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## Factors that Shape Arab American College Student Identity

Abdul Rahman F. Jaradat  
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FACTORS THAT SHAPE ARAB AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT IDENTITY

A Dissertation Presented

by

ABDUL RAHMAN F. JARADAT

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

MAY 2017

College of Education

Social Justice Education

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A Dissertation Presented

By

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My dream to have a doctorate degree is finally coming true. My journey to fulfill this dream has been a long one, but it is becoming real, which means that I have not been alone in it. As I am finishing writing this joyful, tiring, and important piece, the support that I have received to get here has been rare and unprecedented.

Let me start by saying a very deep thank you to my mentor, teacher, and dissertation advisor, Dr. Maurianne Adams, who believed in me. Without her support, encouragement, and patience I would not be here. She is one of the best scholars that I have ever met and one of the most thoughtful and thorough human beings whom I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. Thank you, Maurianne, for being there for me and for guiding me in my search of a topic and pushing me when I delayed turning in a section for your review. You have been retired for a while but have never stopped being a great inspiration to me. You opened your home to me when you no longer had an office and you gave me the same time, energy, and passion one would expect from a novice professor. I am indebted to you for the rest of my life.

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The young men and women in my study who gave me the time, the energy and the encouragement to write about Arab Americans and their identity. You all inspired me when you shared yourselves, your stories, and your experiences. You have given me hope that one day all the stereotypes about Arab Americans will end and the shadow of fear and injustice that follows all of us as “assumed suspects” will vanish.

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<sup>1</sup> *Yaba* is an Arabic word that means father. *Yamma* is an Arabic name that means mother or mom.

<sup>2</sup> *Intifada* means uprising. In December of 1987, the Palestinian people in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and

you never lost hope. You invested in keeping my older brothers in school and in raising them to help and support each other. All of my siblings helped me to be where I am now. Rest assured, *Yaba* and *Yamma*, my older siblings helped me tremendously and without them all, I would not be here today. I should name the late Ablah, Mohammed, Abderraouf, and Yusra as well as Zahriyyeh, Yousef, Sufian, Hiyam, Mariam, Jamal, and Abdellatif. You never asked me whether or not I needed help but rather what was it I needed and how much I needed, especially Yousef and Sufian. All my sisters helped raise me and supported me when our mother got sick during my early years and when we lost her when she was still young. You have all been there for me. I dedicate part of this dissertation to my parents and to my siblings. I love you all very much.

To my beloved Sariy and Nurah—my mother used to tell me that I was the sight of her eyes, and now I say the same to you both. Part of this dissertation is dedicated to you because I know how proud you are now that I have finished my doctorate. I love you so much, beyond what words can express.

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I would also like to thank every one of my friends, colleagues, and family members who encouraged and supported me during this journey. And to little Yousef, you have given me hope for the future generations with your love, warmth, intelligence, and infectious smile. This dissertation is for you and your generation of Arab Americans.



## **ABSTRACT**

FACTORS THAT SHAPE ARAB AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT IDENTITY

MAY 2017

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Arab American identity has not yet received the research attention and scholarship that it deserves. In this dissertation, I have qualitatively studied the narratives of young Arab American college students and recent graduates. The research questions that I explored include what makes them Arab Americans, and what are the factors that help them identify as such. By focusing on Arab Americans and their identity factors, I have presented the narratives of those women and men who self-identify as Arab American and quoted their accounts of how they navigate this under-valued, misunderstood, and stereotyped identity. I have used ethnic and racial identity models, such as Cross (1971) and Wijeyesinghe (1992, 2001, 2012) to note the factors that are salient in Arab American identity as described through in-depth interviews and focus groups with 11 Arab American young women and men. The dissertation concludes with a model that presents the factors that shaped Arab American identity for these subjects and the interrelationships among those factors.

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## CHAPTER 1

### OVERVIEW AND SIGNIFICANCE

#### Background of Study

For many years I studied the history of the Arab immigration to the United States and the historical factors that affected Arab immigrants, such as country of origin, religion, language, push and pull factors, and motivation to migrate to the US. The immigration of Arabs to the US started late in the 1880s although the various waves of Arab immigration were not documented until 1980s. Naff (1983) was one of the first scholars to interview hundreds of immigrants, young and old, women and men, and from different parts of the US, as well as children of immigrants, first, second, third and fourth generations of Arab Americans.

My interest in this topic comes from my own experiences as an immigrant Arab American myself. I came to the US with my wife to attend graduate school in 1986, just before the start of the First Palestinian *Intifada*<sup>2</sup>. Political, economic, and most importantly, the security situation in occupied Palestine (especially in the West Bank, where we came from) seriously deteriorated in the context of harsh, ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank since the 1967 war.

My wife and I came from Palestine as graduate students, enrolled in Master's programs—my wife on a Fulbright scholarship. By the time our son was born in the US in 1989, we had already spent 3 years in the US. My family and I are situated as self-identified Arab Americans. My wife and I have been US citizens for a number of years. Our children are US citizens, as they were born in the US. Our orientation is secular and

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<sup>2</sup> *Intifada* means uprising. In December of 1987, the Palestinian people in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, areas occupied by Israel since 1967, took to the streets to protest and to eventually end the occupation of their land.

not religious, and for that reason it has been interesting to me to observe the conflation of Arabness and Muslimness.

By the time my wife and I finished our initial degrees, the Second Palestinian *Intifada* broke out, followed by increasingly severe Israeli measures that made life for Palestinians in the West Bank extremely unsafe. By 1992 we had already spent six years in the US.

After a total of six years abroad, Palestinians abroad have to return in order for them to maintain their *residency* in Palestine. Otherwise, they lose their residency and would never be able to go back to Palestine. Any property they may have would be declared as “absentee property” and becomes Israeli *de facto* property. Since we had to return for a visit after six years in the US, we returned to the West Bank and showed up in person in front of Israeli military guards at the border crossing between Jordan and Palestine. The Israeli military authorities have full control of Palestinian movement in and out of Palestine. The Israeli military occupation authorities dictate that all Palestinians who leave the West Bank cannot stay outside the West Bank more than three continuous years, with a permit that is renewable for another period of three years.

My wife, son, and I returned to the US after six weeks of a dangerous trip and deeply unsettling experiences for the three of us. Although my wife and I realized it would be a long time before we would make another trip back home, we were unaware of how traumatized our son was by that experience. One day when he was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, his teacher asked the class to write about “the best or worst day of your life.” His essay was about crossing the Jordanian-Israeli border point getting into Palestine and going through the Israeli border security; six years earlier, when he was less than 3.5 years old.

Although it had been a long time for him since that trip, he wrote his short essay with some vivid details. He wrote about getting awakened from his nap, being strip-searched by a female Israeli soldier along with his mother, then being sent to another hall bare-footed as his shoes were sent to be checked with laser for *security reasons*. He also wrote about how scared he was being treated like that and how helpless his parents were when they were unable to protect him from *strangers*.

Both my wife and I were extremely shocked and saddened by the fact that our son could remember all those painful details, although we tried not to talk about that experience at home, hoping that it would fade away from his memory, but we were wrong. That experience of crossing the Israeli borders ended up being his college essay, with more vivid detail to our huge surprise.

By 1995 I had a full time professional position in a higher learning institution in New England. Our daughter was born in 1998, and my wife finished her doctorate degree two years later and got full-time employment. Now, at 18, my daughter has just started college. She has grown up in the US and barely knew anything about her parents' home, relatives, or culture. She visited Palestine one time for 3 weeks with her mother when she was 14 and her grandmother was dying.

A series of international events serve as landmarks that have directly affected my family's experience as Arabs/Arab Americans in the US. Those events include the First Palestinian *Intifada* in 1987, the First Gulf War<sup>3</sup>, the Oslo Peace Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Second Palestinian *Intifada* in

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<sup>3</sup> First Gulf War took place when in August 1990 the Iraqi troops invaded and occupied Kuwait. In 1991, the United Nations under a US leadership formed a coalition of many countries and forced the Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, restoring the Kuwaiti Monarch.

September 2000, the events of September 11, 2001, the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

My experience has been shaped most recently by having two children, born and raised in the US. Although my children identify as Palestinian American or Arab American, they are assumed to be outsiders from another country, with dual status of Arab and American with a hyphenated identity. They both have Arabic features, like dark brown eyes, tanned skin color, and curly hair. My son is a recent college graduate and understands what it means to be a young Arab American male growing up in the US post-September 11<sup>th</sup>. My daughter has the understandable instinct of an Arab American young woman who realizes the widespread negative stereotypical images of her people. She often gets questions from complete strangers as well as from some of her own mainstream American friends about her parents, where they come from, what food they eat, how the relationship between her parents is, and whether her father allows her to date or to sleep over in a friend's house. My wife also was asked many stereotypical questions even by highly educated people, including whether I allow her to work outside the home, and why does not she wear the hijab as a Muslim woman. Many have asked her when did she take her hijab off, making the assumption she had to wear it back home. People often cannot hide their shock when she explains that she never had to wear the hijab, nor had she needed to change her dress code upon moving to the US.

Being an Arab American family in the US, we face an array of scrutiny and stereotypes. My children are usually asked questions about the Palestine/Israel conflict that they do not have answers to but are expected to answer anyway. They are exposed to stereotypical images of what the media portrays as Arab or Arab American should look

like or how they should behave. Usually these images are of veiled women who walk behind their husbands, young bearded men with turbans that represent “terrorist figures” or Arabian Gulf men in their white robes and head covers with no women in their presence, portraying oppressive and exclusionary environment for women. Although my children never lived in Palestine, and my wife and I had never planned to immigrate to the US, due to our circumstances as Palestinians under Israeli occupation, and having two US born children, we have become Arabs and Americans.

Having decided to stay in the US and raise our children here, I am interested in better understanding my own children and the factors that are shaping their identity as second-generation Arab Americans. It has been fascinating to watch them grow and see how proud of their heritage they are, how they think of their own hyphenated identity, and how they negotiate being bi-cultural in their collegiate and high school contexts.

I do not claim to have special expertise in the Arab American identity, but I have done a considerable amount of thinking, observing, researching, educating, studying, and analyzing this identity and the experiences that young Arab Americans have dealt with to call this identity one of their salient identities.

I am thankful that I found a group of young Arab American women and men for my study who shared their experiences and thoughts with me. Whether I share the same experiences with them or whether I have similar experiences to theirs, I will continue to research this identity further, look for opportunities where I can make a difference in creating awareness about this identity with honesty, objectivity, and dedication so that Arab American young adults will continue to have their voices heard.

For the past 22 years I have been a full-time educator at the University dealing with students in Residence education and taking leadership on issues of racial and religious identity. My decades of experience with students have grounded my understanding of identity development in the college years. I have seen not only how basic models of identity development apply (Checkering, 1969; Erikson, 1968; Perry, 1970), but I have also seen a necessity for the models of racial identity and an understanding of the intersections of religious identity that I will refer to later in this study.

My first interest in research and teaching was in the area of international students and their needs in US higher education and student affairs. For conference presentations, I have interviewed many international students and videotaped their interviews and presented about their needs at local, regional, and national conferences, like National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA) and American College Educators International (ACPA). Second, I got interested in observing and studying Study Abroad American Students and their needs. I interviewed another group of undergraduate US students who spent time studying abroad. As I did in the first study, I videotaped their interviews and presented my findings locally, regionally, and nationally as well.

I became interested in studying Arab and Muslim students right after September 11, 2001 when I noticed that students from these backgrounds were afraid, confused, and not sure what to do in such circumstances. I interviewed and videotaped a group of undergraduate students who came from Arab and Muslim backgrounds, including Christian Arabs who were all born and raised in the US. As I did with the other groups of students before, I videotaped their interviews and presented my findings locally, regionally, and nationally. Often, professors from different disciplines on campus invite

me to talk about Arab American and Muslim issues to their students. Other times, I get invited to local high schools and community events to share my knowledge and findings with school children and with community members.

I have been an active member of ACPA for the last 21 years and presented there annually at the national convention, except in 2002 when I cancelled my trip to Long Beach, California where the ACPA annual convention took place that year. I feared for my safety at airport checks and the expected added scrutiny by TSA. Many Arabs refer to such experiences as “traveling while Arab (TWA).” My name and my look are stereotypically Arab and Muslim. Fifteen years after September 11<sup>th</sup>, and my luggage gets “randomly checked” by TSA almost every time I fly nationally. I find a note inside my bag informing me of the “random check.”

My presentations aim at creating awareness among higher education students, staff, and faculty. My presentations are often sought after and well attended. I presented on topics, such as Arab American students, Muslim Students, Arab and Muslim women, Arab American students in higher education, the needs of Muslim students, and the politics of hijab. I am still surprised at how little students and professionals in higher education know about Arabs, Arab Americans, or Muslims. My presentations at ACPA are often offered by the Commission for Counseling and Psychological Services for continuing education credits for psychologists approved by American Psychological Association (APA).

I often present my work to full-time professional staff and undergraduate staff in Residence Education, especially to Resident Assistants. Part of my presentations was



meant to educate about Arab and Muslim college students and their needs, especially in the residence halls.

In 2004, I was elected as the Chair of ACPA Commission of Global Dimensions for Student development (GDSD). I chaired this national commission from 2005 to 2007. In my role as the Chair, I oversaw the Directorate of the commission, sponsored presentations related to student development of international and study abroad students, and reported to the ACPA leadership every year. I continued to serve on this commission as the past Chair in 2008. I am an active member of ACPA, GDSD, and other ACPA commissions and continued to attend their meetings and activities during the annual convention. I have also been a volunteer reviewer of ACPA program proposals for the annual convention programs for the last 15 years. For example, I have reviewed 13 proposals for the 2017 annual convention this year and made recommendations on general programs, research papers, spotlight programs, and poster presentations.

I also have a professional role at the University where I work in Student Affairs and Residence Education. As a coordinator of a few residential areas I have direct interaction with students from different backgrounds, domestic and international. I have noticed obvious ignorance about Arab American issues as well as about Muslim issues. This ignorance strikes me as very serious, considering the increasing misunderstanding of these issues nationally. I have a concern for this subject as a professional from both faculty and staff in Higher Education.

My wife and I are often invited by professors to talk about our personal experience. We find students who are extremely attentive and interested but know very little. When I talk to undergraduate students, I get questions, such as “Who are the Arabs?

What is the difference between being Arab or Iranian? What language do Arabs speak? Who are the Arab Americans? Where do they live in the US? Is Aladdin an Arab?" Then there is the conflation of religious and ethnic identity. Finally, the anti-immigrant, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim fervor in the US is heightened and out of control as I write this chapter in early February 2017. A topic that had seemed so important a few months ago becomes of paramount importance, and I write this with urgency.

As a doctoral student in Social Justice Education, I am aware of the attention given to marginalized, disadvantaged identities. My doctoral work has also led me to see the very interesting current work being done. It is my intention with this study to contribute to this work with a study of college-age undergraduate and graduate young adults who identify as Arab American. My focus on the Arab American identity enables me to note non-religious factors in the identity and to separate them from the religious identity that might have been paramount if I had not asked for subjects who identify as Arab American, not as Muslim Americans. I want to add to this literature, particularly for professionals and faculty in higher education because that is the point at which young people grapple with issues of identity. It is also important for faculty and professionals to have a much better understanding of the Arab American identity factors than they currently do.

Arab Americans are negatively stereotyped by the American mainstream, mistreated by the US government and racialized, especially the Muslims among them. They are treated as if they were members of an oppressed race. Islam and Arabness are tangled for lack of understanding and for Orientalism. The conflation of Arabs and Muslims is an important concern for me, although the majority of Arab Americans are

still of Christian origin, and the majority of Muslims in the world are not Arabs. The role of US mainstream media contributes to conflating and demeaning Arab and Muslim Americans by the way they portray them and by talking about them and not with them. By painting a stereotyped image of Arab and Muslim Americans, the media reinforce the terrorist image as the most visible representation, especially when there is negative news about a member of them, rendering these people to be among the most invisible and marginalized groups. This invisibility of an entire people of hopes, struggles, and dreams gives way to the visibility of the state of Israel, adopting its narrative as victim and granting it the headlines of almost every media outlet.

The development of the Arab American identity has been of keen interest to me for many years and I have over the years read carefully about the historical factors that affected the evolution of Arab American identity. To the best of my knowledge, there are no theoretical models that deal with Arab American identity.

In this study, I have interviewed Arab American students to understand the factors that have shaped their identity and studied those factors in comparison with already understood identity factors that affect other marginalized groups in the US, like African Americans, Asian Americans, and multiracial identities. There are multiple factors that come together in the development of the identity, including gender, religion, class, historical and social orientation, physical appearance, ancestral origins and countries of origin (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, 2012). These models include factors that are parallel to those that affect Arab American identity and others that do not. Cross's identity enactment model (2001, 2012) is applicable to the efforts of Arab Americans to cope with the negative stereotypes, avoid confrontation and being vulnerable especially

after the 2001 events when people of Arab and Muslim backgrounds were picked up, locked up, and in many cases deported.

### **Significance of the Study of Arab American Identity Factors**

Although Arab Americans are among the most recent ethnicities to migrate to the US in groups, this identity is important to me as an Arab American who migrated to the US and became a US citizen for reasons of safety for my family and myself. Having two children who were born and raised in the US, working in a higher learning institution, coming across students from Arab origins, and observing the political and social atmosphere in the US for the last 30 years ignited my interest to study this identity as it relates to me and I relate to it.

I decided to study the Arab American identity in the context of Arab American college students because of my long-time professional role in higher education. I work closely with an age group who try hard to promote their identity and many of whom, especially those from marginalized social groups, are confronted by multiple hurdles in the creation of a positive identity, including negative stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, fear, and lack of the sense of belonging as they are perceived as outsiders, foreigners, anti-US and the West.

Studying this group as a sample of Arab Americans made me focus on these issues that they face and deal with. It also made me focus on studying the factors that influence this group of people and the formation of their identity. It is also important to understand what it means for them to self-identify as Arab Americans, to reach some conclusions and to make recommendations for higher learning institutions, policymakers, and other institutions to treat this group of people based on social justice standards by

which they will be equally included rather than excluded in social justice literature, research, and movement.

The Arab American identity is under-researched, “although the educational experiences of other minority groups have been widely studied and documented, research on Arab American students’ experiences remains largely lacking” (Mango, 2012, p. 84). At the same time, the voices of the Arab American Christians and Muslims are often not included in the literature and research of social justice. Wijeyesinghe (2012) stated that there are shared assumptions and characteristics between multiracial identity and intersectionality literature. The voices of Arab American young adults, their experiences, and their stories are scarce in Arab American identity literature. Their voice is not only missing from social justice literature, but rather, is often ignored or suppressed.

Wijeyesinghe (2012) suggests using the discipline to enact social change in order to address inequity and to promote social justice, “placing at the forefront of discussion and study the voices of individuals who were previously excluded from research and movements for social justice, and promoting grounded research to investigate the lived experience of individual within these groups” (p. 83). The purpose of my study is to give a voice to my subjects and to help them feel empowered to continue to make meaning of their Arab American identity and to continue to advocate for themselves and others who identify as such.

### **Overview of Dissertation**

I have designed my dissertation to provide information to the readers that is organized by content and analysis. Chapter 2 is a literature review of the three major Arab immigration waves to the US from 1880 to present, and the Arab American identity

factors and how these factors contribute to the formation of this identity, including internal and external factors that used a social justice education lens to explain how this identity has been under-searched and over-stereotyped. Lacking any theoretical models that directly deal with Arab American identity, I use a similar model to compare my research with and to add any factors that I found in my sample that were not found in the model that I use. Chapter 3 is a description of the qualitative research design that I used, including the steps of finding my subjects, their demographics, and other logistics to conducting my research. Chapter 4 is the data that I collected from my subjects in that they answered my research questions and how they concluded that the Arab American identity was one of their salient identities. Chapter 5 is my analysis of the data in relation to the literature review and how the literature is connected with the data that I collected from my subjects. In Chapter 6, I put forward some recommendations to higher education professionals and how higher education institutions can be more informed about Arab Americans in general and about Arab American college students in particular. I put forward some recommendations for future research of the Arab American identity.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The literature review in this chapter is divided into four sections that will help me explore the identity factors of Arab American<sup>4</sup> young adults, mainly college students and recent graduates. In section one, I focus on the historical and social background of Arab American immigration to the US and the formation of the Arab ethnicity since the 1880s. This section will discuss three major immigration waves of Arabs to the US, mainly from Greater Syria<sup>5</sup>.

In the second section, I focus on the struggle of Arab immigrants to become US citizens and the complications posed to their racial and religious identities to become “White by law” as a prerequisite by the US government for obtaining US citizenship.

In the third section, I discuss the stereotypes of Arabs, Muslims, and Arab Americans by the US public and mass media that led both to racialization of Arabs and Muslims as non-White and to the treatment they receive painting them as foreigners who hate the West and the US, and are dangerous to the fabric of the US society (Said, 1981).

In the fourth section I explain how I use the multiracial identity model developed by Wijeyesinghe (2001, 2012) to ground my literature in the current theoretical frameworks of factors that lead to racial identity and the intersections among those factors. I also use the identity enactment model of Cross (2012) to discuss some of the

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<sup>4</sup> The term Arab is an umbrella that loosely refers to people who originated from the Arab Peninsula and spread out over the history to areas now known as “the Arab World,” from Morocco to Iraq, including Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen in Western Asia, and Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia, in North Africa. All these 22 countries are members of the Arab League.

<sup>5</sup> The term Greater Syria was used during the Ottoman rule over what are now Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan.

factors that apply to Arab American like *buffering*, *code switching* and *bridging* where some of my subjects use these factors to enact their identity as Arab American.

### **Historical Context: Arab Immigration Waves to the United States**

In this section I explore the multiple historical contexts and factors that have shaped the ways in which Arab Americans have self-identified in the United States or have had identities ascribed to them. I review the literature on Arab migration to the United States with the following research questions:

- a) What are the significant Arab immigration waves to the United States, based on different historical periods and generational status, countries and regions of origin, push and pull factors, religious identities, language, and status within the US?
- b) How did the US government classify Arab immigrants, and what were the factors that affected their classification?
- c) How did Arab immigrants self-identify in ways that differed from their official classifications and why?
- d) What are the landmarks and specific factors that have shaped Arab American identities in the US over the years, and how do these factors continue to affect contemporary Arab American identities?

According to Naff (1985) and Orfalea (2006), some individuals from Arab backgrounds migrated to the US as early as 1492, where some of the sailors who accompanied Christopher Columbus on his voyage across the Atlantic were of Arab origins, via Spain<sup>6</sup>. The first known mass Arab migration to the US started in the 1880s (Naff, 1985; Orfalea, 2006). Naff and Orfalea discuss Arab migrations to the US, based on the dates of intensified migrations. They considered these migrations to take place in waves: The first wave, 1880s-1924; the second wave, 1925-1965; and the third, 1965 to the present.

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<sup>6</sup> Until 1492, Arabs (called “Moors”) ruled southern Spain (Andalusia). Of those accompanying Columbus on his voyages, some sailors were Arabs, several of whom stayed and settled in the Americas.



## **First Arab Immigration Wave to the United States, 1880s-1924**

In this first immigration wave, I write about the inclusive immigration dates, countries of origin, religious affiliation, push and pull factors, and status of Arab migrants within the US.

### **First Wave Inclusive Dates**

The 1880s marked the beginning of the first immigration wave of Arab Americans to the US that continued until 1924. In 1924, the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act that was passed by the US Congress, severely restricting immigration from non-Northern and non-Western European countries to the US. The restriction included the Arabic-speaking people from Greater Syria. Statistics about the numbers of early Arab immigrants to the US are not accurate since the US Immigration Services did not distinguish the Syrians from other subjects of the Ottoman Empire<sup>7</sup> and often classified them as “from Turkey in Asia or “Turks.” The first time the US Immigration Services classified Arabic-speaking people from Greater Syria as Syrians was in 1899 (Gualtieri, 2001). According to Abraham (1981), almost 60,000 Arabs immigrated to the US between 1899 and 1910. The number of Arab immigrants reached its highest in 1913-1914, with about 9,000 Arab immigrants. The immediate reason for that high number was the conscription of Arab men, both Muslim and Christian, to the Ottoman army that was about to enter the First World War in 1914, side by side with Germany, against France and Britain.

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<sup>7</sup> Ottoman Empire was the empire that ruled many parts of the Muslim World and was the last Muslim Dynasty to rule large areas out of modern Turkey with its capital Istanbul that was called Constantinople at the time. This empire was dissolved at the end of First World War losing to Britain and France. The victors colonized Greater Syria right after the war until the end of the Second World War, when Greater Syria was divided into 4 different countries: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine with a Jewish State that was established in Palestine in 1948.

### **First Wave Countries of Origin**

The overwhelming majority of the Arab immigrants during this wave came from Greater Syria, with a very small number who came from Yemen, Iraq, Morocco, and Egypt. It was estimated that 90%-95% of the immigrants came from Mount Lebanon, with about 5%-10% of them from Palestine. It was estimated that by 1924, there were 200,000 Arabs living in the United States. Most of the immigrants in this wave were Christian single men between the ages of 14 and 40 years old. Only 12% were married at the time and brought their families with them. Men migrated to the US temporarily to make some money through back peddling and some menial factory jobs. They went back home with some money to pay their debt, build a new home or to bring prestige to their families. In the beginning of this wave, a small number of women migrated, mainly married women who joined their husbands. Very few single women immigrated on their own. Between 1919 and 1930 the number of women increased to 47.5% of Arab migrants due to the change of immigration laws in early 1924 (Kayyali, 2006; Naff, 1985; Orfalea, 2006).

Single women began to immigrate to the US to find a husband or to escape the tough life in their villages and to seek the freedom that comes with the adventure of being in a new country. The emigration of women forced the men, who up until then, were living in shared rooms with other men, to marry and move to real homes and eventually to settle in the US and to call it home (Kayyali, 2006)

### **First Wave Religious Affiliation**

Ninety to 95% of the immigrants were Christians from the Eastern sects (Greek Orthodox and Maronites) and the rest were mostly Muslims, and a smaller number were

Druze. The number of Druze was so small that they were rarely mentioned in the literature (Haddad, 1994; McCarus, 1994). Palestinian Jews also immigrated to the US and their number in Palestine was reduced by one third at the time, despite that Jewish emigration to Palestine had increased tremendously under the British mandate of Palestine (Orfalea, 2006).

Muslims were hesitant to migrate to the United States, fearing that they might lose their religion and culture in a Christian foreign country that they knew nothing or little about. The numbers of Muslim immigrants increased in the early 1900s, almost 20 years after their Christian counterparts (Elkhouly, 1969; Hagopian & Paden, 1969; Naff, 1985; Orfalea, 2006).

Though the number of Muslims migrating to the US in this wave was small, Muslim mosques played an important role in preserving the Arab culture and traditions of Arab Muslims and of Arab Christians. Mosques and churches in the new established Arab communities were often built in mixed Muslim and Christian Arab neighborhoods (Elkhouly, 1969).

### **First Wave Push and Pull Factors**

#### **Economic Hardship in Greater Syria**

The opening of the Suez Canal<sup>8</sup> caused a hardship for many people in Greater Syria and forced many into unemployment. Many of them migrated to the US seeking new jobs in the expanding US job market (Abraham, 1981; Orfalea, 2006).

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<sup>8</sup> Suez Canal was opened in 1869 to connect the Mediterranean with the Red Sea, making the transport of goods from Europe to Asian countries, like India and China, much shorter. This created a hardship and loss of jobs for a large number of people who had worked in the seaports of Greater Syria, like Haifa, Jaffa, Tripoli, and Beirut. Those were the transformation ports for goods between Europe and Asia through the Silk Way.

The silk industry in Mount Lebanon<sup>9</sup> was the most important source of income. In the 1880s, the silk prices started to decline. This had pushed some young men to seek jobs in the US to make a “quick buck” and to return home to reestablish a better economic status in their villages (Khater, 2001; Naff, 1985). The total collapse of the silk industry left a large number of people without jobs; so more of them sought immigration to the US (Abraham, 1981; Kayyali, 2006; Naff, 1985).

Orfalea (2006) reported that the famine during the First World War in Lebanon was another factor that led people to leave the country. He estimated that 100,000 people died as a result of that famine. In addition to the famine, the ruling Ottomans at the time imposed heavy taxes on the population to support their war expenses during the First World War. Orfalea believes that Lebanon lost almost half of its population due to famine and immigration.

Almost 50% of the first wave immigrants settled as farmers in the Southern States, 25% settled in the East Coast, and the remaining 25% settled in the Midwest as laborers in the auto and steel industry or opened their own grocery and dried food stores (Elkhoully, 1969).

### **Religious Oppression**

In 1860, Druze, who are considered a Muslim sect by some, attacked the Maronite Christians in Mount Lebanon as the Druze got the blessing of the Ottoman central government in Istanbul to do so. The Turks gave asylum to the Maronites only to disarm them and send them back to face their oppressors (Orfalea, 2006). The French supported the Maronites, while the British supported the Druze during this period of one of the worst civil wars in Syria since the Turks took over that area in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. American

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<sup>9</sup> Mount Lebanon is a term that was used to describe what is now known as Lebanon.

missionaries played a positive role during that period, as they helped both the Druze and the Maronites who were victims of this civil war. The aftermath of the sectarian massacre left 20,000 Maronites dead. Large numbers of Maronites were helped by American missionaries and sought immigration to the US.

The Ottoman Turks<sup>10</sup> committed genocide against the Armenians, killing about one million of them. This resulted in almost 30,000 Armenians escaping the massacre and finding a new home in Lebanon. Lebanon at the time was enjoying semi-autonomy, especially after the religious Druze-Maronites civil war that was forced by the French and the British on the Ottomans (Orfalea, 2006).

Historians do not agree on the motives for that Lebanese civil war, nor on the number of people killed during the war. They also differ in their assessment to the role it played in causing people to immigrate to the US. Saliba (2005) argues, “Religious persecution was a supplementary rather than a primary factor in emigration” (p. 36). Naff (1985) and Khater (2001) argues that the Druze-Maronites crisis was not a factor in the immigration of Maronites to the US. Khater does not agree that there was religious oppression by Muslims against Christians in Mount Lebanon. He contends that some writers, like Phillip Hitti and others, exaggerated the 1860 civil war to advocate for a Maronite independent state in Mount Lebanon, which eventually happened later on in 1946. France and Britain, super powers at the time, put pressure on the Ottoman Turks to give autonomy to the Christians in Mount Lebanon. They succeeded, and the Christians in Mount Lebanon enjoyed some kind of self-rule with less pressure from the central government in Istanbul.

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<sup>10</sup> Ottoman Turks is a term loosely used to refer to the Ottoman Empire that ruled Greater Syria and other parts of Arab countries until 1917.

### **The Conscription of Muslim and Christian Men in the Turkish Army**

In 1908, the Ottomans mandated that Christian men also serve in the Turkish army side by side with Muslim men (Abraham, 1981; Orfalea, 2006). The resistance by Arabs against the conscription was growing but was met by a heavy hand by the Ottomans who executed a number of men. They hanged 14 Muslim and Christian men in Beirut and 7 men in Damascus on May 6, 1916 (Orfalea, 2006). After this hanging, many people participated in the rebellion against the Ottomans while others fled the area seeking freedom and refuge in other countries, including the US. In addition to that repression, freedom of speech was harshly suppressed by the Ottomans. Newspapers were shut down. Editors and writers escaped the area and some of them sought refuge in Egypt where they continued to write and publish against the Ottomans (Orfalea, 2006).

### **The Economic Expansion in the US and the Need for Foreign Labor**

Although the religious, linguistic, and cultural traditions of the new immigrants from Asia were so different from those of the North and West Europeans, the US industrial economy needed foreign labor. This caused some sectors of the US-born workers to become unhappy about receiving new waves of strange immigrants who were different in their linguistic, religious, and political ideologies and who mainly came from Eastern and Southern Europe and Mediterranean countries, like Italy, Poland, Russia, Greece, and Slovakia. This period also witnessed the most sustained Arab immigration wave to the US (Samhan, 1999).

### **The Role of the US Missionaries**

The Christian Protestant missionaries from the United States who came to Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine to convert Muslims and Eastern Christians to Protestantism, played a role in encouraging Arab people from those areas to migrate to the US. They portrayed a positive image about the Americans as kind, generous, and educated people. Kayyali (2006) believes that this might have left a positive impression on Christians and encouraged them to consider migrating to the United States, and this could have been a reason behind the disproportionate number of Christian immigrants versus Muslim or Druz immigrants to the US at the time. She also believes that Christian immigrants probably felt safer migrating to the US because of their Christian faith and knowing they would not be persecuted for their religious beliefs, unlike Muslims who were hesitant to migrate to a Christian foreign country, though rich and prosperous with a great economic opportunities (p. 29).

### **World War I and the Defeat of the Ottomans and the Treatment of Arab Americans in the US**

The Ottoman Empire sided with Germany during World War I against the traditional allies of the US, Britain, and France. Since the Ottoman Empire was the Muslim state that claimed it represented all Muslims in the world, Muslims and Islam were seen as the enemy of the West by the US mass media and by the predominantly Protestant American public. Arab immigrants in the US at the time, especially those who identified as Muslims, were seen and portrayed in many instances as enemies of the United States since they came from the Ottoman Empire, regardless if they were pro or opposed to the Ottomans at the time (Naff, 1985).

During the war, many Christian, Druze, and Muslim young Arab men from Greater Syria who were forced to serve in the Ottoman forces in 1908 forward through conscription, tried to escape the imminent death. Arab troops were placed on the front lines ahead of the Ottoman troops in almost all battles. A lot of them died in the War, as they were poorly trained and ill-equipped. British and French troops imposed a blockade on Lebanon and Syria that resulted in more hardship for the local population, forcing them to leave the area (Kayyali, 2006; Orfalea, 1988).

### **First Wave Status Within the US**

When Arabs in the US tried to apply for US citizenship, they were denied, as citizenship was only for White persons. This was one of the most complex issues that faced immigrants from Arabic-speaking countries in the US. To be eligible for citizenship, Arabs in the US started to litigate the US courts to prove they were the same as White for many reasons. I discuss this issue in more details later in this chapter, under Arab Whiteness and will use the literature of Haney Lopez (2006) and Gualtierie (2001, 2006, 2011).

### **Nativism Pressure on Arabs Immigrants to Assimilate in the US**

First-generation Arab Americans from the First Wave, especially after the immigration restrictions and the rise of nativism during the 1920s and 1930s in the US were forced to speak English only. It went against the assimilationist grain in the US to speak any language other than English. Orfalea (2006) quotes from an interview with someone whose father migrated from Lebanon in 1900. The son, Najeeb Halaby, told Orfalea “To my later regret, we never spoke Arabic at mealtime, as many Arab Americans.” Halaby went on to say, “That first generation of the immigrant Arabs really



wanted to be 100 percent American and changed their names and their religions even” (Orfalea, 2006, p. 138). On the other hand, Mehdi (1978) published original documents in her book. Among those documents were two Op Ed pieces published in August and September 1928 in the *Syrian World* magazine about teaching Arabic to youngsters. Both documents discuss the need to teach Syrian American children the Arabic language. The articles discussed how some parents were ignorant about this important issue and how others were ashamed of their mother tongue. Though many wanted for their children to learn Arabic, it was a challenge for them then to keep up with this. Children went to English-speaking schools and spent many hours learning English.

Teachers were demanding that children of immigrants learn English before they came to schools. Children of Arab immigrant parents were teased by their schoolmates; therefore, they refrained from speaking Arabic among themselves in schools or in public. This was also true to children of other migrants. Khater (2001) discusses the role public schools played in affecting the assimilation of immigrant children into American middle-class values. Khater concludes, “Many children were exposed to the narratives of ‘American modernity’ and learned to feel that their own languages, dress, and customs were stigmas in an intolerant environment” (p. 87).

For first generation immigrants of the First and Second Waves of immigration, it was easy to lose the Arabic language. Naff (1985) cites the Immigration Quota Act as one reason contributing to the decline of the use of Arabic language, as the number of new immigrants who spoke the language became very limited over time. Naff discusses how some parents and leaders attempted at teaching the Arabic language at churches,

mosques, private schools, and clubs. She states, though, that those attempts often failed to keep the interest of both students and teachers.

An example of this generational phenomenon is Abdeen Jabara, the first ADC president, born to Christian immigrant parents from Greater Syria. He was ashamed when his father, a grocery storekeeper, spoke Arabic to his children in the store. Decades later, when Abdeen was in college, he took Arabic language courses to improve his Arabic, and then he went to Lebanon to improve it (Gualtieri, 2009). More recently, Salaita (2006), a second-generation Arab American scholar who attended grade school in the 1980s, reports on the insults and the racism he encountered throughout his entire school experience. Salaita discusses how his teachers, not only never intervened to stop the harassment by other school children, but sometimes their anti-Arab racism was worse than the students'. A teacher once said to him, "Don't ever do that again, you damn foreigner" (p. 3).

While Arab migrants shared many commonalities in their encounter with the US society, they also brought a lot of differences, such as affiliating with their own nationality rather than just "Arab," belonging to different social and economic status and having different levels of education as well as belonging to different religions. Within each religion, the level of religious practices differed from the absolute secular to fully practicing Christians or Muslims.

### **Second Immigration Wave, 1925-1965**

In this section I write about the inclusive dates, countries of origin, religious affiliation, push and pull factors, and the status of the immigrants within the US.

## **Second Immigration Wave Inclusive Dates**

Migration in this period was extremely limited due to the US Congress Immigration Quota Act of 1921 and the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924. The legislation reduced the number of immigrants from non-Western and non-Northern European countries based on the increased number of immigrants to the US from countries that were not classified as White, or not White enough, including countries from East and South Europe, like Italy, Greece, Spain, and Jews from Eastern European countries. The number of immigrants from Greater Syria allowed to the US dropped to 100 non-relative persons per year. However, since wives and dependent children were not part of the immigration restrictions, they continued to arrive as part of the reunion process (Naff, 1985).

During this period, the immigrants from the earlier immigration wave were isolated from their relatives in the homeland in Greater Syria due to lack of travel and fear of not being able to return to the US if they traveled home to visit their families. Pressure of the nativism movement on immigrants to assimilate was rising, and Arabs who decided to stay in the US started to assimilate in the mainstream American culture (Kayyali, 2006; Orfalea, 2006).

## **Second Immigration Wave Countries of Origin**

The majority of the immigrants within this second wave of 1925-1965 emigrated from Palestine<sup>11</sup>, Lebanon, and Syria, with fewer people from (Jordan), Yemen, Egypt, and Iraq (Orfalea, 2006). Most of these Palestinian refugees were permitted to enter the

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<sup>11</sup> The majority of the Second Wave of 1925-1965 immigrants from Jordan were Palestinian refugees. They first took refuge in Jordan after losing their homes and land to the newly founded State of Israel in 1948. Most of them carried Jordanian passports and were, therefore, classified by the US Immigration Services as Jordanians.

US as an exception to the Johnson-Read Immigration Act of 1924 quotas. In 1953, the US Congress passed the Refugee Relief Act that was extended in 1957 to accept post-World War II refugees to immigrate to the US, including Palestinian refugees. Approximately, 3,000 Palestinians were admitted to the US between 1953 and 1963. Most of them became refugees as a result of the aftermath of the 1948 Israeli Arab war that resulted in the establishment of the state of Israel and 700,000 Palestinians becoming refugees. Most of the new Palestinian immigrants settled in the Chicago area (Cainkar, 2009). Many more Palestinians were not counted as refugees because they came on temporary student visas or were carrying travel documents from other countries and were counted as citizens of those countries, like Jordan, Syria, or Egypt (Kayyali, 2006).

In 1952, the Egyptian army overthrew the Monarch and established a “socialist” government that redistributed the farmland to the Egyptian peasants, disposing elite landowners. Landowners and others who were Monarch loyalists left the country and some of them migrated to the US. The 1958 Iraqi army overthrew the Monarch and that resulted in more refugees migrating to the US as their country was destabilized. Loyalists to the old Iraqi regime fled the country and some of them migrated to the US as well (Kayyali, 2006; Suleiman & Abu-Laban, 1989).

### **Second Wave Religious Affiliation**

While the majority of the First Wave immigrants were Christians, the majority of the Second Wave immigrants—as many as 60% (Orfalea, 2006) to 75% (Ghazal Read, 2004)—were Muslims. Middle-class Coptic Egyptians and Muslims from Iraq, Syria, and Egypt found themselves at odds with the newly formed regimes and left their countries seeking a new home in the US (Orfalea, 2006).

## **Second Wave Push and Pull Factors**

### **Independence of Arab Countries and Political Turmoil**

During the period of the Second Immigration Wave of 1925-1965, several Arab resistance movements were waging military resistance against colonial European powers, like Italian, French, and British as part of the turmoil before, during, and after World War II (1930s-1950s). New Arab countries and new governments emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Arab Gulf States, Libya, Morocco, and Sudan either claiming their independence from colonial powers or overthrowing regimes through coup d'états. Other countries, like Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, got remapped to fit some of the interests of the colonial powers as France and Britain were leaving the region and new powers were emerging, like the US and the Soviet Union post-WWII. These political events stimulated further migration to the US, especially elites from Egypt, Syria, and Iraq who arrived to the US with financial resources, education, and good command of the English language. Migrants, such as Egyptian Coptic Christian landowners or Iraqi or Syrian owning or middle-class members, had little to do with earlier Arab immigrants who had assimilated in the mainstream American society and kept defined distance until the 1967 Israeli Arab War that created a new pan-Arab consciousness (Naff, 1985).

### **The State of Israel and the Palestinian Refugees**

Almost 6,000 Palestinian refugees who lost their homes and land to Israel in 1948 were accepted to the US in 1950s, taking advantage of the US Congress Refugees Act of 1953 (Kayyali, 2006; Naff, 1985; Orfalea, 2006). Orfalea argues that while there were only 4,385 Palestinian refugees registered in the US Immigration Services, the actual

number was much higher. Most of the Palestinian refugees came to the US with passports showing their first refuge, like Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, or Egypt. They were registered in the US as if these countries were their countries of origin. It is estimated that 1.3 million Palestinian refugees first found refuge in surrounding Arab countries, like Jordan (including the West Bank), Lebanon, Syria, Egypt (including Gaza Strip), and Iraq. Many of them subsequently migrated to the US.

### **Arab Political Opposition Groups Seek Political Freedom in the US**

Political opposition groups from the newly independent Arab states or from countries with new regimes in Arab states sought freedom in the US from political dictatorships and/or religious and nationalistic regimes or escaped the atrocities in European colonized areas. The political instability in the Arab countries led many to migrate to the US. More educated individuals with undergraduate degrees, professionals, and technical trained people sought graduate studies in US universities, many of whom decided to stay because of better economic opportunities and lack of freedom in their own countries. Palestinian refugees found no other place to go back; therefore, they stayed in the US as refugees after the 1948 Palestinian “*Nakba*”<sup>12</sup>. Many of these students and professionals established small Arab enclaves in non-traditional immigrant places, like college towns, high technology areas, and newly-constructed middle-class suburbs outside the old urban areas (Abraham, 1981).

Muslim immigrants in particular found themselves spiritually alienated in the US and kept their bags packed longer than the First Wave immigrants, not knowing when their problem was going to be resolved, so that they could go back to their promised

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<sup>12</sup> *Nakba* is a term used to refer to what had happened to Palestinian people in 1948 after the establishment of the State of Israel where 700,000 Palestinians became refugees and an estimated of over 400 Palestinian villages and towns were destroyed.

homeland of the “Arab State in Palestine” that had been voted by the initial United Nations Partition Resolution in 1947—a vote for two states in Palestine: one for Jews and one for Arabs (Orfalea, 2006).

### **Second Wave Status Within the US and the Beginning of Arab American Identity**

The restrictions on the number of immigrants from Arab countries to the US from 1925 to the 1950s led many Arab Americans in the US, both descendants of the First Wave and immigrants from the Second Wave, to assimilate and de-emphasize their ethnic background. Many Arabs blended in the American society and some of them passed as White and became invisible as Arabs. Many of these Arab immigrants married American women and decided to stay and live in the US. Others, like the late Edward Said, Ibrahim Abu-Lughud or Hisham Sharabi, prominent Palestinian American figures, found themselves without a choice as Palestinians who had just lost their homeland in 1948 for Israel, but to stay and settle in the US (Kayyali, 2006; Naber, 2000; Orfalea, 2006).

