of identity within the Arab-American community in relation to the mosque (ICA) and the various community/social ties attributed to the mosque and its activities. Once I reviewed the information from the various sources, this thesis was able to invalidate this notion of binary oppositions and thus been able to challenge the current literature on Arab Americans. The various archival material, interviews and personal narratives of members of the Arab Detroit community have shed light on their perception of their community’s identity, and the divisions that exist within that community and thus its construction of identity. These narratives depict the various divisions within the Muslim Arab community, and the factors that have exacerbated them, and subsequently emphasized the various layers of identity present in the Arab Detroit community. Which in turn depicts the malleability of identity and its fluid nature.

The advantage of conducting this type of historical research is that it allowed me to collect information from a wide array of sources. This was extremely useful as each source I consulted offered me a different perspective of the Arab-American community. By examining a variety of secondary sources I was able to assess the present scholarship on Arab Americans as well as the point of view of both ethnographers and historians who have written extensively on the Arab-American community. I was then able to consult primary historical records, as well as current records on Arab Detroit, which allowed me to gain a better understanding of the community. Further, by referring to personal narratives, interviews, community surveys, and archival records of community activities I gained the benefit of an insider’s perspective of the society. I had the advantage of hearing/reading the viewpoint of the Arab Detroit population, as well as seeing the community through their experiences. Thus, allowing me to analyze the notion of identity on their terms. What further aided this process were the personal
interviews I conducted, whereby I got to meet some of the community’s most prominent members. I was able to interview the leaders of Arab Detroit’s most influential organizations (ACCESS and ICA), the same leaders who claim to represent the community in its entirety, and as such I was able to prompt them into revealing their outlook on what it means to be an Arab American, and their perceptions of the Arab Detroit community.

The disadvantage of conducting this type of research is its reliance on primary sources, especially interviews and personal narratives, which are highly subjective and notoriously susceptible to the ever-changing whims of memory. People’s memories can be deceiving, as Donald Ritchie explains:

Eyewitnesses to memorable events who change their testimony and contradict themselves may be reflecting their initial confusion of the array of other viewpoints they subsequently encountered... recollections were further shaped by newspaper coverage, conversation, speculation, books...there is also the possibility that people are lying to themselves. Some people dramatically change their positions but convince themselves of their consistency and correctness.27

Thus illustrating the fact that people rarely remember events exactly as they happened, and that memories are constantly changing and are influenced by subsequent events. Another disadvantage concerns the archival material, since one set of records’ originsates from an institution and the other from a prominent scholar of Arab Americans, they reflect a ‘top-down’ perspective of the community. The archives from the ICA, are specific to that institution and its congregation, is composed of a majority of official papers. Likewise, the archives from the Naff collection consist of interviews Alixa Naff conducted, and thus the answers of participants are hindered by the way she framed her questions (which are constricted, as she too adopts the analytical lens of binary oppositions).

27 Ritchie, Doing Oral History, 105.
Chapter I

History of Arab Migration into the US

Since the focal point of this thesis is the malleability of identity within the Muslim-Arab Detroit community, the origins of Arab migration to the United States, and more specifically Detroit, needs to be examined thoroughly in order to historically contextualize their experience. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Arabs began emigrating to the United States in relatively large numbers and continued to do so throughout the twentieth century.\(^{28}\) During this period, not only did the number of Arab immigrants grow but so too did their religious, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity. The twentieth century witnessed the growth and consolidation of Arab-American communities, as the early immigrants and their descendants began to establish themselves as 'part' of the larger 'American' whole and thus began consolidating their space within the topography of the US. Tracing this 'journey,' from the arrival of Arabs to the United States towards their development as established communities, is essential in understanding the complexity of Arab-American identity: their society's dynamics, their relationships and understandings of the self, the 'other', as well as how they understand religion, culture, and identity within American society. As such the focus of this chapter is to outline the history of Arab migration into the US, to trace their journey into Detroit, Michigan, and to examine the subsequent development of Arab Detroit’s Muslim community. This chapter depicts the historical development of the Arab-American community in Detroit within the larger history of migration; in order to trace the simultaneous development and gradual fragmentation of the Arab Muslim

\(^{28}\) Arabs hereby refers to people from the Middle East and Egypt.
community in Detroit, which began with the arrival of the first wave of Muslim Arab immigrants into Detroit.

**First Wave – 1870s-1930s**

Arabs who emigrated during the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century were the ‘pioneers’ of their immigrant group. They ventured long distances under harsh circumstances to make their way to a nation they knew very little about. As the prominent scholar of Arab-American history, Gregory Orfalea, notes:

The Syrians at the end of the nineteenth century moved by donkeyback or a three-day foot trip to the harbors – Beirut, Tripoli, Haifa, and Jaffa. There they encountered eager steamship merchants, as well as a whole class of hucksters... who would do everything from bribing Ottoman officials for passports... to securing $30-$50 tickets... to take what would be the longest sea voyage anyone took east-to-west to America... Marseilles unveiled the last Sirens for the Syrian peasant before he braved the Sea of Darkness to America.29

Arab immigrants were unaware of what to expect upon their arrival to American shores. Most were unprepared for the arduous ‘welcome’ they would receive at Ellis Island, New York, the migration facility through which most Arabs entered the United States, which consisted, amongst other things, of a long sequence of strenuous medical tests performed on immigrants immediately upon their arrival. Ironically, in some cases immigrants were forced to remain on the island for months and more often than not their stay at Ellis Island caused their illnesses.30 The only information many Arab immigrants had about the US had either been provided by American missionaries stationed in their home villages or through family/village members returning from trips

30 Ibid.
to the US. Information provided by these two sources was often scarce and superficial. Indeed, the positive depictions often presented by returning immigrants of Americans often failed to adequately represent the harsher realities of immigrant life, including the arduous journey and the difficulties of adapting to life in a new homeland where they did not speak the language.

Both the positive representations of the United States conveyed to Arab immigrants, and the disparaging conditions at home promoted Arab migration. The majority of these immigrants migrated from the Levant, from two provinces of the former Ottoman Empire, ‘Mount Lebanon’ and ‘Syria’. Because of their Ottoman origins, when they reached the United States the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) categorized them as “Turks from Asia”, despite the fact they spoke Arabic and not Turkish, and were often Christians fleeing political strife and persecution. As Orfalea notes: “they were miscalled ‘Turks’ and listed as such until 1899, a humiliating reference given the fact that most were Christian and had sacrificed so much to get away from Ottoman Turkish rule.” Indeed, Arabs arriving from the Levant resented such a categorization, as they did not feel a sense of belonging to the Ottoman Empire and instead usually identified primarily with their region/province of origin.

Contrary to American assumptions about the importance of national and racial identity, the first wave of Arab immigrants who arrived on American shores came from an area where regional identity often trumped allegiance to the Ottoman state. The Ottoman Empire was a large political entity that presided over a vast amount of provinces, and a diverse population of peoples from varying ethnicities and religious

31 Latiff, Anthony, Detroit, Michigan, 1980, June 4, Faris and Yamna Naff Arab-American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, box number 82, folder number 17, digital file number AC0078.
33 Orfalea, "Seeds to The Wind," 72.
backgrounds. As such, Ottoman governance was highly decentralized. Each city and/or province within the Ottoman Empire was semi-autonomous and was most often defined by its populations’ religious and ethnic identity. Ottoman authorities often appointed local religious leaders as representatives of state power. Consequently, local religious and political leaders become the only source of visible power to the citizens of the city.\(^{34}\)

As one scholar of Ottoman history notes:

Each Ottoman urban center was divided into \textit{mahalles}, or city quarters... ‘tended to segregate the urban population’ in accordance with ‘religion and profession’... central to every \textit{mahalle} was the house of worship that served as the religious and cultural heart of the neighborhood... under the leadership of their religious and administrative heads.\(^{35}\)

On account of the Ottoman Empire’s decentralized rule, the only entities these Arab immigrants had recognized back home were the local villages and cities they belonged to, which were defined along both ethnic and religious lines. Thus, they adhered to a local rather than national identity. Furthermore, not only did these Arab immigrants not recognize Ottoman power, they also resented it. Despite Ottoman practices of indirect rule in the provinces, during the waning years of Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman government sought to strengthen its control over its empire and this repression was increasingly felt in the form of forced military conscription, higher/more frequent taxation and the consequent poverty that ensued.\(^{36}\)


\(^{35}\) Ibid, 71-72.

\(^{36}\) In addition to the fact that Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) acquiesced to the increasing power of Muhammed Ali (Governor of Egypt) and in 1833 gave him the position of Governor of Syria, as such illustrating the autonomous nature of the province of Syria that was an already recognized political entity (which was unhappy with Ottoman Rule) - Kia, Mehrdad. “European Imperialism and the Drive to Reform,” In \textit{The Ottoman Empire} (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2008). \textit{eBook collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost} (accessed November 1\(^{st}\), 2013). 97-112.
Leaving the Ottoman Empire:

This repression was only one of the many reasons that prompted these early Arab immigrants to leave the Ottoman Empire and seek a new home in the United States. According to Alixa Naff, “Scholars estimate that 90 to 95 percent of the pre-World War II Syrian immigrants were Christians.”37 The reason behind the influx of Christian ‘Syrian’ immigrants into the US was the domestic political situation in the Ottoman Empire. In addition to imposing heavier taxes, the Ottoman policies often marginalized Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Despite the autonomy and recognition Christians were increasingly awarded by Ottoman rulers, they remained under the rule of an ‘Islamic Empire’ and efforts to equalize their status under Ottoman reforms sometimes led to backlash from local Muslim communities. And, despite the decentralization of Ottoman rule, Arabs were still susceptible to the ruling monarch’s arbitrary taxation, laws and were affected whenever the rulers declared war on their neighboring Empires or faced independence movements from within the Empire (a frequent occurrence during the late nineteenth century and through to the outbreak of WW1).38 As hinted at earlier, other factors driving the migration of Christian ‘Syrians’ from the Ottoman Empire to the United States were famine and depravation, both a result of frequent and ever-increasing taxation. This dissatisfaction merged with local sectarian tensions erupted in a civil war between local ethnic and religious communities in the ‘Greater Syria’ area of the Ottoman Empire, culminating in the massacre of thousands of Arab Christians in 1860.39 Even greater Ottoman political repression followed. Hence, Arab Christians’ destitute economic situation, local political instability, inter-sectarian tension, and their lack of protection were all factors that led to a lack of

38 Kia, "European Imperialism and the Drive to Reform," 97-100.
imperial allegiance by the people of both the ‘Syrian’ and ‘Mount Lebanon’ provinces, while also pushing them to seek a prosperous life elsewhere. Although Arab immigrants traveled to many areas of the globe, the US was often the immigrants’ destination of choice because of the important economic pull factors emerging at that time. The US was in the midst of a labor shortage in both their booming industrial and agriculture markets.\[^{40}\]

**A US (Un) Welcome:**

The majority of Arab immigrants were of single men emigrating from the Ottoman Empire into the US: According to the INS’ “Number of Arrivals in the United States from Turkey in Asia, by Sex, 1869-1898” the total number of males is 12,356 in comparison to the total number of female immigrants which was 5,565.\[^{41}\] The disparate numbers of female and male immigrants grew even more during the later period of the 19\(^{th}\) century in to the 20\(^{th}\) century according to the INS’ table “Number of Arrivals from Syria in the United States by Sex, 1899-1924,” where the total number of male immigrants was 69,514 and the total of female immigrants was 36,877.\[^{42}\] In both these periods the number of female immigrants amounts, more or less, to half the number of male immigrants. This disparity between male and female immigrants during this first wave of immigration was on account of the fact that many of the ‘Arabs’ emigrating to the US, especially those emigrating during the late periods of the 19\(^{th}\) century, believed that they would be returning back to their ‘motherland’ once they had achieved economic success. This notion of ‘bonds of passage’ is one that is shared across various immigrant groups; they come to the US under the presupposition that their stay is

\[^{40}\] Orfalea, "Seeds to The Wind," 52-63.
\[^{41}\] Orfalea, "Seeds to The Wind," 314.
\[^{42}\] Ibid, 315.
temporary, and that their position in the US is that of a trans-migratory laborer. Many of the early immigrants were spurred into migration to the US based on economic motivations, and the desire to reach financial prosperity in a (relatively) short amount of time, this desire was encouraged by "the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876... Syrians, mainly Christian urban tradesmen... first Arabic speakers to discover American economic opportunities."\textsuperscript{43} Many of the early immigrants were drawn to the US by notions of economic success and financial prosperity, and believed that they would be returning back home once they achieved it; the notion that their stay in the US was temporary was unanimous, many of the immigrants believed that they would be able to accumulate a sizable amount of capital in about two-to-three years and return home.\textsuperscript{44} Although, these early immigrants' initial plans changed once they realized, as Orfalea put it, “there was little to go back to... they stayed here because the bridge was cut behind them and left burning.”\textsuperscript{45} The change in immigrants ‘plans’ and their decision to remain and settle in the US permanently led to the surge in female immigration to the US, beginning in 1910;\textsuperscript{46} once these single and/or married men settled into the US they would either return home get married and make arrangement for their families to travel to the US and/or call on to their families to join them in the US.\textsuperscript{47}

As the number of Arab immigrants to the United States increased during the turn-of-the century, they became more visible as a unified immigrant group, and as a result the US government soon placed more emphasis on trying to properly classify the group first when they came as immigrants and later, when they applied for

\textsuperscript{43} Naff, "Migration," 77-78.  
\textsuperscript{44} Naff, "The Early Arab Immigrant Experience," 26.  
\textsuperscript{45} Orfalea, "Seeds to The Wind," 52.  
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 315.  
\textsuperscript{47} Naff, "The Early Arab Immigrant Experience," 26-28.
naturalization. Beginning in 1899, the INS changed its categorization of Arab immigrants from 'Turks in Asia' to 'Syrians.' Migration only increased in subsequent years; “statistics show that in the first year of World War I – 1914 – more Syrians came to America than in the whole period of 1869-1895.” But the changes in the categorization of these Arab immigrants from 'Turk' to 'Syrian' complicated matters for the US government when it came to issues of naturalization. By labeling them as 'Syrian' rather than 'Turkish' without meaning to, the INS had created a great deal of confusion about which racial classification applied to 'Syrian' immigrants. Although 'Turk' had been a racial category with some historical resonance and at least partially recognized by US authorities, 'Syrian' had no such recognition.

