

Being Young in Arab Detroit: Media and Identity in Post-9/11 America

By

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Dedication

To my mom and dad

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Abstract

More than ten years after the events of 9/11, the Arab American community of the Dearborn and Detroit, Michigan area continues to feel the effects of the nation's intense scrutiny of their lives and identities. As formal government and informal communal surveillance, threats of violence and deportation, and general anxieties escalated, the Arab Detroit community has been at the center of various efforts to understand Arab and Muslim Americans. Through an engagement with post-9/11 national news media discourses, participant-observation work at the Arab American National Museum (founded in 2005 and located in Dearborn, MI), interviews and focus groups with Arab American youth, and digital ethnography of Arab American youths' online cultural productions, this dissertation examines what it means to be young and Arab American in Dearborn. Moving beyond well-worn distinctions between mainstream and grassroots media, this dissertation examines news discourse and television programming in relation to various media produced and circulated by Arab American youth. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to scholarship in a number of related areas including media representations of race and ethnicity, geography and identity, the increasingly vexed relationship between race and religion, and youth culture.

Introduction

In the late spring of 2013, a Dearborn/ Dearborn Heights area charter school's auditorium, which doubles as its gym, was packed to the brim with students from grades nine through twelve. Ms. Ayoub,¹ a twenty-something Lebanese-American 10th grade English teacher, quieted the students and asked them to welcome the filmmakers of the "Dreams from the 313" film festival. A group of about twenty 11th grade students aged 15 - 17 entered from either wing of the stage and lined themselves up facing the audience near center stage. Behind the group of students was a large screen projecting an amended United States flag. White circles had replaced the stars, the background was a dark navy blue, and the "stripes" were statements taken from the students' films. The "stripes" of the flag featured statements such as: "We're still segregated"; "We all came here for opportunities. If they had known there wasn't anything here, they wouldn't have come"; "They could survive, but not live"; "We can do it with our generation"; "The idea of keeping Dearborn clean has changed. Now it's about pollution back then it was about keeping it white"; "You can relate that to other countries. Like Palestine, where they're fighting for their freedom"; "When I come to America, I'm American, that's it. Doesn't matter if I'm Arabic or come from other country"; "Instead of rioting against each other, why didn't they riot against the law?"

The large projection of the adapted U.S. flag set the tone of the film festival as critical and provocative. Ms. Ayoub thanked the students and teachers for coming to the mid-school day

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation to protect each participant's identity.

event. She continued by introducing the film festival judges² and describing the premise of the film projects as seeking to answer the questions: "Why Am I Here?" and "What does the American Dream mean to me?" After these initial remarks, Ms. Ayoub invited each student group to step forward and say a few words about their film before screening it for the audience. After each student film was shown, applause from the judges, students, and teachers rang through the large, cement-walled room. The "Dreams of the 313" high school film project is one of many instances of youth in Arab Detroit using media to critique mainstream discourses about 'Arab youth' and, in the process, coming to terms with what it means to be young and of Arab descent in contemporary America.³

Since the events of 9/11, the scrutinizing eye of the U.S. mainstream media has corralled Arab Americans into focus. And as the most densely populated Arab American city in the U.S., Dearborn, MI has emerged as the most prominent geographical space in which anxieties over Islam and Arab identity are negotiated. Outsider curiosity and the need to make sense of this city have resulted in documentaries, television shows, and countless news stories focusing on Dearborn, MI and its residents.

Arabs and Arab Americans have a long, complicated history of representation in U.S. media. Since 9/11, Arab American visibility has become part of a standard portrayal of the United States as being a "post-racial" and multicultural society. News and entertainment media representations run the gamut from portrayals that vilify as well as sympathize with the plight of Muslim Arab Americans. Evelyn Alsultany points to this trend as she explores post-9/11 mainstream media representations that portray Arabs and Arab Americans in largely sympathetic

² This included me as one of the three judges.

³ I use "Arab Detroit" to refer to the city of Dearborn and, in general, the Arab American population and culture of the Detroit Metro Area.

roles (2008). However, Alsultany argues that while sympathetic portrayals do counter the dominant stereotype of Arabs as terrorists, they ultimately work out a “logic of ambivalence,” one in which racism is deemed wrong yet essential to U.S. sovereignty (2008). It is in this ambivalently racist, Post-9/11 era that Dearborn, MI has emerged as the site par excellence in which the place of Arabs – and Muslim Arabs and Arab-Americans in particular - in the American imagination is being debated.

This dissertation focuses on mainstream media representations of Arab Detroit as well as the media produced by Arabs and Arab Americans in the region as a way to understand how Arab identity is being defined and fought over in the context of the heightened visibility and anxiety surrounding Arabs and Muslims in contemporary America. In doing so, this dissertation brings a much-needed focus on media and communication to scholarship on Arab Detroit and more broadly, race and ethnicity. This dissertation moves past well-worn paradigms that either ignore media and communication or take a media-centric approach that does not adequately situate media within broader socio-cultural and political contexts. In doing so, this project conceptualizes Dearborn, MI as a mediated city and the Arab American population living in the city as subjects whom actively shape narratives about their city and themselves. Thus, I begin with the broad question of how youth in Arab Detroit are spoken of in national and local mainstream news media and if there are alternative media outlets or institutions that challenge troubling representations of disaffected and inassimilable Arab American youth. But this inquiry is grounded in research that I conducted in Dearborn, MI among a range of Arab American youth and their families. Thus, my analysis of mainstream media – news media as well as entertainment media – is tempered by an analysis of media produced and circulated by Arab

American youth and that have tremendous influence in shaping their sense of self, community, and belonging in the U.S.

Thus, this dissertation begins with an analysis of mainstream news media addressing Arab Americans since 9/11. The prominent mode of Arab American representation in mainstream news media oscillates between various strategies of containment, where a discursive connection to particular geographic places that contains the excess and domestic otherness of Arab Americans is central. This strategy of geographic containment situates Arab American identity within specific urban immigrant spaces and frames them as inherently part of a U.S. multicultural landscape. As we will see, this narrative strategy ultimately reinforces the idea that Arab Americans can never fully belong and will always fall short of full cultural citizenship. However, when the boundaries of this geographic confinement are pushed, mainstream news discourses resituate the out-of-bounds subject within other schemas. Narratives that focus on geography are supplemented by ones that question Arab Americans' worthiness of public sympathies and their ability to assimilate. Taken together, these strategies of containment found in post-9/11 mainstream news media create an atmosphere of superficial engagement with Arab Americans that has the potential to produce further misconceptions and often get taken up as evidence for the need for formal and informal surveillance.

As Arab Detroit became the center of attention for understanding Arab Americans post-9/11, the community has responded and been affected on both an institutional and individual level. In order to understand one of the ways the Arab Detroit community responded to intense post-9/11 media attention and attempts to reclaim definitions of "Arab Americanness," this dissertation uses the Arab American National Museum as an institutional case study. The Arab American National Museum, through its permanent exhibits and dynamic programming, presents

a complex example of how the Arab American community carves out a space for itself in national collective and public memory. The permanent exhibits, specific locale, and architecture of the Arab American National Museum standardize a pedagogical approach to defining Arab Americanness that emphasizes an alignment with dominant U.S. immigrant narratives. The Arab American National Museum's performative approaches to identity construction, which come through in public programming such as academic and cultural events and conferences, complicate and build upon the more static pedagogical approaches. The pedagogical and performative aspects of the museum reveal the intense work involved in attempting to pin down the definition of "Arab Americanness" and the ruptures that occur with this space.

In order to understand and consider how Arab youth grapple with this intense scrutiny, the second part of this dissertation considers the ways Arab American youth make sense of their identities vis-a-vis their media consumption and production practices. The bridging of youth culture and globalization studies features a number of studies on particular youth populations in various parts of the world, addressing how they are wrapped in the complexities of transnational subjectivities and discursive constructions of globalization anxieties. Youth culture and globalization researchers point out how the discourses of each rest on narratives of progress and development (Maira, 2004; Massey, 1998). This constructs youth culture and globalization as phenomena where a liminal state of being is the standard. It is important to note that the main entities under scrutiny when addressing youth culture and globalization include nation-states and individuals. When addressing immigrant subjects/ individuals, particular negotiations are said to occur due to their constant mental and physical shuffle between a "home" and "host" country. Localized hybridity, which manifests from the consumption and production of local and foreign-based media, informs diasporic youth cultures and identity formations (Kraidy 2005). Using this

conceptualization of liminality for immigrant peoples, researchers draw connections between youth and migration, calling for the study of either to be closely bound. Further, some researchers argue that youth culture and all the discourses (concerning body politics, subcultural movements, etc.) associated with it are prime sites for the everyday anxieties of globalization to be negotiated (Maira and Soep, 2005). Not in the least does this concern anxieties over issues regarding citizenship and the necessary ideological work needed to sustain the literal and symbolic borders of the nation-state. The media and our mediated worlds serve as key sites where these narratives, anxieties, and ideological work are conveyed, cultivated, negotiated, and challenged – Arab Detroit exemplifies this.

My contribution to these conversations focuses on Arab American youth in the transnational space of Dearborn, MI. By using interviews, focus groups, and digital ethnography, this dissertation explores how Arab and Arab American youth respond to media representations and actively produce their own media to counter dominant representations. Internet video-sharing platforms and social media websites present particularly fertile arenas for Arab American youth to insert their often humorous and satirical critiques of U.S. mainstream culture, especially in regards to whiteness and racial hierarchies, and their hyper-localized knowledge of an Arab American youth identity and experience. By approaching the analysis of Dearborn, MI as both a mediated construct and a physical site, this project reveals how Arab American youth of this community navigate their lives under the post-9/11 public's watchful eye.

Important to our understanding of how and why Dearborn and the Detroit Metro area at large are synonymous with Arab America is the long, complex history of migration from the Arab World to Southeast Michigan. The Arab communities in Southeast Michigan have migrant pathways that originate from almost every nation-state in the Arab World region, especially from

the countries of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Yemen. Population estimates of Arab Detroit's Arab American population range from 125,000 to 475,000 (Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit After 9/11, 2009). The 2004 Detroit Arab American Study (DAAS) provides some of the most extensive and recent data on the Arab American population of the Detroit Metro Area. By engaging over one thousand Arab Americans from the Detroit area, DAAS found four major regions/ nation-states to be the population's primary nations of origin: Lebanon/ Syria (37%), Iraq (35%), Palestine/ Jordan(12%), and Yemen (9%) (Preliminary Findings from the Detroit Arab American Study 2004). Capturing accurate numbers for the Arab American population in Michigan (and everywhere in the United States) is difficult and has been historically a trying task due to U.S. Census ethnic and racial data not categorizing "Arab" as a standalone demographic. Instead, Arab identity rests, if uneasily, within the "White" category. Only surveys that specifically seek to parse out Arab Americans from Caucasian Americans are able to capture their demographics, yet even these findings are limited.

The diversity of the community regarding their country of origin, immigrant status, religion, and culture is of the utmost importance in understanding this community⁴. Waves of immigration from the area called Greater Syria, the nineteenth and early twentieth century name of the region that includes the countries of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Kuwait, and small parts of Egypt, Iraq, and Turkey, began well over a century ago. Immigration at the turn of the

⁴ The diversity of the community also is important in conceptualizing its intracommunity politics. The ethnic, religious, and national heterogeneity of the Arab American population in the Detroit Metro Area gives way to a variety of rich perspectives and identities. The variance of backgrounds often becomes the grounds through which intra-community hierarchies and differences are determined. Whether it be on the grounds of nation of origin, first-, second, third-, etc. generation immigrant status, religion, or gender, power dynamics and struggles over community cultural and political hegemony are a significant characteristic of Arab Detroit.

twentieth century included, albeit in smaller numbers, people from Greater Syria (Schopmeyer 30-31). As one of the largest cities in the United States at the time with a major industrial economy, Detroit attracted immigrants from multiple backgrounds. The Ford Motor Company became a major employer of immigrants to the Detroit area and a crucial site of the Detroit-based Arab immigrant experience (Hassoun 1). Because of racist discrimination in hiring practices during the early stages of the Ford Motor Company, African Americans were overlooked as "viable" employees and in turn immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Arab World were brought in as industrial workers (Stiffler 72). To this day the interwoven cultural fabric of the Ford Motor Company and the Arab American population in Dearborn is apparent through its continued employment of Arab Americans and subtle, yet obvious presence in their everyday lives. One only needs to think about Fordson High School, named after Henry Ford's son Edsel Ford. Fordson is today a major public high school in Dearborn, MI, with a majority Arab Muslim American student population.

The ebb and flow of Arab immigrants to the United States and, thus, the Detroit Metro area was and continues to be primarily dictated by both U.S. immigration policy and events occurring in the Arab World, particularly war and conflict that produce refugees. It was not surprising, then, that with the passing of anti-immigration legislation and the slide into the Great Depression, immigration to the United States from the Arab World ceased in the 1920s for a number of decades (Schopmeyer 30). While professionals from the middle and upper classes and young students were often permitted entry into the United States, it was not until the Immigration Act of 1965 that immigration from the Arab World (and many other parts of the non-European world) resumed (or from some regions really began) in large numbers. The passing of this legislation in combination with ongoing conflict in the Arab World (e.g., the Arab-Israeli

conflict, particularly with Lebanon in 1967, the mid 1980s, and the early to mid 2000s, Palestinian refugees from 1948 onward, the Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990, the First Iraq War of 1991, the Second Iraq War from 2003-2011, and Arab World uprisings, and most recently the Syrian Civil War) resulted in widespread migration to the United States from the Arab region. Because Detroit had a well-established Syrian-Lebanese immigrant population from the early 1900s, Arab immigrants made Dearborn and other Southeast Michigan cities their new home. Established networks in Dearborn and other cities' cultural, economic, and social landscape by previous generations of immigrants easily draw new immigrants to the area; Detroit, New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago continue to be the cities with large and prominent Arab communities (Schopmeyer 30). Further, while the first immigrants to the Detroit area were mainly Christian men from the Greater Syria region, later Arab immigrant generations had a variety of religious, national, and gender identities. For instance, Shi'i Muslims from Lebanon established themselves in the Detroit Metro area, making the religion of Arab Americans in the region quite diverse and thought to be evenly split between Christians and Muslims (Schopmeyer 30). The variance in immigration backgrounds, religion, and ethnicity found among the Arab American population of Arab Detroit can and do create intra-community tensions and hierarchies.⁵

Since the 1970s, the Detroit Metro area has truly become a place synonymous with Arab America. The Arab American population in the area is mistakenly believed to be the largest in the United States, but this is a common misconception. What is true, however, and relates to the

⁵ This aspect of Arab Detroit culture is significantly under researched. Nabeel Abraham's chapter from *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* titled "Arab Detroit's 'American' Mosque" details tensions between newly immigrated Yemeni American Muslims and well-established Lebanese American Muslims in Dearborn (2000). From my experience in researching for this dissertation similar tensions are still apparent. Future research in this area is needed.

fascination with the Arab American community in Southeast Michigan is that it is the most concentrated place of Arabs outside of the Arab World, whereas the Los Angeles and New York City metro areas vie for the largest population of Arab Americans (Stiffler 70). The fascination, at best, and fear, at worst, of Southeast Michigan's Arab American community has become a prominent aspect of cultural and political discourse in the U.S. since 9/11.

Through this deeply contextualized engagement with Arab Detroit, this dissertation contributes to scholarly conversations on youth culture, U.S. race, ethnicity, and migration politics, and media and cultural identity. By using textual and discursive analyses with ethnographic methods, these interventions in youth culture studies and race and ethnicity studies contribute to studies on the lived experiences of Arab American youth and more broadly, media and communication scholarship on youth and identity. Overall, the two parts of this dissertation – the first focusing on large media and cultural institutions, and the second focusing on the everyday media lives of Arab and Arab American youth – come together to offer a rich account of how national anxieties concerning race, religion, and youth are negotiated. In the rest of this introduction, I offer the key theoretical frameworks that shape this dissertation by drawing upon various bodies of literature and disciplines. I also provide notes on research design and methodology and an outline of the chapters to come.

Post-9/11 Youth Culture

On September 10, 2012 a Twitter user with the username “Dearborn Wonka” released a tweet that featured an image-based Internet meme of a photograph of the HBO series Game of Thrones character Ned Stark anchored by the text “Brace yourselves. The 9/11 posts are coming again” (see Figure 1). The text of this meme appropriates the Ned Stark character’s phrase

“Brace yourselves. Winter is coming” that has been popularized by the HBO series. The Twitter profile of “Dearborn Wonka,” which I explore more in depth in Chapter Four, often disseminates online memes that are appropriated to highlight aspects of Arab American and Arab Detroit youth culture. This particular example reveals a tone of contempt toward the impending onslaught of 9/11-themed social media activity that has come to be expected to occur each year on September 11th and be especially prevalent in the Arab American community (see Salaita 2005 for more on Arab Americans’ “imperative patriotism” post-9/11). The sense of contempt conveyed by the meme demonstrates how Arab American youth come into friction with U.S. dominant ideologies that are rooted in post-9/11 citizenship expectations and forms of cultural imperialism. Through an engagement with Arab Detroit youth culture, this dissertation converses with the decades worth of youth culture scholarship and particularly the youth culture scholarship that works through questions of imperialism, empire, and place.

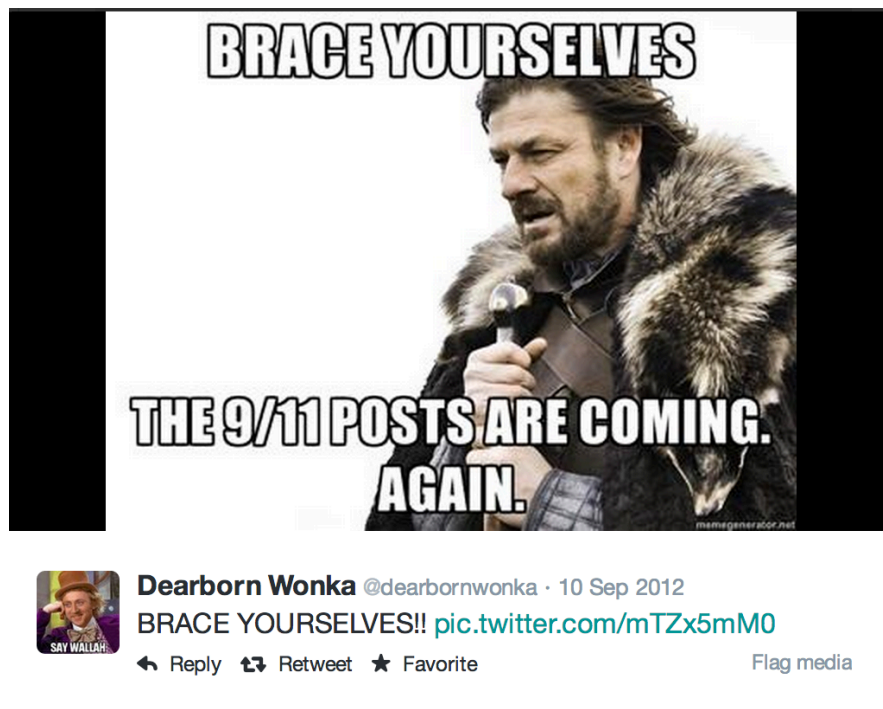


Figure 1 <https://twitter.com/dearbornwonka>

The development of youth culture studies can be traced to the beginning of the 1970s at the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University, particularly in the writings of Dick Hebdige, who authored the classic cultural studies book Subculture: The Meaning of Style (1979). Since the 1970s, feminist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial critiques of youth culture studies pushed this research area in multiple directions. One of the first major critiques of this originally male-dominated research came from Angela McRobbie. McRobbie brought a gender critique to the table with essays that focused on British girls' cultural consumption, including pop music, teen magazines, and other "teeny bopper" pop culture. Later, these essays were published in her book Feminism and Youth Culture (1991). Around the same time period of the 1980s and 1990s, British cultural theorists grappled with the positionality and experience of diasporic subjects and their contemporary cultural productions (Gilroy, 1991; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990; Hall, 1996; Mercer, 1988). While cultural theory took a turn towards understanding the complexities of the diasporic experience, they did not strongly, nor explicitly engage in exploring this phenomenon within the context of youth culture. Nonetheless, these studies from the British Cultural Studies camp provide the foundation through which contemporary studies on youth and globalization are conducted; and not only do they remain influential in terms of theoretical development, but also their methods, which range from close textual and ideological analysis of cultural texts to ethnography-influenced audience and reception studies, continue to influence youth cultures research.

More recently, scholars examining youth culture in an era marked by accelerated globalization and processes of media convergence reframe the questions and approaches explored by an earlier generation of media and cultural studies researchers. For instance, more contemporary scholars explore how discourses of youth culture and globalization similarly

position subjects involved in both or either as bound in narratives of progress, positions of liminality, and sites of cultural anxiety. Connecting the status of being young with some form of diasporic/migrant identity often becomes a framing device for researchers bridging these two bodies of research. Imperative to this connection is approaching youth as a socially-constructed life stage. Youth studies scholarship that addresses youth as a construct argues that it works for both social and economical reasons, i.e., labor market divisions, (Osgerby, 2004; Maira and Soep, 2005), a Post-World War II conceptualization emphasizing consumerism and upward mobility (Huq, 2006).

For instance, Doreen Massey makes connections between youth and globalization phenomena in her book Space, Place, and Gender (1994) and essay "The Spatial Construction of Youth Cultures" (1998). Massey connects the discourses of youth and globalization by pointing out how they are wrapped in narratives of progress -- thus, speaking to the liminality of the subjects who are being constructed. Advancing her interjection further, Massey adds a spatial-networked approach to this critique by calling for a re-imagining of the geographies of culture (1998); she argues for conceiving of various spacialities as interrelated nets, which locate different cultures within it (124-25). This conceptualization of space differentiates itself from a "temporary coherence" approach that relies on connections based on time (124-25). At the crux of her intervention is the centralizing of youth in global networks, thus foregrounding the importance of exploring youth culture in global, spatial terms. Re-framing our imaginings of the global and local speak closely to the transnational ethnographic approach of this project. Putting Massey in conversation with cultural geographers Vaughan Robinson (1987) and Peter Jackson (1989), Anoop Nayak's book Race, Place, and Globalization: Youth Cultures in a Changing World (2003) connects cultural geography and notions of space with race. Nayak takes a cultural

geographic framework, which focuses on the dynamics of space networks, and applies it to the context of studying white masculinities in Northern England. Through this study he argues that place and geography matter more now than ever, speaking directly to those who are researching under the premise that the importance of place and geography are dying in the age of globalization (5). Nayak builds off Massey's ideas and seeks to situate young people in time and place as part of a spatial cultural study; he argues, "empirically grounded place-based analyses of young lives may now offer a challenge to wider perceptions of globalization as an omnipotent, homogenizing forces that goes unheeded..." (5). Nayak often reiterates how the study of place and space offers sites of analysis for both material and symbolic meaning in youths' lives -- a position that speaks closely to this project.

Continuing the conversation on the interconnection between youth and globalization, Sunaina Maira (2004) discusses how the social ambivalence of youth as both immature citizens and potentially powerful, change-inducing citizens discursively constructs them as a primary site for the anxieties and hopes of a society and/or nation. Further expounding upon these ideas, she connects youth discourses with globalization discourses by discussing how youth as subjects of development tie analyses of them to globalization studies:

Stage models of identity assume that development is, if not linear, at least a teleological process...Globalization, too, is often framed in the context of arguments about "progress"; even if these arguments are discussing economic and political, and not psychological, development, they still are embroiled in debates about the desired end goals...The processes of both globalization and youth, and the conjunctures and disjunctures between them, need to be considered together" (206-7).

As a liminal stage of human development, particularly as it is constructed in Western societies, discourses about adolescence connect to globalization discourses and their related modernizing projects, which are imbued with the values of a teleological, linearly-framed progress narrative and accompanying modernizing projects for developing nation-states. For these two reasons 1) youth constructed as the site of anxiety and hope for a society and 2) the similar "progress" narratives both youth and globalization invoke are why Maira, Soep, and others argue for the imperativeness of studying youth culture in a global, transnational context. This dissertation project on Arab American youth follows these same reasons for supporting the necessity of this research.

A major intervention into this bridging of youth cultures and globalization studies by Maira and Soep is the formation of their theoretically-framing concept -- youthscape. Youthscape purposefully invokes Arjun Appadurai's notion of global -scapes, which attempts to conceptualize the various dimensions of globalization in terms of ideological, cultural, economical, technological, and people flows (1996). Appadurai describes these cultural dimensions/ -scapes of globalization as fluid, infinite, and always in flux. Youthscape as a term is inspired by the "epistemological spirit" of this framework, "conceiving of youth as a shifting group of people that is simultaneously a deeply ideological category" (xvi). Young people interact with all of Appadurai's various -scapes and, thus, youthscape is not necessarily an additional, but a responsive -scape that is deeply interwoven with these other dimensions of globalization. Maira and Soep's notion of youthscape, while compelling, hinges on the logic of global flows, while some transnationally-focused scholars are developing more complex concepts to describe the fraught negotiations of globalization. For instance, Anna Tsing's concept of frictions goes beyond the concept of flows and attests to the movement and notion of

"frictions" as a better-suited concept for describing the phenomenon and experience of globalization; Tsing argues:

Speaking of friction is a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency. Friction is not just about slowing things down. Friction is required to keep global power in motion. It shows us where the rubber meets the road. Roads are a good image for conceptualizing how friction works: Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement. Friction inflects historical trajectories, enabling, excluding, and particularizing (6).

The "enabling, excluding, and particularizing" that frictions allow one to sift through provides the opportunity for a complex, specific, and nuanced analysis of power relations to be central to this project. While flow connotes free movement and transition, friction conveys a sense of conflict and push-and-pull. The latter dynamic, I believe, is better suited to frame and explore the everyday negotiations of Arab American youth working their way through the everyday lived realities their positions as fragmented subjects. A central theoretical framework for this project speaks to the demands, consequences, and affective qualities of studying people who are burdened with the position of being constructed as a domestic Other in the U.S. Post-9/11 context. This aspect of subjectivity formation is only one slice of this groups' identity construction, for their diasporic, transnational and gendered identity constructions also are incredibly imperative. The massively intersected mode in which Arab American youth identities are constructed speaks to the grittiness and tough negotiations that the notion of global "frictions" connotes.

Lastly, Sunaina Maira's intervention into this body of transnational youth culture research brings to the fore the long, historical, and still relevant context of U.S. empire. This intervention begins with her articles "Imperial Feelings: Youth Culture, Citizenship, and Globalization" (2004) and "The intimate and the imperial: South Asian Muslim immigrant youth after 9/11" (2005), yet is most fully developed in her book Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire After 9/11 (2011). The mode of studying empire as lived experience through multiple lens of the local, national, and transnational speaks to the spatial networking theories and methodologies as articulated and studied by Massey, Nayak, et al. Similarly, Maira uses the term "imperialism" to frame her study and argues that returning to the notion of imperialism as part of this present cultural moment, rather than a phenomenon of the past, is imperative to exploring contemporary U.S. power relations and the construct and lived experiences of youth. In the article, "Empire is in the details" (2006), Catherine Lutz calls for the need to explore contemporary formations of empire at a more micro-level. Lutz believes that it is in the lived experiences (the ethnographic details), not just the political, macroeconomic, and institutional formations, where we can begin to understand empire. Of particular relevance to this project, Lutz argues, "every U.S. community is a site at which empire becomes lived experience through household economies, media products consumed, and workplaces shaped by capitalism's imperial processes" (598). The concept of Arab-Western dialogism, as described by Marwan Kraidy in his empirical work with Lebanese Maronite youth, is particularly useful, as it describes a relational approach to conceptualizing youth's locally hybridized identities through media practices (2005). In the micro-realm of everyday life practices of media consumption and production, youth identity formations display cultural nomadism and mimicry (Kraidy 2005).

By focusing on Dearborn, MI and its Arab American youth population, this project explores micro manifestations of empire and hybridity and what it means to be young, Arab, American, and possibly Muslim in 21st Century United States. Using imperialism and hybridity as framing devices for our understandings of the ubiquitous and often convoluted term "globalization" speaks to the heart of this project. In the hyphenated, transnational mode of being that young (and old) individuals navigate in the context of Arab Detroit/ Dearborn, MI, centering the post-colonial and neo-colonial setting under which everyday lives are carried out poignantly resonates.

All of these aforementioned studies greatly influence this dissertation project, and there is an acknowledgement here of the areas where this project builds upon past research. For instance, this project addresses the subject of contemporary Arab American youth's identity constructions vis-a-vis their media consumption and production practices. Some studies focus specifically on Arab American youth, globalization, and identity. For example, in her article "Imagining Postnationalism: Arts, Citizenship Education, and Arab American Youth" (2009), Thea Renda Abu El-Haj reflects upon and analyzes her engagement with Arab American adolescent girls who worked with her in an after-school program, where they produced and created a documentary about their lives as Arab American female youth. Her work with this group explored how they understood citizenship, borders, and belonging through an activity that allowed them to self-narrate their experiences as being Arab American (and sometimes also Muslim) in the United States (4). One of the more interesting threads of discourse that emerged from Abu El-Haj's study addresses how some of the girls expressed feelings of shame in not knowing Arabic or other aspects of their heritage. These expressions of shame lead to questions of authenticity in their Arab American identity(7). In much of her research on South Asian

American youth, Maira also explores similar grapplings over definitions of authenticity in terms of one's ethnic identity (see Maira, 1999). Themes of authenticity and other facets of Arab American identity construction need to be further developed. This dissertation project develops a research agenda that intervenes to contribute to these conversations by examining Arab American youth culture as a transnational cultural formation that comes into friction with dominant U.S. ideologies, particularly concerning race and ethnicity.

Politics of Race and Ethnicity with a Focus on Arab Americans

After seventeen years of running, the annual Dearborn Arab International Festival was cancelled in both 2013 and 2014, because of an increase in insurance costs for the three-day event due to growing tensions and subsequent protests from Christian groups (Warikoo 2014). Dearborn, MI's annual Arab International Festival drew thousands of people from around the country, the majority of whom were Arab Americans, to celebrate Arab American culture through games, carnival rides, and music events. In the years leading up to the festival's 2013 and 2014 cancellation, protests and demonstrations against the event increased under the pretenses that it promoted Islamist extremism.. The inciting incidents to the festival's cancellation were the 2010 and 2012 protests by right-wing Christians. Multiple arrests of Christian protestors were made, which resulted in a lawsuit against the City of Dearborn and the subsequent increase in insurance costs for the festival (Brush 2014). These events only begin to illustrate the state of contemporary racial and ethnic politics concerning Arab Americans; furthermore, they also allude to how Dearborn, MI has come to signify a domestically othered place and the repercussions the city has faced. Situating this dissertation project in the literature of race and ethnicity studies, particularly Arab American studies, is the next step in

understanding the conversations influencing it and the interventions it makes by focusing on Arab Detroit.

The Arab Diaspora and its iterations in the United States, particularly the Detroit Metro area, are the main focus of this dissertation project. However, it would be a false boundary to instill by ignoring the networked connections of the Arab American diaspora with other Arab diasporas located elsewhere (see Zabel, 2006). Yet, in an effort to be precise and relevant, this project focuses on the scholarship addressing the Arab diaspora in the United States. In the literature that addresses Arab Americans and the Arab Diaspora in the United States, themes of post-9/11 politics (Abraham, 2011; Akram and Johnson, 2002; Cainkar, 2009; Howell and Shryock, 2003; Salaita, 2005; Yezbick, 2011; Youmans, 2011), racial identity and U.S. race categorization (Ajrouch and Jamal, 2007; Majaj, 2000; Naber, 2000), gendered experiences (Abdulhadi et. al., 2011; Marshall and Ghazal Read, 2003; Shakir, 1997; Ghazal Read, 2004), and media representations (Alsultany, 2008; Shaheen, 1984; Shaheen, 2009) are featured prominently. By focusing on the specific site of Arab Detroit, this project builds upon this research and contributes through its focus on mainstream news media discourses post-9/11, the identity work of the Arab American National Museum, and the robust cultural productions by Arab American youth.

In order to fully understand the contributions of this project and the context under which the project was conducted, an engagement with past and ongoing research concerning Arab Americans is integral. A thorough review of the current state of Arab Americans is outlined in the anthology Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11, edited by Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber (2008). This collection (and other recent research addressing contemporary lives of Arab Americans) contextualizes the living situation of Arab Americans within the dynamics

of post-9/11 politics, institutional or otherwise. As is suggested by the title of this anthology, Jamal and Naber's collection works through the question of whether or not the social construct of race, and the ways it was and is used as an institutionalized categorizing tool, is a useful way to frame and discuss Arab Americans. What ensues is a discussion over what they call "the politics of visibility." The circumstances of Arab Americans before 9/11, as argued by the authors in this collection and in other essays (Naber, 2000), were that they predominantly operated as "invisible" citizens. Nadine Naber intervenes into the literature of Arab American studies by asserting the "invisibleness" of this group of people in U.S. history (2000). The implications of this "invisibility" are complicated and extensive; for she argues this lead to extreme difficulties in institutionally classifying this population. The results of a lack of institutional recognition resulted in political racism, which is different than racism based on biological/ phenotype "scientific" knowledge. Political racism is based on Arab Americans' default association with the perception of a constantly unstable, conflict-ridden Arab World. If Arab Americans expressed support, monetarily, verbally, etc., they were subject to discrimination from non-Arab Americans at best and subjected to governmental scrutiny and consequences at worst (41-42).

Naber's ideas from this article are expounded upon throughout the anthology (Jamal and Naber 2008); for Jamal and Naber pose the following guiding questions for the collection: "Is 'race' a useful concept for exploring the relationship between U.S.-led war in Arab homelands and the marginalization of Arabs in the diaspora? What are the theoretical and political implications of bringing Arab American studies into conversation with the study of 'race' in the U.S.? Are whiteness studies relevant to Arab American studies? What is the relationship between Islamophobia and 'race' and 'racism'? What are the transformative possibilities for organizing around the rubric of racial justice for Arab American scholars and activists?" (Jamal and Naber,

5). The articles in the anthology grapple with the idea of the creation of "Arab" as a racial category to be officially used by the U.S. racial classification system, which, as Naber and Jamal argue, is a contemporary form of colonialist race theory that underpin(ned) and justify(ied) (neo)colonialism. These questions ask how Arab Americans are to be recognized by the state and fall within a long history of minorities/non-whites struggling to be granted equal rights. The authors historicize Arab Americans' most recent negotiations with the state by discussing "bureaucratic racism," the institutional rules that decided who was or was not recognized as a particular race, which was historically experienced by Native Americans and African Americans (12). They discuss how Native Americans and African Americans were treated differently in this colonialist, capitalist system, yet always contributed to the systematic sustainment of white supremacy (13). For Native Americans, an erasing project was underway, making it harder and harder to be recognized by the state as an indigenous U.S. citizen. This legitimized the overtaking of land and the dis-recognition of Native Americans rights. On the other hand, African Americans were subjected to the "one drop rule," where black as a racial category was defined by any amount of "black" blood a person had. Ultimately, the "one drop rule" constructed the racial category of black as impermeable; and the erasure project of Native Americans forced this population to impossible standards of continuation. Both institutional projects were necessary for a capitalist system that needed slavery and justifications for white-dominated land ownership to sustain. With a long history of complicated race relations, the United States' contemporary system of racial classification is still laden with longstanding ideologies wrapped up in erasure and the forefronting of an "other." The major intervention of this anthology is to question and explore how thinking about Arab Americans through a U.S.-based race framework promotes or hinders our understanding of this highly heterogeneous group

of people, who have struggled historically with U.S. racial formations and institutionalized racism (44-45).

In other articles from this anthology, questions of how and if Arab Americans should or could fit into the U.S. racial classification system are addressed. Naber, in her stand-alone article, brings in questions of gender and sexuality; she argues, "racism did not operate as a separate, mutually exclusive axis of power. Rather, it intersected with multiple axes of oppression, such as class, gender, and sexuality" (281). Following in line with this mode of thinking of oppression as operating on multiple axes of identity construction, this project works from this point of view by aiming to take into account class, gender, sexuality, and age (in my case youth, specifically) intersections of identity. Further, in his essay "The Moral Analogies of Race; Arab American Identity, Color Politics, and the Limits of Racialized Citizenship," Andrew Shryock discusses how deeply imbedded this mode of racial thinking is in the United States; he argues, "we are encouraged to think of ourselves and others racially, and attempts to evade this task are often regarded with suspicion. Racialization, in this generic sense, is part of Americanization, and Arabs are expected to participate in this process, just as they expected to vote, pay taxes, and learn English" (87). Shryock takes these ideas and looks to Arab Detroit to explore how they manifest in the nation's largest community of Arab Americans – Dearborn, MI and the surrounding area. He surveys Arab Americans in the area about how they conceptualize their racial identity. Shryock finds religion and residence to be two major variables contributing to how people label themselves as Arab American, white, etc. (89). Ultimately, Shryock argues that U.S. and local Detroit processes of racial formations and "racialization" fails to make them exclusively "white" or "non-white," but convinces them that they are indeed an "Other" (113).

The anthologies Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream (2000), edited by Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock, and Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade (2011), edited by Nabeel Abrham, Sally Howell, and Andrew Shryock, speak to the specific context of Arab Detroit, particularly Dearborn and neighboring towns, and the area's history of Arab American immigrants and their lived experiences in the pre-9/11 (covered in the 2000 anthology) and the post-9/11 context (covered in the 2011 anthology). Combining academic essays, poems, personal accounts, and memoir-like articles, the first anthology uses typical academic language and analysis in conjunction with personal narrative to explore the Arab Detroit setting and the constant flux of the Arab population to be between margins and the mainstream. The second anthology mainly focuses on how the events of 9/11 transformed the ways Arab Americans were framed by larger U.S. discourses and how these changes were experienced in the everyday lives of Arab Detroit residents. Together, these two anthologies exemplify a deep engagement with a particular population in a particular location at particular moments in time. In addition to building upon the deeply poignant information about Arab Americans and their experience in Arab Detroit provided by these two anthologies, these books provide a context to conceptualize this dissertation as working within a very specific moment – a moment that is highly influenced by multiple networks of power and experienced in multiple arenas of day-to-day life.