Many immigrants of this Second Wave came already professionally trained as medical doctors, engineers, or had their higher education degrees in different fields of study. Others came with enough money and expertise to start their own businesses. This constituted a significant professional, educational, and social-economic class difference between this Wave and the First Wave immigrants who had immigrated for economic mobility and became pack peddlers<sup>13</sup> or joined the factory labor force to make some money and improve their lives. These differences between the First and the Second Wave

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<sup>13</sup> Most Arab immigrants in the first immigration wave, like other immigrants who came before them from East European countries, worked as *Pack Peddlers* carrying goods on their backs from house to house selling their goods (Naff, 1985; Orfalea, 2006).

immigrants kept them apart until the 1967. To some degree, the issue of Palestine was the most salient issue that united some of the First Wave immigrants with the Second Wave immigrants (Haddad, 1994; Orfalea, 2006). According to Haddad, it was not an all-out unity between First and Second Wave. On the contrary, it was very limited and based on special issues, like the Palestinian refugees issue and the role of the United States in hosting them.

Haddad (1994) believes that some of the early immigrants distanced themselves from issues in the homeland for assimilation purposes in the newly adopted home and for religious reasons as well. Most of the First Wave Christian immigrants had believed that they, or their ancestors, were persecuted by Druz Muslims in Mount Lebanon, especially in 1860. Since most of the Palestinian refugees in this wave were Muslims, First Wave Christian immigrants did not want to associate themselves with the Palestinians on the political level, although some of them tried to provide humanitarian aid, like the Syrian American Association of Boston (Haddad, 1994).

The Second Wave immigrants, although small in numbers, brought with them a sense of identity and religious affiliations as mainly Arabs and Muslims, Christian Lebanese, Chaldean Iraqis, or Egyptian Copts. These immigrants had a better sense of identity and pride of being Arab Muslims or being Christian Copts. The Copts did not want to have any affiliation with Arabism or Islam either. Another divide in this Second Wave was within Muslims themselves between upper-class Egyptian Muslim immigrants (Haddad, 1994).

The year 1965 marked the end of the Second Immigration Wave and the beginning of the Third Immigration Wave, based on new immigration legislation passed



by the US Congress repealing previous legislations that limited the immigration from non-Northern and non-Western European countries.

I emphasize the importance of the Third Wave as it is still developing. More migrants from Arab countries continue to arrive to the US. Some of the immigrants arrived during the Civil Rights Movement. Others continue to arrive as a result of political turmoil in the Arab countries. They escape oppressive dictatorships, civil wars, and wars with other countries, seeking the freedom and the safety the US provides. More people migrated in the Third Wave than during both First and Second Waves combined. Unlike the First Wave, more Muslims than Christians arrived. They also have more education and better resources with better understanding of the American way of life.

In the Third Wave, I write about the inclusive dates, the countries of origin, religious affiliation, push and pull factors, and status within the US.

### **Third Arab Immigration Wave, 1965-Present**

There are important differences between the Second and Third Wave of migrants from Arab countries to the US. Although both Second and Third Wave immigrants shared similar educational levels, professional training, and skills (Orfalea, 2006), the sheer size of the Third Wave was 13 times larger than the Second Immigration Wave. The rise of Muslim fundamentalism during the period between the two waves in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon, and most recently in Iraq and North Africa, contributed to the increase in immigrants. For example, the rise of Muslim fundamentalism led to a drastic increase in the number of Christians migrating to the US, like the Iraqi Chaldeans, the Egyptian Copts, and the Palestinian Christians. As a consequence, the Christian

population in Palestine has dropped from 15%-20% in 1944 to a mere 2% in recent years (Orfalea, 2006).

### **Third Wave Inclusive Dates**

As noted before, the 1921 Immigration Quota Act and the 1952 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act had dramatically restricted immigration to the US from countries outside North and West Europe. As a result, the Second Wave of Arab migration was cut off in 1924. In 1965, and in the wake of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the US Congress passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act (1965), repealing the discriminatory constraints of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924. More immigrants from different parts of the world took advantage of the new regulations and started to migrate to the US in large numbers, and this included people from Arab countries (Gualtieri, 2009; Malek, 2009).

### **Third Wave Countries of Origin**

Between 1965 and 2008, over 30 million people from all over the world migrated to the US, among whom 841,501 came from Arab countries. The highest numbers of Arab immigrants came from the following countries, arranged by the highest to the lowest number of immigrants: Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan/Palestine<sup>14</sup>, Iraq, Morocco, Yemen, Sudan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and in a smaller numbers from Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Libya, Qatar, Oman, and Djibouti (Orfalea, 2006).

Several factors affected people to migrate from their countries to the US. Lebanon, for example, went through crises, like the continued Israeli air raids against Muslim and Christian towns in South Lebanon in the late 1960s through the 1970s

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<sup>14</sup> I write here Jordan/Palestine because Palestinians after the 1948 war were issued Jordanian passports; therefore, they were classified as Jordanians and not Palestinians.

(Abraham & Abraham, 1981), and the Lebanese Civil War that ravaged Lebanon from 1975-1991. Another reason was the invasion by Israel in 1982 (Orfalea, 2006). Egyptian Christian Copts and some middle-class Muslims continued to migrate since 1965 to the present (Kayyali, 2006; Orfalea, 2006). Most of all, it has been the Palestinian immigration from the 1967 Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip and from other neighboring Arab countries that were the first refuge areas for them, like Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. People from these countries continue to immigrate to the US due to the reasons discussed earlier in this chapter, in the Second Immigration Wave.

Iraqi immigrants have been coming to the US throughout this post-1965 period as a result of major conflicts in modern Iraqi history (Orfalea, 2006). Syrians also continue to migrate to the US for several reasons and crises. Syrian migration intensified after the Hama massacre in 1982. It was estimated that 10,000 to 25,000 Syrians were killed (Friedman, 1989; Orfalea, 2006). Political turmoil in Yemen between South and North Yemen led to a significant Yemeni migration in the late 1960s, taking advantage of the new US immigration regulations.

### **Third Wave Religious Affiliation**

Overall, the Third Wave includes more Muslims than Christians, both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, thus reversing the trend from the First and Second Waves. It is estimated that almost 60%-65% of the immigrants in this Third Wave are Muslims, versus 35%-40% Christians. Currently, it is estimated that 85% of Muslims in the US are Sunni and 15% are Shi'a. As noted above, their national origins are Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Morocco, Yemen, Sudan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria, as well

as all other Arab countries with smaller numbers of immigrants (Arab American Institute [AAI], 2003; Kayyali, 2006; Orfalea, 2006).

### **Third Wave Push And Pull Factors**

#### **Refugees from the 1967 Six-Day Israeli Arab War**

The major influx of immigrants in this wave came to the US as a result of the 1967 Israeli-Arab War. Israel attacked three Arab countries on June 5, 1967: Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in what has become to be known as the Six-Day War, as a preemptive war for many reasons. Israel defeated the three Arab armies and took over the Golan Heights from Syria, Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the West Bank of Jordan, including East Jerusalem (the part that remained of Palestine in 1948 when Israel was established), as well as Gaza Strip. The West Bank was administered by Jordan from 1948-1967, while Gaza was administered by Egypt during the same period. Since then, Israel has annexed East Jerusalem and declared it the eternal united capital of Israel and annexed the Golan Heights as well. Subsequently, Israel withdrew from Sinai as a result of the Camp David Peace Accords that was signed between Israel and Egypt in 1979 and was facilitated by the US government.

When Israel took over the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War, one of the first steps that Israel took was to cut off the Palestinians who were living or visiting outside the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip from their families in the Occupied Territories as of June 5, 1967. For example, if a Palestinian college student was studying in Cairo or Jordan University, that person was not allowed to return to his or her home after June 5, 1967. As a result of this unannounced decision, almost one million Palestinians who happened to be living, working, or just visiting

outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip became refugees in the countries in which they happened to be at that time. A few thousands of them migrated to the US because their host countries did not accept them as refugees (Malek, 2009).

### **Brain Drain and Arab Intellectuals Leaving Arab Countries to the US**

The Third Immigration Wave period, 1965- present, has been called the “brain drain.” Thousands of highly educated and trained professionals in the Arab World responded to the vast demand in the US for skilled workers and professionals in different fields. This pull factor was accompanied by a related push factor. There was a rapid increase in the number of professionals, accompanied by an inability of the Arab economies to expand rapidly enough to absorb this increasing number of professionals (Kayyali, 2006).

After their independence from European colonialism, Arab countries, like Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon established good universities in their capital cities that attracted and graduated large numbers of highly trained professionals and technical workers. US higher education institutions were and still are technologically and academically superior to those in the Arab countries (Kayyali, 2006). Kayyali reported that between 1965 and 1976, 15% of Arab immigrants to the US were professionals, like medical doctors, engineers, and highly skilled technical workers. “On September 16, 1983, Middle East International reported that about half of all Arab science and engineering Ph. D’s had left the Arab World” (Orfalea, 2006, p. 189). At the same time, the political instability in the Arab countries continued to push people out of their own homelands.

## **Arab Immigrants Seeking Religious Freedom in the US**

Some moderate Muslims and some Christians, like Iraqi Chaldeans and Egyptian Copts hoped for more religious freedoms in the US than in their own countries. The rise of Muslim fundamentalism, like the Muslim Brotherhood, has been a push factor for these groups (Kayyali, 2006; Orfalea, 2006).

## **Third Wave Status Within the US**

The Third Wave of Arab migrants found ways to adapt to their new environment in the US. Their adaptation process has included keeping connections to their home countries. Ninety percent of immigrants maintain relationships with their relatives back home. Arab families in general tend to be large, and sometimes many people live in the same house, either because they have a large family or because they have extended family members living with them (Kayyali, 2006).

In the US, Arab Americans tend to live in towns in which other family members live or where people from the same original town, region, or country live. While Arab Americans live in all 50 states, most of them are concentrated in communities in 13 states with the highest concentrations found in Michigan, California, and New York (AAI, n.d.).

Education is of high value in Arab American communities as well as in the Arab World. It is considered a means for upward mobility and a precursor for professional achievement (Kayyali, 2006). At least 85% of Arab Americans have high school diplomas. More than 4 out of 10 Americans of Arab descent have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 24% of Americans at large. Seventeen percent of Arab Americans

have post-graduate degrees, which is nearly twice the American average of 9% (AAI. n.d.).

### **Resistance to Assimilation**

Most Arab immigrants, especially Muslims who have arrived to the US since 1965, try to resist assimilation in mainstream American society (Haddad, 2004). Traditions and customs vary between one family and the other, but some norms are common among many Arab American households in the US. They tend to sustain and pass their traditions and customs that they brought with them from the homeland. Many immigrants of the Third Wave value interconnectedness, communal living, and less assimilated communities. These values are contrary to what mainstream American society values, such as independence, individualism, and egalitarian relationships. Socioeconomic status and religious traditions influence the continuity and the maintenance of the cultural traditions where religious people resisted assimilation more than secular people. Also, upper-middle-class people were less resistant to assimilation than those with fewer resources to move upward and assimilate (Kayyali, 2006).

Some Arab Muslim communities started to build independent living apartments within a walking distance from the mosques they attend so that they can go there to pray and practice their religious and social activities. Some Arab Muslim immigrants were intentional in stressing their differences from the American society, believing that Islam was the answer to all problems in the US (Haddad, 2004).

### **Stereotyping Arab Americans**

Third Wave immigrants and Arab Americans have been subject to stereotypical, biased, and unfair treatment by American institutions and by the American public.

Although early Arab migrants, mostly Lebanese Christians, were accorded “Caucasian White” status by the US courts because of the prerequisite laws to become naturalized citizens, immigrants in the Third Wave found themselves with fewer rights than their White counterparts. They have been stereotyped by the US mass media and mistreated by the US government (Gualtieri, 2004; Haney Lopez, 1995; Kadi, 1994; Salaita, 2006). The stereotyping of Arab Americans had negative effects on many in the claiming of their Arab identity.

I am an Arab-American woman. For most of my life, however, I distanced myself from my ethnic identity. Growing up in the United States meant being constantly bombarded by negative images of Arabs. The popular stereotype portrayed Arab men as at best rich oil sheiks, and at worst sadistic terrorists with no regard for human life. US society painted a more uniform picture of Arab women: passive and silent (Sharif, 1994, p. 151).

Stereotyping Arab and Muslim Americans takes a toll on their morale as well. Al-Khatahtbeh (2016) expresses how she has always wanted to do research on “how much of an emotional toll today’s climate takes on Muslim youth.” She adds, “It is mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausting to have to assert your humanity time and time again. It is exhausting to have to denounce violent actions on behalf of your entire religion” (Al-Khatahtbeh, 2016, p. 109).

Stereotyping of Arab Americans sometimes is based on the way people dress. For example, a Muslim woman who covers her hair or sometimes her face too, is looked at differently by the mainstream. Both Sawsan and Reema shared that they “get looks” sometimes because of their head cover that might be seen as different or foreign. Some religious Arab American Muslims, especially women, continue to dress in a more modest way than those who are not religious or secular. Eck (2002) considers that the difference



in dress causes people of religious minorities to become more visible among marginalized people.

In all these cases looking different may sometimes trigger uneasiness and even fear—the fear that we do not know who “they” are or perhaps that we do not know who “we” are. As Americans, we are literally afraid of ourselves. (p. 297)

### **Conflation of Arab and Muslim**

There is a conflation of Arabs and Muslims due to ignorance on the part of the media that continues to feed stereotypical images to the mainstream American society. The notion that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs or Middle Easterners is not true. It is also not fair to many groups, including the Arabs themselves, to be lumped and confused with other ethnicities within or outside the US. Arab American Christians are still the majority within Arab Americans. Muslim Arab Americans are only 24% of all Arab Americans (Malek, 2009; Shryok, 2008).

In the following section, I discuss the Arab American “Whiteness” as a prerequisite to become US citizens. This is one of the most important factors that Arab Americans are split over. For example, early Arab immigrants, mostly Christian Maronites from Mount Lebanon, fought their case in US courts to gain their US citizenship, but they had to prove they were “White” to be eligible for citizenship. Currently, many Arab Americans consider themselves as people of color and reject their official classification as White. This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

### **Arab American Whiteness and the Fight for US Citizenship**

After almost one century, the Arab American Institute Foundation surveyed a large number of people of Arab descent and asked whether they wanted to rally to become a protected minority in the US, like other protected groups. After one century of

being accepted as “White” and US citizens and a few generations of Arab Americans who were born and raised in the US, many of them feel that their whiteness is not equal to the American whiteness of European descent. They suffer stereotypes, discrimination, hate crimes, and their whiteness does not protect them from being seen as outsiders, not loyal enough to the US, and a threat to the US and to the West.

### **Classification of Arab Immigrants by the US Government as from “Turkey in Asia”**

Because early Arab immigrants came mainly from Greater Syria, Syrians were not distinguished from other Ottoman subjects until 1899. The statistics about how many Syrians entered the United States before World War I was inaccurate. The numbers of Syrians varied from official US counts to Churches’ or Syrian communities’ counts. The US Immigration Commission recorded that 56,909 had entered the country between 1899 and 1910. The US 13<sup>th</sup> Census of 1910, under the category of “foreign stock” of Syrian origin, gave a figure of 46,727. Reverend Basil Kherbawi, relying on figures from Syrian associations and churches estimated 200,000 Syrians were in the US in 1913 (Gualtieri, 2004).

### **The Need to be Classified as “White” in Order to Gain US Citizenship**

Early Arab immigrants to the US, first known as from “Turkey in Asia,” “Asiatic,” “Subjects of the Ottoman” or in 1899 as “Syrians,” faced little or no problem entering and working in the US. Many of them in the beginning came to work for a short period of time intending to make some money and go back home. Many of those, however, ended up staying longer and wanted to be naturalized as US citizens. To be naturalized then, one had to be White, Black, or of African descent. Arab immigrants, mainly Christians, petitioned their naturalization cases to US courts to prove their

whiteness. Since they came from “Turkey in Asia,” it was difficult for them to argue their case. The rise of nativism in the US and the resistance to new immigrants from non-Northern/Western European countries made it especially difficult for Arabs to prove their whiteness as a pre-requisite to gaining their US citizenship.

Haney Lopez (2006) states that judges who ruled on “prerequisite cases” depended on one or more of the following rationales: “(1) common knowledge, (2) scientific evidence, (3) congressional intent, and (4) legal precedent” (p. 45). He notes that many of the lower courts depended on either common knowledge (what was commonly known) or scientific evidence, as in “the Court’s reliance on the term ‘Caucasian’” (Haney Lopez, 2006, p. 56) for their ruling—often, using one or the other. Haney Lopez points out that for most of the cases that were successful in court, the judges used scientific evidence to consider the petitioner as White, hence eligible for citizenship. On the other hand, in most of the failed cases, the judges depended on common knowledge to deny the request.

In 1909, a federal judge in Georgia ruled that Costa Najour, a Syrian immigrant, was considered White based on scientific evidence. This ruling was made regardless of the tone of Najour’s skin color and granted Najour the US citizenship. This was the first successfully litigated case in court for someone to be considered a “White person” (Haney Lopez, 2006). Yet, the success of Najour’s case did not mean that Syrians were consistently granted citizenship based on their whiteness. “More perplexing still, judges qualified Syrians as ‘white persons’ in 1909, 1910, and 1915, but not in 1913 or 1914” (p. 48).

George Dow was another Syrian immigrant who applied for US citizenship in 1914 and was denied twice by the lower courts based on *common knowledge* and *congressional intent*. The Dow case was yet another example of how Arab Americans won their whiteness through the courts since naturalization was limited to “aliens being free White persons, and to aliens from African nativity and to persons of African Descent” (Gualtieri, 2001, p. 29).

At the time of Dow’s failure to qualify for US citizenship, the Syrian communities in the US was estimated to be 150,000 people. They rallied behind Dow’s naturalization case. In their petition, the Syrian communities’ lawyers and Syrian American Associations formulated a five point argument to defend Dow’s and all Syrians’ right to be considered “White persons” as a pre-requisite to become US citizens.

(1) That the term “white persons” in the statute means person of the “Caucasian race” and person white in color. (2) That he is a Semite or a member of one of the Semitic nations. (3) That the Semitic nations are all members of the “Caucasian” or white race. (4) That the matter has been settled in their favor as the European Jews have been admitted without question since the passage of the statute and that the Jews are one of the Semitic peoples. (5) That the history and position of the Syrians, their connection through all time with the peoples to whom the Jewish and Christian peoples owe their religion, make it inconceivable that the statute could have intended to exclude them. (Gualtieri, 2009, p. 67)

Dow’s lawyers were finally successful. The federal court ruled on September 14, 1915, “he was indeed a ‘white person’” (Gualtieri, 2009 p. 73). In his decision, the federal judge applied three of the rationales mentioned above to grant Dow his citizenship; scientific evidence, congressional intent, and legal precedent (Haney Lopez, 2006).

While these five points were effective in several cases in front of many judges and set a strong precedent for Syrian whiteness, other judges did not take these points into consideration, arguing that a White person should be from European descent, like East

European Jews. Another exclusion argument used by judges was that when the US Congress passed the Immigration Law in 1790 and its amendment in 1878, they did not intend to include Syrians as part of the White race; therefore, they were ineligible for naturalization based on racial classifications (Gualtieri, 2001). The 1790 immigration law remained in effect until 1952, when it was amended to include post-World War II immigrant refugees, mainly from Europe, to be granted US citizenship (Haney Lopez, 2006).

Although Syrians became “White by law” in 1915 as they won the case of George Dow to naturalize, their (legal) whiteness did not protect them from being subjected to humiliation, intimidation, or assaults. This included many attacks by Ku Klux Klan in Georgia. A horrible example of mistreatment of Syrians was the lynching of a Syrian immigrant, Nicholas Romey, in Florida. This was a reminder that the Syrian whiteness was not inclusive, especially in places, like the Jim Crow South (Gualtieri, 2001).

As I have shown, the courts were hesitant to consider Arabs as White and dealt with them on a case-by case basis (Haney Lopez, 2006).

While Christianity in Dow’s case in 1915 was acknowledged as a very good reason in his petition to naturalize, Islam in Ahmad Hassan’s case played an opposite role. Hassan was a Muslim Yemeni Arab immigrant to Detroit, Michigan in 1942, whose petition to naturalize was denied by the district court. The judge ruled that Hassan’s skin color was darker than the average Mulatto. Skin color was not used as a factor when Syrian Christians petitioned for naturalization; on the contrary, the judge in Najour’s case in 1909 dismissed the tone of his skin as a factor. The judge in Hassan’s case argued that Yemen, unlike Syria, was far away from Europe; therefore, Yemenis were not considered

culturally compatible with Europeans. Hence, they were not of the white race. Bayoumi (2015) notes that the judge's decision was based on the fact that Hassan was Arab, and the majority of Arabs were Muslims. He concluded, "Religion determines race. At least in 1942 it did, and so Arabs were not considered white people by statute because they were (inassimilable) Muslims" (Bayoumi, 2015, p. 50).

In another case, a Palestinian Muslim applied for eligibility to naturalize in 1942. His Arabness was recognized as Semite and related to the Jews; Palestine was seen as close to Europe geographically and culturally; therefore, whiteness could be measured culturally. The judge ruled that since the year 1942 was the year that politics in Europe was at its worst and racial discrimination was the worst ever, the Immigration and Naturalization Services in the United States at that time considered that Arabs, like Armenians and Jews, were to be treated equal to the Whites (Gualtieri, 2001).

Whiteness of Arab Muslims was, and still is, provisional and the notion of Arab Muslims being "provisional White" or "not quite White" will continue to appear in the typical media stereotypes and the conflation of Arabs and Muslims in the US. The commitment of the US to the ideals of Zionist aspiration in the Arab Muslim countries, suspicion of pan-Arab ideals and the resentment to oil-producing Arab states are still important factors in the way that Arabs and Muslims are being treated and portrayed (Gualtieri, 2001).

Becoming White, then, is not an either/or proposition, but rather it is an uneven process, resulting in racial identities that change across context and time. Thus, in the 1920s eastern and southern Europeans could be White for the purposes of naturalization, but still racial inferiors in the close context of immigration and the more general milieu of social relations. Becoming White is, moreover, a continuing process (Haney Lopez, 2006, p.75).

## Stereotyping of Arabs and Arab Americans

### **Introduction**

According to Beydoun (2013), currently only 24% of Arab Americans are Muslims, while 63% are Christians. Yet, the conflation Arab and Muslim in the United States is not a new phenomenon. In 1785, when the newly independent US almost went to war with Barbary States, the US Congress classified them as Arabs based on their Muslim religion. This conflation is still prevalent in the US today due to Orientalism<sup>15</sup> (Beydoun, 2013) and the conflation of Arab with Muslim became the norm in public media after September 11<sup>th</sup> and through reporting on the profiling of Arabs and Muslims. Almost immediately after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the US government required the citizens of five Muslim countries to go through special registration process as a way of surveillance. According to Bayoumi (2015), that special registration had a much deeper effect. “In requiring that citizens and nationals of those countries suffer through its burdens, special registration collapsed citizenship, ethnicity, and religion into race” (Bayoumi, 2015, p. 59).

This conflation is always on the mind of Arabs and Muslims, even when one might belong to only one of these two identities. Both Arabs and Muslims have been stereotyped greatly and reduced to their stereotypes. For his 2008 book, Bayoumi interviewed seven subjects in depth, six of whom identified as Muslim. In describing the subjects, Bayoumi comments, “[T]hey have a keen awareness about their lives, an acute kind of double consciousness that comprehends the widening gap between how they see

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<sup>15</sup> Orientalism is a product of racism, conflation, and stereotyping of the East in general. It provided rationale for European colonialism in the Arab countries and other parts of the East according to Said, (1981). To Orientalists, Arabs and Muslims are one and the same. They are all foreigners, backward, and uncivilized. They think that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs. They don't even bother to make a distinction in most cases.

themselves and how they are seen by the culture at large” (p. 12). At the same time, Muslim women, regardless of their Arab identity, are subjected to additional stereotyping. The media insist on portraying Muslim women as if they all wear the hijab, according to Al-Khatatbeh (2016) who talks about tokenization and stereotyping of Muslim women and how they are often seen as a “monolith... The intricacies of the different identities that exist among Muslim women far beyond their faith are melted away” (p. 95).

Arab immigrants to the US faced stereotypes by the American public and the mass media since their early arrival to the US in groups in the 1880s. Like other groups who came before them, such as East European Jews, Latinx, and Asians, they were equally unwelcome to migrate to the US, unlike the experiences of other immigrants from Northern and Western Europe. The exclusion of the Arabs and other ethnicities from the racial hierarchy of who was White led to a social construct that kept the Whites on top although there was no definition of what was whiteness. They used scientific evidence when it suited them and when it did not, for example, in the case of Japanese immigrants, they used the common sense, or “what the common man thinks” that someone was White or not (Gualtierie, 2001; Haney Lopez, 2006). These immigrant groups, like the Irish, Italians, Greeks, Poles, and Jews, who arrived from Europe before the Arabs were considered “non-White” or “not quite White,” by Americans, (mainly Anglo Saxons who arrived to the US first).

Arabs, like other immigrants mentioned above, were faced with similar prejudices and discrimination in many areas, like jobs and housing. Therefore, stereotypes were used to enforce their inferior status as immigrants who will always be seen, as I discuss



later as “foreign,” and a threat to the West and to the US in particular. They are seen as invisible with regard to their contributions to the American society and very visible when there is a problem in their original countries with the US foreign policy. Their treatment is based on stereotypical images portrayed by the US media and the public, ranging from prejudices to harsh treatment, and sometimes violence (Bell, Joshi, & Zúñiga, 2007; Orfalea, 2006).

### **Stereotypes of Early Arab Immigrants**

The identity markers of the early Arab immigrants were strongly affected by a history of stereotypes. From the perspective of the US mainstream, among whom these early immigrants from Arab countries settled, the important markers were not ethnic or religious so much as stereotypes were based on stigma. The stigma of being an Arab or “dirty Arab” as it was used in a derogatory way, was what most of the early Arab migrants tried to stay away from, and that was one reason for them to try to blend in the American mainstream as White. The already existing stereotypes that were used against East European Jews and Japanese who preceded Arabs in migrating to the US, provided stereotypical precedents to describe the Arab migrants as well. Almost identical stereotypes that were commonly used against Jews and Blacks were also used against Arabs (Stockton, 1994). The fact that most of the early Arab migrants were Christians, although not from European Protestant sects, did not protect them from being stereotyped, as their Christianity was not part of Protestantism that was commonly practiced by the mainstream Americans (Naff, 1985).

The image of Arab migrants started to build up in the minds of Americans as a stereotypical image that was compared more to stereotyped Jews and Asians rather than

to Christian, White Americans, even though almost all early Arab migrants were Christians. The overwhelmingly Christian Arab migrants used their Christianity as a means to gain access into the mainstream society, so they could fit the positive image of the White people rather than the negative images of others who were not Christians, as mentioned above. They discovered quickly, though, that they were treated like the “other” as well and that their Christianity was different from the mainstream Protestantism that was practiced in churches across the US.

Stereotypes and the pressure to assimilate have affected the identity formation of early Arab immigrants in many ways. Their sense of belonging to the new country was most important to them. Some had expressed loyalty to their new country by volunteering in the US armed forces to go and fight the US wars. Others chose to work hard and achieve the “American dream” by accumulating more money and establishing their own businesses and moving to the middle class rather than staying in the labor force or peddling (Naff, 1985).

The mainstream American media played a pivotal role in stereotyping immigrants from Arab descent. The images they portrayed about Arabs and Muslims were images of barbaric, backward, women abuser, harem herder, oil-rich sheik, monster-like, and an immanent threat to the West and to the US. The movie industry, for example, and from the very early days of its existence, portrayed Arabs negatively and made jokes about them that are degrading. It also painted them as lacking civility and modernity. Many of the Hollywood-produced movies over the years that included Arabs or Muslims rarely portrayed them in any positive ways. On the contrary, it is almost always that negative images are run over and over again (Shaheen, 2001).

Stereotypes lead to prejudice and discrimination that affect public opinion, policy making and may lead to acts of violence and hate crimes. Being stereotyped for a very long time, Arab Americans suffer biased acts of discriminations and hate crimes that rise inside the United State whenever there is a problem inside or outside the US, where Aras and Muslims are *scape-goated* and blamed. Arab American identity has become a suspicious identity and the whole community becomes a suspect at any time there is a terrorist attack or what is suspected as such, anywhere in the world. “How one’s religion and culture is apprehended, for example, can also assume a racist character” (Bayoumi, 2015, p. 57). Despite all that, Arab American community is a successful community in the US. Their average level of education, income, and professional careers are above the American average, sometimes by a significant percentage (AAI, n.d.).

In more recent history, there were a number of global events that played a role in renewing and intensifying negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the US, like the 1967 Israeli Arab Six-Day War, the 1973 Israeli Arab War, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Iranian Iraqi War in the 1980s and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, as well as the aftermath of the first and second Gulf wars in 1991 and 2003, and most recently the War on Terror. I discuss these factors individually in the following section.

### **The 1967 Six-Day War Effect on Stereotyping Arabs in the US**

Immediately following the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel on one side and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on the other, some Arab Americans, especially Palestinians, started to take a leading role among Arab American communities in the US to establish themselves as a political group to support the Palestine issue and influence the US foreign policy. American mass media coverage of the war before, during, and after was biased

and full of attacks on Arabs and Muslims. Stereotyping Arabs as terrorists, backward, frozen in time, anti-West and pro-Communist Soviet Union (Kayyali, 2006; Malek, 2009; Suleiman, 1988, 1999).

Reports in the US media of the defeat of the “Arabs” had racial overtones. The view in the US was that the United States won a war against the “dirty Arabs” as Abdeen Jabara, an Arab American community activist, was quoted as saying right after the war (Gualtieri, 2009). Similar statements from media outlets and news commentators were explicit in their racist remarks against Arabs and Muslims (Gualtieri, 2009; Naber, 2008; Suleiman, 1988).

Arab Americans, mostly from the Second Immigration Wave and some from the second- or third-generation of the First Immigration Wave, as well as newcomers from the Third Wave realized right after the 1967 Six-Day War that while the US courts recognized Arabs as Whites, their treatment by the mainstream American public, the mass media, and the US government was not the kind of recognition that European Whites have received. They were looked at from a stereotypical, marginalized imagery and portrayed as being anti-assimilation, uncivilized, backward, and inferior (Gualtieri, 2009).

On the other hand, many of those Arab immigrants were not sure about the economic, political, and occupational risks they needed to take in order to speak up against the pro-Israeli, anti-Arab US foreign policies. They often experienced anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab sentiments and more pressure on those who wanted to speak up against US interference in the Arab affairs, especially arming and supporting Israel that at the end of 1948, causing 700,000 of them to lose their land and livelihood. Arab migrants

in the Second and Third Waves were challenged to find political common grounds to tackle issues of mutual concern and overcome the many national, political, religious, and sectarian differences that they brought with them to the US (Orfalea, 2006). They never gave up on finding common grounds and in 1967, the first Arab American organization, the American Arab University Graduates (AAUG), was formed, which attracted Arab Americans from all immigrations waves, religions, and ethnicities and formed a formidable body to educate about and defend Arab American rights and fight against stereotypes of Arab and Muslim people (Gualtieri, 2006; Orfalea, 2006).

### **The 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the Oil Embargo Against the US**

Arab oil-producing countries reduced the export of oil to the US and to some European countries that sided with Israel during the 1973 Arab Israeli war. During the war, the US supplied Israel with weapons that most Arabs believed helped tip the balance of that war and helped Israel maintain the occupation of Arab land that it occupied in its 1967 war. The oil embargo against the US resulted in long lines of drivers waiting for hours to fill their gas tanks and a hike in the oil prices that caused a worldwide financial instability. The media coverage of both the war and the oil embargo was also seen as one-sided, anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim (in that most Arab countries are also predominantly Muslim countries), which was similar to the coverage of the 1967 War. The media portrayal of Arabs as wealthy oil sheiks who wanted to destroy the American economy was uncritically accepted by the American public, reinforcing the stereotypical images of Arabs and Muslims in the movie industry, TV shows, radio talk shows, and print media (Gualtieri, 2004; Shaheen, 2000, 2005; Suleiman, 1988, 1999).

The late Edward Said, a Palestinian American professor at Columbia University, noted how the prevailing Orientalist views in Western media reduced Islam to a religion belonging to the “Orient” that was characterized as “one monolithic thing, and then with a very special hostility and fear” (Said, 1981, p. 4). Said discusses how Christians considered Mohammad (the prophet of Islam) to be “a false prophet, a sower of discord, a sensualist, hypocrite, an agent of the devil” (p. 5). Said contends that since several great civilizations from the East were conquered, they did not pose continuous threat to the West. He went on to say

Only Islam seemed never to have submitted completely to the West; and when, after the dramatic oil-price rises of the early 1970s, the Muslim world seemed once more on the verge of repeating its early conquests, the whole West seemed to shutter (p. 5).

Such views describe Islam as a foreign religion and deny its positive contributions to the West; therefore, the stereotyping and the nonstop assault on Arabs and Muslims continued.

### **The Iranian Revolution Factor<sup>16</sup>**

Anti-Muslim mass media conflated Muslims with Arabs, especially after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 that overthrew the US-backed monarch and took over the US embassy, taking 70 embassy employees as hostage for 444 days, citing grievances against the US policy in their country. Pictures and videos of the blindfolded American hostages taken from the embassy fueled hard feelings against Arabs and Muslims. The conflation of Arabs and Muslims and the very little differentiation between both entities in the US made that crisis seem as if all Arabs and all Muslims posed a threat to the US. Images of

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<sup>16</sup> I should point out here that Iran is not an Arab country. It has its own history, culture, and language. The overwhelming majority of Iranians are Muslims, and they practice Shi’aism, a sect of Islam. One important difference between Shi’a and Sunni Muslims is that Shi’as believe that the succession of prophet Muhammed should have stayed in his own grandchildren of his daughter Fatima.

Arab and Muslim leaders, like Khomeini, Arafat, Hafez al-Assad, Gaddafi, and Arab Gulf States leaders in their white robes, were portrayed in the US mass media and were played over and over again to add to the feelings of hostility within the US. These images were powerful since they all came from a region that was/is volatile and vital for the West and for the US, as one of the most oil-rich regions that supplies oil to the West and to the US (Said, 1981). “Reactions to what took place in Iran did not occur in a vacuum. Further back in the public’s subliminal cultural consciousness, there was the longstanding attitude to Islam, the Arabs, and the Orient that I have been calling Orientalism” (p. 6).

The hostage crisis in Iran was accompanied by the Lebanese civil war and the role of the US mass media in bringing more images of fighting all over Lebanon, that portrayed Arabs as savages, terrorists, and hostage-takers. In the midst of the Iranian hostage crisis, the Iraq-Iran War started and a new fuel was added to the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim flames over the American mass media: audio, visual, and print (Suleiman, 1999). Ironically enough, Israel took full advantage of the Iran Iraq war and invaded Lebanon, occupying its capital, Beirut. This invasion resulted in the Sabra and Shatilla massacre<sup>17</sup> that received very little coverage by the US media.

### **Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait**

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1991, the US led a coalition that was authorized by the United Nations to force Iraq out of Kuwait. This became known as the First Gulf War. The American troops led an international coalition of many countries and they succeeded in restoring the Kuwaiti monarch. The United Nations passed a resolution

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<sup>17</sup> Sabra and Shatilla are two Palestinian refugee camps adjacent to Beirut. Tens of thousands of Palestinians live “temporarily” in the United Nations—temporarily-built units to house Palestinian refugees of 1948. After the withdrawal of the PLO forces from the camps in 1982 and guarantees from the US and the UN to protect the camp population, right-wing, Israeli-backed, Christian Lebanese militias entered the camps and indiscriminately killed a few thousand Palestinians. This massacre has become known as the massacre of Sabra and Shatilla.

to impose sanctions against Iraq to punish the Iraqi regime and to cripple it for years to come. Those sanctions lasted until 2003, when the US invaded all of Iraq and occupied the country.

The sanctions were disturbing to many people, especially Iraqi people and many Arab Americans. Most of the Iraqi troops were destroyed in Kuwait and in Iraq due to air strikes by the American forces. The American-led coalition allowed the Iraqi army to keep their helicopters. President Bush (senior) asked the Iraqi people to rise against the Iraqi regime and overthrow the government. The Kurds in the North and the Shi'a in the South felt encouraged to revolt, and hoped that the United States would come to help them, or at least provide aid for them. The reality was that they did not receive any tangible support in their rebellions against the Iraqi regime. Instead, they were dealt with swiftly and brutally by the Iraqi troops in the North and the South areas. Once the news reported the crackdown on the Kurds and the Shi'a, the US influenced the UN and passed several resolutions to impose more sanctions on Iraq that lasted until the invasion by the American troops in 2003 and the overthrow of the Iraqi regime altogether.

### **The Aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> Attacks**

The terrorist attacks caused another rash of American public hatred toward Arabs and Muslims. All Arabs and all Muslims were blamed for the attacks. Although the official position of the US government did not publicly blame them, still, hate crimes, death threats, and vandalism of Arab and Muslim businesses and mosques escalated (AAI n.d.; American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, [AAADC], 2015). Arabs in the US, particularly Muslims, were afraid of retaliation by the American public. Eight men were murdered in the two weeks following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> (Gualtieri, 2004).



Seven of them were from Arab and Muslim backgrounds and one person, Balbir Singh Sodkh, was a Sikh shopkeeper from Arizona, who was thought to be a Muslim because he was wearing a turban. His murderer was convicted and put on death row. Another example of indiscriminate hate against Muslims was when Jim Zogby, the president of the Arab American Institute Foundation, a third generation Arab American Christian, received a death threat from a caller describing him as “a towel head” (Gualtieri, 2004). The rate of hate crimes against Arab and Muslim Americans rose to 1700% in the first months following the terrorist attacks, and has never since returned to its pre-2001 level (AAI, n.d.; ADC Website; Bayoumi, 2008; Gualtieri, 2004).

As a result of the fear among Arabs and Muslims that spread after the surge of hate crimes, some Arab Americans Anglicized their names, so that a person named Muhammad would refer to himself as “Mike” or “Moe.” Other Muslim men shaved their beards for fear of being targeted. Some Muslim women who wore the hijab felt unsafe since many of them became a primary target to anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racial slurs and hijab pulling, so they decided to take off their head covers to protect themselves (El Rassi, 2007; Haddad, 2004).

The media’s antagonism toward American Arabs and Muslims was fueled by changes in public policy. The US Congress passed PATRIOT Acts I and II, which restricted civil liberties and allowed surveillance, questioning, searches, and use of listening devices in the homes and offices of suspected terrorists. The Immigration Services required all men from 24 Arab and Muslim countries who were living legally in the US to register with Homeland Security Department (Gualtieri, 2004).

The reaction of the US government to invade two Muslim countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, was an overreaction to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. The invasion and the continued occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in the destruction of the two countries with countless numbers of human casualties, collateral damage, and displacement of millions of people within their own countries, and as refugees in other countries. There were tens of thousands of American soldiers who either lost their lives or sustained different degrees of injuries and disabilities. Although none of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attackers came from Iraq or Afghanistan, nor were any of them a US citizen, Arab Americans, especially Muslims, were indirectly blamed for the incidents, only because they shared the ethno-religious background of the attackers. This blame by the American public was inflamed by the mainstream media that constantly portrayed Arabs and Muslims as savages, terrorists, and most recently as members of sleeper cells (Bayoumi, 2008; Orfalea, 2006). Bayoumi reports on a poll conducted by *Time Magazine* in 2010 that indicates that 62% of average Americans have never met a Muslim person. Bayoumi (2015) comments that when regular people do not get to know each other, they form their views on Islam through what they see in the news or social media, which is often distorted. Eck (2002) point out that despite that Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is of the Abrahamic faith, it is the religion “about which many Americans have the most negative stereotypes—extremist terrorism, saber-rattling *jihad*, and the oppression of women” (p. 232).

The US Congress, immediately after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, approved the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, to oversee and safeguard the different US security agencies. The Congress also passed the PATRIOT Acts I and II as

mentioned earlier. Arabs and Muslims in the US suffered the most out of these new governmental procedures that mainly targeted them through different methods of racial profiling: being singled out, questioned, and searched in airports and other border points of entry to the US. They get pulled out of airplanes, and several pilots have refused to fly while some racially profiled Arab and Muslim men were on board of their planes. Their homes and offices have become targets of raids and searches by the FBI and other federal and state security agencies, sometimes without search warrants from the courts. Overseas, American embassies have restricted issuing visas to people coming from Arab or Muslim countries, and applicants are frequently subjected to scrutiny and questioning by embassy security staff and employees. Some of the people who had valid visas to enter the US were turned back to their countries upon arrival to US airports and were denied entry (Bayoumi, 2008; Jamal & Naber, 2008; Salaita, 2006).

Arab and Muslim communities in the US have been suffering more damage to their image and are afraid of racial profiling and more scrutiny in the US, and one clear example is at airports. Some are afraid to travel outside the country for fear of being denied reentry visa to the US. This is especially true for students from Arab and Muslim countries who are either on student visas or are permanent legal residents but do not have their US citizenship yet.

The negative stereotypes have affected Arab Americans in many ways. Stereotyping contributed to dehumanizing Arabs and Arab Americans and has normalized their negative images among mainstream Americans. “For Muslims, the media victimized all 1.6 billion of us with each news cycle” (Al-Khatahtbeh, 2016, p. 106). This made it easier to wage wars on their countries of origin and easier to racially

profile them, even when the majority of them are US citizens. The Iraq War in 1991, for instance, had triggered a new wave of racist views and acts against Arabs and Muslims in the US, none of which caused any public condemnation or outrage. The second Iraq war in 2003, that was based on lies and fabrication of evidence, did not move the people of the US in masses because the government and the mainstream media have already damaged the image of Arabs and Muslims. Any hurting that is done to any of them is seen by the American public as a justified act of either *preemptive war*, or *national interest of the US* or *to protect the safety of the American people*. It is worth mentioning again that the animosity and acts of violence that were waged against Arab and Muslim Americans have preceded the war on terror started in 2001. Mansoor Collier (1994), for example, reports on a case of repeatedly vandalizing a mosque in Houston, Texas with rocks and smoke bombs and spray paint that read, “Death to Evil Arabs.” Mansoor Collier questions, “Why is it socially acceptable to defame Arabs?” (p. 165).

### **Arab American Organizations and the Perceived US Bias**

In 1969, the Nixon Administration passed “Operation Boulder” that aimed to investigate activists of Arabic-speaking origins through questioning, wiretapping, and eavesdropping to see if there was any connection between them and Arab terrorists in Arab countries (Gualtieri, 2009). The focus of this investigation was mainly Palestinian groups that had resisted the Israeli occupation in Palestine. The American Association of University Graduates (AAUG) members considered that operation to be intimidation to silence Arab American activists in the US and to prevent them from criticizing the US and the Israeli policies. In 1974, the US Department of Justice admitted to having used

electronic devices to eavesdrop on an American-born founding member of the AAUG, Abdeen Jabara (Gualtieri, 2009; Suleiman, 1988).

Alliances between Arab American groups and African American leaders and groups developed after the Six-Day War and as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. These alliances were put to the test in 1979 when Andrew Young, a prominent African American leader who was the US representative in the United Nations, met with Zehdi Terzi, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) representative in the UN. Pro-Israel groups protested the meeting. Young resigned his position because of the lack of support from the US government and President Carter. The PLO then was considered a terrorist organization by the US government, and US officials were not allowed to talk to PLO officials. This incident caused friction between Black organizations and pro-Israel groups based on the fact that there was no official meeting between Young and Terzi. It was a mere encounter according to Young who happened to live in the same neighborhood where Terzi lived. They were walking their dogs when they greeted each other and started talking.

Another example of the above-mentioned alliance was that Arab American organizations, such as the Arab American Institute Foundation (AAI) and the American Arab Anti Discrimination Committee (ADC) supported Reverend Jesse Jackson's bid for the nomination of the Democratic Party in 1984, and they raised money for his primary campaign (Gualtieri, 2009).

Upon the assassination of Alex Odeh, the ADC West Coast Regional Director, that was believed to be at the hands of the Jewish Defense League, a pro-Israel organization, several Arab American organizations rallied together to demand protection

of the Arab American civil rights and to demand political freedom in the US. This incident was described by members of Congress as a “zone of danger” for Arab Americans and led to a hearing about the assassination of Alex Odeh and the need to protect the civil rights of Arab Americans. Congressman Conyer of Michigan cited many examples of death threats and hate crimes against Arab and Muslim Americans (Gualtieri, 2009; Malek, 2009; Suleiman, 1988).