The importance of understanding how to classify Syrians extended well beyond just historical or cultural factors. Because American naturalization laws limited citizenship to only members of the 'white race', the issue of 'Whiteness' and being classified as 'white' became gravely important. The responsibility for finding the answer to this important question was assigned to state courts. On the one hand, various branches of the US government wanted to maintain the notion of 'whiteness' to be one of exclusivity. On the other hand, Arab immigrants, aware of the benefits of being identified as 'white', strove to align themselves with the 'white' race, since the alternative of being classified as non-white denied them the rights to citizenship and adequate legal protection. Thus, the battles Arab immigrants fought in the courts to define themselves as white illustrate, the first steps Arab immigrants took upon their

48 "The Syrians came to America at such a pace that they alarmed the Ottomans and other authorities" - Orfalea, "Seeds to The Wind," 73.
50 Orfalea, "Seeds to The Wind," 52.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid, 239.
arrival to the US in redefining and reconstructing their identity whilst attempting to integrate into their new homeland.

As noted above, the majority of these early Arab immigrants were Christian and this played an important role in shaping the future identity of these communities. As one scholar has noted: “several thousand Christians had formed a steady stream of emigration for a generation, only a few hundred Muslims and Druze... their slow migration prohibited the generation of a chain migration comparable to that of the Christians.”

More importantly, the first generation of immigrants held an advantage that future Arab-Muslim immigrants would not have, and that was the fact that their religion allowed them to identify with the religious beliefs of the majority of Americans. Christian Arab Americans were thus able to occupy a space ‘in-between,’ whereby their ethnic ‘otherness’ was diminished by their religious affiliation with Christianity. Their religion allowed them to maneuver the blurry categorizations that often merged racial and religious difference. In contrast, the Muslim-Arab immigrants that soon followed on their footsteps found that their religious identity often placed them in an unwelcome spotlight. A spotlight that emphasized their ‘otherness’ and depicted them as the antithesis of ‘average Americans.’

Of course, Arabs were not the only migrants to flock to American shores. The preponderance of immigrants arriving into the US during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century alarmed the American public and pushed the US government into placing discussions of race, racial superiority and immigration on the forefront of the nation’s political agenda.

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54 Naff, “Migration,” 84.
55 “The largest single ethnic group in America – the Germans – had begun to immigrate as far back as 1710, and by 1900 German Americans numbered 5 million... in 1878, there were already 200,000 German Jews in the country... the Syrians ranked 25 of 39 immigrant nationalities.” - Orfalea, “Seeds to The Wind,” 72-73.
1880s and 1890s, after World War 1, the United States government responded to public hostility by imposing ever-harder limitations on immigration culminating in the adoption of the 1924 ‘Johnson-Reed Act’ that imposed a drastic quota on immigration.56 The implementation of this law by Congress was a direct by-product of the mounting American animosity towards immigrant groups and served an important demonstration of institutionalized racism. The immigrant groups that faced the most limited quotas were those who originated from non-western European countries, largely because the US government considered them as inferior races.57 The new immigration law limited Syrians to 100 immigrants annually.58 Indeed, despite their attempts to identify as white, Arabs were not immune from these racist interpretations and were often categorized by immigration reformers as ‘Orientals’ and thus relegated to the status of undesirable alongside other allegedly inferior races accused of harming the ‘purity’ of American society. In the words of one of the congressmen who participated in the ‘National Origins Act’ debate: “we have admitted the dregs of Europe until American has been orientalized, Europeanized, Africanized, and mongrelized to that insidious degree that our genius, stability, greatness and promise of advancement and achievement are actually menaced.”59 Members of the US Congress did not only deem Arab immigrants as inferior, but also as dangerous; they claimed that the Arab immigrant’s presence was diluting the ‘American’ race, and aiding in the ‘stupidification’ and criminalization of the ‘American race’, as a hindrance to America’s journey towards greatness.

America – ‘The Land of Opportunity’:

Despite the harsh immigration restrictions imposed in 1924, the large number of Arab immigrants that had made it to the United States before this date, were large enough to shape an important and developing community. After successfully navigating the tests and trials of Ellis Island the majority of the early Arab immigrants settled in New York.\(^{60}\) According to Orfalea, “by 1900, over half the Syrians in America lived in New York city” where they established a community on “Washington Street – the closest thing to a Little Sicily the Arabs ever had in America.”\(^ {61}\) These Arab immigrants had established their community and organizations into the topography of the city; they had established their own stores, small factories, textile mills, printing presses...etc. in which later Arab immigrants would find work.\(^ {62}\) Peddling remained the most common form of employment of the early Arab immigrants, on account of the fact that it was extremely profitable; “they averaged $1,000 annually when the US labor force was averaging about $650 annually.”\(^ {63}\) Despite the hardships of life on the road, the majority of peddlers carried their merchandise by hand and walked.\(^ {64}\) This form of employment was made easier on account of kinship and community relationships. As the majority of Syrian immigrants were peddlers they began to rely on each other and created a network of peddlers; whereby members of kin or of the same village would join together and form networks that would then share the same supplier, offer room and board when possible and lend capital (with no interest).\(^ {65}\)

\(^{60}\) Orfalea, "Seeds to The Wind," 71-74.

\(^{61}\) Ibid, 76.


\(^{63}\) Naff, "The Early Arab Immigrant Experience," 30.

\(^{64}\) The Syrian peddlers went everywhere... the Syrian peddler took to the American farmwife, factory worker wife, and country squire wife an invaluable item – the market place - Ibid, 80-81.

\(^{65}\) Naff, "Migration," 77-78.
Although peddling was not the only means of employment for Syrian immigrants, the number of Syrians who engaged in the trade greatly facilitated the process of assimilation of the Arab community, especially in procuring language skills. It also served as a window into the lives of ‘every-day’ Americans; these peddlers did not only engage with Americans through trade, but often spent time in the houses they frequented and interacted with the families socially (as they often required/requested room and board). The peddler’s interactions with American families and the American home provided him with an illustration of American values and customs and forced him to gain a greater command over the English language for sheer economic survival. Peddling gave Arab immigrants the space to define themselves within their newly adopted home; it was an opportunity for them to witness and experience ‘American life’ first hand, and time to (re)-define themselves as American citizens.

Since Arab peddlers spent the majority of their time on the road travelling through the states selling their merchandise, they did not have a ‘settled’ home. This transitory lifestyle played an important role in shaping the future of the Arab community in the United States. As Arab peddlers travelled throughout the states, some settled down to establish communities, which consequently dispersed the Arab-American community away from their (former) central location in New York. Once they had achieved a substantial sum of money they would settle with their families in their chosen state. Many of the early immigrants remained in New York, and others opted to work in factories and established homes in states such as Maine, others worked in cloth factories in New England.
Henry Ford and the Arrival of Muslim Arab Immigrants to the US:

Many of the Muslims that emigrated to the United States during this period of early immigration discovered the Midwest through peddling and were subsequently attracted to the area on account of the thriving industries in both Michigan and Pennsylvania. The early immigrants who settled in Michigan during the early twentieth century were mainly attracted by the booming automobile industry; they arrived as ‘unskilled’ laborers, with little or no formal education, they did not speak English, and many came from rural villages. These early arrivals sought employment in the industrial factories; many came to work in the ‘Ford Motor Company’ plants and lived in and around the plants.

Henry Ford was a very skillful entrepreneur; he built up Metro Detroit in the early twentieth century; he created the factories for producing the automobiles, such as the Rouge Plant, as well as the Ford Rotunda, which was the showcase for his vehicles, and the Ford World Headquarters. Surrounding the Ford Motor Company’s buildings, near the Rogue Plant was the city of Dearborn, which provided low-cost housing for his employers. Ford essentially divided the city up into quarters, reserving West Dearborn for management, East Dearborn for hourly workers, the Southend was dedicated to newly arrived immigrants, and the quarter he named ‘Inkster’ was reserved for African-Americans. Henry Ford designed the whole area of Metro Detroit meticulously to ensure the success of his company. Ford anticipated his need for an unskilled labor force, and thus looked towards Yemen. Many of the early Arab immigrants were from

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Yemen, and came to work in the Ford automobile plants.\textsuperscript{70} These Yemeni immigrants were Sunni Muslims and many came in as unskilled laborers, single men, who sought temporary work and settlement. A small percentage continued their stay in the US, and made it their permanent homes, establishing communities.

Despite the emerging automobile industry in Detroit, many of the early immigrants that settled in Detroit were peddlers. Peddling was seen as a means to an end, many immigrants sought out peddling as a source of capital, so they could eventually save enough money to open and run their own businesses. Peddlers in the Detroit area were mostly men who sought to support their families who settled in the area: “Peddlers saved to support their families... were later able to save enough to open businesses of their own... these businesses became the center of family life, as many families lived above stores or in back rooms.”\textsuperscript{71} These early immigrants saved their resources and poured them into their businesses, which were family run-businesses. Through this process of accumulating capital, many of the early immigrants began establishing institutions to not only serve their extended family’s needs but the needs of the ever-growing Arab community. As such, these early Arab immigrants established the institutional foundation, which the next generation of immigrants built upon. The tight kinship relations, that were evident in the early twentieth century, propelled the establishment of community institutions and in many cases ensured the success of these institutions, which relied on the community to maintain and develop them.

Ford built and adapted the cities of Metro-Detroit in accordance with his vision, and inadvertently made class and socio-economic differences among Detroit’s population extremely visible. Consequently, this created a rift in the community across

\textsuperscript{70} Abraham, Nabeel, and Andrew Shryock. \textit{Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream} (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 95.

\textsuperscript{71} Ameri and Lockwood, \textit{Arab Americans in Metro Detroit}, 51.
socio-economic lines, whereby people began to identify each other and themselves using their socio-economic class. This form of class divisions was highly divisive, on account of the fact that defined the locus of residents’ life. Since socio-economic positions designated people’s place of residence, the locus of their community is comprised of people who share the same socio-economic position as they do, thus creating communities separated by class. This type of division subsequently breeds’ animosity and resentment in the community, and gradually these divisions become increasingly invariable.

