

**Inventing the American Mosque:
Early Muslims and Their Institutions in Detroit, 1910-1980**

by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Detroit, Michigan, has been home to sizeable Muslim communities for over a century. Today, there are fifty-five mosques in the city and its suburbs, among them several of the nation's largest, oldest, and most influential congregations. In this dissertation, I explore the early development of Detroit's Muslim communities and the central role mosques have played in anchoring and transforming Muslim American identity. At first glance, this agenda might seem to require a fairly straightforward approach – the assembly of institutional records, the piecing together of extant narratives about the founding of Detroit's mosques, the gathering of oral histories, and the establishment of a reliable chronology of mosque building projects – but I quickly realized that undertaking even these basic research tasks would prove difficult. The raw materials for a schematic history of early Islam in Detroit were frequently missing. When institutional records or contemporary news accounts were available, they often contradicted existing historical accounts, both written and oral, of the city's first mosques. Not only were data absent or inconsistent; narrative frameworks in which to fit the data were also weakly developed, or they were skewed in ways that made them inappropriate to the materials I was uncovering.

As I began to track down information about the city's oldest mosques, verifying their origin dates and gathering newspaper stories about them, I discovered that most of Detroit's Muslim leaders and older activists were reluctant to embrace these institutions as mosques. Some had completely forgotten, or had never known, about Islamic institutions established in

the first half of the 20th century; others remembered the old mosques, but described them as failed endeavors not worth commemorating. Time and again, I was encouraged to focus on newer mosques that were considered more deserving of public attention and scholarly treatment. What my interlocutors were unaware of, however, was the extent to which Detroit's new mosques replicated, sometimes in precise detail, features crucial to the success (and eventual disintegration) of the city's first mosques. The steps early Muslims had taken to Americanize Islamic practice and render it compatible with everyday life in the United States were seldom remembered, or they were not thought to be part of a collective history worth knowing about or learning from today.

In this dissertation, I initiate a project of historical recovery. Drawing on untapped archival sources, on interviews with older Muslims who are personally connected to the city's past, and on representations of Detroit's mosques and Muslims that appeared in the local press, I will explore the history of mosque development and Muslim identity formation in the city. My goal is to prompt a systematic reconsideration of existing accounts of Muslim communities in North America prior to the 1970s, a project that can succeed only if it starts in cities like Detroit, New York, and Chicago, where Muslim communities have ethnically diverse, temporally deep, and institutionally complex histories. Focusing on the intersection of immigrant, convert, and American-born Muslim populations in Detroit in the years between 1910 and 1980, I will historicize the unique challenge Islam posed to deep-seated understandings of race, religious freedom, and national belonging in the United States in the 20th century. Mosques, as I show throughout this study, are spaces in which Muslims have consistently negotiated, transcended, and reinforced the ethnoracial and sectarian identities most important to them. Against this backdrop, I will ask how Detroit's Muslims have balanced the need to localize and Americanize Islam with the demands (and increasingly, the dangers) of participation in a global religious community. Finally, I will try to make sense of

the tactical amnesias, the persistent discontinuities, and the narrative breakdowns that have thus far prevented the telling of this history.

A Complicated Celebration

The American Moslem Society (AMS) is the oldest mosque in greater Detroit, and one of the oldest in the North America. It celebrated its 70th anniversary on May 15, 2009, with a large banquet at the Greenfield Manor in Dearborn, Michigan. Tickets for the event sold out quickly. Roughly 1,000 members and friends of the mosque attended. The mosque had not held a formal banquet on this scale in decades, and their board of directors, mostly young professionals new to mosque governance, took the event very seriously. Although it is the oldest mosque in the Detroit area, the American Moslem Society – also known simply as Masjid Dearborn (the Dearborn Mosque)¹ – is today a congregation composed mostly of immigrants, the majority of whom came to the United States from Yemen after 1990.² The Muslims who built the AMS in the 1930s, and developed and sustained it during its first forty years, were largely of Syrian and Lebanese origin. Voted out of office in an ideological coup that took place in 1977, the founding congregation is not, for the most part, on friendly terms with the current AMS leadership. Most of the original members of the AMS and their families now worship in a breakaway mosque, which they established in 1982.

In celebrating the 70th anniversary of the AMS, the banquet organizers faced a major dilemma: namely, how to acknowledge the group's early history without drawing attention to the sharp, still painful rift between the mosque's past and present. This discontinuity was not simply a matter of demographic shifts in the immigrant status or national origins of the

¹ The mosque is also referred to as the "Dix Mosque" by people who lived in the Southend prior to the 1990s or knew the mosque before its transition from a primarily Lebanese to a primarily Yemeni mosque in the 1970s. The Dix Mosque appellation also appears frequently in the literature about Muslim communities in the Detroit area (Abraham 1978, 2000; Howell 2001; Terry 1999; and Wigle 1974).

² According to the 2003 Detroit Arab American Study, 58% of Yemeni Americans in the Detroit area arrived in the United States after 1990 (DAAS Team 2009:43.).

mosque's membership; at stake were also changing ideas about Islam, how it should be practiced in the United States, and what it means to be an American Muslim. These questions have proven especially vexing for Masjid Dearborn, and for Muslim congregations nationally, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when Muslims have been widely perceived to be culturally alien and Islam has been portrayed as a (false) religion antithetical to American values. The choreography of the anniversary celebration was intended to convey an upbeat sense of the group's confidence, religious devotion, and Americanization, which meant that much of the mosque's history would be off topic, politically vexing, and in poor taste.

The keynote speaker for the evening, Dr. Jamal Badawi, a professor of Management and of Islamic Studies at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, had been asked to speak about American mosques and their varied strategies for survival as minority religious institutions. In his prepared notes, Dr. Badawi explored three ways of interacting with the larger, non-Muslim society: "isolation," "assimilation," and "positive integration." It was clear that Dr. Badawi, an unapologetic integrationist, had expected the audience he addressed in Dearborn, filled with Yemeni immigrants, to display strong isolationist tendencies. Yet his journey to the podium led him past table after table of public officials (including several Muslim elected officials), and his speech followed the congratulatory remarks of Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm, U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow, Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano, Dearborn Mayor Jack O'Reilly, and others members of the political elite, most of whom greeted the gathering in Arabic and quoted from the Quran for good measure. As Dr. Badawi looked back and forth between his notes and the crowd, he admitted that his talk now seemed inappropriate. Perhaps he had more to learn from Masjid Dearborn than the other way round. Nonetheless, he forged ahead.³

³ For a comprehensive examination of the longstanding incorporation of Detroit's Arab and Muslim communities and the consequences of this incorporation for their experiences in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror, see Howell and Jamal 2008.

Isolationism, Dr. Badawi cautioned, is un-Islamic. It encourages fear mongering and misinformation among Muslims, cuts them off from the mainstream, and kindles distrust between Muslims and other Americans. Assimilation is equally harmful. It compels Muslims to reject their cultural identity and, ultimately, to abandon their faith. Positive integration, however, occurs when Muslims are allowed – and are able and willing – to maintain their cultural and religious distinctiveness, all the while participating in the larger society as full citizens. During the last seventy years, members of the AMS have traveled down all three of these paths, but most of Dr. Badawi’s listeners that evening, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, would have agreed that “the straight path” led to positive integration.

In the Detroit metropolitan area, where Muslims can trace their history back to the early 20th century, it is easy to conclude, as Dr. Badawi did, that Muslims have achieved successful integration. The Muslim community there is large (roughly 150,000-200,000),⁴ highly diverse, socially active, and politically engaged, which explains why so many public officials attended the AMS anniversary celebration. In addition to members of the secular establishment, imams and lay leaders from over three dozen local mosques were on hand, proof that the event was important to the Muslim community as a whole. Leaders came not only from local Arab mosques (Iraqi, Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian, Palestinian, and Yemeni), but also from Bengali, Indian, Pakistani, black American, Nigerian, and Iranian mosques. Sunni and Shi`a, conservative and liberal, urban and suburban, the crowd included interfaith activists, civil rights advocates, representatives of Muslim and Arab service organizations in Detroit, and several hundred members of the American Moslem Society itself.

⁴ Estimating the size of the Muslim American community is exceedingly difficult. The U.S. Census does not ask about religious identification, so any population figure is a rough estimate. I arrive at the figure of 150,000 by pegging the size of the Muslim community in Detroit to that of the Arab American community. As of the 2007 American Community Survey, the Arab and Chaldean populations of the metro area hovered around 157,000. Slightly less than half of the Arab community is Muslim (DAAS Team 2009), which gives us a starting figure of 75,000 Arab Muslims in Detroit. The Arab Muslim community is the single largest Muslim population in the area and is estimated to comprise roughly half of the area’s Muslims (both practicing and non-practicing), based on the number and size of their local mosques (see Bagby 2004).

In the period following the 9/11 attacks, Detroit's Muslims have found it increasingly important to assert and make public sense of their presence in the United States. The American Moslem Society is the third mosque in the city to celebrate its past with a gala banquet in recent years and to have produced a video recounting the development of their congregation over time. Two much younger mosques – the Islamic Center of America (established in 1963) and the Islamic Institute of Knowledge (established in 1982) – made extensive use of interviews with their founders, old photographs, and home movies to reconstruct their past in rich detail. The AMS, lacking access to such resources (which belong to the people who left the mosque, en masse, in 1977), produced a brief video that made a simple point: were it not for the small group of Lebanese Muslims who dug the basement foundation of the AMS with picks and shovels in 1937, perhaps none of the infrastructure of Detroit's Muslim community would exist today. Aside from this claim (which members of other local mosques might dispute), we learn very little about the mosque's founders or its long history. At the video's conclusion, the narrator stops a young man leaving the mosque after prayer and asks him: "If you could say one thing to that small group of Muslims, what would it be?" The young man replies, "I would say thank you. Of course it is by the grace of God that this place was established, but it was their effort that made this place possible, so I thank them very much. I wish they were here to see this place today, all the improvements, and all of the people that are coming here."

Congressman John Dingell (age 83), who was given a lifetime achievement award at the banquet, was a teenager when the founders of the AMS began work on the mosque. He assumed the audience would include several living founders and hundreds of their children and grandchildren. He wanted to hear their voices and thank them for the contributions they had made to Detroit history. When accepting his award, he asked the founders to stand and be recognized. His entreaty was met with an awkward silence. No one stood. Unlike Dingell, many in the audience were aware that the Dearborn Mosque of today bears almost no

resemblance to the American Moslem Society of the past. Many of today's members would argue that the small congregation of the past was oriented, rather shamelessly, toward assimilation and, beyond bricks and mortar, had contributed little to the practice of Islam in Detroit. The mosque's past is used as a motivating tool by its current leaders, a reminder of what the future could hold if they let down their guard.

In a generous attempt to mend this divide, the banquet organizers recognized two men as founders of their institution. The first, Hussein El Haje, was indeed among the original members of the American Moslem Society in 1938. He dug out the mosque's basement during his first summer in the United States. He sent his children to Sunday school at the mosque. And he left in 1977 with the other Syrians and Lebanese who felt the mosque had become isolationist and anti-American. Today, however, at 97 years of age, El Haje worships once again at the American Moslem Society, and he takes pride in praying with a congregation that sometimes exceeds 2,000 worshippers. He wept tears of joy when he was recognized at the banquet. The second founder, Abdo Alasry, is a much younger man. A Yemeni immigrant who arrived in Detroit in 1966, he was among the newcomers who began worshipping at the mosque in the 1970s, eventually taking over the institution, making sure that it was open for all five of the daily prayers, insisting that women who entered the building wear an appropriate *hijab* (head covering), banning dances and movie nights, and replacing Sunday morning services with a Friday congregational prayer. He was the first Yemeni president of the mosque's board. Alasry, a subdued and modest person, took the stage only briefly.

The message the board of directors sent with this pairing was clear. El Haje and his generation built the building; they are a living link to a remote past that will soon be gone forever.⁵ By contrast, Alasry and his generation saved the mosque; they represent the present and the future of Islam in Detroit. With the inclusion of El Haje, Congressman Dingell had

⁵ Hussein El Haje passed away in August of 2009.

his surviving founder. El Haje appeared on the program because he has accepted the new order at the AMS, not because he represents the mosque's older heritage in the present. This way of dealing with the past is typical not only of the AMS, but of Muslim organizations throughout Detroit, and in the United States more generally. Despite a century of accumulated arrivals, heartfelt conversions, and the establishment of mosques and Muslim congregations; despite years of teaching and preaching Islam among Americans, combating stereotypes, struggling to reshape American foreign policies in the Muslim world, and resisting racism at home, the history of the Muslim American community prior to the 1960s remains oddly problematic. The difficulties faced at the American Moslem Society in the 1970s, when Muslims families who had been in America for three generations were displaced by new immigrants, have occurred repeatedly across North America. They have been traumatic for all parties, who have often disagreed bitterly about the fundamentals of Islamic practice, the nature of American citizenship, and the function of the mosque in everyday life. These contests have also occurred, often in the same mosques, between new converts to Islam and those who are already Muslims.

Theoretical Framings

Interest in Islam and American Muslims has flourished in the post-9/11 period, both among the general public and among academics. In scholarly quarters, research on American Muslims has been channeled largely into three overlapping zones of inquiry: religious pluralism, Islamophobia or Orientalism, and the dynamics of racial formation. These frameworks are enabling devices that help us read scholarship on Muslims across time, space, and disciplinary boundaries. They facilitate the comparison of research on Muslims to that conducted among other ethnic and religious minorities. At the same time, these three frameworks place serious constraints on what we can know and what questions we will ask about the formation of Muslim identities in the United States. Certainly, Muslim American

history had been shaped by ambient forces of pluralism, Orientalism, and racialization, but it also responds to peculiar dynamics that are internal to Muslim communities, and these have logics and historicities that often do not conform to the expectations of mainstream scholarship. It is worth looking closely at trends developing under these three rubrics to determine how they have motivated and preempted certain kinds of analysis and how one might productively recombine and work beyond these trends.

Before discussing larger frameworks, however, it is important to establish a few demographic facts that make American Muslims especially resistant to any analysis that pretends to represent them as a unified cultural community or a single political constituency. Islam in the United States is, depending on one's point of view, a pan-ethnic, diasporic, multiracial, multi-sectarian, or polycultural religious bloc. The diversity of cultural, linguistic, and sectarian backgrounds found among Muslims in the United States today is not duplicated in any Muslim majority country, except in Saudi Arabia during the annual *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). The American Muslim population can be subdivided into black Americans (20%), South Asians (32%), and Arabs (37%), with smaller populations of Europeans, Africans, and culturally mixed peoples (11%).⁶ Some of these Muslims trace their American roots back for centuries; others are still waiting for green cards. Some American Muslims are descendents of the Prophet Muhammad; others are just learning to say the *shahadah* (confession of faith).

In short, Muslims in the United States do not belong to one diaspora, one racial category, or one religious tradition; they are attached to many. As immigrants (65% of Muslim American adults [Pew 2007]), they face simultaneous pressures to assimilate to American cultural norms and to resist assimilation. As converts (20% of the adult Muslim population [Pew 2007]), they face simultaneous pressures to adopt Muslim lifestyles and to

⁶ The figures are taken from the 2007 Pew Research Center *Muslims in America* survey. Pew does not break their numbers down by ethnicity in this way. These figures were arrived at by recombining the foreign born and US born into similar ancestry categories (see Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2007).

reject aspects of those lifestyles that are considered merely cultural and not properly Islamic. There is not a single American or Muslim cultural context to which all Muslim Americans adapt, whether they are immigrants, converts, or American born.⁷ There are, however, general patterns of sociocultural adaptation that emerged prior to the 1970s that seem, in retrospect, highly distinctive. Many of these patterns are resurfacing today in ways that might help us reconcile the tendency of contemporary American Muslims to forget or suppress (or simply not to know about) their history in the United States with their desire to assert a particular sense of national belonging.

Two of these old/new patterns provide revealing context for a broader discussion of theoretical frames. The first is an intense longing for pan-Muslim unity, which is closely related to a contradictory desire for solidarity along racial, ethnic, and linguistic lines or, increasingly, along lines of doctrine and everyday religious practice that divide the Muslim community internally. The second of these old/new patterns is a persistent attraction to, and suspicion of, a political status secured and privileged by its links to “modernity.”⁸ As I hope to show, issues of religious pluralism, racialization, and Orientalism become more particular to the Muslim American case, and hence more useful analytically, when set in dialogue with emergent problems of this kind.

Religious difference. Despite the “separation of church and state” enshrined in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the United States has been ruled as a de facto

⁷ Theories of segmented assimilation and incorporation seem especially relevant here for populations that are spread out across the nation and divided by race, class, immigrant or convert generation, urban/suburban/rural distinctions, and ideological attachments (see Portes and Rumbaut 1996; 2001; Waters 1999).

⁸ By modernities I mean large scale cultural constructs that present a temporal opposition between “us” and “them” and frame the Other as existing outside the time-space and therefore the moral community of the Self. In the 16th century and afterwards, European and later American elites often represented the Muslim world as pre-modern and unfit for inclusion in the time-space of the West. Muslims have also produced their own large scale constructions of self and other that frame the West as outside the “we” of history. Beginning in the early 20th century, in part due to the experience of direct colonial rule and other expressions of Euro-American economic and political power in the Muslim world, new modernities took shape in the region that defined contemporary Muslim society as morally corrupt and in need of basic reform (see Malik 2004, Zaman 2002).

Protestant nation for most of its history. The disestablishment of religion, originally undertaken in the context of a Christian majority, gave rise to an open market of religious affiliation (Herberg 1960; Berger 1969). Without state sanction and funding, American religious communities, congregations, and denominations were free (and forced) to rely on popular support (Lipset 1991). They had to compete with each other and be responsive to changing social and political conditions in order to survive. Disestablishment accounts for the vibrancy of religion in the United States, and it produces religious structures and institutions that actively promote cultural pluralism (Warner 2005). Of course, not all religious traditions are created equal in this framework. As Tracy Fessenden reminds us, “at various points in American history, Muslims, Catholics or Mormons could be construed as enemies of republican institutions, Jews as a racial or economic threat, and Native American ritual practice as an affront to environmental or drug policy, all without apparent violence to cherished notions of religious freedom” (2007:4).

Cultural pluralism, immigration, and the invention of distinctively American religious traditions – three projects to which American Islam has contributed – have challenged Protestant hegemony in the United States; they have also, ironically, contributed to the definition of Islam as an “outsider religious tradition.” When religious minorities claim “outsider status,” Lawrence Moore argues, they challenge Protestant hegemony by demanding mainstream acceptance (1986: 46). According to this logic, “outsider” status does not inevitably disempower minorities; rather, it can sharpen their attention to the dynamics of ethno-religious solidarity, buffer them from the religious (and secular) mainstream, and engage them in a struggle for recognition that mirrors the fight to win racial, gender, and other forms of social equality. The process is dialogical. Those who adopt hegemonic Protestant styles – of textual exegesis, congregationalism, volunteerism, denominationalism, ecumenicalism, and a personal faith based on sincerity and individual choice – find themselves more accepted, more readily incorporated, than others (Fessenden 2007). The

same could be said of cultural styles associated with whiteness and Occidental modernity, a link that shows the extent to which racial difference and Orientalist thought have operated in tandem with religious difference to define the contours of American citizenship and cultural belonging.

These models have a strong assimilationist tilt, but the adaptive transitions they depict do involve reciprocal change. As claims for recognition are expressed in languages and institutional contexts that are increasingly shared, the religious landscape itself adjusts to include minority traditions, a process that has culminated in the belief, widespread today but unthinkable a century ago, that the United States is a Judeo-Christian society in which Catholics, Jews, and Protestants have roughly equal access to the cultural mainstream. In the case of Muslim Americans, however, the process has not yet assumed a fully reciprocal, inclusive quality, nor has it been a linear process historically. The movement of Muslims from outsider to insider status has been blocked in two ways. First, the relative invisibility of American Muslims in the first half of the 20th century, which eased their incorporation in many ways, at least initially, has been replaced by several decades of negative hyper-visibility, which is conducive only to certain types of incorporation.⁹ For the most part, negative visibility has resulted in “disciplinary inclusion,” a political process that selectively incorporates Arab/Muslim citizens and their institutions by subjecting them to a kind of cultural rehabilitation that clears them of “enemy” associations (Howell and Shryock 2003; Shryock 2008; Howell and Jamal 2008).

A second obstacle to incorporation is broadly similar in effect, but it operates at points internal to Muslim communities. As members of one Muslim American generation, ethnic community, or congregation embrace Protestant-inflected styles of worship,

⁹ For a discussion of Muslim and Arab American “invisibility”, see Naber 2000, 2008; Samhan 1999; Kadi 1994; Majaj 1999; and Saliba 1999. See Bakalian and Borzoghmer 2009, Howell and Jamal 2009, Cainkar 2009, Shryock and Lin 2009 for very different perspectives on how this dynamic has worked in the post 9/11 period. Hisham Aidi also points out that identification with Muslims as an “anti-imperial idiom and imaginary community” intensified greatly after 9/11 (2003:38).

institutional governance, or the language of American religious pluralism, they do so under the critical gaze of Muslim communities and congregations who are not willing to take such steps, often rejecting outright the “compromises” made by other Muslims. Often these critics are newly arrived immigrants, enthusiastic converts, or Muslims who observe American Islam from abroad. They are likely to assume that American religious styles (read as Christianity, weak religiosity, or secularism) will attenuate the relationship between American Muslims and the *umma*, the global community of Islam (Cesari 2004; Bukhari, et al, 2004). Meanwhile, many non-Muslim Americans believe that, precisely because American Muslims are connected to a global *umma* – and because so many Muslims are immigrants who seem unnaturally “devout” – their claims to American identity are compromised; indeed, they are thought to represent a threat to national security. Views of the latter sort can even be found among American Muslims themselves, who often criticize newly arrived Muslim immigrants in terms many non-Muslim Americans would immediately recognize as “nativist.”

Peter Mandaville (2001) has described the project of Americanizing Islam and connecting American Muslims to the global *umma* as a kind of “translocality,” a mode of interaction “which pertains not to how peoples and cultures exist *in* places, but rather how they move *through* them,” disrupting “traditional constructions of political identity” and giving “rise to novel forms of political space” (2001: 50). The American mosque is *translocal*. It is a space in which commitments to alternative homelands and to Islam (as an outsider religion) can be renewed and reinvigorated in ways that enable Muslims to imagine the United States as a Muslim homeland, as a political field in which Muslim identities can be reinforced and not incessantly threatened. Once this recognition is possible, immigrants and new Muslims can invest in a politics of accommodation that (re)defines American nationhood and citizenship in ways intended specifically to include Islam. The American mosque is not

the only translocal political space in which Muslim American identity takes shape, but it is an important and vital one.

American mosques are also *transcommunal* political spaces. Mosques bring together, in a common institutional form (and frequently in the same institution), members of different diasporic and ethnoracial populations, each of which identifies differently with the American mainstream and cultivates its own historical understandings of Islam. The American mosque is a context in which Muslims observe, criticize, and emulate each other's institutional accomplishments, collaborating on the renewal of Islamic ritual practice, worshipping together, and teaching Islam to one another and to non-Muslim Americans. As Muslims encounter each other in American mosques, they (re)define the Muslim umma as polycultural, not in the abstract, but in the everyday. In this way, the twinned political forces of translocality and trancommunalism work together in Detroit's mosques to reterritorialize Islam in the U.S., keeping it relevant and connected to other Muslim homelands and, over time, making Islam increasingly compatible with American culture and intelligible to non-Muslim Americans.

These projects unfold in Detroit's mosques in complex ways, and they do not work themselves out in a necessarily linear progression. While some American Muslims have sought to de-emphasize Islam's ties to foreign homelands, creating a "culturally naked" Islam that is nonetheless an utterly American ideological construct, others have celebrated foreign ties and origins, building monocultural institutions that shut out other Muslims. Still other Muslims have grounded their Islam in a critique of American racism. These efforts, whether linguistically and ethnically closed, or Anglophone and decidedly pan-Muslim, are sources of dynamic, productive tension in Detroit. They are made in relation to other American Muslims and their institutional histories; they are made in relation to other American religions and their institutional histories; and they are made in relation to secular trends in American public culture.

Racialization. In the United States, debates about which groups will qualify for immigration, naturalization, and the full rights of citizenship have often centered historically not on religion, but on the distinction between “whites” and “nonwhites,” categories that are reproduced discursively, in law and everyday cultural practices, and have shifted significantly over time and in space (Jacobson 1999; Takaki 2002; Hartigan 1999; Lipset 1989). The vast majority of the contemporary population of the United States has been considered nonwhite, or insufficiently white, at some point in the past 200 years, including Germans, Irish, Jews, Turks, Syrians, Poles, Italians, Mexicans, and other groups (including many Muslims) now officially included in the U.S. census category “white.” In each case, nonwhite status was linked to the perception that a group was not modern, was incapable of assimilating to whiteness without corrupting it, and was an appropriate target for discrimination, colonial dispossession, and other forms of violent subjugation.¹⁰

Public interest in Detroit’s Muslims was especially intense in the years surrounding the passage of new, restrictive immigration laws in 1917, 1921 and 1924. These laws had the cumulative effect of curtailing Muslim immigration just as it had begun to gain momentum and Detroit’s Muslims had begun to build mosques with an American future in mind. While the anti-immigrant agenda worked to consolidate legal and cultural definitions of citizenship that excluded most of the world’s Muslims from naturalization and defined them as non-whites, the diverse cultural origins of Muslims – who were from Albania, Poland, India, North Africa, Turkey, China, and Greater Syria – defied attempts to contain them within an overarching conflation of racial and religious categories. European Muslims, Turkish Muslims, and Arabic speaking Muslims were eventually allowed to naturalize as free whites, although these decisions were challenged in courtrooms as late as the 1950s. A contributing

¹⁰ Paul Spickard (2007) argues that American understandings of racial difference can be attributed to Euro-American encounters with Africans, in the act of “enslaving them”; with Native Americans, in the act of “displacing and destroying them”; and, much later, with overseas populations in the Philippines, Vietnam, or Iraq (for example), in the act of “making formal empire” (24).

factor in the acceptance of Turks and Syrians as “free whites” was the work of Christian missionaries who advocated for the admittance of Armenian and Syrian Christians to U.S. citizenship by arguing that they faced religious persecution at the hands of Ottoman and other Muslim authorities (Gualtieri 2001, Naber 2000, Samhan 1999).¹¹ Muslims from Iran, India, Afghanistan, and China, regions without significant Christian populations, were barred from admission and excluded from the right to naturalize outright, as were other Asians. Religious difference (between Christians and Muslims or between Christians and other faiths) and religious similarity (between American and Arab Christians) were used to construct a border between Europe and Asia across which racial difference was read as insurmountable.

Lisa Lowe has argued that race, “the locus of economic, gender, sexual, and cultural conflicts that organize our contemporary politics, remains, after citizenship, the material trace of history and thus the site of struggle through which contradictions are heightened and brought into relief” (1998:26). Lowe’s understanding of racial difference emphasizes the social, political, and discursive processes that make racial categories meaningful to majority and minority subjects alike. Building on this emphasis, many scholars have begun to argue that the social category Muslim American (and the category Arab American with which it is often twinned) operates now in a capacity similar to that of racial categories: it provides a marker of difference that can be used to construct economic, ideological, political, judicial, emotional, and other boundaries between a Self and Other imagined to be essentially different and unequal (Jamal 2008, Naber, 2008, Bayoumi 2008, Maira and Shihade 2006, Cainkar 2009). This body of work is recent and focuses largely on the post-9/11 period and the consequences of the War on Terror for the civil liberties and human rights of Muslims and Arabs, both in the U.S. and globally. The idea that Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners are being racialized is a complex assertion that makes immediate sense to many scholars and little sense at all to others, especially when this formula is applied more specifically to

¹¹ This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter III.

Muslims, who are not in any conventional sense a racial group, and who do not generally identify as a unified racial bloc. Among American Muslims, disparities of wealth, incarceration, education, health, and socioeconomic opportunity map onto existing U.S. ethn racial categories. Shared experiences of anti-Muslim discrimination have not offset these differences, a fact that has led some scholars to question whether the new racialization paradigms can be consistently applied to Muslims as a group.¹²

Despite the political urgency and novelty of these arguments, surprisingly little work has been done on the historical development of Muslim American identity as both multiracial and integrally religious. In the early 20th century, Muslims living in the United States were located in different racial categories, just as they are today, and the impact of these racial attributions on the social and political opportunities available to Muslims was profound. Historically, American Muslims have been accommodated very differently in relation to whiteness, but attempts to racialize Muslims have consistently run up against Muslim American efforts to imagine and organize themselves as a pan-ethnic, polycultural religious community. The binary, racially polarizing language of black (Muslim) and white (Muslim), of American born and immigrant Muslim, of convert and born Muslim is pervasive in Detroit, but it is also offensive and politically unappealing to many Muslims, and this stance has been common in Detroit since the first mosques were established there in the 1920s.

Black Americans, who have strongly identified with Islam for its counter-hegemonic potential, often embraced the faith because Islam was first preached to them as a genuinely colorblind religion.

The Quranic teaching is that people are to be valued in terms of virtue not colour or race. Muslims insist that there is no divinely favoured race and that the Quran is God's message to the whole of mankind. They take pride in the fact that Islam is a genuine multi-ethnic religion (Christianity is the only other) and point to the fact that one of the first converts to Islam was Bilal, a black slave (Arab trade in black slaves having pre-dated the same by

¹² See Bakalian and Borzoghmer 2009, Karim 2006, Leonard 2003, Shryock 2008.

Europeans) and that in Muslim history there have been several black rulers and generals in racially mixed societies (Modood 1990:278).

Yet the ideal of Islam as a colorblind religion is not the same as the reality in which American Muslims live. This reality is highly stratified, and immigrant and black Muslims are “located at different places in these social hierarchies,” a fact that challenges “their ability to create a cross-ethnic *ummah* identity” (Karim 2009:231). Some of this tension arises from what Omi and Winant (1986) refer to as the “immigrant analogy,” in which the socioeconomic failures of blacks are compared to the successes of non-black immigrants and the resulting disparity is then used as proof of the inferiority of black Americans rather than as evidence of racism and structural inequalities. David Roediger (1991) has argued that early 20th century immigrants (Italians, Irish, and Jews are his examples) made the case for their own inclusion in whiteness by joining in anti-black racism, garnering favorable treatment in labor and housing markets in return. Likewise, recent immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East often arrive with economic and educational advantages that give them a leg up in achieving middle class status. Others argue that the “model minority” profile of South Asian immigrants in particular drives a wedge between them and American blacks (Karim 2006, Prashad 2001). Asian and Arab Muslims are statistically more likely to be in the highest income brackets than are Americans at large, while black Muslims are much more likely to be found below the poverty line (Pew 2005).¹³

In addition to these highly visible economic disparities, another dynamic that troubles the relationship between black and other Muslims is best described as a gap in religious authority, an authenticity gap. In the first half of the 20th century, the differences between converts who were eager to learn about Islam and Muslims who were born into the tradition

¹³ Asian and Arab Muslims are also found below the poverty line, especially recently arrived immigrants from Yemen and Bangladesh, two populations that are rapidly growing in the Detroit area and developing mosques, religious schools, and Muslim neighborhoods in close proximity to urban black communities. Muslim communities in Hamtramck and its surrounding Detroit neighborhoods are among the most racially and ethnically mixed in the area (Howell forthcoming).

and had internalized its rhythms and moral aesthetics created a structural disadvantage for blacks (who were mostly converts) relative immigrant Muslims (who were rarely converts), regardless of the actual circumstances of either group's education, piety, or religious commitment. This authenticity gap has closed significantly in the past 20 years, but it is still substantial.¹⁴ Nonetheless, solidarity and pan-Muslim identification across lines of racial difference have always been possible and represent an important historical trend. Muslim immigrants and missionaries introduced blacks to Sunni Islam, provided them with Qurans and taught them how to read and interpret them. Immigrants welcomed black converts into their homes, mosques, and lives in periods and places where racial segregation was the norm. Some Muslim immigrant populations, mostly those defined officially as non-white, settled in or near black enclaves and assimilated (or are assimilating today) into black America rather than into hegemonic whiteness.

While American mosques have tended to be racially and ethnically particular (in terms of leadership and membership) for reasons of residential concentration, language, sectarian difference, and cultural preference, the vast majority of mosques are open to all believers. Unlike Sunday at 11:00, Friday at noon (in Detroit's mosques at least) is often the least segregated hour of the week. Even mosques that are ethnically homogeneous tend to maintain links between their core congregation and the city's other Muslim communities. Although this quality varied historically, many American mosques have functioned as active spaces of polyculturalism, a term Vijay Prashad calls "a provincial concept grounded in antiracism rather than in diversity. Polyculturalism, unlike multiculturalism, assumes that people live coherent lives that are made up of a host of lineages" (2001: xi-xii). Much of the history of Detroit's mosques is oriented explicitly toward anti-racist and anti-colonial projects at home and abroad, toward finding commonalities and common cause among the city's Muslims, and, just as importantly, toward resisting efforts to impose sameness or uniformity

¹⁴ This issue is covered at length in both Chapter III and Chapter VI.

on their populations. The Muslim American community is a polycultural, transcommunal space where identity is negotiated across racial divides and where shared and parallel histories of exclusion and discrimination, of faith and religious imagination, frequently converge. It is equally a space in which ethnoracial and sectarian differences are reinforced and the possibilities of cultural convergence are adamantly refused.

Orientalism. The final framework in which Muslim American difference is commonly analyzed is that of Orientalist knowledge production. The uneven encounter between the West, defined as secular, and a Middle Eastern or Muslim world, defined as religious (and intolerantly so), is based ultimately on “an economy of representation in which the modern is prized over – and placed over – the non-modern” (Gregory 2004:4). It is hardly inconsequential that these understandings of religiosity and secularism are firmly grounded, rhetorically and historically, in the colonial encounter between Europe and the Muslim world (Said 1978; Malik 2004; Salvatore 1999). Thus, the language in which debates about Orientalism and the status of Muslims in the West are waged – about who is an insider, about relations between colonized to colonizer, about whose traditions are modern, and about the characteristics and rights of people defined as (non)European – is historically fraught, highly charged, and varies greatly across national contexts. These debates are actively pursued in the Muslim world as well, and they have greatly influenced modernist Islam, whose essential Other is the once Christian, now avowedly secular West (Deeb 2007, Abu-Lughod 1998, Eickelman 2000, Mitchell 2000).

Timothy Marr (2006) has argued that 19th century American understandings of Islam differed from European Orientalism because the former were divorced from the experience of direct colonial encounter. “Early Americans,” he writes, “employed the difference of Islam to both frame and extend the boundaries of their own cultural enterprises” (Marr 2006: 18), such as the abolition of slavery, the temperance movement, and efforts to exclude Mormons from U.S. citizenship. Islam, in this tradition, stood for two related, but oppositional sets of values.

On the one hand, as Edward Said (1978) carefully illustrated, Muslims were thought to be culturally primitive and despotic, both repressive and repressed. On the other, the Muslim world was associated with extreme courtesy, chivalry, hospitality, spiritual purity, insight, and sensual pleasure (Makdisi 2008; Gregory 2004; McAlister 2001; Prashad 2001); in short, the qualities of the “noble savage” (Khattak 2008). For much of the 19th century, Islam, and the Orient more generally, was used by Americans as a “mobile sign,” one that attracted or repelled depending on the context and manner in which it was deployed (Marr 2006: 297).

As American interventions increased in the Muslim world in the second half of the 20th century, images of the Muslim Other became more consistently negative. In all forms of mass media, Muslims and Arabs were portrayed as violent, misogynistic, anti-Semitic, and eventually anti-American as well (Alsultany 2005, Naber 2008, Shaheen 2001). These hostile images reflected, legitimized, and fueled an era of political intimidation of Muslim Americans, especially those who were critical of Israel or U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. In the post 9/11 period, the War on Terror went even further in this direction, selectively limiting the rights of Muslim in the United States and encouraging Americanization under duress.¹⁵

Again, however, the Orientalism framework does not capture important aspects of the Muslim American experience, or the vexed role Orientalist discourses and their alternatives play in mosque politics. The Muslim world has undergone many internal struggles in response to European colonialism, national independence and nation building, and Cold War interventionism. These encounters have generated a wide array of alternative modernities, some secular and nationalist, others religious and global in orientation. Writing of Lebanese Shi`a (who are well represented in Detroit), Lara Deeb describes a religious sensibility that emerged from the Hizbullah-led liberation struggle against Israeli occupation of South

¹⁵ The War on Terror, as pursued by the Bush administration, has been thoroughly analyzed, as has its political effects on Muslim and Arab American communities (see especially recent works by Bakalian and Borzhongmer 2008, Cainkar 2009, DAAS Team 2009, and Ewing 2008).

Lebanon. This movement combines piety and progressivism to create an “enchanted modern.”¹⁶ Its “dual emphasis” is placed on “material and spiritual progress,” both of which are needed to fashion a “viable alternative to the perceived emptiness of modernity as manifested in the West” (Deeb 2006:5). The enchanted modern confronts Western materialism and secularism, but it equally confronts its own past religious traditions, insisting on spiritual progress through piety and personal commitment to Islam and its everyday practice.

The “enchanted modern” has come to Detroit with Lebanese immigrants, but it is only one of dozens Muslim modernities that have thrived, and withered away, in the city over the last century. Attempts to build new mosques are often driven by explicitly modernizing impulses, with the ironic result that Orientalist tropes (accusations of backwardness, inferiority, fanaticism, or ignorance) are commonly deployed in the identity debates that transpire within the Muslim community. What is more, they are employed by immigrants *and* the American-born, and by new converts to Islam *and* those raised as Muslims. As platforms for innovation in Islamic practice in the United States, mosques are sites where complicated discourses of piety, authenticity, and modernity encounter, and often clash with, one another. The primary reason the history of Detroit’s early mosques has gone untold is because its telling invariably triggers accusations of backwardness and ignorance, of fanaticism and blind devotion, across these many lines of difference.

Looking at the intersection of ethnoracial, geopolitical, and local religious dynamics in Detroit, I hope to move beyond the familiar binaries that frame the study of Islam in the United States: black/white, immigrant/native, orthodox/heterodox, assimilated/oppositional, and authentic/inauthentic. By examining historical moments when the interests of Detroit’s Muslim populations have aligned and diverged, I will consider not only what happened in

¹⁶ She echoes Max Weber in her use of the term enchanted to signify a modernity colored by a religious sensibility.

Detroit's past, but also why scholars and Detroit Muslims alike are so quick to dismiss this past as a failure or a threat to contemporary Muslim American identity. As I will argue below, a reliance on well-established binaries has given the study of Islam in America its own stereotypical tropes.

Making Muslim American History

Muslim American studies is a new field that has not yet developed a strong historical consciousness. As such, there are gaps in the literature that I hope to account for and fill in with this work. Because most Muslim Americanists situate their work in the present and recent past, they include brief histories only to provide context for their analyses. Scholars have tended to skim briefly over the surface details of the arrival and settlement of Muslim immigrants in the first half of the 20th century, or the first conversions of blacks to Sunni Islam – or skip this period entirely – in the race to provide the more accessible history of the post-1965 immigration and the dramatic mass conversion of the Nation of Islam (NOI) to Sunni Islam, which began in 1975, after the death of Elijah Muhammad. Those who have conducted original research and written about the lives of early 20th century American Muslims have done so almost entirely under the rubric of ethnic studies scholarship, producing work that focuses on ethnic groups who happen to be Muslim.¹⁷ Original research on black Muslims¹⁸ (by which I mean African American Sunni Muslims) is usually discussed apart from studies of other Muslims, in the framework of African American Studies (R.M. Curtis 1994, Dannin 2002). The proto-Islamic movements that were embraced by American

¹⁷ These community histories have focused on Turks (Bilge 1994), Albanians (Trix 1994, 1998, 2001), Poles (Ferris 1994), Arabs (Aswad 1974, Haddad 2004, Elkholy 1966, Sarroub 2005, Wasfi 1971, Takim 2009, Walbridge 1997) and South Asians (Leonard 1992, 2007; Malik 1989).

¹⁸ I use the term black Muslim in the same way I refer to Arab Muslims, or Albanian Muslims, or Bengali Muslims, not in a pejorative sense, but to describe one demographic sector of the Muslim community. The term “Black Muslim” was first used by C. Eric Lincoln to describe the members of the Nation of Islam (NOI) in 1956 (Lincoln 1994) and it has been a problematic term for those within the NOI and for blacks who were Sunni Muslims and did not consider the NOI to be Muslim at all. For the sake of clarity, I never use the term black Muslim to refer to NOI members and instead reserve this term – distinguished by a lowercase “b” – for those who are part of the community other scholars (Bagby 2004, Leonard 2003, Jackson 2005) refer to as “historically Sunni African Americans.”

blacks in the 1920s and 30s – e.g., the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam – have been explored in much greater depth, perhaps because these traditions fit easily into the “black church” paradigms that were already in place among African Americanists, or among those interested in Pan-Africanism, black nationalism, and the civil rights movement, literatures with a much longer and more venerable pedigree of scholarship than that of Muslim American studies.¹⁹ Several full length studies have also explored what might be called the pre-history of the Muslim American community, the Muslims who traveled to, were transported to, or somehow managed to settle in North America prior to the 20th century, including Spanish and North African navigators and explorers, African slaves, and 18th century performers, diplomats, and travelers.²⁰

In general, this literature keeps blacks and non-blacks separate unless explicitly covering the interrelations between the two groups.²¹ Even in edited volumes seeking to bring these literatures together, essays on the black Muslim experience are housed in special sections, while the volumes as a whole tend to address non-black histories, experiences, and concerns (see Haddad and Esposito 1998 for a prominent example). While those who write about Islam among blacks cannot effectively do so without mentioning the immigrant Muslims and the non-black missionaries who initiated conversion in the black community and connected American blacks to a variety of religious, political, social and aesthetic movements overseas, those who write about immigrant Muslim populations and their descendants often make no reference to black Muslims at all.

More problematic than this balkanization of the history of Islam in the United States is the way the pre-1965 Muslim American experience has come to be represented through the

¹⁹ See Curtis 2002, 2006; Essien-Udon 1962; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Lincoln 1961; and Turner 1997, and for works on Pan-Africanism, black nationalism, and the civil rights movement, see Von Eschen 1997; McAllister 2001; Evanzz 1999; Haley 1962.

²⁰ See Abd-Allah 2006; Alford 1977; Austin 1984; Diouf 1998; Younis and Kayal 1995.

²¹ Jamillah Karim’s work (2009) and Garbi Schmidt’s (1998, 2004) are welcome disruptions of this pattern.

lens of post-1965 immigrant Muslims and converts to Islam. Yvonne Haddad is a pioneering and preeminent scholar in both Arab Americanist and Muslim Americanist circles. Her writing, solely and in conjunction with her two primary collaborators, John Esposito and Jane Smith, has had a tremendous influence on scholarship about American Muslims. In the following passage, Haddad represents the difference between the pre- and post-1960 periods of Muslim American institution building in language that has become hegemonic in the field.

The earliest immigrants to found mosques before the Second World War and, for the most part, their children and grandchildren appear to have fitted comfortably into America. They tried both to fit into the new culture and interpret it in new ways that tended to emphasize the respect Islam had for Jesus and his mother Mary and to quote verses from the Qur'an emphasizing the commonalities between the two faiths. To the immigrants who have come since 1960, however, this kind of accommodation seems too high a price to pay. They are critical of their coreligionists who appear to have diluted the importance of Islamic traditions, rituals, and distinguishing characteristics, going so far as to refer to the mosque as "our church," to the Qur'an as "our bible," and to the imam as "our minister."

The more recent immigrants are neither poor nor uneducated; on the contrary, they represent the best-educated elite of the Muslim world who see themselves as helping develop America's leadership in medicine, technology, and education. They have been influenced by a different socialization process, and while they appreciate, enjoy, and have helped create America's technology, they want no part in what they see as its concomitant social and spiritual problems. Confident that Islam has a solution to America's ills, they have no patience for the kinds of accommodations they see as compromising the true Islamic way. (Haddad 1998:21-22)

This passage is entirely accurate. It also captures perfectly the dismissive attitude the educated elites of the new immigration harbor/ed against the Muslims they found in the United States when they arrived in the 1950s and 1960s. Poor and uneducated, socialized into the Islam of an earlier era, comfortable in the accommodations they had made to America's social ills, and compromised in relation to the one "true Islamic way," these American Muslims were in need of reform. The institutions they had developed and the struggles they had waged on behalf of Islam were instructive to this new generation of Muslim activists only as a counter example. In this formulation, it is easy to dismiss as well the history of the institutions the American Muslims had established. No matter the intentions or successes of

their founders, these institutions were insufficient. New ones were in order. Energy should be directed toward this new project of institution building.

Two of the first monographs to focus on Muslims in the United States were written by Abdo Elkholy (1966) and Atif Wasfi (1971), an Egyptian and a Lebanese national, who received their Ph.D.s from American universities based on research they conducted in Dearborn, Michigan, and Toledo, Ohio, in the 1950s and 1960s. These sociologists each provided a brief synoptic history of Detroit's Arab Muslim enclaves as background for their research findings, which focused on measures of religiosity among American Muslims. In the absence of other sources, their work has been treated as a sort of eye witness account of Dearborn's mosques at mid century, which technically it is. Their sketches of the city's past have also been accepted at face value, and the details they presented have been cited and reproduced as fact for over 40 years, even though several of their claims were inaccurate. Linda Walbridge (1997), who produced the third monograph about Dearborn's Muslim enclaves a generation later, was one of the first and only scholars to note that Elkholy's establishment dates for some of the city's early mosques were inaccurate (44). She has other objections to his account as well, pointing out that his perspective was simply biased. "What is most significant about Elkholy's account," Walbridge claims, "is that he tells the story of the community from a Sunni perspective. His history of the community is only one history. And one might even go so far as to say it is a dead history" (45).²²

Writing before such a thing as "Muslim American" studies could be said to have existed, Wasfi and Elkholy were part of a larger cohort of immigrants and foreign students who arrived in the US between the 1950s and 1970s who were sometimes highly judgmental of the way Islam was practiced in the United States. It is not clear from their writing that

²² Nabeel Abraham (2000), following Walbridge (1997), challenges some of Wasfi's dates. I find it interesting that even scholars who use contemporary sources (essays from the *Moslem World* and the *Moslem Sunrise*) that clearly date the opening of the first purpose-built mosque in the U.S., the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park, to 1921, provide instead the 1919 date for this opening that is mentioned by Elkholy (1966).

American Muslims were more ignorant of, or relaxed in, their religious observances than were Muslims of a similar generation and socioeconomic background in South Lebanon, rural India, or small town Albania. In my own interviews, I often asked mid-century immigrant informants to describe for me their experiences in mosques prior to immigration. Invariably, they responded as did Mike Alcodray: “I didn’t go to the mosque. I never went” (Alcodray interview). Fatme Boumrad mentioned that the only time she visited a mosque growing up in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon was when she received her polio vaccine as a young adolescent (Boumrad interview). References to the tepid Islam practiced in “churches,” with “ministers” who sometimes abandoned their pulpits for the entire summer (see Elkholy 1966), and with “clubs” led as much by women as by men (see Abraham 2000 and Walbridge 1997) were consistent with the political assessments made by would-be Muslim leaders who sought to overturn the existing order and lead American Islam in a new direction.

Narratives about the failings of the American mosques that predated the 1960s were important to the post-1965 immigrant cohort because many of the scholars and activists among them sought not simply to promote Islam in the United States or keep it alive among future generations but also to bring about an international Islamic revival. “They strongly believed that the key to reviving Islamic civilization was the intellectual revival of the ummah.... The lack of freedom for rethinking the Islamic civilizational project and to indulge in serious rejuvenation of the stagnant Islamic sciences was not available in the Muslim world” (Khan 2004:98). Thus immigrant intellectuals, men like Fazlur Rahman, Ismail Farooqi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, who ascribed to an alternative reading of modernity, set about institutionalizing Islam anew in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, building mosques across the country and building organizations that eventually superseded those of the earlier Muslim Americans, like the Federation of Islamic Associations of the United States and Canada (FIA) (established in 1952). The first of the new generation of national Muslim organizations was the Muslim Student Association,

founded (in 1963) not by immigrants but by foreign nationals who were often extremely critical of already American Muslims and their institutions. As many of these students graduated and settled permanently in the United States, however, they developed a more accommodationist tone and established several additional institutions – the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA, established in 1981), the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS, established in 1972) and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIT, established in 1981) – that replicated, with much enhanced capacity, the work of the FIA. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, the ambition of these Muslim intellectuals went well beyond condemning the Islamic centers and Muslim practices they saw around them in the United States; their ambitions were global in scope and their efforts were forward looking. Living and working in cities and on college campuses that generally did not have deep Muslim roots, they were not concerned with Islam's past in the United States and were quick to simplify the experiences of their predecessors.

This partisan perspective, however, was not promulgated solely by scholars like Wasfi and Elkholy, or by immigrant activists with missionary zeal. It is pervasive in the literature, even among non-Muslim scholars who presumably would have less of a stake in the political outcome of attempted reframings of the Muslim American experience. This structural feature of Muslim American historiography, which seems now to reproduce itself largely through imitation and inertia, reinforces the idea that the early period of Muslim American community formation is of little relevance to Muslim American identity and practice today. It amounts to an historical erasure in which the labor, initiative, conflicts, triumphs, and failures of the past are explained away to make room for new struggles.

Karen Leonard (2003) and Stewart Lawrence (1999) have pointed out that scholarship on Muslim populations in the United States is organized around particular ethnic groups (Arabs, blacks, South Asians), sectarian groups (Sunnis, Shi'a), and urban locations (Chicago, New York, Houston, Detroit), trends that predominate on either side of the 1965

watershed (see Abraham and Shryock 2000; Fischer and Abedi 1990; Kelly and Bozorghmer 1993; Leonard 1998, 2007).²³ In this environment, the best historical reference on immigrant Muslim populations remains the edited volume produced by Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith, entitled *Muslim Communities in North America* (1994), which brings together the work of 25 scholars, each focusing on a particular urban context, belief-based population, or ethnic community. Detroit warrants 4 different chapters, one each about local Albanians (Trix 1994), Shi'i Lebanese (Walbridge 1994), Turks (Bilge 1994), and one set simply in Dearborn (Aswad 1994). The Trix and Bilge essays, in particular, make excellent use of Turkish and Albanian language sources and provide nuanced histories. Finally, another Haddad and Smith collaboration, *Mission to America: Five Islamic Sectarian Communities in North America* (1993), is an invaluable resource that marries ethnographic conversations with original historical research.²⁴ Given the wide array of languages needed to access oral and written sources in such a polycultural religion, and given the unique historical circumstances that contributed to each ethnic population's migration and settlement in Detroit and elsewhere, the attention of specialists is vital to the study of Islam in the United States. While these recent historical syntheses do bring separate threads together between the covers of a single book, they nonetheless reinforce the impression that Muslim communities were historically isolated from each other along ethnic, racial, and sectarian lines. "Stories of immigrant and African American Islam in this country for a long time were quite distinct and separate, and relations between blacks and immigrants were generally quite rare" says Jane Smith (1999:75), who goes on to argue that integration among America Muslims is a very recent phenomenon.²⁵

Historical writing about black encounters with Islam is in many ways more advanced than research on other American Muslims, yet it too reinforces the idea that the 1965 (or in

²³ To point this out is not to fault the tradition. My own past work easily fits into this tradition (Howell 2000b, 2001; Howell and Jamal 2009; Howell and Shryock 2003).

²⁴ One would like to see more studies of this quality. Unfortunately, this work focuses on small sectarian minority communities and not on the mainstream of Muslim activity in the United States.

²⁵ The other two works of synthetic Muslim American history are by Haddad (2004) and Curtis (2009).

this case, the 1975) watershed is a divide between authentic and inauthentic practices, between a historical narrative that has relevance today and one that can easily be dismissed. Scholarship on early black Muslims focuses primarily on how well known men like William Blyden, Marcus Garvey, Noble Drew Ali, and Elijah Mohammed were drawn to Islam's potential as an alternative to American identity, anti-black racism, and Christianity (which was largely acquiescent in upholding slavery and the on-going racism that followed emancipation). Excellent work has been done on this topic, from a variety of perspectives²⁶, but only Robert Dannin's groundbreaking ethnographic history, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (2002), tracks Sunni Islam – as opposed to movements like the NOI – among blacks nationwide.²⁷ Dannin's work is the exception to a literature that persistently overlooks the pre-1975 history of black Muslims.²⁸

This lacuna is important because it too represents a political refashioning of Muslim American history to meet the needs of Muslim activists in the present. The small and admittedly fragmented population of black Muslims in Detroit, just to cite one example that has been completely overlooked by scholars, played an important role in linking the city's other Muslims together in the 1960s and 1970s (see Chapter VI), and later was similarly influential in easing Imam Warith Deen Mohammed's followers (former members of the NOI) toward institutional stability in the 1980s. When this community is erased from history, then all possibility of constructing nuanced accounts of black and non-black interaction, cooperation, disinterest, and antagonism prior to the 1970s disappears as well.

In his influential 2005 work, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection*, Islamic Studies scholar Sherman Jackson unwittingly reinforces an idea he

²⁶ See Richard Brent Turner (1997), Edward Curtis (2002, 2006), Clifton Marsh (1984, 2000), C. Eric Lincoln (1961), Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), Essien Essien-Udon (1962) and Sherman Jackson (2005).

²⁷ Unfortunately, Dannin has not yet published his research on Detroit's Muslims.

²⁸ Others have focused on the work of Shaikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal at the State Street Mosque in Brooklyn, New York, see especially, Curtis (2009), Dannin (2002), Ferris (1994), and McCloud (1995).

intends to critique. He argues that Islam is viewed as a new transplant religion in the United States that arrived in the post-1965 era. “Prior to 1965,” he writes, “Islam in America was dominated by an indigenous black presence” (2005:3). This community was overshadowed and robbed of its religious authority “following the settling of critical masses of Muslims from the Muslims world” (2005:3), whereupon authority shifted “to the sources, authorities, and interpretive methodologies of historical Islam” (2005:4). He goes on to argue that the underlying anti-Western political sentiments of both immigrants and blacks encouraged them to work together in the 1960s and 1970s, but this alliance was short lived due to a “mutually contradictory relationship to American whiteness” (2005:4). Rather than explore the dynamic push and pull that marked the relationship between blacks and other Muslims well in advance of 1965, Jackson’s treatment winds up privileging the Nation of Islam, and the Sunni community that grew out of it after 1975, as the authentic voice of American Islam. As a result, the thousands of Muslims, black and non-black, who lived in the United States in the first three quarters of the 20th century are little more than footnotes in his history of American Islam.

Jackson is not alone in appropriating the term “indigenous” to refer to African American Muslims, and the term “immigrant” to refer to non-black American Muslims (see Curtis 2007 and Aidi 2003 for additional examples). By appropriating the term indigenous, these writers imply a prior claim to American citizenship on behalf of black Americans and insinuate that “immigrant” Muslims somehow usurp the rights of black Muslims. Casting non-black Muslims not only as immigrant/newcomer/outsideers, but also as colonizer/usurpers, is a polemical act that registers a history of conflict and a present in which polarizations are anything but resolved. This formulation also represents a re-application of binary thinking and encourages yet again the public forgetting of the history of Islam in the United States. In this case, black Americans who embraced Sunni Islam prior to the 1970s are erased, but so too are all the other Muslims who lived in Detroit and many places like it, who

were heavily invested in perpetuating and institutionalizing Islam as an American religious tradition that included African Americans.

This lack of historical interest in early 20th century American Islam is hard to explain, especially in a city like Detroit, where so many different populations of Muslims were making sense of their proximity to one another and adjusting to their isolation from the Muslim-majority world. As we will see in chapters to come, the Muslim population of Detroit was already thought to be in the tens of thousands by the time the first mosque was built there in 1921. Today, when the city's Muslims number over 100,000, the dynamics of pan-Muslim integration, racism, and ethnic particularism that beset and enlivened the early Muslim enclaves are still alive and well. The oppositions entrenched in the politics of Detroit's Muslim populations, most significantly the divides between blacks and immigrants, between Sunni and Shi'a, and between the newly arrived and those who are already American, are crucial elements in any attempt to explain the ahistoricism, and aversion to certain kinds of history, that currently flourish in the city. Even in the post 9/11 period, when Islam has repeatedly been described as a foreign religion and Muslims as a threat to the nation, when a history of long standing incorporation, Americanization, and successful community formation would seem of obvious real world benefit, knowledge of early Islam in Detroit, and elsewhere in North America, remains stagnant or unavailable. Insofar as it can be found in Detroit, it exists among small pockets of now elderly Muslims, among the children and grandchildren of the founders of the city's early mosques, or in a handful of academic essays about Detroit's ethnic Muslim populations.²⁹

While my project is generally one of construction, of building a narrative history where one does not currently exist, it is also one of deconstruction. When I first began my research on Detroit's mosques, I consistently encountered five tropes, a few of which I have

²⁹ See Abraham 2000, Bilge 1994, Elkholy 1966, Walbridge 1994, 1997, and Wasfi 1971.

already discussed, that are ubiquitous in the scholarly literature and circulate orally among Detroit Muslims as well. It would be wrong to dismiss them as untrue, yet in my research I discovered a parallel history that was at odds with these accounts, a discovery I did not know how to account for at first.

Narrative tropes about the pre-1965 Muslim American community (especially in Metro Detroit) come in the following forms:

- 1) an inclination to downplay the efforts and religiosity of earlier generations. Wasfi, for example, argued in 1971 that “one of the basic problems faced by the community members is how to learn their religion. The lack of education of the pioneers and their ignorance of their religion prevented them from teaching their children” (1971:46). Haddad made a similar point about the early immigrants who, she argued, “were generally too busy with basic economic survival to make much attempt to promote Islam on a community level” (1997:2).
- 2) a reluctance or hesitancy to describe the early Muslim institutions as mosques. The Arabic word *nadi* (club) was constantly used to refer to both of Dearborn’s first Arab mosques by those who established and participated in them. The term is ubiquitous. Sometimes the term *nadi* was used with affection by those who also insisted these institutions were mosques. Others, however, used the term *nadi* in a derogatory manner. One leader of the United Citizens Society went so far as to claim the group changed its name to Moslem Mosque of Highland Park “when we learned there were specific tax incentives for doing so” (Hammoud Interview).
- 3) a tendency to describe these congregations as ethnically particular and isolated from one another, especially as the narratives move further back in time. Elkholy, for example, asserted that the Arab Muslims in Dearborn had “no connection whatsoever” with other Muslim populations in the city in the 1950s and prior to this period (1966:18).³⁰ Several of my interviewees asserted that there were few or no connections between the Arab and Albanian congregations and African Americans, either those who were Sunni or those who belonged to the NOI, conflating their personal experiences with that of the Muslim population as a whole.
- 4) a tendency to blame current tensions between Sunni and Shi`a in Detroit on immigrant outsiders and to idealize relations in the past. “The Sunni and the Shi`a... I never knew one from another. We kids grew up as sisters and brothers. We never knew Sunni/Shi`a till this last bunch come from the old country and they parted us” (G. Ecie interview).

³⁰ Trix (1994) and especially Bilge (1994) are exceptions to this pattern. Bilge’s history points to direct cross-cultural collaborations in the early decades of the 20th century, and Trix carefully documents the uneven religiosity of Albanian Muslims at mid-century. Their work is rare because they explored Turkish and Albanian archives from the early decades of the century rather than having relied exclusively on oral histories or on texts like those of Elkholy (1966) and Wasfi (1971).

- 5) a tendency to describe the early Muslims as politically apathetic. To quote Elkholy again, “It is said that the [1948] Palestine War in which the Arab countries were defeated awakened the nationalistic sentiments of the Arab-Americans in general and especially of the Moslems” (Elkholy: 46).

What I slowly pieced together was a history at odds with these accounts. Efforts in which Muslims worked to overcome racial, political, and other differences to uphold a common faith were more frequent and of greater significance than current narratives about Islam in Detroit (and in the United States more generally) acknowledge. Detroit’s Muslims sought common cause with one another on religious grounds, celebrating and observing Islam, learning and teaching the faith to one another, welcoming new arrivals to the city, and welcoming new believers to the faith. They also sought common cause on the political front, rejecting racial segregation, resisting colonialism in their homelands, opposing America’s growing support for Zionism, advocating for the Non-aligned Movement, and supporting the Civil Rights Movement. Building on, contradicting, and contributing to 20th century American Orientalisms, these Muslims made a space for Islam as an inherently American religious tradition. They also linked this American Islam, and themselves as Muslims, to a global religious community, the umma of Islam.

The Invention of the American Mosque

My objective in writing this dissertation is to look at the ordinary men and women who embraced Islam as a faith, “Muslim” as an identity, and translocal Islam as a political orientation in Detroit beginning around the period of WWI and continuing through to the early 1980s. I will focus my discussion on the institution of the American mosque as it developed in Detroit in this period. The mosque is an institutional form that has assumed many shapes and purposes over the past several centuries and is still evolving in the present. Most simply, a mosque (from the Arabic *masjid*, a space where one bows in prayer) is a

collective space in which Muslims come together for worship. A coffee shop or living room can easily be converted into a prayer space simply by pushing the furniture out of the way and putting down rugs or other clean material so worshippers can line up in rows, face Mecca, and pray. Today, street corners, public parks, and airport terminals are frequently pressed into service as prayer spaces in Detroit. In the 1920s, men prayed together in automobile factories, in one another's apartments, and in a variety of ethnic clubs and associations. All of this is in keeping with the tradition of the Prophet Mohammad, who stated that "the Earth has been made a place of prayer (Masjid) for me, and pure. Therefore, any man from my community who is overtaken by the time of prayer, let him pray [wherever he may be]" (Saabiq 1995).

In the United States, the term mosque (*masjid* and *jamea* are common alternatives) is applied to voluntary associations that are organized, in part at least, for the purpose of hosting and organizing congregational prayers; to the buildings in which these associations meet; and to the discrete spaces within these institutions where congregational prayer is commonly held. A mosque, then, is both a space for prayer and the institution or community that provides this space.

In Detroit, Muslim religious associations date back to the 1910s, when the city's first immigrant Muslims began encountering one another in their workplaces and on the streets. They quickly sought to establish ethno-religious institutions to address their common interests and needs; mutual aid societies, coffee houses, and eventually mosques.³¹ In the 1920s they opened two short-lived mosques, but Muslim worship continued in coffeehouses, ethnic clubs, and homes. In the 1930s, the first two enduring mosques opened in Dearborn, and by the late 1940s, the area was home to several formally organized Muslim associations,

³¹ These steps are the classic steps of what sociologists refer to as ethnic identity formation – the recognition of common cultural characteristics (in this case a religious heritage), common interests (in this case the practice of Islam in America, social interaction, mutual aid, and frequently a common anti-colonial political agenda), and the development of shared institutions (mosques, clubs, coffee houses, mutual aid societies). See Spickard and Borroughs 2000 and Cornell 1996.

or mosques; three were Arab, one was Albanian, and another was African American. A few less formal, but still viable, ethnic associations hosted prayers for the city's Turks and South Asians. These mosques usually served as ethnic clubs, social halls, political bodies, or non-profit charities, in addition to their role as sites for congregational prayer, and their social and political functions frequently overshadowed their overtly religious character.

Gradually, Detroit's Muslims developed the American mosque as a flexible, but nonetheless recognizable institution. At its simplest, the mosque is a place where Muslims meet for prayer. At its most complex, the American mosque also serves as a school, a community service agency, an athletic and recreation facility, a health clinic, an ethnic club, a spiritual retreat, and a hostel for travelling missionaries. In both their simple and complex forms, American mosques are institutions that represent Islam in the United States to Muslims and to non-Muslims alike. As such, they are the primary institution through which the role of Islam in the lives of Americans is negotiated and made manifest. Mosques are translocal spaces that link Muslims in Detroit to other Muslims around the world and across time. They are transcommunal spaces that connect Muslim worshippers to an overarching Muslim American identity. They are transgenerational spaces as well, providing for the continuity of Muslim traditions within families and larger communities of affinity and kinship. They are variously sites of assimilation, isolation, and successful integration.

In this dissertation, I trace the history of Detroit's early mosques and how the city's Muslims came to understand the obligations and opportunities they faced as religious and cultural minorities living in the United States. I piece this narrative together from newspaper accounts of the city's first mosques; interviews conducted by historian Alixa Naff with the city's Arab Muslim pioneers (conducted in 1980); my own interviews with elderly Muslims who grew up in Detroit between 1920 and 1960 and played a part in developing or sustaining the city's mosques; mosque institutional records, where available; newsletters and other materials from the Federation of Islamic Associations; photographs, journals, and other

ephemera; and the eyewitness accounts of Muslim visitors, scholars, and reporters who spent time in Detroit's mosques prior to the 1980s. Several populations did not build mosques of their own in the period of my study – e.g., Turks, Bengalis, Indians, and Pakistanis. For these groups, I rely on a similar range of sources. As I argue in the pages that follow, Detroit's Muslims frequently worked together in ways that have not yet been fully explored by scholars. Bringing together the history of the city's diverse Muslim populations in one work has enabled me to see Detroit's mosques and Muslim enclaves from multiple perspectives. Each chapter that follows will trace the development of a particular mosque or set of mosques and the conversations that ensued over their successes and failures.