Using this foundation of research on the Arab Diaspora and Arab Detroit, this project contributes to this body of research in three ways. First, this dissertation highlights the cultural identity work of the Arab American National Museum, located in Dearborn, MI, as a national and local institution. This adds an engagement with an ethnic museum institution's role in negotiating, constructing, and performing Arab American identity. Second, this project hones in on and focuses upon the particularities of the Arab American youth population of Dearborn, MI.

Lastly, this project focuses on an analysis of cultural identity constructions vis-a-vis media practices. Focusing on media representations of the transnational space of Dearborn, MI and the media practices of Arab American, Dearborn youth adds another understanding of Arab American and Arab Diaspora studies.

Media Production and Cultural Identity

Throughout the vast literature on race and ethnicity, a number of sites become the entry point in which researchers analyze their specific phenomenon. Family, activism, U.S. race politics, literature, and more are a few lenses that researchers use to explore U.S. racial and ethnic groups and their cultural identities. This dissertation focuses on media as the main site to explore cultural identity and community formations. Minority cultural productions in terms of media consumption, production, and meaning making is a particular area of research that many researchers are looking to develop. This project works in conjunction with this budding area of scholarship and works to contribute especially to ideas of Arab American media studies and Arab American youth cultural production. Moreover, this dissertation contributes to ideas concerning the mediation of places and the intense ideological work that goes into the mediation of Arab Detroit and the simultaneous identity and community formations that occur.

Emergent studies in this area of research lend themselves to being solid theoretical and methodological bases for this dissertation. Contemporary researchers of media and race, ethnicity, and diaspora confirm that using media as an entry point into exploring the complexities of cultural identity constructions is not only a fruitful avenue of engagement, but an imperative site to sift through the politics of (trans)national imaginaries. In the previously reviewed article by Thea Abu El-Haj, we see how studying the symbolic realm of media self-representation (the

Arab American girls she studies worked on a documentary about what it means to be Arab in the United States) is key to exploring how Arab American youth are active participants in their social and political spheres (2). Not only does this occur in the realm of production, but also through various means of consumption and engagement with media worlds and texts. Nevermore is this true and apparent than in the cultural productions of the Arab American National Museum, Arab American youths' negotiations of dominant media representations, and the Arab American social media sphere, as explored throughout this dissertation.

By engaging with scholars such as Madhavi Mallapragada and David Morely, this project builds upon their research concerning media, place, and constructs and imaginings of "home." Madhavi Mallapragada's ideas on how media become the site of negotiating diasporic and migrant peoples' relationships between their "homeland" is helpful in situating this transmedia project; she states:

... the digital landscapes of the web are transforming the meanings of 'home' and 'homeland' for immigrant and diasporic communities around the world. The cyberworlds of migrant groups participate in the transnational and uneven flows of technology, culture, capital and communities in this age of globalization; in the process, they disrupt conventional understandings of cyberpractices and migrant politics (208).

In her more recent work Mallapragada (2014) reiterates how it is essential to study immigrant groups through media, as "our physical mobility is increasingly played out via the tools of technological mobility" via online and digital media (143). Similar arguments can be made regarding media landscapes, media worlds, and media practices as a whole for diasporic groups. In the same vein, engaging with the varying media practices of Arab American youth reveals how their identity constructions function in online spaces.

Furthermore, David Morley's book Home Territories: Media, Mobility, and Identity (2000) also provides a useful foundation. The focus of Morley's book addresses the significance of the home as a physical space and mental concept, ultimately, thinking through "what it might mean to be 'at home' in a world where the sitting room is a place where, in a variety of mediated forms, the global meets the local" (2). Morley argues that the "home as the site of a global, local meeting space" is more apparent in the home of a diasporic, migrant family; he states, "Certainly, traditional ideas of home, homeland and nation have been destabilized, both by new patterns of physical mobility and migration and by new communication technologies which routinely transgress the symbolic boundaries around both the private household and the nation state..." (3). Morley's ideas provide a foundation to begin theoretically engaging with Arab American youth's conceptualizations of homeland and their cultural identity vis-a-vis their media practices. A deeply transnational bricolage of media circulates within the lives of Arab Detroit youth in the forms of music, news and entertainment. Whether it be the most readily available Arabic-speaking satellite cable channel ART, a Saudi-based radio and television network that is the one and only Arabic language channel currently offered by AT&T and Comcast (the two major cable and internet service providers in the Metro Detroit area), or engagement with online entertainment or news sources based in the Arab World (i.e., Al-Jazeera, MTV Middle East, Arab country popular music artists, etc.), the "global meets local" scenario Morely discusses is an accurate, albeit nuanced situation in Dearborn.

Research addressing transnational youth culture focuses on how youth use media texts to expand their positionality as an immigrant and/ or ethnic other in their host country and, subsequently, create a space of their own. Mexican telenovela consumption by young Mexican-American girls (Mayer 2003), Chinese immigrant youth who read Japanese comic books (Lam,

2004), and Moroccan-Dutch girls' use of online instant messaging (Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2011) are a few examples of youth media consumption studies that illustrate how young people with immigrant backgrounds and ethnic other statuses in their host countries cultivate media practices that position them as active agents of their lived realities. This common thread of the cultivation of a "third space" to construct and play with identity by young people speaks to a goal of this project, which is to explore the various avenues in which Arab American youth's agency is fostered. Using this theoretical idea of "third space" cultivation allows this project's methodological bearings be in tune to the particularities of the abstract "spaces" created by participants. Similarly, research that focuses on immigrant communities online theorize how identity construction functions for various marginalized voices. Whether it be in the context of Trinidadians, Iranians, Moroccan-Dutch diasporas, Iraqi diasporas, or South Asian women, it is found that the Internet provides affordances to some by granting access to a realm of communication and connection often denied to them by dominant media outlets and forms of offline, public engagement (Karim, 2003; Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2011; Miller and Slater, 2000; Mitra 2004; Nouriaie-Simone, 2005; Shohat, 1999). These ideas concerning "third space" cultivation and subsequent affordances obtained through various media practices set a foundation for this project to explore the potentialities of community construction and self-representation -- practices that facilitate agency-building. Addressing Arab American youth diasporas and their media practices further develops this area of scholarship and brings to bear imperative questions concerning contemporary U.S. cultural politics of being an Arab American youth in the early 21st Century.

Notes on Research Design and Methods

This dissertation project has been driven by the goal of exploring the media representations as well as media production practices involving Arab Americans. And to do so, I have had to steer clear of approaches that set up various binaries – good stereotypes/bad stereotypes, resistance/compliance, media consumption/media production, and so on. Instead, this project understands Arab Americans as active subjects of cultural productions and practices that are fraught with complex negotiations and often ambivalence (for exemplars of ethnographers who understand their participants similarly, see Abu-Lughod, 2005; Deeb, 2006). Furthermore, the methodological approach of this dissertation works to go beyond the problematic media studies' divisions between media production and consumption, because the media environments of Arab Americans, particularly Arab American youth, in this context are not clearly demarcated between production and consumption practices -- just as they are increasingly hard to demarcate in general. Therefore, while building upon reception studies methods, this dissertation project transcends standard media studies' research models and categories.

Further, it is important to note how this project is generally informed through my work and volunteering with the Arab American National Museum and the subsequent relationships and experiences that developed. In the summer of 2011, I worked at the museum and since then have remained part of its extended family of supporters and volunteers. This initial work in 2011 situates my entry point to engaging with Arab Detroit at the museum. The information obtained from my interviews, focus groups, and participant-observation experiences are placed in relation to close readings of media texts that represent Dearborn, MI, as explored in Chapter 1. Moreover, my interviews and participant-observation experiences and dominant discourses of Arab Americans and Arab Detroit are also put in relation to Arab American youth's cultural

productions, especially their online cultural productions. Through the deployment of these modes of inquiry, this dissertation project provides a deeply-contextualized look at Arab American youth in Dearborn, MI after a decade of being framed as domestic ethnic others.

In aiming to create a project concerning mainstream discourses of Arab Detroit and the ways Arab Americans are speaking back and creating their own via their media practices and identity constructions, a number of methods were used to gather data. Each chapter uses data gathered through methods that include at least one of the following: constructing an archive of ‘texts’ (news and entertainment), in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and digital ethnography. The first method deployed to gather data for this project was the creation of an archive of news media. I collected mainstream news pieces, primarily newspaper articles, concerning Arab Americans and Arab Detroit that were published/ aired from Sept. 11, 2001 to early 2014. I used online news and current event databases (Lexis Nexis, ProQuest, Access World News, and the Vanderbilt TV News) and resources from the Arab American National Museum’s library to gather news media artifacts. This collection ultimately created an archive of hundreds of mainstream news media artifacts that feature various topics about Arab Americans and their culture. News pieces from local- and national-based news media outlets make up the archive, in attempts to capture the proliferation of discourses about Arab Americans for multiple markets. Generally, the goal of creating this archive of news media texts is to engage with the representational and discursive realm of Arab American identity construction and provide an understanding of the role this population plays in the national imaginary.

The second major method deployed includes a variety of fieldwork-based methods in the Dearborn/ Detroit area. Through my work at the Arab American National Museum, I used my participant observation experiences to inform the majority of chapter two's arguments concerning

the museum. Furthermore, the work I did at the Arab American National Museum helped me build connections with high school students and teachers and other Arab Detroit community members who were interview and focus group participants. From the Fall of 2012 to the Summer of 2013, I conducted focus group interviews and one-on-one personal interviews with 40 different high school students and 12 adults who were parents and/ or educators. All of the participants reside in the Detroit Metropolitan Area and are Arab American. The majority of the participants lived in the Dearborn/ Dearborn Heights area, but some were from surrounding communities such as Canton, Bloomington Hills, and Hamtramck. I met the majority of these Arab American High School students by connecting to local teachers from charter and public high schools and gaining the teacher's permission to attend their classes and/ or meet with their students during study periods or after school.

The connections I made to local charter school teachers and students were predominantly through happenstance and occurred by linking to teachers and students through the many relationships I made over the years in the larger Arab Detroit community. I did not specifically seek out charter schools as sites for focus groups, interviews, and participant-observation opportunities. However, some of the most fruitful engagements were made at these sites. The charter school sites were much more relaxed in their permissions to grant me access to their teachers and classrooms in comparison to public school systems. I believe this was due to their smaller populations, more informal hierarchies, and lower demands from researchers (A Dearborn Public School administrator and a couple different principals commented upon on how often they are solicited to participate in academic research projects from various disciplines because of their high populations of Arab American and Muslim American students). It was not until after meeting with a few different administrators and all of the high school principals from

the Dearborn Public School system and providing an outline of my research agenda and goals that I was granted access to connect with their high school students. When I was working to organize focus groups at various high schools in the Dearborn area, administrators, teachers, and principals often met my requests with a mixture of hesitation, indifference, and curiosity. I firmly believe that because of my position as a young Arab American woman working to obtain a Ph.D. at the University of Michigan I was able gain access to these sites.

Between working with charter high schools in the Metro Detroit Area and Dearborn Public High Schools, I was able to engage and connect with a variety of students and teachers from different Arab American backgrounds. The students and adults represented in this study are Arab Americans with immigration ties primarily to Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen, with the vast majority being from Lebanon. They also represent immigration histories from first-, second, third-, and fourth-generations. Further, only a handful of the Arab Americans I interviewed are from Christian religious backgrounds; the vast majority are from Shia Muslim backgrounds. The students I interviewed are predominantly from middle to upper class backgrounds, yet I did speak with a small number, less than 5, of students from families who had recently immigrated within the last few years and were undergoing challenging financial transitions. In terms of gender, almost exactly half of my participants were women and the other half men. Regardless of the wide range of identities and backgrounds of the participants of this study, generalized claims do not work in this qualitative analysis for multiple reasons. I offer excerpts from my conversations with teens and adults from the Arab Detroit community as glimpses into the negotiations and frictions of Arab American life in the Detroit Metro. The representation of these dialogues is important in and of themselves as moments that are given a space in academic

research. Even so, I acknowledge fully the privileged position from which I, as an academic researcher, conducted the interviews and now present and frame this data.

Chapter Overview

Part 1: Dominant Discourses and Institutions

Part One "Dominant Discourse and Institutions" provides two chapters that explore post-9/11 dominant discourses of Arab Americans from U.S. corporate news media and how the cultural institution of the Arab American National Museum works to define Arab Americanness within various pedagogical and performative modes. Part One sets the stage for understanding the dominant ways Arab Americans in general and Arab Detroit specifically is framed in national discourses and the complexities that arise when an ethnic museum, seeped in the politics of appealing to the diverse Arab American local and national populations and non-Arab Americans, situates what it means to be Arab American. Chapter One "The 'Dearborn Syndrome' and Strategies of Containment in Post-9/11 Arab American Representations" analyzes a variety of corporate news media pieces produced after 9/11 to understand the dominant modes of representing Arab Americans. I find corporate news media outlets to engage the topic of Arab American life post 9/11 on a superficial level that oscillates between framing them as a threat to U.S. society and culture or as victims of stereotypes, who are worthy of public sympathy. Geographic containment, where the domestic otherness of Arab Americans is framed as bound to and contained by specific city neighborhoods, is a prominent discursive strategy used within dominant U.S. discourses found in the news media. I argue that the prominent use of the geographic confinement framework connects Arab Americans to a liberal multicultural U.S. ideology, while simultaneously constructing them as othered and without full cultural

citizenship. I analyze the news media's attention to the rise and fall of Miss USA 2010 Rima Fakih, a Lebanese American woman from Dearborn, MI, to illustrate how the discursive strategy of geographic confinement draws upon the policing of non-white gendered bodies to reinforce questioning the cultural citizenship of Arab Americans.

Chapter Two uses thick description of the Arab American National Museum's spaces and exhibits and my experience working as an organizing committee member of DIWAN5 2013, a conference held at the Arab American National Museum to feature Arab American artists and scholarship on Arab American art and creative expression, to explore the museum's various modes of defining and performing Arab Americanness. This chapter focuses on the museum, because of its national and local presence as a major cultural institution for and about Arab American history and life. Ethnic museums in the United States have had an immense amount of growth over the few decades and provide a major entry point or "contact zone" from which the ethnic community establish itself within the U.S.'s larger social and cultural schema (Clifford, 1997). In their establishment as cultural centers, ethnic museums often face tensions in decisions concerning audience and sponsorship (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach, 2004). As a cultural institution that came to be in the aftermath of 9/11 and in a surge of Arab Detroit response to dominant discursive frameworks concerning their community (as explored in Chapter 1), the Arab American National Museum inserts Arab Americans into a national collective and public memory. The AANM does this by making claims to Arab Americans' validity in full cultural citizenship through both pedagogical and performative modes of identity creation and assertion. The analysis of the museum's place and space through its location, architecture, and exhibits explores the pedagogical modes of construction Arab American identity, which works to standardize Arab American identity and insert it into common tropes of U.S. immigration stories.

Whereas, performative approaches, which are often dynamic and challenging to the limits of U.S. discourses of ethnic minority identities, to expressing and constructing Arab Americanness are analyzed through the DIWAN5 conference (which is but one case example of the museum's events and programming that work within performative modes of identity construction).

Part Two: Arab Detroit Youth's Cultural Production

Part Two "Arab Detroit Youths' Cultural Productions" offers two chapters to explore how Arab American youth in Arab Detroit are particularly speaking back to and actively inserting themselves into discussions concerning their identity and community. Chapter Three dives deeply into the conversations that stemmed from interviews and focus groups with Arab American high school students in the Dearborn area. The chapter is flanked through an engagement with the TLC reality television series All American Muslim that aired eight episodes in late 2011 and early 2012. I argue that the All American Muslim text frames a particular representation of Arab Americans in Arab Detroit as easily fitting within U.S. dominant, conservative cultural norms. An especially rigid definition of "All American" is necessary, because of the dominant discursive mode of framing Arab Americans, which includes both non-Muslim Arab Americans and Muslim Americans, as inherently domestic others and perpetually foreign. The show works to define "All American Muslim" through its framing of two main women characters as not practicing their Islamic faith in accordance with tradition and, consequently, as outside U.S. conservative values that uphold rigid religious practices, nuclear family values, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. Furthermore, a binary mode of understanding Arab Americans was created from the conflict between the wholesome, conservative, and "All American" representations found on All American Muslim and the discourse from right-wing

conservative Christian groups calling for advertisers to pull their ads, because they argued that the show "incorrectly" portrays Arab Muslim Americans by not showing their association with terrorist groups and Anti-U.S. ideologies.

I spoke to Arab American high school students in Arab Detroit about All American Muslim, and through our conversation it became apparent how their responses to the show break down this binary to reveal the more complex lived experiences of being Arab American in Arab Detroit. The students' complex negotiations with the show reveal how the seemingly easy connection between "All American" and "Muslim," as portrayed on All American Muslim, does not relate to their actual lived experience and how the connection to terrorism also definitely does not relate to their lived realities. Consequently, our conversations about All American Muslim lead to students grappling with the intra-community politics and their identities as young Arab Americans in Arab Detroit. Lastly, this chapter explores the work of two groups of Arab American high school students who produced short films for the "Dreams of the 313" Film Festival, and how their short films work through these grappings and further complicate dominant discourse through the insertion of their particular perspectives of life in Arab Detroit.

Finally, Chapter Four picks up where Chapter Three ends by closely exploring Arab American youth cultural productions, particularly their online cultural productions. Through thick descriptions of YouTube videos and my participant-observation of the Arab American social media sphere (which includes Twitter, Tumblr, and the usage of hashtag and image-based memes), this chapter shows how Arab American youth from Arab Detroit take to online platforms to complicate representations and discourses of Arab Americans and offer critiques of whiteness and racial hierarchies and localized hybridized expressions of Arab American identity. The complexities of hybridized Arab American youth identity emerges in this chapter as a

central theme, as the dialogism of operating within and between various cultures becomes apparent in these online cultural productions. The first section focuses on analyzing a YouTube video channel named "Eatsnax" that features "Arab American-style" spoofs of popular MTV shows and an original webseries named The Ed and Moe Show. I closely analyze these YouTube videos and find how they deliver critiques of whiteness and mainstream discourses of Arab Americans, while simultaneously incorporating Arab American stereotypes in a mocking, humorous way. The second section of Chapter Four analyzes Arab American youth culture as propagated via an Arab American social media sphere. It is in this Arab American social media sphere where one can find an intensely localized Arab American youth culture generated through the circulation of hashtag and image-based memes that satirizes and mocks specific aspects of Arab American youth life, such as dating culture, immigrant life, and religious norms. In addition to exploring how these online cultural productions speak to, work within, and critique dominant discourses concerning Arab Americans, this chapter also works to centralize this hyperlocal and insider knowledge-based youth culture within a schema of U.S. youth culture as a whole.

Together, the two sections of this dissertation work through the various ways Arab Americans, particularly Arab American youth, obtain and negotiate their belonging – a sense of cultural citizenship – in contemporary United States. In the context of living more than a decade after 9/11, the construction of Arab Americans as a domestic other is still incredibly prominent and strong within mainstream, dominate U.S. discourses. The ramifications of these discourses result in formal, institution-, state-, and government-enacted as well as informal, self-regulation, community-based, surveillance. Moreover, framing Arab Americans as domestic others further perpetuates U.S. imperialistic actions, policies, and ultimately violence abroad toward peoples of

the Arab World and at home toward the Arab diaspora within its own borders. Ultimately, this dissertation sheds light upon the dynamic and complicated culture of Arab Detroit as its community negotiates life as longstanding domestic others.

Part One: Dominant Discourses and Institution

Chapter One: The “Dearborn Syndrome” and Strategies of Containment in Post-9/11 Arab American Representations

In a Detroit Free Press article published in 2002, Imad Hamad, the regional director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee from 1997 to 2013,⁶ coined the term the “Dearborn Syndrome” in reference to the post-9/11 phenomenon of “a national focus on Dearborn and terrorism solely because of its Arab population” (Niemic B1). The creation of the phrase the “Dearborn Syndrome” alludes to the complex negotiations that have occurred in the aftermath of 9/11 between and among Arab Americans across the country, including Arab Americans and allies in the Metro Detroit area, and the various constructions of Arab American identity in popular imaginaries. Part of the “Dearborn Syndrome” phenomenon is a simultaneous development of Arab American-produced organizations and images to counter and speak back towards dominant media discourses. Invoking a Dickensian theme, editors of the anthology Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade describe the post-9/11 years as “the worst of times” and “the best of times” (4-5). They expound, “The larger society’s desire to discipline Arab Detroit, to control and investigate it, triggered a related desire to protect and understand it” (4-5). This

⁶ Since the writing of this chapter, Hamad has been fired from his position under accusations of sexual abuse. My use of the term “Dearborn Syndrome” is purely as a phrase to describe the phenomenon at hand and not to associate this work with these circumstances.

resulted in already established institutions in the area to launch strong public relations campaigns and for new Arab American-centric organizations to form. Skepticism, the need to control and to discipline, and desires for cultural understanding were met with a dynamic response from the Arab Detroit community.⁷ This interweaving between and simultaneous formation of state surveillance (and often subsequent symbolic and physical violence) on one hand and Arab Detroit prosperity on the other is mimicked and negotiated in national news coverage of Arab Americans broadly and of Arab Detroit specifically. Multiple strategies of containment to frame Arab Americans as a group in need of both public sympathy and state surveillance are common to post-9/11 national and local media discourses. This chapter analyzes the various strategies of containment used, and considers how discursive geographic confinement in the form of the “Dearborn Syndrome” is especially deployed to negotiate and make sense of Arab Americans in a post-9/11 realm.

The methods used for this analysis include the formation of an archive that was built using news media artifacts, which includes newspapers, news-focused magazines, and news television broadcasts. To keep within the time period of interest to this analysis, all searches and, thus, presented data focus on news pieces from September 11, 2001 to January 2014 (the month when this analysis was primarily written). Online databases that were used to collect news about Arab Americans after 9/11 include Lexis Nexis Academic, ProQuest News and Current Events, Access World News, and the Vanderbilt TV News archive. In addition to these online news and current event databases, I used a forming news archive located at the Arab American National Museum’s library. The news archive of the Arab American National Museum is a curated collection of newspaper and magazine articles that were collected by museum members, the

⁷. I explore this response in more detail in subsequent chapters.

museum's librarians, various museum staff, and other Dearborn and Detroit-based community members.⁸ Using these sources I searched for news pieces that featured Arab Americans or stories about Arab American culture. In keeping with the goals of this project, I paid particular attention to stories about Detroit and Dearborn's Arab American community, which were undoubtedly plentiful. From these targeted searches, I gathered close to three hundred newspaper, magazine, and television media artifacts from national and local news sources that explicitly discussed Arab Americans. Examples of outlets publishing or airing news pieces about Arab Americans includes The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, The Chicago Tribune, The Atlanta Herald, 60 Minutes, and Meet the Press. Because of the intensity around the 9/11 events, many news media artifacts from this search were created and published or aired within the first few years following September 11, 2001. Nevertheless, a steady stream of news media coverage continues. I grouped the articles into themes and scope of interest, meaning whether they focused on Arab Americans at large or an Arab American population within a specific city or region. From here I used NVIVO software to code the news media artifacts and refocus my sample. Presented in this analysis are two of the dominant coding nodes that emerged – the interrogation of assimilation and sympathy and geographic confinement. The news media pieces presented here are exemplary of these frames and often come from well-known and regarded news sources. These choices were made in order to showcase how prominent these frameworks are. In order to understand the larger media representation and

⁸ Various museum and community members gave the majority of the articles in the museum's news archive to the museum. Therefore, the museum's news archive was not a When I first began sorting through the collection of materials at the museum, they had not yet been catalogued and organized. Now, the museum's librarian has catalogued and organized the collection, and it is accessible to anyone who visits the Arab American National Museum.

discursive context in which these news media artifacts emerge, the history of U.S. representations of Arabs and Arab Americans is integral to consider.

Arabs and Arab Americans have a long, complicated history of representation in U.S. media and popular culture. Problematic portrayals of Arabs in U.S. film and television span over a century, dating back to early twentieth century cinematic portrayals of the desert-roaming, sex-crazed Arab savage (Shaheen). Arab and Arab American representations evolved and often correlated to significant events, such as escalations in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, 1970s oil embargoes, the 1972 Olympic attacks, 1970s rash of plane hijackings, and the 1979-1981 Iranian hostage crisis. The evolving images portrayed Arabs and Muslims as rich, greedy oil sheiks and/or vengeful terrorists (Shaheen). One major trend since 9/11 can be seen in the fact that Arab American visibility has become part of a standard portrayal of U.S. multicultural society. Complicated representations abound and run the gamut from portrayals that vilify as well as sympathize with the plight of Muslims and Arab Americans in the U.S. post-9/11 media landscape.

Recent work by Evelyn Alsultany about post-9/11 mainstream media representations points to this trend in her exploration of serial television dramas that portray Arabs and Arab Americans in sympathetic roles (208). Alsultany argues that, while these sympathetic portrayals counter the hegemonic stereotype of Arabs as terrorists, they ultimately promote a “logic of exceptionalism” (50). This “logic of exceptionalism” constructs 9/11 as an exceptional event and crisis that requires exceptional actions. Alsultany asserts that, under these circumstances, it “becomes crucial in producing a new kind of racism, one that purports to be antiracist while perpetuating and justifying racism” (50). Sympathetic portrayals of Arabs and Muslims on television advance the “logic of exceptionalism” by providing evidence for a post-racial

ideology, suggesting that the U.S. has moved beyond its racist past. The “logic of exceptionalism” constructs a contradictory mode of varying Arab and Muslim representations that have political and cultural effects and often justify discrimination against Arabs and Arab Americans. Furthermore, Alsultany takes on TV serial dramas because of their seemingly banal, yet very impactful cultural and ideological work. This chapter explores similar issues as Alsultany in its examination of mainstream, corporate news media depictions of Arab Americans in a post-9/11 era in order to flesh out the specifics of their ideological work. For similar reasons outlined above in regards to television dramas, I assert that the ideological work that occurs in the news media also needs to be taken seriously.

Of central importance to this chapter’s analysis is the concept of the “Dearborn Syndrome.” The “Dearborn Syndrome,” while specific in its name, alludes to a larger discursive phenomenon that utilizes geographic constructs to anchor Arab American identity in different spaces. Bonnett and Nayak make the connection that “to speak the language of race and ethnicity is, very often, to talk geography” (300). Because conceptions of racial identities make reference more explicitly to the physical body and become naturalized associations to the physical body, other modes of constructing racial and ethnic identities, such as through geography, seem to escape critique (300). Furthermore, the intersection of race and geography illustrates the meanings and, thus, exclusions that can be etched upon spaces: “The discursively Otherised become the declared out of bounds, the physically Elsewherized and Isolated. The categorically excluded become the spatially enclosed” (Pred 98). Geographic constructions of othering build the ideological framework for imposing structural and political restrictions and exclusions upon minorities. Arlene Dávila explores a similar phenomenon in the context of East Harlem and its association with Latinidad (1999); she invokes the concept of “objectification of culture” to

describe how multiple multicultural contexts experience a reduction to specific spaces that work to manage them (61). As a predominant phenomenon of post-9/11 Arab American representation, the “Dearborn Syndrome” works similarly by deploying geographic constructs of race and ethnicity to geographically contain the Arab American domestic other. The discourse that invokes the place of Dearborn and other particular places (such as specific neighborhoods in the other heavily-populated Arab American cities of Chicago and New York) as the primary “sites” of Arab American activity enacts an implicit means of constructing, essentializing, and containing Arab American identity. When the domesticated Arab American other steps out of bounds culturally, geographically, and/or socially, there occurs a strong appeal to reconstruct them as within the safe boundaries of U.S. liberal multiculturalism. The question of cultural citizenship and Arab Americans’ ability to gain it is central to this particular instance of racial/ethnic and geographic intersection. Thus, the connection between racial identity and Dearborn conjures up restraints on Arab Americans’ discursive ability to obtain cultural citizenship.

In order to explore the various strategies of confinement used, particularly the “Dearborn Syndrome,” this chapter is divided into three sections, providing the context for understanding Arab American representation in post-9/11 U.S. news media. The first section engages with the immediate surge of national media coverage after 9/11 that concerned the Arab World and the U.S.’s Arab American population. Immediate reactions and stories took inquisitive tones and more often than not approached Arab Americans with skepticism. More than ten years later, this retrospective analysis of the past decade’s national coverage of Arab Americans reveals that, while there was definitely alarmist and skeptical framing prevalent, media outlets employed a wide variance in representational strategies. This section pulls back from the specific context of

Arab Detroit to look at how Arab Americans in other parts of the United States and nationwide are discursively framed and constructed. In this section I identify two distinct yet intertwined strategies of containment that dominate national news discourses of Arab Americans—sympathy through assimilability and geographic confinement. Providing this context allows us to understand how Dearborn and Detroit-centric news works both within and at times against national imaginaries of Arab Americans. The second section analyzes the discourses that specifically focus on the post-9/11 Arab Detroit context. This section deeply engages with how the strategy of geographic confinement, or the “Dearborn Syndrome,” actively works to contain and reduce Arab American identity to specific geographic constructs. Finally, the last section of this chapter takes up the case of Miss USA 2010 Rima Fakhri, the first outwardly-identifying Arab American Muslim woman to receive the title, and the news coverage concerning her coronation and highly scrutinized reign. Through an analysis of the national discourse surrounding the crowning of Rima Fakhri, the stronghold of the “Dearborn Syndrome” becomes apparent. The Rima Fakhri case particularly works through the concept of cultural citizenship and how it relates to geographic confinement. Together, these three sections illustrate the intense desire to make sense of and contain Arab American identity that plays out in post-9/11 corporate news media and how the “Dearborn Syndrome” is deployed as a discursive strategy to essentialize Arab America within specific geographic constructs, thus imposing limitations on cultural citizenship.

Strategies of Containment

In the more than thirteen years of media coverage since 9/11, a variety of discursive modes of Arab American representation can be found in corporate media outlets. Corporate

media coverage of Arab Americans in the post-9/11 era evidences the use of various strategies of containment that evade a deep understanding and exploration of Arab American culture.

Maintaining a superficial level of Arab America coverage connects to upholding Arab Americans as domestic others and to thus justify their formal and informal surveillance. Two major discursive frameworks emerge as strategies of containment within the post-9/11 media coverage of Arab Americans; they are the interrogation of assimilation and sympathy and geographic confinement. The first framework, the interrogation of assimilation and sympathy framework, simultaneously addresses two separate ideas – assimilation and sympathy, because of their interrelatedness. This is to say, when the Arab American subject in question is deemed assimilated and/ or actively working toward assimilation, discourses frame them as worthy of public sympathy. The second framework, geographic confinement, works to essentialize Arab Americans with very specific urban spaces that discursively disconnect them from white culture. While both frameworks are parsed out separately in the following analysis, their boundaries are fluid, and each has qualities that are recognizable within the other. Furthermore, these frames evolve, because the news media outlets that produce them are complicated, non-monolithic entities comprised of individuals who shift, change, and grow.

The politics of post-racial ideology construct a meta-framework for the usage of these strategies of containment and contributes to media discourses that superficially gloss-over engagements with Arab America in the post-9/11 era. Over the past decade, post-racial ideology has been prominent across the political spectrum as it found “evidence” through the election of a black U.S. President and the scientific findings of the human genome project (Squires 5). However, the wide dissemination of the idea of race as a social construct dangerously elides how racial tropes are embedded within institutions and social relations (Watts 217). The power of

post-racial ideology, especially as it relates to media institutions and representations, relies heavily on neoliberal logics and its emphasis on individualism (Squires 6). In this context, racial (and ethnic) identity is reduced to its marketability and a “‘celebration’ of differences” (Giroux, 1993; Hasinoff, 2008; Joseph, 2012; Mukherjee, 2011; Squires, 2014). Arab Americans, including Muslim and non-Muslim Arab Americans, were and continue to experience particularly silencing effects in the aftermath of 9/11; as Catherine Squires explains that within a post-9/11 context “...being post-racial required people of color—in this case, people of Arab descent and/ or Muslim faith—to silently accept racial profiling as a sacrifice for the nation to tacitly agree to refrain from exercising their First Amendment rights to satisfy a barely tolerant majority” (9). The subsequent analysis of U.S. mainstream news post-9/11 exemplifies how these representations and discourses are constrained in their ability to offer in-depth understandings of Arab Americans, because they are steeped in this post-racial ideological framework that in turn is embedded within institutional ideologies. Furthermore, in order to understand and explore how post-racial ideology affects Arab Americans as a “not quite white” racialized group, we must continue to move beyond the common approach to studying postracial ideology in black/white terms.

Interrogation of Assimilation and Sympathy

A significant aspect of the news coverage that immediately followed 9/11 was the attention given to the reality and fear of backlash towards Arab and Muslim Americans. Coverage that conveyed Arab Americans as worthy of sympathy dominated the initial onslaught of news pieces concerning the United States’ Arab American population, especially during the first week after 9/11. Worrisome and sympathetic in tone, these news pieces were widely

published across the country in many U.S. cities. However, the tone of concern and sympathy that dominated the immediate national coverage of Arab Americans after 9/11 was short-lived. After the massive increase in articles that covered the backlash against Arab Americans and their explicit condemning of 9/11, a different engagement (albeit often superficial) and probing investigation into the lives and communities of Arab Americans subsequently unfolded. As a result, the question of Arab Americans' assimilability became a central theme driving these discourses. The vast deployment of sympathetic discursive strategies and the quick shift and simultaneous oscillation between these two discursive modes illuminates the struggle over incorporating Arab Americans, both Muslim and non-Muslim, into the fold of normative U.S. cultural citizenship. Even as calls for sympathy are made there is the constant looming question of whether or not Arab Americans are ever truly assimilable. Much like the history of Asian Americans' discursive framing in U.S. society and culture, these discursive frameworks of sympathy of Arab Americans work to construct a façade of U.S. Inclusiveness (Lowe 5-6). Yet, the contradictory mode of discursive questioning assimilability frames Arab Americans as perpetually "foreigners-within" (Lowe 5).

A September 14, 2001 New York Times story about Sami Merhi, a Lebanese-American who immigrated to the U.S. 27 years ago, uses a perceived authentic, insider perspective to convey complicated feelings of necessary patriotism and fear for Arab Americans. The article opens with quotes from Mehri simultaneously expressing hope that the attacks were not connected to the Middle East and that his godson who worked at the World Trade Center was safe. He is quoted as stating: "I'm so devastated, it's beyond belief... You have a tragedy in your home, it's not a time for politics" (Purdy A.14). In a similar vein, the Atlanta, Georgia

publication The Atlanta Constitution contributed to national discourses concerning the welfare and discrimination of Arab Americans with this article from September 13, 2001:

Simon Machar, 22, says he was walking home to Le Carre apartments in Clarkston when the men blocked his path about 10 p.m. “They said, ‘You killed our people in New York. We want to kill you tonight,’” says Machar, who is a Christian but comes from Sudan...Machar says the men shoved him against a wall and tried to stab him...Local mosques also reported a flurry of abusive phone calls. Some Atlanta residents of Arab descent are afraid to walk in public. There are an estimated 60,000 Muslims in the Atlanta metro area. “I haven't left the house in the last two days,” says Husam Jamjoum, a Marietta resident of Palestinian descent. “I don't want to be forced in a situation where I have to defend myself.” (Blake and Poe A19)

Articles like these illustrate the two-fold devastation that 9/11 had on Arab Americans: first, the feelings of mourning for 9/11 victims and second, the fear and experience of backlash against their community. Conveying the worries and devastation incited by 9/11 for Arab Americans, articles like this demonstrate the discourses of sympathies that dominated the immediate post-9/11 mainstream news coverage of Arab Americans. The abundance of articles that showcased the worried voices of Arab Americans who were filled with feelings of mourning, condemnation, and deep-seated fear of threats against them, their families and friends, and businesses provided personal narratives to incite sympathy for and protection of the now even more vulnerable Arab and Muslim American populations.

Examples of headlines from other mainstream news publications around the country include: “ARABS UNDER SIEGE HERE - NEW YORKERS VENT RAGE AT INNOCENTS” published by The New York Post on September 13, 2001 (Crowley, Allen, and Hunter 37);

“‘STAY HOME’ ARAB-AMERICANS TOLD BACKLASH FEARED FOR MUSLIMS” in the Arizona Republic on September 12, 2001 (EX. 17); “Tolerance put to test in Bay Area / Muslims, mosques, Arabs find themselves targets of threats” in the San Francisco Chronicle on September 12, 2001 (Lattin, Hendrix and Sullivan A15); and “I’m Not the Enemy” in The Washington Post on September 13, 2001 (Yaquob A31). These types of articles surrounded announcements from President George W. Bush, Attorney General John Ashcroft, and New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani publicly calling to avoid unnecessary violence and repercussions toward Arab and Muslim Americans. For instance, President George W. Bush made the following, widely televised remarks at the Islamic Center of Washington D.C. on September 17, 2001 calling for the respect of Muslim Americans: “America counts millions of Muslims amongst our citizens, and Muslims make an incredibly valuable contribution to our country. Muslims are doctors, lawyers, law professors, members of the military, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, moms and dads. And they need to be treated with respect. In our anger and emotion, our fellow Americans must treat each other with respect” (“‘Islam is Peace’ Says President”).⁹ President Bush’s statements put forth a conservative and ambivalent definition of citizenship for Muslim (Arab) Americans. Bush’s definition emphasizes traditional occupations, military work, and parenthood. The use of this narrow definition constricts Arab and Muslim American citizenship to these terms. If an Arab and/ or Muslim American falls within this definition of citizenship, then they are worthy of public sympathy. This strict definition continues to reverberate (see Chapter Three). These discursive tones of sympathy, however, soon

⁹ While Bush’s remarks focus on Muslims, I believe it can also be considered a call to respect Arabs and Arab Americans. This is because of the intense conflation of Muslim and Arab that occurred at this time and continues to exist.

faded. A shift toward the question of Arab American assimilability entered mainstream U.S. post-9/11 news coverage.