Second Wave – 1940s-1965

The second wave of Arab immigration into the US constituted a migration pattern vastly different from the previous one, in terms of the immigrant’s origins, religions and political affiliations. Whereby, another shift in the Arab-American community began to emerge; the community began to not only self-identify with their respective ethnicity, but also in opposition to other ethnicities within the larger Arab-American community. Unlike the first wave of Arab immigrants who left the (former) Ottoman Empire, beginning in the 1940’s Arabs began emigrating from distinct nation-states in the Middle East. Thereby these ‘new’ immigrants had a stronger notion of state, and nationality than their predecessors. These newcomers defined their nationalities explicitly, unlike their predecessors from the ‘Syrian and Mount Lebanon’ provinces of the Ottoman Empire who referred to themselves as ‘Syrians’. These newcomers refer to their distinct nationalities as a point reference, whether it is Lebanese, Syrian,
Palestinian, Jordanian, Yemeni or Iraqi, as such identified strongly with their respective nationalities.\textsuperscript{72}

The Middle East – A Turbulent Time:

These ‘new’ immigrants who arrived between the 1940s-60s, were comprised of Arabs emigrating from a variety of nations such as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, Egypt…etc. This wave of ‘new’ immigrants did not solely base their migration to the US in pursuit of economic prosperity, but were mainly prompted by political unrest and/or upheaval in their respective nation states. This period, 1940s-60s, depicts a tumultuous time in the history of the Middle East, whereby the region was plagued by a number of civil wars, political unrest and other forms of civil violence. Such as the Arab Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973, as well as the post-colonial wars of independence that occurred during the 50s and 60s. Furthermore, many of the nations in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Egypt continued to face sectarian violence and/or animosity.\textsuperscript{73}

The US – A Promise of a Better Life:

These immigrants decided to settle in the US, largely due to the fact that many Arabs had already established communities there, and based on the success stories of their predecessors they were hopeful that they too would be able to share in the prosperity and wealth of the US.\textsuperscript{74} Many of the ‘new’ immigrants, who were predominately Muslim, encountered a different America than that of their predecessors. These new immigrants arrived in the US and settled in states, such as New York, California and Detroit, where


\textsuperscript{73} “Aside from Palestinians, the rest constituted new immigrants from countries just emerging into independence and going through growing pains that included revolutions, purges”- Ibid, 166.

\textsuperscript{74} Naff, “The Early Arab Immigrant Experience,” 26.
there were already established Arab-American communities, which narrowed the
distance from their home-land, their cultures and traditions.75

Unlike their predecessors the majority of these immigrants were already
affluent, educated individuals, and members of the middle class. The exception to this
would be the Palestinians, many of whom were educated, but since many were refugees
(who fled leaving their wealth and their homes behind) lived in refugee camps or in
destitute areas in neighboring Middle Eastern countries; as illustrated by the experience
of one Palestinian immigrant, “a second-class citizen under Jordanians... he made
arrangements for the Jordanian government to pay for university education for him in
the States, but ‘they never pursued it’” despite the lack of assistance he received from
the government he pursued and followed through and graduated from Washington
University.76 Thereby, depicting another motivator for immigration into the US, which
was the pursuit of higher education. Many of these Arab students decided to remain in
the US at the conclusion of their studies and sought to obtain US citizenship.77

Upon the arrival of these ‘new immigrants’ a cultural disjunction between the
earlier Syrian immigrants and the ‘new’ immigrants, a majority of whom emigrated
from Iraq, began to emerge. Whereby some of the Syrian immigrants perceived the
behavior of the ‘new’ immigrants as destructive, since the ‘older’ immigrants had
worked hard to establish themselves within and as part of their surrounding
community, as retold by an Arab-American resident of Metro-Detroit: “Many have
worked hard to dispel these negative images [of Arabs], and now the Iraqis prove to be

75 Ameri and Lockwood, Arab Americans in Metro Detroit, 19.
77 Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. Not Quiet American? The Shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the United
a great embarrassment.”  

This particular dispute between the various ‘waves’ of Arab immigrants involved other factors, such as ethnicity and socio-economic class. Since many of the ‘old’ or American-born immigrants constitute members of the first wave of Arab immigrants who were predominately ‘Syrian/Lebanese’ and many of the ‘new’ immigrants during this period came from other areas in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Egypt, Yemen...etc. this revealed a layer of fragmentation within the Muslim-Arab Detroit community between members of two differing cultures. As well as the fact, that many of the ‘older’ immigrants have established themselves in society and as such occupied a higher socio-economic class than the ‘new’ immigrants who are new arrivals to the US, and generally occupy a lower socio-economic class. These clashes emphasizes the dichotomy present within the Arab-American community, whereby the community is simultaneously growing, and consolidating its strength as a unit whilst gradually fragmenting on account of ethnic, socio-economic and sectarian differences. These disjunctions are especially evident among societies, such as Metro-Detroit, where there is a highly concentrated and diverse Arab-American community, with influential and established political, social and religious organizations. For example, the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS), Arab American National Museum (AANM), which are both secular organizations that were established by the Arab-American community in support of it.  

Likewise, the Arab Detroit community has also established numerous religious organizations catering to the multiple faiths and sects present in the community, the most prominent of which are the Islamic Center of

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79 According to the Arab American Institute's "Roster of Arab Americans in Public Service and Political Life," Michigan boasts the largest number of politically active Arab Americans - http://www.aaiusa.org/index_ee.php/pages/arab-american-roster#michigan
America (ICA), the American Moslem Society (AMS), the Mother of God Chaldean Church and Our Lady of Redemption Church.

**Third Wave – 1965-to Present Day**

The third wave of Arab immigration into the US is comparable to the second wave in many aspects; both periods were riddled with unrest, violence, limited wars and insurgencies. During this period, the region witnessed another Arab Israeli war in 1973, the Lebanese civil war 1975-1990, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, the first Gulf War 1990-92, the civil unrest in Syria during the 1980s. This specific period was defined by extreme unrest, instability and violence in the history of the Middle East. The political unrest of the region disseminated and affected all aspects of life; the majority of the region hit an economic downturn during this period, the civil unrest spurred sectarian violence once again, and ravage unemployment plagued the region during this period. The Middle East’s population experienced a period of severe instability, lack of security both politically and financially. These citizens witnessed the foundations of their respective countries crumble and fall to ruin. The exponential increase in civil unrest, the devastation of the economy, inept or corrupt governments that either perpetuated violence directly or indirectly, and the resurgence of sectarian violence were all factors that reinvigorated the exodus (reminiscent of the first and second wave of immigrants) out of the region into the US. Many of the third wave immigrants consisted of professional, affluent, educated members of society, similar to the second wave; many of whom held degrees.

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of higher-education, including doctors, scientists, engineers and other Ph.D. holders.\textsuperscript{81} The preponderance of these educated members of society were unable to find employment in their respective nations and/or were fleeing an unstable situation of civil unrest/war.

Although, there are many factors that convey the distinctness of the third wave. One such factor is the higher concentration of immigrants during the third wave as opposed to the second wave, on account of the 1965 repeal of the of the Johnson-Reed Act, which eliminated the immigration quotas and allowing for an influx of ‘new’ immigrants into the US.\textsuperscript{82} Unlike the previous generation of immigrants, the third wave consisted of both Muslim and Christian Arabs. This wave of migration witnessed a resurgence of Christian Arab migration, particularly from Iraq and Egypt; “certain Christian sects, such as the Iraqi Chaldeans and Egyptian Copts, felt increasingly isolated in their societies... they began to come in larger numbers.”\textsuperscript{83} The third wave of Arab immigrants did not only mark a resurgence of immigration in general but consisted of much more diverse group of immigrants, both ethnically and religiously then the previous generation of immigrants.

Moreover, the immigrants of this third wave were attracted to states with an already established and substantiated community of Arab Americans, such as the Arab-American community of Detroit, Michigan.\textsuperscript{84} Many of the Iraqi Chaldeans and Yemeni immigrants settled in Detroit. The Chaldeans were attracted to Detroit by the already flourishing Chaldean community there: "for immigrant entrepreneurs, family is perhaps the most crucial resource contributing to their success... along with these kin-based advantages, Chaldean community networks provide mutual support for immigrant

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 177.
\textsuperscript{82} Naff, "The Early Arab Immigrant Experience," 26.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 178.
\textsuperscript{84} Rignall, "Building the Infrastructure of Arab American Identity in Detroit," 50-56.
store owners.” In order to ensure their successful acclimation and their economic prosperity immigrants tend to look for established shared ethnic communities, whereby they look for a support network to join. Consequently, this particular proclivity to join communities of a shared ethnic background, marks an additional shift in the Arab-American community, whereby Arab immigrants tend to self-identify with members of their shared ethnicity, regardless of religion or in addition to it.

The state, new immigrants choose to settle in, is an extremely important decision, as their choice will determine whether their integration into the US is seamless or riddled with difficulty. This is illustrated by the contrasting experience of one immigrant family, the Hamza family: “after briefly residing in Dearborn... my father decided to open a business in Hollywood, in southern Florida... it was a harsh city in which my family struggled to survive.” The Hamza family found it extremely difficult to assimilate into their new community, and thus were unable to flourish socially or economically. This immigrant experience is not unique, but it portrays the importance of ethnic communities and microcosms are to immigrants and their success in their ‘new’ home.

The Detroit Arab-American community’s development and consolidation as a center for Arab Americans is fairly evident and can be traced through the community’s migration history. Moreover, the Detroit Arab-American community's gradual fragmentation can also be traced through its migration history; whereby as the community grows in both numbers and in diversity, so does the number of divisive factors which results in the gradual fragmentation of the community. The nature and trajectory of fragmentation of Arab Detroit becomes much more evident with the

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institutional development of the community. Especially since these institutions act as overt representations of said community; thus serve as identity markers for the members of the community.
Chapter II

The Arab Community of Detroit – Arabia Reproduced

The population demographics, religious topography and institutional history of Detroit are highly complex. The Arab American community of Detroit is one of the oldest of its kind, consequently the earliest Arab settlers in the area assisted in the development of the present geographic area referred to as Metro-Detroit. Thereby the origins of the community and its subsequent organizations are all deeply engrained in the history of the city, and many of the nuances of ‘Arab Detroit’ are only recognizable and identifiable to the area’s native population. As such, outlining the community’s demographic nuances, which include delineating both its religious and ethnic topographies, is of vital importance. Especially since within the Arab Detroit community, their surroundings greatly influence their construction of identity and in some cases act as identity markers. What is of more importance is the community’s institutional development; the Arab-American community has been highly dependent on their organizations, they constantly defer to them for guidance and help on both civic and religious matters. Members of the Arab Detroit community use these institutions as overt proclamations of their identities. Additionally, community members used these institutions to allude to their more specific ethnic and/or sectarian identities without resorting to verbally articulating it. Community members also used their choice of residence, and (if they have children) the schools they sent their children to as a semi-implicit manifestation of their identity.
Population Demographics of Wayne County

The majority of Arab Americans in the state of Michigan settled in either Wayne County or the Metro Detroit areas. Within these geographic areas the highly concentrated and diverse population of Arab Americans created their own cultural subgroups based on either their ethnic or religious/sectarian lines. These subgroups have generally manifested themselves in the form of the Arab Americans’ choice of residential area. As Andrew Shryock, a prominent historian of Arab Americans in Detroit, explains, “Religious status influences where you live, who you marry, what kinds of jobs you have, how much education you are likely to have, and so on. Arabs are good at figuring out each other’s religious identities, even without asking directly.” As a result within ‘Arab Detroit’, Arab Americans use their zip codes as identity markers (identity represented in this form, is only recognizable to other members of the Arab Detroit community). A resident of Arab Detroit’s zip code reveals an abundance of information of that person, such as his/her ethnicity, ancestry, religion and sect, and in some cases their village of origin. The Arab communities of Wayne County are one of the most densely populated by Arabs nationwide; according to the census two cities in Wayne County are ranked as the “top ten places with the largest Arab population”, Dearborn (ranked at number 2) and Detroit (ranked at number 6), with Arab populations of 29,181 and 8,287 respectively.\(^{88}\)

\(^{87}\) Shryock, Andrew. Interview by Mariam Al-Thani. Personal Interview, Doha/Detroit, February 19th, 2014.

Table 1 – Population of Arab Americans: 89

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Michigan Total Population</th>
<th>Michigan Arab Americans</th>
<th>Wayne County Total Population</th>
<th>Wayne County Arab Americans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>9,295,297</td>
<td>76,504</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34,213 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>9,938,444</td>
<td>115,284</td>
<td>2,061,162</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>9,883,640</td>
<td>153,713</td>
<td>1,820,584</td>
<td>75,460</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>9,882,519</td>
<td>168,832</td>
<td>1,792,365</td>
<td>85,728</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Arab community of Wayne County is very influential politically and in the world of business, on account of its concentrated population of Arab Americans. This concentration of Arab Americans has led to the development of a tight-knit community; whereby they have created support networks within the community, and thus have been able to advance in both the private and public sectors. As such, many Arab Americans have been able to achieve prominence in numerous sectors, including business and politics through their reliance on community networks such as ACCESS, the National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC), and the American Arab Chamber of Commerce. 91 These networks have allowed Arab Detroit's populace to prosper, as they not only aid Arab American entrepreneurs, but also protect their rights and interests. These organizations induct Arab Americans into civil life in the United States, by assisting them as they navigate the nation's political and legal systems.