Chapter II examines the conditions under which Detroit's first Muslim immigrants settled in the city and how they practiced Islam. I explore interethnic relations among these early Muslims and the means by which two imams were chosen to serve their communities. I trace the initially successful effort to build the first mosque in the United States, the Moslem Mosque in Highland Park (established in 1921). This mosque was meant to stand as a unifying symbol of Islam in the United States. Its builders hoped to rally Muslim support behind the mosque's arabesque façade, to educate Americans about the growing Muslim presence in their midst, to link Detroit's Muslims to those overseas, and to create a site of pilgrimage for Muslims living throughout the American hinterland. Despite these lofty ambitions, and perhaps because of them, the first American mosque was also the first to fail. I parse out the motives for the mosque's construction, the reasons for its demise, and the significance of this failure for the building efforts that would follow.

Chapter III considers life in Detroit in the 1920s for a growing Muslim population that had no mosque. I examine the effects of the hostile media coverage Detroit's "Turks" received and the concurrent passage of anti-immigration legislation that effectively closed the door to new immigration from the Muslim world. Despite this cold welcome, many

immigrant Muslims decided to stay in Detroit. The second effort to build a mosque in the city was an explicitly anti-colonial campaign organized in the name of pan-Islamism, a movement hoping to build a transregional alliance that could dismantle European colonies in India, Africa, and Syria. This agenda overlapped with pan-Africanism, a sociopolitical movement that was soon to become entangled with Islam as well. The polycultural mosque that grew out of these alliances, the Universal Islamic Society, did not survive the Great Depression. Created by a largely “bachelor” population, this mosque also had little means, and even less motive, to carry on once the politics of the Muslim world changed and the world economy buckled in the 1930s. Many of its bachelor leaders returned overseas and the alliances that upheld this society quietly faded from view.

Chapter IV explores the consequences of the Great Depression for Detroit’s Muslims. Many repatriated to their countries of origin voluntarily, others unwillingly. For those who remained, Detroit and America were embraced as a certain future. Muslim families in Detroit, and increasingly in Dearborn, faced a new impetus to organize: the need to provide religious education and a distinctive ethno-religious social space for their American-born children. They needed a place in which to perform the rites and rituals of Islam, but also a space that could serve as focus for the perpetuation and reproduction of the Muslim community. Sorted now into ethnoracial enclaves that had not existed a decade earlier, mosque building became easier for local Muslims. Syrians (the largest enclave and the group that included the most women and children) could concentrate on building a mosque with and for other Syrians, rather than for all the city’s Muslims. The difference between Sunni and Shi’i styles of worship, however, still had to be reconciled. With a Shi’i majority, Dearborn’s Muslims eventually built two mosques rather than one. These successful institutions housed the nascent Muslim American identity then taking shape in Detroit. Far from insignificant, the lessons learned by the builders of these two mosques resonate loudly in Detroit today.

Chapter V focuses on the 1950s and 60s, a period in which Detroit rose to prominence as the center of Muslim life in the United States. Now home to several sometimes competing mosques, the city's Muslims sought to make their institutions vital. They imported well educated clerics from overseas, participated as leaders in the new Federation of Islamic Associations of North America and Canada (FIA), developed an active English language Muslim press, built readily identifiable, modern mosques, revitalized Islamic education for their American-born children, developed elaborate media campaigns to address American misconceptions about Islam, and welcomed the visits, attention, and resources of foreign Muslim leaders. Despite this flurry of progress and activity, this period was also vexed by intense and painful disagreements over the adaptive steps Detroit's mosques had taken to remain relevant. After the "Islamic awakening" began to gain momentum in the 1950s and the Sunna (the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers) was increasingly recognized as a model for contemporary life, many of the habits that had developed in the older American mosques struck new arrivals, new religious leaders, and new converts as unacceptable. This chapter examines the encounter between new and old models of American Islam in two important Detroit mosques: the Islamic Center of America and the Albanian Islamic Center. In both of these settings, the older, more Americanized models of Muslim practice actually prevailed. I also examine the role the FIA and Detroit's Muslim leaders played in producing this outcome, and in mutually reinforcing one another's authority as representatives of American Islam in a newly transnational political sphere.

Chapter VI looks at the paradigm shift that took place within American Islam in the 1960s and 1970s as newer, modernist, and transnational Muslim movements gained sway. I follow the careers of two American-born Muslim leaders in Detroit, one Arab and one black, and the ethnically distinctive, but nonetheless open and polycultural mosques they served. In many ways, these two institutions, the American Moslem Society and Masjid al-Mu`mineen, were prototypical American mosques. Yet their authenticity, and the authority of their imams,

was constantly disputed. I chart the troubled rise to prominence of the men who led these mosques, their encounters with new immigrants and with foreign Muslims living and studying in Detroit, and the challenges they and their congregations faced in the 1960s and 1970s, an era of civil rights struggle, Palestinian resistance, countercultural revolution, growing anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice, and a newly politicized and doctrinally rigorous Islam. Given the limited authority of their leaders, in both mosques new models of Islamic practice and new manifestations of Muslim identity ultimately held sway. I trace several conflicts which arose over leadership and religious authority in these institutions, gauge the influence of the Muslim Student Association (a second national Muslim association) on these mosques, and assess the impact of the introduction of petro-dollars to the Muslim American establishment in Detroit.

In sum, this dissertation explores the history of Americans who were already Muslim and Muslims who were already American prior to the 1970s. It considers the dynamic forces that pulled immigrants from diverse parts of the Muslim world into a common orbit with black Americans. Rather than dismiss early efforts to institutionalize Islam in Detroit, as many historians and other scholars have done, this dissertation asks why (and whether) these early efforts failed and, more importantly, why (and how) later efforts to establish mosques in the city succeeded. Detroit's Muslims had to clear two important hurdles before they could develop institutions that would endure over time. First, they needed a transcommunal politics that would enable them to speak with one voice and support each other in times of need, while simultaneously preserving and respecting the autonomy of their culturally distinctive communities. Second, they needed to come to terms with their status as a minority faith tradition in the US, which meant devising, among themselves, a working definition of what a mosque could and ought to be in this diasporic context. By focusing on interethnic relations among Detroit's Muslims, especially as they invented and redefined the institution of the American mosque, I show how intra-Muslim differences, some of which Muslims came to

respect and others of which they sought to overcome, have given Muslim American identity some of its most distinctive contours. These contours have become highly visible since the renewed immigration of the post-1965 era, and they have taken on political urgency since 2001, but they have not yet been fundamentally reconfigured.

Chapter II

The Lost History of America's First Mosque

America's first mosque was built in 1893 on "Cairo Street" at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. A close replica of the Mosque of Sultan Qayt Bey in Cairo, the mosque was built to display Islam for American audiences (Davis 2006). The Muslim workers and performers at the Exhibition, including a well trained imam, were encouraged to remain in their "native costumes" by the fair's organizers. But it was on their own initiative, and to the apparent delight of the public, that when the *adhan* (call to prayer) was made from the mosque's minaret five times a day, the visiting Muslims would duly gather inside and perform their obligations (Younis and Kayal 1995).

The exquisite and picturesque little mosque – it is the prototype of the purest bit of Eastern architecture in Stamboul – these thoroughly genuine people, this sacred service – not as a necessary part of the oriental exhibit, but as an essential, indispensable part of the life of the natives themselves – this combination of the genuine and the picturesque is to me the keynote of the Great Exposition.

[*Scribner's Magazine*: Vol. 14:606, quoted in Younis, 1995]

At the exhibition's close, the mosque was torn down and the performers and staff at the "Cairo Street" exhibit, who had been imported to the United States as objects of spectacle, returned to their more prosaic lives in Egypt, Morocco, and Palestine, where the ritual of prayer would draw little comment.

The second mosque to be built in the United States, with two ornamental minarets and a shallow dome, was completed in 1921, in Highland Park, Michigan. Built by Muslim immigrants for use as a place of worship, this mosque, like the one on "Cairo Street," was

intended to represent Islam to American viewers, but the Muslims of Highland Park hoped to create a very different impression of their faith. The Islam to be practiced in the Highland Park mosque would not be exotic, or a thing of spectacle. It would be an American faith not unlike those found in churches and synagogues.

While histories of Islam in the Americas often begin with the arrival of Morisco conscripts who sailed with Portuguese and Spanish conquistadors, or, generations later, with the Atlantic trade in African slaves, I argue that the history of today's Muslim American communities begins effectively in the 28 years that separated the construction of the Cairo Street and Highland Park mosques. The "Islam brought by the enslaved West Africans," Diouf observes, "has not survived. It has left traces; it has contributed to the culture and history of the continents; but its conscious practice is no more. For Islam to endure, it had to grow ... through transmission to the children ... and through conversion of the unbelievers" (1998:179).¹ The performers at the Columbian Exhibition, who were free to come and go, were able to influence the development of American Islam in ways Muslim slaves could not. When they returned to their homes in the Levant, they told fanciful tales of their sojourn in America, tales of "progress and opportunity." Their testimony added fuel to the "emigration fever" that was already burning in many regions of the Ottoman Empire (Younis 1961:183). By the first decades of the 20th century, Muslim immigrants from Ottoman domains began congregating in small mill towns, urban industrial centers, and on remote homesteads across North America, wherever work or trade could be found. These Muslim communities were small and dispersed, but, unlike earlier slave populations, they were free to practice their faith in the New World, and many of them decided to stay.

¹ West African slaves, who perhaps numbered in the tens of thousands, "came as Muslims and lived as Muslims" (Diouf 1998:1) despite the brutal conditions of slavery. Deprived of the opportunity to reproduce Islam through the generations, they nonetheless sustained it in their own lives and, where possible, found personal and political empowerment through Muslim networks. See Sylviane Diouf (1998), Terry Alford (1986), and Allan Austin (1997).

In the early decades of the 20th century, Islam was strange to most Americans, and Muslims were new to the United States. Immigrants and converts would have to build viable Muslim institutions if they wanted Islam survive in a predominantly Christian society. In cities like Detroit, Muslims faced serious constraints as they set about creating infrastructure for the practice and reproduction of Islam, an agenda that both required and would generate a distinctively Muslim American consciousness. In Chapters II and III, I explore these constraints and the efforts Detroit's Muslims made to overcome them. Chapter II focuses on the practical side of this work: on identifying religious leaders and determining their role; on identifying and creating social spaces in which immigrant communities could practice Islam without mosques; on figuring out where to locate a mosque in a rapidly growing city whose Muslims were diverse, dispersed, and highly mobile; on deciding how to fund and manage a mosque; on reaching a consensus about the purpose and function of a mosque; on negotiating sectarian difference within a mosque; and on accommodating women and children in mosque space. Detroit's first Muslim immigrants lacked experience in each of these areas, as do many Muslim immigrants today. More importantly, the early Muslims also lacked models. In Chapter III, I examine the intricate relationships between Detroit's Muslim communities, American society at large, and the geopolitics of interwar colonialism in the Muslim world. This transregional focus will illuminate the racial and political formations that were taking shape in the 1920s and their impact on the long term stability of the Muslim community in Detroit.

Life for the Early Muslim Immigrants: Making Room for Islam

The Muslim immigrants who began settling in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century emigrated from a surprising array of European, Ottoman, and formerly Ottoman domains. They began arriving in the 1890s, but their numbers were small compared to the better known European migrations of the same period. These pioneer American

Muslims were a highly mobile group until the 1930s, moving from one city or work site to the next, seeking better pay, better working conditions, marriage partners, and the company of others who shared their native languages and religious traditions.

Most of the early immigrants did not envision settling permanently in the United States. Their transience made it difficult for them to establish effective organizations, but by the early 1900s Muslim associations had begun to appear in cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit, and in smaller communities in the Midwest and Great Plains states. These immigrants needed a place to observe communal prayer. They needed fellow Muslims to wash and pray over their dead in keeping with Islamic custom. And they longed for everyday company with their fellow countrymen, for conversation in their native tongue, and for news of the families and friends they had left behind. These goals were as social as they were religious. They were also political. Many of the early Islamic associations began as ethnic clubs that doubled as nationalist organizations of one sort or another. Gradually, as Muslims gathered in one city or another, in the shadow of this factory or the terminal of that railroad, they began to build the infrastructure of a collective, Muslim American life.

In 1906, for instance, a Bosnian mutual aid society was established in Chicago under the name *Khairat ul-Umma* (Husain and Vogelaar 1994). A group of Polish, Lithuanian, and Russian Muslims followed with the *American Mohammedan Society* in New York in 1907. After meeting in rented rooms for decades, the society bought three buildings in 1931, making it the “first corporate body to purchase property in New York City with the express purpose of practicing Islam” (Ferris 1994:221). In 1924, a congregation of Grenadians, Arabs, and Indian seafarers established a small mosque on State Street in Brooklyn (Al Kahera 2002). Arab Muslims had also begun to settle in rural communities and near working factories on the East Coast and across the Midwest. They too established mutual aid societies in the first decade of the 20th century, in places like Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and Newcastle, Pennsylvania. Syrians founded the *Bader Elmoneer Society* of Michigan City

(Indiana) in 1914, and in 1924 they incorporated this society as the Asser El Jadeed Temple (the New Generation Temple), purchasing their first building to be used as a mosque in 1935 (Munger 1969).² In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the mosque known today as the “Mother Mosque of America,” was first organized as the Rose of Fraternity Lodge in 1925. By 1929 this congregation had begun construction of a purpose-built mosque, which was finally completed in 1934, after the worst of the Depression had passed (Aossey 1978).³ Similarly, the Syrian Mohammaden Lodge opened in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1918 (Boosahda 2003).

Detroit’s “Syrian colony” was part of this national trend. By 1897 a small colony of Syrian peddlers had settled in the city (“Arabian Colony,” *Detroit Journal*, 21 July 1897). The earliest Syrian settlers were Christians, but by 1908 Muslims had also begun moving into the area, congregating with other Arabic speakers. Several of Detroit’s older graveyards attest to the presence of Turkish, Kurdish, Afghan, and Albanian Muslims, again in the very early years of the 20th century.⁴ These Muslims were but a small part of a much larger influx of immigrants who arrived in Detroit between 1889 and 1923. Their numbers swelled in earnest after 1914, when Henry Ford, greedy for men to keep his new assembly line in motion, began offering a five dollar work day. The village of Highland Park, site of the world’s first standardized, integrated assembly line, had a population of just over 4,000 in 1910, and 47,000 by 1920. Detroit’s population more than doubled during this same decade, jumping from 465,000 to 993,000.⁵

This remarkable population boom was fueled not only by the arrival of new immigrant workers, but also by the internal northward migration of blacks and whites seeking

² “A History of the Islamic Mesjid of Michigan City” is included in the Naff Collection, NMAH #78, 1-K-1-b, anonymous, undated.

³ It can be argued that it is the oldest, but not the first mosque built in the United States.

⁴ See www.umich.edu/~biid for images of a few of the gravesites.

⁵ See Farley, Danziger and Holzer 2000 for a more extensive breakdown of these figures by race and place of birth.

economic opportunity and an escape from Jim Crow conditions in the South.⁶ Highland Park, like Detroit, was what we would now describe as a “fast city,” a town with cache that seemed to spring up overnight. Money could be made there quickly, and those with ingenuity found they could often do better for themselves outside Ford’s factory, building the city itself, laying out its streets and sidewalks, financing its model housing stock, feeding and furnishing the working and middle class families who were rushing into the new metropolis. In Detroit and Highland Park, there would be no immigrant ghetto, no overcrowded tenement houses. Highland Park offered those who could afford it (and were not excluded along racial lines) a domestic Eden where immigrant and American born workers could own their own homes, raise vegetables in their back yards, and stroll around the neighborhood visiting one another’s grocery stores, coffee houses, and churches. Neighborhoods closer to the Ford Factory also included modern, frequently mixed race apartment houses (*Detroit Saturday Night*, June 12, 1926). Highland Park incorporated as a city in 1920 to avoid being absorbed by Detroit, which had already encompassed the small village during the First World War.

A sizable population of Syrian Muslims had settled in Highland Park when Ford’s factory was still under construction, and these Syrians attracted more Syrians once the assembly line began to churn out large numbers of Model T automobiles. These Arabic speaking Muslims came from two different regions of today’s Lebanon. Those from the Bekaa Valley were mostly Sunni; those from further south, from the villages of Tibneen and Bint Ijbayl and the surrounding countryside, were predominantly Shi’a. Both were tightly knit communities. And they were unlike the Turks and Kurds who preceded them in Detroit, or the Indians whose numbers grew steadily after 1916, because many of the Syrian immigrants were women and children.⁷ Most Syrian Muslim families in the Detroit area in

⁶ In 1920, 30 percent of Detroit’s population was born overseas and another 36% were the children of at least one immigrant parent. Of the city’s 40,000 black residents 87% were born outside Michigan, most in the American South (Farley, Danziger and Holzer 2000:26-29).

⁷ Orfalea (2006) provides an appendix with the breakdown of Syrian arrivals by sex.

1914 lived in or near Highland Park, but the overwhelming majority of Muslim immigrants at the time were men without wives and children (Naff 1985, Bilge 1984). Many of these “bachelors” lived not in Highland Park, but in the immigrant settlement houses closer to downtown Detroit.

It is difficult to estimate the size of the Muslim populations of Detroit at the time. Immigration statistics are unreliable, given that many Turks and Kurds claim to have identified as Armenians when they entered the U.S. (Bilge 1994). American prejudice against Turks was strong at the time, and it was continually stoked by sensational media accounts of the Armenian Crisis, which had begun in the 1890s (see Chapter III). Likewise, Albanian and Syrian arrivals were part of a migration flow that was majority Christian. While historians have long placed the Muslim percentage of the Syrian immigration at 10% (Hitti 1924, Naff 1985), there is no way to verify this estimate. Bilge argues that there were about 5,000 Ottoman Sunni Muslims in Detroit by 1914 (1994: 387), a number which grew significantly during the First World War, as famine, military conscription, and social chaos beset the Ottoman domains. Figures for the overall Muslim populations that circulated in the press in the 1920s varied significantly, but tended to hover between 7,000 (*Detroit News*, July 10, 1924) and 15,000 (*Detroit Free Press*, January 11, 1921).

While Muslim immigrant populations acknowledged that they had many things in common with one another as Muslims, they viewed themselves primarily through the lens of national and cultural origins and tended to reside in ethnically distinctive enclaves and to invest in ethnically distinctive associations. A combination of legal restrictions on their migrations, both at the points of emigration and immigration shaped the gender imbalance of these populations. This gender imbalance had significant consequences for the religious institutional life of the Muslim community. Those in the US with intact families were more likely to stay in the US and to invest in mosques where their children could be raised as Muslims and exposed to religious education. Those without intact families were more likely

to perceive themselves as sojourners, a self perception that facilitated their eventual return overseas and discouraged the investment in mosques even for those who remained. The Turkish and Kurdish Muslim enclaves were made up almost entirely of men, often young men, who, like the Syrians, were mostly peasants who had left the Ottoman Empire around the turn of the century to avoid conscription, political turmoil, and overall conditions of neglect in the countryside. Many left home to make a bit of money, hoping to return once they were too old to be drafted. Uncertain about the conditions they would find in the United States, and not intending to stay, these men rarely brought women with them (Bilge 1994).

Indian immigrants were a different matter. Excluded by the Barred Zone Act of 1917, and later, in 1924, denied the right to naturalize, Indian Muslims continued to arrive in the United States through undocumented channels. Bengali Muslims made up a large percentage of British maritime workers between 1900 and 1925, and many jumped ship or found other means of entering port cities like New York, Boston, and New Orleans. Scores of Bengali workers, mostly from the rural Sylhet district, made their way to Detroit during and after WWI. Acir Udin Maeh, who arrived in the city in 1916 and thought himself to be the only Indian there, was surprised to meet another man from his village shortly after his arrival (Maeh interview). Lacking citizenship, Bengalis were unable to sponsor the migration of spouses, or to travel back and forth between the United States and India (Bald 2006; Chopra 1998).

For this predominantly male population of Muslim immigrants, the most important social institution to develop in Highland Park and Detroit by 1918 was not the mosque or mutual aid society, but the coffeehouse. In many ways, the coffeehouse served as a surrogate for both. It also acted as a surrogate for family life. Organized loosely along linguistic and cultural lines, with Indians and Afghans meeting in one space, Turks and Kurds in another,

coffeehouses provided men with a place to relax and socialize when not working.⁸ The coffee shops were similar to one another in that they provided *narjilabs* (waterpipes), cards, *tawilah* (backgammon), and other ways to pass the time. All served “Turkish” coffee. Many had adjoining restaurants. Alex Ecie, in his interview with Alixa Naff, mentioned that the single Syrian men he knew in his early years in Detroit purchased meal tickets from an Armenian restaurant in Highland Park, and took their meals there. Many coffee houses also provided light meals for their bachelor clientele. Muslim coffee shops were somewhat distinctive in their décor. Notably they tended to feature Arabic calligraphy from the Quran, usually the *shahada* (confession of faith) or *fatiha* (opening verse of the Quran), often easily visible from outside the shop. Several made prayer rugs available to patrons and set aside a corner or back room of the shop for collective prayer on special occasions. Whether Christian or Muslim, Afghan or “Hindoo,” these coffee houses provided immigrant men – and these were strictly homosocial spaces – with a place to gather intelligence on work opportunities, learn of new arrivals to and departures from Detroit, keep track of events taking place “back home,” and organize ethno-national associations, religious mutual aid societies, or some other form of club or society (Bilge 1994; *Detroit Saturday Night*, July 7, 1926; Bazy/Naff interview; Ecie/Naff interview).

Turks in Highland Park and Detroit created a housing cooperative in 1914, and in 1920 they joined with local Arabs and Kurds to open a Detroit chapter of Kizilay, a Muslim

⁸ Charles D. Cameron, in particular, studied the “Syrian” enclave in some detail and published his reports on life in this and other immigrant enclaves in the weekly society newspaper, *Detroit Saturday Night* in a 1926 series. These reports are exceptional. The details are carefully observed, no matter Cameron’s subject. He reports on the history of the Highland Park mosque, writes several essays on the coffee houses of the Armenians, Turks, and Syrians of the period, discusses the politics of the Syrian/Druze Rebellion against the French, and analyses the foreign language press in Detroit, largely through a detailed examination of the Polish community’s many papers. Cameron was also a member of the Americanization Committee of the Detroit Board of Commerce in 1919 (*The Detroit*, Vol. II, #8, Nov. 24, 1919: 1-2). In his capacity as a journalist, he seems to have been concerned with the question of assimilation, and his writing about Detroit’s Muslims emphasizes the adaptations they are making to life in Detroit. He plays off of the presumed Orientalist expectations of his readers, exoticizing his subjects while also stressing that these “easterners” are anything but unchanging or un-American. See especially his essays from July 7, May 22, 1926.

funeral association already established in New York (Bilge 1994). They also purchased a section of Roseland Cemetery for Muslim burials, the first explicitly Muslim cemetery plot in Michigan (Trix 1994, Bilge 1994).⁹ In 1922 men from the Indian subcontinent organized the India Club, which is said to have been open to all Muslims in the city (Maeh interview). In Highland Park, where the majority of Muslims were Arab Shi`a, a smaller mutual aid society was formed that held regular meetings in the homes of members. A prominent member of the Syrian community, Kalil Bazy, who spoke with historian Alixa Naff in 1980, remembered Highland Park in this way: “every *balad* (village) had a *jamea* (association or social club)” [translation mine] that also served as an unofficial mutual aid society when needed (Bazy/Naff interview).

While coffeehouses were suitable for meetings and prayers in communities where few or no families were present, for the growing Syrian population, the male centered world of the coffee shop presented a bar to the social and religious participation of women and children. For immigrants with families, holiday celebrations, Friday prayers, *mawlid*s, and other Muslim religious and social events were held in the homes of better established Syrians. Furniture was pulled against the walls, special carpets laid down, and household prayer spaces were created that easily accommodated men and women, adults and children. Worshipping in homes enabled women to participate more directly in the affairs of the Muslim associations, not simply as cooks and supporters, but also as hosts in their own right of *mawlid*s (services in praise of the Prophet), recitations, and other prayer services (G. Ecie, Berry, N. Bazy interviews). The homes of area Muslims, like their coffee houses, were important sites of religious and ethnic identity formation. But these private spaces could not hold large gatherings, nor were they welcoming to large parties of single men. They were also inadequate to the task of representing Islam to non-Muslim Americans, and they did little to

⁹ In her history of the Albanian Muslim communities of Detroit, Frances Trix argues that the Sunni Arabs congregated with the other Ottoman Muslims, but that the Shi`a Arabs congregated by themselves.

help Muslims fit in as other immigrant communities were doing, through the establishment of ethnic churches. Highland Park's Syrians were aware of the new churches built in Detroit by their fellow Syrians. St. Maron's Catholic Church was established in 1909 and St. George's Antiochian Orthodox Church was dedicated in 1918 (Howell and Jamal 2009b). They were equally aware of Muslim associations being established in other parts of the country. As more and more families began to settle in Highland Park, the Syrian Muslims there began to long for a church of their own, a mosque in which they could teach Islam to their children, keep Islamic traditions alive in America, and introduce Islam to other Americans. They wanted something more than a male-centered mutual aid society or social club. At the close of WWI, a plan was set in motion to build a mosque in Highland Park.

America's First Imams: Sunni and Shi'i Difference

Detroit's early Muslim communities were distinctive not only for their size and diversity, but because, by 1914, they could already count on the services of two imams. One of the first hurdles immigrant Muslims faced in practicing Islam in the United States was the lack of religious and spiritual leadership. They needed guides to help them understand their rights and obligations as Muslims living in a non-Muslim society. They needed ritual specialists to wash the bodies of their dead, provide a proper burial, and perform other, happier rites of passage. They needed preachers and teachers who could speak on their behalf to other Americans. Kalil Bazy and Hussien Karoub were Detroit's first imams. For over fifty years, they facilitated the growth and establishment of Islam in the city. They brought scriptural authority to Detroit's Muslim enclaves, stitched them together through ritual and worship, served as living bridges between America and the Muslim world, and became ambassadors of Islam in the United States.

Kalil Bazy (1886-1982) was the first to arrive in Detroit. He stepped off the street car onto LaBelle Avenue in Highland Park, Michigan, in 1913. Unable to speak or read

English, he had been told to turn left and follow the numbers on the houses until he came to 199. This was the address of his brother and sister-in-law, who had arranged Bazy's passage to the United States. They would take him in and help him settle into his new life. Like so many new arrivals, Bazy quickly found work on Henry Ford's rapidly expanding automobile assembly line, the model, modern, and – to Bazy's eyes – monumental structure that loomed over the growing cityscape of Highland Park, where workers were paid \$2.70 for a ten hour day. Bazy did not need much English to work on Ford's assembly line, nor did he need much English to get along in the thriving "Syrian colony" that had already taken shape just outside the gates of the factory, along Labelle and Victor Avenues.

Historian Alixa Naff was fortunate to have interviewed Shaykh Bazy in Dearborn in 1980. He was 94 years old at the time, but very clear in his memories. He described his Highland Park neighborhood, circa 1913, as "Arab. All Arab. All Shi`a from Bint Ijbayl and Tibneen [neighboring villages in what is today the South of Lebanon]. There were Christians, but our neighborhood was Muslim" (Bazy/Naff interview).¹⁰ Alex Ecie, also interviewed by Naff, arrived in Detroit a few years later, and he confirms Bazy's description: "you could walk up and down Victor Avenue and not hear one word of 'American.' There were thousands of Arabs there, just like Dix Avenue today" (Ecie/Naff interview).¹¹

After work, Bazy passed time in the coffee shop of Hussein Abbas, another Syrian immigrant from his home town of Bint Ijbayl. Here, amid cups of tea and coffee, tobacco smoke, and the familiar sounds of Arabic, he could share news from home, keep track of other Syrian settlements in "Amreeka," and relax in the company of other men from Ottoman Syria. A pious young man, Bazy had prayed and actively observed his faith in Bint Ijbayl, a habit he continued in Highland Park without difficulty. "This is a free country," he told Naff.

¹⁰ All interviews are indexed in the bibliography. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

¹¹ Dix refers to the intersection of Dix Avenue and Vernor Highway in the Southend of Dearborn, the main street business district in the Southend and eventual home to the Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society and the American Moslem Society

“No one asks you what your religion is, or your sect, or divides you. A person like me used to pray and fast in my home country. Here I prayed too. No one turned me away or opposed me” (Bazzy/Naff interview). Bazzy was singled out for his piety and sincerity by others in the Syrian community, not for his religious education. At the time of his arrival he had received no formal education, religious or otherwise.¹² Nonetheless, he was a skilled practitioner of Muslim ritual observances, and for this reason he gradually came to be known as *Shaykh* Bazzy.

Shaykh is an honorific used for both secular and religious leaders. Among the Shi`a, the title *Imam* – the one who leads in prayer – is reserved for the first 12 imams of the Muslim age, who were descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and are believed [by the Shi`a] to have been divinely sanctioned and infallible. Disputes over the legitimacy of these imams caused a schism in the early Muslim community. Those who came to be known as Shi`a believed leadership should remain within the family of the Prophet; they sided with the line of Imams that began with `Ali. Those who did not accept this line of leaders argued that righteous men who were not descendants of the Prophet could also lead the community. They came to be known as Sunni Muslims. The majority of the world’s Muslims are Sunni. Most of the religious practices and beliefs of the Sunni and Shi`a are the same, but several important rituals, like prayer, differ in small, but meaningful ways. In the role of *shaykh*, Bazzy was encouraged to master and maintain these fine distinctions on behalf of local Shi`a, leading them in prayer, reciting the stories and poetry associated with `Ashura (the annual commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn), and preparing the bodies of the Muslim dead for burial. Shaykh Kalil Bazzy served as a religious leader of the South Lebanese Shi`a in greater Detroit from 1913 until his unofficial retirement in the late 1970s.

¹² Bazzy worked as a shepherd before emigration. It was not until after he arrived in Detroit that he began to teach himself to read and write. At some point in his life, he traveled to Iraq for several months where he studied with religious scholars. He returned to the U.S. with several certificates empowering him to marry Muslim couples, perform funeral services, and carry out other official functions of Muslim and American clergy (Bazzy/Naff interview, Hamood interview).

Hussien Adeeb Karoub (1892-1973) arrived in Highland Park a few months after Bazy. He too was a Syrian immigrant, and like Bazy, he was singled out for his piety. But unlike Bazy, Karoub had received an “elementary education” in his native village of Marj al Angar, in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon, and had later traveled to Damascus, where he apprenticed himself to Shaykh Bader Deen at the Suleimaniyyah Mosque (*Detroit News*, Jan. 16, 1921). Hussien was 15 years old when his brother, Mohammed, returned from the United States for a visit in 1912. Mohammed had done well during his five year sojourn in America. He was eager to marry a girl from the village and return to the United States with a bride and his younger brothers to work beside him.

Mohammed was especially pleased with Hussien’s religious training. Mohammed had not encountered anyone with such experiences in the United States, and he recognized the value this training would represent to other Muslim American immigrants. Mohammed, Hussien, and a third brother, Osman Karoub, traveled to the United States in 1912. After working briefly as farm laborers in Danbury, Connecticut, they made their way to Highland Park in early 1914.¹³ Not only had they heard promising accounts of work in Henry Ford’s factory, but they also knew that Detroit was becoming the center of Syrian Muslim life in the United States. If Muslims were making Detroit their home, they were going to need an imam. Hussien Karoub was well equipped to fill this role (C. H. Karoub interview; Karoub/Naff interview).

When the Karoubs arrived in Highland Park, they quickly found jobs at Ford’s factory. Like other immigrant workers, the Karoubs were required to take English language and citizenship classes in the evening in order to qualify for the promised \$5 daily wages. Like Bazy, they were eager to make a home for themselves among expatriate Syrians,

¹³ Karoub’s sons and grandchildren disagree over the precise date of his arrival in Michigan. His ship crossed the Atlantic in April of 1912 and was at sea and heard the distress calls of the Titanic. Hussein’s son Karl thought his father arrived in Michigan in 1914, but his brother Mike understood his father to have arrived before the 5 dollar work day at Ford. This would have placed him in Michigan in 1913 (Karl H. Karoub interview, Karoub/Naff interview).

Muslims in particular. The Sunni Arab community of Highland Park was smaller than the Shi'a population, but it included a larger percentage of families, most of whom were from the Bekaa Valley. This group accepted Karoub immediately as their imam. Karoub was much better educated than most Syrian Sunnis in Detroit, and he could recite the Quran from memory. Despite his young age, his education and religious sincerity strongly recommended him for this important, but unpaid position.

Yet Karoub's education in Damascus – the very quality his brother had hoped would qualify him for a leadership position – made him a source of trepidation for many local Shi'a. In Ottoman Syria the distinction between Shi'a and Sunni communities was important. The Shi'a, a small religious minority in the Syria, suffered periodic harassment and persecution by Ottoman authorities and provincial elites, who were Sunni. Conditions were worse for Shi'a in urban centers like Beirut and Damascus (Norton 2009). Faced with the arrival of Hussien Karoub, Detroit Shi'a redoubled their support for Kalil Bazy.¹⁴ Thus, within only a few years of their settlement in Highland Park, Syrian Muslims had reasserted their commitment to maintaining their distinctive sectarian traditions, effectively dividing their community into the followers of Bazy and the followers of Karoub.

The city's other Muslims, Turks, Kurds, Afghans, Tartars, Bengalis, Albanians, and other Balkan Muslims, were predominantly Sunni. These different ethno-national communities were often familiar enough with Turkish (the administrative language of the Ottoman Empire), Arabic (the language of the Quran and of Muslim prayer), or English (the language of the factory and the larger society) for their members to communicate with one another. They also had lay religious figures like Kalil Bazy, men who were respected for their piety and led small gatherings in prayer. Acir Udin Maeh, for example, was the informal

¹⁴ In his interview with Alixa Naff, Bazy mentioned that he taught himself how to perform weddings, wash the dead, etc., and that when he arrived in Detroit, there was no Shi'a who could provide these services and the community "were happy when one of their own learned to do those things" (Bazy/Naff interview), implying that he learned these skills only after another man, most likely Karoub had already begun providing these services.

imam of the Bengali Muslim community for most of his life. He officiated at weddings, funerals, and holiday celebrations in the Asian community, providing services in Hindi, Bengali, and Urdu, most often alongside Hussien Karoub, who also spoke in Arabic and (later) English (Maeh interview).¹⁵ Karoub, however, was the only Muslim in greater Detroit with any formal religious education, and he was highly respected for his ability to recite the Quran. Karoub made a conscious effort to acquaint himself with the city's different Muslim communities, seeking out those who were interested in Islam or in need of his expertise. Over time, Karoub came to be recognized as imam to the city's Muslims as a whole, gaining the respect of Sunnis and Shi'a alike (Bilge 1994; Trix 1994; Maeh interview).

Soon after Bazy and Karoub settled in Highland Park, the First World War broke out in Europe, and the Ottoman Empire aligned itself with the Germans. This conflict wreaked havoc in the Ottoman domains, triggering multiple independence movements, and leading to Muslim political uprisings in British India as well. It also brought discord to Detroit, where Muslim immigrants faced an intensification of anti-Turkish propaganda, even as they struggled to hear news from home and worried about family members who braved the transatlantic journey despite the conflict. Across the U.S., former Ottoman subjects from different ethnonational and sectarian backgrounds advocated conflicting political outcomes for the Ottoman Empire. Over 16,000 Syrians enlisted in the U.S. Army, for example, eager to fight against the Ottomans in the expectation that the empire's demise would bring Syrian independence (Hitti 1924, Suleiman 2006).¹⁶ Later in the War, Arab Muslims in Detroit were greatly excited by the Arab Revolt and began a long campaign to convince the United States

¹⁵ Mr. Maeh led the Bengali community of Detroit until his death in 1967. Imam Karoub officiated at his funeral and mentioned at the time that the two men had performed over 50 funerals together (Maeh interview).

¹⁶ While most of the Arab veterans from WWI had no difficulty serving where asked, a few Muslims were given honorable discharges when they refused to take up arms against the Turks (Hamood interview).

government to support Arab independence (Bawardi 2009, Davidson 1999). At the end of the war, Turks found themselves embroiled in their own national liberation struggle.

By 1918, however, many of Detroit's Muslims had put down roots in the city and planned to stay there. Those who had intended to return home – to Turkey, Lebanon, or the Caucasus – received news that conditions in the countryside were abysmal. The Muslim enclave in Highland Park began to grow again. Veterans of the war returned to Detroit, many for the first time as American citizens.¹⁷ A few of Highland Park's Muslims had become wealthy during the war years, as Detroit's economy and population continued to expand. Highland Park was home to (at least) two prominent, and affluent, community leaders: the grocery store and coffee house owner, Hussein Abbas, a loyal supporter of Shaykh Bazzy; and Mohammed Karoub, the older brother of Imam Hussien. Together, and with separate coalitions of supporters, these men began to discuss building a mosque in Highland Park – a mosque that would sit alongside Highland Park's many churches and announce the presence of the city's Muslims to passersby; a mosque where American Muslim children could be taught the principles of Islam and be raised in their faith, where Islamic holidays could be celebrated by all the city's Muslims and Friday prayers could be appropriately observed; a mosque that could make Islam part of the landscape and fabric of Highland Park.

The Moslem Mosque of Highland Park

Building a mosque in the United States was a novel proposition. The first purpose built mosque in England, complete in 1889, was established on the grounds of an Oriental Institute in Woking, with funds provided by Sultan Shahjehan Begum of Bhopal, India.¹⁸ The history of this mosque resembles that of the mosque built at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893. While constructed for the intellectual amusement of British tourists and day

¹⁸ See the mosque's website at <http://www.shahjahanmosque.org.uk/>.

trippers, it was nonetheless adopted by Britain's colonial subjects, who began worshipping there as soon as the mosque opened. In Detroit, no wealthy patron or foreign government offered to finance the construction of a mosque. Local Muslims would have to pay for the project themselves. What would the mosque look like? How would it be financed and administered? Who would make decisions on behalf of the facility? Would the mosque have members? A congregation? What functions would it serve? These were challenging questions for the city's Muslims.

At the close of WWI, Mohammad Karoub, brother of Hussien, stepped forward and announced that he would build the first mosque in the United States. He did not organize a committee to help him in this task. Nor did he inquire at local churches to see how they had built their facilities. He simply declared that he wanted to build a mosque, and then set about doing so. Although ambitious, such an undertaking was not beyond the reach of a man with Mohammad Karoub's entrepreneurial talents. He had become a successful real estate speculator and developer just before the outset of the war. After buying a home for his young family and selling it a year later for a significant profit, he left Ford's factory and set out on his own. Detroit's population continued to grow at a rapid pace during the war and Karoub made a sizable fortune trading properties and eventually building apartment houses in Highland Park. By 1921 he was reported to be worth half a million dollars (*Detroit News*, Dec. 9, 1924). Intending to follow through on the impulse that had inspired him to bring his clerical brother with him to the United States, Karoub hit upon a plan to provide his brother – and all of Detroit's Muslims – a mosque in which to pray. Having bought up several empty lots along Victor Avenue, and a large multi-story apartment house, he pledged to apply the profits he made from turning over this property, an estimated \$50,000, toward the

construction of a mosque on Victor Avenue within a block of the gates to Ford's factory. In 1919 he hired an architect, Theodore H. Degenhardt, to begin work on the project.¹⁹

While Karoub's plan for managing and funding the mosque was never made explicit, it can be pieced together from news coverage of his plans and from what we know of mosque endowments in the Ottoman Empire, where mosques were the property and responsibility of a state sponsored religious endowment known as a *waqf*. Villages or urban neighborhoods did not set about building mosques on their own, rather they petitioned the government for a mosque. Alternatively, a wealthy individual would endow a piece of income-generating property as a *waqf*, which would be administered by a set of trustees put in place by the donor. The upkeep of these institutions was supported by *waqf* income and the trustees managed their financial affairs (Kuran 2001; Mandaville 1979). Karoub apparently envisioned the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park (MMHP) operating on a modified version of this model, with the apartment house acting as the *waqf* property and his brother Hussien acting as the *waqf* trustee. He borrowed from an American business model as well, soliciting "subscriptions" from mosque supporters in and outside the Detroit area. These subscriptions were to support the upkeep and improvement of the facility (*Detroit News*, July 10, 1924). Having made a quick fortune in real estate, Karoub now sought to become a patron of the Syrian Muslim community by building America's first mosque. His brother, Hussien, was to serve as resident imam.

Toward this end, the two brothers planned a cross country trek to solicit donations and drum up enthusiasm for the project.²⁰ Illustration 2.1 is a poster based on Degenhardt's drawing of the mosque, which Karoub had printed up for distribution on their journey. The

¹⁹ Degenhardt received no remuneration for this work, but performed the task as "his sacred duty" (*Moslem Sunrise*, July 1921:21-22).

²⁰ Abdo Elkholy provides the date 1919 for the opening of the mosque in Highland Park and also says that the building is now a church (1966:25). His work, being the first to provide any detail on Detroit's Muslim history, has been taken up and universalized among Muslim Americanist scholars. To her credit, Linda Walbridge also notices that Elkholy is factually mistaken on this point, among others, and she credits the opening date of the mosque, as I do, to Detroit newspaper sources (1997:43).

poster depicts the two brothers as well, Imam Hussien on the left in *tarboush* (a fez-like head covering) and *abaya* (robe), with a Quran tucked under his right arm and *masbaha* (a string of prayer beads) in his left hand – items signifying Arab/Oriental religious authenticity and authority – and Mohammad on the right, dressed in a suit and bowtie, complete with a stick pin on his lapel – items signifying worldly, American success. Note that the building’s design also marries 1920s urban American building materials and styles with a touch of the Orient. The building would have sat well in Highland Park’s streets, with its small front stoop, large open first floor, and basement. The mosque’s otherwise mundane facade is augmented with ogee arches (similar to those used on the Taj Mahal) over the windows and doors, two strictly

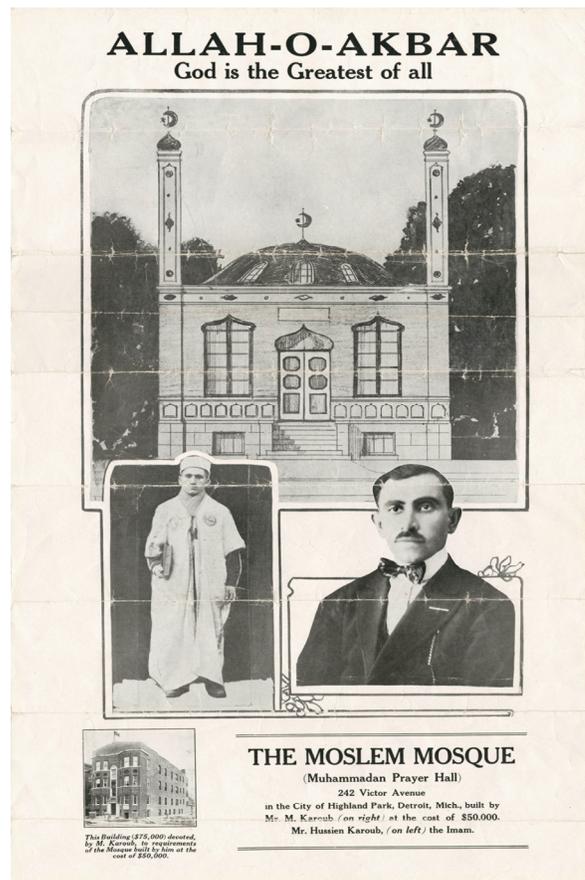


Illustration 2.1 Poster used to raise funds for the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park. Courtesy of Carl M. Karoub.

ornamental “minarets” capped off with crescent and star finials,²¹ and a low lying ornamental dome. With this deft mix of imagery, the two brothers sought to unify the time/space of Islam and the Middle East with that of urban America. For good measure, Karoub’s apartment building investment plan is included in the lower left corner of the poster.²²

The mosque had several interesting internal features as well. Muslims face toward Mecca (technically, toward the Kaba`a in Masjid al-Haram) when they pray, lining up toward the *qibla* (direction, orientation) of the holy city. The most significant and essential feature of any Muslim mosque or *musalla* (prayer space) is that it have an architectural feature, usually a niche, that both marks and is known as the *qibla*. As the finials on the mosque’s dome and minarets pointed toward Mecca to orient the city’s Muslims outside the mosque, inside the mosque the main *musalla* (prayer space) featured a *qibla* as well. Because Highland Park’s urban grid made it impractical to orient the building itself toward Mecca, the standard practice in much of the Muslim majority world, the *musalla* of the Highland Park Mosque was constructed as a circle with a 30 ft. diameter and a *qibla* and *mihrab* (prayer niche) facing southeast (*Detroit Free Press*, Jan. 11, 1921).²³ The mosque also included a spigot located on the front of the building so Muslims could perform their ablutions there, although most worshippers were expected to arrive in a state of purity appropriate for prayer, especially in winter, when the outdoor spigot would not have been functional. Likewise, a

²¹ The finials are said to have pointed in the direction of the *qibla* in order that the city’s Muslims know which direction they should be facing as they prayed (*Detroit News*, January 16, 1921).

²² This *Free Press* (Jan. 16, 1921) article is the first to document the direction in which Detroit’s Muslims placed their *qibla* in the 1920s. In the 1970s, most members of the community shifted to using a Mercator Map when determining where to locate their *qibla*. This entailed shifting their *qibla* from Southeast to Northeast. See Walbridge 1989 and Bilici 2008 for a discussion of this shift and its implications.

²³ This circle within a square architectural design was an impractical solution to the problem of creating an artful *qibla* in the already small building, reducing the size of the main room from 45 X 30 feet to a 30 foot circle. It is worth pointing out that one of the Detroit area’s most recent and grandest mosques, the (new) Islamic Center of America which opened in 2005, also utilizes the circle within a square design, but with much more room available. This congregation was able to make efficient use of the space between the round mosque and the building’s octagonal exterior as a lobby, entrance, and hallway.

crate of “turbans” was located inside the main door so men entering the mosque could cover their hair appropriately for worship (*Detroit News*, January 16, 1921).²⁴

On their 1920 journey, the Karoub brothers visited Arabic speaking Muslim communities across the United States and presented their proposal for a mosque in Detroit. Most of the Muslims they visited were Sunni Arabs from the Bekaa Valley, although in places like Michigan City, Indiana, or Toledo, Ohio, they also met with Shi`a Arabs, and in Connecticut with a small group of `Alawis. Often the families they stayed with on this journey had relatives in Detroit and Highland Park, and the Karoubs generated a sense of excitement on their travels. Young Hussien was kept busy marrying young couples and praying over the graves of the recently departed, while his brother solicited donations. They also visited with non-Syrian Muslims, again drawing on their connections in Detroit’s diverse Muslim enclaves. A precise itinerary of their journey no longer exists,²⁵ but Imam Karoub made similar pilgrimages throughout his life, visiting Muslim settlements wherever he was invited, stopping in Williamson, West Virginia; Newcastle, Pennsylvania; Mancelona and Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Ross, North Dakota; and Toledo, Ohio (C. Karoub, C. H. Karoub, Karoub/Naff interviews)..

This journey was a mapping expedition of sorts, with the Karoub brothers tracing the presence of Islam in the United States as they went. Inspired by these travels and the enthusiasm they generated for the planned mosque, Mohammed now wanted a mosque that would unify Muslims locally and nationally, that would provide Muslims with a locus of both sentiment and pilgrimage in the United States. A *Detroit News* reporter captured Karoub’s ambitions in the following statement: “To Karoub came the vision of Detroit as a holy city;

²⁴ In today’s American mosques, a box of scarves is frequently found next to the door as well, but is intended for women who need to cover their hair during prayer. Most Muslim men no longer consider a head covering necessary or even preferable during the act of prayer, whereas for women, it is required.

²⁵ The *Detroit News* (July 10, 1924) mentions that Karoub raised funds for the mosque in “every large city in the Eastern states.”

the vision of a united Muslim congregation drawn from the varied nationalities represented here; a sacred place to which the followers of Mohammed would be drawn from all parts of this continent” (*Detroit News*, July 9, 1927). Karoub’s plans were received with great enthusiasm, perhaps more so outside Detroit than at home. News stories that ran in the Arabic language papers in New York generated interest in the project overseas as well. “From the king of all Egypt came a Persian rug of the finest weave and the gift of a ring from his own hand. The king of Mecca sent 400 pounds of Turkish money” (*Detroit News*, July 9, 1927). Karoub also raised money for the project among local Muslims in Michigan. Newspaper sources (written after the fact) also named a few local Shi`a leaders as financial supporters of the mosque, including Hussein Abbas, William Harb, and Moses Samht (*Detroit Free Press*, April 27, 1924; *Detroit News*, July 10, 1924).

Construction began on the building in 1920, and by January of 1921, the pace of work was picked up in hopes that the edifice would be completed by Eid al Fitr in June of 1921. The mosque’s construction and opening were well documented by Detroit newspapers. The *Detroit Free Press*, for example, provided a population estimate for the area’s Muslims of 15-16,000 and claimed the number of languages spoken by these immigrants to be sixteen (*Detroit Free Press*, Jan. 11, 1921). James Devlin, a *Detroit News* reporter, visited the construction site and chatted with Mohammed Karoub. These excerpts from the interview again reveal Karoub’s ever mounting ambition. No longer a simple prayer space for Detroit’s believers, the small, still unfinished mosque was now an international shrine in his imagination:

Mr. Karoub said that since he had resided in the United States for the last seven years, he had been convinced of the need in America of a mosque where the followers of Mohammed might worship, and his civic pride prompted him to distinguish Detroit in the eyes of the world by building in this city a mosque that would draw the Musulmans from all parts of America in pilgrimage to worship.

The presentation of the mosque to the Musulmans of Detroit elevates the city in the eyes of the followers of the prophet throughout the world... It will be

no longer necessary for the 400,000 Moslems in America to make their “salat” in their hearts but they have the option of making pilgrimage to Detroit to pray in the house of their God and their prophet after the manner proscribed by their faith.”

(*Detroit News*. January 16, 1921)

Making Detroit the center of Islam in America and a site of pilgrimage was critical to Karoub’s vision, and it has remained a vivid dream for Muslim Detroiters for almost a century.

To realize this vision, Karoub enlisted the support of people who saw in Detroit’s Syrian community a potential center of the nascent Arab nationalist movement in the United States. Mohammed al-Mahayssin, a political refugee from Damsacus and the representative of King Faysal to the United States, was in Detroit at the time of this 1921 interview, and his views were also sought by Devlin. After praising American support for religious freedom, al-Mahayssin describes local Muslims as “content to remain permanently as residents of the city and to show their appreciation of the freedom of worship granted them by being useful citizens and devout believers in the faith of their fathers.” He then appeals to American fairness on behalf of Syria’s “constitutional king,” reminding readers that King Faysal supported the British during the war, and was now expecting “the support and friendship” of the United States in returning him to his Syrian throne. In this narrative, Detroit’s mosque serves an important symbolic role, providing Muslims with a place of pilgrimage, a home for their faith, and an intermediary space in which the United States and the Arab world could communicate with one another. The mosque becomes an embassy of sorts, representing the interests of both Muslim Americans and the larger Muslim *umma*. Finally, the article mentions that “the Moslem sheiks of the city, who number 5, look forward to a revival ‘that

will bring the faithful into communion once more, and bring a blessing on Islam in America”
(*Detroit Free Press*, January 16, 1921).²⁶

In February, as enthusiasm for the project continued to build, the Karoubs read about the arrival in Philadelphia of a Muslim scholar and missionary from India, Mufti Mohammed Sadiq. Sadiq’s arrival made the newspapers because he was taken into custody upon arrival while his application for entry – for the purpose of proselytizing for Islam in the country – was reviewed. Immigration officials sought initially to deny his entry on the grounds that he would promote and advocate for polygamy, despite his assurances to the contrary. Sadiq was eventually given entry after he clarified his position on polygamy to government officials. He argued that a distinction should be made between behaviors that are *required* of Muslims, such as prayer, and those that are merely *permitted*, such as polygamy. He assured officials that Muslims were obliged to obey the laws of the land in which they reside unless these laws specifically contradict their religious obligations (*Moslem Sunrise*, June 1921). Sadiq took his detention in stride, managing to convert 20 of his fellow detainees to Islam, but the leaders of Sadiq’s Ahmadiyya Movement in Lahore were stunned by this discriminatory move on the part of U.S. officials against an Indian national. They were, as Richard Turner points out, apparently unaware of American discrimination against Muslim and Asian immigrants and threatened to have American missionaries cast out of India in retaliation (1997:116). The Karoubs were greatly impressed with Sadiq’s mission, education, and prolific writing, and they quickly invited him to join their mosque building project in Detroit.

Opening Day and the Days that Followed

²⁶ In addition to Shaykh Bazzzy, Imam Hussien, and Mr. Maeh, it is unclear who the additional two religious leaders were, but this public acknowledgement that the city has 5 shaykhs indicates again how in touch with one another the Muslims were in 1921.

On June 8, 1921, it was Mufti Mohammed Sadiq who gave the following English language address to a crowd of several hundred gathered for the Eid al-Fitr holiday celebrations and the grand opening of the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park, Michigan.

This is the first Moslem mosque built in this land and I am proud to have the first prayer in it, as the first imam therein. This mosque, although built for the followers of Islam, will be open to the believers of all religions for a place of rest, prayer and meditation.

Mohammedans believe in worshipping but the one God. Mohammed, on whom be peace and the blessings of God, is a prophet of God who teaches us how to come into communion with Him. The religion of Islam treads underfoot all racial prejudices. Islam teaches its devotees that when they go to any other country they must peacefully obey the laws of the government of that country. Thus it is the sacred and religious duty of every Mohammedan here to be a good citizen of America and to learn the language of the country, without which we cannot understand each other rightly.

(Detroit News. Thursday, June 9, 1921)

The prayer itself was led by Hussien Karoub, who also addressed the gathered crowd of several hundred in Arabic, as did Kalil Bazy. After breaking the fast together, the three Imams led a parade of “swarthy orientals, headed by a band, and marching under the banners of America, Arabia, Syria, Mexico, and Turkey” across Woodward Avenue to Ford Field, where they paused briefly before returning to the mosque. The parade was followed by



Illustration 2.2 Opening ceremony of the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park. Featured from left to right are Kalil Bazy, Mufti Sadiq, and Hussien Karoub. (*Detroit Free Press*, June 9, 1921.)

members of the Mohemmedan Young Men's Association. Women were included in the procession in order "to show that they were Americans" (*Detroit Free Press*, June 9, 1921).²⁷ The *musalla* was not entirely completed on opening day, so carpets were placed over the dirt floor in the basement, and prayers were held there instead. It is unlikely that the several hundred who attended the prayers, meal, and parade could have fit in the basement, but it is certain they would not have fit in the circular *musalla* upstairs.

Mufti Sadiq was in many ways the ideal candidate to address the media and public officials who gathered to commemorate the mosque's opening. He was a well trained scholar

²⁷ Note the tone of skepticism in this language. In Chapter III, I will provide a lengthier discussion of the symbolic role women played in illustrating the "modernity" or the "Americanness" of Detroit's Muslims in the local media. Reporters typically complain when women were absent from public events, and when they attended, as at this event, their attendance was treated as insincere. Women, in the 1920s, did not worship in mosques in the villages and small town Detroit's Syrian Muslims emigrated from. In Syria, as in Detroit, mosques, like coffeehouses, were for men only.

of Islam and had received a degree in Philology from the University of London. He was also fluent in seven languages, could communicate freely with many local Muslims in their native tongues, and his English far surpassed that of Detroit's other clerics. In other respects, however, Sadiq was an unlikely spokesman for the mosque. He was not an immigrant to the United States like Detroit's other Muslims, nor had he helped to build or raise money for the project. Instead, Sadiq was a missionary to the United States from the Ahmadiyya Movement of Islam which is based in Qadian, India. His goal was not to sustain and support Islam among immigrants and their children, but to colonize America on behalf of a very particular sect of Islam founded at the end of the 19th century by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Ahmad claimed to be not simply a *mujaddid* (reformer of the age), but the promised messiah of both Islam and Christianity. His Islamic revival movement was explicitly tied to anti-Christian and anti-colonial campaigns in India, and the group rapidly gained adherents.

While the Ahmadiyya refer to themselves as Muslims and adhere to most of the beliefs and practices of other Muslims, they diverge from Islamic tradition when they insist that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was himself the messiah and a prophet of God. An important tenet of orthodox Islam is that Muhammad was the seal – or last – of the prophets in the Abrahamic tradition. Thus the majority of the world's Muslims have rejected the Ahmadiyya, arguing that they lie outside the fold of Islam. The Ahmadiyya nonetheless have remained among the most active Muslim missionary bodies globally, work which began roughly in 1920, just as Mufti Sadiq was sent to the United States (Turner 1997; Haddad and Smith 1993). The Karoubs, like most of Detroit's Muslims at the time, appear to have been unfamiliar with the Ahmadiyya Movement and the degree to which Sadiq's mission differed from their own.

The marriage of Sadiq's missionary agenda, education, and English language skills with Mohammad Karoub's money and ambition started off as a very happy union. Sadiq moved into an apartment at "Karoub House" on Victor Avenue and set about the business of

establishing his first permanent mission in the United States.²⁸ In July of 1921 Karoub underwrote and printed the first edition of the *Moslem Sunrise*, the English language newsletter of the Ahmadiyya Mission to the United States, which Sadiq edited (*Detroit Free Press*, September 24, 1922). As the cover of the first issue of the magazine illustrates (see Illustration 2.3), Sadiq seems to have shared Karoub's vision of Detroit and Highland Park as the center of Muslim life and pilgrimage in the United States. He places them near the center of his rising sun.²⁹

The *Moslem Sunrise* was not a project jointly controlled by Karoub and Sadiq; rather, it was a vehicle for Sadiq's mission. In the first issue, Sadiq provided details about his time spent in detention, responded to critical letters he had received after lecturing about Islam for American audiences, issued a very sharp note on why polygamy is not permissible for

²⁸ In Chapter III I discuss Sadiq's outreach to local blacks. While his mission work addressed all American audiences, he found that his successful conversion rate among blacks was higher than in other groups and he eventually targeted his efforts in this direction. In Detroit, he also had success bringing already Muslim immigrants to the Ahmadiyya faith. After his bad experiences with the Karoub's however, he placed less emphasis on converting Muslims once he left Detroit for Chicago.

²⁹ This correlation between the rising sun and the United States has symbolic significance for many Muslims, especially African American Muslims, who interpret a Hadith (a saying of the Prophet Muhammad) recorded by Muhammad Ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, in which the prophet states that the Day of Judgment will come when the sun rises in the West, as a prophetic reference to the future conversion of Americans to Islam.



Illustration 2.3 The cover of the *Moslem Sunrise*, July 1921.

American Muslims, reprinted several newspaper stories about the opening of the Highland Park mosque and the role he played in it, and acknowledged the generous support he had received from the Karoub family and from many other Arabs in Highland Park (“Arabian Hospitality,” *Moslem Sunrise*, July 1921:16). A feature of the *Moslem Sunrise* that he copied from the Ahmadiyya community’s equivalent paper in England, *The Review of Religions*, was the inclusion of a brief report on his success at bringing American converts to Islam, including the names of each new convert. In this list Sadiq symbolized the shedding of an old identity and embrace of a new one by publishing each convert’s birth name, followed by their newly given Arabic name. Mr. Robert Bednell, for example, became Abdullah, and Miss Elizabeth Barton became Zeinab. A secondary list was also included with the names of “Moslem gentlemen and ladies in this country” who “joined the blessed ahmadia movement.”

Several Arab Muslims appeared on Sadiq's July 1921 list. Of special interest to Karoub would have been the following: Hussain Haage, Muhammad Moshaiikh, and Othman Karoub (*Moslem Sunrise* 1:13). Othman was the brother of Hussien and Mohammad Karoub. Did this mean Othman had joined the Ahmadiyya Movement? Had he done so, he would have been considered an apostate by his brothers.

Apparently the brothers did not notice this detail of the English language coverage in the paper. They continued working with Sadiq. In October, when the second issue of the *Sunrise* was published, again with a Karoub subvention, Sadiq was more explicit about his mission. In addition to providing "a page from the writings of Ahmad (The Promised Messiah and Mehdi)"³⁰ (*Moslem Sunrise* 1(2):28), the newsletter also presented an illustration of the Highland Park Mosque and described the Karoub family in generous language, emphasizing the role the three brothers played in making the mosque happen. In this brief note, however, the name of the third Karoub brother was given as "Osman Karroub Ahmadi" (*Moslem Sunrise* 1(2): 31), indicating as explicitly as Sadiq could, that this third Karoub, brother to the founder and to the imam of the only mosque in the United States, had become a member of the Ahmadiyya community. At this point the Karoubs were confronted directly with Mufti Sadiq's heresy and with his ambitions toward their community, including their own family. Their hospitality and patronage of the missionary were immediately revoked. The *Moslem Sunrise* was not published again from Detroit, but from Chicago a year later. Sadiq moved his mission there in January of 1922.

This troubling encounter between the Karoubs and Sadiq was only the first of several woes that beset the Highland Park Mosque over the next few years. The Syrian Muslim population was "deeply shaken" by their encounter with Sadiq, and they were eager to challenge the judgment of the Karoub brothers for having embraced Sadiq so enthusiastically

³⁰ This violates one of the primary tenets of Islam: that the Prophet Muhammad was the final prophet in the Abrahamic tradition.

(*Detroit News*, July 10, 1924). This controversy made it difficult for Mohammad to raise the final bit of money he needed to complete construction on the building. Add to this the multi-staged opening of Ford's new River Rouge Assembly in Dearborn (beginning in 1918), several miles away from Highland Park. Many Syrians were moving to Dearborn to be near the new work opportunities there and could no longer get to the Highland Park Mosque without difficulty. The congregation celebrated Eid Al Adha in the mosque in August. After the Sadiq incident, however the number of worshippers began to dwindle significantly from week to week. In 1922, the building fell into disuse.

The very public demise of this mosque was painful, politically traumatic, and embarrassing for Detroit's Muslim leaders and did not become a tale that was recounted easily to later generations. When Kalil Bazy, who was an eyewitness to these events, was asked about the mosque's demise during his interview with Alixa Naff, he refused to recount them on tape (Bazy/Naff interview). Alex Ecie, who arrived in Detroit shortly after these events unfolded, described the demise of the Highland Park mosque for Naff in the following way: "the Sunni and Shi'a cannot get along. I don't care if I have to say it. It is true. So, if they had the shaykh first, the Shi'a, and the Sunni don't like that. And if the Sunni had their shaykh first, the Shi'a don't like that. So they had a fight or something like that and one man got killed. One man got killed. And they sold the place. Some of them, two three guys, they had control just like a committee or something, and they sold the place" (Ecie/Naff interview). Newspaper accounts of the mosque's downward spiral, and of the murder trial that followed, suggest that a tale of conflict between Sunni and Shi'a is too simple to account for what happened in Highland Park. Rumors and speculation filled the pages of the local press. Presented in the order of their first appearance in print, here are a few of popular theories of the new mosque's demise. These items read like cautionary notes in the margins of an instruction manual for new mosque development:

1) Attendance was “lackadaisical. Friday was their Sabbath and they had to work in the factory that day. If they didn’t, they lost a day’s pay” (*Detroit Free Press*, September 24 1922).

2) Sadiq was not able to convert local Christians to Islam (*Detroit Free Press*, September 24, 1922).

3) After a full year of waiting, Karoub had received no money from his “subscribers.” With two offers on the building and no worshippers, he decided to sell (*Detroit Free Press* September 24, 1922). Descriptions of the mosque’s financial woes grew more elaborate and sensational over time, until a 1924 story accused Karoub, with an “insatiable desire for money and power”, of embezzling \$100,000 in mosque donations (*Detroit News*, July 10, 1924).

4) Turks and Syrians were described as political enemies, uninterested in worshipping together. Apparently, other nationalities were “also at war” with the Arabs. “United under one religious banner? Yes! United in any other way? No!” (*Detroit Free Press*, April 20, 1924).

5) Karoub wanted the building to serve as both a mosque and a community center focused on providing Americanization services, while others felt it should be a “shrine” alone (*Highland Parker*, April 24, 1924).³¹

6) Mufti Sadiq “professed an advanced and reformed movement in Islam. ... This doctrine was not that of the bulk of the followers of Mohammad here, who clung to the old doctrine...” (*Detroit News*, August 9, 1922).

Of these claims, only the second is implausible. The mosque was not built for converts. It was built for Detroiters who were already Muslim in 1921, almost all of whom were immigrants. Most of the news stories suggest it was a combination of these factors that shut down the mosque. Such conclusions were easily drawn. The sources of contention described in these stories still plague mosque development today: financial mismanagement made possible by a lack of transparency; disagreements over the relationship between secular and profane activities within the institution; low attendance due to conflicts with work and family; pre-existing conflicts among member from different social backgrounds; irreconcilable theological differences.

³¹ This matter too suggests that Karoub had a financial ambition for the mosque that revealed itself only after the building was officially opened. This story does not suggest that Arabic be taught in the mosque or religious classes, but that it provide instead on Americanization services. Karoub could charge rent for Americanization classes, whereas Arabic classes, which were eventually provided from the home of his brother, Imam Hussien Karoub, would not have produced income.