The US-Libyan crisis in 1986/87 was another example of perceived bias. The US attacked Libya based on alleged accusations of Libyan government’s support of terrorist attacks on American citizens in Germany and other European countries. Retaliations against Arab Americans followed the attacks, whether through the media depictions of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists, graffiti on Arab and Muslim American symbols, like mosques and businesses, or slurs at Arab Muslim women who wore the hijab (Gualtieri, 2004; Suleiman, 1988).

### **Arab American Organizations Explored the Possibility of a Minority Status for Arab Americans**

Another politicizing effort by Arab intellectuals was to establish Arab American organizations to advocate for the rights of Arab Americans and for Arab issues as they are affected by the US foreign policy in the Arab world. In the 1990s, some Arab American organizations, like the AAI, explored the possibility of establishing official minority status for Arab Americans like other protected ethnic groups in the US. This effort for approving a minority status was put on hold after the events of September 11, 2001 for fear of escalating anti Arab racial profiling (Gualtieri, 2009; Haddad, 2004).

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, it became clear to Arab Americans that they were not treated equally like other White people of European descent although they

were classified as White by US law. Because of the mistreatment of Arabs in general and Arab Americans in particular by the US government, some Arab American writers and scholars started challenging their White designation. They consider that Arabs and Arab Americans were living a dilemma in which, on one hand they were eligible for American citizenship, and on the other, this citizenship and its qualification were incomplete and a cause of racial profiling for them. Several Arab American writers and scholars share Joseph's (1999) view about the incomplete acceptance of Arab Americans as true members of the American mainstream society. They describe Arab Americans as "not quite White," "in between," "between Arab and White," "honorary Americans," "most invisible of the invisibles," or as "a minority without a minority status" (Gualtieri, 2004; Joseph, 1999; Naber, 2008; Saliba, 1999; Samhan, 1999).

The War on Terror that the US has been waging around the world as a result of the acts of September 11, 2001 was not caused by those terrorist acts alone. It was the latest example of a long-term policy that the US, as a super power, has adopted over the years in dealing with Arab issues. US policy in the Arab world has been one-sided, especially toward the Israeli Arab conflict in Palestine, in which the US is almost always pro-Israel and anti-Arab. Arab Americans feel that their country, the US, is not taking a fair or just position about the most important problem for Arabs and Arab Americans—the Palestine problem and the Israeli occupation of Palestine and other Arab land. This has been an ongoing question in the minds of Arabs and Arab Americans who see that as a double standard of the US government. On one hand, it is quick to react, and is even willing to use military force, to invade Iraq because of its occupation of Kuwait in 1991, as mentioned earlier. On the other, the same US government did nothing to stop the

building of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian occupied land for almost 50 years since Israel took over the West Bank, Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula (Orfalea, 2006).

Another issue for Arab Americans is that they believe they are treated in the US as foreigners and outsiders who have their own traditions and beliefs that are different from those of mainstream America. Not only they are seen as different from mainstream America, but also their loyalty is not perceived as being to the US, rather to their own countries of origin or to Islam. Often, in the minds of the American mainstream, Islam means Arab, and Arab means Islam.

Treating Arab Americans as outsiders is not limited to the American mainstream. It extends to progressive and feminist circles as well. Jarmakani (2011) describes an experience when she was delivering a paper at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference on Arab American literature. She got to the conference to find out that she was scheduled to join a panel titled, "Construction of Gender and Sexuality in International Literature," rendering Arab American issues as "foreign." Jarmakani notes that not only the conference organizers were confused but the audience at the session,

seemed to have no frame of reference for understanding Arab or Arab American women as writers, since the activity of writing requires a subjectivity that is incompatible with the stereotypical frames of reference that are widely available for understanding Arab and Muslim womanhood (p. 235).

Mango (2012) discusses how "many Arab American women were born and raised in the United States. They are strongly tied to life and culture in America, but the Arab component of who they are is regarded by others as anti-American" (p. 83). Bayoumi (2008) states that is demoralizing for Arabs to be seen by their own fellow Americans as



a problem. He talks about a few cases of Arab American young adults who found themselves caught in the midst of the War on Terror in New York City and faced treatment as if they were foreigners in their own country, the US. Accused of being a terrorist by one's own government, the very same government to which they pay taxes and abide by its laws, seen as suspects by their neighbors, and portrayed as villains by the media, is a hard feeling to carry, especially that many get scrutinized when there is no evidence against them for any wrong doing even as simple as a traffic violation. When one's identity, ethnicity, or religion becomes the only evidence against them, this is a problem (Bayoumi, 2008). Arab Americans feel that they are treated with prejudice and their own government is racially profiling them.

The most recent acts of terror in France, San Bernardino, and Orlando and the rhetoric during the 2016 US presidential election cycle have increased the attacks on Arabs and Muslims and skyrocketed the number of hate crimes against Muslims in the US. The *New York Times* reported in September 2016 that hate crimes against American Muslims has increased more than the time after September 11<sup>th</sup>. In August 2016, a white man killed his Lebanese American neighbor, who he often called "dirty Arab," "dirty Lebanese," "Muslim," according to the victim's siblings, even though the Lebanese family is Orthodox Christian (*Democracy Now!*, 2016). A recent report from Counsel on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and UC Berkeley indicated that anti-Muslim crimes were at their highest by the end of 2015 (*Confronting Fear*, n.d.). Just two days after President Trump's executive order to ban immigrants from seven Muslim countries, a white supremacist who is a supporter of Trump opened fire in a mosque in Quebec, killing six people and injuring eight more (CNN.com, 2016). The situation of Arabs

living in the US regardless of whether they are first generation or fifth generation, Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, there is a question of how the Arabness and the Americanness will fit together. Basically there are two approaches, one is the notion of a hyphenated Arab American identity that parallels earlier ethnic identifiers, such as an Italian American or Irish American, and I will look at this first, but then farther down in this section, I will show the inadequacy of hyphenation to capture the nuances of the identity, and for that reason, I will be looking at a factor analysis of multiracial models.

### **Hyphenated Identity and Arab American Identity**

Hyphenated identity was commonly used in the early 1900 and peaked in 1915 upon the start of the World War I as a product of American nativism and nationalism. It was directed against German immigrants, who numbered around 2.3 million people at the time. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson considered hyphenated Americans to have divided loyalties and called for one America (Higham, 2002). Over the years, hyphenated identity took different meanings. Oxford Living Dictionary defines hyphenated identity as “An American citizen who can trace their ancestry to another part of the world, such as an African American (so called because terms such as African American are often written with a hyphen)” (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Hiyam and her family, for example, identified themselves as Muslims or Arabs or Palestinians simultaneously, but after September 11<sup>th</sup>, when Islam became under attack, they intentionally started to refer to themselves as Arab American because they thought that dropping Islam would keep them out of the spotlight and give them a sense of protection against negative stereotypes. By combining Arab and American, they moved away from their Islamic identity.

The Arab American identity is a complex identity since it is very diverse in many areas, such as cultures, sociopolitical circumstances, and religions, as well as influenced by country of origin, language, and other sub-ethnicities and nationalities. The Arab American hyphenated identity started to take shape after the 1967 Israeli Arab Six-Day War. The mass media presented blatant biased and stereotyped images of Arabs and Muslims. Arabs and Arab Americans in the US started to organize themselves as a cultural and political pan-ethnic group to educate others about themselves and to focus on getting engaged in the socio-political discourses in the US. They also started to mobilize themselves and rally to defend against being ridiculed and stereotyped by the US mass media and the American public, as they were treated as second-class citizens in many cases and were seen as inferior to White Americans with European descent.

Arab American hyphenated identity is seen differently by different people within the community. Some people consider “Arab” in “Arab American” as an adjective to American, stressing their own assimilation process and consider themselves more American than Arab. Other people with Arabic heritage used the term “Arab-American” with pride in the two parts of their hyphenated identity, stressing the fact that they have Arabic heritage despite their Americanized upbringing. Others, like Hiyam and her family, added American to the Arab/Muslim identity as a means of feeling safe in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The notion of hyphenation and assimilation will be discussed later in this chapter when I discuss the factors that shape Arab-American identity.

Others argued that the narrative of Arab immigrants, as I believe is the case with other immigrant communities, does not fit simply in either assimilation or

marginalization; it is the product of many intersecting factors. For the case of Arab Americans, the 1967 War has complicated their claims of identity. Naber discusses how Arab Americans have bought into the assimilation narrative in the 1950s and 1970s to be seen closer to the American side of the hyphen, “within the framework of ethnic accommodation and the politics of cultural authenticity” (Naber, 2011, p. 43). Naber asserts that this framework has supported their interest in economic mobility into the middle-class. She also argues that the politics of cultural authenticity ignores the US systems of oppression as well as “the violences of imperialism, militarism and war” (Naber, 2011, p. 109). The concept of hyphenated identity fails to take into consideration the multiple factors and historical context that affect Arabness.

Naber (2011) critiques patriarchy and forced heterosexuality within the dominant Arab American culture and offers a theoretical model that she describes as

a diasporic Arab feminist critique, makes central a critique of the power structures of patriarchy and homophobia that are internal to Arab families and communities, while illustrating that these power structures are shaped by a range of intersecting histories and power relations (p. 109).

I share Naber’s belief in her assessment of the Arab American culture and Arab American identity. When analyzing the data from the interviews with my subjects, I will be looking at the factors and situational context that will affect how they identify as Arab American in relations to Cross (2001, 2012) and Wijeyesinghe (2001, 2012), and looking at the intersectionality of factors affecting their identities.

### **Arab American Ethnic Identity in Relation to Multiracial Model and Situational Context**

Adams (2001) states “ethnicity refers to people’s *culture* more than to their *physical* characteristics” (p. 211). Even though this cultural reference takes into account

people's "life styles, value orientations, language, customs, beliefs and habits" (p. 211), Adams refers to a number of ethnic groups in the US who have been racialized as non-White both by their white neighbors as well as governmental institutions. I would argue that the same applies to Arab American as an ethnic group that has been racialized over the years.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the issue of hyphenation and assimilation for Arab Americans belongs to a specific moment in history. It was the 1967 Israeli Arab Six-Day War that served as a turning point for many Americans with Arab background to start using Arab-American as an ethnic hyphenated identity. At the same time, Arab Americans have not assimilated like European Americans, for whom the hyphenation disappeared, as in the ethnicities of Italians (Italian-Americans) and Irish (Irish-Americans), who became White for the purposes of citizenship as well as non-ethnically identified Americans (Haney Lopez, 2006). Beydoun (2013) considers that pan-Arabism started in the 1930s, planting the seeds for the current Arab American identity.

As a pan-ethnicity, the Arab American hyphenated term can be compared to the use of Asian American as an umbrella to encompass

the complexities, the struggles and layering of various facets of one's identity, which are shaped by the history and the politics of one's imaginary and adopted homeland(s), as well as the importance of memory, myth, and art in the construction of self" (Ty & Goellnicht, 2004, p. 2).

Noting that such complex identities cannot be lumped under one single term, Ty and Goellnicht note that the term Asian American was used by activists to build coalitions with other marginalized groups. They suggest that while the term does not reflect the complexity of national origins or other aspects of identity, it can still be useful for coalition building but should include Canadian Asian Americans, using the term "Asian

North American” instead to denote the similar issues affecting people of Asian descent who live in both countries.

Audre Lorde used the term “hyphenated identity” in 1984 to refer to German American women in Berlin, as an affirmation to their belonging to both cultures (López, 2008). For the Latina poet, Chinchilla, the hyphen signifies a special place that opens limitless possibilities for her claiming of her distinct evolving identity (Garcia-Rojas, 2016). Since Audre Lorde’s use of the term, it became widely used with different meanings and intentions by people of marginalized as well as dominant identities. Some earlier leaders in the US tried to eliminate the use of hyphenation from an egocentric perspective, to create one mainstream America (Harris Powell, 2014).

Arab American literature reflects similar discussions about the hyphenated term. Sharobeem (2003) defines the hyphenated identity as “a term that implies a dual identity, an ethno cultural one, and evokes questions and debates regarding which side of the hyphen the person belongs to” (p. 60). Many writers who studied immigrant communities have written about the hyphenated identity and the various degrees of assimilation, cultural contradictions or negotiation (Abinader, 2007; Kadi, 1994; Majaj, 1994; Sharobeem, 2003). Sharobeem describes the experience as leaning more toward one culture than the other, while swinging between both. Others rejected the notion that they have to identify with one culture over the other. Majaj (1994) who was born to a Palestinian father and an American mother writes,

I am tired of being afraid to speak who I am: American and Palestinian, not merely half of one thing and half of another, but both at once—and in that inexplicable melding that occurs when two cultures come together, not quite either, so that neither American nor Arab find themselves fully reflected in me, nor I in them (pp. 67-68).

Majaj's assertion that she is the product of both cultures is mirrored in what many others wrote about. Abinader (2002) discusses how she found connection to other writers of different ethnicities who tended to discuss similar issues of "belonging, identity, cultural loneliness, community, and exoticization" (p. 4).

The widely varied understanding and use of hyphenated identity shows how the hyphenation for Arab Americans has failed as an explanatory paradigm for the complexity of identity. In order to better reflect this complexity in identity, I use Cross's (2012) and Wijeyesinghe's (2001, 2012) models to help explain the responses of my subjects and how they make meaning of their own identities.

### **Applicable Social Identity Models**

As noted earlier, the prevalent models of identity development among student affairs practitioners comes from the Piaget and Perry cognitive development and the Eriksonian and Chickering of psychosocial development. These are valuable models, but they do not account for the complexities of the subjects I am dealing with in this study. These models were college students focused with an assumption that college students were predominantly white and male. This is no longer the case, if it ever was, so we need to look for new models. Many years ago, Cross (1971), Jackson (1976), and Hardiman (1982) developed racial identity models essentially along Eriksonian lines. Cross's model has evolved to include the complexity of multiple factors (Cross, 2001) and also the situational nature of the enactments of identity—*Buffering, Code Switching, and Bridging*. These two aspects of Cross's model, its intersectionality of aspects, and its situational enactments are extremely helpful to me in understanding what my subjects said to me.

Basically in the earlier article, Cross (2001) was looking at different life faces in an Eriksonian approach but also looking at political, ideological, and family factors, using Wijeyesinghe's (1992) approach. This then led him to understand that the differences of family, political, social, and cultural are dominant at different contextual enactments.

In discussing his model of identity enactment, Cross (2012) states, "divergent social groups are more alike than different in the way social identity is *enacted during critical everyday transactions*" (p. 194). Some elements of Cross's model might be helpful in explaining responses from Arab Americans as some of them enact elements of Cross's model due to oppressive behaviors and circumstances they go through in their day-to-day life in the US living within racial and cultural groups, mainly Whites. Cross believes that the way people present their identity may change based on the situation they are in. He calls that "identity management" (p. 195). Cross, Smith, and Payne (2002) developed a "Black Enactment-Transactional Model BETM" in 2002. Cross (2012) argues that the same model can apply to different social groups. Similar to black parents, other parents from different racial or ethnic backgrounds prepare their kids for both positive and negative experiences they will encounter within and outside their own communities. Cross (2012) explains

The enactment of racial-cultural identity under conditions of racism called *buffering*. The enactment of experiences within the mainstream is called *code-switching*. The transaction of cross-racial (out of race) friendships is called *bridging*. (p. 197)

When looking at the data from my subjects, I will be looking to see if any of them discusses such enactments.



To return to Wijeyesinghe (2001) when she points out that multiracial people do not comprise a single identity group. I would argue that, similarly, Arabs and Arab Americans do not either; rather, they are an ethnic group. “*Ethnicity and ethnic groups*” are socially constructed subcategories of racial groups that emphasize the shared geographical, historical, and cultural experiences of different groups of people” (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 130). Arab American identity is not assigned to them either, by mainstream society, as is the case also with multiracial people, despite their formal racial classification by the US government as “White” or “Caucasian.”

Wijeyesinghe (2001) explains that multiracial people often do not have their racial identity assigned to them the way it is with mono-racial people. They sometimes choose one aspect of their multiracial identity over the others based on a number of formative experiences. Wijeyesinghe offers an alternative paradigm to studying the racial identity in multiracial people. Her “Factor Model of Multiracial Identity” (FMMI) can be useful in studying the factors affecting identity choices among Americans of Arab descent. The FMMI model suggests factors affecting multiracial people choosing their racial identity, which can be applied to the formative experiences of Arab American students. Such factors include: Early Experiences and Socialization; Political Awareness and Orientation; Spirituality; Other Social Identities; Social and Historical Context; Physical Appearance; Racial Ancestry; and Cultural Awareness (p.137).

Most of the factors in this model are similar in nature and could be applicable to those that affect the Arab American identity. In the absence of Arab American identity theories or racial theoretical models, and as Arabs/Arab Americans come with different shades of color, many countries of origin, multiple religions, different political, social,

and economic backgrounds, accents, subcultures and sub-ethnicities, Wijeyesinghe's model is one of the most recent and applicable models to help ground the Arab American identity in the literature of Social Justice education.

I will also use the identity enactment model by Cross (2001, 2012) as it applies to Arab American identity in different life situations, since I argue that Arab and Arab Americans use different factors in their identity in encounters with US authorities, mainstream media, and majority white Americans. In my study, I am using a qualitative approach to explore how participant young adult Arab Americans view their experiences of being Arab and American. The factors discussed in Wijeyesinghe's model can be very useful to guide the study of factors affecting Arab American identity development.

Wijeyesinghe (2001) argues that multiracial people choose their racial identity based on some of the above listed factors—early experience and socialization, political awareness and orientation, spirituality, other social identities, social and historical context, physical appearance, racial ancestry, and cultural attachment—and not necessarily on all of them. She also discusses the fluidity of identity. Any person's identity is not a static part of their core; on the contrary, it develops “based on the interaction and level of salience of numerous factors.” She also adds, “The exploration of how individuals *experience* their identity is best served by qualitative and grounded approaches to research” (Wijeyesinghe, 2012, p. 86). Her discussion of ascribed racial group membership can also apply to the ascribed identities to Arab Americans; as such ascriptions often depend on their physical appearance, which is so diverse.

As Wijeyesinghe (2012) reviewed her FMMI Model, she examined the Multiracial Identity Factors presented earlier in 2001 in terms of their intersectionality.

She suggests that the scholarly work done in this area as well as in her and others' research on Multiracial identity "gave voice to populations who had been part of the fabric of the United States for centuries, but whose experience had yet to be captured by existing research and theory" (p. 84).

The FMMI (Wijeyesinghe 1992, 2001) framed the racial identity for Multiracial people as a choice made by an individual. The choice was affected by a number of factors and reflected an internal meaning-making process of the individual, which takes place within broad external social and political contexts. The FMMI consists of eight factors that affect choice of racial identity. A Multiracial person's choice of identity at a given point of time was usually based on some, but not all, of these factors. (Wijeyesinghe, 2012, p. 88).

These statements can be applied to Arab Americans who migrated to the US later than many other ethnicities from around the world. Arab American ethnicity is under-researched and yet can be highlighted as one of the most stereotyped ethnicities in the US. (Haddad, 1994, 2004; Naff, 1985; Orfalea; 2006).

Wijeyesinghe (2001, 2012) did not include the level of education as a factor that affects the formation and the development of identity.

### **Contexts for Arab American Identity Markers**

The review of the historical and social context for the three waves of Arab migration to the US as noted in Chapter 2, highlights a number of factors that shaped the self-identity, the identity ascribed or attributed to Arab communities, and for the descendants of the three immigration waves. These major identity markers for Arab Americans, whether self-identified or attributed by others are identities based on national origins, identities based on religion, and an identity based on language. Since I have already discussed the various national origins and religious affiliations of Arab

immigrants to the US, it is important in conclusion to say something about the shared language of Arab immigrants to the US.

Arab immigrants brought with them their diverse mosaic of shared history, shared culture, diverse religions, and ethnicities. For early Arab Americans, and in order to maintain their culture, their social and political awareness, and religious teachings (some of Wijeyesinghe's [2001 and 2012] factors), they all tried hard to keep and pass these elements through their language, the Arabic language, regardless of their different dialects. Arabic language is considered rich, romantic, poetic, and descriptive. For many immigrants from Arab countries, it is a challenge to keep the Arabic language alive and pass it on to their children to maintain their heritage and cultural values (Naff, 1985).

In the early immigration years, mosques and churches taught religion to Arab American children using the Arabic language. In those cases, they were passing language, religion, traditions, and customs to their children. For Muslims, and because the Qur'an, the book of Islam, is written in Arabic, it is important for the practicing Muslims to learn Arabic to maintain the Islamic faith and traditions. Christian Arabs also continued to speak Arabic, and they also taught Arabic to their children. Even the early Jewish immigrants from Syria spoke Arabic (Naff, 1985; Orfalea, 2006).

Despite their attempts to pass their heritage, early Arab immigrants were affected by different factors, which intersected and interacted differently with different sub-groups of Arab immigrants. A number of researchers and identity theorists have written about the importance of taking an intersectional approach when studying the various social identities (Gallego & Ferdman, 2012; Goodman & Jackson, 2012; Renn, 2012; Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Renn notes how earlier studies of identity development focused on

one area of the identity at a time instead of looking at the intersectionality of all, which is a more comprehensive way of understanding identity.

The evidence of intersectionality both in the intersectionality of Arab American identities that are diaspora based and on the scholars noted immediately above, leads to the usefulness of Wijeyesinghe and Jackson (2012) when studying or researching social identity development. They and other scholars consider intersectionality as very important as it offers a more inclusive approach, taking into account the various social identities and their interaction and effect on one another. Jones and Abes (2013) state that taking the intersectionality perspective into account complicates identity as it makes us focus on both individual and group identity and how that is affected by the various social identities.

In addition to studying identity in a more holistic way when accounting for intersectionality, Wijeyesinghe (2012) cites her FMMI model and the Multiple Dimensions of Identity model by Jones and McEwen (2001) as models stressing that identity is not static. “[I]dentity is a sense of self that evolves and changes based on the interaction and changing level of salience of numerous factors” (Wijeyesinghe, 2012, p. 86). This notion of evolving identity will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 in more detail as it is evident in some of my subjects. Jones and Abes (2013) also stress that one forms a sense of self and own identity through their interactions with their social environment, which includes people’s expectations of them, accepted behaviors as well as systems of power and oppression. This notion will also be evident when discussing some of my subjects’ sense of identity. My analysis of the data will take intersectionality into account

as I attempt to understand how my subjects make meaning of their Arab American identity.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Questions

This exploratory study addresses the following four research questions and their sub-questions:

1. What does it mean to be Arab American?
  - a) Please tell me a bit about your extended family's country/countries of origin, and the ways in which members of your immediate family identify. (As Arab, Arab American, religious identity, identity based on national origin or US citizenship)
  - b) How and when did you become aware of your identity as Arab American as a salient identity or decide that an Arab American identity best described who you are? (Probe examples concerning how early this identity was conscious, any early experiences that influenced this identity, awareness of other identity possibilities)
  - c) Is it important for you to identify as Arab American? If not, Why?
  - d) Do you feel free to talk about your Arab American identity to your friends and peers and others who are different from you? If not, can you explain why?
  - e) Is Arab the more important identifier for you, or being a Muslim, Christian or Jewish . . .etc is?
  - f) Where and when (if at all) would you identify yourself as an Arab American or as Muslim, Jewish . . . etc?
  - g) Do you think that identifying, as Arab American is more important than identifying with your family's country of origin or with your religion? If so, Why?
  - h) Has your identity as Arab American been questioned by members of your family, religious community, or others whose opinion is important to you?
  - i) What elements of the Arab American identity make you proud to be an Arab American? (Culture, traditions, history, family, school, political atmosphere, sense of belonging to a community or ethnicity, ethics, moral, religion). Are there elements of the Arab American identity that make you

uncomfortable or not proud? Are there elements about your identity that make you proud? Uncomfortable, or not proud?

- j) What are the most important elements in both Arab and US cultures that you think have influenced you to identify as Arab American?
- k) Do you think that your gender has a particular effect on your identifying as Arab American? If so, why?
- l) Can you say anything more about other aspects of your identity that connect you with your Arab American identity, besides gender?

2. What are the factors or experiences that led you to identify as Arab American?

- a) In your early experiences and socializations, have you had any mentors who influenced you to claim your Arab American identity as a salient identity, like parents, siblings, teachers, professors, community members . . . ?
- b) Are there any events that took place in the US that influenced you to identify as Arab American?
- c) Are there any events that took place in the Arab World that influenced you to identify as Arab American?
- d) Do you feel being an Arab American has had any bearing on your college experience, in the classroom, residence hall, dining commons, etc.?
- e) Have any specific aspects of your college experience affected your identity as an Arab American? If yes, please give examples.
- f) Do you feel that your friends, peers and others respect who you are when you identify as Arab American? Do not respect? (Give examples)
- g) Are there situations on campus in which you prefer not to disclose your Arab American identity? Situations off campus?
- h) Do you feel included and/or supported as an Arab American by the diversity initiatives on your campus?
- i) Do you belong to any organizations, on or off campus whose main focus has to do with Arab/Arab American?
- j) Do you think that your religious background has had any bearing on how you identify?



- k) Do you think that people who do not know you ascribe an identity to you based on your physical appearance? If so, what are some of the identities that are often ascribed to you? How does that make you feel?
3. When you are asked to fill in the census forms with questions of ethnicity/race (for example, census forms or college application forms), how do you fill them in: African, Asian, Caucasian, other?
  4. Are there experiences you have had as an Arab American – or aspects of your identity as Arab American – that you would like us to talk about, to help me understand your identity?

### **Overall Design and Rationale**

I use a qualitative approach to describe and examine the factors and choices that lead Americans of Arab descent to identify as Arab American that is new in the field of ethnic identity research and social justice. In searching for resources on this topic for the literature review, I ran a search in ERIC and PsychINFO between 1974-2016. I concluded that this topic is still under-researched because I was only able to identify a few studies that deal with Arab American identities (Mango, 2008, 2012; Sheldon, Graves Oilver, & Balaghi, 2015; Witteborn, 2007). This study is qualitative and exploratory by nature and as such, justifies a qualitative approach to my research, for the following reasons:

- a) The research questions are better answered through conducting in-depth interviews with a sample of Arab American college students and recent graduates whose identity as Arab Americans is a salient identity versus conducting a statistical quantitative questionnaire administered to a large sample (Seidman, 2006).
- b) Qualitative methods give me the opportunity to talk to the subjects face-to-face and to get to know what their feelings and thoughts are about their own identity formation as Arab American and how they make meaning of their experiences, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Conducting a quantitative method would not have given me the same opportunity to have the subjects answer my questions face-to-face where I can see them, to probe for

clarification, to hear detailed anecdotes illustrative of their experiences, and to get a sense of what they experience while answering the questions. That may trigger follow-up questions that are essential in giving me better responses to my questions.

- c) Quantitative methods call for a large pool of participants, yet do not allow for the depth that I can get into when interviewing a small number of students. In-depth interviews with a few students can lead to a deeper understanding of their experiences.
- d) The in-depth interview research model empowers the subjects and provides them with the opportunity to know me as a researcher who cares about their needs, their issues, and their experiences.
- e) Qualitative interview design gives the subjects the opportunity to express themselves in a way that they may not otherwise be able to when answering a questionnaire or a survey.

My goal is to learn about the Arab American college students experience and to contribute to better understanding of the Arab American experience in higher education. I hope that the narratives shared by my subjects, my thematic analysis of the data, and my recommendations and conclusions will have a role in informing the mainstream American public at large, policymakers, higher education administrators, and educators about Arabs and Arab Americans as an emerging phenomenon in higher education institutions and in the American society (Creswell, 2009).

#### **Site of Population Selection**

College provides a formative period for young people to explore their identities away from home. While they are exploring their own identities away from the pressures of their family or larger community, they are also interacting with others who are going through a similar process with different identities. I have developed understanding and gained knowledge and expertise that led me to believe that college is a period of identity exploration during which students explore their identity with depth, experimentation, and

seriousness (Erikson, 1968). This exploration of personal and social group identity may be influenced by internal and external factors that might lead the individual to become part of social, political or ideological groups (Erikson, 1968; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001).

I chose to study Arab American college students (undergraduate, graduate as well as recent graduates) also because I have professional experience with college students and with Arab and Muslim students in my different roles as a graduate student and as a professional in higher education and college student development. I have been working closely with college students in the classroom and in Residence Education in a public higher education institution my entire professional career for more than 22 years. I have had many opportunities to observe close interactions, opportunities for building bridges and to observe frequent misunderstandings among students. “Professional researchers and many graduate students already have a sound footing in their disciplines before they begin a research project and often have an intimate familiarity with the research topic and their literature about it” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 17).

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I only found a few studies that address Arab American identities. I was not able to find any studies focusing primarily on Arab American college student identity factors leading to Arab American identity formation, nor have there been studies on Arab American college students’ experiences or of the choices they make to disclose or mask this identity in a range of collegiate situations. For this reason, I decided to conduct a pilot study with 2 Arab American college students, one female and one male before exploring the research questions more extensively with a larger group of students. I included the data collected from the pilot study in my analysis

and discussion. Conducting a pilot study allowed me to further develop my methodology. In addition to the pilot study, I interviewed 11 Arab American college students, 6 of whom were females, and the other 5 males. Four students identified as coming from a Christian background, and 7 identified with Muslim backgrounds. More details about the demographics of my subjects will be found in Chapter 4. I also conducted one in-depth guided interview and two gender-based focus groups in order to understand what meaning these subjects make of their experiences. The reason that I chose a gender-based focus group was to give an opportunity to either gender to speak freely about their experiences. Often, in qualitative research, “The study is exploratory, not much has been said about the topic or the population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to informants and to build a picture based on their ideas” (Creswell, 2003, p. 21).

Higher education institutions have no choice but to focus on diversity and inclusion, as immigration to the US has increased with more diverse students coming to colleges. Ethnic identities should take a priority in higher education institutions for both faculty and administrators to be able to understand and to include new diverse students (Smith, 2015; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Among the new diverse population immigrating to the US are people from Arab countries. The population of Arab Americans has increased by 72% between 2000 and 2010 (Arab American Institute, 2014).

I believe that college is the time when students start seriously exploring their own identity. By the time they graduate, many of them are still trying to understand who they are and what their beliefs and views on various issues are. Baxter Magolda (2001) discusses how college years are the time when students form their inner understanding of

their identity, which is part of what she refers to as “self-authorship.” Baxter Magolda stresses the important role that educators play during this difficult journey for college students, as they encourage them to explore their identity and pursue deeper knowledge of who they are.

I sought participants who were attending college, or had just recently graduated within a few years and graduate students as they may still be seriously considering the question of their identity. Once my pilot study was completed, I proceeded to refine my interview protocol. In this protocol, I used a set of questions to guide for the interview process with the goal of giving subjects ample opportunity to describe in details their own experiences that have shaped and influenced their Arab American identity and their understanding of their identities. Asking the same questions to all subjects will serve the purpose of consistency. I also used follow-up questions when it was helpful for me to get more information from the subjects or when there was a need based on what they shared with me in relation to their specific answers and experiences. Follow-up questions provide opportunities for the subjects to add any information that they would like to share with me. I also made it possible for them to ask their own questions of me, and this helped create a trusting atmosphere between them and me. They felt they could share their thoughts freely with me. I was clear with them that they could ask questions about the interview questions or about me and why I chose this topic and for what purpose. Some of them asked me questions, and I answered them with transparency, explaining to them my personal connection to this topic, making it of great importance, especially after having my own US-born and -raised children who are also in the process of figuring out their own identities.

## Selection of Subjects

### Selection Criteria

In order for someone to be selected as a participant in this study, they had to meet a set of selection criteria:

- a) Participants should identify as Arab Americans. My goal is to study Arab American identity as an identity not primarily based on religion or nation of origin. Although the identity of Arab American may include people from different religious backgrounds and multiple nationalities, my primary focus is on those who identify as Arab American first.
- b) All participants have to be college age students. It is possible to include recent graduates or graduate students, if needed.
- c) Ideally, an equal number of men and women participants. Extra effort was exercised to balance the ratio of women to men. A total of 6 women and 5 men agreed to be part of the study. A man and a woman who were the subjects of the pilot study participated in the in-depth interview and in the gender focus groups as well. Gender balance is a very important factor for my study as experiences and understandings of identity may differ from one gender to another. As I discuss in my findings and data analysis, female participants often expressed their salient identity as women and how being a woman was as important as being an Arab American. Sometimes, and in some situations being a woman was more salient than being Arab American. Tatum (2000) reports that whenever she asked the question, "Who am I?" in a coed setting, women would usually mention being females as an important identifier, while men rarely mention their maleness. In some cases during my interviews some men talked about their identity as being targeted as an assigned identity to them by the US public and US authorities for being young Arab men who are subject to stereotypical image as womanizers, terrorists and women abusers.
- d) Subjects who identify as Arab American could also claim Christian, Muslim, or Jewish religious backgrounds while also claiming Arab American as their salient identity. I did not find Jewish participants.<sup>18</sup>
- e) I intended to get equal number of subjects from four different Arab American generations who have Arab ancestry or roots in Arab countries.

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<sup>18</sup> I did not receive any responses from people of Jewish background.

## Selection Process

I employed purposeful sampling strategies (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 1990) to interview college students (undergraduates or graduate and recent graduates within New England) drawn from Western Massachusetts (UMass Amherst and the Five College area, including private colleges Amherst, Hampshire, Mt. Holyoke, and Smith).

Purposeful sampling strategies involve selecting participants who meet the criteria I have set for this study. The purposeful use of such a sample is helpful for me to understand their process and their understanding of claiming their Arab American identity (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2008). “Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, . . . selected *purposefully*” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). To utilize purposeful sampling, I reached out to the Arab Students’ organizations in all Five College area campuses. I drafted a letter and sent it as an email to Arab American clubs and Muslim Student Association in the five colleges with my criteria looking for students or recent graduates or graduate students who identify as Arab American or at least Arab American identity is one of their salient identities. My initial contact was by sending my letter to the leaders of these organizations looking for possible participants. I introduced myself in the letter (Appendix A), and I gave a brief description of the study that I wanted to conduct. My letter also asked for volunteers to participate in the study. I also asked those who receive it to forward it to other potential participants that they might know or believe would be possible participants.

I designed a demographics questionnaire to screen participants based on the above criteria (see Appendix B). The questionnaire was sent electronically to all members of the organizations as an attachment along with the call for participants (Appendix A).

Twenty-five students responded by filling the questionnaire and sending it back to me via the email address that I provided. Out of that pool, I narrowed down the number to 11 participants who met the criteria and formed my sample. I also decided to include the interview data from two participants from the pilot study mentioned earlier

The participants signed a consent form before they were interviewed, and all were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point. A copy of the consent form is included in Appendix D.

After I conducted the pilot study, the in-depth individual interviews, and some follow-up interviews, all participants were invited to attend two gender-based focus groups. I invited an Arab, Muslim woman colleague who is an expert on issues of Arabs and Muslims and works in student affairs to join me in conducting the women's focus group. The reason for inviting her was to balance the effect of having a man alone leading the women's focus group.

In conducting the gender-based focus groups, I followed thematic, open-ended questions similar to the ones asked during the individual interviews (Appendix F). The set up allowed both groups of women and men to speak freely among themselves and go deeper in discussing issues, such as gender, patriarchy, religion, culture, parental/ family influence, political circumstances, issues that affect Arab communities in the US and other circumstances that helped or hindered to shape their salient Arab American identity. The data collected from focus groups interviews is included in the study.

### **Sample Size and Demographics**

Eleven subjects who identified as Arab American participated in my study. Four subjects are of a Christian background, and 7 subjects are of Muslim background. Six



subjects are females, and 5 subjects are males. Of these, 2 participated in the pilot study. No respondents claimed a different gender identity or a gay or lesbian sexual identity. None were disabled. I did not explore socio-economic class identity. More details about the demographics of the participants will be discussed in Chapter 5.

One of the factors that emerged from the subjects who responded to my call was intergenerational. I had a random grouping of first-, second- and fourth-generation Arab American subjects.

It is of interest that the demographics included 4 Christian-identified Arabs out of the 11 subjects I interviewed. I had no Maronite, Coptic, or Chaldean Christian Arab Americans, and I had no Arab Americans whose families of origin were Jewish.

### **Data Sources**

The study relied on three sources of data. The first source was responses to the demographic sheets I sent out to potential participants. The second source was transcripts from the in-depth interviews, which in a few instances included follow-up interviews. The third source was transcripts from two focus groups.

My first step before I conducted the interviews was to conduct a pilot study of two subjects: one female and one male. I included the data that I collected from the 2 pilot subjects in my study. I used the data that I collected from the pilot study to adjust some of my questions and to ask more detailed questions during the in-depth interviews. Most importantly, I learned from this pilot study how to make sure when asking the questions that the subject understood the questions as intended and that if they did not, they were encouraged to ask me clarifying questions. I also asked clarifying questions when I did not completely understand their answers or when I needed more clarifications

of their responses. Sometimes, I briefly summarized some of their answers back to them so that they would confirm or add to what they just shared with me. The pilot data was also helpful to me as I revisited my interview questions one more time and made some needed adjustments.

The use of primary and secondary sources of data helped me triangulate the study (Richards, 2009). My primary source of qualitative data was the in-depth, face-to-face, 60- to 90-minute, audiotaped interviews. I also followed up with a second interview with 3 subjects who did not provide enough information for me.

Another source of data was the demographic sheets that I sent to the potential participants prior to the interviews to determine eligibility for participation in the study. Another secondary source was the gender-based focus groups that were held separately after all the individual interviews were completed. I also formed two focus groups based on gender: one for females only and one for males only. Only 4 females were able to attend the female focus group, and 3 males attended the male focus group. I audiotaped both focus group interviews, and I took notes as well.

## **Data Collection Methods**

### **Interviews**

Data collection was conducted in several stages. First, an initial contact letter was sent to potential participants along with a demographics form attached to the initial email that I sent to potential participants and to people who might know any potential participants. I asked them to read my letter and if they fit my criteria, to respond to me and fill out the demographics questionnaire and send it back to me, so I would have their

information. All participants signed a consent form (Appendix D) for their participation in the study prior to scheduling any interviews.

I conducted in-depth interviews as part of this qualitative study with college students and recent graduates whose Arab American identity is a salient identity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 2006).

The in-depth nature of an intensive interview fosters eliciting each participant's interpretation of his or her experience...the interviewer is there to listen, to observe with sensitivity, and to encourage the person to respond. Hence, in this conversation, the participant does most of the talking. (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 25-26)

Creswell, 2008 states, "We identify our participants and sites based on places and people that can best help us understand our central phenomenon" (p. 213).

I also followed up with clarifying questions about some of the information that I received from 3 participants. The rest of the interviews were clear and the responses were very detailed, so that I did not need to follow up with those subjects.

My interview questions, noted above, are based in the work of the Multiracial Identity Model developed by Wijeyesinghe (2001) and the intersectionality of various factors that affect multiracial identity. Wijeyesinghe argues that multiracial people often do not have their racial identity assigned to them the way it is with monoracial people who might get the correct ascription to them more often than multiracial people. They sometimes choose one aspect of their multiracial identity over the others based on a number of formative experiences. Wijeyesinghe's model, Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI), proved useful in studying factors affecting identity choices of Americans of Arab descent.

The first interview lasted for 60-90 minutes. The follow-up interviews lasted between 20 to 40 minutes each. I used a set of questions as a guide to probe the

conversation and facilitate the interviews. Follow-up questions varied from one participant to another, based on their individual responses. A copy of the interview protocol is available in Appendix E. I audiotaped and transcribed all the interviews at the data analysis stage.

I held two focus groups, organized based on gender, one for females and one for males. Gender relationships could be a little complicated, so this was done to give the females and males equal opportunities to express themselves, their views, their experiences, and their identities in isolation of any influence of the other gender. I had also planned to give an option to any potential transgender to decide what group to join in the case I had transgender respondents. Each focus group members had the opportunity to discuss the research questions in depth during their focus group meetings.

I triangulated the data by:

- a) Sending a demographics questionnaire to potential participants. This step followed the initial inquiry and preceded the selection of the interview subjects. For those who became participants, their responses to the demographics questionnaire were included in the study.
- b) Conducting one in-depth, face-to-face interview with each of the 11 subjects, with follow-up interviews in a few cases. This includes the 2 subjects who participated in the pilot study.
- c) Conducting gender-based audiotaped focus groups to give each group the opportunity to discuss some of the issues of gender, culture, religion, countries of origin, history, and social and political issues in the US and in the Arab countries in general.

Data collected from the above-mentioned sources (questionnaire, interviews, and focus groups) were analyzed and triangulated the study (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Richards, 2009).

## Data Management

To protect the confidentiality of the participants, I made sure it was kept as securely as possible. All consent forms, survey copies, audio-recordings, backup USB drive, interview materials, and transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet. I kept all audiotaped interviews and focus group recordings in both my password-protected cell phone and on a back up copy that was stored in my password-protected computer.

The transcribed or analyzed data was kept on my computer that is password protected. The pseudonyms were used on all the files on the computer. There was one file with the participants' real names and pseudonyms that I saved separately on the password-protected computer. At the conclusion of the study and after the transcription of all the interviews and the focus groups, the audiotaped data were destroyed. All paper materials from the study were kept locked in the cabinet for as long as the regulations by the University of Massachusetts Amherst requires. After that, it will be destroyed.

Throughout the research process, I also made every effort to protect the participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Part of maintaining confidentiality was to use pseudonyms for all participants and to shield identifiable details. I offered participants the option to choose a pseudonym or I would assign them one. Only one participant chose her own. I used the pseudonyms throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing up the findings and recommendations. At the same time, I am aware that some of the participants might know each other and had the potential to recognize each other as they met at the focus group. Because of that, I could not guarantee total anonymity to participants. I let them know the degree of confidentiality I was able to offer them. I provided clear statements about confidentiality in the consent form. I also

reminded the participants of the importance of maintaining confidentiality prior to the start of the focus groups. At the start of focus group meetings, each group agreed on a common set of ground rules that included confidentiality. At the same time, there were no guarantees that all the participants would definitely respect the confidentiality agreement by the group. This was also made clear to the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

I carefully transcribed all the audio-recordings, utilizing Express Scribe software. I studied the transcripts and looked for emerging themes and patterns and developed some themes that I discuss in detail in Chapter 4. I used NVivo software program to organize the emerging themes. Some of the emerging themes were: country of origin, religious backgrounds, culture, parents, home environment, schools attended, language spoken at home, immigration backgrounds, and stereotypes and images of Arabs and Arab Americans in the US media and salient identities.

I coded the data, looking for emergent categories. I remained open to the possibility of unexpected findings, and I went back and forth between my literature review and coding, making sure that the emerging themes and categories from my data were supported by my literature review of the study. According to Patton (1990), “A qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry. Qualitative designs continue to be *emergent* even after data collection begins” (p. 196).

While analyzing the data, I looked for patterns and gender differences in the responses of participants. I also looked at the differences between participants from Christian backgrounds and those of Muslim backgrounds. Throughout the data analysis

process, I kept “checking and rechecking the data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 147), to pay attention to any similarities and differences between the participants. I should mention here that the Arab American identity is under-researched, therefore I relied on models that were done for Multiracial identity and Black identity by Wijeyesinghe (2001, 2012) and Cross (2001, 2012). I used these two ethnic and racial identity models as I think they are most applicable to analyzing the data from my subjects, only after allowing the identity factor categories to emerge directly from the interview and focus group data. After generating all factors from the data, I benefited from these two models in arranging the themes and the categories that emerged from the data collection and the coding of the data. Where the models did not account for factors, I so noted before adding those factors to my description and analysis.

I used a peer debriefer who agreed to check what I wrote step by step. The debriefer is someone who has research experience, expertise in Arab American issues, experience working with college students and is herself of Arab and Muslim background. She gave me feedback on what I wrote. I would go back to my writing and recheck what I wrote and what I coded again and made sure that I argued and defended my writings. I accepted her challenges, and I took her feedback very seriously, which helped me stay focused in all the writing stages.

### **Subjectivity and Objectivity of the Researcher**

I am aware that being a researcher requires objectivity throughout my study. I am aware also that I need to guard against research subjectivity. The ways I maintained research objectivity is through the following:

- a) Triangulating the data, using demographics, face-to-face, in-depth interviews and focus groups with the subjects.

- b) Having a peer debriefer who has experience in research and Arab American issues.
- c) Having an Arab American woman joining me during the individual interviews with Muslim women and during the female focus group with subjects. This step was taken to give them more freedom to speak about their issues and their needs.
- d) Drawing upon the scholarship available on Arab American to inform my findings.