Many articles that address Arab Americans' assimilability work to frame Arab Americans as strong believers in dominant U.S. ideologies who proudly uphold the vague, yet powerful and ubiquitously-cited values of "freedom" and "democracy." These types of news media pieces entered the mainstream media discourses following the initial onslaught of fearful discourses after 9/11. For instance, in a 2005 Louisville Courier-Journal article titled "Arab-Americans cherish freedom," Arab Americans from the Louisville area are featured discussing their admiration for living in a country that upholds "freedom" (Wohlsen A1). The article opens by stating, "Mamdouh Khayat, 18, will never be president, but he loves America. Born in Syria, the University of Louisville pre-med student immigrated to the United States with his parents when he was 7. 'Freedom is a privilege,' he said after Friday afternoon prayers at the Louisville Islamic Center. 'It's something that I cherish'" (Wohlsen A1). The article continues by mentioning how since 9/11 "freedom" became "a more complicated concept" (Wohlsen A1). It is notable, however, that dissenting opinions and stories from Arab Americans about these complications with the notion of freedom are not featured. This absence is important to note as it demonstrates the selective framing often used when presenting Arab Americans' experience post-9/11 (Norris et al. 2003). The article continues with quotes from more local Louisville-based Arab Americans who espouse similar positive feelings towards their life in the U.S.

Other news media coverage also focuses on the achievements of contemporary and historical Arab American figures, illustrating how "Arab-Americans are a vital part of this nation's historical and cultural fabric" (a quote from a 2003 Orlando Sentinel newspaper article) (Porter A27). Examples of subjects and rhetoric from articles include a quote from an Arab

American in the Jacksonville, Florida area featured in a 2003 USA TODAY piece: “‘We're ambitious to start telling people who we are. We have to for self-preservation. After 9/11, we feel that we have to educate.... We are not responsible for 9/11’” (Nasser A17). In another example, from the Boston Globe in 2005, that takes up an exhibit at the Arab American National Museum, Evelyn Shakir, a literature professor, speaks to the importance of the Museum featuring the story of her mother Hannah Shakir’s life as a turn-of-the-century Lebanese immigrant business owner in Boston who is “shattering myths about Arab Americans” (DePasquale CW1). Shakir is quoted as stating: “‘I don't think there's ever been much recognition of Arab-Americans as a part of the American mosaic, even though we've been here for well over 100 years,’ she said. ‘Arabs have been thought of as an overseas, alien people, without recognition that we've been a part of the American family for a long time’” (DePasquale CW1). Articles like these situate Arab Americans as well-adjusted, longstanding citizens of the United States. Similar statements and stories from Arab Americans across the country were and are featured in national and local news outlets from 9/11 to the present. The abundance of articles that assert the assimilability of Arab Americans use liberal multiculturalist discourses to frame them as a diverse, yet knowable group that can be easily controlled. Their containment is accomplished through surveys that expound upon census data, dominant histories and understandings of U.S. immigration, and conservative cultural values, further situating them as foreigners-within.

Skepticism and fear-mongering frameworks have simultaneously made their way into the assimilability discourses of Arab Americans that grew and continue to grow after 9/11. These frameworks explicitly work to frame Arab Americans, non-Muslim and Muslim alike, as perpetually foreigners-within. Sending a complex and contradicting message, an August 2008

issue of The New York Times Magazine featured an interview with Arab American Brigitte Gabriel, a Lebanese Christian who immigrated to the U.S. during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The interview focused on the release of her new book They Must Be Stopped: Why We Must Defeat Radical Islam and How We Can Do It, where Gabriel issues a warning to the U.S. on the spread of fundamentalist, radical Islam and explores how radical Islamist armies are spreading within U.S. borders. While the interviewer presses Gabriel on the messages of her book, the interview itself throws fuel onto the proverbial fire of increasing animosities towards Arab and Muslim Americans. An excerpt from Gabriel's published interview reads:

Interviewer: In your new book, you write about the Muslim presence in America and bemoan the rise of Islamic day schools and jihad summer camp. Is there really such a thing?

Gabriel: Yes. Instead of taking lessons on swimming and gymnastics, the kids are listening to speakers give lectures titled "Preparation for Death" and "The Life in the Grave."

Interviewer: You also lament the public footbaths that have been installed at the University of Michigan and elsewhere to accommodate Muslim students.

Gabriel: I lived in the Middle East for the first 24 years of my life. Never once did I see any foot-washing basins in airports or public buildings. So why are they pushing them down the throats of Americans?

Interviewer: I can't get upset if people want to wash their feet before they pray.

Gabriel: This is the way they are taking over the West. They are doing it culturally inch by inch. They don't need to fire one bullet. Look what is happening in Europe. Do we want to become like "Eurabia"? (Solomon MM13).

Gabriel's use of harsh phrases such as "pushing them down the throats of Americans" and "taking over the West" connote Arab and Muslim Americans as very real ideological, even physical threats to U.S. culture and society. Furthermore, by calling Europe "Eurabia" Gabriel

expresses how Europe's Western culture has already been "compromised,"¹⁰ and threatens that the U.S. is next. Hinging upon her Lebanese identity, Gabriel frames herself in her books and this interview as an insider to the realities of Islam, thus making her ideas seem rooted in her insider status. Through the feature in the New York Times Magazine, her opinion and perspective are granted further legitimacy.

News media discourses calling for sympathy for Arab Americans take place at the same time as discourses interrogating whether or not Arab American are able to truly assimilate to U.S. culture. The circulation of these discourses simultaneously creates an ambivalent, superficial mode of understanding Arab Americans. Ultimately, Arab Americans continue to be constructed as perpetual "foreigners-within." In order to frame Arab Americans as able to be confined, bounded, and unthreatening, the discursive strategy of geographic confinement is also deployed.

Geographic Confinement

The stronger yet subtler strategy of containment found within media discourses is the geographic confinement framework. Through the continued discursive association of a community within a particular geographic place, an essentializing effect takes place. The othering of domestic places justifies physical segregation and disenfranchisement of immigrant/ethnic communities. The "Dearborn Syndrome" is ultimately a discursive strategy of essentializing Arab America with a specific geographic construct and specific identity. Again, while Arab Detroit is utilized most often, other specific locales are also used to frame specific

¹⁰. For examples of research exploring Islam and national identity in Europe see, Bowen 2001; Judge 2004; Sniderman and Aloysius 2007.

urban spaces as inherently “Arab American,” i.e. othered. Furthermore, the strategy of geographic confinement not only works by way of specifically naming a particular neighborhood, but it is also through the association of Arab Americans with urban places and non-white culture that Arab Americans are portrayed as unfit for full integration into white culture.¹¹ This comes to bear particularly when the Arab American other steps “out of bounds” as in the “The Jihadist Next Door” case (2010) explored below. Again, through the use of the geographic confinement discursive strategy, mainstream news media constructs Arab Americans as “foreigners-within.”

Coverage of protests and violence around the Bridgeview neighborhood of Southwest Chicago, which is a predominant Arab American-populated area, garnered local coverage in the city and around the U.S. A September 14, 2001 Chicago Tribune article features Arab American voices from the local Chicago community relaying their fear of escalating tensions and backlash:

Zeinah Elayyan prays at a mosque a half-block from her house in southwest suburban Bridgeview, on Thursday she said she was too fearful to step out her front door without police nearby. “No American should be made to be so afraid,” she said...Elayyan and her husband, Kamal, are indeed proud American citizens who followed the immigrant trail of dreams from the Middle East to the Midwest...They fell in love with each other and America at the same time. Their four children were born here. “When I was sworn in as a citizen,” Kamal Elayyan said, “the judge said this is the only country built on immigrants and we should all be proud, we were all Americans.” But in Bridgeview on

¹¹. A short list of how this phenomenon relates to other ethnic communities: Dávila 1999; Gregory, 1999; Haynes 2008; Lin 1998.

Wednesday night, the Elayyan family said they felt like foreigners (Terry and Ahmed 1.11).

Framing an immigrant story within the context of the Bridgeview neighborhood anchors Arab Americanness within a particular geographic place. Furthermore, this quote illustrates how both geographic confinement and sympathetic strategies can work together. The phrase "...proud American citizens who followed the immigrant trail of dreams from the Middle East to the Midwest..." constructs this Arab American family's immigrant narrative closely, and perhaps inherently, to the Midwestern neighborhood of Bridgeview in Chicago. They are deemed "proud American citizens" as this Arab American family talks about their worries and fears. This article simultaneously generates sympathy for Arab Americans and signals to their citizenship of Bridgeview.

Similarly, discourses around the Bay Ridge neighborhood of New York City construct it as an ideal space to contain the otherness of Arab Americans, as illustrated by this article from 2010:

Bay Ridge's main street looks like a healthy, bustling slice of American life in Brooklyn. The shops that line its Fifth Avenue - about a half-hour ride on the Metro from downtown Manhattan - include Greek delis, a German schnitzel restaurant, Irish pubs and Chinese takeaways. But among the crowds of shoppers are a large number of women wearing headscarves. Many of the businesses have signs in Arabic advertising parties to mark the end of Ramadan. A burst of loud Middle Eastern music blasts from a passing car stereo. For Bay Ridge is not just another suburb; it is the heart of Arab-American New York and thus one of the largest Muslim neighborhoods in the city. It is this suburb where Muslims

have become most settled and, now, where they feel most safe in a current time of trouble (Harris 2).

Constructing specific geographic places as Arab American frame this ethnic community as intrinsically tied to these urban neighborhoods. This geographic construction rhetorically works to contain otherness to urban geographies. When Arab Americanness steps outside the allowed boundaries of the multicultural cityscape discursive regulations occur.

A 2010 cover article from the New York Times Magazine illustrates an especially powerful way geographic confinement is deployed and regulated. The article titled “The Jihadist Next Door” was the sole cover story in the January 31, 2010 issue (Elliot 26-47). A red-toned photograph takes up the entirety of the front page featuring a close-up of a bearded young man wearing a patterned scarf around his head and a grin across his face. In crisp white lettering the title reads “The Jihadist Next Door” imposed over the right side of the man’s face. Below appears a question in smaller font: “How did a popular kid from a small town in Alabama wind up connected to Al Qaeda?” This story conveys the perceived urgency of a situation when otherness is found to be out of place and the efforts made to contain its threat.

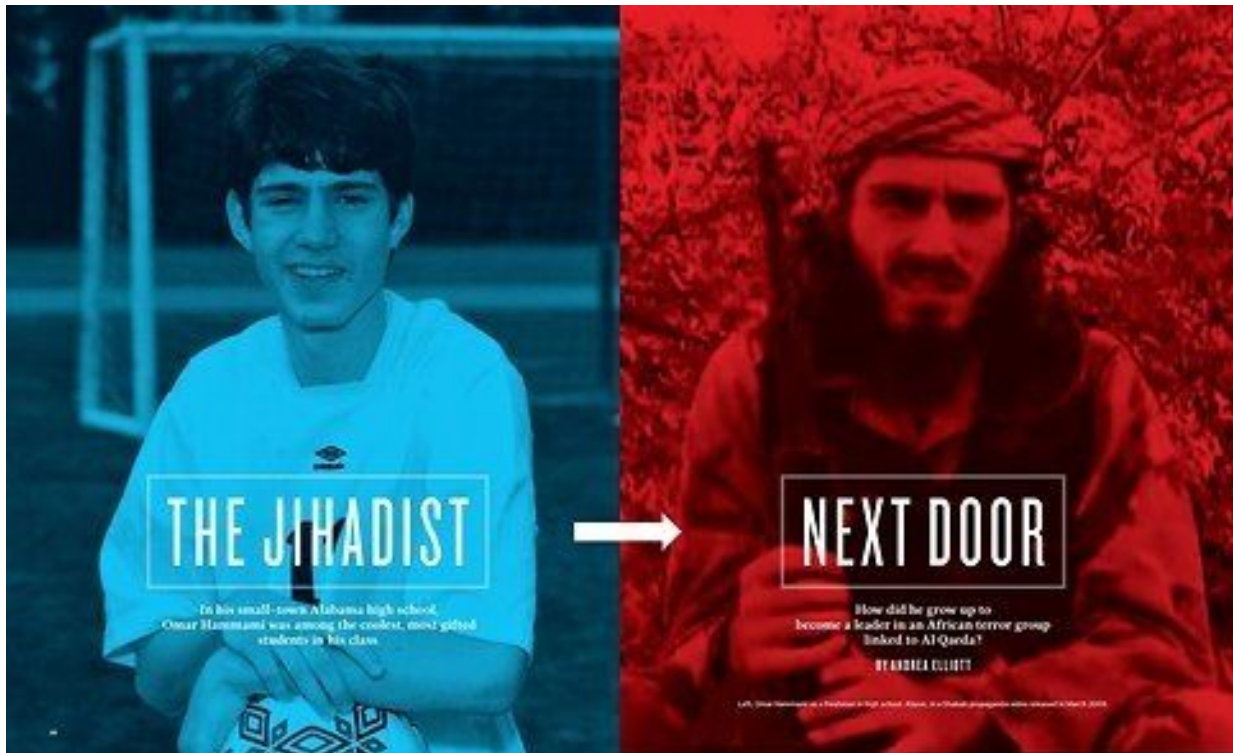


Figure 2 The New York Times, January 27, 2010

Inside the issue, a two-page spread introduces the cover story. The left page features an unbearded adolescent boy posing for his individual soccer team photograph. Decker in Umbro sportswear and clutching a soccer ball, the photograph of the young boy has been seeped in a blue tone and the anchoring words “The Jihadist” are splashed across the bottom of the image (Figure 1). On the opposite page, a photograph similar to the cover image shows the same young boy a few years older with a beard, a headscarf, and heavy clothing. Again, the image is red in tone, and instead of a soccer ball, the young man clutches a gun. At the bottom, the words “Next Door” finish the title of the article. In the article’s imagery alone a story of innocence turned threat is told. The most alarmist aspect about the way the article is presented is the fact that “the jihadist” is an ever-looming presence “next door” in any small town in the U.S., instead of residing in the proper place of an ethnic neighborhood in a large multicultural city. The article goes on to detail how Omar Hammami, who was born to a Syrian immigrant father and an

Alabama-born mother, went from being the charismatic president of his high school sophomore class and a regular attendee of Bible camp to the leader of “one of the world’s most ruthless Islamist insurgencies” (Elliot 28). Stories such as this provides a basis from which fictional stories that fantasize over the threat of young sleeper cells (e.g., John Updike’s 2006 novel *Terrorist* and multiple plotlines on popular, often primetime, television shows such as *Sleeper Cell*, *24*, *NCIS*, and others) can develop.

Furthermore, these stories not only provide fodder for fictional media depictions of Arabs, Muslims, and Arab and/or Muslim Americans, but they also implicitly condone discriminatory acts inflicted upon Arab and/or Muslim Americans by individual citizens and U.S. government legislation (Alsultany 4-5). The logic that follows from this article affirms the false assumption that even the most seemingly non-threatening, assimilated Arab American youth can become a gun-toting terrorist. From the explicitly othered to the passable, all Arab and Muslim Americans have the potential to be a terrorist threat. Part and parcel to this threat is its “next door” proximity and the out-of-placeness of the young sleeper cell. Stories like “The Jihadist Next Door” deploy the geographic confinement strategy by regulating the proper place of immigrants and framing otherness as a threat when found outside of it. Together, these strategies of containment present a means by which to keep deep engagements with Arab America at arms length. The following section engages exclusively with the third strategy of containment—geographic confinement—in its most prolific form as the “Dearborn Syndrome.”

The “Dearborn Syndrome”

On the evening of Sunday, November 25, 2001, CBS’s long-running, highly-rated news program *60 Minutes* opened its weekly broadcast with a segment spotlighting Dearborn, MI and

its Arab American population. 60 Minutes co-host Ed Bradley introduced viewers to the story titled “America’s Arabs” by stating:

When President Bush declared war against terrorism, he insisted it was not a war against Arabs or Islam. But because all 19 of the September 11th hijackers and almost all of the 22 suspects on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist list are Arabs and Muslims, many Americans have had difficulty making that distinction, and suspicions of American Arabs and Muslims persist. That’s something that worries the people of Dearborn, Michigan, which is the heart of metropolitan Detroit’s 300,000-strong Arab community, one of the largest concentrations of Arabs outside of the Middle East. Since September 11th, they have been the targets of bomb threats, assaults and racial profiling. They've also been under intense scrutiny by the FBI and by some of their non-Arab neighbors, who question their loyalty (60 Minutes, 2001).

Bradley’s voiceover narrates images from Dearborn of men walking on the streets, a “Welcome to Dearborn” sign, a mosque, and Arab restaurants. The opening segment frankly details the tensions that were exacerbated by 9/11 between Arab Americans and the U.S. government and non-Arab American civilians. The decision to focus on the site of Dearborn, Michigan is alluded to by providing population statistics over images and signs of “difference,” such as the mosque, concentrations of Arabic restaurants, and masses of brown bodies. Because of its unique demographics, Dearborn, is depicted as a particular stronghold for sentiments towards and about Arab Americans in the U.S. imaginary. These sentiments have manifested in special reports, films, and television shows, resulting in the development of Arab Detroit as the primary site of the “Dearborn Syndrome” strategy to make sense of Arab Americans. This section takes up the iterations of the “Dearborn Syndrome” that specifically refer to Arab Detroit. Arab Detroit has

become spotlighted as a result of the events of 9/11 being linked to Arabs and Muslims and the needs that stem from anxieties to understand, survey, and contain threats against U.S. society and culture from this Arab other. In order to understand the context through with Dearborn and Detroit-located Arab Americans negotiate their identities via their own cultural productions, it is important to flesh out this phenomenon as it specifically relates to Arab Detroit.

A common aspect of the “Dearborn Syndrome” is how Arab Americans are often interviewed via “on-the-scene” coverage to gauge an “insider’s” perspective on events concerning the Arab World. This is especially true for Arab Americans of the Dearborn and Detroit area. What results is the construction of Dearborn as a domestically-othered place. The use of framing Dearborn and the Detroit Metro Area as particularly Arab/othered is found both within national-level media, non-Michigan local media, and local media coverage based in Michigan, especially Metro Detroit. National level media and non-Michigan-based local media often use the “Dearborn Syndrome” trope on a superficial level, while local Metro Detroit media at times is more critical and engages with the nuances of Arab American life in the area. However, local Metro Detroit news outlets are inevitably not operating within a vacuum and subscribe to common tropes of portraying Dearborn as a domestically-othered city.

The November 25, 2001 60 Minutes episode provides a useful starting point to begin to understand the “Dearborn Syndrome” as it plays out in Dearborn. By profiling both Arab Americans and non-Arab Americans in the Dearborn community, the segment continues to dive more deeply into the tensions between Arab Americans, the U.S. government, and non-Arab American civilians. Arab Americans profiled share anecdotes on how perpetrations of discrimination and hate against them and others they know in their community have increased significantly since 9/11. Countering these Arab American narratives that call for sympathy and

understanding, the program immediately follows their anecdotes with comments from contrarians who call for the necessity of surveying and being skeptical of Arab and Muslim Americans. A conversation between Bradley and Dearborn-based FBI agent John Bell illustrates this perspective. Transitioning from a conversation with an unidentified Arab American man living in Dearborn, who states in an interview with Bradley, “I was born here, my mother was born here. Why should I have to defend my Americanism? Why am I a suspect? Why should you fear me?”, Ed Bradley is shown in the office of John Bell, where he asks him, “As far as you know, are there terrorists or supporters of terrorists currently living in this community?” The conversation ensues:

Bell: There are.

Bradley: Terrorists?

Bell: Supporters of terrorists.

Bradley: There are some people who believe that within this community, there’s sort of a fifth column, and that there are people in the community who know about these people and who help them. Is that a fair assessment?

Bell: I think that is a fair assessment. There are a number of people in this community who will disagree with the United States government policy vis-a-vis the Palestinian issue. And they’re very vocal about that.

Bradley: But does that extend to them hiding or not reporting people who may be terrorists in their midst?

Bell: You’re talking about terrorists. I would say concealing maybe the support of terrorism.

Bradley: Is there anything you can say publicly about the kind of activities—how do they support them?

Bell: It is not unusual to recruit and have front organizations receive money from the community. And that money is then funneled back into terrorist groups in the Middle East and elsewhere. (60 Minutes)

Ambiguous responses to Bradley's questions from Bell leave interpretation open and thus make it easy for the audience to infer that terrorist activity is afoot.

Spliced between Bradley and Bell's conversation is a conversation between Bradley and Ishmael Ahmed, the co-founder of then Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS). Ahmed is asked by Bradley to speak to the charges of two men who received educational funding from ACCESS and were later arrested by the FBI. Ahmed defends the work of ACCESS by stating, "We pay tuition for thousands of people. If they misuse what they've learned, then we can't be held to blame for that. We've cooperated with the authorities. We want to see the people who are guilty get taken care of." Bradley questions him, "Knowing what you know now, have you changed your procedures? Are you doing anything different?" Again, Ahmed responds with assurance of ACCESS's credibility and points out how false documentation is a problem not only for their organization: "We're checking documentation more closely. Because the one thing that slipped past not only us, but everybody else, was that the documentation was fake documentation." After this short exchange between Bradley and Ahmed, the segment switches back to Bell and Bradley's conversation and intersperses it with footage showing men inside of a mosque. Bell states, "There are people who will come into the country, they will go to the mosques and they'll solicit money for various charities overseas." Bradley presses him to elaborate, "But you haven't seen people who you think are here to carry out terrorist acts..." Bell responds, "I don't believe I could comment on that." After a few more exchanges between Bradley and Bell, the segment comes to a close by featuring closing statements from both Ahmed and Bell.

From footage shot during the conversation between Ahmed and Bradley, Ahmed's closing remarks are presented, "But [another terrorist attack is] our worst nightmare. I think Arab

Americans have entered the danger zone. That's why we're fearful, if anything else happens, that that could escalate greatly. We've gotten a taste of what's possible." Switching back to Bradley's conversation with Bell, Bradley ends with, "These are difficult times we live in now." Bell states, in agreement, "Very difficult. Very stressful for both sides." By foregrounding Bell's statements and giving him both more screen time and the last words of the segment, Arab American perspectives are sidelined. Bell's words "stressful for both sides" work to equate the stress and real threat of institutional and physical violence felt by Arab Americans with the anxieties of the U.S. government to punish and prevent perpetrators of terrorist attacks. Visuals of voiceless Muslim men inside of a mosque paired with Bell's words of warning and vagueness construct an image of Arab Americans in Dearborn as different and secondary.

The 60 Minutes segment "America's Arabs" presents a subtle, yet powerful message of the necessity for Arab American surveillance, regardless of the implications this may have for the Arab American community in Dearborn and other Arab American communities around the country. Pieces like "America's Arabs" set the dominant framework through which to understand Arab and Muslim Americans. This framework of including Arab American voices while simultaneously implying the necessity of surveillance and skepticism through visuals and framing techniques that construct their voices as secondary creates a false sense of objective, balanced, and unbiased news coverage. The broader implications of such framing strategies could suggest Arab American experiences and voices as subordinate to a primary objective of surveillance and regulation.

A defining aspect of the "Dearborn Syndrome" is the upholding of specific geographic places as the primary domestic sites to understand Arabs' and Muslims' opinion, behaviors, and culture, both within and outside the United States. The centralization of Arab Detroit in U.S.

national news coverage on the Arab World, worldwide terrorist activity, U.S. government policy (concerning anything from the Iraq War to the War on Terror to immigration policy to the Patriot Act), and general Arab and Muslim American news constructs it as an exceptionally, domestically othered place. Multiple examples from U.S. news articles convey the prolific nature of this phenomenon. One example titled “Muslims Pray for London Bombing Victims,” published by the Associated Press in 2005, covers Muslims’ reactions to the July 7, 2005 London bombing of the underground subway system (Murphy). The article features Muslim voices, which include imams, prayer leaders and politicians from Jerusalem, Baghdad, Mauritania, Damascus, Gaza City and more. While all of the remarks excerpted ultimately condemn the bombing, some are also critical of perceived connections between Western injustices and terrorist defiance. The only U.S.-based person cited in the article is Ali Lela, an imam at the American Moslem Society in Dearborn, Michigan. In the article he distances himself and Islam from the London bombings. Lela is quoted as saying, “This has nothing to do with Islam... The first people to suffer, after the victims, are the Muslim community” (Murphy). This distancing of Islam from violence is a common theme that arises from Muslim voices, especially those from Arab Detroit. Furthermore, no other Muslim voice from the U.S. is featured in this article, thus constructing Dearborn as the site par excellence of U.S.-based Muslim opinion and perspective. The Dearborn construct is commonly employed in such a manner after major U.S. and world events; examples include the toppling of Saddam Hussein published by the Associated Press in 2004 (El-Tablawy); a May 2004 speech made by President Bush addressing the Iraq War published by the Associated Press in 2004 (“Bush's speech: Different audiences draw widely differing conclusions”), the 10-year anniversary commemorations of 9/11 published by

Associated Press in 2011 (Karoub), and the death of Osama bin Laden published by The Wall Street Journal in 2011 (Levitz, Hagerty, and Searcey).

General interest stories about Arab American life and the growth of the Arab American population make up another set of national news coverage that utilizes the “Dearborn Syndrome” framework to provide insights. The majority of this coverage continues to convey the plight of Arab Americans in a post-9/11 world, but it does so by individualizing the grand narrative and providing personal experiences and specific immigrant histories (e.g., PBS’s special documentary Caught in the Crossfire, which aired in 2002). This type of news coverage often explicitly assert the patriotism of Arab Detroit residents by detailing their strong desires to live in the U.S. and/or serve their country and local communities (Singer; Karoub; Freeman). Local news coverage emerging out of the Detroit Metro area especially uses the techniques of individualizing and goes even further to develop complementary discourses that illustrate the more specific nuances of life in Arab Detroit. Similar to national news coverage, local coverage often develops the construct of Arab Detroit and its residents by featuring articles about Arab immigrants’ loyalty to the U.S. and desire to remain here (see Pardo 8A published by The Detroit News in 2010). This features the utilization of the “assimilability” discursive strategy in conjunction with the “Dearborn Syndrome” strategy. Furthermore, Detroit Metro area news outlets also feature stories about: Arab American soldiers from Dearborn and Detroit who receive a variety of responses to their roles in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (“Arab-American soldiers sometimes face criticism at home,” which was published by the Associated Press in 2004); Arab Detroit’s relations and, at times, conflict within its diverse communities and with other local, non-Arab American communities (“Chaldeans struggle for identity of their own” [published by the Associated Press in 2003]; Krupa 1-8A [published by The Detroit News in

2008]; LeDuff 1-3A [published by The Detroit News in 2008]; Murphy [published by the Associated Press in 2005]); and how Arab Americans are generally thriving in the U.S. yet are younger and less affluent in Michigan (see Wilkinsin and Hicks 1-5A [published in The Detroit News in 2013]). Detroit area local news coverage of its Arab Americans is also heavily invested in highlighting the successes of its Arab American residents, making a case for their assimilability (see Barnas 12A [published by Detroit Free Press in 2009]; Kozlowski 1-8A [published by The Detroit News 2008]; Kurlyandchik [published by Hour Detroit in 2011]; Warikoo “Homegrown Miss USA “ [published by Detroit Free Press in 2010]). As such, news coverage of Arab Detroit from the Detroit area works within the national “Dearborn Syndrome” trope, yet develops nuances of Arab Detroit life that go beyond the blanket and ubiquitous themes of: 1) Arab Americans facing discrimination, and 2) caution and skepticism towards Arab Americans.

A specific case of the “Dearborn Syndrome” that remained a subject of national news reporting for quite some time is the crowning of Rima Fakhri, a Lebanese American woman from Dearborn, Michigan, as Miss USA 2010. The Rima Fakhri case exemplifies the blend of fascination and skepticism (and perhaps, at times, disdain) that underpins much, if not all, of the ways that Arab Americans and Arab Detroit, specifically, is constructed in the U.S. national imaginary. Imperative to understanding the complexities of this case is to keep in mind the different ways that anxieties are mapped onto feminine, othered bodies. Moreover, the questioning of Arab Americans’ legitimacy to cultural citizenship and construction as perpetual foreigners is also central to the Rima Fakhri case.

The Case of Miss USA 2010 Rima Fakhri

On the evening of May 16, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada, the questions “Will it be Oklahoma? Or will it be Michigan?” were posed by Today Show anchor Natalie Morales during the final moments of the 2010 Miss USA pageant. Clutching each other’s hands, Miss Oklahoma, Morgan Woolard, and Miss Michigan, Rima Fakhri, pressed their foreheads together, wincing in anticipation. “The first runner up is...Oklahoma,” Morales proclaimed, “which means, Miss USA 2010 is Michigan! Rima Fakhri!” (“Miss USA 2010 Pageant”). For the first time in the 58-year history of the Miss USA pageant, an outwardly identifying Arab American Muslim woman received the crown. The shifting of power, as signified by the Miss USA crown and camera attention, between subjects within this liberal multicultural representation of beauty presents a visualization of post-race ideology. In the days following the pageant, national and local U.S. news publications were quick to announce the achievements of Rima Fakhri on becoming the first Arab American to be crowned Miss USA. Connected to the celebration of Fakhri’s individual triumph was the applauding of the Miss USA organization’s liberal politics. Just as quick as praise was delivered, however, backlash against Rima Fakhri followed. This much-hyped moment of U.S. liberalism and race relations quickly fell apart, putting Fakhri and the Miss USA organization into a full-time, damage control mode, which lasted throughout the duration of her tenure and beyond.

In an era marked by hostility towards Arabs and Arab Americans, the moment when an Arab American woman from Dearborn, MI was feted for the coveted role of Miss USA posed challenges to established norms of femininity (as embodied by the tall, blonde, and blue-eyed Miss Oklahoma and Miss USA 2009), racialized beauty hierarchies, and representations of Arab Americans in mainstream media and popular culture at large. Furthermore, Rima Fakhri’s ties to Arab Detroit further aggravated the already susceptible place and population to continued

scrutiny. The case of Rima Fakhri further illustrates how the “Dearborn Syndrome” is used to put the excess of Arab America back into place. What this case ultimately reveals is the discursive struggle over Arab American cultural citizenship. As defined by Toby Miller in his book “Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age,” citizenship is not only an officially nation-state- granted status, but has three zones – political, economical, and cultural (35). These three zones of citizenships developed alongside each other and at times overlapped. Miller describes political citizenship as “the right to reside and vote,” economic citizenship as “the right to work and prosper,” and cultural citizenship as “the right to know and speak” (35). When working through discourses and representations of Arab Americans, cultural citizenship arises as the most significant zone of citizenship to be addressed. However, it is important to keep in mind that each zone has implications on the others. The debates and policies concerning immigration, surveillance, and welfare all have implications for and are influenced by a group’s cultural citizenship. The case of intense scrutiny over Rima Fakhri illustrates the struggle over Arab Americans’, and in this case particularly Arab American women’s’, cultural citizenship.

The media acts of intense surveillance that followed the crowning of Rima Fakhri convey the unease in framing an Arab American, Muslim American woman as a figurehead of U.S. femininity. In response to this unease, multiple accounts and photos attempting to sully Rima Fakhri’s reputation surfaced in the days that followed the coronation of Miss USA 2010. For example, FOX News’s political pundit Gretchen Carlson scoffed on-air at Fakhri’s crowning as another mainstream attempt at political correctness and affirmative action, whilst upholding Miss Oklahoma’s “informed opinion” on immigration (“Carlson Asks If Miss OK Lost Crown Because of Her ‘Informed Opinion’ on AZ Law, and Arab-American Won Because of a ‘PC

Society”). The clip of Fox News’ Fox and Friends begins with co-anchor Steve Doocy introducing the topic of the Miss USA 2010 pageant and Rima Fakih’s response to the question-and-answer portion of the competition. Doocy states, “Miss Michigan had an interesting quote and she was asked whether or not your health insurance should cover your birth control medication. Well, here’s what she said. Here’s her quote…” (“Carlson Asks…”). Doocy’s voiceover narrates a clip of Miss Oklahoma and Miss Michigan hugging immediately after Fakih is announced as the winner of the pageant. By the end of his set-up, an image of Fakih from the swimsuit portion of the competition, where she is shown wearing only a bikini swimsuit, takes over the screen. A cut from this photograph shows a split screen of Fakih in her bathing suit with the text of her response next to it. Doocy reads the text aloud: “I believe that birth control is just like every other medication even though it’s a complicated substance.” After reading her quote, Doocy continues, “That answer had some people going…um, even Miss South Carolina said that didn’t make any sense” (mentioning Miss South Carolina is a reference to the Miss Teen USA 2007 participant Caitlin Upton whose notorious, nonsensical answer during the Q&A portion of the competition made headlines). Gretchen Carlson responds to Doocy by questioning any Miss USA competitors’ career motives and why anyone should care what their answers and opinions to various topics are. Nonetheless, Carlson goes on to back up Miss USA 2010 runner-up Miss Oklahoma’s response to a question about immigration. Carlson states, “Guess who lost? Someone with an informed opinion actually, Miss Oklahoma. She was first runner up, and she talked about supporting states’ rights. Here’s what she said… ‘I’m a huge believer in states’ rights. I think that’s what’s so wonderful about America. So I think it’s perfectly fine for Arizona to create that law.’ She’s talking specifically about the immigration law… Did she lose, was she first runner up, because she supported the Arizona immigration law? And did the Muslim

American win, because of the whole P.C. Society that we find ourselves in?” Using the same split-screen shot, a fully clothed, blazer-wearing picture of the blonde Miss Oklahoma Morgan Woolard is shown next to her competition answer. Showing a barely clothed Fakhri next to her quote about birth control and a buttoned-up Woolard next to her quote about immigration with voiceovers that condemn the former and condone the latter create a visual and auditory contrast between the two women and raise issues about appropriate forms of sexuality and politics. Their politics are explicitly contrasted and ultimately Miss Oklahoma’s are upheld. Implicitly, their representations of sexuality and femininity are also compared. Miss Oklahoma is shown covered, while Fakhri is barely clothed.

The dismissal of Fakhri’s remarks about birth control also signal her as overly sexed and unfit for the Miss USA title as compared to the appropriately sexualized Miss Oklahoma. The framing of Fakhri’s win against the praise of Miss Oklahoma’s blatant condoning of Arizona’s controversial immigration laws gestures to Fakhri’s unworthiness of the title. Furthermore, in the photograph of Rima Fakhri during the Miss USA swimsuit competition, Fakhri is also wearing her “Miss Michigan” sash. The semiotics and context of this photograph signify an association between Fakhri as an overtly sexualized domestic other and her connection to Michigan. The context of making a comparison between Fakhri in a bathing suit and Woodward fully clothed and the news anchors’ explicit condoning of Woodward primes this association between Fakhri’s overtly sexualized otherness and Michigan. After almost 10 years of prolific use of the “Dearborn Syndrome” in national media coverage of Arab Americans, dominant connotations of Michigan include it as a geographic construct of Arab American enclaves. The framing of Rima Fakhri in this manner makes explicit her unfitness to uphold the cultural values of the Miss USA title.

Other examples of backlash towards Rima Fakhri include: CNN Newsroom's Carol Costello during an interview with Fakhri reprimanding her for cursing and challenging her judgment for competing in a wrestling reality show ("Miss USA A Wrestler For WWE"); local, Dearborn-area conservative blogger Debbie Schlusser gaining national coverage for accusing Fakhri of having ties to Hezbollah (Schlusser); and notorious celebrity gossip blog TMZ.com circulating pictures of Fakhri participating in a pole-dancing contest for a Southwest Michigan radio event, deeming her a stripper ("Miss USA 2010 -- Champion Pole Dancer"). Throwing more fuel on the fire, Fakhri was arrested for allegations of drunk driving in December 2011 and later received a sentence of probation, community service, fines, and mandatory attendance of an anti-alcohol class.¹² It is important to note the exacerbated surveillance of Fakhri's actions after this incident, as exemplified by extensive TMZ coverage, TMZ's release of a video of Fakhri outside a bar in California, and other articles with headlines that read: "MISS USA: POLE DANCE CHAMP" (published by St. Petersburg Times); "FROM POLE TO CROWN" (published by New York Daily Times); "New Miss USA and Her Religion are Poles Apart" (published by The Star); and "The Shi'ite Stripper Girl Next Door" (published by The Washington Times). The praise that initially surrounded the Miss USA 2010 pageant quickly gave way to embarrassment and even calls to strip Fakhri of her crown ("Some Call for Removal of Rima Fakhri Sign in Dearborn").

The media event of the crowning of Rima Fakhri as Miss USA 2010 and the subsequent backlash illustrate the intense scrutiny that comes with the assertion of a young Arab American woman as the epitome of U.S. femininity, purity, and beauty and the ways that Fakhri's

¹² Undoubtedly, if any Miss USA winner, or even contestant, experienced run-ins with the law or had pictures of taken of them pole dancing, there would be some sort of backlash. The point to note about the Rima Fakhri case is how the criticisms are seeped in essentializing and racist tones.

“difference” was managed. The title of Miss USA designates cultural appropriateness and cultural citizenship upon its bestowed. Fakhri’s identity as a young, Arab American Muslim woman with childhood and familial ties to the Arab American community of Dearborn, Michigan intertwined to provide the fodder needed to frame her as unfit and ultimately a threat to the dominant notions of U.S. femininity that are upheld by the Miss USA title. The public regulating and discussions around Fakhri’s race, ethnicity, and sexuality reveal the cultural anxieties her identity evokes. A large aspect of this was the way the “Dearborn Syndrome” discursive strategy positioned her as out-of-bounds and needing to be regulated via geographic confinement. Anxiety-ridden, alarmist rhetoric worked to position her as a hypersexualized, ethnic other with strong ties to suspicious Arab and Arab American activities. This rhetoric legitimized the positioning of Fakhri as unworthy for the Miss USA title and the particular type of safe, American, and multicultural femininity it exemplifies.

Conclusion

Since the events of 9/11, the scrutinizing eye of the U.S. mainstream media has corralled Arab Americans into focus. These primary discursive strategies of containment—the interrogation of assimilation and sympathy and geographic confinement—evolved over the past thirteen years and can be found in multiple iterations in U.S. corporate news media coverage concerning Arab America. The desire to make sense of and contain the perceived otherness and threat of Arab America is the ideological foundation of the cultural work done by mainstream news media. The most profound of these strategies is geographic confinement or the “Dearborn Syndrome.” By discursively connecting Arab Americans with particular geographic locations, they are framed as being inherent to an urban immigrant space. This urban immigrant space

connotes integration into a multicultural U.S. landscape, yet distance from full cultural citizenship.