Carl Muller, of the *Detroit Free Press*, after interviewing Muslims from several cultural backgrounds in coffeehouses throughout the city, offered his own analysis of why the mosque failed. Narratives like this, although typically less colorful, also continue to surround the opening of mosques in the United States today. Relying on familiar Orientalist motifs of antiquity, fatalism, and desert quiet and purity, Muller seeks to naturalize Islam and confine it with its proper Middle Eastern setting. By contrasting Eastern quiet and calm to Western lights, bustle, and noise, Muller suggests outright that Islam does not belong in Detroit. The Kipling poem he quotes from conveys a similar conclusion: the Highland Park mosque failed because its setting in urban America was incongruous, antithetical even to the practice of Islam.

“East is East.” It is an unhurried land, the home of Mohammedanism. It is a land of deserts and infinite silence, where the mind turns readily to philosophy. It is a land of minarets and mosques, faint perfumes, crooked streets, pomp and power, poverty and need, fatalism and muezzins calling the devout to prayer from the balconies high up on the spires of ancient temples. It is the setting and the background and the stage property of Mohammedanism.

“West is West.” Consider that portion of the west in which the Highland Park mosque was built. From four high towers, as unlike the minarets of the East as the Protestant minister is unlike the sultan, great clouds of smoke belch forth. There is no peace and quite, but uproar and turmoil. There is no desert silence. Instead there is the unending roar of traffic and the shrill sound of the traffic policeman. Instead of the bright stars of the eastern heavens there are garish electric signs advertising soap, chewing tobacco, underwear, tooth paste and Providence knew what else. There is hurry and strife and madness. There is the background, the setting and the stage property, not for a mosque, but for a convention hall for master mechanics.

“East is East. West is West. And never the twain shall meet.”
(*Detroit Free Press*, April 20, 1924)

Murder and Sectarian Conflict

Within a year of the mosque’s opening, Mohammad Karoub gave up on the project. Because the building was not being used for worship, the city of Highland Park stepped in to tax the property. Karoub then tried to sell the building, washing his hands of the MMHP.

Rather than end here, however, the story took a macabre twist. Karoub's decision to sell the building was vehemently opposed by those who had contributed money to its construction. People objected to the sale of the building on two grounds. First, the building had been consecrated as a mosque, and it would be wrong, some argued, to convert this sacred space for secular usage. Others complained that Karoub alone would profit from the sale of the property, when hundreds of Muslims had contributed. Tension between the various parties eventually coalesced into a conflict between Mohammed Karoub and Hussein Abbas, the wealthy coffee shop proprietor who was Shaykh Kalil Bazzy's biggest supporter.

Abbas lobbied to block the sale with city authorities and attempted to have the building turned over to (or sold to, the record is not clear) a committee of local Shi'a Muslims, who proposed that they be allowed to complete construction of the facility, maintain the building, and, most importantly, to begin worshipping in it again, this time behind the leadership of Bazzy. Unable to resolve these differences amicably, Abbas filed an injunction with the city to prevent the sale of the mosque in February of 1924. While Alex Ecie's comment about Sunni and Shi'a competition is born out here, it is equally true that both groups supported the mosque initially, and reportedly prayed together in the mosque (Bazzy/Naff, Ecie/Naff interviews). But it was a Shi'a delegation who were eager to see the mosque live on. In fact, beyond the Karoub brothers, no Sunni faction or group of supporters is mentioned in the news media at all.

On March 13, 1924, a few weeks after Hussein Abbas filed the injunction with the city, he was murdered in his sleep. He was shot while his wife lay bound and gagged on the bathroom floor. The police were sent to question Karoub about the murder, and it was Karoub who directed them toward a young Turk, Ahmed Mohammad. Mohammad, found with the murder weapon still on his person, immediately confessed to the crime. He also accused Abbas's wife, Muneera, of having "concocted the plot" so that she and Ahmed could marry and live off of Abbas's wealth, which reportedly amounted to \$100,000. The young Turk and

Mrs. Abbas were apparently lovers. Both were convicted of the murder and received life sentences (*Highland Parker*, March 26, 1924). Suspicion was also cast upon Mohammad Karoub, however, because of his well known dispute with Abbas. During her defense, Muneera Abbas argued that Karoub, not she, had contracted with Ahmed to carry out the shooting. Ahmed Mohammad also implicated Karoub, saying Karoub had hired him to carry out the killing and had been the one to propose his liaison with Muneera Abbas. For this reason, Mohammad Karoub also had to stand trial for the murder of Hussein Abbas. He was acquitted of all charges (*Detroit News*, Dec 9, 1924). The fiasco at the mosque, coupled with this personal tragedy, insured that Mohammed Karoub would never again undertake a mosque building project in Detroit (or play any public role in the religious life of the community).

The matter of the property sale dragged on in court for another year before it was finally resolved in 1926. Karoub sold the building to the city of Highland Park and divided the proceeds up among those who had initially contributed to the mosque. The city sold the building again a year later to the Woodmen of the World, a fraternal lodge, for \$14,000 (*Highland Parker* July 7, 1927).

The Consequences of Failure

The Highland Park mosque may have ended in tragedy, but it was in many ways the beginning of mosque building efforts across the country. Mohammad Karoub's initial ambition, which he shared with Muslims nationwide, inspired Muslims in other communities to organize and begin to invest in institutions of their own. At some point in the 1920s Hussien Karoub, imam of the failed MMHP, left Detroit and sought solace elsewhere. He retraced his first cross-country American tour, visiting Muslim enclaves, relating the sad news of the mosque, and continuing to provide the religious services Muslims in small communities throughout the Midwest would come to rely on him for. He lingered in Cedar

Rapids for a few months (and returned there frequently in subsequent years), helping their active Muslim community hire an imam of their own, developing an Arabic school and Quran school that became the envy of the nation, and establishing a mosque that is, perhaps, the oldest functioning mosque in the United States.³² Many of the mosques that were built – or initiated – in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Ross, North Dakota; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Dearborn, Michigan) were inspired in part by the Karoubs’ campaign to build the MMHP, and many of these mosques resembled the Highland Park Mosque in their basic layout.

On his travels, Imam Karoub discovered that Mufti Sadiq (the Ahmadiyya missionary) had already passed through many of the same communities he visited, bringing word of the Highland Park Mosque, and speaking enthusiastically of the importance of mosque building. It is worth quoting from Sadiq’s “Advice to the Muhammadans in America,” which he published in his second edition of *The Moslem Sunrise*. This text provides the best example from the period of a new arrival to the United States exhorting American Muslims about the state of their faith.

There are many Muhammadans in this country who come from Syria, Palestine, Albanian, Servia, Bosnia, Turkey, Kurdistan and India. Their exact number is yet unknown, but they are in thousands. This epistle is addressed to all of them. I beg to be excused to say that in the majority of cases you are Moslems in name only – Islam not playing a practical part in your every-day life. Nay, even your names are generally no more Moslem because you have adopted American names. These are the days of trouble for you. The Moslems are being disturbed and dispersed everywhere. The United States is a very good country for you to live in. I wish millions of Moslems to come over here, settle in this land, make it their home and enjoy the privileges of the citizenship in this free, fertile and rich land. But I must advise you—
(*Moslem Sunrise*, 1(2) 1921:29)

³² I spoke with the current imam of the Mother Mosque, Imam Taha in 2006. He mentioned that when he first arrived in Iowa several of the older women in the congregation would sing Arabic religious songs as they worked in the mosque. When asked where they had learned such songs, they mentioned Imam Karoub, their “first” imam. The family narratives disagree on how long Imam Karoub stayed in Cedar Rapids, between a year and several months. He also visited the city frequently in ensuing years. Abdullah Igram, an Iowan who was interviewed by Naff in 1980, mentioned that Karoub stayed in the city for several years to set up the school there (Igram/Naff interview). It is more likely that Karoub visited Cedar Rapids when there were work slow downs at Ford in Highland Park.

Sadiq then lays out a ten point plan to redress the dire plight of American Muslims, which I provide in Appendix A. He reminds them to pray and teach their children Islam, among others duties, but the eighth item seems to have been inspired by his stay in Detroit. “Build a Mosque in every town to worship one God, however small and simple it be, but there must be one” (1921 1(2):29). Written when his future in Detroit and that of the mosque still looked bright, this statement seems to foreshadow the mosque’s fate. “If you cannot build a Mosque, then fix up a room in the house of one of you to meet there everyday to say prayers together...” he continues. It is not the minarets or carpets that are important to Sadiq but the act of communal prayer, and the reading of the Quran. Sadiq is impressed by the opportunity American Muslims have to settle and “enjoy the privileges of citizenship,” but he is also concerned that, as a tiny minority and as a population of men (primarily) who did not come to the United States for religious purposes, the cost of those privileges will be their faith. Rather than gaining for Islam a new territory for “millions of Moslems,” he is concerned that America will rob these immigrants of their Islam.

Sadiq did not understand what historians and sociologists of American religion have long recognized: that religion becomes more salient – or newly salient – for immigrants (and transmigrants as well) as they settle into a new environment. Religion is an important, and politically protected, arena of identity formation in the United States, especially for ethnic and racial minorities whose political voice is otherwise stifled and whose value as citizens is not fully recognized (Wuthnow 1991:295). “Religion is a refuge for cultural particularity” (Warner 2005:30) and for political particularity as well. Perhaps Sadiq did understand this latter point. When he condemns American Muslims for being Muslims not even in name, he is speaking in the language of an evangelist. He wants America’s Muslims to make use of their privileges and find their collective voice, a task he deems urgent given the “disturbed and dispersed” state of the world’s Muslims. He understands that the power of this collective

voice is at risk, should American Muslims lose their identification with Islam, just as surely as this loss would jeopardize their souls.

Kalil Bazy, leader of Highland Park's Shi'a Muslims, was well positioned to understand this warning. Coming from a marginalized religious minority within Syria, Bazy's ethnic identity was already tightly intertwined with his faith. Bazy had been sidelined in the campaign to establish the Highland Park Mosque, which had been built by one Karoub to be handed over to and led by another. When the Karoub brothers suffered their crisis in leadership, a crisis which was spiritual, financial, and political, it was Bazy's allies and supporters who stepped in to contest the sale of the mosque and propose an alternate plan. Freed from the necessity of deferring to Sunni hegemony, the Shi'a had hoped to lead and manage this institution according to their own traditions. It helped that they had grassroots support and, as we will see in the next chapter, greater social and political acumen as well. This differential between the Karoubs' financial power and Bazy's popular support and Arab nationalist ambitions may explain why community hostilities were elevated enough in 1924 for Hussein Abbas's murder to have been blamed on Mohammad Karoub.

With Abbas's death, Shaykh Bazy lost a wealthy and loyal patron, but he did not lose his commitment to establishing Islam, Islamic associations, and mosques in Detroit. The need for a mosque, in Bazy's view, became more urgent with each passing year. Other pressing matters overtook the city's Muslims in the early 1920s, raising the stakes considerably for the future of Islam in the United States. In May of 1921, the Emergency Quota Act was passed, which severely limited the ability of the Muslim population to grow via new immigration. Asian Muslims found themselves excluded from the right to naturalize, and their co-nationals were denied entry to the United States altogether. Syrians and Turks found themselves defending their right to naturalize as "free white persons" in American courtrooms. Locally, while the Highland Park Mosque's opening had brought initially positive visibility to the city's Muslims, in the wake of the organization's decline this

coverage soured quickly, exacerbating the anxieties and bigotry of local nativists. Regardless of the large number of Syrians who had enlisted in the US Military during WWI specifically to fight against the Ottomans, Muslims found themselves being featured negatively in stories about the Armenian genocide in Turkey. Finally, Syria was now under French control, and the terms of the Balfour Declaration insured that European interventions in the region would make Arab autonomy and sovereignty an uphill struggle. These were the issues that Shaykh Bazy found provocative, but each of the city's Muslim enclaves had its own set of political grievances, and most of them intensified during the 1920s.

The inability of Detroit's Muslims to create a viable mosque significantly hindered their ability to represent themselves as a political, ethnic, and religious constituency in the city and – given the grandeur of Karoub's plans – in the nation as a whole. The consequences of remaining mosqueless also made it more difficult for both Hussien Karoub and Kalil Bazy to provide religious services and build alliances across the ethnic and racial divides that defined the Muslim immigrant community. Christian churches in Highland Park began poaching on Arab families, inviting their children to Sunday school, luring them in with treats and toys. Finally, as African Americans became increasingly interested in Islam in the 1920s, a mosque could have provided an institutional setting in which they might have learned about Islam, as happened a generation later at the State Street Mosque in New York. A viable mosque could have provided a secure space in which Muslims could encounter and challenge one another and non-Muslims could be addressed or converted to the faith. In the next chapter, I will explore the consequences of the failure of the Highland Park Mosque and examine several new campaigns to institutionalize Islam and develop a sustainable transcommunal Muslim politics in the years that followed.

Eventually, Imam Hussien returned to Detroit, shorn of his brother's ambitions, and recommitted to his role as Muslim cleric of all the city's Muslims. Given the painful turn of events in Highland Park, it is no wonder that Karoub did not speak often of this first mosque

building campaign; nor did he carefully go about preserving the records of the “first American mosque.” The Highland Park Mosque was not only the first mosque established in Detroit, and the first built by and for immigrants in the United States; it was also the first mosque to fail and the first to be publicly forgotten.³³

³³ Elkholy mentions the Highland Park Mosque in his book: “The first mosque in America was built in Highland Park, Michigan, in 1919. It is now a church” (1966:25). Many other scholars have followed his lead, although the story has accrued a detail or two as it has evolved in footnotes. Shaykh Bazy, as mentioned previously, turned off the tape recorder when Alixa Naff asked about the mosque’s history and her notes of their conversation off tape do not survive. Alice Karoub, reflecting on the story, told me that she wished I would not write about it. She feared it would make the Karoub brothers look greedy. From Imam Hussien’s perspective, “it was humiliating and painful that his brother was involved in this type of scandal.” As will become obvious in later chapters, mosque openings throughout the Detroit area have frequently been described by the word “first.” Rarely have their experiences been this painful.

Chapter III

They are Orientals and they Love the East: Locating Muslims in the Racial Hierarchies of Detroit, 1922-1930

The Muslim American identity that began to emerge in Detroit in the 1920s did so in relation to several intersecting discursive spaces in which Muslim difference had taken on heightened political significance. The second mosque to be established in greater Detroit, the Universal Islamic Society (UIS, established in 1925), was a direct response to the political upheavals of the period. Unlike the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park, the UIS was not the brainchild of a wealthy, would-be patron, but of a multiracial alliance of pan-Africanist and pan-Muslim actors who sought, for a brief time, to pursue their political and religious agendas together. These agendas reflected a growing subaltern consciousness among Detroit's Muslims that was shaped by domestic American policies (immigration and naturalization legislation, polemical media representations of the city's Muslims, anti-black racism in the South and North) and by growing resistance to European colonial policies in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

As Orientalist and nativist discourses converged in the 1920s, not simply in Detroit's newspapers, but in courtrooms and legislative bodies across the nation, Muslims saw their ability to immigrate greatly curtailed. South Asians and Afghans, inscribed as non-whites, were now denied the right to naturalize and to come and go freely from the United States. This meant they were cut off indefinitely from their families overseas and, with few (and in most cases no) women of similar ethno-religious origins in the United States, cut off as well from the possibility of endogamous marriages. Their ability to develop ethnic enclaves of

their own was foreclosed. They also found themselves discriminated against in employment and housing markets. Even those who were allowed to naturalize (Turks, Syrians, Kurds, Albanians) faced a discriminatory quota system that fixed immigration from their homelands at 100 individuals per year.¹

Those who had hoped their adopted home, the United States, a nation committed to “liberty and justice for all,” would support independence movements in their former homelands – Syria, India, Albania, Turkey – were gravely disappointed. Pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism were both ascendant among Muslims abroad, and these movements were embraced by many in Detroit as well. African Americans began to embrace pan-Africanism during this period, a movement that linked the plight of black Americans to that of colonial Africa and to black populations elsewhere in the Western hemisphere. Black Americans also began to convert to Islam, in part to escape the ravages of American racism. These populations, immigrants on the path to citizenship, immigrants excluded from citizenship, and native-born Americans excluded from the full rights of citizenship, together explored the potential and the limitations of a pan-Muslim identity and politics in Detroit. The Universal Islamic Society provided Detroit’s Muslims, especially those without families in Detroit, with a space to pursue these agendas. It also gave new Muslim converts and those curious about Islam an opportunity to interact with Muslim immigrants and activists and to explore their own commitment to Islam.

In addition to exploring the rise of the UIS and the political discourses to which it sought to respond, this chapter will trace the less public, but equally polycultural support networks Detroit’s Muslims created to sustain the everyday practice of Islam in the 1920s. The vitality of these networks is absent from the academic literature on Islam in the United States, which generally treats the 1920s as an era of religious and political apathy among

¹ This was the official quota for both Turkey and Syria, although the Syrian quota was uniformly exceeded (Orfalea 2006).

immigrants. Today, most scholars assume that few ties were established during this period between immigrant Muslims, black Muslims, and others drawn to Islam. More importantly, the vitality of Muslim organizational life in the 1920s contradicted the image of Muslims promulgated by Detroit's local nativists, who believed Islam should be prevented from taking root in the city. "They are Orientals and they love the East," journalist Faye Elizabeth Smith said of the city's Turks, Kurds, and Syrians in 1922 (*DSN* April 22). By exoticizing and racializing the city's Muslims in this way, portraying them all as Orientals – a term of exotic danger and appeal – Smith neatly encapsulated the intricate patterns of discursive, judicial, and legislative discrimination that sought to block Muslim settlement in the city. The same ideological constructs were used to validate the ongoing colonization of Muslim homelands abroad. Though dismissive, Smith's claim was accurate: Detroit's Muslims did love the East. Rather than return to it unchanged, or sit by as it was conquered and exploited, Muslims in Detroit struggled to reconfigure the relationship between East and West. Their love for the East was inseparable from their commitment to Islam, a commitment that brought the city's Muslims together and motivated them to reterritorialize Islam and the East as integral parts of the American city in which they lived.

Polygamy Again?

In 1922, the society newspaper *Detroit Saturday Night* ran a series of articles on eight of the city's newest and most "foreign" colonies, entitled "Bits of the Old World in Detroit." Armenian and Chinese populations received especially glowing coverage. The Chinese "admire the United States intensely and devote themselves eagerly to absorbing our habits." Not only are they Christian, but the "colony is made up almost entirely of better class Chinese who came to this country as students, merchants, travelers, or teachers" (March 4, 1922:4). The Armenians "are the pilgrims of the twentieth century," the "Europeans of Asia," who live "according to Western standards and looking to the West for their ideas" (March 18, 1922:8).

Written not long after the passing of the Emergency Quota Act (May 1921), the series set out to evaluate several of Detroit's more exotic immigrant populations in terms of their "fitness" for citizenship by evaluating the conditions in which these newcomers lived in Detroit, touching specifically on their gender and marriage customs as a gauge of this fitness. Series author, Faye Elizabeth Smith, visited immigrants in their homes and work places, in their social halls, coffee houses, and places of worship. Her impressions of the local "Turkish colony" were not pleasant. Here is the lead to her story:

The Detroit Turkish colony is made up of 1,500 young bachelors wedded to polygamy. They consist of Ottoman Turks, Kurds, and Syrian Mohammedans, and have built the only mosque in America, on Victor Avenue, in Highland Park, that Islam may gain a foothold in this country. To set the crescent against the sky of the New World is their only ambition in the occident. They remain only to make money that they may return to the homeland and take unto themselves the delightfully multiple state of matrimony which Mohammed decreed.

No American school will ever set them writing 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' The oriental can always wait. Minera Abass² is the only Turkish woman known to be in America today. Her soft eyes and veiled charms, in contrast with the joyous experience of the American flapper, suffer no eclipse. When they chance to see her, they are only inspired to work harder that they may speed the day when they may draw one, two, three, even four queens from the pack.

(*Detroit Saturday Night*, April 22, 1922:8).

These images were perhaps as familiar to the readership of *Detroit Saturday Night* (DSN) in 1922 as they are to us today. Following on the heels of popular films such as *The Arab* (1915), *The Garden of Allah* (1916), *Salome* (1918), and especially *The Sheik* (1921), and drawing from the deep well of American Orientalism, readers were fully prepared to see Detroit's Muslims as sexually libidinous, existing outside of time, their women oppressed, and their faces "blank with the mask of the orient" (DSN, April 22, 1922:8).³ "Grounded in a Social Darwinistic belief in the racial inferiority of Arabs, Kurds, and Turks and sustained by

² Minera Abass is the same woman discussed in Chapter II who was found guilty of conspiring to kill her husband, Hussein Abbas.

³ Melanie McAlister (2001) provides a much longer list of films and other cultural products that were popular during this period which drew on and contributed to stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims.

an abiding faith in the superiority of the United States,” observes Douglas Little, “orientalism American style became a staple of popular culture during the 1920s through such media as B movies, best-selling books, and mass circulation magazines” (2002:17). In the late 19th century, this imagery had focused more specifically on the “terrible Turk” as Christian missionaries working among Armenians in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire documented and fed stories to American newspapers on the Armenian separatist movement and its conflict with Ottoman authorities, a conflict that escalated eventually into ethnic cleansing and genocide. American media presented one-sided, and sometimes falsified, accounts of this conflict (Whitman 1914; Davidson 1981), in which Turks – and Muslims writ large – were portrayed as explicitly and aggressively anti-Christian. In Detroit, these representations partook of anxiety about polygamy, but they often focused explicitly on the plight of the Armenians as well, on the “unspeakable tragedies committed in the name of Allah and Mohammed, His Prophet” as Smith put it (*DSN*, April 22, 1922:4).

By the 1920s, in the aftermath of the Arab Revolt, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the rejection of the Balfour Declaration, and similar independence and anti-colonial movements, the imagery used to malign Turks and Ottomans was being shifted to Arab Muslims. Whereas stereotypes of a generally passive people prone to emotional and sexual extremes had been dominant prior to this period, a newer, more aggressive set of images of Muslim/Arab fanaticism and radical anti-Westernism took shape after the First World War (Little 2002:20). Melanie McAlister (2001) and William Leach (1993) have argued that these representations would eventually be used to rationalize American interventions in the Muslim and specifically the Arab world. In the 1920s, however, they were used to promote a new consumer culture at home (Orientalist exoticism was a common theme in advertising) and, more importantly, to alleviate – and confirm – anxieties about immigration (by associating the Orient with dreadful and desirable things). American Orientalism also provided an important discursive space in which discomfort over shifting gender roles in the post-

Victorian era could be transposed onto Muslims, freeing Americans to package their new gender ideologies as “emancipation” and, therefore, as proof of the superiority of Western modernity.

Smith’s prurient interest in polygamy borrows heavily from several of these Orientalist traditions. For example, her discussion of gender practices among the different immigrant populations as a whole contains a clear disciplinary message intended to steer immigrants toward the evolving American ideal of autonomous heterosexual married couples. She chastises the Armenians, for example, for relying so heavily on the “picture bride” custom of arranging transnational marriages through the mail, while also acknowledging the circumstances that made this practice, however “unnatural,” expedient. “Social workers among the Armenians,” she writes, “feel that this unnatural mode of mating will cease at a very early date, certainly as soon as the dire need of relief for the women in Armenia is met” (*DSN*1922b). She has glowing praise to bestow upon the domestic life of the populations she approves of. Here is another Armenian example: “Having been a rural people, their whole interest centers around the home and family. The women take pride in their households and for food values, palatability and variety perhaps no other nationality in the world has a more nutritious diet” (*DSN* 1922b). This text could easily have been used to describe Syrian family life in Detroit in 1922, had Smith bothered to visit the homes of local Syrians.⁴ Instead, Muslims are all lumped together as “Turks” who “have no women with them and will not marry Christian women. Without homes or children who may come under American educational influences, there is no chance for American ideals to replace those of the old world” (*DSN* 1922c). Her apparent inability (or is it refusal?) to find women among Detroit’s Muslims provides Smith with a powerful argument against the assimilability of the “Turks”.

⁴ Hussien Karoub, whom she interviewed at the mosque, was married at the time with one child and another on the way.

It is in raising the specter of polygamy, however, that Smith is at her most polemical. Recycling an earlier American Orientalist canard, in which the conflation of Islamic history and culture with that of Mormonism was used to deny statehood to Utah and define Mormons as un-American, Smith now attacks Muslims as un-American in hopes of staving off their access to American citizenship.⁵ In 1922 polygamy was not a common practice in the rural districts most Turkish, Kurdish, and Syrian immigrants came from, and it was totally absent in the “bachelor population” of Detroit. Yet Smith evokes this powerful motif to convince readers of the utter difference of “the Turks” and of the threat this difference poses not simply to Armenian Christians, but to the American family as well. Her essay makes visible an expressly anti-Muslim nativism. The same rhetoric had been used in the attempt to deny the Indian missionary, Mufti Mohammad Sadiq, entry to the United States the previous year in Philadelphia, also on the grounds that he might endorse polygamy. Smith makes an explicit case against the inclusion of “Turks” as citizens by stressing their bachelor, working class, and religious commonality and emphasizing the distance that separates these communal features from those of more assimilable, middle class, and Christian immigrant communities. To quote from her essay one last time, “the Turk comes to America to make money and return to the East. If he may take out citizenship papers to further his ambition he will. To him it is only a form. He gives as little and takes as much as he can” (1922c).

Muslims, Citizenship, and Ambivalent Racial Categories

⁵ “Not inaptly or without logical force has Joseph Smith been designated the Mohammed of America. Between the prophet of Arabia and the prophet of Nauvoo (each claiming divine, prophetic powers) there is a strong family resemblance and a more than singular coincidence of experience,” declared T.B.H. Stenhouse in *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (1873:203, quoted in Marr 2006:186). Stenhouse is affronted by both Mormonism and Islam because they dare to claim “divine, prophetic powers” that extend beyond the teachings of the Christian Bible. Beyond this structural similarity between the two religions, both also condone – and for somewhat similar reasons – the practice of polygamy, a “strong family resemblance” indeed.

Nadine Naber has argued that “the divergent contexts through which various immigrant communities have engaged with European and U.S. constructs of ‘race’ illustrate that ‘race’ has operated as an unquestionable fact of virtually all immigrant histories in the United States and that ‘race’ operates according to multiple, shifting logics depending on the context” (2008:20). Muslim life in Detroit was shaped by U.S. immigration and naturalization policies that determined which Muslim populations were allowed into the country during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which were allowed to naturalize as citizens, and which were able to settle in the United States with intact families and to begin the process of reproducing Muslim American communities. These policies informed and were informed by the social/racial position Muslim immigrants occupied in Detroit in the 1910 and 1920s. The policies, ultimately, influenced how, and by whom, American Islam was practiced in the first half of the 20th century.

In 1917, 1921, and 1924 immigration laws were passed to end immigration from East and South Asia outright and to severely curtail it from Asia Minor and other Muslim sending regions. These laws were in place with minimal abridgements until 1952, and they were not effectively superceded until 1965. During this period, legal challenges to the Nationality Act of 1790 – which granted the right of naturalization to “free white persons” – were carried out on behalf of Syrians (who were both Christian and Muslim) and Indians (who were Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and Muslim), in which their exclusion along racial and national origins lines was contested by arguing that these groups should be classified as “white.” The resulting judicial and legislative decisions, in tandem with Orientalist media representations, consolidated legal and cultural definitions of “whiteness” that included and excluded Muslims simultaneously. Syrians, for example, were deemed white and thus allowed to become citizens, while South Asian immigrants were judged non-white and denied citizenship.

Detailed accounts of these challenges to the exclusion of Syrian and Indian immigrants have been offered by numerous scholars, and I will not repeat them here (see Naber 2000, 2008; Samhan 1999; Gualtieri 2001, 2004; Gross 2008; Naff 1985; Suleiman 1999). I do, however, want to draw out the role religious identity played in this history. This point has often been overlooked by historians of Islam in America, who have uniformly claimed that early immigrants, particularly Arab Muslims, asserted their whiteness – and correspondingly rejected a non-white status – when evidence in support of this assertion has not been identified (see Turner 1997, Curtis 2002, Jackson 2005, Lincoln 1961). A large majority of Syrian immigrants to the United States prior to 1924, roughly 90% (Naff 1985, Hitti 1924), were Christians. Historian Sarah Gualtieri argues that the Syrian claim to whiteness – which was made specifically by Christians – was not premised on “a claim to any special phenotype, but on a reclaiming of a Semitic origin and an emphasis on the Syrian connection to the Holy Land and to Christianity” (Gualtieri 2001:41). She points out that Syrians did not advance their status as whites because they embraced early 20th century American conceptions of whiteness. Instead they adhered to Ottoman-influenced understandings of social difference perpetuated by the millet administrative regime. In this system, religious communities were accorded limited autonomy in regulating their own legal, religious, and educational affairs based on sectarian categories, rather than, or in addition to, categories based on cultural, biological, or genealogical distinctions (Gualtieri 2001).⁶ Syrian American Christians already perceived themselves to be separate from Syrian Muslims in significant ways and had long associated and identified closely with French and American

⁶ Ussama Makdisi has argued that the sectarianism that developed in Ottoman Syria in the 17th and 18th centuries was a product equally of “indigenous and imperial histories, which interacted – both collided and collaborated – to produce a new historical imagination” (2001:2). This newly modern historical imagination linked Syrian Christians (especially Maronite Catholics) to French and later American missions and encouraged Maronite leaders to differentiate between Muslims and Christians. The Ottomans would, it was presumed, protect and, when needed, punish Muslims for stepping out of line and the French would protect and punish Maronite communities, even though both groups (and the Druze who were in a uniquely autonomous situation) existed as subjects of the Ottoman Sultan.

missionaries. When making their case for naturalization as whites, Syrian Christians distanced themselves not only from *blackness* (Gualtieri sites several examples from the early Arab American press) and *Asianness* (which Naff [1985: 108] presents as the primary status being projected onto and rejected by Syrian immigrants), but from *Islam* and *Muslims* as well.

Imagining themselves to be in some essential way different from Syrian Muslims, Syrian Christians successfully argued their way into whiteness. The difference between the status of Muslim and Christian Arabs as whites or Others in American racial thought, and in relation to citizenship law and popular media more generally, has a long and complex history.⁷ Of special interest in the Detroit case is Gualtieri's assertion that Syrian *Christians* took part in the denigration of blacks in an effort to be seen as something else while also distancing themselves from – and in the process denigrating – Syrian and other *Muslims* in their struggle to claim American citizenship. Ironically, Syrian Muslims were granted the right to naturalize along with Syrian Christians once the courts had decided in the latter group's favor. Syrian Muslims and the other Arabs and Muslims (most significantly Turks) who were associated with their communities moved freely into the city's white immigrant neighborhoods and worked alongside other white workers in Detroit's factories as "immigrant whites" in the 1920s and 1930s, while the city's Asian and black Muslims were denied this opportunity.⁸ It was not until 1942 that a Muslim Arab appealed when denied the right to naturalize on racial grounds. Ahmed Hassan, of Detroit, was denied citizenship because he was "indisputably dark brown in color." Yemeni rather than Syrian in origin, his

⁷ See AlSultany 2005, Cainkar 2009, Gualtieri 2004, Howell 2000, Jamal 2008, Naber 2008, Shryock 2008, Shyrock and Lin 2009.

⁸ See Naff 2000 and Howell 2005 for discussions of this interstitial "children of immigrants" identity and what it meant in Detroit at mid-century.

Muslim faith and his dark skin were used together to disallow his claim to whiteness (Gualtieri 2001).⁹

With such diverse geographical origins, Detroit's Muslim populations experienced distinct patterns of integration into the city's immigrant or minority enclaves based on their legal status and phenotype. The majority – Albanians, Turks, Syrians, and Tartars – moved steadily toward, and were eventually included within, an ethnic and somewhat provisional whiteness. Asian Muslims, who were denied access to the benefits of citizenship and of whiteness more generally, did not move into white immigrant neighborhoods, but remained in the area of Greektown and moved also to the outskirts of black and mixed race neighborhoods like Paradise Valley. Their economic opportunities were severely limited by their illegal status. The auto industry required citizenship papers for employment in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, which forced Indians into economic niches like peddling. Like Arab peddlers,¹⁰ Indians and Bengalis found that their cultural origins, broadcast by their dark skin and foreign accents, linked them in the minds of many Americans to an exotic, inherently spiritual East. This image, honed by yet another strand of American Orientalism, was exploited by Bengalis in Detroit to sell “spiritual” tokens such as holy water, incense candles, or relics from the “Holy Land.” Emasculated as objects of desire and fantasy, many Bengalis settled into the niche of peddling women's lingerie, cosmetics and silks (which they imported from India). This is how Acir Udin Maeh, the spiritual leader of the Bengali Muslims, met his wife. He was a peddler in Black Bottom, and she was one of his customers. Most of the men from this community who married, married into Detroit's black population under similar

⁹ I have been reminded repeatedly in my interviews with Muslim Arabs that Syrians, and in the popular imagination all Arabs, were declared white in the Dow case of 1909. Often if a question of the racial ambiguity of Muslims is raised, or a discussion of discrimination and anti-Arab racism, I will be told, “We have Dow!” by my interlocutors (Atwel, A. Karoub, Haragley interviews). These discussions are invariably with elderly Muslims, but the question of Syrian whiteness among this older generation is not something to be taken for granted.

¹⁰ See Naff 1985 for the most detailed description of peddling life among Arab immigrants in the early 20th Century.

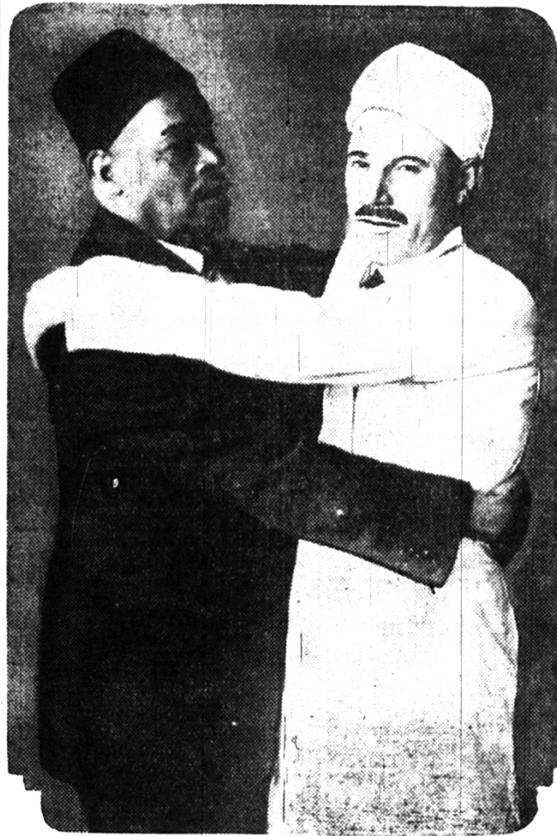
circumstances. Of the several dozen men who married Americans, roughly half of their wives became Muslim (Maeh and Clarke interviews).¹¹

To what extent did Muslims in Detroit worship, organize politically, study, and raise their children across this newly constructed racial barrier that defined European, Turkish, and Syrian Muslims as white and Asian and African Muslims as something else. As I will show in the pages that follow, collaborations of this kind were very much the norm for those who placed their Muslim identity above or on par with their ethnicity. The sense of mutual obligation, camaraderie, and solidarity they found in Islam transcended even the enormity of living daily in a society that viewed and discriminated among people along the lines of (not) white, (not) citizen, and (not) immigrant. Not all Muslims immigrants participated in explicit efforts to reject American racial dichotomies. Nor did all Syrians promote their acceptance of these dichotomies when lobbying for the right to naturalize as American citizens.

The Universal Islamic Society – Exploring Pan-Islamism in Detroit

On April 25, 1926, a photograph (illustration 3.1) appeared in the *Detroit News* under the headline “‘Allah ho Akbar!’ is Chant in Detroit when City’s Moslems Gather for Service.” The two men shown embracing each other in the picture are Duse Mohammed Ali on the left, and Kalil Bazy on the right. The accompanying story is grandiose in language: “It was for the first time in the history of the faith that the throne of Allah was beseeched by communal prayer from Detroit.”¹² Here, in black and white, was evidence that Detroit’s Muslims had moved on after their disappointment in Highland Park, and moved in a new

¹¹ One Bengali, Jamil Ashkar, married a white woman. His children were raised in white neighborhoods and suburbs. Ashkar was the most successful entrepreneur from the Bengali community. He opened an import/export company known as the Tajj Perfume Company that supplied many of the other Asians with the goods they used in peddling. I was not able to interview the Ashkar family for this project, but their history provides an interesting counter example to the Bengali American families who were/are both black and Asian.



EMBRACING THE IMMAN.

Illustration 3.1 Duse Mohammed Ali (left) and Kalil Bazzy embrace after the Eid al Fitr prayer at the Universal Islamic Society in Detroit.

direction. Organized now as the Universal Islamic Society (UIS), greater Detroit's second mosque¹³ was not the project of one man or a pair of brothers, but a collective endeavor undertaken by a committee of men who shared political as well as religious ambitions and interests. As the name Universal Islamic Society indicates, this was an explicitly pan-Muslim project.¹⁴

¹² The writer was more literal than inaccurate. He goes on to relate the "stormy career" of the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park, and then to acknowledge that the prayer he attended was the first in the city itself.

¹³ Here I use the term mosque to stand for any institution organized for the express purpose of hosting congregational prayers (Qureshi 1996).

¹⁴ Ian Duffield has translated the name of the group, mentioned in Ali's memoir, as the "Central Islamic Society", and assumes that this name was copied from the similarly named group that managed the Woking Mosque in England (41), an assertion I disagree with. Ali's name appears nowhere in the incorporation papers of the UIS, and it is likely he was invited to Detroit by a UIS board that had already formed.

The UIS incorporated with the state of Michigan on October 12, 1925, in order to provide “religious and benevolent services.” Its board of directors included Joseph Ferris, president; Shah Zain Ul-Abedin, secretary; Kallil Zhidy, treasurer; Mohammad Aiddora; and A.M. Ahmed.¹⁵ In the 1926 newspaper article we are introduced to Duse Ali as the president, Kalil Bazzy as the imam, and Shah Zain Ul Abedin as the group’s vice-president. Duse Ali was of Sudanese/Egyptian Sunni origin, Bazzy of Syrian Shi’i origin, and Ul Abedin of Indian origin. Of the other board members, A.M. Ahmed was most likely Turkish (an earlier founder and leader of the Kizalay Society), and Aiddora and Ferris are names commonly found in the Syrian Sunni population. The 1926 prayer was held not in the heart of an ethnic enclave, but at the New Oriental Hall, one in a long line of clubs/coffeehouses/mosques used by the city’s Indian and Bengali populations between the 1920s and the 1970s (Maeh, Clarke interviews).¹⁶ Oriental Hall was located at 1941 Hastings Street, in the commercial heart of what would, in the late 1920s and early 30s, come to be known as “Black Bottom,” the cultural and entertainment center of the city’s largest and most infamous black neighborhood, Paradise Valley. In the mid 1920s, this strip of Hastings Street was still multi-racial and multi-ethnic, and it was located very near the “bachelor” Muslim enclaves that lay between Hastings Street, Downtown Detroit, and the riverfront. The UIS was also a quick streetcar ride from both Highland Park and Dearborn.

The group’s central location, its choice of name, and its explicitly diverse board of directors seem to have been effective at drawing Muslims from diverse cultural backgrounds to their services. A second photograph appeared in the *Detroit News* coverage of the holiday prayer that warranted special mention in the story itself. “A picture of Mohammedans at prayer would have been regarded as an act of sacrilege among the faithful and as a risky

¹⁵ Michigan Department of Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth, incorporation papers of the Universal Islamic Society, October 12, 1925.

¹⁶ The Building Islam in Detroit website, www.umich.edu/~biid/, includes a half dozen sites that were used as meeting places that hosted holiday celebrations, funerals, and ethnic and nationalist events by the South Asian population. The spaces were primarily used as clubs and coffeehouses.

adventure by the photographer,” the article explains. Many Muslims consider photography to be “a serious digression from Moslem orthodoxy.” Roughly two thirds of those on hand did not pose for this picture. The photographer and journalist were special guests at this prayer, however, and despite the “grumblings” of the disapproving, “Many removed the fezzes, turbans, and bath robes and other parts of the religious panoply of objects too sacred to be shown in a photograph” and lined up again as though in prayer (Illustration 3.2).

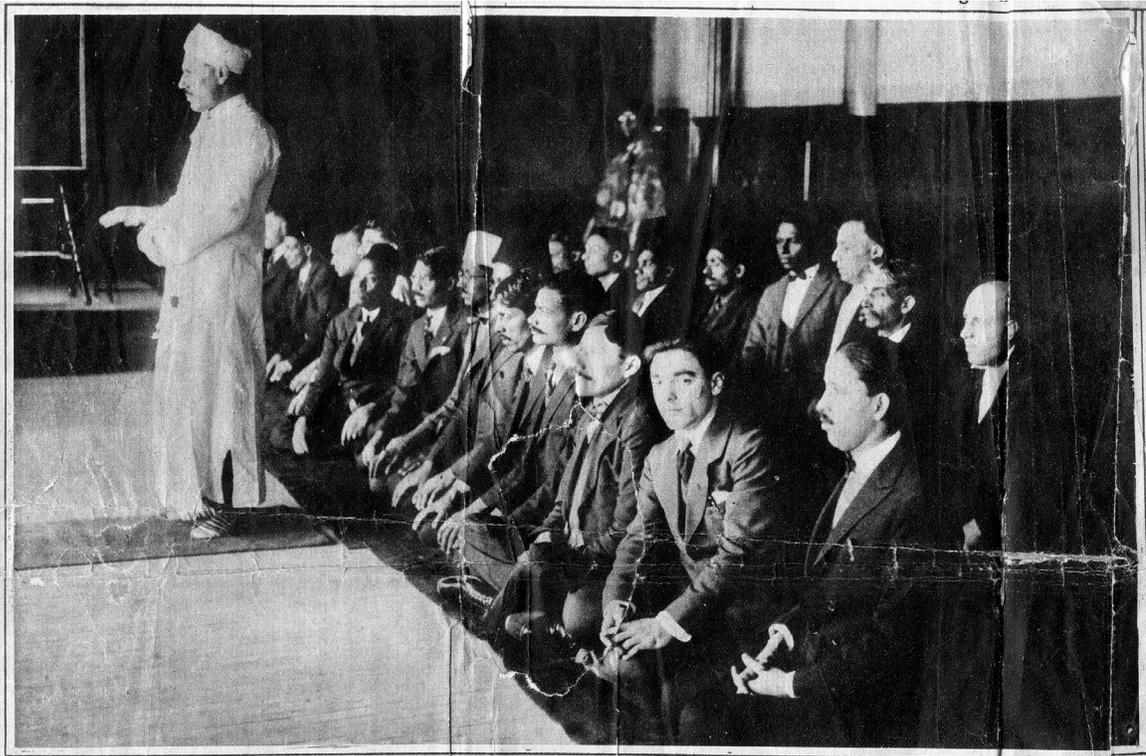


Illustration 3.2 Holiday prayer at the New Oriental Hall, led by Shaykh Kalil Bazy. (*Detroit News Rotogravure Section*: 2, April 15, 1926).¹⁷

This picture is remarkable for the diversity of Muslims it represents. Arabs, blacks, South Asians and whites can all be clearly distinguished in a photograph that predates the Nation of Islam by several years. While the post war period led to large scale migration of both black and white workers from the South, Detroit was not yet as overcrowded as it would

¹⁷ This photograph was given to me by Liela Abbas, a granddaughter of Kalil Bazy. She inherited it with a scrapbook of family papers collected by the Shaykh.

become in the 1940s, and the worst of the city's housing segregation lay before it. Thus Asians, Arabs, Turks, Blacks, and other Muslims frequently lived and worked – in addition to worshipping – close to one another, and these populations often found that they had much in common. They were disproportionately male, disproportionately non-white, and overwhelmingly recent migrants to the city and its rapidly urbanizing and industrializing economy. Their ethnoracial social positions were all in flux in a period of intense socioeconomic and geopolitical transition. Those among them who were politicized found that they had other interests in common as well, most noticeably a common desire to change the conditions of their status as subaltern subjects and to change the conditions of Western colonization and exploitation of their various homelands.

Duse Ali was in Detroit at the specific request of the founders of the UIS, who were familiar with his career as a pan-Africanist and pan-Islamist activist in London and New York. But his record of political activism was not entirely what Detroit's Muslim activists had expected when they invited him to the city.

Duse Mohammed Ali, Race Man in Detroit

Vijay Prashad refers to South Asian guru figures who trade on stereotypes of a timeless, spiritual East to promote religious movements, social theories, and consumer products in the United States as “*babas*” or “god men” (2000:2). Hazel Carby intends something slightly different when she discusses the charismatic representations and reputations of black American leaders, referring to them as “race men” (1998:25-26). What the two terms have in common is that both conflate the bodies, speech, and actions of public men with the distinctive social groups or “nations” these men are thought to, and often eagerly consent to, represent. Preaching the social, economic, or spiritual uplift of their race/nation/religion, race men and god men often manage to reify and promote essentialized understandings of the same. Duse Mohammed Ali was one such race man, a pan-Africanist

and pan-Muslim leader who came to Detroit in 1926 after first having mentored and worked with Marcus Garvey in London and New York. Ali was among the founders of the Universal Islamic Society, and it is worth exploring briefly the role he played in pan-Africanism in the early 20th century and the influence his acolyte, Marcus Garvey, had among the proto-Islamic movements in the United States that explain why Ali was invited to Detroit and what he hoped to accomplish while there

Of Egyptian and Sudanese heritage, Duse Mohammed Ali was orphaned young and raised in England by a French foster father. As a young medical student, he performed on the London stage to great acclaim, often playing the part of a Moor or Oriental. In his free time he frequented the Woking Mosque, an Ahmadiyya-run mission that was a center of Muslim anti-colonial activism in Europe. It was at this mosque that Ali first encountered pan-Islamism and observed the intersection of this political project with a parallel pan-Africanism. Eventually, Ali dropped out of medical school and pursued his acting career and a career as a political activist instead. He published *In the Land of the Pharaohs*, a critique of especially British colonial interventions in Egypt and the Sudan in 1911. The book was well received among London's imperial subjects and Ali was recognized as a rising star and forward thinker at the First Universal Races Congress, which was held in London that same year. Inspired by this international gathering, Ali soon launched the *African Times and Orient Review*, a cultural, political, and financial journal that became, for a brief time, the primary political organ of the disparate pan-African movements in Europe (Ali 1938, Duffield 1987, Turner 1997). Ali's mission statement for the journal read as follows:

The recent Universal Races Congress convened in the metropolis of the Anglo-Saxon world clearly demonstrated that here was ample need for an Oriental Pan-African journal at the seat of the British Empire which would lay the aims, desires, and ambitions of the black, brown, and yellow races – within and without the empire – at the throne of Caesar. For whereas, there is extensive Anglo-Saxon press devoted to the interests of the Anglo-Saxon, it is obvious that this vehicle of thought and information may only be used in a limited and restricted sense in its [communication] of African and Oriental aims. Hence the truth about African and Oriental conditions is rarely stated

with precision and accuracy in the columns of European Press.... The voices of millions of Britain's enlightened darkened races are never heard; their capacity underrated: discontent is fermented by reason of systematic injustice and misrepresentation (Ali 1912, quoted in Turner 1997:84).

Ali's journal soon caught the attention of Marcus Garvey in New York, who traveled to England and interned with Ali in the period just prior to the launching of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in New York in 1914. It was the UNIA that first popularized pan-Africanism among American blacks during and after the First World War. By 1920 the UNIA had over 100,000 members and 800 chapters worldwide (Vincent 1971). "By linking the entire black world to Africa and its members to one another," Von Eschen writes, "Garvey made the American Negro conscious of his African origins and created for the first time a feeling of international solidarity between Africans and people of African descent. In a brutal era of Jim Crow, lynchings, and political disenfranchisement, Garvey transformed African Americans from a national minority into a global majority" (1997:10). Garvey also, by adopting the slogan, "One God, One Aim, One Destiny," and by including Muslims like Duse Ali in the pages of *Negro World*, became an early promoter of Islam as an African religious tradition with the potential to link non-whites in their opposition to European colonialism and racial oppression in the United States.

Support for Ali's journal waned after WWI, and he eventually moved to New York in 1922 to work directly with Garvey, covering events in Africa for the *Negro World*. By this time, the two men had evolved differing approaches to solving Africa's problems and those of the diaspora. After 1922 Ali started a business venture, the American African Orient-Trading Company, that he hoped would enable him to challenge the colonial British East India Trading Company and bring economic development to Africa using American dollars and entrepreneurialism. This business endeavor also failed, and it was apparently with relief that Ali accepted the invitation of several Indian Muslims to come to Detroit and help organize an environment like the one Ali had experienced earlier in Woking, England, a

mosque where faith and politics brought men from vastly different regions of the globe in contact with one for the purposes of conversation, prayer, and resistance to European colonialism (Ali 1938, Duffield 1987).

While in Detroit, Ali pursued these goals within and beyond the UIS. He became involved with a second organization as well, the America-Asia Society. This group sought to bring about “more amicable relations and a better understanding between America and the Orient in general than had previously been obtained” (Duffield 1987:41). According to their incorporation papers, this group was led by Mrs. Consuelo Holmes, president; Shair Mohamed Queraishi, vice president and treasurer, and Duse Mohammed Ali, founder and secretary.¹⁸ Ali acted as the group’s impresario, directing and performing in two short “costume dramas,” lecturing, and providing a speaker series as well. The group was successful enough to attract the patronage of “the Persian charge d’affaires, the Egyptian minister in Washington and his wife, and the mayor of Detroit and his wife,” but within a year of its founding, the group succumbed to infighting among “different Asian groups” and disbanded (Duffield 1987:40, Ali 1938:7).

After the failure of this society, Ali turned his attention more directly to the work of the UIS (1938:7), but he also, in keeping with his more public role of race man, started an “oriental” theater company in Detroit, which performed several of his original works. They were performing “A Daughter of Judah” at Orchestra Hall in late October 1926 when Harry Houdini died of a ruptured appendix at the Garrick Theater nearby. Ali’s troupe quickly moved to the Garrick to fill in for Houdini’s cancelled shows, where they received positive press for works “oriental in substance” and with a star, Duse Ali, who was “a large factor in the success of the plays” (*Detroit Free Press*, October 29, 1926). Despite this personal success, Ali’s ongoing effort to recruit support for his African trading company did not fare

¹⁸ Michigan Department of Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth, incorporation papers of the America-Asia Society, March 12, 1926.

well in Detroit. In late 1927 he left for New York at the invitation of yet another Asian group, for whom he launched a new Oriental Association and replicated some of the theatrical successes he had experienced in Detroit.

Historian Ian Duffield has speculated that “Duse Mohamed Ali helped to induce some consciousness of Islam among black Americans in the city” (1987:41). The Nation of Islam was founded just a few short years later (in 1931 or 1932) only blocks from New Oriental Hall, and Ali’s sojourn in Detroit is frequently mentioned in histories of that movement, suggesting that he did play such an inspirational role.¹⁹ Apart from pictures taken at the UIS prayer – which included what appear to be several black worshippers – we have little evidence of Ali’s contact with local blacks, nor do we have text from his speeches that would help us understand the issues he emphasized while in Detroit.²⁰ The son of a Sudanese mother, Ali was a dark skinned man who, when in the United States, appeared in public wearing a fez, a hat then popular with urban men in the Middle East. He found that the fez helped him accentuate his identity as an exotic outsider, a role that protected him from the insult and injury that came with American anti-black racism (Duffield 1987). This practice of accentuating one’s foreignness was also followed by many Ahmadiyya converts, and by members of the Moorish Science Temple (which opened a chapter in Detroit in 1923). Noble Drew Ali encouraged his followers to wear exotic clothing, including the fez, and to call themselves Moors or Asiatics in a similar attempt to deflect white hostility. It is worth noting that only one of the darkest men in Illustration 3.2 is dressed in Moorish or African clothing. The others are indistinguishable in dress and demeanor from the Arab, Asian, and white men

¹⁹ See Beynon 1938 for an early effort to describe what life was like in the early NOI community.

²⁰ Elijah Poole (Mohammad) and Duse Ali were in the city at the same time (Evanzz 2001:55). Poole was an active member of the UNIA and is likely to have known of Ali through his writings in the *Negro World*. It is easy to surmise that his path and Ali’s could have overlapped in 1926 and 1927. Similarly, if Fard Mohammed was in Detroit at the time and was living as a Muslim or a peddler in any way associated with the Indian and Bengali population there, it is equally likely that his path could have crossed Ali’s in Detroit.

included in the picture. This suggests that the blacks in the photograph were Muslims rather than members of the Moorish Science Temple or the Ahmadiyya Movement.

While Ali performed the role of “Oriental African” on stage and dressed the part as well, there is no evidence to suggest that he used these Orientalist motifs to attract black Muslims to Islam. Still, his reputation as a leading figure in both the pan-Africanist and pan-Muslim movements, combined with the respect he received in Detroit among immigrant Muslims from Syria, India, and Bangladesh, and the attention his lectures and performances garnered him in Detroit, would surely have legitimized and augmented the appeal of such displays for those blacks who did know of him. “The tendency has been to see the transnational elements of black culture in the United States as focused exclusively on identifications with Africa,” writes Melanie McAlister. “However, in complex ways, African American intellectuals, writers, and artists have looked not only to Africa but also to other areas, particularly to the Middle East, as sites and source for explorations of blackness and the recovery and reconstruction of black history”(2001:87). Ali understood this appeal; he trafficked in it; and all evidence suggests that his persona, if not his politics, was compelling not only to blacks, Asians, and Muslims, but to white Americans who were also attracted to his Oriental mystique.

Syrian Nationalism - Translocal Islam?

While Ali was a celebrity of the pan-Africanist movement, he was not alone in bringing a subaltern political sensibility to the work of the UIS. Not race men, but working men, Detroit’s Muslims were active participants in a variety of anti-colonial projects in 1925 and 1926, when the Universal Islamic Society was first established. World War I had greatly transformed many of their homelands. For Turks, this meant the loss of an empire, but the birth of a newly modern, secular nation-state, where the role of religion in public life was greatly reduced. For the Syrians, it meant direct European colonization and defeat. For the

Indians, it meant mounting resistance to the British Empire, resistance organized frequently along religious and sectarian lines. Given the diversity of these interests, what role did Islam or the UIS play in developing a subaltern, anti-colonial consciousness among Detroit's Muslims?

Evidence of the Syrian community's political involvement is the most developed. Arab nationalism had been on the rise in Detroit since 1919, when the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement were finally made public, revealing the extent to which Britain had misled its Arab allies, who were originally led to believe that they would receive political independence in exchange for rising up against the Ottomans in the Great Arab Revolt. Instead, Greater Syria was divided into several territories that were administered as French and British mandates. The Syrian American community initially unified in opposition to these plans, but they divided in support of alternative proposals for how the region should be governed and what its political borders should look like. Historian Philip Hitti, who participated in this debate, described post-war Syrian American divisions in this way: "There are those among them, mainly Muhammadans and Druze ... who aspire to virtual union with al-Hijaz and Mesopotamia in a pan-Arab empire. Others, chiefly Christian, stand for an independent Syria, with an independent Lebanon under French Mandate" (Hitti 1924:59-60).

Over the next decade, Detroit, with its sizable Muslim and Druze populations, became the center of American support for the first of these plans, to join Syria/Lebanon with a large, independent, pan-Arab nation. The city's Orthodox Christians also tended to be on the side of pan-Arab unity. New York, with its Christian-dominated Arabic newspapers and its core of Syrian intellectuals and artists who were predominantly Maronite Catholics, became the center of support for the other plan. This group advocated for an independent Syria and a gerrymandered Lebanese territory that would maintain Christian autonomy under French support and protection. These factions, for the most part, overcame their differences in opposition to the British-backed plan to create a Jewish "national home" in Palestine

(Bawardi 2009; Davidson 1999; Suleiman 2006). Advocates for these different political positions began visiting the Syrian communities in America, hoping to drum up financial backing, but also to elicit wider American support for their objectives. Abdul Rahman Shabander, for example, a leading figure in the Syrian nationalist movement, visited Detroit in 1924 and encouraged Syrian Americans to support the liberation of Syria and to reject the Zionist campaign in Palestine (*New York Times* March 28, 1924).

In 1925, several years into the French mandate, a full scale rebellion against the French colonial army in Syria/Lebanon began in Jebel Druze, the historic stronghold of the powerful Druze minority, led by the Atrash clan. This rebellion quickly spread to Damascus, Transjordan, and beyond and became a full-scale revolution seeking to shake off European control, just as the earlier Arab Revolt had sought to gain independence from the Ottoman Turks. When news of the “Druze Revolt,” as it was called in Detroit’s newspapers at the time, broke in the city, the Muslim and Druze populations rallied excitedly behind the New Syria Party, an international body of exiled and expatriate Syrians who supported the revolt and its objectives. Many in Detroit were not content to sit on the sidelines and observe the conflict. Membership in the party grew quickly. This local enthusiasm encouraged Abbas Abushakra, the general secretary of the American arm of the party, to move to Highland Park in 1926, bringing the national headquarters of the New Syria Party (NSP) with him. Kalil Bazy was one of three delegates elected to represent Detroit’s Syrians at the NSP’s first and second conventions, held in Detroit in 1926 and 1927.²¹

Journalist Charles Cameron captured the mood among Syrians in Detroit in a May 22, 1926 essay entitled “Detroit Druses Watch Revolt.”²²

²¹ Kalil Bazy, Wadi' Mi'mari, and Dr. Lutfi al-Sa'di are the three Detroiters who were made delegates in 1926 (Bawardi 2009). Bazy was a Shi'i Muslim, Mi'mari a Druze, and Al-Sa'di a Sunni Muslims, each representing a different constituency from Detroit.

²² Charles Cameron was covering the “foreign colony” beat for *Detroit Saturday Night*. Unlike his predecessor, Faye Elizabeth Smith, Cameron’s essays about the Syrian and Muslim communities were well researched, thoughtful, and largely sympathetic. I have included all dozen of his entries in the

In such a time the Detroit Syrian colony seems really like a “Little Syria,” for here, on a smaller scale, appear the same divisions of partisan thought and factional sympathy which are disclosed in dispatches from Damascus or Aleppo.

Here, as there, all Syrians dream of autonomy or independence. Here, as there, they differ in their views of the advantages or disadvantages of French mandatory control (Cameron 1926:10).

He goes on to describe the fault lines, whereby the majority of the Christian community – with the exception of many in the Orthodox population – hold “aloof from the rebellion,” while “Syrian Mohammedans, both Shi`ite and Sunnite, who number upwards of 2,000 in the Detroit metropolitan area” are sympathetic to the uprising. Speaking on behalf of the NSP, Abbas Abushakra told Cameron that the rebellion was not a religious war or “jihad” on the part of the Muslims, but a war of liberation, just as it was not a crusade on the part of the French but an effort to reinforce their control of a foreign colony. That such assertions would be necessary provides a small glimpse into Cameron’s assumptions about the preconceived notions of his readership. Apparently they were not predisposed to sympathize with an Arab uprising led by Muslims and Druze against a European power.

Several months later, on January 18, 1927, a *Detroit Free Press* story announced that “400 Syrians Protest Visit of Emir Here.” The Emir in question was Shakib Arslan, the lieutenant of Sultan al-Atrash, the leader of the Druze rebellion. Arslan was in town to address the second convention of the NSP, which met at the Fort Wayne Hotel in Detroit. The *Free Press* covered a gathering of 400 Syrians that took place at St. Maron’s Church. George Asmar, spokesman for the crowd, was upset that Arslan was visiting Detroit “as an official representative of the people of Syria,” rather than as the head of what he dismissively referred to as “Shoof county.”²³ Asmar paints Arslan and the others in his party as political

newspaper index in the bibliography, even those not sited directly. Cameron’s work warrants further treatment by scholars.

²³ Asmar also mentions that Detroit is home to roughly 18,000 Syrians, of which 15,500 are Christian. Hoping to dismiss the New Syria Party, he suggests that it has only 25,000 members nationwide, a



Illustration 3.3 – New Syria Party Convention, Detroit, 1927. Abbas Abushakra is seated fourth from the left with his hand on the table. Shakib Arslan is seated at the table in the center of the photograph. Kalil Bazy represented Detroit’s Syrian community at this meeting, but does not appear in this photograph. (Coutesy of Mohammed Eltaher).

fugitives and describes the revolt as an explicitly anti-Christian campaign.²⁴ “This Arslan and his Druse tribe are the people that persecuted and killed Christians.... Arslan was the right-hand man of Kemal and Djemal Pasha, the murderers of the Syrians and the Armenians” (*Detroit Free Press*, January 18, 1927). Here we find not only a difference of opinion between the Syrian Muslims and Maronites of Detroit, but a willingness on the part of the spokespeople of the Christian community to associate themselves with Armenians as victims of Turkish/Muslim/Druze violence. Furthermore, Asmar was equally willing to disassociate Syrian Maronites from Syrian Muslims by linking them to anti-Christian violence that was well known to the American public at the time – the Armenian genocide. Incidents like this illustrate how quickly these tropes of anti-Christian violence were taken up and deployed

mere 10% of the overall Syrian American population, a number that seems large, despite his protests to the contrary. In effect, he is stating that all Syrian American Muslims were members of the NSP.

²⁴ In a fascinating quote, Asmar asserts that the “French government and its policies are favored in Syria and in the greater Mt. Lebanon, next to the United States. The Syrians and the Lebanonites preferred the United States, but when this country refused a mandate over Syria, France was the second choice” (*Detroit Free Press*, 1/18/27).

against Muslims in Detroit who had no connection to this violence. Syrian Muslims were compelled by this early 20th century anti-Muslim, Orientalist trope to defend their struggle for Syrian liberation against charges that they were engaged in a jihad against Syrian, French, and by extension all Christians. Given the work already undertaken by writers like Elizabeth Smith and popular cultural representations of Islam literature and film, it is easy to see how Detroit's Syrian Muslims might have been discouraged by these accusations.

Kalil Bazzy was a deeply religious man, known and respected as an imam, but he was proud of the role he played in the New Syria Party as well. In his later years, when his efforts on behalf of the party were generally forgotten, as was the party itself, historian Alixa Naff asked him if he had followed any of the early Arabic newspapers. He named several for her: *Al-Bayan* (a Druze paper published originally in Detroit), *Mirat al-Gharb*, *Al-Hoda*, *Al-Samir* (a Muslim paper published in Detroit). He also gave her the names of their publishers, adding, "they all were my friends. They would visit me and I would go and visit them." Naff, who knew nothing of Bazzy's political interests, was clearly surprised by his response. She asked him how he knew these men. "I was the head of the New Syria Party in Detroit," he responds.²⁵ When Naff does not follow up, he adds, "We did not want the foreigners to rule our country. Syria is for the Syrians, not the French. Iraq is for the Iraqis" (Naff/Bazzy interview).²⁶

²⁵ Naff's oversight here is reflective of a larger trend. The preponderance of sources lie with the majority, Christian population and the majority of historical attention has followed these sources. Not only have *Arab Muslims* been ignored within the relatively new field of Muslim American history, but *Muslim Arabs* have also been overlooked in the better developed field of Arab American history.

²⁶ These sentiments could easily have been echoed by Punjabi and Bengali Muslims in Detroit who were fighting their own anti-colonial battles. No record of their papers, no tape of an interview between one of their leaders and an interested historian has yet been identified. For this reason, the political ambitions of the South Asians, who once had their own ethnic associations in the city, who invited Duse Mohammed Ali to preside over their affairs, and who knelt in prayer behind Kalil Bazzi, are another forgotten element in the history of Muslim life in Detroit.

Islam in Blackamerican Detroit

Little is known, but much is assumed, about the interrelations between Detroit's immigrant Muslims and new converts to Islam in the early 20th century. Beyond the photographs I have presented here, which clearly depict a multiracial gathering at prayer, we know little about the relationships established at the UIS. We also know little about how the city's Muslims fared in the 1930s under the pressure of the Depression, newly segregated housing codes, and the proximity of the radical and sensational ideology of the Nation of Islam. African Americans began embracing Islam in Detroit perhaps as early as 1914 (Fahd, personal communication) and certainly by 1921, when Mufti Sadiq began to recruit converts in Highland Park. Most of these early black converts to Islam, and later to the Nation of Islam, were southerners new to the city. In the early decades of the 20th century, the majority of black Americans lived in the rural South, where Jim Crow conditions blocked their opportunities for social advancement and the threat of violence was pervasive. Gradually at first, and then in a groundswell, blacks began moving north to participate in the rapid industrialization taking place in cities like Chicago and Detroit. The North they discovered was not the Promised Land they had hoped for. Jobs were available, but too often blacks were at the bottom of the social pyramid, well below European and other immigrants, in matters of housing, employment, and other opportunities white citizens took for granted. Northern black churches, which were predominantly middle class and largely acquiescent on racial social conditions, did not reach out to southern blacks, nor did the worship experience provided in these churches meet the expectations of poor southerners (Gregory 2005, Dillard 2007). White churches often had segregated seating and sometimes separate services for black and white parishioners (Sharieff interview). Islam offered the city's newcomers an alternative to these Christian offerings, and an alternative to the accommodations the black church had made to American racism.