### **Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

Credibility for this study is established through clear procedures on how the study was conducted, how the data was collected, managed, and analyzed, and how the conclusions were drawn (Patton, 1990). There are several ethical considerations related to my study. I asked Arab American students and recent graduates to talk about their own personal identification process, how they self-identify, how they reached this self-identity, and what were the factors that led them to identify as such. Most Arab Americans are generally aware of the mainstream societal bias and prejudicial treatment against them (Bayoumi, 2008, 2015; Beydoun, 2013). Arab Muslim women among them, especially those who cover their head or cover all their body are most vulnerable and among the most likely to encounter this kind of treatment that could be psychological, mental, emotional, or even physical. Identifying as Arab American can lead some to feel unsafe if they were completely honest about their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Gaining the trust of my subjects was important to me so that they would share their experiences with honesty and authenticity. I believe that I prepared for the interview atmosphere to be as safe as possible for them by assuring them that whatever they said would be held in utmost confidentiality and that I would shield their information in my dissertation and elsewhere and would always use pseudonyms when discussing their data.



I also assured them that their real names will never be used anywhere, so they will be safe to share their information with me.

Another ethical consideration was in relation to women participants. Arab women in general, and observant Muslim women in particular, may be hesitant to share and to discuss family relationships with a stranger, especially a male. To offset this anticipated problem, and for me to get as much information from all participants as possible, I asked my wife who has served as my peer debriefer to be present with me during the interviews. I believe that all female participants welcomed this idea and felt more comfortable with the presence of my wife during the interviews. The interview and the focus group atmosphere were more of a social discussion atmosphere than an artificial atmosphere, in which people are just asked to answer some questions.

This consideration also applies to Arab men, especially those who are of Muslim background. The fear of discrimination is strong and legitimate among most of them as they feel the effects of racial profiling in their day-to-day interactions with their government and officials at airport and ports of entry to the US. I believe that my male subjects shared as much information with me as they could because they felt that I relate to what they go through as an Arab man myself who encounters issues of harassment by airport authorities almost every time I travel in the US.

### **Limitations to the Study**

Some limitations of the study are related to the fact that the participants in this study are all college students or recent graduates who may still be in the formative and exploratory stages of their identities. The age of my subjects ranged from 19-29. Probably some of them are still in the process of the formation of and figuring out their

identity, but I am positive that they shared what they believed was true and representative of them at the time of the interviews. A second limitation stems from a class perspective. Being a college student, whether an undergraduate or graduate, is a privilege compared to others who do not have the means to attend college. A third limitation is that the participants in this study attended colleges in New England at the time of the interviews. New England is known to be progressive, more liberal, and accepting of diversity than some other parts of the US. I am aware that if the sample came from the working-class population, with varying educational levels, or from those who live in a more hostile area to Arab and Arab Americans, the responses might be completely different.

If the question of identity was open-ended, without choosing those who already identify as Arab American, the responses might also be different. I also acknowledge that not all Arab Americans identify as such, for other reasons that might add to the limitations of the study. One factor might be fear of discrimination, fear of not being accepted by peers, or the need to attempt to assimilate into mainstream middle class. Also identifying as Arab American might be stronger among older generations than younger generations or vice versa. There might be differences in the responses as well if the interviews were conducted among Arab Americans who live in heavily populated areas of Arab Americans, like Dearborn, Michigan or Anaheim, California. The questionnaire that would be sent to possible participants included demographics questions to the informants to find out where they were born, raised, attended schools, what were the communities their families socialized with, among other questions that would help me select the final pool of participants. Also, as an Arab American student myself, I may (knowingly or unknowingly) exaggerate the pride in the Arab Culture.

Due to the nature of the topics discussed, it is expected that many students would be hesitant to participate due to fear of being asked too many questions by others. An additional limitation comes from the fact that I, as a researcher, am considered both insider and outsider to the participant group. While I am both Arab and Muslim, I grew up outside the United States and did not have my undergraduate college experience in this country, like the participants. These factors might pose some barriers to the interview process with the participants in this study. The questions that I asked my participants may have been influenced by my own experiences as an Arab American, and this could have affected how they responded. Also my own background and experiences as an Arab American, older male may have affected how I viewed and interpreted the findings (Zuniga, Mildred, Varghese, DeJong, & Keehn, 2012).

My subjects do not come from all of the geographical regions of the US. They come from New York, Ohio, Massachusetts, and Michigan. Their countries of origin are Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Tunisia<sup>19</sup>. My study would have been more comprehensive had it included subjects who came from all Arab countries and who lived in all Arab American concentrated areas in the US and from all geographical areas in the US.

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<sup>19</sup> Sawsan, for example, was born in Kuwait to Palestinian parents and moved to the US when she was two years old. Reema was born in Canada to Tunisian parents and moved to the US when she was three years old. Noor's mother was born in Colombia to a Palestinian father and a Colombian mother and grew up in Colombia. She moved to Palestine and got married at a young age to a Palestinian man.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS ON ARAB AMERICAN IDENTITY FACTORS

#### Introduction

In this introduction I will present the major themes that emerged from my interviews with the college young adults who responded to my request to talk about their Arab American identity. I had put a call out through the Arab Students' Club on campus, and approached a few people I know and asked them to sit for interviews. Some of the participants connected me with others within their networks, and that yielded some participants. One common factor among all participants was that all include Arab American as part of their identity.

#### Sample

This was a purposeful sample generated by my requesting participants on the basis of ethnic, not religious identity. The demographics might look like a skewed sample, except these are the people who accepted my request to interview as Arab Americans and not as Muslim or Christian American, although some of them came from a Christian or Muslim background with different countries of origin and varied educational levels.

I have 11 participant: 5 men and 6 women. Everyone in the sample was specifically gender identified. The countries of origin of the participants include the following: Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Colombia/by way of Palestine<sup>20</sup> and the US. They are a mix of first-, second-, and fourth-generation US Americans. Four participants are first-generation, all of whom came to the US when they were between

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<sup>20</sup> Father was born in Palestine, and mother was born in Colombia to Palestinian parents.

two and three and a half years old, as shown in Table 1; six participants are second-generation and one is fourth-generation. The participants identified their religious backgrounds as either Muslim or Christian: Sunni, Shi'a, Roman Catholic, Melkite, Greek Orthodox, and Eastern Orthodox. Four of the women are Muslims. It is worth mentioning that the first-generation participants are four females and they are all Sunni Muslims. All four Muslim female participants came to the US when they were very young: 2.5 to 3 years old. All second-generation participants are male, except for one female. The religious background of the male participants varies. Three are Sunni Muslim, one is Shi'a Muslim, and one is Melkite Christian. There are no third-generation participants. There is only one participant who is a fourth-generation female with Roman Catholic background.

Two of the first-generation female participants wear the hijab, covering their head, and the other two do not. Two women are Christian, so are two of the men. The other three men are Muslim. Four participants identified English as their first language; seven participants speak fluent Arabic; two are functional in Arabic; and two participants know some Arabic or none. One female participant speaks fluent Spanish, in addition to Arabic and English. The educational level of the participants varies. Seven of the participants are undergraduate students in college; two are recent graduates with bachelor degrees. One participant holds two Master's degrees, and she is a career woman under 30; and one participant is a doctoral student.

The following table summarizes the participants' demographics by gender, country of origin, place of birth, religion, level of education, age when they moved to the

US for those who were born in another country, and the type of school each attended before college:

### **Major Emergent Themes**

I will introduce all the themes that emerged, including the cultural norms, the feelings about the culture of the parents, and the points of pride that parents or extended families passed to them, and when they agreed or disagreed with some of cultural norms. Some of the participants felt strongly about some of the themes while others did not feel that strong. The major themes that emerged from my sample are country of origin, religion, culture, language, current US policies in relation to September 11, 2001, situational identity, and the primacy of Arab American identity.

### **Country of Origin**

Preserving the feel of the country of origin here in the US is often important to immigrant families. For example, Lebanese Americans who live in Dearborn, Michigan, or Cleveland, Ohio, copy where they came from and transfer the homeland to the US like traditions, customs, culture, and language.

They picked up Beit Hanina [name of a village in Palestine] and brought it to Cleveland, Ohio. It is very indicative of immigrant populations that they immigrate and they come, and they settle, and they want to so badly hold on [to] what it was that they had that they miss and force those traditions to stay, and they limit themselves [from] actually progressing further. So that, I dislike. (Hiyam)

Table 1. Participant demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Religion	Place of Birth	Parent Country of Origin	Educational Level	Generation	Salient Identity	Spoken Language at Home	School Attended
<b>Hiyam</b>	F	29	SuM	Palestine	Palestine	M	1st	Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, Arab American	Arabic	Public School
<b>Amal</b>	F	21	RCC	USA	USA	U	4th	Arab American of Lebanese/Syrian Origin	English	Public School
<b>George</b>	M	21	M(RC)C	USA	Lebanon	U	2nd	Christian, Lebanese, Arab American	Arabic	Public School
<b>Reema</b>	F	21	SuM	Canada	Tunisia	U	1st	Muslim, Arab American	Arabic	Private Muslim School
<b>Ahmed</b>	M	29	Sh M	USA	Lebanon	G	2nd	Arab, Lebanese, Arab American	Arabic	Public School
<b>Noor</b>	F	21	SuM	Colombia	Palestine/Colombia	U	1st	Palestinian, Arab American, Muslim	English/Spanish/Arabic	Public School
<b>Rakan</b>	M	26	SuM	USA	Palestinian (F), US (M)	B	2nd	Palestinian, Arab American, Muslim	English	Public School
<b>Sami</b>	M	24	SuM	USA	Palestine	B	2nd	Palestinian, Arab American, Muslim	Arabic	Public School
<b>Jamil</b>	M	19	GO	USA	Palestinian (F) Jordanian (M)	U	2nd	Palestinian, Arab American,	English	Private School
<b>Sawsan</b>	F	19	SuM	Jordan	Palestinian	U	1st	Muslim, Arab American	Arabic	Public School
<b>Yasmine</b>	F	19	EO	USA	Syria/Lebanon	U	1st	Arab American of Lebanese Origin	Arabic	Public Schools

**Religion:** SuM=Sunni Muslim; M(RC)C=Melkite (Roman Catholic) Christian; Sh M=Shi'a Muslim; GO=Greek Orthodox; EO=Eastern Orthodox **Educational Level:** U=college student; B=graduated; G=graduate student; M=holds a master's degree.

As a Lebanese American in Dearborn, for instance, one is supposed to live with their Klan, continue to work there or nearby, and form a nuclear family close to their extended one. People leave Dearborn only if they have has a very good reason, like having their own business for which it is worth leaving the community. Otherwise, they may be looked down upon. They will be seen as Americanized or a sell-out for Whiteness, “When I go back, I get either questions from my family in a sense that they want to question to a degree in which I am committed to the family by not being physically there” (Ahmed).

Country of origin for participants has influenced how they feel about their salient identity as Arab Americans. Whether they were born in the US or moved to the US when they were very young, they feel that they are part of that country or an extension of people from that country and that they share their culture, history, and aspirations and for some, the Arabic language. “There were things I wouldn’t dare doing like taking my girlfriend to Dearborn. It was OK when I was in Ann Arbor. Some people did, but I was not that type” (Ahmed).<sup>21</sup>

I interviewed people who have roots in Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Syria. They all believe that all Arabs are one ethnic group that shares the same values, religions, traditions, history, aspirations, and language.

Many immigrant parents try hard to maintain the Arabic language as an important part of the country of origin. Knowing Arabic is very important to keep the heritage and to pass it from one generation to another. They try to speak it at home, but when their children go to school, they pick up English so fast, and it becomes their primary

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<sup>21</sup> In mostly Arab/Muslim communities in the US, it is socially unacceptable for young women and men to date openly. Dearborn is a suburb of Detroit where the majority of the residents are of Arab/Muslim background, so Ahmed did not bring his girlfriend that he dated in Ann Arbor to Dearborn.



language. “People in school, they spoke English so how they were going to know who spoke what Arabic dialect?” (Ahmed). Intermarriages are common among Arabs who come from different Arab countries. Some participants have parents from two different Arab countries, and sometimes each parent came from parents who came from two different Arab countries or non-Arab countries. For example, Jamil was born in the US from a Palestinian father who was born and raised in Lebanon to two Palestinian parents. Jamil’s mother was born and raised in Jordan, from a Palestinian mother and a Jordanian father who was born in Palestine. Amal, for example, is a fourth-generation Arab American. Her father was born to Syrian/Lebanese American parents. Amal’s great grandparents came from what was then Greater Syria and identified as Syrian/Lebanese<sup>22</sup>.

My great grandparents came to this country, and so my grandmother was identifying as Syrian American on her side of the family. I feel they became more Americanized but my grandfather’s side of the family which was Lebanese was very active in keeping traditions and that kind of thing, but they-my dad’s side-my grandfather side of the family speaks more Arabic than probably anybody else (Amal).

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<sup>22</sup> Greater Syria is a geographical region that included what is now known as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. The Ottomans ruled this area until the First World War when the British and the French forces defeated the Ottomans and divided this region into four different countries.

Table 2. Country of origin

	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Born in the US or Came Early</b>
Ahmed	Both Parents are Lebanese	Was born in the US
Amal	Great grandparents came from Greater Syria	Was born in the US
George	Both Parents are Lebanese	Was born in the US
Yasmine	A Lebanese father and a Syrian mother	Was born in the US
Hiyam	Both parents are Palestinians	Was born in Palestine and moved to the US when she was 3.5 years old
Jamil	Mother was born in Jordan from a Palestinian mother and a Jordanian father. Father was born in Lebanon from Palestinian parents	Was born in the US
Noor	Parents are Palestinians. Mother was born in Columbia from a Columbian mother and a Palestinian father.	Was born in Palestine and moved to the US when she was 2 years old
Rakan	A Palestinian father and a US mother	Was born in the US
Reema	Both parents are Tunisians	Was born in Canada and moved to the US when she was 2 years old
Sammy	Both parents are Palestinians	Was born in the US
Sawsan	Both parents are Palestinians but grew up in Kuwait, then moved to Jordan before they immigrated to US	Was born in Jordan and moved to the US when she was 2 years old

### **Recent Immigrants**

It is worth mentioning here that the four participants who were not born in the US are all females: Hiyam, Noor, Reema, and Sawsan. While they all were too young to have memories from their parents' countries of origin, and while they saw themselves not different from their US-born peers, this factor will play a role as we look at the intersectionality of gender, country of origin, and being a recent immigrant. "Like

Tunisia is not like really a part of me. It is, but I don't connect with it. I am more used to how things are done in America" (Reema).

### **Second- and Fourth-generation Immigrants**

The participants in this study were all first-, second-, and fourth-generation Arab American. Throughout the interviews, the first- and second-generations still had a strong sense of their parents' culture and often were exposed to Arabic spoken at home and some of them learned it. Ahmed, a second-generation participant, learned to speak Arabic at home, but his grandparent teased him that his spoken Arabic was not good enough, and he wanted him to improve it. "My grandparent mocked me because I did not speak good Arabic when I was in high school. Arabic language is a big factor in how Arab you are" (Ahmed). He grew up in Dearborn and went to school there with other Arab American children, so being an Arab American was not an issue for him until the event of September 11 and the aftermath. He became more aware of his Arab roots and culture, embraced his Arab culture more, and became politically involved after these events. "It was a feeling of, may be it was by choice right after September 11<sup>th</sup>, that I became politically engaged and I did not hide away or shy away from my identity but definitely more feeling of Arabness" (Ahmed).

Rakan is a second-generation participant also, and he found himself more attached to his Arab side of the family, especially after Sept 11<sup>th</sup>. He was a teenager then and found himself defending everything that was Arab or Muslim because of the stereotypes that erupted against Arabs and Muslims in the US. He felt that his culture is very important to him, being of Arab/Muslim background, at least from his father's side, and the treatment that he personally received was "different."

So I was very young and I remember the first day [of the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>] nobody really knew what happened-we were in middle school. But by the second day, the media had sensationalized it and labeled Arabs as the perpetrators and Muslims as the perpetrators . . . I never really backed down when people said “Oh, you Arab, you Muslim”, I would challenge them “Oh, what are you trying to say?” blaming me for the attacks, or my family for the attacks, or my religion for the attacks, or my ethnic identity for the attacks-I wouldn’t let that happen. (Rakan)

Rakan continued his activism in college, embracing his Arab identity, and he became the President of the Arab Students’ Club on campus. He continued to defend Arab culture and what his ethnicity stands for.

I did my second BA in Middle Eastern Studies so I wanted to take Middle Eastern politics, and I wanted to take [learn] Hebrew. I took lots of Arabic courses. I was president of the Arab students’ Club. I met lots of people, and I tried to find people like me and make a community. (Rakan)

When Rakan graduated from college and got a job in a prestigious firm, he was very careful and selective about disclosing his ethnicity and his culture when introducing himself to new people on the job. He would not first say he was a Palestinian American or Arab American or Muslim but rather he would say, “I speak Arabic.” Then it depended on the conversation and where it would go. For example, he is careful not to say much in the presence of Jewish Zionists since one of his Asian American professors warned him that there is a lot of prejudice against Arabs and Palestinians in particular in the business world.

Again, it is just being careful when you are recognizing that there are incredible amount of Zionists in the business world. In a way it makes me sound prejudice when I see a Jewish name, I think I have to be careful. (Rakan)

It is also a struggle for Ahmed to see himself in a majority Arab community in Dearborn. Move to another part of the country for his first job after college, he felt more as an immigrant although he is a second-generation Arab American born in the US. He

does not feel the same way as other immigrants feel but mostly he feels like “the other” especially that his first name is an Arab and Muslim name.

While out here I feel it is more like a sense of otherness. Mostly I think in my head more than anything. I grew up in . . . I mean it is not the same way you guys in some sense immigrating, but in some ways there is a sense of immigration in my head, and I know sometimes I am more caught up. (Ahmed)

The one participant, Amal, who is fourth-generation expressed her desire to reclaim her Arab American identity after the passing of her grandparents, and especially after entering college and pondering her identity.

None of my aunts or my dad knows how to speak Arabic, but they have cousins that do, but we mostly eat a lot of Arabic food, that is kind of one of the things that they continued . . . My parents are divorced now, but my mother loves Arabic food, and we frequently eat it, and my grandmother taught her how to make it, but once my grandparents died, my grandfather died 4 years ago. It is kind of dwindled a little bit, and I feel like they were the ones that pushed our heritage on to us, so it is getting harder now that they are gone. (Amal)

Rakan also described his identity development as a crisis that he went through growing up to a White, German American mother and to a Palestinian Muslim immigrant father. He expressed his feelings now that he has settled with who he is and what he is makes him feel happy because to some other people who grew in similar circumstances it could have been more difficult to go through all of these contradictions.

I would almost classify it as identity crisis that I had growing up and then having to become comfortable with who I am as both an American and a Palestinian and accepting who I am and who I am not . . . I am involved in the community; I still talk about the Middle East all the time. It is settled now so that it is not that I don't think about that much, it is just part of who I am as an entire person (Rakan).

### **Religion**

Although religion has various degrees of saliency, and it takes different forms, it was important in some way to all of the participants. All of them were influenced in some way by the religiosity of their parents and community, even if it meant they rejected it.

Like my mom will put the rosary on every single day like on the TV if there is a church service going on from overseas. It is usually during dinnertime and whenever there is the Gospel, she gets mad like when I don't stand up and things like that, but I just want to eat, and I am like, "It is dinner." (Yasmine)

For example, some participants from Muslim families choose to live in heavily populated Arab American communities for that reason alone. They want their kids to marry into the religion. One participant talked about his uncle's marriage into another religion and his family's reaction to his kids identifying with their mother's religion. Ahmed explained as the children of a Muslim man, his cousins are expected to think of themselves as Muslims. But when his cousins started identifying themselves as Catholic, after their White, American Catholic mother, the entire family and close community frowned upon their behavior. One is supposed to marry an Arab woman, preferably a Muslim, if they are Muslims and to a Christian if they are Christians. Either way, the children practice the father's religion.

My uncle, for example, married a Polish American woman. His kids identify as Catholics, . . . If you leave the Arab Community in Detroit (Dearborn), unless you are leaving for business, then you are running away from your identity because people expect you to stay part of them, but if you leave to open your business somewhere else in the country, then it is okay, and this is why many people came to this country to have their own businesses. (Ahmed)

This is an example of how religion intersects with culture and country of origin. Almost all participants indicated that they went to churches or mosques when they were young, but as they grew older, most of them stopped going to religious institutions on a regular bases either because they do not believe in organized religion or they developed some kind of spiritual connection that is not necessarily part of a church or a mosque.

Religion was forced on me, like I always had to go to church, always, always, always, always . . . It wasn't until I was in high school that I could get away with like, "I can't go to church today," and my parents were like mad at me, and I was like, "Sorry, you know." (Yasmine)

Those who still attend church or a mosque, mostly do that to celebrate with their parents on some religious occasions. Some participants noted that they do not even believe in organized religions.

When I identify myself to people, I don't identify any organized religion. But I used to identify as Muslim Palestinian . . . I think it can exist independent of pre-dictated beliefs and guidelines and rituals and organizing with others that I feel is sufficient without specific organization. (Sammy)

At least two participants said they do not believe in organized religions: Yasmine and Sammy, although Sammy grew up in a Muslim household, and Yasmine grew up in a Christian household. "I have a lot of resentment about organized religion because it really has not provided any positive aspect to my life" (Yasmine). Yasmine has also reported that her parents have resentment against Arabs, and they do not want their children to identify as Arab Americans, but they want them to identify as Lebanese, Syrians, or Lebanese American or Syrian American.

I don't think that I ever heard my parents say they are or they refer to themselves as Arabs, like ever. If anything maybe like Syrian American or Lebanese American . . . They have a lot of hold on oppression that Christians go through in the Middle East, and like they have gone through so that is really a big part of their identity (Yasmine).

The conflation of Arab and Muslim in the US causes anxiety to some Christian Arab American families. Yasmine's parents, for example, do not want to be mistaken for Muslims, who they believe had mistreated them in Lebanon in the past for being Christians. She reported that they take pride in being Lebanese and Syrian, but not Arab as an ethnic group. Yasmine's parents, like George's parents, do not want to be identified as Arabs; rather they identify as Lebanese or Syrian. To them, Arab and Islam is one and the same; hence, they reject Arabness.

Sometimes, a participant indicated that she or he looks at religion in a progressive way in which she or he critically thinks about the script and does not follow it without questioning as most people do. “Now that I am older, I see that there is a difference between just following religion or step back and take a moment . . . to learn, think, and interpret and act” (Hiyam).

Two Muslim Sunni female participants, Sawsan and Reema, are religious and cover their head wearing the hijab. Reema, the most religious identified of my participants, and her two older sisters attended an Islamic charter school until the eighth grade. Then they moved to public high schools. Reema started wearing hijab by the time she started the high school, right after the eighth grade when the Islamic school ended. She spent the first 9 years of schooling in the Islamic school, from Kindergarten to the eighth grade. “By the time I got to high school, I was wearing the scarf and my oldest sister also” (Reema). Islam is a more salient identity for Reema than being Arab. “I am always both Arab and Muslim, but I think that I would identify stronger as Muslim than Arab.”

Sawsan is also religious and wears the hijab, but she seemed more open-minded about living in the US than Reema. Sawsan insisted that she wears her hijab not because she was asked to do that by her parents or because her mother covers her hair. On the contrary, she made a deliberate choice to start wearing the hijab right before she came to college. She also said that her parents tried to discourage her from doing that.

Okay, yes, actually I always wanted to put the hijab on . . . I was discouraged by my parents because they wanted me to make a fully conscious decision about what it means. So later on, I kind of thought a lot about its implications: gender and religion, women and modesty and all of this stuff. I had a lot of thorough thinking about it. And I kind of like, “Okay. Well, after high school, and there



will be a new transition [to college] and I am going to meet new people so this is when I am going to start wearing it.” (Sawsan)

That participant talked about getting stereotyped, even by other Arab/Arab American and Muslim students in college, assuming she was forced to wear hijab by her parents. Sawsan had to explain herself several times and why she decided to wear the hijab. She was also stereotyped on religious basis as she refused to drink alcohol with her peers of Arab/Arab American, Muslim or non Muslim and non-Arab students who kind of rejected her because she would say that she is a Muslim, and she does not drink or that she could not be in a bar with other students who wanted to go to bars and drink. When she tells them that she does not drink or is not interested in going to bars with them, they assume she is not allowed to socialize at all and start to exclude her from all their social activities. “When you say I can’t drink or be in certain situation, they’re like, “Okay,” but then they just assume you can’t do anything else. It is less expected for women to stand their ground” (Sawsan).

The male participants in the group did not report that their religion whether Christianity or Islam was regarded above or equal to being Arab American. They thought of religion as something that their parents practiced or that they were taught about either by their parents or through going to Sunday school. They recognize that parents go to church or to Mosque, and they respect that. At the same time, they do not think that this is something that plays any significant role in their life. Among the Muslim participants, more females tended to practice the teachings of their religion than their male counterparts. Reema and Sawsan are religious and cover their head. Hiyam practices several aspects of her religion, but she does not see herself as a religious person, even though she likes to fast for Ramadan and pray.

Several Muslim participants talked about the conflation among their peers and friends between Arabness and religion. They expressed that even though they do not believe religion is a salient identity for them, they often find themselves having to respond to questions about Islam or to explain themselves for others, especially post-September 11. Rakan, for instance, identifies as secular and does not go to either a church or a mosque although he has Muslim and Christian background since his father is Muslim and his mother is Christian. He believes that his religion is private and personal. He should not go around saying he is a Muslim. On one level, some people ask him why he does not eat pork, and then he tells them that it is because he is a Muslim. Other times he finds himself defending Islam because of Islamophobia and the media portrayal of Islam and Muslims. He believes that media is not teaching people about Islam but contributes to the widespread misinformation about Islam by continuously using stereotypical generalizations when reporting on Islam or Muslims. “I feel I need to explain to them or educate them, not just for myself, but on behalf of my entire religion, and Arabs in general” (Rakan).

Sometimes, the religious aspect of a participant’s life seemed to stem from nostalgia rather than from religious belief. George, for instance, does not identify with his parents’ religion, nor does he consider himself religious, but going to the church with his family “makes [him] more Lebanese because it is the Lebanese culture in it” (George). Amal, also, is still connected to her grandparents’ religion, but she is not as connected as she used to be when they were alive.

I tried to identify as a person that tries to be kind to everybody, and I think that just the Catholic roots and not necessarily about their beliefs about gay marriage or anything like that. I don’t agree with a lot of that stuff. It definitely gave me the moral background. (Amal)

Neither Noor, Yasmine, Jamil, nor Sammy go to church or mosque nor do they practice their parents' religions, but they are willing to go for special occasions when there is a celebration of some kind, only to please their parents. This was true for both Muslim and Christian participants. Yasmine attended a Catholic school when she was young, and she was forced to go to church with her parents. Both parents are very religious, especially her mother. "My parents are really, really, really religious, like really religious. They are Orthodox Christian, like Eastern Orthodox and churchgoers" (Yasmine).

Table 3. Religious affiliation

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Parents' Religion</b>	<b>Practicing/not practicing Religion</b>
Ahmed	Both parents are Muslim Shi'a	Not practicing
Amal	Both parents are Roman Catholic Christians	Not practicing but goes to church occasionally
George	Both parents are Melkite Christians	Not practicing but celebrates some Christian traditions in church
Hiyam	Both parents are Muslim Sunni	Occasionally practicing. Doesn't cover her head
Jamil	Both parents are Greek Orthodox	Not practicing
Noor	Both parents are Muslim Sunni	Not practicing
Rakan	Father is a Muslim/ Sunni, mother is Christian with no affiliation to a specific faith	Not practicing
Reema	Both parents are Muslim Sunni	Practicing Muslim/covers her head
Sammy	Both parents are Muslim Sunni	Not practicing
Sawsan	Both parents are Muslim Sunni	Practicing Muslim. Covers her head
Yasmine	Both parents are Syrian Orthodox Christians	Not practicing

## **Culture**

### **Culture of Origin**

The community participants lived in has affected the way they reflected on themselves and their upbringing. Those who grew up in mainly Arab communities, like Dearborn, Michigan or Cleveland, Ohio, and those who grew up in communities where the majority was a mainstream White American or a mix of White and non-White communities have had some differences in their responses. Some of the answers by

participants were like a summery of what they learned from their parents and other role models in their lives, especially those who were born to two Arab parents and are second-generation Arab Americans, while those who were born into mixed marriages responded slightly differently to my questions because their learning is different from the learning of Arab-only parents.

Parents engrained the culture in their children's day-to-day life. Most participants said their parents fed them Arabic food not only at home, but they sent it with them to school. According to George, that made him sometimes feel out of place or awkward.

I remember the food was embarrassing, taking it to school, like sometimes, like taking *loobyeh wa zeit*<sup>23</sup> to school, then everyone say, "What is that green stuff?" and trying to eat it with like *khibiz*<sup>24</sup>, like it was awkward. (George)

They also taught their children how to dress properly and what was acceptable and what was not, "Like my Mom used to tell me, 'Never show the bottom of your foot [when you sit down with others]' and stuff. Like some customs in the Arab culture that I like" (Jamil).

Participants shared how they were taught to behave outside their homes or in the presence of other people and how to behave appropriately, especially if they grew up in an Arab American community. Ahmed and Hiyam grew up in highly concentrated areas of Arab American communities in Dearborn, Michigan and in Cleveland, Ohio where both towns have significant Arab communities. Dearborn, in particular, has the second largest Arab American community in the US (Arab American Institute, 2014). Their parents and their extended families, like their uncles, aunts, and cousins, influenced their

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<sup>23</sup> *Loobyeh wa Zeit* is a dish that is a combination of green beans, tomatoes, olive oil and some spices that usually eaten as a cold dish. It is mainly known to the Arabs in Greater Syrian countries; Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan.

<sup>24</sup> *Khibiz* is the Arabic word for bread spoken in the Lebanese accent.

way of life. Several female participants talked about this influence and their parents' attention to the opinions of the extended family members. "People care sometimes too much, and so if you do something like it reflects on all your family, and this is the worst part" (Noor). "Other aunts will say to my mom, like, 'Why do you let her do this and do that? Why don't you do this? Why would you let her do certain things?'" (Noor). Some of the female participants expressed their frustration with their parents' differential treatment based on gender, while considering that to be consistent with keeping up with the Arabic traditions.

My parents very much expect me to act in a certain way as a woman, dress a certain way as a woman. When Arab friends come over and their son would be a year younger than me and my dad would go, "Hey, do you want a beer?" And I was like, "HELLO, I am HERE." And my dad goes, "It is different. He is a boy" (Yasmine).

Participants also talked about their parents maintaining the traditional, conservative aspects of the Arabic culture in order to preserve their Arabness.

They came from a village with very small close knit, and they have a village mentality... To identify as American means that we have lost all our values so we can identify as Arab American, which means that we retain some of the modesty and the culture and the traditions. (Hiyam)

In order to preserve the culture, parents applied strict rules.

We don't drink, we don't smoke, we don't do drugs, we don't lie. You do get married to who your father and mother think is a good person for you. You don't wear shorts or short sleeves . . . so this is what an Arab is. You cook, you clean, so you are an obedient child . . . that is an Arab. (Hiyam)

### **Participants' Own Culture**

Participants have expressed how they navigate their parents' culture while forming their own, which is often a mixture of both Arab and American. Hiyam, for example, got married to an Arab American man who she loves, while most women in her

family's hometown in Palestine get married to men that they never met, and often through arranged marriages.

Some of the participants have visited the country of their parents' origin while others did not. Some who visited more times became more familiar with some of the original elements of their parents' cultural and social circumstances where they grew up. They had developed more understanding, especially some of the women, in that they came in close contact with their parents' Arab Muslim or Christian cultural norms while visiting their relatives. They have also seen first-hand the difference between living back home and living in the US and made comparisons and developed understanding of the different circumstances of their parent environment.

Going to Palestine, visiting and seeing how other people were like when we go to someone's house, and there are boys that are my age and want to go talk to them but like, no, you can't do that if you are a girl . . . I feel that is not much how I am like here. I can go and talk to anybody and like hang out with anyone (Noor).

Ahmed, for example, had a girlfriend when he was in college but would not dare to take his girlfriend with him to Dearborn because the life for Arab Americans in Dearborn is very similar to that of the Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, Yemenis, or Iraqis. It is not acceptable by the community to have a girlfriend. To dare and take her home to your parents and your community is even worse. "There were things I wouldn't dare doing like taking my girlfriend to Dearborn. It was okay when I was in Ann Arbor. Some people did, but I was not that type" (Ahmed).

This influence of the parents' culture gets challenged later on in life once the children are grown ups and once they get exposed to other cultures around them so they start comparing other Arab cultures in other areas in the US and eventually this leads

them to question their parents' culture, that is, the culture that parents brought with them from the village or the town where they came from.

I definitely have strong connections being a Palestinian. I feel very much so like I am a Palestinian and very much American, and I am an Arab, and then I never thought that I was that much American until I went to visit Palestine and realized that, "Okay, I have American aspects in me" (Noor).

As a grown up, married woman with a career, Hiyam went through a cycle of questioning her parents' culture that they brought with them to the US. She asserted that her parents and other families who lived in the Palestinian Arab community in Ohio brought with them the same cultural norms that they learned, and they never changed a bit. What is more astonishing for Hiyam is that when she went back to visit her parents' hometown in Palestine, she found that people over there have changed, sometimes significantly, while her parents seemed to have been frozen in the time they left Palestine decades ago.

Over the years, as I have been the only one from my family, from my siblings to fly the coop and move away. So I left the community with that entrenched kind of thinking, and I have become much more aware of my surroundings, aware of the real world, so to speak, and aware of other Arabs that caused me to question my upbringing, not in a negative way . . . So they caused me to question it and then to reshape my definition of it, which in turn makes me fight with my parents when I go back and visit, because I say stuff that they feel is more American than Arab. It contradicts the upbringing. I don't fault them; I just think that they need to move out of Ohio (Hiyam).

Most participants said they eat Arabic food in their homes, including Amal whose mom learned how to cook Arabic food at home. They listen to Arabic music and enjoy *Dabkeh*<sup>25</sup>. The participants also expressed that they enjoyed the gatherings of Arab families and friends at parents' homes and in larger gatherings in Arab clubs, in the mosque or church during religious and cultural celebrations, where usually there is plenty

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<sup>25</sup> *Dabkeh* is an Arab dance known in Greater Syria: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.



of homemade food and a variety of pastries made especially for these occasions.

Participants expressed that these gatherings have served the purpose of building support and solidarity with each other as well as a platform for discussing other important issues that concern the community or individuals in the community.

There are pros and cons, but I really admire the fact that in Arab society the opinion of the whole is always taken and like every gathering is just emphasized to everyone the togetherness, and there is a lot of community and just like I love the food and music and everything, like *Dabkeh* is great. (Sawsan).

### **Language**

Participants learned they are Arabs mainly from their parents, when they were little. Arabic language was spoken at home at least by one parent, except for Amal, neither of whose parents spoke Arabic. Amal's parents did not speak Arabic at home, but her paternal grandfather learned the Arabic language from his parents who migrated from Greater Syria during the First Immigration Wave<sup>26</sup>. He spoke Arabic and was very active in a local Lebanese club called the Sons of Lebanon in Boston, Massachusetts. "My grandfather started the Sons of Lebanon that was like a club in Quincy, Massachusetts. We were there all the time."<sup>27</sup> Although Amal's mom is an Irish, Italian American, Amal was pulled more to the Arab side of her family, so she sees herself as more of an Arab American than an Irish or Italian and refers to herself as Lebanese Syrian and Irish Italian. "I usually say both Lebanese and Syrian, and I always put them together or I just say Arab American" (Amal).

Most participants said that their parents wanted them to learn to speak Arabic at home. "We talk Arabic at home although my sister and I end up talking in English more

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<sup>26</sup> First Immigration Wave is the period between the late 1800s and the First World War, when most Arab immigrants came to the US from Greater Syria.

<sup>27</sup> Amal's grandparent took her with him to the club often to introduce her to other Lebanese people and to the culture. Amal is a fourth-generation Arab American.

than Arabic sometimes. Arabic was my first language growing up (Reema).” Jamil wants to learn Arabic, although he is in college now. He wishes that he learned it before when he was younger. “I feel like I know that I want to speak Arabic, but I don’t, you know. I really want to go to Jordan or to Palestine so I can learn it” (Jamil). Ahmed’s parents and grandparents wanted him to speak fluent Arabic and not only functional Arabic. “My grandfather mocked me because I did not speak good Arabic when I was in high school. Arabic language is a big factor in how Arab you are” (Ahmed).

### **Gender**

Gender also was a very strong theme by which men and women shared their stories of how both the Arab and the American parts of their personality and socialization have influenced the way they understand and interact with their community. Muslim women in the group had different opinions about Islamic teachings regarding women’s roles. Some agreed with the teachings about the role of women in the Arab or Arab American society and others disagreed and criticized some elements of the culture and religion to a certain extent. Reema stated proudly.

[Wearing the hijab has] affected me positively because wearing the scarf, people notice me more, which helped me form connections with my professors because they see me, and I stand out of the rest of the class because of my scarf.

In contrast, Noor stated,

Being like a Muslim you have to wear the hijab or certain things like .... you have to do that I don’t like to prescribe to, so like I don’t wear the hijab. I don’t do all the things that a woman is supposed to do within that Arab culture. I don’t feel that I have to do these things.

Participants are all too aware of the societal differential treatment of men and women within Arab cultures. They all commented on similar social norms like, women being expected to do certain things inside and outside the house, and obey certain social

rules that men do not have to adhere to. Jamil, for example, commented on assigned gender roles between his parents even though both of them have full-time jobs.

My mom does all the cooking in the house, and maybe she is too good at it, and my dad is not, but also it is the fact that she is the wife, and she is expected to do the cooking. (Jamil)

If men are expected to obey the rules and they don't, then there are no consequences for them, while women often pay a heavy price for not doing or following certain norms.

If I were a male, it would be much easier because you kind of do whatever you want in both cultures, but I think that because I am a female, there is like certain like rules and stuff. Like my brother can wear whatever he wanted when we got to Palestine. It didn't matter, but then with me, it was like, "You can't wear this. You can't wear that. You can't talk to this person." (Noor)

Muslim and Christian parents share their Arabness, so it is not specific to one religion, but people from both religions are holding girls and women to different standards. These standards get often stricter in conservative Muslim households. Growing up, girls are taught these rules, and they are expected to carry them to their adulthood. Parents, brothers, uncles, aunts, and cousins are supposed to monitor the code of conduct of young women to ensure they behave in certain ways, and if they do not, all these relatives are supposed to report their behaviors to their parents, and often, parents will inflict punishments to show the community that they are still holding onto the same norms for their children as if they still lived back home. "You need to be more feminine, you need to be quieter, you need to be softer, you need not to laugh so loud, you can't sit like that, and you can't make those faces" (Yasmine).

In a traditional Arab American households, Arab American women, like women back home in Arab countries, are supposed to stay home mostly and not spend time out

with friends as most young people like to do. This is bothersome to the new generation of educated and more independent Arab women. When they visit their parents' homeland, they see clear differences between genders, where men are dominant and have authority over women in almost everything and often controlling the day-to-day life of their women—wives, daughters, or sisters—and believe that women should take care of men. “One thing that I don't like I guess is like the idea that the woman should stay at home like cooking and stuff like that” (Reema). Noor went with her mother and brother to visit relatives in Palestine in her early teen years. Her mother warned her that wearing short sleeves or shorts would not be acceptable, so Noor packed clothes that were considered modest here in the US, yet, when she got to Palestine, her relatives were vocal with her about what was acceptable or appropriate to wear or to do in their village. She was very surprised how different it was for her, that people were so conservative and extremely controlling of her behavior as a female, even though she was visiting for the summer. “You can't do this, and you can't do that, and it was so annoying to me and to my mother and gave me first-hand experience how easy it is for me in the US” (Noor).

Noor also noticed how tough it was for her as a female and how easy it was for her brother as a male. He could wear almost anything he wanted to wear and nobody would say anything to him. Not only did her relatives want to control her clothes but also who to talk to, especially males, even their neighbors. She reports that once they were walking down the road, and a teenager boy waved to them. When she waved back, her cousin told her not to do that again.

If you are a girl, you can't go talk to boys over there, so I feel that is not much how I am like here. I can go and talk to anybody and like hang out with anyone, so I think that in terms of gender, it is less Arab. I don't think my identity interacts too much with it (Noor).

Another important differential factor among genders reported by participants is about females' behavior in public. Noor, who moved to the US with her mom and her little brother when she was 3 years old, had a chance to visit her mother's village in Palestine when she was 12 years old. She noticed how restrictions were imposed on her behavior, dress, or movement by relatives whom she was visiting, especially males of the family, and how much of her behavior she needed to adjust in order to fit in the Palestinian rural cultural norms in that town. It was obvious to her that dealing with men in particular was extremely restricted, if not forbidden. She even felt the difference between her parents' hometown cultural norms and the cultural norms in Ramallah, the town nearby, which is a semi-urban place. She talked about an incident when she went for ice cream with her relatives. She was told she could not lick an ice cream cone in the street because she was a female. Noor was much more comfortable with her American side when it came to how to behave with others, especially with males and in public. Even her open-minded mother sided with her relatives against her during the visit. Noor remembers one time when a group of guys came to visit and were sitting at the porch. When she attempted to join them outside, she was not allowed to because she was a girl and that girls should stay inside and not socialize with males. She did not challenge that and stayed inside with other girls, but when she laughed, she was told not to laugh loud so the guys outside would not hear her laughing. That was a shock for her. "So coming back to America I was like, "Oh, now I can do whatever I want to" (Noor).

At the same time, Noor understands the roots of her family's background and how this kind of overprotection for young women is considered a form of care, as they explained it to her. Of course, living in the US from the age of 3 until she was 12 in an

open society and where girls and boys socialized together freely, she realized that this was not necessarily a protection of her only. Yet, she realizes that being part of a larger extended family that represents deeply rooted traditions that are embedded and engraved in the minds of the people back there, and it is not easy to change. Generation after generation have inherited the same traditions, and very little has changed, especially with regard to the social role of women. Despite all the restrictions, Noor enjoyed the Palestinian food, dance, songs, the generosity of the people, and how helpful and hospitable they are.

Religious women in this study expressed their need to balance their schooling and career aspirations with their religious practices. Reema, for example, wears the hijab. Since she is a pre-med major and sometimes gets in close contact with men in her lab class like when they practice taking blood pressure for each other, her professor was very sensitive to her needs, and she always asks Reema if she is comfortable doing that or if her traditions allow her to do that, and if not, how could she be of help for Reema to find alternative ways to practice what she learned while accommodating her religious needs. “And the professor goes like, ‘Now, tell me how can we do this with respect to your boundaries?’” (Reema).

It seemed easier for some male participants not to think about gender the same way the women participants did. Sammy said he thinks that his gender as a cismale is something that is easily identifiable so he does not give it much thought on a daily basis. Sammy is aware of his male privilege and that gender tends not to be on his mind much. “In general, life is easier for me as a male, so I don’t know if I was a woman if I would think differently about this questions or about my identity” (Sammy).

Other male participants talked about gender roles in the Arab world and in the US for Arab Americans. Jamil thinks that there are stereotypes about Arabs and Arab Americans about gender issues and Arab women in general. He hears a lot about Arabs in the Arab World from his grandfather because he follows the news in the Arab World and how awkward they are about gender issues and how the women are treated. He also questions the role of women, in general, and the role of his mother at home, in particular. She is expected to cook at home, although his father helps out, but it is his mom's job to cook for the family, even though she is working a full-time job, exactly like his father. "My mom does all the cooking in the house and maybe she is too good at it, and my dad is not, but also it is the fact that she is the wife, and she is expected to do the cooking" (Jamil). George is also resentful that his dad and his uncle leave the women out of their conversations and ignore their opinions when they try to participate. He does not like that his mother and his aunts spend a lot of time in the kitchen preparing food for the men while the men are enjoying themselves and waiting for the food to be ready and giving the women hard time all along.

One male participant talked about gender from another point of view, as it relates to him as a man. Ahmed believes that it is not always about Arab American or Muslim American women who are oppressed or disadvantaged. He believes that Arab American and Muslim American men are stereotyped as terrorists and women abusers or womanizers.