Through a connection to particular urban immigrant spaces, Arab Americans are framed as inherent to the U.S. melting pot ideology. Furthermore, in order to keep racial and ethnic hierarchies of this ideology intact, their cultural citizenship needs to be discursively regulated. As the most densely-populated Arab American city in the U.S., Dearborn, Michigan became, and remains, the most focused-upon geographical space where anxieties over Islam and Arab identity are negotiated. Outsider curiosity and the need to make sense of this domestically-othered city have resulted in documentaries, television shows, and countless news stories focusing on Arab Detroit. Furthermore, the narrative of Rima Fakhri's fall from grace is an exceptional mediated moment that reveals national anxieties surrounding the inclusion of Arab Americans into full cultural citizenship. The backlash against Fakhri illustrates how strongly a threat is posed when an Arab American Muslim woman attempts to obtain full cultural citizenship and the lengths to which discursive strategies of containment are used. Ultimately, the vast variance in tones and framing of Arab and Muslim American by the U.S. news media since 9/11 creates extremely complex and conflicting discursive constructions and, consequently, hinders the potential for sustained understandings. The circulation of discourses that both condemn and condone discrimination towards Arab Americans creates an atmosphere primed to produce confusion, misconceptions, and potential hatred.

As was alluded to in the introduction of this chapter, Arab Detroit continues to experience a parallel development of being both highly scrutinized by outsiders and in the midst of significant economic and cultural development. The following chapter outlines one case where this is especially true, the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan

Chapter Two: “Telling Our Story”: Pedagogy and Performance of the Arab American National Museum

Located across from Dearborn City Hall on Michigan Avenue, a major thoroughfare of Dearborn, Michigan, the Arab American National Museum (AANM) opened its doors in 2005 and has since established itself as the preeminent site for showcasing and collecting histories, artifacts, art work, and more from the Arab American experience, which dates back in the U.S. more than a century. The AANM is both a highly recognized national cultural institution and local community center. The museum itself and the events it organizes present crucial sites to analyze and inform our understanding of how Arab Americans speak back to dominant narratives and representations of their identities and community. As a museum with permanent exhibits as well as ever-evolving programming and circulating exhibit, the AANM practices strategies of signification that construct a dynamic “double narrative movement” between the pedagogical and performative in defining what it means to be Arab American in a post-9/11 context (Bhabha 296-7). The AANM’s pedagogical approaches used to create an Arab American narrative attempt to standardize a particular experience through its permanent exhibits, specific locale, and spatial structure. In contrast, the museum’s performative approaches to creating an Arab American narrative, which includes conferences, musical concerts, seasonal parties, and other events, position Arab American identity as nebulous and constantly changing. Performative approaches, moreover, situate Arab American subjects in contradictory positionalities both

within and outside of the fold of the American nation. Ultimately, the splitting that occurs between the AANM's static, pedagogical approaches and its fluid performative programming reveals ruptures and shifts in Arab American narratives and histories. The goal of this chapter is to explore both approaches embodied by the AANM with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the complexities of attempting to pin down the floating signifier of "Arab Americanness."

Further, a primary goal of this chapter is to engage with pedagogical and performative approaches of the AANM as they relate to the cultivation of collective and public memory. Collective and public memory, while being highly contested discursive sites of national identity, have the power to (dis)unite social groups and are particularly essential in official and vernacular traditions of U.S. histories (Confino 1390; Atwater and Herndon 17). In a post-9/11 context, cultivating a national collective and public memory that includes Arab Americans becomes integral to challenging questions over Arab and Muslim Americans' claim of cultural citizenship. The AANM becomes an essential public space through which Arab American figures and histories are inserted into U.S. national collective and public memory.

In order to address how the pedagogical and performative aspects of the AANM contribute to a U.S. national collective and public memory, this chapter presents an analysis of the museum's mode of speaking back to dominant ideologies concerning Arab Americans and Arab Detroit. This analysis is done through the use of my participant-observant experience at the AANM. During the summer of 2011, I worked at the AANM in their education department to develop educational materials for a new exhibit. This was a position made possible through funding by the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor's public scholarship program titled Arts of Citizenship. Since my summer 2011 work at the AANM, I remain connected to the museum by

regularly attending events, sustaining my museum membership, and working on various museum projects. One of the major ways I remained connected to the AANM is through my voluntary position as a DIWAN5 conference committee member. The DIWAN conference is a biannual multi-day conference that focuses on bringing together Arab American artists, activists, and scholars from around the country to discuss the growing and complex Arab American art movement. The 2012 DIWAN conference was titled DIWAN5 to denote it as the fifth annual conference since its inception in 2006. My participation in planning DIWAN5 consisted of regularly meeting with the organizing committee at the AANM for the six months prior to the conference, which was held the weekend of April 5-6, 2013, to make decisions concerning event promotion, scheduling, organization, and panel formation. During the conference weekend, I attended all of the panels and events, helped register attendees, moderated a panel, and fully engaged with attendees. I consequently use these participant-observation experiences to inform the following analysis of the AANM.

The first section of this chapter takes a close look at the AANM itself. The AANM's permanent exhibits, Dearborn locality, and general spatial aesthetic and ambiance are the primary foci in the analysis of how its pedagogical foundation can be understood. Next, the chapter shifts to an engagement with the performative aspects of the AANM and how they constantly redefine and recreate an Arab American identity. While various events and programs are addressed, my participant-observation experience planning and attending DIWAN5 are the main focus of this discussion. The AANM's politics of experience emerge and signal the organization's move away from the exaltation of the archive to an orientation toward "the realm of the senses and the embodied" as presented by the space of the museum (Chakrabarty 9).

Pedagogical Approaches through Location, Spatiality, and Permanent Exhibits

As communicative mediums grounded in physical spaces and collections of objects, museums present complex sites to explore the physicality and spatiality of culture (Hooper-Greenhill 10). Analysis of these aspects of the AANM reveals the pedagogical as deeply ingrained at the level of space, place, and object. This section addresses how pedagogical identity constructions function in the AANM; this includes an engagement with its permanent exhibits, its specific location in Dearborn, and the museum's spatial structure. This analysis reveals how the AANM strikes a delicate balance between keeping connected with its historical and contemporary immigrant roots, i.e. its "otheredness," while simultaneously aligning itself with dominant white culture. This balancing effect constructs a version of Arab American identity that works within twenty-first century, U.S. racial politics and incorporates post-race and liberal multicultural ideologies. The permanent museum exhibits, location, and space of the AANM work together to strike this balance and make it a palatable and accessible institution for the largest audience possible. I posit that legitimization of the museum is achieved through association with dominant white culture by way of 1) aligning with the Dearborn government and larger Metro Detroit Community, 2) sharing an Ellis Island-centric immigrant history that emerges as some of the most privileged histories and themes of the AANM's pedagogical identity constructions, and 3) upholding the uncontroversial, dominant cultural values of heterosexuality, close-knit families, and the "American Dream."

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the AANM is located on Michigan Avenue in the city of Dearborn, Michigan, and is positioned immediately across the street from Dearborn City Hall. Its governmentally centralized location and proximity to both Detroit and Dearborn's city centers ground the museum's location in a physical orientation that connects it to

a hybridized urban/suburban space. By traveling only a couple miles east on Michigan Avenue, one will cross into Detroit and eventually into the city's urban center. Traveling a couple miles in the opposite direction will have one passing through the commercial downtown center of Dearborn proper and eventually into the affluent, suburban neighborhoods of Dearborn Heights and beyond. Instead of placing the AANM closer to downtown Dearborn or even further west towards Dearborn Heights, its location on the opposite side of U.S. Interstate 94 from Detroit, which is the physical boundary between Dearborn and Detroit city limits, places the museum in the Detroit Metro Area's physical framework that connects it to downtown Detroit, downtown Dearborn, and Dearborn's governmental center. Furthermore, the area of Michigan Avenue on which the AANM lies also proximately connects it to Dearborn's South End neighborhood, the contemporary and historic center of the area's Arab American immigrant community. The geographical positioning of the AANM embeds the institution within these various physical and cultural infrastructures and primes visitors to understand the public space and exhibits of the AANM as physically connected to Detroit, Dearborn, local governments, and the contemporary and historical Arab immigrant community. This multi-modal setting of being both central to the dominant culture and yet still outside of it sets the larger context from which the exterior and interior of the AANM is understood.

The AANM space itself, including its interior and exterior design and architecture, further sets the basis for how an individual in or outside of the community begins to understand the AANM's presentation of a general Arab American history and experience. On the north side of Michigan Avenue between Schaefer Road—a busy north-south byway that easily connects the AANM to Warren Avenue, a major commercial district of Dearborn's east side—and Necklel Street, a smaller road leading into a residential neighborhood of closely-lined single family

homes built in the mid-20th century, the AANM building is nestled between two banks and a small restaurant. The facade of the building is prominent and reaches three stories high. In the center of the building's facade is a primarily blue mosaic featuring Arab calligraphy and the English words "Arab American National Museum." The bottom floor of the building consists of glass walls and doors, while the mosaic sign and intricately cut white stone make up the top two floors. On top of the building is a large dome that pays homage to the domed architecture of mosques. Upon entering the AANM from its main entrance off of Michigan Avenue, one steps into an open and airy space where the front desk attendant welcomes you to the museum. To the left is a book-filled library and to the right an artifact-filled museum store. Past the entry foyer and front desk, the museum opens into an impressive three-story courtyard. Colorful mosaics decorate the floor and walls of the courtyard. Window displays that are cut into the walls of the courtyard house Arab World artifacts and lessons on how Arabs made historical impacts in the spheres of science, language, and art, among others. Three screens hang from the ceiling and face the front of the museum (thus immediately greeting one who enters through the entry foyer); they present a variety of old and new photographs featuring Arab Americans participating in family and civic life. Auditorily, echoes of the oud, a stringed instrument that originates from Mesopotamia and is still widely used in the composition of contemporary Arabic music, fill the courtyard. Behind the three screens is a pristine marble stairway that leads to the second level. Above the entire courtyard is the domed rotunda ceiling that mimics centuries of Arab World architecture and artistry. Together, all the features of the courtyard contribute to the space's openness and consequently inviting ambiance.

Leslie K. Weisman, in her book concerning feminist critiques of design, connects space to language, thus foregrounding how space is inherently imbued with meaning:

Space, like language, is socially constructed; and like the syntax of language, the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect and reinforce the nature of gender, race, and class relations in society. The uses of both language and space contribute to the power of some groups over others and the maintenance of human inequality... Architecture thus defined is a record of deeds done by those who have had the power to build. It is shaped by social, political, and economic forces and values embodied in the forms themselves, the processes through which they are built, and the manner in which they are used. Creating buildings involves moral choices that are subject to moral judgment. (2)

The AANM immediately commands attention both from its exterior facade and interior entry foyer and courtyard. By the AANM taking up such a large amount of commercial space immediately across from Dearborn City Hall, one can perceive a call to bring attention to the city's Arab Americaness. Yet, the aesthetic beauty and transparency of the outside façade—conveyed by the windows-for-walls bottom level of the main entrance—denote openness and encourage visitors and passersby alike to engage with its content and messages. Connecting these ideas to Weisman, the space of the AANM, through both the physical space it takes up and its interiors, makes explicit claims to the legitimacy of the Arab American community as rightful citizens of Dearborn, the Detroit Metro Area, Michigan, and the United States.

The permanent exhibits found on the AANM's second floor further build upon the balance the museum strikes between being central to both dominant U.S. culture and to Arab immigrant culture. Up the stairway from the bottom level of the courtyard, a large map that highlights the countries of the Arab League, which is used synonymously with the Arab World, hangs from the large, multi-story wall. Pervasively, the large map visually connects Arab

American history, set forth in the permanent exhibits, to a vast and expansive geographic area that extends from Northwest Africa to the Indian Ocean. Past the map and up the stairs, one makes their way to the landing of the second level, which is open to the courtyard below and the dome above. From this vantage point, the three rooms that house the three permanent exhibits are presented. Starting from the right, a chronological tale of Arab American history and contemporary culture is told. It encompasses three phases, beginning with “Coming to America,” then “Living in America,” and finally “Making an Impact.” Together, these three permanent exhibits convey a very specific narrative that has a potentially universalizing effect on how Arab American history and experiences are told and understood. Susan Pearce (2000) reminds us, “museums, of course, are quintessential institutions” (15). Thus, the permanent collections put forth by the AANM together produce a narrative of Arab Americans’ centrality to the U.S. cultural fabric—a message that is undeniably significant and necessary in a post-9/11 context of hostility towards and confusion about Arab Americans. The politics of the institutionalization of objects, e.g., the placing of objects from the Arab immigrant/Arab American experience into collections and permanent exhibits, abides by a European model of infusing value into objects via their collectivity (18). Following this standardized model of museum curation and presentation in the context of the AANM places the Arab American and Arab immigrant experience into an obtainable and accessible form of communication; and these narratives’ permanency within the institution further reveal this history as fully integrated and integral to a U.S. national, collective memory.

The permanency of exhibits, especially in the case of the AANM, presents a conundrum. On the one hand, the exhibits’ permanency sustains an accessible entry point for visitors of both Arab and non-Arab backgrounds to decode a non-fluctuating, seemingly inherent narrative. The

perceived permanency of this narrative is of particular importance for the Arab American community, because of the often questioned legitimacy of Arab Americans' governmental and cultural U.S. citizenship. However, on the other hand, this model of permanent collectivity creates a linear mode of narrative delivery that disfavors narrative fissures and multimodal storytelling and engagement with histories (Ernst 18). The ongoing inclusion and production of special exhibits and events is a common museum practice used to speak to the fissures inherent in its permanent exhibits, an issue which is examined in further detail in the next section.

Through the collection of concrete, physical and ephemeral, audio and/or visual, objects, the second floor's permanent exhibits "Coming to America," "Living in America," and "Making an Impact" provide an accessible entry point for visitors to encounter and interact with a hegemonic Arab American history.

Upon entering the "Coming to America" exhibit room, enlarged photographic reproductions of men, women, and children emigrating from the Arab World to the United States greet the visitor. The solemn faces of a mother with her toddler-aged son, a young woman, and a small boy catch the eye. The looming presence of immigrant hardships sets the tone of this exhibit, and is especially embodied by the largest image depicting the mother and her penetrating gaze. Below these faces are glass cases holding a variety of objects that were brought to the United States by Arab World immigrants. Objects range from intricate or simple luggage pieces to children's toys to clothing items, family heirlooms, instruments and musical recordings from the homeland. Many of the objects are obviously aged and date back to the early twentieth century, while others signal a more recent past through their 1960s-80s aesthetics. The personification of immigration, and in this case specifically Arab American immigration, through these enlarged photographs and personal objects expresses the emotional intensity of

physical relocation and connects this aspect of Arab American history to the dominant narrative of U.S. immigration history. Anchoring these objects and images is an entryway plaque that reads: “Arab Americans have been coming to the United States for hundreds of years. Like other immigrants, they came seeking better lives for themselves and their families” (Telling Our Story 21). What comes through in this first part of the “Coming to America” exhibit is both the sameness and difference between Arab immigrants and other immigrants to the U.S. Explicit connections are made in the connotations of hardships and desires for “better lives.” While sameness is imbued into this introduction, difference is also present through the particular aesthetics of the objects on display. From this entry point, the remainder of the exhibit details chronologically the centuries-long immigration history of people from the Arab World to the United States. The narrative of Arab World immigrants begins with the telling of how Arabic-speaking slaves from Northern Africa were transported to the Americas as early as the 1500s. Other major historical moments addressed include Ellis Island and “The Great Migration” Era, the Post-World War II Era, which saw an influx of war refugees, the “Brain Drain” era of the 1960s and beyond, and more contemporary immigration contexts concerning Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon.

One of the most profound aspects of the “Coming to America” exhibit is how it strongly situates Arab American history within the dominant narrative of Ellis Island immigration at the turn of the twentieth century, also known as “The Great Migration” period. Much space and narrativization is provided to detail how Arab World immigrants were indeed part of this major moment in U.S. history. This leads to the normalization of Arab American immigration through its association with a major touchstone in U.S. immigration history. Visitors are invited to stand before a replica of an Ellis Island immigration desk, where an immigrant would be greeted by an

immigration officer and issued immigration papers, to listen to the imagined ambient sounds and exchange between an officer and an immigrant. A plaque at the desk details how Arab-speaking immigrants often had their names changed to sound and look less foreign when immigrating through Ellis Island (and its predecessor Castle Garden, also located in Manhattan).

Interestingly, the plaque's details illustrate one of the moments in which the "Coming to America" exhibit presents a complex message about how Arab Americans by force or by choice acquiesced to hegemonic U.S. culture and society to gain cultural and civic citizenship. This and other complex aspects of the Arab American experience are further conveyed in the "Classifying Arabs," "Change in Consciousness," and "9/11/2001" areas of the exhibit, each of which relay issues that have come up for Arab Americans related to their efforts to assimilate into U.S. culture and policies. The exhibit wraps up by providing visitors a foundation from which to understand the themes of education and middle class lifestyles as they are featured in "Living in America" and the political activists highlighted in "Making an Impact."

The "Living in America" exhibit offers an engagement with various themes and spaces framed as integral to the Arab American experience as they assimilate, negotiate, and thrive (a theme that is especially highlighted) in the U.S. The spaces of this exhibit convey a hybrid Arab American lifestyle that incorporates facets of both U.S. and Arab culture. The exhibit first historicizes Arab American life in the U.S. in economic terms, by highlighting the contributions they made from the 1800s forward through roles such as peddlers, storeowners, seamstresses, and manual laborers. This historicization sets the stage to understand Arab Americans as longstanding contributors to the U.S. economy—an important point to make in the current political landscape that is wary of immigrants in general. Using this as the foundation, the major themes of patriotism, economic contribution, family-centered, heteronormative values are

foregrounded through various aspects of the “Living in America” exhibit. Ultimately, the “Living in America” exhibit highlights the sameness between Arab American culture and dominant U.S. culture, while simultaneously pointing to differences that are framed as contributions, not threats, to U.S. culture and society.

One specific example from the “Living in America” exhibit that features this complex framing of Arab American experiences as both connected and disconnected from U.S. culture and society is a plaque that features an anecdote from an Arab American woman named “Anissa.” As a child of immigrant parents from Yemen, Anissa recounts how she has “the best of two worlds”:

I was born and raised in the United States. When I was 16, I went to Yemen with my parents... I was shocked at how different I was from my people in Yemen. Although I am American, my parents raised me and my siblings, the way they were raised back in Yemen... Yemen’s newer generation seemed to have more modern ideas than us... I was feeling like I don’t belong here nor did I belong there... After maturing, I learned the differences more and accepted them. Today, I find myself comfortable knowing I have the best of both worlds. (Telling Our Story 96)

Anissa’s anecdote combines with other personal anecdotes and physical representations of hybridized identity in the exhibit, all of which convey a sense of contentment and gratitude with life in the U.S.

One of the major aspects of the “Living in America” exhibit that presents this hybridized experience through a physical experience is the invitation to visitors to engage with domestic spaces of a quintessential, middle class Arab American family, which include a front porch, kitchen, living room, and teenager’s bedroom. Family pictures from gatherings with extended

family, wedding ceremonies, and high school and college graduations are ubiquitous in these spaces and are placed throughout, conveying these domestic spaces as inhabited and representative of real homes. At first glance these replicas of these domestic spaces seem similar to any common perception of such spaces in a U.S. middle class, single-family home; a lived-in cooking area, television set (which is showing images from Arabic Al-Jazeera), football trophy, and other markers of daily, middle class family life are found. Yet, upon further inspection, items such as a water pipe for smoking tobacco (colloquially called a hookah), Arabic food and cooking products, such as olive oil, rose water, walnuts and phyllo dough sweets, among others, demonstrate a connection to Arab culture.

In addition to the historicizing of Arab Americans' economic roles and the showcasing of a middle class family home, Arab American music, journalism, and roles in the U.S. military are also featured. The successes of Arab Americans and how they adapt and thrive in mainstream U.S. culture is strongly conveyed. However, the "Living in America" exhibit does not convey this message without demonstrating the trials Arab Americans often face. The "Stereotypes" area of the exhibit, where visitors are confronted with three walls showing hundreds of media images and a video montage, blatantly addresses the longstanding, abundant negative depictions of Arabs and Arab Americans. This space is another example of how the museum conveys the complexity of the Arab American experience.

Moving from the "Living in America" exhibit to the final permanent exhibit "Making an Impact," visitors are invited to learn about various historical and contemporary Arab American figures who have established themselves in the spheres of activism/politics, sports, entertainment, and business. This final exhibit solidifies the presence of Arab Americans in U.S. history and culture, implicitly conveying their integral role within a U.S. melting pot ideology.

From Helene Thomas, the first woman of the White House press corps, to Casey Kasem, radio personality, to Kathy Najimy, the “Making an Impact” exhibit reinforces the narrative of integration, assimilation, and the American Dream set forth by the other two exhibits. The major importance of the “Making an Impact” exhibit is how it solely conveys this aspect of the Arab American narrative, leaving out the negotiations and complexities.

The museum’s permanent exhibits put forth an accessible entry point into Arab American life and culture by connecting it to touchstones of dominant, oftentimes conservative, U.S. values. As seen in the “Coming to America” exhibit, a strong assertion is made through centralizing the mimicking of the Ellis Island experience from an Arab American perspective. The centralizing of the Ellis Island immigrant narrative, while providing specifics that relate to an immigrant from Greater Syria as opposed to Italy, Ireland, etc., connects Arab Americans to the dominant immigrant, melting pot narrative of U.S. culture and history. Furthermore, by pointing to the longstanding presence of Arab World immigrants in the U.S., the centralization of the Ellis Island narrative works to exclude Arab immigrants from contemporary debates concerning immigration through this alignment. Next, the “Living in America” exhibit does the work of humanizing and connecting Arab Americans to dominant U.S. values of family, heteronormativity, and upward mobility. Lastly, “Making an Impact” furthers the work done by the other two exhibits by showcasing the success stories of Arab Americans who have worked in the public realms of activism, academia, politics, sports, and entertainment. These exhibits work in connection to the physical location, spatiality, and general architecture of the AANM; together, all of these aspects standardize an accessible narrative and identity of Arab Americanness. As a result, Arab Americans are presented as having a substantial and long history in the U.S. and as non-threatening to U.S. politics, society, and history.

Performative Approaches of the Arab American National Museum

The AANM is one of many projects pursued by the Arab American community within Dearborn and the Detroit Metro Area that presents multiple opportunities for asserting their own identity conceptions that go beyond what one sees in the mainstream media. The Arab Detroit community puts on multiple events throughout the year (especially since 9/11) that appeal to a wide variety of local, regional, and national audiences. Examples of these types of events include the annual Dearborn Arab International Festival, the AANM's Arab Film Festival, multiple banquets that focus on recognizing Arab American businesses and philanthropic endeavors, stand-up comedy events, music concerts featuring Arab American and/or Arab artists, and community theatre troupes that perform plays featuring dialogue in both English and Arabic. Another community-based representational strategy is the organizing of Arab American-centered conferences by Arab Americans in the community who seek to spread knowledge about Arab American people and their culture, traditions, art, and more outside their local and national communities. One of the foremost organizations behind organizing and hosting such events is the AANM. The museum hosts music concerts, academic conferences, comedy acts, and much, much more.

This section draws on my experience organizing DIWAN5 to provide an in-depth example of how dynamic events function within the cultural ecosystem of Dearborn, MI and the AANM. DIWAN5 was and continues to be one event among many at the museum and within the local community that explores and opens up the complexities and varying perspectives of being Arab American. Specifically, DIWAN5 opened up the category of Arab American presented by the museum by: 1) including histories and figures that do not fit within the dominant stories

presented by permanent exhibits (e.g., the “Ellis Island” immigrant story), 2) taking up the question of Palestine and Zionism explicitly, and 3) shifting the framework of contemporary Arab American identity away from 9/11 and towards a transnational identification with the Arab Spring and Arab World revolutions, Islamophobia, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The association with these transnational events and themes shifts the AANM space away from its foundation of countering negative perceptions of Arab Americans and inserting Arab Americans into the U.S. cultural and historic fabric. This primary use and framework was integral as the museum opened in the years immediately following 9/11. Today, instead, through conferences and events, especially those like DIWAN5, the museum opens up a space for transnational aspects of Arab Americaness to be established via performative identity constructions. As part of this transnational identity construction of Arab Americaness, bolder and less mainstream opinions and oppositions toward the U.S. government, Arab World politics, and the relations between the U.S. and Arab nation-states are being taken up through the performative.

As a member of the DIWAN5 conference organizing committee, I worked with eleven other committee members over the course of six months to determine and plan the panels, events, and general vision of DIWAN5. What manifested from our meetings was a weekend that brought artists and scholars from around the country together to discuss, display, and engage with Arab American art-based research and practices. To understand the process of creating this conference and the space of performativity and embodied experience that emerged from it, the first subsection chronicles the making of DIWAN5 and an engagement with the conference’s founders to explore how it has evolved since its inception in 2006. What becomes apparent through an overview of this process is how at each step there were considerations to be made concerning the who, what, where, and how of DIWAN5. Furthermore, the first subsection

addresses how the organizers attempted to strike a balance between appealing to Arab American and non-Arab American audiences on both a local and national level. The second subsection explores particular panels and themes from the conference to see how panelists/scholar-artists' presentations facilitated this moment in articulating Arab Americanness. Through this analysis and engagement with the making and actual event of DIWAN5, the AANM's performative approaches of conveying Arab American identities and narratives reveal how Arab American identity formations are perpetually shifting within a state of flux and contestation.

The Making of DIWAN5

On the morning of April 5, 2013, Anan Ameri, the Founding Director of the AANM, opened the conference with a welcome before the day's first panel began. Ameri's remarks framed the motives and goals for the weekend's conference. She began by providing the definition of the word "diwan" as a meeting place and explaining how the conference utilizes this word to signal the desire to inspire meetings, collaborations, and networks between Arab American artists and scholars. Ameri explained that by building strength via a national network, DIWAN as a meeting place becomes a vehicle for propelling Arab American artists and the Arab American art movement into a mainstream art arena. Over the course of the two-day conference, both Anan Ameri and Holly Arida, the founders of DIWAN, made statements of hope regarding the promotion of Arab American artists, and therefore Arab American issues, topics, and experiences, into national visibility. Through Ameri's opening remarks, the desire to hinge upon the performative nature of the conference to strengthen national networks and, ultimately, a sense of national Arab American identity, becomes apparent. Along with other AANM events, conferences, and programming, DIWAN5 worked to make the linear, permanent Arab American

narrative of the museum more dynamic and complex. Purposefully, DIWAN5 and other events produced fissures in the pedagogical narratives present in the museum by addressing topics and themes not included in permanent exhibits. One way this occurs is through the constant, although often implicit, negotiation over the identity and history of “Arab America,” who this does or does not include, and what histories and themes are deemed legitimate.

Holly Arida explains the organic premise of DIWAN by stating:

One thing that distinguishes DIWAN from a typical conference is that we have always resisted the urge to choose a theme for each event. In this way, the platform remains evergreen; we wait for the submissions of artists to tell us what is important and new and what they think needs to be shared with each other and with the audience.

As the committee leader, Arida guided the conference committee in making decisions to feature topics and artists that were fresh and had not been addressed multiple times at past DIWAN conferences. Relevancy and organically emerging themes were a priority when accepting submissions. Negotiations took place between topics that had been done before and ones that were again popping up as relevant and important in the submissions. This kind of bottom-up approach is central to how DIWAN5 at its core functions to produce deliberate fissures in any stagnant understanding and construction of Arab American identity.

The initial DIWAN committee meetings brought up major questions to address, particularly the conference’s format and intended audience. The desire to appeal to national and local audiences was immediately addressed. This connected to the basis of the AANM’s mission, for its goal is to be both nationally reaching and to serve the local Dearborn/ Detroit area and state of Michigan. The attempts for the conference to tread the various appeals of national and local audiences came through in almost every choice made in the DIWAN5 planning process.

The scheduling and panel choices, conference entertainment, catering, and setting were all specifically chosen to make appeals to the largest audience possible, while still speaking to the local community.

After multiple deliberations among the conference committee organizers, two days of conference events were created that mixed 90-minute long, academic type panels that featured three to four presenters and a Question and Answer (Q&A) session with a variety of performance events. What resulted was an eclectic mixture of panels and events that conveyed the complexities and pluralities of Arab American identity and experience (See Figures 1 & 2).

| FRIDAY 4.5.13 | | |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| 9:30 a.m. | OPENING REMARKS | |
| 10-11:30 a.m. | “AFTER THEIR DIASPORA” | <u>Artists contemplate Palestinian life in exile through a variety of mediums.</u> |
| 11:30a.m.-12:30 p.m. | “WHY AM I HERE” | <u>Using film as their medium, teenagers in the U.S. and Syria explore identity and portray their culture.</u> |
| 1:30-3 p.m. | “ART REVOLUTION: TREMORS FROM THE ARAB AWAKENING” | <u>Arab artists respond to the Arab Spring through their artistic practice.</u> |
| 3-4:30 p.m. | “TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES” | <u>A dialogue with DIWAN5 attendees concerning the impact of Islamophobia and the Arab Spring on the presentation of Arab art in America.</u> |
| 6:30 p.m. | OPENING RECEPTION | <u>DIWAN5: THE EXHIBITION</u> |

Figure 3 Information from: <http://www.diwanart.org/schedule/>

| SATURDAY 4.6.13 | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| 9:30-11 a.m. | “READINGS ON A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE” | <u>Arab American writers share stories of intersecting lives, lived in intersecting lands.</u> |
| 11a.m.-12:30 p.m. | “ICONOCLASTS: ARAB AMERICAN WOMEN CROSS THE NEW FRONTIER” | <u>Arab Female Artists as the creator, the subject, and the object.</u> |

| | | |
|--------------------|---|---|
| 1:30-3 p.m. | “NARRATING THE NON-NARRATIVE THROUGH EXPERIMENTAL ART” | <u>Four artists present and dialogue about the practice of experimental Arab art from multiple perspectives.</u> |
| 3-3:30 p.m. | FASHION SHOW | <u>The designer presents a series of avant-garde art garments that act as an outward expression of the fragmented identity among multigenerational transnational descendants of the Ottoman Empire.</u> |
| 3:30-5 p.m. | “SIXTEEN” | The artist dedicates this performance to <u>Dr. Anan Ameri, AANM founding director</u> - A performance by Suheir Hammad, poet/actor/activist |
| 9 p.m. | DIWAN5 AFTER-PARTY | Trinosophes, 1464 Gratiot Ave., Detroit, MI |

Figure 4 Information from: <http://www.diwanart.org/schedule>

The DIWAN5 conference committee decided to follow a standard academic conference format, which consisted of 90-minute panels with three to four panelists and a moderator. However, conversations and concerns ensued as to whether or not to tweak this panel format. The committee, being made up of museum employees, local artists, academic-types (myself included), art educators, and community members (who were not necessarily artists or art educators, but had been involved with museum programming in the past) often had differing ideas on the approach and target audience for the conference. Some found this format too academic and potentially inaccessible to larger audiences. Others were concerned that 20 minutes would not be optimal for performance art to be included in panels. In a similar vein, there was discussion over how many scholar presentations to include. In this context, scholarly presentations are defined as a delivery of original research projects that are different from artist presentations of their work or of instances of performance of dance, poetry, and other artistic

forms. Concerns were voiced over whether or not scholarly presentations would be relevant and/or distract from the goals of the panel and conference in general. Ultimately, it was agreed that academic research on Arab American art movements, artists, writers, etc. has a place at the conference. Nevertheless, preference was given to presentations of original work in order to ensure the conference kept its mission to support Arab American artists' work and collaboration.

A major aspect of deciding between panelists not only had to do with the subject of their proposed presentation, but also its form and how it would fit into a succinct panel. In terms of the form of a presentation, while the vast majority of proposed presentations kept to a standard 20-minute long talk format, others infused spoken word art, film screenings, dance, or other artistic elements into their submissions. Because of the variety in presentation forms, the forming of the panels themselves required a bit of strategy and finesse to piece together a variety of presentation formats. Not only was form an aspect to take into consideration when forming panels, but, of course, thematic content was also a concern. The desire to incorporate a variety of presentation/art forms was considered by the whole committee to be an integral aspect of the conference. These moments of disagreement and negotiation among conference committee organizers concerning panel formats and presenters directly connect to questions over audience. The decision to include multiple forms and contents signals the desire to appeal to the largest audience possible.

The events of the weekend were also a major aspect of the conference and were ripe with decisions over intent and audience. *DIWAN5: THE EXHIBITION*, which featured 13 Arab American artists' work, including some previously displayed by the museum and some new pieces pulled from the museum's archive, was an effort to set the ephemerality of the conference into a more permanent (at least permanent for a few months) form. This exhibit also explicitly

grounded the conference in its Arab American Art movement roots and established a strong outlet for Arab American art to be featured to not only the national Arab American community, but also to mainstream art enthusiasts. This exhibition struck a balance between appealing to Arab American and non-Arab American audiences alike. After the Friday afternoon opening of *DIWAN5: THE EXHIBITION* in the lower exhibit space of the museum, Saadi, an indie pop Syrian-American woman music artist whose music draws from “dancehall to traditional Arabic dabke, from Brian Eno to Lady Saw,” performed in the museum’s auditorium. Saadi’s performance was a dual-programming decision as it was framed as both part of *DIWAN5* and the museum’s longstanding concert program named *Global Fridays* (originally *Global Thursdays*), which features music artists from around the world. As a young musician coming from the indie music scene of Brooklyn with rising recognition from national and global indie music industries, Saadi’s performance brought an edgy, youthful tone to the conference. Saadi was brought up at the first planning meeting as an ideal choice to appeal to Arab American and non-Arab American locals alike. As a young artist who lyrically, musically, and visually samples from U.S. New Wave, Arab Pop, and other non-U.S. or Western-centric genres, Saadi represents in a sense a globally hybrid citizen. The decision to feature Saadi as the main Friday night event of the conference appealed to the transnational identity formations that were being articulated throughout the conference. This decision further appealed to the conference committee’s goal of using *DIWAN* as an event to draw in local crowds (an appeal that was voiced often especially by museum employees on the committee), because it was thought that her indie music persona would speak to young people (not only Arab American youth) in the area and that her Arab Americanness would appeal to all ages of the Arab American community. Again, *DIWAN5: THE EXHIBITION* and the Saadi performance provided forms of performative approaches to

articulating Arab American identity. The Saadi concert is particularly dynamic in this sense because of her immigrant history and persona as a hybridized music artist.

Further, the question of appealing to multiple audiences was a constant matter brought up in conference planning meetings, and Saadi's performance was considered a key event in facilitating a widespread draw to the conference and museum. In addition to Saadi's performance, other entertainment events were also thought to be advances towards casting a wide net for potential conference goers. The second day of the conference held the fashion show and Suheir Hammad's poetry performance in the afternoon. Similar to the Saadi concert, the attendees that ended up being drawn to these two Saturday events spanned across ages and appealed to Arab American and non-Arab American audiences alike. The question of who made up the conference's target audience constantly came up during conference meetings. Generally, it was decided that "the more the merrier" was the absolute goal. A large number of conference attendees meant larger conference monies and wider exposure for Arab American artists present, the Arab American art movement, the AANM, and the Arab American community in general. The DIWAN5: THE EXHIBITION opening, Saadi concert, fashion show, and Suheir Hammad performance all contributed to strike the balance between appealing to local and national audiences and Arab American and non-Arab American audiences.

Another concern regarding audience that came up during meetings was the question of place and where to hold the conference. Because the last DIWAN in 2011 was held in New York City, there was a concern that locals who did not have strong ties to the national Arab American art movement would not remember or continue to expect DIWAN as a reoccurring event at the museum. While New York City is undoubtedly the epicenter for the Arab American art scene, there were strong opinions regarding the necessity to keep DIWAN in Dearborn and at the

museum in order to cultivate an expectation of the conference's presence every other year for local audiences. Keeping the DIWAN conference in Dearborn and at the museum was also imagined to center Arab Detroit at the forefront of the Arab American artist community. Plans for the location of future DIWAN conferences were up for debate. However, this desire to connect to New York City's art scene and vibrant Arab American community and center Dearborn/Detroit as integral to the Arab American art movement was a strongly contended point of conference committee discussion and, again, gestures to intended audience and questions of accessibility.

Another point of discussion that emerged multiple times during conference planning meetings and concerned place and audience had to do with the location of the conference's final event, the Saturday night after-party. Accounts of the 2011 New York DIWAN conference's successful and lively after-party were expressed and led to the DIWAN5 committee's decision to follow suit and close out the weekend with a similar event. Ideas were immediately thrown around as to how to best entertain a group of people who had spent two long days talking, engaging, and thinking about a variety of serious topics. Subsequently, live music, food, and dancing were determined as necessities. However, a major point of contention was the question of where to hold the after-party. A few committee members suggested the after-party be taken out of the museum space and located at a Detroit venue. Others were concerned with keeping all events associated with DIWAN at the museum as a way to promote the AANM as the foremost space for all things DIWAN and Arab American art-related. It was argued that the after-party could be held in the courtyard, where the breakfasts, lunches, and fashion show were held. Others countered this idea by arguing that it was important to give guests an opportunity to see other areas of the city and be exposed to the Detroit art and music scene. Ultimately, the idea of

taking the after-party to Detroit won out. This decision signaled a desire to place the Dearborn Arab American community within the context of the larger Detroit cultural and art scene.

Trinosophes in Detroit's Eastern Market neighborhood was determined as the location for the after-party. On the DIWAN5 website Trinosophes was presented as:

Trinosophes is a multi-use facility featuring a cafe, gallery, and art+music venue. This artist-run space is a continuation and expansion of the celebrated programming previously held at Bohemian National Home (2004-2008) — deemed 'One of America's 50 Coolest Places' by Spin Magazine and 'the little avant-garde engine that could' by Detroit Free Press' Mark Stryker.