Mufti Sadiq was the first Muslim missionary to make an explicit appeal to blacks based on the race-neutral ideals of Islam, and he did so from his apartment in Karoub House in Highland Park.. In the following example he illustrates not only his facility with Islamic traditions, but also with those of American churches:

In Islam no Church has ever had seats reserved for anybody and if a Negro enters first and takes the front seat even the Sultan if he happens to come after him never thinks of removing him from that seat “I tread under the feet the Racial prejudice” said the master-Prophet Muhammad. ...

It is a well-proved fact that Islam is the only religion that has ever destroyed color and race prejudices from the minds of the people. Go to the East and you will find the fairest people of Syria and Turkestan eating at the same table with darkest Africans and treating each other as brothers and friends.
(*Moslem Sunrise* 2, 1922:41-42)

Richard Turner, in *Islam in the African-American Experience* (1997), provides a detailed survey of the historical, intellectual, and political roots of Islam among American blacks prior to the 20th century and introduces the individual actors, the “Prophets of the City,” who initiated the best known of the 20th century African-American Islamic and proto-Islamic movements: the Ahmadiyya Movement of Islam, the Moorish Science Temple, and the Nation of Islam.²⁷ Yet while other scholars suggest that we need to know more about the interaction between immigrant Muslims and the early black proto-Islamic movements, or about immigrants and early black Muslim converts (Allen 1997, Nance 2002, Lincoln 1961, Curtis 2002), Turner actively downplays the polycultural Muslim networks that supported and challenged blacks as they began to embrace Islam in the 1920s, especially the important State Street Mosque (established by Shaykh Daoud Faisal in New York City in 1924).²⁸ To

²⁷ Turner’s work is shaped, however, by an underlying political animus toward Islam. “Lodged into the creases of Turner’s thesis appears to be a perduring frustration with the fact that Christianity has been tarred with the charge on anti-black racism,” Sherman Jackson writes, “while Islam has not only been exonerated but cast as the friend of black people. It is ultimately his intention to refute this irksome proposition” (2005:122).

²⁸ This despite admitting that “Shaykh Daoud’s groups,” which were heavily influenced by Muslims from Yemen, Somalia, Madagascar, and other nations, “spread Sunni practices among black Muslims on the East Coast in the 1920s and 1930s and continued to be significant to African-American Muslims for the remainder of the twentieth century” (2003:120).

cite a Detroit example, Turner is aware of the Karoub brothers and the role their mosque and later ministry played in supporting Islam among black converts, arguing even that the Highland Park mosque “inspired the Ahmadiyya movement in its efforts to link varied Muslim communities” (2003:121). Yet these are relatively insignificant references in a book that treats the Ahmadiyya and the Moorish Science Temple in full length chapters and provides the Nation of Islam with two chapters. These movements were fascinating, but this does not adequately explain why they are the subject of multiple volumes, while the experience of black Sunni Muslims prior to the 1960s has warranted significant treatment only in Robert Dannin’s (2005) *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, or why immigrant-black encounters prior to Malcolm X’s famous turn to mainstream Islam are more likely to have been downplayed than explored by scholars.

Turner goes so far as to accuse the early immigrant Muslims of racism because they “allowed” American blacks to take so many liberties with the name and symbols of Islam:

These Arab Muslims, who came to the United States because of economic downturns in the Middle East, were mostly uneducated and worked as peddlers and industrial laborers. Their eagerness to escape immigration restrictions of the 1920s and to achieve financial success led many of the later arrivals to assimilate and to change their Arabic names to American ones. It is important to note that with a few exceptions these white Muslims remained separate from black Muslims in America before the 1920s. Apparently, the former brought Islam’s historical pattern of racial separatism to America from their old countries. Working against the separatist traditions, the Ahmadiyya movement struggled to bring together Muslims of different racial and ethnic groups in the 1920s (1997:119).²⁹

Turner seems unaware that the Karoubs, who “inspired” the Ahmadiyya in this very impulse toward polycultural Islam, were also immigrant Sunni Arabs, or in Turner’s formulation, “white Muslims.” He is also unaware that Hussien Karoub (his birth name retained) was a dedicated mosque builder, teacher, and religious leader to black, white, Asian, European, and Middle Eastern Muslims for half a century.

²⁹ This trope is not uncommon. See especially Jackson 2005:60.

Before the 1920s, there were very few black Muslims in the United States, and it would have been difficult for the immigrant Muslims – who were also small in number and concentrated in northern and Midwestern towns and in rural areas that had very few, if any, blacks – to identify and communicate with them. The first of the black proto-Islamic movements, the Moorish Science Temple (MST), which was established in 1913 but did not spread to Detroit until 1923, presented a confusing array of teachings, several of which were (mis)appropriated³⁰ from Islam. Sections of the Quran, for example, were combined with mystical and quasi-religious texts to form the “Holy Koran” of the movement’s founder, Noble Drew Ali. It is difficult to imagine what about MST teachings would have convinced immigrant Muslims that the “Moors” or “Asiatics,” as MST adherents referred to themselves during these years, were Muslims at all. Likewise, Noble Drew Ali was himself wary of challenges to his elaborate theology, and he encouraged his followers to avoid those who claimed to be Muslims but did not recognize Ali as the second prophet of Islam.

Even if Turner’s intention was to refer not to the period before 1920 but to the 1920s themselves, a decade in which Mufti Sadiq (a foreign missionary) and the Ahmadiyya missionaries who followed in his footsteps claim to have converted a total of 1,025 black and white Americans to Islam (1997: 124), very little is known about how these converts fared as believers. To date, we have no study that tells us how many of these converts remained Muslim, how long they practiced Islam, whether they remained part of the Ahmadiyya tradition or embraced more orthodox forms of Islam, or if they later joined the Nation of Islam. The existing literature says almost nothing about the relations of these converts to immigrant Muslims at any point between 1921 and 1965.

³⁰ Jackson is as straightforward as one can be in describing the borrowings of movements like the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam from the symbols, texts, and traditions of what he refers to as “historical Islam.” He calls these borrowings “appropriations” (2005:45). From the perspective of the immigrant Muslims, however, these appropriations were so warped, misused, and realigned that they could only appear as misappropriations.

In cities like Detroit, where there was an active community of Muslims seeking to build mosques, establish mutual aid societies, and otherwise practice and institutionalize Islam in the United States, the Ahmadiyya movement did not fare well.³¹ In Chicago and Cleveland, where the movement had its greatest successes, its congregations were frequently approached by immigrant Muslims eager to worship or discuss theology with their members (Dannin 2002). It was in Detroit, however, that the most influential of these proto-Islamic movements, the Nation of Islam, was started in the early 1930s only blocks away from New Oriental Hall where the UIS met, and in the period immediately following the demise of that multi-ethnic mosque. The Nation of Islam appealed especially to newly-arrived Southern immigrants to Detroit. It was a social movement that drew heavily on Muslim imagery and terminology, but whose theology was not recognizably Muslim. The NOI quickly sought to insulate itself from the influence of Muslim immigrants and converts, moving its headquarters to Chicago, where Sunni and Shi`a Muslims were less visible and had no imams or mosques to offer a countervailing orthodoxy.

Living as Muslims in the Everyday

The UIS was organized largely by men who were in the United States without families and for whom religious and political identities were tightly intertwined. The record of their efforts, like those of the NSP, exist in newspaper articles and institutional archives, but these sources can direct us only to that part of Muslim American identity formation that was taking place in public: mosque building efforts, political organizing, and (sadly) murder trials. Much of the important work of establishing Muslim communities in Detroit, and of reproducing them socially, was conducted in the realm of the face-to-face, the oral, and the

³¹ The group had a small population of followers in Detroit from the 1920s on. Mostly African American until the arrival of Pakistani immigrants in the 1970s, this group did not associate with other Muslims and did not welcome other Muslim interventions in their activities (Hassanein interview, *Detroit Free Press* July 10, 1956).

ritually intimate. Here a less political Muslim identity took shape. For some, this more intimate realm was strictly ethnic. Syrians from the Bekaa Valley worshipped only with other Syrians from the Bekaa Valley; Turks with other Turks, and Kurds with other Kurds. For others, especially those from smaller communities, those who were new to Islam, and the city's Muslim clerics, this more intimate realm of study and worship was also an exciting materialization of the Muslim *umma*. More needs to be known about these networks and how they operated. Imam Hussein Karoub carried out much of the work of guiding and counseling the city's Muslims in the 1920s and 1930s, when the city's first mosques were organized. The historical record of this pastoral work exists primarily in the memories of the city's oldest Muslim residents. The following is a brief examination of how this work transpired, based primarily on the memories of the children on the city's active Muslim leaders from the 1920s and 1930s.

Carl Karoub was born in 1930, and his memories of his father, Hussien Karoub, and his work in the city's Muslim enclaves, were scattered widely in time. From his early childhood, Carl remembers the basement Arabic classes Imam Hussien provided for the children of Highland Park.³² Mohammed (Mike) Karoub, Carl's older brother, was interviewed by Alixa Naff in 1980. He also remembered his father's basement classes. "One of the objectives was to teach Arabic because of the holy Quran," Mike explains. "So it would be almost mandatory, if possible I mean, to teach Arabic... so that the person would benefit from the Quran in its original language." Carl studied Arabic in the family's Highland Park basement, along with his brother Mike and other siblings, and he noticed that in the 1930s adult students began showing up at his house as well, mostly African American converts who wanted to be able to pray and recite the Quran in Arabic and to understand the

³² Michael Berry, who was born a decade earlier, in 1920, remembers attending this school as a young boy before he moved to Lebanon with his family in 1930. In the 1920s, the school seemed to be for boys only. A decade later, in Dearborn, a similar basement school taught both boys and girls (Berry, Jabara interviews).

message of the Quran.³³ New Muslim converts, or those simply interested in Islam, would stop by the house frequently and request literature on Islam and copies of the Quran. They would visit with Imam Karoub, seek his personal and religious guidance, and listen to his stories about Muslim history, or his advice on practicing Islam in the United States.

In the absence of mosques, the Karoub living room often doubled as the official meeting space for the city's Muslims. It served as a semi-public space in which new arrivals to the city, visitors, and new converts to Islam could check in with what passed for the Muslim establishment of the period. Karoub himself was a resource who connected Muslims across their many differences. New immigrants, according to Alice Karoub, Imam Hussien's daughter-in-law, would come to the imam's house and sit with him. "If they came to this country, that was one of their first stops. He was very important to them." American Muslims who lived outside Michigan would also visit the Karoub house and introduce themselves, or reconnect with the Imam if they already knew him. These visitors were of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, and of all sectarian orientations (A. Karoub interview). Mike Karoub described to Alixa Naff one of the Ahmadiyya missionaries who frequently stayed with their family; not Mufti Sadiq, who did not remain in the United States for long, but one of his successors, Ghulam Ahmed, who was headquartered in Chicago in the 1930s.

Mike Karoub: He used to come to my father's house and sleep at our house. His name was Ghulam Ahmad. He's Ahmadiyya – he used to try and convert us to Ahmadiyya.

Alixa Naff: Nobody brought him in? He came of his own?

MK: He was a missionary. Whenever he came into Detroit, he'd come to my father's house. He's a good friend. He had a big turban he wore all the time and a big beard. I was a little boy.

AN: How did people react when they saw this strange costume in an American street?

³³ Mike Karoub, who apprenticed himself to his father as a teen and became an imam himself in adulthood (see Chapter VI), would continue this work of teaching Arabic to new converts throughout his life. In my own research among local mosques, I often meet elderly African Americans who studied with one of the two Karoubs.

MK: Oh, we didn't react at all. We just thought it was [unintelligible]. We didn't look at him with any kind of like, uh, askance. We just thought that was the way he dressed from India, and we accepted it. We were better than today, people today they're more...we just accepted it because it was all ethnic groups and ethnicity was rampant but we never called it ethnic, we didn't know that word. We just thought that was the way the world was.

AN: He wasn't an Arab then?

MK: No, he was from India. He spoke Urdu. I think he spoke Urdu.

AN: How did he communicate with your father?

MK: In English. Also, he knew the Holy Quran. He read the whole Holy Quran in Arabic. As I recall, did he know Arabic? I can't really say if he really spoke. You see, so many people around the world read Arabic in the Quran but can't speak it. You know, like the Turks and Pakistanis – they read real good Arabic, but they can't speak it. So if he was one of those, I can't swear. But he spoke English; he spoke, I think it's Urdu or maybe Hindi, and he was of the Ahmadiyya movement.

On one occasion, Emir Faisal of Saudi Arabia (later King Faisal) stayed in the Karoub home for several days while he was visiting Detroit. This, according to Alice Karoub, was in the late 1940s.

Imams Karoub and Bazy also created Muslim space wherever they travelled. Both men led prayers throughout the city, and performed weddings and funerals throughout their lives. They are remembered fondly for this reason. Azira Maeh, whose father was the unofficial shaykh of the Bengali community, remembers someone from the Karoub family being at all the funerals she attended in the Asian community. Maeh's father would be called first when a Bengali died, and he was responsible for washing and preparing the body for burial, but Karoub often joined him in this work. Azira described the funerals of her childhood in the following way:

Azira Maeh: Where I would see Islam expressed was at funerals. And there were always funerals, you know, because it was a population of older men. And I would stand behind the men, you know, and I never felt put upon.³⁴ I felt protected and that that was the way you practiced for people to be buried.

³⁴ Women stand next to or behind men in prayer in the Muslim tradition.

Now my father let me do some things that – some Muslim people were very upset – like, after he prepared the body and wrapped the body, he would let me crack camphorated ice through the coffin. He would let me put perfume on their face, you know, from Tajj Perfume Company. They would do that, and the camphorated ice.

And one guy said, “You are a girl!”

You know, he wasn’t supposed to [let me] do that.

...and he would let me stand and look at the bodies. Sometimes it was people that I knew personally, and he would say, “Mr. Khan” or “Safa.” Everybody was Safa [uncle]. We would call everybody uncle. And, I was like the son he never had, so, some people were opposed to that. And Imam Karoub would be there. And he would, he would let me do it. I was like 4 or 5 years old...

And, look, it was like being here, being so far from their culture, there had to be some flexibility for them to have survived.

When Maeh’s father died in 1967, Imam Karoub officiated at the funeral. He mentioned to Azira that he had buried more than 50 men with her father at his side (Maeh interview).

Carl Karoub also mentioned that the Turkish community relied on his father for services, as did the Afghans, Bengalis, and Albanians. His father picked up a few words in each of these languages, and he would schedule events by phone in Turkish. The Turks had been the first to organize funerary associations and to purchase blocks of cemetery plots at local cemeteries. “Imam Karoub... was called in to officiate at the funeral services [of the Turkish immigrants] and was invited to the memorial dinners held forty days, and then one year, after burial” (Bilge 1994:393). Each of the Karoub boys was familiar with the coffee houses and clubs of the various ethnic groups, where funeral services would be held when people’s homes were not large enough for the occasion. Carl remembered attending ceremonies with his father at the All India Brotherhood near Grand River Boulevard, in downtown Detroit.

Azira Maeh and Hansen Clarke, both the children of Bengali fathers and African American mothers, described for me a series of Indian, Asian, and Pakistani clubs that they visited as children. This is where they would celebrate Islamic holidays, watching their

fathers pray and chant, sampling the mix of Indian and American foods, and enjoying the attention lavished on them in an environment where children were rare. Maeh was also a regular in the city's Turkish and Indian coffee houses. She described a network of active, practicing Muslims among the Turks, Bengalis, Indians, Afghans, and other "bachelor" populations. These men would meet occasionally in one another's coffee houses or clubs to pray, discuss politics, and read the Quran. "No Muslim was different then," Maeh said. "You didn't even know the difference. In fact, my father would make reference to them all as Mohammadans."

About her father's politics, she remembered, "He blamed the British for every problem in the world!" Like the Karoub children, Azira Maeh might have been more aware of these transcommunal activities than most because her father often led services and meetings. Karoub was also a frequent presence in her memories: "He was like an angel. There was no one that I have heard who could speak the Quran like he did." As a member of a community made up of single Bengali and Indian men – and a few dozen married to African American women, most of whom did not embrace Islam – Maeh's experiences differed significantly from those of the Syrian/Lebanese Muslims of her generation. The latter were raised, for the most part, in households with two Arabic-speaking parents who were connected to an ethnic community that passed gradually into whiteness, and full legal (if not cultural) citizenship, and would, in the 1930s, begin to build effective, long lasting mosques.

Meanwhile, the experience of Detroit's Turks resembled that of the Bengalis more than the Syrians, despite the fact that Turks were racialized as whites and allowed to naturalize, while Bengalis were not.. Writing of the early immigrant period, Barbara Bilge (1994) claims that fewer than 5% of the Turkish population in the city married, and only a handful brought wives with them from Turkey or returned there to marry. Thus, the second generation was small, dispersed, unlikely to identify as Muslim, and concentrated in the homes of a few dozen men who married white Americans, an outcome that is highly ironic,

given Faye Elizabeth Smith's original portrayal of Turks as a polygamous, fecund, and religiously colonizing population. In contrast, Bilge describes "Detroit's old Turkish community" as "an ethnic fragment... because of its disparate sex ratio" (1994:390). This community joined with the Syrians and other Muslims for Islamic holidays, and relied on Karoub for religious guidance and services (Bilge 1994).

Hussien Karoub also brought his faith to the assembly line. According to his son Carl, "they were very good to him at Ford. He would pray right there at the factory. He would take his prayer rug with him to work. The unions were not there. Their immediate supervisor was very cooperative, not just with Hussien, but with other Muslims as well." In his interview with Naff, Mike Karoub suggests that this is one way the city's early Muslim immigrants discovered one another. They saw Karoub, or another devout man like him, praying at the factory. Factory work is what brought most Muslims to Detroit. Regardless of their racial or ethnic background, these communities had in common their outsider/newcomer status in Detroit, experience on the assembly line or laboring as peddlers, residence in working-class, migrant enclaves, and reliance on ethnic social institutions like the coffee house or club. By the late 1920s, Detroit's Muslims had begun to work out from these shared experiences to explore the political and religious ties that united them. The UIS was one of their initial attempts to institutionalize these ties.

But if work brought Detroit's Muslims together, it was the sudden absence of work that successfully tore them apart. After the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing economic meltdown, the Universal Islamic Society disappeared from view. In the face of tremendous anxiety and radical social change brought on by the Depression, concerns over where to meet for prayer or the nature of political changes taking place overseas gave way to more basic needs. In the early 1930s, it was hunger (and prayer), not politics (and prayer) that brought Muslim populations together.

Religious beliefs which forbid the eating of pork or food prepared with lard, keep 400 Mohammedans out of soup lines and dependent on the charity of their racial friends.

Fate of the 400, all single men who formerly worked in Detroit factories, is discussed at length at meetings of their leaders at the coffee house of Joe Hassan... The men from India, Afghanistan, Arabia, Turkey, and Albanian are obedient to the restrictions of the Koran...

“These men are of good character and they do not turn to crimes of violence when pinched by want,” [Kermou Alli] declared. “The city provides for others. Most of these Mohammedans have been good citizens of Detroit for five to 25 years and cannot understand why they are given no relief.”

(Detroit Free Press, December 12, 1932)

Eventually, in 1933, a soup kitchen was made available to the city’s Muslim indigents who, by then, numbered 800. The hardships of the Depression clearly grated at the edges of Muslim unity. “Conflict among the nine different racial groups which represent Mohammedans in Detroit has given [Welfare Department representatives] a trying time for six weeks. Each week some new leader comes forward and renounces those who have been negotiating” *(Detroit Free Press, January 12, 1933)*. Many Muslims left the United States altogether during the Depression. Azira Maeh even suggested that Bengalis were repatriated at the expense of the U.S. Government.³⁵ African Americans did not have this option. Nor did many of the city’s more destitute immigrants.

Conclusion

In the 1920s, Detroit’s Muslims were preoccupied with many things: with becoming citizens, supporting the immigration of friends and family, finding and keeping good jobs, getting married and raising children, and finding a decent, affordable place to live. Their opportunities to achieve these goals were influenced not simply by their initiative and skill, but by the color of their skin, the country of origin written on their immigration papers, and

³⁵ Vargas (1993) documents a statewide effort to repatriate Mexican workers in the early 1930s, but I was unable to identify similar evidence that Indians were forcibly repatriated. Similarly, Indians and other Muslims were not the subject of a hostile media campaign, as were Mexican workers. Several wealthy Muslims, Mohammed Karoub among them, offered private assistance to those in need. It is unclear how sustained or far reaching these efforts were (A. Karoub).

the way their faith was viewed and represented in public discourse. The city's Muslims were also preoccupied with establishing a mosque in Detroit. In 1921 and 1925 they succeeded, briefly, in doing so. These mosques were not long lived because – in the first instance – there was not yet a consensus about what they should be or how they should be organized, and – in the second instance – the Muslim population itself was not yet stable, nor were the political alliances on which these particular mosques were founded. Contrary to the tropes of political apathy, religious ignorance, sectarianism, and ethnoracial isolationism that permeate lay and scholarly representations of early Islam in the United States, the Muslims of Detroit were actively invested in practicing and reproducing their faith in the 1920s, and they often did so in coalitions that were remarkably diverse.

The history of this period is difficult to assemble because many of the city's Muslim populations were fragmented. Cut off from their families and children, dispersed to the ends of the earth by colonial disruptions at home, limited in their opportunities in Detroit, then scattered again by a global economic collapse, it is remarkable that we still have a handful of textual and oral historical sources that can provide context for media images that survive from the 1920s. These materials suggest at every turn that, despite their diverse backgrounds, the city's Muslims knew one another, worshiped together, and organized together to build mosques.

Narratives popular today, in which early immigrants changed their names to hide their Muslim identity and otherwise avoided calling attention to themselves as Muslims, cannot account for men like Duse Ali, Hussien Karoub, Kalil Bazzy, or Acir Udin Maeh. These men lived as Muslims at home and in the world. Their names were Arabic in origin, if eventually American in pronunciation, but their identities as Muslims were expressed in a new language, a practical idiom that was sensitive to the real conditions in which Detroit Muslims lived. This idiom was local, transcommunal, flexible, and oriented to the survival of Islam on terms Muslims did not always control. Over time, the number of Muslims in Detroit

who understood this new language grew, as did their desire to situate Islam in institutional forms that were more secure, and more recognizably American.

Chapter IV

Dearborn's First Mosques

In the mid 1930s, the small group of Syrian families who had made a home for themselves in Dearborn and survived the worst of the Great Depression decided it was time to try again to build a mosque. They wanted a house of worship, not an outpost of Islam in the West; a place of their own in Dearborn; a club, a church, a place for prayer and education, a mutual aid society, a gathering place for their small, but growing community, a place for young adults to meet and marry other Muslims. Concerned about raising children in the US without much religious exposure or training, it was parents now and families who built Detroit's next mosques, not bachelors and political activists. In 1937 the Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society (Hashmie Hall) was opened as a mosque and social hall on Dix Avenue in the heart of the business district of Dearborn's Southend. In 1938, the Islamic Mosque opened a few blocks away. It too was organized as a mosque and social club. These institutions were unlike the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park or the Universal Islamic Society of Detroit. They were ethnic clubs established by and for Muslim families that doubled as mosques. Hashmie Hall was a Shi'i institution, and the Islamic Mosque was Sunni. The Islamic Mosque, renamed the American Moslem Society in 1942, is today the oldest mosque in Michigan, and one of its largest. A second Shi'i mosque grew out of Hashmie Hall in the early 1960s, the Islamic Center of Detroit. Renamed the Islamic Center of America in 1969, this institution is among the oldest, largest, and most influential mosques in the United States.

Why did these mosques survive when the city's earlier efforts failed? Part of the answer was provided to me by Ardella Jabara when she described to me the religious education she received in Dearborn in the early 1930s. At the time, Jabara (nee Simon) lived in a household anxious about the future. Her parents had nine American-born daughters. They felt overwhelmed by the demands of everyday life and were unable to provide even the basics of a religious education for their children. When I asked her about this subject, Jabara told me, "I only prayed once."

That is all I remember. It was during Ramadan. We were fasting, you know. And my mother says, come on, and - but we had 9 girls, kiddo. And she would take us one at a time and show us how to *twadhi* [perform ablutions for] ourselves, as she would say it, and by the time she got finished she was all worn out, you know. So we prayed that one time and she said, "Forget it. I can't do this for you every day, every day, five times a day," and all that, you know. So I remember once praying. That is all.

The Simons had moved to Dearborn to be near other immigrant families from the Bekaa Valley, but would this be enough to guarantee a Muslim lifestyle in the United States for their children? During the worst years of the Depression, the Simons and other families in the neighborhood pooled their resources and hired one of the better educated men in the area, Mr. Aishi, to teach Arabic and the Quran to their children three days a week in his basement. They fasted during Ramadan, celebrated the holidays, and came together on Fridays in one another's homes for jumaa prayers, when they were able. But Syrian communities in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Ross, North Dakota, had already opened mosques. Their immigrant neighbors in the Southend were opening churches – Romanian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Romanian Baptist – and ethnic clubs – Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Polish, Italian. "This is what Americans did," explained Jabara, "build churches and clubs". Muslim Americans, those who hoped to raise their children as Muslims, built mosques/clubs.

Hashmie Hall and the American Moslem Society (AMS) succeeded where the city's earlier mosques had failed because they were situated in tightly woven ethnic enclaves where religious and ethnic identities were perceived to be one and the same. These mosques

responded to and reflected this conflation of ethnic and religious identities by being equal parts ethnic and religious institutions. They reproduced a moral community in which Islamic values and traditions were taught and enacted in the safety and comfort of others who shared and treasured these values. Each relied on the support of hard working, loyal families who considered these institutions their second homes. Yet Hashmie Hall and the AMS were both judged in the 1950s and 60s as being little more than ethnic clubs. The religiosity on display in these mosques was deemed inadequate by modernist Muslims clerics and lay leaders who arrived or came of age in Detroit in this later period. It is the history of these mosques that was most actively suppressed by scholars and religious leaders whose voices became dominant in the 1960s and 70s. It is vital then that this chapter explore the history of these mosques from the perspective of their enduring success as well as their religio-historical failings.

Making Space for the Moral Community of Islam

In his seminal work on the religious incorporation of immigrants who arrived in the United States prior to the 1920s, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (1960), William Herberg emphasized the centrality of religion to the formation of new American ethnic identities:

Of the immigrant who came to this country, it was expected that sooner or later, either in his own person or through his children, he would give up virtually everything he had brought with him from the “old country” – his language, his nationality, his manner of life – and would adopt the ways of his new home. Within broad limits, however, his becoming an American did not involve his abandoning the old religion in favor of some native American substitute. Quite the contrary. Not only was he expected to retain his old religion, as he was not expected to retain his old language or nationality, but such was the shape of America that it was largely in and through his religion that he, or rather his children and grandchildren, found an identifiable place in American life (27-28).

Contemporary scholars of race and ethnicity are likely to equate the “identifiable place” the descendents of Herberg’s Protestants, Catholics, and Jews found in American life with the “privilege of whiteness.” It is unclear how many of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren

of Herberg's immigrants are still true to the religion of their immigrant ancestors. Mary Waters has argued that for many third and fourth generation Americans ethnicity is largely "symbolic" and involves, perhaps, "celebrating holidays with a special twist, cooking a special ethnic meal ... or remembering a special phrase or two in a foreign language" (1990:147). The roots of this "symbolic ethnicity" can be traced to American ideas about race and racial origins. If we believe that all races/ethnicities are equal, and that everyone must belong to a group described in these terms, then to know and accept one's origins can only make an individual more complete (Waters 1990:147-168). Unfortunately, most Americans do not believe that all racial or ethnic categories are equal and, throughout its history, the laws of the republic have codified and enforced this inequality by denying access to full citizenship according to racial, ethnic, and sometimes religious categories.¹ The degree to which different groups are free to "choose" this ethnic option depends largely on the category to which they belong.

Herberg's formula does, however, capture the seminal role religious institutions played in facilitating the political and social incorporation of the pre-1920s immigrants. A generation later, Raymond Williams (1988) described the same process in a more contemporary idiom of identity formation:

Immigrants are religious – by all counts more religious than they were before they left home – because religion is one of the important identity markers that helps them preserve individual self-awareness and cohesion in a group... In the United States, religion is the social category with clearest meaning and acceptance in the host society, so the emphasis on religious affiliation and identity is one of the strategies that allows the immigrant to maintain self-identity while simultaneously acquiring community acceptance (29).

Again, emphasis is placed not only on continuity with the past, with the preservation of a distinctive "self-identity," but on the pursuit of gaining mainstream acceptance. Laurence Moore takes this argument a step further, noting that "religious outsiders" – from sectarian,

¹ For three of many possible examples, see Marr 2006 on Mormons, Makdisi 2009 on Native Americans, and Razcck 2008 on Muslims.

minority, or immigrant traditions – challenge Protestant hegemony in the United States when they insist on mainstream rights and accommodations (1986: 46), a process that sharpens their focus on ethno-religious particularity and buffers them from the religious (and secular) mainstream. This process requires that certain aspects of ethno-religious identification be performed in public. They must become visible in order for other Americans to recognize, question, contest, and, in many cases, accept immigrant religious traditions as American. The corollary to this formula must also be recognized; outsider traditions rely on collective, private spaces where rituals and ideas important to minority communities can be enacted securely, without fear of criticism or harassment.

These twinned spaces, public and private, have been especially critical to Muslims in the United States, whose religious traditions were (and often still are) presumed to lie outside the boundaries of Euro-American civilization and of whiteness. Moving beyond the discrimination Muslims faced in the 1920s in the press and the courts (see Chapter III), and leaving aside the intense prejudice Muslims in the West have faced since the 1970s, a period in which “community acceptance” has not been uniformly sought or granted, this chapter will explore the first successful efforts to establish visible and enduring Muslim spaces in Dearborn. It is through the development of religious associations that Muslims have gradually been empowered to seek, define, and articulate their communitarian identities (Etienne 1984) and to represent the “durable presence” (Leveau 1988:114) of their communities in the United States. Yet Dearborn’s mosques have always been more than institutional signs of settlement, visible to Muslim and non-Muslim observers alike. They were (and still are) intended as proof that Islam itself can be American; objectively, functionally, practically, and ritually American.

By focusing attention on the visibility of immigrant, diasporic, or outsider religious communities and the role this visibility played in the incorporation of early 20th century immigrants, scholars like Herberg and Williams overlooked a second process that was

equally important: namely, the process of objectifying a faith for the first time, or in new ways. Objectification was a direct result of migration, which led to the decontextualization of Muslim identities and subsequent efforts to recontextualize – or reterritorialize – Islam in the United States. Dale Eickelman describes the “objectification” of the religious imagination of Muslims as a pervasive effect of modern institutions and state governance, which, over the course of the 20th century, brought about mass literacy and historically unprecedented levels of popular education to Muslim-majority societies. Because Islam was taken into this transformative process, the result was a new way of experiencing religious identity in which “three kinds of questions come to the foreground in the consciousness of large numbers of believer: What is my religion? Why is it important to my life? And, How do my beliefs guide my conduct?” (Eickelman 1992:643). Eickelman’s work is set in contemporary Arab nation-states and focuses on the first generation of citizens who studied Islam in school systems organized in keeping with Western, mass educational standards and institutional forms. He argues that long-standing traditions of religious learning and moral authority have been replaced, devalued, or supplemented by new, largely state-sponsored institutional forms. The latter, which have their origins in colonial and post-colonial rule, have transformed the discourse and practice of all Muslims over the last century.

Early Muslim immigrants to Detroit confronted the same forces of objectification, not because of the educational shifts Eickelman describes, but because the migration process disarticulated their Muslim identities from the cultural and governmental supports that had enabled them to be Muslims in Syria, Turkey, or India. The distinctive rituals, histories, and social forms that constituted their Muslim identities were largely, if not completely, unknown in Detroit in the 1920s and 1930s. Familiar structures of moral authority and the local institutions of instruction and power that sustained them were absent or radically transformed in diaspora. In many ways, the religious authorities themselves were also absent, despite the

best efforts of men like Hussien Karoub and Kalil Bazzy to take on the obligations of clergy in the United States.

For many of these immigrants, it was enough to attempt to reconstitute the props and practices of their faith in Detroit and to hold onto as many “authentic” traditions as possible. This strategy motivated the earliest campaigns to institutionalize Islam in the city. The process was complicated, as we saw in previous chapters, by the presence of Muslims from so many different ethnonational backgrounds, each seeking to conform to a particular understanding of tradition. It was also complicated by the uneven distributions of religious knowledge found among early immigrants. In the modernizing Muslim societies Eickelman describes, literate and unlettered forms of religious knowledge were mutually constituting; familiarity with the Quran was sustained through the collaboration of those who were highly trained and those who called upon and supported literate expertise. This practical division of labor was disrupted by emigration.

Muslims conventionally represent themselves as “people of the book,” yet until recently most Muslims – and certainly those in the Middle East – were not sufficiently literate to read or directly comprehend the Qur’an or other religious texts. Nonetheless, the idea of the book and the text has long pervaded many social contexts... Even where texts are not present, people behave as if they are. The idea of the book, by analogy with the divine text of the Qur’an (Pederson 1984), conveys for many Muslims the idea that valued knowledge is fixed and memorizable... Memorization of the Qur’an continues to be a virtually unquestioned form of cultural capital ... although few still memorize it in its entirety, as was common for an earlier generation. Qur’anic memorization served as a paradigm for subsequent learning in the religious sciences as well as in other fields of knowledge; ideally, texts were mnemonically “possessed” (Eickelman 1992:644).

It is widely believed among scholars (e.g., Bilge 1994, Trix 1994, Haddad 1994, Naff 1987) that most of the early Muslim immigrants to the United States were functionally illiterate in Arabic and English, and it is certainly the case that the overwhelming majority of Detroit’s early Muslims had received little formal religious instruction. Imam Karoub had memorized much (perhaps all) of the Quran, and Bazzy eventually studied the Quran for a time in Najaf.

A few other men, like Acir Udin Maeh, also possessed some Quranic knowledge, but most of Detroit's Muslim residents in the early 1930s had access to "the book" only through a literate friend or relative, through Karoub, or through the ritual traditions – prayer, funeral rites, holiday observances, and homilies – they brought with them from overseas. Attempts to teach children Arabic and Quranic recitation were piecemeal and rarely produced impressive results.²

This distance from the text haunted the immigrants' new awareness of Islam as one faith among others in the United States. Ill-equipped to think of their faith as something they could simply interpret for themselves, their energy went to providing a context in which the traditions and practices they did know could be reproduced and given new life. The process of religious objectification did not come easily to them. In the absence of religious authorities who could sanction or direct such a critical conversation, Detroit's Muslims focused on building mosques, and the process of inhabiting these institutions became the principal medium in which Muslims asked and answered existential questions about Islam. Their (dis)agreements over how Dearborn's mosques would be structured served as a discursive space in which the moral community of Islam could be imagined, experienced, objectified, and performed.

Art historian Oleg Grabar, in his search for visual symbols and styles that unify the Muslim *umma* across the vast cultural space it occupies, concluded that "Islamic culture finds its means of self-representation in hearing and acting rather than in seeing," for "it is not [architectural] forms which identify Islamic culture... but sounds, history, and a mode of life" (1983:31, 29). Through the spoken word, prayer, and the remembrance of sacred events, space is made Muslim, even though other cultural associations may intensify the process. Grabar's references are aesthetic; buildings do not need to look like the archetypal mosque –

² Even the children of Bazy and Karoub, with one important exception, were not capable of reading or reciting the Quran as adults.

the grand mosque in Mecca, for example – to function as a mosque. They do, however, need to contain spaces in which prayer can be observed, sermons delivered, and scriptures taught and recited. Thus “it is ritual and sanctioned practice that is prior and that creates ‘Muslim space’,” rather than “juridically claimed territory or formally consecrated or architecturally specific space” (Metcalf 1996:30).

In their location outside the Muslim world, however, Detroit’s mosques were the focus of activities that were not strictly religious, and the concentration of these “secular” activities in mosque spaces created new possibilities and problems for Muslims who wanted to *see* evidence of their community. Mosques doubled as ethnic clubs, coffeehouses, foreign language schools, funeral parlors, and match-making agencies. This swirl of activity made them important sites of Americanization. In this (often profane) work of religio-ethnic identity formation, mosques produced new varieties of Muslim space. The “sounds, history, and mode of life” – as Grabar describes them above – that pervaded Dearborn’s Muslim spaces were not exclusively, or even predominantly, religious in content, nor were they part of deep historical traditions. The mosques established in Dearborn in the 1930s were conceptually expansive enough, and physically flexible enough, to accommodate (and ultimately to redefine) basic conceptions of sacred and profane, thereby putting Islamic traditions to the task of cultural preservation as well as communal worship. This process resembled what Gregory Starrett calls the “functionalization” of Islamic discourse. “In general,” he writes, “functionalization refers to processes of translation in which intellectual objects from one discourse come to serve the strategic or utilitarian ends of another discourse. This translation not only places intellectual objects in new fields of significance, but radically shifts the meaning of their initial context” (1998:9). In the case of Detroit’s early Muslims, existing religious discourses were reified, preserved in the novel institution of the American mosque, and put to work for the strategic and utilitarian interests of the immigrant generation, whose special challenge was the socialization of their American children as Muslims.

The simultaneous demand for sacred spaces in which to worship and non-sacred spaces in which to act out and explore their new American identities created anxiety among Dearborn's Muslims. The mosques immigrants had known in the towns and villages of Syria had occasionally doubled as schools or impromptu health clinics, but the services they offered were centered on prayer and religious instruction. By contrast, the institutions immigrant Muslims established in the United States performed a much wider array of social functions, with the unexpected consequence that profane functions were often of greater significance than sacred ones. Activities that seemed social on the surface – fund raising events, dances, festivals, clubs, and picnics – took on a sacred coloring because they were motivated by the desire to perpetuate the moral community of Islam in the Christian and secular wilderness of America. Even activities that seemed to undermine Syrian or “Islamic” gender norms, like American dancing among unmarried partners, became sanctioned mosque events for this reason. As Dearborn's mosques came to functionalize Islam in relation to its American backdrop, they were evaluated by different criteria. People were unsure about the correctness of these criteria. When old world models of the mosque were held up as explicit points of comparison, many Muslims questioned whether Detroit's Islamic institutions were, in fact, mosques at all.

Settling into the City

The development of greater Detroit's first sustainable mosques coincided with changes in the American political economy that encouraged home ownership among industrial workers. By the 1930s, it was no longer assumed that immigrant populations would be constantly moving. The unionization of the automobile industry facilitated the upward mobility and social stability of Detroit's working-class. Likewise, the demographics of Detroit shifted dramatically in the 1920s and 30s. Passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 had effectively cut off significant new immigration from Syria (and other

Muslim homelands) and denied Muslims already in the United States the expectation that their communities might grow to resemble other well established ethno-religious populations in size and influence. New working-class immigrants and a tremendous influx of Southern blacks moved into the city. Whereas Syrians had originally lived in neighborhoods alongside other new arrivals in Highland Park and downtown Detroit – neighborhoods that included blacks, non-Arab Muslims, and other immigrants – their move to Dearborn in the late 1920s, and especially in the 1930s, was part of a widening pattern of residential segregation in Detroit and its suburbs.

“Beginning in the 1920s – and certainly by the 1940s – class and race became more important than ethnicity as a guide to the city’s residential geography. Residents of Detroit’s white neighborhoods abandoned their ethnic affiliations and found a new identity in their whiteness” (Sugrue 1996:22). The Syrian/Lebanese, who were too new to the city and too small in number to have established a homogenous enclave of their own, did not, as Sugrue suggests, abandon their ethnic affiliations in the rush to embrace whiteness.³ They did, however, settle in the Southend of Dearborn, a neighborhood of class and racial homogeneity, of low-income, blue collar households consisting of newly arrived immigrants, most of whom came from Eastern and Southern Europe (except for a sizeable contingent of white southerners). Detroit’s newly arriving black population was excluded from this settlement pattern and was forced instead into pre-existing and now extremely overcrowded black neighborhoods in the city, such as Paradise Valley. In the 1920s, landlords throughout Detroit were reluctant to rent to Southern blacks, many of whom were ill equipped for urban life, and later this reluctance grew to include all blacks. White homeowners, similarly, perceived the influx of blacks as a threat; they refused to sell to black buyers and used racial covenants and the threat of violence to guard their neighborhoods from black settlement (Sugrue 1996).

³ One wonders how uniform this process was. Ethnicity remained important for many groups in Detroit. To see just how important, one would have to look at immigrant churches, synagogues, and mosques, where garden variety whiteness was rarely the ideology on offer.

Dearborn, which incorporated as a city in 1927 and merged with the adjoining villages of Fordson and Dearborn Township in 1928 to arrive at the municipality's current boundaries, has a long history of racial exclusion. The city's population expanded dramatically between 1920 and 1930. In 1920, the Dearborn had a population of 2,470; ten years later it was home to more than 50,000 residents. This population explosion, a growth rate of 1,939 percent, was engineered largely by Henry Ford, who bought most of the land between the village of Dearborn and the City of Detroit in 1915 and convinced the federal government to underwrite his plans to build a factory for the production of submarine chasers for the U.S. Navy. His soaring, mile long industrial complex, the River Rouge Assembly, was opened to production in 1918, whereupon workers began settling in the neighborhood that lay just to the east of the factory, the Southend. This community began to stabilize in the late 1920s as Dearborn itself was laid out and developed, again by Ford, and the factory was converted to automobile production.

Ford planned Dearborn for white residents, but the city was divided along class and ethnic lines, with West Dearborn serving as a middle class suburb, and East Dearborn as a housing reserve for blue-collar workers. Those with greater resources lived north of Michigan Avenue in housing built largely of brick, while more recently arrived immigrants and white Southerners shared the Southend, whose housing stock was a mix of single family frame bungalows, frame duplexes, and multi-unit apartment houses occupied mostly by bachelor males. Sensitive to the population pressure being placed on Paradise Valley as the migration of black Southerners quickened in the 1920s and 30s, and eager to keep his black workers from settling in Dearborn, Ford helped develop a black suburb to the west of Dearborn, which he named, apparently without irony, Inkster. Ford, and the city's white residents, successfully collaborated to keep black residents out of Dearborn in the 1920s and 30s. This settlement pattern has held firm over time. Today, Dearborn is less than 2% black.

Ensnared in a new neighborhood, with the smokestacks and raised elevators of the world's largest factory complex looming to the west, Dearborn's Muslims began the work of transforming Henry Ford's industrial landscape into one that would accommodate Islam and provide Muslim American futures for their children.

Commitment to Americanization

In the 1930s, Detroit's Syrians experienced an imaginative shift in the way they understood themselves as American which strengthened their commitment to living in Michigan, raising families there, and becoming a permanent settlement in the United States. This shift in emphasis, what Jon Swanson calls the move from "sojourner to settler" (1988:65), was a result of several interrelated trends. Syrian Muslims had been in the United States for a full generation by the late 1920s. Their shared experiences as workers and itinerant peddlers had encouraged greater cooperation, mutual aid, and the collectivization of resources, a process that equipped Syrians to behave, and to think of themselves, as an American ethnic constituency. Moreover, when some returned to Syria/Lebanon in 1930 to escape the Great Depression, they were shocked by conditions in their homeland. While many of the Muslim bachelors who returned to Syria during this period decided to stay, for the families who made this journey, the deprivations of life in the countryside made repatriation difficult, especially if their children had flourished in the public schools of Detroit and Highland Park. Those who moved to Dearborn in the early 1930s were committed to remaining in the United States. This commitment motivated them to transform southeast Dearborn into an explicitly Muslim space, one in which continuity with their Syrian past could be emphasized alongside their new identification as American citizens who would participate in local civic life as Muslims.

A common path to Syrian American identity included a Depression era retreat to the Lebanese countryside, and it is worth dwelling on this trend, since it shows how transregional migration can, in some contexts, lead to a tactical rejection of the immigrant homeland (Naff 1985, Khater 2001).⁴ Several of Highland Park's Muslim families moved back to the Bekaa Valley and the Bint Ijbayl district in Syria in the early 1930s, part of a larger exodus that took place among the city's Muslims populations as a whole.⁵ Their encounters with the Syrian countryside under French control, and their reception by kin and fellow villagers, compelled them to rethink the opportunities available to them in Detroit. The Maury (Farraj) family, for example, moved to Rafeet in the Bekaa Valley from Highland Park in 1930, when jobs were scarce at Ford. Fatima El Haje (nee Maury), recollecting her own seven years spent in Lebanon, described her mother's reason for staying there despite the harsh conditions: "she thought it was going to be better for us because she didn't want to go on welfare. She hated the idea of people subsidizing her." The family, which included several American-born teenagers, found adjustment to life in Lebanon difficult. The options for employment, education, and overall quality of life simply did not meet the standards set during even their roughest years as homesteaders in North Dakota or during periods of economic boom and bust in Highland Park. The Lebanese countryside had received little investment from French administrators during the mandate era, and the economy of the region was also suffering a

⁴ Both Naff (1985) and Khater (2001) suggest that this pattern of migrating back to Lebanon and then finding life there unsatisfactory, resulting in a return and permanent settlement in the United States occurred a generation earlier for many Syrian Christians. I observed a similar pattern take place at the conclusion of the Lebanese civil war in the 1990s. Most of my friends and colleagues who had settled in Detroit during the war years, returned home after the conclusion of the war to look into employment and housing opportunities, educational options for their children, and to assess the overall stability of the country. Very few of these would-be-returnees actually remained in Lebanon. Most returned to Detroit with a renewed commitment to the lives and institutions they had built for themselves in the United States.

⁵ Akram Khater (2001) and Gregory Orfalea (2006) agree that the number of Syrians who left the United States in the 1930s greatly exceeded the number of arrivals, although immigration statistics are not uniformly available for all years. Turkish and Albanian Muslims also returned home in large numbers, reducing their presence in the city by half in the years between 1930 and 1940 (Bilge 1994, Trix 1994). Bengali Muslims are thought to have been repatriated at the expense of the U.S. government, although this claim has not been confirmed through government sources (Maeh interview).

crushing depression. The Maury family had hoped to return to the United States when the job market improved, but this took longer than anticipated. Young Fatima married a man from her village, Hussein El Haje, who was not a U.S. citizen, then followed her parents back to the United States with him in 1937, shortly after her first son was born.

Michael Berry returned to Syria/Lebanon with his family in 1930 when he was ten years old. His impressions of life in Tibneen were not positive. In his 2008 biography, the 88 year-old Berry relates his boyish encounter with his parent's home village in terms that accentuate his Americaness. "The lack of facilities," he writes, "lack of playground, lack of reading materials, and lack of paper. Everything that I had here, the things you would expect to find even in the poorest areas, they didn't have overseas" (Giffin 2007:8). Berry's parents wanted to stay in Tibneen, despite the protests of their children. The younger Berrys were amazed to find themselves fetching water by donkey from a well several miles from their home, spending hours a day baking bread over open flames, sleeping in a tiny apartment, and attending an improvised one-room school attached to the village mosque. The school was new to the village in 1930, a rare improvement provided by French authorities, but it hardly impressed the Berry children, who were accustomed to Highland Parks' sparkling public schools, which had been newly built in the 1920s. Berry's father was unable to make a living in Tibneen, and less than a year after their arrival in Lebanon, the family returned to the United States, now truly destitute. They settled this time in Dearborn, where Michael Berry had to make yet another adjustment. Years later, Berry became the Supervisor of Roads for Wayne County, Michigan, an important political position in the 1970s. He does not romanticize the time he spent in Tibneen. "Had I lived there the rest of my life," he speculates, "I would probably have loaded donkeys with sacks of flour and things of that sort. That would have been my future there, because there were no schools of higher learning in Tibneen" (Giffin:12).

Berry is not alone in drawing a sharp contrast between life in the United States and life in Syria under the French Mandate. Hussein El Haje was denied entry to the United States in 1937 due to glaucoma. A year later he was finally allowed to immigrate. "I got so excited," he said, "I had \$25 with me for my fare to Detroit, and I gave it away to the people." Fatima El Haje, explaining her husband's elation to me, added, "He made it to America. It doesn't matter if he doesn't have money, doesn't have a job, has to go on welfare. He is here in America. As far as they are concerned back in the old country, he could be a millionaire" (F. El Haje interview). Most of the families who had settled in Dearborn by the mid 1930s had similar stories to tell. By then, talk of returning to Lebanon to start a business, live "like a king," or retire among the grape arbors had begun to fade. So too had talk of sending the children home to learn Arabic, acquire the customs of the "old country," and learn to be good Muslims. These lessons would have to be imparted in Dearborn and Highland Park.

Motives for Organization

As young girls in Highland Park and Toledo in the 1920s, Gladys Ecie, Fatima El Haje, and Ardella Jabara (whose families were instrumental in establishing the American Moslem Society in the 1930s) each attended Christian church services of one kind or another. According to Ecie, "When we were young, we lived on Orleans... And down the block from my dad's place, they had a Catholic church, and on Sunday, everybody went to church. Well, we kids used to go. We learned about the Catholic religion. We learned about different things, you know. It was something you looked forward to when you were a kid." This ecumenical viewpoint was not uncommon among the early immigrants; many felt as much kinship with Christianity as they did distance from it. They were pleased that their children were receiving moral and religious instruction, although they would sometimes correct the Sunday school lessons from a Muslim perspective once the children returned home. The children themselves did not mind the attention paid to them by Christians. Gladys Ecie

mentioned the treats she was given at church, while Fatima El Haje was a bit more explicit about the tactics of Christian proselytizers who apparently saw the Muslim children as potential converts. “In Highland Park,” she said, “there was a lady there who was teaching the Christian religion, and we’d go there because we got free gifts.” Candy and toys were import lures to children whose families had very little. The only toy El Haje remembers having as a child was a pair of roller skates; her brother had only a basketball. Both were provided by the Christian missionary, who wanted the children to attend her church.

Over time, Syrian parents began to worry about the inroads these missionary efforts were making on their children’s beliefs. To counter the appeal of Christianity, the parents organized to provide programs of their own. In Highland Park in the 1920s, Hussein Karoub had held Arabic and Quran classes in his basement. These classes focused on rote memorization, and on learning to read and write directly from the complex Arabic of the Quran (Karoub/Naff interview). Once enough families had settled in Dearborn, Mr. Aishi – whose first name was never used and is no longer remembered – provided similar lessons, but these were no match for the enrichment opportunities available at local churches, where moral instruction came in the form of colorful, illustrated books, and was accompanied by music, food, simplified stories and parables, and treats and toys to be taken home.⁶

Ardella Jabara moved to Dearborn 1932 from Toledo, Ohio, where she was born, and she remembers fondly the prayer services held in her family’s living room, as did each of my older informants. “Mom had everything took back so they could pray. And they would come in, I guess it was a feast or something like that, and then they would pray.” These weren’t large groups, 10-12 men, as she remembers it. Gladys Ecie recalled meeting her husband, Alex Ecie, at a prayer meeting “at my mother’s and dad’s. His parents come in... He come

⁶ Sharon Abraham Korhonen, who was responsible for youth programming at the American Moslem Society for many years in the 1960s and 70s, remembers having received similar treats at the AMS when she was a girl. This practice of distributing toys, sweets, and favors to children at the mosque continued until the late 1970s.

here in 1922. He was 15 years old when he come from the old country. His father used to be with my parents, you know...” At a typical prayer in her childhood home in Highland Park, “they just prayed. They sat down and prayed, and they had something to eat afterwards and they played cards...Men and women prayed all together. You prayed to the side and the men prayed ahead...Where you put your rug, and it’s clean, you prayed.” Women would wear a small scarf on their heads during the prayer, but not at other times. “We didn’t have too many women who come and prayed. Most of them were single, the boys, so there was a few women, a few kids that sat down and prayed. And they had hymns afterwards, you know. It was nice.” She also described other types of services that were held in the home. “It was different. Altogether different. Yeah. It used to be if you had a birth, you had a whole bunch of people come to visit. Or if there was a wedding... You couldn’t get them in. If there was a funeral, it was just as bad, you know. They were all together” (G. Ecie interview).

Jabara also described another occasion when Muslims gathered in each other’s homes – the *mawlid* (a gathering at which hymns were sung and homilies were delivered in praise of the Prophet Muhammad). The children of Essie Abraham, whose family helped establish the American Moslem Society, and whose mother, Essie, was instrumental in founding a later mosque, the American Muslim Bekaa Center, also recalled mawlids in their parents’ home. Robert (Sy) Abraham (SA), Marylynn Abraham Hassan (MH), and Sharon Abraham Korhonen (SM) described the mawlids of their childhood in the following way:

Marylynn Hassan: They had what they called mawlids at the house, you know...

Sally Howell: What is a mawlid?

Sy Abraham: A prayer service.

Sharon Korhonen: ...in your home.

SA: Somebody, the men, would come to one house and they would have like a ...

SK: ... Sit around in a circle.

MH: Isn't it like a blessing?

SK: ... and they had the *masbahas* [prayer beads]...

SA: ... and they would be ...

SK: ... chanting, praying ...

SA: ... in the house, and if you looked at them, you would say, "This looks like an African dance from the 1940s," in the old movies you would see, when they gathered around.

SK: Actually, what I remember is they would sit on the floor with their *masbahas* ...

SA: ... it used to be prayer services.

SH: And when would they do this?

SA: Actually, it was when somebody was sick in the old country, or when someone died, they would have it.

MH: ... or, you know how they say hail Marys with the rosaries?

SH: Yes.

SM: That is what it was like.

MH: ... That is exactly what it was. Not exactly, but that is pretty much what it was. If my sister was sick and she got well, we would have a *mawlid*...

SM: [Referencing a later period] You could have it in the mosque, or you could have it in your home.

MH: ... it would be a celebration that she got well. It would be a prayer for your mom that was ill. It would be a prayer for her brother in the old country. It would be a blessing of the house.

SM: ... for some good fortune.

MH: ... a new baby.

SH: What was done at these events? What was recited?

SM: They read out of the Quran. It wasn't just chanting. It was like in a verse. And what they would say ...

MH: ... and one man would say it, and then the other men would say it in a chorus like.

SA: My grandfather taught me one of them, and it was like [he hums a few bars; tones not words.] They never really had a Shaykh or anything like that. It was just a group of men who would get together.

There was disagreement among the siblings about what the older generation of Muslims would actually have been chanting during *mawlid*s. Reciting the Quran was common, but other call and response chanting was common as well. The 99 names of God were recited, along with religious poetry. The fact that this American-born generation of Abrahams had no clear idea of what was being recited – that they associated the tradition with African rituals or with Catholic observances – indicates the distance they felt from their parents' faith. This ritual was associated in their minds with old people and the old country, not with themselves or their futures. The *mawlid*s were appreciated by the Abrahams. "I remember that *mawlid*s were good things," Marylynn assured me. "They had sweets and pastries. There were a variety of reasons to have one, and it was a good feeling after it was over." Nonetheless, this appreciation was not enough to sustain the tradition among the immigrants' children. Without fluency in Arabic, religious chanting sounded like gibberish. These rituals, once common, became exotic and fragile, and all but disappeared.⁷

Funerals were also hosted in private homes in the 1920s and 30s, which had not presented a problem when the population was small. As it continued to grow, however, it became more difficult to host these events in homes. Jabara, Ecie, and El Haje all spoke of the difficulties their mothers and other women in the community faced when receiving guests after someone died. In an amalgamation of Lebanese and American customs, the body of the deceased would be bathed and enshrouded by a family member, often with the participation of Imam Karoub or Imam Bazy. It

⁷ In the 1980s, the *mawlid* tradition was revived among the Bekaais when their new mosque hired Mohammad Mardini as imam. He frequently led *mawlid*s for the older generation of Lebanese Americans when he first arrived (Mardini interview). Today the tradition has been thoroughly revived by new immigrants.

would then be laid out in the living room of the family. Friends and family would gather to pay their respects and to grieve. Mourning rituals often included loud, ritualized chanting and wailing by those closest to the deceased. Others recited the *fatiha* (the opening surah of the Quran), offered up supplications on behalf of the deceased and mankind in general, and recited verses from the Quran to comfort the family. The bereaved family was expected to provide a meal for their guests, a ritual intended to keep them busy and ease their suffering. As the community grew, holding such services in individual homes became burdensome. Yet funeral parlors were expensive and immigrants did not feel free to express themselves openly in such spaces.

Sociologists of religion and American religious historians are quick to point out that immigrants are most likely to establish religious institutions when their American-born children come of age (Williams 1988; Warner and Wittner 1998). A keen sense of responsibility for the moral education of their children prompted the Syrians to build Dearborn's mosques, but so did their concern over finding Arab and Muslim spouses for their children. Confronted by their extreme minority status in the United States, maintaining group endogamy was critically important to Detroit's Syrians, and a much overlooked motive for the development of mosques and other religious associations. In most Islamic traditions, men are permitted to marry Christians or Jews because the husband's religious identity is presumed to represent that of the household.⁸ The children of Muslim fathers are assumed to be Muslims. By a corresponding logic, the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim is not religiously or socially sanctioned. It would result in offspring who are not assumed to

⁸ Christians and Jews are referred to as "people of the book" in the Quran. Islam is a prophetic tradition that accepts the major prophets of the Torah and New Testament. As such, neither Christians nor Jews are considered *kufar* (unbelievers), and women of both faiths can be married by Muslim men. Muslims are not permitted, in a religious sense, to marry unbelievers.

be Muslim.⁹ It was hoped that participation in mosque-based social events would encourage young people to know – and therefore marry – one another, which justified making sacred space available for social interactions as well.

Together, the need for a proper Arabic/Quran school, a funeral parlor, a congregational prayer space, and a social space in which other community events could be held motivated the Muslims of Dearborn to try again, roughly 15 years after the Highland Park debacle, to establish a local mosque. While adult immigrants were often content to carry forward traditions like mawlid, fasting during Ramadan, celebrating holidays, and perhaps attending communal prayers with one another, it had become apparent to them – after 10-20 years in the United States – that these traditions would not suffice for their children. Given the Christian and secular options that surrounded them in Dearborn and Highland Park, parents needed to explain the faith and its history. Customs they found themselves performing reflexively needed to be interpreted for their children, who often did not understand their relevance.

Muslim American scholars, and Muslim critics of these pioneer Muslim Americans, have been quick to argue, as did Atif Wasfi (1971) in his study of Dearborn's mosques, that the pioneer generation of Muslims were ignorant of Islamic history and interpretive traditions and incapable of providing their children with the basics of an Islamic religious education. There is truth in this statement, but a misreading of the situation as well. In the Lebanese countryside these Syrian immigrants had grown up in, Islam was not commonly taught through books or even in Quran schools. It was situated in local contexts and immediate, everyday rituals. Its meanings came from specific applications and improvisations rather than from rationalization or scholastic mastery. The religious consciousness of the immigrants

⁹ Imams in Detroit, with a few infamous exceptions, have refused to marry Muslim women to non-Muslims unless these potential husbands first embrace Islam.

was invested in forms, words, and traditions that were social in nature, not intellectual in a literary or textual sense. It was this vernacular, social Islam that immigrants wanted to impart to their children in Detroit. By the 1930s, they had not yet formalized their religious practice enough to see it as a set of abstract rules or universal precepts. Yet their children, who were raised in an ethnically and religiously diverse environment, educated in American schools, and painfully aware of their parents' and their own foreignness, did objectify the faith. They needed more than a vernacular Islam to encourage their identification as Muslims. Eventually, they would come to demand more than rituals like prayer, and fasting, conducted in a language they did not fully understand for reasons they did not fully comprehend. They would want an intelligible, objectifiable, historical Islam. They would want to be familiar with the Quran and its many interpretive traditions. As a first step toward these goals, they and their parents would build mosques.

Two Mosques are Better than One

Pnina Werbner, writing about South Asian Muslims in Manchester, England, argues that religious solidarity “is often a feature of early immigrant sociality. Permanent settlement, however, brings fragmentation as numbers increase and associations multiply and often compete internally for moral supremacy” (Werbner 2002:63). This zone of contest “enables the urban community to reproduce itself in all its cultural and ideological diversity, leading to a process of increasing communal incorporation and institutional completeness, an elaboration of the moral community in all its complexity” (63). Yet it is sometimes difficult for Muslims in diaspora, who are struggling to adjust to their new status as religious minorities or religious outsiders, to articulate the complexity of their moral community and the meaning of this complexity in a manner that does not also highlight an internal divisiveness [*asabiyah*] they find socially and morally repugnant. Peter Mandaville (2001)

has also recognized the ideological challenge this complexity poses to Muslim leaders, who “hoped that the circumstances of diaspora would lead Muslims from different parts of the world and cultural backgrounds to focus on that which is common to them all, as prescribed by scriptural norms,” and to provide an “opportunity for greater Muslim unity. Too often...it seems as if the call for greater unity has been viewed ...as a call for uniformity – a political maneuver by one school or tendency trying to force its own particular brand of Islam on the entire Muslim community” (127). This tension between the *ideal* of a unified Muslim umma and the *reality* of a highly diverse Muslim community has made it difficult for Detroit’s Arab Muslims to discuss, and even to understand, their division into Sunni and Shi’a congregations. Their silence on this topic has contributed to the larger silence that surrounds the early history of Islam in Detroit, obscuring the extent to which Shi’a and Sunni worked together in the past, just as it obscures the official and everyday settings in which uniformity was actively avoided by both groups. Looking at the institutional spaces Muslims have created for themselves in Dearborn, at how they were imagined and inhabited, we recover this history as one in which conflict and collaboration are essential to the construction of the moral community.

Rather than build one mosque, Muslims in Dearborn established two. Rather than build a club and a mosque, they established two associations that performed both functions. In the end, it was difference in relation to “ritual and sanctioned practice” (Metcalf 1996) that compelled this division into Sunni and Shi’i congregations. The rituals of prayer vary slightly across the two traditions, but these differences are historically and doctrinally important. Equally significant are differences over moral and religious authority, which manifest themselves especially when determining the most appropriate person to serve as imam (prayer leader) for collective prayer. Among Sunnis, any male from the congregation can lead a prayer, with the honor/obligation usually falling on the person with the greatest religious

knowledge.¹⁰ Among the Shi`a, the moral purity and piety of the imam are of great significance. Following an illegitimate imam in prayer can, some Shi`a believe, invalidate the prayer altogether (Fischer and Abedi 1990) and many immigrant Shi`a assumed (in the 1930s and 40s) a general prohibition against praying behind a Sunni imam.¹¹ With two Muslim leaders, a Shi`i majority among Dearborn's Syrians, and a Sunni majority in Detroit as a whole, these differences compelled a binary development of American Muslim space, with Sunni and Shi`i mosques evolving side by side rather than converging across difference.

When I began recording narratives about the early Muslim communities in Highland Park, Detroit, and Dearborn, I initially found the same reluctance to discuss the separation of Shi`i and Sunni communities that Linda Walbridge encountered during her research in the early 1990s.

The early Shi`a in this area like to stress that there was a lack of Shi`i/Sunni division in the community, and there is actually strong resistance to discussing this topic. But, obviously, there was a distinction being made between the two sects even in the earliest days... The development of mosques and communities in the Detroit area is complicated, but always there has existed some distinction between the Shi`a and other Islamic sects. (Walbridge 1997:43)

Most of the older Syrians I spoke with remembered a childhood in which Shi`i-Sunni divisions did not matter, an adolescence in which the words Shi`a and Sunni were not spoken,¹² and a general ignorance of the historical circumstances that led to the division of the Muslim community in the 7th century.¹³ My experience was unlike Walbridge's, however,

¹⁰ Men can lead both men and women in prayer, but women have historically only led other women in prayer.

¹¹ This issue of prayer leadership was less of a concern to Detroit's Sunnis in the 1930s, although in recent years, in reaction to Salafi activism which tends to reject Shi`i legitimacy, many Sunnis in Detroit today would not agree to pray behind a Shi`i imam. During the Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini made several proclamations that were viewed as bringing about greater harmony between Sunni and Shi`i perspectives on political and religious leadership. Among these was a rejection of the prohibition against the two worshipping together (Helfont 2009). The majority of Dearborn's Shi`a today follow *marjahs* who have opposed Khomeini's rulings in this regard, although Imam Chirri, who led Dearborn's Shi`a at the time of the revolution, was a follower of Khomeini in this regard.

¹² While several of the people I interviewed mentioned not having heard the word "Shi`a" until the 1950s or later, all of the Shi`a I spoke with, and most of the Sunnis as well were familiar with a term now considered derogatory, "*mitwali*."

in that I heard many theories about the rift between the two sectarian groups and how it began. Almost universally, it was blamed on the arrival of newcomers to Detroit, either a new Muslim cleric, a new immigrant cohort, or a combination of the two. The Sunni/Shi`i division is described as something brought to the United States by outsiders, not as something created or perpetuated in Detroit. According to Gladys Ecie, “We never had it before... The [terms] Sunni and the Shi`a. ‘They are Shi`a.’ I never knew one from another. We kids grew up as sisters and brothers. We never knew Sunni/Shi`a. ‘Til this last bunch come from the old country and they parted us. Imam Chirri [a Shi`i imam who arrived in 1949] was at the Joy Road [mosque]. We used to go there. Anything they had, we went. Anything we had, they came.”