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Another way the Arab community of Wayne County has contributed to the topography of the area is through the development of its own cultural enclaves. For instance ‘Chaldean Town’, which was developed by the highly concentrated and visible Chaldean community in Wayne County, who have appropriated an area within Detroit as their own. This is an example of one of the many ethnically specific cultural enclaves that the Arab-American community has carved out. As the Arab Detroit community grew and diversified, more and more of these ethnically specific spaces began to emerge, which radically changes the topography of Metro-Detroit. The first wave of Muslim immigrants resided in Highland Park during the early twentieth century, and once Ford moved his Rouge Plant to Dearborn, so did the Muslim Arab immigrants. Dearborn remains to be the site of the community's largest concentration of Arab Americans (See Table 3); consequently it is the area that houses a majority of the community's institutions. This continuous change illustrates the way in which the Arab Detroit community was able to grow in strength whilst simultaneously growing apart (in terms of the increase in sectarian and ethnic divisions).

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Table 2 – Arab American Population in Metro Detroit by Race/Ethnicity (in percentage of total Arab population of area): 95

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanese</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi (including Chaldeans)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemeni</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestinian/Jordanian</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 – Percentage of Arab Americans by City (within Wayne County): 96

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percentages (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detroit/Hamtramck</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dearborn/Dearborn Heights</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downriver</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Suburbs</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near North Suburbs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Suburbs</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Suburbs</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The diversity of Wayne County can be explained through historical migrant factors, dating back to the settlement of the first generation of Arab immigrants in Detroit, many ethnographers/historians noted a trend whereby the majority of the Arab immigrants tended to congregate along ethnic lines. 97 Each ethnographer/historian has documented the diversity of the Arab American community in Detroit by identifying the areas of settlement of multiple ethnic communities. Another observation these

95 Schopmeyer. "Arab Detroit After 9/11: A Changing Demographic Portrait," 36 (Table 1).
96 Baker, Wayne et al., Detroit Arab American Study (Detroit, Michigan: University of Michigan, 2003), 8.
97 Such as Alixa Naff, Sally Howell, and Andrew Shryock.
ethnographers/historians have made concerns the Arab immigrants' tendency to congregate and settle in areas where their kin have settled, thereby resulting in the microcosmic reproduction of their native village in their new homeland. For instance the neighborhood of Southend in Dearborn has been an important Syrian/Lebanese settlement since the early 1920s. This trend had a twofold motive, one being security and the other being an adherence to Ford’s city plan. Immigrants flocked to areas where there kin or people of similar ethnicities had already settled in an attempt to preserve their culture, and surround themselves with people who are likeminded; it was an attempt to create a secure enclave within their new and 'alien' home. Andrew Shryock (AS) has documented these migration patterns among Arab Americans as ‘chain migrations of kin’, whereby one family member instigates the migration of his/her (most cases it is a male member that instigates this type of chain migration) immediate family, subsequently his/her extended family and in many cases other members of the same village.

AS: there are entire neighborhoods in Dearborn where a disproportionate number of people are from just a few towns in Lebanon. Those distinctions then become important for everything from who runs for city office and wins, to who prays where, to who own stores in what areas of Detroit. Really, it’s these immigrant chains that have made Arab Detroit the large, flourishing community it is today.

Beginning in the 1920s the earliest Arab immigrant settlers in Detroit, the Syrian/Lebanese community, thus created a cultural enclave in Dearborn that attracted future Muslim immigrants to the area, which in turn resulted in a both a diverse and

99 “Ford, had built the town of Dearborn... For hourly workers, there was East Dearborn, while West Dearborn was reserved for management. For blacks, Ford created... Inkster... for the poorer new immigrants... there was the Southend.” - Malek. "Dissent," 59.
100 'Alien' in terms of differences in language, culture, dress and beliefs.
102 Shryock, Interview.
concentrated community of Arab Americans. They began this process by remodeling Henry Ford’s constructed cities (such as Dearborn) to fit their community’s needs, and subsequently transforming it into their own culturally distinctive enclaves: “Dearborn’s Muslims began the work of transforming Henry Ford’s industrial landscape into one that would accommodate Islam and provide Muslim American futures for their children.” Detroit’s Muslim community altered and appropriated Ford’s city; they commandeered Ford’s vision for the city and created their own miniature city within it.

**Religious Topography of Arab Detroit**

As the Arab American Muslim community grew, the larger Muslim community of Detroit grew simultaneously. Consequently, this resulted in the community making itself more visible and present in Detroit’s physical topography. Arab-American Muslims began establishing mosques and religious centers, began celebrating Islamic holidays and sharing their traditions and beliefs with the larger non-Muslim community: “staff and student demands for acknowledgment of Islam in the school, recognition of Muslim holidays, and allowing Muslim students to leave school to attend Friday communal prayers.” On account of the Arab Americans’ institutional presence they were able to cement their presence within the larger non-Muslim and non-Arab community, as well as reinforcing the fact that the US has become their new home and nation.

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Table 4 – Arab Americans in Metro Detroit by Religion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Percent of Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaldean</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maronite</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melkite</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi’a</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Illustration 1 – Population Demographics of Arab Americans in Michigan by Cities of Residence:106

As Arab-American Muslims began recognizing their settlement in Detroit as permanent, they began articulating their presence and prominence in the community by catering to their communities specific needs.\footnote{The moment of recognition differs for each generation of immigrants, for example for the majority of 1st generation immigrants this recognition came after the great depression, in the 1930s.} “I’d see the signs that read ‘Halal Meats’ in the butcher shops of the Southend of Dearborn... Until Arabs became as visible as the Model T in the 1930s, the Southend was the only place a Muslim could buy lamb, beef, or poultry.”\footnote{Charara, Hayan. “Becoming the Center of Mystery,” In Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 416.} The increased visibility of Muslim Arabs in the area has turned Detroit into a hub for Muslim Arabs and other Muslims, As Hassan Jabor, the Executive Director of ACCESS explains:

In 1974, one year before the start of the civil war in Lebanon, the number of immigrants coming in to the Detroit are using the Detroit airport as a port of entry, were on average, [umm uh] these [uh] were the [uh] Arab immigrants, were on average 4,000 a year. And [uhm uh] in 1975, after the civil war started in Lebanon the number went up to 7,000 a year. In 1979, three years after, the number actually went up to 17,000 a year coming, so that was a huge number of immigrants and refugees coming into the region.\footnote{Jabor, Hassan. Interview by Mariam Al-Thani. Personal Interview, Doha/Detroit, February 14th, 2014.}

Jabor illustrated the fact that the efforts of the earlier immigrants in establishing their community and providing for the nuances of their community were extremely successful. Which led to the rapid growth of the community’s population, and thus further complicating the ethnic, sectarian and socio-economic divisions already present in the community. What is of more importance, is the influx of Lebanese immigrants, as these immigrants’ conception of identity, ethnicity differs from their earlier counterparts, as they experienced Lebanon in a different historical context. Lebanese immigrants from the period during/after the Lebanese civil war emigrated to the US from an area that was strife with sectarian violence among the Muslim sects.
Detroit’s American Muslim Community:

The ever-increasing visibility of the Muslim communities in Detroit has transformed the area into a destination for other non-Arab Muslim immigrants and American Muslims [former Nation Of Islam (NOI) members who were newly converted to orthodox/mainstream Islam- who have returned to reclaim Detroit as their domain]. Their presence has further fragmented the Muslim Arab-American community along sectarian lines. Since previous to their arrival, the Muslim-Arab community was a small and concentrated, but the influx of Muslims has resulted in an influx in institutions and thus greater institutional choice, which led to the dispersal of the Muslim community (including Muslim Arabs). The presence of multiple Muslim communities further complicates the sectarian divisions within the Muslim Arab-American community in Detroit, as it adds an additional factor to the community’s sectarian differences. Members of the Muslim American community retreated to their own ethnic groups and/or sectarian groups, which consequently increased fragmentation within the community. This increased fragmentation weakened Muslim Arabs strength as a unitary entity, which would have allowed them the opportunity to better represent their interests on a local, state and national level.

Metro-Detroit’s most prominent Muslim communities, discounting Arab Muslims, are the Albanian Muslim community, the African-American Muslim community and the South Asian Muslim community. Each of these communities

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110 NOI is a religious organization that was founded in 1930 by its patriarch Wallace D. Fard; the NOI's main dogmas were the divine nature of the 'black man', the fact that the 'white man' was the devil and the creation of a separate 'Black Nation'. Elijah Muhammed succeeded Fard in 1934. Orthodox/mainstream Islam refers to Sunni Islam – Many of the NOI members began converting to 'mainstream Islam' following in the foot-steps of Malcolm X’s conversion (Malcolm X served as the 'face' of the NOI; he was a 'Minister' of many of the NOI's most prominent 'Temples' and represented them in numerous public events and appearances) – and others followed in Warith Deen Mohammed’s conversion (Elijah Muhammed’s son) and abandoned the teachings of Elijah Muhammed and the NOI’s doctrines and assumed leadership of the NOI after his father's death in 1975 - Berg, Herbert. “The Legacy of Elijah Muhammed,” In Elijah Muhammad and Islam (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 131.
(excluding the African American Muslims) began as a small group of aggregate immigrants who joined the congregations of the existing Muslim societies (which were predominately dominated by Arab Americans), but as their communities grew they began establishing their own ethnically distinct communities. Where as the African-American community of Muslims in Detroit have a long history in the area, beginning with the establishment one of the first African-American congregations in the 1940s: "Hajj Sammsan Abdullah came to Detroit in the late 1940s... he was inspired by the energy and potential of Detroit's black community, and he wanted to establish a mosque on their behalf... [he] established the Universal Muslim Brotherhood of Al-Islam of America in 1948 or 1949." Additionally, when Elijah Muhammed succeeded Fard in 1930, he began developing the NOI in Detroit, he founded the first of the NOI's 'temples in Detroit, 'Muhammed's Temple No. 1' on Hastings Street. In 1978 the congregation moved to a different area in Detroit, they made Linwood avenue their new home and renamed their mosque Masjid Wali Muhammed, as the congregation converted to 'orthodox'/Sunni Islam under the leadership of the NOI's successor Warith Deen Muhammed.

Metro-Detroit is home to a multitude of smaller, ethnically distinct congregations, which further complicate the sectarian divide within the Muslim Arab community. Whereby Arab Muslims who had formerly identified along sectarian lines, have now retreated to ethnic divisions in addition to sectarian divides, as the Detroit Muslim community grows, these divisions become increasingly visible within the Muslim-Arab community. For example, Albanian Muslims established their own congregation, Albanian American Moslem Society in 1957 under the leadership of Imam

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112 "Building Islam in Detroit."
Vehbi Ismail; the congregation then established their own mosque in 1963, the Albanian Islamic Center.\footnote{Howell. “Inventing the American Mosque: Early Muslims and their Institutions in Detroit, 1910-1980,” 210.} Previously, Imam Vehbi was an Imam at the American Moslem Society, his arrival marked the first sectarian divides within the community, whereby this influx of Sunni Imams was one of the reasons that instigated the sectarian divide of the Muslim-Arab community.\footnote{Ibid.}

In addition to these ethnically distinct Muslim groups, is the ever growing community of South Asian Muslims in Metro-Detroit, who beginning in the late 1990s began establishing their own ethnically distinctive religious centers such as the Al-Islah Islamic Center congregation that was established in 2001, whose congregation is predominately Bangladeshi,\footnote{“Al Islah Islamic Center.” Building Islam in Detroit. http://biid.lsa.umich.edu/ (accessed 24th February, 2014).} as well as the historic Ahmadiyya Islamic Center, which was established in the 1920s, and serves a predominately Indian congregation.\footnote{“Ahmadiyya Times: Detroit, MI - USA: Ahmadiyya sponsored interfaith dialogue.” Ahmadiyya Times. http://ahmadiyyatimes.blogspot.com/2012/03/detroit-mi-usa-ahmadiyya-sponsored.html (accessed February 27, 2014). & “Detroit Area Mosques.” Building Islam in Detroit. http://biid.lsa.umich.edu/ (accessed February 24th, 2014).} Detroit’s South Asian Muslim community grew from a small community of single men, the majority of whom were university students, into a larger community of families. Since they began as a small aggregate community they joined existing congregations, once they began settling in Detroit, making it their home, they subsequently began founding their own congregations where the main spoken languages would be Urdu/Hindi and English, such as the Muslim Center of the Western Suburbs (est. 1977).\footnote{Howell. “Inventing the American Mosque: Early Muslims and their Institutions in Detroit, 1910-1980,” 272.}
The Muslim Arab-American Community:

The Arab American population made their divisions along ethnic, religious and sectarian lines visible through the geographic locations they congregated to, and by the institutions they built and the location of those institutions. The Muslim Arab-American community is predominately Shi’a, and the ethnicity that dominates the majority Shi’a population is made up people from South Lebanon.\(^{118}\) Although since the 1980s onwards the populations of both the Yemeni and Iraqi communities had been steadily growing.\(^{119}\) The number of Iraqi immigrants coming into Detroit increased significantly in the 1990s; with estimates claiming that more than 68,000 Iraqi immigrants entered the US during the 1990s (35,000 of whom settled in Michigan). Additionally, the Yemeni’s now represent between 8% to 9% of the Arab American community of Metro Detroit.\(^{120}\)

The two oldest and most noteworthy congregations among the Sunni Muslim Arab-American communities are the American Moslem Society (AMS) that was originally founded in 1921 by Imam Karoub (Lebanese American) and was comprised of a congregation that was predominately made up of Lebanese Americans, most of whom immigrated from the same village, Bekaa, in Lebanon and as such the congregation was commonly referred to by that name.\(^{121}\) The congregation was founded in 1921, although they were only able to acquire a mosque in 1938 on Dix Avenue, making it one of

\(^{118}\) "The second largest sectarian population in Arab Detroit is Shi’a, at 23 percent, who make up more than half (56 percent) of Detroit’s Arab Muslim population." – Sally Howell & Amaney Jamal. “Belief and Belonging,” in *Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit After 9/11* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), 110.