Providing the appropriate entertainment to supplement the space, young local music artists including hip-hop musician Stevie Soul and DJ Scott Zacharais were booked. The significance of taking the conference out of the AANM and into Detroit cannot be overstated. The wider histories and setting of Detroit set the context for the development of Dearborn as an Arab American enclave. The placement of the after-party in Detroit gestures to the relations between the larger community and its Arab American population.

The debates and decisions made by the conference committee concerning the panelists, panel formats, events, and event locations were all rooted in desires to appeal to local and national Arab American and non-Arab audiences. These negotiations, disagreements, and decisions reveal how Arab American identity is a process that is firmly connected to place and performance.

Artist Authenticity - Considering Arab Spring, Islamophobia, & Zionism

An appeal to DIWAN5's national scope and the specific locale of Dearborn was cultivated not only through scheduling and planning choices, but also in the specific topics and content of the panels and the discussions they spawned. The panel discussions also created a fruitful discursive site from which performative constructions of Arab American identity unfolded. Four primary contextualizing topics weaved themselves throughout the two and a half days of the DIWAN5 conference, including 9/11, Islamaphobia, Arab Spring, and Zionism. The discourses of 9/11 have been a contextual jumping off point in exploring contemporary Arab American identity formations for more than a decade. Relatedly, Islamaphobia as a lingering and prominent discourse also continues to be highly influential. Arab Spring, on the other hand, is a more recent contextual and discursive framing device that was confronted by the conference. Zionism is also found to arise as an ideological framing device that effects Arab American identity formations. This section pursues questions that address the discursive framing devices used by the conference and explores how they become markers that influence the ways the conference facilitates performative approaches to Arab American identity in this particular moment.

Beyond 9/11

While taking place more than a decade ago, the 9/11 events and their ideological aftermath are still considered, at least in this conference space, to be a very real and logical historical marker for understanding current Arab American community issues and identity formations. Aspects of the museum, including sections of its permanent exhibits and the fact that it opened as a response to 9/11, can prime events to speak or react to the events of 9/11 and its ramifications for Arab Americans. The most explicit of the museum's permanent exhibits

confronting the hardships of Arab Americans after 9/11 is found in the “Coming to America” exhibit where a copy of a U.S. Department of Justice letter to a Dearborn resident is hung. The letter asks the recipient to meet with the Department of Justice to provide any information they have concerning terrorist activity. An accompanying text box anchors the letter by explaining how after 9/11 many Arab Americans were coerced into interviews or even taken captive by U.S. governmental entities. This letter and accompanying text exemplify how the events of 9/11 are explicitly placed within the pedagogical narrative of Arab American history.

Previous DIWAN conferences, especially the first, took up the topic of 9/11 and its aftermath, thus incorporating it as a formative framework for understanding Arab American identity. The first DIWAN conference occurred in 2006, a year after the museum opened and five years after 9/11. The conference’s inception began during a critical time to address 9/11, the Iraq War, and other events/policies that affected, and continue to affect, Arab Americans. In the introduction to Etching Our Own Image: Voices from Within the Arab American Art Movement, an anthology created by the founders of DIWAN from the presentations of the first conference, Holly Arida addresses how 9/11 reaffirmed the need for Arab Americans to play a large role in their own image-making:

Arabs in America have long struggled with negative characterizations, but 9/11 placed on them a special burden. In addition to the anguish and concern for this country’s safety that we share with all Americans, Arab Americans are constantly made to define and defend who we are. Otherwise, our image will be defined for us, either by those who commit violence in our name or by those who assert that Arabs and Muslims are somehow monolithic or deserve collective blame for 9/11. (1)

These opening words of Etching Our Own Image powerfully convey the strong desires and necessity of Arab Americans (artists or otherwise) to discuss and create images and narratives that promote a more complex understanding of Arab Americans.

Since the first DIWAN conference, a shift away from 9/11-centric discussions and topics has occurred, a shift that is especially true for DIWAN5. This is a particularly obvious point regarding how DIWAN5, and other museum events, complicate the pedagogies found within the permanent exhibits and have grown to encompass other discursive frameworks. While it is still a relevant contextual framework to an extent, 9/11 was not as prevalent of a topic in DIWAN5 as it was in previous years. Instead, Islamophobia, the Arab Spring, and Zionism, emerged as more relevant and critical issues, as a great deal of time was granted to exploring these topics. This alludes to a shifting away from certain conceptions of Arab American identity and marks another way in which events like DIWAN5 allow for performative, dynamic, and ever-evolving forms of identity construction to emerge.

Islamophobia and the Arab Springs as Framing Devices

Connected to, but not beginning with the 9/11 events is the very corporeally felt and psyche-affecting Islamophobia. The topic of Islamophobia is a common one often confronted by other AANM events and projects (other performative aspects), and thus it easily found another space for discussion during DIWAN5.

While the topic of Islamophobia dotted the conversations held at DIWAN, a couple panels explicitly used this ideology/phenomenon as a framing strategy for conversations. Friday afternoon's "Truth or Consequences" panel confronted it head-on. A panel to take up these seemingly ever-present ideologies was proposed by lead conference organizer Holly Arida and

the other conference organizing committee members. As such, Arida moderated the "Truth or Consequences" panel, which was detailed in the conference program as "A dialogue with DIWAN5 attendees concerning the impact of Islamophobia and the Arab Spring on the presentation of Arab art in America" (more on the Arab Spring in the following subsection). The panel consisted of Suheir Hammad, a prominent Palestinian American poet and activist, Michael Orlove, Director of Artist Communities and Presenting & Multidisciplinary Works for the National Endowment for the Arts, and Reem Gibriel, an artist from and currently living in Libya who created an arts organization in Tripoli after their revolution. Because of its centrality to the conference, as shown by its presenters being committee-invited guests, its prominent placement in the schedule (it was held in the middle of the day), and the fact that Arida was the moderator, the "Truth or Consequences" panel should especially be considered with the questions of Islamophobia and Arab Spring's impact on Arab American art and identity construction in mind. In the opening remarks of the panel, Arida stated the guiding premise of the panel by posing the following questions: "How has Islamaphobia... affected for artists their practice, their subject and their ability to have their work shown or performed or published? And how has that impacted or inspired organizations or institutions to show work coming from the Arab World or Arab American art [movement]?" As most panels that operate under the pretense of answering a few questions to spark dialogue, the conversation of the panel shifted back and forth between these questions.

Poignantly, Suheir Hammad responded to Holly's opening remarks by voicing a series of thought-provoking questions and musings concerning the premise of the panel. In her first statements concerning Islamaphobia, Hammad remarked, "So our panel is called 'Truth or Consequences' -- how hilarious is that? No really. What do you do with that? So I wanted to ask

a couple of questions about Islamophobia. When did it start? In 1948? I don't know. But maybe someone can tell me how it started, because then I would know what I was dealing with..."

Hammad's call to historicize Islamophobia rings throughout the auditorium as she inserts a long pause after her opening questions. The audience made audible sighs and soft gasps. In a straightforward word of contemplation, Hammad nails down, ironically, the prime dilemma of Islamophobia. The primary dilemma of the term's prominence and widespread use to explain multiple dimensions of Arab American and Arab life, anything ranging from events to micro-aggressions to historical narratives of diverse peoples and places. The result is that because it stands for everything, it stands for nothing.

Relating to this shift away from 9/11 centrality, the third major contextual framing device for the conference was the Arab Spring. The collection of events and Arab country-located uprisings problematically termed the Arab Spring was a new theme/ topic through which panelists and audience members could frame their conference conversations. This was done either in the limelight of the panels or through peripheral conversations held around the lunch table, on the bus to and from the museum, etc. As an attendee of the conference, I can account for the abundance of peripheral conversations concerning these topics. At the last DIWAN conference the Arab Spring was only a dream (or nightmare) to be imagined. Now, two years later and in the thick of making sense of what this Arab Spring was/ is all about and the social and/ or political changes it may have brought to the Arab World, DIWAN5 in 2013 was a much needed space for Arab American people, not only artists, to continue to reflect on and understand these events and their impact on Arab American art and expression.

Again, the "Truth or Consequences" Panel becomes a particularly ripe cite to explore DIWAN5's addressing of the Arab Spring, for it was a another foundational topic in addition to

Islamaphobia. After her words concerning Islamaphobia, Suheir Hammad continued her opening statement by addressing the Arab Spring: "...and then the Arab Spring thing. Okay, so spring is a season, right? But every season carries with it the other seasons, and this one feels very winter like anyway... there's something about being told you have won something that you deserve or that you worked hard for... Then, there's the reality of what that is like. The victory of the revolution happen, and you should feel a certain way...I don't know for me, as an artist, to get my cues from political reactions, it doesn't work for my art." The first part of Hammad's words on the Arab Spring, similar to her words on Islamaphobia, brought into question the linearity, immensity, and amebic qualities of these two phenomenon – this points out the similar, recent effect of the Arab Spring's overuse in describing, being the answer to, etc. Arab Americanness. Moreover, Hammad's voices her response to the implied notion of the panel that the Arab Spring highly influences Arab American artists. Hammad complicates this implication by directly rejecting that the Arab Spring has a stronghold on her art.

Later in the conversation of the same panel, panelist Reem Gibriel tackles the question of whether Arab American art is affected and to what extent by events such as Arab Spring Gibriel, when discussing her art organization and experience in the post-revolution art scene of Libya, was asked by the moderator Arida to speak to her on-the-ground experience in a post-revolution Libya and whether or in what ways artists feel pressure to make art that speaks to the revolution, and whether they worked with the subject matter before or not. Gibriel spoke to this effect both in terms of general pressures for one's identity to relate to their art and, more specifically, to her perception of how this pressure is felt in Libya:

What happened after the revolution or the Arab Spring...they say that a lot of artists, including [myself], were having [a] kind of pressure to produce art about the revolution

or art related to the Arab Spring. And for me this is another [pressure such as] ...you're an Arab woman so your art should talk about this, or you're a Muslim so your art should [talk about that], so your religion should translate into your art... [these are] all assumptions that they put on you, and you have to either be strong enough or be careless about [it]...In Libya it was more [like], "What did you do for the revolution?" If you didn't make a piece on the revolution, what did you do for the revolution?... A lot of artists fell into this. Some of the pieces are beautiful and interesting, and some of the other pieces you can tell it's forced. This [kind of art] was not what you used to do, why now? There are a lot of issues in everyday life that need to be addressed...[more] than just talk about the revolution. Now, it's a new era [and] we have to work on that... as soon as we landed in Libya we went to...a big show...and all of the work [was to] be produced in 2011 and [be] about the revolution. And some of the pieces seriously had...just a scene with a flag on it. You don't need to do this ...it was a lot of pressure.

This quote from Gibriel reveals the strong pressures put upon artists from her perspective as being both Libyan and an Arab Muslim woman in the United States. Moreover, her statement reveals how the pressures to produce art based on contextual and identity expectations are complicated and, from her perspective, stifling creativity.

Gibriel continues by addressing the situation two years after the fall of Gaddafi and how some space has opened up for non-revolution art to be created and exhibited:

The second anniversary of the revolution people started to calm down and think of...a lot of other issues...[at] the same time we're dealing with, at least the organization is dealing with, an art scene that [has been] frozen [for] 30 years. All of the art that's in Libya now... [is] either politicized and celebrating Gaddafi, or classic landscapes that [are] kind of

isolated away from what's going on in the country [and] in our society...that's what we are faced with, there is no other option for them unless you want to do political art.

Her words oscillate between describing a space opening for Libyan artists to not feel the pressures to submit revolution-inspired artwork and the pressures to be perceived as active in the Libyan revolution. Hammad's and Gibriel's positions and contexts vary and reveal their viewpoints on how the Arab Spring has or has not impacted the art scene from which they come. Suheir Hammad, as a Brooklyn-based artist, from my understanding was not directly involved with the various revolutions occurring in the Arab World. Therefore, this rendered her experience of the Arab Spring as a person and artist different than Reem Gibriel's. Nonetheless, what both Hammad and Gibriel point out is how extremely complex the negotiations are around artist identity, nationally, ethnicity etc. and how this does or does not influence the work they produce.

One audience member, in accord with Gibriel's frustrations, empathized with these sentiments of abiding by various nationalistic pressures both within and outside of the United States context. Yet, within the same breath the audience member challenges the idea of depoliticizing one's identity and asked, "What is the point of being an Arab artist if you're not going to talk about your ethnicity? ... Why would you have a landscape without a flag? Why would [you] write a poem these days that's about love or anything that isn't defending or proclaiming your ethnicity?" In response, Gibriel attended to her argument that some Arab (American) artists can seamlessly do this and some cannot, and that the pressure to do so jeopardizes the authenticity of an artist's work. She continued by describing her experience of being an artist in the United State and feeling these tokenizing pressures: "I'm an Arab artist. I was an artist back home in Libya before I came here. And I came here and I was faced with

‘You’re an Arab woman. You should do work about being an Arab woman,’ and I didn't do that in Libya. Why now I change myself when I'm in a different environment?’ These questions concerning external pressures conjure up intense questions for the panelists and the audience members. The question of whether or not it is the responsibility of Arab/ Arab American artists to speak to 1) ideologies and events (such as Islamophobia and the Arab Spring) and/or 2) their identity politics in this cultural climate spawns a dynamic discussion among the large group. This did not necessarily trigger strong disagreements, but instead allowed for a perceived individualized internal struggle that confronts Arab and Arab American artists to be worked through in this communal setting. This oscillating shift from discussing this conflict as an individual struggle versus as a community issue reveals the strong discords these seemingly universal Arab American issues (Islamophobia, Arab Spring, etc.) strike for individual artists. These discords and discussions over identity negotiation as it relates to making art further convey the dynamic space in which DIWAN5 creates to perform and reevaluate Arab American identity.

Facing Zionism

Another major discursive marker for the conference, and this panel in particular, was the implications of Zionism, the always convoluted, yet nonetheless powerful ideology and movement, on Arab American artists. Zionism was confronted both explicitly in some panels, and subtly in other panels that dealt with Palestinian art, including the "After Their Diaspora" panel where: "Artists contemplate Palestinian life in exile through a variety of mediums." Zionism was not brought up as a major phenomenon and ideology to deconstruct or even explicitly address during committee meetings at the planning stage of the conference. Yet, on

reflection of our decisions when creating panels and the topics they would explore, Zionism as a contextualizing phenomenon had a presence, whether it was stated outright or not.

For instance, the aforementioned "After Their Diaspora" panel specifically featured artists from the Palestinian diaspora. Artists Hamza Salim, Eric Drury, and John Halaka each spoke about their art and how it grapples with and manifests the internal dialogues of a person in the Palestinian Territories or Diaspora in sometimes obvious and other times unintentional ways. As the moderator Mejdulene Shomali put it, "The experience of exile is unrepresentable. It's very difficult to find mediums to express the emotional and affective responses to diaspora and immigration." The three panelists of "After Their Diaspora" use sculpture, photography, drawings, and art installations as a means by which to interrogate and express their experiences as diasporic Palestinians. Salim with his mixed-media piece titled "Suicide Bombers" worked through his experience as a recent immigrant to the United States. The "Suicide Bombers" piece had stenciled black images of twelve babies, six in two horizontal rows, all of whom Salim said are Arab American. Anchoring this piece with the title of "Suicide Bombers," Salim remarked that the installation worked to confront Arab and Muslim stereotypes as "mass produced terrorists." Further into his presentation, he discussed his complicated position "outsider looking in" to Palestine when he was a refugee youth in Jordan, and especially now as he is banned from visiting Israel and the Occupied Territories. He showed the audience two more mixed media pieces that he said work through his relationship with and position to Palestine. The last and most striking of the two shows a painting of an aged Arab man under laid by an actual piece of chicken wire that folds across the bottom half of the canvas. The chicken wire is a direct reference to replicate a fence or coup; Salim said that it symbolizes the "one thin line to separate culture, history, a whole country, family from each other..."

In the "Truth or Consequences" panel, Suheir Hammad also brought up the effects of Zionism on her work, and noted that it has a stronger effect on her than the panel's main topics of Islamophobia and Arab Spring. Hammad commented upon her experience as an immigrant and child of Palestinian refugee parents in the United States and its effects on her work:

So what makes me Palestinian? It's just the stories I carry. And I realize that I carry my stories with my body into spaces and I have to debate for that right to be there. And I might be wrong, but my language around that is that it is Zionism. Specifically around a narrative that has been told before I got there about me and my parents and... You know I grew up in the public school system. I share with people all the time. I had great teachers... But my entire life I was asked to point to Palestine on a map... As a child I didn't know what that meant. It made me really hate all maps, actually. I mean as an artist, I don't think it's a silver lining, but you do look for your victory... There is a freedom that comes growing up being estimated and denied. There's also a weight that comes with that that can then become your art itself...

It is apparent that through the discussions that organically emerged and the emphasis of specific topics as arranged by panel topics Islamophobia, Arab Spring, and Zionism were concepts central to DIWAN5. This suggests that movement beyond conceptualizing Arab American identity in relation to 9/11 has begun, as the aftermath of this event that has occurred now more than 12 years ago. Subsequent, relative phenomena and events have ushered in new frames from which Arab American identity is being constructed. As was shown from the selection of conversations and presentations above, engagements and relevancy to these various phenomena vary depending upon many factors, which include, but are not limited to art medium, positionality, and personal interests. What remains clear, however, is how longstanding

ideologies like Zionism and Islamophobia continue to enmesh the lives of many of the Arab American present at DIWAN5. Furthermore, DIWAN5 conversations revealed how these longstanding ideologies are taking on new forms and manifestations as they overlap and entangle with the narratives and repercussions of contemporary events in the Arab World.

Conclusion

The Arab American National Museum presents a complex site of analysis to understand how Arab American identity is always in flux. The space that is created at the AANM for Arab American identity formation is a complicated yet fruitful arena. The dual movement between pedagogical and performative modes of Arab American identity construction occurs across multiple discursive, physical, and ephemeral planes within and concerning the museum. The representatives and employees of the museum over the years have taken up a variety of ways to induce dynamic programming to the space. Events like DIWAN5 give fluidity to the static aspects of the museum's permanent exhibits, specific locale, and architecture. The AAMN is a breathing entity and organization that since its inception has been comprised of individuals with different personalities, motivations, expertise, and ethnic backgrounds. Inherently, negotiations of Arab American identity abound. Continuously returning to this space to analyze the ongoing process of Arab American identity will provide an imperative case through which to gauge the critical negotiations being made within a highly influential and pioneering Arab American cultural space.

Part Two: Arab Detroit Youth's Cultural Productions

Chapter Three: Desperately Seeking the 'All American Muslim': Arab American Youths' Critiques of Dominant Discourses

From November 13, 2011 to January, 8 2012, The Learning Channel (TLC) aired the reality television show All American Muslim in their 10pm EST Sunday night programming slot. The forty minute, eight episode series followed five Arab Muslim American families living in Dearborn, MI in attempts to depict the everyday ordinariness of Arab American life. All American Muslim's promotional trailer introduces audiences to key figures and themes of the program. The trailer opens with an establishing long shot of the exterior of the ornate Islamic Center of America mosque that is located in central Dearborn. It cuts to an interior overhead view of men kneeling inside the mosque as prayers in Arabic are recited. The trailer continues by splicing footage of people from the series with b-roll footage from around Dearborn (e.g., "Welcome to Dearborn" signage, people dancing at a wedding, children—some of whom are young women in hijab—playing outside, shots of members of the five families socializing, Fordson High School football games). The voices of various people featured on the show overlay this footage and set-up the main themes explored in the show through their statements. In the following order, the following quotes are heard from the various characters in the trailer: "Dearborn is a whole other world"; "Being in Dearborn has allowed us to practice our faith

without losing our sense of American patriotism”; “After 9/11 the environment was more hostile”; “They say we’re Muslim. We’re barbaric. We’re terrorist”; “Towelheads. It got bad.”; “We live our lives like everybody else”; “I’ve been in law enforcement for 19 years.”; “I don’t require much. I like my country music.”; “The most important things are my family and coaching football.”; “I really am American. There’re no ifs, ands, and buts about it” (“All American Muslim Trailer”).

The trailer’s visuals and audio convey a mixture of both difference and sameness in relation to mainstream U.S. culture. Signifiers of religious and ethnic difference such as Arabic music, women in hijab, people praying to Allah, etc., are mapped onto signifiers and utterances of sameness, e.g., American patriotism, law-abiding and law-enforcing citizenship, country music, football, and the importance of nuclear family. Reality television’s premise of verisimilitude and TLC’s promotional material of All American Muslim frames the television series as exceptional and different from standard portrayals of Arab Americans in mainstream news media and fictional television and film. The definitions of “All American” and “Muslim” are aligned through these visual and auditory signifiers. All American Muslim draws a strong connection between the connotations of “All American” and “Muslim” and attempts to usurp dominant connotations of Arab Muslim Americans that define them as inherently and undeniably outside the U.S. cultural norm. As outlined in Part 1 of this dissertation, mainstream media quickly centered much of its attention on Arab and Muslim Americans and the construct of “Arab Detroit” following 9/11. As the production of All American Muslim reveals, this attention still exists after more than a decade, and it continues to affect the ways Arab Americans in Arab Detroit conceptualize their identities and community.

The topics of my interviews and focus groups with Arab American youth in Arab Detroit centered on their identity constructions vis-a-vis their media practices and how they understood and interpreted mainstream representations of Arabs and Muslims in the media. In order to understand how Arab American youth situate themselves within and outside of these dominant discourses, I often used the All American Muslim text as a basis for my conversations with them, because it hit close to home and was widely discussed within their community. I conducted interviews with Arab American youth roughly a year after the television show ended. All American Muslim and the conversations it sparked nationally and locally were still current, making it both an important and obvious media text to explore in my interviews. The responses I received from young Arab Americans after asking them about the show varied—there was either intense interest or absolute apathy (“I don't care” was one response prompted by my mention of the show). Yet, one thing became clear: the seemingly authentic and true-to-life representation of “All Americanness” and “Muslim”/“Arabness” as easily connected identities was problematic and ultimately did not resonate with Arab American youths’ lived realities. Our conversations reveal how All American Muslim generated both pleasure in seeing their community represented on cable network television, as well as suspicion and discomfort in its representation and framing of Arab and Muslim Americans.

One notable event that partially shaped the context of my conversations with Arab American youth includes the decision of the home-improvement retailer Lowe’s to pull its advertising from All American Muslim midway through the airing of the first season due to the fraught public discourse surrounding the television show. The Lowe’s decision was made after the Florida Family Association, led by right-wing Christian David Caton, called for businesses to stop buying advertisement spots during All American Muslim because it was “a front for Islamic

takeover” of the United States (Freedman). A national conversation regarding the representation of Arab America and Islam ensued. Ultimately, All-American Muslim was not renewed for a second season by TLC, a decision that the network justified by claims that its ratings were not high enough, although it seemed that this debate and controversy were the true reasons behind its cancelation (Warikoo). The pushback from right-wing organizations against All American Muslim distinguished a binary regarding what is considered a “correct” representation of Arab Muslim Americans. On the one hand, All American Muslim presents a representation of Arab American culture that is steeped in American patriotism, ordinariness of everyday life, and strict conservative values. On the other hand, however, the pushback from right-wing organizations challenges this representation of Arab American culture as seen on All American Muslim by going to the other extreme and suggesting that it was a false representation of Arabs and Muslim Americans because it did not show them as terrorist extremists filled with hatred toward the United States. My conversations with Arab American youths about the All American Muslim text and the discourses that it spawned break open this binary to reveal nuanced critiques and complex (mis)identifications.

This chapter is divided into three sections and aims to work through the how and what of exploring Arab American youths’ engagements with and negotiations of dominant U.S. discourses concerning Arab Detroit. Featuring real people’s voices from the Arab Detroit community imperatively provides glimpses into the lived experiences of Arab Americans. Because youth and youth culture is generally a less researched group and topic, I aimed to engage Arab American youth in Arab Detroit specifically. As part of my goal of understanding multiple facets of Arab American youths’ lives, I interviewed Arab American parents and educators in the Arab Detroit community. The first section of this chapter focuses primarily on

two specific interviews with Arab American women raising their children in Arab Detroit. These perspectives show how, while Arab American youth today do not have strong recollections of 9/11, adults' experiences of the 9/11 events and their aftermath—many of which were severe—strongly influence the context of being a young Arab American in Arab Detroit. This engagement with Arab American parents frames my conversations with Arab American youth. Furthermore, the anxieties of Arab American parents about raising children in a post-9/11 era lays the foundation for understanding this disjuncture between “All American” and “Muslim” and the ways Arab American youth confront it.

The second section closely explores conversations I had with Arab American high school students. Using data from my in-person one-on-one interviews and focus groups, this section uses the All American Muslim text to contextualize our conversations about their identity, media practices, and perceptions of outsiders' opinions about them and their community. It is in this section where Arab American youth express their complex negotiations with the All American Muslim text. Subsequently, their complex negotiations explicitly allude to their ideas of what it means to be Arab American in Arab Detroit and connected to its intra-community politics. Central to their negotiations are the ways they trouble the discursive alignment between “All American” and “Muslim.” Our conversations reveal how Arab American youth know that they are part of an identity group that struggles to be thought of as “All American.”

Lastly, the third section of this chapter begins to build a case for the dynamic and robust ways Arab American youth are speaking back toward these dominant discourses and representations. As part of my experience as a participant-observant in the 2012 high school film festival “Dreams of the 313,” I engaged Arab American high school students through the backdrop of their short film productions. In these conversations with Arab American high school

students, they discussed their short film projects and how they made various choices in addressing the class assignment to ask themselves and create a film around the questions, “How did I get here?” and “What is the American Dream?” What this section reveals are the deliberate ways in which Arab American youth confronted dominant perceptions and narratives about Arab Americans and Arab Detroit through their short films. This final section further exposes the shortfalls in this binary mode of defining Arab Muslim Americans as either terrorists or conservative “All Americans,” and the ways in which this group of Arab American high school students are actively producing representations and discourses that complicate these notions. Together, informed by the All American Muslim example text and its contextualizing binary enforcing discourses of defining “Arab, Muslim Americanness,” this chapter works to begin to understand how Arab Americans,¹³ especially Arab American youth, are questioning, taking up, and challenging mainstream discourses concerning their identity and community.

Setting the Context: Parent Perspectives

In order to understand the larger context of Dearborn Arab American youths’ consumption and production of various mainstream and alternative media texts, I conducted interviews with parents and educators in the Arab Detroit community. I use these interviews with Arab American adults who often interact with Arab American youth to provide one entry point

¹³ I use “Arab Americans” here and throughout this chapter not to conflate Muslim and Arab identity. My use of “Arab American” is intentional, for I believe that Arab Americans of various religious backgrounds were affected by the airing of All American Muslim because the television show, like dominant discourses, often conflates Arab and Muslim. Therefore, the Arab American students I interviewed, regardless of their religion (although most of them were indeed Muslim), had interesting (mis)identifications with this show. Furthermore, the Arab American high school students who participated in the film festival and created short films that speak back to dominant discourses of Arab Americans were also from varying religious backgrounds; and, thus, using “Arab American” here also acknowledges their religious diversity.

into understanding the familial and communal context of these youths' lives. These interviews provide glimpses into social and cultural structures, such as schools, family, and religion, as embodied by parents and educators. The experiences of adults who regularly interact with youth undeniably have consequences on youths' everyday lived realities and, thus, their identity formations in general and vis-a-vis their media practices (FisherKeller 227). The vast majority of my interactions with parents and educators of Arab American youth in the Arab Detroit community were laced with desires to both empower and protect them. On multiple occasions, different individuals voiced to me how Arab Americans are "just like everyone else" and how young Arab Americans in their community are remarkable, driven, and able to pursue prestigious careers. Comments like these were prolific in my conversations with parents and educators. A great sense of hope rang through in their words, mixed with concern and worry (about the future? whether or not I believe them? I am not sure), were present in their voices. What becomes clear is that navigating the terrain of Arab Detroit more than ten years after 9/11 presents a wide range of challenges for parents and educators of Arab American young people. Through an analysis of two specific interviews with Arab American women, two themes become clear: 1) the events of 9/11 and the fears they instilled carry through vividly in how parents understand the context in which their children are growing up, and 2) a strong sense of not belonging, based on actions by others and general perceptions, comes up for young Arab Americans and is addressed often by their parents. By taking into consideration the voices of Arab American parents in Arab Detroit, another facet of Arab American youths' complex reality of being neither "All American" nor a real threat to U.S. society is explored.

The events of 9/11 occurred when Arab American high school students in 2012-2013—the period covered by this study—were babies or toddlers. Their entire lives have taken place

within a post-9/11, Iraq War context, and their personal memories of 9/11 are vague or nonexistent. One of the primary ways Arab American youth come to understand life pre-9/11 is through intimate interactions with their families, especially their Arab American parents, who often experienced firsthand discrimination and/or the fear of discrimination. For instance, Reem,¹⁴ a third-generation Lebanese American woman active in the Arab Detroit community as an educator and parent, talked to me about the “stigma” of being Arab American and parenting her high school- and college-aged children:

I look at our kids, and growing up in the 9/11 era and having that stigma [of being Arab] - I look at my son, specifically, my son who is just a normal kid, just a normal American child, who would have never thought about these different things. But, I think after 9/11, he was a little too young to really get the gist of it. And there was a time where it was a non-issue for him. But once he got into high school, he was exposed to other kids that were very much enthralled by it. And so I see that he's very cognizant of that issue, and it's almost like an 'us and them' mentality. I work against that all the time. I'm always talking to him.

Reem analyzes the shift in her son’s identity as he grew up and attended high school. While growing up in a post-9/11 era, it was not until Reem’s son reached high school that she saw how his understanding of his Arab American identity was shaped by interaction with his peers. She identifies a critical mass effect occurring within her son’s high school, where he and his friends are beginning to become aware of and understand the often hostile environment that is the post-9/11 United States—hostile particularly for young Arab American men. Reem continues, expressing her concern for her son and his peer group:

¹⁴. All of the names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of research participants.

He comes home sometimes with these ideas and they bother me a lot...the kids [in high school] I think for some odd reason, have a sort of sense of entitlement that this is who they are, this is what's happening, and I'm going [to] be vocal, and I don't care what I say or what I do. Now having that mentality, but using it in a constructive way, and showing your case in a constructive way that people can understand, I get it. But when you're left to your own, a teenager, without guidance from adults in terms of - or maybe having the wrong guidance on how to express yourself - is dangerous. And I see that with my son. And I'm always talking to him. I mean, he's one that I can get - I got him. But there's so many others out there that scare me, in terms of what they're gonna say, maybe not meaning it...

The space of Reem's son's high school is where she perceives anger between young Arab American men about their positionality in a post-9/11 world coming to a head. Reem spoke to me about how she did not experience this when her daughter, who is now attending college, was in high school. The awareness of post-9/11 policy towards immigration, Arab Americans, security, the Arab World, etc., from Reem's perspective, did not conjure up as much anger within her daughter as it did with her son. Nonetheless, she sees her daughter pursuing pre-law as an undergraduate in order to gain a sense of power over her individual and community rights as U.S. citizens. This example reveals potential differences based on gender socialization and interpellation between young Arab American men and women. However, because this is only one example, more extensive research based on this question is needed.

One of the most striking comments made by Reem during our conversation was regarding her son's more poignant realizations. Reem said, "...they're [young people] starting to realize the [U.S.] political process here. And when you don't equate human life with human life,

you sort of get angry and resentful...I think these kids are realizing the importance of an Arab life or a Palestinian life or an Iraqi life or a Syrian life is not as important as somebody else's life...what scares me the most is that their sense of inclusivity is being damaged a bit, because they don't feel effective...they have a sense of not belonging here, not belonging there, and not having a sense of you know, being grounded." Reem narrated to me how she witnessed the stark reality of social and political disparities coming to the foreground in her son's experience.

The everyday modality of not belonging, as discussed by Reem, also emerged in another conversation I had with a parent. Janice, a Lebanese American woman, immigrated to the U.S. as a small child and grew up in Western Michigan, later moving to the Detroit Metro Area. She spoke to me about the troubles she ran into when her thirteen-year-old son attended a school that was predominantly white:

My son experienced some issues. At school he was the only Arab child... I get a letter one day from the school. It was on a Thursday. It said that on the past Monday, it was the anniversary of September 11th; your son was talking about suicide. He was 7. And I looked at him, "Do you know what suicide is?" He was like, "Yeah, suicide, it's...a suicide." I said, "Who was talking about that?" He goes, "The kids on the playground." He was the only Arab kid. So I was horrified... All the kids were talking. But oh my god, the Arab kid said something about it. And he didn't even know what it was. He learned [about] it from the other kids on the playground. So I was advised not to pursue anything. You know we'd gone through the trauma of divorce. If I pursued it, it would require more questioning and more disturbance in his life, and I was advised to just remove him. It's like what do you mean [not pursue anything]? I'm in law school, I'm doing this stuff for

other people, how do I just do that? They [family and friends] said [Janice], you just have to do that for your son.

As a single mother in law school, Janice faced the frustrations of her young son confronting discrimination in grade school, and then an added powerlessness as she was advised to not confront his teachers, other parents, or the school system. Janice's experience conveys a moment when a silencing effect took place as to avoid further turmoil in her son's life – turmoil that stemmed from her son's difference at school and his parents' divorce. This statement reveals how a parent's decisions concerning their children being discriminated against at school is negotiated and tempered.

While the 9/11 events were not experienced firsthand and remembered by Arab American high school students during the 2012-2013 school year, their reverberations without a doubt influence both the structures and the individuals within those structures with which young Arab American people interact on a daily basis. Furthermore, the perspectives of these two mothers, and other parents and educators with whom I spoke, are heavily informed by their daily negotiations between attempting to push back against dominant ideologies that, as illustrated by these stories, have ramifications on their daily reality, and to temper their frustrations in the interest of cultivating a safe space for their children. As is exemplified by excerpts from these two interviews, my discussions with parents and educators reveal how Arab American adults' perceptions and experiences shape how their children experienced the reality of being considered different and not "All American."

Confronting Mainstream Representations of Arab Detroit

The All American Muslim television show, discussed earlier, focuses on five Arab Muslim American families living in Dearborn, MI. The families include the Amens, a large family consisting of two older parents, their four adult children and one grandson, the Aoudes, a young couple whose first son was born mid-season, the Bazy-Aliahmads, another young couple with one seven-year-old son, the Jaafars, a couple in their late 30s/early 40s who have four children, and the Zabans, another couple in their late 30s/early 40s who also have four children. Each family presents a particular storyline and theme. The Zabans and Jaafars feature stories mainly around their respective husband/father characters, one who is a high school football coach and the other a police deputy, and their busy life raising children. The Aoudes feature the storyline of being newlyweds and young parents and the major life changes that come with each. The Bazy-Aliahmads' storyline mainly focuses on the goals of the wife/mother character wanting to open a lounge and event space in Dearborn, MI. Finally, the Amens' storyline centers on inter-faith relationships and generational tensions between the parents and adult children. Generally, every character identifies as Muslim and practices their faith in various ways and to different extents. This media text and the discourses surrounding it provide an excellent entry point for my conversations with Arab American high school students in Dearborn to grapple with their perceptions of dominant U.S. representations of their community and, more specifically, their disillusionment with their community being labeled and defined as "All American."

The phrase "All American" can be defined in a variety of ways and can take on various connotations and significations depending on the context. In the context of representing Arab Muslim Americans¹⁵ from Dearborn, MI as "All American Muslims," I argue that "All

15. I include Arab here because all of the Muslim characters on the show are also Arab American, particularly from Lebanon. The non-use of "Arab" in the title of *All American Muslim*

American” is deployed in an attempt to bring Arab Muslim Americans into the fold of mainstream U.S. multiculturalism—a multiculturalism that constructs non-whiteness and difference as safe and able to be capitalized upon, as not presenting a true threat to white supremacy and the social, cultural, and political status quo, and, especially in this case, as appealing to the constitutional ideal of religious freedom. Therefore, central to All American Muslim’s definition of “All American” is the upholding of conservative values such as patriarchy, nuclear family, same-faith (-race, -ethnicity) marriage, and heterosexuality. Because the post-9/11 context so strongly and convincingly constructs Arab Muslim Americans (and I would argue non-Muslim Arab Americans and non-Arab Muslim Americans) as not American, a staunchly conservative definition of “All American” is needed in order to appeal to strong opposition. To define Arab Muslim Americans within this particular conceptualization of “All American,” the narratives and characters of All American Muslim drive storylines that situate some as not properly appealing to these tenets of All Americanness and Islam. Nina Bazyz-Allahmad and Shadia Amen are the two primary characters who are used to distinguish and define “All American Muslim” through their disassociation and tensions with family members and people in their community. It is through the othering process of two women on the show, Nina and Shadia, their gender lending to the ease in their othering, that allows All American Muslim to deploy a definition of “All American” that upholds conservative U.S. values and demarcates Arab Muslim Americans (and I would argue Arab Americans generally) as able to be folded into dominant U.S. culture. This othering process of Nina and Shadia was recognized by

further perpetuates the conflation of Arab and Muslim that is prominent in U.S. discourses of Arabs and Muslims.

the Arab American youth I interviewed, as they pointed out these two characters as particularly problematic for them and their community.

Unsurprisingly, the conversations that stemmed from opinions about All American Muslim were about much more than the show itself; our dialogues would quickly transition into topics concerning their ideas about religious and gender identity and perceived shifts in the cultural and ethnic landscape of Arab Detroit. These conversations reveal how Arab American youths' reception of All American Muslim goes beyond the binary discourse laid out by the show and the Lowe's controversy—which reestablishes the conservative, assimilated “All American” identity versus the terrorist extremist. The expressions of identity and community as articulated by these young Arab Americans open up this binary by showing how their perceptions and lived experiences are much more expansive and complex.