Hussein El Haje blamed a different culprit for this division: “The Shi`a and the Sunni [were] together. We didn’t have divided until what’s his name... Chirri, show up. We have a guy, we opened a school at that mosque. We opened a school. We have all the kids, the Shi`a and the Sunni, all come together to learn from a guy name Ali Shaltout from Egypt... And he got those kids together and they love him very much. ‘Til Chirri show [up]. He split everybody [to] go his way.”¹⁴

Ardella Jabara also shared her thoughts on the subject, articulating the sentiment of the first American-born generation toward this division within their own community.

Ardella Jabara: Kalil Bazy, that’s who it was? He was a wonderful person. He didn’t differentiate between the Shi`a and the Sunni. He was just straight like this. A Muslim, that’s all, you know. A lot of the Sunni, they kinda liked him because of this attitude and everything, you know.

¹³ At a memorial function for one of the founders of Hashmie Hall and the later Islamic Center of America, a group of older Muslims who were all born in greater Detroit engaged in a lengthy discussion about the origins of the Shi`i schism. Several of those who live outside of Michigan, in places without Shi`i congregations who have thus not participated in the active revival of Shi`ism that was initiated with the Islamic Revolution in Iran, were unaware of this history.

¹⁴ The first time the word Shi`a appears in print that I have noticed in my research, was in the announcement of the arrival of Shaykh Mohammad Jawad Chirri to Detroit in 1949, quoted at length in Appendix B.

I'll tell you something, my husband was in South Dakota. He went to church¹⁵ one time. He took the Quran with him... [Someone asked him about] the difference between the Shi`a and the Sunni.

And my husband said, he told him, "I never heard of it." He never heard of it in the old country neither. He used to live in the old country. And he said, "What do you mean Shi`a and Sunni."

[The other man] said, "There is a difference."

So my husband said to him, "Bring me the Quran. I want to see the difference between yours and mine." So they open the other Quran and he says, "It is the same as mine. There is no difference at all."

What is the difference? He couldn't find it.

There is a difference between Shi`a and Sunni. I think some people, it is just in their head. I don't know how they do that. This has something to do with way back when Nabi Mohammed was killed,¹⁶ or something like that ...

Sally Howell: It was over the leadership after [I explain the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, who rebelled against the unjust caliph, Muawiyah, and whose death solidified the division between Sunni and Shi`i communities.]

AJ: Yeah.

SH: So you said Kalil Bazy didn't pay attention to this difference. How about Imam Karoub, did he mention it?

AJ: No. He never mentioned it. He never did.

SH: So when you were growing up, why were there two ...

AJ: Two *jameas*. Because the Shi`a wanted to be alone, I guess. That's all.

SH: So they had their church and you had yours and you didn't think about it.

AJ: No. We cooked the same *mujaddarah*, the same lentils, at our *jamea* that they cooked at theirs!

¹⁵ Many of the Sunni who attended the American Moslem Society in the 1940s and 50s were accustomed to referring to this mosque, and to mosques in general, as churches. In this anecdote her husband was in a mosque with Shi`i Muslims in South Dakota.

¹⁶ The Prophet Muhammad was not killed. He died of natural causes. The division between Sunni and Shi`a took place decades after the prophet's death. Jabara's error here is quite stunning. Perhaps it should be attributed to her age and to the reluctance expressed by the older generation to discuss the Sunni/Shi`i division and its origins. Otherwise it reveals that, despite the decades she invested in building and maintaining the American Moslem Society on behalf of her family, her own religious education was rudimentary.

Jabara's narrative articulates both a commonplace acceptance of this division and frustration over its perpetuation in Detroit.¹⁷ Most people were eager to point out that neither Bazy nor Karoub exacerbated the division or discriminated among believers when providing ministerial services, yet these narratives do not help us fathom why Dearborn had two distinct congregations or how this early division occurred.

Charles Kalil Alawan (Hajj Chuck), who was born in 1930 into a Shi'i family in Detroit, confirmed the overall pattern when he claimed that, "The first time I knew anything about Sunni/Shi'a was when I went to the old country [in 1945].¹⁸ My father never talked about it. Joe's father [Mr. Caurdy, a friend of his father's from the Sunni community] never talked about it. That wasn't a big issue for the kids." He repeated the trope about sectarian divisions arriving from overseas, but he also acknowledged, in a way most people did not, that this division was important for his parents' generation of immigrants, just as it is for today's. "It was a big issue for the adults when they split in the late 30s," he said. Alawan then gave the fullest account of how the two Dearborn congregations traced their genesis to a mutual decision made in 1935 to maintain, observe, and accommodate this longstanding distinction between the Arab Muslims.

Hajj Chuck Alawan: I have a recollection of my dad taking me, so I couldn't have been less than five years old, to what were called meetings.¹⁹ I don't remember them being small groups, you know. Meetings in those days, if they had an executive committee, it was beyond my imagination. It seemed to me they ran on a grand scale.... It was what they knew best. And the best was one man, one vote. And I remember him taking me... Originally, I think it was called the American Moslem Society.²⁰ I gotta find the picture for you.

¹⁷ Jabara also narrated several incidents that indicated Shi'a difference from Sunnis, differences that implied the social inferiority of the Shi'a.

¹⁸ Alawan's family was from Damascus where they suffered ongoing persecution for their minority status. For the Shi'a the significance of the difference was much more important than it was to the Sunni majority.

¹⁹ While it is not transparent in the sections of the interview quoted here, Hajj Kalil does not claim to remember the events which transpired at this meeting in a literal sense. His understanding of what happened is based on the way these events were discussed by his father's generation. He situates himself in the room, as it were, for the sake of dating the meeting.

²⁰ American Moslem Society was not adopted as the name of the Sunni mosque until 1942. The only organizational name I could find predating the 1935 incorporation of the Progressive Arabian Hashmie

Sally Howell: The mosque is now called the American Moslem Society.

CA: I understand. Whatever it was, it was generic. And they used to meet, regularly. I think it was on a monthly basis. What they did, I don't know... I think what they were trying to do was just meet. Just socialize. Just to have – and it was men. It wasn't women – and in my sense of thinking they were trying to find themselves in our culture here. They would observe what was going on and knew they needed to do something, but, whether they had any grand ideas, I don't know.

SH: Was Karoub involved with them?

CA: Yes. Sure. Karoub was, well, he was the only Sunni leader and I think he was servicing both Dearborn and Highland Park ... Whether he was servicing the joint group of Sunni/Shi'a before they split, I can't tell you. I can't even tell you if they were that religiously involved. They had no place to worship. Not in Dearborn ... I think Shaykh Kalil Bazy was probably more involved secularly. I don't know if he was even recognized yet as the volunteer, lay clergyman, because that's all he was.

SH: With the Hashmie people.

CA: Yes. But I think he might have been involved prior to that.

[I tell him about the Highland Park mosque and the role Kalil Bazy played as a religious leader in the era of WWI and its aftermath. This information was new to Hajj Kalil. Surprised by the diversity of the early congregation in Highland Park, he returns to the narrative about the meeting he attended as a child in 1935.]

CA: If that mosque was a predecessor of the development, it was also probably a root of the problem, in that [the Sunni said] “Hey. We are Lebanese. We are orthodox Muslims” ... [but] ... the group was majority Shi'a now [in 1935]. Because when they held the vote, the vote was, we want it to be the Hashmie Society. And the other group says, “Go ahead. We are not with you.”

SH: And so they [the Sunni] started the American Moslem Society.

CA: “We are taking our balls and we are going to play over there.” “We are right down the road from you.” Now, they [the Shi'i majority] bought the bank. That is what they [the larger group] wanted to do. And when they decided to buy the bank, they wanted to name it the Hashmie Hall, Hashemite Society. And “Hashemite” today is benign. I mean it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't mean Shi'a. As I told you, the Kingdom of Jordan

Society was Bab al-Alef (Door A, or the First Door). The letterhead of the Bab al-Alef Society includes a foundation date of 1934 (Abraham Family Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan). The name Bab al-Alef was similar in nature to the early names of the Syrian Muslim associations in Ross, North Dakota, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Michigan City, Indiana.

is the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. But in those days it meant something to those people. Now when you say the Prophet's family, what clicks in?

SH: *Ahl al-bayt* [the household of the Prophet Mohammad and his descendents; the Shi'a refer to themselves today as followers of *ahl al-bayt*].

CA: *Ahl al-bayt*. Yes. Which is the Hashmie, [The Prophet was a part of the Bani Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe and their descendents today are called Hashemites.] the Hashemites, against the Quraysh or the Bani Umayyad [those who blocked the Bani Hashim leaders from becoming caliphs in the 7th century].²¹

So in their minds it meant something. And they [the Sunni] could see that the Muslim majority [in Dearborn] was on this side. As a matter of fact, the Muslim majority grew to be a very large majority of the Shi'a. Of course today it is predominant, so what the hell are you going to do? But at that time, as a young kid, I won't say it didn't mean anything. I will say that my natural progression went into the Hashmie Society, but my father still associated with ... When we came to the community, socially, my dad tried to thwart [the division]. I will tell you that ... He tried to reconcile the issue.

In this narrative Hajj Kalil covers several important points. First, he mentions a meeting he attended as a boy, which he places roughly in 1935, at which a large group of Syrian men discussed purchasing the foreclosed Union State Bank building on Dix Avenue, the main business district of the Southend, for conversion into a mosque. At this meeting, a vote was taken over what to name this new society, and the majority in attendance agreed to name their association the Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society. The Hashmie Society incorporated with the State of Michigan in June 1936 and purchased the foreclosed Union State Bank for their new home in the same month, see Illustration 4.1. It was the Shi'a majority who voted for this name which, as Alawan asserts, was explicitly partisan. Alawan did not know the history of the Highland Park mosque or the Universal Islamic Society before our meeting, but he quickly seized on these events to augment his theory about the Sunni's refusal to acquiesce

²¹ Quraysh is the tribe into which the prophet Mohammed was born, along with most of those from Mecca at the time of his birth. After the prophet's death, the leadership of the Muslim community, the Caliphate, was initially granted to several of his closest supporters. The 4th caliph, Ali, was a cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, and a member of the Bani Hashim family within the larger Quraysh tribe. It was an Umayyad caliph who blocked the rival claim of the prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali, and later challengers to the office. This dispute over the caliphate led to the division of the early Muslims into Shi'a – those who were the followers of *ahl al-bayt* – and the Sunni - those who did not oppose the Omayyad caliphs.

to their minority status. For them, this would have entailed turning their backs on centuries of Islamic history in an effort to accommodate a local majority who followed practices the Sunnis considered unsanctioned innovations.



Illustration 4.1. The Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society on Dix Avenue in Dearborn, circa 1970. Courtesy of Raad Alawan.

Alawan saw a parallel between the experiences of the Sunnis in Dearborn and what the Karoub brothers faced in their encounter with the Ahmadiyya missionary, Mufti Sadiq, in Highland Park. What he did not realize, or articulate here, was how decidedly different the Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society name was from those that had preceded it. The Moslem Mosque of Highland Park and the Universal Islamic Society were names (and groups) that did not distinguish among Muslim sects, among ethnicities, or make assertions about political orientation. The Progressive (not conservative) Arabian (not polycultural) Hashmie (not Sunni) Society conveyed in its name a legacy of Arab Shi`i marginalization

(both local and international), and a refusal to submit again to Sunni hegemony. This name is, in fact, strong evidence that a Shi`i/Sunni rift indeed played a part in the demise of the Universal Islamic Society, as it did in the demise of the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park. Tired of being marginalized, the Shi`a were willing now to assert their majority status, and their independence. The Arabic-speaking Sunnis who had, up to this point, worked alongside the Shi`a to develop a new mosque in Dearborn, decided to remain independent as well.

Did the Sunni and Shi`a consider their differences irreconcilable? Did they imagine themselves to be two moral communities, rather than one? Although the groups chose to preserve their autonomy, they were both Muslim, Syrian, and Arabic speaking. They lived in the same neighborhoods and raised their children together. The two populations worshipped separately, each behind a different imam. Their mosques/ethnic associations were led by different sets of men, each with their own rules and priorities. Yet the two congregations supported one another's fund raisers, attended one another's special events, were married in each other's social halls, sent their children to one another's Sunday schools, and married their children to one another. As Ardella Jabara stated above, the two mosques made the same *mujaddara*. Rather than describe this structural bifurcation as divisive, it can be interpreted as proof of the moral and historical complexity of the community and evidence of its institutional completeness (as Werbner argued above). The Sunni-Shi`i split was a reality that could not always be acknowledged, but which could never be ignored.

What's in a Name?

The effort to establish a mosque, or mosques, in Dearborn did not begin at the meeting Kalil Alawan attended as a small boy in 1935, nor was the division he witnessed between Sunni and Shi`a the only conflict Detroit's Arab Muslims faced. With very little money, competing ambitions, and differing understandings of their relationship to non-Arab Muslims in the city, the Syrians struggled to establish shared terms and common agendas.

Even among the Sunni there were two factions: one which sought to develop an ethnic, local, and intimate institution; and one which pursued instead a pan-Muslim, polycultural, or universal mosque. Smaller in number than the Shi`a, the Sunnis struggled to raise enough money to build anything at all. They settled on a practical plan. They would build the first floor of a mosque now, a simple structure with a large multi-purpose room that could be used for prayer and religious education, but also for funerals, weddings and social events. As circumstances changed, the Depression passed perhaps, and the community grew and matured, they could add a second floor with a space dedicated solely for prayer, a proper mosque, complete with *qibla*, dome and minarets. This later construction would allow the mosque to serve the long desired symbolic function of representing Islam and the city's Muslims to others in Detroit.

The year 1938 is commonly given as the incorporation date for the American Moslem Society (AMS) in Dearborn, although no records exist which tie the AMS to this date. In fact, as illustrated below, the AMS did not incorporate until 1942. The 1938 date is drawn instead from the building's cornerstone, a relic that has been covered, uncovered, buried, and discovered repeatedly over the past 70 years, as the building has undergone one expansion after another. Illustration 4.2 features this "cornerstone" as the lintel above the entrance to the mosque in a photograph that was taken in 1952. The date "1938" is engraved between the name "Islamic Mosque" in English, and its Arabic translation "*al-masjid al-Islami*." Ironically, this photograph has done more to confuse the history of the mosque than to clarify it; most families associated with the historical AMS now claim that the photograph itself was taken in 1938. The façade of the building, however, clearly shows age and markings that indicate an awning once stood protectively over the building's entrance, covering up, oddly enough, the name "Islamic Mosque" and the institution's foundation date.



Illustration 4.2. American Moslem Women's Society in 1952, taken in front of the American Moslem Society as it was initially constructed in 1938-1939. Courtesy of the Abraham family.

Similarly, the young girls in the picture had not yet been born in 1938 or were babies when this building was constructed. I have dated this picture to a gathering which took place at the mosque in 1952, to break ground on the building's second phase, the addition of a second story "mosque." Yet the lintel, with a date and name carved in stone, is now taken by most people to be self evident, irrefutable proof of when the AMS was established.²²

²² The photograph was used in an exhibition on the history of the Arab American community which I curated in 1989 at the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services in Dearborn, and in a second exhibition, "A Community between Two Worlds: Arab Americans in Greater Detroit", which was hosted by the Smithsonian Institution in 1995. I erroneously attributed the date of the photograph to 1938, as instructed by Helen Atwel, the image's donor. Ameri and Lockwood (2001), in a photographic book that builds on these earlier exhibitions, also attribute the photograph to 1938.

When I set about exploring the early history of the AMS, I was startled to find so many forgotten organizational names and inception dates among the archival papers of the group's founders. Rather than one or two groups, I found five legally distinct entities that undertook mosque-building projects in Dearborn in the 1930s. Making sense of this litany of names was ultimately very helpful to me as I set about trying to understand how the mosque was first organized, what its relationship was to other early mosque building efforts in Detroit, and how it related to Hashmie Hall.²³ The list hints at a second conflict that emerged among Dearborn's Muslims as they set about the task of building a mosque, this one unfolding within the Sunni community and based on historical and cultural divisions very unlike the sectarian division between Sunni and Shi'a. The following timeline of "start dates" for Dearborn's mosques reveals both the difficulty the AMS faced in supporting a mosque financially, and the difficulty the community's rival factions had in resolving their conflict over which Muslim public the mosque would serve – the families and community of its founders, or the city's Muslim populations as a whole.

Timeline of important "start dates"

1934 – Minaret al-Hoda founded "to build a Mohamadan Mosque" in Dearborn.²⁴

1935 – El-Bokka League established, also to build a mosque in Dearborn.²⁵

1936 – July 28th – Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society incorporated. Purchased Union State Bank at 10401 Dix Avenue, also in July 1936, also for the purpose of creating a mosque.²⁶

1937 – April 30 – Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society celebrates its grand opening as a mosque and social hall (*Detroit News*, May 31, 1937).

1938 – ground broken on a mosque at 9945 Ferndale [later W. Vernor Highway].²⁷

²⁴ Essie Abraham Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, letterhead of Minaret al-Hoda including foundation date and primary objectives.

²⁵ Essie Abraham Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, incorporation papers of El-Bokaa League.

²⁶ Michigan Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth, Articles of Incorporation, Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society, July 2, 1938.

1939 – Feb. 20 – deed for building at 9945 Ferndale granted to the Islamic League.²⁸

1940 – deed transferred from Islamic League to El-Bokaa League – “to undertake completion of the mosque which this corporation has been attempting to handle, and is willing to undertake and agree to pay all unpaid bills, taxes and liens against said building and relieve this corporation of that burden and liability.”²⁹

1942 – June 28 – American Moslem Society incorporated. “To buy, rent, or otherwise acquire a spiritual center known as “masjid” for the furtherance of Islamic teachings and religious services for old and young and to maintain religious classes for the Moslem Children.”³⁰

If we remove the name Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society from the list, we can see an orderly progression of names that begins with Minaret al-Hoda [Guiding Light], moves to El-Bokka League, then to the Islamic League, back to El-Bokaa, and then rests finally with the American Moslem Society. The first and last names on this list are open ended, or “generic” as Hajj Kalil described them. They make no reference to ethnicity or sectarian orientation. The Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society and El-Bokaa League, by contrast, are partisan and ethnic appellations, and both enter the record in 1935. The “El-Bokaa League” was the name adopted by local Sunni Syrians who traced their origins to the Bekaa Valley of Syria/Lebanon. Like its Shi’i counterpart, Hashmie Hall, this organizational label implies ethnic and sectarian exclusivity. Without more specific dates, however, it is unclear which partisan name came first, but their sudden appearance in 1935 suggests that their leaders sought to build local, ethnically organized mosques under the control of a select group of closely affiliated members. The groups’ by-laws make it clear that both wanted social halls and ethnic clubs for their members/congregations in addition to the more conventional prayer space essential to mosque architecture.

²⁷ Dearborn Department of Records, Dearborn Historical Society.

²⁸ Essie Abraham Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, incorporation papers of El-Bokaa League.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Essie Abraham Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, incorporation papers of the American Moslem Society.

These ethnically particular organizations were in competition not only with one another, but also with a third constituency that wanted to establish a permanent mosque in Dearborn. This third group, which called itself the “Islamic League,” emphasized unity over particularity and brought forward some of the vision and ambition that characterized earlier mosque-building efforts in Highland Park and Detroit. In 1938 it was members of the El-Bokaa League, however, who broke ground on Dearborn’s first Sunni mosque. They began digging the hole for the building’s basement and foundation at 9945 Ferndale (later West Vernor Highway), and they did this work “by hand,” using only picks and shovels. They could not afford to hire professionals or to rent machinery to perform this tedious work (El Haje interview). Despite this backbreaking labor (which has become a badge of honor among the descendents of the men who toiled in this way), the deed to the building was registered in February 1939 not to El-Bokaa League, but to the Islamic League, and it was the Islamic League that placed the lintel above the door of the mosque that read “Islamic Mosque” when the ground floor of the building was completed, also in 1939.

The building of even this modest structure placed a tremendous financial burden on the dozen or so Syrian families who first undertook the task. Hussien El Haje and Gladys Ecie both recall paying 5 cents a month per family member before the construction was underway; an amount that was ratcheted up as the demand for dollars became more urgent once work began. Others described the multiple picnics that were held, flowers sold, doilies crocheted and sold, and dinners hosted, all in the effort to fund Dearborn’s Sunni mosque (Ecie, Jabara, Abraham interviews). Help from Muslims outside Dearborn – those associated with the Islamic League – was also critical. In 1940, responsibility for funding (and leading) the institution again returned to the hands of the El-Bokaa League when Musa Halimi loaned the community the settlement money he received after being injured on the job at the Ford Motor Company. This gift enabled the group to extricate itself from a bank loan on which

they were paying interest.³¹ The Islamic and El-Bokaa Leagues continued to trade leadership of the mosque in the 1930s and 40s, drawing new coalitions of support for their evolving campaigns to finance the construction of the mosque in a period of genuine economic duress. One strategy was ethnic. The other was universal.³² This administrative tug of war finally ended in 1942 when the American Moslem Society took over management of the institution.

The AMS's vision for a mosque in Dearborn was quite different from the ethnic club model and it prioritized the sacred functions of the institution over its social functions. Their by-laws formalized the following goals:

- 1) To promote and improve the spiritual and social life of its members;
- 2) To teach and inculcate American principles of government and institutions among its members;
- 3) To preserve and teach all Moslems, irrespective of sect, the doctrines of Islam; to maintain and support a regular spiritual advisor known in the Moslem faith as "Imam" for spiritual services of the members and of all Moslems;
- 4) To promote peace, love, and mutual helpfulness among its members;
- 5) To buy, rent, or otherwise acquire a spiritual center known as "masjid" for the furtherance of Islamic teachings and religious services for old and young and to maintain religious classes for the Moslem Children.³³

The masjid this group sought to acquire was the Islamic Mosque in Dearborn, which they successfully took over in 1942. The Imam in question was Hussien Karoub, whose polycultural vision for the new mosque was clearly championed in this statement of goals, which mentions serving "all Moslems" not once but twice, "irrespective of sect" or membership. Yet Karoub was willing to compromise with the Bekaai leadership and to incorporate their vision of a local, ethnic, and social institution into the AMS charter. The names of the "charter members" of the mosque reflect the exacting nature of this

³¹ Paying and receiving interest is not sanctioned in Islamic jurisprudence. The practice was also expensive and both of these early Dearborn mosques were eager to remove themselves from their obligations to bank lenders as quickly as possible. Owing money to a member of the congregation was far preferable and more affordable.

³² The dates I provide here bring together information provided by a variety of sources, the interviews I conducted with the mosques' founders, the incorporation papers referenced above, and Dearborn records pertaining to the ownership of the property at each address.

³³ Essie Abraham Collection, Bentley Historical Society.

compromise. Of the 14 men whose names appear on this list, 7 were from the Bekaa Valley, and the remaining 7 were a mix of Turks, Afghans, Indians, a South Lebanese Shi'a, and others Arabs from outside the Bekaa Valley. The AMS was located in Dearborn, in a neighborhood closely identified with Syrian Muslim families, and the institution became a home away from home for these families in the coming decades. Women would eventually play as central a role in leading and shaping this group as did men (Abraham 2000). The education of children and the match-making of young adults shaped the programs for which the mosque would eventually be known (and later, notorious). The Bekaa families provided most of the money, and most of the "sweat equity," to support this institution, which today, over seventy years later, is still called the American Moslem Society. The polycultural faction led by Karoub assisted financially as well. Their presence on the mosque board helped ensure that the mosque would remain welcoming and open to the Muslim community as a whole.

The competing visions of mosques and of Muslim space that were seemingly resolved in 1942 when the American Moslem Society assumed control of a mosque consisting mostly of Bekaa Sunni families, did not dissipate. In the 1940s and 1950s the mosque's leaders were content to blend the religious and social functions that took place there seamlessly. The following announcement for a dance at the mosque provides a clear illustration of how untroubled such combinations were in the 1940s.

General Invitation to My Muslim Brothers in Detroit and Windsor, Canada

I hope that my Muslim brothers will come to the Islamic Mosque in Dearborn this Friday evening, the 8th of October, 1949, for a party featuring Arabic music and American dances in the mosque. This gathering will take place every Friday night at the Islamic Mosque for all of the Muslim youth. Bring and send your children so they can meet us and we can get to know each other and be united. Please help me, children of Islam, so that our group will grow and we can be proud of ourselves in front of others. Separation from each other will do nothing but degrade the status and name of Arabs and Muslims. For this reason, I beg my brothers to make your children attend every Friday night at the Islamic Mosque in Dearborn. I am ready to provide any service my religion requires and this is the duty of every single Muslim.

From the Committee of Muslim Youth
Detroit, Michigan

Your servant,
Mohammed Hassan

(*Nahdat al-Arab*, October 5, 1948, translated by Ryan Ferris)

Eventually, many local Muslims would grow concerned that mosque dances themselves would “degrade the status and name of Arabs and Muslims” and would use such events to question whether this institution was a mosque at all, an ambiguity not entirely absent from the group’s by-laws. In many ways, the tensions that were built into this mosque, effectively re-aligning its sacred and profane functions, remain vital to the collective life of the Muslim community in Detroit today. The universalists and the particularists still vie for control and, as we will see in later chapters, their struggles are increasingly played out in American terms.

A Space of their Own

It may have been “ritual and sanctioned practice” (Metcalf 1996:3) that marked Dearborn as a Muslim space in the 1920s, when the first immigrants settled there and began worshipping together in their homes. It may have been Syrian and Turkish coffeehouses that made Muslim men visible to others in the city. But it was the opening of Hashmie Hall and the American Moslem Society that decisively reterritorialized Islam in Dearborn, giving it legally sanctioned, highly visible, and broadly recognizable forms. Borrowing from urban American institutional models ranging from ethnic halls and clubs to mutual aid societies and Protestant churches, then recombining these with the mosque forms they had known in Syria and (since 1921) in Detroit, Dearborn’s Arabs produced new spaces in which Islam could be practiced and learned by Muslims. Non-Muslims could encounter Islam in these spaces as well, reinterpreting the cultural practices of this “Oriental” faith as local, American, and intelligible.

The opening day ceremonies at Hashmie Hall, for instance, were choreographed to highlight the familiar, to signal to local audiences that the city’s Muslims had distinctive

traditions and practices, certainly, but that they were also fluent in American styles of public performance. Recycling elements of the holiday celebration, parade, and official pronouncement that had figured so prominently 16 years earlier at the opening of the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park, the Hashmie Hall event was far more elaborate.

More than 1,000 men, women and children of Detroit's Syrian colony, and many persons of the same race from other American cities, came to the dedication ceremonies. First there were exercises at the Salina School, then a parade, and the formal entry into the temple (*Detroit News*, May 31, 1937).

This article suggests many differences between the establishment of Hashmie Hall and the failed venture in Highland Park. The two-year effort to raise the money needed to purchase and renovate the bank, for example, was a success "due largely to the energy of the women of the colony who sponsored innumerable dances, picnics, excursions, auction sales and other entertainments to raise money for a building." This observation illustrates the extent to which Detroit's Syrians had embraced local notions of volunteerism, the public role of women, and civic life in general. While both the "Rev." Hussien Karoub and the "Rev." Kalil Bazy – already assimilated to the titles of Christian clergy – were "in charge of the ceremonies," public officials from Dearborn and Wayne County were also on hand to address the crowd and lend municipal authority to the proceedings. Rather than emphasize the Muslim holiday being celebrated, the reporter dwelled on the history and accomplishments of the Syrian colony in greater Detroit, Christian and Muslim, working-class and entrepreneurial. After a performance by the Salina School band, "bidding was opened for the honor of cutting the ribbon across the door." "Externally," the reporter tells us, "it doesn't look much like the Mohammedan mosques of the Near East that you see in picture books. It is an old bank building. But the inside has been painted and decorated to make it look as much like the real thing as the structural difficulties permitted" (*Detroit News*, May 31, 1937). Hashmie Hall was an amalgamated, hybrid space, one through which Islam entered the United States and the United States entered Islam.

The incorporation papers for Hashmie Hall offer a glimpse into the political and social imaginary that shaped the activities and physical layout of this mosque. The “purposes of this corporation” were:

1. To promote an abiding interest in the social life of the community and in good government; to inspire respect for the law and establish a definite understanding of civic duties; to promote patriotism and to work for international accord and friendship.
2. To encourage and assist members to become naturalized citizens of the United States and to constantly urge that all members exercise the full franchise of their citizenship and conscientiously discharge their civic duties.
3. To engage in Welfare work and charitable aid to worthy members of the Society and their families and to any other persons of Arabian extraction who may be in need.
4. To maintain a building to be used as a Moslem Church and for other religious and educational purposes.
5. To conduct classes designed to teach American born children of members Arabian History and the Arabic language.

The first item mentioned in this list was the promotion of the social life of the community, and this activity does seem to have dominated the calendar and agenda of Hashmie Hall, in the memory of its members and supporters. Promoting Americanization and good citizenship were also important in the articles of incorporation. Use as a “Moslem church” is fourth on the list, after the group’s status as a mutual aid society and before the education of “American born children.” Given this list of priorities, it should come as no surprise that many of the older Arab Americans I interviewed did not necessarily remember Hashmie Hall as a mosque. It is referred to most commonly by the Arabic term *nadi* (club). Sunni Muslims (and other neighborhood residents) attended parties there on a regular basis; weddings, graduation celebrations, fashion shows, dances. Political lectures and rallies were held there, events which addressed local American concerns and the group’s escalating concern over Zionist ambitions in Palestine. Candidates for office addressed Syrian and other neighborhood voters. Dignitaries from overseas were hosted and toasted. The United Auto

Workers Local 600 rented Hashmie Hall for a year while their own hall was under construction across the street. Oddly, given how many people were married at the *nadi*, the only picture I have been able to locate taken inside the hall is Illustration 4.3, dating from the 1950s. It documents a memorial service held in Dearborn for the Lebanese relative of one of the mosque's members. Hashmie Hall was also the funeral parlor used by the Lebanese Shi'a until the early 1960s.

While Sunnis remember this space for the social events that took place on the ground floor of the mosque, what is surprising is how few people in the Shi'a community describe having attended prayers or other religious observances there. Instead, they speak of the Sunday school programs that were held at Hashmie Hall intermittently over the years, programs attended by Sunni and Shi'a children. The question of whether the *nadi* (club) was also a *jamea* (mosque) is answered, almost universally, in a political fashion. The starkest



Illustration 4.3. A memorial service held at Hashmie Hall, late 1950s. Shaykh Kalil Bazy, bearded, is standing in the back row, closest to the picture of the deceased. Shaykh Mohammad Jawad Chirri is standing to the left of the portrait wearing a white *lutfi* (head wrapping worn often by Shi'a clerics). Courtesy of Abdullah Berry.

example of this perspective is provided by Hajj Chuck Alawan. In the beginning of the following conversation, he is describing the AMS:

Hajj Chuck Alawan: We would look down the street, and here was this strange damned building, half out of the ground, with a roof on it, and the stairs going down into it. We, I had never been into it at that time... I do remember the Hashmie Hall. We used to call that the "coal mine." The reason we used to call it the coal mine, first of all, let us understand something. To the American-born, these buildings were far below our standards. It was very hard for us as young kids, or even as teenagers, to buy into them as being religious places, because they were far, far below any standard that we ever observed.

Sally Howell: So for the mosque, you are talking about the fact that it was a basement, and its construction. But for Hashmie Hall you are talking about the way it was decorated, the furniture was run down...

CA: First of all, it [the AMS] wasn't a mosque. It was a social hall. No matter how you cut it, you can call it any damn thing you want, but to say there was regular Friday prayer there and it was dedicated to that purpose... It was a social hall. And so was the Hashmie Society. There wasn't a place for them to pray in the Hashmie Society until they decided to remodel the upstairs which was in the early 40s or late 30s.³⁴ They finally cleaned the upstairs, which was all offices of the bank, got rid of the partitions and put a carpet in... We called it the coal mine. The windows were so bad that the soot from the factory used to get in there and you would go in there and you would smell it, inhale it, everything you touched, no matter if you cleaned it now, the next day... We used to call it the coal mine...

When you lived in Detroit, when you looked at churches...you would see these grand edifices, and you'd say, "I am a Moslem." Now this is not something we dwelled on, but I did. I was a nerd...I used to go to that mosque and it was terribly below my dignity. Even as a teenager.

SH: Do you mean the mosque or Hashmie Hall?

CA: I'll call it the mosque now. It is Hashmie Hall, ok. Cause when I would go there we would have the kids downstairs and we would have what we called "Sunday School."

Hajj Chuck goes on to mention that his parent's generation, who built Hashmie Hall, were *fallahin* (peasants). Their expectations were not high. They were not educated. They thought that a "fund raiser in which several hundred dollars were thrown onto a carpet and collected

³⁴ The building itself did not open until 1937 and the prayer space renovation was completed at least by mid 1939 (*Detroit Free Press*, Nov. 13, 1939).

together was a major accomplishment” (Alawan interview). His narrative suggests not that Hashmie Hall and the AMS were not mosques, but that they were inadequate institutions in the mind of American-born Muslims who, like Alawan, wanted their mosques to stand shoulder to shoulder with Detroit’s impressive array of churches. They should be clean. They should hold regular Friday prayers. They should be structured around these regular prayers. Finally, although Hajj Chuck does not mention it here, they should have educated and well trained imams.

Other American-born Muslims who grew up in these institutions had no problem identifying the AMS as a mosque and valued its unique blend of social and religious activities. Sy Abraham, for example, described it as “a meeting place. It had religious as well as social [functions] ... in the same space. I don’t recall Friday prayer services ...” According to Marylynn Abraham Hassan, “It kept everybody together.” Sharon Abraham Korhonen added, “It was a necessity.” While not offering regular Friday prayers until the second floor was added in the 1950s, the AMS did host holiday services, Sunday services, and Sunday schools. The Abrahams remember the kitchen of the mosque with particular fondness, but they also described a space in which dances were held in the afternoon. The furniture could be pushed against the walls, a carpet rolled out in the evening, and the space could then be used for prayer, for a mawlid, or for some other religious purpose. Flexibility made the space important in the life of the community, and the Abrahams emphasized again and again that its purpose was both religious and social.

Like most Muslims who grew up in the Southend in the 1940s and 50s, the Abraham children attended Sunday school at both the AMS and Hashmie Hall. Sy Abraham remembers studying with Shaykh Hassan Balooly (who was a Sunni Muslim leader) at Hashmie Hall in the late 1940s, adding that Hashmie Hall was “strictly a social place.” As Sunnis, it is unlikely that the Abrahams would have worshipped in the prayer space at Hashmie Hall, just as Hajj Chuck did not worship at the AMS. The Abrahams did describe the many parties they

attended at the “Nadi” and, when Shaykh Chirri was mentioned, Sy explained that, “When he got started there [at Hashmie Hall], it was strictly social and he brought the religion.”

Ardella Jabara, who joined the American Moslem Women’s Society in 1947, when the group was officially incorporated (and who was the group’s treasurer for over 30 years), also remembered the wide array of programs sponsored by the AMS. For her, religious events such as mawlid, holiday celebrations, and Sunday school took center stage, but most of her energy went into organizing the many picnics and *haflis* (parties) at which money was raised to “keep the place up and to make improvements.” While women had engaged in fund raising for the mosque from the beginning, they formally organized in 1947, and took over much of the responsibility of organizing the group’s fund raising events. Women did not serve on the board of the American Moslem Society. The men’s group was responsible for decisions concerning the religious activities of the mosque, overseeing its physical development and upkeep, and handling membership dues and fees. According to several of my interviewees, the women were more effective and more active than the AMS board (Abraham, Jabara, G. Ecie interviews). Ardella Jabara recalls with pride a moment when one of her co-workers at the Dearborn Public Schools described her as “one of the seven women who held up the church.” It did not occur to Jabara that the AMS was anything other than a church/mosque, or that any of the activities that took place there and were intended to “keep the community together” might later be judged as inappropriate. For the older generation, the question of whether Hashmie Hall and the American Moslem Society were mosques was irrelevant. When I asked him why the AMS was built, Hussein ElHaje responded, “because we need a place to go pray and on the holidays like Ramadan and Eid al-Adha, we needed a place to pray too. So we built that mosque.”

It is unlikely that the founders of the AMS realized it would take them until 1952 to complete the second floor sanctuary and prayer space which occupied pride of place on the upper, main floor of the building. The basement, as it was called, was intended to serve as a

social hall and classroom and was not designed to function as a mosque. It bore none of the architectural features associated with a prayer space – no *mihrab* (prayer niche), *minbar* (pulpit), or carpeted area set aside for prayer, and thus not walked on in shoes. Once the Second World War ended, however, and prosperity returned to Detroit, the AMS set about completing its original plan. “I present you with good news and it is that we have begun immediately to prepare building the second floor of the Mosque and this is clear proof of the dedication and devotion of our good, hardworking women,” announced Ali Eisaa, on the second anniversary of the American Moslem Women’s Society (*Nahdat al-Arab*, February 11, 1949). If there were any lingering concerns that the AMS was not a proper mosque, they were temporarily resolved in the new push to build a more recognizable prayer space, one set aside for acts of worship, and one that would offer a more dignified representation of Islam to the city’s Muslim and non-Muslim resident alike.

Hashmie Hall evolved differently. With the help of an energetic women’s auxiliary, Hashmie Hall was much more successful at financing their facility than the AMS.³⁵ A larger group to begin with, they purchased their building when it was in foreclosure and relatively affordable, and their social hall, which was rented out to the general public, generated income for the mosque. In November 1939, a scant 3 years after they purchased the former bank, the Hashmie Society hosted a large celebration at which they ritually burned their mortgage papers. The *Detroit Free Press* covered this event, and their story also weighed in on the question of how Hashmie hall was used. It “houses the mosque of the colony and is used as a social headquarters. Five nights a week the place is turned into a classroom where Arabic is taught, the traditions of Arabia preserved, and lessons in American citizenship given, for, you see, the 45,000 Arabians of Detroit take their American duties seriously and have a great pride in the background of their race” (*Detroit Free Press*, Nov. 13 1939).

³⁵ Once these debts were paid, however, the women’s society of Hashmie Hall faded from view (Abraham 2000).

Hajj Chuck Alawan, a founder of the Islamic Center of America, the mosque which eclipsed Hashmie Hall in the early 1960s, and a committed supporter of Imam Chirri, the founder of this new and improved mosque, was persistent in his criticisms of Hashmie Hall, which he considered an inadequate, pseudo-mosque. But for his parent's generation, and especially for Shaykh Bazy, who had struggled for many years without a mosque and had twice failed to create one, Hashmie Hall was a significant achievement. Its creation, like that of the AMS, brought Islam into the public culture of Dearborn, gave focus to the social and religious life of the city's Syrian colony, and attracted new Muslims families to Dearborn. In his 1969 interview with historian Alixa Naff, Bazy was deeply offended when Naff suggested that Hashmie Hall was converted into a mosque in 1949 (the year Shaykh Chirri first preached there) and had been nothing more than a social club before that date. Bazy responded with the following account:

Kalil Bazy: Take *my* word for it. [Emphatically stated.]

Alixa Naff: Excuse me. This is what I have heard. Please, of course, correct me. Set the record straight.

KB: The Sunnis had a mosque on Vernor in Dearborn. They had a mosque. When they didn't have a mosque, the Shi'a used to...the Shi'a and the Sunnis used to pray together. When we established the Nadi al-Arabi al-Hashmie (the Hashemite Arab Club), the Shi'a were praying in a [tape unclear]. Nadi al-Hashmie, see, was composed of two floors: the first floor was for community gatherings, and the second floor, because it was a bank building, it was a bank building, up and down, see. We took down all the rooms and turned it into one big room. So the lower, the first floor, [was a] big hall. We took out all the partitions that were there since it was a bank building. And the second floor was a floor of offices. We demolished all those and we turned it into a *musalla* [prayer space]. Religious prayer was on the top in the Islamic mosque on the second floor and the general gatherings, the social [gatherings], stuff like that, whether they were Christians or not Christians, Muslims or not Muslims, the Americans and [tape unclear], it was a permissive club. And that's how the Nadi al-Arabi al-Hashemi was. It's name was a *nadi* [club] down [stairs] and a *jamea* [mosque] upstairs.

To Kalil Bazy, Hashmie Hall was a mosque; a club and a mosque.

Conclusion

In the 1930s, despite the economic hardships of the Great Depression, Detroit's Syrian Muslims entered a period of energetic and effective mosque building. They established two imperfect, but engaged and enduring institutions. These mosques were more likely to host Friday night dances than Friday noon congregational prayers. They were not like the mosques immigrants had known in Syria and other parts of the Muslim world. They represented a newly functionalized relationship to Islam on the part of American Muslims, who sought to reconstitute the moral community of Islam in Detroit by creating a social context in which Islam could flourish and Muslims could "know each other and be united." The emphasis in these mosques was on reproducing vernacular Islam rather than a doctrinal or intellectual tradition.

Instead of viewing the mosques of this period as proof that the Muslim community in Detroit was active and thriving, it is now widely believed that the city's early Muslims were not proper Muslims, did not know their religion well, and made fundamental errors in their fledgling attempts to establish Islam in America. This negative assessment is shared by contemporary Muslim actors who are searching for a past that is useful to them – one that justifies their vision of mosque-building and Muslim moral community today. This way of framing Detroit's past, however hegemonic, obscures key guides to understanding the historical development of Islam and Muslim American community in Detroit. The institutions built by Dearborn's Muslims in the 1930s and 1940s have survived to the present day in variously modified forms. For the founders of these mosques, the visibility, viability, and vitality of Muslim and Arab communities in Detroit today provide abundant confirmation that their early efforts, however we evaluate them today, were not wasted.

Chapter V

Doctors of the Soul: Building Detroit's Mid-Century Mosques

In the aftermath of WWII, a new generation of Muslim clerics, formally trained in Islamic sciences and often possessing secular university degrees as well, were called to serve American congregations. Advocates of nationalism, economic development, and other modernist ideologies, these men were eager to revitalize the Muslim umma for both political and religious reasons. What the new imams saw when they arrived in the U.S. disturbed them, and they immediately dedicated themselves to reforming the ethno-religious institutions and identities American Muslims had created. They preached a return to – or a step toward – what they, as learned men (*ulima*), understood time-honored Islamic belief and practice to be. This paradigm shift effectively removed early immigrant Muslims in the U.S. from the historical tradition of Islam. If these communities had a relevant identity, it was as Syrians, Albanians, or Indians living abroad, not Muslims upholding Islam in the West. As the latter, they had gone astray and their history, from this perspective, could be told only as a story of salvage, as an exercise in spiritual retrieval and nationalist awakening led by the new imams of the latter half of the 20th century.

This narrative transformation began in Detroit in 1949 with the arrival of two young, well educated, modernist clerics. These men gradually changed local ideas of who the city's Muslim were, how Islam should be practiced in North America, and which local forms of Muslim identity would be suppressed, left behind, and forgotten. Ironically, these imams, Shaykh Mohammad Jawad Chirri and Imam Vehbi Ismail, came eventually to embrace many of the institutional forms developed in the early years of Hashmie Hall and the AMS. The

Islamic Center of America and the Albanian Islamic Center, the new mosques Chirri and Ismail would build in the 1960s, were architect-designed and visually identifiable as mosques, but they allocated much more space for social activities than for prayer. Instead of doing away with practices they found questionable or objectionable when they first arrived in the city, both imams came to regard vernacular forms of American Islam as functionally expedient and complementary to their own visions of a more historically authentic, textually based, and politically relevant Islam.

In fact, Chirri and Ismail represented an Islamic tradition that was as new as the practical innovations they encountered in American mosques. They were eager to reform outdated practices and to purge the errors of the past in order to bring about an enlightened future. They called for a political awakening among American Muslims, and they worked hard to develop the American Muslim community as a national religious constituency and to establish greater ties between Muslim American institutions and those overseas. It was in pursuit of these agendas that Chirri and Ismail introduced lay Muslims and other community leaders to the idea that American Islam was inadequate, heterodox, and had to be rebuilt from the ground up, the very tropes that now dominate scholarship on early Muslim American communities. This sober assessment of Muslim American life was avidly embraced by a new generation of American Muslims, and it enabled Chirri and Ismail to build a power base in Detroit that would eventually acquire international dimensions. What the imams did not foresee as they confidently began their work at mid century was a future in which Islam would become a medium of resistance to American power in the Middle East and the Muslim world. They also could not have imagined a future in which new Muslim immigrants would see *them* as representatives of an American Islam that was accommodationist and badly in need of reform.

The Soul Doctor

On May 5, 1949, an essay entitled “The Future of the New Generation” appeared in *Nahdat al-Arab* without a byline, but alongside a photograph of Mohamad Jawad Chirri. The statement, whether written by Chirri or for him, was intended to introduce Detroit Muslims to their newly arrived cleric and his mission to America. It offered both a diagnosis of the spiritual malaise that had infected the body of the Muslim community and, in the person of Mohamad Jawad Chirri, a cure.

The Arab immigrant community of this republic, in our opinion, does not face a more truly dangerous issue than that of the new Arab American generation and how to instill in them adequate knowledge and guidelines that will allow for the preservation of good traditions and customs, [given that] their progenitors let go of [these] over time [and let them drift away] in the new American ocean....

Here, the community needs to resort to doctors of the soul ... devoted religious servants versed in spiritual and literary knowledge, able to express their culture and learning in order to save the new generation from the danger of melting into the body of an American nation that does not believe in any lofty religion ... [thereby losing] ... the blessed gift of a religion that has guided and instructed their parents and grandparents before them over many decades.

If the religious domain of Muslims in this country is barren and stricken by drought, we now have a sign that the fertile waters of life will return. This will be accomplished with an outpouring of abundant knowledge, religious devotion, and honorable piety. Yes, the gathering clouds that spelled a dark future for the next Muslim generation in this region have cleared with the coming of Shaykh Mohammed Jawad Chirri, who will be a watchful servant, guide, and religious organizer for the entire Shi'a Muslim community in Dearborn, Detroit, and in other regions....

We have long heard of the shock many feel at the development of the new generation and their fears that they will grow up ignorant of the religion of their forefathers. But now these fearful people have been shown the way.... Shaykh Mohamad Jawad Chirri brings them effective medicine and a reliable cure, if only they let go of their past mistakes and make every effort to take advantage of this favorable opportunity... of ensuring our children's salvation from the ill fate that threatens them.

(*Nahdat al-Arab*, May 5, 1949, reproduced in full in Appendix B)

Detroit's Muslims were not alone in experiencing such religious anxiety. Robert Ellwood (2000) has identified several patterns that made religion seem more urgent in the United States in the 1950s. Post-war prosperity and the rise of the suburbs contributed to new church

construction across the country, and people wanted these churches (and mosques) to reflect a confident, middle class, modern, and progressive mood. The baby boom produced a growing number of parents who were eager to give their children the values and stability they associated with their own childhoods, values identified with rural churches, inner city synagogues, or – as in Chirri’s mission statement – with immigrant homelands and “religious traditions that have been sacred for ages.” Finally, the Cold War brought with it the fear mongering of McCarthy era politics and, among Protestant Christians, an evangelical movement that offered itself as the antidote to Communism and moral decline. Among Muslims, a new religious sensibility emerged that presented itself as the antidote to Western imperialism, and more specifically to Zionism and the shocking defeat, subjugation, and displacement of Palestinians it accomplished. To manage this complex array of spiritual and political trends, Detroit’s Muslims needed expert guidance of exactly the sort Chirri was said to possess.

Mohammed Jawad Chirri was among the better educated of South Lebanon’s clerics in the early 1940s, having graduated from the Islamic Institute of Najaf, Iraq. After Lebanese independence, he joined forces with Shaykh Mohammed Jawad Mughniyya, another Najaf-educated Shi’i cleric from the South and a highly influential social and religious reformer (Brunner 2004), to popularize an Islamic theology that emphasized social justice and human rights.¹ In the 1940s Chirri published several popular books on religious subjects, including *Al-Riyad in Islamic Jurisprudence*, *al-Tahara*, *The Fast*, *A Book of Prayers*, *Islamic Wills*, and *The Caliphate in the Islamic Constitution*.² He gained a reputation as an innovative

¹ Mughniyya’s work influenced not just Chirri, but Musa al-Sadr, the Iraqi theologian and activist who is credited with having given birth to the Amal political party in the early 1970s and challenging the communist party in Lebanon for the support of the Shi’a masses. Al-Sadr’s disappearance in 1978 was one factor that contributed to the rise of Hizbullah, the most powerful political party, religious movement, and militia in South Lebanon today.

² These titles are taken from one of the English language books Chirri published while living in Detroit, *The Shi’ites Under Attack* 1987(1-7).

thinker and social activist who was not afraid to disturb the entrenched Shi`i establishment in the South.³

Chirri's journey to Detroit was set in motion in 1947, when Adil Osseiran, a hero of the Lebanese independence movement, the first speaker of the Lebanese parliament, and a Shi`a from Saida in South Lebanon, visited Detroit while in the country to address the United Nations.⁴ Osseiran petitioned the General Assembly on behalf of Palestinians enraged over the partition of their homeland and on behalf of Shi`i pilgrims who were being harassed on the annual hajj in Saudi Arabia (Hamood interview). His tour of the Detroit area was a coup for the Lebanese Shi`a, who eagerly welcomed him. Osseiran was hosted at Hashmie Hall and toured the United Syrian Citizens Society as well. His visit to these mosques was a great embarrassment to the city's younger Muslims, who felt the community should have more to show for itself after 35 years in the area. The local religious leader, Shaykh Kalil Bazy, was also found wanting by the newly educated generation.

"They greet him [Osseiran] and have a dinner for him, and show him what they have," said Hajj Hamood, who attended these events. "They don't have anybody but Imam Bazy," he added, "who is not enough for them." After Osseiran's visit, the Rustum family quickly wrote to Osseiran and asked if he could help them find a religious leader more like himself, worldly, qualified to address the United Nations on an important matter like the crisis in Palestine, but also a South Lebanese who could speak to the concerns of the Shi`a and empower them in relation to the city's other Muslims. The Rustums asked for a religious

³ It should be noted that Chirri and Mughniyya were concerned with bringing about a reconciliation between Sunni and Shi`i Islam in the 1940s. Osseiran's trip to the United Nations had been motivated, in part, by tensions between the Sunni and Shi`a in Saudi Arabia, or between Saudi officials and the Iranian government and all three men were involved in a dialogue taking place between several leading Shi`i clerics (in Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran) and the leadership of Al-Azhar University in Egypt, the most important center of Sunni scholarship in the Arab world (Brunner 2004).

⁴ The Lebanese government was set up to create the semblance of a balance of power between the three majority communities, "Christians," "Sunni Muslims," and "Shi`i Muslims," while in reality guaranteeing Christian, and in many ways Christian-Sunni, dominance. The three most important political positions were distributed along these same ethno-religious divisions – the president (Christian), premiere (Sunni) and speaker of the house (Sh`ia) – a distribution still upheld today.

scholar who was also a trained jurist, someone who could lead American Muslims into the modern time/space of Islam.

Osseiran recommended Imam Chirri, in whom he saw the determination and energetic focus needed to repair all the “errors in religious practice and oversight” that had accumulated among Muslims living as a minority community in a Christian society (Makled 1998:3). Following Osseiran’s recommendation, leaders at Hashmie Hall and the United Citizen’s Society called Shaykh Chirri to Detroit in 1948 (C. Alawan interview, Hamood interview, Makled 1998).

Chirri’s vision of a reformed, progressive Shi`ism that would emphasize individual religious commitment rather than tradition-oriented, communal religious practices was eagerly championed in Detroit by a cohort of young men who were dismissive of Detroit’s existing Muslim associations and the religious establishment in South Lebanon. Most of these men were themselves new to Detroit. Part of a small but influential influx of immigrants who arrived after WWII, they helped bridge the gap between Muslims born in and outside the United States, between those with and without a secondary education, between those who saw Lebanon as an irredeemably foreign, backward place and those who saw it as home. Most of these new immigrants had grown up not as subjects of the Ottoman Empire, but as French colonial subjects, and they came to the U.S. as citizens of the new Lebanese nation-state, which gained independence from France in 1943.⁵ Many of them were the children and grandchildren of American citizens, émigrés who had returned to Lebanon with financial resources and varied cultural experiences. These returnees helped to create a local, uniquely Lebanese modernity defined by changing gender and family roles, a new and expanding middle class, urbanization, educational achievement, literacy, and conspicuous identification

⁵ From Arab sending nations, the average was just under 1,000 immigrants a year between 1950-1960 (Orfalea 2006).

with the West (Khater 2001).⁶ The Shi`a of South Lebanon, however, long oppressed by Sunni elites in both Damascus and Istanbul, and controlled by a local network of powerful landowning families, were shut out of the new nation's economic development (Norton 2007, Peters 1970), which left many young South Lebanese frustrated and willing to try their own hand at emigration. Those with American citizenship often settled in Detroit, while those barred (by restrictive immigration legislation) from the United States typically moved to West Africa or Latin America.

This generation of immigrants, like American-born Lebanese of the same age, were likely to possess at least some high school education, and many had college degrees; they were not eager to settle in Dearborn's heavily polluted Southend, preferring Highland Park and Detroit; they were more likely to enter private business or a profession than to work on the assembly line; they were strong participants in the city's mosques, but they expected these mosques to reflect the ethos of a modern, progressive age. With influence that far outweighed their small numbers, these new immigrants helped make Islam palatable to American-born Muslims, and they made a modernizing, reformist Islam palatable to an older generation of Muslims, many of whom sympathized with Shaykh Chirri's desire to correct flaws, but were themselves unable to teach Islam in ways their Americanized children could understand and respect.

Hussein Hamood and Hussein Makled typified this new immigration. They were young adults when they moved from South Lebanon to Highland Park, Michigan, after the Second World War. Hamood's father was a veteran of the First World War, which explains how Hamood arrived in the United States as an American citizen (H. Hamood interview).⁷ Makled married a young Lebanese woman whose family had returned to Lebanon during the

⁶ In some regions of the country, over a third of the local population had emigrated abroad between 1890-1920 (Khater 2001).

⁷ While Hajj Hamood's father was an American veteran of WWI, he also apparently refused to fight against the Ottoman Empire during the war, arguing that "this is my country. I can't fight against my own country" (Hamood interview). He was offered an honorable discharge.

Depression (H. Makled interview). Both began their lives in Detroit on the assembly line, but moved into the grocery store business as soon as they were able. Both men lived in Highland Park rather than Dearborn, and participated in the United Syrian Citizen's Society (USCS), a mosque/social club that had opened in the 1930s, but did not incorporate as a mosque – the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park – until 1957. The USCS/Moslem Mosque was located just a block away from the site of the original Highland Park Mosque, although members seemed unaware of (or ill informed about) the earlier mosque's history (see illustration 5.1).⁸ The USCS was similar to Hashmie Hall, although smaller in scale. Both Hamood and Makled eventually became avid supporters of Imam Chirri.



Illustration 5.1 The Moslem Mosque of Highland Park, circa 1958. Courtesy of the Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

⁸ In some ways, this society can be traced back to the early 1920s. Shaykh Bazy mentioned a group that formed during WWI to host Friday prayers (Bazy/Naff interview). The group shortened their name to United Citizen's Society in the late 1930s and bought a storefront on Victor Avenue in the 1940s. They changed their name again in 1957 to Moslem Mosque. In fact, the group split into two factions when they decided to change their name to Moslem Mosque. Apparently this split reflected a division into two factions, one supporting Chirri's mission, and the other (the Moslem Mosque faction) remaining loyal to Shaykh Kalil Bazy.

In a 2006 interview, Makled described his impression of Detroit's mosques at the time of Chirri's arrival.

Hajj Makled: There was two places. They're not mosques – they call them “hall.” One of them was on Dix Avenue – you probably passed by. It's demolished, nothing over there. And you wonder how people used to be in that place, making a wedding or having a gathering? And it's only ... you see that piece of empty land over there?

Sally Howell: Yeah, you're talking about Hashmie Hall.

HM: Yeah, Hashmie Hall.

Fatmeh Makled: [It was] so small [laughs].

HM: Now, we had one in Highland Park. We called it United Citizen's Society. When I came here in 1948, the United Citizen's Society was already established and the people who lived in Highland Park, you know, they belonged to that society, or to that Hall ... that was the place where we meet, the place where we have our deceased ones when they die, you know we take him from there. It was a place for the community. Like I say, we called it a hall. We never called it a mosque.

SH: Did you do prayers there, like Friday prayers?

HM: No, not at the time, no.

SH: And you didn't have anything like ... it wasn't, it wasn't in any way a mosque? There was no prayer space, no qibla?

HM: No, no. Neither that, neither the one in Hashmie Hall. The Hashmie Hall got to be for the prayer after Imam Chirri arrived here, they made the upstairs, they put a few, uh, I still remember, they put a few rugs over there and they use it for prayer.

Hajj Hamood, who arrived in Detroit a year later, in 1950, was equally dismissive of Hashmie Hall and the USCS, claiming not only that they were not mosques, but that the only reason they were described as such was for tax purposes. “Again, they called it – just to save, just to not pay property taxes on it – they call it Hashmie,” he said. Hajj Hamood made the

same point about the UCS, which, in his understanding of events, changed its name to the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park in order to avoid property taxes.⁹

Hussein Humood: They have union meetings. They have the marriages and the New Year and members of the Hashmie Society would meet and everything, and a mosque. So Imam Chirri came and he said:

“Is this good for the Muslims? Where people do this and do that and we’ll call this a ‘place of worship’ or something?”

We are supposed to have a place that – for a school, a place for the community, a place to pray ...

Thus Hajj Makled, Hajj Alawan (cited in Chapter IV), and Hajj Hamood, three early supporters of Chirri, each speak of Hashmie Hall and the UCS using the same language; they portray these institutions as small, dirty, too social, not adequately oriented toward religion, and, in the words of Hajj Chuck, “completely inadequate to promote a strong, positive identification with Islam” among American Muslims.¹⁰ This critique was articulated by men who took their faith seriously and were eager to compete, as Muslims, in the marketplace of American religious ideas. They were, with few exceptions, products of modern school systems and members of the middle class, whether Lebanese or American. They were educated to expect social, economic, and political advancement and to assert their rights as citizens. They wanted Detroit’s mosques to sit on a par with the city’s churches. The leadership of Hashmie Hall and the UCS might have shared this ambition in the abstract, but in practice most of them were comfortable with the status quo.

In his first public act in Dearborn, Imam Chirri set about “founding” both a new mosque at Hashmie Hall and a new history for the Shi’i community there. An “opening

⁹ Hajj Hamood arrived in Detroit well after Hashmie Hall was established. While he admitted that the group did have a place set aside for prayer, a space he referred to as a “mosque” in our interview, he was unaware that Hashmie Hall had originally been founded to serve as a mosque for local Shi’a.

¹⁰ Chirri published a regular series of sermons in the pages of *Nahdat al Arab* (see June 17, 1949, May 24, 1949, May 13, 1949, April 26, 1949, June 24, 1949, September 23, 1949, May 30, 1950, for examples). The style of these sermons is somewhat repetitive and didactic (and does not lend itself to artful translation). Chirri addresses personal piety, the need for better education, and the political condition of the Shi’a universally, but is careful to avoid criticizing Detroit’s existing mosques directly.

party” for a new “Islamic Mosque” was held on May 29, 1949, according to an article that appeared in *Nahdat al-Arab* on June 6, which describes Imam Chirri asking “the Muslim community in Dearborn to build a mosque for prayer and educational meetings,” a project that would enable him to fulfill his mission to the US, “providing the religious guidance the community had solicited from him.” During the ceremony, Chirri unfolded a new carpet on the floor of Hashmie Hall and declared the space “a mosque,” then led the congregation in prayer “for the first time.” This event is memorialized in the narratives of Makled, Alawan, and Hamood, none of whom were on hand twelve years earlier, when Hashmie Hall celebrated its previous opening as the “first mosque in Dearborn.” Many, if not most, of the people who gathered for the second opening would have remembered the earlier event. What they made of Chirri’s arrival, and his symbolic usurpation of their historic mosque – which simultaneously erased its past, and announced its future as a house of worship – did not disrupt the fanfare of the occasion, but it was soon to disrupt Chirri’s mission in Detroit.

The (re)opening of the Hashmie Hall mosque was well attended. Supportive speeches were made by Shaykh Kalil Bazy, Joseph Berry, Hussein Makled, and Mohammad Berry. A delegation from the local Albanian community was also on hand, including representatives of the newly organized Albanian Moslem Society of Detroit (a Sunni congregation) and the Bektashi community (a Sufi order closely associated with Imami Shi`ism through the Turkish Alevi). Several Albanians addressed the crowd, among them Baba Rexheb Ferdi,¹¹ Zainab Ali (representing Shaykh Vehbi Ismail, who was unable to attend), and Ahmad Ramo, who

¹¹ The list of attendees provided in the pages of *Nahdat al-Arab* (June 6, 1949) places Baba Rexheb at this event, which is unusual. Rexheb settled permanently in the Detroit area in 1952 (Abiva 2005, Trix 2001), and once the Bektashi Tekke was completed in 1954, as a monastery for the Baba, he no longer ventured out to other Islamic centers in the area – apart from the Albanian Islamic Center. In the style of a classic guru (Barth 1991), his company had to be sought out. It should be noted that the Bektashi Sufi order Baba Rexheb represented was closely aligned with the Alevi community in Turkey, an *ithnashari* (Twelver) Shi`a sect. This event is the first documented occasion on which the Lebanese Shi`a and the Bektashis worshipped together, but they had many things in common. A few years later, in 1955, the *Detroit News* (August 27) reported on an `Ashura celebration at the new Bektashi Tekke. This is the first documented occasion on which this important Shi`a holiday was commemorated in a Detroit mosque.

presented the congregation with a painted Quranic inscription on behalf of the Albanian Moslem Society. Letters extolling Chirri's mission were read at the event, sent by representatives of the Muslim communities in Chicago, New York, and Michigan City, Indiana. Ali Rustum was master of ceremonies. Chirri spoke as well, emphasizing the significance of religious and social cooperation among Muslims and how both were necessary for maintaining Islamic religious obligations and for the equally important work of keeping an Islamic identity alive in America. He entreated the audience to "return to their religion" and in so doing to uplift the social status of the community as a whole (*Nahdat Al-Arab*, June 6, 1949). Imam Hussein Karoub and other leaders of the American Moslem Society, the Sunni mosque located just down the street, are not mentioned in the newspaper coverage, but it appears that Imam Chirri, who had been in Detroit for only a month at the time of this event, was already developing a polycultural Islamic network of his own. His non-Arab allies, like his most enthusiastic supporters in the Lebanese community, were mostly new immigrants to Detroit and American born Muslims who sought to institutionalize Islam in unprecedented ways.

Yet when Chirri rolled out his campaign to improved religious education – which included professionalizing the role of imam – he was met with swift resistance from within the congregation he sought to serve. His welcoming party at Hashmie Hall was followed a few weeks later by a second event that celebrated the opening of a new school in the Islamic Mosque. "In keeping with the goal of fulfilling our duties to our religion and our people and of answering the desires of this generous community," Chirri wrote in *Nahdat al-Arab*, "we resolved, God willing, to open an Arabic school in Dearborn for the purpose of teaching the Arabic language and the fundamentals of religion" (June 24, 1949). As head of this school, Chirri also requested a salary. This plan met with a mix of welcome and hostility among local Shi'a. Shaykh Kalil Bazy, who had long served as the religious leader of the South Lebanese

without receiving a penny in payment, was still very much on the scene. His supporters were quick to distance themselves from Chirri.¹²

The idea of a salaried clergy seemed radical to Detroit Muslims, who paid minimal dues to their three mosques, and made donations in the \$5-\$25 range at fund raising events. Neither income stream could provide for the livelihood of Shaykh Chirri. The Shi`a, in particular, prided themselves on paying off the debts incurred in the establishment of Hashmie Hall and the USCS in a few short years. They were no longer as actively engaged in fund raising as were the supporters of the American Moslem Society who, in 1949, were caught up in a multi-year campaign to add a second-floor prayer space to their facility. Hashmie Hall, which initially included a women's auxiliary, apparently disbanded this group once the association's debts were retired (Walbridge 1997, Abraham 2000), and the group was not fastidious when it came to the upkeep of their Highland Park and Dearborn buildings.

Very quickly, resistance to Chirri's plans began to build. Driven by Lebanese political factionalism, a rejection of Chirri's modernist interpretations of Islam, and by resentment over Chirri's presumptive reopening of a mosque that was already a mosque and rededication of a school that was already a school, this opposition lined up squarely behind Kalil Bazy.¹³ When the old guard stepped in to defend the status quo, Chirri's local host, Faiz Humoud, asked the imam to leave his house. Chirri moved into a small apartment, unfinished and unfurnished, on the second floor of Hashmie Hall. From these reduced circumstances, he appealed to readers of his regular column in *Nahdat al-Arab*, asking

¹² Bazy was famous for not accepting money. In his later years, several members of Hashmie Hall gave the shaykh a car to show their appreciation for his service to their community. His wife accepted the keys to this car while he was away. When he learned of what had happened, he told her he would divorce her if she did not return the keys immediately. In his words, "My reward is from God" (see Walbridge 1997).

¹³ Bazy's supporters were drawn largely from the Berry family, who were well represented in Detroit and included several of the Shi`a community's better educated members. Their hostility to Chirri had as much to do with Lebanese politics as with events in Dearborn and Highland Park. A large and powerful family in the area around Tibneen and Bint Ijbayl, the Berrys included their own line of Shi`a clerics whom Chirri had antagonized in his reform campaign in South Lebanon. This group was also not fond of Ossairan, who won his position as Speaker of the House by defeating the candidate the Berrys supported (Hamood interview, personal communication Alawan, Makled, and Amen).

readers to back his plans to build a new mosque, trust and support him with their “unity,” place their conflicts and division behind them, and empower him to do more than bury the dead, marry the young, and lead the occasional holiday prayer (June 24, 1949).