\(^{120}\) Ibid.

Detroit’s oldest mosques. However, in 1976 the newly arrived Yemeni immigrants commandeered the AMS. The Yemeni immigrants sought not only to join the AMS’ congregation but also to control the mosque, its board and its operations. In reaction to the Yemeni communities hostile take-over of the AMS, their ousting of both the founding board members and the women’s auxiliary society, and their introduction of what was deemed (by the founding members) as ‘old world’ views of a mosque’s ‘proper’ function. The founding members of the AMS congregation re-located to a new facility they purchased, and in 1979 declared themselves as the American Muslim Bekaa Center in Dearborn. The hostile takeover by the Yemenis was extremely significant as it marked the first overt display of fragmentation along ethnic lines in the community.

As the Shi’a community represents the majority of the larger Muslim Arab-American community, there congregations are worthy of note, as the formation of each new congregation was a result of either sectarian or ethnic disputes. The first is one of the oldest mosques in the area, whose congregation was founded in 1936, a few years after the establishment of the AMS, and that is the Hashemite Club. The members of the Hashemite club represented the pioneers of the Shi’a congregation in the Metro-Detroit area, as they are the first to build an exclusively Shi’a mosque in Metro-Detroit, one that caters to all the religious and cultural needs of their congregation. The creation

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122 Imam Karoub began construction on a mosque after the first World War, which was completed in 1921, in Highland Park, that mosque was short-lived due to a scandal brewing within the community that eventually led to a murder of one of the congregation’s members by another member – Howell. “Inventing the American Mosque: Early Muslims and their Institutions in Detroit, 1910-1980,” 59-72.
124 The women’s auxiliary basically ran the day-to-day operations of the mosque, and were in charge of the most important task, fundraising, by ousting them and introducing reforms such as segregated praying areas, reserving the mosque solely for prayer, they abandoned the tradition of using the mosque as a community center – Ibid, 280-281.
127 The name ‘Hashemite’ refers to the tribe that the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) belonged to.
of the Hashemite club also marks the first division within the Arab-Muslim community, between the Sunni and Shi’a sects of the early ‘Syrian’ immigrants.\textsuperscript{128} Although the Hashemite Club did enjoy relative success in the decades after its establishment, this all changed with the introduction of a new mosque in the area, the Islamic Center of Detroit (now the named the Islamic Center of America) in 1963.\textsuperscript{129} The Islamic Center drew away many of the members of the Hashemite Club’s congregation to their newly establishment mosque, this was mainly on account of the efforts of the Islamic Center’s new, young and charismatic Imam, Imam Chirri:\textsuperscript{130} “there were 600 members five years ago but by 1963, the number had dwindled to 150. This decrease is due to the following: The establishing of the ‘Islamic Center Society’ which absorbed many of the members.”\textsuperscript{131} This was an extremely substantial decrease, as the Hashemite Club’s congregation went down to a third of its original number. The Islamic Center also attracted many members of the already existing Sunni communities.\textsuperscript{132} In the immediate aftermath of the abrupt and forceful Yemeni takeover of the AMS, many of the members of its Lebanese congregation joined the congregation of the Islamic Center. Thus, in this instance the Arab-Muslim community differed to ethnic as opposed to sectarian divisions, this was mostly on account of Imam Chirri, who according to members of the community, was much more understanding and aware of the lifestyle and needs of the Muslim Arab American community: “Imam Chirri personifies the ideal

\textsuperscript{128} The founders of the Hashemite Club had the benefit of learning from the past mistakes of their predecessors who attempted to build and found mosques in the area. They observed the establishment and demise of such mosques as the Highland Park mosque, and learnt from their mistakes.


\textsuperscript{130} Imam Chirri possessed many qualities that the other ‘Imams’ in the area did not, for one he had received formal religious training, spoke English, and was (in the opinion of the Arab American community) ‘Americanized’ (someone who did not hold ‘old world’ views and was not an ‘immigrant transplant’).

\textsuperscript{131} Wasfi. “Voluntary Associations,” 76.

\textsuperscript{132} “The Dix mosque was facing competition from the new Islamic Center and its dynamic, young leader Imam Chirri. Assimilated members of the Dix mosque congregation also deflected to the Islamic Center ignoring the Sunni-Shi’a divide in the process.” - Abraham. “Arab Detroit’s ‘American’ Mosque,” 290
of self-sacrifice, compassion, and love for his community... Imam Chirri was invited by the Detroit Muslim community to be their spiritual leader. This was a major milestone in Islamic history as it marked the first time a prominent Muslim theologian and historian 'broke the ice' by coming to the United States of America.”

Even years after his departure, the Detroit Arab-American community remember the ICA’s founding Imam with great admiration. Many of the current ICA congregation members have expressed their dissatisfaction with the direction that the mosque has taken after the departure of Imam Chirri, and call for a return to the past.

In addition to the two mosques mentioned above the third Shi’a mosque that is of note is the Islamic Institution, which was established in 1985 and is located on Warren Avenue in Dearborn. The establishment of the Islamic Institution by Shaykh Abdu’l Latif Berri represents another break in the Shi’a community of Metro Detroit; according to community members Shaykh Berri had many disagreements with Imam Chirri and the ICA’s board members. These stories were corroborated by the fact that Shaykh Berri began as an Imam in the ICA and subsequently left and founded his own congregation beginning with a few of his devout followers (former members of the ICA’s congregation).

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136 Ibid, 347.
Arab Detroit’s Institutional History

The story of Arab American institution building is not unlike that of other immigrant groups in the United States. The members of the thriving Arab Detroit community have followed in the footsteps of their immigrant predecessors in their quest towards establishing institutions.

Religion mediates difference... Many immigrants find that when they become parents and want to pass on their heritage, religion is their key to cultural reproduction... to say that religion is salient for immigrants is not to say that they merely cling to what they had before they left their home countries. As religion becomes less taken for granted under the pluralistic and secular conditions prevailing in the United States, adherents become more conscious of their tradition and often more determined about its transmission... religion is... an instrumental of cultural conservation, is not to say that their religion is preserved pristinely, without change... the religion must take on new forms to be capable of survival in the new land.137

Institution building plays a significant role in the lives of immigrants as it performs two essential functions that ease the immigrants’ settlement process; it is used to make the community visible and consolidate it. The community is thus able to connect with one another, solidify community relations, and consequently create a space for cultural preservation, whereby community members are able to maintain their ethnic culture, language and other rituals (for generations to come). By positioning themselves within the larger community, and following in the footsteps of other immigrant and non-immigrant communities, Arab Americans have joined in an ‘American’ cultural practice of institution building, thereby entering into the cultural mainstream. Through the process of institution building Arab Americans have been able to re-create their native environment (on a micro-cosmic level) whilst simultaneously adapting to ‘normative American’ values, in relation to religious institutions, which usually cater to both the

social and religious needs of the community. Likewise, many Arab American religious institutions cater to the multiple needs of their community, including their religious, cultural, educational and social needs, thus nullifying the notion that this particular practice of institution/community building is ‘strictly American’, as well as the notion that Muslim-Arabs are incapable of having anything in common with ‘Americans.’ Thus, illustrating the multiple tiers that compose Muslim Arab-Americans’ identity.

**Christian Arabs:**

The Arab Detroit community is composed by a majority of Christian Arabs; this is an important fact to note as it depicts the diverse nature of the Arab Detroit community. In addition to illustrating the complexity of the community’s population demographics, which in turn further complicates notions of identity within the community. It also dispels the stereotype (perpetuated by both mainstream media, and a few scholars) that Christianity is the antithesis of Islam, and that Muslim Arab Americans are incapable of appropriating ‘American values and norms’. It does so by illustrating the fact that both Christian and Muslim Arab Americans belong to the larger Arab-American community, in which they share a multitude of community organizations and institutions, the most prominent of which are ACCESS, the Arab American National Museum (AANM), and the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (AADC).

Arab Detroit lays claim to a multitude of Christian sects, the majority of which belong to the Catholic and Orthodox denominations, and whose geographic locations are concentrated mainly in Macomb and Oakland counties (with a few communities located in East Detroit and Livonia).\(^{138}\) For example some of the largest Arab Christian communities belong to the Catholic denomination, such as the Iraqi Chaldeans and the

\(^{138}\) Refer to Image 1.
Melkites (majority of Arabs belonging to this sect are from Lebanon). The Chaldeans are a very distinct group, as they associate both ethnically and religiously using the same term, as Andrew Shryock explains: "one could argue that the Chaldean community is an ethnic extension of their church, but this would be sloppy, and one could just as easily argue that the Chaldean Church is defined by its relationship with an ethnic group."\(^{139}\)

The term Chaldean does not only reflect a specific religious group but it is also representative of a specific cultural group that is located in the Northwest of Iraq.\(^{140}\) As such, their religion is integrated into their identity; it is a marker of their culture, ancestry, ethnicity and of their religious beliefs. One of the main institutions associated with the Chaldeans is the Mother of God Chaldean Church located in Southfield, which was established in 1980 (in conjunction with a convent and senior citizen home, which were established in 1976 and 1997 respectively). Furthermore, the Melkites have also established their own institutions, such as the Our Lady of Redemption Church that was founded in 1929 in Detroit, but since the onset of the 1980s the congregation relocated and settled in Warren (Macomb County).\(^{141}\) The Melkite Church originally only catered to a Lebanese congregation. As the congregation expanded, re-located and evolved (the move to Warren in 1980, the construction of a larger building in 2001, the establishment of a pre-school, an education center and a social center), it attracted parishioners from various ethnicities, including people of Lebanese, Palestinian and Italian ancestry to join the congregation.\(^{142}\) The multiple ethnicities that compose this congregation convey the lack of ethnic divisions in the Christian-Arab community, and

\(^{139}\) Shryock, Interview.
\(^{141}\) Ibid
\(^{142}\) Ibid.
emphasize the strict sectarian divisions, as each congregation identified itself by its specific denomination.

Catholicism is only one of the major denominations represented in Arab Detroit; another is the Orthodox denomination, which has a long history within the Arab American community. Many of the pioneer immigrants that landed in New York in the late 1800s (the first wave of Arab American immigrants) belonged to the Orthodox denomination, specifically belonging to the Antiochian sect. Subsequently these pioneering Arab immigrants established their first congregation in 1904 in Brooklyn.143 The members of the Antiochian denomination played a significant role in synonimizing the monikers Arab and Christian; this group was a visual example of how Christianity does have a history in the Arab world, as well as acting as a reminder of the diversity present in the Arab world. Moreover, these immigrants represented a number of ethnicities, such as Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, Palestinian, but all belonged to the same Antiochian community. One of the main churches belonging to the Antiochian sect in Arab Detroit is St. Mary’s Antiochian Orthodox Church, which was established in 1972 in Livonia.144 The Antiochian community in Detroit grew from an extremely small community scattered around the greater Detroit area; a small Christian Arab community in Detroit propelled the establishment of an official and distinctly Orthodox (Antiochian) Church. They began the process by contacting a seminary in Lebanon to send an immigrant priest to their new established homeland in order to begin the process of institutionalizing their religion/culture. Consequently this institutionalizing process attracted other members of the Antiochian community to the established

143 "The Antiochian Orthodox Church has always identified as the Arab branch of Orthodox Christianity... the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Antiochian Orthodox is Arabic... The Arab Christian heritage was transplanted to the United States." - Stiffler, Mathew. "Orthodox, Arab, American: The Flexibility of Christian Arabness in Detroit," In Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 106.
144 Ibid
congregation in Livonia, which grew from a modest congregation of 11 in 1972, to a congregation boasting over 1000 members as well as running a successful school that caters to over 400 children in 2002. The community did not establish their own distinct congregation until the late twentieth century, mainly on account of the fact that many of the earlier immigrants preferred to attend already established ‘American’ churches as a means of assimilation, as Alixa Naff recollects a memory from her early childhood in the early 1920s:

My brothers and I attended Protestant churches: Methodist, Congregational, and Baptist... Even after the Syrian church was dedicated, we were not required to attend it. Our parents thought we would learn the lessons of religion better if we heard them in a language we understood... The Protestant churches are effective Americanizing institutions... we learned more than religion.