During each of the focus group interviews, I asked students what they thought about All American Muslim, and purposefully left the question open-ended, allowing them to take the conversation where they saw necessary. Responses to questions regarding All American Muslim varied and led to a wide range of conversation trajectories. Arab American youths' responses to my asking about their ideas on All American Muslim were rarely simple; and if they initially were, they would often be expanded upon to reveal complicated feelings and perceptions of the show and their understanding of how other people in their community responded to it. For instance, the following excerpt highlights a conversation I had with two high school-aged Arab American men and how they liked the show, but witnessed other people in their community, particularly older generations—from their perspective—who did not like it:

ME: What about the show All American Muslim? Did you watch any of it?

ALI: I liked it.

JABER: I liked it, but a lot of people they criticized it, the older generation [or] like the older parents, they're kind of old school -- they're like, "Oh what is this?". They think it's bad, it's making Dearborn look bad when it's really not. They're just criticizing.

ME: Do you remember what specifically they thought was bad? What kind of things were on the show they didn't like?

JABER: Some of the actors, because a lot of people knew them. So they all [thought that] we're going to get a bad name because we know them. And that's how they think...

ME: What did you like about it?

ALI: The actors because I know some of them.

ME: And so it was neat to see them on TV?

ALI: Yeah, it was cool.

ME: Do you think it was pretty cool to see people that you knew and Muslims on television, Arab Muslims on television?

ALI: First time ever.

ME: ...So are you disappointed that it was cancelled then?

ALI: Yeah, I never found out why it was cancelled.

ME: ...Do you guys have ideas of maybe why?

JABER: No I don't know why.

ALI: They got a lot of viewers, a lot of people talked about it. They got a lot of good compliments about it...

JABER: I don't know what [was] so bad about it.

My conversation with Ali and Jaber illustrates the complicated ways they perceive the show being received more widely and within their local Arab American community. Both voiced their appreciation of the show and disappointment at its cancelation, while also pointing out how many people thought it "made Dearborn look bad," Dearborn being used here as a stand-in for Arab and Muslim Americans. Ali especially noted his like of the show as it differentiated itself

from typical television shows that focused on “Americans.” I interpret his usage of “American” as meaning dominant white American culture. Because it offered a representation of Ali and Jaber’s ethnicity and local Arab American community, they both expressed how they “understood” it and connected to it, because it “represented” them, in spite of critiques from their community.

Further in our conversation, Ali went on to discuss at further length his feelings of pride about seeing people like him on television, in spite of the community’s complicated feelings; he states:

I felt like that [this] was the first time Arabs got a chance to speak and have their own time. Usually they [the people on television, are non-Arab] Americans. I’m not saying anything bad about it. It’s usually [non-Arab] Americans on TV. But this time it’s the people we know that are on television and they’re representing us and making us look good. Some people [are] saying look bad but some people [are] saying they make us look good -- they [are] representing us. And we can kind of relate because we all grew up in the same neighborhood.

Ali expresses identification with people on All-American Muslim because of their connection to growing up in the same neighborhood. Furthermore, he expresses his sense pride in seeing members of community on television, because he understands Arab American representation on television to be minimal. He makes a point to express that he is saying anything negative about the dominance of “Americans,” that is to say white Americans, on television. Interestingly, this comment can convey a sense of desire to not express disdain towards the representational status quo, yet, nonetheless, excitement in the potential to identify with media representations of Arab Americans. This conversation with Ali and Jaber conveys a sense of identification with and

pleasure derived from All American Muslim. However, their identification and pleasure are not simple acts of compliant consumption, for they understood the text as operating within a context that does not generally represent their community in such ways.

In other conversations I had with Arab American youth about All American Muslim, they voiced similar viewpoints, where they liked the show, but recognized the controversy it caused for some people in their community, particularly their parents' generation. In the same conversations where some voiced interest and appreciation for the show, another participant would often present the counter opinion that was perceived to be also prevalent. The subjects of these countering opinions often had to do with two specific women on the show, Nina and Shadia, for they are pointed out as being especially controversial due to their relationship to and practice of Islam. By bringing up these two characters, Arab American youth use the All American Muslim text to explore the politics of respectability as it relates to Arab Americans' gendered and religious identities. The ways All American Muslim frame Nina and Shadia construct their liberal representations of Arab Muslim American femininity as inappropriate and not aligned with the ways the series is attempting to define the "All Americanness" of this community. Unsurprisingly, the Arab American high school students with whom I spoke addressed these constructions of Nina and Shadia and expressed their apprehension and disapproval towards them.

Important to understanding the subject matter of these group interviews is a more thorough description of these two characters, Nina and Shadia. Nina is the wife and mother of the Bazy-Aliahmad family and an aspiring business owner. Throughout the All American Muslim series, the main storyline of the Bazy-Aliahmad family centers on Nina and how she operates in the Arab Detroit community as a woman who does not wear hijab, who dresses in

heels, tank tops, and skirts, works in the event planning industry, and wants to open her own nightclub/lounge. Early in the series, Nina is seen meeting with a prominent Arab American businessman in the area at a local diner. As they sit across from each other, Nina details her ideas for opening a nightclub. The man's reaction is, "a woman, she's not going to handle a club" ("The Fast and the Furious"). This short video and audio snippet from this man is used in almost every scene featuring Nina discussing her nightclub venture throughout the series. The constant use of this clip from the diner reiterates how Nina is stepping out of the community's cultural and societal norms and being met with—often harsh—resistance.

Another way All American Muslim frames Nina's character, portraying her as particularly different from the rest of her community, is by narratively and visually juxtaposing her to women in hijab. One especially poignant example is when Nina accompanies her mother to their mosque for the Ramadan "Night of Power" ("Friday Night Bites"). A lengthy scene before Nina and her mother's departure to the mosque depicts a debate between her and her mother over what she should wear. In the scene, shots show Nina and her mother sitting on a couch next to each other. The visual juxtaposition between Nina and her mother is stark as Nina has long, blonde hair and is dressed in a black tank top, while her mother wears a headscarf, long-sleeved jacket, and long pants that only leave her face and hands uncovered. They converse over what Nina is wearing and what she should wear to the mosque. Nina's mother tells her, "You can't go like that." Nina assures her, "I brought other clothes. I'm going to change." Her mother responds, "You have to" ("Friday Night Bites"). Next, Nina shows her mother the clothes she brought to wear, which include a blazer and various long-sleeved shirts. Yet, because they are still too low-cut and tight-fitting, her mother disapproves. Nina's mother brings her a headscarf and long dress to wear over the clothes she is already wearing. After spending a few

minutes wrapping Nina's head in the scarf, her mother voices her approval and tells her she looks good. Nina complains, saying she is hot and feels weird in her new outfit. This scene between Nina and her mother is followed by the series' convention of using footage from a group interview with various characters discussing topics of concern to being Arab American and Muslim. This group interview scene features the characters discussing whether or not Islam is a demanding religion. The loudest voices in this conversation are Samira and Bilal, two of the adult children in the Amen family, and Fouad, the husband/father from the Zaban family, who all make statements that express their belief that Islam is not a demanding religion and is actually quite simple. The group interview scene ends with Fouad stating, "Honestly, I feel personally, I don't know how you guys feel, but I feel that it [Islam] is very simple and very easy to follow" ("Friday Night Bites"). During Fouad's statements, the camera cuts to close-up shots of Nina and Shadia's faces showing expressions of disbelief and skepticism. These scenes convey how Nina experiences pushback from her family and community and imply that Nina is the problem and not so much her family, the community, or Islam itself.

Shadia's plot line was particularly prominent in the show, as it followed her experience marrying an Irish Catholic American man named Jeff who converted to Islam to be with her (The featuring of a storyline that includes an Irish American man centralizes this positionality within an othered domestic context, conveying that the Caucasian man is still a relevant and important figure). Shadia, who does not wear the hijab and has tattoos and piercings, is often framed as the black sheep of the Amen family. The negotiations she faces as a Muslim, a loving sister and daughter, a single mother, and the spouse of a converting Irish Catholic American were the basis of her story. Similarly to how Nina is constructed on the show, Shadia is framed through the narrative and visuals as ultimately the instigator to her tensions and problems with family and

religion, for it is alluded to that she makes choices that produce her problems. Again, this type of framing of “rogue” characters places the burden of the problems upon the individual and not upon various institutions. This works to place Shadia, like Nina, outside the definition of “All American” in the Arab Detroit context. One prominent example of framing Shadia as different and problematic to her family and community is her lifestyle and relationship with a white American man.

The first episode of the series focuses on Shadia and Jeff’s wedding and Jeff’s conversion to Islam (“How to Marry a Muslim”). The episode opens with a group interview scene featuring Nader and Nawal Aoude, Nina Bazy-Aliahmad, and Bilal, Suheila, and Lila Amen, Shadia’s siblings and mother. They are discussing the complications of a Muslim marrying a non-Muslim. There is debate as to whether or not an Islamic wedding can be performed when one of the people is not Muslim and is not converting to Islam. Bilal explains, “The Muslim man can marry someone from another religion, from Christianity or Judaism, but a Muslim woman can’t” (“How to Marry a Muslim”). After Bilal’s statement and shots of the others shaking their heads in agreement, the scene ends and a long segment introduces viewers to Shadia. A voiceover of Shadia introducing herself overlays shots of her interacting with her son at their home, showing off her tattoos to friends, and dancing in a bar; she says, “My name is Shadia Amen. I was born and raised in Dearborn, Michigan. I’m Muslim, and I have a ten year-old son Adam from my first marriage. In the Amen family I play the rebel role. I grew up learning the Quran. I have read it three times. Do I choose to follow all of that? Not so much. My dad always makes his comments: ‘Well, you know you should, and I wish you would.’ And my mom does the same” (“How to Marry a Muslim”). By opening with this group interview scene and Shadia’s storyline, All American Muslim immediately focuses on displaying conservative and liberal

representations of Arab Muslim Americans and constructing the latter as problematic and not aligned with its defining of “All American.” Throughout the episode Shadia continues to describe tensions between herself and her family and community. To convey the stresses Shadia brings to her family and community, the episode features a scene between her father Mohsen and brother Bilal discussing Mohsen’s concerns with Jeff converting to Islam, a scene of Jeff and his mother expressing the stresses of his conversion, and another group interview scene with the same group who opened up the episode debating what it means to convert and practice Islam correctly (This scene interestingly features Nawal Aoude, a woman who wears hijab, making a comment about how Muslims who are born into the religion do not always practice the religion correctly and then cuts to a shot of Nina with a look of disgust on her face, visually suggesting Nina is in tension with Nawal and with the notion of “correctly” practicing Islam). The episode reaches a generally happy conclusion when Jeff’s conversion occurs seamlessly and Shadia and Jeff’s wedding is shown as being an amicable and even enjoyable engagement between Shadia’s Lebanese Muslim American family and Jeff’s Irish Catholic American family. However, there are still expressions of concern and tension before the episode reaches this point. Furthermore, Shadia’s tensions with and critiques from her family do not stop here, for they continue through other storylines throughout the series. This suggests that in spite of her being married to a Muslim man, her “rebellious” lifestyle continues to be a choice she makes that causes frictions between her and her husband and family.

The Arab American youth I interviewed picked up and grappled with All American Muslim’s framing of Shadia and Nadia outside of a conservative “All American” definition for Arab Muslim Americans. My group interview with three Arab American high schoolers, Sam, Nasser, and Abraham, displays a conversation of both dissenting and approving opinions

concerning All American Muslim, and how these opinions are connected to the feeling that they imagine their families and the elders of the community have toward the show, and these two characters especially:

ABRAHAM: My parents [thought] some of the people on there they really pushed it to the other level.

SAM: ...[those who were] representing us weren't that good.

ABRAHAM: They didn't represent us...

ME: What do you think was missing?

ABRAHAM: ...It was more of an act than it was reality...it wasn't how it really is here. They put us in a bad picture honestly. And sometimes they made us look way better than we are, and sometimes they made us look way worse than we are.

ME: ...What were the things that happened that you felt were putting you in a bad light?

SAM: ...It was pretty much [not] representing us.

NASSER: She was talking about opening up a club or something like that.

ABRAHAM: In our religion it's bad for us to drink and she's a girl. Yeah it's kind of trashy...

ME: What were some of the things that you thought were good?

ABRAHAM: Seeing everyone, Arabs have been here for a while, they did some good. A lot of Arab people doing a lot of things, owning places now. Coming from overseas.

NASSER: ...contributing to the community and stuff.

In this conversation with Sam, Nasser, and Abraham, they debate over whether All American Muslim represented Arab and Muslim Americans and their community well. Their comments reveal their ambiguous feelings over how the show represented them and their community. At first Sam makes remarks that suggest his approval of All American Muslim, yet moments later he agrees with the other two young men who expressed how the show did not represent them.

Their remarks oscillate between liking the show, not agreeing with how it represented them, and approving of how it showed Arab Americans as business owners and contributors to the community.

As part of their expressions of general disapproval with how it represented their community, Nina's character is brought up as a particular example ("She was talking about opening up a club..."). An excerpt from a different group interview again shows how Nina was a particular person to reference when discussing why the show was disliked by some. In this interview, a young Arab American man, after being asked about his thoughts on the show, stated: "My thoughts were how -- did you see that lady that wanted to open up a night club? She's not really, wouldn't consider her -- really like -- we wouldn't consider her practicing her faith like for good. Because like the way she dresses -- and she's inappropriate. You know?" Remarks like this one and those included above offer examples of how All American Muslim provided fodder for Arab American young people to explore the politics of respectability, particularly for Arab Muslim American women.

Similar to Nina, Shadia explicitly became the subject of controversy during my conversations with Arab American youth. During one of my focus group interviews with two Arab American young people named Nadia and Joseph, they describe feelings of discomfort in seeing the portrayal of Shadia and Nina:

JOSEPH: There are two characters on that show I don't like. I don't know what their names are, I just don't feel comfortable watching them.

ME: Describe to me which ones they are [and] what made you feel uncomfortable?

JOSEPH: The blonde, rich one. After she wanted to open a club in Dearborn and the one that's got tattoos and stuff.

ME: What was uncomfortable about it?...

JOSEPH: ...she would like to make a lot of money. She wouldn't make a lot of money, I think.

ME: Yeah? So it was uncomfortable to watch that?

JOSEPH: Yeah.

ME: And what about the other person, the one with the tattoos?

JOSEPH: She was, I don't know, she acted weird...What was weird about her was like how she pierced her lips and like tattoos and stuff.

NADIA: Honestly, that show, some of it just don't make sense. How they describe stuff, some of the stuff is untrue and doesn't make sense. I just don't like how they were explaining about losing and stuff like that.

ME: What were some of the things that were untrue?

NADIA: The last one I watched was about when it first came out and then it was how they described some religious stuff. It's just that some of it was untrue.

The ability to articulate fully what made these young Arab Americans uncomfortable was not always realized. However, their remarks do express unease with the forefront portrayal by All American Muslim of Arab Muslim American women who want “to make a lot of money,” “act weird,” and have tattoos and piercings as being common and prominent in the community.

Furthermore, as Nadia's comments reveal, the particular portrayal of religion on All American Muslim, perhaps by the foregrounding of women like Nina and Shadia—although this is not entirely clear—was not perceived as being an accurate representation of the youths' experience of being Arab Muslim in Dearborn. While some of the critiques taken up by young people are directed specifically towards two characters, their comments can also be seen as potential disillusionment with the medium's inevitable inability to convey a complete and complex Arab Muslim American experience in their community. Sabah, another young Arab American woman with whom I spoke, voiced her general disdain for the television show, particularly because of its representation of Islam. She explicitly said that the show was stupid

because it made it seem that this was the only way people practice Islam, when in fact “everybody acts differently,” and the show did not represent people she knows or her family. I would argue that much of the criticism towards these two women on the show acted in a sense as a red herring for frustrations and discomfort in the overall portrayal, which was constructed as having “truth” to it because it belonged to the reality television genre and due to its spotlighting of their community on national television.

One of the most interesting aspects of the conversations I had with young Arab Americans during these focus groups was how discussions concerning the cultural landscape and the racial and ethnic politics of Arab Detroit so often followed dialogue on All American Muslim. A clear transition between talking about All American Muslim and then about Dearborn as a radicalized place was not always apparent. However, it was clear that the critiques of All American Muslim spawned musings concerning Dearborn as an Arab American enclave and critiques of perceived racial tensions within the community. This further conveyed how Arab American youth articulated the disjunctures they felt with their community being framed as “All American.” From my group interview with Sam, Nasser, and Abraham, a conversation about Dearborn and being Arab stemmed from our discussion about All American Muslim:

- SAM: Dearborn’s like a Chinatown.
- ME: Do you feel like it is?
- SAM: Yes. Day after day it’s becoming more and more.
- ME: What’s more and more?
- SAM: Of like Chinatown for Arabs
- ME: How?
- NASSER: More Arabs are coming in.

ABRAHAM: It's going to be a full of Arabs...

SAM: More Arabs are doing stuff in Dearborn and stuff like that. Trying to bring what they have there here. And it's messing up Dearborn.

ME: How's it messing it up?

Sam connects the high concentration of Arab Americans and prolific Arab American culture of Dearborn to the ethnic enclaves of U.S. Urban Chinatowns. Sam, an Arab American himself, expresses a sense of panic and worry about the continuous rise in Dearborn and Detroit's Arab American population. Earlier in our conversation Sam discussed his family's longstanding ties to the Detroit area through multiple generations of family moving from Lebanon to the area. He spoke proudly about his family's connections to Dearborn, alluding to their successful assimilation. Sam's expression of fear towards new immigrants "messing up Dearborn" begins to communicate the intra-community politics that occur between established Arab Americans and newly immigrated Arab Americans.

My conversation with Sam, Nasser, and Abraham continued to invoke strong feelings from all parties. By bringing up the ideas that new immigrants are "messing up Dearborn," Sam's comments incited Abraham to defend his newly immigrated family:

SAM: ... I'm an Arab, and most Arabs, they make us look bad.

ABRAHAM: Not everyone's family's like that.

SAM: I'm not saying everybody I'm saying a couple. I'm Arab. So I can talk about Arabs.

ABRAHAM: You can talk about yourself only, you can't talk about everyone, you can talk about yourself.

SAM: I'm not talking about you so why do you care?

ABRAHAM: I do care, because I'm Arab.

SAM: I'm Arab too. I'm not saying anything bad, I'm just saying they're ruining Dearborn.

ME: How so?

SAM: You think about how Dearborn was a long time ago and now it's all messed up now...

ME: I want to hear what you're saying.

SAM: Dearborn used to be like a really, really nice city. But as more and more Arabs get in it, it just gets worse and worse.

ME: How? What happens?

SAM: Warren Avenue for example it's like all messed up, all these store. They don't do anything right.

NASSER: Second of all we're not black. I'm not trying to be racist right now, but we don't do drinking, no. [I'm] talking about his family probably not my family...

SAM: I never said anything about drinking or anything.

ABRAHAM: Well you're trying to explain it like we're dumb, we're throwing stuff around.

SAM: Did I say anything about throwing around or drinking? I never said nothing. Did I say anything about drinking or dirty? Did I say the word dirty?

ME: No, you didn't say those words.

SAM: I never said it...it's like not even one American person lives here, it's like all Chinese. That's what I'm trying to say.

Conflict in this conversation arises when claims are made toward there being a problem with newly immigrated Arab Americans coming to Dearborn. The reference made to Warren Avenue, with many Arab American-owned businesses that have Arabic writing on their facades, points to a perceived problem with public signifiers of Arab American otherness. Abraham pushes back on a number of the points Sam and Nasser make regarding there being a problem with a large number of Arabs living in Dearborn. It is important to note the difference in these young men's immigration histories. Sam and Nasser, who are also close friends and neighbors, come from

Lebanese American families who have called Dearborn home for three generations (each of their grandparents immigrated to the U.S.), whereas Abraham, a Palestinian American and first-generation immigrant, moved with his family to the United States when he was a toddler. These differences in immigration histories, transnational identity, and established histories in Dearborn facilitate varied perceptions of what are “good” and “bad” modes of Arab American visibility and identity. Differences in ideas of respectable modes of being Arab American that stemmed from conversations on All American Muslim illustrate how respectability politics and the regulating of one’s domestic othered identity are internalized and manifested among peers. Furthermore, the dealignment with certain people in the community who are not assimilated conveys a desire to be considered within the definition of “All American,” yet this is met with pushback in these conversations from those who are less able to fit into this definition (more recent immigrants).

A similar conversation to the one above transpired in another group interview with two Arab American youth named Will and Karem. Our discussion of All American Muslim segued into a discussion on the experience of living in Dearborn. Again, comments of dissatisfaction and intra-community politics ensued. Following participants’ comments about wanting to leave Dearborn, I asked why they wanted to leave:

- WILL: It’s very annoying.
- ME: What is annoying about it?
- WILL: How they like ruined it.
- ME: How they [ruined] what?...
- WILL: They ruin everything...
- KAREM: Like rumors.

WILL: Expect like the parents, the parents don't like know nothing. Like these kids. They're annoying...

ME: ...What are the rumors about that you don't like?

WILL: See that's what -- all that stuff is on Facebook. That's why I don't like it [Facebook]...

KAREM: They say like someone is fake.

WILL: Like someone will write a status about someone [they] didn't like and they'll make a status of "you're so stupid." People like to start fights too...[This] generation is messed up.

ME: This generation is messed up. How so?

WILL: Like look at these young kids, they have iPhones and everything.

ME: Just like spoiled?

WILL: Yeah...And they're bad. You know what I mean? And they're disrespectful. They're bad.

ME: So what do you do since you guys are part of that generation? Like how do you deal with it?

WILL: I just don't hang out with those kids.

KAREM: I don't bother anyone.

Initially, how and who Will and Kareem defined as "bad" remained quite vague, but later in our conversation they identified Iraqi American students in their high school to be particularly untrustworthy. Since the beginning of the 2003 Iraq War, tens of thousands of Iraqis have immigrated to the United States. The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants reports that more than 45,000 Iraqis migrated to the U.S. since 2003, and that the majority of them are located in Dearborn ("Dearborn: Home Away from Home for Iraqi Refugees"). This conversation with Will and Kareem a sense of disdain for and tension with the growing Iraqi American population of Dearborn and Detroit. Will and Kareem conveyed feelings of irritation that stemmed from high school peers who they saw as entitled, spreading rumors, and generally

untrustworthy. The later, explicit naming of high school peers who were Iraqi American offered them a placement of their feelings onto a particular group of people, whom they were initially hesitant to name. The significance of singling out Iraqi American peers alludes to intra-community politics and negative perceptions of Iraqi Americans and immigrant. While there is not sufficient data here to make a strong argument, I believe this does indicate resistance to the increase of Iraqi immigrants to the United States as a result of the U.S. Iraq War.¹⁶

These conversations between Arab American high school students in Arab Detroit about All American Muslim reveal how themes perceived as controversial on the show provided fodder and energy to critique a variety of aspects of the Arab American ethnic and cultural landscape. Religion, gender, and intra-community politics came to the foreground as students voiced discomfort and dislike for the television show in general and then about specific characters. The reception of All American Muslim by the Arab American youth I interviewed speaks to how media consumption practices are anything but passive. These conversations reveal the immense complexity in Arab American youths' perception of the ways All American Muslim attempts to define Arab Muslim Americans as "All American." Their complex (mis)identifications break-up the binary mode created by All American Muslim and the Lowe's controversy of defining Arab Muslim Americans as either aligned with blind patriotism and conservative American values or radical extremists. The All American Muslim text and paratext (which includes the controversy of it not being renewed, etc.) opened a discursive space for Arab American youth in Dearborn to both find pleasure and discomfort in seeing the high visibility of

¹⁶ Without further research in the area of gauging perceptions of Arab Detroit intracommunity politics and perceptions of Iraqi Americans, it is challenging to make major claims. However, I think pushback against and negative perceptions of Iraqi immigration to the U.S. stems from broad negative sentiments about the Iraq War in general and desire to disassociate with a national identity that is perceived as the cause of war and hardships.

their community in the mainstream media. The critiques and discomfort that stemmed from discussions about All American Muslim seamlessly segued into discussions on Arab Detroit's racial, ethnic, and cultural politics. The ideas that came up should be contextualized and recognized as working within a discursive framework of state surveillance and active U.S. imperialist policy in the Arab World that has concrete ramifications in the everyday lived experiences of Arab Americans. Self- and community regulation result from this context and ultimately influence Arab American youth's perceptions and receptions of mainstream media texts and discourses.

Producing Counter Imagery

Arab American youth in Arab Detroit generate a wide variety of cultural productions via an assortment of platforms and mediums that include social media (as explored in Chapter Three), music, and short films. Their cultural productions provide another level of engagement with national and local discourses of Arab America and Arab Detroit, further complicating the simplified representations and experiences conveyed by the All American Muslim text and the mainstream discourses concerning it. The students I interviewed spoke to me about their involvement in online role-playing games via Tumblr, hip hop and rap music creation, short film productions, and other culture-making practices, all of which integrated practices of identity exploration and construction. Often, their culture-making practices entailed an explicit engagement with broader contexts and discourses. One of the more robust instances that I found during my research period that highlights this engagement was the production of high school

student films for their “Dreams of the 313”¹⁷ Film Festival, which was held at a charter school in the Detroit Metro area that has a majority Arab Muslim American student population. The making of these high school student film projects illustrates a poignant example of how Arab American youth in Arab Detroit are actively exploring and questioning their personal histories and identity formations, and how they relate to national and community contexts. The two specific group film projects I explore particularly reveal how the process of producing media enabled these Arab American youth to question the logics of the “American Dream” ideology and their positionalities within the racial politics of the Detroit Area.

Ms. Ayoub, the Lebanese American high school English teacher who organized the student film projects and “Dreams of the 313” film festival, invited me to spend time with her and her students during the spring semester of the 2012-2013 academic year. I observed a number of her classes and got to know a few of her students more personally through interviews and informal engagements over school lunches and classroom discussions. The film projects were a major assignment of the spring 2013 semester for Miss Ayoub's 11th grade English class. It was a curriculum experiment Ms. Ayoub undertook through a partnership with an artist-in-residence program from the Detroit-based non-profit organization Detroit Future Schools (DFS). From their website, Detroit Future Schools is described as “an in-school digital media arts program committed to humanizing education in Detroit” (“Detroit Future Schools”). Their primary program is to pair their artists-in-residence with a Detroit Metro Area classroom teacher for at least one academic school year to experiment in implementing digital media projects into the teacher’s curriculum. Ms. Ayoub worked with an artist-in-residence to have her Arab American 11th grade high school students explore such questions as, “Why am I here?”; “What is

¹⁷. “313” makes reference to the Metro Detroit area code.

the American Dream?"; and "What are the racial politics of Detroit?" via short film production. Ms. Ayoub and her DFS artist organized the students into small groups, provided them with camera equipment and computers with editing software (all of which was provided by DMF), and asked them to create short films that explored their identity as Arab Americans living in the Detroit area. Students' films took on a variety of topics, tones, and approaches. Many relied on interviewing people in their community to gain their perspectives on religion, the Arab American community of the Detroit area, and histories of Detroit's racial politics. Others took on projects that explored their own personal and family histories. One example of this type of film project came from a young Arab American man named Nabil who told his family's story through their love of olives—connecting them to the olive tree fields of Lebanon, his family's homeland. The group interviews excerpted in this section are with two different small groups of Arab American high school students who created two short films that took on more serious tones in exploring the American Dream ideology and racial politics of Detroit.

The first group, which consisted of two young women named Zeinab and Mona, chose to create a short film that explored various people's perspectives on the American Dream ideology. The questions that they asked each person they interviewed were, "What was your American Dream?" and "Where is it now?" Both women grew up in the Dearborn and Dearborn Heights area and did not have extensive exposure to Detroit proper. For that reason, they desired to connect with people both in their community and to people who lived in Detroit. They were especially interested in connecting with people from the African American community in Detroit; so they decided to travel Warren Avenue, a major street in the Detroit Metro Area that begins in downtown Detroit and extends to the suburbs, including Dearborn and Dearborn

Heights. Mona told me about the process of deciding on their project topic and how they approached it:

When the teacher said something about Detroit, we always thought, because we live in Dearborn and we were like in the Metro Detroit, how it's all segregated. It's like a big bubble of Arabs on one side, Americans on one side and African Americans on the other. And we tried to look deeper and more specific, and we saw the street, Warren [Avenue]... I practically go on that street every day, so I kind of see these things and when you think about it, that's when you start realizing that it's all burnt down and everyone's low income here, and then you start going [further down Warren Avenue] and that's where all the businesses [owned by] Arabs are, and you always see them.

Mona's description of Warren Avenue and reasoning for using it as the main site from which to approach people for interviews reveals her perception of how spatial and racial segregation is a very real aspect of Detroit and its close suburbs.

The young women's decision to travel Warren Avenue illustrates their idea that to engage with Detroit's various racial and ethnic communities, one must literally transcend spatial boundaries. Detroit and its suburbs are deeply entrenched in racist and classist histories of spatial racial segregation. Multiple events over the past century have created Detroit as a sprawling city of racial and ethnic segregation. Examples of significant events affecting Detroit's past and present racial and ethnic communities include post-World War II white flight, the 1943 and 1967 race riots, and multiple instances of government-induced displacement and ghettoization of racial and ethnic communities on the grounds of eminent domain. Following her comments on the choice to use Warren Avenue as a cross-sectional site to engage with various Detroit

communities, Mona continued to comment on the racial segregation of the Detroit area and the tensions that arise when boundaries are crossed:

And if you see a white person in that area, you kind of feel weird. But if they were just ten minutes down [the road], it would be fine...we went and interviewed people on that street. That was pretty hard, because we barely were able [to interview people], like everyone felt just weird, but we did get a couple of people to talk...They were like scared, they didn't want to jeopardize their business or company.

Mona's comments about their experience approaching Arab American business owners reveal their sense of hesitancy in expressing ideas that could be interpreted as negative commentary. The tensions over civil rights and resources between Detroit's racial and ethnic communities persist; and the young Arab American women Zeinab and Mona made it a point to begin to understand these tensions through a spatial engagement with the city.

Continuing our conversation, Zeinab described the responses they received when stopping people on Warren Avenue and asking them about their ideas of the "American Dream": "Yeah, so we just started doing our interviews, we went to like different places around Detroit and Dearborn Heights to get like different types of answers and that's how we interpreted it...there was like mainly two different opinions, some people said that yeah, the American Dream is still alive and you can get whatever you want, but then the other people said they were like the American Dream, it's dead and everything right now is just about money. That was basically the two main answers." Mona continued, elaborating upon Zeinab's points: "In Dearborn Heights, those [people] were the ones that were saying, yeah, the American Dream is still alive. You can achieve it if you work hard for it, like if you just put in the effort. Then like around Detroit, there were people that were saying like it just revolved around money and how --

like if you want to go get an education -- it's just very expensive nowadays." Their experience speaking to Arab American, African American, and White American people who they met on Warren Avenue, while, of course, not being completely extensive, gave them a snapshot of the variance in ideas on the obtainability of the American Dream. Using the very strong differences in perceptions of the American Dream, they came away with a clear idea of how their short film would display Arab Americans, African Americans, and White Americans' disparities in resources and beliefs in upward mobility.

When speaking with African American members of the Detroit community, they were especially taken aback by their experiences. Mona tells me about what she heard from African Americans living in Detroit and her uncle's response when she asked him about how he interacts with African Americans: "If they [African Americans] are seen like in a Arab community or in a non-American community, they were looked at differently, or they are treated differently...I asked a couple of my uncles, do you treat people differently? He was like, 'it's not that you want to, but it just comes out, they are not your natural people that usually communicate with, so we have to speak differently.'" Mona and Zeinab spoke earnestly about how they were both shocked, but at the same time not incredibly surprised by the responses they were receiving from people both in and outside their Arab American community. The witnessing of the variance in landscapes and resources was also very shocking to them, for, as sixteen year olds, this was one of the only, if not the only, times they had driven through certain areas of Detroit on their own. Zeinab explained: "The burnt down houses, like how do you live in a place that's burnt down? Like the smell of gas and when we were walking by this [area], we never thought anyone was living there. Then, we've seen [a] couple of people come out and we were like oh... We asked them like, 'Do you guys live there?' They were like, 'Yeah, what can we do?' And there's [sic]

the deserted areas. Detroit is a really big city, but not [many] people living there...you drive for blocks and blocks and blocks, and there's nothing there. It's just vacant...Where's the life? Where are the people? It's sad." Revelations concerning the disparities between Detroit and its surrounding suburbs, including Dearborn and Dearborn Heights, occurred for these two young women, and they became a central part of their short film. They voiced to me their hopes of continuing to get to know Detroit and its residents. It became obvious how this project, which started as a way for the students to explore their identity as Arab Americans, branched out into an exploration of racial and ethnic politics within Metro Detroit's ethnic communities. This exploration connected back to their personal identity exploration as it relates to the Arab American community's positionality among Detroit's racial politics at large.

The second group of Arab American students with whom I spoke decided to create a short film that generally explored their Arab and Muslim American community's history in Southeast Michigan and how 9/11 affected their lives. The group, which included three young women named Farah, Leila, and Dina, worked on their short film both for a class assignment, but also with the intention of submitting it to a national competition that asked high school students to work on creative projects exploring the impacts of 9/11 ten years later. Their short film ultimately made it to the finals of the competition, and they travelled to Washington D.C. to participate in the showcasing of finalists' projects. They did not walk away with an award, but nonetheless were proud of their project and the reception they received both in the competition and within their school community. In my conversation with the three young Arab American women who produced the short film, Farah began by explaining the competition and the premise of their film: "It's a history competition. So besides having opinions and cultural part, we had to have like the facts -- like how Muslims came here, how life was before 9/11. Then, we had to

talk about how life was after. So we got an interview with our teacher, and we just talked about everything within ourselves. Like, okay, how do we feel about our personal experience?” Leila continued, “We didn’t want to get only Arab perspectives. We even got like a priest. We also had our current teacher in it (who is a white man).” Later in the interview, Leila continued expressing her ideas on obtaining multiple perspectives, “We were scared that maybe if we just show, you know, just Arabs and all talking about how they’re victimized that it might come off as antagonizing Caucasians.” Regarding their decision to make a short film, Dina described the reasoning for their approach further, “Because in the beginning we were thinking for the competition there are many mediums that we could use to portray the same thing, but we thought that through video would be the most effective, because what we go through today, or like Muslims in general, is mostly based on the media.” The three young women described their desire to interview people who had different ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, hopefully conveying a variety of opinions on how 9/11 affected people’s lives. As I mentioned previously, the competition that they entered did not require video to be the medium of people’s projects. However, this group decided that they wanted to work with the same medium they saw as so powerful in constructing discourses and ideas of Arab and Muslim Americans. By using video, they imagined they could contribute and disseminate their message on the same terms as those of mainstream film, television, and news depictions of their community.

The group imagined their film project as a way to help people outside of their community understand the plight of Arab and Muslim Americans both before and after 9/11. As Leila put it, the group wanted to convey how discrimination is “not just an Arab problem, but it’s just like a human problem.” Farah and Leila discussed with me their ideas for approaching this topic and their desire to be very aware of how they present themselves and their information:

FARAH: When we got into it we thought that we're going to be the ones that were like educating the ignorant. But I felt like hey, we do not know much stuff about it either. So it was a experience for us. We had already known that even before 9/11, there [were] already prejudices against Muslims and Arabs through like movies in Hollywood or anything. But we didn't know like how much... how prominent it was in the media...and how even after 9/11 happened, that was kind of like the government's excuse to like pass the Patriot Act and go into Iraq and all that. So like, kind of like, the domino effect that you have.

LEILA: And because of that... I started like telling myself, like okay, I have to research my facts so if anyone [challenges me] I could jump in and tell them no. I started feeling like my guard up. Started researching in order to know...what people think.

Farah and Dina also agreed with Leila regarding the need to inform themselves, so they can speak intelligently to anyone who questions their short film and its thesis on Arab and Muslim Americans. In doing research on 9/11 and the Arab American community, Leila told me about how she came to realize the connections her community had to Japanese Americans during World War II:

I hadn't noticed how similar 9/11 is to Pearl Harbor. And how basically almost 3,000 people died in both incidents, and how it was from a foreign nation...they vilified Japanese and now they're vilifying Arabs. And it's the same thing. And then I also realized that apparently they had concentration camps... they still [have] those just in case another incident happens. So that really scared me because...What's it going to take for us to be American? I know eventually the Japanese, they've gotten over that scare and now they're almost normal basically in the U.S. But how long is it going to take for us? I realize now that [it is] like a cycle; it's not a matter [of] when – it's just whose turn is it now?

Undeniably, the short film projects these students embarked upon led them to numerous educational moments that made them realize aspects of their own community and perceptions of

their community from outsiders. The cultural work of these short films cultivate a platform for Arab American young people to express themselves and complicate the mainstream discourses and representations concerning their Arab Detroit community.

Conclusion

Arab American youth in Arab Detroit regularly address mainstream discourses concerning their identity and community, however this does not take place outside the context of their parents, families, schools and other community figures and institutions. As addressed in the section concerning Arab American parents' perceptions of their children's lives, the intense fears that came with 9/11 and its aftermath continue to haunt Arab American adults and subsequently their children, in spite of them being too young to remember the event itself and the immediate backlash that occurred. The second section of this chapter addressed how the binary of defining Arab and Muslim American identity by the All American Muslim television show and its related counter discourses inspired the Arab American high school students with whom I spoke to have complicated moments of pleasure and identification in seeing their community in the mainstream media. These complicated moments of reception by Arab American high school students often picked up on how All American Muslim used two specific Arab American women characters to other and thus define the "proper" mode of being Arab and Muslim American today. Often, the conversations about All American Muslim segued into critiques and troubling over racial and ethnic identities within the Arab Detroit community. This suggests that the binary mode of defining Arab Muslim as either based on a conservative "All Americanness" or terrorist extremism struck a chord with Arab American high school students and led them to question and confront the intra-community politics they saw prevalent in their Arab American community.

Finally, the last section of this chapter addressed how Arab American youths' cultural productions are robust sites for taking on mainstream discourses and representations. These cultural productions complicate the binary so often set forth in mainstream discourses and representations of Arab Americans (which includes Muslims and non-Muslims)—particularly that of the “good,” conservative “All American” Arab Muslim and the “bad” terrorist extremist. Through their complex (dis)identifications and cultural productions, Arab American youth problematize these simplified representations and reveal nuances of their actual lived experiences of being Arab American.