Despite the urgency of his appeals, support for Chirri’s mission did not materialize as promised.¹⁴ His allies among the new immigrants did not yet have the means, financial or social, to build an effective pro-Chirri coalition. And Chirri’s inability to speak, read, or write English meant that the American-born Muslims he championed in his sermons and essays could not read his column in the newspaper, understand his sermons, or even converse casually with him. If Chirri’s goal was to teach Sunday school and other classes, represent Islam to the larger society, and guide the young, he lagged far behind Imams Bazy and Karoub in this one, very critical skill.

Chirri had come to Detroit to teach Islam “as the Prophet Mohammed had taught it” (Makled 1998:2). Alas, like the Prophet Mohammed, Chirri encountered stiff resistance among the leadership of the very community he hoped to redeem and, like the Prophet, he was forced into temporary exile. Alert to Chirri’s precarious tenure in Detroit, members of the Asser El Jadeed Arabian Islamic Society of Michigan City, Indiana, the second largest settlement of Shi’i Lebanese in the United States, invited Chirri to settle there instead.¹⁵

¹⁴ Shaykh Bazy visited Hajj Hamood’s house twice over the years. On the first occasion he lobbied directly for Hamood’s support, saying “You have to be on par with your family and your parents. . . . The Hamood family and the Fawaz family are friends of mine and that is where I expect to have you.” He also brought with him certificates he had been granted during his travels to Iraq and on the hajj that authorized him to perform weddings, funerals and divorces. The second time he visited was in the company of Shaykh Chirri when the two men appealed to Hamood and Hajj Makled to support the Islamic Center. Most elderly members of the congregation downplay the active role Shaykh Bazy played in thwarting Chirri’s mission during his first stay in Detroit. It is clear from Hamood’s narrative that Bazy did fight to keep his position in the community (Hamood interview). Once Chirri returned to town, however, Bazy became a graceful supporter of the ICA.

¹⁵ First organized in 1914 as the Bader Elmoneer Society of Michigan City, Indiana, this group had a long history of close ties to the Muslims of Detroit. A small, stable population of immigrants who worked mostly for the Pullman Company building boxcars and running their freight house, Syrians (and Turks) were first imported by the Haskell-Barker Car company in 1869 to avoid the labor disputes that had troubled the industry in nearby Chicago. Many of Detroit’s Shi’a worked in Michigan City before moving to Detroit. Ties between the two populations remain close today, although the Lebanese presence in Michigan City has dwindled since the Pullman factory closed in the 1970s. See *The*

Without benefit of a local imam like Bazzy or Karoub, the Muslims of Michigan City were eager to hire a cleric of their own. Chirri moved to Michigan City in late 1949, less than a year after his arrival in greater Detroit.

Albanian Soul Doctor: Vehbi Ismail Comes to Detroit

Imam Vehbi Ismail was the second reformist imam to arrive in Detroit in the late 1940s. Like Shaykh Chirri, he was invited by a group of young, educated, post-war immigrants. Like the Lebanese community, the Albanian Muslim community of Detroit included two important internal divisions that would complicate Ismail's mission. The first was a gap in education, religious sensibility, and socioeconomic status that separated the new immigrants from the old. The second was reflected in the presence of both Bektashi Sufi Albanians and Sunni Albanians in Detroit. Like Chirri, Ismail was highly critical of many of the religious practices he found among Detroit's Albanians when he first arrived. Given that religious communities of all forms were suppressed under the new Communist regime in Albania, Ismail felt that his work in Detroit was urgently needed to keep Islam alive among Albanians in exile. His goal of building a mosque for Detroit's Albanians was as much a nationalist political ambition as a religious one. This ethno-national goal was, at least initially, of greater importance to Ismail than the more general goal of establishing Islam as a viable religious tradition in the United States. It is hardly surprising, then, that the most intense resistance Ismail faced in Detroit came not from within the Albanian community, who had no imam and no pretenders to that status, but from Hussien Karoub, the Syrian cleric who had served as imam to the city's Albanians for over thirty years.

Ismail was invited to Detroit in 1948 by the Albanian American Moslem Society (AAMS), which had formally organized in 1945. Detroit's Albanian Muslims had been active

History of the Islamic Masjid of Michigan City, Indiana (Munger 1969, housed in NMAH # 78, 1-K-1-b).

since the first decade of the 20th century, but most of the Albanians in Detroit prior to the 1940s were unmarried men (Trix 1994). This pattern changed after 1944, when Albania was liberated from German occupation and a new, communist-led government set about eradicating organized religion in the country. Placing tremendous pressure on religious institutions, elites, and clergy, the government drove a sizeable contingent of the Albanian religious establishment into exile. Many of these exiles made their way to Detroit, where Christian and Muslim Albanian populations were already settled. An Orthodox parish, St. Thomas Orthodox Church, was being organized in this period, and the Vatra, a national mutual aid society founded in 1912, had a strong local chapter as well (see Chapter II). Frances Trix (2007) has argued that the influx of post-war Albanian immigrants was much larger than official statistics acknowledge¹⁶ and that roughly 100 Muslim Albanian families had settled in Detroit by the 1960s. Like contemporaneous Lebanese immigrants, these new Albanian Americans were much better educated than earlier migrants, more likely to arrive as families, and more focused on settling permanently in the United States. It was this population of immigrants who organized the Albanian Moslem Society in 1947 and invited Imam Vehbi Ismail to Detroit the following year.

Born on November 25, 1919, in Schkodra, Albania, Vehbi Ismail was the son of Ismail Alkovaji, the Grand Mufti of Islam in Albania. Imam Vehbi was raised in a scholarly, religious, and nationalist household. He studied theology at the Islamic University in Tirana, Albania, and then at Islam's leading seminary, Al-Azhar University, in Cairo, Egypt, where he had the opportunity to meet and befriend the Egyptian King, Farouk, who was of mixed Albanian and Egyptian ancestry. Ismail came from a Sunni Muslim family, but his father was the Mufti of Albania's diverse Muslim communities, and Ismail was interested in and

¹⁶ Immigration statistics indicate the arrival of a scant 144 Albanians in the 1940s and 1950s. For the Syrian/Lebanese, they indicate the arrival of 80-150 individuals a year to the United States as a whole, including both Muslims and Christians, an equally unrealistic set of numbers (see Trix 2007, Orfalea 2005).

comfortable with a wide array of Muslim practices. In particular, he was familiar with the Bektashi Sufi order in Albania and spent time with an aspiring leader of this order, Baba Rexheb, who was also a student at Al-Azhar University. Ismail was still in Egypt in 1945 when the Communists took control of the Albanian government and the suppression of religious observances and institutions began. In exile, Albania's religious communities, both Muslim and Christian, were united in the effort to reassert the role of religion in the public life of the nation. Ismail's father led this campaign inside Albania, but as his public role and personal freedom were increasingly curtailed during the late 1940s, he advised his son to remain outside the country, beyond the reach of the new government. These events left young Vehbi to fend for himself, so when invited to Detroit,¹⁷ Ismail accepted the offer, not because he was eager to build a new Islamic center for Albanian immigrants, a goal he little understood at the time, but because it would position him to advocate against the Albanian Communist regime from the heartland of the world's most powerful capitalist nation (Ismail interview).

Ismail's initial experiences in Detroit were bumpier than anticipated, in part because of these mixed ambitions. He was a very young man, just out of seminary, who had grown up in a conservative, but elite household. In Detroit he found himself among working class, poorly educated Albanians. Many had lived in the United States for decades, and most had no formal training in Islam and were not especially interested in religious matters. In our 2005 interview, Ismail shared his first impressions of Detroit's Albanian Muslims.

When I came first, in their halls they used to drink. Because – they think was nothing. Because they didn't know.

Mostly [they] were workers. They came, eh, left their country at sixteen, seventeen years old. And they didn't know anything about religion. But then they wanted to learn, little by little.

¹⁷ Ismail was recommended for this position by Mohammad Makke, an Albanian missionary based in Ohio who had corresponded with Ismail when he was still at Al-Azhar University (Ismail interview).

When I came first and saw this, I wanted to turn back. My father was a Mufti, the head of the Islamic Waqf in Albania. [When I called him and told him I wanted to leave, he] would say, “Why are you leaving?”

I said, “They are drinking.”

He said to me, “You read the Quran?”

“Yes.”

“You don't know the Qur'an first said, *'la taqrabu salat wa andhum sukarah'*... 'don't go to prayer when you are drunk'. Little by little they get used [to observing Islamic prayer]. Then, say it [drinking] is *haram* [forbidden].

In this exchange Ismail's father reminds him that the Prophet Mohammad was also confronted by drinkers and apathetic Muslims in the first days of the Muslim community in Mecca. He was guided by a Quranic revelation that encouraged him to be patient with drinkers, to prevent them from praying while drunk, but not to cast them out of the community altogether. Ismail's father suggested that his son be patient, that he stay and work with these American Muslims, educate them about the religious prohibition against consuming alcohol, and gradually encourage them to avoid drinking and other un-Islamic behaviors they had acquired during their years in Detroit. Many of the early immigrant Albanians had made no sustained effort either to organize into a separate congregation or to involve themselves in the activities of Detroit's other Muslim institutions in the 1920s and 30s. They were similar in this respect to the city's other bachelor Muslim communities. In a conversation with Frances Trix, one of these early immigrants summed up the state of Albanian religious life in the city prior to Imam Vehbi's arrival by observing that “the coffeehouse was our church” (1994:367). Upon his arrival, Ismail replaced Hussien Karoub as the imam of this now aging Albanian population.

The sectarian rift in the Albanian population, between those who identified with the Bektashi Sufi order and those who described themselves as Sunni Muslims, also created tension for Ismail during his early years in Detroit. At the same time Ismail was invited to the city by the young Sunni leadership, the Bektashis had begun searching for a religious leader

of their own. They brought Sufi master, Baba Rexheb, to Michigan and in 1953 established the First Albanian Bektashi Monastery (*Tekke*), in the nearby town of Taylor, where the Baba could live and teach. The relationship between the Sunni mosque and the Bektashi *tekke* seems to have resembled the relationship between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims in Dearborn in previous decades. The two supported one another on most occasions, but made no attempt to merge. Imam Ismail attended the two holiday events observed at the monastery (ʿAshura, the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, and Nevruz, a New Year's celebration). Likewise, Baba Rexheb attended the two major holiday celebrations (Eid al-ʿAdha and Eid al-Fitr) that were celebrated at the mosque. The two groups supported one another financially; they respected one another's differences and autonomy. Nevertheless, for Imam Ismail, a young, inexperienced cleric who needed to raise money to build a mosque, secure his own salary, and provide religious instruction and guidance, the *Tekke* represented a potential source of competition.

Just as Imam Chirri faced organized resistance from Kalil Bazy and his supporters in the local Shi'i establishment, Imam Ismail faced resistance from Imam Hussien Karoub. After my 2006 interview with him, when I was packing up to leave, Imam Vehbi felt compelled to share a final anecdote with me. He said that when he arrived in Detroit, in 1949, Hussein Karoub tried to have him deported. Karoub apparently wrote U.S. immigration authorities and advised them to deny Ismail a work permit or green card, on the grounds that the Muslims of Detroit already had a cleric and were not in need of a second. Ismail was in Detroit as a political refugee – whether this was his official status or not. Karoub's actions seemed malicious to Ismail, who did not fully understand why Karoub would lobby the U.S. government to have a fellow imam deported.

Trix (1994) Elkholy (1964), and Walbridge (1994) have argued that relations between Albanian Muslims and other Muslims in Detroit were limited at best. Karoub's

actions suggest that the various pan-Muslim networks in the city ran deeper and were more important than has previously been acknowledged. Ismail's impressive academic credentials and professional training enabled him to preach and write not only in Albanian, but in Arabic as well. Hussien Karoub, who throughout the 1940s and 1950s referred to himself in print and in person as *imam al-muslimin al-'am fi al-walayyat al-mutahadida wa Canada* (roughly, The Official Imam of All Muslims in the United States and Canada), apparently felt, as had Shaykh Bazzy in relation to Imam Chirri, that he was being confronted with a serious rival. Beyond Karoub's occasional work performing weddings and funerals in the Albanian community, it is uncertain how far his ties in that community reached. Albanians were well aware of the American Moslem Society – they emulated the Syrian group when choosing a name for their own society and in the structure of their by-laws – but they considered the group too oriented toward the Arabic language and Syrian ethnicity, and they did not always feel welcome there (Trix 1984). In the late 1940s, when the Albanians first organized, the AMS was once again trying to pull the city's Muslims together in support of their mosque, Detroit's "public mosque" as Karoub came to describe it, which was raising funds to complete construction on their second floor addition. Karoub might have been concerned that the two construction projects would compete with one another.

Imam Ismail was not deported, however. Instead, he began to build a following among local Albanians, and he soon became a popular speaker and spiritual advisor among the younger generation of Arab Muslims as well. He was frequently invited to lecture at their mosques in Highland Park and Dearborn, to perform weddings, and, once Imam Chirri returned to Detroit, to participate in the life of the Islamic Center of America as well (Ismail, E. Alawan interviews). Events in the Albanian Muslim community were covered in *Nahdat al Arab*, alongside those of the city's Arabic-speaking Muslims, a further indication that the two populations found common ground despite their cultural and linguistic differences. Ismail's willingness and ability to provide leadership for an increasingly polycultural Muslim network

enabled him ultimately to replace the aging Karoub in Detroit and nationally as well, just as Karoub feared he would.

The American Albanian Moslem Society was a small group, roughly 100 adults in 1949, who were well organized politically. When they hosted a convention in Detroit to introduce their new spiritual leader to their members and supporters, Michigan Governor G. Mennen Williams was in attendance, as was Detroit Mayor Eugene Von Antwerp and the head of the Detroit City Council (Trix 1994), evidence that the Albanian community was already well connected to public officials. For the newcomer, Ismail, these connections were important. As a vocal anti-Communist, Ismail had no problem making friends in Republican circles in Michigan and eventually became a close friend of Governor Williams. Imam Vehbi also used the national infrastructure of the Vatra to introduce himself to Albanian Muslim settlements across the country and in Canada. In 1949 he embarked on the first of many cross-country journeys to visit Albanian Muslim communities, provide religious services and counseling when needed, and solicit contributions for the opening of an Albanian mosque in Detroit. By 1950, under the new leadership of Imam Vehbi, the AAMS was able to move out of its rented space at the International Institute, on Grand Boulevard in Detroit,¹⁸ and into a newly purchased building (a former Armenian church) not far from Highland Park.¹⁹

In our interview, Imam Vehbi spoke at length about the difficulties of raising money in Detroit's small, working class, often newly arrived population of Albanians. Unlike

¹⁸ In 1948, the International Institute also hosted meetings of the Pakistan Association of Detroit and the Young Pakistan Association, including holiday celebrations for Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, and a memorial service for the slain leader of the Muslim League in Pakistan and the country's first Governor-General after Partition from India, Mohammad Ali Jinnah (See *Detroit News* stories from August 7, 1948:16, and October 14, 1948:11). Mohammad Munir, who was the Young Pakistan Association's spokesperson in 1948, also joined the board of the American Moslem Society and served in a leadership role there for at least a decade.

¹⁹ Imam Vehbi was careful to mention that the money used to buy this church was provided by his own congregation, by local Albanian Christians, and by Arab Muslims in Dearborn, further evidence of polycultural mutuality in the city. Not only did Arab Muslims support the establishment of this Albanian mosque, but Ismail traveled across the United States again several years later and raised money to help complete the second floor addition to the AMS (Ismail interview).



Illustration 5.2 The Albanian American Moslem Society mosque, circa 1955, courtesy of the *Detroit News* Archive.

Karoub and Bazy, who supported themselves financially with secular employment, Imam Vehbi drew a salary from the Albanian Moslem Society that came out of the membership dues of the organization. *Waqf* (religious endowment) support for religious institutions was the common practice in Albania and Syria (see Chapter II), which is why, Imam Ismail explained to me, “we Muslims are not used to paying very much for mosques. Because every mosque that was built in [Albania] had property first.” Nonetheless, a fulltime salaried position freed Ismail to pursue his academic work in Detroit. His initial writings in the United States were addressed to Albanian American Muslims, rather than to other scholars, and focused on the basics of Islamic history, moral principles, and the practicalities of worship and religious observance. It is clear from the level of this writing and its subject matter that he presumed very little prior knowledge on the part of readers. He began publishing a quarterly Albanian-language journal, *Jeta Muslimane Shqiptare* (*The Albanian Muslim Life*) in October of 1949.

The Communist takeover of Albania produced, at least among immigrant and exile Albanians in North America, a collective identity in which Islam and Albanian nationalism were tightly interwoven. Communist rule had radically transformed the political meaning of Islam, and of religion more generally, in everyday life. Holding on to Muslim identity in the United States was as much an Albanian nationalist project as it was a commitment to personal or communal piety, and this was the motive behind Ismail's journal. It was intended to keep the dispersed Albanian community in touch with one another, to provide religious instruction, and to give voice to the anti-Communist movement among Albanian Muslims in exile. Despite his conflict with Hussien Karoub, and perhaps as a means of reconciliation, Ismail printed *The Albanian Muslim Life* – which later became *The Muslim Life* and was distributed to a pan-Muslim readership – at Karoub Printing in Highland Park, from 1949-1963 (Ismail interview, C. Karoub interview).

A Clinic for the Soul

The impulse to build new mosques, so strongly expressed in Detroit in the 1950s, was felt in Muslim communities across North America. Smaller Muslim settlements were eager to create strong ties to each other, to the large urban Muslim communities, and to the larger Muslim world. In the early 1950s, a network of Muslim organizers established the Federation of Islamic Associations of the United States and Canada. The FIA would help Muslims overcome their sense of isolation. It would advocate for their political concerns, expand the contexts in which Islam could be practiced in North America, and educate North Americans, Muslim and non-Muslim, about the history and teachings of Islam (Igram-Naff interview, Alawan interview).

Abdullah Igram, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, who is credited with having founded the federation and who served as its first president, mentioned three reasons for the group's

creation (Igram/Naff interview). Igram was personally motivated by his experience serving in the Philippines during the Second World War. The dog tags available to soldiers at the time required them to identify as Christians (Protestant or Catholic), Jews, or “no religion,” which meant that Muslims who died in combat were not granted burial according to Islamic rites. Igram wrote President Truman to request that Islam be recognized by the U.S. Armed Forces in a manner similar to that of Judaism and Christianity. Upon receiving no accommodation, he decided it was time for American Muslims to organize so that issues of this kind could be addressed by a collective body. In 1951 he called a meeting of midwestern Muslims, mostly Iowans of Syrian/Lebanese descent, to discuss the situation. Older attendees at this meeting had a very different concern. They were worried about how to identify potential Muslim spouses for their children and grandchildren. Increasingly, young men and women were marrying outside the faith.

A third, explicitly political and transnational impetus for organizing was raised at the meeting: the Palestinian refugee crisis. President Truman’s support for the creation of Israel in 1948 was seen by many Americans as a result of “election-year politics” that catered to American Jewish voters (Little 2002). The displacement of Arabs from Jewish-controlled sectors of Mandate Palestine, a process that continued after U.S. recognition of the Israeli state, led Arab Americans to organize nationally as a counterweight to American Jewish support for Zionism, with the goal of encouraging an American foreign policy more sympathetic to Arab nationalist agendas. The Cedar Rapids Muslim community convened a national meeting in 1952, to which they invited every Muslim organization they could identify. Over 400 people attended, including Imams Vehbi and Karoub from Detroit and Imam Cirri from Michigan City, and the body agreed to organize as an international voluntary association, officially named the Federation of Islamic Associations of North America and Canada (FIA). The Federation was an immediate success among American Muslims, especially those of Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian origin. Its annual convention

moved from city to city, attracting ever larger audiences and involving hundreds of new members in the organizational life of the Muslim community (Igram-Naff interview, Mashike 1977, Elkholy 1966).

The FIA played a crucial and frequently overlooked role in reinforcing Muslim American identity, organizing the North American community at the local and (bi)national level, and bringing American Muslims into more direct contact with Muslim institutions overseas. It is frequently described as having been a social, rather than religious, institution, a critique that mirrors the language commonly used today to describe American mosques of the period. Hajj Zein Hamood, for example, scoffed when I asked if he was involved with the association. “There was no sign of Islam in this,” he replied. “They used to dance in the Federation. The ‘Federation of Islamic’ [they called it], and there was no sign of Islam in it. That is how it was” (Hamood interview). Elkholy (1966), who provides the best written accounting of the FIA’s early history to date, offers an assessment of the group that is essentially negative:

...the Islamic Federation’s activities up to now have been minimal and, in fact, do not really involve anything worth mentioning except an annual convention. One Toledo respondent complains that this annual gathering itself seems to be mainly for dancing and singing. Another prominent person in the Detroit community described the 1959 convention as “successful in collecting money, but very weak and disappointing in other respects” (1966:47).

Between the years of Elkholy’s original research (1958-59) and the publication of his work (1966), the FIA matured significantly, and Elkholy alludes to this change in his text. He admits, for example, the group’s success in forging links between the Muslim American community and several international Muslim organizations, including Al-Azhar University, the Muslim World League, and the governments of several Muslim-majority nations. Yet Elkholy’s harsh evaluation of the fledgling FIA, though premature, is what other scholars cite when recounting the FIA and its history (Haddad 1983, Poston 1992, Ahmed 1991).

Contrary to Elkholy's description, the FIA leadership built educational programs and provided instructional services from the very start. Imams Chirri and Ismail were major advocates of this work. By 1952, both men were familiar to Arabic-speaking Muslims across the country due to Chirri's column in *Nahdat al-Arab* and the ample coverage Ismail received in the paper. While Hussein Karoub had been, and remained, a much beloved imam to Arab Muslims in small communities throughout the northern U.S. and across Canada, Chirri and Ismail quickly gained respect as scholars, institutional leaders, and political activists. Imam Vehbi in particular, due to his status as a Sunni cleric, was asked to visit far flung Muslim congregations, as Karoub had done a generation before, advising them on how to establish mosque schools for Arabic and Quranic instruction. Ismail's journal, *The Albanian Moslem Life*, was made available increasingly in English as well, so it could reach American-born Albanians and other Muslim Americans through the FIA.

The FIA provided a source of forward momentum for Muslims in the United States and Canada, but in the early 1950s, the group was still incipient and poorly funded. The FIA incorporated officially in 1954, with a board dominated by Muslims of Arab descent, yet they moved quickly to include individuals and member organizations of Albanian, Pakistani, Iranian, African American, and other backgrounds, especially in cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit, which had large, ethnically mixed Muslim populations. This diversity was reflected in the Federation's stated goals:

1. to promote and teach the spirit, ethics, philosophy and culture of Islam to Muslims and their children in the United States and Canada.
2. to participate in and contribute to the modern renaissance of Islam.
3. to establish contacts and strengthen the relationship with the Muslim world community.
4. to expound the teachings of Islam.
5. to point out the common beliefs which other religions share with Islam.

6. to provide a media for religious, intellectual and social needs of Muslims.
(Wolf 1959).

The FIA also helped local communities develop mosques. When the FIA was established in 1952, there were fewer than a dozen mosques in the United States (four of them in the Detroit area), but a decade later there were several dozen (including 6 in greater Detroit). By electing officers only from the group's institutional members (as opposed to individual members), dozens of Muslim groups across the country were motivated to organize, seek non-profit status, and join the FIA. For communities that were already organized, like those in Detroit and Toledo, the FIA created a feeling of camaraderie and healthy competition. Many mosques were completed in the months before the annual FIA convention was hosted in their community. The Syrian American Moslem Society of Toledo was one such mosque that opened a new facility just in time for an FIA convention. In 1953 the convention was held in Toledo, and Imam Chirri was the keynote speaker. A large delegation from Detroit attended this convention, and the Shi'a among them were especially impressed by Chirri's address, which, to their surprise, was given in English.

A Triumphant Return

By the mid 1950s, Imam Chirri's reputation as an effective teacher and community organizer had been securely established through his work with the FIA, his leadership of the Asser El Jadeed Arabian Islamic Society of Michigan City, and his writings in *Nahdat al-Arab*. His years in Michigan City were not misspent. Realizing that he had been unable to communicate with the constituency of American Muslims he most sought to reach – the American-born generation – Chirri set about mastering the English language. Aware as well that young Muslim Americans were already well integrated into American society, he made a point of studying American culture, observing and evaluating how religious institutions in Michigan City, Muslim and non-Muslim, functioned.

Chirri also came to realize that his early sermons about cultural loss and the threat posed by the religious mainstream may not have been the most productive way to approach a young, relatively educated generation of Americans who eagerly embraced their American identities, were poised to enter the middle class, yet were eager to identify with Islam, as long as Islam could be made a viable aspect of their middle class American lives. He concentrated his energies on reviving interest in Shi`i Islam and promoting some of the distinctive Shi`i observances that had long been suppressed in Lebanon prior to independence.²⁰ Overall, his time spent in Indiana allowed Chirri to temper his earlier criticisms of American values and ways of life. He was now better equipped to understand the choices Muslims were making as they sought to practice Islam in the United States.

Among the Shi`a of Dearborn and Highland Park, frustrations had risen as they watched the Toledo Mosque open in 1953, the American Moslem Society complete construction on its second floor mosque (in 1952) and weekend Arabic school. Elsewhere, plans were underway to build a grand mosque in Washington, DC. Things seemed to be on the move for Muslim communities across the country, yet Hashmie Hall grew older, dirtier, and less engaged. Finally, in 1955, a delegation of six young Muslim Americans drove to Michigan City from Highland Park and Dearborn to implore Shaykh Chirri to return with them to Detroit. This group swore allegiance to the shaykh and brought with them pledges from several older community members to support the imam and work with him to fulfill his earlier ambition of building a mosque for the Shi`a of greater Detroit. Chirri acquiesced, returning to Detroit in 1955.

²⁰ During his Indiana years, Imam Chirri began working closely with an American convert to Islam, Wilson Guertin, with whom he produced a book, *Inquiries about Islam* (Chirri 1962), based on their conversations about matters of faith. This volume became a popular guide for American converts like Guertin, as well as a sourcebook for Muslim Americans who, in their practical knowledge of Islam, were often on a par with new converts.

“Here a new phase of the Imam’s life began,” writes Hussein Makled about Chirri’s return.

God prepared American men and women to help the Imam return to Detroit in 1955. At that time the big *jihad* [effort] began. Prayers were held at Hashmie Hall in keeping with Islamic religious principles. Sunday school was held at the same time. The Sunday school was also copied in Highland Park at the United Syrian Society Club. Imam prepared the community to go ahead. He announced that we must build an Islamic center for the community to help them be proud of their religion like other communities. In 1956 the first council [the Islamic Center Foundation Society] was established, including eight trustees and the support of many people in the community.... At the beginning of 1959, the Imam declared that he would travel to Africa to ask for help to build the Islamic Center, and he got it. Actually, the Imam spent the period from 1956 to 1959 preparing the community to sacrifice, convincing many people that they had the power and strength to build (Makled 1998:3).²¹

The FIA, the Islamic Center of America, and Mid-century Transnational Islam

Progress on the new Islamic Center went hand in hand in the late 1950s with progress at the FIA, an institution that continued to inspire American Muslims and provide them with new opportunities and resources. This progress made the American Muslim community more visible to non-Muslims Americans and to Arab embassies and Muslim NGOs; it also attracted the attention and ire of American Zionists, which in turn encouraged the further politicization of many young American Muslims. Detroit’s Muslim leaders entered a new period of transnational religious and political engagement, and the FIA became the primary vehicle through which Muslim Americans interacted with Muslim religious and political agencies overseas.

In 1957, the FIA hosted its sixth annual convention in Detroit, the first in Michigan. It was a tremendous success. Over 2,000 people attended and, as illustrations 5.3 and 5.4 show, the crowd was well heeled and ethnically and racially diverse. The local organizing committee included representatives from the American Moslem Society, the American

²¹ Translation by Saja Alasray. This manuscript is available in the Hussein Makled Collection at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Moslem Women's Society, the Albanian American Moslem Society of Detroit, the Albanian American Moslem Youth Club, the Islamic Center Foundation Society, the Islamic Center Women's Society, the Islamic Youth Organization, the Progressive Arabian Hashmie Society, and the United Citizen's Society. The organizers were drawn primarily from the new Islamic Youth Organization that Imam Chirri had been active in establishing. The IYO, while predominantly Arab, was open to both Sunni and Shi'a and included several Albanian and South Asian members. A young Charles Alawan (later Hajj Chuck) was chairman of the convention. Imam Chirri was keynote speaker at the banquet, and Imam Karoub led the juma prayer.



Illustration 5.3. Federation of Islamic Associations 1957 banquet in Detroit, courtesy of Joseph Caurdy



Illustration 5.4. Federation banquet detail, courtesy of Joseph Caurdy.

This convention gave the city's Muslims a chance to show off their dynamism and significance to a national Muslim audience, but it was equally significant because it drew, for the first time, organized political opposition. Among the highlights of the convention was the refusal of the acting mayor of Detroit, Louis Miriani, to welcome the conventioners to the city as had been planned. He sent a statement to the organizing committee explaining why he had backed out of this obligation: "I have no objection to local groups but I understand they are bringing in some questionable people from outside, particularly Washington. These people are anti-Eisenhower, anti-foreign aid and anti-American and therefore I will have nothing to do with the meeting" (*Detroit Free Press*, August 3, 1957). Local Zionist groups protested the appearance of two speakers who were scheduled to discuss the Palestinian refugee situation, Syrian Ambassador Farid Zeineddine, and the Director of the Arab Information Center, Fayez Sayegh. The 1957 convention is widely remembered for this controversy and the media storm it generated. "I think it was the first time we, as Muslims, made front page news," Hajj Chuck told me, not without pride. As Chairman of the convention, it was Hajj Chuck who addressed the media on behalf of the FIA. "We are stunned," he said, "that the acting head of an American city would refuse to welcome a religious group, especially in a country that is dedicated to religious freedom." He then accused Miriani of "attributing the political beliefs of a few to a world-wide religion" (*Detroit News*, August 3, 1957). The mayor did, in the end, address the conventioners, not to welcome them to the city, but to apologize for snubbing them, although his mea culpa was not granted in public (Alawan interview).

Following on the heels of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's rise to power, his nationalization of the Suez Canal, and the Suez Crisis, Arab nationalist sentiments were running high in 1957, so Mariani's snub was greeted with humor, rather than offense, by the FIA. "Let me tell you," confided Hajj Chuck, "the Detroit convention was the most profitable, the most active convention they ever had.... It was dynamic. It set the pace."

Aside from the political wrangling that went on with Mariani and the media, the Detroit convention was like other FIA conventions. “You got religious education. You met other Muslims. You were able to express your opinion in seminars and various things,” remembered Hajj Chuck. “You would have a big banquet, but every night you were there you would have dancing and music, socializing. People weren’t worried about *halal* in those days, so they would go to the coffeehouses and restaurants around and in the hotel and, hey, it was a fun time. It wasn’t overburdened with [pause] ... It was more secular.”

The public controversy surrounding the Detroit convention is proof of the increasing politicization of the Arab American community after the creation of Israel in 1948, but especially after Nasser came to power and Arabs had a leader to be proud of, a shift in orientation that was propelled by forces internal and external to the community. The 1958 FIA convention was held in Washington, DC, and one participant, Joe Caurdy, remembers this event as the first time he was insulted because of his ethnic or religious identity. “I came out of the hotel with another guy I only had met at the meeting, and I had my nametag on, and some guy threatened me and my friend because he saw that we were Muslims. It was probably the first time I was in contact with prejudice against us, and he [pause] he actually chased us down the street” (Caurdy interview). Abdo Elkholy, who was in Detroit in 1959, saw vivid evidence of the changing political mood.

The Arab defeat in the Palestinian War [1948] aroused the anger of Moslems in America but discouraged them as well. The Egyptian Revolution and the rise of President Nasser to world prominence, however, aroused their sense of nationalism. To Moslems in America as well as in the Middle East, Nasser became the symbol of Arab nationalism. In almost every Moslem home in America there is more than one picture of Nasser. In their social and religious events, the Moslems receive enthusiastically and applaud strongly the songs about Nasser. As a prominent woman in Detroit put it to a Jordanian official accompanying King Hussein during his visit in 1959: “Whenever a party is opened in the name of the Prophet, no one is particularly moved. If it is opened in the name of God, no one cares either. But the name of Gamal Abdel-Nasser electrifies the hall.” (1966:48).

During this period the FIA began to facilitate the tours and public addresses of important Arab activists, diplomats, politicians, and leaders when they visited the United States. Often these scholars and officials stopped in Detroit, courting the support of American Muslims. These networks of patronage and politics worked both ways. In 1959 the FIA was invited by President Nasser to hold their convention in Cairo, Egypt. The American delegation had the opportunity to meet with the President, with the head of Al Azhar University, and with several religious authorities in the country, and Nasser agreed to send four Al Azhar-trained imams to the United States to help meet the demand for Muslim preachers in American pulpits.²² He also agreed to offer 10 scholarships to Cairo University to American students and a scholarship for theological training at Al Azhar University, all to be arranged and administered by the FIA.

Of arguably even greater significance was a solo trip to Egypt and Jordan taken by Shaykh Chirri on behalf of the FIA, also in 1959. Chirri traveled first to Sierra Leone, then to Lebanon, and finally to Egypt, hoping to raise money for the Islamic Center. While in Lebanon, he presumably met with his friend and former colleague Mohammed Mughniyyah, who was deeply involved at the time in a high stakes effort to bring about a rapprochement between the Sunni and Shi'i religious establishments in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. This issue weighed heavily on Chirri's mind when he had his audience with President Nasser in July of 1959. He made two appeals to the Arab leader. First, he requested financial support for his mosque, which was granted. Second, he asked Nasser to stand behind the effort to

²² Among the problems raised annually at the FIA's conventions was the lack of trained clerics to lead the growing number of mosques in the United States. Detroit, with its excess of clergy, lay and professional, was the exception. As communities built new mosques, they wanted professional leaders. The four imams who came to the United States at the expense of the Egyptian government, for the most part, fared very poorly. They did not speak English. They did not appreciate the participation of women in the mosques. They were unprepared to organize fund raising events for the mosque or otherwise provide counseling services. With rare exceptions, these imams did not survive their contracts in the US (Alawan, Hamood, A. Karoub interviews). Oddly, the exception was the young imam who spent time at the AMS. He was there for five years and was much appreciated by young members of the congregation in particular (Abraham family, Hassanein interviews). This imam also found adversaries within the Karoub family, as we will see in Chapter 6.

bring about Sunni-Shi'i reconciliation. Mughniyyah had been lobbying Mahmoud Shaltout, the religious leader of Al Azhar University, hoping Shaltout would use his authority to sway

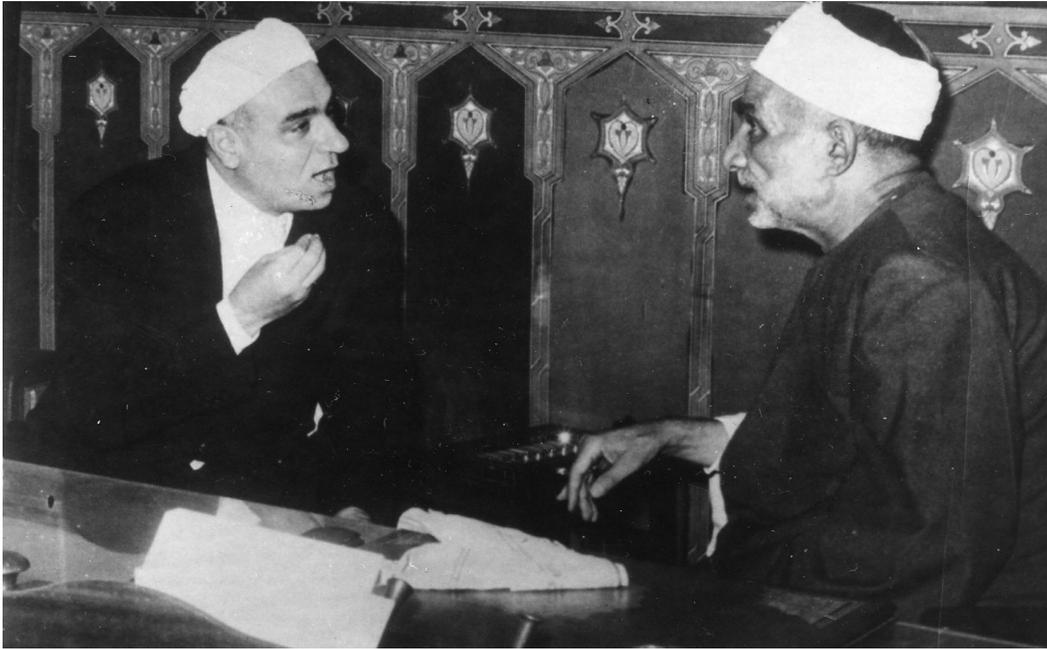


Illustration 5.5. Imam Mohamad Jawad Chirri meets with Shaykh Mahmoud Shaltout at Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, 1959. Courtesy of Adnan Chirri.

leaders across the Sunni world. After a positive meeting with the Egyptian President, Chirri met with Shaltout (see illustration 5.5) and again discussed the matter of Sunni-Shi'i unity.

The next day, Shaltout issued the following legal decree, or *fatwa*:

1. Islam does not oblige any of its adherents to be affiliated with a specific *madhhab* [Islamic school of thought]. Rather, we say: Every Muslim has, first of all, the right to follow any of the legal schools that have been properly handed down and whose rules in their specific (legal) effects are laid down in writing. A person who follows one of these schools is entitled to turn to any other without being subjected to reproach.
2. In the essence of the religious law of Islam (*shar`an*), it is allowed to perform the divine service (*ta`abbud*) in accordance with the rite of the Jaafariyya, which is known as Shi`a *imamiyya*, in the same way as in accordance with all schools of the Sunni. (quoted in Brunner 2004:289-290).

This proclamation was likely in the works before Chirri's arrival. It smoothed the way toward a Cold War alliance between Egypt, Syria, and Iran that had little to do with

Chirri's visit (Brunner 2004), but the Imam's requests were the occasion on which the announcement was made, and Chirri was thrilled to have played a part in achieving this historic recognition of the Ja'afari *madhhab* – the Shi'i tradition of jurisprudence – by the leading cleric of the Sunni Muslim world. This moment of Muslim ecumenical esprit proved to be fleeting, but it was nonetheless a tremendous boost to Chirri's status as a scholar and a political activist among Muslim Americans.

The Islamic Center of America

Home again in Detroit, Chirri was able finally to begin work on his long awaited Islamic Center, using both the cultural capital and the financial capital he had amassed during his travels. The \$44,000 Chirri secured from President Nasser, King Hussein of Jordan, and officials in Sierra Leone for the construction of a new mosque was greeted with wild enthusiasm when he returned to Detroit.²³ In my discussions with the founders and early supporters of the Islamic Center, the \$44,000 from Nasser, and other financial victories and setbacks, large and small, animated much of our conversation. "You see," narrates Hajj Chuck, "when you dedicate and you give your sworn promise to somebody, and you can't buy a pencil. And you take it to \$100,000 through hard damn work, and you do it within 5 years, you know that there is a bond there. You know that there is a commitment. There never has been and there never will be again in this community a group with that kind of fervor. We worked damn hard. There was nothing and we brought it up from zero to the Islamic Center of America. American born, immigrants, young and old, committed to doing something behind the leadership of one man." Hajj Makled, describing this process in great detail, reveals the kind of pressure Imam Chirri placed on his supporters.

²³ The Shaykh was given \$10,000 by King Hussein of Jordan and \$7,000 by officials in Sierra Leone. Because his trip was facilitated by the FIA, these donations were controversial. When Chirri returned to the United States, he was forced to give half of the money to the FIA. The \$44,000 which is commonly attributed to Nasser was actually half of the total dollars he raised on the trip from several sources (Makled interview).

I still remember one [woman] in Highland Park. She gave \$300. And one in Dearborn, bint [daughter of] ‘Ali Wajni, she gave \$300. And people started give money, you know, \$100 here, 300 there ... and we thought about making a little dinner, you know. And the first dinner we made, it was in Highland Park, in that Hall where we were at [UCS], and at the time we collected \$8,000. And that was a big news in the community. “Hey, hey, hey ... they collected \$8,000?” “Oh, those people are really ... they mean business. Now it’s time to fight ‘em.”

[Laughter]

So ... and I remember the time, I remember the time ... uh ... Imam Chirri came to me ... and he was so close to me and, God bless his soul, he said, “Bismallah [in God’s name], \$100? You paid the whole \$100?”

Well to me, yeah, I paid \$100, that’s \$100. I say, “Yeah, what’s wrong with \$100?”

He said, “You wanna build a mosque, and you pay \$100?”

I said, “How much you want me to pay?”

He said, “*Ya ‘ayb al shum* [Shame on you], at least \$300. Let the people see that somebody is payin’ some money.”

His vision was that it could be done, and it’s gonna be done. And then he made the trip to Egypt – that was the breaking point.

Makled’s sacrifices went well beyond \$300. At one point he took out a second mortgage on both his home and his grocery store to help the Islamic Center Foundation Society secure the loan it needed to purchase a building site for the mosque (Makled interview, Alawan interview).

Fund raising was only one dimension of Chirri’s project. When he returned to Detroit, he again took up residence in Hashmie Hall. This time, however, Chirri did not wander the streets at night hoping someone would invite him in for dinner. He did not open the doors for Arabic classes that no students were willing to take, as he had in the past. Instead, Chirri worked with Imam Vehbi to develop effective Sunday school curricula and language instruction materials. With the help of volunteers in Dearborn (Chuck Alawan) and Highland Park (Sidney Mashike), Chirri organized serious language and Quranic recitation

classes at Hashmie Hall and the United Citizens Society (renamed the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park). Roughly 50 students participated at Hashmie Hall. He also continued to write, publishing essays on Islam for American Muslims, and he steadily (re)introduced Detroit's Shi'a Muslims to their heritage as followers of Ahl al-Bayt, the Family of the Prophet. Both the Highland Park and Dearborn Shi'a communities came together to back Chirri's vision.



Illustration 5.6 The Islamic Center of Detroit, 2006, photo by Elshafei Mohammed, Building Islam in Detroit.

On September 20, 1963, eight years after Chirri's return to Dearborn, the gleaming Islamic Center of Detroit was officially dedicated on Joy Road and Greenfield (see illustration 5.6). This modern structure was identifiably Muslim. It included a sizable prayer space, a large social hall, a lecture area (later known as the funeral parlor), several classrooms, a large office and library for the imam, and an industrial kitchen. Two minarets were added, and the size of the social hall doubled, in 1966.²⁴

²⁴ While in Michigan City, Shaykh Chirri had come to appreciate the role women played in making the mosque there run well, and he encouraged women's leadership and women's participation in planning,

The *Jahaliyya* and the *Umma*: Before and After Chirri

The establishment of the Islamic Center of Detroit (later “of America,” ICA) was a collective effort, but Shaykh Chirri is given the lion’s share of credit for leading the building campaign. Moreover, his work is often described using motifs drawn from stories of the Prophet Muhammad’s life. Chirri, I was told many times, came to Dearborn when the community was ignorant, like Mecca was before the Prophet Muhammad received the divine revelation of the Quran. As the Prophet was rejected by the people of Mecca and exiled to Medina, Chirri was rejected by the people of Detroit and exiled to Michigan City. Just as the umma (the community of Muslim believers) triumphed when the Prophet returned to Mecca and ended its *jahaliyya* (its “age of ignorance”), Chirri’s return to Detroit ended the city’s *jahaliyya* and ushered in a new era in which Muslims began to live as Muslims who properly understood and practiced their faith. The Islamic Center of America was the proof and the symbol of this transition.

Hajj Hussein Hamood provided the most careful articulation of this “out of *jahaliyya*” narrative.

The Islamic faith was not the top important item on their list [in 1949 when Chirri arrived in Detroit]. Even I heard that some Muslims who are really with the masons or the business, or the Americans or something, they deny to their children that they are Muslims. Some people, you know, because really, they are not praying, they are not fasting, they are not going to the hajj, they are not doing – except if somebody make charity – I don’t know. I saw people, and you know it was in the time before. I saw older men during Ramadan they smoke a cigar. Or they go to Camp Dearborn and they make food outside, you know, on Sunday or something.²⁵ This is the time before Imam Chirri came.

building, and operating the Islamic Center of Detroit. As Hajj Hamood described this, “the ladies of the Islamic Center really are the backbone. They raise money and they work and they make the people go for the prayer and the services, and the children go to Sunday school.” He goes on to add that Chirri recognized the value of this contribution only after he had returned from Michigan City (Hamood interview).

²⁵ The Muslim fast includes giving up all food and beverages, sexual activity, and vices such as smoking, from sunrise to sunset.

Images of “the time before” surface repeatedly in Hajj Hamood’s narrative. Even the Hajj himself was not living as a devout Muslim in “the time before.”

There was in the community under ten women who covered their hair and their body completely. And maybe ten, I am telling you how many, how many women who were here. I don’t have to name anybody, but they were here, and how many men who were here – they are about 10 people. Less than a dozen people who are practicing their faith fully while living in Detroit and Highland Park and in Dearborn ... in 1949, when I came... I wasn’t religious myself. I mean, I had, my wife and I, we produced nine kids, OK. And I was working at Chevrolet here at Axel in the beginning, and I had trouble with the system. I wasn’t working right, to tell you the truth. And all I know was running to raise my family, and, thank God, I was able to do that. Four or five of them, five of them, they graduated from college.

After a long digression, Hajj Hamood arrives at the moment when the Islamic Center is fully functioning and Shaykh Chirri has accomplished his goal of producing a Muslim community marked not by ignorance, but by faith.

Until Imam Chirri start to practice, and to recognize so many things more than what we do in south Lebanon. You know, we have Eid al Mawlid [the Prophet’s birthday], and we have Imam Ali’s birthday, and we have the day that the revelation came to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and we have `Ashura.²⁶ We were the first ones to – we were about 40 people or something like that, less, and I suggested to Imam Chirri to do it for three days [rather than the ten customary days]. Do it on Saturday and Sunday and something like that, because I work afternoons. He said, “Abu Ali.” (I wasn’t Hajj.) He said, “Abu Ali, in Iraq and in Iran they make it 40 days, and you make it too much for Imam Husayn 10 days or something?” And the 10th day is supposed to be in the daytime, you know, and I told him that the people will not come. “You want to make it in the evening?” And he said, “Come on. Are you still with that same thinking?” And the next days, honest to God, Sally, they make it in the middle of the day in the middle of the week, and the people, they filled the entire Islamic Center and the people were standing by the wall. There is nothing that unites the Muslims as much as remembering Imam Husayn.

²⁶ `Ashura literally means “tenth.” It refers to the tenth day of the month of Muharram, on which Imam Husayn, his family, and his supporters were massacred on the fields of Karbala by the forces of the Caliph Muawiyya. This is the penultimate holiday in the Shi’i calendar. Each of the holidays mentioned here are celebrated more commonly among the Shi’a, with the exception of Laylat al-Qadr (the night of the first revelation). As noted previously, the Albanian Bektashis began celebrating `Ashura at their *tekke* a full decade before the ICA began hosting `Ashura commemorations.

Hajj Hamood is very clear to point out that this *jahaliyya* included American Muslims, the old timers, the first generation, their children, *and* the newcomers, people like himself and others who arrived after the Second World War. Many of the practices Imam Chirri introduced, such as these `Ashura observances, were unknown to Detroit Shi`a, unknown to their parents' generation, and unknown in most of South Lebanon (Norton 2007, Deeb 2006). Chirri brought these "traditions" with him from Iraq, where he had attended seminary at Najaf, and from the experiences he gained working alongside Shaykh Mughniyyah in Lebanon. These men were not simply preachers of Islam; they were reformers. They had lived in Lebanon during its period of liberation from Ottoman and then French imperial rule. The Shi`a of the South, despite their poverty and disenfranchisement from the Lebanese political process, were now relatively free from persecution and at liberty to explore the possibilities of Shi`i identity in the political context of a modern Lebanese nation-state.

Hajj Hamood, himself a mid-century immigrant, was aware of changes taking place among Shi`a in Lebanon and North America, a vantage that enabled him to see continuities of class, education, and religious experience between American and Lebanese Muslims. Unlike so many contemporary Muslims, he does not blame the religious ignorance of Detroit's Muslims on their having been isolated from *Dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam, the Muslim-majority world) in the United States. Instead, he attributes the weakness of religious identity and education to a Muslim community that was everywhere unfamiliar with Islam as the Prophet intended it to be practiced. Shaykh Chirri led people away from this ignorance. He brought the Quran, Hadith, respect for *Ahl al-Bayt*, and viable ways of living as Muslims, bringing *Dar al-Islam* not only to Shi`a in Detroit, but to Shi`a wherever they might be found. The subtlety of Hajj Hamood's assessment disappeared a generation later, when new Muslim immigrants – and, just as often, the scholars who studied them – could no longer discern a

kinship of faith, or shared bonds of culture, with Muslims who lived and worshipped in the Muslim spaces Chirri and his supporters had struggled to build.

The Albanian Islamic Center

Imam Vehbi Ismail also saw continuities between the religious ignorance of Detroit's Muslims, in this case the Albanian community, and the spiritual negligence of Muslims still living in Dar al-Islam. The Albanian refugees who arrived in Detroit throughout the 1950s were often anti-communist activists, and, like many Albanians already in Detroit, they were not necessarily interested in Islam as anything more than a political identity. Nonetheless, the St. Thomas Albanian Orthodox Church and the Albanian American Moslem Society were the two anchors of Albanian expatriate life in the city, and Ismail's congregation grew rapidly in the 1950s. By 1957 the congregation had outgrown their small, converted church, which they sold to finance the new mosque they would build from the ground up.

Like Imam Chirri, Imam Vehbi learned a great deal in the 1950s about his new homeland. His English improved rapidly. He traveled frequently, working with the FIA, raising money for the American Moslem Society, and adding his voice to protests against the Communist government in Tirana. He came to know and to appreciate the older Albanians who had lived in Detroit for decades, and he found thoughtful ways of making Islam relevant to their lives. He focused his intellectual energy during these years on providing basic educational materials to the community. He developed a Sunday school and a youth movement, just as Chirri would do when he returned to Detroit. Ismail used the *Albanian Moslem Life* to circulate his ideas and make them accessible to his congregation. Like Chirri, Ismail was a committed ecumenical Muslim leader. He lectured at the United Citizen's Society and even led a year of study there for a combined Albanian, Pakistani, and Arab youth group. He collaborated with the Bektashi Tekke as well, participating actively in their holiday celebrations and other festivals, contributing financially to their growth, and writing

about the traditions and historical figures important to them in the *Albanian Moslem Life* (Trix 1984). When Imam Karoub made the Hajj in 1959, and was out of the country for almost a year, Ismail rented the AMS for his congregation and, in effect, led both the Albanian and Arab Sunni congregations during Karoub's absence. He never suffered exile from Detroit, as Chirri had. As a Sunni leader, with a strong ecumenical commitment, he was greeted by receptive audiences throughout Detroit's Muslim enclaves.

By the mid 1950s, the *Albanian Moslem Life*, with a subscription base limited to Albanian speakers, was losing money, and it was hard for Imam Vehbi to justify investing further time and money in this project when resources were needed to fund his new mosque. The FIA stepped in and began publishing the magazine in English, redubbing it *The Moslem Life*. Ismail stayed on as editor for eight years, continuing to emphasize the basics of Islamic history, beliefs and practices, but also publishing lectures and speeches delivered at each year's FIA convention, and covering news of the Muslim world from an American Muslim perspective. In 1958 Ismail gave the keynote address at the FIA's annual convention in Washington, D.C. His speech addressed several audiences. It was didactic – he began by reminding the audience of the five doctrines Muslims hold in common (belief in the unity of God, in the angels, in the holy scriptures, in the prophets, and in the afterlife), and of their four primary obligations (prayer, alms, hajj, and fasting). It was a political and patriotic speech. Ismail quoted from President Eisenhower's recent address at the opening of the Islamic Center of Washington, DC, and from Jamal Al-Din Afghani, a 19th century pan-Muslim and anti-colonial activist. It was also a motivational speech. "Muslims everywhere have begun to wake up," he exhorted. "Everywhere around the world we can be witnessing a kind of renaissance and this awakening also can be witnessed among the Moslems here in the United States and Canada" (1958:30).

While not denying the unique position Muslims faced as a minority community in the United States, Ismail clearly saw their awakening as part of a global pattern. The FIA, he

argued, was playing a significant role in moving American Muslims from a state of *jahaliyya* toward one of revitalized Islamic belief and practice.

During those seven years, the influence of the Federation has entered many Moslem homes and reached many Moslem hearts. It has instilled on many of our youth the spirit and teachings of Islam. Many of us, knowing little about our religion, were not aware of the principles of our faith. Due to this ignorance, some developed a sense of inferiority, a complex which made them feel ashamed of their religious beliefs. This inferiority complex was removed from the minds and hearts of many who learned, thanks to the publications of the Federation, how rational the teachings of Islam are. These enlightened people can now feel proud to be members of the universal faith (Ismail 1958:31).

In portraying Islam as rational, enlightened, and universal, Ismail was clearly aligning himself and the FIA with a body of contemporary Muslims writers and activists, many of whom lived in the United States or had studied there (Ismail al-Faruqi, for example), who believed Islam could be a constructive part of the West, rather than a tradition that should reject Western societies as inherently anti-Islamic (the view associated with Hassan al-Banna, Said Qutb, and Mawlana Mawdudi). To seal his argument, Ismail drew from the Quran, arguing that America's reform minded Muslims understood well that "God does not change the condition of a people until they change their conditions themselves" (1958:33).

At home in Detroit, Ismail pressed ahead with his plans to build the Albanian Islamic Center (see illustration 5.7), which hosted its dedication and grand opening on November 3, 1963. The guest speakers at the banquet included Hussien Karoub, Kalil Bazy, Mohammad Jawad Chirri, Baba Rexheb, Abdullah Igram (FIA founder), Dr. Mohanna (a visiting imam at the AMS), Abdel Halim Naggar (imam of the Islamic Center in Washington), William Hulber (mayor of Harper Woods, where the mosque was located), Dervish Bagram (from the Bektashi Tekke), and Jack Alli (President of the Albanian American Moslem Society) (*Muslim Star*, December 1963). Despite their periodic disagreements and backstage rivalries, Detroit's Muslim leadership found practical ways to support one another in the 1960s, as their population – of imams, of mosques, and of Muslims – grew.

Imam Vehbi's career was a model of transcommunal practice, yet the Albanian Islamic Center was an unmistakably ethnic mosque. The founding board consisted entirely of ethnic Albanians, and Imam Vehbi's sermons were conducted in Albanian and English until the 1980s. The mosque hosted Albanian national clubs and youth associations, and it was open for weddings, dances, and public meetings. The mosque's façade, which was not completed until 1975, was a distinctly Balkan, Ottomanesque design. The interior, however, was like that of most other Detroit mosques.²⁷ The prayer space itself was relatively small. No barrier separated men and women. The *qibla* faced east. The social hall/banquet hall was much larger than the prayer space, casually appointed, and easily rearranged for multiple uses. The industrial kitchen was appreciated for the Albanian food its cooks (mostly women



Illustration 5.7 The Albanian Islamic Center, 2008. Photo by Sally Howell, Building Islam in Detroit.

²⁷ The mosque was designed by Frank Bimm, a German convert to Islam who donated his time and work to the mosque. The minaret and semi-dome which now ornament the entrance to the building were not added until 1975. Prior to that, the mosque looked very much like a modern office complex or medical clinic.

of the congregation) provided to guests. The imam's office was the heart of the building. Ismail's office walls were lined with an impressive library of Arabic, English, and Albanian books. Located in the suburb of Harper Woods, the mosque overlooks Interstate Highway 94 and has stood as a symbol of the Muslim presence in Detroit to those entering the city from the north and east since 1962.

The story of the Albanian Islamic Center, and of Vehbi Ismail's career, has received much less attention from scholars than have the stories of Dearborn's mosques and clerics. This neglect stems largely from Ismail's location within a small, easily overlooked population of ethnic Muslims. Albanians make up only a tiny fraction of American Muslims today, and in the 1950s their numbers were also small.²⁸ Frances Trix, who has written extensively on the history and founder of the First Albanian Bektashi Tekke, provides a brief history of Imam Vehbi's congregation, but her research focuses on the Bektashi order, and she is less interested in, and seems largely unaware of, the role Ismail played outside the Albanian community (Trix 1993, 1994, 2001, 2009). "It is understandable how such a relatively small immigrant group," Trix argues, "and one that is dispersed across the American northeast and Midwest could be overlooked in surveys of Muslim groups in America. Further it is understandable how even an unusual Muslim institution like the Bektashi Tekke could be overlooked in a place like Detroit with its multiple Islamic centers" (1994:365). This may be true of the *Tekke*, which has made a conscientious effort to keep its distance from the ebb and flow of Detroit's polycultural Muslim communities and institutions, but it is not true of the Albanian Islamic Center or its founding imam. Elkholy agrees with Trix, arguing that there was "no connection whatsoever" between Albanian and Arab Muslims in the city (1966:18), a strong assertion to be made by someone whose

²⁸ Ismail himself placed the number at 1,000 when he arrived in Detroit in 1949, while Trix and other scholars estimate there were 5,000 Albanians in the country as a whole by the late 1930s. INS figures for the years between 1941 and 1960 only count 144 Albanians entering the country. Far more than this number arrived in Detroit alone during these years, which suggests these statistics are unreliable (Trix 1994, The Federal Writer's Project of the Works Progress Administration 1939, and Nagi 1989).

research was conducted in 1959, at the peak of the pan-Muslim synergy I am describing.

Elkholy seems to have been interested only in the Arabs of Dearborn, and he relied on very few sources when drawing his information about Detroit more generally, yet his writing has generally been accepted by scholars as an accurate portrayal of the city's Muslim enclaves.

Not only was Ismail an active participant in Detroit's polycultural umma, he was also active nationally and internationally on behalf of American and Albanian Muslims. In 1967, for example, he was invited to make the hajj as a special guest of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. He was part of a small delegation of American Muslims that included Warith Deen Mohammed, the son of Nation of Islam founder, Elijah Muhammad. Warith Deen Mohammed was, in the 1960s, exploring and being introduced to Sunni Islam as Malcolm X had before him, both in defiance of his father's teachings. Edward Curtis (2007) has pointed out that the Saudi government was involved in its own Cold War against Egypt and Iran in the 1960s, and they were eager to recruit Americans to their side of this conflict. Ismail, by this time, was on comfortable terms with the Saudis, the more conservative and more decidedly anti-communist of the two Arab factions. Shortly after he returned to the United States from his 1967 hajj, he was invited to serve as imam of the Islamic Center in Washington, DC. This mosque, built largely by and for the Muslim diplomatic community, was vying for the status of national mosque. Its founders and the leadership of the FIA wanted to make the Islamic Center the leading mosque in the country and to empower its imam to speak as a Grand Mufti of sorts for all American Muslims. Ismail was surprised and honored to be offered this position, especially given that the FIA was controlled by Arab Americans and the DC mosque, by Arab embassies. Fearful of becoming a pawn in Cold War politics, Imam Vehbi demurred in order to continue his work in Detroit.

Conclusion: Detroit's American Mosques²⁹

Opened within weeks of each other, the Islamic Center of America and the Albanian Islamic Center had a great deal in common. Their congregations were hungry for the revival of Islam. They were eager to transform the lives of Muslims, both in their homelands and in their diasporas. They were, for the most part, progressive congregations, and, like the city's older mosques, these new institutions were used as often as social halls as they were for religious purposes. Despite the strong misgivings about assimilation Chirri and Ismail harbored upon arriving in Detroit in 1949, both men had, within twelve years, overseen the establishment of mosques that resembled Hashmie Hall and the AMS in their everyday usage. With well educated, seminary-trained imams, these institutions provided Islamic instruction based on the Quran, Hadith, and the *madhhabs* of their founders, yet these same imams, these "doctors of the soul," eventually sanctioned many of the vernacular practices they had condemned when they were newcomers to Detroit.

When I interviewed Imam Vehbi in 2005, he was 87 years old and in poor health (see Illustration 58). The moral certainty and optimism that pervaded his 1958 address to the FIA was no longer visible. He did not mention the modern renaissance of Islam, or the movement of American Muslims from ignorance to knowledge and pride. Instead, he emphasized the growing distance between his congregation, between the varieties of Islam his congregation had developed in Harper Woods, and the identities embraced by newly-arrived immigrants from the Muslim-majority countries. The continuity between Islam as practiced at the Albanian Islamic Center and that practiced in much of the Muslim world was no longer evident to Imam Vehbi. He told me of bitter disputes that took place at the American Moslem

²⁹ Nabeel Abraham, writing about the American Moslem Society and the transition it went through in the late 1970s as it was taken over by recently arrived, conservative Yemeni Muslims, describes the AMS prior to 1976 as "Detroit's American Mosque." The American mosque, in Abraham's sense, is characterized by the combination of social and religious functions, by serving multi-generation families, by its voluntary lay leadership, and by the active participation of women (2000:279-312).

Society in the late 1970s (see Chapter VI), and at a similar mosque in Windsor, Ontario, in the 1990s,



Illustration 5.8. Imam Vehbi Ismail, circa 1990. Courtesy the Ismail family.

where new immigrant populations wrested control of local mosques from their founders and longstanding members, radically altering the atmosphere and manner of worship, in effect destroying Muslim American institutions in the name of a purified Islam.

These conflicts between already American Muslims and recent immigrants regularly focus on a variety of issues concerning public expressions of faith, especially on the public role women play in the city's historic mosques, on the way women dress, and on the conventions that guide cross-gender interactions, rules that have changed dramatically since the late 1970s. When I asked Imam Vehbi if they had weddings and dances at the Albanian Islamic Center, practices which have been banned at the AMS since the late 1970s, he responded, "We had. And we didn't have problems here. Anyone who does not like it can go

anywhere else.” He explained further: “We, to keep the kids, you know, Sally. We had to have some ... entertainment. In place of going to bars and clubs, we see you. And we are more in control here. And know each other, get married together ... there are benefits.” He went on to argue that there is no need to segregate men from women in the mosque – for social events, or in separate prayer rooms – another issue which became significant in the 1970s. “We don't [segregate], a man and woman they sit together, one facing another, all equal. All the Muslims are brothers. The one that comes here thinks that my wife is his sister. We don't look in different ways.”

Transnational migration is a gendered process and mosques are gendered spaces. By the 1950s Detroit's mosques were spaces that allowed for a great deal of autonomy and participation for men and women alike. For earlier generations of Muslim women, these spaces were emancipatory and affirming. Elkholy argued that without the participation of women, Detroit's mosques would probably not have existed. He found gender to be an insignificant variable when measuring the religiosity of Detroit Muslims and an insignificant topic when attempting to “intelligently discuss Islam” (1966:119). By the 1970s, however, thousands of new immigrants were arriving in Detroit, as a consequence of liberalized immigration laws and political unrest in Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, and Palestine. As crisis engulfed the Middle East and Islam was increasingly vilified in American popular culture, the gender norms that prevailed in Detroit's mosques became problematic for new immigrants, who often considered themselves authorities on Islam because, unlike Americanized Muslims, they spoke fluent Arabic and had grown up in Muslim-majority countries. The new immigrants were also likely to consider the United States a dangerous place. As in imperial power and strong supporter of Israel, the U.S. threatened not only the cherished traditions of their ancestors, as Chirri had warned when he first arrived in the U.S., but stood in opposition to the political interests of all Arabs and Muslims.

“Racialized immigrants,” according to Yen Le Espiritu, “claim through gender the power denied them through racism” (1999:279), but this project, as central it seems to critical race theory and postcolonial immigration politics, cannot adequately explain why new immigrants to Detroit became singularly obsessed with re-gendering Detroit’s mosques to conform to their expectations. Nabeel Abraham (2000), in his analysis of the Yemeni takeover of the American Moslem Society in 1978, argues that newly arrived Arab immigrants, especially the more devout among them, brought to America very different cultural models of mosques as gendered spaces. In the Arab world of the 1970s, women rarely visited mosques at all, and they had almost no role in their daily operation. When immigrants from Yemeni and Palestinian villages saw women in American mosques, with hair uncovered and presiding over Sunday school classes and social functions of all sorts, they were scandalized, and they insisted that propriety, as they understood it, be restored.

These problems became especially complex at the ICA, where Imam Chirri, who had worked so diligently as an Americanizer of Islam and supporter of U.S. Cold War policy, found himself greatly inspired (and politically marginalized) by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, a Shi`a people’s movement led by men of religion like himself, whom he revered and most Americans despised. The Shi`a population in Dearborn exploded in the 1970s, as Lebanese immigrants and refugees poured into Detroit to escape the ravages of civil war and Israeli occupation. Although Chirri’s political embrace of the Islamic Revolution was in keeping with the political sensibilities that prevailed among new Shi`a immigrants, the relaxed gender regime of the Islamic Center, in which women moved about the mosque with hair uncovered, and gender mixed wedding dances were normal events, was a source of extreme anxiety for the newly arrived.