Many other immigrants from the first wave of immigration, whose children represented the first generation of American born Arabs, used religion as a tool of ‘assimilation’, as a way to enter the ‘mainstream.’ Thus, depicting the differing experiences of Muslim and Christian-Arabs; whereby many Christian Arabs did not feel the need to create their own institutions upon their arrival, as they felt comfortable integrating into the already established community. As opposed to Muslim Arabs who felt a pressing need to institutionalize their presence upon their arrival. They needed to create a space for their community, as one did not exist, to cater to their specific religious needs.

**Muslim-Arabs:**

Although the majority of Arab Americans in Detroit adhere to the Christian faith, Islam remains a dominant religion within the community. Moreover, the visibility of

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145 Ibid, 105
146 Naff is not only an authority on Arab Americans in Michigan, but also someone who grew up in a family that emigrated to the United States during the first wave of Arab immigration.
Islam in Metro Detroit has gained certain cities in the area infamy, for example
Dearborn is recognized Nation-wide as a Muslim hub: “it was inevitable that federal
authorities would turn to Detroit...Within hours of the 9/11 attacks... the first terror-
related arrests were made in Dearborn... by early 2002, Dearborn (not New York) was
the first American city to have a local office of Homeland Security.”¹⁴⁸ On account of the
infamy of the Metro Detroit Muslim Arab American community, and the community’s
institutional visibility, Detroit was one of the first cities targeted for arbitrary arrests in
the aftermath of 9/11, and Dearborn (one of the most concentrated neighborhoods of
Arab Americans in Metro Detroit) became the center of operation for federal
agencies.¹⁴⁹ In spite of the increased negative attention placed on the community by
mainstream media, the Muslim communities of Detroit continued to be increasingly
vocal about their religious beliefs, vocalizing the multiplicity of their identity, while
being forced to defend their ‘Americaness/American identity’: “The Dearborn and
Wayne County residents overwhelmingly possess a strong sense of being Muslim and
Arab.”¹⁵⁰ The Muslim Arab American communities in Metro Detroit do not only posses a
strong affiliation to the US as their homeland, but they also maintain their ethnic
identity as an Arab Muslim proudly, despite the negative attention that comes along
with such a proclamation. The Muslim Arab American communities used 9/11 as an
opportunity to rebuild relations that they had previously cultivated, and re-shape the
image of Arab and Muslim Americans. As such the Muslim Arab Americans continually
maintain their already existing institutions as well as establishing new institutions,

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Shryock, Abraham Nabeel and Sally Howell. “The Terror Decade in Arab Detroit,” In Arab
¹⁴⁹ “the city of Dearborn... historic home of most Lebanese Muslims and more recently includes Yemeni,
Palestinian, and Iraqi Muslims... according to the DAAS data, about 79 percent of all Muslims reside in
¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 40.
which act as a visible declaration of their ethnic identity and religious affiliation/identity.

Nonetheless, the Muslim communities of Metro-Detroit have an already established history unrelated to the events of 9/11. The Muslim Arab Americans in Metro Detroit have a long established institutional history dating back to the early 1920s, with the establishment of the first mosque, ‘Islamic centers’, and coffee shops which served the community’s religious, social and cultural needs.\textsuperscript{151} Moreover, the current Arab American community is acutely aware of the history of their predecessors (earlier immigrants), who in some cases are their ancestors and/or family members. These early members began to settle in Detroit and accumulate wealth they began cementing their roots in the area, firstly by establishing families (going back to their native land to get married or by bringing their wife and kids over to the US), and secondly by establishing institutions, organizations and private businesses.\textsuperscript{152} On account of the presence of a highly concentrated community of Arab Americans in Metro-Detroit many national Arab and Muslim organizations have designated it as the location of their head quarters and/or local offices. For instance the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) have a designated center in Michigan, the Arab American Center for Civil and Human Rights headquartered in Michigan, American Arab Chamber of Commerce, ACCESS, Arab American News, Arab American National

\textsuperscript{152} The most common businesses operated by Arab Americans were grocery stores, coffee shops and restaurants. This was on account of the fact that these places played a dual purpose, as a cultural meeting ground and simultaneously catering to the specific dietary needs of the community (for the Christian Arab Americans it gave them a taste of home and for Muslim Arab Americans it provided them with Halal products). – “Father and sons saved their factory wages until one could open the family store...Louis began with a fruit stand shortly after his arrival in America in 1906. By the end of the twenties, he owned seventeen stores...in 1926, ‘there was a small family Syrian grocery on practically every corner.’” – Naff, Alixa. “From Syrian to Syrian-American: Between the Wars,” In Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 271-272.
Museum. Through these secular institutions the community is able to simultaneously support themselves and create a space for cultural interaction/sharing, with the larger non-Arab community, as well as with the second, third and fourth (so on) generations of American born youth of Arab ancestry.

The Infamous City of Dearborn:

The city of Dearborn began to gain a reputation for being a city dominated by Muslim Arab Americans. This attention that Dearborn began to garner beginning in the late 1970s would prove to be extremely problematic in the following years; as Dearborn’s community of Muslims grew so did their visibility, and this increased visibility transformed from a virtue (a center for interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance) to a vice after the events of 9/11. Immediately after the events of September 11, the city of Detroit began to attract unwanted media attention and was subsequently targeted by homeland security and other federal entities: “the idea... that the Arabs of metropolitan Detroit had finally entered the cultural mainstream... is likely to be dismissed today... Once hailed as ‘an immigrant success story’, as ‘the capital of Arab America’, the image of Arab Detroit changed within hours of the 9/11 attacks.” In spite of the negative attention placed on Detroit during the immediate aftermath of the events of 9/11, the Muslim Arab American community prospered and gained strength from the hardships they faced during this period. They were able to grow from this period of hardship due to the strength of their community’s institutions; by that time

154 “Arab Detroit, where the FBI has arrested the wrong men, federal prosecutors have convicted the innocent, thousands of people have been interrogated and spied upon because of their national origin or religious affiliation, and others have been detained and deported without due process of law.” –Ibid, 5.
the Arab American community was already established, prosperous and adept with dealing with difficult situations.156

Dearborn has gained the region a reputation of being a Muslim hub, according to many scholars on Arab Detroit, Dearborn is commonly referred to as 'Dearbornistan' by certain popular media outlets: "governmental agencies treated Arab Detroit as a 'special place'... referring to Dearborn as 'Dearbornistan.'"157 Moreover, Dearborn and its surrounding neighborhoods have also gained infamy in the Arab world on account of the large concentration of Arab Americans, and their visible Muslim institutions. Additionally, on account of the presence of the community's highly visible Muslim institutions, the Metro Detroit area has attracted a lot of attention (both negative and positive) by the American public. The area is home to numerous religious institutions, some of which operate purely as mosques, others which operate as community centers, schools and some which encapsulate all three functions in one center, in addition to operating as an implicit identity marker. Some religious centers are made up of congregations solely from one nation of origin (in some cases one village – all though as the community grows this statement becomes less true), other centers cater to a specific Islamic sect (Shi'a, Sunni, both). As such the community has established mosques and Islamic centers that cater to the specific needs of each congregation; for instance there are centers that cater to a congregation that prefers a more

156 "The capable hands of community spokespeople, most of whom worked for Detroit’s well-established Arab American service institutions (notably, the Arab Community Center for Social and Economic Services, ACCESS), its advocacy groups (most often, the local chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, ADC), or its media-savvy mosques (foremost among them, the Islamic Center of America, ICA, whose progressive leader, Imam Hassan Qazwini, became a 'go-to' Muslim cleric for local, national, and international reporters)," – Abraham et al. "The Terror Decade in Arab Detroit: An Introduction," 4.

‘Americanized mosque’, as well as to a congregation that prefers a ‘traditional mosque’, or a congregation that is politically engaged (with issues that affect the Arab world)…etc. There are a number of differing mosques in the area that cater to a highly concentrated group of Muslim Arab Americans, and the reason behind the multiplicity of religious centers is mostly on account of congregational preference. There is an observable pattern in Arab Detroit, whereby a new mosque/center emerges only when a congregation splits, whereby a portion of the members dislike/disagree with the direction of the center’s board of directors and/or the religious leadership of the center.

Detroit’s Arab-American community is unparalleled; it constitutes a diverse population of peoples and religions within an already diverse metropolitan area. Arab Detroit hosts a strong community, which is composed of influential organizations, prominent community members and representatives at the local, state and national levels of government. On account of this infamy, many community members feel obligated to adhere to this ‘Pan-Arab-American’ identity, especially when defining themselves to people outside of the community. Although, within the Arab Detroit community, members find comfort and/or prefer to accede to their more specific ethnic and/or sectarian identities; as depicted by the experience of an Arab American community member, Mohamed Forge, “went to coffee houses to see friends, had only Muslim and Christian friends from Lebanon.” Many members of Detroit’s Arab-American community identified more with members of their shared ethnicity, and preferred ethnic identifiers as opposed to religious ones; but even so, as illustrated

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158 Term usually used within Arab Detroit to refer to a mosque that conducts sermons in English, uses the center for multiple functions, and one that conducts some form of a ‘Sunday School’.
159 Traditional usually used synonymously with ‘old world’ – a center whose function is purely religious.
160 Jabor, Interview.
161 Forge, Mohamed, Dearborn, Michigan, 1980, June 6, Faris and Yamna Naff Arab-American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, box number 81, folder number 18, digital file number AC0078.
above, religion still plays an important role in identity construction. Despite his preference for an ethnic identity marker, which he articulated explicitly and implicitly by the coffee house he frequented, his friends' religions were still noted above, displaying the important role of religion within the community as an identity marker.
Chapter III

Detroit Mosques – Historical Presence & Cultural Deviations

Religious institutions constitute an important part of the daily lives of Arab Americans. Muslim Arab Americans are highly dependent on their religious organizations, as they satisfy not only the community’s spiritual needs, but also their cultural, social and educational needs, as illustrated by the current Imam of the Islamic Center of America (ICA), Imam Qazwini’s explanation of the multiple roles he occupies in the ICA:

My role is that I am the spiritual leader of the Islamic Center. I am the main religious figure here. I lead the Friday prayer. I conduct the memorial services. I preside over marriages. I conduct Islamic divorces. I conduct marital counseling. I giver lectures at various places, in Muslim and non-Muslim places. Many things actually.162

This explanation discounts the multiple functions that these religious centers satisfy. Hence, the community invests greatly in these institutions, whether it is with their time or money or both. Community members are actively involved in the maintenance of these religious centers, on the day-to-day running of the center and occupy pertinent positions either on the board of the religious center or as members of the centers multiple groups. The ICA as well as other religious centers in Muslim Arab Detroit are run by a ‘Board of Trustees’, as well as overseeing a number of youth and women’s groups.163 This fact of investment illustrates the extent of community members’ association with religious institutions. Consequently conveying a complex relationship

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162 Imam Qazwini is representative of an archetype of the majority of the Imams within the Muslim American community. - Qazwini, Hassan. Interview by Mariam Al-Thani. Personal Interview, Doha/Detroit, January 2014.

between the community and its institutions, whereby the population of Arab Detroit intertwines its identity with its organizational membership. Community members merge their identity with the identity of their religious institution and/or congregation. This phenomenon further complicates the construction of identity in Arab Detroit, as it depicts a layer of their multi-tiered identities, thus signifying a further fragmentation within the Muslim Arab Detroit community. This phenomenon is articulated and made visible by an increase in religious centers in the Metro-Detroit area; Dearborn alone is home to over eight Islamic centers.\textsuperscript{164}

**Interactions and Influences**

Traditionally in most Middle Eastern countries the 'Mosque' serves the community in a limited capacity; as a place of worship/prayer and a means of consultation with the Imam (one of many). Mosques in the Middle East typically remain open for the majority of the day, worshippers are able to come in before prayer to read from the holy text (Quran), and are free to remain after prayer to do so.\textsuperscript{165} Another main function of the mosque is the Friday prayer (communal prayer), which begins with a sermon (khutba). The mosques in the Middle East typically do not function beyond these limited roles.