I see sometimes that I am stereotyped as an Arab man. They made assumptions about my wife and myself, and they were all lies. Sometimes, I feel that I have to watch what I say about gender issues so people won't make their own interpretations. (Ahmed).

Rakan also had similar experiences travelling and being profiled and singled out as an Arab American Palestinian Muslim Male.

I have been profiled by the Israelis, by the Americans, ... by everybody, and in Germany they profiled me and did random searches. I guess when you put these things together and you say young Palestinian Arab Muslim male, then ... gender play[s] a role because supposedly if you want to assign gender roles, women are less threatening (Rakan).

One participant discussed how Arab and Arab American women are at a disadvantage in the society. She talked about the role of religion and how people misuse it to the advantage of men. "It is very much direct prejudice toward women, but there is no way you can escape it at all and here in America. There is no way you can escape it" (Sawsan). Here, Sawsan was indicating the intersections between gender and religion. She also believes that while Muslim women are mistreated by their male counterparts, Western women in the US are mistreated as well. The gender issue is a social issue that people do not think much about, especially women who were born in these societies. She believes that men are threatened by women's success; therefore, they perpetuate women's disadvantageous status quo so they keep their privileges as men over women.

Despite this, Sawsan believes there is hope. "I think that there are current movements to pull women in here and in the Middle East. There is progress in this area, I guess" (Sawsan). She comes from a more open-minded family, and her parents are supportive of her as a Muslim female who covers her hair and enjoys her freedom as an independent woman. They were concerned that her hijab might restrict her freedom. On the contrary, she argued that putting the hijab on or off is her own freedom, and her parents are supportive. "Relatively speaking, I have liberal parents in this sense that they



don't force me to wear the hijab, and they wouldn't force me to keep it on if I choose to do so" (Sawsan).

### **9/11 and Current Politics**

Several participants expressed their pride in their ability to speak and understand Arabic: their parents' language. "I mostly listen to Arabic music. I definitely like to teach my kids Arabic; I lost my Arabic until high school" (Ahmed). At the same time, speaking Arabic could be a curse, according to Yasmine, especially after September 11, as many of the Arabs and Arab Americans were singled out in airports or other places only because they spoke Arabic in public. Yasmine recalls a story when she was travelling on a ferry with her mother, and they were speaking a mix of Arabic and English. That drew the attention of a man next to them who heard the mother's Arabic accent when she spoke English and seemed curious about them.

I was on the ferry with my mom when I was home like two weeks ago and some guy was like, "Oh, I hear that accent. Where are you from?" And my mom was like, from Staten Island, and he was like, "No, originally!" And my mom was like, "Syria," and he was like, "Oh!" and they started talking, and he was like, "Oh, I like the culture," and I was like, "OK!" (Yasmine).

This incident made Yasmine worry that that person on the ferry asked these questions based on the way she and her mother looked. She believed he realized they were Arabs but wanted to make sure. She worried about further racial profiling. Yasmine shared remembering a similar story of two White Americans on a flight who told the flight attendant that they did not feel safe flying with a couple of Arabs on the plane and caused them to be detained for two hours for questioning by the US authorities. Yasmine was so worried that the same thing would happen to her mother and her if the man did something similar to what the others did on that flight.

Amal's mom was concerned about her safety after September 11 and wanted to protect her because she looks Arab and her last name is Arabic and can be easily stereotyped. Her mom wanted to bring her back to the other side of her heritage that is Irish and Italian on her mom's side. Being seen as of Italian and Irish heritage is considered more American and safer for Amal than being just an Arab American. "She [her mother], when actually 9/11 [took place], wanted to hyphen my name and put her last name onto the front, but I told her, 'No way'" (Amal).

Islam to Hiyam and her family was a salient identity when they moved to the US from Palestine. In order to make sure that they are keeping the traditions and the religion from the homeland, her parents identified as Arabs, as Palestinians, and as Muslims, but when Islamophobia started to surface in the US, and especially after September 11, 2001, they dropped Muslim and added American, so they started identifying as Arab and American. Their most salient, pronounced identity has become Arab American as a safer way to identify.

So again, I ... kind of think that what ended up happening was progressively as the politics of the US policies in the Middle East progressively got worst, specifically with Muslim countries, we became more afraid to identify as Arab Muslims, and so we have to identify as Arab Americans because we thought the safety in there ... I watched myself go from saying I am Arab Muslim to Arab American. (Hiyam)

Rakan lived with his mother and went to school with all White children so he was in the middle school when September 11 events took place. He was one of four children who did not identify as White. It was hard for him and sometimes he was subject to physical violence as retaliation to what happened on September 11 because he was the only person of Arab/Muslim ancestry. He was physically attacked by White children more than once.

I was one of probably four minorities in a school of 400, and they really had no idea what it meant, so they kept at it and, um, the name calling like, sand nigger, towel head, all these things. Sometimes it was physical violence, so that really forced me to say, “Ok, if I have to choose, I’ve been basically exiled by America, I would choose Palestinian over everything.” (Rakan)

### **Situational Identity**

Some participants talked about how they change how they present themselves based on the situation they are in. While Yasmine, for instance does not practice Christianity as an adult, she has been using Christianity to her advantage recently as an Arab American since the stereotypic image is every Arab is a Muslim. In other situations when she says she is Christian, it has a different safety meaning for her. She does this so that people will not ask further questions, and they do not get overly curious. Those who often conflate the religious identities of Arab Americans with their ethnic background assume that every Arab or Arab American is a Muslim. Therefore, Arab Americans, like Yasmine, once they mention they are Arab Americans, or Lebanese or Syrian get stereotyped. Once Yasmine is in such a situation or worries about the possibility, she adds Christian or Catholic to her Arab American identity. Yasmine also talked about the stereotyping of Jewish people that gets added to her mixed and stereotyped identity.

People would ask me if I was Jewish, and they would say because I have a big nose, and then when people figure out that I was an Arab, then they are like, “So you are a Muslim?” Then I was like, “No, not that either. I am Christian.” . . . I don’t know, just being a Christian is almost a shield in America. (Yasmine)

Yasmine admitted that having a Christian religious identity that she can use when confronted with anti-Muslim rhetoric is a privilege that she has over other Muslim Arab Americans who do not have a choice. “I can be like, ‘Oh, I am Christian.’ It’s like almost it is a buffer for me” (Yasmine).

## **Primacy of Arab American Identity**

All of my participants are college students or recent graduates. College provided an opportunity to explore, deepen, or discover their identity as Arab American. When discussing what Arab American identity means to them, several participants disclosed that they started identifying as such in college.

Yasmine as well as Amal got exposed to social justice concepts and principles upon entering college; they looked inward at their own identity. “I think it was when I came to college I kind of better understood how I felt, like how I should identify [Arab American]” (Amal). “I think going to college made me definitely identify more as Arab American ” (Yasmine). Nobody from her family approved of it, including her older sister, both parents, and some of her relatives because they are very Christian and believe that Arab mean Muslim, and they do not want to affiliate themselves with Arabs or with Muslims; therefore, they do not consider themselves Arab Americans but rather they say Syrians or Lebanese, Syrian Americans, or Lebanese Americans. “And then when I came to college that’s when I started using it [Arab American]. Nobody in my family approved of that basically” (Yasmine).

George criticizes parts of the US culture in comparison to the Arab culture, especially with regard to hospitality and generosity as important parts of his identity as Arab American.

I think one thing that I hate in the US culture right when you enter my dorm room here, I make you coffee, I’ll get you food. I will take care of you. You know what I mean. Here like I could enter my [American] friend’s apartment ,and they could be having dinner, and they don’t even offer me any dinner or anything (George).

Ahmed expressed his pride in his heritage, yet, is critical of some aspects of the Arab culture in Dearborn. “American culture is about freedom. They leave you alone.

Arabic culture is more intrusive, asking personal questions” (Ahmed). He also said, “I want to have my own house, and I want to be left alone by the society, maybe I’ve become Americanized. So be it. Maybe this is the way I am.”

Hiyam, a Muslim woman who does not cover her head, said that she is enjoying the best of both cultures—the Arab and the American, especially once she became an adult. She got married to an Arab American man who she loves, while most women in her family’s hometown in Palestine get married to men that they never met, and often through arranged marriages. Although she was raised in a traditional and conservative Palestinian Arab Muslim immigrant family in the US, her grandmother and her mother passed on their own cultural traditions that Hiyam admires, like this is the way you stitch this piece of cloth or this is the way you decorate your pillow cases or your traditional wedding dress, yet she has a chance to fall in love and marry a Lebanese Arab Muslim Shi’a man, finish two graduate degrees, and start a promising management career.

I am not just an Arab American. I am an Arab American woman, a sister, a daughter, and so it becomes important for me then, and it has become as I have grown, important for me to freely talk to my friends, my peers, and my coworkers about being an Arab American (Hiyam).

Rakan, although he is half Palestinian and half American and identifies as Arab American, feels proud of who he is and whenever Arab or Muslim organizations in the US do something good.

I’m particularly proud when Arabs or Palestinians do things that are unexpected or dispel stereotypes, so you know, when Arab Americans become very successful, CEOs, and gain the respect of their communities, when Islamic organizations in the US set out to do community service and change people’s perspectives and their minds (Rakan).

## Intersectionality

Arab American identity is complicated by many factors. For example, national origin is complicated generationally. First-generation Arab Americans do not necessarily see their national origin the same way a second-generation sees it. A fourth-generation woman, Amal, who grew up having grandparents around who identified as Arab American does not have the same attachment to her grandparents' country of origin as first-generation or second-generation Arab Americans. Her great-grandparents came from Lebanon and Syria toward the end of the 1800s. Amal did not necessarily understand what national origin meant to her growing up, until she came to college and started to learn that national origin is part of one's identity even after four generations. Amal, who used to go with her grandfather to the Sons of Lebanon club in Boston and ate hummus, falafel, and tabbouleh at home, has a nostalgic connection to her ethnic background.

Noor or Rakan, for that matter, who lived for periods of time in Palestine and experienced first-hand different cultural and political situations thought differently about what being an Arab American means or developed different understandings of their ancestors' homeland that they still believe that they belong to that land and have emotional connections because they lived there. Both experienced first-hand cultural and social circumstances and connected with their cousins who live there and made some friends also. At the same time, they noticed the difference between living in Palestine and living in the US and how the concepts of social norms are different, especially Noor as a female, where she felt that the Arab culture in Palestine, especially in her parent's town, was so restrictive to women. Noor enjoyed the Arab hospitality, generosity, and belonging to her Klan but resented patriarchy and interference by others in her day-to-day

life. She got to enjoy more of the US individual freedom for women that she totally lost in her visits to Palestine. Rakan, on the other hand and as a male, had a different experience. He enjoyed his freedom in the Palestinian society but lost it for different reasons, especially when he was stopped and questioned by the Israeli Military Authorities who control the boarder crossing between Jordan and Palestine. As an Arab and American, he developed resentment to the way the US government supports the Israeli Occupation of his grandparents' home. He also feels that he has to defend his Arab and Muslim parts of his identity when he comes to the US, although he is not a practicing Muslim.

Arab identity is also complicated by religious identity where recent history in Lebanon, for example, hold different meanings to George's parents and to Yasmine's parents, as a second-generation Arab American, than to Amal, who is fourth-generation Arab American. Although George, Amal, and Yasmine are of Christian background, the civil war in Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s hold different meanings to George's parents than to Amal's parents or grandparents. The divide, at some point in time, was between some Christians and some Muslims based on whether their last name sounded like Christian or Muslim. Despite that Muslims and Christians love the Arab culture in Lebanon, one's family in context and one's upbringing is complicated by national origin and by religion and by gender as well.

Gender is another complexity that both Christian and Muslim women participants described circumstances of patriarchy and discrimination based on gender. Noor complained that her brother was able to get away with doing many things that she was not able to do. She was not able to talk to males who were not close relatives while her

brother could. Yasmine complained that her mother wanted her to be religious, to behave in a certain way around other Arabs/Arab Americans just because she is a female. Her parents did not want her to identify as Arab Americans because they connect Arab to Muslim and Muslim to Arab; therefore, when she says Arab and American, she gets stigmatized as Muslim.

Education intersects with all other factors as participants learned more about their national origin, culture, religion, and gender identities in college and have become more accepting of who they are. Most of them connected more with Arab/Arab American students in college and socialized with them, and they also connected and socialized with other mainstream US college students. Suzanne, who covers her head wearing a traditional hijab and practices Sunni Islam, thinks of herself as a modern woman who can do many things that her peers could not do back home, like in Jordan or Kuwait, including socializing with males. At the same time, being a practicing Muslim Sunni woman make her peers assume that she is not modern and rather that she is backward. For example, when she does not go to a bar with her friends or when she does not participate in activities where alcohol is served adds to their misconception and misunderstanding of her as a normal college student, but she stays away from some behaviors or practices that she does not agree with. Her American peers, including some of her Arab American friends, stopped including her in their social events and started to make assumptions about her. This, of course, makes her feel isolated. Making a choice to wear the hijab and practice Islam has a price that she has to pay. She does not feel that she is being accepted as a whole human being although she tries to reach out to all and be



friendly and connect with all, but she does not feel that her friends include her based on their assumptions.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**FINDINGS ON FACTORS SHAPING ARAB AMERICAN COLLEGE  
STUDENT IDENTITY**

**Introduction**

To study some of the ways in which self-selected Arab Americans in New England constructed their Arab American identity, I interviewed 11 subjects who identify as Arab American. When I sent my call for participants I asked only for those who identified as “Arab American” and took care not to stipulate religious identity (such as Muslim, Christian, Jew, or secular). Eleven subjects who are college students or recent graduates agreed to sit for in-depth interviews with me. They also agreed to take part in one of the two focus groups, based on their gender. There are a total of six females and five males in the study. In this chapter I will apply the factors that I derived from the interviews, some of which were based on Wijyesinghe’s (2001, 2012) work but others of which became evident in the self-descriptions of my Arab American subjects.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, the issue of religion became an important theme for analysis, since the Arab American subjects readily identified as Christian (three Lebanese and one Palestinian) or as Muslim (seven: five Palestinians, one Lebanese, and one Tunisian) young adults. They also expressed a range of “observant” to “secular” preferences, although all emphasized the importance of religion in their familial connections that included extended family religious identities. The religious identities were as follows: Among the Christians—one Melkite male, two Roman Catholic females, and one Greek Orthodox male. Among the Muslims: One Shi’a male, four Sunni females, and two Sunni males.

It is important to note that the religious component of “self-presentation” for some of my subjects differed across the sample. Two of the Sunni females, Reema and Sawsan, cover their hair wearing the hijab. Of these two, Reema, went to a Muslim school until the eighth grade, but she did not start covering until she reached puberty. Sawsan, on the other hand, who attended public schools, made a decision to start covering her hair right after she graduated from high school and right before she started college. The other two Muslim Sunni women did not cover their hair.

Mir’s analysis (2009) lists 17 distinctive reasons why Muslim women cover their hair. She raises issues, such as God wants women to cover their hair, and it is a religious act, head covers symbolize purity, it brings respect and honor for Muslim women, they identify Muslim women to other Muslims, or they may be used to show respect to elders in some society. The issue of covering is an on-going theological and political debate. Some of the most common known reasons range from God requires women to do so to some who believe that both men and women should cover and the cover should be for many other reasons, like cultural, respect, purity, modesty, or simply showing the face only means showing the most beautiful part of a woman, as it is the most beautiful part of her body. Muslim women who cover have become a symbol for Islamophobia in the US and in the West in general. Islamophobia<sup>28</sup> has been on the rise for the last two decades, especially after September 11, 2001 (Ali, 2016; Walther, 2015). This stereotypical image of Muslim women has been generalized and women who cover their hair have become target for bigots and a symbol of oppression and backwardness. It is the first identifiable target in the streets, in schools, and shopping centers. Sawsan decided to cover her hair as

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<sup>28</sup> Islamophobia is irrational fear of Muslims. Over the years, Islam has been treated as a foreign religion by Judeo Christian cultures.

a political statement to show others that she is neither backward nor submissive and that she is in defiance of the US and Western stereotypes about Muslim women. Islamophobia extends back to the early days of White Protestant settlers in the US who brought with them the anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish antagonism (Walther, 2015).

Islamophobia has a long history in the United States that can be traced back as early as the colonial era when European settlers carried their antagonism to the Islamic faith with them to the New World (para. 3)

Seven subjects were born in the US, and the other four migrated to the US when they were very young, ranging in age from two and a half to three and a half years old. At the time of interviews, the subjects ranged in age from 19 to 29 years old. During the interviews, one of the subjects was a doctoral student, seven were undergraduate students and three subjects had recently graduated from college, one with double master's degrees and the other two with bachelor's degrees. These three were out in the working world, having just started their careers; the others, as noted, were in higher education at various undergraduate or graduate levels.

One subject is a fourth-generation Arab American, five subjects are second-generation, and five subjects are first-generation. I had no third-generation respondents. All subjects attended American public schools, except the one who attended a Muslim school throughout the middle school.

### **Factors Influencing Arab American College Student Identity**

I believe that my subjects shared a lot of information and probably some of the information would not have been shared with other researcher had I not identified as an Arab American as well. Participants were candid in discussing many issues like their families, own upbringing, their sense of safety and security, vulnerabilities after September 11<sup>th</sup> and the encounter with US authorities especially in airports.

I review these demographics to emphasize that the focus of interviews had to do with ethnic, not religious identity. Where religious identity enters into the discussion – and it is an important theme, it was brought in by the subjects themselves in relation to my questions about their Arab American identity.

In my interviews, I asked the subjects to answer two major questions: “What does it mean to you to be Arab American?” and “What are the factors that led you to identify as Arab American?” In addition to these 2 major questions, there are 2 other questions that I asked, “When you are asked to fill out the US Census forms with questions of ethnicity/race, how do you fill them out?” The other question I asked was, “Are there experiences you have had as an Arab American – or aspects of your identity as Arab American – that you would like us to talk about, to help me understand your identity?”

I have already presented some discussion of religion as an important factor and will return to the intersection of religion with other factors, such as culture, gender, and family, later in this discussion. In the next section I analyze the major themes that emerged from the demographic sheets, in-depth research interviews and focus groups that I conducted in an attempt to answer these two questions.

Some of the identity factors for Arab Americans were the strong attachment to the Arab culture, the role of parents and family, a long shared history and aspirations, political awareness and orientation, early experiences and socialization, religion, the role of gender and patriarchy, and education. These were common grounds for Arab Americans that intersect and interact with their spiritual and religious affiliations as Muslims or Christians and also intersect with gender issues. There are other factors that influence the Arab American identity, like the rise of Islamophobia, stereotypes, and hate

crimes, especially against Muslims. These factors contribute to racializing the Arab American identity

### **Education**

One of the factors that affected the formation of the Arab American identity that I found in my interviews with young Arab American college students and recent graduates was the level of education. I observed that the level of education among these young Arab Americans has affected the formation of their identities. Most of my subjects shared that either they learned about their Arab American identity in college, or deepened their understanding of what it means to be Arab American and the connection between being of Arab descent and being American. College experience has played a role in deepening that understanding as they *matured*. It provided them with the tools needed to go back to their parents and challenge the statue quo of the culture that they were raised in as children of immigrant parents.

The level of education among Arab American college students appeared to have affected the level of identification, as more educated subjects have better understanding of their identity. For example, I found that some of my subjects knew about their ancestors only when they took courses in college. Others enhanced their attachment to their Arab culture and identity. Some subjects were influenced by other Arab American families after they left home and went away to enroll in graduate school and met such families. That move away from home, encouraged them when they go back to their parents to challenge some of the elements of the Arab American identity that their immigrant parents brought with them and insisted on keeping and passing to their children. They faced their parents' fear of loosing their Arab culture to the American culture.

## Arabness

As I mentioned in the literature review in Chapter 2, most Arab American scholars define the term Arab American to describe people who live in the US and trace their ancestry to Arab countries or Arabic-speaking countries (Naff, 1985; Orfalea, 2006; Suleiman, 1999). This term is broadly used to include all people who immigrated to the US since the early Arab immigration waves in 1870s to present.

There are many complexities and nuances to this term that includes Muslims and Christians and also includes non-Arabs, like Berbers, Armenians, and Kurds who grew up in the Arab world and group themselves with Arab Americans in the US. There are Jewish Arab Americans who most likely identify primarily as Jews, perhaps ethnically as Arabs. The origins of Arab Americans imply historical, cultural, and commonalities and shared interests (Kayyali, 2006). I have to mention here that some Maronite Lebanese and Coptic Egyptian Christians do not associate themselves with Arabs due to some historical factors that have to do with the perceived threat of Muslim Arabs to the survival to the Maronite and Coptic communities (Haddad, 1994).

Most of the subjects that I interviewed became aware of their Arabness and Arab identity when they were very young, whether they are first-, second- or fourth-generation. They learned about their Arabness from their families as they grew up speaking Arabic and identifying with the Arab culture. Others knew about their Arabness because of who they were not. They were not “Pakistani or Indian,” like Reema, or they were not “White American” like Ahmed, or they were just “Lebanese and Christian” like Amal and Yasmine whose both families did not identify with Arabness but with their country of origin or with their religion. They knew that Lebanon is an Arab country only when they

came to college and made the connection and started identifying with being Arab American. Jamil and Sammy lived in an Arab atmosphere at home where Arabic was the language spoken at home, ate Arabic food, listened to Arabic music, and attended Arabic social and cultural events. Rakan learned that he was Palestinian from his father because his father wanted him to identify as such and to find others who identify as Palestinians or Arabs.

All of the subjects were either born in the US or moved to the US with their families when they were very young. All of them are either first- or second-generation Arab Americans, except for Amal who is a fourth-generation, Christian Arab American, and whose great grandparents migrated to the US from Greater Syria pre-First World War.

Reema, for example, a second-generation Arab American was born to Tunisian parents in Canada with Muslim Sunni background and moved to the US with her parents when she was three years old. Reema knew that she was an Arab as early as she began school:

We spoke Arabic and I knew that I was different from most of the people that I went to school with. A lot of them were like Indians or Pakistani so they spoke Urdu, so I knew I wasn't like Indian, and I was an Arab. The identity just evolved as I was growing up. It is kind of I just knew all my life, I guess. (Reema)

While Amal was close to her grandparents, she was not aware of her Arabness as a child and did not completely identify with her Arabic side until she came to college and started seeing other Arab and Arab American students. She took classes in political science and learned that her ancestors migrated to the US from Syria and Lebanon (former Greater Syria) in the First Immigration Wave. Growing up in Massachusetts, she was introduced first to the Lebanese/Syrian culture by her grandparents. Her paternal



grandfather founded the Sons of Lebanon Club. She used to go with her him to the club, and when he died, she stopped going. She was first introduced to elements of her Lebanese heritage by both grandparents, then by the club, where people from Lebanese and Syrian descent gathered to celebrate different cultural and religious occasions, and she got to know about Lebanese dance, music, food and other cultural aspects, which Amal had connected to her grandparents rather than to her Arabness. She ate Arabic food that her grandmother cooked at home, which she expressed she misses since her grandmother has passed away. Her mother does not cook Arabic food anymore, although she learned how to cook some Arabic dishes from Amal's grandmother.

I have made grape leaves many times, and I used to make *kibbe* with my grandmother. Yes, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother in the kitchen. I helped my dad make Tabbuli once. I love eating *kibbe*, except the meat. It is a little freaky but one you get over it. (Amal)

Amal listened to her grandparents speaking Arabic at home and in the club with other Lebanese Americans. She did not learn to speak Arabic herself, neither did her father, but she said that some of her cousins learned to speak Arabic. Amal's father identifies as Lebanese and/or Syrian American, and her mother is Irish Italian American. Amal made the connection that having a Lebanese and Syrian heritage is the same as having Arab heritage since both Lebanon and Syria are Arab countries and started identifying as Arab American. This did not happen until she came to college. Her last name sounds Arabic, and she said that her mother wanted her to hyphenate her last name to sound more American by adding the mother's Irish name because of fear of being profiled as of Arab descent. This happened right after the events of September 11, 2001.

For the rest of the subjects who are first- and second-generation Arab American, their sense of Arabness had been gained at home at an early age, through extended family

and community factors of speaking Arabic at home, living within an Arab community or being raised as an Arab and being distinctly told how they were Arabs, not Americans.

### **Arab and Arab American Culture**

Arab refers to people who live in 22 Arab countries that are members of the Arab League or where the majority of the people are of Arab origin. “Arab is both a cultural and linguistic term used to describe people who share the Arab culture and Arabic language” (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2010). Haddad (2011) discussed how the term Arab refers to people who live in the Arabian Peninsula, currently Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the Gulf States.

Haddad (2011) also offers a more inclusive discussion for “Arab” based on language, history, and culture:

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Arab was used to refer to all who speak Arabic language and identify with Arab history and culture, regardless of whether they are Muslims, Christians or Jews. This multi religious view was promoted primarily by Jews and Christian [Arabs] in an effort to carve out a national identity where religious minorities would be recognized as full citizens. It was also propagated by some Arabic speaking Muslims opposing the Young Turks who were seeking to “Turkify” all ethnic and tribal group resident in the Ottoman Empire. (p. 13)

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the early Arab immigrants from Greater Syria referred to themselves as Arabs although most of them were Christians. Even the Arab Jews who migrated from Aleppo and Damascus referred to themselves as Arabs. Muslims, Christians, and Jews who migrated from Greater Syria to the US referred to themselves as *Wlad Arab*<sup>29</sup> according to Naff (1985). Early Arab Muslim and Christian immigrants to the US in the First Immigration Wave valued one culture, which is the Arab culture, because most of them were from Greater Syria. They differentiated themselves from the

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<sup>29</sup> *Wlad Arab* is an Arabic word that means “children of Arabs.” Early Arab immigrants from Greater Syria, mostly Christians, referred to themselves as *Wlad Arab* to mean that they were not Turks, and they were Arabs.

Turks, at the time when they themselves came from Syria and Syria was part of the Ottoman-ruled areas and they carried the Turkish passport as an identification card but refused it as an identifier, although at the points of entry to the US they were recorded and counted as “*Turks*” or “*from Turkey in Asia*.” This is the time when Arabs, and especially Christians, wanted to have their own Arab identity that is separate from the Turks. They spoke Arabic that was not Turkish, ate Arabic food, that was not Turkish, and advocated for their own Arab identity as a whole to disassociate themselves from Turkey and the Turks. Some Lebanese Maronites immigrants disassociated themselves from the Turks and the Arabs as they are both Muslims and they did not want to be part of that identity (Gualtieri, 2009; Haddad, 1994).

All of my subjects identify with Arabness by factors they saw as “Arab,” such as culture, language, shared history, aspirations, and values that include generosity, hospitality, togetherness, help for the needy, and respect for elderly and for parents. The questions of Palestine also is an Arab issue that is considered as a unifying factor among most, if not all Arabs who believe there is injustice that has been done to the Palestinian people for the last one hundred years. Most of Arab Americans rally around this cause (Orfalea, 2006; Samhan, 1999). The Arabic cuisine, like tabbouleh, kibbe, falafel and hummus; the Arab folklore, like *dabkeh* dance, wedding celebrations and parties, new born and death and loss rituals; there is the Arab literature, poetry, music, and arts; and there are many other things that Arab people or those who identify with Arabs, say, do, practice, and express in their day-to-day life. When someone mentions any of these things, there is an immediate recognition and connection with others who share these

traits and heritage of a rich ethnic culture. This is what Arabness means in the context of this discussion.

### **Growing Up Within an Arab American Community**

Ahmed is an Arab American graduate student who was born in Dearborn, Michigan to Lebanese parents with Shi'a background. The population in Dearborn is mostly from Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, and Palestine (Orfalea, 2006). Ahmed's parents met in the US and got married in Dearborn. The Arab American Institute (2014) reports that the State of Michigan hosts the second largest Arab American community in the US with a population of 223,000, after California with a population of 324,000, and followed by New York with 152,000. Most of Arab Americans in Michigan live in the metropolitan Detroit area, and most of the Detroit-area Arab Americans live in Dearborn. Detroit Arab Americans are almost 50/50 Christian with a majority of Chaldeans and Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'a. Arabs migrated to Detroit Area and worked in peddling in the 1880s. They are still migrating to Dearborn as one of their preferred destinations (Arab American Institute, 2014).

Ajrouch (1999) conducted a study of adolescents and their parents in Dearborn, Michigan looking at the role of family in their children's ethnic identity. She discusses the close familial relationships among the extended family members and the importance of their support to each other. At the same time, members of the family carry the burden of protecting the reputation of the family and its name. She states how Arab immigrant families apply stricter rules than their native countries, especially over girls. They often invoke religion to instill desired and scorned upon behaviors in their offspring. Strict rules are often applied to girls who "come to bear almost the entire weight of maintaining

an Arab identity for their families and community” (p. 138). Ajrouch concludes from her study that

An Arab ethnic identity is being created as a dialectic emerges that includes a disdain for the American culture but includes a desire to acquire those attributes deemed desirable. I propose that these immigrant families hold onto their Arab ethnicity through their daughters and strive to attain the American dream through their sons. (p. 138)

Ahmed’s parents identified as Arabs before they identified as Lebanese, Shi’a, or Muslims. When he talks about his parents or relatives, he talks about people who belong to a culture and ethnicity that represents them and they are proud of.

There is my dad’s side of the family and my mom’s side of the family. When they all came from Lebanon in terms of identity and politics, it was identical. I mean my parents met in America, they would say they were Arabs before Lebanese or anything. (Ahmed)

Both Christian and Muslim immigrants in the First Immigration Wave to the US lived in mixed Christian/Muslim neighborhoods as they both shared the country of origin and Arabness as their base of support for each other and for the new immigrants who were arriving from Greater Syria. Both groups built churches and mosques. According to Elkhoully (1969), the church and the mosque played an important role in preserving the Arab culture, although the number of Muslims in the First Wave was very small.

### **Arabic Language and Culture as Identifying Factors**

All of my subjects agree that the most identifiers to their Arabness are the Arabic culture and Arabic language. Two of my subjects, Ahmed and Hiyam, who grew up in large Arab communities in Dearborn, Michigan and Cleveland, Ohio, share the same values as those early Arab Americans who came to the US in the First Immigration Wave, regardless of their religious affiliation being Christian or Muslim (Abraham, Howell, & Shryock, 2011). More information about Arab American communities in the

US can be found at Arab American Institute website and American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee website. Muslim and Christian Arab Americans share neighborhoods in large Arab American communities, like Dearborn, Cleveland, New York, Anaheim, and other places. They have their own stores and restaurants that sell Arabic food and cuisine. They share their folkloric dances and traditional dress on national occasions, like Palestine Day or during the Eid<sup>30</sup> or Christmas. They invite each other to their homes and maintain positive relationships.

Almost all the subjects shared that they have friends from the other religion (Muslims and Christians) and did not show any resistance to having friends and sharing the Arab culture with others. The Arab Student Club on the college campus that was chaired by two of the subjects that I interviewed, Rakan and Sawsan, included students from both Muslim and Christian backgrounds: Palestinian, Egyptian, Lebanese and Syrian Arab, and Arab American students. Rakan shared that all Arab and Arab American students in his college, both Christian and Muslim, participated in their Arab cultural nights and performed Arabic dance, like *dabkeh*, ate Arabic food, like hummus, falafel, kibbe and other Arab cuisine. He also shared that students from both religious backgrounds sent holiday wishes to each other and got invited to each other's parties. George, for example, is a Christian Melkite, second-generation Lebanese who is proud of the Arab culture and has a lot of Arab friends in college and also when he was in high school. He has American friends also but feels closer to his Arab and Arab American friends, especially when he needs some support. There are chapters of Arab Student

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<sup>30</sup> *Eid* is an Arabic word refers to the major 2 Muslim holidays in the year; *Eidul Fitr*, that is, the holiday that follows the month of Ramadan and *Eidul Adha*, and that is the holiday associated with Muslims' pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. *Eidul Fitr* is the day when Muslims break their fast, marking the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. *Eidul Adha* means the day of sacrifice, referring to when Abraham sacrificed a lamb instead of his son, Ishmael.

Associations in many colleges and universities in the US that provide space for students of Arab descent to connect and provide support for each other. One of the Arab Student Club objectives at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, for example, is “to offer social and moral support for Arab and Arab American students.” [UMass Arab Student Club, n.d.]

Most of my friends are Arabs and Arab Americans. I have a lot of American friends, but like the special moments happen with the Arab friends when you are up late that night and watching a movie together or you guys study for difficult exam together it happens with Arabs, but say if I get sick like I know that they would be there to bring me food and medicine and stuff. When I think of my college experience I think of them definitely and being closer to them. (George)

### **Diversity of the Arabs and Arab Americans**

In my interviews, I did not find notable differences between the subjects in regard to their ethnicities. Arabs consider themselves to belong to one ethnicity, speak Arabic language, share similar history, eat the same variations of foods, celebrate similar festivities whether Christian or Muslim, enjoy similar traditions, listen to similar music and songs, dance, and share similar arts and history. This was true of my sample, with the only difference coming from the Christian Lebanese, for whom religious identity had an impact on their “Arabness.” For example, Yasmine’s parents, siblings, and extended family members did not agree with her identifying as Arab American; instead, they want her to identify as Lebanese American or Syrian American.

My mom is from Hums in Syria as well as her family. I don't know, I mean if anybody ever asks them where they are from, they would say they are from Lebanon and Syria. I don't think that I ever heard my parents say they are or they refer to themselves as Arabs, like ever. (Yasmine)

George also was confronted by his father and was asked to say that he was Lebanese, identifying with the country of origin, but his father told him to add American to

Lebanese and identify as Lebanese American. Yasmine's and George's parents' identification is consistent with what scholars have written about Lebanese Americans.

There are some differences in Arab traditions between sub-geographic areas, but similarities weigh over differences at most part. Traditions in the Arabian Peninsula, for example, are slightly different from those in the north, like Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. Also, North African countries are a little different from the rest, especially in their Arabic dialects that are very different from the Eastern part of Arab countries, like Syria, Lebanon, or Iraq. Egyptian cinema has influenced the Arabs everywhere for decades, as most of the movie and TV industry started in Egypt and moved to different parts of the Arab World. For example, some subjects, like Noor, Hiyam, Reema, and Sawsan, criticize Saudi Arabian old traditions that still exist in their treatment of women as I mentioned during my analysis of Arab culture. Cinema in Saudi Arabia is still forbidden and there are no movie theatres even today.

### **Passing the Culture to Children**

Both Muslims and Christians in the First Arab Immigration Wave to the US worked on passing the culture, religion, traditions, and Arabic language to their children. Christian and Muslim alike were faced with American Nativism movement in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that had a strong sentiment for assimilation to Americanize all new immigrants, including Arabs. According to Nativists, immigrants needed to learn English and to adopt the American values and the American way of life. Christian Protestant establishments and Anglo conformity determined what an American should be. Nativism and racism were at their peak so Arab immigrants, especially Muslims of them,



like all other immigrants who came to the US in the late 1800s and early 1900s, were under a lot of pressure to assimilate in the new country (Naff, 1985).

Early Arab immigrants who mostly came from peasant, conservative religious backgrounds found themselves in a dilemma: either learn English and conform to certain rules or leave the US to go back to their country. Some actually left the US for fear of losing their culture and religion. Under such pressure, Arab immigrants who decided to stay were forced to adopt new traditions and new values, including changing the names of their children to English names. “Muhammad became Mo, Rashid became Dick, Mojahid became Mark and Ali became Al” (Haddad, 2011, p. 4).

Most of my subjects appreciate the ways in which their parents passed Arab culture onto them although several of my subjects questioned some elements of it, especially when it comes to religion and gender (Elkhouly, 1969). Hiyam and her sisters, for example, were taught by their mother and by their grandmother how to clean, cook, decorate and how to take care of their future husbands. Hiyam’s family is very traditional, conservative, and protective of the Arabic and Islamic traditions, especially around gender issues, where both the Arab traditions and Islamic traditions collude in their treatment of Arab Muslim females. They are very conscientious about what to say and how to identify themselves and what it means to be an Arab, Arab American, Muslim, Muslim American or American. Hiyam’s family did not want to identify as American in the beginning when they first migrated to the US. Instead, they continued to refer to themselves and identify as Arab first or Muslim first. In identifying as such, there was the sense of belonging to the Arab culture and to Islam. They believed that if they said “American,” they would lose an essential part of their identity. They initially

identified as Muslims, Palestinians, or Arabs, as these identifiers connected them to their religion, country of origin, and their Arab culture. But when the US politics shifted (after the events of September 11, 2001), they started to use the term Arab and added American to it and dropped Muslims for safety reasons that meant something like, “We are Americans too.”

To identify as American means that we have lost all our values; so we can identify as Arab American, which means that we retain some of the modesty and the culture and the traditions but we are still safer than saying we are Muslims, for safety reasons. As the policy of the US progressively worsened with Muslims and Muslim countries, we shifted from identifying as Arab Muslims to Arab Americans. (Hiyam)

Ahmed was expected by his parents, the extended family, and the community in Dearborn to keep the Arabic traditions and the Shi’a doctrine. In college, he broke away from most of the traditions and ended up falling in love with a Sunni woman and marrying her. This is considered an extreme move on his part and breaking away from the norms of the family and the community. Traditionally, many Arab men, mostly Muslims, marry from the extended family, their neighborhood, their town or region, and within the religion. Ahmed, his being a Shi’a man, to marry a Sunni woman, did not sit well with his parents, especially with his mother who wanted him to marry a Shi’a woman from the community.

Ahmed identifies as a secular with a Muslim Shi’a background. He practices some of the Islamic traditions that his parents and community passed down to him. He chooses to fast the month of Ramadan, for instance, but does not keep the daily prayers. He enjoys his freedoms and married a woman of his choice rather than a woman who fits the traditional description of his community. He was already married when I interviewed him, living happily with his wife, knowing that his parents did not like his choice.

Despite that, it was important to Ahmed to stay in close touch with his parents and siblings and to pay them visits on occasions. He has maintained his respect for his parents, elders, and the community, believing that he could do both and make choices that sometimes do not necessarily fall in the traditional social norms of a traditional Arab American Shi'a family living in Dearborn, Michigan. Regardless of what his parents or community thought of him, he challenged the traditions he disagreed with and broke away from them in some aspects. He kept his positive relations with his parents because he loves them too, and his love for his parents did not interfere with his love for his wife. He is maintaining a healthy relationship with both parties—his wife and his parents—and chooses the traditions that suit him, not necessarily the community he grew up in.

While Ahmed has the freedom to make choices for himself and while most of my subjects have similar freedoms, passing the Arab culture to the children is not always smooth. Some parents are restrictive of their children's freedom and put considerable pressure on them to keep and continue their Arab values and norms and disconnect from any American values or traditions. I have concluded that breaking away from Arab Muslim or Christian traditions is more difficult and sometimes not possible especially for women. Conflicts between immigrant parents and their children who were either born in the US or moved to the US when they were little and grew up here attending US public schools is inevitable. Yasmine, Noor, and Hiyam have talked about these pressures and the generational gaps, as noted in Chapter 4. Arab American scholars have often discussed this sentiment. Naber (2012) states:

As parents exercise their control over young adults through claims to cultural authenticity, young adults experience normative generational wars as a conflict between Arab and American culture. Many interlocutors have faced intense emotional struggle over whether they were going to live up to the demand of what

their parents' generation conceptualized as idealized "Arab culture" or as a stereotypical "American culture." (p.75)

Yasmine discussed similar sentiments when she talked about her parents and their restrictive rules and harsh expectations.

### **Cultural Generational Shift**

The struggle between strict traditional culture that Arab immigrants bring with them to the US, which is stagnant and static, and what the US offers the children as modern and dynamic is an ongoing phenomenon that Naber (2012) discusses in depth. In her analysis, Naber tries to find

Alternative to both assumptions to help Arab Studies scholars to think differently in dealing with issues of family, gender, patriarchy, religion and sexuality, without either using Orientalist approaches or responding to Orientalism by "its critique of politics, war, and racism."

Naber (2012) suggests the use of

the techniques of ethnography, in order to simply sit with the people that we seek to understand, to observe and to ask questions, to enable their own narratives-- rather than our own preconceived ideologies-- to restructure our thinking. (p. 249)

### **Balancing Arab and Arab American Cultures: The Culture of Parents and the Culture of Children**

Most immigrant ethnic groups share the same dilemma when faced with the Americanization of their children. Clearly this is far from unique to the dilemma faced by Arab families in balancing their Arab identity, culture, and language with the Americanization of their children. However, because of the specific factors that we have noted in Arab American identity, some of the ways this tension or challenge played out will be different, and that is the subject of this next section.

Erakat (2011) discusses how she balanced both American and Arab cultures as she was born to Palestinian Muslim immigrant parents.

My parents consistently tried to limit my emerging into American society. They did their utmost to shelter me in an Arab Muslim community. When I stepped out of line, they threatened to send me “back home” where I could be raised without the threat of becoming Americanized. I rebelled against my parents’ efforts but within limits: I violated my curfew to practice in student government activities; I slept outside of the home to participate in leadership camps; I missed family events to volunteer in senior centers and homeless shelter (p. 176).

Similarly, some of the participants in my study discussed how they found balance in their life between being an Arab and an American. For example, Sammy and Jamil grew up in rural areas in Massachusetts where there are very few Arab families, so the pressure to conform to traditional cultural values was not there for either. They have this balance of positive Arab values and positive American values. They both are good students, respect their parents, and do not go out of their way to bend the rules. They both are enlightened and were encouraged to explore all options available to them to the fullest of their potentials, like learning music, working part-time jobs when in high school and depending on themselves, watching out for their siblings, and not being forced to practice their parents’ religions, although both were encouraged to. They both were expected to show respect for others regardless of who they were and both grew up to be socially conscious. Neither of them have had the need to pay attention to what Arabs might say about them and how they lived their lives, yet they remained respectful to their parents’ Arab culture. Both young men expressed that they did not think much about gender issues, realizing their privilege as cismen, and being raised in mostly egalitarian households that respected women.

It is worth mentioning here that Sammy grew up in a Sunni Muslim household, and Jamil grew up in Greek Orthodox household, but both households were secular. Both Jamil and Sammy credited their positive upbringing to their parents’ education; both sets of parents have achieved graduate degrees and have successful careers. As I mentioned

before, the upbringing of these two subjects reflects how education influences culture. More educated Arab American parents are less worried about losing their culture—often welcoming the adoption of new values while keeping the ones they care most about from their own original culture. Hayani (1999) states, “It is generally accepted, for example, that the higher the level of education or the occupational status, the easier it is for the immigrant to cope with the challenges of entering a new society” (p. 288)” Sammy discussed how he was encouraged to be himself and to pursue his interests.

Growing up, I was inspired by Hip Hop music and culture. I have always tried to wear things I think other people don't have or won't be wearing. Not necessarily tried to stand out, but tried not to blend in. (Sammy)

Yasmine's parents are Lebanese and Syrian Orthodox immigrants who keep the same traditions of other traditional Lebanese or Syrian Christians. They wanted Yasmine to behave in a certain way that conformed to their traditions, to practice their religion, and marry into it. These strict expectations have resulted in her resistance to their cultural norms. Yasmine stopped going to church, dresses the way she wants, and behaves the way she wants, regardless of what her parents think. She chose a major in college that fulfills her interests, and not necessarily what her parents had hoped for, like Engineering. In this case, she appreciates the American side of her being born and raised here. Noor, on the other hand, was not born in the US but came to the US very young and attended American public schools. Her visits to relatives in Palestine have opened her eyes to what the US culture offers her that she did not find in the Arab culture, and vice versa. Most importantly, she appreciates the unconditional care, support, and help, generosity, and love by relatives that she does not see in the American culture, while critiquing the strict rules they try to impose on her.

Amal, a fourth-generation Arab American with Christian background, wanted to know more about her cultural heritage because she was introduced to the Arab culture by her grandfather who took her with him to the Sons of Lebanon Club in Boston. Her grandfather's generation followed early Arab immigrants in identifying with their country of origin or with their religion, embracing their culture, and referring to themselves by "*Wlad Arab*," as they all spoke the Arabic language regardless of their religion. When Amal came to college, she started looking more for her Arab roots and started identifying as Arab American, a term that most people who migrated from Arab countries are either familiar with or identify with. Her belonging to the culture is more nostalgic because she did not experience the Arab culture first-hand, like Noor and Rakan, nor did she live with immigrant parents, like Hiyam, Jamil, George, Sammy, or Yasmine.

George and his brother grew up in a Melkite family that originated from Lebanon. As a Christian male, he was not subjected to as strict rules as Hiyam, Ahmad, or Yasmine, for example, who were required to abide by their parents' rules. Yet, he expressed his awareness about and critique of the practiced patriarchy in his father and uncles' generation.