Chapter Four: “Say Wallah”; Internet Memes and Online Cultural Production from Arab Detroit Youth

The first episode of The Ed and Moe Show YouTube web series, which is titled “Ed and Moe Show #1 - We Get It!,” begins with one of the main characters Moe, an young Arab American man, introducing himself and the show over the visuals of the title page and an image of the Earth taken from space: “Okay, I’m ready. Hi! My name is Moe. This is the planet Earth.” As the camera zooms down from high above the Earth to an overhead view of a Dearborn intersection, Moe proclaims, “I live in Dearborn, MI.” Television static follows this clip, imitating the changing of channels through an analog connection. A series of news media clips show different scenes from Dearborn with a variety of news anchors’ voices exclaiming “Dearborn! Dearborn! Dearborn!” Next, a longer clip features Glenn Beck, whose eyes have been covered by a black rectangle box, saying “The Arab Capital of the United States! You don’t really have to go to Iraq to be witness to radical behavior...all you have to do is head over to Dearborn, MI. As goes Baghdad, so does Dearborn!” Multiple exclamations of “Dearborn!” are again spliced together, increasing in speed and volume. The television on which the clip series is playing blows up at the end of the sequence. Audio stops and the visual cuts to black. Exasperatedly, Moe responds to the series of news clips: “Are you [bleep] serious? Dearborn is not like that! Dearborn’s more like this.” Video cuts to footage of a quiet Dearborn street, a young child playing on a skateboard, and an older woman wearing a hijab sleeping on her porch. Over these images Moe is heard saying, “Boring. Boring. Boring.” After this introduction, a

series of 10 webisodes featuring the comical, yet unexceptional lives and friendship of Ed and Moe follows. The explicit commentary of YouTube-based The Ed and Moe Show illustrates a poignant example of how Arab American youth utilize online outlets to challenge national media coverage of Arab Detroit and the humorous ways they express their hybridized identities. YouTube videos such as this one and other forms of Internet memes are ubiquitous on the Internet and present an opportunity to explore the complexities of hybridized Arab American youth identity.

Central to the Arab American youths' online cultural productions explored in this chapter are dis-identifications and identifications with representations in mainstream white media and/or immigrant culture. Dynamic identity work that involves establishing boundary definitions is especially important for adolescents from immigrant families who tread between their home and host cultures (Ajrouch 2004). These (dis)identifications can be understood as active expressions of negotiating hybrid identity, where identity (for everyone, not only immigrants) is an unstable process and always put into relation with others (Bhabha 1994). Marwan Kraidy describes hybridity as "a notion, an ideology, or as an existential experience," where "social agents with a variety of motivations and objectives muster communication processes to articulate versions of hybridity that suit their purposes...hybridity comes in different guises and with different effects" (2005). The guise of the hybridity present in Arab American youths' online cultural productions grapples with the aforementioned (dis)identifications with mainstream, white culture and immigrant culture. Humor plays a central role in Arab American youths' expressions of hybridity online.

Hybridity and humor are enmeshed within Arab American youth cultural productions through how they mimic and appropriate common modes of responding to post-9/11 society and

culture. The use of humor and comedy hold a strong place within dominant post-9/11 discourses. Ted Gornelios and Viveca Greene iterate this point in the opening of their anthology A Decade of Dark Humor: How Comedy, Irony, and Satire Shaped Post-9/11 America: “[H]umor, irony, and satire were not only shaped by 9/11 and its aftermath, but were also pivotal in shaping responses to the events—especially as their practitioners combated the foreclosures and silencing of discourse and (re)opened and reinvigorated an active, contested public sphere” (xii). Therefore, through the adoption of comedy into their online cultural productions, Arab American youth are working within a common modality of post-9/11 cultural commentary. However, Arab American youths’ cultural productions’ adoption and mimicry of humor-filled cultural commentary insert identity negotiations specific to their lived realities. Furthermore, hybridity and humor can seamlessly intertwine as both relate to exchange. R. Graeme Dunphy and Rainer Emig elaborate on the connection between hybridity and humor: “[Humor] rests on difference (of positions, assumptions, and expectations), yet also on similarity. Otherwise jokes would not be understood as jokes and would end up as misunderstandings. In these respects, humour (sic) resembles hybridity structurally in its modification and transfer of positions” (2010). In a similar vein, as Luckett found in her work on the Britasian comedy sketch television show Goodness Gracious Me, humor functions as a difficult, yet accessible, mode to address hybridized diasporic life and culture—particularly in ethnic comedy productions (407). The hybridity of Arab American youths’ online cultural productions utilize insider knowledge that speaks to the specifics of an Arab American youth experience, while also harnessing U.S. mainstream media tropes of the spoof and parody comedy genre. Therefore, similar to the Britasian comedy show Goodness Gracious Me, these online cultural productions are accessible to varying degrees to multiple audiences. The reliance on humor in Arab American youths’

online cultural productions, therefore, takes up this commonly used mode to work through, adapt, and often assert their particular hybrid positionalities.

In order to understand the context in which Arab American youths' cultural productions are created, it is imperative to situate them within the larger U.S. media production landscape. U.S. television industry logics grapple with and often exclude ethnic markets and topics and themes of interest to ethnic markets. As Madhavi Mallapragada's research on MTV Desi illustrates, U.S. television logics continue their long history of dividing imagined audiences between a mainstream, white, and middle-class segment and a non-mainstream, racialized minority segment, where the former is primarily catered to (2012). Within this context, media texts like The Ed and Moe Show and other Arab American-produced online discourses that use localized frames of references centralize (dis)identifications with mainstream white and immigrant culture. In so doing, they explicitly critique whiteness and Arab American representational tropes and, therefore, do not fit into mainstream television industry logics.

Thus, online media platforms are undeniably one of the most dynamic spaces for self-representational practices among many different communities. The distinction between professional- and amateur-produced media is blurred in online spaces like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and the like, where participatory culture thrives (Burgess and Green, 57). Immigrant and diasporic communities from numerous cultural and national contexts are documented as having particularly robust online activities (Bernal; Diamandaki; Jacob; Mallapragada; Panagakos and Horst; Van Den Bos and Nell). Arab Americans are no exception; Arab American (prod)users of various ages, genders, and backgrounds have taken to online platforms to create and disseminate videos, vlogs, blogs, photos, and other media that take up topics concerning their identities and communities. Internet memes as ubiquitously-found online phenomenon offer a cultural template

from which mainstream humor formats can be adapted, localized, and repurposed for Arab American youths' purposes. Moreover, Internet memes are an easily accessible form of expression for Arab American youth through which they can insert their ideas into a realm of the public sphere. In a sense Arab American youths' online cultural productions are examples of "program-format adaptations," as they mimic and adopt various, commonly-used parody formats (*MTV Cribs*, spoof videos, image-based memes, etc.) (Kraidy 2005). Arab American youths' online cultural productions exemplify adaptations to local parameters and tastes that are not being fulfilled by mainstream cable and network media.

This chapter works to situate these hybridized self-representations both within, and speaking toward, the larger schema of Arab American media representations.¹⁸ Ultimately, what comes to bear is an example of how Arab Americans youth in Arab Detroit negotiate their identities through complex "dualities of stance" with and against mainstream white culture and immigrant culture through the use of online cultural production (Kraidy 2010). Therefore, this chapter focuses specifically on the use of Internet memes as a self-representational strategy and on the central use of humor in the online cultural production of young Arab Americans in Arab Detroit. This chapter takes up two specific examples. The first section analyzes YouTube videos, including another video from the creators of The Ed and Moe Show, as sites where Arab

¹⁸ As I explored in previous chapters, dominant modes of Arab American representation and discourses that are found in mainstream media superficially engage with the complexities of being Arab American post-9/11. Though this lack of complex engagement began well before 9/11, it was deeply exacerbated in the event's aftermath. Binary-like depictions dominate contemporary mainstream media by showing Arab Americans as worthy of both sympathies and surveillance. These types of depictions use discursive modes of containment to generate a sense of necessity in denying Arab Americans political and cultural capital and in passing governmental policies that target Arab and Muslim Americans' civil rights. Arab American youths' online cultural production carves out an imperative space for varying, critical voices to have an outlet.

American youth critique whiteness and racial hierarchies through a humorous mode. The second section looks at the context of an Arab American social-media sphere, where hyperlocalized, specific knowledge is circulated via memes and hashtags. The YouTube videos more explicitly challenge dominant discourses of Arab Americans than the memes analyzed from the Arab American social-media sphere, as they take on a number of issues directly related to Arab American placement within U.S. social and cultural schema. However, this is not to say that the Arab American social-media lacks potency; on the contrary, for the specific knowledges circulated via image and hashtag memes affords Arab Detroit youth the ability to cultivate identity and community formations that speak directly to their particular lived experiences. Together, these two sections illustrate how Arab American youth from Arab Detroit are taking to Internet and social media platforms to insert themselves and their ideas, critiques, and particular modes of humor into public discourses; and how through this outlet their identity boundary work emphasizes hybridized (dis)identifications with both mainstream white culture and immigrant culture.

YouTube Memes

A segment from a YouTube video titled “Sh*t Arabs in Dearborn Do” pans the outside of Fordson High School, a public high school in Dearborn, MI known for its large (over 90%) Arab American student population. The next shot features a young man dressed up in a button-down collared shirt and khakis standing in front of a chalkboard, mimicking a school teacher. He begins roll call and quickly gets flustered after repeating the same or similar names for different students: “Ali Ali? Ali Ahmed? Ahmed Ali? Muhammad Ali? Muhammad Bazy? Muhammad Bazzi with an I? Muhammad Bazzie with an I E?...” Poking fun at the perceived redundancy of

Arab American students' names, this YouTube video appropriates the "Shit [Fill-in-the-blank with a specific group of people] Do/Say" meme that was widely circulated throughout 2012. The premise of this meme, which spawns from the YouTube video "Shit Girls Say Episode 1" uploaded on December 12, 2011, is to point out cliché or stereotypical aspects of whichever group is being focused upon in each video. "Sh*t Arabs in Dearborn Do" takes on the form of this popular meme and uses it to mock life for Arab Americans in Dearborn. While this video is the only example of the appropriation of the "Shit People Say" meme that is specific to Dearborn, a large amount of "Shit People Say" memes take on the "shit" Arab Dads, "Hijabis," Muslims, Arab guys, etc. say or do.

In the same vein as the mimicry of this popular meme, other YouTube videos appropriate popular television shows by parodying them in the "style" of a particular ethnic community. In this section, I specifically analyze the comedic YouTube video channel "Eatsnax," one of the most viewed and dynamic Dearborn-centric YouTube video channels. Videos like "Sh*t Arabs in Dearborn Do" and those found on the "Eatsnax" video channel exemplify how the community of Arab Detroit youth uses humor through online memes and parodies to reproduce, realign, and critique mainstream media messages. Critiques of consumerist culture, whiteness, and racial hierarchies — critiques that could not work within mainstream media logic, because of its commitment to serve primarily white, middle class audiences — are especially prominent and find an outlet within this online platform. These critiques reveal moments of strong (dis)identification with mainstream white culture and an upholding of difference as portrayed by Arab American immigrant culture. What comes to bare in this section is how YouTube-based memes facilitate the creation of a complex mode of representing Arab Americanness as a hybridized positionality that situates itself within and against mainstream, white culture and

immigrant culture. This complex mode of representing Arab Americanness plays with parody formats and narratives to deliver an ambiguous conception of what it means to be Arab American in a post-9/11 context.

Collectively, the “Eatsnax” YouTube channel, which features over 60 videos comedically depicting Arab American life in Dearborn, MI, has close to 3 million views and continues to serve as a dynamic forum for discussion in each video’s comments section. The “Eatsnax” YouTube channel is a project of Mike Eshaq, an Arab American filmmaker and comedian from Dearborn, and several local actors. Along with “Arab American-style” spoofs of popular MTV shows like Cribs, Made, and Next, the comedy web series The Ed and Moe Show is the mainstay production of the “Eatsnax” video channel. The Ed and Moe Show consists of ten short, five to fifteen minute webisodes that follow the seemingly unlikely duo of Ed, a 20-something white man, and Moe (short for Mohammed), a 20-something Arab American man. The series was created as a reaction to the widely-viewed (close to one million views) “Eatsnax” video “CRIBS-Arab American Style” that spoofed MTV Cribs, a popular early to mid-2000s MTV franchise reality television series that features tours of mansions and properties owned by celebrities and athletes (Figure 1).



Figure 5 <http://www.youtube.org/watch?v=JqqKtqdrh7g>

The “Cribs - Arab American Style” video was uploaded to YouTube in July 2009. Through the use of parodic touchstones, many of the humorous qualities of this video stem from countering the expectations set by the original version. Through various ways of signifying difference, the hybridized representation of Arab American life found in “Cribs – Arab American Style” challenges the representational expectations of consumerism and white culture set by MTV Cribs. The precedent laid by MTV Cribs is to expose a slice of exceptional celebrity home life that equates material wealth with success. While “Cribs - Arab American Style” also conveys “exceptionalism,” it is a different type of exception—one that highlights cultural and ethnic difference. It is this exceptional difference that is then used to provide the fodder needed to counter the expectations of the original format. Parcel to the original MTV Cribs format is the context of lifestyle marketing that so heavily imbues the foundation for MTV’s programming.

MTV Cribs, in addition to other MTV-aired reality programs since 2000, such as My Super Sweet 16 (2005-2008), Laguna Beach (2004-2006), The Hills (2006-2010), and other shows that explicitly fetishize material wealth, sells a consumerist-based lifestyle through the markers of gender, race, and class (Smith and Beal, 106). Central to the ideological work of MTV Cribs is meritocracy, class mobility, and an individual's obtainment of wealth and class through their success, as opposed to "coming from old money." These central ideologies of MTV Cribs makes it an ideal text for "Eatsnax" to parody, because the show's representations of mainstream U.S. culture closely align with the successful, assimilated immigrant narrative of social and class mobility.

"Cribs - Arab American Style" opens with an edited version of the original MTV Cribs title sequence that features a "MTZ"¹⁹ Cribs logo over a flashing blue and white background of architectural blueprints. This spoof version of the title sequence contains the insertion of the words "Arab - American Style" below the Cribs logo. In addition to using the same title sequence, the audio and editing styles of "Cribs - Arab American Style" also replicates those found on MTV Cribs. Immediately following the title sequence's visuals and audio, audio snippets from the song "E.I." by the popular early 2000s African American hip-hop artist Nelly introduce the setting and property that is about to be toured. The use of the song "E.I." by Nelly plays off of tropes from MTV Cribs, for this song and other similar hip hop singles from this era are often used on the original show as background music and sound effects. The opening editing style also mimics that of MTV Cribs through the use of quick jump cuts that go from long, establishing shots to up-close details of a home's exterior. On the original MTV Cribs, the

¹⁹. Any audible or visual gesture to MTV is replaced with "MTZ" in "Cribs - Arab American-Style." Presumably, this was done to avoid legal repercussions of using MTV in a non-MTV production.

subject of these opening shots is the home to be toured and any particularly impressive exterior features of it. The standard establishing shot is often wide and from a low angle, accenting the immensity of the home being toured. After the establishing shot, the camera hones in on various exterior details of the home and property that are markers of upper-class status and consumerism. Common markers from MTV Cribs include glistening infinity pools, well-manicured landscaping, impressive views, basketball courts, and expensive cars. After the initial establishing shot, the close-ups of various exterior details are framed by subtitle work displaying specific real estate features of the home, including square footage and the number of bedrooms and bathrooms. Quantitative specifics of the home overlay visual and audio signifiers of wealth, class and cultural capital to convey an ideal presentation of a domestic, materialistic lifestyle.

The comedic qualities of “Cribs -Arab American Style” version of this opening sequence stem from the differences between what is portrayed and what is expected. The precedent of MTV Cribs sets the expectation of seeing the aforementioned markers of wealth and highbrow taste in some variation. The “Cribs - Arab American Style” version’s establishing shots feature a two-story Sears craftsman home with white paneling and a front porch. The home is framed by two similarly sized single-family homes on either side. The mid-to-early Sears craftsman home type is a common feature of the residential architecture in East Dearborn. With knowledge of the Dearborn and Detroit area, one could easily place the location of this home within the central to eastside residential neighborhoods of Dearborn. The following series of quick shots zooms in on an ADT home security sign in the front yard, a simple outdoor table set, and the front facade of the home. Framing these shots is a CGI screen with a flashing blueprint background and the details of the home: 1500 square feet, 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms. The framing of a modest single-family home with the same markers used to introduce excessively large homes sets the tone from

which to understand the following differences between what is portrayed (“Arab American-style” affluence) and what is expected (U.S. mainstream affluence).

A series of close-ups showing parts of a red car, a water hose, and a man’s feet wearing socks and sandals follow the opening sequence. A long shot pulls back and reveals the setting from where the following close-ups came. A young man holding a water-spouting hose stands next to the red car in the driveway of the home. With a foolish grin and thick accent, the man addresses the camera and welcomes the obviously staged interruption of washing the car; he greets the camera, “Oh! Hey! MTZ Cribs! Welcome to my house. I’m Mohamad. How are you? Come on (sic) here. Let me show you.” Mohamad, a young Arab American man looks exceedingly happy to be welcoming the MTZ Cribs production crew to his home. The juxtaposition between the expected self-presentation of the person greeting viewers on MTV Cribs and our “Cribs - Arab American Style” greeter Mohamad visually and bodily demarcates differences in class. As opposed to being greeted by a well-manicured, often tall, athletically-built, and designer-doting celebrity, we find Mohamad, who is slightly overweight, wearing socks with sandals and a baggy polo shirt, and greets viewers with a very strong, often hard to understand accent. Immediately, “Cribs – Arab American Style” provides a representation of Arab American culture as portrayed by the Mohamad character. Through Mohamad’s physicality, clothing, and speech, this representation connotes a sense of obliviousness to cultural markers of wealth and class, in spite of an apparently strong desire to convey such cultural markers. This introduction to Mohamad, and the ways his physical embodiment of otherness stands against expectations set forth by MTV Cribs celebrities and athletes, is a primary way “Cribs - Arab American Style” sets up the series of representations of difference conveyed throughout the video.

After the opening series of fast cuts of the home and its exterior, Mohamad begins the tour without hesitation by waving the camera towards his home. He starts by showing off his car. Following a series of long shots and close-ups that feature the Ford Mustang's horse symbol on the car's wheels, a Michigan license plate, and the 5.0 numbers on the back, which denotes the car's power and top speed abilities, Mohamad proudly leans on the car and exclaims, "This Mustang they say is like pony! But me it's more like cat. It purrs." He draws out the purr and continues, "This car I bought it [inaudible] '93! Droppy top!" The next shots show Mohamad sitting in the driver's seat of the Mustang. Comedically surrounded by bright yellow, tree-shaped air fresheners, Mohamad displays the car roof mechanically being put down, "Look what I mean when I said the '93 droppy top." As the roof drops back, one of the air fresheners that was dangling falls from the roof. Showing off a tooth-bearing grin, Mohamad assures viewers, "Oh! That's not a problem, my friend. If I drop one I have one here. I have one here. There. Here. Here. Even when I put the hand on the sticky shift, I have a three here." At the utterance of each "there" or "here," the camera jumps to close-up shots of each specific air freshener. This first segment with the protagonist Mohamad and his '93 Mustang parodies the common tropes seen in MTV Cribs in order to emphasize the difference between Mohamad's representation Arab Americaness and the representations of U.S. values and culture as conveyed on MTV Cribs. In the original series, the showcasing of a brand new luxury vehicle is the usual norm. In some ways the pride and sincerity of Moe showing off his car actually runs counter to Cribs and serves to draw further comedic contrast with the show. The Cribs celebrities usually show-off their often numerous cars with nonchalance, making them seem commonplace. The portrayed sincerity and exuberance with which Mohamad brags about his car provides the basis for this parody's humor and construction of Arab American difference. Furthermore, the adoption of

MTV Crib's representation of nonchalant affluence as portrayed in its commonly used car sequence signals to the parody's representation of hybridity. By inserting an adapted car sequence into "Crib – Arab American Style," this cultural text intertwines representations of determined attempts at assimilation with the established MTV Cribs format that emphasizes mainstream, consumerist culture and values. Yet, the "sincerity" with which the representations of immigrant assimilation are portrayed is complicated through the use of parody and humor.

As exemplified in its opening sequences, the "Cribs - Arab American Style" video plays between both specific cultural knowledge of being Arab American in Dearborn and more accessible mainstream comedic, parodic tropes. Self-deprecating humor, which is especially embodied and represented by the Mohamad character, combines with the mocking of U.S. dominant values and representations of white culture to present an Arab Detroit-specific example of how irony and satire in a post-9/11 context are used. The combination of societal critique and self-deprecation creates a space of cultural production that both challenges and utilizes dominant portrayals of Arab Americans, which ultimately exhibits a hybridized representation of Arab Americaness. In his book Punchlines: The Case for Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Humor, Leon Rappoport describes the ambiguities and inherent polysemy imbued in contemporary ethnic comedy:

...depending on their context, jokes and comedy routines involving minorities can have different meanings at different times for different audiences. At the negative extreme, they may be taken as expressions of prejudice encouraging people to accept dehumanizing stereotypes. Yet in contemporary society, one is equally or more likely to encounter various forms of humor that ridicule abusive stereotypes (2).

The collection of “Eatsnax” YouTube videos, along with most other online productions created by Arab Americans, oscillates between these two extremes by invoking Arab stereotypes while simultaneously critiquing them. This oscillation and invoking of humor presents a hybridized representation of Arab American culture in Arab Detroit that highlights unease and disorientation as well as contempt in operating within a post-9/11 context. I argue that using humor to engage and express this multi-modality of living within the contentious environment of post-9/11 affords Arab American youth the ability to work through the complexities of their lived experiences.

The “spoof” or parody genre, which is a common type of comedic short video found on YouTube, further emphasizes the ambiguities of hybridized cultural texts. Parodic modes of humor use “dualities of stance,” which allow the actors to distance themselves from the parodied, while simultaneously embodying it. Yet, while a distancing can occur, “the embodiment entailed may result in leakages of voice and ambivalences of stance” (Chun and Walters, 254).

Mohamad’s character is constructed as jovial, foolish, and eager to abide by U.S. consumerist ideology to convey his and his family’s assimilability. Mohamad’s portrayal of Arab Americanness is constructed as non-threatening, albeit at times confusing (as seen in moments of dissonance between Mohamad and the white production team) to U.S. mainstream culture. Furthermore, this construction signifies Arab Americans to be distanced from white culture/media representations. However, the parodic form of this text allows a more complex construction/interpretation to occur, as we see in the ways this video actively mocks representations of mainstream white culture and consumer culture. A distancing and embodiment of stereotypes simultaneously occurs and results in (dis)identifications with both mainstream white culture and immigrant culture. It is in this space of (dis)identification and hybridity where

the comedy often arises. This results in an ambiguity in the representation of Arab Americanness through its relation to white characters found in “Cribs – Arab American style.”

Another major aspect of how this parody functions in terms of representing Arab American hybridity is the manner in which it socially and culturally situates Arab Americans within racial and ethnic hierarchies and against representations of whiteness. In addition to creating humor-filled tensions between Mohamad’s sincerity in showcasing markers of middle class, and the anticipated markers of high class found on MTV Cribs, the explicit miscommunication between Mohamad and the white production crew also constructs Arab Americans in relation to white representations. Four white characters are presented: the producer, camera operator, sound professional, and “Ed,” Mohamad’s best friend. Each functions to represent Arab Americanness in the ways they relate to Mohamad and his family. While the instances in which Mohamad interacts with these white characters often create comedic moments based on their inability to communicate with each other, these white characters—especially the production crew—are not framed as particularly “superior” to Mohamad. Instead, they are constructed as ignorant, clueless, and unaware of cultures and ideas that fall outside of their own. While “Cribs - Arab American Style” uses common, often demoralizing tropes to other Mohamad and his family, the white characters with whom they interact are not without affront.

The production crew, which consists of two men, the producer and camera operator, and one woman, the sound professional, collectively operate as embodiments of mainstream white culture and the imagined audience of MTV/Z Cribs. The breaking down of the fourth wall is a common trope of MTV Cribs, yet rarely is the production crew visible, let alone seen speaking directly to the protagonist/owner of the property being toured. Our first introduction to the producer is when Mohamad, after dancing to Arabic music being played from his car stereo,

realizes he has misrepresented himself and says, “Stop! Turn off.” Mohamad approaches a white man, who is revealed as “Dane Starkwether”/ MTZ Cribs Producer on the lower-third title work, outside the frame, “Bro, you see this part? I shake-shake booming” (in reference to his dancing). Dane the Producer leans his head down and listens intently as Mohamad works through his pronunciations: “Yeah, that was great, it was...” Mohamad responds, “No! Crumble! Throw!” Mohamad extends his arm with his pinky finger jutting out towards Dane; he says, “Pinky swear. No more.” Dane laughs awkwardly and connects his own pinky finger to Mohamad’s (Figure 2). Content with their “pinky swear” agreement, Mohamad smiles, nods, and walks out of the frame. Dane is left by himself, smiling sheepishly. A voice, presumably from the cameraman, outside the frame asks, “What did he say?” Dane stares into the camera looking quizzically and responds, “I have no idea. It’s no different. I don’t understand half the rappers we do.” The video cuts to a clip from an actual MTV Cribs episode featuring rappers Method Man and Red Man from the rap group the Wu-Tang Clan introducing viewers to their home. The video cuts back to the front lawn of Mohamad’s home. A close-up of Mohamad’s face shows him looking back toward Dane; he asks, “Something wrong?” Off camera, Dane replies, “No. No. Everything’s great. Yeah. Yeah. We’re ready for the next segment.” Hesitantly, Mohamad agrees and suggests they now enter his home.



Figure 6 "Pink Swear" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqqKtqdrh7g>

These moments of interaction between Dane, the producer, and Mohamad reveal a dissonance in their ability to understand each other. Dane's reactions to Mohamad construct Mohamad as incomprehensible and child-like. Furthermore, showing Dane on screen and interacting with Mohamad and his crew establishes the necessity in bringing in a white tour guide to make this setting accessible to multiple audiences. Mohamad and Dane's interactions humorously represent generally perceived miscommunication and misunderstandings between Arab American and White American culture. This need for a white tour guide is made further apparent through the clip of the black rappers Method Man and Red Man. The use of this clip constructs Arab American difference as partly rooted in an association with blackness and general otherness. Through this association, the necessity of a white tour guide is further enforced. The producer, Dane, along with his crew of a cameraman and a sound woman, become the stand-ins of white culture and play the role of guiding imagined audiences. These scenes

between Mohamad and the white camera crew narratively represent flows of hybridity and the subsequent dissonance that occurs within them.

Other moments that feature Dane and his crew work in similar narrative fashion to the “pinky swear” scene. For instance, as the crew enters Mohamad’s home, the threesome is seen shuffling through the small back entrance. Muffled sounds indicating their difficulty getting through the door with their equipment are overheard (this signals the modesty of Mohamad’s family home). Off camera, Mohamad, who is in the house, yells, “Take off your shoes!” As a close-up of the sound woman’s confused face is shown, Dane responds, “Excuse me?” Mohamad again yells, “Take off your shoes!” The sound woman stutters in disbelief, “I’m in, I’m in bare feet.” Immediately, Mohamad responds, “TAKE IT OFF!” Taken aback, the three members of the crew begin shuffling off their shoes. A few moments later, after a series of moving, quick edited shots reveal the interior living room as a voice from upstairs yelling “Mohamad!” interrupts Mohamad’s introduction to the inside of his home. A visibly annoyed and embarrassed Mohamad walks to the bottom of the stairs leading up to the second floor. Mohamad begins to engage in a conversation/argument in Arabic with his mother who is adamant that no one enter the living room. Mohamad turns away from yelling up to his mother and sheepishly smiles at the camera. From the direction of upstairs, and presumably from his mother, shoes begin to fly and repeatedly hit Mohamad in the head and face. Mohamad turns back towards the stairs and begins to yell up to his mother in Arabic: “Mom I already told you nobody is sitting on the couches. You’re embarrassing us in front of all of these people. They want to put this on American television. You’re embarrassing me. I don’t know how to tell them to erase it! Millions of people will see you hitting me with the sandal!” After his tirade, Mohamad slowly turns back toward the camera taking a breath and returning to his big grin. Not more than a moment goes by and

another sandal flies down from upstairs and hits Mohamad on the head. Letting go of attempts to save face, Mohamad immediately turns toward the stairs and yells, “Mom! I told you to stop!” Exasperated, Mohamad exclaims, “Ok! That’s it! No more!” The comedic strife between Mohamad and his unseen mother signals to Mohamad’s hybrid positionality as a middle man between containing his mother’s eccentric otherness and appealing to the white production crew’s sense of normalcy. The following interaction between Mohamad and Dane further reveal how this narrative moment situates the Mohamad character as a hybrid subject.

The next shot shows the production crew being led into the dining room by Mohammad. He begins, “I have a question for you. You see this part. The sandal!” Dane, again quite clueless and not completely understanding, responds, “The sandal? Yes. Yes. You got hit.” Mohamad begins making gestures with his hand crossing his chest. After confusion over what Mohamad is trying to convey, Dane says slowly, “Edit it out.” In broken English Mohammad repeats exaggeratedly, “Eddin in ohut?” Dane and Mohamad go back and forth multiple times trying to understand what the other is saying. They are seen getting visibly frustrated with each other. Finally, it seems Dane understands Mohamad’s desire to edit out the argument with his mother from the final cut of the house tour. This “edit it out” moment carries on throughout the rest of the skit, where we see other moments when Mohamad asks Dane to edit something out. These moments illustrate Mohamad’s foreignness/otherness, Dane and Mohamad’s inability to understand each other, and Mohamad’s attempts to save face from presenting himself and his family as being too different. Through this series of shots, a boundary is drawn between Mohamad’s representation of Arab American culture and the production crew’s representation of whiteness.

The introduction of Mohamad's white neighbor and best friend Ed, who is the only white person seen as an insider to Mohamad and his family's dynamic, adds to the complexity of how whiteness and Arab Americaness are constructed and represented on "Cribs." By being constructed as both an insider and outsider to the Arab American space of the garage recreational area, Ed's presence further obscures the clear racial and ethnic hierarchy being presented on the show. After the tour of Mohamad's family home, Mohamad escorts the production crew towards the back of the property where a standalone garage sits. As the garage door starts to open, wafts of smoke escape. The producer Dane turns towards the camera, "Ok, I think the garage is on fire, but he's saying it's okay. Ugh, there's a lot of smoke." Laughs and chatter begins to be heard from inside the garage. Once the garage door is fully lifted, a group of people sitting around a card table and television, relaxing and smoking hookah is seen.

Mohamad begins introducing each of the people found in the garage, which includes an assortment of his friends, brothers, cousins, sister, and grandmother. Mohamad then comes to Ed, a young man sitting next to his grandmother playing video games and the only non-Arab person in the garage (aside from the production crew). Mohamad enthusiastically introduces him to viewers, "This guy here is my neighbor. His name Ed! Ed play with my grandmother and she like him because he's neighbor." Making the comment that Ed is liked by his grandmother is a particularly keen framing strategy of how Ed is a white man, neighbor, and friend to Mohamad and his family. The framing is successful because, immediately preceding Ed's introduction, there was a segment showing Mohamad's grandmother having an altercation with Dane. Mohamad's grandmother is portrayed as particularly ornery and untrusting toward Dane and the production crew. Her face is blurred, because, as the segment with Dane shows, she refused to sign the release form and chased Dane away at the suggestion that she should. Mohamad's

grandmother comes to stand-in for the extreme stereotype of a skeptical, unassimilated Arab American. Therefore, her interactions with the white characters communicate and represent Arab Americaness in this sketch as they relate to the U.S. racial and ethnic hierarchies that are presented.

While Dane presents an embodiment of buttoned-up, mainstream, middle-to-upper class whiteness, Ed, the white neighbor, presents a different embodiment of whiteness that more easily blends in with Mohamad and his family. This approval becomes obvious as segments showing the stark contrast between the grandmother's fondness for Ed and disdain for Dane are shown one right after the other. Furthermore, as a "neighbor," Ed is demarcated as being within the same class as Mohamad and his family. In the final scene of "Cribb" the contrast between Ed's and Dane's different forms of whiteness, and cultural tastes, also becomes apparent. The pinnacle of Mohamad's quest to convey his and his family's assimilation to U.S. mainstream culture, especially consumerist culture, comes at the very end of the video, when his uncle who left early promising to bring a surprise, returns in a large SUV. The uncle steps out of the large car and immediately smiles to Mohamad and points to his car tires, "22s!," referencing the 22-inch tire rims. Happy and moved by the rap music playing from the vehicle, Mohamad starts to dance and is joined by his uncle, and all of the other family and friends, even his grandmother. Special attention is given to "Ed," the only white friend present, and his sincere attempts at performing blackness through an attempt at break-dancing. Mohamad pulls Dane into the middle of his dancing friends and family and shakes his sides and arms to encourage him to participate. The white producer uncomfortably stands off to the side while everyone forms a Dabke line and dances around him and the SUV. Ululation, a common vocal sound made in Arabic culture, mostly by women, during dances and celebrations, overlays the conversation and music, which

further constructs this as a space and moment that differentiates Dane from Mohamad and his family's Arab Americanness.

The camera closes in on Dane as he says, presumably to the cameraperson, "We are editing this out." Mohamad grabs the producer's arm and says, "Hey! YOU'RE NOT EDITING... ONLY I edit it out." The producer unconvincingly smiles and nods in agreement, gesturing to his ability to ultimately make the decision. Mohamad attempts to retain his say in his own portrayal through making the producer "pinky swear" to not edit it out. Again, Mohamad's inappropriate use of a childish form of agreement reveals the inadequacy of his attempts to show assimilation. Mohamad and Dane's power struggle gestures to the larger political, and cultural struggle between dominant white culture and Arab American culture. As these scenes featuring white characters convey, "Cribs" simultaneously reinforces Arab and immigrant stereotypes and reinforces the idea that Arab Americans are somehow different and unassimilated. Yet, it also disrupts racial and ethnic hierarchies by constructing white characters as clueless and outside the realm of authenticity, therefore lacking cultural capital in this context. This mode of representing Arab Americanness through its mocking of whiteness constructs a strong critique of dominant U.S. culture.

It is important to emphasize the strong attempts by Mohamad to convey to viewers his and his family's assimilation as central to the ethnic comedy demonstrated in this video. Major comedic moments arise from the failed attempts at conveying assimilability. While in the garage with his friends and family, Mohamad shows viewers a variety of items in an attempt to convey their middle class status. At the end of this garage tour, Mohamad gets close to the camera to gesture to one final item: "We have one more very, very big thing..." In the editing style of MTV Cribs, the camera cuts and hones in on two small American flags on top of the television.

Mohamad gestures to the flags and waves his hands in emphasis, “God bless the America!” Off camera someone says in Arabic (translated to English by the subtitles) “Thank God you said that. Now they will think we are Americans.” The music abruptly stops, and Mohamad responds to the off-camera voice in Arabic “Shut up, man! You just embarrassed us now!” Mohamad turns slowly to the camera, standing very closely to the lens and whispers in broken English, “Edit it out.”

Persona cultivation that relies on assimilation to dominant U.S. culture is central to the Mohamad character’s goals of depicting Arab American life in Dearborn. The pushback he encounters from the production crew and his family produces the fodder for the comedic irony of “Cribs – Arab American Style.” A primary way that the humor of “Cribs - Arab American Style” is derived comes from the tensions that results from Mohamad and his family’s failed attempts to uphold the definition of success as endorsed by MTV Cribs. Mohamad relentlessly works to portray a certain image of his life, home, and family that abides by dominant U.S. values, i.e., materialism, consumer culture, blind patriotism, etc. Mohamad attempts to convey his family as truly assimilated and fully entrenched in a dominant upper middle class lifestyle, but the otherness of his family emerges, contradicting his presentation. Mohamad himself fails to convey the exuberant standards of materialism and consumerism, all the while unbeknownst to him. He shows off middle class commodities, for example, his 1993 Mustang, a kitchen without appliances, an old, nonoperational boom box, and an automatic garage door opener in the same boastful mode celebrities and athletes on MTV Cribs showcase their high-class living. It is Mohamad’s failure to convincingly portray assimilation to middle-class and white culture from which much of the comedy and critique derives. Arab American difference is further conveyed by the explicit othering that occurs by introducing unassimilated Arab American characters, and

white characters as “tour guides,” creating a visual and narrativized topography of Arab American assimilability. Through the characters of Mohamad and his family and the production crew a boundary between Arab American/ immigrant culture and white/ mainstream culture is drawn, albeit the boundary is messy and at moments complicated, especially through the character of Mohamad’s white friend Ed.

The “messiness” of Mohamad and his family’s representation of Arab Americanness through this parody format connotes the messiness of hybridity and demonstrates how this YouTube video exemplifies an Arab American hybrid text. Marwan Kraidy uses the term dialogism to describe Lebanese Maronite youths’ identification with “Arab” and “Western” cultures simultaneously (2005). This is not to construct a dichotomy between “Western” and “Arab” cultures, but rather a conception of a “double-voiced” positionality and a “dualities of stance” (2005). “Cribs – Arab American style” uses the parody format and humor through character conflict as a mode to express and represent the hybridity of Arab American youth culture. Within this Arab American youth dialogism as represented in “Cribs – Arab American style,” we see how humor and parody are used a modes by which to reject and accept various aspects of white, mainstream and immigrant cultures, as represented by the production crew and Mohamad’s family, respectively.