Whereas, religious institutions in the US function in ways that go beyond the limited scope of being simply a place of worship. Many churches and synagogues in both urban and rural communities function as social centers and hubs of religious education. The majority of churches in the United States host multiple community events, and


\textsuperscript{165} Many but not all public mosques are open 24hrs a day.
serve as the meeting place for various social groups (both church related and unrelated) ranging from book clubs to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Many of these various groups and/or societies are sponsored by the religious centers they utilize, while others simply rent the space. Religious centers in the US rent out their halls or other spaces within their center to various groups in order to supplement their income. Further, synagogues and churches, alike, run religious education programs, such as 'Sunday Schools' or bible study classes, and classes that teach the Torah, in addition to serving their congregations' other non-spiritual needs, such as attending to moments of celebration and mourning.

Thereby it is highly understandable that immigrant groups and communities in the US have predominately opted to create 'religious centers' instead of creating a space for the sole purpose of worship. As illustrated by the multiple religious centers belonging to immigrant groups in the Metro-Detroit area, which have adopted this notion of creating a 'religious center' as opposed to a 'Church', or 'Mosque' or 'Synagogue'. These religious centers are not only built by their respective immigrant communities, but are also maintained by them and function to serve their multiple and ever-growing needs.

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167 Various synagogues and churches in Michigan cater to the multiple needs of their respective congregations. The Center of FREE (synagogue) holds weekly Sabbath services, and celebrations of all the 'High Holy Days', as well as running a Sunday School, teen club, camp. It also has a recreation center fit for numerous activities. St. Gerrard Church, which also hosts numerous activities and societies in addition to its performance of religious services. They also run an educational program. - "The Pluralism Project at Harvard University," Center Profile. http://www.pluralism.org/profiles/view/71791 (accessed November 20, 2013).
168 Ibid.
Following the example of previous religious institutions, the Arab-American Muslim community continued the tradition of creating ‘religious centers’ in the US.\textsuperscript{169} These religious centers provided the immigrants with a connection to their native culture/home. It is a space where they can freely express and participate in their cultural customs and celebrations. Additionally, these religious spaces provide immigrants with solace; as they now have an institution, a community, an established leadership to guide them on how to maintain their religious observances in an ‘alien’ culture/home.\textsuperscript{170}

\textbf{Generational Rifts:}

Beginning in the 1970s with the influx of new Arab immigrants, the community of Arab Muslims increased in number and diversified in terms of religious sects, national origin and socio-economic class (refer to Charts 1&2).\textsuperscript{171} This diversification was indicative of the differing ideologies and beliefs present in the community. These differing ideals led to the uneasy and at certain times tumultuous integration of the new immigrants into the already well established community and institutions (previously developed by the first wave of Arab immigrants). The newer immigrants’ found their transition into American society to be uneasy; this was on account of the fact that their experience was different to that of the ‘older’ immigrants (who emigrated during late nineteenth to early twentieth century). Whereby, the first wave of Arab immigrants, who encountered a general population of US citizens that were largely unfamiliar with


\textsuperscript{171} "In Detroit, it is clear that a wealthy, college-educated... third-generation Lebanese American man is located in social fields dramatically unlike those open to a poor, Arabic-Speaking... first-generation, Yemeni immigrant." - Detroit Arab American Study Team. \textit{Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit After 9/11} (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), 47-48.
Arab Muslims, had the freedom to recreate, develop and adapt their religion and/or the way in which they practice their religious faith, within their newly appropriated homeland. This freedom was not available to the subsequent waves of Arab immigrants who encountered a different US upon their arrival. These ‘newer’ immigrants encountered an already established ‘Arab’ community, and more importantly a community of ‘Arab Americans’. These ‘new’ immigrants entered into the US and witnessed a community composed of individuals with multiple hybrid identities, a community that had already carved out their cultural and religious space within the topography of the US. As described by Alawan, a prominent member of the Muslim Arab American community of Detroit:

Developing an American identity, which is an American Muslim... Islam is well travelled. It travelled to Spain, as well as other countries. It adapted itself, it did not change Islam, it adapted itself to the culture it was in. And there is nothing wrong with me saying I am an American Muslim. Usually when you say this to a foreigner. A Muslim from a foreign country, they hear you as saying that you are changing Islam, it is not changing Islam. It is only amplifying the [uh], amplifying or [the, uh], or applying Islam to the lifestyle you are in... When I say I am an American Muslim all of sudden people will sit back, especially foreign people, they will sit back and say oh you are going to change the Quran, you are going to change this and that.172

These ‘new’ immigrants had to (in many cases begrudgingly) navigate and integrate themselves within the confines of an already defined space: "The immigrants of the 1970s often found the accommodation of the earlier immigrants to American Culture too high a price to pay."173 As illustrated by the points of view of members of both the ‘new’ and ‘old’ generation, disagreements between these two communities were frequent and common, and very complex. Misunderstandings, and assumptions made by both sides often exacerbate the situation. Further, most of these disagreements occurred between ethnic communities within the Muslim Arab community, and at times

along sectarian and socio-economic lines. This is on account of the fact that members of each respective community within the larger Muslim Arab community hold on to preconceived notions, assumptions and/or stereotypes about their ethnic/sectarian counterparts, which only breeds further animosity within the community, and cements these divisions.

Chart 1 – Religious Topography of Arab Detroit:174

**Foreign Influences:**

Generational clashes were further aggravated by the influx of visiting imams during the 1970s-90s from the Middle East; these imams were welcomed and viewed by many Arab-American Muslims as the true beacons of Islam, as authorities in the religion. Many of these Imams would try to impart the norms prevalent in the Middle East to the communities they were visiting. This phenomenon of ‘visiting Imams’ occurred as a corollary to what was deemed as the ‘Islamic resurgence’ of the 1980s; “there was a period at the turn of the 1980s when both were energized by the success of the Iranian Revolution.... American Muslim activists were successful in their organization efforts during the 1980s.” This religious invigoration helped strengthen

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175 Ibid, 5.
176 “board of directors ultimately prevailed and invited an Old World scholar to Detroit. Dr. Ahmed Mehanna, an Egyptian graduate from al-Azhar University... Dr. Mehanna was popular with those who grew up in the Middle East and with some American born Muslims... who longed for a ‘purer’ form of Islam and Arabic culture.” - Abraham, Nabeel. “Arab Detroit’s ‘American’ Mosque,” In Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 288.
the institutions of the American Muslim community, but it also consequently led to the fragmentation of the Arab American Muslim community. Whereby, disagreements between older generation immigrants, American-born Arabs, 3rd and 4th generation Arab Americans (who were predominately of a Lebanese/Syrian ethnicity, and affluent) against newly arrived Arab immigrants (who were from a variety of ethnicities, occupied a lower socio-economic position), were constant. These differing groups argued predominately over how the religious organization should be run and by whom. These disagreements stemmed from the fact that the opposing parties held on to invariably different visions of what a ‘mosque’ is and what the role of religion in society should be. These differing ideals were mostly on account of the fact that the arguing parties came from extremely different backgrounds and experiences.178 Many of the newer immigrants, who immigrated from Yemen and Iraq, were arriving from decidedly different communities, than that of the earlier ‘Syrian’ immigrants and of their Lebanese counterparts (from the second and third waves). Both Yemeni’s and Iraqi’s were emigrating from strictly segregated societies, oppressive regimes and areas where both human and women’s rights were greatly diminished. Where as, immigrants emigrating from the Levant, were arriving from multi-culturist communities and religiously pluralistic societies that enjoyed relatively more freedom than some of their Middle-Eastern counterparts.

This period also witnessed an influx in the establishment of Muslim organizations at the national level by the Muslim American community. Many of these Muslim organizations were being funded by a number of Middle Eastern countries, for example, one such organization is the Federation of Islamic Associations (FIA), which is

178 As illustrated by participants answers from a community survey conducted by Kim Schopymer in 1994 on Mosque practices in Detroit – Community Survey, 1994, Box 4, Administration, Imam Mohamad Jawad Chirri Papers, 1959-2005, Bentley Historical Library Archives, University of Michigan.
the oldest Muslim American organization (est. in the 1950s) and funded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and whose headquarters are in Detroit.\textsuperscript{179} The FIA made it possible for the establishment of other Muslim organizations such as the Muslim Student Association (MSA): "the MSA was formed to strengthen national and international ties among Muslims of all national origins and ethnicities...an agency with enormous influence in helping redefine Islamic identity in America."\textsuperscript{180} The issue of foreign donors created similar problems to the ones that emerged as a result of the visiting Imams. Foreign influences within the Arab-American Muslim community seem to highlight the differences between the various communities within the community. Whereby, by supporting one faction over another and subsequently strengthening their institutional power they are inadvertently further cementing the rifts or oppositions within the community. Consequently, weakening the larger community's position and their potential position of influence.

The disagreements within the Muslim Arab-American community were made visible by the designation of imams, whereby once an imam was designated to lead a congregation, that congregation was able to establish its newly appropriated, distinct identity and separate from the former congregation it belonged to.\textsuperscript{181} Since the imam is the decisive factor when determining which direction the organization would take (conservative Islam, or modernized Islam...etc), whereby, membership to certain institutions depicts a layer(s) of their identity.\textsuperscript{182} Community members began using religious institutions as signifiers of their identity. As such, the increase in Islamic

\textsuperscript{179} Haddad, Not Quiet American, 24.
\textsuperscript{182} "Second- and third-generation offspring who began moving from Southend to east Dearborn... a good number were beginning to attend the new 'upscale' Islamic Center on Joy Road... Assimilated members of the Dix mosque congregation also deflected to the Islamic Center." - Abraham. "Arab Detroit's 'American' Mosque," 290.
institutions in the area can be viewed as a visual representation of the increasing divisions in the community.

**Interactions with Non-Muslim Community:**

A prominent way that the ‘Islamic Centers’ engaged with the non-Muslim community is through their involvement in inter-faith dialogue. Islamic centers have engaged in numerous forms of dialogue with their neighbors, in an effort to situate themselves within their new community. These Islamic centers have hosted a number of ‘inter-faith dialogues’ with their Christian and Jewish counterparts; the Islamic Center of America (ICA) continually interacts with its Church neighbors, such as the Armenian Church, socially and through religious exchanges. The Islamic centers in Metro-Detroit continually engage in other forms of inter-faith dialogue that are more implicit, such as conducting open houses. Additionally, the Islamic centers regularly host fundraising ‘galas’, dinners, and other events that are open to all members of their surrounding area.

Another important role that these Islamic centers adopt is to unite the Arab-American Muslim community and to mobilize them as a political constituency. For instance, the Islamic Center of America declares itself as a representative of the Muslim-American community in its entirety, and has garnered relative success with this assertion, as illustrated by the fact that both leaders of the ICA (Imam Chirri and Imam Qazwini) have been continually chosen by government officials to represent American Muslims and/or Arab Americans on both national and international arenas.

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184 For example, the ICA conducts weekly group tours of its center - As stated in their website - http://www.icofa.com/index.php/announcement
185 Imam Chirri has travelled to the Middle East on numerous occasions to raise funds for the ICA, and to promote and advocate for the Muslim communities in the United States & Imam Qazwini has been chosen
board members of these Islamic institutions began to realize the amount of political capital they held as a group. This realization came in large part due to the success of Arab American organizations nationally, such as the Arab American Institute (AAI) and locally (Detroit) such as ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services). ACCESS has been largely successful in assisting Arab Americans and ensuring that their transition into the US is effortless (to a large extent), by aiding them in their economic and social endeavors. ACCESS has also effectively promoted and encouraged Arab Americans to take advantage of and participate fully in their new nation of citizenship, in their new homeland and community. Whereby, many of the Islamic centers’ events in Detroit now frequently include prominent politicians on their guest lists. These institutions have come to realize their political power and influence; they have the ability to make a change in their local community and on the state level. These institutions moved away from their previous isolationist policies, which had prevented them from participating in their larger surrounding community and receiving the benefits of that participation. Furthermore, it portrays an additional layer of Muslim Arab-Americans manifold identities, which is their accepted degree of ‘Americaness.’ Muslim Arab-Americans view the notion of ‘Americaness’ in degrees, whereby they internalize their own definitions of what it means ‘to be American’ and incorporate it into their identity. The degree of ‘Americaness’ they are comfortable with and accept is a further divisive factor in the community, and this choice manifests itself in Muslim Arab Americans’ choice of congregation. Whereby depending on their conception of citizenship, of what it means to be ‘American’, the values they adhere/relate to are all

conveyed through the organizations they belong to. These organizations’ structures are a further representation of their congregants’ notions of ‘Americaness.’