### **Pride in the Arab Culture**

The Arab culture and traditions are deeply rooted in history. An Arab person would know and learn about the tribe or clan to which he or she belongs and from where that originated for hundreds of years. Kinship in the Arab family is very important too. It is important to learn Arab history and the history of one's family as descendants of a specific tribe. If an Arab person finds another one who shares the same last name, regardless of where they came from or where they grew up, then they would interact like

long-lost relatives and try to find something in common. Rakan's father, for example, has lived most of his adult life in the US and tries to identify more as American than Arab. Despite all the years he lived in the US, marrying a White American woman and having a successful career as an engineer, he managed to pass to his son, Rakan, the love of his homeland in Palestine, although he himself was born in Kuwait and grew up in Jordan and never lived in Palestine. He often told Rakan to never forget who he was as a Palestinian or where he came from. Rakan was born to a White American mother in rural Massachusetts, whom he lived with most of his life until he came to college. His parents got divorced when he was five years old, and his father moved out of the house. Yet, Rakan grew up listening to his father telling him he needed to learn Arabic as part of his heritage as Palestinian and that he could not be fully Palestinian or Arab without learning Arabic.

In the Arabic traditions, children carry their father's name and religious identity, not the mother's if they are Christian or Muslim. It is an old tribal practice that Arabs kept and Islam came to enforce. Despite the parents' divorce at his young age, it was evident that Rakan was closer to his dad than to his mom, unlike his younger brother who did not learn Arabic and grew up closer to his mother than to his father. Rakan took his dad's teachings and recommendations to heart.

It kind of goes against logic that I spent more time with my mother but felt closer to my father. But, yeah... I still identify closer to my father. I guess it was- he who put a lot of focus and emphasis on religion and language and cultural identity with me. Enough so that it is kind of snowballed and then I took it on my own once I was old enough. Whereas with my brother, it never really stuck, you know he- I think he barely remembers living with my father, so for him it was normal to sort of take on after my mother. (Rakan)



Rakan learned Arabic in college and tried to keep up with the Arabic culture by visiting his relatives in Palestine or Jordan every summer and taking a summer course at a Palestinian college one summer to immerse himself in the language and culture. He made numerous Arab friends along the way. He took advanced Arabic courses, learned more about Arabic culture, got closer to Arab and Arab American students and eventually became so involved that he became the President of the Arab Students Club on his campus. Rakan now speaks fluent Arabic, knows a lot about the Arab/Muslim culture and took on a second major in Middle Eastern Studies. He still identifies as secular and does not practice Islam.

Being an Arab man, one is expected to take care of his parents when he grows up; like checking on them, supporting them if they need support and providing for them when needed. Although Rakan was still in college and was dependent on his mom and dad, he tried to call his mother every day and ask how she was doing and whether she needed anything. After a while, she told him to stop doing that. She was a career woman and did not expect him to help her with anything. His father's teachings, though, resonated with him, and he never quit checking on his mother. Even after graduating from college, he makes time to go and visit with her and with his younger brother.

While Rakan was the subject who talked about how he actively sought his Arab heritage, all the other subjects expressed their pride in their heritage.

Things that make me proud are how unique of a culture it is, especially one that doesn't seem to be presented often, at least in the sense of presenting the actual cultural traits that don't seem to be presented much in day to day mainstream US culture. (Sammy)

Amal's pride in her culture stems mostly from her nostalgia to her grandparents as a fourth generation Arab American.

I love telling them about my family's culture and traditions because you know everybody has got your own, you know, stuff. I like to be able to share with my friends and they share with me too. I think that it is really important to understand each other's identities. (Amal)

Amal commented on the cultural differences between her both sides of the family, contrasting her Arab side to her American [Irish Italian] side.

I think that the things that make me proud of the Arab American culture is my family's traditions and connection to each other. I feel more of a connection to my dad's side of the family, as they are more close net than my mom's... I really feel proud of it, absolutely. (Amal)

### **Celebrating the Arab Culture**

The Arab culture has numerous traditions that many of the subjects in my study enjoy. Arab and Arab American gatherings around holidays and social celebrations, the Arabic food, traditional dance or *dabkeh*, the generosity of Arab people, helping the needy, taking care of elders, parents and neighbors, and sacrificing for the community are some of many traditions of which the subjects felt proud. They expressed that these elements of culture make them who they are whether in part or in full. Several of them listened to Arabic music in their homes or in their parents' cars on their road trips or when they were picked up and dropped off to school. A number of them learned Arabic, and most of them understand it even if they do not know how to speak it. Most of them knew their parents' religious practices, although most of them did not practice their parents' religion or any religion at all for different reasons.

Most of my subjects described themselves as secular. Reema and Sawsan who cover their hair and practice the Islamic faith referred to themselves as Muslims and Arab Americans or Arab Americans and Muslims. They both swayed between these two identities and saw them as a completion to each other. Sawsan is on the progressive side

of religion; while Reema is more conservative but has some reservations about Islamic traditions and how they are practiced by Muslims, especially gender roles, as men usually have the upper hand and the last say.

My subjects did not share and I did not ask them whether they were practicing Muslims or practicing Christians, as my focus was on their Arab American identity regardless of their religious background or their religious practice. None of the Muslim male subjects mentioned joining Muslim Student Association (MSA) except Rakan who started going to MSA meetings in the beginning of his first year in college looking for Arab students to feel that he belongs to a group that shared his ethnicity. Rakan quickly discovered that they were not the kind of people that he wanted to hang around with. On one hand, he thought of them as too religious, and on the other, he sensed hypocrisy in some of their behaviors. He did not relate to MSA leadership, as he observed that they preached one thing and practiced the opposite of what they preached. He then joined the Arab Students Club and eventually became the president for one year, as the Arab Student Club was more inclusive of all Arab students, Arab American students, Christian and Muslims alike, who were not religious, less religious, or secular. The rest of my subjects are secular and have no religious affiliations, although they come from Christian and Muslim families.

American values that give individual freedom are most appreciated by all my subjects. On the other hand it is one of the triggers for many Arab American parents, especially immigrants. It can potentially create a divide between them and their children. It is usually the second-, third- and fourth-generations' cultures that embrace the individual freedoms. Naber (2011) described this struggle and the pressure on Arab girls:

I came to understand a set of unspoken rules: that Arab girls don't wear mascara or that going to a party with a boy will offend the memory of my grandparents. Sometimes I actually upheld them. Or, more often as time went on, I simply tried to hide these parts of my life from my parents. Because even worse than disobeying my parents was the threat—always present in my house, in our extended family, and in our community centers—that I might be betraying my people, a term that signified anyone from the Naber family to everyone in Jordan to all Arab Christians to all Arabs. (p. 2)

This is usually a source of struggle between Arab immigrant parents and their children when they start going to American schools. Some Muslims choose to homeschool their children or send them to Islamic schools in their early years, like Reema for example, so they guarantee that their children get Islamic and Arabic education before they go to American public schools and before they start learning values that may not resonate with the values of their parents. This is the generational divide between those who attend American schools at an early age and their immigrant parents who, for the most part, do not know much about the American school system and are afraid that their children be “corrupted” by the schools and by other American children. This was the case for Reema and her sisters. For example, one of the social practices in the US is that school children sleep over at each other's homes, and especially young girls. Sleepovers are forbidden or frowned upon in immigrant Arab American households, although I had heard identical stories from second-generation Latina students. Dating is another issues that an Arab girl is not allowed to do. Hiyam mentioned that in her interview as well. It is just out of the question based on her interview and what she shared with me. Arab parents in general are very strict about these traditions. Staying out late is another problem that Arab Americans, particularly immigrants reject. As I mentioned before, Naber (2012), although she grew up in the US, raised by her Arab Christian family, had some trouble navigating some of these issues as a girl and as a young woman. Hiyam would not even

dare to think about sleeping over in her friend's house because the answer from her parents, and especially from her father, was a definite no to any activity that was beyond her academic classes or what was required by the school. For the most part, the subjects enjoyed the best of both cultures and all expressed a sense of social and personal balance and responsibility.

Several female subjects complained about the strict, gendered rules they had to abide by while growing up, like Hiyam, Yasmine, and Noor, especially when Noor visited Palestine. Yet, even these subjects have clearly expressed how they were able to find balance when they got to college and how they celebrated both cultures. For example, Yasmine talked about applying to an immersion language program in Jordan so that she could become fluent in Arabic and get to understand the Arabic culture first-hand.

This is in line with the exploration of new identities that Erikson describes in his psychosocial model and what Chickering describes in showing the importance of exposure to new cultures when one leaves home and reaches college. In effect, most of the developmental models have something to contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon.

### **Arabic Language**

As I discussed in Chapter 2, passing the Arabic language to their children was very important to early Arab immigrants, both Christian and Muslims. Jewish Arab immigrants also often spoke Arabic in their homes in the beginning (Orfalea, 2006). But it was especially important for Muslims to pass the Arabic language to the children as the Qur'an was written in Arabic, and Muhammed was an Arab. Early Arab immigrants,

Christian and Muslims alike, taught their religion to their children in the church and in the mosque in Arabic language. Faced with nativism and anti-immigration laws and negative public opinions, they were not able to sustain their activities to keep up with teaching their children a different language and a different religion (Naff, 1985; Orfalea, 2006).

It was challenging for Arab immigrants to keep the language and preserve their Arab heritage and culture and even more challenging to pass it on to their children.

Mehdi (1978) stated:

Some of the early Arab immigrants were ignorant about teaching the Arabic language to their children so it was easier for the children of the First Immigration Wave to fully assimilate in the American culture. (pp. 84-85)

Other parents failed to teach Arabic to their children because, according to Khater (2001), “Many children were exposed to the narratives of ‘American modernity’ and learned to feel that their own languages, dress, and customs were stigmas in an intolerant environment” (p. 87). During the 1920s and 1930s, it was particularly difficult for immigrants to maintain the Arabic language due to the Immigration Quota Act of 1924, as the number of new immigrants who spoke Arabic became very limited. Naff (1985) discussed how parents who were very concerned about their language and heritage tried hard to keep teaching Arabic to their children, and they used mosques, churches, and private clubs for that purpose, but at the end, it was not sustainable, and both teachers and students failed to keep this going.

Passing the Arabic language to children is still important to more recent immigrants of Arab Americans, as it is part of their identity. Many of my subjects shared the importance of learning Arabic, like George whose aunts insisted on his learning the

language because they did not speak English themselves, as they moved to the US at an older age.

One of my mom's sisters would always like encouraging us to speak Arabic but the funny part is that they don't speak English that well. So I told them you are in America and you have to speak English better, and she would say we are doing this for you.

Ahmed was mocked by his grandfather because he did not speak "good Arabic." Hiyam, Reema, Noor, and Sawsan spoke Arabic at home because they all lived in Arab neighborhoods or had stay-at-home mothers, so by the time they went to school and learned English, their command of the Arabic language was already established. Sawsan, for example, learned Arabic from her mother. "My first language was Arabic. I speak Arabic at home with my Mom, some English here and there. I am still in close contact with everyone from oversees because I have a lot of family there obviously." At the time they entered kindergarten, these subjects already spoke Arabic.

Rakan, on the other hand, started learning Arabic in college because he was motivated to learn. Not only did he take Arabic courses, he also travelled to Palestine over a few summers to improve his Arabic. This is consistent with one example that Gualtieri (2009) discussed about Abdeen Jabara, who was born to Christian immigrant parents and was the first president of the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), who was ashamed as a young child when his father, a grocery shopkeeper, spoke Arabic in his store. When Jabara was in college, he started learning Arabic, and he travelled to Lebanon to learn it. Jabara's described experience with learning Arabic language is consistent with two of my subjects who were born in the US and wanted to learn Arabic and improve it. Rakan went during summer vacations to Palestine, Jordan,

and Dubai, and Yasmine was taking Arabic courses in college and applying for a scholarship to go to Jordan to take an extensive Arabic language course.

Sammy and Jamil were my only two subjects who knew the Arabic language but were not fluent in it. This was due to the fact that their parents worked full-time jobs, there were no Arab communities for them as a cultural and Arabic-speaking context, and neither of them went to Sunday school to learn the language. Amal, being a fourth-generation Arab American did not learn Arabic since neither parent knew it, and she did not identify as an Arab American until college.

**Are the Arabs and Arab Americans Really White?**  
**Do They Pass as White?**

The issue of racialization of the Arabs goes back to the First Immigration Wave 1880-1924 described in Chapter 1. This wave was primarily from Mount Lebanon who were mostly young, light skinned males and Christians. They were seeking naturalization in the US at a time of real anti-immigration fervor so that the naturalization decisions of the Supreme Court reflected striking disparities and contradictions. Haney Lopez (1995) describes the contradictions of decisions affecting Japanese Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans. Caught up in these contradictions were so-called scientific arguments about who is Caucasian and reliance on common sense arguments of who looked different. As a result, the First Wave of Arab immigrants who were Christians coming from the Holy Land had little difficulty with naturalization, but when other Arabs with dark skin and with Muslim religion presented themselves for naturalization, it was clear that they did not fit the criteria of Caucasian. In this context there is a real question for Arab American students whether they fit the white majority, whether they do not, or whether they are somewhere in between “not quite white.”



As discussed earlier, the whiteness of Arab immigrants has been debated and litigated in US courts for the purpose of naturalization from 1909 to 1942 (Bayoumi, 2015; Beydoun, 2013; Haney Lopez, 2006). Even though religion was not one of the rationales that the courts depended on, scholars point out that judges in court often noted the religion of the petitioner and used it to determine their eligibility for citizenship. (Beydoun, 2013; Bayoumi, 2015; Gualtieri, 2001; Haney Lopez, 2006).

Bayoumi (2015) considers the use of religion in naturalization cases has paved the way for the imposition of the Special Registration in 2002 that required males from to 25 countries in which 23 are Arab and Muslim countries register with the Department of Homeland Security. The Special Registration included people with dual citizenships, those who were born in one of these countries regardless of their citizenship in it, and those whose parents were the citizens of the target country, even if they themselves were not. Bayoumi (2015) refers to this as “blood relationship to Islam.... Through that blood relationship, legal barriers have been established to exclude as many Muslims as possible, and that fact consequently turns Islam into a racial category” (Bayoumi, 2015, p. 60).

The Special Registration, according to Bayomi (2015), has produced an image of Muslim men that extends to the entire population. I would also argue that this stereotypical image applies to non-Muslim Arab Americans due to the widespread conflation of the two populations. According to Bayoumi “What it produces is a kind of racial anxiety among Muslims, non-Muslims from Muslim countries, and those who are perceived to be Muslim” (p. 71).

Since the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and even after the cancellation of the Special Registration program, Muslims and Arab American have been racially profiled.

While I have conducted the interviews with my subjects before the 2016 presidential elections and the challenged Presidential executive order ban on Muslims from selected countries, almost all my subjects expressed their awareness about their vulnerability to profiling and about their provisional whiteness.

Although I did not ask my subjects about whether they identify as White, most of them knew that their classification by the US federal government is White. I asked, however, what box do they check when they fill in the federal government racial classification forms like Affirmative Action and Census. The answers fluctuated from checking “White,” to “other” and to writing-in “Arab” or “Middle Eastern.” Some said they choose “Asian” as a geographic location of Syria rather than a racial classification.

George, for example, was born in the US to a Lebanese father and a Syrian mother with a Christian background. He identifies as Arab American or Lebanese American even though his father wanted him to try to pass as White and to identify as such. His father asked him to check White on his application to Medical school. “My father always told me to say I am White. I want to go to a medical school so this will better my chances.” George was worried if his application showed him as Arab American, it might be denied out of discriminatory reasons. When I asked George what box he checks on the government forms, he said, “They consider us Caucasians, but we are not European White. We are being treated very bad, and they should recognize us like other minorities in the US.”

Yasmine was born in the US to Lebanese-Syrian Christian parents, and she is still not clear about using White or when to use it. She shares situational and sometimes conflicting choices that she makes about her whiteness. Sometimes she passes as White,

but she does not believe being an Arab American qualifies her to be White American, but whiteness sometimes is ascribed to her because she does not look dark enough to be easily recognized as Arab. Her skin color is darker in comparison to light-skinned white people, but she looks White when standing next to a black person. "I am different from these people that say they are White." She chose a different category on her common application for college that asks for her racial classification that she believed could affect her acceptance to college, and what her Financial Aid would look like.

In the common application, which I was curious about and in the drop down menu I put White and in parentheses, I put Middle Eastern, and I was like I guess that is me, different obviously but still encompassed. (Yasmine)

Hiyam was born in Palestine to two Palestinian parents with a Muslim background, who migrated to the US when she was three years old. Hiyam was clearer about her non-whiteness status when she applied for a scholarship that she was denied. She was disqualified because she put Arab American on her application assuming that she was a woman of color, but the committee in her college denied her based on her racial classification as Caucasian White. She tried to appeal their decision but was unsuccessful as they used the government classification as a base for their judgment.

So since that day I never put White or Caucasian on any of my applications. I put Arab/Middle Eastern. I feel that until I am given the full right as a Caucasian then I am a minority. (Hiyam)

Hiyam is also aware of the color of her skin and the designation of her ethnicity or race as non-White.

Because I couldn't in a class of diversity and US politics say I was White or Black. I am Brown but what does Brown mean, and how did I become Brown? So I think that junior year in my undergraduate career when I had that ah ha moment of the browning of myself and accepting that I was Brown and Brown means I am Arab American, and that was it for me. I am the Brown. (Hiyam)

Reema identifies as Muslim American or Arab American, but she is also clear about her racial classification, and she wanted to change it. “I say White because Tunisia is categorized as White. There should be a box that says Arab or Arab American.” While both Hiyam and Reema realize that the US government requires them to check White, their reaction to this requirement is quite the opposite. Hiyam refuses to comply and rejects her legal whiteness because she is aware of her racial disadvantage, whereas Reema complies even though she is not convinced about the accuracy of that classification as it applies to her.

Noor is another case where whiteness is something that she understands contingently. She gives an example in which they get “randomly checked” at the airport while traveling with her mother and her brother, who is in a wheelchair. Although their skin color is light, their last name, which is clearly Muslim, gives them away for extra scrutiny.

We kept getting pulled aside because of my brother, a 23-year old man with a Muslim name, and they get a kid in a wheelchair and they’re like, oh, oops. My mom’s name is Selma, so it is not like too Arab, but our last name will give us away. (Noor)

When Noor fills the official forms, she puts “other.” In other situations, as when she was a Resident Assistant in college on a floor of first-year students, it helped her to pass as a White person and to overcome some difficulties, “I work as a Resident Assistant. Being an RA and having white skin probably helps as students did not make a connection between me being Arab American and my light skin.”

Amal, a fourth-generation Arab American with Christian background was confused about her whiteness and what box to check when she was younger.

Now I started putting other or if they have mixed ethnicity or mixed race I usually do that. When I was younger I would be like, Mom what do I put? Because I know I am not White, you know, I don't look Irish or whatever, and she said well, you are Caucasian, and I am like well, I guess, not really. So, I mean, I wish there were more options and usually I just put other. (Amal)

Sawsan is an Arab American woman who covers her hair as a practicing Muslim who has very light skin and could easily pass as White. Many Muslims, being mostly brown, make assumptions about her. "Muslims that I meet think of me as not an Arab. They think of me as a White American who converted to Islam." That assumption allows her to pass sometimes. When Sawsan fills out forms, she puts Caucasian, but at other times she writes in Arab.

Rakan used to get bothered by the color of his light skin. He said that it does not bother him anymore, though he does not identify as White at all.

I used to say, well I feel like Arab. Why don't I look Arab? It used to be very irritating to me. I would get so furious once somebody would say you look White or you look American or you look this or that, and I wouldn't say anything, but I would be so pissed off. Now I just, I guess with maturity, it just doesn't bother me. I look White. Ok, I don't really care. Even my family in Jordan would say, "Oh, you have the light skin. We wish we have light skin like you" because it is a novelty there. It is like being tanned here. (Rakan)

When I asked Rakan about what box he checks in the US census or federal forms, he was much more critical than the other subjects that I interviewed.

They can't just leave entire ethnicities off of a census. Let's group them with Persians and Arians, and let's just call them all Caucasians and Europeans. It is very, very different to have somebody from Saudi Arabia be described as the same person as White, Protestant, and Irishman. It is ridiculous. (Rakan)

Sammy has two Palestinian parents with a Muslim background, and he sees whiteness in with a different lens and questions what does being American mean. "So, immediately by look, I don't identify as just American. That is the prototypical White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) person, is what you think of when you say American."

Jamil was born to a Palestinian father and a half Jordanian, half Palestinian mother with Eastern Orthodox background. When I asked him what box he checks in federal forms, he said, “Sometimes there is Middle Eastern, and I check that. When it is White or something else, I put either White or Arab, or Arab American.”

It was very clear that even the subjects who check the White box, do not see themselves as White. They understand the complexities of their racialized status as Arab Americans. Some comply without any criticism or challenge; others are critical of this classification.

### Gender

Arab culture has strict behavioral criteria for both women and men, but it is much more restrictive to women, especially young women. These cultural constraints are reinforced by religions, both Christianity and Islam, and are much more restrictive to women’s behavior. As I mentioned in the literature review and discussed in the section on Arab patriarchy, culture and religion collude to restrict the behavior of young Arab women and men so that parents’ fear of their children’s becoming “Americanized” presents serious intergenerational challenges (Elkhouly, 1969; Ghazal Read, 2004; Marshal & Ghazal Read, 2003; Naber, 2012).

A number of Arab American scholars have written about their own upbringing by immigrant parents who were very restrictive and who worried that having what they considered “Americanized” children meant the loss of their culture, religion, and identity (Erakat, 2011; Naber, 2011). They also discuss how they simultaneously rebelled against the strictness of their parents or simply hid certain sides of themselves, while battling being systematically stereotyped by the host culture. Erakat (2011) discusses how her

exercise of her own agency was dismissed “as an anomaly rather than a common characteristic of Arab women” (p. 177). At the same time, Naber (2011) argues that the “dominant middle-class Arab American discourse is shaped by the liberal logic of U.S. multiculturalism” (p. 85). Muaddi Darraj (2011) contends that the diversity found among Arab American women is similar to the diversity found in the various ethnic American communities in the US.

What my subjects shared with me during their interviews and the focus groups was congruent with what Arab American scholars have discussed about cultural generational shift. I myself tried to understand what they say regardless of my own cultural, ethnic bias. I asked my questions so that their answers would help me and others who research the Arab American identity to understand how Arab Americans, mainly students or young adults, manage their identities like being Arab American.

Hiyam for example, started to break away from some of the traditions that she learned at home that in many cases were imposed on her and her older siblings. She started questioning some of the traditions only after she started graduate school in another state. Her graduate school was located in Massachusetts and far away from her parents and the Arab community surrounding them in Cleveland, Ohio. The influence of her parents continued to affect her and her siblings, but she felt empowered and liberated to be able to challenge some of her parents’ unchanged traditions every time she went home for a visit. She felt encouraged upon meeting other Arab and Muslim female students and some Arab families who happened to come from the same or similar backgrounds as her parents. The people she met while in graduate school did not behave like her parents and have let go of some of the old traditions that they brought with them to the US, not

because the US offered better traditions, but because the old traditions were not practical anymore for them. Every time she went home, she would share with her family how these students and the families that she had met were living their lives and how there was nothing wrong with leaving some traditions behind that seemed to be important only to her parents and the community where they lived.

I learned and discussed and got engaged here and I go home and challenge my family and siblings, like mailman versus mailwoman with my nephew. So in my community in Ohio, my family included, they saw the mail person as a mailman although it was a woman who was doing the mail. So I think that in any immigrant community they don't want to see what is beyond because they are afraid of what is beyond. (Hiyam)

When Arab/Arab American people live in one community, they often watch each other throughout the neighborhood or when attending social events or religious services. The reputation of the family is so crucial for survival in the Arab/Arab American community and women in particular are supposed to protect the honor of the Arab family, Christian and Muslim alike, to varying degrees. Culture is the reason used to control the kids of immigrants. Naber (2011), an Arab American scholar of Christian background, remembers her own growing up in San Francisco. "Culture was the way my parents exercised their control over me and my siblings. The same fight, I knew from my aggrieved conversations with friends and relatives, was playing out in the homes of countless other Arab families" (p. 79).

The fear that Hiyam's parents displayed when dealing with their daughters growing up in the US was similar to the fear that early Arab immigrants to the US had, although almost all of them, about 90% were Christians. Their Arabness, though, did not leave them, and they continued to treat their children the same way they were treated by their own parents and by the community back in Greater Syria (Naff, 1985). Hiyam



challenged the status quo that she was raised in and succeeded in many areas in which she felt that some traditions could be changed and that breaking away from them can be developmental in order to move forward while maintaining her Arab identity intact.

I made a full circle moving with my husband and quitting my job twice, and then I have to stand up for myself and change from the Arab woman that my mother raised to who I am as an independent woman with higher education degrees and a job that I like. (Hiyam)

Noor had similar experiences when she went to Palestine with her mother and brother to visit relatives. Her brother was free to do anything that he wanted because he was a boy, but her every move was controlled by her extended family members. Her natural behavior was considered inappropriate, and she was instructed on proper behavior by every adult relative in that community. She often was told what she could and could not do.

When Noor visited Ramallah, a town near the village she was visiting, she saw a considerable difference between how women behaved over there and how they had much more freedom than in the village where she was visiting. Elkhoully (1969) studied Arab families and their children and concluded that gender was the most important element for the young adults, especially young women, and religion was the most important element for the parents to hold onto their restricting traditional religious teachings. Therefore, religion was a means of controlling the behavior of their children, especially their young women.

Ajrouch (1999) studied Arab American families and their children in Dearborn, Michigan. She found that there is a relationship between gender and religion when the children and their parents answered the question of what it meant to be Arab American. Gender was the most important factor that made the difference between being an Arab

and being an American according to the adolescents she interviewed and mainly the female behavior. Parents held to religion to justify their treatment of their children and how they were supposed to behave and how they were supposed to listen to their parents and to respect them. She found that there was a significant cultural clash between children and their families. Al-Khatatbeh (2016) grew up to practicing Muslim parents, and as an adult has fully embraced her Muslim identity. Yet, as a middle-school girl, she did not like having to abide by strict dress codes imposed by her father, “I resented not being able to wear shorts” (p. 11).

When I asked the male subjects about gender and the treatment of Arab or American women, some were not able to relate to what women subjects complained about, even though they were aware of and acknowledged the differential treatment of women. Ahmed and Rakan, for instance, looked at gender from their own perspectives as stereotyped Arab American men first. I would not say they or other males in the study were oblivious to the plight of Arab/Arab American women, but because they are stereotyped by the American media and the public, they became more sensitive to their own gender as Arab Muslim males who have been targeted by the authorities for extra screening in airports, and they felt that their own gender as males was equally important to them to discuss when talking about gender. Both Ahmed and Rakan discussed how they, as Arab American males, receive differential treatment in the US that is based on racial profiling because of their ethnicity and religion. Ahmed and Rakan believe they get mistreated by the media and their government and are stereotyped by the popular culture. They both discussed how they are often portrayed as abusers to women, controlling and womanizers.

I see sometimes that I am stereotyped as an Arab man. They made assumptions about my wife and myself, and they were all lies. Sometimes I feel that I have to watch what I say about gender issues so people won't make their own interpretations. (Ahmed)

At the same time, they are on the receiving end of the terrifying possibility of being racially profiled in their travels domestically and internationally. Rakan described his travels domestically and overseas as negative.

I have been profiled by the Israelis, by the Americans, [and] by everybody. In Germany<sup>31</sup>, they profiled me and did random searches. I guess when you put these things together and you say, "Young, Palestinian, Arab Muslim male," then the gender plays a role because supposedly if you want to assign gender roles, women are less threatening. (Rakan)

Seeing first-hand how women were controlled in the village of Noor's mother in Palestine, she seems to have internalized that to be an Arab girl or woman, one has to conform to the village conservative rules. Being free of these norms in the US, Noor did not see herself as an Arab woman who is making her own reality; rather, she saw that she deviates from being "totally Arab" and moved to being "totally American" regarding gender norms in the traditional Arab culture.

Table 4. Gender demographics

<b>Females</b>	Amal	Hiyam	Noor	Reema	Sawsan	Yasmine
<b>Males</b>	Ahmed	George	Jamil	Rakan	Sammy	

Noor enjoys her freedom in the US since she does not have to conform to any of the rules that apply to the women she met back home in Palestine. Noor lives in a rural, liberal area in Massachusetts where there is no sizable Arab population except for a few. She said that she has met some who remind her with the traditional Arab cultural norms

<sup>31</sup> Rakan refers to Germany as his mother is a German American, so he goes to visit his mother's family in Germany and that is why he mentions Germany in particular here.

that they bring with them from the country of origin and keep and hold dear to their heart, afraid they would lose their children to mainstream America.

During her visit to Palestine, Noor was shocked about her treatment that was based just on being a young woman. This caused her to embrace her American identity until she went to college and started seeing herself as both Arab and American. Hiyam, on the other hand, and because she lived in a community of Arab Americans in Cleveland, had to conform to the same Arab traditions to which her mother and grandmother conformed. As many recent immigrants to the US do, the rationale of Hiyam's parents was that they needed to maintain the traditions of the motherland, even after their move to the US. She remembers when her father walked her to college with his gun on his waist regardless of whether he carried it because he needed it or to show that no one could mess with his daughter. At the same time, Hiyam believed he was sending a message to her, as she was the first from her family to enter college. College in the US means freedom for young people; therefore, she was silently told that she should not think that she could leave her Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim traditions at home. Her father drove her to college and back every single day. He knew her schedule of classes, and dropped her off and picked her up right before the first class started and right after the last class ended. To be allowed to attend college, Hiyam had no choice but to accept the rides to and from school by her father. As a protective culture, many Arab American parents expect their children to go to a local college and to live at home while in college. This means that they do not get the full college experience of living on campus, attending evening activities and events, participating in organizations and clubs, making their own decisions, and learning from their mistakes. They miss out on many social, educational,

and emotional developmental opportunities when they do not live in the residence halls (Blimling, 2015).

Hiyam's mother and grandmother were no less controlling of Hiyam and her sisters than her father was. This is consistent with the literature that discusses Arab American women. "Foreign-born women are more gender traditional than native-born women" (Ghazal Read, 2004, p. 101). Hiyam was expected to wear decent clothes according to her family's standards: no tank tops, no open dresses or shorts. Hiyam joked about how even when the weather was very hot in the summer, she would not dare to wear her shorts to school or even at home in front of her father. Dating was completely out of the question for Hiyam who would not dare to challenge that as a teenager. Dating or dressing like American girls would have meant to her family that she was becoming Americanized and was no longer an Arab, a Palestinian, or a Muslim. These expectations did not apply to Hiyam's brother. For example, he would wear his shorts and date girls while Hiyam and her sisters could not.

Muslim girls who do observe the traditional prohibitions against dating are becoming more articulate about how frustrated they are that their families often hold a double standard for boys and girls, with more leeway granted to their brothers. (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006, p. 87)

### **Arab Patriarchy and Gender**

Joseph (1996) defines the Arab patriarchy as "the prioritizing of the rights of males and elders (including elder women) and the justification of those rights within kinship values which are usually supported by religion" (p. 14). Patriarchy is deeply rooted in the Arab culture and is persistent. It impacts how the family and the society function. Joseph stresses that her definition of the Arab patriarchy is different from the Western feminist definitions, where those do not include the power of elder women or

kinship. In her discussion on Arab American culture, Naber (2012) states, “Within the dominant middle-class Arab immigrant discourse that circulated in my interlocutors’ homes and community networks, gender and sexuality were among the most powerful symbols consolidating an imagined difference between ‘Arabs’ and ‘American’” (p. 7). Marshal and Gazal Read (2003) also state, “All major religions [including Islam] endorse patriarchy” (p. 877).

Hiyam grew up in Cleveland, Ohio where there is a large Arab American community. Her father was the patriarch of the family. She described him as authoritarian, who takes charge of all members of the family, a typical Arab patriarchal man: a father and husband who provides for his family. Hiyam described him as an overprotective of her, especially when going to school or to college.

I did not have undergraduate friends. It was very limited, and I was sheltered. My father picked me up and dropped me off and walked me through to the university center where everybody stood. He would call my phone, and if I did not respond in 2 seconds, then he would ask me many questions: Where are you? Who are you sitting with? Why don’t you answer the phone? It is comical now, but it was horrific, like nobody wanted to talk to me, because I was with a father that walks with a gun strapped to his waist. They didn’t know that he worked in a very dangerous part of Cleveland, and they didn’t know that he had the gun because he was either going to work or coming from work when he picks me up or drops me off. They didn’t care, so I didn’t really have many friends, and the only friends that I had were Arabs who came here for education, and they left. (Hiyam)

Joseph’s definition is consistent with what Hiyam and other subjects shared with me during the interviews and the focus groups. Reema, for instance, was sent to an Islamic school until she finished the eighth grade. She said that the reason was for her to get immersed in the Islamic traditions and learn the Qur’an and learn Arabic. That type of schooling has yielded her parents’ intended results to raise her as a traditional Muslim woman. Although Reema holds a lot of traditional religious views, she rejects Arab

patriarchy and debates whether Arab patriarchy is a religious or cultural phenomenon. She, however, discussed that in reference to the Arab World, not to Arab American communities.

One thing that I don't like, I guess, is like the idea that the woman should stay at home, like cooking and stuff like that. She shouldn't do like that is her job, that, like an Arab mentality, which I don't like over in the Arab countries. I feel like it is still a problem. (Reema)

George also does not like Arab patriarchy when he notices that his father and other men in the family sit together in the living room talking about politics, ignoring the women if they attempt to enter the discussion.

Sometimes my mom would try to get in the conversation and say something. She gets excited and tries to say something and them [the men] sitting in the back would say like well, like they'll say something very softly, and their words are taken with much more weight than the women's words. (George)

Jamil mentioned a similar example when he talked about his mother being the one with the responsibility of cooking for the family. "My mom does all the cooking in the house, and maybe she is too good at it, and my Dad is not, but also it is the fact that she is the wife, and she is expected to do the cooking." Although both parents work outside the house full-time, still Jamil's mother is the one who is expected to do all the cooking. Jamil did not mention whether his dad participates in other housework chores.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, Noor, had her share of patriarchy when she visited her extended family in Palestine. She was basically not able to do anything without a male's permission—a brother, an uncle, a grandfather or even a male cousin. Men in her family interfered in her behavior, in what to say or what not to say, whom to talk to, or how to behave in public or the presence of visitors. A lot was forbidden.

These findings are consistent with available literature about Arab American youth. Naber (2011) interviewed young Arab American adults whose parents immigrated to the US between the 1950s and 1970s.

Despite a broad diversity in family origins and religious sectarian values, and despite access to socioeconomic class privileges, nearly all of these young adults told the same story: the psychological pressure to maintain the ideals of Arab and American culture felt overwhelming and irresolvable. (p. 82)

Arab culture often gets entangled with Christianity for Christians and with Islam for Muslims<sup>32</sup> about social issues, like behaviors and relationships. It is most obvious around women's rights and the role of women in the society. For example, in the traditional Arab culture, a woman in her parents' house and before marriage is named after her father, like "the daughter of so and so." After marriage, she becomes "the wife of so and so," and once she has her first child, especially if it is a boy, then she is automatically named after her son and becomes "the mother of so and so." With some exceptions, the name of the Arab female is kind of a taboo and should not be said in public. Religion has a say in that. For example, in traditional Islam, a woman and a man should not be together in a closed space unless they are family members, like a daughter and a father or a sister and brother. Also, in some Islamic traditions, a woman should not appear with a non-relative male alone or by herself. In many common interpretations of Islam, men should not hear a woman's voice, especially if she is laughing and having fun, and this is where Noor was criticized when she went to visit her family in Palestine. When Yasmine was told to sit in a certain way and dress in a certain way, especially when men were around, is a similar experience to Muslim Arab women, although she is Christian. This is where the Arab culture is more dominant than both Christianity and Islam. It is worth mentioning that

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<sup>32</sup> When I say Christianity or Islam here, I mostly mean what is interpreted by Christians and Muslims, which is often biased, favoring males over females, as the interpretations have mostly been done by men.



many Arab Christians are culturally affected by the Arab Muslim culture as it surrounds them throughout the Arab world in which Muslims are the overwhelming majority in almost all Arab countries except Lebanon where it seems that Christian and Muslims are at 50/50 of the total population.

These situations are totally rejected by Hiyam, Noor, Yasmine, and Amal as well and by all the men in the group, Christians and Muslims. The only subject, who is more tolerant to these rules while expressing confusion about the role of women in society, is Reema. On one hand, she wants her freedom through going to school, socializing with men and having equal rights, while following the teachings of her Islamic school and parents at home. At the same time, she does not want to appear like she is second to the man. "Men in general are treated better than women in the Arab society."

The combination of religion and culture is often used together to control women's behaviors and relationships and to discredit their abilities to make decisions on their own, and to impose male guardianship. One of my subjects, Sawsan, commented on this combination during her interview and how religion is used culturally to justify the mistreatment of women.

It is just not good in any of these cultures. Women are put at a disadvantage just blatantly in both cultures, and when you are part of one culture you see the flaws in how women are treated in the other culture . . . It is a huge issue in the West, and also it is a huge issue in the Arab countries. Also religion comes in the midst of it, and the misuse of it to enforce that on women is a whole other issue in the Arab society that just ruins everything for everybody. Religion ruins it, the reputation of the Arab countries and the Muslim women. People who are advantaged when women are disadvantaged, usually men are the ones who feel threatened by women's success . . . I mean I personally have been privileged to not have to deal with it. It is very much direct prejudice toward women, but there is no way you can escape it at all, and here in America there is no way you can escape it . . . There is definitely a huge issue, and it is really engrained in the society and how people work, and so it will be very hard to change. That being

said, I think there are current movements to pull women in, here and in the Middle East. There is progress in this area, I guess. (Sawsan)

For example, when Islam was revealed to Prophet Mohammed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, women were given the right to inheritance, although a woman is given half of a man's share. The rules of inheritance are completely detailed in the Qur'an. The proportions given to females and males, children or adults and how much each will inherit are extremely simplified in the Qur'an so that the average person who understands Arabic would understand her/his share<sup>33</sup>. Yet, it is so common in many Arab communities that women do not dare to ask for their share of inheritance. Here is where the culture wins over religion, even though religion stands on the side of women (for the most part) in this case. The culture shames women who ask for their share of inheritance and expects them to surrender what is their Godly-given right to their men, be it their brothers, sons, or uncles. On the other hand, it is an old, pre-Islamic tribal practice, especially when women are married outside of their own tribe or Klan that they should not take any of the tribe's wealth to the other tribe where they are married. This is where the culture and proclaimed religious men collude against women. In theory, Muslim Arab women have the right to go to a Muslim judge and file against their brothers and ask for their portion of inheritance. But in reality, women do not dare to do so. The least is that they would be culturally shamed and socially chastised by others. All of my subjects, Muslim and Christian, are in opposition to these old religious rules and they all believe that inheritance should be equally distributed among children, regardless of their gender. Although this was not one of my questions to the subjects, it came up as they were discussing the rights of women in the Arab culture versus their rights in Islam. Divorce is

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<sup>33</sup> The Qur'an is written in Arabic. I mean that anyone who is versed in reading and writing in Arabic would be able to understand the inheritance laws in Islam.

another area where there are clear contradictions between the Qur'anic text and what Muslims practice.

The recent history of the civil war in Lebanon between Muslims and Christians from 1975 to 1990 left a lot of antagonism and animosity based on religious divide. Beirut was divided in two—East Beirut with Christian majority and West Beirut with Muslim majority. There were many armed militias fighting each other on both sides of Beirut and in other parts of Lebanon. Two main groups led the fighting for 15 years—the national movement representing what was known as the nationalists; leftists, mainly Muslims and Druz, and the Lebanese front representing mainly Christian factions. The civil war was devastating to hundreds of thousands of Lebanese and Palestinians (Friedman, 1989; GlobalSecurity.org, 2017).

George is a Melkite Christian from Lebanon, and his parents do not identify as Arabs. They identify as Lebanese or Christians, depending on the situation and the context. Amal's grandfather did not identify as Arab either, rather as Lebanese or Lebanese Christian; so do Yasmine's parents, who not only do not identify as Arabs, they do not want her to identify as Arab, either. All male subjects in my study, whether of Muslim or Christian backgrounds, identify as Arab Americans. All women subjects identify as secular too except for two. Sawsan identifies both as Arab and Muslim American, but sometimes she uses other variations. The second is Reema who identifies as Muslim American first, and Arab American second; even though she tried to say she uses them interchangeably sometimes.

## **Arab Muslim Women and the Hijab**

The discussion here is an elaboration of my earlier discussion of the parental religious ideological and political factors. Although religion was not the focus of my research, in my interviews with at least Reema and Sawsan, the subject of hijab came up a few times during the interviews, as both women cover their hair. Hijab, khimar, scarf, or head cover are all descriptive words for the variety of head covers for Muslim women, especially traditional Arab Muslim women who directly or indirectly are expected by their men, to cover their hair and, in some extreme circumstances, cover their face, hands, eyes, and the whole body as it is the case in Saudi Arabia, for instance. Women there are required by law to cover from head to toe. In some areas, women have to have a thick cover over their faces. This requirement comes from male interpretations of what God said in the Qur'an or what the Prophet Muhammed practiced. This is enforced to ensure that men would not be able to see anything of the woman's body or even the shape of her body, not only her hair. Within Islam, this is still a debated issue—how much a woman should cover of her hair (if any) and what does decency mean.

Historically speaking, the entire body of both women and men needed to be protected from the elements of the desert, like the hot sun and the blowing sandy winds of the Arab Peninsula. In the old Arab pre-Islamic culture, mainly in what is Saudi Arabia now, where Islam started, women in general were treated very poorly by a male-dominated culture. Socioeconomic status of women played a role in how they were treated. Those who came from famous and rich families had better status than those who were not wealthy nor came from famous families. The first wife of the Prophet Mohammed, Khadija, for example, was a businesswoman herself and employed men to

work for her business. She hired Mohammed himself before he became a Prophet and was the one to propose to marry him.

Women in pre-Islamic Arabia were not completely without power and authority. These women are known in many cases to have been proud and strong-willed participants in battle as well as holders of significant religious status as seers and soothsayers, judge-arbiters, and (although rarely) even prophetesses. (Smith, 1985, p. 20)

Those women covered their hair before Islam and they continued to cover after Islam. So the question of hijab, whether it is an Islamic practice or just a cultural tradition is still being debated. Whether it is an oppressive symbol as Nomani (2005) calls it or as a symbol of liberation and a political statement, as Sawsan sees it, hijab and head cover for Muslim women is still being debated. Despite the fact that women of different cultural and religious backgrounds other than Muslims have covered their hair throughout history, no head covering has been debated as much as the hijab for Muslim women. Al-Khatatbeh (2016) states:

Throughout time, the headscarf has evolved to symbolize autonomy and control over Muslim women's bodies. An empowering rejection of the male gaze, colonialism, and anti-Muslim sentiment, it can just as easily be twisted into a disempowering tool of subjugation and repression through its forced imposition. In any given time period, the headscarf would be at the center of a tug-of-war between people and their government, between colonizers and colonized people. (p. 41)

Although Reema and Sawsan are Muslim Sunni female subjects and cover their hair, cultural, religious, and political differences were evident between them. Sawsan grew up in a practicing Muslim household but attended public schools in the US with no expectations by her parents about wearing hijab or covering her hair. In contrast, Reema went to a Muslim elementary and middle school and was expected by her parents to cover her hair, starting around the eighth grade. Reema insisted that covering her hair was

a mutual decision with her parents, and she was in favor of doing that. She conveyed in no ambiguous tone that her parents did not force her to wear the hijab. Reema and her two other sisters were sent to the Islamic school until the eighth grade, then moved to public schools. Now, the three of them cover their hair since their early teenage years along with their mother. Reema's identity is a mixture of both Arabness and Islamic traditions. She is a practicing Muslim, but she seems to have gotten less strict in applying Islamic rules since she started college and got to know and socialize with other Arab and Arab American students who are less religious than she is or were mainly seculars.

In college, Reema shared a room in the residence hall with her older sister who was one year ahead of her in college. When the older sister graduated, her younger sister started college and Reema and her younger sister roomed together also until Reema's graduation. Although Reema lived away from home, she continued to live with her sisters on campus. Practically, she lived in the same or similar environment to the one she grew up in, missing out on experiencing living with other college students. She has lived in the same room and in the same residence hall for all her four years in college in an all-women hall.