Arab American Social-Media Sphere

In addition to YouTube videos, a variety of image and hashtag memes created by Arab American youth from Arab Detroit circulate on the Internet, including Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr and various blogs. These social media-based conversations are widespread across a

variety of social-networking platforms and generate an insiders' space of cultural production.²⁰ While the YouTube videos by Arab American youth also often use culture-specific knowledge that is particular to Arab Detroit, the brevity of tweets, hashtags, image captions (which are delivered through tweets and hashtags), and mainstream meme-based images allow for shorter and more nuanced and very specific signifiers of Arab Detroit and Arab American youth cultural knowledge. The specificity of these Arab Detroit-centered image and hashtag memes creates a discursive space that can primarily appeal to Arab American youth, yet still be accessible to non-Arab American users (who are at least familiar with meme culture). André Brock's research of Black Twitter relates to this point as it iterates the importance of Black Americans' prolific social media usage: "...a tweet's content coupled with a topical hashtag, when leavened with cultural commonplaces, could enrich communal bonds between networked Twitter users; this happens regardless of cultural affiliation" (2012). Brock points out how "invention, delivery, ritual, and audience participation" are all aspects of memetic discourse that especially give credence to ethnic community formations online (2012). Similarly, the Arab Detroit social-media sphere uses hyperlocal knowledge to engage Arab American users and subsequently develop an online public community space. The Arab American social-media sphere offers another space in which Arab American youth express and disseminate (dis)identifications with the cultures and worlds they negotiate, further articulating and representing their hybrid positionalities.

²⁰. The origin of these hashtag conversations and images is convoluted due to the strong interconnectivity between these sites and the ways Twitterers' original usage of the hashtag, a user-driven curatorial device to denote meta conversations and/ or a contextualizing, personalized modifier (Brock, 2012), has seeped into a standard convention of social media usage. Hence, I find "social-media sphere" to be a better phrase to use that accurately captures the sites of online Arab American youth culture.

The specificity, hypermemetic logic, cultural penetrability, and speed of Arab American social-media sphere's image and hashtag memes make them a potent ideological force; they afford Arab American youth the potential to connect and cultivate a sense of shared identity and community (Shifman, 2013). Central to the memes analyzed in this section are Arab American youths' dynamic processes of identification and disidentification with perceptions of their identity as domestic others.²¹ Similar to the "Eatsnax" videos, Arab Detroit memes use and critique, identify and disidentify with Arab American stereotypes, producing similar, albeit nuanced representations. These processes of (dis)identification via the cultivation of a hyper-localized, youth culture-driven Arab American social-media sphere further convey how Arab Detroit youth redefine "Arab Americanness" in online spaces. Similar to the expressions of hybridity found in "Cribs – Arab American style", central to Arab American youth-produced online memes are representations and expressions of an intricate dialogic stance that neither fully identify or disidentify with either Arab immigrant culture or white, mainstream U.S. culture. These expressions of hybrid Arab Americanness via an Arab American social-media sphere further exemplifies how Arab Detroit youth actively work to reclaim the discourses surrounding their Arab American identity. Important to note, however, is how these affordances are inevitably limited in scope and reach. Nonetheless, in the context of post-9/11 and the high-level surveillance of and attempts to control Arab Americans and Arab immigrants and the discourses about them, the Arab American social-media sphere, with its qualities of specific, hyperlocalized knowledges and hypermemetic logic, is a potent realm of Arab American youth-driven identity

²¹. See Leppänen et al., 2014 for more on processes of identification and disidentification through social media.

and community formations. This is true even when these representations convey complex hybrid positionalities.

A number of different Twitter accounts and Facebook group pages are the primary outlets to circulate Arab Detroit-centric memes. Examples from Twitter accounts include:

@DbrnProblems, @dearbornwonka, @DPSSmack, @DbrnGrlProblems, and

@FordsonProblems. From Facebook, some examples of pages that circulate Arab Detroit memes include: “UM-Dearborn Memes,” “Dearborn Memes,” and “Fordson Memes.” While there are a wide variety of potential Arab Detroit memes found on Facebook and Twitter to explore, I focus on two Twitter accounts primarily — @dearbornwonka and @DbrnGrlProblems and the various images and hashtags they circulate.

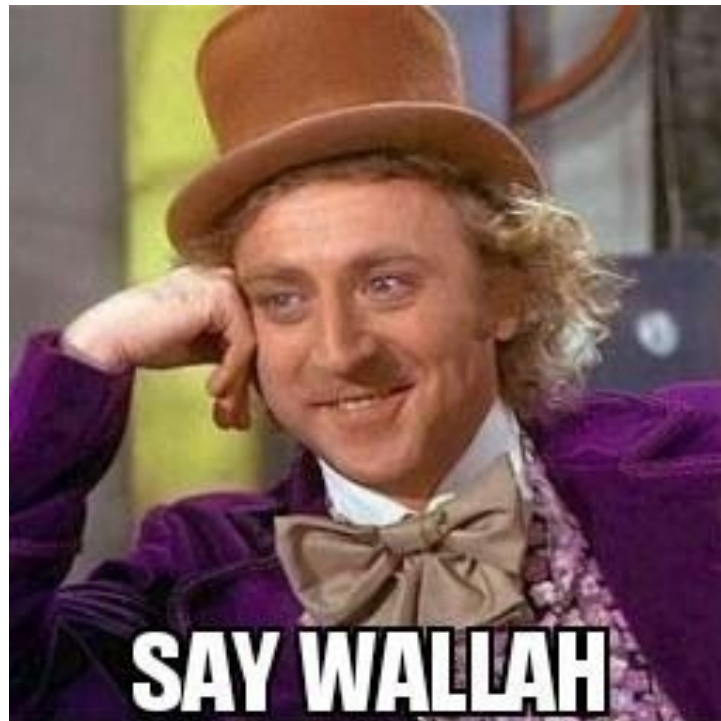
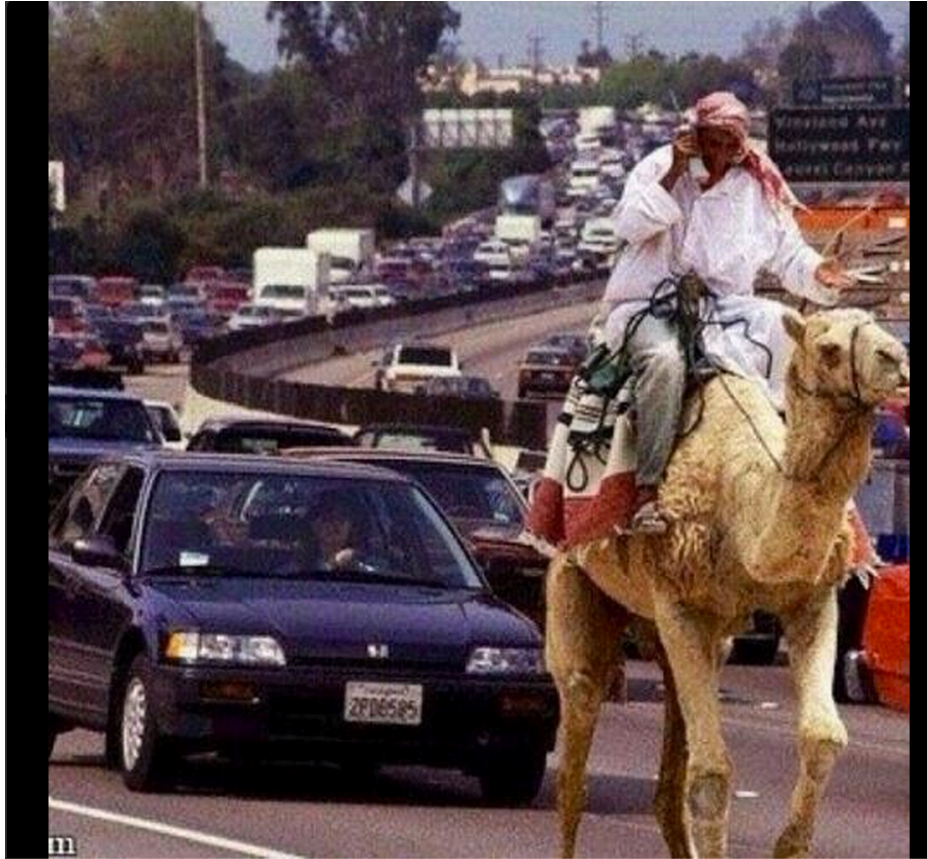


Figure 7 "Dearborn Wonka" <http://twitter.com/dearbornwonka>

The image-based meme named the “Condescending Wonka” uses a still of the actor Gene Wilder as the fictional character Willy Wonka from the 1971 film Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory with his arm propping up his head as he smiles and looks off towards the right side of the frame. The context of this image comes from a scene in Willy Wonka where Wonka shows off a contraption to the recipients of his “Golden Ticket” competition (a competition where a select number of chocolate bars made in his factory hid a golden ticket that allowed the consumer to gain exclusive entry into his factory). As played by Gene Wilder, the Willy Wonka character is eccentric, quick-witted, sarcastic, and often seen making faces towards other characters in the film. The “Condescending Wonka” meme began its circulation on the Internet in 2010 and continues to take on various versions today. The standard form of the “Condescending Wonka” meme is the still image with bold white text on the top and bottom thirds, with the top text usually asking a question and the bottom third being a reply. Both text statements are framed as if they are being uttered by Wonka. Examples of text from various iterations of this meme include: “You’re only 18 and already engaged? You must be really mature for your age.”; “Oh, you’re an engineer? Please, continue telling me why my career is a waste of time.”; “Oh, you just graduated? That’s nice. I will have the mocha frappuccino.” The visual of a disillusioned expression on Wonka’s face anchors the overlaying text to present an image that creates an imagined interpellated audience who is critiqued by Wonka. The @dearbornwonka Twitter account takes up this adaptable meme template and circulates tweets of images and text using the same mocking, critical tone.

For example, the @dearbornwonka’s avatar uses the standard Wonka image with the text “Say Wallah” at the bottom (Figure 3). “Wallah,” while having a direct translation along the lines of “I promise by God” or “I swear by God,” is an expression used in colloquial Arabic to

convey a sense of disbelief. Using the “Condescending Wonka” meme with “Say Wallah” localizes the meme to function within the cultural framework of Arab Detroit, making it an unsurprising adaptation of the meme. A few commonly repeated themes found on the @dearbornwonka Twitter account include mocking Arab Americans in Arab Detroit, spreading news of Arab World current events, and bemoaning high school life. The Arab American social-media sphere’s commentary on Arab Detroit life often involves a nuanced approach to respectability politics through denouncing and mocking the unassimilated. Meme images found circulated by @dearbornwonka often work to regulate definitions of “Arab Americanness” by calling out the unassimilated, essentially disidentifying with this representation of Arabs/ Arab Americans. An example of one of these memes includes a photograph of an Arab man wearing a long, traditional thob (robe/dress) and keffiyeh head scarf riding a camel while talking on an outdated cellphone. Meanwhile, car traffic behind him is excessively backed up. The @dearbornwonka accompanying text reads, “when people drive 25 mph on ford rd” (Figure 4). The reference to Ford Road uses location-specific knowledge of this road as a major thoroughfare in the Detroit Metro Area and especially Dearborn, where many Arab American-owned businesses are located that display Arabic writing on the facades of their buildings.



Dearborn Wonka @dearbornwonka · 2 Jul 2013

when people drive 25 mph on ford rd

pic.twitter.com/SHiEuwwqFP

Reply Retweet Favorite

Flag media

Figure 8 <http://twitter.com/dearbornwonka>

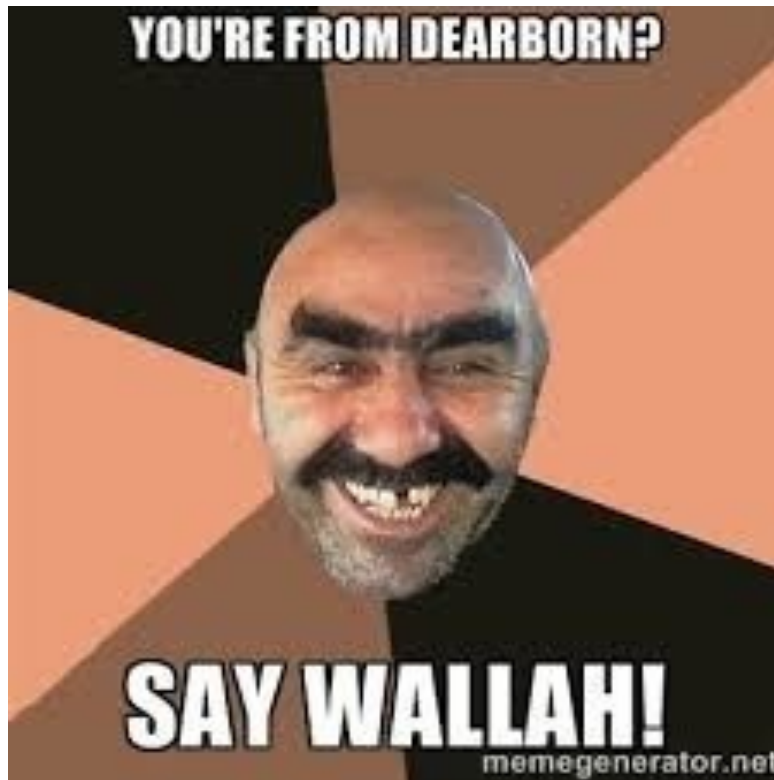


Figure 9 <http://memegenerator.net>

By juxtaposing the image of an Arab man wearing traditional garb riding a camel and talking on a old cellphone with the backdrop image of a sea of cars, this meme utilizes the construction of the backwards Arab as an exacerbated cause to traffic congestion in Dearborn, MI. Such images that regulate and critique the unassimilated, backwards Arab are often tweeted by @dearbonwonka. Another example of this kind of disidentification with the unassimilated Arab is of a meme that mimics the @dearbornwonka avatar. Instead of Gene Wilder as Willy Wonka smiling and posing with the text “Say Wallah” across the bottom, an image of a man’s head against a geometric background with the text “You’re from Dearborn?” at the top of the image and “Say Wallah!” at the bottom can also be found (Figure 5). The man in this meme is bald, has a dark brown unibrow, unkempt facial hair, and a huge grin revealing a missing tooth. With his olive-toned skin and dark brown hair, this photograph signifies a man who can be read

as Arab. By replacing the Willy Wonka image with an unsightly Arab man, yet with the same anchoring phrase “Say Wallah!”, this meme localizes the “Condescending Wonka” meme. Furthermore, the use of this image of an Arab man with markers of backwardness accentuates and ridicules a representation of Arab American unruliness and, consequently, informs a sense of what it means to be a “good”/assimilated Arab American.

In addition to regulating, mocking, and disidentifying with the unassimilated, backwards Arab prototype, high school dating politics and gender roles also come up as central themes of memes circulated by @dearbornwonka and other Dearborn-centric Twitter accounts, such as the previously-noted @DbrnProblems, @dearbornwonka, @DPSSmack, @DbrnGrIProblems, and @FordsonProblems. Self- and intra-community surveillance of what is considered “haram”—most commonly/easily translated as forbidden and sinful—or “halal”—most commonly/easily translated as allowed and permissible—often occurs at multiple personal and structural levels within the Arab Detroit community. This regulation especially occurs within the context of high school youth culture. These regulations translate into the circulation of memes that denounce, question, and mock various behaviors. Within the context of high school, this type of peer-regulation of behaviors is exceedingly pervasive and finds another outlet online for this insider community. Examples of tweets that follow this type of regulating and mocking of behaviors include “Dearborn logic School=gay Gay=haram Haram=hell SCHOOL=HELL” from @dearbornwonka; from @PioneerProblems (which references the Dearborn High School pioneer mascot) “HALAL FOOD? BEST PROM EVER” followed by “can we grind since theres [sic] halal food?”. The first tweet “Dearborn logic School=gay Gay=haram Haram=hell SCHOOL=HELL” follows tautological argumentation to convey a disdain for high school life and framing it as inherently “haram.” Similarly, the other two tweets use the cultural binary of

haram/ halal to frame prom, an event where casual mixing of genders occurs, and “grinding,” sexualized, close-body dancing, as allowed, because “halal” food²² is present. These tweets exemplify how specific knowledges of Arab, Muslim American youth culture take shape online.

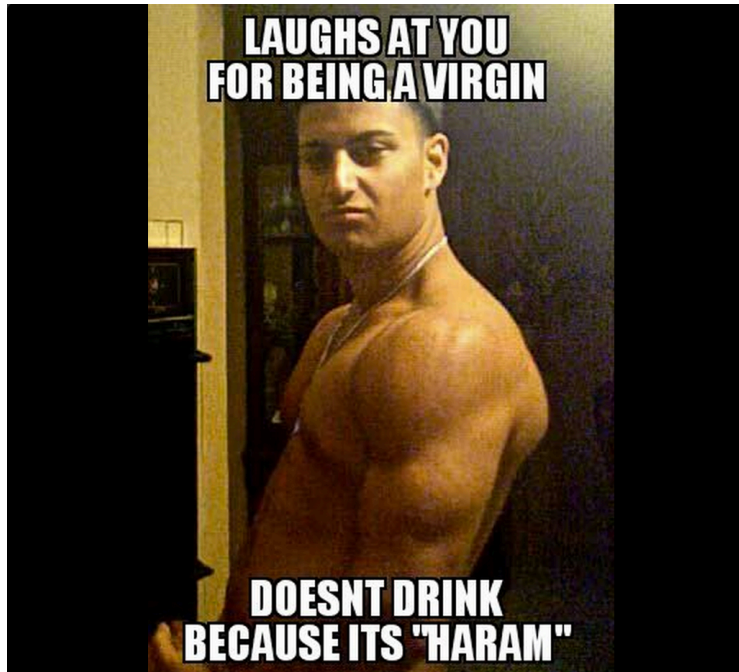
An image meme named “Scumbag Steve” is another example of a mainstream meme appropriated and localized to Arab Detroit youth culture. As described by the website KnowYourMeme.com, a website that curates and collects information about a wide variety of Internet memes, the “Scumbag Steve” meme “is an image macro series featuring a kid with a sideways fitted cap standing in a hallway. The overlaid text generally centers around unethical behavior regarding drugs, partying, and other hedonistic behaviors” (“Scumbag Steve”). The Dearborn version of the “Scumbag Steve” meme features the text “DRINKS” at the top of the image and “BUT ONLY EATS HALAL FOOD” at the bottom (Figure 6). Similar to this image, another meme using the stock photo of a muscular young man from the waist-up wearing only a chain around his neck, flexing his arm, and making a gruff face towards the camera features the text: “Laughs at your for being a virgin. Doesn’t drink because its [sic] ‘haram’” (Figure 7). In a similar vein as the preceding image memes, image memes like these convey the paradoxes and thin lines drawn between “good/halal” and “bad/haram” behavior when attempting to act piously and align with Islamic tenets and at the same time explore the boundaries of social and cultural norms as a teenager. The mocking of such paradoxes, as seen in these memes, is commonly circulated within the youth culture-driven Arab Detroit social-media sphere. The mocking tone of these image memes conveys a sense of ridicule and ultimately regulation of seemingly

²². The term “halal” is used to describe behaviors and objects, and often is used to describe food. Halal food refers to criteria for both what kind of food is permissible and the way the food is prepared. The consumption of halal food is considered an essential Islamic practice. Halal foods do not include pork, blood, alcohol, and any animal killed inhumanely and without Islamic prayer being recited at its slaughter.

contradictory behaviors. Similar to the regulation that occurs in the image memes of the “backwards” Arabs, these memes work to distinguish a particular definition of “Arab Americaness.” In this case of the halal/ haram memes, the mocking tone achieves a disidentification with contradictory behaviors.



Figure 10 <https://www.hsemes.com>



Dearborn Wonka @dearbornwonka · 8 Feb 2013
#TypicalDearbornGuy pic.twitter.com/Tp47nZEc

Reply Retweet Favorite

Flag media

Figure 11 <http://twitter.com/dearbornwonka>

The memes examined thus far mostly speak to the behaviors of young Arab American men, but the behaviors of young Arab American women are also highly scrutinized—likely more so. The stresses of dating, a common trope and lived reality for many while in high school, are a ubiquitous topic in U.S. mainstream discourses. Localizing these stresses within the context of Arab Detroit invokes the regulation of dating culture norms for young Arab Muslim American women, where virginity is upheld and casual relationships between different genders is dissuaded. A potent example of mocking young Arab American dating culture and the ways young Arab American women specifically experience regulation of their selves, time, and bodies is apparent in a tweet from @DearbornWonka that features an image of a screenshot from a YouTube video created by the “Internet famous” star Fousey, a young Arab American man who

regularly uploads videos mocking various aspects of Arab American culture. Anchored by the text from @DearbornWonka that reads “All of you”, the screenshot depicts the frame split into three horizontal thirds to convey a top-to-bottom linear passing of time between frames (Figure 8). The top third shows Fousey lying on a bed with a telephone tucked under his head. The text overlaying this image reads, “I love you...” The second, middle frame features Fousey dressed as a girl wearing hijab who is also lying on a bed and holding a phone up to her ear. In response to the text that presumably came from the young male version of Fousey, the second image’s anchoring text reads, “Aw...I love you too habibi...” (habibi means sweetheart in Arabic). The final frame again features Fousey dressed as a young woman in hijab and presumably takes place only a few moments later. The text next to Fousey (dressed as a woman) reads “*footsteps*”, with the asterisks denoting movement, action, or sound. His face has changed from smiling to concern, and the dialogue text reads, “If I hang up on you without saying anything, it means my mom walked in. Okay?” This image mockingly depicts a scenario of young love where the burden of being out of bounds falls upon the young woman. The comedy comes from the performance of drag by Fousey and the succinct depiction of an apparently common occurrence between young Arab American men and women, where a declaration of love is followed by the worry of “being caught.” This image meme uses specific cultural knowledge from Arab American youth culture signaled here by the Arab American, “Internet famous” actor Fousey, language, and dialogue. Furthermore, in this context of the meme’s dissemination, it is anchored by the @DearbornWonka Twitter profile, avatar, and commentary, which further situates it within specific Arab American youth culture knowledges.



Dearborn Wonka @dearbornwonka · 3 Apr 2013

All of you pic.twitter.com/NHRyYhQFZN

← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite

Flag media

Figure 12 <http://twitter.com/dearbornwonka>

As illustrated through the analysis of these hashtag and image-based memes, the Arab American social-media sphere heavily relies on and circulates discourses utilizing specific knowledge of Arab American youth culture. Yet, because online memes can be considered adaptable cultural templates, others not privy to Arab American youth culture can potentially discern them. What is revealed in these online meme is how tones of mocking behaviors attempt to regulate Arab American youth culture norms. The subject of the mocking reveals moments of identification and disidentification with particular representations of Arab American identity. Ultimately, the specificities of the youth-driven Arab Detroit social-media sphere used to describe and redefine “Arab Americanness” offer complex hybrid representations of Arab American life, in spite of their potentially problematic engagements, that go beyond the simplified and binary-based representations and discourses found in mainstream U.S. culture.

These hybrid representations convey a dialogism between and within various aspects of U.S. mainstream culture and Arab American immigrant culture.

Conclusion

Internet video-sharing platforms and Arab American social-media sphere robustly generate commentary on the experience of Arab American youth in Arab Detroit. Online cultural productions by Arab Detroit youth offer alternative perspectives and voices on Arab American identity that trouble the common portrayals and discourses found in mainstream media. The examples I explored focus primarily on online cultural production that connects to the specific context of Arab Detroit and its youth culture, while recognizing that this is a sub-sphere within a much larger dynamic of Arab American social media and Internet activity and connection. Thus, it is important to consider how this study speaks only to alternative representations and discourses from this specific community's youth culture.

For this analysis of Arab American youths' Internet-based cultural productions, I explored two major online social media realms—YouTube videos and Twitter/ Facebook image and hashtag memes. Both realms use humor and varying degrees of insider knowledge of Arab Detroit culture to confront mainstream representations of Arab Americans and express (dis)identifications with immigrant culture and white/ mainstream culture. YouTube videos offer a critique of whiteness and dominant U.S. racial hierarchies through hybrid formats and narratives that convey the dialogism of Arab American youth culture. Television industry logics continue to abide by the construct of an imagined audience that creates disparities between a mainstream, white audience and ethnic, racialized audiences, where the former is primarily catered to. This context excludes these types of hybrid representations from mainstream media

texts. Therefore, Internet videos from “Eatsnax” and other YouTube video channels utilize the YouTube platform for alternative modes of articulating and representing Arab Americans within U.S. racial hierarchies. Furthermore, the dominant use of parody and mimicry in YouTube videos created by Arab American youth presents an ambiguous mode of opening up the signification of Arab Americaness. Alternative depictions abound in these video memes, yet the humorous mode in which they are delivered varies their meaning.

Lastly, the Arab American social-media sphere is dynamic in its use of insider knowledge through the circulation of image and hashtag memes. Social media sites that either limit users’ output (e.g., Twitter) or have community standards that reward users’ limited output (e.g., Facebook and Tumblr) by making the content more easily circulated and memetic use insider knowledge of Arab Detroit youth culture to regulate community definitions of appropriate behavior. This specifically comes through in the regulation of what is considered proper behavior for young Muslim immigrants, and especially young Muslim women. It bares recognition that these two cases reveal only two sub-realms of a larger Arab American social-media sphere. I concentrate on these two realms because they offer a close look at how young members of the Arab Detroit community are taking to the Internet to construct their own cultural productions and hybrid representations of Arab Americanes.

Conclusion

On July 6th, 2014 the longest running broadcast television show in the United States, Meet the Press, aired a short three-minute segment from their series Meeting America named “All American Muslims in Michigan” (Meeting America: All American Muslims in Michigan, 2014). Host Kevin Tibbles guides viewers through an engagement with Arab Americans in Dearborn, MI. Three Arab American representatives, an Imam from the Islamic Center of America, a middle-aged woman attending her son’s baseball game, and a young man who owns a local restaurant make remarks about their experiences as Arab and American. Statements condoning Islamic extremists and affirmations of “All Americanness” from each of these community representatives are littered throughout the clip. Kevin Tibbles narrates the first scene, “The Iraqi-born Imam sounds the warning against religious extremism.” Imam follows by stating, “I’m worried about my original country, which is Iraq. I’m worried about this country, my second country, the United States. It [Islamic extremism] is not a foreign issue” (Meeting America: All American Muslims in Michigan, 2014). Later in the segment, Tibbles introduces Zeinab Ali, who is on the sidelines of her young son’s baseball game; he describes her as “U.S.A. to the core” in spite of her experience of being considered an outsider. This segment of Meeting America aired in the middle of 2014’s Ramadan month (which was June 28 - July 28). Alluding to this context, Zeinab explains how she reconciles these two seemingly divergent aspects of her life, “My culture is Fourth of July. I celebrate Ramadan. I had an All American meal yesterday [for iftar]. I had meat loaf with mashed potatoes and gravy. How much more American can you

get?” (Meeting America: All American Muslims in Michigan, 2014). Lastly, Aaron Saab, who “epitomizes the American Dream,” sits in a booth of his restaurant and exclaims, “This country gave me more than any other country could give me” (Meeting America: All American Muslims in Michigan, 2014). As this July 2014 segment of Meet the Press illustrates, Arab Detroit as a geographic construct of domestic otherness still has a stronghold in discourses about Arab and Muslim Americans. Furthermore, the intense compulsion to align Arab and Muslim Americans with “All American” conservative values also continues to dominate the representational and discursive strategies of Arab Detroit.

As this type of Arab Detroit construct continues to have a stronghold over mainstream U.S. discourses and representations, Arab Americans living in the Dearborn and Detroit area also continue to contribute actively to the conversation through their own cultural productions. Arab Detroit as a geographic construct infused with contemporary U.S. cultural anxieties around racial, ethnic, and religious politics is not necessarily a new phenomenon within the post-9/11 era. However, the intensity of surveillance over Arab and Muslims Americans and, subsequently, Arab Detroit immensely increased and intensified since 2001. This dissertation uses this longstanding discursive context as a backdrop to explore the ways members of the Arab Detroit community confront dominant discourses and representations of their identities. What accumulates through this dissertation project are a series of close engagements with spaces of Arab Detroit-based responses and contributions to definitions of “Arab Americanness.” Whether in the context of pedagogical and performative approaches of identity construction via spaces of the Arab American National Museum, Arab American high school students’ critiques and (dis)identifications with TLC’s All-American Muslim, or the circulation of insider knowledge-based online memes by Arab American youth, a dialectic of power and resistance takes place

within the post-9/11 Arab Detroit community's dynamic and consistent challenges to mainstream media representations and discourses. In this conclusion I provide an overview of the findings from each chapter and propose future engagements for research on Arab American youth culture.

Main Arguments

Three major arguments arise from the analysis put forth in this dissertation's chapters. The first concerns the construct of Arab Detroit in the national imagery and how it becomes the site through which anxieties over Arab and Muslim Americans play out. The second major argument is that Arab Americans in the Arab Detroit community actively speak back to these discourses through their own cultural productions. Lastly, this dissertation claims that Arab American youth are particularly deserving of attention when examining Arab American discourses, because they are often the focus of national cultural anxieties about citizenship, immigration, and U.S. racial and ethnic hierarchies. Arab American youths' cultural productions and meaning making exhibit their complex (dis)identifications and negotiations in asserting their self-expressions and claims toward cultural citizenship. It is particularly important to note how Arab American youth from the Arab Detroit community find an outlet of self-expression through various Internet platforms. I flesh out each of these arguments in further detail and connect them to specifics found in this dissertation research.

Chapter One explored the dominant discourses about Arab Americans and Arab Detroit found in post-9/11 mainstream news media. Central to this chapter's findings is how Dearborn, MI becomes a prominent geographic construct that stands-in for Arab American culture. Therefore, the focus on Dearborn, MI and Arab Detroit by mainstream news media after 9/11 to depict and "understand" Arab American life and Islam is excessive. The mainstream new media's

obsession with Dearborn, MI revealed how this geographic place became the site through which cultural anxieties about U.S. racial and ethnic hierarchies, and the placement of Arab Americans within this hierarchy, were negotiated. The discursive connection between race and Southeast Michigan geographies continues to sustain a stronghold over mainstream news media depictions of Arab America. The connection between Arab and Muslim Americans and a particular geographic site works to discursively contain their excessive (domestic) otherness. By connecting Arab Americans with specific urban spaces, they are aligned with urban immigrant spaces and narratives. Central to the geographic containment of Arab Americans and the repercussions this has on their placement within a U.S. racial and ethnic hierarchy is the contention over Arab Americans' cultural citizenship. Through this alignment Arab Americans are positioned as outside of white mainstream culture and, therefore, not fully able to obtain cultural citizenship. This connection to urban immigrant spaces is only one aspect that positions Arab Americans as non-threatening, yet still not full cultural citizen. Strong alignments with U.S. conservative values also arise and are implemented to appeal to Arab Americans' ability to assimilate and not generate and disseminate political, cultural, or religious radicalism. When Arab Americans test the boundaries of this construct strong backlash and discursive work occurs to resituate and contain them. The geographic construction of Arab Americans with Arab Detroit illustrates how race and space are intimately connected (Neely and Samura, 2011).

In response to the intensity of the post-9/11 environment, Arab Americans in the Arab Detroit community, through multiple outlets, have, and continue to, shift and complicate U.S. mainstream representations and discourses concerning their racial, ethnic, and religious identities. As explored in depth in Chapter Two, the Arab American National Museum has played a central role in complicating and contributing to national and local understandings of

Arab American culture and identity since its opening in 2005. The Arab American National Museum presents a space where performative and pedagogical formations of identity are constantly being upheld and constructed. The Arab American National Museum's pedagogical formations of Arab American identity hinge upon permanent exhibits, its specific location, and spatial structure. The permanency of these aspects of the museum allow for its depiction of Arab American identity and history to be conveyed as inherent to U.S. national identity. The permanent exhibits emphasize Arab Americans' long history of immigration to the United States and, thus, assert Arab Americans' as having a common immigrant narrative with European immigrants. Ultimately, the pedagogical approaches to Arab American identity formation portrayed by the museum inserts Arab Americans into a national collective public memory. The museum's performative approaches to Arab American identity formation include events, conferences, traveling exhibits, and other examples of dynamic programming. These aspects of the museum build upon the foundation set forth by the pedagogical approaches of the museum. I explore the DIWAN5 conference that was held at the museum in the spring 2013 to illustrate how the museum facilitates the complicating of its permanent features by encouraging conversations and presentations on often controversial topics of concern to the Arab American community. Together, the pedagogical and performative aspects of the museum strongly insert Arab American culture and history into the national imagery. The Arab American National Museum offers a ripe space from which to understand a collective and institutional approach to redefining and complicating definitions of Arab Americanness.

Part Two of this dissertation further illustrates how the Arab Detroit community is responding to the intense scrutiny that they experience. By focusing on Arab American youth who grew up in a post-9/11 context, Part Two explores the frictions of being Arab American,

sometimes Muslim, and young in a cultural and political environment hostile and/ or highly judging of each of these identity positions. Chapter Three engages Arab American high school students to explore their ideas regarding the controversial cable television show All-American Muslim. The All-American Muslim text presented a particularly poignant example of 1) a mainstream media outlet's fixation on Dearborn, MI and the geographic construct of Arab Detroit, 2) an alignment between Arab, Muslim Americans and U.S. conservative ideology to convey their ability to be "All American", and 3) the intense discursive backlash that stems from attempts to fold Arab Americans into the mainstream. Arab American high school students' responses to All-American Muslim were varied and revealed strong identifications and misidentifications with it. There was pleasure to be taken from seeing members of their community on cable television. Yet, at the same time there was also discomfort with a number of the characters and story lines, and a distancing of themselves from the show. Curiously, our conversations about All-American Muslim would often shift seamlessly from explicit discussions about the show to their more implicit ideas about their community and identities. These conversations with Arab American youth reveal the complicated ways in which mainstream discourses about Arab and Muslim Americans are processed to appeal to their particular lived realities and understandings of their positionalities as domestic others.

As Chapter Three began to develop the notion of Arab American youth as active participants in complicating the national and local discourses about their community, Chapter Four more fully engaged with the third major argument of this dissertation: Arab American youth take to various means of cultural production to claim cultural citizenship through complex modes of (dis)identifications with various aspects of mainstream white culture and immigrant culture.. Their acts of self-narration are, in and of themselves, infused with defiance and desire

for self-realization. I attest that the cultural productions explored in this dissertation are indeed powerful in their repercussions on Arab American youths' lives and understandings of themselves and their communities. Seeing as how Internet platforms are a common and ubiquitous means by which young people perform their identities and establish mediated peer networks, they became obvious sites to explore. Therefore, social media outlets like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook are sites of particularly robust cultural productions and, therefore, were the focus of Chapter Four's analysis.

The Arab American social-media sphere uses hyperlocal knowledge and humor to take up critiques of dominant Arab American representations. The Eastsnax YouTube video channel featured a variety of short videos that spoofed popular MTV television shows by adapting them to an "Arab American style." One of the most compelling aspects of many of their videos is the blatant critique of whiteness and racial hierarchies. In the YouTube video "MTV Cribs Arab-American Style," the white characters were portrayed as in positions of power, yet sorely out-of-touch, lacking self-awareness, and the target of jokes. These depictions of Arab American and Caucasian American interactions convey the disconnect between the two groups; however, it is often constructed as at the fault of the white characters. Humorous depictions like those presented by these types of YouTube videos challenge the status quo of U.S. racial and ethnic hierarchies and highlight the problematic nature of a white-black racial and cultural binary.

Lastly, online meme production and dissemination by Arab Detroit youth exemplifies their strong desires to assert their voices and ideas within a public realm. The hyperlocal knowledge that is often the basis of these online memes carves out a public space steeped in exclusivity. While the content of these online memes are important, I want to emphasize the acts of carving out an exclusive space within an online public sphere as in and of themselves

profound. The networks that form around the circulation of these online memes via social media sites can afford Arab Detroit youth and Arab American youth around the country a sense of interconnectedness and, therefore, a strong, insider knowledge-based community.

Future Research: The Racialized Geographies of Detroit

Moving forward from this dissertation project, an area worthy of further research is how Arab Detroit is and has been defined in relation to other racial and ethnic communities within the Detroit Metro Area. Detroit has a deeply contentious history of racial politics and spatial segregation; thus the intergroup dynamics of the city are crucial in further analysis of Arab Detroit.. From the post-World War II white flight to the 1943 and 1967 race riots to the displacement of various non-white communities, the larger historical context of Detroit's racialized geographies offer a rich site from which to explore U.S. interracial politics. Detroit's racial and ethnic groups have been (re)defined in relation to one another and their spatial and discursive boundaries for over a century. Infused into the prolific national discourses about Detroit's demise and rebirth are undertones of racial tensions. From my research in the Detroit area, I found multiple examples of how the Arab American National Museum and Arab American youth are forging connection and developing sites of conversation with other racial and ethnic communities in Detroit.

Two compelling examples of Arab American engagement with and defining of their identity in relation to African American and Latino/a American communities in Detroit particularly arose while I was conducting my research. The first example is of the independent film *Detroit Unleaded*, directed by Arab American Rola Nashef and released in 2012. The narrative of *Detroit Unleaded* tells the story of a young Arab American man named Sami who

runs the gas station that was once owned by his father, an immigrant from Lebanon, before he was tragically shot while working a late shift. While still following the tropes of the romantic-comedy genre (the main plotline is a romantic, but taboo courtship between Sami and another young Arab, Muslim American named Najlah), *Detroit Unleaded* uses the site of the urban Detroit gas station as a contact zone for a variety of characters from different racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds to interact. *Detroit Unleaded* provides an example of a grassroots-based cultural production of Detroit's race-space connection.

Another example worthy of exploration is a public programming event organized by the Arab American National Museum in February 2013. The event was a community panel titled *Place Unmaking: Voices from Detroit Communities* and featured representatives from the Arab American, African American, Latino American, and Polish American communities. Each of representatives from these four ethnic communities were present to discuss the various histories of racial and spatial segregation experienced by their respective communities in Detroit. The communities of the South End, Delray, Black Bottom, and Poletown are each infused with histories of immigration and racial and ethnic community displacement. This Arab American National Museum event presents an example of 1) how racial and ethnic identities in Detroit are defined as in relation to other ethnic and racial communities and 2) how these communities were historically and continue to be defined by their association with particular urban neighborhoods and 3) the governmental policies that policed the discursive and physical boundaries of these communities. These two examples of how Detroit's racialized geographies are being explored by members of the community only graze the surface. Further theoretical and empirical engagements with Arab Americans and Arab Detroit can greatly impact understandings of U.S. racial and ethnic politics.

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