This notion of ‘degrees of Americaness’ is further represented by the nomenclature adopted by Arab-American Muslims, which reveals a lot about the Islamic centers’ role in society, the congregations’ perception of themselves, their culture, heritage and identity. The early Arab-American Muslims were more flexible then the newer immigrants in their process of integration into American society, for example they conducted their communal prayers on Sunday and called it ‘Sunday prayers’, they would also ran a ‘Sunday School’ (religious classes for children). The older generation of Arab-American Muslim immigrants adopted norms that were similar to other religious institutions in the US, this trend was made evident when Muslim Arabs began describing their religious spaces as ‘centers’ instead of ‘mosques’, and opened up the space to other activities unrelated to prayer and worship. They even structured their ‘Islamic Centers’ along the lines of an American institution; whereby they appointed a Board of Trustees who are elected via a democratic process and who are ultimately in-charge of the ‘center’s administration, including the appointment of imams. The appointment of a ‘Board of Trustees’ is reminiscent of an American system of the ‘separation of powers’ and of community involvement; the ‘centers’ are not only at the epicenter of the community but are run by the community as a collective effort on their part.

187 Illustrated through the reasons cited for congregational splits in multiple interviews and personal narratives of Muslim Arab Americans; Such as the AMS split between the Yemeni’s and ‘Lebanese/Syrian’, one of the reasons that attributed to this division was the dissatisfaction of the Yemeni’s over the lack of control the Imam had over the day-to-day operations of the AMS and the absolute control attributed to the AMS’ board members and women’s auxiliary group – they did not believe in this ‘American’ notion of separation of powers – they were happy to appropriate the title of ‘Muslim-Americans’, but were not comfortable in changing their accepted religious norms. Where as the Lebanese/Syrian immigrants were more comfortable with adapting some, but not all of their religious norms, to fit the context of their newly appropriated home- Ibid.
The terminology used by the members of the Arab-American Muslim community has negative connotations, typical of immigrant communities. For instance when engaging in conversation about their native culture and language, they use negative language, the language of loss, of what living in America has ‘cost’ them and their children (cultural capital). This type of language is most commonly witnessed among the members of the newer generation of immigrants, who starkly witness the difference between how they were raised in their native home and how their raising their children in a different home-land. Where as the older generation of immigrants use negative nomenclature, but in an alternate way; they discuss their native heritage and culture using terminology such as ‘Old World’ or ‘traditional’, ‘old ways’ or ‘radical’, ‘dated’, ‘we did not know religion before them’<sup>188</sup>, these are all terms that have extremely negative connotations. The adoption of negative terminology is another example of the varying degrees of ‘Americaness’ that each immigrant group is comfortable with adopting, and invariably determines which congregation these groups will inevitably join.

**Historical Presence of Mosques in Detroit**

Ford essentially constructed many of the cities in the Metro-Detroit area. In 1916 Ford moved its major plant to Highland Park, the designation of the plant to this location consequently designated the same location as the site of the first ‘mosque’ in Michigan, built in 1922.<sup>189</sup> Muslim Arab Americans felt that building this institution was necessary in order for them to be able to adequately practice their religion.<sup>190</sup> This particular mosque was a short-lived experiment on account of the community’s internal

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<sup>188</sup> ‘Them’ – refers to the visiting imams from the Middle East that came along during the period of the ‘resurgence’ of Islam.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 271.

sectarian struggles. The newer immigrants, who had a more clearly defined understanding of ‘nation’, ‘nation-state’, ‘nationality’, ‘religious identity’ and (native) political affiliations, in addition to having lived through numerous religious uprisings and conflicts, arrived with a tainted view of religion. They arrived with an embedded notion of religious identity. These newer immigrants came to the US with established ideas about the United States, religion and culture. Upon their arrival, they witnessed their religion (Islam) being practiced, by the previous generation, predominately of ‘Syrian’ immigrants, in a way that was different to the way they practiced Islam, which was unsettling to some of the new-comers. Consequently these new arrivals began to make demands and claims to the existing religious institutions (founded by the previous generation of immigrants) to change and accommodate their norms and practices, and if that did not succeed they would establish their own spaces of worship. As two residents of Dearborn, Lila and Mohsen, reveal in an interview conducted by Sally Howell, a prominent Anthropologist on Muslim Arab Detroit: “Lila: There are about eight. I can tell you offhand. Eight… In the immediate area… Mohsen:… those are the main six… Lila:… what are you only talking about the Shia mosques? Mohsen: The Shia. Those are the main ones in the community.” This conversation reveals the way in which Muslim Arab-American residents of Dearborn construct their

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191 Such as the Arab-Israeli wars and the Iranian Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the first Shi'a theocracy in 1979. Other conflicts include the Lebanese Civil War have also impressed sectarianism and sectarian violence deeper into their psyche. Meanwhile, other parts of the region had been overwhelmed by Pan-Arabism that had been advocate first by the enigmatic Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser (1950s-70) as well as by the successive leaderships in Iraq and Syria (during the 1970s-80s).

192 “The nationalist Yemenis… were hardly devout. They found the actions of their zealous countrymen, whom they referred to as ‘al-musalee’en’ (literally those who pray)… Yet even the avowed atheists among them understood the logic of the musalee’en’s actions. The Lebanese and Palestinian immigrant population residing in the Southend of Dearborn in the late 1970s also readily comprehended the reasoning behind the musalee’en’s forced entry into the Dix mosque… that the Dix mosque was not open on Friday’s was abnormal, even scandalous, in the eyes of the immigrant Muslim community.” – Abraham. “Arab Detroit’s ‘American’ Mosque,” 279.

193 “Newcomers who sought to redefine the tenor and role of the mosque… their respective imams were forced to establish separate congregations… this occurred in the 1980s… [Islamic Institute of Knowledge]” - Ibid, 297.

identity. Sectarian differences are the first to be emphasized/recognized, followed by ethnic, then socio-economic differences and degrees of ‘Americaness.’ Socio-economic differences and notions of ‘being American’ can often be delineated by the status of the immigrant (year of immigrants arrival to the US) and/or their ethnicity. For instance, many of the ‘newly arrived’ immigrants from Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon, who emigrated to the United States as refugees/displaced peoples, were of lower socio-economic classes. Similarly, many of the Iraqi and Yemeni immigrants, who came from cultural/ethnic backgrounds where they belonged to the majority religion and/or official state religion, experienced religion differently from Lebanese/Syrian immigrants, who come from a multi-cultural and religiously pluralistic community, and thus their appropriation of ‘being American’ differs. Whereby, many of the presupposed ‘American values’ do not seem strange or ‘alien’ to the Lebanese/Syrian immigrants, but do to the Yemeni/Iraqi immigrants. Moreover, Syrian/Lebanese immigrants, generally find themselves more flexible then their Yemeni/Iraqi ethnic counterparts in their integration process, as they came from religiously pluralistic societies, as opposed to the Yemeni’s and Iraqi’s who were part of the majority/official religion in their homeland.

Conclusion

The scholarship on Arab Americans has been and continues to be dominated by the notion of a clash of identities; the Arab immigrants’ experience in the United States is consistently being examined through a binary frame, which places the notion of being Arab and the notion of being American in opposition to one another. This binary framework begins with two main presuppositions; the existence of both a unitary ‘Arab’ and ‘American’ identity and that ‘Arab’ identity is antithetical to ‘American’ identity. Both these presuppositions are highly assumptive and consequently extremely problematic. When scholars begin with such presumptions it is inevitable that their work will follow a specific trajectory that will lead them to the utilization of a binary framework of clashing identities. Such a framework leads to the perpetuation of these inaccurate assumptions about the nature of both ‘Arab’ and ‘American’ identities; these identities cannot be truncated into a single, all-encompassing identity. This type of truncation leads to a superficial examination of these identities; this simplification of identities is not only apparent in the scholarship on Arab Americans, but is also continually being perpetuated on the ground within Arab immigrant communities.

One of the many manifestations of the ‘clash of identities’ that is continually reproduced within the Arab American community is the notion of an ongoing ideological conflict between the ‘old immigrants’ and the ‘new immigrants’. This ideological conflict is described utilizing the terminology of immigrant discourse, whereby differences of opinion/belief/traditions/culture and other forms of animosity between Arab immigrant groups are defined as ‘clashes’. These ‘clashes’ are defined as battles between two groups, those who are categorized as ‘new immigrants’ (with the implication that this group is representative of ‘old world’ and ‘traditional’ values) and
those who are categorized as ‘old immigrants’ (with the implication that they represent a group that is ‘assimilated’ into ‘mainstream American’ society; ‘Americanized’).

Similarly, the utilization of this immigrant discourse is highly problematic as it simplifies all disputes that occur within immigrant communities as a clash of ‘new world V. old world’ ideals. The use of the above paradigm may be feasible in some cases, however even in those cases the paradigm only accounts for a partial explanation.

After further examination of some of Arab Detroit’s most infamous (presupposed) ‘old V. new immigrant’ disputes a pattern emerges, whereby many of these disputes occur across ethnic/national lines. A majority of these ‘clashes’ have been between Lebanese and Syrian immigrants in opposition with Iraqi and/or Yemeni immigrants, and in many of these disputes the additional aspect of the immigrants socio-economic status comes into play. Hence, attributing these ‘clashes’ to the ‘old V. new’ paradigm leads to a gross oversimplification of the situation, which overlooks/ignores the nuances of the each specific conflict, such as the ethnic and cultural differences of the people involved, as well as differences on the individual level.

Examining differences on the individual level is vital when discussing leaders in the community, as many of these leaders are highly influential members of the community and have the ability to sway public opinion. The leaders of the various Muslim congregations in Metro-Detroit act as representatives of their respective congregations. Thus, these leaders act as representatives of the various groups of the Muslim-Arab Detroit community; and as such encapsulate the various layers of their congregants’ identities. Each congregation, under the leadership of their imam, reveals their ethnic and sectarian leanings, as well as their notion of ‘Americaness,’ which are revealed through the congregations’ activities and constitution.
At the conclusion of my historical analysis of Detroit’s Muslim-Arab community, I have concluded that identity is both a malleable and fluid concept within the Arab American community; as community members self-identify using various monikers depending on the specific situation they are in. In spite of the increase in fragmentation of the Muslim Arab-American community along sectarian, ethnic and socio-economic lines, they still remain a tight-knit community. The closeness of the community is not only evident through their interactions, institutions and community activities, but also from the fact that Dearborn acts as a hub for the community. In recent years Dearborn has not only become a transit point for recently arrived Muslim Arab immigrants, but is also the epicenter of the community, whereby most of the community’s institutions are located in that area.196

Through my exploration of the community, its interactions, relationships and institutional developed I have observed a certain tendency that is prevalent among the Arab-American community, which is their tendency to self-identify along ‘certain lines’ depending on the situation they are in, on who they are addressing and the social/historical/political context of that situation. For example when being addressed by ‘outsiders’, that is non-members, Arab Americans tend to prefer using monikers such as ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’; they tend to identify with the ‘larger’ identifier group and use it as a protective umbrella (belonging to a larger group – one that incites more power). In other situations, certain Muslim Arab Americans (especially community leaders) tend to identify as ‘Muslim’ in order to depict themselves as representatives of the community in its entirety.197 Nonetheless, within the confines of the Arab Detroit community the

197 For example Imam Qazwini is constantly being invited to speak on behalf of the ‘Muslim community’ or the ‘American Shi’a community’ in various national and international capacities/platforms – Beforehand Imam Chirri was also invited to do the same.
divisions become more apparent and a larger degree of significance is placed on these differences in identity. Members of the community take pride in both their ethnic and sectarian differences, as well as their socio-economic status (an accumulation of wealth is translated into a success story and celebration of ‘being American’). Members of the Arab Detroit community display the multiplicity of their identities’ in various explicit and implicit ways; through their connection with certain community institutions, their fundraising efforts, the neighborhoods they choose to reside in, the schools they send their children to and the establishments they frequent and/or support. As such, these various community interactions and relations convey the various layers of their identities, as well as depicting the divisions within the Arab Detroit community.
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