Sawsan, in contrast to Reema, decided to cover her hair when she finished high school, and right before she started college, thinking that this was a good time to do so. Neither student population from high school or college would witness the change in her appearance as it happened. She was born to Palestinian parents in Kuwait who migrated to the US when she was two years old. She said that it was her decision to cover her hair as a Muslim woman who was fully capable of making her own choices in life. According to Sawsan, her parents tried hard to convince her not to commit to head covering because

she would have to deal with it for the rest of her life, usually, but she went ahead and did it. Her mother covers her hair too, but Sawsan was sure to point out that this was not why she chose to wear the hijab. She said she wanted to send a political message. “It is part of my freedom to put the hijab on or to take it off.” Her message is directed to the Muslim and Arab community and also to non-Muslims, defying stereotypes of Muslim women who cover their hair. Cainkar (2009) reports that in the last 20 years there has been a great increase in the number of Muslim American women who choose to cover their hair for similar reasons that Sawsan has—in defiance of the stereotypical images of Muslim women.

Hate crimes and violence against Arabs and Muslims took a sharp turn in the aftermath of September 11. The US has been “struggling since then to accept them as a community with a distinct religion” (Elassar, 2010, p. 9). Muslim women who cover their hair, in particular, have been targeted violently by individuals. Although there are many interpretations for why or why not Muslim women should cover, must cover, or whether covering the hair is optional or not, Islamophobia in the US and in Europe has been on the rise in the last few years (Ali, 2016; Walther, 2015). Hate crimes against Muslims have been on the rise lately according to the FBI 2015 Hate Crimes Statistics (Uniform Crime Reporting, 2015)

Sawsan said that covering her hair did not mean she was backward or controlled by her parents or by the social and political norms around her. Rather, she wanted to defy what is portrayed by the US media about Arab Muslim women—that they are incapable of making decisions concerning their well-being or defying patriarchy and some religious interpretations of Islam. Her reasons for covering were not only political but illustrated

the political engagement of some Arab Americans while in college. Sawsan admitted that not all Muslim women know that covering is optional, nor are they free to not cover in traditional patriarchal Arab Muslim society. As an educated woman with more open-minded parents, she wanted to show that she could do that, hoping to facilitate dialogues with other people who see a woman with her hijab. Her covering was an invitation for people to ask questions about her experience and what it means to be a Muslim woman who covers her hair. Sawsan believes that she is an Arab American, and she is a Muslim American too. Sometimes, it feels to her that it is one identity and not two, “I won’t pick one identity over the other, meaning Arab and Muslim. I am an Arab American woman and I am a Muslim American. As a whole I feel like they intertwine a lot.” (Sawsan).

### **Political Islam and the Hijab**

The rise of the recent political Islam by the Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and then their expansion to all Arab countries requires Muslim women to cover their hair and preferably all their body from head to toe. This movement got more traction after the 1967 Israeli defeat of Arab countries during what is known as the Six-Day War and peaked after the Iranian revolution in 1979. Decades earlier, in 1919, Arab Muslim women in Egypt took to the streets and took off their head covers, demanding that this should not be imposed on them because it was neither Islamic nor cultural. Egyptian women influenced elite and urban Muslim Arab women to do the same in other Arab countries. The unpopular Muslim Brotherhood was neither able to impose hijab nor convince Arab Muslim women to cover their hair despite their push for it. Most Arab regimes were either under colonialism or were semi-free from colonialism and mostly nationalistic, which resented the Muslim Brotherhood as a



backward movement, especially in Egypt. Muslim Brothers demanded the Egyptian government in 1960s to mandate for women to cover their hair. Their leader met with President Nasser who refused that demand. He stated that it was not the job of the government to mandate, but rather it is a personal choice that women make (Haddad, 2011).

Although the Muslim Brothers are a Sunni group and the Iranian regime is Shi'a, and although both groups have many ideological differences and they interpret Islam differently in many areas, both put so much pressure on women to cover their hair. Among all Muslim countries, there are two countries that force women by law to cover their head, Iran and Saudi Arabia. A woman who shows her hair is subject to punishment by the religious police in both countries, whether by paying a fine, going to jail, or both. What is more demeaning to these women is that their male guardian (father or husband), too, is held responsible and is subject to punishment by law as well "Every Saudi woman, regardless of her age, is under the authority of a male relative, her *wali al-amr*, or legal guardian. A woman's legal guardian has the authority to make a range of critical decisions on her behalf." (Human Rights Watch Report, 2016, p. 15)

Sawsan's parents did not want her to cover her hair, as this might become a burden on her in college and in life thereafter, especially after the September 11<sup>th</sup> era and the anti-Arab/anti-Islam sentiments in the US and the backlash against Arabs and Muslims. Sawsan's parents worried that she would be picked on or get singled out due to her cover, as it is a visible sign that leads hate groups or anti-Muslim and anti-Arab individuals to give her a hard time. As it has been the case, and especially after September 11<sup>th</sup>, whenever there is any political heat, women who cover their hair become

the first target for hate and prejudice (Cainkar, 2009). Sawsan was convinced that this was the right thing to do and went on with her decision. She said that she has not regretted her decision. She said that in the end, both of her parents were very supportive of her decision.

Both my parents were really supportive, and like were happy about it. I think my dad wanted me to think more about it just because, like, as a woman and in America, it is already hard enough to have the same opportunities and stuff. So they definitely support my decision and they are happy. It is my choice to take off the hijab if I choose to do so. It is part of the freedom to put the hijab on or to take it off. Relatively speaking, I have liberal parents in this sense that they don't force me to wear the hijab, and they wouldn't force me to keep it on if I choose to do so. (Sawsan)

One of Sawsan's motives was that she wanted people to see that being an Arab and a practicing Muslim, covering her hair was not a hindrance in any way to her advancement. She believes that in doing so, she stands out as evidence of freedom of choice. Sawsan is fully aware that Arab and Muslim women are stereotyped as weak, controlled, and cannot make decisions for themselves. She understands that male figures—fathers, brothers, sons or husbands, even uncles and cousins—make decisions for a lot of Arab Muslim women, including whether to cover their hair, whether to attend college, who to marry, how to behave in public, and what to do and when, as was discussed about Noor's visit to Palestine.

Sawsan's case is a bit different, as it is the case for the many women who choose the hijab for political reasons (Cainkar, 2009). On one hand, her parents did not object to her covering her hair and wearing hijab. On the other, she ended up paying a price for her decision with two different groups—the first one was her Arab and Muslim colleagues who insisted that she was forced to cover her hair by her parents and would not see beyond that. The other group was her secular friends, American and Arab Americans

who stopped inviting her to their parties because she did not drink alcohol, for example. Drinking alcohol and covering one's hair do not go together, as she says. Sawsan was always willing to socialize with her friends and have a good time being around them and going to non-alcoholic parties, but her friends stereotyped and boxed her in as a practicing Muslim who got excluded from any gathering whether it included alcohol or not. This is not the only Arab or Muslim college woman who shared similar experiences with me in college. At least two other women college students shared the exact example of exclusion from social circles because they did not drink alcohol, and they did not go to bars where alcohol was served. They did not cover their hair, but they did not drink alcohol either. One of them was Syrian and the other was Iranian, and they both were secular, but they did not want to go to bars. They, too, got boxed in as practicing Muslims, therefore, stopped getting invited by others.

### **Religion**

Although I asked for subjects who self-identify as Arab American to participate in my interviews, religion came up as a major factor in the Arab and Arab American culture including Islam and Christianity. Four subjects have Christian backgrounds and seven subjects have Muslim backgrounds. The Christian subjects are two females and two males. There are four females and three males with Muslim backgrounds.

Religion is an important factor in the Arab American identity formation and has a lot to do with how people of Arab origin identify in the US. Although the majority of Arab Americans are still mostly Christian, more Muslims have been migrating to the US in the last 30 years. This increase has been especially observed after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the displacement of a few million Iraqis, Syrians, Libyans, and

Yemenis. Over the years, mostly Arabs from Muslim backgrounds sought to migrate to the US and Europe looking for freedom, security, and better economic opportunities but most importantly, escaping the wars in their countries (Haddad, 2011). The current Syrian civil war is no exception.

Table 5. Religious backgrounds

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Names</b>					
Roman Catholic	Amal	Yasmine				
Greek Orthodox	Jamil					
Melkite	George					
Muslim Shi'a	Ahmed					
Muslim Sunni	Hiyam	Noor	Rakan	Reema	Sammy	Sawsan

Religion is part of the Arab American demographics in the US. As I mentioned before, Christians from Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine started immigrating to the US in the late 1800s earlier than Muslims. As time went on, Muslims, cautiously, started to follow Christians from the same areas to the US. Muslims were reluctant to migrate to the US for fear of losing their religion, hence the establishment of mosques around the US. Naff (1999) credits mosques and churches for playing an essential role in preserving the culture. She states that the establishment of these religious institutions was often successful due to women's efforts in fundraising for that purpose, even when the men did not get involved.

The two major sects in Islam are Sunni, which is the overwhelming majority, and Shi'a with a smaller number of followers, mainly in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria.

Christianity and Islam are two major components for the Arab culture and play important roles in what makes an Arab. It is hard to separate being Arab from being a Muslim or an Eastern Christian. The Arab culture is a mixture of religions and traditions. Often, they are tangled up and confusing as to what is religion and what is culture, especially around women's rights. Al Hibri (2005) who has written extensively on Islam and Muslim women's rights believes "that problematic jurisprudence was often the result of a misunderstanding or misapplication of the Qur'anic text resulting from cultural distortions or patriarchal bias." (p. 160). This assertion was confirmed by the Muslim Arab American subjects that Naber (2012) interviewed:

In their estimation, patriarchy is a product of Arab culture, more than of the religion of Islam. They reconfigure the idea of being "culturally Muslim" or "Arab Muslim" into the idea of being Muslim First, Arab Second. (p. 121)

The same identification was evident in Reema's interview. Hiyam identifies as a mostly secular Muslim woman who is keeping the faith of her parents. She believes in equal opportunities for both women and men, regardless. She believes that it is time for some modernization of Islam. Noor is more secular than Hiyam, yet she believes that Islam is a much better religion than what is portrayed in the mainstream American media. Both Hiyam and Noor believe that if women are intellectually capable to compete with men and are smarter in many cases, what gives the man a power over them? Why is it always men that are in charge of women's rights and what they can or cannot do? All three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—give power to men over women. In this study, all male participants agree with the women subjects and believe that this superiority should end, and the rights of women and men should be respected the same way, based on their merit and not on what a scripture says about them thousands of years

ago, or to be more specific, what the interpretation of men says about women, whether old or contemporary.

### **Radical Islamists and the Treatment of Arab Christians**

When I asked my subjects about what they do not feel proud of as Arab Americans, almost all of them identified the rise of extremist groups in the Arab countries, mainly Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and especially in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. This is something that really bothers and shames them. They found themselves defending Islam and Muslims because of the acts of the few, who caused erosion of rights of all Muslims, including the subjects of my study. Both Muslim and Christian subjects expressed that it is not fair to lump all Muslims and all Arabs in one category and to stereotype them as terrorists and call Islam “the religion that hates the West and America.” Hiyam said she felt very afraid on many occasions where she did not even feel safe to say she was Muslim. Rakan, as I mentioned before, was subjected to harassment in school when he was younger, right after September 11<sup>th</sup> and racially profiled during his international travels when he was older. Even Jamil, who has a Christian background, was stereotyped and called names because he identifies as Arab American, with the assumption that he was Muslim. He was called “Osama”<sup>34</sup> on the school bus one time by other children who teased him because of who he was and insisted that he was a Muslim.

Advocating for an Arab American identity as a political umbrella to defend the rights of Arab Americans was discussed by most of my subjects during the interviews. All subjects talked about stereotypes and the different kinds of personal and identity-based attacks on Arabs and Muslims in the US. Some subjects, like Yasmine, who is not

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<sup>34</sup> Osama is a reference to Osama Bin Laden, known as the mastermind of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

even a Muslim, but because she and her family spoke Arabic or their last name sounded Arabic, was subject to some biased incidents and discrimination. Jamil, Sammy, and George were young teenagers at the time of September 11<sup>th</sup> and witnessed a lot of media scrutiny against their fellow Arab Americans. Ahmed and Hiyam, who were older at the time, tried code switching, from being Muslims first, to being Arab and American or American Arab depending on whom they talked to. They tried to defend themselves and not to fall victim for prejudice and hate.

### **The Historical Context of Arab American Identity**

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the term Arab American surfaced first in the 1950s and 1960s, influenced by factors, like the Civil Rights Movement in the US and the political circumstances in the Arab world post-World War II and the newly independent Arab countries, the rise of pan Arab nationalism, and the 1967 Six-Day War. Second Wave Arab immigrants and students in the US started to use the term Arab to refer to themselves rather than identifying with their region or country of origin or religion as the First Wave immigrants did. The term Arab American became widely used by the Second and Third Wave immigrants and whatever some of the First Wave people who stayed connected to their ethnic identity as Arabs and Arab Americans. This term peaked right after the 1967 Arab Israeli Six-Day War, when the US mass media totally supported the victory of the Israelis over the Arabs and stereotyped Arabs as losers, terrorists, and wanted to throw the “Jews” in the sea. Kadi (1994) believes that the use of the term Arab American helps Arabs and Arab Americans affirm their identity. It also helps the newly formed group, Arab Americans, to teach others around them about their own culture and who they are as an ethnic group. Using the term also strengthens the linkage and enforces

the relationship between themselves and the people in their country or the ethnicity of origin (Kadi, 1994).

### **Racialization of Arabs and Muslims**

The Arab American identity has been racialized from as early as when Arabs started to migrate to the US in large numbers in the First Arab Immigration Wave. The US immigration policies had just banned Chinese immigration to the US by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. This act was supposed to be temporary for 10 years, but was renewed again in 1893, prohibiting immigration of Chinese people to the US. This act was followed by an immigration law that banned Japanese immigration to the US in 1907 amidst racist waves of anti-immigration movements in different parts of the US. In the midst of this wave of anti-Asian sentiment in the US, Arab immigrants were arriving from “Turkey in Asia.” By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Arabs in the US started to feel the stereotypes, prejudices, and racialization by mainstream White Americans and nativist groups that were pressuring the US government to ban all non-Northern/Western Europeans from migrating to the US. The Arabs became racialized as an inferior, foreign entity that is incapable of participating in the American democracy. Arabs became an unwelcome ethnicity, like other Asian groups from China, Korea, and Japan, who had already been banned from migrating to the US. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Arabs challenged their inferiority and the sentiment that they were ineligible to be US citizens in the US courts and argued their cases in the appeal courts. Finally, in 1909 the court granted the first Christian Lebanese with light-skin color, Costa Najour, US citizenship. This was not a *guaranteed status* in that all Arabs would become US citizens based on their whiteness. Arabs with dark skin tone or Muslim Arabs were rejected and denied US



citizenship. This wave of racialization of the Arabs continued, and eventually they were included in the most famous Immigration Act of 1924, banning all Arabs from migrating to the US based on their inferiority and the fear of others who might have looked different or acted differently from mainstream White America. This ban stayed in effect until the 1964 Civil Rights and Immigration Act that repealed the earlier discriminatory acts (Gualtieri, 2001; Haney Lopez, 2006).

Islam on the other hand, was lumped with Arabs. Arabness was conflated with Islam, which was treated as foreign, and not a true religion—a sentiment that has resurfaced in recent years and has peaked during the 2016 presidential elections season until now. Muslims among the Syrian immigrants were denied US citizenship. The newly elected US president and his government imposed restrictions on immigrants from Syria and 7 other Arab and Muslim countries. The recent treatment of Arab and Muslim citizens from these countries, including those with valid visas to the US were turned back to their countries or detained in US airports upon arrival. The treatment of Muslims and Arabs has long been based on inferiority and ineligibility to become equal to the White people or being worthy of full membership in the White race. It was not until the US discovered oil in Saudi Arabia that the first Arab Muslim became eligible for US citizenship (Bayoumi, 2008). Although the US immigration laws now allow Arabs and Muslims to become US citizens, and although they are considered and classified by the US government federal forms and Affirmative Action forms as Caucasian and White, they are not treated as such. The immigration status of people with Arab identity in the US has been so fragile in the last century (Naber, 2000, 2008; Samhan, 1999).

Racialization of Arabs and Muslims continued over the years. Stereotypes against Arabs and Muslims continue as well, and political and discriminatory laws were passed to punish all Arabs and Muslims after the attacks of September 11, 2001, punishing a whole Arab ethnicity with almost 450 million Arabs around the world and the whole religion of Islam, with almost 1.5 billion people, because of the acts of a few radical young men. The passing of PATRIOT Acts I and II was an exaggerated reaction to what had happened in 2001. Waging two racially motivated wars against two Arab and Muslim countries and the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocent people in the name of “war on terror” is an over-reaction, to say the least, and must have had a racial tone to it, at least from Arab and Muslim points of view. Arab Americans were not surprised about the treatment of Arabs and Muslims, especially immigrants in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> as their treatment has always been bad, but this time it was the volume of the reaction that made the environment for Arabs and Muslims in the US to be much worse than before (Shryock, 2006).

I should explain here what Arab Americans mean by racialization of Arabs and Muslims. They do not mean it the same way the race relationships play between Whites and traditionally oppressed groups, like Blacks and Brown marginalized people. Eck (2001) states, “Religion is often conflated with race as a marker of the difference that generates fear or hate” (p. 301). The US government and the US mass media have been building a connection between Arabs, Islam, and “terrorism,” therefore, it is a politically-based and -motivated notion that Arabs and Muslims versus the US and the West, in relation to Pan-Arab ethnicity that hates the West and the US. Therefore, Arabs and Muslims have been classified and persecuted by the Government and the media as

“suspect terrorists” or as a “distinct” racial group that is connected to terrorism; therefore, they are in the same category of “others” with fewer rights to be “full US citizens.” Hence, stereotypes, prejudices, hate crimes, and discrimination acts are on the rise as Arab Americans are becoming more and more oppressed groups (Shryock, 2006). In a comprehensive study of 1000 Arab and Chaldean Americans and another 500 people from the general public in Detroit area that was done by a group of professors from University of Michigan, University of Michigan Dearborn, and Princeton University found out that the most pressing need for Arab Americans was to fight negative stereotypes and misrepresentation. Muslims in this study believed that they should worry about their future in the US and that their religion was not respected. In comparison to Arab and Muslim Americans, the general public sample of this study is significantly more willing to “target Arabs and/or Muslims for surveillance, random stops and searches, and detention without sufficient evidence to prosecute” (Baker et al., 2003, p. 2). It is also important to mention that radicalizing Arabs and Muslims in the US has to do with the unconditional support of the US government and the biased US media in support of Israel that has been occupying Palestinian Arab lands for the last 60 years in violation of the international law. This relationship between the US and Israel overshadows the Arab Americans status in the US (Shryock, 2006).

### **Pan-Arab Ethnicity**

The idea of a pan-Arab movement as a political statement for Arab Americans has emerged on college campuses as a way of expressing political engagement. The first known organization to use Arab American self-identity officially was the Arab American University Graduates (AAUG) that was formed in 1968. This organization opened its

membership across religions, ethnicities, and countries of origin as a pan-Arab umbrella. They were motivated by a few factors, like the Civil Rights Movement and the hyphenated ethnic and racial groups, like African American and Asian American, for example, that rallied most Black and Asian people in the US around these identities. Another factor was the pan-Arab movement in the 1950s and 1960s in the Arab countries that was led by Egypt for the purpose of uniting all Arabs under one identity. This was a reaction to European colonial powers, mainly Britain and France who, literally, divided the Arab people into many smaller countries. A third factor was that AAUG wanted to open the door to those early Arab Immigrants who assimilated themselves in the US to go back to their roots and join a unifying body of one Arab ethnic organization as an intergenerational organization. AAUG opened its doors for allies who were in support of the post-colonial Arab cause and also particularly the Palestine issue that was renewed after the 1967 Six-Day War when Israel took over the rest of Palestine and has since occupied it. The aftermath of the 1967 War was so devastating for the Arabs in general and for Arab Americans in particular, not because they were badly defeated and lost all of Palestine and Syrian and Egyptian land to Israel, but because of the volume of negative stereotypes by the US media, as Arabs were portrayed every night on the TV evening news as terrorists, backward, frozen in time, anti-West and pro the Communist Soviet Union. These negative stereotypes and anti-Arab, anti-Muslim sentiment facilitated their being systematically attacked, day in and day out, and vilified as subhuman (Kayyali, 2006; Malek, 2009; Shaheen 2005; Suleiman, 1989, 1999).

AAUG was the first Pan-Arab organization aimed to educate North Americas; both mainstream media and the US public, about the Arab people and the Arab Americans who are already part of the US society.

There is an enduring representation of “Arab” as not quite American - not quite free, not quite white, not quite male, not quite persons in the civil body of the nation. Arabs therefore are seen as not quite citizens, despite their possession of formal papers and US passports. The hyphen after Arab - is not firmly attached to American, not yet embedded in the body politic of this nation. (Joseph, 1999, pp. 257-258)

As I mentioned before in my literature review, AAUG opened the door for other secular pan Arab organizations to form, like the National Arab American Association (NAAA) in 1972, American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (AADC) in 1980, and the Arab American Institute Foundation (AAI) in 1985. All these organizations tried so hard to push back negative stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination and anti-Arab sentiment that was so exaggerated and widely used by the US mass media and the government. These organizations tried to rally Arab Americans and their allies to get more involved in the American political discourse and to advocate for themselves as equal citizens with the same rights as other Americans (Gualtieri, 2009; Orfalea 2006).

### **Hyphenated Identities and Intersecting Factors**

What does it mean to be both Arab and American? As I discussed in Chapter 2, the identity of Arab Americans is complicated, and the use of the term Arab American takes a number of meanings among members of the population itself. Some use the hyphenated Arab-American to claim two distinct sides to their identity—both positive and negative. Others use the expression either as a sign of the assimilation of Arabs into the American society or as a political statement, bringing attention to the marginalization of Arabs. The political effect of the 1967 War on the claiming of Arab American pan-

ethnic identity was also discussed earlier. The use of Arab American can take a different meaning generationally. In the Arab traditional culture, Arab children are supposed to obey their parents, do what they are asked to do, and not question their authority, especially the father or older brothers. Arab Muslim children are ordered by the Qur'an to obey their parents all the way until death. One exception to this command and that is only if parents ask them not to believe in God anymore. Usually, younger siblings take instructions from the older sibling. Also older siblings take part in raising their younger siblings in the family. Arabic culture, like many others, is patriarchal and some parents and older siblings take full advantage of that and impose their values and teachings on children whether they are their own children or their younger siblings. It is harder for children to say no to anything their parents or family elders may ask them to do. In writing about Arab Canadian adolescents, McIrvin Abu-Laban and Abu-Laban (1999) wrote about the Arabic tradition:

In Arab culture, the traditional value system is collectivist in orientation, emphasizing the group, hierarchical relationships, harmony, and conformity. The traditional Arab family system is one in which sex roles are sharply defined, men possess more power and status than women, and the father has the highest authority in the family. (p. 121)

This part is contradictory to the American values of individual freedoms that American children learn early on in their life. Decision-making and taking responsibility for their decisions is important for individuals in the Western and American context. Some Arabs find it selfish and individualistic to do so. Parents, and to some degree the extended family in Arab communities, decide for the individual directly or indirectly, depending on kinship. Decisions can vary from small things, like what to wear, what to eat and, how to

dress, to more serious decisions, like when or where they should go to college and what to major in.

When people like my age are trying to find a career or trying to do something about their life, they don't get that much of a chance to get to sit down and be like, "What do I want to do and what best suits my interests and needs?" They think of what would go along with my family's expectations and "what my parents want," and like the name of the family and stuff. (Sawsan)

Even if Arab children have the freedom to choose, they still have to keep the interest of the family, and sometimes the extended family in mind. Sometimes, the decision of whom to marry is made for them. Grandparents also interfere directly with the way their children raise their own children. Naber (2011) discusses how Arab American parents invoke culture to control their children, creating the "us" and "them." She contends that this divide between Arab and American cultures is widespread among immigrant Arab parents, regardless of their nationality or religion, Christian or Muslim. Naber (2012) adds:

In distinguishing between concepts of good Arab families and bad American families, middle-class Arab diasporas remake long-standing nationalist logics for coping with the West. Within the dominant middle-class articulation of Arabness, a patriarchal and heteronormative family is a key signifier of a pure and unchanging self. Despite the distinctive shifts brought about by displacement, assimilations, and racialization, the politics of cultural authenticities arranges the domain of family as a space that this Arab diaspora can call its own. (pp. 74-75)

In discussing Arab American women writers, Abdelrazek (2007) questions what hyphenation means to these writers. She wonders whether home could mean estrangement from both homes; the one they originated from back in their country of origin or the new one in the US. Sharobeem (2003) argues that hyphenated identity

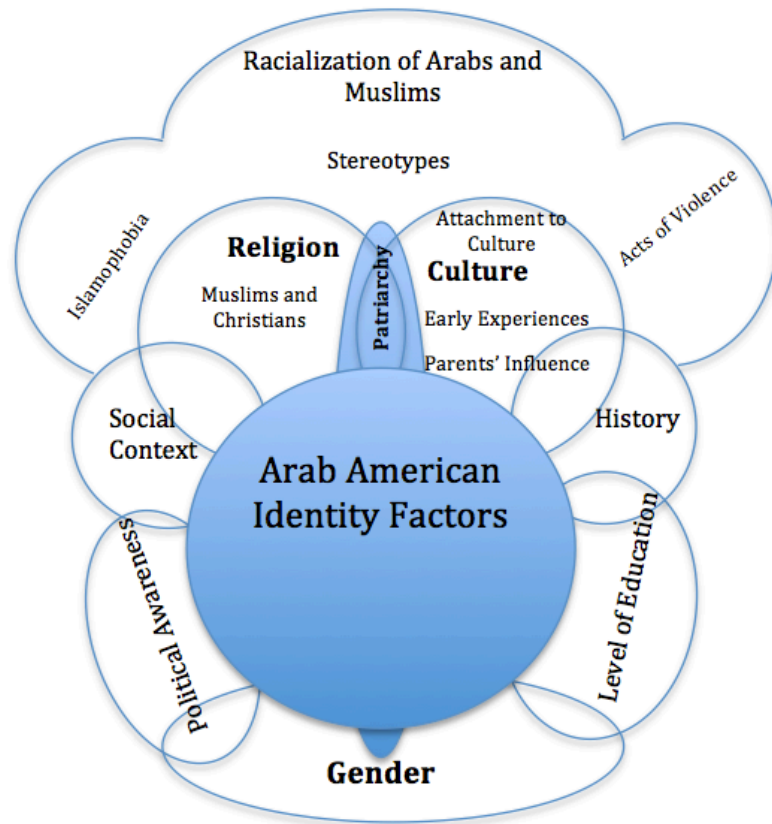
previously assumed the famous label of the *melting pot* where immigrants from different parts of the world are expected by the host culture/country to start afresh and to relinquish their ethnic identities . . . with the passage of time and the birth of consecutive generations from various ethnic backgrounds, some of these

ethnically diverse immigrants started to take and show pride in their ancestral pasts and insist on demonstrating their dual identities. (p. 60)

### **Racial Identity Factors, Intersectionality, and the Enactment of Identity**

In this section, I discuss Wijeyesinghe's (2001) Racial Identity Factors, Wijeyesinghe's (2012) Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity and Cross's Enactment of Race and other Social Identities (2001, 2012) in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and in relation to my findings in Chapter 4. What my subjects had shared with me allows for utilizing what Wijeyesinghe and Cross have theorized in relation to race and racial factors and the intersectionality of identity factors. As the Arab American identity is yet to be theorized, and since it is still fluid and developing, there are no specific models that deal with Arab American identity that I could find. In this research study, I discuss some of the factors that help Arab Americans make meaning of their identity in relations to other models that are developed by scholars, like Wijeyesinghe and Cross.





Arab American Identity Model, diagram 1

Figure 1. Arab American Identity Factors Model 1

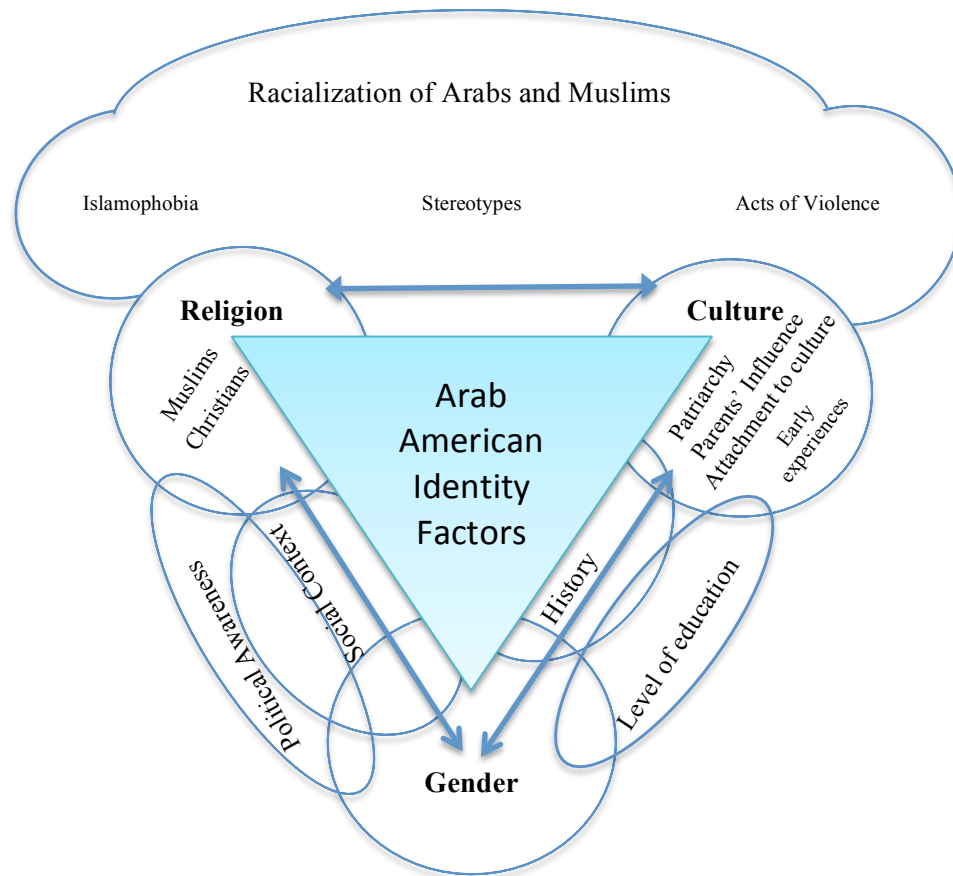


Figure 2. Arab American Identity Factors Model 2

Wijeyesinghe (2001, 2012) Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI), and the Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity named the following factors that affect the choice of racial identity: Racial ancestry, cultural attachment, physical awareness, social and historical context, early experience and socialization, political awareness and orientation, spirituality, and other social identities.

The major factors that emerged in my study are culture, religion, gender, patriarchy, social and historical context, early experiences and socialization, political awareness, spirituality or religion, and level of education. I have concluded that religion and culture collude to help patriarchal parents who use history and social context to

restrict their children's behavior especially women. Many of my subjects discussed these factors in detail on how they affected their decisions to identify as Arab American.

There are two major clusters of factors that I identify in this study. The first cluster is the "inside factors" that come from the Arab individuals' environment in which they grow up and learn from parents, families, and community that intersect with each other on a daily basis. The other set of factors that shroud the inside factors are the "outside factors." I identify the outside factors are the racialization of Arabs and Muslims, Islamophobia, and discrimination that is based on stereotypes and deep resentment to Arabs and Muslims that are usually followed by acts of violence and hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims. My subjects discussed how the US government, US media, and the public are responsible for continuously demonizing Arabs and Muslims and hold them all, especially Muslims, for any violent acts that are committed against the US by any terrorist groups anywhere in the world. I should mention here that my study is a sample study, and I am not generalizing my findings to all Arab Americans. Please see the figures in the above pages, as they illustrated the factors that affect the Arab American identity and how they intersect with each other.

The identities of each subject in my study were influenced by a number of factors, some of which parallel those in the Wijeyesinghe (2012) factors model and others that do not appear in the identity literature but emerged from these participant interviews. All of the observed factors have intersected in multiple ways to affect how the subjects make meaning of their identities and how they reenact Cross's (2012) factors as a way of coping.

In the Multicultural Enactment-Transactional Model (METM), Cross (2012) theorizes that different social groups have similarities in how their social identities get “enacted during critical everyday transactions” (p. 194). Cross believes that people respond to different situations differently, prompted by the situation itself. These enactments that are described on both the intergroup and intragroup levels were part of the original Black Enactment-Transaction Model that was originally proposed for Black people. On the intergroup level,

The enactment of racial-cultural identity under conditions of racism is called *buffering*; the enactment of experiences within the mainstream is called *code-switching*; and the transaction of cross-racial (out of race) friendships is called *bridging*. (p. 197)

In the METM model, Cross proposes that these enactments, along with the intergroup ones can be useful in examining the interactions among people with multiple social identities. I believe that in analyzing the responses of my subjects, a few of them have demonstrated the use of some of Cross’s METM enactments. For example, Hiyam’s family’s *code-switching* is discussed later in this chapter.

Wijeysinghe’s factors model can be seen at play when analyzing the interviews of my subjects. For instance, Sawsan’s interviews focused on gender: patriarchy and religion, with less focus on Islamophobia, although she covers her hair. She did not express experiencing Islamophobic acts against her personally. This could be due to living in a highly educated area and a progressive region or her own unawareness due to her young age and limited experience. Reema’s focus was on religion, patriarchy and gender, culture, and social context. Jamil, on the other hand, focused in his interviews on family relationships, culture, ancestry, and politics. Rakan was more focused on stereotypes, Islamophobia, and the social and political atmosphere that surrounded him

growing up in a more conservative and mainly white community. He also experienced prejudice and discrimination because of his ancestry, particularly being Palestinian and Arab. Sammy focused on factors, like culture, family relations, social orientation, and politics. Amal, as a fourth-generation Arab American, focused on factors, like ancestry, culture, food, history, and social context. These examples demonstrate how each subject's identity is influenced by a number of factors interacting together as discussed by Wijeyesinghe (2012).

In the next section I discuss some of the factors that I mentioned above as my subjects discussed them in more details. I focus on a few subjects where these factors appeared more consistently in their interviews: Noor, Hiyam, Yasmine, and Ahmed. First I should say that most of my subjects expressed how they came to embrace their identity as having the best of both Arab and American cultures, so when they said Arab American they meant Arab and American. Several of them did not identify as such until they entered college, like Noor, Amal, and Yasmine where *the level of education* was very important for them in that it intersected with their growing political engagement and the impact of college on their identity..

One of my findings was the *Level of education*, which is not a factor that was discussed by either Wijeyesinghe or Cross, but I have observed it consistently affecting my subjects and their identity formation.

Noor: The factors that intersected to affect Noor's identity were gender, patriarchy, attachment to the culture, social context, ancestry, social and historical experiences. Noor also used buffering and code switching (Cross, 2012). Noor's *level of education* effect was clear when she started college. The subject of Arabs and Arab

Americans started coming up in some of her classes. She did research on her Arabness and Americanness and realized that throughout her years in college she found herself defending the Arab American identity against many stereotypes that she did not notice prior to her college years. It is also important to notice that Noor learned a lot about the Arab culture in Palestine during her visit to her parents' hometown. She started comparing the two sides of her identity, the Arab and the American side, and found out the positives and the negatives of both cultures and realized she is the product of the intersection of both.

When Noor was confronted with strict, gendered rules as a young teen during her visit to Palestine, she rejected that side of her identity where there were severe restrictions on her behavior and severe limitations to her movement, to the way she dressed and to her relationships with others, especially with males. Noor appreciated the American side of her identity as that allowed her to move freely and to dress the way that made her comfortable, and having relations with people that she felt comfortable with regardless of their gender. It was not until she entered college that she proudly adopted her hyphenated identity, so she now feels that she has the best of both sides of her identity, Arab and American. She admired and adopted the parts of the Arab identity that brings people closer as a community, the respect for others, help parents and listen to them and the help for the elderly, the disabled and the needy and being community-oriented. *Social context* and *attachment to the culture* that made her more balanced having the half of each culture that makes her happy and comfortable, and this is what she identifies with. She stayed away from individualistic points of view and living too independently from her family.

In discussing Noor's experiences, it is obvious that there are a few factors that intersected to make her identity a mix of two different cultures and ethnicities: the Arab side and the American side that sometimes collided, and in some other times they intersected to make her who she is as an Arab American woman. On the one hand, she appreciates some parts of her *ancestry in the social and historical experiences* that she has learned in two different cultures, in two different contexts of the Arab culture where the location of two Palestinian places. One allowed her to be who she was, and the other one had extremely restricted her life and made her succumb to old historical and social paradigms that are extremely rigid.

The factors identified by Wijeyesinghe (2012) -- *Political Awareness and Orientation, Cultural Attachment, Social and Historical Context, along with Gender and Religion* -- intersect to help Noor become aware of her culture and the parts she identify with and the parts of her culture that she does not feel comfortable with. The appreciation of her Arab side in a *historical and social context* helped her appreciate, yet critique some parts of each side of her hyphenated identity. Noor reaffirmed her attachment of some parts of the Arab identity and to some parts of the American identity and found balance between both cultures. It is not either American or Arab as the nativists wanted immigrants to be. Noor is it a melting pot where one assimilates into the mainstream, either. It is, rather, the best of both cultures and a realistic conclusion to Noor experiencing both cultures critically and consciously.

Hiyam: The factors that were observed through Hiyam's interviews and intersected to affect how she identifies were political awareness and orientation, historical context, religion, stereotypes, gender, socialization, patriarchy, prejudice and

discrimination, acts of violence and Islamophobia, attachment to the family's culture, parents and family influence, and level of education, as well as her use of buffering and code switching (Cross, 2012).

Hiyam discussed how her family's identification evolved around the political situation in Cleveland in a historical context and political awareness of difficult times in their life when regardless of how she describes herself, she is subjected to Islamophobia in the aftermath of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The family decided to adopt the Arab American identity as a safety measure in response to different acts of stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination or fear. Hiyam's family moved away from the "unsafe" Muslim or Arab side of their identity and attached American to it, as "American" may provide a sense of "safety." Hiyam said, "I watched myself go from saying, 'I am Arab Muslim to I am Arab American.'" Wijeyesinghe's *political awareness and orientation* is also used here by Hiyam's family who felt unsafe although still attached to their culture and what it stands for but afraid of what might happen to them as Muslims or Arabs. At the same time, they enacted Bill Cross's *Buffering and Code Switching* to avoid feeling hurt as a reaction by racist individuals or groups who are anti-Arab and anti-Muslim.

There is an analogy to Cross's buffering and code switching by black individuals or groups to avoid confrontation with others who might hurt them. Hiyam's family is not Black, but the social and political circumstances are similar in that Arabs and Muslims were targeted by the US mass media and the government based on their religion and ethnicity that have already been racialized. This opened the door for acts of violence and hate crimes to be committed against them.



Especially in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, many of my subjects “buffered” from self-identifying as Muslim Americans to Arab Americans as a way to provide “psychological protection” and to avoid physical harm to themselves and to their families. Eight people of Arab and Muslim descent or who were thought of as of Muslim or Arab descent were killed in the first week aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The first person to be killed as retaliation to September 11 was a Sikh wearing a turban and was confused with being a Muslim. In addition to the killing of eight people, numerous acts of violence were committed to hurt Muslims and Arabs, including property damage to businesses and to mosques.

Hiyam was clear in her interviews about how she slowly broke away from her family’s old traditional identity and came to her own identity, moving away from the old static traditions that her parents held on for fear of losing their Arabness and Islam to a more dynamic and modern American side of her identity. She spoke in details about how her parents held onto what they learned 40 or 50 years ago and brought with them to the US, not wanting to deviate even one step. “Change was a threat to them,” Hiyam said. Hiyam’s experience was similar to what Noor experienced, except Hiyam did not have to go back to Palestine to compare both sides of her identity, the Arab and the American. Rather, she lived it in her own home in Cleveland with her own parents. What Hiyam did was that she chose to go far away from her family to attend graduate school.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, Hiyam saw the wrong that was done to her and to her sisters by their parents but was not able to change it. Only when she became a graduate student and met other Arab American families who had a balance in their Arab and American culture was she able to make a personal change. She was influenced by the

way they were living their lives. She then started questioning her family's values and traditions and started a dialogue that aimed to challenge her family to make some positive changes. She wanted to help get rid of some traditions of her Arab culture and to adopt new sides of her American culture. Like Noor's, Hiyam's experiences with her family were compatible with Wijeyesinghe's *historical and social context*, kept some of her spiritual traditions without being forced to practice all of them, and she got rid of some of the old traditional values that extremely restricted the behavior of Arab and Muslim girls and women. Being a married woman also produced and enacted a new social factor for Hiyam that was not there when she was living with her parents. This gave her more leverage to be a positive influence on her younger siblings so that they started questioning and negotiating new values and traditions with their parents, in a way they have never done before.

Ahmed: Factors that were observed in Ahmed's interviews included early socialization, culture, political awareness, religion, history, patriarchy, Islamophobia, stereotypes, and level of education. He also used bridging, as described by Cross (2012).

Ahmed was always aware that he was different as a child. He recalled that in second grade a white girl told a racist joke about Arabs hesitantly because he was present. Ahmed recalled that he could not totally understand the joke and how it applied to him. He was growing up to a proud Arab American family, but broke away from strict definitions of Arab/Muslim by his family and community. He allowed some traditions to give way to a more American sense of freedom when he needed to make choices on how to live his life as a young college student. He moved closer to the American side of his identity, as far as his personal freedom was concerned and moved away from old

traditions that prohibited free choice. He made a choice, for example, to marry a woman from a different Muslim sect and to live his life as he chooses, while keeping in close contact with his parents and siblings, despite living differently from them and their norms. Ahmed has enacted Cross's *Bridging* by reaching out to within the same ethnic group as an Arab and getting married to an Arab Muslim Sunni woman. He also adhered to *historical and social* factor of Wijeyesinghe's by maintaining some of his Arab elements of his identity while using his male privilege to practice more personal freedoms. He also practiced what Wijeyesinghe called the *spiritual* factor, similar to what Hiyam did by keeping spiritual practices that had positive meanings for him and left other elements that were not that useful to him as a Muslim Shi'a.

Yasmine: The factors that were displayed by Yasmine during her interviews were: gender, religion, culture, patriarchy, socialization, political awareness, and Islamophobia. Yasmine has revolted against going to church and protested gender inequality in her family, yet as she entered college and her political awareness increased, applying Wijeyesinghe's *political awareness and orientation*, she has adopted her Arab American identity, defying her family's wishes as they wanted her to refer to herself as a Syrian-Lebanese. As her *political awareness and orientation* increased and was put in a *social and historical* perspective, and as practicing her Christian traditions decreased, her *spirituality* was maintained but with less visitations to the church and less observing of elements of Christianity that did not mean much to her well-being and to her daily life. Yasmine has increased her *cultural attachment* to the pan-Arab culture and to her *racial ancestry* by identifying in college as Arab American rather than as Syrian or Lebanese or both. Being an Arab American is a more unifying umbrella and more inclusive to whom

she is, as part of an Arab American identity. This self-identification as Arab American brings her away from the ascribed identity to herself as a White person. Yasmine reinforced her Arab identity by taking Arabic language classes and joining Arab Students Club. When she performs her spoken word, it is often about her celebrated hyphenated identity that crosses over both Arab and American.

I used to think that I was passing as White, and sometimes I do, and other times I don't. It is tough when it is on that range, like that I am not really sure when exactly I identify as Arab and when exactly I identify as American. (Yasmine)

In this context, Yasmine is enacting Cross's *code switching* in identifying American or "White" when it is "safe" for her and *bridging* as she is reaching out within her Arab ethnicity to another part of the ethnicity, which is the Islamic part Cross (2012). She discussed how she initially tried to pass when she joined her, mostly White, sorority. At the same time, she often proudly announced her Arab American identification when she was with other Arab or Arab American friends or in the classroom, especially when needed to challenge some assumptions by her professors. She said that she was more open now about being Arab American and actively seeking an opportunity to go to Jordan to strengthen her Arab side and to attend an extensive Arabic language program. By celebrating a hyphenated identity, Yasmine means celebrating what is positive in her Arabness and what is positive in the American side of her identity away from religion that makes her enjoy the American freedom.