Conflicts over gendered practices in Detroit’s mosques will be covered in detail in Chapter VI, but I will provide here two brief examples to illustrate how Imams Chirri and

Ismail responded to these controversies when they first emerged in the 1970s. According to Hajj Hussein Hamood, Imam Chirri “used to shave” his beard.

He used to shake hands [with women],³⁰ and he used to ... accept the women uncovered. Ok.

Just when they started to have [political] parties in Lebanon, Hizbullah and Amal and that sort of thing, there is a young man over here and he stand by the door [of the mosque] and he tell you if you are not covered you cannot get in or nothing.

And he [Imam Chirri] said, “Oh no. Those women, those daughters, those girls, they came from Troy and Sterling Heights, from Warren. They passed by so many things [non-Islamic things] that they can go and have fun and different things and they [instead] want to hear the word of God, and they come over here to Joy Road [where the mosque is located in Detroit]. You tell them – let them come inside. I will speak to them.”

And he says in his sermon, “Your ancestor is Umm Hashim (for example) or Umm Ali [women of the Prophet’s lineage], and they will be proud of you when you are covered.”

That is how he would do it.

Imam Vehbi too was a master of the gradualist approach. “Let me tell you one example,” he said to me during our interview. The imam then narrated a brief encounter between himself and a representative of the Muslim World League, a Saudi-sponsored NGO that supports Islamic education and Islamic institutions internationally. The League was in Detroit on a fact finding mission, and several local mosques were eager to solicit substantial donations.

In 1981 came the head of *Rabita al-‘Alam al-Islami* [the Muslim World League] here. He went to Dearborn first, and they called me. They said, “Please tell the woman to put [on the hijab].” Because most of our people don’t.

And, he came, and I did not tell the women. But I told him that Dearborn had asked me to do it. I told Dearborn, “If they don't listen to me because it is

³⁰ After the Islamic Revolution, Imam Chirri eventually conceded to many of the more conservative rules imposed by Ayatollah Khomeini that became common expressions of Muslim identity for the South Lebanese Shi’a. Many conservative men, for example, no longer shook hands with women. Beards also became ubiquitous. The changes were made, not simply out of fashion, but because they followed the example of the Prophet. As this example illustrates, they affected both men and women equally.

ordered, or is good religiously, why [should they] make it [cover] for Ali Harakan?”

His name was Ali Harakan.

I said, “I did not tell them.”

And I didn’t.

The only mosque that [he] gave \$10,000 to was our mosque.

He said, “I like your sincerity.”

I said, “Why to [ask the women to cover], to cheat you, to tell my wife [to cover]?”

My wife does not put [wear a hijab]. She is born here.

The Qur'an says '*la ikrah fi ad-deen*' [there is no compulsion in religion]. I tell her she has got to have [it, to wear the hijab]. She does not want this.

And then there is a misunderstanding. In the Qur'an, the Qur'an tells to man, “lower your eyes.” It tells the same to woman. So why does the woman have to wear those [scarves]?

As these brief anecdotes suggest, the two imams and the two institutions they established had a great deal in common. They had become “American” in ways no one had anticipated; behaviors Chirri and Ismail had once considered moral lapses, they now tolerated and even endorsed as vital aspects of American Muslim identity. Like Hashmie Hall and the American Moslem Society before them, the Islamic Center of America and the Albanian Islamic Center functioned as discursive spaces in which knowledge of Islam could be renegotiated, enacted, debated, objectified, and adapted to changing circumstances. The members of these congregations were convinced, as were thousands of members of the FIA, that, under the expert moral guidance of men like Chirri and Ismail, they had fashioned a religious identity that was confident, forward-looking, universally recognizable as Islamic, and comfortably American.

The events of the 1970s would cast all of these assumptions into doubt, as a new generation of immigrant and American Muslims faced each other across cultural, political, and spiritual divides that, in the thirty years since Chirri and Ismail arrived in Detroit, had grown unexpectedly deep.

Chapter VI

Homegrown Muslim Leaders: Convergences of Race and Class

The Muslim communities of greater Detroit, as they existed between 1925 and 1965, were being numerically overwhelmed throughout the 1970s by new immigrants from the Muslim world. From Palestine and South Lebanon, the immigrants came as refugees and displaced persons. From Pakistan and India, they came mostly as university students, doctors, and engineers. From Yemen, they came as unskilled workers escaping civil wars and economic underdevelopment. This growing cohort of foreign-born Muslims was joined, in 1976, by newcomers of a very different sort: former members of the Nation of Islam. When the NOI's leader, Elijah Muhammad, died in 1975, his son, Warith Deen Muhammad, assumed leadership and promptly set about modifying his father's heterodox teachings. He rejected the divinity of Fard Mohammad, founder of the movement, and abandoned the NOI creation myth, in which white people are portrayed as the devilish creation of an evil scientist named Yaqub. By disposing of these doctrines, Warith Deen Mohammad led the NOI closer to a Muslim faith based on the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad.

Large scale immigration from abroad and the mass conversion of thousands of NOI followers meant that older Muslim communities in Detroit, some of which dated back to the early decades of the century, would be reduced to minority status by new Americans and new Muslims, neither of whom identified strongly with the historical roots of Islam in the city, and both of whom had, or would soon develop, a powerful subaltern consciousness. The United States, for them, was a purveyor of economic and military policies that threatened

Muslims and people of color around the world. The new immigrants and recent converts often saw themselves, and were often seen by others, as people who had no place in mainstream American political and religious culture. Many of them wanted to maintain this separation. The latter stance was especially hard for the older Muslim community to accept. Not only had they struggled to build the mosques and Muslim organizations the newcomers now vied to control, but they had come to see themselves as Americans in the process. They were deeply offended by the anti-Muslim and anti-Arab prejudice that flourished in American popular culture, but few of them could believe that Islam and American identity were incompatible. Their own lives had taught them that cultural citizenship was, for Muslims, an attainable goal, despite the many obstacles in its way.

In previous chapters, I have looked at the careers of foreign imams who encountered American Muslims, and immigrant Muslims who encountered American society. This chapter will turn the tables, focusing on two American-born imams whose careers were shaped by their transformative encounters with immigrant Muslims and converts to Islam. The first of these figures, Imam Muhammad (“Mike”) Adeeb Karoub succeeded his father, Imam Hussien Karoub, as spiritual head of the American Moslem Society in Dearborn. Imam Mike was at the helm of the AMS when it was taken over by a conservative (predominantly) Yemeni American faction in 1977. The new congregation expected the mosque to function exclusively as a house of worship and set about purging all social activities that were not overtly religious. They also expected those who entered the mosque to comport themselves and dress according to a new, more conservative regime of mosque etiquette and attire. The second of these figures, Osman Hassanien (born Oscar Hudson), converted to Islam in 1952 and joined the community of the Hajj Sammsan Abdullah Mosque (later Masjid al-Mu’mineen) in Detroit. This mosque was a “transit station” for Muslim students studying at Wayne State University, for Tablighi Jumaat missionaries who began passing through Detroit in 1952, and for others, especially Nation of Islam members, curious about Sunni Islam, Sufi

Islam, and links to the global community of Muslims. The core congregation of this mosque was African American. As president of the mosque's board, Hassanien steered the institution through the troubled political waters of the 1960s and 1970s with a firm commitment to the polycultural umma of Islam. His death in 1978 coincided with the mass conversion of NOI followers. Both events overwhelmed Masjid al-Mu'mineen and its new leadership. The mosque struggled and eventually failed in 1985.

Karoub and Hassanien were friends, partners in faith, and close collaborators in the project of bridging the black/white divide among the city's Muslims. Like Chirri and Ismail, with whom they also worked to build the infrastructure of a polycultural Islam in Detroit, both imams rejected the new fundamentalisms of the period and their impositions on American Islam. The institutions Karoub and Hassanien oversaw – the American Moslem Society, the Mu'mineen Mosque, and the Federation of Islamic Associations – were sites of transcultural encounter and mutuality in matters of belief and practice. They were also bitterly contested social spaces that did not survive the crises of the 1970s unscathed.

Coming of Age: the American Moslem Society and its American-born Imam

In 1952, when the American Moslem Society broke ground on its new addition (see illustration 6.1), it was part of a national trend. Plans to add a second floor to the AMS had been underway even before Imams Chirri and Ismail came to Detroit in 1949 and the Federation of Islamic Associations was established a few years later. But the arrival of these young, well educated imams challenged the mosque to represent itself anew as more than a local social club for Syrian Muslims. This shift in orientation motivated the group to complete their new facility. In 1952, when work on the new prayer space, lecture hall, and office was done, the AMS was the best equipped and largest purpose-built mosque in the United States. Imam Karoub's longstanding practice of describing the AMS as Detroit's *Masjid al-`am* (the mosque for all Muslims) finally seemed an accurate description. Despite

its location in the Southend, Dearborn's industrial and highly polluted ethnic enclave, the mosque drew worshippers from across Detroit and from Windsor, Ontario, as well, especially when foreign leaders visited the community and on Muslim holidays (see illustration 6.2). Yet the mosque lacked the kind of leader who, like its sparkling new prayer space, could reflect the progressive, modernist ethos of the period. Gradually, disputes arose among the mosque's several factions over who would lead the congregation into the future. These debates centered on gender dynamics in the mosque, the relationship between the imam and the board of directors, and the nature of religious leadership and moral authority in the Muslim community.



Illustration 6.1. The American Moslem Society, circa 1958. Courtesy of the Detroit News Archive.

In comparison to Imams Ismail and Chirri, Imam Hussien Karoub seemed old and

out of touch with the larger Islamic world. With their impeccable religious credentials, university degrees, and eagerness to make Islam politically and socially relevant, Chirri and Ismail were popular with Detroit's younger, more educated Muslims, both immigrant and



Illustration 6.2. Hussien Karoub leads a holiday prayer at the American Moslem Society, late 1950s. Courtesy of the Detroit News Archive.

American-born, both Sunni and Shi'a. Imam Karoub was admired and respected across the country, but in Dearborn he was associated with the status quo, with the older immigrant generation and their vernacular expressions of the faith. Karoub was not trained as a jurist, and the AMS board did not consider him qualified to render authoritative judgments on Islamic law or to engage in Quranic hermeneutics, skills that Chirri and Ismail both possessed.¹ Unlike these new arrivals, he did not offer inspirational sermons that drew

¹ Two other Dearborn residents were sometimes relied on to render such judgments when the congregation at Hashmie Hall and the AMS needed a more authoritative interpretation of the business

connections between contemporary life and the example and sayings of the Prophet. Instead, he was associated with the Islam of sock hops, bingo, and basement belly dance fundraisers, events that flourished under his watchful eye. These practices kept young people involved and the lights on, but they had not succeeded, from the perspective of many new immigrants in particular, in creating strong American Muslims who could sustain Islam in the United States over time. While the congregation was willing to be patient with Imam Karoub out of respect for his years of service, some were made nervous by the ambitions of one of the imam's sons, who served as his father's personal assistant and expected to be named the imam of the mosque upon his father's retirement.

Muhammad Adeeb Karoub, "Mike," was born in Highland Park, Michigan, in 1924 to Hussien and Maryam Karoub, the fourth of the couple's seven children. Like his siblings, Mike grew up working alongside his father at Karoub Printing, typesetting the family newspaper, translating articles from Arabic into English, and eventually writing news stories. He also helped with his father's clerical work, chauffeuring the imam around town (and around the country), hosting the constant stream of visitors who made their way to the Karoub home, facilitating his father's interactions with English speaking audiences. Mike showed an aptitude for Arabic and Quranic studies at a young age, and he pursued a degree in religious studies at Wayne State University on the GI Bill after serving in WWII. As his siblings pursued independent careers, Mike found himself working more closely with their father, taking over much of the management of the *Arab American Message*, and sharing his father's clerical duties. Eventually, Mike Karoub described himself, and was generally

at hand. For the Sunni, this function was performed on certain occasions by Gus Balooly, who was not a scholar in the manner of Ismail or Chirri, but who pursued Islamic studies as a matter of personal interest and promoted himself as something of a lay scholar. Similarly, Abdullah Berry was a prominent member of the Shi'i establishment in Dearborn who also rendered judgments on occasion. Berry's authority stemmed from family ties to well known clergy in Lebanon. Berry was not an active member of Hashmie Hall, nor was he a particularly observant Muslim (C. Alawan, A. Balooly, A. Berry interviews).

recognized by Detroit area Muslims, as “the first American-born Imam” (M. Karoub/Naff interview).²

This title, although comfortably worn by Mike himself, was a curiosity, and as the Muslim community grew and changed around him, Mike spent a good deal of time defending his credentials to newly arriving immigrants who often considered the title “American-born imam” an oxymoron. When Alixa Naff interviewed Mike Karoub in 1980, she asked him about his credentials in a manner he must have found wearying: “Did you get your title because of your own education or because of heredity from your father?”

Muhammad Karoub: No. Not heredity. No, no. Nothing is heredity. I got it from my own education. And because...

Alixa Naff: Because of your own training as an imam?

MK: Yes, my own training, because I earned it by working, by doing, by being active in it. As I told you, my father and mother used to take me with them. Well, in addition to that my father took me to wash bodies with him at a very young age. I began to do that with him when I was, I bet, 9 or 10 years old. You know, we have to wash the bodies when...

AN: Yes, of course...

MK: So, I was doing that. I was attending the weddings with him. And soon I was performing part of the ceremony with him, because, of his English. Of course, Arabic was his prime language, although he studied English a lot...

Mike’s response, which makes no mention of religious studies, would not have satisfied his critics. Even to his supporters, who were mostly American-born Muslims of his own generation and their parents, this answer would have sounded incomplete. These Americanized Muslims respected the senior Karoub, and they admired Mike as an exciting public speaker, as a university graduate in a community where such degrees were still uncommon, as a teacher who was truly bilingual in Arabic and English, and as an excellent congregational pastor. He was comfortable with the old, vernacular Islam of his father’s

² This title was not intended to be boastful, nor dismissive of other claimants to the title. Imam Karoub simply did not encounter American-born Muslim leaders like himself among Arab American Muslims. The claim is nonetheless chauvinistic in that it overlooks African American spiritual leaders in Detroit and elsewhere.

generation, but equally conversant with the new, more critical and objectified Islam of the modernists. He was familiar to Muslims of every cultural background in the city, and he found opportunities to bring these different cultural communities together in ways no other imam was capable of. The younger Karoub made the city's Muslims feel connected to each other as members of a specifically American Muslim community. Mike was also very effective at explaining Islam to non-Muslims, to new Muslims, and to young American Muslims in a style that was well suited to addressing multiple forms of curiosity, ignorance, and fear (Abraham family, C. A. Karoub, and S. Khalid interviews).

To his critics, however, most of whom were post war immigrants, or college educated Americans with middle class ambitions, the modest, service-oriented approach to Muslim leadership that both Mike and his father represented seemed out of place. It came across as outmoded, in the case of the elder Karoub, or as insufficiently Islamic, in the case of the son. In the opinion of many immigrants, Mike's American birth (couched in a critique of his Arabic-language skills) disqualified him outright from consideration. His lack of formality, his English fluency, and his American education all placed him at a remove from the textual authority they associated with the *ulema* – the scholarly class of Muslim leaders whose authority lay in their familiarity with Islamic jurisprudence and their ability to render judgments that drew from and contributed to this tradition. One such immigrant, Mike Alcodray, expressed common sentiments when he told me that “Mike Karoub was born here and he did not read or write too much [Arabic] – a very little bit. He couldn't even read the Quran in the right I used to complain to his father about this.”³ Alcodray's primary grievance against the younger Karoub was that he, like his father, was improperly trained and did not have the authority needed to guide the congregation appropriately.

Mike Alcodray: I think he was a man-made shakyh, Hussien Karoub, in his village back home. Then when he came here, the son like started learning from his father. He did not go anywhere, Mike didn't, to learn to become a

³ Imam Mike Karoub was fluent in both colloquial and classical Arabic.

shaykh. This used to bother me a little bit. Right? Everybody want to be a fanatic about things ... but really, it was not right for him to participate as a shaykh.

I got a son-in-law. He is a fanatic. I told him. I said, "Could you tell me what school did you go to? What shaykh taught you these things?"

Alcodray assumes here that religious authority is located in the Muslim world, not the United States. If Hussien Karoub was himself a self-made shaykh, this was a matter for past generations of Muslims to reconcile, but by the 1950s, when the isolation of the community was still real, but no longer an obstacle to finding qualified leadership, "it was not right" for the younger, equally self-made shaykh to replace his father as head of the congregation.

Alcodray, like others I spoke with, made specific comparisons between the city's different shaykhs. Imam Chirri and Ismail were in one category, while Mike Karoub, Hussien Karoub, and Kalil Bazy were in another. Compared to the scholars, self-made imams like Bazy and the Karoubs were "relaxed in their teachings." Imam Chirri was a specialist in Islamic law whose guidance Alcodray found helpful. Equally important was his willingness to shake things up. "Chirri came and started going up and down the street to the coffee houses and tried to pull these people from playing cards," Alcodray remembered, "and drinking and all that, and every week he used to come on Fridays and try to get them out of there." Chirri challenged the status quo,⁴ whereas Mike, like his father, was more accepting and easy going; he was part of the American Muslim community Chirri sought to transform (Alawan, Boomrad, and Caurdy interviews).

The conflict between the Karoub model and that represented by Chirri and Ismail was between two different discursive traditions within Islam – one based on practice and experience, on fluency in local customs, and the other on correct practice and textual authority, on fluency in an ostensibly more global Islam. The recognition and working out of this distinction was a classic instance of what Talal Asad has referred to as "the domain of

⁴ Alcodray was also highly critical of Imam Chirri for reinforcing divisions between Sunni and Shi'a.

orthodoxy,” in which one party asserts its right to “regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones” (1986:15). As we saw in previous chapters, and will see again, this formula played itself out repeatedly in the city’s Muslim congregations.

Leading the Charge

When the Federation of Islamic Associations annual convention was held in Detroit in 1957, it inspired the congregation of the AMS to ask themselves serious questions about the future. They had added a dome and minarets to the façade of the mosque in time for the convention. Now they began to consider new kinds of programming. Imam Chirri’s return to town, his newly launched Sunday school program, and the talk he generated about building a new Shi`a mosque, added to their sense of urgency. Sunnis needed an appropriate response. One plan of action, pursued largely by the Women’s Society, was to concentrate on developing education programs for the young. The other, pursued largely by the all-male board of directors, was to evaluate and improve the congregation’s leadership.

Mike Karoub and his wife, Aida Karoub, began working with the Women’s Society of the mosque to provide a Sunday school program in the late 1950s. Aida Karoub had arrived in Detroit in 1950 from Lebanon as an exchange student at Wayne State University. Aida was brought up in a wealthy, Greek Orthodox household in Beirut. She met Mike through his brothers, who were students at the time, and married him in 1951, against the wishes of her Lebanese family. Aida was still a Christian when she began working closely with her husband at the AMS Women’s Society.⁵ The couple had become interested in providing religious instruction for their children as they began to mature. Together with a few leaders in the Women’s Society, they developed an innovative curriculum that divided the

⁵ Hamed has since converted to Islam. The couple divorced in 1980 and Aida later married Nihad Hamad, an Egyptian immigrant engineer who played an active role in both the AMS and the FIA. He was president of the AMS when it changed hands and became a Yemeni congregation in 1977. He was similarly president of the FIA when it was destroyed by board in-fighting and lawsuits in 1980.

students into three classes, where they were taught using bilingual curricular materials imported from England. A variety of rewards and treats were used to help keep the students motivated.⁶ This program, with its illustrated texts filled with age-appropriate stories for children, was in marked contrast to the mosque's earlier educational efforts, which, according to Sy Abraham were "hit and miss," and usually involved one teacher in a room with students of all ages and skill levels engaged in rote memorization of Arabic scriptures (Abraham family and Jabara interviews). Successful as the program was, Aida confessed that "it was hard for them to have me because, I mean, it was not easy to have a Christian teaching Muslim girls, or the Muslim children at the mosque Sunday school." She also made clear that few people in the congregation at the time had the skills necessary to conduct such classes "because, first of all, I don't think there were many people who were reading at the time or who know how to read" (A. K. Hamed interview).⁷

At this same time, the board of directors began to talk openly about finding a scholar, preacher, and institution-builder who was also an Arabic-speaking Sunni, preferably from Syria or Lebanon, to replace Imam Karoub upon his retirement, thereby avoiding the likelihood of Mike Karoub inheriting the role of imam from his father. This plan was resisted by the Women's Society, who generally supported Hussien Karoub's leadership and that of his son. According to Nabeel Abraham (2000), the conflict ensued in the following manner:

The men demanded the "preservation" of (in actuality, a return to) "authentic" Islamic traditions, while the Women's Society insisted on maintaining the status quo. The men betrayed their true feelings when they complained that some of the women were "too aggressive," faulting Imam Karoub for failing to preserve "traditional Islamic doctrine," which they

⁶ Aida is very proud of the innovations she brought to the mosque and those who taught and studied with her were also appreciative of the materials she identified. Similar materials were also distributed by the FIA. The use of these materials at the AMS was novel at the time (Abraham family, and Boumrad, and A. Hamed interviews).

⁷ This Sunday school program continued and was later taken over by a younger generation of American-born volunteers, still under the guidance of Imam Mike Karoub. Aida's comments were addressed to the late 1950s and early 1960s, but other members of the congregation are likely to protest her characterization of the community, even if she is describing events in 1960. For example, all of the American-born generation would have been able to read and write in English. Presumably she is referring here to reading proficiency in Arabic.

believed resulted in the women's assertiveness in congregational matters. As the head of the congregation, the men reasoned, Karoub could have used his influence and knowledge of "the traditions" (sacred texts) to curtail the demands and independence of the leaders of the women's auxiliary. This had not happened, according to the mosque's male leaders, because the imam lacked sufficient "authority" (i.e. his command of theological and legal matters was wanting) (287-288).

In fact, Karoub shared the women's commitment to the creative, active use of the mosque as a social as well as a religious space. The dome, minarets, and *musalla* did not prevent this usage; rather, they made it easier to keep secular and religious spaces within the institution separate, while reminding those who hosted social events, like weddings, in the mosque, that the facility they were using was also a house of worship and that, by holding their functions here, they were participating in the life of the Muslim community.

The Women's Society contributed to the success of the AMS through their fund raising events, the youth activities they sponsored, and the construction projects, large and small, they paid for. Ardela Jabara, known as "one of the seven women who held up the church," told me that the Women's Society was composed of people "who did all the cookin', all the work, and everything else" (Jabara interview).⁸ Many of these women were pious Muslims who prayed daily, fasted during Ramadan, and educated their children about Islam. Most of them, however, did not pray regularly, but expressed their faith and commitment to the Muslim community through their work for the Society. Their identification with Islam was social in nature, and they met their religious obligations by facilitating a healthy social life for local Muslims. They fasted during Ramadan, for example, and broke the fast "with a guest at the table" (Miriam Abraham). They cooked for mosque banquets. They organized, hosted, and sold tickets for a popular ethnic festival each summer, which featured music,

⁸ When I asked Jabara to name the seven women, she had a bit of difficulty. These names shifted over time and she did not want to leave anyone out. These names are provided in their colloquial forms: Umm Omer (Mrs. Okdie), Umm Alia Ecie, Marat Said Ali, Essie Abraham, Miriam Simon, Gladys Ecie, Ardella Jabara, Fatme Boumrad, Mrs. Caurdy, Hind Balooly, and Mrs. Boshammy. Jabara was treasurer of the Women's Society for roughly 35 years (Jabara interview).

dancing, sack races, and generous amounts of food. They left the “business of running the mosque” to the men, but it is hard to determine which association – the men’ or women’s – actually raised more money toward the upkeep of the institution. Ironically, it was a Christian woman, Aida Karoub, who turned the efforts of the Women’s Society toward religious education by her involvement in the Sunday school program. Aida was an energetic young woman, and she quickly involved herself in the life of the mosque beyond the Sunday school program. She joined the Women’s Society, becoming one of the group’s best ticket salespeople by reaching out to members of the Arab Christian community, and to other non-Muslims, in order to broaden the base of affiliates and supporters the mosque relied upon (A. Hamed interview).

The financial strength of the Women’s Society helped empower them in relation to the male board of directors. So too did the amount of time and energy the “seven sisters” and many others invested in the institution. In some ways, these women embodied the mosque and dominated its social agenda, a state of affairs simply unheard of in Lebanon and Syria in the 1950s, where mosques were the preserve of men and even the most devout women tended to pray at home. While the extent of the women’s involvement eventually became problematic for the men of the AMS, it was difficult for them to vote against the interests of the Women’s Society lest they alienate the women, lose access to their fundraising skills, and weaken the institution as a whole. Certainly Imam Karoub, whose most avid supporters were women, made no attempt to restrict their increasingly public role, which he seemed actually to endorse.

This pattern of increased influence for women in immigrant congregations (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish) was common in the United States at mid century, often because these institutions were responsible for the social reproduction of entire ethnic communities and not just their religious beliefs (Warner 1993a). Immigrant men, even if they opposed the involvement of women, were seldom able to thwart it. They needed the logistical and

financial support women could provide (Warner 1993b).⁹ Empowering women, over time, became a survival strategy for immigrant religious institutions. The situation at the AMS was symptomatic of these trends. It also reflected a division between those who had been in the United States longer (who tended to be tolerant of greater female influence), and those who were more recently arrived (who thought women should not be prominent in mosque affairs). At the heart of this tension were conflicting ideas about how mosque spaces should be inhabited.¹⁰ Would the AMS continue to function as both a religious institution (led by men) and a social club (reliant on women's labor and financial support), or would Arab world "norms" reassert themselves in the mosque, now that new immigrants were arriving in Dearborn and becoming active in the mosque? What role would Imam Hussien Karoub play in this controversy, and what role would his son, Mike, play in adjudicating it?

Despite the success of the new Sunday school, and perhaps out of concern over Mike Karoub's growing involvement in the institution, the board of the mosque took decisive action against the Karoubs in 1959, while Imam Hussien Karoub was making the *hajj*, a yearlong trip that included visits to England, Italy, Syria, and Egypt. In Imam Karoub's absence, the board voted to lease the mosque to the Albanian Islamic Center, whose new facility was still being planned. Imam Ismail led prayer services at the mosque during this time, but most other activities were on hold. When the AMS board learned that the Egyptian government had authorized the FIA to bring four Al Azhar-trained Muslim clerics to serve in American mosques, they quickly petitioned the FIA and Al Azhar to receive one of these

⁹ See also Sheba George (1998) and Sheryl Gilkes (1995).

¹⁰ In Sunni tradition, it is believed that men receive an extra blessing for joining congregational prayers, but women do not. This is one reason why the participation of women in mosque activities, including prayer, is not common in most of the Muslim majority world. Religious instruction is often provided in public schools, rather than in mosques, which also reduces the participation of children in the regular activities of mosques. Both of these patterns are undergoing transformation in many Muslim societies.

scholar/imams.¹¹ Dr. Ahmad Muhanna arrived in Dearborn late in 1959 and assumed religious leadership of the AMS. He led Friday prayers, offered special religious classes to augment the curriculum of the Sunday school, and provided other services in the community as requested. According to Aida Karoub, this development did not sit well with the Karoub family.

Aida Karoub Hamed: Certain people at the mosque, certain names, wanted someone from Egypt. His name was Dr. Muhanna. Al-Azhar sent him to teach or to be the imam and they didn't tell my father-in-law or they didn't tell my husband either, because they thought they were kind of stabbed in the back. I mean especially Imam Hussien, my father-in-law.

And you know I was young, very emotional, very excitable, I guess.

I said, "He is not staying! I am going to make sure he goes back where he ..."

So, I said, "Listen. This is not right what is happening."

Aida continued at length, detailing the steps she took to send Muhanna back to Egypt.

If you do not attend . If you do not sell tickets. If you do not do all the things that you did before... Actually, I almost quit, but I did not. I just stopped. I wasn't selling tickets. I wasn't doing fund raisers. And there were very few people, and there was no money coming.

I wasn't trying to hurt him directly. I just stopped working, And when somebody who does all the work stops working...

SH:... people notice.

AKH: [...] My father-in-law went back to the mosque. My husband said, "Since he didn't know English well, I will be in English. He will be in Arabic." We had no complaints. And that is how it stayed... For quite a while.

While Aida takes full credit for having sent Dr. Muhanna packing, she does not mention that he remained in Detroit for the full five years of his contract, leaving town only after it had

¹¹ Edward Curtis has pointed out that this offer on Egypt's part was undertaken as part of the "Arab Cold War" (see also Kerr 1965), a conflict between Egypt and Saudi Arabia over the hearts and minds of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Egypt represented the side of revolutionary socialism, pan-Arabism, and the non-aligned states, while Saudi Arabia was pro-western, pro-monarchy, and anti-communist (2007).

expired. Muhanna got along well with people at the mosque, including Mike and Aida Karoub, but he was especially popular among newer immigrants, who were pleased with his credentials, pleased with his authoritative manner, and pleased that the mosque now had a progressive imam similar to the city's other Muslim clerics. Atif Wasfi, an anthropologist who conducted research in Dearborn in 1963, claimed that few people attended the classes taught by Muhanna, and that the Friday congregational prayers, in particular, were poorly attended. He attributes the poor attendance to bickering between the families, to a Shi'a "boycott" of the Sunni mosque, and to "the weakness of the sense of religiosity in the community" (1964:133). The Shi'a were busy putting the final touches on the Islamic Center in the early 1960s, and Friday jumaa prayers were not privileged in Detroit during this period (Sunday was more popular and convenient), so it seems that bickering between the mosque's different factions is likely to have worn at the edges of Muhanna's support.

Although Muhanna was in every way the antidote to the self-made status of the two Karoubs, he did nothing to curtail the participation of the Women's Society in the life of the congregation. He did not intervene in the management of the mosque or in fund raising efforts; nor did he take any steps to challenge the status quo. Near the end of his five year contract, he requested and was denied a position on the board of directors of the AMS, apparently out of fear he would "take over" the mosque (Abraham 2000). Disappointed in this outcome, which may have had some bearing on the status of his work visa, Muhanna returned to Egypt in 1964.¹² Hussien Karoub returned to his position as presiding imam at the AMS, and remained there until his death in 1973.

I asked Aida Karoub Hamed to explain to me how and when Mike Karoub assumed the title of imam.

¹² Hussein Elhaje mentioned that Mike Karoub "turned the guy in to immigration because he took his job away from him" (Elhaje interview), which implies that some people shared Aida's point of view on this matter.

AKH: When his father died. His father died and they needed an imam because there was nobody at the mosque. So the board met, whatever board they had at the time. It was a good board, all Bekaai, all people who built the mosque really, and they all said – no women of course – and they decided that, they voted on, they wanted Muhammad Karoub to be imam at the mosque. And then he started the sermons. An imam in Islam doesn't ... nobody has to appoint him, nobody has to give him a diploma. He is on his own. It is not like you have to be ordained, nothing like that. Since then, which would have been '73 or '74, he worked a lot. He spoke at every church that invited him. He went and I went to. We went together.

Dearborn's American mosque finally had an American-born imam. Mike Karoub had already transformed the position of imam into one that mirrored the profile of the Protestant clergy, especially clergy from non-denominational, locally autonomous churches, where efficacy as a preacher, teacher, pastor, and fund-raiser took precedence over seminary training, ordination, and conformity to a denominational hierarchy. In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, Imam Mohammad Karoub was a strong advocate for Muslims in American public life, and for Arab political causes as well. Since 1959, Mike Karoub had been the editor of *The Muslim Star*, the quarterly newsletter of the FIA. It was the first national Muslim American publication, and it is the best surviving record of the forward momentum this organization exhibited during the 1960s, then rapidly lost in the 1970s. In its early issues, the *Star's* pages are filled with mosque openings, news of fund raising campaigns, announcements of the hiring of new imams, and notices about the educational achievements of American Muslims (especially those committed to studying Islam abroad). In the 1970s these announcements continued, but with reduced frequency. They were replaced by political commentary and prepackaged news from Pakistan, Palestine, Iran, and Egypt, and by announcements that the organization would be opening new offices to counter stereotyping about Islam and to address the American media's intensifying bias against Muslims around the globe.¹³

¹³ These newsletters have not been accessible to scholars, but the Islamic Center of America and Adnan Chirri, Imam Chirri's son, have donated a large collection of papers to the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan where dozens of the *Muslim Star* will soon be accessible.

A Muslim Transit Point in Detroit

The center of polycultural Islam in Detroit in the 1950s-70s was located not in Dearborn's Arab enclave, but in Virginia Park, a small, centrally located neighborhood in Detroit that was home to the Mumineen Mosque, the city's first congregation of black Sunni Muslims. This mosque was founded by an American-born imam who, like Mike Karoub, faced constant challenges to his authority as a Muslim leader. Hajj Sammsan Abdullah came to Detroit in the late 1940s, roughly when Imams Chirri and Ismail arrived. No existing congregation of Muslims had invited him to town, but he was inspired by the energy and potential of Detroit's black community, and he wanted to establish a mosque on their behalf. In a religious tract he disseminated when he first arrived, Sammsan described himself as "Hajj Ismail Sammsan, American citizen, ancestral or lineage, 'Arab', from the 'Tribe of Shabazz', birthed in the State of Arkansas, May the 1st, 1894" (The Universal Muslim Brotherhood of al-Islam in America," collection of Ihsan Bagby). This reference to the tribe of Shabazz suggests that Sammsan might have belonged to the Nation of Islam at some point in his past, but he staked his claim to leadership in Detroit on having made the hajj to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and on his faith in the "universal" brotherhood of Islam.

Hajj Sammsan established the Universal Muslim Brotherhood of Al-Islam of America in 1948 or 1949, when he, and a small gathering of local Muslims who worshipped and studied together, raised enough money to purchase a spacious duplex in the once prosperous district of Virginia Park (H. Sharieff interview).¹⁴ The house at 1554 Virginia Park Avenue doubled as Hajj Sammsan's residence and site of the Universal Muslim Brotherhood Mosque, an organization whose name changed several times in subsequent years

¹⁴ Much of the money seems to have come from Sammsan himself, who suffered a debilitating work injury and received a lump sum disability payment from his employer. Apparently he was advised to have his leg amputated, but he did not. "He prayed on it," said Haitama Sharieff and when his leg healed, Sammsan used this money to purchase the duplex. He walked with a limp thereafter, and does not seem to have sought employment again. A similar story is told by the members of the AMS in Dearborn (see page Chapter IV) (Sharieff interview).

and came eventually to be known as Masjid al-Mu'mineen (the believers' mosque).¹⁵ The core congregation of Masjid al-Mu'mineen was made up of African American converts. Their newness to the faith made religious education crucial to the life of the mosque, and Islamic teaching was pursued at Masjid al-Mu'mineen with a diligence unparalleled in other Detroit mosques. The members of al-Mu'mineen were mostly newcomers to Detroit, and their status as Muslims placed them at a social remove not only from their home communities in the rural South, but from other black migrants to Detroit, who were overwhelmingly Christian.¹⁶ In effect, Masjid al-Mu'mineen was a mosque for migrants, and it resembled the city's Arab and Albanian mosques in the strong emphasis it placed on social events and mutual aid. It was a center of political activism for the black and other Muslims who worshipped there, and it had a strong women's auxiliary that held fundraisers, cooked holiday meals, and provided recreational programs for the congregation's youth.

For the people of Masjid al-Mu'mineen, the 1950s and 1960s were years very unlike those experienced by the city's Arab and Albanian Muslims. The economic prosperity of the period led to new opportunities for the white working class, yet, as Sugrue contends, "African American workers bore the brunt of economic change ... [with] options limited by discrimination and their jobs threatened by deindustrialization" (1996:155). Given their experience of racism, lack of education, and disintegrating labor conditions, the small congregation at al-Mu'mineen was sympathetic to the nationalist and separatist orientation of the NOI. Their conversion experiences, however, were different in important ways from those common in the NOI. In their decision to embrace a universal religious tradition, Robert Dannin argues, groups like al-Mu'mineen sought to "resolve the historical tensions of

¹⁵ It was also known as the Hajj Sammsan Abdullah Mosque and then as the Universal Consolidation of Islam, HOLY MOSQUE, before it settled into its final name in 1966 (Incorporation papers 1952, 1964, 1966).

¹⁶ Haitama Sharieff mentioned the suspicion and hostility her husband's family expressed toward Islam. When she too became a Muslim in 1948, her mother-in-law asked her, "Isn't it true that Muslims like to jump out windows and kill themselves."

African-American society by concluding that liberation from racial domination and spiritual redemption are one and the same. The end goals require an indefatigable dedication to transform oneself and one's fellows. 'Verily, Allah does not change the state of a people until they change themselves inwardly' (Quran 13:12) is by far the most frequently quoted scriptural passage among African-American Muslims" (2001: 7). The congregation looked inward to transform the self, and outward as well, linking themselves to a global community of believers.

The nuances that distinguished the beliefs and political leanings of Masjid al-Mu'mineen from those of the NOI were lost on the Detroit police, however, and on the FBI, whose officers contributed to the group's sense of isolation and persecution. Law enforcement agencies had been interested in the Nation of Islam since its earliest days, and they were seldom interested in separating black Sunni Muslims from their surveillance programs (Evanzz 1999).¹⁷ The handful of (now very elderly) black Sunnis who were active in Detroit prior to al-Mu'mineen report that their community was slow to organize not because of its small size, or lack of funds, but because of the persistent intervention of law enforcement agents, who tried to break up their meetings. In an interview with Akil Fahd (personal communication), Brother Alahab recalled the elaborate evasive maneuvers the group took in the 1940s whenever they gathered for prayer. They would announce the location at the last minute, shuttling frequently between homes, coffeehouses, and other sites, so the small band could avoid government informants and other interfering individuals (sometimes associated with the NOI).

¹⁷ Police interest in the Nation of Islam community began in 1930 and '31 with Fard Mohammad's close association with the Japanese radical Satohata Takahashi, who established the Society for the Development of Our Own in Detroit in 1930. It was exacerbated in 1932 when an acolyte of Allah's Temple of Islam (the institutional precursor of the NOI), Robert Karriem, committed human sacrifice in his apartment before a stunned gathering of new members. Karriem thought he was following Fard Mohammed's directives. This incident led to Fard's eventual flight from Detroit and ultimate disappearance. The combination of anti-American (and pro-Japanese) political rhetoric with criminal behavior such as murder and truancy guaranteed government interest in the early NOI. Karl Evanzz's 1999 biography of Elijah Mohammad is pieced together largely from police and FBI files and is the best source on these investigations.

This misrecognition by government agents haunted the Mu'mineen congregation throughout its history. When the association changed their name in 1964, after an apparent lawsuit and factional split,¹⁸ Hajj Sammsan included the following statement of purpose in the organization's articles of incorporation:

To promote the Religion of Al-Islam in its entirety, as expounded in the Holy Qur'an, and illustrated by the Holy Prophet Muhamad over 1300 years ago. Be it resolved, that the incorporated and members of this corporation are not connected with the Black Muslims, nor any other Cult, at home, or abroad, directly, or indirectly, nor any secret society, societies, or the Communist Party. Be it further resolved, that this Religion of Islam, is not prejudiced towards races, colors, language, or national origin. This great religion Islam, abolishes all invidious and class distinctions, thus lays down the basis of a vast brotherhood, in which all men, women, have equal rights, so much so, that no one can trample upon the rights of another, and all praise is due to Allah! The ruler and sustainer of all the Worlds (October 7, 1964).

Written after the Nation of Islam and other countercultural and anti-establishment organizations were included in the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) – a covert operation intended to subvert groups ranging from the Black Panthers to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference – this statement is phrased as an antidote to multiple misidentifications. Hajj Sammsan was eager to assert that the Mu'mineen Mosque was not connected to the Nation of Islam (the Black Muslims), nor to any other cults of interest to the government, including foreign religious associations like the Tablighi Jumaat (who will be discussed later in this chapter), nor to the Communist Party. To members of the NOI – and perhaps to the city's other Muslims – Hajj Sammsan was equally eager to affirm that Islam did not condone racism or other variants of discrimination and prejudice. He identified his association with mainstream Islam in the clearest way possible,¹⁹ seeking to correct those in

¹⁸ In addition to the statement of purpose provided here, the papers also state that “members considered by the Incorporation must be of good repute, immuned against sueing (sic) at law any member of this body of Islam, or the Mosque itself. All grievances should any arise, must be settled by a Imam, or the Holy Qur'an” (sic, incorporation papers, October 7, 1964).

¹⁹ It should be noted that by the 1960s many members of the Nation of Islam in Detroit were so misinformed about Islam that they considered Elijah Mohammed to be the Prophet Mohammad referred to in the Quran and Fard Mohammed to have been God (*Allah*) (Saleem Rahmann and Gary al-Kassab interview).

the black community, law enforcement, and the Muslim community at large who were unwilling to see Masjid al-Mu'mineen for what it was: an American mosque for all Muslims.²⁰ Such grand disclaimers notwithstanding, the community continued to attract the unwanted attention of the FBI until its demise in the late 1970s. Tahira Hassanein Khalid, the daughter of Osman Hassanien, the mosque's long-time president, was aware that the group's mail was tampered with and that some of the Tablighi visitors and new converts who stayed in the mosque for brief periods were government informants.²¹ Quoting her father's reaction to this situation, she said, "Bottom line, the only thing they're gonna see us doing, and I'm gonna be clear about that, is that they're gonna see us praying. They're gonna see us serving dinner. They're gonna see me killin' a goat [slaughtering on the holiday for distribution to the hungry]" (T.H. Khalid interview). In the early 1960s, when Hajj Sammsan's statement was made, Detroit's non-black mosques did not yet harbor these concerns about law enforcement interference.

Despite multiple pressures to do otherwise, the Masjid al-Mu'mineen congregation rejected racial and other forms of isolationism and opened their doors to all Muslims in the city. While the congregants who supported and identified closely with the mosque were African American, Al-Mu'mineen was also home to foreign students who studied at Wayne State University, to an initially small community of Asian immigrants who settled in Detroit in the 1950s, and to members of the Tablighi Jama'at, a South Asian revivalist, missionary movement whose members began visiting Detroit on lengthy *dawa* (Islamic propagation)

²⁰ The COINTELPRO infiltration and disruption of the NOI was among the FBI's best funded operations and the agency remained involved in this work up until the NOI's dissolution in the 1970s. Their counterinsurgency program was so involved that members of the FBI later took credit for the succession of Warith Deen Mohammed after his father's death and for having steered the movement into the fold of Sunni Islam (Curtis 2002).

²¹ In the 1970s, a new convert who had been staying at the mosque for several months received a returned letter from the postal service. The letter was addressed to the FBI. T. Khalid and some of the women who lived at the mosque decided to open the letter. It was a report on the congregation that described them in dismissive language, but described them also as harmless (T. Khalid interview).

missions from Pakistan in 1952.²² The person most remembered today for having lent the mosque this air of openness and welcome was not Hajj Sammsan, but Osman Hassanein, who joined the mosque in the early 1950s shortly after his conversion to Islam. Hassanein befriended Mike Karoub in the 1950s, and the two worked together over the next 20 years to build up Detroit's polycultural Muslim establishment. Masjid al-Mu'mineen was an anchor for this diverse network of believers. While the American Muslim Society considered itself Detroit's *masjid al-`am*, the city's central or official mosque, Masjid al-Mu'mineen played an equally important role as a meeting ground for Muslims who did not have personal ties to Detroit's immigrant and ethnic communities, and for Muslims who wanted to establish ties across these communities.

Al-Mu'mineen's policy of openness came at a price. Its educational programs were often hierarchical and culturally biased, with foreign Muslims assuming authority over American converts. While this tendency was appreciated (and pedagogically necessary) in the beginning, it became frustrating for American Muslims who wanted to develop their own understanding of the Quran and its relevance to everyday life in Detroit. Al-Mu'mineen was clearly an important mosque in Detroit, and nationally, but its history has not yet been written; in fact, it is completely absent from the oeuvre of Muslim-American studies, an omission that would be difficult to explain were it not for the fact that so much of the material available to scholars of Islam in North America has been sifted through the filter of Arab American Studies (and Arab Americanists have apparently been unaware of this mosque) or has focused primarily on the Nation of Islam, a movement hostile to black Sunnism. Masjid al-Mu'mineen played a significant role in the history of the AMS, however, in effect creating a (now forgotten) bridge between Arab American and black Muslim histories. I will explore

²² The Tablighi Jama'at began sending missionaries to the United States in 1952, the same year they began coming to Detroit. Barbara Metcalf (1996) provides an overview of this organization and their mission work in the United States, as does Postum (1992).

this link below, but before doing so, it is necessary to consider the intertwined careers of Hajj Osman Hassanien and Masjid al-Mu'mineen.

Journey to the Heart of Islam

Osman Hassanien (born Oscar Hudson) converted to Islam in 1953 at a moment of personal crisis. His conversion was part of a larger 20th century pattern in which American blacks were attracted to Islam even though (indeed because) their conversion made them a double minority (Dannin 2001, Leonard 2003, Curtis 2002, Rouse 2004). Many scholars of Islam and the black American experience have sought to explain why individuals would decide to compound their stigma in this way.²³ Jackson's list (2004:44), summarized below, is among the most recent and thorough, borrowing as it does from earlier studies.

- 1 – Islam was both “African” and “Eastern,” and came with a non-European language as well.
- 2 – It was not practiced by “whites” (or at least not by Northern European, “American” whites).²⁴
- 3 – It was associated with resistance movements that maintained a sharp division between insiders and outsiders.
- 4 – It was tied to a historically significant, non-European world civilization.
- 5 – It was deeply fraternal.
- 6 – Its basic teachings were easy to grasp relative to Christianity.
- 7 – It conformed well to a conservative ethos common in the black community.
- 8 – It included Biblical tropes and language familiar to Christians, and thus was easily incorporated into ideas of redemption and divine retribution already common among blacks.
- 9 – As an object of Western fear and contempt, Islam was attractive to those suffering from displacement and moving toward a separatist political stance.
- 10 – Islam as practiced by the majority of the world's Muslims was a non-hierarchical tradition, without a unified body to police or represent its claims and teachings.

²³ See especially Turner 1997, Lincoln 1961, and Curtis 2002.

²⁴ In my conversations with Muslim converts and the children of converts, the segregation of Detroit's Christian, especially Roman Catholic, churches came up frequently as something that frustrated people and encouraged them to seek religious experiences elsewhere. One church on Woodward Ave., for example, had different hours for black and white services. “That's just not right”, said Haitama Shareiff, when explaining her husband's search. While “white” institutions like the Catholic Church were viewed as racist, independent black churches were often viewed as exploitative (H. Sharieff, S. Khalid, and T. Khalid interviews).

Each of these features made Islam attractive to Oscar Hudson, if not when he first embraced the faith, eventually over the course of his life as a Muslim. I recount Hudson's conversion narrative because it facilitates a deeper understanding of the role he played in shaping Masjid al-Mu'mineen and the larger public culture of Islam in Detroit.

Oscar Hudson was born in Bishop, Georgia, in 1922 or 1923, during a flu epidemic that left him an orphan at 8 months. He was shipped off to an aunt in Dayton, Ohio, who was neglectful and abusive of the boy. His daughter, Tahira Hassanein Khalid, remembers him reflecting on his childhood and asking, "Didn't anybody see me? Couldn't anybody see how hungry, how ragged I was?" "Part of his effort in Islam," she continued, was to compensate for these childhood experiences, "to feed people. That's what he did at the masjid; that's how he got people to come in, allowed them to come in and feel a part of a group" (Tahira H. Khalid interview). Hudson's extended family eventually took pity on him and sent him to Detroit to live with one of his married sisters. There his negative experiences were shaped not by domestic life, but by racial exclusion and discrimination in the world around him. He enlisted in the U.S. Army and fought in the Philippines during WWII in a segregated unit, in part to flee harsh conditions in Detroit, but the racism he witnessed in the military was horrifying to him.

Hudson returned to Detroit after the war, married, and found work in the foundry at Ford's River Rouge plant. Foundry jobs were the most physically demanding in the factory, and they were usually reserved for black workers, and later for non-English speaking immigrants (Georgakis and Surkin 1998). Hudson was nonetheless grateful to be paid the same as white workers; he was able to provide a comfortable living to his growing family. Rather than settle in crowded, "second hand" housing in the city, "houses used up by white people," (T. Khalid interview) Hudson purchased a post-war bungalow in the new subdivision of Ecorse, a working class suburb southwest of Detroit, and raised his family

there. Plagued by the demons of his childhood, and struggling to cope with physically challenging work, Hudson became a chronic binge drinker, neglecting his family as a result. After tolerating his worsening situation for several years, Hudson's wife gave him an ultimatum in 1952: sober up, or leave. The thought of abandoning his three young daughters – as he had been abandoned – brought Hudson to the breaking point, but he was unable to give up alcohol on his own.

One evening, as he came out of the factory gates, he was approached by a Muslim co-worker.²⁵

Tahira H. Khalid: ...who asked, "What's the matter? You look so unhappy." And Dad, not being himself, [said] "I'm just jeopardizing my family, I gotta stop this drinking. I can't do this anymore." And the brother said, "Well, I've got a group of brothers who are studying another religion and we gotta understand our identity. We're not who these people say we are, clowns and animals and all of the things ... alcoholics, just lowlifes. Come study with me."

I was five [years old when this happened]. And it was Hajj Sammsan's Mosque at 1554 Virginia Park, and he held classes over there ... and they had readings, and they would teach us about Islam, the principles of Islam, that all human beings are created equal, that Allah loves us. There are tests in life, you know. This was our test. It sort of started to make sense to Dad that you couldn't, in order to be a good Muslim, drink, eat pork. They started laying the laws down, and Dad really tried to struggle with that. They started teaching us Arabic.

In his early years at the Mu'mineen Mosque, Hudson changed his name to Hassanein.

"They'd all gotten rid of their names," Khalid said, "because the Sheikh said, 'You have the name of your slave master.' Our last name was Hudson. There were no Hudsons in Africa; that's a Dutch name. So my Dad loved that. [She puts on his voice.] 'Hell, yeah!'" Thus he became Osman Hassanein.²⁶

²⁵ It is likely that this co-worker was Mustapha Bey, who was known to solicit new members outside the city's different factories. Brother Bey walked Brother Sharieff through his early introduction to Islam in the 1940s, before Hajj Sammsan came to Detroit (H. Sharieff interview).

²⁶ Taking on new names like this was a critical mark of distinction for new Muslims. The practice began with the Moorish Science Temple, continued with the Ahmadiyya and the NOI movements, and was also common among Sunni Muslims. Often names were chosen for their meaning in Arabic or their associations with important historical figures, but sometimes, as was the case here, Arabic names

Khalid also remembers missionaries from the Tablighi Jama'at leading educational programs during her early years at the mosque. The family lived socially in a Muslim-only environment, one shaped not by race or ethnicity, but by religion. The Tablighis, a transnational Islamic revival movement founded in Delhi, India, in the 1920s, sent their members on *dawa* [missionary] trips, eventually around the world. Tablighis focused their energy on educating other Muslims and reviving the traditions of the faith rather than on converting new communities to Islam. Detroit, with its large and well known community of Muslims, was a center of their American campaigns when they began sending missionaries to the United States from India and Pakistan in 1952. By the 1960s, Tablighi missionaries were also Arab, African American, African, and Indonesian (Metcalf 1996). A steady stream of Tablighis moved through the Mu'mineen Mosque from 1952 on, staying in vacant rooms in the basement, teaching Islam, nurturing the faith among these new believers, and providing a community of support for converts and their families, people who were often ostracized in the larger community for making a leap of faith.

This period was an intense one for the Hassanein family.

THK: A lot times we would go [to the Masjid] every Friday night; we would go Wednesday nights. Our life revolved around it at that point. On Wednesday nights we'd study Arabic, Friday nights *tafseer* [Quranic interpretation] as we understood it, and Sunday you'd have some kind of little meeting. And you had the food. It was emulating the families that you had broken away from, not only biologically, but socially too.

After several years of learning about Islam and getting to know the local Muslim community, Hassanein was still drinking. "He was, to be very honest, still very tortured about things, the pain in his heart from being an orphan, the racism. So the brothers said, 'You know what you need to do? You need to make Hajj. That will solve a lot of your problems.'" Hassanein made the hajj in 1957, but his travels did not end there. They included a *dawa* trip to Pakistan with

were chosen that resembled a person's birth name. Hassanein did not change his name legally, he was simply known as Hassanein in the Muslim social circles he moved in. Tahira Hassanein Khalid changed her name legally when she was married. Her husband also changed his name legally to Selim Khalid.

a group of Tablighis. This trip was one of utter deprivation. Significantly, Hassanein had no access to alcohol, and the missionaries ate little more than what was given to them as charity, slept on the floor in rural mosques, and were not adequately dressed for the cold of a Pakistani winter, or the heat of a Saudi Arabian spring. The experience was transformative for Hassanein. He shed his skin on the journey, his daughter told me, and became a new man.

THK: Something died there. It was unbelievable. Everybody could see that.

And Dad even said about the racism, he said, “You know? I’ve come to the conclusion: racism’s bad ... but as long as you’ve got a bathroom and some soap, [Laughter] you can deal with it. [He is referring to the hardships he faced in Pakistan.] I’m not really that mad about it. I can deal with this, you know. We have to get out here and vote and get ourselves together.”

And around that time, the South was exploding and Martin Luther [King] was coming up, and Dad was all into that.

He said, “I can deal with some racist,” excuse me, “white boys. I cannot deal with drinking water out of a tin cup, being in the back – I can’t, I just can’t do it. We still have more going for us here than they have anywhere in the world. I can work with that.”

And he, and then...

SH: That’s an amazing conclusion to come to.

THK: But that’s the same thing Malcolm [X] came to – that that is part of *this* reality. It is not the reality of the universe. And from what I understand, and Dad would always say, when you are truly ready for reform, “Allah *ta’ali* [on high] will send you something to help you make that reform.”

Dad couldn’t walk. His feet swoll up trying to go around the Ka’aba [while on the hajj in Mecca], trying to make the different [stages] ... especially that one between Marwa and Safa [two stages of the pilgrim’s journey]. A white man held him up.

And Dad would say, “Allah sent me something to get out of my madness. He sent a European, the very thing I resented the most, is what kept me on my feet, drug me around.”

And they stayed in contact for years until that man died or whatever. I think that man was from Grosse Pointe.

Hassanein’s experience of the hajj and living as a missionary in Pakistan changed him into a man who embraced Islam fully, into a leader of al-Mu’mineen congregation, and into a

cultural ambassador for the foreign Muslim population circulating in Detroit during the late 1950s and 1960s. What he saw overseas helped the Hajj place his own understanding of anti-black racism in a new framework, one that would no longer cripple his life. Hajj Hassanien was now ready to explore the “reality of the universe,” and he did so by opening his heart, his family, and his mosque to the Muslim community of Detroit.

Brothers from the East

Those who were active at al-Mu'mineen Mosque in the 1950s and 1960s describe a facility organized somewhat differently from the mosques in Dearborn and Harper Woods. Rather than collect dues from members, a few elderly members of the congregation, including Hajj Sammsan, rented rooms in the Virginia Park house. Members were also expected to pay their annual *zakat* (tithe or alms) to the mosque.²⁷ The facility also let out rooms in its basement to traveling Tablighi Jumaat missionaries. With so many residents, the mosque was able to approximate the functioning of mosques in many Muslim-majority countries; it was open for each of the five daily prayers, from the earliest to the latest, and for Friday and weekend services.²⁸ Hajj Sammsan was “the big cheese” at the mosque, Haitama Sharieff told me, “but the prayers were called and led by the brothers from the East.” She does not remember the mosque having a single imam during this period, but an ever changing array of teachers. These men included graduate students at Wayne State University who frequented the mosque, visiting Tablighis, leaders from the city’s other mosques, like Imam

²⁷ Giving *zakat* is among the primary obligations of all Muslims. Customs associated with the tradition vary widely, but the majority of American Sunni Muslims donate a percentage of their wealth to a variety of charities directed toward the poor. Supporting mosques as Hajj Sammsan requested his congregation do, was an innovative application of the tithe at the time. Allowing Tablighi Jumaat missionaries to stay in the mosque, or elderly members of the congregation who were without support, justified these donations as almsgiving in a more classical sense. Today, most Muslim American non-profits issue statements assuring would-be donors that contributions toward their operating support qualify also as *zakat*.

²⁸ This does not mean that the mosque was open for all 5 daily prayers, but that the building could be opened and made available to them at any time.

Karoub, and black American imams whose names and backgrounds she could no longer recall. These instructors (who were often students at the mosque as well as teachers) would call the prayers, organize *tafseer* (Quranic exegesis) classes, provide Arabic instruction, conduct classes on the history of Islam and the Muslim community, and lead the prayer itself on a daily basis, as well as on Fridays or during the weekend services. The heavy emphasis placed on classes and learning, most of which was oriented to adults rather than children, set al-Mu'mineen apart from the city's other mosques. While many of the teachers were foreigners, or new immigrants, Hajj Sammsan and other leaders from the local black community also held classes. As a center of Muslim intellectual exchange and polycultural interaction, there was simply nothing else like Masjid al-Mu'mineen in Detroit.

Yet the congregation also resembled the city's other mosques in vital ways. Islamic holidays were celebrated on the weekends, rather than on their actual day due to the work and school schedules of the congregation. Sunday services and Friday evening services took precedence over the jumaa noonday congregational prayers. The women's auxiliary played a significant role in raising money for the mosque, and it did so through hosting bake sales, picnics, and banquets. The American women of the congregation would bring collard greens, chitlins, and fried fish or chicken, while the Indian and Pakistani women would bring biryani, lamb, and other "eastern foods" (H. Sharieff interview). The mosque hosted funerals and, much less frequently, weddings. The basement was occasionally rented out for social functions. There were not enough children for the congregation to have organized Sunday school classes. Instead, families like the Hassaniens attended programs at the Dearborn mosques, and others were taught in the homes of immigrant and native-born volunteers.²⁹ The local congregation was small, with roughly 20 families who were active in a sustained way from the 1950s through the 1970s, but many hundreds of university students, travelers,

²⁹ Interestingly, the children of Asian families residing in the city did not join in educational programs at the mosque.

and single Muslims also attended the mosques during these years (T. Khalid and H. Sharieff interviews).

After his return from the hajj, Hassanein also became a leader of Masjid al-Mu'mineen, and he engaged more actively in the extra-mosque activities of the Muslim community in Detroit. "What happened was people started coming through Mu'mineen Mosque – guess the word got out, and Dad started traveling and meeting more people ... and what brought us together, um ... we lived in Ecorse, so we studied a lot in Dearborn" (T. Khalid interview). Khalid remembers studying with the Karoubs and with Dr. Muhanna, who was appreciated as a non-judgmental scholar by her father. Hassanien spent more and more of his time with the Karoubs, with Imam Chirri, and with the growing population of Indian Muslims who were in Detroit, for the most part, as students. According to Selim Khalid, Hassanien's son-in-law, these interactions were part of a larger effort to support Muslim social life in Detroit; they were intensely personal, but they had a practical function as well.

Selim Khalid: I think if you talk to many of the immigrant doctors in the suburbs around here, as graduate students, my father-in-law would go and buy meat, halal meat before there was East Dearborn and [halal] markets in the Eastern Market, and he would butcher the meat – he was a butcher – and he would cut the meat and distribute it to graduate students here. So some of these individuals, if you mention his name, their face just lights up, because they remember him not only as a person who was involved in the mosque, but even on a more personal level as a person who came to their homes, brought them meat, and saw to it that as students they were taken care of, OK, when they were just making their adjustment coming from wherever they were coming from to Detroit. He was that kind of person (S. Khalid interview).³⁰

Hassanien was also pulled into the activities of the Federation of Islamic Associations. The pages of *The Muslim Star*, the FIA newsletter Mike Karoub edited and published from 1967-1980, regularly featured announcements from Masjid al-Mu'mineen, just as they did for the other mosques in the city: news of wedding and funerals, of holiday

³⁰ While the several people I spoke with from Masjid al-Mu'mineen had no real knowledge of the Bengali Muslim community in Detroit, it is clear that Osman Hassanein was familiar with this population. Azira Maeh's father and other Bengalis purchased halal meat from Hassanein and describe him as having been the city's first halal butcher (Maeh interview).

celebration, of fund raising events, and of lectures or special services provided by visitors to the mosques from overseas and from a growing network of mosques and Muslim associations across the country. However, because of their close association with students at Wayne State University and with the Tablighi Jumaat Movement in the United States, Masjid al-Mu'mineen also developed a close relationship with the Muslim Student Association of the United States and Canada (MSA).

The MSA was organized in 1963 by foreign students on the campus of the University of Illinois-Urbana. The group sought originally to counter the secular, socialist-leaning Organization of Arab Students, which had organized a few years earlier to advocate on behalf of pan-Arab nationalism. The MSA was a much more conservative organization. It focused on providing religious support and a religious forum for Muslim students at a time when there were very few mosques in the United States and campuses provided little accommodation to religious minorities of any stripe. As expatriates, the organization's leaders were explicitly political and identified with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (a group that opposed Nasser's leadership and was violently suppressed by Nasser's regime) and the Tablighi Jumaat (who received similar, if less harsh, treatment in Pakistan). They were adamantly opposed to Nasser, Socialism, Communism, and (much of) American foreign policy. Like the FIA, the MSA included Muslims from diverse cultural backgrounds (which added to its political difficulties), but was majority Arab.

In 1964, when the group was still coming together, it held its annual convention on the campus of the University of Michigan (a center of secular Arab student activism during this period; see Abraham 1989, Abu Lughod 1971, Suleiman 2007). Detroit's strongly FIA-identified mosques welcomed the students to town, and the convention banquet, held in the social hall of the Islamic Center of America in Detroit, was hosted jointly by the ICA and Masjid al-Mu'mineen (see illustration 6.3). Hajj Hassanien was among the key Detroit



Illustration 6.3 Mr and Mrs Othman Hassanein (3rd and 4th from the right) at the Muslim Student Association banquet in Detroit, 1963. Courtesy of Haitaima Sharieff.

organizers of the convention. He arranged for visiting students to stay with local Muslim families, which he saw as both a cost saver and, more importantly, as an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange.

For the first several years of the MSA's existence, the group was on cordial terms with the FIA. The groups sent representatives to each other's annual meetings, advertised their publications in one another's journals, and cooperated on fund raising. Yet as Nasser's power grew in the 1960s (and his suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood escalated in turn), the FIA's leadership openly celebrated and courted the Egyptian regime's attentions, accepting money, scholarships, and clergy from Al-Azhar, sending regular delegations to Egypt, and holding multiple conventions there, actions that offended MSA leaders and drove a wedge between the two groups that intensified over time.³¹

³¹ Political events in the Middle East played a large role in this division. Nasser was a Socialist who organized his government along socialist principles, but he was a staunch anti-Communist as well (although an ally and, after 1967, a client state of the Soviet Union). The Saudi government,

This political wedge opened up deep ideological difference between the two organizations. The MSA leadership admired and identified not only with the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed al-Banna, but with the movement's then active intellectual star, Said Qutb. Qutb had studied in the United States himself in the late 1940s, an experience that contributed greatly to his political philosophy. Qutb was extremely critical of American materialism, social injustice, violence, mistreatment of Arab immigrants, overwhelming support for Israel, immorality, and hollow religiosity (Qutb 1951). His critique of the United States resonated with many foreign Muslims students, most of whom had no local mosque like al-Mu'mineen to help them deal with culture shock and homesickness. Qutb also advocated the overthrow of much of the political establishment of the Muslim world and the creation of new societies managed according to the precepts of the Quran and Sunnah. He described the Muslim world as languishing in a state of *jahiliyya* (ignorance, see Chapter V) under the domination of the secular and anti-Muslim West (Qutb 1964). In the 1960s and 1970s, many of the MSA's more active members considered themselves the vanguard of a new Muslim consciousness and political movement (Johnson 1994, Poston 1992). The FIA's leadership took a very different position, as did the leaders of Detroit's mosques. These American Muslims were less critical of American values overall and tended not to see Islam and America as irreconcilable categories. While they were vocally opposed to American support for Israel and to the Viet Nam War, the FIA was less critical of Arab national governments and did not advocate for shari'a law over the institutions of secular and civil society.

As the leaders of the FIA and MSA began to understand each other, their relationship quickly soured. It was members of the MSA who first popularized the representation of

meanwhile, was dependent on American corporations and the American military for its development and defense. The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war that followed also created tensions within the MSA and between it and the FIA, as did many other political conflicts in India, Pakistan, and elsewhere (Johnson 1994, Poston 1992).

American Muslims, and the FIA in particular, as apolitical, uneducated, factional, and un-Islamic (see Chapter III). MSA leaders were critical of the formal dances and youth mixers that were a part of FIA annual conventions. They also resented the attention given on the convention program (and in FIA publications) to representatives of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (the Egyptian Ministry of Al-Waqf) and the newly established Muslim World League, a non-governmental organization established by the Saudis in 1962 to promote Islam throughout the world, but also to further the policy concerns of the Saudi regime (which was closely aligned with American political and corporate interests in the region).³² The MSA was equally critical of Muslim American institutions like those found in Detroit, where attendance at daily prayers was low, jumaa prayers were de-emphasized, women's auxiliaries exerted genuine leadership, weddings and dances were held in mosques (these critics of American Islam did not distinguish between the social halls of mosques and their prayer spaces), and women came and went from mosque facilities (again, not the prayer spaces, but the social and administrative parts of the building) wearing the latest fashions and with their heads uncovered. In the 1970s, as many of these students received professional degrees, settled permanently in the United States, and were joined by a new migration of Muslim immigrants, the FIA-identified American Muslims became the minority of Muslim in the United States. Their mosques became sites of contention between conflicting views of Islam, of America, and of the relationship between the United States and the Muslim world.³³

³² Al-Rabita al-Alam al-Islami, the Muslim World League, supported mosque construction in the United States, funded the salaries of foreign imams working in the United States, distributed Qurans and other religious texts, sponsored conferences, and eventually opened an office in New York that had non-voting member status at the United Nations. They also conducted research on Muslims and Islamic institutions in the United States.

³³ The FIA gradually responded to their critics within the MSA by expanding the array of services they provided. In 1977, for example, the group instituted an annual "Islamic Mid-Year Seminar" that was held in January and was "devoted entirely to religion" (*Muslim Star*, Oct. 1977:11) rather than on social or political topics. In addition to presenting lectures by clerics like al-Aseer, Chirri, Karoub, and a half dozen others, these meetings also featured representatives of the MWL and the Egyptian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs. The FIA also opened an office in New York City in 1977. Led by Dawud Assad, and coordinating closely with the MWL office in New York, this office handled complaints about discrimination, complaints about media misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims,

Given their close ties to the Tablighi Jumaat, to local Muslim students, and to the city's other Muslims, these tensions between the MSA and the FIA became increasingly consequential for Masjid al-Mu'mineen. Tahira H. Khalid remembers her interactions with the MSA at Wayne State during her college years as troubled. "A lot of that was still culturally driven by the Arab students who came here and needed something to belong to," she said. "So, you know, it was pretty much male driven. There weren't a lot of women ... and they instituted the same policies that came up [elsewhere]," policies that excluded women from leadership positions, enforced the *hijab* [Muslim headscarf and modest clothing] at MSA meetings, and made it difficult for women like Tahira to participate freely. Azira Maeh, who also tried to join the MSA when she was a student at Wayne State University, felt equally unwelcome, both as a mixed race person whose Asian origins were questioned and as an American Muslim whose religiosity and identity were challenged. The FIA's Muslim Youth Association, which was also active in Detroit during this period, did not reach out to these women either.³⁴ Azira was not part of any congregation, and Tahira's mosque was too small to have an active youth association of its own. Tahira was invited often by MSAs in the area to speak, but never to join or participate in local chapters.

In the 1960s and 1970s Egypt and Saudi Arabia competed actively for the support of American Muslims. They did so by sending Muslim clerics and scholars to the United States, by supporting new mosque construction (especially after the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973, when the price of oil sky-rocketed and the Saudis became cash rich), by sponsoring Arab American delegations to the Middle East, by supporting African American delegations to the hajj and *umra* (off-season, lesser hajj), and by providing scholarships to Muslim American

coordinated the FIA's communications and membership affairs, served as a non-voting member of the United Nations, and handled fund raising activities for the organization (*FIA Star*, July 1977: 5).

³⁴ The members and former organizers of the MYA I have spoken with do not remember having been aware of these women, but Mike Karoub was certainly familiar with them. The MYA was a predominantly Arab organization in Detroit – one explicitly eager to create endogamous marriage opportunities for their young adults. Perhaps Hassanein and Maeh were excluded because they were non-whites. Perhaps they were simply overlooked.

students to study at religious institutions in Egypt or Saudi Arabia.³⁵ The Tablighi Jumaat and Muslim Brotherhood, although much less wealthy than the Egyptian and Saudi governments and their competing NGOs, also actively recruited American Muslim support, not so much for their political agendas, but for their religious and cultural projects which were designed to convince Muslims everywhere to live by the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Each of these groups was especially interested in wooing African American Muslims, both within and outside the NOI, whom they saw as open to ideological and spiritual influence in a way the Arab and other Muslim immigrant communities, already familiar with Islam and Middle Eastern politics, were not. Some of this financial investment in American Muslim communities and institutions was channeled through the FIA and the MSA, groups whose members were alternately devalued by critics as “fanatics” and “extreme conservatives,” or “too liberal” and “un-Islamic.”

While the congregation at Masjid al-Mu’mineen continued to provide a friendly welcome to all comers, a generation gap began to open within the black Muslim community between two cohorts: (1) those who had become Muslims in the 1940s and early 1950s, mostly married couples with grown children, who anchored and supported Masjid al-Mu’mineen financially, and (2) those who became Muslim in the late 1960s and 1970s. The younger Muslims were more often unmarried, frequently unemployed, and disproportionately male. They had not been personally influenced by the black nationalism of Marcus Garvey or Elijah Mohammed, which promoted middle class economic and moral codes despite their separatist ideologies (Lincoln 1961, Essien-Udon 1962), nor had they been active in the Civil Rights Movement. Instead, they admixed ideologies from the Black Power Movement, Malcolm X, the Anti-War Movement, the counterculture, and conservative Islamic movements to create their own method of turning on (within the bounds of Islamic marriage),

³⁵ Both governments actively competed to attract African American Muslims in particular, including those of the Nation of Islam. These encounters played a significant role in the history of the NOI. See Curtis 2007, Evanzz 1997, and Marsh 1996.

tuning in (to the example of the Prophet), and dropping out (into exclusively Muslim social networks).³⁶ Increasingly, these young Muslims were not willing to study at the feet of foreign students or immigrant imams; they worshipped at al-Mu'mineen but did not join in the everyday life of the congregation. These young Muslims were highly diverse and identified ideologically with several national or transnational Muslim movements – for instance, with the Dar al-Islam movement, which began in the 1960s, but was popularized in the 1970s, when Imam Jamil al-Amin (formerly H. Rap Brown) began writing and preaching, or the Tablighi Jumaat.³⁷ “The younger people just didn’t have the wherewithal to have their own facility,” said Selim Khalid, who arrived in Detroit in 1971 and embraced Islam at Masjid al-Mu'mineen in 1972, “but these were guys who knew each other, who had friendships with each other, and they deferred to al-Mu'mineen.” Perhaps they had not yet organized an official mosque of their own, but it is also clear that they did not always respect the opinion of Hajj Hassanien, who saw their attraction to countercultural expressions of Islam as socially, morally, and politically wrong.

THK: Dad had a real problem with some of the [sectarian minority communities]. They didn’t work. The women were suffering and Dad would go clashing with some of them. They misinterpreted a lot of the stuff. Some of the groups, became very militaristic. They were doing things that weren’t quite up to par with Dad. And Dad, like he said, “I’m not afraid of any man,” would get into it with them.

“You need to take care of your kids. See, I work everyday. You’re on the welfare thinking somebody’s gonna respect you? You know, you need to get up off your behind and get a job.”

And their whole thing, “We need to make our five daily *salat* [prayers].”

“You need to be feeding your kids and making *salat* after you get home.”

That was a running battle. A lot of the brothers talk about it. Dad wasn’t scared of anybody. You know, he’d tell them, “Take that mess off your head

³⁶ Dannin 2002, Rouse 2004, and McCloud 1995 detail similar alternative Muslim communities. These groups stood in sharp contrast to the congregation of al-Mu'mineen that was comprised mostly of working class families. Polygamy is sometimes practiced in these alternative Muslim communities.

³⁷ The Dar al-Islam Movement developed out of the State Street Mosque in New York mentioned in Chapter III (see Dannin 2002 and Jackson 2005).

and go in there and feed your kids. Allah's not gonna be pleased with you. Your kids eating up off food stamps, and you're young, you know."

Not all young Muslims followed this path, and the trick for Hajj Hassanien was to keep as many Muslims as possible on what he considered "the straight path." When Selim Khalid first began frequenting the mosque in 1971, it was Hajj Hassanien who made him feel welcome. "Tahirah's family [the Hassaniens] were very patient with me," he told me. "They provided literature; they answered my questions. They were very patient. The same question I asked yesterday at noon they would answer today and they would be willing to answer it again tomorrow." Two other figures were central to Khalid's education and to making him feel part of a larger, politically relevant, and universal community: Mike Karoub, with whom Khalid "took the *shahada*" [made a public confession of faith],³⁸ and Adil al-Aseer. Al-Aseer taught at al-Mu'mineen in the early 1970s. "He came up and he would conduct classes on the weekend," said Khalid, "and I can remember sitting in a number of his classes. He was a trained Islamic scholar, and when I say that, I believe he was actually an Islamic judge back in Palestine. He was an extraordinary Islamic scholar." To Tahira Khalid, these credentials were meaningful, but given her longer familiarity with the politics of the Muslim community, she was equally impressed by al-Aseer's ability to work with people rather than against them.

THK: I loved Imam Adil al-Aseer. That was a sweet, that was an incredible human being. He was Palestinian, and he truly knew the law as well as the Book. Some people know one or the other, but he was diplomatic with his interpretation and he understood our illnesses, too.

[He] was the epitome of scholarship, *hafiz* Quran [had memorized the entire Quran], who came and taught us, who wanted to smooth the edges out of our understanding. A lot of the things we learned from the Pakistanis were cultural. They really, some of it wasn't Islam. Like, we didn't have to cover our heads because we were in America. And that wasn't Islam, you know. But that's what maybe they believed, and I'm not sure that everybody who came to us was a scholar. They might have jumped on the Jumaat bandwagon and just came and started teachin' folks. That's what Sherman Jackson says in his book. Have you read the *Third Resurrection*?³⁹

³⁸ This took place in a ceremony at the American Moslem Society in Dearborn. Mike Karoub also officiated at Khalid's marriage to Tahira Hassanein. The couple named their son after Adil al-Aseer.

³⁹ *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection*. Jackson 2005.

SH: Yes.

THK: That's a very powerful analysis...of what happened. Sherman got it down. That's what happened. We assumed because they were Arabs, [or Pakistanis] they weren't black, they weren't white, they knew what they were talking about. That wasn't always true. And what they did was they talked us out of a lot of our identity. "You shouldn't be doing this; you shouldn't be doing that. That's not Islam." Well, you're doing it, you know. I mean, we can't dance but y'all doing the *dubkeh* [Levantine folk dance]? That's as much shaking, you know.

Despite the fact that Adil al-Aseer and Mike Karoub, teachers Tahira Khalid greatly admired, were also Arabs, she (like others in the black Muslim community) began to question the relationship between faith and culture in the 1970s as the number and types of foreign visitors to her mosque escalated. Sherman Jackson, whom Tahira Khalid glowingly mentions above, argues that, as immigrant Muslims came to outnumber black Muslims in the 1970s, they assumed a "virtual monopoly over the definition of a properly constituted 'Islamic' life in America" (2005: 4). Jackson's claim is made in reference to African American Muslims, but this "monopoly" was felt by non-black Muslims as well. Hajj Hassanien was perhaps uniquely positioned to observe and resist this monopoly, but also to understand that the immigrants themselves were by no means homogenous; the Islam they preached was by no means uniform. Islam in Detroit had come to resemble other American religious traditions in that it now operated in a climate of open competition (Stout and Buddenbaum 1996, Berger 2004). Masjid al-Mu'mineen was a marketplace in which competing ideas were aired and evaluated.

This religious marketplace, though rich in ideas, was poor in dollars. In addition to the challenges Hajj Hassanien faced in balancing the ideological and religious diversity of Islam in Detroit, the congregation at al-Mu'mineen encountered dire economic straits in the early 1970s. Their neighborhood declined quickly after the Detroit Uprisings of 1967. One of the major incidents which contributed to the riots began at the corner of Virginia Park and Woodward Avenue (at the Ambassador Hotel), and the white flight that followed 1967

devastated the formerly middle class Virginia Park neighborhood, as it did much of the city. The black middle class, and Detroit as whole, suffered another blow after the 1973 oil embargo, when the auto industry – and Michigan’s economy – suffered a major recession and further de-industrialization. Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments were expressed openly in the wake of this conflict (see Joseph 1999, Abraham 1994), and Masjid al-Mu’mineen was not immune to this prejudice. The Virginia Park neighborhood block club complained to the city about the mosque in this period. The house was zoned as a duplex, not as a house of worship or boarding house, which is how it was being used. Tahira H. Khalid explained the neighbor’s newfound “curiosity” in the following way: “You would see, you know, people with all these different garbs, run in, run out. Who knew? Islam wasn’t that big of a factor until recently.” The city stepped in and sought to evict the residents of the mosque, citing several building code violations as well as the zoning issue. Suddenly, the group was in need of \$50,000 at a time when their middle class members were largely retired, the younger generation was largely unemployed, and their non-black members and affiliates were mostly students and missionaries. Hassanien’s friends in the Federation of Islamic Associations advocated on the mosque’s behalf with the Muslim World League, and in 1978, the mosque was sent a check for \$60,000.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the check came too late for Hassanien. He died of a heart attack shortly before the mosque’s economic crisis was resolved.

After Hassanien’s death, the congregation tried to reorganize under the leadership of his son-in-law, Selim Khalid. They sold the old house and purchased a storefront facility on Detroit’s west side. But they had to face several hard truths about their own strengths and weaknesses. By 1980, some of the smaller groups of young people did not move with al-Mu’mineen to their new location. Masjid al-Asr opened in 1978. Masjid al-Nur and Masjid

⁴⁰ Selim Khalid was not as enthusiastic about the FIA as were many of the Arab Muslims I interviewed. He felt that the organization sought to represent Detroit’s Muslims to organizations like the Muslim World League rather than encourage them to represent themselves. It played the role of middle man or gatekeeper (S. Khalid interview).

al-Haqq followed in 1981. In the late 1970s, three former NOI temples in the city were converted into mosques as well. Where once there had been a single mosque for the black Sunni Muslims of Detroit, now there were seven, and the stresses placed on individual mosques by foreign Muslims continued to mount. In his new role as imam, Selim Khalid was not as deft at balancing the demands of local and visiting Muslims as his father-in-law had been. Haitama Sharieff captures the mood of the period vividly in her description of the last event she attended at al-Mu'mineen

HS: It was in the 80s. It was on Fenkell, in a new place they were renting.

I don't know where this brother come from, a brother from the East, but we were having this eid and, you know, the ladies would usually go in and cook the dinner and everything. And this brother couldn't stand to see a sister passing. So the brothers said, "Well, just hand us the food and we'll fix it."

I don't know what was wrong with him, but he put all the sisters in the back, and he put a sheet up in front of them. So the brother was having a fit. So they said, "We are going to feed this brother in a hurry and get him out."

I don't know where he come from. He was a foreigner and a fanatic and he was having fits. [She mimics someone shouting in a foreign language] The sisters said, "No! No!" So the sisters were behind the curtain. Some of them were talking loud enough for this guy to hear. "What is wrong with that crazy guy?"

In Sister Sharieff's narrative, the clash of cultures, the clash of orthodoxies, is reduced to craziness, unintelligibility, and appeasement. The most conservative voice – and the loudest – is able to dictate the behavior of the group. Masjid al-Mu'mineen disbanded in 1985.

Brothers from the East: Take 2

The clash of cultures that beset Masjid al-Mu'mineen in the 1970s also played out at the American Moslem Society in Dearborn, the city's oldest mosque and one already familiar with challenges between new and old immigrants, between competing orthodoxies, and between those with very different understandings of the mosque as an American religious institution. The Syrian-Lebanese congregation who had built and sustained the mosque over

multiple generations was now confronted by a faction of brothers from the East not unlike those who contributed to the demise of al-Mu`mineen.

Abdo Alasry was one such brother from the East. He came to Dearborn from Yemen in 1967, when he was 22 years old. His impression of the Southend, of the American Moslem Society, and of the Muslims who populated the neighborhood and the mosque, was not positive. “The institution was very bad. If you looked at it from a [Muslim perspective], lot of people they do not practice Islam. They do not pray. It doesn’t matter. You could not make a difference between them and other people, you know. Lot of them. You might see a few people practicing Islam, but the majority, no. You see gambling places. You see bars. They have alcohol, a lot of places. Also they had some Arab people being killed in this area, too” (Alasry interview). Selim Khalid, from a very different perspective, argues a similar point: “The Dix mosque [AMS] didn’t have life. It was totally different from what you see today. It was a place that was opened and closed. Al-Mu’mineen was a different way. People came to Detroit and they asked for the Mu’mimeen Mosque; they didn’t ask for the Dearborn mosque.”

By the mid 1970s the majority of Muslims living in Dearborn and surrounding communities were, like Alasry, foreign born. As these newcomers began attending the American Moslem Society, the board of the mosque became nervous. Mike Karoub, in particular, having taken over as official imam of the mosque in 1973, was eager to gain a place on the mosque’s board, an official and permanent status that would provide him with a sense of security and a basis for wielding more power in the institution. Nihad Hamed, an Egyptian engineer who was voted in as mosque president at about this time, also sought to have the by-laws changed, so the president of the board could serve a four year term, rather than one year. The idea behind both efforts was to provide continuity for the mosque’s existing leadership in a period of obvious demographic flux. Aida Karoub also suggested that the by-laws be changed so that membership in the organization would no longer be open.

Many of the old Syrian and Lebanese families from the Bekaa Valley were leaving the Southend and being quickly replaced by Palestinian, Yemeni, and South Lebanese. These new arrivals were often extremely critical of how the AMS was run, and Aida Karoub wanted to exclude them from mosque governance. The board, however, opposed any changes to the by-laws. They feared the influence of Hamed and the Karoubs, who frequently sided with the Women's Society rather than the all-male board in the numerous internal conflicts that beset the mosque (A. Alasry, A. Karoub Hamed, N. Hamed interviews).⁴¹

While the AMS board was debating its by-law controversy, Tablighi Jumaat missionaries based at Masjid al-Mu'mineen began visiting the Southend neighborhood with greater frequency.

Abdo Alasry: The people start coming from there [Masjid al-Mu'mineen] and they start going to the places, to the coffee shops, the stores where the people go. Sometimes they go even to the bar to talk to the people. They do this until 1976, and then some of them start talking to some of the people who are in charge of this mosque, the Lebanese people.

Some people told him [Nihad Hamed], "OK, can we have the key for the mosque? Can we have the key so we can open the mosque and go inside and pray?"

He said, "Yes, we can issue you a key, but you have to pay the bill." Because at that time the society was very poor. They didn't have much money back then.

The board agreed to let the new worshippers use the mosque, but only if they would pay rent to cover the costs of power, cleanup, and building maintenance. It struck the newcomers as odd that they should have to pay a fee to pray in the mosque or hold religious classes there, but they agreed to do so. This arrangement was similar to how the social hall of the mosque was rented out for weddings and other parties. Those observing memorial services at the mosques often took up a collection for use of the facility as well. "Back then," Alasry explained, "they used to open up on Friday, and every weekend to teach the kids because they

⁴¹ See also Nabeel Abraham's (2000) more detailed account of these events at the AMS.

have schools.” Otherwise, the mosque remained closed. For men like Alasry, who came from countries in which mosques were never closed, this behavior was inexplicable.

While the newcomers did not complain about the fees, they did complain about the lack of a formal jumaa congregational prayer at the mosque and about the overall laxity of religious observances there. As their complaints escalated into demands, Hamed devised a radical strategy to fend them off. He organized a meeting of the city’s Muslim clerics and scholars and asked them to issue a formal edict – to “make shura,” as Alasry described it – that would declare Sunday a legitimate substitute for Friday as the day of congregational prayer for the city’s mosques. This consensus decision of the scholars was then to be accepted as binding by the community as a whole. “Of course, the imams and the scholars are not going to ask for this,” Alasry assured me, “to move the prayer from Friday to Sunday. I think it was the members, because the majority does not have knowledge. They want to have it on their day off. To them, they said, ‘OK. Everybody can come on Sunday, we’ll have the meeting on Sunday.’” The Shura Council rejected this suggestion outright,⁴² and the mosque began hosting formal congregational prayers on Friday in addition to their Sunday lectures. Even this positive outcome was problematic for the newcomers, however, because Mike Karoub offered these services in the English language. The prayer itself was led in Arabic, and the Quran was read in both languages, but the sermons were in English. Furthermore, Karoub’s sermon topics were often offensive to the newcomers; one memorable sermon was given in defense of abortion rights (Abraham family interview).

The issue of rescheduling religious observances for the weekend resurfaced later that year on Eid al-Adha, which fell on a Wednesday. The English-language faction planned to celebrate the eid, as they always had, on the weekend, when people were off work. The Arabic-language faction expected to celebrate the eid on Wednesday, when they showed up

⁴² Mike Alcodray also mentioned this decision. This was one factor that contributed to his viewing Mike Karoub as unqualified to lead the AMS congregation.

at the mosque and demanded to be let in. They were turned away from the mosque by Hamed and others on the board. “Today is the eid,” Alasray remembers the *musalee’een* [those who would pray] crying. “We have to pray today. Today is eid.” Eventually, the *musalee’een* broke the lock on the door and went inside to pray.

Shortly after this conflict, another took place that ultimately doomed the Lebanese congregation at the American Moslem Society. On this occasion, a Friday evening, the Yemeni faction was hosting a class upstairs in the mosque, and the Lebanese faction was hosting a dance downstairs. The building was not sound proofed, and the loud and raucous music was disruptive to the group gathered upstairs. They continued with their class, but when the *adhan* was called for the evening prayer, they expected the music to stop for the prayer itself. When it did not, the upstairs crowd became angry and asked the others to stop the music so the prayer could be conducted in peace. Their request was denied. One faction felt their right to hold a party in the social hall of the mosque was being violated. The other felt their right to hold a prayer in the mosque was being violated.⁴³ At this point, the *musalee’een* decided to take over the board of the mosque. In 1977 they elected Fawzi Mura`i president of the AMS board. Hajj Fawzi was a Palestinian from Beit Hanina, a West Bank village on the outskirts of Jerusalem that had been taken over by Israel for the construction of one of their earliest and largest settlements. He was a very conservative Muslim, sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood. His election – by a Yemeni dominated but culturally diverse block of voters – marked the end of nearly 40 years of Lebanese control over the mosque. The two groups attempted to use the mosque jointly, but the new board quickly solicited a new imam from the Muslim World League and established a new set of rules for the mosque.

⁴³ For many conservative Muslims, music is associated with immorality and the sensual and is thus considered *haram* [forbidden]. The *musalee’een* did not find it acceptable to pray or recite the Quran while loud music was blaring in the mosque. Many Muslims who do not object to secular music would also have difficulty praying under these circumstances.

Imam al-Barakani, a young Yemeni who was trained in Saudi Arabia and spoke little English, was eager to impose a strict regime on the American Moslem Society. Mike Karoub found himself, again, marginalized within the institution, but he continued to provide his Sunday lectures at the mosque. Al-Barakani provided the *khutba* (sermon) for the Friday prayers in Arabic. The Abraham family described to me how the other changes unfolded:

Miriam Hassen: We taught Sunday school for about ten years and then they wanted us to stop.

Sharon: They wanted us to stop the social functions.

SH: Including the Sunday school?

MH: The Sunday School wasn't proper.

Sy Abraham: When they became a majority of the men's club, they voted everybody out and put their own people in. Then they decided that they wanted to be strictly a mosque. No more dances, no more weddings.

SH: And the Sunday school was somehow inappropriate?

SA: Well, they wanted it conducted in a certain way.

MH: It had to be in Arabic. It had to be taught by the right persons.

SA: They did not like the ways of the Lebanese Moslems.

MH: No functions. No kids.

SH: Scarves on the women?

SA: Yes, they started that. Basically, they started a conservative mosque.

MH: The whole reason they built the upstairs was for prayer and the downstairs was supposed to be social. And they said this was not right ... and then they wouldn't let women go upstairs at all.

Sharon: I used to get on that rug and pray.

SA: Not anymore.

The new rules included gender segregation in all the mosque's activities, including Sunday school classes and congregational prayers. The hijab had to be worn by women at all times, everywhere in the building. This hijab could no longer be a simple scarf to cover the

hair, but also entailed covering all parts of the body except for the hands and face. All social functions hosted by the Women's Society were banned from the premises. When the women's group protested these moves, the young imam told them, "I am here to teach you the right way; you have gone astray" (quoted in Abraham 2000). When the women protested further, they were banned from the mosque outright. The two groups went to court over these new, restrictive policies. Abdo Alasry, who was president of the mosque board at the time, explained the court case as follows:

AA: The reason is, I will tell you, because they [the Lebanese Americans] had their own way. And the people who are coming [the *musalee'een*], they have their own way also. Like before, they have the sisters, they want to come to the masjid like outside. And this is unacceptable, because this is not a club.

SH: So what do you mean "like outside"? They didn't cover their hair?

AA: Yes. That is the main thing. And we went to the court too, because [they] told the court, "They won't let us go inside." And the women said this.

I was then the president of the society, and we, one brother from Egypt also, asked the judge, "When someone comes to the court, he is supposed to have certain dress?"

He [the judge] said, "Yes."

"Ok," [he explains] "sister, even the judge said you have to have [appropriate] attire ... when you go to the mosque."

The other side argued that the mosque itself was one room in the larger facility and appropriate religious attire was observed historically in that room alone. But the judge, siding with the new board, asked the Lebanese faction to turn over their keys to the building. "In the beginning," Alasry explained, "we were ok with them. We said, 'You have the key, you can go in anytime. No you cannot make dances, and [wear short dresses]. They may make a wedding with no problem, but not like with dancing as it used to be in a club. Not in a mosque ... belly dancing, that is what I mean. That's why we don't want it here. We couldn't. We said, 'That is not right.'"

A club, a community center, a place for education, and a place for prayer and worship; for the mosque's founders these functions could co-exist with minimal conflict and had done so for decades. For the *musalee'een*, however, some of these activities polluted the mosque, degraded its status, and interrupted (perhaps even rendering moot) the religious functions that took place there. Alasry understood the pain this transition imposed on the mosque's founders. "You know, back then they didn't want to [follow the new rules]. It was very hard for them. They had hard feelings. If you tell them put a scarf on your head, it is like you shot them with a gun. They don't want to do it."

I responded, "They did feel that the mosque was their home."

"It was in the beginning, and nobody could deny it," replied Alasry. "But this is not just a home for them or for me or for you or for anybody. This is the house of Allah. And we have to respect that, too."

On Winners, Losers, and Islamic Sprawl

It is no longer politically correct to speak of human migrations in the language of nature, to describe immigrant waves, or floods, or swells. Yet in the 1970s, this is precisely how the new immigration from the South of Lebanon, from Yemen and Palestine, from Pakistan and India, and to a lesser extent from Jordan, Iraq, and Syria, was perceived by the existing Arab and Asian populations in Detroit. These new immigrants brought demographic power and significance; they brought new believers to the area's mosques; they brought new resources, new marriage partners, and a renaissance of Arab, South Asian, and Muslim identities. They also numerically overwhelmed the existing Muslim American community. Detroit's "American mosques," built by *already American* Muslims, drew new immigrants to the Detroit area, and these mosques initially welcomed newcomers with open arms. Yet new immigrants often reacted to Detroit's mosques just as Imams Chirri and Ismail had a generation before: with disapproval. Many saw the gender dynamics of these mosques, the

reluctance to celebrate holidays and Jumaa prayers at the appointed times, and the use of mosque spaces for dances, movie nights, and other social functions, as American, illegitimate, un-Islamic, scandalous, even *haram* (forbidden by Islamic law). Often they saw the Americans worshipping and working in these mosques as Muslims in name only. They expected instead that the city's mosques would offer them a safe retreat from American values, which they found poisonous and threatening; they wanted their mosques to be spaces of reflection, prayer, and religious study.

Many of the *musalee'een* who took over the American Moslem Society in the 1970s were young, single men, or men whose families were still in Yemen or Palestine. They did not consider the education of children at the mosque a major priority. They did not have American wives who might want to pray at the mosque, or to socialize and participate in religious classes there. These newcomers, when they finally wrested control of the mosque from its founders, established a set of rules that struck the already American Lebanese congregation as foreign and culturally Other; as extremely, unnecessarily conservative; as un-American, un-Islamic, and fanatical. These two factions judged one another not just in religious terms, but in political and cultural terms as well. By waging their campaign in a language of moral and religious absolutes, the *musalee'een* foreclosed negotiation. The mosque remained, as it had always been, a space in which Muslim American identity was debated, enacted, and embodied. But under its new immigrant board, Detroit's *masjid al-'am*, its Mosque for All Muslims, was committed to the systematic rejection of the Muslims who had lived in the city for almost a century and had created the infrastructure of communal life that was now being so hotly contested. The takeover of the AMS was a paradigm shift that established a new regime, one not of incorporation or accommodation, but of confident orthodoxy and (initially at least) principled separation from the larger society.

Meanwhile, Masjid al-Mu'mineen was undone by a different kind of demographic transition. The regime of orthodoxy that new immigrants successfully imposed on the AMS

was present in their community as well, both among historically Sunni Muslims and among those who came to Islam through the Nation of Islam. Masjid Wali Muhammad, for example, the former Mohammad's Temple # 1, birthplace of the Nation of Islam, welcomed a new imam in 1977, a Syrian doctor named Mazen Alwan, who was charged with teaching the congregation correct doctrine and bringing their practices into conformity with those of Sunni Islam. Alwan was a gentle, generous, and thoughtful teacher, but he was also a conservative Salafi who identified strongly with the Muslim Brotherhood and had no patience with the American imams he encountered in Detroit, men like Mike Karoub, whom he saw as an accommodationist, or Imam Chirri, who might have been a scholar, but was, in Alwan's view, an assimilationist. Under the watchful eye of Imam Alwan, Detroit's newest black Muslims learned the virtues of theological rigor; they also learned that almost everything Muslims had built and believed in America before 1976 – whether these Muslims were black, Arab, Albanian, Bangladeshis, immigrants, or American born – was wrong. In short, there were no lessons to be learned, only mistakes to be avoided, in the careers of men like Imam Mike Karoub and Hajj Osman Hassanien.

Masjid al-Mu'mineen was also affected by the politics of space, place, and race. Indian and Pakistani immigrants and students no longer made a home for themselves at this urban mosque in the 1980s. Many who had studied at WSU in the 1950s and 1960s were now doctors and engineers with families and homes of their own. In 1977 they started their own mosque, the Muslim Center of the Western Suburbs. Students and immigrants could now attend a mosque where Urdu and Hindi were spoken.⁴⁴ Arab students could, by 1981, choose between three Yemeni and three Lebanese mosques. African Americans could now choose among seven black-majority mosques. Instead of becoming newly relevant as Detroit's black Muslim population grew from a few hundred to a few thousand, Masjid al-Mu'mineen

⁴⁴ Selim Khalid considers this process to have begun well before Elijah Mohammed's death and was set in motion when both Warith Deen Mohammed and Malcolm X made the hajj or studied Islam formally in Egypt and Saudi Arabian in the 1960s.

suddenly seemed rudderless and outdated, their congregation aging, their Islam, like that of the founding congregation of the AMS, representing a regime of accommodation and compromise in an era of orthodoxy.

I asked Selim Khalid if anti-black racism played a part in the demise of Masjid al-Mu'mineen. His response was illuminating:

SK: It propelled Islamic sprawl outside the city. Where do you find the Muslims? They are not setting up shop on Cass Ave., on the East Side [blighted urban areas], and people will give you a thousand different reasons and at the end of the day, at the bottom of that recipe, is racism. Now it doesn't have to be overt. It can just be, "we are a lot more comfortable in Canton." "We are a lot more comfortable in Rochester [middle class suburbs]." I understand that.

SH: The schools are better...

SK: The insurance rates are lower. The incidence of break-ins and car thefts is lower.

SH: The houses are newer...

SK: I understand. So, you see, racism played a role. It played a role back then, but you don't dwell on it. You keep moving; that is what you have to do and that is what people did back then. They understood that people weren't going to come and set up shop in the middle of Detroit. If they were going to give *dawa* [volunteer or support a mission], they were going to give *dawa* from a distance. If they were going to raise money for an Islamic center in Detroit, it was going to be a little less than they were going to raise for somewhere else.

That was part of our reality.

This assessment presents a binary between what are often referred to as "immigrant mosques" (all non-black congregations in this period) and those of "indigenous Muslims" (African American mosques). Khalid's statement could also be made in reference to class distinctions rather than, or in addition to, racial ones. In 1981 three Arab mosques and all seven black mosques were located in Detroit rather than the suburbs, and not in the city's more privileged enclaves or on its major thoroughfares, but in poor and working class neighborhoods. Yet it is also true that, despite the difficulties of discrimination and prejudice Arabs and Muslims have

faced in the United States since 1967, Arab and Asian Muslims have had a better shot at securing for themselves the privileges of suburban life than have black American Muslims. This is the point Khalid was making, that this racial disparity too accounts for the weakening and demise of Masjid al-Mu'mineen.

These tales of transformation are as much about culture and politics as they are about religious beliefs and ritual purity, but, as I will argue in the conclusion, the idiom of orthodoxy has obscured the history of these transitions. The tide of new Muslims, immigrant and convert alike, effectively washed away much of Detroit's past as an Islamic city. For many, this was a much needed purification. For others, it was a violent erasure. Without choosing sides in a conflict that has already become historical, and whose meanings are still changing, it is perhaps best to note the ironic outcome of these struggles. By the 1980s, after decades of arrival, reform, and cultural survival, Detroit had actually become what two Syrian immigrants, Mohammad and Hussien Karoub, dreamed it would be when they built the city's first mosque in 1921 – a beacon of Islam in the West.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

“Mosques in Detroit, which have never been many, have been remodeled rooms of American buildings, and the only mosque ever built here was built for a somewhat remodeled Mohammedanism”

Charles Cameron, *Detroit Saturday Night*, July 7, 1926.

Cameron’s description of Detroit mosques can easily be dismissed as the views of a journalistic outsider, but many of the tens of thousands of Muslims who came to the city, or converted to Islam there, in the early 20th century would have agreed with his assessment. Oddly, his sentiments are still heard among observers of Detroit’s mosques today, when mosques are numerous, often quite successful, and as capable of remodeling American space as they are likely to be remodeled by it. Islam is still seen as an outsider religious tradition in the United States, as a foreign religion, sometimes even as an anti-American religion. And it is seen this way by Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Khan 2002, Shakir 2005). The presence of so many Muslims in greater Detroit, and of so many mosques, is generally treated as a novelty, or a curiosity (with potential for touristic development), and sometimes also as a threat. Yet after a century in the city, Detroit’s Muslims have established much more than a marginal foothold. They have remodeled and reshaped a large part of the cityscape and now confidently engage in Detroit’s public culture. While it is not always easy for Muslims to say so, it is also true that they have remodeled Islam. The American mosque, as invented in Detroit, is a core space in which the role of Islam in variously American lives is negotiated, modeled, and made visible.

In the middle decades of the 20th century, Detroit's American mosques were sites defined by a contested mix of social and religious functions. They anchored ethnic identities among Muslim Americans; they announced the presence of Islam in the United States; they made the city's Muslims visible, especially to each other; and they enabled the Muslim community to reproduce itself over time. These mosques were sites of Americanization, of political and social incorporation, and of "positive integration." They were also translocal spaces, connecting Muslims in Detroit to those in other parts of the Muslim world, and transcommunal spaces, connecting ethnoracial and sectarian congregations to one another in an overarching Muslim public sphere. Rather than concentrate solely on the relationship between Detroit's Muslim communities and the larger society, I have focused much of my analysis on how translocal and transcommunal practices have transformed Detroit's mosques and its Muslim American identities over time. Both of these dynamics encouraged (and sometimes compelled) the city's believers to recognize the diversity of Islamic traditions through interaction with Muslims of different social backgrounds and doctrinal inclinations. In the process, Detroit Muslims became increasingly self-aware. They saw, with their own eyes, the pluralism and ecumenicalism their differences made possible. They also realized that not all Muslim traditions and discourses were created equal, and that their desire for Islamic community extended only so far. Detroit's mosques were intensely political spaces – not simply because they connected the United States with the Muslim world, or because they nurtured a uniquely *Muslim American* identity, but because they connected Muslims to one another across multiple boundaries, creating new *Muslim* identities that were not always easy to express.

As translocal, diasporic spaces, Detroit's mosques were places in which Muslims could interact with other Muslims as members of communities that, over time in America, had come to share a history and a religious sensibility. As they accommodated themselves to life in the city, they found themselves not only reproducing customs they had brought with

them from overseas, but also inventing new traditions, new ways of making their faith meaningful and passing it on to their children. These activities required them to objectify Islam, functionalize their approach to religion, rationalize their shifts in attitude and behavior, and justify them to one another. As new believers continued to arrive in the city, especially new clergy, local Muslims learned that Muslims overseas were also practicing Islam in changing ways. As a result of pervasive educational reforms that took place in the colonial and postcolonial era, these newcomers to Detroit were also committed to the rationalization of Islamic practices. They wanted to standardize Islamic teachings and evaluate Islamic traditions against standards that, despite being historically new, were promoted in a language of authenticity and religious authority that was rooted in ideas of a timeless orthodoxy.

These new approaches to Islamic ethics and praxis were many, and they challenged one another. Very quickly Detroit's mosques became battlegrounds on which two discursive traditions competed for space. One was based on vernacular expressions of faith. It was situated in ethnic identities, oriented toward American futures, and expressed through local, often practical accommodations to the minority status of Islam in the United States. The other tradition was based on textual authority and interpretive acumen. It was situated in universals, oriented toward an idealized (and foreign) past, and expressed through conventions that were largely indifferent to their location in the United States. These two sensibilities placed those who were already American Muslims (a category that brings together long term immigrants, American-born Muslims, and long term converts to Islam) in opposition to those who were new to American Islam (either as recent immigrants or converts). At mid century, the already American Muslims outnumbered the newcomers, but the newcomers often had advantages of education, class, or religious training. In many of these battles, vernacular, Americanized Islam won out, at least for a time, but as the demographics of the community shifted in favor of the newcomers, and as American foreign policy became increasingly anti-Arab and anti-

Muslim during the Cold War, the new orthodoxies, many of which were born in opposition to Western colonial power, came to dominate many of Detroit's mosques.

The congregation of the American Moslem Society, for example, was completely overwhelmed by this transition in the 1970s. The Lebanese Bekaai families who established the AMS in the 1930s opened a second mosque in Dearborn in 1979, the American Muslim Bekaa Center, where they were able to continue their old practices of English language sermons, Sunday lectures and congregational prayers, and using their institution as a social club as well as a house of worship. This new mosque was founded by a woman, Essie Abraham, and paid for largely out of the coffers of the Women's Auxiliary. Women did not enter this building through separate doors, nor did they segregate themselves from the men in any of the mosque's functions, other than prayer.¹ They did not allow the appropriateness of their attire to be challenged by others. Over time, however, the American Muslim Bekaa Center has grown to resemble the city's other mosques in many ways. Holidays, for example, are now observed when they fall, not on the nearest weekend. As the number of Muslims in Detroit has increased and public institutions have come to recognize Islam, these changes have become much easier for all of the city's Muslims to embrace.

The AMS, meanwhile, was for many years an isolationist institution that saw itself as a tiny island of morality in a vast sea of broken families, drugs, illicit sex, atheism, secularism, and anti-Arab racism motivated ultimately by strong American support for Zionism. The primary defense against American culture the mosque offered its members was to minimize engagement with the larger society and, when possible, to send children (especially daughters) overseas at adolescence, rather than risk losing them to the tantalizing depravity of the public school system in Dearborn or Detroit (Abdo 2006). Gradually, however, as economic and political conditions brought more families to Detroit from

¹ They stood behind men in prayer, as is the universal custom of Muslims, but did not erect any barriers between men and women and certainly were not banished to another floor of the mosque entirely, as they had been at the AMS.

Palestine and Yemen, as new cohorts of Muslims who were born and raised in the United States matured, and as the Muslim population grew and became more active in Detroit, the AMS too began to adapt. They began to offer Sunday School programs and weekend Arabic schools specifically oriented toward children. Increasingly, their services were held in English. Slowly, they added social activities to the mosque's calendar, sponsoring soccer teams, inviting candidates for public office to address their members, hosting "get out the vote" campaigns, and building, finally, a large banquet facility for dinners, lectures, and weddings.

Similar events transpired at the Islamic Center of America in the early 1980s. Their founder, Imam Chirri, had arrived in Detroit in 1949 as the epitome of the modernist Muslim cleric. After working with the Federation of Islamic Associations and leading mosques in Indiana and Michigan, Chirri had come to appreciate the accomplishments of American Muslims, and he championed the relevance of the ICA's "already American" vernacular Islam. The ICA sought to balance orthodoxy with Americanized social practices as a defense, not primarily against cultural loss and assimilation, but against Sunni hegemony. It hosted 'Ashura commemorations and wedding dances in the same social hall, welcoming all comers in a non-judgmental atmosphere. But in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution (a Shi'i political movement that revitalized the Muslim world, but had a transformative impact among the Shi'a of South Lebanon in particular) and in the face of new immigration from Lebanon (mostly refugees fleeing the Lebanese Civil War and the Israeli occupations of South), Imam Chirri found himself confronting conservative clerics who were new to Detroit and were able to attract followings at the ICA, which was becoming more conservative as well. Rather than succumb to repeated efforts to usurp his authority and overthrow the mosque's existing board, Chirri gently transformed the ICA into an institution that would not alienate

the newcomers.² In this instance, the two imams who vied with Chirri for control of the ICA, Shaykh Abdel Latif Berry and later Shaykh Mohammed Elahi, left the ICA and established mosques of their own (Walbridge 1997).³

While the outcome of these clashes was never certain in Detroit's mosques, the trends, after 1980, favored a new, decidedly more conservative hegemony. In the 1960s, the city's already American Muslims outnumbered new arrivals, which compelled men like Imam Chirri and Imam Vehbi Ismail (of the Albanian Islamic Center) to adjust themselves to the practices they found in the city's mosques – practices they complemented with a greater focus on piety and religious education, to be sure, but which they came to value in their own right. By the 1970s, when newly arrived and newly converted Muslims took control of the city's mosques, evicting the already American Muslims who had established and nurtured these institutions, Chirri and Ismail identified with the older communities, of which they were now prominent members. With their impeccable religious training, and the loyalty they had fostered over decades, these men were able to retain control of their mosques throughout their lives. In other institutions, however, the new American Muslims produced sweeping changes. During the 1980s, many of the city's mosques, and most of the newly established ones, came to resemble the regime at the AMS, with thorough gender segregation, no music, dancing, or weddings, a steep reduction in social activities, and the sudden and ubiquitous appearance of the hijab (not simply inside the city's mosques, but on its streets as well).

This regime change brought with it fundamental shifts in the narrative history of Islam in Detroit as well. Whereas once Hashmie Hall and the AMS had been hailed as

² Imam Chirri strongly identified with the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and became an outspoken defender of the revolution in the local media. He organized shipments of medical supplies to Iran, sought to intervene on behalf of American hostages held in Tehran, met with several sitting presidents to discuss conditions in Iran, Lebanon, and Palestine, and otherwise found himself trapped between his two deep commitments – one to a fully engaged political Shi'ism, the other to a fully engaged political Americanism.

³ The Islamic Institute of Knowledge was established in 1982, the Islamic Council of America in 1989, and the Islamic House of Wisdom in 1995. All were offshoots of the ICA.

pioneering institutions, the first and oldest mosques in Dearborn, the first and oldest mosques in the country, their founders proud Muslims who had assured the survival of Islam in its new American home, suddenly these institutions and the past they represented were not only embarrassing to the city's new Muslim leaders, but shameful and frightening as well. They suggested that, after another 30 or 40 years in the United States, the children and grandchildren of the city's new Muslim leaders might resemble the (to them) derelict Muslims who worshipped at the AMS, the Albanian Islamic Center, or Masjid al-Mu'mineen in the 1970s. They might be completely Americanized, and barely recognizable as Muslims at all. It was the new arrivals, at first men like Imam Chirri and Vehbi Ismail, or scholars like Abdo Elkholy, and later men like Mazen Alwan and Abdo Alasry, who encouraged the truncation of the history of Islam in Detroit and the history of Islam in America more generally.

Historian Hayden White, writing about the character of historical narrative, suggests that the trends I have been examining as idiosyncratic features of Muslim American history are by no means unique to it. "The growth and development of a historical consciousness..." he contends, "is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is to identify it with the social system that is the sources of any morality we can imagine"(1987:14). For Detroit's Muslims, the social and moral system that came to matter by the 1980s was identified with a renewed commitment to a religious orthodoxy, as defined by various forms of Islamic revivalism popular in the Muslim world. As Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya have argued, "other-worldly religious transcendence can be related dialectically to the motivation, discipline, and courage needed for this-worldly political action" (1990:234). A discourse of this kind tends to be critical of the status quo, and averse to the historical experiences that produced it. To the new immigrants and new converts, the stories told by already American Muslims – tales of immigration, cultural survival, ethnic and racial identity formation, the personal trials and victories of assimilation, and the founding

mosques – no longer mattered. They had no moral worth preserving. In writing this dissertation, I have tried to show that these stories do matter, or once did, and that the narratives that now flourish in their place, and at their expense, are themselves related in vital ways to this older tradition.

The second dynamic of Muslim American identity that I have explored in this dissertation is transcommunalism. Detroit's mosques were rarely structured as universal houses of worship. In other American cities, places like Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Toledo, Ohio, where the Muslim population was not large and Muslim minority communities (whether defined by sect, ethnicity, or race) were too small to justify breaking off on their own, supporting one mosque was possible. But in Detroit, where many different types of Muslims lived in sizable populations, and where minority sects (the Lebanese Shi'a) sometimes outnumbered the majority tradition (the Lebanese Sunni), or where minority ethnic populations (Albanians) could afford a religious leader and a mosque of their own (not to mention a Sufi monastery and resident saint as well), such divisions were not only possible, they were actively pursued. Ethnic and sectarian mosques were essential to the practice of Islam in Detroit. They enabled each population to address the social as well as religious needs of their members and to maintain sometimes idiosyncratic, vernacular traditions that lent continuity and meaning to the lives of their members. These institutions were imitative of the ethnic churches around them. They provided new citizens with the opportunity to participate in nominally democratic institutions, to make investments of time and money in what were, in effect, American voluntary associations. They provided immigrants and new converts, both of whom were socially isolated, with the opportunity to reconstitute themselves as members of communities (held together by a mix of religious, racial, and ethnic ties) and to offer one another support.

Toward this end, the city's oldest mosques developed a variety of social functions that were every bit as important to their communities as were their religious functions.

Reflecting this emphasis, the architecture of these institutions often provided more space for banquets than for prayer, more room and equipment for cooking than for education. In the period between 1925 and 1965, when the area's churches were its primary ethnic institutions (Boyd 1998, Dillard 2008, Howell and Jamal 2009b, Sengstock 1982), Muslims expected their mosques to nurture their ethnic identities, and they saw no contradiction between this agenda and affiliation with a larger Muslim world. Those who were without mosques, like the city's bachelor Muslim communities, the Bengalis, Turks, and Kurds, used their coffee houses and social clubs (explicitly ethnic associations) as quasi-mosques. It was in these spaces – the mosques of those who had them and the clubs and coffee houses of those who did not – that national (foreign and American) as well as religious holidays were celebrated, foreign dignitaries were received, political organizing took place, American politicians interacted with these communities as constituencies, funerals and wedding were held, and so on. These were vital, busy institutions, and they were actively engaged in the Americanization process.

Of equal significance to the creation of ethnic and racial solidarities was the work these mosques, and particularly their leaders, did to connect the city's Muslims to each other. Not all Muslims participated in these transcommunal networks. As a rule, they were activated and held together by political activists and ritual specialists. This explains why most of the elderly Muslims I interviewed during my research knew Hussien Karoub and Kalil Bazy personally, regardless of their ethnic or sectarian background. Those who were active at mid century knew Mohammed (Mike) Karoub, Vehbi Ismail, and Mohammad Jawad Chirri. In the 1960s and 1970s Osman Hassanien joined the ranks of these network builders, all of whom competed and worked closely with one another. Their institutions formed a tight web of religious education and observance. Their mosques shared ideas, resources, and a common expectation and pan-Muslim community. They published together, filled in for one another, raised funds together, addressed American audiences together, and responded sympathetically

to the political issues that animated one another's constituency. Sociologists Abdo Elkholy and Atif Wasfi were not inaccurate when they stressed the pervasive overlap of social and ethnic functions in Dearborn's mosques. Yet both men somehow overlooked the connections, quite extensive by the 1960s, that threaded the city's Muslims together. It was at this transcommunal level that the city's Muslim public sphere had been evolving since the 1920s. In fact, the public life of Muslims in Detroit predated the city's mosques; it was sustained by Imams Karoub and Bazzi, and others like them, before there were mosques. By the 1950s, Detroit's Muslim public sphere was anchored securely in its mosques and its local leadership, and it became transnational in scope in the same decade, when the FIA connected Detroit's Muslims to other mosques across North America, and to Muslims overseas.

This Muslim public sphere grew in importance and complexity as the city's Muslim populations grew. As Detroit's mosques shrugged off social and ethnic functions in the 1970s and 1980s, private institutions developed to pick up the slack. And as the relationship between the United States and much of the Muslim world soured after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, placing intense pressure on Arab Americans in particular, new secular, and explicitly ethnic institutions emerged to speak on behalf of this and other populations – social service agencies, political lobbies, civil liberties organizations. As the mosques became more conservative, wedding halls and village clubs opened nearby, where families could celebrate with music and dancing, if they so desired, or with belly dancers and open bars. Islamic schools opened in conjunction with the city's mosques, and so did charter schools that offered Arabic language instruction and a more conservative social atmosphere than the public schools. Rather than rely on the city's imams (many of whom were new to the country and spoke broken English) to speak on behalf of the community, now there were dozens of secular, American born Muslims who were able to represent Muslims and Islam to the larger society. By the 1990s, there were Muslim cemeteries and funeral parlors; Muslim radio programs and newspapers; university professors and public school principals; halal butchers;

Muslim obstetricians and gynecologists; poets, writers, and musicians. Gradually, the Muslim population in Detroit grew from several thousand in the 1930s to 150,000 in the new millennium. Today, Detroit is home to over fifty-five mosques, an uncounted number of clergy, dozens of Islamic schools, and even an Islamic university (Howell, forthcoming; Bilici 2008).

Detroit's mosques are no longer the sole, or even the primary, engines of ethnic and racial identity formation among Muslim American populations. They are part of a vast and complex market of institutions, public and private, that compete for the attention of Muslim Americans, enriching, facilitating, and sometimes undermining Muslim American identity. This Muslim public sphere, which intersects with Arab, African American, South Asian, and other ethnoracial and immigrant publics, has enabled the city's mosques to concentrate on the everyday practice of the faith. Today's mosques do not have to work as hard as the mosques of the 1940s and 1950s did to provide a sense of community, to sustain Muslim American identities. Today's mosques can specialize. In the language of commerce, they can develop niche markets, focusing their attention on religious and moral education, ritual, and piety.

Yet in some ways today's mosques have to work much harder. In a community of this size and visibility, where multiple institutions make relentless claims on the individuals Muslim's time and loyalty, and where dozens of approaches to interpreting Islamic tradition are cultivated in close proximity to one another, Detroit's mosques have now reached the point where they are full participants in American religious pluralism. They compete not only with Christian churches and secular ethnoracial organizations, but with one another for the attention and support of believers. Perhaps this explains why the larger mosques, with no exceptions, have reverted to the intensely social model rejected by the conservative reformers of the 1970s. Not only do the larger mosques boast of prayer spaces that can hold several hundred (and sometimes thousand) worshippers, but any guided tour will feature a walk through the shining industrial kitchen, the gymnasium, the library, the daycare facility, the

sparkling his and her ablution rooms, the weekend or private school. If these features are not enough, one can sample the rich array of activities these mosques often provide, activities which are sometimes strikingly similar to those which motivated conservative reforms a generation or more ago: yoga classes, chess clubs, spelling bee practice sessions, after school homework programs, interfaith councils, art exhibits, open mike poetry slams, and so on.

In this environment, the tension between the ideal of an all-inclusive Muslim umma and the equally strong pull of ethnic solidarity, or particularistic interpretative traditions, remains powerful. The majority of Detroit's mosques today are identified with a particular ethnic, national, racial, or linguistic group (Bagby 2004), but increasingly mosques are forming around neighborhood identities, around strong leaders, or around a common vision. Within each of these mosques, there are predictable factional cleavages based on length of time spent in America (or in Islam), income level, and education (Howell and Jamal 2009b). All of these institutions compete to draw worshippers, to lock in the time and energy commitments of volunteers, and to gain the trust of donors. The most important idiom in which Detroit's mosques market themselves and compete with one another, however, is that of perceived religious orthodoxy. In this realm, congregational splits are rarely the traumatic upheavals that shook Detroit in the 1970s and 1980s. They are now a common occurrence, and most large mosques spin off smaller ones, which are almost always defined as more or less conservative than the original. It is now much easier to start a new mosque than to take over a well-established one. Conservative mosques have one primary advantage over others: clarity of vision, rules, and practice. Less conservative mosques also have significant advantages: their social (and religious) flexibility, and their more convincing hold on the politics of integration, Americanization, and, very often, socioeconomic success. At stake in these divisions are issues of openness in worship and interpretation, policy toward women, and engagement with the broader landscape of both American and Muslim ecumenicalism. In the post-9/11 era, the advocates of "positive integration" made sweeping gains across the

Muslim community, and the old divide between already American Muslims and new Americans and new Muslims no longer translates as neatly as it once did into conservative and liberalizing sensibilities in matters of mosque politics, or Muslim identity. This state of affairs was vividly on display at the 70th anniversary of the AMS, which I described in the introduction to this study. There, young Yemeni American men and women, both the recently arrived and the American born, align in loose tactical alliances of isolationists, positive integrationists, and temporary members of both camps.

It would appear, then, that Detroit's mosques, even traditional ones, like the AMS, have arrived at a comfortable relationship with American pluralism. This arrangement is not exactly new. The history of Detroit's mosques and Muslim communities shows clearly that Islam, against common perception, is a long standing American faith tradition. In the past and the present, Detroit's Muslims have sought and have been granted accommodations. Those granted today, when Muslims form large voting blocs in the city, are so extensive that the compromises made by the city's early mosques – shifting Muslim sacred calendars into alignment with Christian ones – are utterly unnecessary. In cities like Dearborn and Hamtramck (both over 35% Muslim), the public schools close on Islamic holidays.⁴ Nowhere in greater Detroit are Muslim students penalized for staying home and most employers recognize these holidays as well. Similarly, many Muslim workers can easily extend their lunch breaks on Friday to accommodate jumaa prayers, if they so desire. In Detroit, Muslims are no longer an extreme religious minority; in some areas, they are the majority. Their faith is widely recognized and often understood by non-Muslims in ways that, outside Detroit, are hard to imagine.

This work of seeking accommodations, establishing mosques, and speaking out on behalf of Muslim causes did not begin in the 1980s, or even the 1950s. It began in the era of the First World War. It began when Muslim immigrants from the Ottoman Empire sat in one

⁴ Howell forthcoming..

another's homes and coffeehouses and discussed the things they had in common as Muslims. It began when they prayed together next to a moving assembly line at Henry Ford's Highland Park factory. It began when they gathered to celebrate the opening of the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park. The ebb and flow of immigrant demography shaped, subsequently changed the meanings of, and eventually obscured each of these beginnings. At some point, the hegemony of the new arrivals will give way again to that of the already American Muslims. It is already happening. New historical sensibilities will inevitably follow.

This work has captured only small portions of a small history. Much of what the early Muslims of Detroit thought, experienced, and believed is no longer knowable.⁵ I am prompted to conclude, nonetheless, that their experiences were perhaps not as different from those of today's Muslims as we have been led to expect. Like today's new Muslims, the people who built the Highland Park Mosque, or the Albanian Islamic Center, or Masjid al-Mu'mineen, were a mixture of the devout and the less so. They were challenged by the differences they observed among the city's other Muslims. They were described as unworthy of citizenship in local and national media and were denied the right to become citizens. They built mosques and dreamed of American futures for their children. If the 70th anniversary banquet of the American Moslem Society can tell anything about the future, it is that possessing a long American history is a valuable asset. The Muslims who gathered to celebrate this milestone, for the most part, did not know the particulars of this history, but they are now richly equipped to extend, repeat, alter, deny, and recreate it in terms appropriate to their own lives. This is the viable future of a forgotten past.

⁵ Much of it too, will eventually come to light. Several people I spoke with during the course of this research mentioned archives they have in their possession or are aware of that pertain to the history of the city's Albanian, Bengali, Lebanese Shi'a, Lebanese Sunni and African American congregations. Some of these collections are related to the lives and work of the city's first imams. As these papers are donated to local archives or shared privately with scholars, a richer and larger history may be possible.

Appendix A

My Advice to the Muhammadans in America

Dear Brothren in Islam

Assalam-o-Alaikum

There are many Muhammadans in this country who come from Syria, Palestine, Albania, Servia, Bosnia, Turkey, Kurdistan and India. Their exact number is yet unknown, but they are in thousands. This epistle is addressed to all of them. I beg to be excused to say that in the majority of cases you are Moslems in name only—Islam not playing practical part in your every-day life. Nay, even your names are generally no more Moslem because you have adopted American names. These are the days of trouble for you. The Moslems are being distributed and dispersed everywhere. The United States is a very good country for you to live in. I wish millions of Moslems to come over here, settle in this land, make it their home and enjoy the privileges of the citizenship in this free, fertile and rich land. But I must advise you:

1. To keep and preserve your Islam with you wherever you go—“Keep your faith always above the world.”
2. Retain your Moslem names—Muhammad, Ahmad, Ali and so forth, and don't become Sams, Georges, James, Mikes, etc.
3. Say your five prayers daily in mosques and in your homes. If you do not find time and opportunity to keep regular times, say them together—but never let a day pass without your prayers.

4. Never forget that Arabic is the one common language of all Moslems. Try to learn it, read and write it. Teach Arabic to your children and make the habit of speaking it at home. Learn the English language thoroughly as this will a great help in understanding the people and becoming good citizens.
5. To marry the Christian or Jewish girls is lawful according to our religion, even if they remain in their own faith, but try your best to prove to them by kind treatment, love and your practical clean and pure life that Islam is the true religion from God for the welfare and prosperity of humanity.
6. Be careful to bring up your children to become good Moslems—lest they remain ignorant, and mixing up the surrounding influences become lost in other religions. That will be a great sin for you.
7. Islam prohibits Usury and Interest. Its taking is so forbidden as is its giving. But when you put your money in Banks in this country, take the portion of your Interest (which they give you as their own rule) and then spend it in propagation of Islam; for example, in printing a book on Islam, which should be distributed free among the American Christians and thus their money will go back to them in better form.
8. Build a Mosque in every town to worship one god, however small and simple it may be, but there must be one. If you cannot build a Mosque, then fix up a room in the house of one of you to meet there everyday to say prayers together, read the Quran and Tradition and talk on religious subjects.
9. Make it an object of your life to promulgate Islam; to tell others that Islam is a true religion; to prove the truth of Islam by a true, sincere, sympathetic and kind treatment to all. Win the American souls to Islam and this will be great achievement.
10. God is the best Protector of Islam in all ages. Always follow His directions. In these days He has raised a great Reformer to help the cause of Islam—“Ahmad,” the promised

Messiah and Mehdi. Join his fold in the Ahmadia Movement to be blessed by the Creator and the Provider—Allah-o-Akbar.

Mufti Mohamad Sadiq, *Moslem Sunrise*, 1921 1(2):29.

Appendix B

The Future of the New Generation

The Arab immigrant community of this republic, in our opinion, does not face a truly dangerous issue like that [facing] the new Arab American generation and how to instill in them adequate knowledge and guidelines that will allow for the preservation of good traditions and customs, [given that] their progenitors let go of [these] over time in the new American ocean.

There is no resisting the fact that the next generation of Arabs born in this country appear to be on their way to becoming American at every opportunity, in their culture, business, abilities, experience, and residence, because this country makes up the lion's share of their earthly experience.

However, earthly prosperity alone does not form strong individuals of substance who possess good manners or precious moral fiber.

Here, the community needs to resort to doctors of the soul, to those who are life long specialists at strengthening the inner talents and individuality without which a person will not be recognized by society and will not contribute any good to the young generation.

And who are these doctors of the soul other than true religious servants who give themselves completely to promoting moral values, and who devote a large part of their lives to supporting youth in their steps towards honorable goals and noble intentions?

No one who has mixed with Arab immigrants fails to recognize [the problem of the new generation].... The Muslim congregations share a strong need for devoted religious

servants versed in spiritual and literary knowledge, able to express their culture and learning in order to save the new generation from the pitfall of melting into the body of an American nation that does not believe in any lofty religion ... [thereby losing] ... the blessed gift of a religion that has guided and instructed their parents and grandparents before them over many decades.

If the religious domain of Muslims in this country is barren and stricken by drought, we now have a sign that the fertile waters of life will return. This will be accomplished with an outpouring of abundant knowledge, religious devotion, and honorable piety. Yes, the gathering clouds that spelled a dark future for the next Muslim generation in this region have cleared with the coming of Shaykh Mohammed Jawad Chirri, who will be a watchful servant, guide, and religious organizer for the entire Shi'a Muslim community in Dearborn, Detroit and in other regions.

In truth, it is said that this learned Islamic jurist, who has ample acquaintance with the religious and literary sciences, is unique among those who serve the Muslim immigrant community. We would not be wrong in saying that the Shaykh is the only person who has come to us with so much religious and literary knowledge. And so the reins of the congregation have been passed to him, and he will quickly deliver us towards the desired reform.

The success many expect of the Shaykh depends on factors that are the responsibility of the Muslim congregation who have called him. The most important of these factors is giving the Shaykh free hand in the matters of the congregation and for the public to stand firmly behind him, forgetting old conflicts after setting out a new plan for itself based on integrity, sincerity, and the goal of facilitating the efforts of their skilled religious servant. This is all to insure that he is supported while saving the new generation of American Muslims from the religious dangers that threaten them and while reversing the loss of honored religious traditions that have been sacred for ages.

We have long heard of the shock many feel at the development of the new generation and their fears that they will grow up ignorant of the religion of their forefathers. But now all these fearful people have been shown the way [out of this predicament], and it is that Shaykh Mohamad Jawad Chirri brings them effective medicine and a reliable cure, if they let go of their past mistakes and make every effort to take advantage of this favorable opportunity.

This is a fortunate turn of events that will pay our immigrant community back many times over. We should benefit from this and make it the means of ensuring our children's salvation from the ill fate that threatens them.

May 5, 1949, *Nahdat al-Arab*.

No attribution. Likely by Mohamad Jawad Chirri.

Translated by Ryan Ferris and Andrew Shryock.

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Interviews Cited

Liela Abbas, Redford, Michigan	2008
Robert (Sy) Abraham, Dearborn Heights, Michigan	2006
Abraham family (Sy Abraham, Marilyn Hassen, Carolyn Joyner, Sharon Korhonen, Aileen Michno)	2006
Abdo Alasary, Dearborn, Michigan	2008
Charles Khalil Alawan (Hajj Chuck), Dearborn, Michigan	2005
Eide Alawan, Dearborn, Michigan	2005
Alan Amen, Dearborn, Michigan	2000
Mike Alcodray, Dearborn, Michigan	2005

Mazen Alwan, West Bloomfield, Michigan	2007
Alex Balooly, Dearborn Heights, Michigan	2008
Najah Bazzi, Plymouth, Michigan	2006
Michael Berry, Dearborn, Michigan	2007
Joe Borrajo, Dearborn, Michigan	2000
Fatme Boomrad, Dearborn, Michigan	2005
Joseph Caurdy, Saline, Michigan	2005
Adnan Chirri, Dearborn, Michigan	2005
Hansen Clarke, Lansing, Michigan	2006
Gladys Ecie, Dearborn, Michigan	2005
Fatima El Haje, Dearborn, Michigan	2005
Hussein El Haje, Dearborn, Michigan	2005
Aida Karoub Hamed, Farmington Hills, Michigan	2005, 2007
Nihad Hamed, Farmington Hills, Michigan	2005, 2007
Julia Haragely, Dearborn, Michigan	2007
Marilynn Hassen, Dearborn Heights, Michigan	2006
Hussein Hamood, Madison Heights, Michigan	2007
Ardela Jabara (and Julie Jabara), Romulus, Michigan	2007
Vehbi Ismail, Harper Woods, Michigan	2005
Carolyn Joyner, Dearborn Heights, Michigan	2006
Tahira Hassanein Khalid, Detroit, Michigan	2008
Selim Khalid, Detroit, Michigan	2008
Alice Karoub, Northville, Michigan	2005
Jeff Karoub, Livonia, Michigan	2005
Carl A. Karoub, Livonia, Michigan	2005
Carl M. Karoub, Farmington Hills, Michigan	2005

Sharon Korhonen, Dearborn Heights, Michigan	2006
Azira Maeh, Detroit, Michigan	2005
Hussein Makled, Dearborn Heights, Michigan	2005
Aileen Michno, Dearborn Heights, Michigan	2006
Kalil Peaks, Detroit, Michigan	2005
Hatima Sharieff, Clarkston, Michigan	2008
David Turfe, Dearborn, Michigan	2006
Donald Unis, Dearborn, Michigan	2000
Catherine Ziyad, Detroit, Michigan	2008

**Interviews sited from the Naff Arab American Collection, National Museum of
American History**

Kalil Bazzy

Alex Ecie

Abdullah Igram

Mohammad Karoub