As I have discussed above, not all Wijeyesinghe's factors apply to my subjects, but most of them do. *Political awareness and orientation, historical and social context, spirituality, early experiences, racial ancestry and, cultural attachment and other social identities* are all applicable to my subjects in their quest to maintain a fluid and

developing Arab American identity. *Physical appearance* is a challenging one for some of my subjects. For example, Hiyam is confused by others as being a Latina woman . Sawsan is often mistaken for a white woman, but because she covers her hair, she is assigned a Muslim identity but as a convert to Islam and not as an Arab American Muslim because of her light complexion. Noor is also confused for White because her skin color is light, but she has dark black hair, so she is not ascribed an Arab American identity, but more often is confused for Italian or East European. Noor said that she uses her skin color as an RA to her advantage, as she passes as White, using *code switching* in this case. This intersects with her last name, unmistakably Muslim and gives her away every time that she is on a commercial airline. Often, she is pulled aside for extra searching. Rakan is often confused as Italian or Latino and so his *physical appearance* intersects with his Arab American identity when he self-identifies as Arab or as Muslim and takes away some of his ascribed privileges that come with being confused for Italian American. Reema is dark-skinned, and she is totally ascribed as Indian or Pakistani and with covering her head. She often has to tell people that she is an Arab and Arab American. Sammy and Jamil are often confused as Mexicans or other Latinos. Neither of these assignments gives them privileges, but they are aware that their *physical appearance* intersects with their privileges as males who have more power over females (*other social identities*). They have darker skin color and scruffy hair so that takes away their whiteness as an ascribed identity by the federal government just by the way they look, so their *physical appearance* is easily assigned to non-White, and it does not carry any privileges.

Based on my interviews I have found another factor that helped my subjects identify as Arab Americans, which is the level of education. As it shows in Chapter 3, all my subjects, males or females, at the time of the interviews and the focus groups were either in college, graduate or undergraduate, or recent graduates who just started their careers. In the next section, I discuss this factor that adds to the factors that I just discussed.

### **Arab American Identity and Level of Education**

One factor that I found that affected how Arab American young adults identify and interact with their day-to-day identity factors is education and the level of education that they enacted and used to help them develop better understanding of who they are, how they self-identify, why they self-identify the way they do, and in what circumstance they suppress or enact this Arab American identity. My subjects in this study self-identify as Arab Americans. Some of my subjects have either developed their sense of what their identity was before they came to college. However, most of them developed this sense of Arabness and *Americanness* and reached their own conclusions about who they are, how they want to identify themselves, what factors helped them identify as such, and how college years helped them reach these conclusions.

My subjects' level of education during the interviews varied from undergraduate students to graduate school levels. Analyzing the data from the interviews, it was apparent that their college education has had positively influenced their identity development as Arab American and helped them either enrich this experience, change some of their beliefs about who they were, or helped them move forward with their identity. Two subjects I think benefitted the most from college. The first one was Amal

who is a fourth-generation Arab American and was not aware that she could self-identify as Arab American until she came to college. The second one was Yasmine, a second-generation Arab American whose family did not want anything to do with this identity, as they are Syrian/Lebanese Christian immigrants, and Arab to them means Islam and Islam means Arab, so they have their own grievances against both Arabs and Muslims and were very upset when Yasmine started self-identifying as Arab American.

Table 6. Level of education

Enrolled Graduate Student	Ahmed Ph.D. Student						
Recently Graduated and Started a career	Hiyam 2 MAs	Rakan BA	Sammy BA				
Undergraduate Student	Amal	George	Jamil	Noor	Reema	Sawsan	Yasmine

### Graduate Level

Hiyam and Ahmed were the most educated among all of the participants and older than the rest of them: Hiyam holds double masters and has begun an excellent career in management, and Ahmed is a doctoral student with a wealth of knowledge about all circumstances and factors affecting Arab American identity. Ahmed's knowledge can be described as deep and thorough. His responses reflected opinions of someone who clearly gets the big picture of what it means to be an Arab American, born and raised in the US to two Muslim Shi'a parents. Hiyam, on the other hand, was more precise in her responses about her identity and what it means to her and to others around her. Hiyam and her family went through some stages in their identity that moved from being Muslim, to being Arab and Muslim to being Arab and American. They added American right after

September 11<sup>th</sup> to their identity to protect themselves from being further stereotyped by US security authorities, and by mainstream Americans who might see Muslims as terrorists with an ideology to destroy the West, especially the US. Growing up in Cleveland, she and her family felt that they were under the spotlight for a long time. Her education in graduate school helped her tremendously to challenge her parents' old norms that are not observed outside their own closed community.

Ahmed's responses reflected that he was more educated and schooled about his identity as an Arab American. He grew up in mixed communities of Arab immigrants and Arab Americans in Dearborn, Michigan. He is aware of the Arab culture in Dearborn, and is also aware of the many differences that new immigrants bring with them and how this mix of subcultures and sub-ethnicities divide people instead of unifying them in that area. Ahmed named some different groups in Dearborn, like Lebanese Shi'a and Lebanese Sunni, Iraqi Chaldeans, Iraqi Arab Sunni, Iraqi Arab Shi'a, Yemenis from South Yemen and from North Yemen, and seculars and religious Muslim Palestinians. These differences to Ahmad were too complicated to sort out and to deal with. He went to school with Arab American children and with other immigrant children. By the time he was in high school, he decided to go to college away from Dearborn just for that reason, hoping to get a different experience and learn new things while away from his community. He wanted to go away so he would be exposed to more than Dearborn and gain deeper knowledge. After college, he got his first job in Baltimore as a schoolteacher. He enjoyed his job because it exposed him to the other side of the spectrum, and he got involved in a community that is different from his own. He learned a lot about mainstream American school system that is different from Dearborn school system. After



a couple of years as a schoolteacher, he had already gotten married, and he and his wife decided to go to graduate school in another area, where there are fewer Arabs than their own communities but enough to have good positive conversations with a few other Arabs. Ahmed, as I mentioned before, was not able to take his girlfriend home with him because of what people would say about him. Having a girlfriend in the open in the Arab culture is not something that the community looks positively upon. He got involved early on in Dearborn Arab clubs and did volunteer work, which exposed him to diverse groups of Arabs, and he got to know more about their cultures and sub-cultures, so his knowledge about the culture was really deep.

### **Recent College Graduates**

Rakan is a recent graduate, who has just landed an excellent job in finance and management with a promising career path. He expressed depth knowledge, with better understanding in comparison to other subjects who were still in college at the time of their interviews. As I mentioned before, he joined the Arab Students Club in college and became its president. He took Arabic courses and completed a second major in Middle Eastern Studies that addressed many issues in the Arab countries. He spoke extensively about his identity as an Arab American and what it meant to him as the first child of a Palestinian immigrant father and a White American mother with a German heritage. His summer visits to his extended family in Palestine and Jordan helped expand his knowledge further and helped him better understand the culture beyond what his father had told him. His first-hand experiences with the Arab culture helped him gain deeper knowledge about his identity and how he chooses to identify himself. He was weary about some of the turmoil that was going on in Iraq and other Arab countries. He said that

the Arab countries now are in a split mode, and smaller alliances that are occurring do not help Arab Americans to unify around one Arab identity. A lot of Arabs right now, according to Rakan, identify with their county of origin rather than with Arabism as it used to be in the time that followed World War II when there was hope to unify Arabs as one entity.

Sammy is another recent graduate who did not feel that college helped expand his knowledge about who he was or how he would identify. He grew up in a home that was politically aware and social justice-oriented. His Arabness was very strong and the American part of his identity is in question as he grew up questioning the interference of the US in the Arab countries. He disagrees with US foreign policies, especially the side that is extremely biased and favors Israel over Palestine. He wants to see a shift to the Middle East US foreign policy in the Arab countries and for the US to seriously try to solve the Palestinian problem. He also criticizes Arab governments, as did Rakan, and blames them for not working for the interest of their people. He believes all Arab leaders were a bunch of dictators who were mainly supported by the US anyway.

### **Undergraduate College Students**

Amal is unique; she was a senior in college, going to graduate school, and she was the only fourth-generation Arab American subject I interviewed. She discovered that identifying herself based on her ethnic background was fulfilling and a source of pride for her. She learned about her heritage first from her grandfather who, as I mentioned before, used to take her when she was young to the Sons of Lebanon Club and introduced her to other Lebanese people, albeit older, but most of her learning about Arabs and Arab American flourished in college. She took courses on the Middle East and tried to learn

Arabic. Although she says that she was not able to learn it, she insisted that she wanted to do so even when she was older.

George is also a senior. He is Christian Melkite who “adores” his Lebanese heritage. He was born and raised by Lebanese parents who, like Yasmine’s, do not want to identify as Arabs or as Arab Americans. George disagrees with his parents, but unlike Yasmine, he does not like to argue with them. He just let go and lives his life as he chooses. The developmental level of his identity is not as polished as Yasmine’s, although he is her senior in college. He is more emotional about his identity. He likes Arabic food, *dabkeh*, and social gatherings in the church around holidays, the Arab hospitality and generosity, community building, and having fun and enjoying life. He criticizes Arab governments as useless and says this weakens Arab American unity around one identity. He also critiques his American friends in college and favors Arab hospitality values over American values. He shared that when his friends come to visit him in his room, he would offer them anything that he has: coffee, tea, or chocolate, but when he goes to visit them and they are eating or drinking something, they will not bother to offer him anything, not even as a courtesy offer, as he puts it.

Noor was a junior when I interviewed her. She manifested a depth of experience as an Arab American living in the US. She had the added advantage of visiting her relatives in Palestine and learning first-hand about the Palestinian Arab culture in her mom’s village. It was evident in her responses that she has taken good advantage of her college education to deepen her own understanding of her identity. While in college, Noor has totally embraced her heritage. She took some college courses and wrote essays about being Palestinian. She said that in the beginning she was afraid to say she was

Palestinian because of possible retaliation, either by her professors or by her fellow students. After she wrote her first biographical essay about her identity as a Palestinian American, she was encouraged by her professor to write more about Palestine, the Arab culture, and even what it meant to her to be an Arab American. By the time of her interview, she was well aware of how she had shied from her background as a schoolgirl who wanted to fit and about the shift in her identification and the pride in her culture.

Reema also had a unique experience, as she was the only subject who went to a Muslim school until high school. She started to cover her hair right after she left the Islamic school. Reema stated that she identifies as Arab American and says, equally, as Muslim or Muslim American, but she celebrates her Muslim identity more. Living with her sisters for all of her four years in college helped her to affirm her Muslim identity and to feel more comfortable covering her hair and practicing her religious rituals. At the same time, it limited her experience and exposure to college life. Reema critiques the Arab culture about colorism. She stated that Arabs prefer light-skinned women to women with dark shades, so there is bias based on the way women look. She herself does not appreciate that as her skin color is a bit darker, which is the most dominant color for Arabs in general. Arab people's skin color, for the most part, is more of brown with different shades, although there are some people who originated from Africa and they are dark and others who originated from Turkey or Greece whose skin color is lighter.

Yasmine was only a sophomore at the time of her interview, but she shared a lot of experiences about her parents, particularly her mother. When Yasmine came to college, she discovered that she could be free to believe that she was of Lebanese and Syrian parents; therefore, she was of Arab heritage, which made her an Arab American.

Her parents did not like that, neither did her siblings, nor her cousins. They all believed “Arab” meant “Muslim,” and they did not want to identify with Muslims. She stood her ground as a secular woman and stopped going with her mother to church. She started to proudly identify as Arab American. I believe that her revolt against her parents, and especially her mother, led her to educate herself more about the Arab culture, and why her parents were so adamant about not identifying as Arab Americans. She started arguing her case with her parents and her cousins, and she expressed strong feelings about her identity as Arab American. She refused to let go of that despite all the arguments that she has had with everybody from her parents, to the extended family, standing alone in her views.

Sawsan was more relaxed about who she was and why she decided to cover her hair to better identify herself as an Arab woman and as a Muslim woman. She referred to herself as secular, but her responses reflect that she is in the early stages of understanding her identity development and that she was leaning more toward identifying as a Muslim as her most salient identity, even though she is definitely both Muslim and Arab. Most of her education came from her discussions of Islam and Arabness with her Arab/Arab American and other college colleagues. More people approached her out of curiosity or to prove their point that she could not be covering her hair and identifying as secular or that she could not be secular and refuse to go with them to bars where alcohol is served. She was aware that she ended up losing some of her friends because she insisted that she was a modern Muslim who covered her hair and who did not want to go to bars but was fully capable of having fun. She believed she could cover her hair and be secular, and she

could cover her hair and identify as Arab American first and Muslim second, depending on the situation.

Jamil was the only first-year college student who I interviewed. He was not as clear as other subjects in describing who he was or what it took to be an Arab American in the US after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Although he had some tough experiences that made him learn quickly, for example, when one of his classmates one day started calling him “Osama,” and insisting that he was a Muslim. When Jamil said that he was not a Muslim, his other classmates on the bus that morning started teasing him and calling him Osama and a Muslim. It was such a tough experience for this young boy to be treated like that. His parents had to contact the school administration for the harassment to stop.

Jamil grew up learning after that what Islam was and about Muslims and what was going on in the Arab countries and the political atmosphere in the US after September 11<sup>th</sup>. He felt proud to be an Arab American, although his parents are Christians but secular; so are Jamil and his younger brother. Jamil was learning how to play musical instruments and continued to play in college. He joined an Arabic Music camp, an annual event for Arabic music learners in the US. Jamil got closer to Arab musicians who came from different Arab countries to teach Arabic music and lead the camp. He got more attached to the Arab culture and became prouder of his Arab American heritage, although he was born and raised in the US. In college, he started talking about his music skills and what instruments he played. He connected with other musicians in college. His skills playing Arabic music were unique and proved valuable for his faculty, to other students in college, particularly to those who play music and to the college culture in general. Jamil was enjoying being the only Arab American in his

class and what he brought with him to the diversity of his college. Jamil quoted his grandfather as saying that the Arab governments were bad for their people, so “before we [Arab people] blame the Western World for our miserable situation, we should blame ourselves.” Jamil’s grandfather migrated to the US to live next to Jamil’s family for the last 15 years when he turned 70 years old, after the death of his wife. Jamil has been learning from his grandfather and also from his father who was born in Lebanon to Palestinian refugee parents. His father never knew Palestine.

### **Conclusion**

In this research study I asked my subjects two major questions with sub-questions and two minor questions. The first one was: What does it mean to identify as Arab American? The second question was: What are the factors or experiences that led you to identify as Arab American? The two minor questions were: 1) When you are asked to fill out the Census forms with questions of ethnicity/race, how do you fill them out: African, Asian, Caucasian, other? 2) Are there experiences you have had as an Arab American that you would like us to talk about, to help me understand your identity?

In discussing what it meant to my subjects to be Arab American, and what factors led them to identify as such, their answers were sometimes identical and at other times totally different from each other. While Arab whiteness has been discussed by Arab American scholars, this was not shared with my subjects except when I asked them a sub-question about what box they check when they fill out the census form or Affirmative Action forms. Some of them had accepted their classification as White; others were ambivalent about it; while some others have completely rejected that classification. While some of the early Arab immigrants benefitted from their classification as White, became

US citizens and moved up in the social hierarchy in some places, others with darker skin color or those who were Muslims were denied citizenship, so it was discriminatory by nature. It is still a complicated issue, as Arab Americans in general and Muslims in particular are not protected by their classification as White nor are they aligned with other people of color and have protection against discrimination, hate crimes or racial profiling. Arabness was a strong theme and an important factor in shaping the identity of all of my subjects. Most of them felt strongly about identifying as Arab Americans as many historically marginalized and underrepresented racial or ethnic groups do, like African Americans, Asian Americans, or Mexican Americans. There is still a strong debate as to whether Arabs should be considered White or not White, based on the US racial hierarchy.

My subjects believe that the Arab culture is rich, deep, and celebratory and open to many religions, ethnicities, and beliefs. At the same time, they named some elements that are not inclusive and sometimes restrictive, like the restrictions of children's behavior and freedoms, that was troubling to some subjects. Although my questions did not ask specifically about religions or religious practice, religion has played an important role in shaping the identity of some of the Christian subjects' parents, in particular, who rejected Arabness for themselves and their children's identity, like Yasmine and to some degree, George.

In the case of Muslim participants, religion was a stronger factor affecting women subjects more than men, for example, due to the strict religious interpretations and practices. Arab patriarchy played against Muslim and Christian women subjects alike as almost all of them expressed during the interviews. All of my subjects talked about the



holiday celebrations and rituals positively and expressed that these social gatherings brought them closer to their families and to their communities. The subjects have dealt differently with their hyphenated identity. Some subjects have arrived to it upon reflecting on their families' identification and upon analyzing academic courses in college and reflecting on their college education. Others were still confused on how exactly to identify and which identity to put forward in each circumstance. Situational identity was clearly used by all the subjects—some consciously, and others subconsciously, based on political circumstances and the location of this identity in the context of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim rhetoric and propaganda that have been on the rise for the last many years. After all, whiteness was not a “natural” classification of Arabs based on their geographic location and their ethnicity or religion like the Northern and West European White Anglo Saxon Protestant. Whiteness was won in the US Appeal courts by some Arabs and not by all and was not given to all. Arabs are still treated as outsiders to the WASP designation like many other groups who were singled out as “not quiet White,” “White by law,” “in between,” “honorary White,” or “honorary Americans.”

Negative stereotypes came up in the interviews as a hindrance to several of my subjects as it comes in their way of upward movement, getting jobs, or getting into some competitive schools. Some of them talked about not mentioning that they were from Arab or Muslim backgrounds in their interviews or on their job or college applications as this might get in their way. Negative stereotypes have followed Arabs and Muslims since the First Immigration Wave in the 1880s. My subjects talked about prejudices, hate crimes,

discrimination, and racial profiling based on where they come from, their religious background, their name or family name, and sometimes the way they look.

College exposed them to other points of view and to other Arab Americans for whom the handling of Arab Americanness was different and opportunities for political engagement. As they became older and had more experience as well as education, the factors in their identities became more intersectional and more clearly enacted in different contexts. Education plays a crucial role to most subjects' thinking about and better understanding their own identity, but the level of education among them was not always reflective in the depth of their understanding of their identities. Clearly, from analyzing these data, Arab American identity is still an evolving and fluid identity that is yet to be more discussed and researched in order to take its place in literature like other ethnic identities. I conclude that the Arab American identity is still under-researched and under-theorized; therefore, I needed to adapt racial identity models that were developed by Wijeyesinghe and Cross to support my analysis of Arab American identity in the US context.

## CHAPTER 6

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

#### Recommendations for Higher Education

Arab American identity is under-researched. Arab American young adults, like college students and recent graduates, provide a wealth of information about Arab American identity since college students in general grapple with the question of identity during their college years. Arab American college students are no exception. My recommendations for higher education professionals are based on what my subjects informed me, my experience as a professional in Residence Education working with college students in different residential communities of undergraduate, graduate and family housing settings, and my identity as an Arab American.

- More research and education are needed regarding students who belong to this marginalized ethnic group that is often omitted from the diversity discourse, even in educated circles. Higher education institutions should include Arab American studies when offering ethnic courses. Research on Arab Americans helps increase the scholarship available to educators, and my hope is that my research will contribute to this scholarship.
- Higher education institutions should provide faculty development opportunities to support the development of courses that include the Arab American experience in different fields, such as sociology, history, education, and psychology. Dessel and Ali (2012) state, “Exploration of salient social identities and the development of a new common in-group identity among diverse participants are also important in reducing bias” (p. 576).
- Higher education professionals, student affairs, and faculty need to understand not only microaggressions but genuine political and physical danger that is the lived reality of many families of Arab American students. Professionals also need to be able to tell when their Arab American students are reluctant to tell them about it because they do not trust them. They need to know the importance of Arab American students knowing that these professionals are trustworthy and that they understand what the students go through in daily life: being constantly harassed, stereotyped, and misrepresented in the media and mainstream culture. The 2106 US presidential election has resulted in a new regime that denies that it is anti-

Arab and anti-Muslim. One of the first Executive Orders of the new president was to ban Arabs and Muslims from seven countries from entering the US. Even those with valid visas or with green cards were prevented from entering the US. Some of them were harassed, detained, and questioned at several US airports. As I write this chapter, this new order has been rejected by two US federal courts as a discriminatory order against one religion (Islam). Six of the seven banned countries are members of the Arab League, with Arab and Muslim majority populations. This order and many behaviors of the newly elected US government officials have encouraged and renewed a surge of Islamophobic speeches and statements and an increase in acts of violence against Arabs and Muslims, including vandalism and hate crimes that had already been rising in the last two years to a level that has not been seen since September 11, 2001 (Confronting Fear, 2016). It is crucial now for faculty and staff in higher education to understand their Arab American students better and to foster that understanding on campus among students who misunderstand and stereotype Arab Americans.

- Inclusion of Arab American college students in higher education and understanding their needs takes courage and hard work by faculty, staff and researchers. Sometimes, it is challenging for professionals to educate about a group about which they, themselves, lack the proper tools to understand and teach. Even though some scholars started to write about Arab Americans and their experiences after September 11<sup>th</sup>, this is a relatively new field, with limited references and data. Arab Americans remain under-researched, heavily stereotyped, and conflated with Muslims.
- Inclusion needs to move beyond the personal contact between faculty and students on a personal level to institutional and structural recognition of the identity of this group. Difficult conversations and uncomfortable dialogues are greatly needed. Inclusion means that teaching about this group, inside and outside of the classroom, at the undergraduate and graduate level, be adopted and routinely implemented by higher education institutions. With the changes in demographics in the US that are caused by immigration, institutions are becoming more diverse (Smith, 2015). Arab American students, who are part of a community that has had a rapid growth (AAI, n.d.), are part of this diversity on college campuses. This increase in numbers is accompanied by a charged political atmosphere against Arabs, Muslims, and Arab Americans, which has contributed to a stark increase in stereotypes, attacks, and hate crimes against members of this community. The political, social, and historical circumstances that affect the Arab American community in the US make this education of great urgency. In discussing identity development in student affairs, Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009) emphasize that student affairs professionals should learn and understand the importance of diverse student identity in order to serve them better.

The need to understand the person, context, and interactions between the two advances identity theories as relevant to student affairs practice. The more practitioners understand how students make meaning of their

identities, the better they are able to assist in promoting student learning and development in higher education institutions. (p. 578)

Well-designed curriculum and carefully planned and implemented programming that address the issues and needs of Arab American students are not just an added aspect to diversity initiatives; they are imperative for the country, given the current political and social atmosphere. Without this urgency, Arab American identity deserves the attention given to other underrepresented groups that have also been historically marginalized.

- My subjects did not feel that they were included in any diversity initiatives on their campuses. Many incidents that directly affect them have taken place, like the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, visa restrictions on Arab and Muslim students and other oppressive regulations. There is very little effort for inclusion of Arab American students, Arab students, or Muslim students in the curriculum, nor extra- or co-curricular activities by the administrations of their campuses. Rakan, for example, answered my question whether his campus put any activities or teach courses that deal with Arab American issues, “It is only what we put together as Arab Student Club or Muslim Student Association on campus to bring awareness to our issues and educate others about who we are as Arab American or Muslim students.” Awareness is a prerequisite to understanding ethnicity. Many of my subjects explained how Arab and Muslim student organizations try hard to get funding for their programs from Students Government Associations and administrations on their campuses to put awareness programs together. They look for their administrations to open a dialogue in classes and to include them during orientation for new students and during co-curricular activities that are purposeful and inclusive.
- Advocacy and inclusion efforts should also include normalizing the Arab American experience. When campuses invite scientist speaker, researchers, comedians, or performers, they should consider inviting some who are experts in their topics and happen to be Arab American, so students are exposed to average Arab Americans and not only the stereotyped images.
- College students in general need to seek knowledge about the US involvement in the Arab countries, where the US has been fighting two wars in Arab and Muslim countries for the last 15 years. Ahmed, for example, said

Students are not curious about what is going on against Arabs and Muslims around the world, especially by the US, like in Palestine, in Iraq, in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and all around the Arab countries, where the US is heavily involved. Sometimes, it feels like they don't even care about what is going on, so it is on academic affairs and student affairs to help create awareness and be more intentional about including Arab and Muslim issues (Ahmed).

- College campuses need to promote intersectionality and stress its importance to foster meaningful interactions among and within diverse student groups. To do that, they need to execute a well planned strategy. At a minimum, they should fund student groups that are making the effort to achieve a truly intersectional campus (Pope & Reynolds, 2017).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

To the best of my knowledge, Arab American identity is under-researched. I have not come across any study of Arab American college students' identity. I believe, as do my subjects, that there is not enough scholarly work that has been done about their identity where they could see themselves reflected or that speaks for them and their issues. For example, I have learned a lot from my subjects about who they are and how and why they identify as Arab Americans. I hope that readers will gain new insights and learn about this ethnicity and its identity. There are many areas of research that could be explored to benefit the American public, higher education institutions, and policymakers to help Arab Americans be better understood and less stereotyped.

It is with urgency that I am writing this chapter in a time at which policymakers and public opinion are in favor of imposing restrictions on immigration from seven Arab/Muslim countries under the safety and security umbrella, with no evidence that any person from these countries has ever committed any terrorist act in the US. Because of lack of information and negative propaganda, as well as years of stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims, and what Bayoumi (2015) calls "racing religion," such an Executive Order can find support among the public. It is more than ever before that extensive scholarly work is needed to provide relevant, current information about Arabs and Muslims that is based on sound research. The political climate in the US is so charged against Arabs and Muslims that the government feels that it does not need evidence to support their claim that these countries are a source of terrorism, and immigrants from these countries are

potential terrorists with intentions to hurt the US. I recommend further research to be conducted with Arab Americans, in general, and with Arab American college students, in particular, to better understand them and their identities and the effects of this negative attention and visibility on their development. Below are some of the questions that might need answers about the Arab American identity that can inform future research:

- How do Arab American college students benefit from policy change in higher education institutions?
- What does it mean to Arab American college students to be seen as potential terrorists who are not trusted by their own government?
- How to influence media outlets to report objectively about Arab Americans instead of helping spread stereotypes?
- What are the effects of stereotypes on Arab Americans young children? Adolescents? Adults?
- What would higher education institutions do to be more inclusive to this ethnic group?
- What is the role of Protestant Christian institutions and how do they see Arabs and Muslims?
- What are the real issues that drive the US foreign policy in the Arab countries?
- What does it mean for Arab Americans to be treated as an underrepresented ethnicity (minority)
- What does it mean for Arab Americans to be classified as White?
- Do Protestant Christian Americans recognize Islam as a religion or as something else? The latest announcement by one of the top Advisors of President Trump, General Michael Flynn, that Islam is not a religion, but it is a political ideology, like communism or Nazism?
- What are the reasons behind the US government's stand against Arabs and Muslims in respect to retaliations against Iraq, for example, or the full and unconditional support for the state of Israel regardless of the Israeli occupation of Arab land in Palestine and Syria since 1967?

- What are the ways that campus administrations can be more inclusive to Arab and Muslim students?

### **Suggestions Future Research Topics**

Some of the research topics for future research could be the following:

- A research study could be conducted with a similar sample in different geographical locations (non-New England) and on different kinds of campuses (small elite colleges, religious-based colleges, private colleges, community colleges) that differ from the public Research-I campus where much of this research was conducted.
- Young Arab American students in High school or in middle school.
- Arab refugees in the US in various geographical locations in the US.
- Muslim men and how they deal with stereotypes and acts of bias or hate crimes.
- College Muslim women with hijab and how they deal with acts of bias and acts of violence which have been escalating recently.
- Comparative study of generational differences between parents and their children

### **Conclusion**

Only with participation of Arab Americans and Arab American college students in scholarly research can some questions yet be answered. Higher education institutions in the US should put more resources to support research that will provide more education about Arab Americans and Arab American college students. Only through scholarly research can stereotypes of Arab Americans and Muslims be shattered. It is very difficult for Arab American college students to feel that others look at them as potential terrorists or potential threat to their security. Higher education institutions should provide an atmosphere that is inclusive to Arab American students and provide support for them that makes them feel accepted and welcomed like other students. Higher education institutions, through scholarly research, can introduce a field of study about this ethnicity



that will change the minds of mainstream students, among whom are future policymakers. Educating college students about this ethnicity can help transfer this knowledge to the general public, including research findings about Arab Americans in regular curriculum materials that normalizes people of this ethnicity that have lived in the US for hundreds of years and remains completely misunderstood.

## APPENDIX A

### PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

#### Call for Participants!

#### ***LOOKING FOR ARAB AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO IDENTIFY AS ARAB AMERICAN AND ARE WILLING TO TALK ABOUT THEIR COLLEGE EXPERIENCES.***

Hello,

My name is Abdul-Rahman (Abed) Jaradat. I am a doctoral student at the College of Education at UMass Amherst. I am interested in interviewing a few students from the Five Colleges whose Arab American identity is a salient identity, for my dissertation research (Arab American College Students Identity Factors).

I am interested in learning about the process of how and why Arab American college students identify as such, what it means to them, and what experiences led them to identify as such. I am also interested in learning about the students' experiences at home, school, and college that help shape this identity.

I am inviting participants who meet the following criteria (other criteria may apply):

1. Identifies as Arab American.
2. Currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate degree or is a recent graduate of one of the Five Colleges in Western Massachusetts
3. A student who was either born in the US or came to the US no later than first year in high school or a lower grade than high school age.
4. A student whose both parents or one of them is from Arab descent.
5. A US citizen student who came to the US for college but spent at least 3 years of their high school attending an American school in another country outside the US.
6. A student who is first-, second-, third- or fourth-generation of Arab descent.

If you meet the above listed criteria and agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a demographic/informational questionnaire. Selection of participants will be based on the completion of the questionnaire. If you are selected, I will call or email you to answer any questions you may have about the study and to set up a date, time, and location for an in-depth interview. I will travel to you to complete a total of two in-depth interviews of approximately 60 minutes. After your interviews have been transcribed (turned from audio format to text document), you will be asked to review the document to ensure the shared information is accurate. Upon the completion of all interviews and transcribing them, the participants will be invited to participate in one of two, gender-based focus groups that consist of different participants.

If you participate, many steps will be taken to keep your personal information confidential.

I will be happy to answer any questions that you might have about this study. If you have any further questions or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact me, Abed Jaradat, [afjaradat@gmail.com](mailto:afjaradat@gmail.com) or by calling me at 413-687-4505. You may also address your questions to my faculty supervisor, Dr. Maurianne Adams ([adams@educ.umass.edu](mailto:adams@educ.umass.edu)). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact either of us or the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Office (HRPO) at 413-545-3428 or [humansubjects@ora.umass.edu](mailto:humansubjects@ora.umass.edu).

You can stop your participation in the study at any time. It is a choice you make. No obligations to me or to anyone.

***If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at [afjaradat@gmail.com](mailto:afjaradat@gmail.com) or call me by phone at 413-687-4505***

Please feel free to pass the information along to:

- Your friends who might be interested in participating in this study
- Your professors, staff members, or anyone else who might meet the criteria.

I appreciate your cooperation, as this is an important study for me.

Thank You,

## APPENDIX B

### DEMOGRAPHIC/INFORMATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please provide the following information:

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
4. College you are attending or have graduated from: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Your academic class rank or occupation:  
\_\_\_ First Year                      \_\_\_ Senior  
\_\_\_ Sophomore                      \_\_\_ Other (Specify other): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ Junior
6. Were you born in the United States?
7. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
8. Were you raised in the United States?  
\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
9. What type of high school did you attend (Check One)?
10. Public school in the US                      \_\_\_ Private School in the US
11. American school outside the US                      \_\_\_ Other (Specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
12. What is the religious background of your parents?  
Sunni \_\_\_ Shi'a                      \_\_\_ Druze                      \_\_\_ Roman Catholic                      \_\_\_ Roman Orthodox  
Chaldean                      \_\_\_ Masonite                      \_\_\_ Copt                      \_\_\_ Jewish                      \_\_\_ Other- (please  
explain) \_\_\_\_\_
13. Please mark the statement(s) below that best describe(s) your family (Mark all that apply)  
I was raised in:
  - a. a two-parent household, both parents are of Arab descent
  - b. a two-parent household, with only one parent of Arab descent:  
Mother \_\_\_ Father \_\_\_
  - c. a single-parent household, with a parent of Arab descent:  
Mother \_\_\_ Father \_\_\_
  - d. a single-parent household, with the parent of Arab descent not living at home
  - e. in a household where two parents spoke Arabic
  - f. in a household where only one parent spoke Arabic
  - g. a household with two grandparents who spoke Arabic
  - h. a household with one grandparent who spoke Arabic

- i. a household where neither of the parents spoke Arabic but kept elements of the Arab culture, like food, music, relationships with other Arabs/Arab Americans
  - j. I did not speak Arabic at home but learned Arabic in the mosque or at the church.
  - k. I did not speak Arabic at home but learned Arabic in college.
  - l. I did not speak Arabic at home but have been trying to learn it in college.
  - m. My parents did not speak Arabic at home but encouraged me to learn Arabic.
  - n. My parents spoke Arabic at home, but I often spoke English instead.
14. I spoke Arabic at home but was reluctant to speak it at school or in college because there were no other children of Arab descent who spoke Arabic
  15. I spoke Arabic at home but did not speak it at school with other children of Arab descent who also spoke the language.
  16. I spoke Arabic at home but was ashamed to use it in public because I did not want anybody to know that I was of Arab descent.
  17. I spoke Arabic at home and at school.
  18. My school lunch was often home-prepared Arabic food.
  19. I listen to Arabic music while in school and while in college.
  20. I attend the Arab Student Club/Organization activities regularly.
  21. I get engaged in discussions about Arab and Arab American issues.
  22. I get engaged with others in political discussions when it comes to the Arab countries and the Palestine issue.
  23. I avoid discussions that are related to Arab/Arab American issues.
  24. I do not participate in the Arab Student Club, but I attend the Muslim Student Association activities.
  25. If both of your parents are of Arab descent, do they both identify as Arab American?
  26.  Yes  No. If not, does either identify as such?  Yes  No
  27. What is the most salient identity of your parents?
  28. Mom \_\_\_\_\_ Dad \_\_\_\_\_
  29. Do you have siblings? If so, do any of them identify as Arab American? If not, how do they identify? Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_
  30. Please provide any information about yourself that relates to your identity as Arab American, your upbringing, your background that I have not asked you about that you think would be helpful for me to choose you for an interview.

Thank you for your time.

## APPENDIX C

### SELECTION CRITERIA

- a) All participants have to be students: undergraduate or graduate, or recent graduates. In the case of not finding a minimum of 10 current college students whose Arab American identity is a salient identity and who attend one of the five colleges in Western Massachusetts, I will have to look into interviewing students from eastern Massachusetts' campuses, like MIT or Harvard.
- b) Extra effort will be exercised to balance the ratio of women to men. I have 6 women and 5 men who agreed to be part of the study. Gender balance is a very important factor for my study, as experiences and understandings of identity may differ from one gender to another. As I will discuss in my findings and data analysis, female participants often expressed their salient identity as women and how being a woman was as important as being an Arab American. Sometimes, and in some situations being a woman was more salient than being Arab American. Tatum (2000) reports that whenever she asked the question, "Who am I?" in a coed setting, women would usually mention being females as an important identifier, while men rarely mention their maleness. In some cases during my interviews, some men talked about their identity as being targeted as an assigned identity to them by the US public and US authorities for being young Arab men who are subject to stereotypical image as womanizers, terrorists, and women abusers.
- c) All participants should identify as Arab American and should have been either born in the US or migrated to the US no later than high school. Spending some

of the high school years in the US helps them understand the US culture more, so it is important that my sample has high school experience in the US prior to attending college; therefore, their Arab American identity has more validity in comparison to those who came directly to attend college without spending time in US high schools.

- d) Participants can be of any religious background so long as they identify as Arab American. The study will be more reliable if I find a balance between those who come from Christian and Muslim backgrounds as they may have different experiences.
- e) The US-born informants can have one or both parents of Arab descent and can be first-, second- or third-generation Arab American.

## APPENDIX D

### HUMAN SUBJECTS CONSENT FORM

#### Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

**Student Researcher:** Abdul-Rahman (Abed) Jaradat  
**Study Title:** Arab American College Students Identity Factors  
**Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Maurianne Adams

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#### *1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?*

This is a consent form that provides you with information about the study that I am conducting so you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. This form will help you understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It describes what you will be asked to do as a participant and what the potential risks are for participating in this study. Please take some time to review this information and ask any questions that you may have. If you decide to participate, please sign this form for my records. You will also be given a copy for your own record.

#### *2. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?*

The purpose of this study is to explore what factors Arab American college students use to identify themselves as Arab Americans. This study also seeks to learn about the experiences that help Arab American college students form their identity and whether college experience is an important factor in helping them form this identity.

#### *3. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?*

I am inviting participants who meet the following criteria (other criteria may apply):

1. Identifies as Arab American
2. Currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate degrees or a recent graduate from one of the Five Colleges in Western Massachusetts.
3. A student who was either born in the US or came to the US no later than first year in high school education or a lower grade than high school age.
4. A student whose both parents or one of them is from Arab descent.
5. A US citizen student who came to the US for college but spent at least 3 years of their high school attending an American school in other country outside the US.
6. A first-, second-, third- or fourth-generation Arab American.

#### *4. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?*

You will be asked to participate in two interviews averaging one hour each. I will call or email you to answer any questions you may have about the study and to set up a date, time, and location for the interview. I will explain the steps I will take to maintain your confidentiality. After your interview has been transcribed (turned from audio format to text document), you will be asked to review the document to ensure the shared



information is accurate. I may also share portions of my dissertation writing with you and provide you with the optional task of offering me feedback about the accuracy of my interpretations of the information you shared.

#### *5. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?*

By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences as a college student and how those experiences help form your identity as an Arab American. The information you share could potentially assist other Arab Americans, college professors, and staff, professors from other colleges' staff and students, and ultimately the American public and the decision makers to better understand Arab Americans and make informed decisions as they relate to this ethnic group.

#### *6. WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?*

As a participant, you may experience risks, such as discomfort from sharing personal information about some of your experiences that might not be pleasant, like family experiences or experiences in school or college where you might have not been treated fairly or treated based on stereotypical assumptions. However, please remember that all information will be confidential.

#### *7. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?*

I will do all that I can to protect your confidentiality. I will keep all records and data in a secure location. I will use a password lock to protect data stored on a computer and will delete all identifying files (e.g., paper files, audio files, and electronic files) at the conclusion of the study. You will also be asked to complete an Informed Consent form before the interview process, which will allow you to choose your own pseudonym (fake name). All data will identify you through your pseudonym, and any specific information about your college/university will use vague descriptors, such as "a mid-size, small size public or private college in the Northeast of the US." Your email address and personal demographic information will never be shared with any other individual. At the conclusion of the study, if I publish any findings I will again protect your identity using your pseudonym and vague descriptors of your college. I will do everything I can to ensure your confidentiality, but I cannot guarantee complete confidentiality in cases of computer theft, tape recorder theft, or a related incident. I will do my best to minimize this possibility.

#### *8. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?*

I will be happy to answer any questions that you might have about this study. If you have any further questions or if you have a research-related problem please feel free to contact me, Abed Jaradat, [afafjaradat@gmail.com](mailto:afafjaradat@gmail.com) or by calling me at 413-687-4505. You may also address your questions to my faculty supervisor, Dr. Maurianne Adams ([adams@educ.umass.edu](mailto:adams@educ.umass.edu)). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact either of us or the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Office (HRPO) at 413-545-3428 or [humansubjects@ora.umass.edu](mailto:humansubjects@ora.umass.edu).

*10. CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?*

You can stop being in the study at any time. It is a choice you make without obligations to me or to anyone.

*11. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT*

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the study described above. The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Chosen Pseudonym (Fake Name)

By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person  
Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

## APPENDIX E

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The proposed study will address the following research questions, and their sub-questions:

1. What does it mean to be Arab American?
  - a) Please tell me a bit about your extended family's country/countries of origin, and the ways in which members of your immediate family identify (as Arab, Arab American, religious identity, identity based on national origin or US citizenship).
  - b) How and when did you become aware of your identity as Arab American as a salient identity—or decide that an Arab American identity best described who you are? (probe examples concerning how early this identity was conscious, any early experiences that influenced this identity, awareness of other identity possibilities)
  - c) Is it important for you to identify as Arab American? If not, Why?
  - d) Do you feel free to talk about your Arab American identity to your friends and peers and others who are different from you? If not, can you explain why?
  - e) Is Arab the more important identifier for you, or being a Muslim, Christian, or Jewish . . .etc?
  - f) Where and when (if at all) would you identify yourself as an Arab American or as Muslim, Jewish . . .etc?

- g) Do you think that identifying as Arab American is more important than identifying with your family's country of origin or with your religion? If so, Why?
  - h) Has your identity as Arab American been questioned by members of your family, religious community, or others whose opinion is important to you?
  - i) What elements of the Arab American identity make you proud to be an Arab American (culture, traditions, history, family, school, political atmosphere, sense of belonging to a community or ethnicity, ethics, religion)? Are there elements of the Arab American identity that make you uncomfortable or not proud? Are there elements about your identity that make you proud? Uncomfortable or not proud?
  - j) What are the most important elements in both Arab and US cultures that you think have influenced you to identify as Arab American?
  - k) Do you think that your gender has a particular effect on your identifying as Arab American? If so, why?
  - l) Can you say anything more about other aspects of your identity that connect you with your Arab American identity, besides gender?
2. What are the factors or experiences that led you to identify as Arab American?
- a) In your early experiences and socializations, have you had any mentors who influenced you to claim your Arab American identity as a salient identity, like parents, siblings, teachers, professors, community members . . .?
  - b) Are there any events that took place in the US that influenced you to identify as Arab American?

- c) Are there any events that took place in the Arab World that influenced you to identify as Arab American?
  - d) Do you feel being an Arab American has had any bearing on your college experience, in the classroom, residence hall, dining commons, etc.?
  - e) Have any specific aspects of your college experience affected your identity as an Arab American? If yes, please give examples.
  - f) Do you feel that your friends, peers, and others respect who you are when you identify as Arab American? Do not respect? (give examples).
  - g) Are there situations on campus in which you prefer not to disclose your Arab American identity? Situations off campus?
  - h) Do you feel included and/or supported as an Arab American by the diversity initiatives on your campus?
  - i) Do you belong to any organizations on or off campus whose main focus has to do with Arab/Arab American?
  - j) Do you think that your religious background has had any bearing on how you identify?
  - k) Do you think that people who do not know you ascribe an identity to you based on your physical appearance? If so, what are some of the identities that are often ascribed to you? How does that make you feel?
3. When you are asked to fill in the census forms with questions of ethnicity/race (for example, census forms or college application forms), how do you fill them in: African, Asian, Caucasian, other?

4. Are there experiences you have had as an Arab American – or aspects of your identity as Arab American – that you would like us to talk about, to help me understand your identity?

## APPENDIX F

### FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. Think back to your early years in school. Did you think you were any different from other kids in class? If so, how?
2. How were you treated by your classmates in elementary school? Did you think they looked at you differently because of the way you look, your ethnicity, your religion, your second language?
3. Did you notice any difference in interactions/treatment by your classmates as you got to high school? Please describe your relationships with other classmates.
4. Tell me about the time you started claiming your Arab American identity.
5. Did you get any resistance from your family? Friends? Classmates?
6. How do you identify yourself now in college (or as a recent graduate)?
7. Has your identifying as an Arab or Arab American had any bearing on what organizations you chose to get involved with in college? Please elaborate.
8. How did your religious identity inform how you identified ethnically in college? Was there any effect from one to the other or contradiction between both identities?
9. Question for women only: Did you have brothers growing up? If so, did you have the same freedoms they had or did you think they received differential treatment? If so, what did you think about that? Have you ever made any connection between the way you and your brothers were treated to the Arabic culture?
10. Question for men only: Did you have sisters growing up? If so, did they have the same freedoms you had or did you think they were subjected to more restrictions

than you were? If so, what did you think about that? Have you ever made any connection between the way you and your sisters were treated to the Arabic culture?

11. What do you think of the recent events in the Arab countries, especially the treatment of women?
12. How do you see the role of Arab/Arab American women (man) in the US and in the Arab world?
13. Is there anything else you would like to talk about?



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